CHAPTER III

FAMILY AND FRIENDS

My family was an omelette of rages and laughter entwined with a curious love— an amalgam of stupidity and love.

Gerald Durrell

To Gerry people were just as much part of the animal kingdom as animals. So he saw people as fascinating specimens of the species. In his books people were animals and animals were people. That's why people loved his books—as and hence the title My Family and Other Animals. Gerry saw people as a child sees people— as characters in a storybook, larger than life, with extraordinary characteristics, usually very funny ones. And if you were in Gerry's company for any length of time you'd start seeing people as he saw them. People you wouldn't have looked twice were suddenly transformed into extraordinary characters.

Simon Hicks

Durrell's masterpiece My Family and Other Animals is the story, as he says “of a five-year sojourn that I and my family made on the Greek island of Corfu” (My Family 11).

This remarkable island, with its happy-go-lucky way of life, provided a most appropriate background for the story he had to tell of a lively family. Their whole life was full of fun and frolic, astonishing alarms and excursions which they shared with the successions of animals Gerald introduced into their midst. In his description, these animals seemed to take on human personality whether they were in the wild or whether they were pets.
The book was such a roaring success that when Gerald produced the sequels, *The Garden of the Gods* and *Birds, Beasts and Relatives*, they were received with equal gusto. Pinchin commenting on the book says “we can of course look at Gerald Durrell as family biographer recording data on a friendly tribe, for they are all there in the *My Family* books” (405). Though Durrell has presented his family in these books, probably, his main idea was to impart the message of treating this world as a miracle of life and believing all creation as an essential part in the Great Chain of Being.

The central figures are: Mother “whose maxim in life was always defend your young regardless of how much in the wrong they were” (*Birds* 25). Larry, “designed by Providence to go through life like a small, blond firework, exploding ideas in other people’s minds, and then curling up with cat-like unctuousness and refusing to take any blame for the consequences” (*My Family* 17). Leslie, “short, stocky, with an air of quiet belligerence,” always with a gun in hand, (*My Family* 21) and Gerald's Mrs. Malaprop – Margo. Theodore Stephanides and Spiro also figure as main characters and surrounding them are an endless series of “cameo portraits”: Lugaretzia, the hypochondriacal maid, lecherous Captain Creech, Doctor Androuchelli, Larry's stream of eating artists, and Gerald's various tutors.

The story begins as the family approaches Corfu by ferryboat in 1935. Gerald notes the sudden change in atmosphere: “We passed the invisible dividing-line and entered the bright looking glass world of Greece” (*My Family*
20). When the family arrived in Corfu town, they at first felt lost and lonely. But soon, after several abortive house-hunts, they at last chose the Strawberry-Pink villa, nestling among the cypress trees “like some exotic fruit lying in the greenery” as their abode (*My Family* 28).

The family was quite fortunate to find the right person, Spyros Chalikiopoulos, better known as Spiro Americana, a great fire-eating fury of a man with a heart of gold to help them in all their endeavours, especially in their house hunts. Later he was to become their “guide, philosopher and friend” on a virtually permanent basis (*My Family* 32). This man was to Gerald “a great brown ugly angel . . . a great suntanned gargoyle,” while to Lawrence he simply resembled “a great drop of olive oil” (*Prospero’s Cell* 21).

The family soon settled down in their new, wonderful surroundings. Corfu was the most beautiful of all the Mediterranean islands, and while the family lived there it was virtually untouched by modern development. It was “like being allowed back into Paradise.” The feeling was so great that “it was like being born for the first time” (qtd in Botting 31). There was a dream like quality about it, a feeling of timelessness, as Durrell explains:

Corfu was wonderful because it was so lunatic, so insane. When a man in a shop said, with the Corfiot’s gentle charm, he would have a thing ready for you tomorrow, he was working in a world that would have mystified Einstein. The word tomorrow might mean half an hour later or two weeks or two months hence or, indeed, never. The word tomorrow had no normal meaning. It
became yesterday, last month, the year after next. It was an Alice in Wonderland world. (qtd in Botting 38)

In one sense, as David Hughes observes, the island "with its unpolluted sea lapping at the deserted beaches," offered an escape to the Durrells – an escape from the "overcast summers and England's all too obvious defects." The escape soon turned into a journey of discovery since each member of the family found his or her vision of fulfillment on the island:

Leslie, preoccupied with guns, boats and the chase, fell upon a paradise no less for the sailor than the hunter. Margaret was a physical being who made the odd sortie into arts and crafts, ached for sunshine and sex and a sense of her own beauty; she found all three. For Larry the cleansing light of Greece illumined the picture of drab England he produced in *The Black Book*, a young man's masterpiece but also committed his mind forever to the Mediterranean. In Corfu he recognised his own voice. (David Hughes 76 - 77)

The family's life in Corfu at a domestic level was "simple, uncluttered, unhurried, unpressured." On the other hand, at an exalted level "the island was gloriously beautiful utterly unspoilt, a paradise on earth surrounded by an unpolluted crystalline sea." For Gerald, it was a revelation:

Gradually the magic of the island settled over us as gently and charmingly as pollen. Each day had a tranquility, a timelessness about it, so that you wished it would never end ... In those days I lived a curious sort of triple life. I dwelt in three worlds. One was the family, one was our eccentric friends and third was peasant
community. Through these three worlds I passed unobserved but observing. (qtd in Botting 40)

The whole island indeed was magical with its tranquility, its colour, its tinge of unreality and its timelessness.

Commenting on the magic spell of Corfu, Lawrence observes: “In Corfu, you see we reconstituted the Indian period which we all missed. The island exploded into another open-air time of our lives, because one lived virtually naked in the sun. Without Corfu I don't think Gerry would have managed to drag himself together and do all he has achieved... I reckon I too got born in Corfu. It was really the spell between the wars that was – you can only say paradise” (qtd in Botting 73).

Lawrence’s comment on his brother is absolutely true. One can with conviction say that without Corfu the writer Gerald Durrell wouldn’t have been born. Corfu was the place which created Durrell the writer. So he must be surely indebted to Corfu for making a real man out of him – a man who proved to the world that perseverance and grit to achieve one’s goal will surely pay off.

The Corfu countryside for Gerald was a kind of Mediterranean Congo inhabited by natives and crawling with wild life. It was a time of pure freedom for him, of gay abandon, a perennial holiday, as he was not burdened by lessons, duties or set hours. His whole life was “just carte blanche to roam at will, exploring the wonders of his paradise land” (Botting 40).
Everyday began with the rising sun striking the shutters of his bedroom windows, followed soon after by the smell of a charcoal fire in the kitchen, cock-crows, yapping dogs and the “unsteady, melancholy tune of the goat-bells as the flocks were driven out to pasture” (My Family 38). After breakfast he would saunter forth with his butterfly net and empty matchboxes in order to explore the island.

During Gerald’s amblings along the countryside, his faithful companion Roger, his pet dog, always accompanied him. More than any other member of his family, Roger was young Gerald’s guide and companion. He endearingly refers to Roger as “that indefatigable student of natural history” (Birds 187). Roger, of course, had the good sense not to interfere with any of the creatures that Gerald collected. He also knew how to steer clear of situations that would otherwise have landed both of them in trouble:

Roger, for example, found that it was unwise to smell hornets, that the peasant dogs ran screaming if he glanced at them through the gate, and the chickens that leapt suddenly from the fuchsia hedge, squawking wildly as they fled, were unlawful prey, however desirable. (My Family 34)

It was during these early outings that Durrell got to know the Corfiot peasants of the locality, many of whom became his friends. There was the cheerful simpleton, an amiable but retarded youth with a face as round as a puffball and a bowler hat without a brim. There was the “immensely fat and cheerful" Agathi, past seventy but with hair still “black and lustrous,” spinning wool outside her tumble down cottage and singing the “haunting peasant
songs" of the island. Then there was the shepherd Yani, “a tall slouching man with a green hooked nose like an eagle, and incredible moustache,” who plied the ten-year-old Gerald with olives and figs and the thick red wine of the region (My Family 40 - 41).

It is interesting to note how quickly Gerald struck a rapport with them despite the language barrier and the differences in age. These local peasants often greeted Gerald as “the little English lord” and all doors were almost always open to him. One should notice that despite the way of being addressed as “the little English lord,” Durrell never put on airs. The peasants though poor were his friends regardless of their age and status. It shows his great sense of humility towards every living being, be it man or animal.

Perhaps one of the most interesting and extraordinary characters Gerald met would be the Rose-beetle man, a wandering peddler of an eccentric nature. When Gerald first met him on the hills, playing a shepherd's pipe, the Rose-beetle man was fantastically garbed, wearing a shapeless hat that sported a forest of fluttering feathers of owl, hoopoe, king fisher, cockerel and swan, and a coat whose pockets bulged with trinkets like combs, balloons and little highly coloured pictures of saints. On his back he carried bamboo cages full of pigeons and young chicken together with several mysterious sacks and a large bunch of fresh green leeks. "With one hand he held his pipe to his mouth, and in the other a number of lengths of cotton, to each of which was tied an almond-sized rose-beetle, glittering golden green in the sun, all of them flying..."
round his hat with desperate, deep buzzing, trying to escape from the thread
tied firmly round their waists" (My Family 43-44). Gerald realised the man was
dumb, when he mimed the beetles were substitute toy aeroplanes for the village
children.

The description of the Rose-beetle man is so vivid and picturesque that
evidently he appears to us as in real life. Such a person is usually found in fairy
tales. Durrell’s description has immortalised the Rose-beetle man in such a way
that he majestically rises to the status of any Shakespearean character found in
the Romantic plays. His whole appearance – the colourful costume and the
flamboyant head-dress of different kinds of birds’ feather’s – gives him a touch
of the supernatural, like the friendly ghosts and witches found in Wendy and
Hotstuff comics. He is not likely to be forgotten by anybody.

And even more mysterious about him was the large sack he carried over
his shoulder. One almost feels that he would be carrying some magic hocus-
pocus with which he would cast spell on things around by uttering the magic
word ‘abracadabra’. As a child Gerald would also have imagined in a similar
way, but to his amazement, when the sack was opened he found a greater
treasure – a number of cute tortoises. After much bargaining, Gerald was
successful in procuring one, which he named Achilles and which later turned
out to be one of his most cherished possessions. He found it to be a “most
intelligent and lovable beast possessed of a peculiar sense of humor” (My
Family 46).
It is quite interesting to note that this young beast was quick to grasp things and it even learnt to answer to its name. A dog or a cat or any other mammal answering to its name comes as no surprise but a tortoise doing so calls for some thinking. He loved being fed and "would squat regally in the sun" for the various fruits held out to him and would become "positively hysterical" at the mere sight of a strawberry – his best loved fruit. Achilles loved human company and if he happened to find anybody lying on the ground "he would surge down the path and on to the rug with an expression of bemused good humour on his face." After a close survey he would "then choose a portion of your anatomy" on which he would practice mountaineering (My Family 47-48). We almost visualise a small human baby running down the path with a hearty laugh into the arms of its father, either to be lifted up or cuddled.

Roger made it a point never to be away during Achilles' feeding time especially when it was being fed grapes. It is quite humorous to observe his agony during these sessions. As Roger also loved grapes very much he watched the whole process with misery:

Achilles would sit mumbling the grapes in his mouth, the juice running down his chin, and Roger would lie near by, watching him with agonized eyes, his mouth drooling saliva. Roger had always his fair share of the fruit, but even so he seemed to think it a waste to give such delicacies to a tortoise. When the feeding was over, if I didn't keep an eye on him Roger would creep up to Achilles and lick his front vigorously in an attempt to get the
grape-juice the reptile had dribbled down himself. Achilles affronted at such a liberty would snap at Roger's nose and then when the licks became too overpowering and moist, he would retreat into his shell with an indignant wheeze and refuse to come out until we had removed Roger from the scene. (My Family 47)

The above passage presents before us a closely-knit relationship between a ten year old boy and two animals of entirely different species. As we read it, however, the species difference fades away and in its place we find the young boy acting like an adult commenting on his two younger brothers. Roger who can be considered as slightly elder than Achilles does not relish delicacies like grapes being wasted on the younger baby who is still in its dribbling stage. It is remarkable that Durrell could present such a relationship in quite a humorous way drawing in the readers to see the animals in his perspective. The adjectives used such as “agonized eyes,” “affronted,” “indignant,” etc. are normally used to refer to human emotions but when Durrell uses them to refer to animals, these words however do not lose their sense at all.

Apart from Achilles, young Gerald bought several other creatures from the Rose-beetle man which included a frog, a sparrow with a broken wing and also the entire collection of rose beetles. Only a child who is fascinated by anything alive would want to buy them, where as an adult would turn up his nose in disgust. Here we are reminded of Tom Sawyer, who, after fooling his friends into white-washing the fence, feels jubilant over his acquisition of the day’s spoils – a dead rat, a kitten with one eye, a toad etc.
Surely Durrell’s siblings would have found it quite irritating to see the rose-beetles crawling into beds and dropping into their laps “like emeralds” (*My Family* 49). They would have found it equally disgusting to share their rooms with Quasimodo, a revolting-looking pigeon with a penchant for dancing as soon as the gramophone was played, and who was very particular to sleep at the foot of Margo’s bed.

Such descriptions of animals and their hilarious situations prove Durrell’s prowess as a writer. The animals emerge as individuals possessing their own unique traits of character just as any human being.

Gerald’s wanderings around the Corfu countryside came to a sudden stop when Mother decided it was high time he had some sort of education. His first tutor was George Wilkinson, who soon found out Gerry’s inclination for natural history and introduced it into everything that was being taught so as to hold the boy’s interest. He also persuaded Gerald to start a nature diary; religiously noting down everything he observed and did everyday. George found a novel method of teaching him, out in the olive groves or at the little beach at the foot of the hill overlooking Pondikonissi:

There, while discussing in a desultory way the historic role played by Nelson’s egg collection at the Battle of Trafalgar, they would float gently out into the shallow bay, and Gerald would pursue his real studies – the flora and fauna of the seabed, the black ribbon weed, the hermit crabs, the sea slugs slowly rolling on the sandy bottom, sucking in sea water at one end and passing it out at the other. (Botting 43)
We at once realise and envy Durrell for being so lucky as to be taught by such teachers who gave in to his every whim. Life for him was therefore more instructive and equally enjoyable.

Gerald’s studies, thus was more of a combination of nature and theory and as Botting observes, he never was at his best within the confines of a room, but outside – whether in an herbaceous border in a garden or a swamp full of snakes – he was a person transformed. To be in the lap of nature must have been aesthetically edifying to Gerald. This fact is corroborated by Edith Cobb when he says a child’s relationship to the natural world is basically aesthetic – a theory in line with John Dewey’s aesthetic theories. Aesthetic experience, according to Dewey lies in the relationship between the individual and the environment, not simply in the object viewed, nor in the mind of the viewer (Evernden 96 - 97).

Therefore such outdoor lessons, apart from being an aesthetical delight, was also an opportunity for Gerald to excel in the art of story writing. At the suggestion of George, he wrote a story of his own entitled ‘The Man of Animals,’ written in a "wobbly and erratic hand and eccentric, nursery school spelling." It relates the adventures of a man who was remarkably like the one Gerald would become:

Right in the Hart of the Africn Jungel a small wite man lives. Now there is one rather xtrodenry fackt about him that is that he is the frind of all animals. Now he lives on Hearbs and Bearis, both of which he nos, and soemtimes, not unless he is prakticly
starvyng, he shoot with a bow and arrow a Bird of some sort, for you see he dos not like killing his frinds even wene he is so week that he can hardly walk! (qtd in Botting 43)

The story strangely bears a close resemblance to the story of Mowgli and animal friends in Kipling's Jungle Books. It shows Gerald's yearning to befriend all animals whether they were interesting or not. In one sense he can be compared to Mowgli, who reigns supreme as the Lord of the Jungle among his various animal friends. Gerald, without any proper schooling does everything that most children would have loved to do. In this respect he is not much different from Mowgli who lived a similar life:

When he [Mowgli] was not learning he sat out in the sun and slept, and ate and went to sleep again; when he felt dirty or hot he swam in the forest pools; and when he wanted honey (Baloo told him that honey and nuts were just as pleasant to eat as raw meat) he climbed up for it and that Bagheera showed him how to do. (The Jungle Book 13)

It can be seen that Gerald too spent his time wandering along the countryside in the hot sun, hunting for specimens, and cooling it off in the "warm, shallow, waters" of the sea (My Family 59). To appease his hunger he would drop into the nearest cottage of some peasant, who would welcome him with figs, bread, olives and grapes.

We find Mowgli is given a sound education, "a practical training in the jungle ways" by Baloo the Bear (Fernandes 43). Like other children, he is not burdened by bookish knowledge, which has no bearing on his life. From Baloo
he learns the Law of the Jungle, which teaches to live in peace with the
animals, and to move safely through the jungle. Again from Father Wolf he
learns "the meaning of things in the jungle, till every rustle in the grass, every
breath of the warm night air, every note of the owl above his head, every
scratch of a bat's claw as it roosted for a while in a tree and every splash of
every little fish jumping in a pool . . ." had something significant to impart (The
Jungle Book 13).

An interesting parallel is seen in Gerald's training too. We find him
being taken into a fascinating world of natural history, by his mentor, Theodore
Stephanides, the doctor naturalist:

Gerald was to journey through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely
intimate forces and phenomena, entering the orbit of Zatopec the
poet and the ex-King of Greece's butler, the microscopic world of
the scarlet mite and the one-eyed cyclops bug, the natural
profligacy of the tortoise hills, the lake of lilies, the
phosphorescent porpoise sea. In the course of his travels he was
to become transformed, learning the language and the gestures of
rural Greece, absorbing its music and folklore, drinking its wine,
singing its songs, and shedding his thin veneer of Englishness, so
that in mind-set and social behavior he was never to grow up a
true Englishman — a handicap which, like his lack of formal
education, was to prove a tremendous boon in later years.
(Botting 46)

To Gerald every sight, every sound, every face, every creature, every
plant was a source of wonder and delight. Corfu "was like Christmas every
day." Pointing out the advantages of living in Corfu he says:
What I really learned was pleasure . . . Sun and sea. Music. Colours. And textures: rocks, tree barks, the feel of the things. Then bathes swimming water on the body . . . The island was perfect for it, like film set, the cypresses stagily against the sky the olive groves painted on the starry backcloth of the night, the big moon hanging over the water – a Hollywood of the senses. (qtd in Botting 225 -26)

One can argue that, like Huckleberry Finn who is initiated into the secrets of nature by Jim, the Negro slave, Gerald too is shown the wonders of the natural world by Theodore Stephanides. He becomes Gerry’s most intimate family friend on Corfu and enhances his interest in natural history. He also shared Gerry's zoological interest and was "an expert on practically everything you care to mention" (My Family 67). As Anna Lillios observes, Theodore, who unlike schoolteachers, is not very strict and caters to Gerald’s love of natural history, treats Gerry like a “highly respected colleague”(18-19).

Theodore’s attitude, one can say, was quite beneficial to Durrell. Normally school teachers are looked upon as an awesome figure by young children. They find classrooms a sort of prison and as Blake in his poem “The School Boy,” says, they are like caged birds. We find this close relationship between Gerald and Theodore paved a way for Gerald to become a successful writer and naturalist.

Theodore religiously visited Gerry once a week and taught him about Corfu's natural riches. It is quite interesting to observe a young boy and an adult working together in harmony. For Gerald, being taught by Theodore was
like entering Oxford or Harvard minus the usual primary and intermediary education. Theodore was a "walking, talking, fount of knowledge" breathtakingly wide-ranging, deep, detailed and exact. He could take Gerald into varied fields of studies like anthropology, ethnology, musicology, cosmology, ecology, biology, parasitology, biochemistry, medicine, history and much else. Gerald was indebted to Theodore for this unparalleled education and with deep gratitude he notes, "I had few books to guide and explain and Theodore was for me a sort of walking, hirsute encyclopaedia." He found the long walks with Theodore very interesting as it "contained discussions of everything from life on Mars to the humblest beetle . . ." (qtd in Botting 47).

Hence Gerald was able to learn the greatest secret of nature that everything on earth was connected, interlocked.

Theodore's views on ecological matters helped Gerald to stand him in good stead in future years. Whenever Theodore went out for drive he would throw tree seeds out of the window, in the hope that a few would sprout, and he took time off to teach the peasants how to avoid soil erosion when they were tilling the ground, and to persuade them to stop goats from devouring everything that grew. Again from Theodore, Gerald imbibed "a heightened awareness of the relation between man and nature, a sense of man's place among the fauna of the island" (Lillios 17). David Hughes recounting Theodore's words says:

The boy had been taught two principles: that life, left to itself without human interference, maintained its own balances; and
that the human role in the scheme of things was one of humble omniscience. (61)

Obviously, Theodore epitomised that humility, viewing nature as a source of wonder. Perhaps by instilling this humility into Gerald, Theodore was able to help the boy strike a rapport with all sorts of creatures. In a way, Gerald lacked the arrogance that most human beings possessed in their dealings with animals. As Botting observes:

Animals, Gerald felt by instinct were his equals, no matter how small or ugly, or undistinguished; they were at a level beyond the merely sentimental, his friends and companions – often his only ones, for he had no great rapport with other children. And the animals, in their turn, sensed this, and responded accordingly, not just when he was a boy on Corfu but throughout all the years of his life. (Botting 49)

Durrell definitely owed everything to Theodore Stephanides. As a measure of his reverence for Theodore’s vast knowledge and friendship, Durrell pays a tribute to him saying: “If I had the power of magic, I would confer two gifts on every child – the enchanted childhood I had on the island of Corfu, and to be guided and befriended by Theodore Stephanides” (qtd in Botting 48).

Durrell’s tribute to Theodore is quite sincere since we can with conviction say that Theodore played a major role in shaping Durrell’s views on living harmoniously in this world and his belief of treating the non-human world as an extended family. What Durrell wanted to impart to the readers was
the theme of universal brotherhood. In bringing his own family and friends into
the picture he is actually trying to convey that this world and its inhabitants are
no less than a family. They are also of equal importance as a bigger unit.
Probably Durrell hoped the world could be changed in to a Garden of Eden if
man would just make an attempt to do so. His firm belief was: "The world is to
us is what the Garden of Eden was supposed to be to Adam and Eve. Adam
and Eve were banished, but we are banishing ourselves from Eden. The
difference is that Adam and Eve had somewhere else to go, we have nowhere
else to go" (qtd in Botting 554).

Durrell is actually advising us to desist from looting and plundering the
treasures of this Eden. If they are used wisely they are infinitely helpful to us
but if used unwisely they create misery, starvation and death to the human race
and to a myriad other life forms.

It is man's greed which hinders him from establishing a connection with
nature. Of all the beings on earth it is man who is most feared by animals.
Kipling, in his Jungle Book stories emphasizes this fact when Hathi, the wise
elephant advises Mowgli that "of all living things ye most fear man" (The
Second Jungle Book 20).

It was man or the 'Hairless one' who caused untold misery to the jungle
people by means of the "noose, and the pitfall, and the hidden trap, and the
flying stick, and the stinging fly that comes out of white smoke [the rifle], and
the Red Flower" that drives animal into the open (The Second Jungle Book 27).

In the jungle, animals never kill anything for sport or 'choice', as they say. Killing for choice is demeaning oneself as seen in the case of Sher Khan, the Tiger. Though Sher Khan speaks of his right to kill for choice [he had killed a man], the Jungle doesn’t approve of it. The Law of the Jungle says “to kill Man is always shameful” (18). What Sher Khan had done was disgraceful as he had come to the Peace Rock “fresh from a kill of Man” and boasted of it, which is equivalent to a dirty trick played by a jackal. Besides, the jungle inmates felt that Sher Khan, by this very act, had “tainted the good water” (18).

The above example wherein animals live harmoniously by the terms of the jungle is in sharp contrast to the life of human beings, who despite having a superior intelligence fail to achieve such a harmony. Man, as seen in the various examples quoted in the earlier chapters kill mainly for sport. Man kills wantonly, for amusement and not out of necessity; whereas animals kill only when the need arises and they are quite strict in imposing the Law which says: “You may kill for yourselves, and your mates and your cubs as they need, and ye can;/ But kill not for pleasure of killing and seven times never kill Man”(31).

This dicta raises a question in ourselves: Does it not behove of us to treat animals as our fellow beings on earth with equal right to exist? Is it right on our part to plague them needlessly? When the Law of the Jungle says
“Seven times never kill Man,” we for once should pause and ponder about our actions towards animals as being justified or not.

Man’s greed for power and wealth is so great that he has no compunction in killing his own kind when the need arises – a fact declared by Mowgli who says:

They are idle, senseless, and cruel; they play with their mouths, and they do not kill the weaker for food, but for sport. When they are full-fed they would throw their own breed into the Red Flower [fire]. This I have seen. It is not well that they should live here any more. I hate them! (The Second Jungle Book 85)

His rally against man continues:

I do not wish even their bones to lie on the clean earth. Let them go and find a fresh lair. They cannot stay here. I have seen and smelled the blood of the woman that gave me food – the woman whom they would have killed but for me. Only the smell of the new grass on their door-steps can take away that smell. It burns in my mouth. (The Second Jungle Book 86)

Again he says “Men must always be making traps for men, on they are not content” (The Second Jungle Book 70). Like Mowgli, Durrell also finds animals far better than humans. We find animals kill only out of necessity and at other times they are quite aware to veer away from unlawful hunting. For example Kipling describes a peaceful setting where all the animals of the jungle irrespective of the predators and the prey, drink the “fouled waters” at the dried up river-bed during summer. For a moment, the vision conjured up is that of the Garden of Eden, where all animals co-exist and roam freely.
uninhibited, with no fear of being preyed upon. They are actually abiding the Law of the Jungle which says “It is death to kill at the drinking places when once the Water Truce has been declared” (10). Maybe Kipling is trying to say that if animals can live peacefully by this truce, can’t man also live in a similar fashion without upsetting the balance in nature. Living with animals is what man has to practice.

This truth was deeply ingrained in Theodore that, whenever Gerald and he set out on an expedition equipping themselves with a bottle of lemonade, biscuits and collecting bags, they never forgot to carry a few clumps of damp moss because as Theodore explained “Both Gerald an I were more interested in studying live creatures and kept our collection of preserved specimens to a minimum” (qtd in Botting 52).

Their enthusiasm to collect specimens was immense, as they left no stick or stone unturned, no puddle unexamined:

Every water filled ditch or pool was, to us, a teeming and unexplored jungle with the minute cyclops and water-fleas, green and coral pink suspended like birds among the underwater branches, while on the muddy bottom the tigers of the pool would prowl: the leeches and the dragon-fly larvae. Every hollow tree had to be closely scrutinized in case it should contain a tiny pool of water in which mosquito-larvae were living, every mossy wigged rock had to be overturned to find out what lay beneath it and every rotten log had to be dissected. (My Family 108)
Theodore was more of a friend than a tutor to Gerald and he was quick to understand the boy's ruling passion about animals. When the rains began to fill the ponds ditches, both, would prowl among them "as alert as fishing herons." Whenever Gerald captured any creature like a toad or a baby snake, Theodore would join in with Gerald's enthusiasm and call them pretty things. Gerald incredulously says: "To hear an adult call a snake a pretty thing was music to my ears" (qtd in Botting 55).

Unlike Theodore, Gerald's family did not share his passion for animals. Since Gerald's collection of specimens increased on a grand scale, he had to house them in various nooks and crannies throughout the villa, as his room was so full. He had to face several embarrassing situations, whenever his siblings encountered these creatures in the wrong place.

Once he found a fat female scorpion in the compound wall, with a mass of tiny babies clinging to her back. Thrilled with this new acquisition, he carefully eased the mother and babies into one of his empty matchboxes with the intention of transferring them into the Bughouse. Unfortunately he forgot about it and this deadly matchbox was still lying on the mantelpiece when lunch was served. After having a hearty meal, Lawrence rose to fetch his cigarettes, picking up the matchbox from the mantelpiece.

As soon as the box was opened, the mother scorpion was out of it, crawling up his hand; sting curved up, babies still clinging on desperately. With a yell of fright Lawrence sent the unfortunate scorpion flying down the table, "scattering babies like confetti" as she fell on the table (My Family 100). What followed was utter confusion; Lugertzia dropped the plate, Roger began
barking madly, Leslie leapt from his chair and Margo threw a glass of water at the advancing scorpion but missed it and drenched Mother instead.

For weeks thereafter, Lawrence opened matchboxes with utmost caution, with a handkerchief wrapped around his hand. He kept reiterating that every matchbox in the house was a death trap and the "bloody boy" will surely kill them all (My Family 101).

There was another unfortunate incident that virtually caused a panic in Leslie. One hot day in September, seeing that his water snakes were wilting in the heat, Gerald took them in to the house and put them in a bath full of cool water. Shortly, Leslie having returned from a shooting expedition went for a shower. With a tremendous roar he emerged from the bathroom calling out for Gerald, hurling abuses at him saying, "That bloody boy's filled the bath full of snakes . . . Great things like hosepipes . . . It's a wonder I wasn't bitten" (My Family 230).

Such incidents had an apoplectic effect on the two brothers and from then on they were wary of Gerald and his noxious creatures. Lawrence was heard explaining to some guests during a party: "I assure you the house is a death trap. Every conceivable nook and cranny is stuffed with malignant faunae waiting to pounce" (My Family 232).

Gerald faithfully recorded such hilarious incidents with his family in his books, so that when his Family read them, they were more "bemused than amused." Except for Larry, none of them had been presented in the public eye.
before, and they found it quite strange to see them in print. Mother, to whom the book was dedicated, remarked "The awful thing about Gerald's books is that I'm beginning to believe it is all true, when it isn't" (qtd in Botting 230). Lawrence commenting about Gerald's books says:

Gerry has turned his watchful animal-lover's eye upon his own family with a dreadful biological fidelity. He has successfully recreated his family with a devastatingly faithful eye of a thirteen-year-old. This is a very wicked, very funny, and I'm afraid rather truthful book – the best argument I know for keeping thirteen-year-olds at boarding schools and not letting them hang about the house listening in to conversations of their elders and betters. (qtd in Botting 230)

Lawrence further added that there were two wonderful portraits in the book; one was of his mother captured with feeling and perfect fidelity and the other was of Corfu, whose beauty and peace had been rendered with tenderness and poetic skill. As for Larry, Gerald has portrayed him as Pinchin comments "the grouch with the heart of gold; the roaring, raging, ineffectual father whose wrath is to be avoided by benign deception" (407). Larry, greatly impressed by the book, wrote to his friend Richard Aldington that it was a "wicked pen portrait of the genius at the age of twenty one" (401).

Durrell has indeed given a faithful picture of his family in the My Family books. His ability as a story-teller is seen in such descriptions. The description of the mother scorpion and her babies who are unceremoniously introduced in the family midst and the ensuing confusion speak volumes about
his ability in the art of story-telling. We experience the same sense of suspense and wonder as we read any thriller books. We can say that by clubbing his family and animals together in his books, and creating a comic situation using them, he is actually trying to show that the world is after all a better place despite the pit-falls. His family can be taken as a substitute for the larger planetary family where all its denizens both human and animal happily co-exist.

The whole story, according to some critics, seems more fictive than fact and as Pinchin declares: "Gerald's extraordinarily popular story may well be true. But truth is after all not an important concern. Gerald Durrell is after fiction. Moreover, he is after a particular kind of fiction . . . . Actual names and places are the real illusion, for they allow us to willingly enter an island idyll" (405).

But Gerald, as Botting observes, denied this. He declared: "I would like to make a point of stressing that all the anecdotes about the island and the islanders are absolutely true" (My Family 13). Another aspect, which gave credence to his story, was his wonderful memory, for, he claimed he could recall the events of any single day during his five childhood years on Corfu with photographic precision. "I have a memory like everyone else. I think mine is colour with 3-D built-in smells and sounds" (qtd in Botting 231). The sights and sounds of Corfu flashed in his mind with blinding clarity and accuracy:

I can remember the curve of a wrist, the glint of a smile, a wart, a blackhead, an old hand as twisted and misshapen with arthritis as
an iris corm patting my shaggy blonde head while toothless gums beamed glisteningly and the yellow rimmed eye peered down and the voice said ‘Na pas sto kako, phil mou, na pas sto kalo’ – a traditional benediction. I can remember the smell of musty clothes, like the wrappings of a mummy, stale sweat, bread, oil, olives and garlic, stockings washing. In her armpits where the hair grew rampant as her head hair, her brassiere grey with water. Peasants drying tea when we had finished with it, popcorn in Maria’s house, warm rain . . . (qtd in Botting 231)

Durrell’s ability to recreate events from ordinary day-to-day activities is evident from the above passage. Such events, though trivial, is transformed into delightful episodes which is basically the essential quality of a writer.

In his book, Durrell has recreated heaven – "a boy’s heaven, an innocent prepubertal heaven, ignorant of evil, a domestic heaven in which Mother is always there, with a ladle and a steaming tureen and a table from which no one is turned away, in a home to which he can return at the end of every momentous day, bringing friends and strays, be they two-legged, four-legged, six-legged, hundred-legged or entirely legless" (Botting 232).

We can see that Durrell’s mother also played a pivotal role in shaping his career as a naturalist and writer. Without Mother Durrell would not have been able to house in all the animals he collected and thus create comic situations to provide him with material to write. Therefore Mother’s backing and support undeniably proved beneficial to him to find a niche for himself as a writer in this world. Paying a glorious tribute to his mother in the preface of My Family, Durrell says:
Like a gentle, enthusiastic and understanding Noah, she has steered her vessel full of strange progeny through the stormy seas of life with great skill, always faced with the possibility of mutiny, always surrounded by the dangerous shoals of overdraft and extravagance, never being sure that her navigation would be approved by the crew, but certain that she would be blamed for anything that went wrong. That she survived the voyage is a miracle, but survive it she did, and, moreover, with her reason more or less intact. As my brother Larry rightly points out, we can be proud of the way we have brought her up; she is a credit to us. (12)

He further adds that Mother had reached that happy state of "Nirvana" wherein any action of her progeny failed to shock or startle her. Her level of tolerance and love for Gerald's pets is exemplified by the fact that, once when all alone in the house, she was treated to the sudden arrival of a series of crates containing two pelicans, a scarlet ibis, a vulture and eight monkeys. Durrell feels that "a lesser mortal might have quailed at such a contingency, but not Mother." He could not help but admire her patience on finding her in the garage "being pursued round and round by an irate pelican which she was trying to feed with sardines from a tin" (My Family 12).

Mother encouraged her family in everything they wanted to do. Durrell was allowed to read anything he wanted to. Every question he asked was answered absolutely honestly, if it could be answered. So Durrell says "In a funny way, I got a unique education which included dealing with an endless
procession of eccentrics – so now, nothing a human being does surprises me" (qtd in Botting 79).

With Mother's backing and support Durrell was able to build up an extensive menagerie. Sometimes Durrell would go out bat-hunting at night – a novel experience for him – thus entering a world of silence and moonlight where he could watch the creatures of darkness – jackals, foxes, squirrel, dormice, night jars appear and vanish like shadows. Once he found a young Scops owl covered in baby down and took it home, naming him Ulysses. It was a bird of great strength of character, according to Durrell, and not to be trifled with, so when he grew up he was given the freedom of the Bug House, flying out through the windows at night and riding on Roger's back, when Durrell went down to the sea for a late-evening swim.

Apart from Ulysses, "who spent all day sitting on the pelmet above the window," Durrell acquired a couple of young dogs named Widdle and Puke. There were rows and rows of jam jars, some containing specimens in methylated spirits. A variety of newts, frogs, snakes and toads were housed in different aquariums and his collection of butterflies and dragonflies were placed in glass-topped boxes.

On one occasion Durrell came across a couple of toads living under a rotting olive trunk squatting there "like two obese leprous Budhas" peering and gulping guiltily. They settled comfortably in his hands and gazed at him "trustfully, their wide thick-lipped mouths seeming to spread in embarrassed
and uncertain grins" (My Family 165). Indeed next time we meet such toads, hopefully, we would tend to look at them as “obese leprous Budhas.” By using the words “embarrassed” and “uncertain” to describe their facial appearances Durrell has presented these toads in a different dimension which helps the readers to observe a beauty in them which otherwise they would have failed to notice.

Over the years, Durrell added to his collection a number of toads such as the spade-footed toad, the Brow-leaf toad and the Hairy toads. All these creatures were quite comfortable with him and he in turn found them very endearing. The spade-footed toad, Augustus Tickle Tummy, (named for his peculiar habit of lying on his back and having his stomach gently massaged by Durrell’s forefinger) when taken out from the aquarium and placed on the floor, would "climb laboriously" up Durrell’s leg and then to his lap, "where he would recline in a variety of undignified attitudes, basking in the heat" of Durrell’s body "blinking his eyes slowly, grinning . . . and gulping." This remarkable creature could also sing for his food. On seeing a writhing earthworm held out by Durrell he "would go into paroxysms of delight, his eyes seeming to protrude more and more with excitement, and he would utter a series of little pig-like grunts" and a strange bleating cry. Tickle Tummy’s recital pleased Durrell’s friends greatly, all of them agreeing that "he had the best voice and repertoire of any toad they had met" (Birds 137).
Durrell's description of Augustus is rendered in such a way that despite being a toad it is quite endearing as a baby. Its ability to sing for food and its bliss while being tickled reminds us of young children who would love to be treated in a similar manner. Such abilities of these creatures show that if they are given proper care and attention they would emerge as beasts with a power of understanding and love. Augustus appears as a winsome character in Durrell's description but a totally different feeling is engendered in us as we read Annie Dillard's description of the frog, in her book *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. She speaks about this frog that startled her, during one of her nature rambles. She explains that as she stared at it lost and dumbstruck:

He slowly crumpled and began to sag. The spirit vanished from his eyes as if snuffed. His skin emptied and drooped; his very skull seemed to settle & and collapse like a kicked tent. He was shrinking before my eyes like a deflating football. I watched the taut, glistening skin on the shoulders ruck, and rumple, and fall. Soon, part of his skin, formless as a pricked balloon, lay in floating folds like bright scum on top of the water: It was a monstrous and terrifying thing. I gaped bewildered, appalled. (5-6)

Dillard's frog is a "monstrous and terrifying thing" whereas Durrell's toad is a remarkably intelligent beast, having "many endearing traits of character."

Among Durrell's various pets, there lived a gecko (lizard) named Geronimo in Durrell's bedroom, whose "assaults on the insect life seemed to be as cunning and well planned as anything that the famous Red Indian had
achieved." He would emerge at dark and wait patiently for his "evening meal to appear." To watch Geronimo's "stalking tactics was quite an education." As soon as he spotted a moth, he would stiffen and inching "cautiously, millimeter by millimeter" he would post himself a few inches away from the prey. His face would have "a look of blood curdling ferocity, the tip of his tail would twitch minutely and then he would skim across the ceiling as smoothly as a drop of water, there would be a faint snap, and he would turn around, an expression of smug happiness on his face, the lacewing inside his mouth with its legs and wings trailing over his lips like a strange quivering walrus moustache" (My Family 162-64).

Again from this description we notice that Durrell has compared Geronimo to a huntsman like the Red Indian. Instead of the lizard we begin to see it is an actual hunter, all geared up for a fruitful hunt. The look of "blood curdling ferocity," its expression of "smug happiness" are emotions seen in any hunter stalking his prey. We see Durrell is implying that animals are no different from us. They are also beasts with emotions and feelings. Therefore our superior attitude towards them is not justified at all.

Lizards, according to Durrell, unlike snakes, can "display considerable intelligence and character." He had with him a pet mastigure named Dandy, "owing to his great partiality for dandelion flowers." Though not very attractive, Dandy's eager personality made him quite endearing:

He had a blunt, rounded head; a fat, flattened body; and a heavy tail covered with short, sharp spikes. His neck was rather long
and thin, and this made him look as though he had been put together out of bits of two totally unrelated species. His colour could only be described as a rich, dirty brown. Dandy, as I say, had a liking for dandelion flowers, which amounted to an obsession. He had only to see you approaching the Reptile House with something yellow in your hands, and he would immediately rush to the front of his cage and scrabble wildly against the glass.

If it was a dandelion flower you were carrying, you had only to slide back the glass front of his cage and he would gallop out on to your arm, panting with emotion; and then, closing his eyes, he would stretch out his long neck and, like a child waiting to have a sweet popped into its mouth, would open his jaws. If you pushed the flower into his mouth, he would munch away in ecstasy, the petals dangling outside his mouth and making him look as though he had a bright yellow military moustache. (Menagerie 66)

Durrell became quite close to Dandy, as he was the only lizard he knew that would “genuinely play” with him. Indeed Durrell would be one of the few persons to achieve such an honour. Equally interesting is his intimate relationship with a pied crow. When he acquired this bird, it had at first ignored him, but after a few months it showed definite signs of friendship, deciding Durrell to be the only person in the world for him:

If I went near the cage he would crouch on the floor trembling in ecstasy, or bring me an offering (a bit of newspaper or a feather) and hold it out for me to take, all the while talking hoarsely to himself in a series of hiccupsing cries and ejaculations. This was all right, but as soon as I let him out of his cage he would fly on to my head and perch there, first digging his claws firmly into my scalp, then decorating the back of my jacket with a nice moist
dropping and finally proceeding to give me a series of love pecks on the head. As his beak was three inches long and extremely sharp, this was, to say the least, painful. (*Encounters* 107)

Yet on another occasion, during his ramblings along the Corfu countryside, Gerald came upon four fat, newly-born baby hedgehogs, "pink as cyclamen, with soft, snow-white spines." Enraptured by these tiny creatures, Gerald decided to make them quite tame. The family was soon introduced to this new acquisition. Mother peering at them benignly, remarked they were quite sweet. But Larry looked at them with distaste and observed they were not hedgehogs, as all hedgehogs were brown. Gerald who always found his family's "ignorance of the world they lived" a source of constant worry, never lost an opportunity to enlighten them, pointing out that baby hedgehogs were always born with little rubbery white spines. Later as they grew, the spines would darken and harden.

Mother soon managed to get a feeding bottle for these babies and Gerald began the arduous but pleasant task of mothering them. But his happiness was short lived, when, one day he found these dear creatures bloated beyond belief due to over feeding [a mistake committed by Margo out of compassion for the babies]. The same night they all died and though Margo wept copiously, Gerald never forgave her. As a punishment to his "over-indulgent sister," he dug "four little graves and erected four little crosses in the garden as a permanent reminder" and for a few days he did not speak to her (*Birds* 168-72).
It is quite interesting to note that while Gerald nurtured a passion for anything alive, his brothers were "hell-bent on blasting the wildlife of the island to pieces" (Botting 65). Lawrence was simply indifferent to the natural world and his several expeditions with Leslie to the north of the island revealed a "killer streak". He once wrote to Alan Thomas:

I'm queer about shooting . . . so far I've prohibited herons. But duck is different matter. Just a personified motor-horn, flying ham with a honk. No personality, nothing. And to bring them down is the most glorious feeling. THUD. Like breaking glass balls at a range. I could slaughter hundreds without a qualm. (qtd in Botting 65)

As for octopus, which he learned to hunt with a stick with a hook like the Greeks, they were "altogether filthy . . . utterly foul."

Leslie was no different from Lawrence and he fancied himself as a tough guy, "strutting about with a gun under each arm and one behind his car, shooting peasants right and left" (qtd in Botting 65). As Durrell comments:

Leslie, of course, was in his element at this time. With a band of fellow enthusiasts he made trips over to the mainland once a fortnight, returning with the great bristly carcase of wild boar, cloaks of blood stained hares, and huge baskets brimming over with the iridescent carcasses of ducks. Dirty, unshaven, smelling strongly of gun-oil and blood, Leslie would give us details of the hunt, his eyes gleaming as he strode about the room demonstrating where and how he had stood, where and how the boar had broken cover, the crash of the gun rolling and bouncing among the bare mountains, the thud of the bullet, and the

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skidding somersault that the boar took into the heather. (My Family 144).

Sometimes Leslie used to shoot the stray and starving dogs that followed the family on their picnics and Gerald, who helped to fill Leslie's cartridges, would look on with compassion.

However, both Leslie and Gerald landed in an embarrassing situation one evening, when Mrs Vadrudakis was invited for tea. This eminent lady wanted to start a society for the prevention of cruelty to animals in Corfu and she was seeking the help of the Durrell family to organize it. On that particular day, Leslie was shooting sparrows in bulk for Gerald's pet owlets. As Leslie shot the sparrows, Gerald picked and put them in the paper bag. Some of the dead sparrows, however, fell on the verandah and Gerald ran to collect them. To his consternation he saw Mrs. Vadrudakis, whom they had forgotten, had arrived for tea. She and Mother were sitting "somewhat stiffly on the verandah clasping cups of tea, surrounded by the bloodstained corpses of numerous sparrows." Mother, obviously hoping that her fastidious guest had not noticed the rain of dead birds was saying, "Yes, we're all great animal lovers." Mrs. Vadrudakis smiling benevolently replied "I hear you lof the animals like me." At that moment a dead sparrow fell into the strawberry jam and Mother found it hard to pretend any more. The situation further worsened when Leslie strode out of the house enquiring, "Have I killed enough?" The guest who was upset beyond words left in a hurry saying that they were all "fiends in human shape."

A fitting finale to this episode occurred when, Larry, hoping to get a drink from
the icebox, met with an unpleasant sight. With a roar of rage he bellowed that the whole box was filled with "bloody great bags of suppurating unhygienic sparrows" (Garden 95-97). It was surely not Gerald's day.

But both Larry and Leslie did join with the rest of the family in gifting a donkey for Gerald on his birthday. He was left speechless by this wonderful present and he watched the donkey affectionately when it approached the edge of the bed, staring at him inquisitively and then giving a little throaty chuckle. He was thrilled when it thrust into his outstretched hands "a grey muzzle as soft as everything soft I could think of - silk worm cocoons, newly-born puppies, sea pebbles, or the velvety feel of a tree frog" (Birds 79).

The donkey, which was named Sally, took to Gerald quickly and surprisingly enough, Larry went out of his way offering Gerald to teach him to ride her. After a few abortive attempts Gerald mastered the "equestrian art" and very soon he was trotting Sally to and fro between the olive groves. Larry, with an exultant air offered to show Gerald how to keep Sally's hooves clean and fishing a penknife out of his pocket he dug the blade into Sally's hoof to remove the muck trapped in it. But Sally reacted as though Larry had "jabbed her with a red-hot skewer" and he was given a neat kick in the pit of his stomach. Larry's face went white and he doubled up clasping his stomach making strange rattling sounds. Gerald alerted the entire family and in the ensuing confusion, he quickly made his escape for fear that Larry may "exact the most terrible retribution" on Sally when he recovered (Birds 81-82).
Such interesting incidents scattered in various pages of Durrell's books, especially in his trilogy *My Family and Other Animals*, *Birds, Beasts and Relatives* and *The Garden of the Gods* help to enliven them. Interestingly, over the years Durrell's love for animals never waned and he was able to maintain the rapport with them as when he did in his younger days.

Arranging expeditions to various corners of the world, catching animals and bringing back them back alive for various zoos was his pastime. And he was able to study their behavioural patterns at close quarters.

One of the animals that Durrell finds most fascinating is the monkey as "they are delightfully childlike, with their quick intelligence, their uninhibited habits, their rowdy, eager, live-for-the-moment attitude towards life, and their rather pathetic faith in you when they have accepted you as your foster parents" (A Zoo 127). One of the things he finds most endearing in monkeys is their total lack of inhibition in performing any action they feel like without any embarrassment. "They will urinate copiously, or bend down and watch their own faeces appear with expressions of absorbed interest; they will mate or masturbate with great freedom, regardless of any audience." Watching these innocent actions of monkeys have caused much consternation and embarrassment to the so-called superior human beings who have thus labelled them as dirty, filthy creatures. Durrell scornfully remarks: "It is an attitude of mind that I always find difficult to understand. After all it is we with our superior intelligence who have decided that the perfectly natural functions of
our bodies are something unclean; monkeys do not share our view" (Bafut 195).

Of the many apes Durrell had, Cholmondeley was the most interesting. This baby ape arrived one morning, retiring in the arms of a hunter, with an expression of "sneering aristocracy." Walking into the room condescendingly holding Durrell's hand, he peered "about him with an air of ill-concealed disgust, like a duke visiting the kitchen of a sick retainer determined to be democratic however unsavoury the task." He accepted the banana offered to him "with an air of one who is weary of the honours that have been bestowed upon him throughout life."

Cholmondeley's antics were a source of unceasing amusement for Durrell. Everyday the ape enjoyed watching Durrell prepare tea for him and then holding the cup with twitching excited hands he would "bring his face in it and with a noise like a very large bath running out, start to drink." Without pausing he would empty the cup and then would wait for the "delicious, semi-melted sugar to slide down into his open mouth." Having confirmed there was no sugar left in the cup, he would hand it back to Durrell vaguely hoping for a refill (A Zoo 138-39).

In the early hours of the morning, Durrell had to put up with the several games Cholmondeley had invented for Durrell's benefit. For instance, "he would prowl down to the end of the bed and squat there," casting surreptitious glances to make sure Durrell was watching. Then he would insert a cold hand
under the bedclothes and grab Durrell’s toes. At that moment Durrell was supposed to lean forward with a roar of pretended rage and then Cholmondeley would leap off the bed and run to the other side of the room, watching Durrell over his shoulders with a wicked expression of delight in his brown eyes. Sometimes Durrell used to tickle his neck to which Cholmondeley responded by "giggling hysterically like a child" (A Zoo 139).

Durrell’s games with Cholmondeley are like games played with a father and his young child. The ape’s “surreptitious glances,” its “wicked expression of delight,” its hysterical giggles etc. can be seen in any child playing such games. Similarly the ape’s fascination for tea and its liking for the semi-melted sugar is again a delicacy any child would crave for. As we read Cholmondeley’s description there appears before us the picture of a child with an eye for mischief and trouble.

Durrell’s happy games with Cholmondeley came to a sudden halt, when the chimp met with an ill-fated end. Though it upset Durrell a lot, he soon recovered when he procured another baby chimp during one of his expeditions. This chimp “who grew in mischief as he grew in size” was also named Cholmondeley in honour of his predecessor. He quickly won the hearts of Jacquie, Mother and Margaret and stayed on in the house as an "honoured guest." Jacquie in fact confessed to one of the reporters of Woman’s Sunday Mirror, saying she was mother to this chimp. The reporter’s comment highlights the situation quite well:
At first I thought I had misheard her, but then she said it again... I'm mother to a chimp,' she said. 'Come and see.' And that's how I met Cholmondeley, dressed in a pink cardigan and playing on the dining-room carpet of an ordinary-looking house in St Alban's Avenue, Bournemouth, just like a child. Which is the way Mrs. Jacquie Durrell, 27, wants it to be. For she plans to bring up Cholmondeley exactly as if he were a human baby – her own baby. Then she explained: 'I have decided I would never have children – the life of an ordinary housewife did not seem right for me. Now I am mother to Cholmondeley – he just steals your affection.' (qtd in Botting 252)

Mother, as said earlier, was no less different from Jacquie when it came to taking care of Cholmondeley. Sometimes the naughty chimp along with his girlfriend Lulu would escape from the cage and make his way to the house, where he would "lollop up the stairs for a cuddle with the ever-patient Mother." One evening she heard a loud bang at the door and found both the chimps on the stairs, looking cheerful and expectant. Undaunted, she invited them in, sat them down on the sofa and opened a large box of chocolates and a tin of biscuits. When Durrell remonstrated with her for letting them in, she protested: "But dear, they came to tea - and they had jolly sight better manners than some of the people you've had up here" (qtd in Botting 290). Her words clearly reveal where her affections lay.

Another creature that came under Mother's loving care was a marmoset called Whiskers. She adopted it on sight and kept it in her bedroom, reviving it from the verge of death. This little creature, which was in a very "forlorn..."
condition” would not have survived but for mother’s love and care. Very soon it regained its health and appeared quite fit with its glossy coat and its “snow-white moustache so luxuriant and curly that it would have been the envy of any brigadier.” Its health helped it to regain its confidence too and Durrell presents it as a creature who ruled his mother “with a rod of iron,” very much in the manner of a dictator. She had to give in to its every whim, like allowing it to sleep with her under the cover or playing with it if it did not feel like taking a nap. Speaking about Whisker’s and Mother’s relationship Durrell writes:

He talks to her the whole time in a high-pitched, twittering call that is extraordinarily birdlike, and, as my mother has pointed out, it is difficult to get forty winks when you have what appears to be twenty operatic canaries singing volubly into your ear.

Every evening he crawls under Mother’s pillow and settles himself for the night, in the hope that we will not notice his absence from his cage and will leave him there. When he is hauled out and put to bed properly in his own cage his screams and twitters of indignation can be heard all over the house, and it is only when the front of his cage is covered that he reluctantly stops shouting and makes his way into his own bed, which consists of an old blanket and an apron belonging to my mother. (qtd in Botting 282-83)

Whisker’s antics reminds us of an exuberant baby who creates havoc for its mother trying to catch up with some sleep.

It is remarkable that Mother could shower on the animals the same love and care that she had given her children and those around her. The animals as
well as her children were at par where her love was concerned. Maybe Durrell loved his mother more for this particular trait of hers. In fact he wished people all over the world would shower their benevolence on the creatures around them instead of plaguing them needlessly.

Durrell's several expeditions served to build up his ever-dominant rapport with various creatures. Like Cholmondeley, another fascinating creature that he was fond of was Pooh, a baby crab eating raccoon, whose looks resembled "Dick Turpin awaiting trial." He was adept at stealing food items like bananas, eggs etc at a moment's notice and when scolded he looked "with the expression of one who has always found life harsh and is beyond expecting sympathy or understanding." In order to keep him occupied he was given a length of old cine-film, with which "he would stroll back and forth with yards of celluloid trailing from his mouth, or else lie on his back, holding the film in his paws and peering at it short-sightedly, looking like a plump and rather melancholy, film mogul contemplating his latest epic." But Pooh's favourite toy was the husk of an old coconut, with which he would spend the day "playing football ... plunging his hand into it like a child with a bran-tub, and eventually, when he was tired, falling asleep draped over it" (Drunken Forest 87-91).

Durrell also had in his monkey collection, two chimpanzees, Mary and Charlie, whom he calls "the two most forceful characters" among monkeys.
Charlie who earlier belonged to a planter was quite tame and was fond of mischief and pranks:

He had a small, wrinkled, sorrowful face and melting brown eyes; he looked as though the world had treated him harshly but that he was too much of a saint to complain. This wounded, dejected air was a lot of moonshine, for in reality Charlie, far from being an ill-treated, misunderstood ape, was a disgraceful little street urchin, full of low cunning and deceit. Every day we used to let him out of his cage for exercise, and he would roam about the camp looking radiantly innocent until he thought he had lulled you into believing in his integrity. Then he would wander nonchalantly towards the food-table, give a quick glance round to see if he was observed, grab the largest bunch of bananas within reach, and dash madly away towards the nearest tree. If you gave chase he would drop the fruit and skid to a standstill. Then he would sit in the dust while you scolded him, gazing up at you sorrowfully, the picture of injured innocence, the expression on his face showing quite plainly that he was being wrongfully accused of a monstrous crime, but that he was far too noble to point that out to you if you were too obtuse to realise it. Wave the bunch of stolen fruit under his nose and he would regard it with faint surprise, mingled with disgust. Why should you imagine that he had stolen the fruit? his expression seemed to say. Were you not aware of the fact that he disliked bananas? Never in his whole life (devoted to philanthropy and self-denial) had he felt the slightest inclination to even sample the loathsome fruit, much less steal any. The scolding over, Charlie would rise, give a deep sigh, throw you a look of compassion tinged with disgust, and lope off to the kitchen to see what he could steal there. He was
quite incorrigible, and his face was so expressive that he could carry on a long conversation with you without any need of speech. (*Bafut* 190 – 92)

As for Mary, Durrell finds her a completely different character. Being older and bigger than Charlie, she was a chimp according to Durrell with “much charm, sunny disposition, and a terrific sense of humour.” Her oafish face and large potbelly reminded Durrell of “a fat barmaid, who was always ready to laugh uproariously at some bawdy jest.” She had also developed a trick which she thought was quite funny and enjoyed playing it time and again:

She would lie back in her cage, balanced precariously on her perch, and present an unmentionable part of her anatomy to the bars. You were then expected to lean forward and blow hard whereupon Mary would utter a screech of laughter and modestly cover herself up with her hands. Then she would give you a coy look from over the mound of her stomach, and uncover herself again and you were expected to repeat the mirth-provoking action. This became known to both us and the staff as Blowing Mary’s Wicked Parts, and no matter how many times a day you repeated it, Mary still found it exceedingly funny; she would throw back her head and open her mouth wide, showing vast areas of pink gum and white teeth, hooting and tittering with hysterical laughter. (*Bafut* 193)

It was such child-like qualities of animals that endeared them to Durrell and he never got tired of watching their antics and putting up with them. He would go to any extent to see an animal comfortably settled, even if it caused him discomfort. Once he had to imprison a baby mongoose inside his shirt. It
"stalked round and round his body and then tried to dig a hole in his stomach with its sharp claws. Later it seized a large portion of his abdomen in its mouth and sucked it vigorously while wetting him " with an apparently unending stream of warm and pungent urine" (A Zoo 20).

Sarah Huggersack, the baby giant anteater, was a "charming and lovable personality" that entered into Durrell's life. He found her "tremendously vocal" and impatient like a child. If she could not get her own she would "blare her head off." If she was kept waiting for food, or if not cuddled when she demanded it, "Sarah battered you into submission by sheer lung-power" (Drunken Forest 150). Sarah enjoyed being hugged and hug in return. Playing games with Durrell and Jacquie in the evening was her favourite past time, and if by chance they were forced to forgo these games at any time, "Sarah would sulk all next day" (Drunken Forest 154).

There is no doubt that such descriptions of animals rendered them more lovable and endearing to the readers. Sometimes they are portrayed as having almost human conversational qualities; for instance the description of Roger in My Family. Roger loved to go out with Gerald and any attempt to deny him this privilege would make him restless:

I would suggest to Roger that perhaps it wasn't worth going out today. He would wag his stump in hasty denial, and his nose would butt at my hand. No, I would say, I really didn't think we ought to go out. It looked as though it was going to rain, and I would peer up into the clear, burnished sky with a worried expression. Roger, ears cocked, would peer into the sky too, and
then look at me imploringly. Anyway, I would go on, if it didn’t
look like rain now it was almost certain to rain later, and so it
would be much safer just to sit in the garden with a book. Roger,
in desperation, would place a large black paw on the gate and
then look at me, lifting one side of his upper lip, displaying his
white teeth in a lop-sided, ingratiating grin, his stump working
itself into a blur of excitement. (39)

Praising Roger, Durrell says, "he was the perfect companion for an
adventure, affectionate without exuberance, brave without being belligerent,
intelligent and full of good humoured tolerance for my eccentricities" (My
Family 39-40). Roger loved games and one of his favourite pastimes was
retrieving stones that Gerald threw for him. But this performance had to be
repeated, otherwise, like a small child he would pester for more and "bark
hideously" till it was repeated in "sheer desperation" (My Family 61).

Like Roger, Jock, the dog described in Herriot's All Things Bright and
Beautiful, also loved games. To this farm dog car chasing was a passion.
Herriot enjoyed watching the dog's antics, for, as he says, "behind a vet's daily
chore of treating his patients there is always the fascinating kaleidoscope of
animal personality and Jock was an interesting case" (13). Being a dedicated
car chaser, Jock took his job in all its seriousness and he practised it "daily
without a trace of levity." He never revealed his intentions and played out a
"transparent charade" of pretending he was not interested in Herriot or his car.
But his final moment came when Herriot prepared for his exit after attending to
a sick animal:
When I was putting on my shoes and throwing my Wellingtons into the boot I saw him again. Or rather part of him; just a long nose and one eye protruding from beneath a broken door. It wasn't till I had started the engine and began to move off that he finally declared himself, stealing out from his hiding place body low, tail trailing, eyes fixed intently on the car's front wheels, and as I gathered speed and headed down the track he broke into an effortless lopé. (14)

When Herriot was finally seen off, Jock had a "happy, panting face" and probably he believed "it was a job well done." He would then contentedly await the next session, "perhaps with the postman or the baker's van" (13-15).

Though Herriot loved Jock and his antics, it was his pet dog Sam who was most dear to him. Speaking about Sam, Herriot becomes eloquent:

But I wasn't really alone. There was Sam, and he made all the difference. Helen had brought a lot of things into my life and Sam was one of the most precious; he was a Beagle and her own personal pet. He would be about two years old when I first saw him and I had no way of knowing that he was to be my faithful companion, my car dog, my friend who sat by my side through the lonely hours of driving till his life ended at the age of fourteen. He was the first of a series of cherished dogs whose comradeship have warmed and lightened my working life. (294)

Herriot and Sam were inseparable companions like Gerald and Roger. Whenever Herriot went out, be it during his hospital rounds or the pub or the barber's, Sam would be there to keep him company. He loved car riding and it was an undying passion in him as Herriot observes:
Most dogs love car riding but to Sam it was a passion which never waned—even in the night hours; he would gladly leave his basket when the world was asleep, stretch a couple of times and follow me out into the cold. He would be on to the seat before I got the car door fully open and this action became so much a part of my life that for a long time after his death I still held the door open unthinkingly, waiting for him. And I still remember the pain I felt when he did not bound inside. (295)

True, the loss of pets does hit one badly as they usually become a part of the household. Many a time Durrell too experienced such a bereavement and the worst that affected him was the death of Cholomondeley.

Though most of the animals Durrell was in close contact with are now no more, they live in his works as immortal vignettes. They emerge as engaging personalities with their own peculiar idiosyncrasies. Such a portrayal naturally endears them to the readers thus paving a way for both the security of the animals and man. His humorous descriptions of these animals as well as people certainly deserve to be dealt with in detail.