CHAPTER I

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Lawrence Durrell is one of the twentieth century writers who threw overboard the nineteenth century thrust on rationalism and materialism. In his work, he pays more attention to philosophy and religion, doing away with narrative conventions to acquaint us with the roots of personality and imagination. He is in pursuit of the nature of truth with its many faces. In his attempt to transmit the essential, he provides the readers with a cluster of ideas to be reworked. He goes on “exploding ideas” into the readers’ minds, “then curling up with cat-like unctuousness and refusing to take any blame for the consequences” (Gerald Durrell 15-16).

Many a critic has pointed out that Lawrence George Durrell, poet, novelist, playwright, critic and travel-writer defies traditional placement. Ian S. MacNiven and Carol Peirce remark about Durrell:

It is clear that his work continues to excite admiration and study . . . . Both magical and realistic, both poet and novelist, both immediate and approachable in his work and yet deeply philosophic in his inner core, he defies traditional placement and standards of literary criticism. As his roots in Elizabethan drama and song, nineteenth century Romanticism, and the evolving psychology and science of the twentieth century emerge, we begin to see a figure who is both modern and post-modern and yet who cannot be evaluated entirely by norms of either category.
Nor is he a writer of only one culture. His world encompasses not
the English heritage alone but that of France, of Languedoc and
Provence; of Greece and Egypt, ancient and modern; and of
the Far East, in its philosophy and mysticism. His reputation in
literature seems to grow not as a provincial but as an international
writer. (1984; 12)

Durrell is one of the major creative writers of the twentieth century with
a particular affinity with the work of Anais Nin, Henry Miller, Richard Aldington
and William Gerhardie. As Richard Pine notes, Durrell cannot be characterised
as a ‘religious’ writer and as a ‘non-joiner’, he was not capable of submitting to
any order (5). However, he places Durrell between Yeats and Joyce:

Where modern literature had been dominated by two Irishmen,
Yeats and Joyce, one looking over his shoulder at the past and the
classical, the other looking over his shoulder towards the future
and the modern, Durrell, the third Irishman, stood between them
like a juvenile Buddha who had just stolen the cream, content to
inhabit the fleeting present and to live with contradictions and
paradox. (82)

Durrell occupies an anomalous position in twentieth century letters and
the reason for this can be traced back to the circumstances of Durrell’s birth.
Durrell, born in India in 1912 of Irish and English descent and coming to
England at the onset of puberty, was multiply marginalised. He could not qualify
as ‘Indian’ or even as an ‘Anglo-Indian’ writer though he would like to believe
that his thinking was shaped by the presence of Buddhist priests passing his
schoolhouse door on their way to and from Tibet. As Earl G Ingersoll
observes, Durrell was the "ultimate expatriate, an expatriate without patria or country to begin with", in the midst of twentieth-century writers usually classified as expatriates - Conrad, Joyce, Eliot, Pound and Hemingway (1998; 14).

Durrell did not have any university education. But the breadth of his reading was such that there was hardly a subject beyond his reach. His artistic consciousness has been shaped by distinct influences of varied natures. He has been influenced by persons and places. He owes to Henry Miller for the tremendous prose style of *The Black Book*. Miller's courageous refusal to do anything except what he feels has always been an example to Durrell. He admires Miller, the artist, for his sense of vocation who was ready to die in the streets more than once, rather than turn his hand to compromises like journalism, teaching, B.B.C, diplomacy and so on. To Durrell, Miller was one of the three wise men in his life, the others being T.S. Eliot and George Seferis, the Greek poet. A very interesting incident introduces Durrell to Henry Miller.

One afternoon, Durrell discovered Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* in a public toilet of Corfu. Reading that book, he sent a letter to Miller for which he got a reply and thus correspondence started between them. Durrell observes: "I would never have been able to write *The Black Book* had I not been in a public urinal in Corfu in 1935." Thus it was Miller who "invented" Durrell in a certain manner (Hawkes 236). Durrell's friendship with Miller provided him with the impetus he needed to analyse his motives and his potential.

Durrell was also influenced by Kipling's novels which his mother read to him. He describes *Kim* as an extraordinary book impregnated with Buddhism. MacNiven points out that the thinking of Durrell, to a great extent,
parallels the thinking of Nietzsche in his “rejection of Christianity, his approbation of the Gnostic assertion of the complementary nature of virtue and wickedness, his attitude towards women” (1998; 154).

Another writer who very much influenced Durrell is D.H.Lawrence. Durrell says:

Yes. . . Lawrence confirmed my resentment against England because he was precisely against those narrow, suburban values and because he depicted so marvellously in things like *Sons and Lovers* the crushing of a spirit that can go on in that urban mould. So in a sense he was a great signaler of that; in fact, I borrowed literally from him in tones of voice. . . . (Gray 79-80)

Durrell was nourished by Freud and Jung. Recognising his agnostic upbringing, he accepted Freud before Jung, just as he accepted Jung before Groddeck. He is of the opinion that our education began with Darwin and Freud. According to him, the two great books, *The Interpretation of Dreams* and *Origin of Species*, as well as Spengler and Schopenhauer were probably the foundation of Western philosophy.

Richard Pine classifies the distinct and disparate natured influences which entered Durrell’s consciousness into three stages: first, his boyhood reading of English classics and adolescent fiction, backed up by the *Encyclopaedia Brittanica* and leavened by Alexander David - Neel’s pioneering studies of Tibet, its magic, customs and religion. Second, the works of Freud, Jung and most importantly of Groddeck; the Greek and medieval philosophers and oriental mystics; the baroque figures of the Elizabethan and metaphysical
poets and dramatists; and modern scientific and cultural historians such as Masterlinck, Spengler and Bergson. Finally, when he arrived in Corfu, he was strongly influenced by Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer* and to a lesser extent by Nin’s *Winter of Artifice*, and through them he found the encouragement and stimulation he had failed to derive from his other contemporaries. Pine continues:

The three main texts affecting his intellectual development were Kipling’s *Kim*, Petronius’ *Satyricon* and Lao Tzu’s *Tao Te Ching*. The first grounded him physically and historically in a triple relationship with India, England and Ireland; the second supplied him with an irreverently and cynically intellectual ambition to write satirically; while the third focused his spiritual quest and suggested how the narrative tradition and the satirical might be subverted into the creation of ‘a Tibetan novel.’ (96 - 97)

According to Pine, Durrell is indebted to his predecessors in the sense that he inherited ideas about time from Proust, about structure from Joyce, about plot from Conrad, and about psychology from Hesse and Mann (10).

Durrell has been influenced by Chuang-tze, a philosophic comedian, who is really the basis of early Chinese religion. Another Chinese philosopher who influenced Durrell is Lao Tze, who is described by him as a “Chinese Heraclitus”. Durrell even wonders if Freud himself wasn’t a sort of Lao-Tze. Lao Tze’s *Tao Te Ching* had a lifelong influence on the thinking of Lawrence Durrell. The small book stands behind Durrell’s *A Smile in the Mind’s Eye* and *The Avignon Quintet*. 
Durrell has been influenced not only by persons but also by places. The places, the spirit of which Durrell imbibed are Greece, Tibet and India. He describes Greece as his “second birthplace”:

It's my second birthplace. You know, the old Indian notion that one's born twice, once physically and then once you sort of wake up to reality. I think it's particularly true of poets or writers. Here it's exactly the place where I finished off *The Black Book* and got my first poems together, and where I discovered my own voice, in a way. (Adam 166)

Greece was a sort of revelation for Durrell, and also the ancient Alexandrian Egypt of Oriental Greece, where he found the country and the philosophy which were the hinge between East and West on which he wanted to be located. Durrell reiterates that Greece brought him the confirmation that he could write.

Durrell has been heavily stamped by Greece, ancient and modern and it comes across in his poems. Before one can understand him, one must first appreciate Greece. The Greek poet Cavafy strongly influenced Durrell. Cavafy is described by him as the “expresser of the essence of the city” of Alexandria in the novel *The Alexandria Quartet*, who expressed the “amorality”, the “irony” and the “cruelty” of it (McDonald 150). What Durrell had in mind when he went to Greece was to return to India, because he sensed that he’d lost something and he wanted to recover the thread of it. He discovered that the ancient Greek philosophers (Pythagoras and company) are really Indians. He “experienced a philosophic relief in rediscovering the Indians through the Greeks” (Graf 203-04).
It was Tibet that kept Durrell going through his life and it was Tibet which gave him the idea for a quartet and quintet. Durrell was interested in Tibetan Buddhism, and the writings of Alexander David Neel fascinated him. Moreover, he spent his childhood in India where he went to school in Darjeeling and the image of the lamas coming down to the plains was a daily spectacle. His family owned a lot of Buddhist texts and one was translated by his uncle.

Mac Niven points to the fact that “India remains the fiery shade behind Durrell’s thought and work.” He describes in a fine manner the close connection between Durrell and India:

To understand Lawrence Durrell one must go to India, physically if possible, but otherwise at least in the imagination. . . . Loving India, he felt that he belonged to it, yet he was estranged by his otherness: a white child among brown playmates, predestined to a master’s position that he did not want. . . .

Durrell was early sensitive to the ‘spirit of place’, but Tibet and India would evolve into a state of mind more than a geographic locus for him. The Alexandria Quartet, the work that would gain him an international readership and fame, Tunc and Nunquam, the novels that would lose for him some of his audience and his American publisher alike, and The Avignon Quintet, the magisterial final sequence that would puzzle some of his most loyal friends, are none of them set in the Orient. And yet, and yet. . . . India remains the fiery shade behind Durrell’s thought and work. If he succeeded — and Durrell himself was never quite sure that he had — his life’s work will come to be seen as a
keystone, ..., a bridge linking the human physical and spiritual centres of East and West, a passage from India to the British homeland of his ancestors and back east again.

...Durrell’s ancestry and upbringing gave him a language and tradition; India gave him a sense of otherness; England nearly broke him to harness; Greece freed him again; Egypt gave him his major subject. War, passion, divorces, disappointment, self-doubt, the temptation to suicide scorched him. Out of Durrell’s drive and tensions and experiences came a range of hard-won novels, volumes of poetry, plays and non-fiction. (1998; xvii-xviii)

According to Durrell, England “constricted the sensibilities whereas the Eastern Mediterranean opened them out” (Haag 9). He compares England with France, Italy and Greece:

Here in France, in Italy and Greece, you have the most hospitable nests, you see, where there’s very little chi-chi about writing or artists as such, but which provide the most extraordinarily congenial frames in which a job of work can be done. ... But in England everyone is worried to death about moral uplift and moral downfall, and they never seem to go beyond that problem, simply because they feel separated from the artists. It’s the culture that separates, you see, and turns the artist into a sort of refugee. It’s not a question of residence. Even the home artist has to fight for recognition. (Mitchell 24-25)
Admitting that he hated England, Durrell gives a Freudian explanation why he attacks England. It was his father who decided to send him to England and he attacks England, because he identifies it with his father.

By the time he finished his schooling, Durrell possessed the habit of wide reading and careful notation, a grasp of English literature and history, a love of classical Greece, a grounding in French, and knowledge of Latin and Greek. He had begun seriously to write by the time of his sixteenth birthday.

Durrell did not adhere to the genre of poetry alone and this resulted in plays, novels, criticism and travelogues. He describes this shifting from one genre to another as a result of a deep psychological weakness about which he talks to Marc Alyn in an interview:

> It is more a question of deep psychological weakness. I’m too excitable, and that means that I’m always going from one form to another. For instance, if I find that I can’t write, that I have come up against a brick wall in the work that I am doing, I immediately turn to painting or a bit of music hall. Everything I do is an orgy. And this weakness was even more pronounced when I was young, which explains the numerous attempts I have made to plumb deeper into various genres, the novel, music, poetry.... As soon as I had pinpointed this central weakness in my character, I realised that if I didn’t move constantly from one art form to another, I should never be able to relax. (Alyn 1998; 138)

Durrell is a success as a creative artist, whatever was the genre in which
he wrote. He shaped his own ideas about art, artists and the relationship between landscape and character from his wide reading of various writers, philosophers and psychoanalysts. Also he talks about his own art to his interviewers.

In an interview he says: “I find art easy. I find life difficult” (Mitchell 36). And in another interview he says that through art he meant to give ‘pleasure’ to the readers and that his art isn’t ‘instruction’:

I don’t think anything I write has any real importance. It’s marvellous to give pleasure, to excite people, to push people, but it isn’t instruction. It’s purely sensual, it’s enjoyment. I’m sorry. I’m a Greek. I’m not a Christian. I do them for pleasure. You’re investigating a nightingale. (Gray 82)

Durrell once remarked to Henry Miller that he was sure enough of his books even if the critics weren’t. He knew that the bone structure of his work was ‘metaphysically solid’ (Collier 91). However, he admits that he is “a burglar of ideas”, and not an “original philosopher” (Lyons 105).

Durrell considers his works as “self-perfectioning equipment” and he doesn’t think that he has any obligation to the reader:

I really don’t have any obligation to my reader. If the reader is of the same wave-length as the writer he will like the book, or else he won’t. . . . I mean, I regard these books as part of my self-perfectioning equipment, and I would like in each book to shed, as D.H.Lawrence says, in books one sheds one’s sicknesses, do you see, shed sicknesses, shed neuroses
and come out to the other end clean as a whistle. (Mac Donald 154-55)

When Corinne Alexandre Garner brings Durrell’s attention to the fact that Durrell’s books are full of literary, historical and philosophical allusions, Durrell replies: “These books were really written for learned people” (Garner 221-22). What he wanted to do through writing was to grow up. He had a tendency to overwrite and produced an average of a thousand words a day. George Fraser was quite correct when he remarked that “a daily stint of writing, whether ambitious and important or not, is probably for Durrell almost a physical necessity. Not only a necessity but a pleasure” (12). Durrell dealt with themes of loneliness and passion in his fifteen major novels, his three plays, his five volumes of island portraits, his poetry, and his manifold other writings. As Pine observes: “Durrell’s journeys became pilgrimages, quests: in the western sense a quest for treasure, the grail at the centre of the labyrinth, the quincunx; in the eastern, a ‘way’, a spiritual progression towards Nirvana” (82).

Durrell airs his views on ‘art’ in general not only in the interviews but also in his fiction. To him, books represent act of purification, a type of yoga and art is in a way some kind of exorcism. In The Alexandria Quartet and The Avignon Quintet, there are numerous references to art. Durrell in The Quartet says that it is “at the point where a form is sincerely honoured by an awakened spirit” that art occurs. He explains a puritan culture’s conception of art as “something which will endorse its morality and flatter its patriotism”. According to him art is a sort of “manuring of the psyche” which has “no intention, that is to say, no theology” and by means of nourishing the psyche, it helps it to find its own level, which is “original innocence”. Durrell points to the
ability of art to “relax the psyche”, which always is there “to help deal with casualties” and “it unravels the tensions” (751 - 63). In The Quartet, he sounds what he wants through his art, in the character Pursewarden’s letter to Clea, another character:

Like you, I have two problems which interconnect: my art and my life. 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. In my art, indeed, through my art, I want really to achieve myself by shedding the work, which is of no importance, as a snake sheds its skin. Perhaps that’s why writers at heart want to be loved for their work rather than for themselves. . . . (381)

Sutcliffe in Monsieur comments on the role of art: “Reality is too old-fashioned nowadays for the writer’s uses. We must count upon art to revive it and bring it up to date”(9).

Durrell says that he does not want to preach to people, as an artist:

The world’s so full of artists posing as priests and priests posing as God that it’s about time we sorted the thing out a bit more clearly. I don’t want to pose as providing moral messages which are really the province of the religious people, the priests, professional ministers. . . . (Wheldon 58)

Durrell believes that only in the silences of the artist can reality be reworked:

The solace of such work as I do with brain and heart lies in this —
that only there, in the silences of the painter or the writer can reality be reordered, reworked and made to show its significant side. . . . For us artists there waits the joyous compromise through art with all that wounded or defeated us in daily life; in this way, not to evade destiny, as the ordinary people try to do, but to fulfil it in its true potential — the imagination. *(The Quartet 20)*

Clea with reference to Pursewarden remarks that underneath the preoccupation of an artist there is a man tortured by the world:

An artist does not live a personal life as we do, he hides it, forcing us to go to his books if we wish to touch the true source of his feelings. Underneath all his preoccupations with sex, society, religion, etc. (all the staple abstractions which allow the forebrain to chatter) there is, quite simply, a man tortured beyond endurance by the lack of tenderness in the world. *(194)*

According to Pursewarden, the pain that accompanied composition was due to the fear of madness, “force it a bit and tell yourself that you don’t give a damn if you do go mad, and you’ll find it comes quicker, you’ll break the barrier” *(212)*. Durrell is confident about the ability of the writer to cement the apparent gaps in our actions with his interpretations:

To imagine is not necessarily to invent... nor dares one make a claim for omniscience in interpreting people’s actions. One assumes that they have grown out of their feelings as leaves grow out of a branch. But can one work backwards, deducing the one form from the other? Perhaps a writer could if he were
sufficiently brave to cement these apparent gaps in our actions with interpretations of his own to bind them together? (275)

Durrell is of the opinion that the duty of the artist is to hunt down the “many truths which have little to do with fact!” (708). Durrell believes that “artists are composed of vanity, indolence and self-regard. Work-blocks are caused by the swelling-up of the ego…” (737). According to him, “to become an artist one must shed the whole complex of egotisms which led to the choice of self-expression as the only means of growth!” (751-52). Again, Darley, the central character in The Quartet, describes artists as an “uninterrupted chain of humans born to explore the inward riches of the solitary life on behalf of the unheeding unforgiving community; manacled together by the same gift” (792). The artist is referred to as the “pilot” who helps the rest of men to comprehend “the shoals and quicksands, the joys and misfortunes” of life so as to give them “power” over those (333). As Pursewarden dictates to the children of the Jewish school, an artist “must catch every scrap of wind” (285). Durrell has his own standards to distinguish between a good writer and a great writer: “A good writer should be able to write anything. But a great writer is the servant of compulsions which are ordained by the very structure of the psyche and cannot be disregarded. Where is he? Where is he?” (758).

Durrell’s name, undoubtedly, is among the ‘great’ writers of the world. Apart from being a writer interested in the portrayal of ideas, Durrell is also a success as a creative artist of innovative, mostly postmodern, techniques. He was much concerned with the act of literary creation, which, as MacNiven puts it, is “the process by which the writer exploits ‘reality’, written sources, and his imagination to produce” the literary work (1981; 334). Serious subjects
are dealt with lightness of touch and this gives Durrell's literary creations a kind of novelty. The literary products of his imagination are "sort of fragments which tease the waking mind" (*The Quartet* 99). Durrell writes not for those who have never asked themselves this question: "at what point does real life begin?" (659-60). He makes an attempt to analyse "life with its grotesque twists and turns" (333).

Lawrence Durrell's "literary gardening" includes poetry collections, novels, literary criticism, plays, travelogues, short stories, letters to eminent writers like Henry Miller and Richard Aldington, contributions to periodicals and journals and also a script for the film *Cleopatra* (Durrell - Miller letters 81). The collection of poems published during Durrell's adolescent years were *Quaint Fragment* (1931), *Ten Poems* (1932) and *Transition* (1934) and in 1933, a satire of Shaw's *Black Girl* entitled *Brome Bom bastes* was published, under the pseudonym 'Gaffer - Peerlake'. The major poetry collections of Durrell made its first appearance with the publication of *A Private Country* in 1943. Later volumes include *Cities, Plains and People* (1946), *On Seeming to Presume* (1948), *The Tree of Idleness* (1958), *Selected Poems* (1931-1974).

Commenting on Durrell's popularity as a poet, David Gascoyne says: "Though no doubt it is as a novelist and travel-writer that Lawrence Durrell will be best remembered, I have always thought of him as first of all a poet, and know that his paramount ambition was to be considered a good one" (6). Durrell's sensibility is at its best in his lyrics. He exhibits a sense of landscape and history and deals with subjects that are exotic, yet circumstantial. He had a passion for poetry as is evident from the poems scattered in his novels and plays. He is a "sensuous" poet and writes with utmost economy yet in full
detail (Thwaite 118). Durrell made his literary reputation first as a poet. His originality, precise use of words and clarity of thought make his poems unique. A spokesman of antirationalism, Durrell thought that time and ego were the two determinants of the style of the twentieth century. Durrell was "a poet who had stumbled into prose" (Young 45).

Durrell's earlier novels Pied Piper of Lovers (1935) and Panic Spring (1937) have not been very successful. The third novel, The Black Book was able to fetch popularity. As Peter G.Christensen points out:

In Pied Piper of Lovers love is the most important.... Then in Panic Spring art and religion (as nondogmatic spirituality) become more important. Finally, in The Black Book, art, religion and love all seem to be of equal importance. Thus there is a progression, which may also represent the deepening of Durrell's sensibilities. (1995; 24-25)

The Dark Labyrinth (1947) and White Eagles over Serbia (1957) are the two minor novels which come between the novels of the 1930s and The Alexandria Quartet. In The Dark Labyrinth, history appears in the form of World War II and in White Eagles over Serbia, politics appears and British democracy is pitted against Yugoslavian Communism. The Dark Labyrinth combines some of the realism or naturalistic character of his first two books with the questing thrust into the interior of The Black Book. With the publication of The Alexandria Quartet - a tetralogy comprising of Justine (1957), Balthazar (1958), Mountolive (1958) and Clea (1960) — Durrell came to be accepted as an established novelist. George Steiner observes that Durrell was more appreciated in France than in England, the French among others recognising

The three island books, *Prospero's Cell* (1945), *Reflections on a Marine Venus* (1953) and *Bitter Lemons* (1957) show Durrell's growth as a writer over a period of nearly twenty years. The setting of *Prospero's Cell* is the life of Lawrence and Nancy Durrell in Corfu in the years just before the Second World War and just after the completion of *The Black Book*. *Reflections on a Marine Venus* records Durrell's experiences as an Information Officer in Rhodes in 1945 and 1946. The Durrell of *Prospero's Cell* is a young man without responsibilities and the Durrell of *Reflections on a Marine Venus* is one caught up in the aftermath of war and misery. For *Bitter Lemons*, Durrell got the Duff Cooper Memorial Prize.

Lawrence Durrell has published three verse plays: *Sappho* (1950), *Acte* (1961) and *An Irish Faustus* (1963). In *An Irish Faustus*, Durrell develops a theme that he had stated emphatically in his early correspondence with Henry Miller that 'All art in the germ is curative' (Cartwright 178).

Durrell had spent brief periods in diplomatic service at Athens, Alexandria, Cairo and Belgrade. His experiences in foreign service gave rise to the farcical stories or humour filled satires *Espirite de Corps* (1957); *Antrobus Complete* and *Stiff Upperlip* (1958) which were welcomed by the readers.
Durrell's writing career was also marked by a keen critical presence. One of his first major publications was *A Key to Modern British Poetry* which includes Durrell's critical analysis of writers like Empson, Dylan Thomas, Auden, George Barker etc. His comparison of Empson and Dylan Thomas is an example to show Durrell's ability to present his views sharply:

Dylan Thomas and William Empson deserve to be read side by side, not because of any similarity but because of their radical differences of approach. Both are difficult but the reasons that make them difficult lie in opposite corners so to speak. Contrasts as extreme as this are worth examining together, for they illuminate each other far more clearly than any similarity of temperament or technique could do. (Fraser 196)

Durrell's last work *Caesar's Vast Ghost* is a series of essays on 'Aspects of Provence', conceived as a combination of autobiography, mythology, poetry, travel and meditation — a mixing of genres. The astonishing range of Durrell made Fraser remark: "There is in Durrell an honest journey - man of letters, a craftsman who will have a shot at something and create occasionally something major or spectacular but always a workman like job"(9).

In the next part of this chapter, some short poems are quoted to show Durrell's ability as a poet. It was in *A Private Country* and *Cities, Plains and People* that Durrell created his private voice and vision. Lines from 'The Beginning' written in 1931 at the age of nineteen show Durrell's flexibility of language:

Oh! to blunder onto the glory of some white majestic headland,
And to feel the clean wisdom of the curving sea,
And the dear mute calling of the wind
On the masked heels of the twilight  

Durrell has written simple lyrics and ‘Water Music’ is an example. But behind its apparent simplicity one can discern complexity.

Wrap your sulky beauty up,
From sea-fever, from winterfall
Out of the swing of the
Swing of the sea.

Keep safe from noonfall,
Starlight and smokefall where
Waves roll, waves toll but feel
None of our roving fever.

From day fever and night sadness
Keep, bless, hold: from cold
Wrap your sulky beauty into sleep
Out of the swing of the
Swing of sea.  

Another beautiful, short lyric is ‘Lerbos’ where the growth of the artist’s consciousness is seen as a ‘slow expurgation’:

The Pleiades are sinking calm as paint,
The earth’s huge camber follows out,
Turning in sleep, the oceanic curve.
Defined in concave like a human eye
Or a cheek pressed warm on the dark’s cheek,
Like dancers to a music they deserve.

This balcony, a moon-anointed shelf
Above a silent garden holds my bed.
I slept. But the dispiriting autumn moon,
In her slow expurgation of the sky
Needs company: is brooding on the dead,
And so am I now, so am I. (14)

In ‘Cities, Plains and People’ Durrell says that he saw life as a book:

To all who turn and start descending
The long sad river of their youth:
The tidebound, tepid, causeless
Continuum of terrors in the spirit,
I give you here unending
In idleness an innocent beginning
Until your pain becomes a literature. (199)

Derek Stanford calls Durrell “The guagin of modern poetry” whose paradise was Greece (43). The beauty of Corfu inspired Durrell about which he confesses in his poem “Carol on Corfu”:

This is my medicine: trees speak and doves
Talk, woods walk: in the pith of the planet
Is undertone, overtone, status of music: God
Opens each fent, scent, memory, aftermath
In the sky and the sod. (1960; 66)


Durrell has written poems about creative writers from Homer to Rimbaud, Horace to Byron, Fabre to la Rouchefold. The last lines of the poem “On First Looking Into Loeb’s Horace” complete the portrayal of Horace beautifully.

... fat, human and unloved,
And held from loving by a sort of wall,
Laid down his books and lovers one by one,
Indifference and success had crowned them all. (1960; 166)

As Paul Lorenz says, Conon and Melissa of Durrell’s poems are formally introduced to the world in Durrell’s note appended to the 1942 poem “Conon in Exile”, where Durrell tells us that ‘Conon is an imaginary Greek philosopher, who visited me twice in my dreams, and with whom I occasionally identify myself, he is one of my masks, Melissa is another; I want my total poetic work to add up as a kind of tapestry of people, some real, some imaginary. Conon is real’ (1994: 62).

In the 1942 poem ‘Conon in Exile’ Conon says:

Even in these notes upon myself I see
I have put down women’s names like some
Philosophical proposition. At last I understand
They were only forms for my own ideas,
With names and mouths and different voices.
In them I lay with myself, my style of life,
Knowing only coitus with the shadows. . . . (1960; 125)

In the 1945 poem ‘Conon in Alexandria’, Conon observes:

There are sides of the self
One can seldom show. They live on and on
In an emergency of anguish always,
Waiting for parents in another? (137)

In the 1946 sequence of poems “Eight Aspects of Melissa”, in the third poem in the sequence ‘The Adepts’, Conon insists on linking coitus with cognition.

Some, the great Adepts, found it [coitus]
A lesser part of them — ashes and thorns —
Where this sea-sickness on a bed
Proved nothing calm and virginal,
But animal, unstable, heavy as lead.

Some wearied for a sex
Like a science of known relation:
A God proved through the flesh — or else a mother.
They dipped in this huge pond and found it.
An ocean of shipwrecked Mariners instead,
Cried out and foundered, losing one another

Conon describes the results of Melissa’s approach as he continues:
But some sailed into this haven
Laughing, and completely undecided,
Expecting nothing more
Than the mad friendship of bodies,
And farewells undisguised by pride.

and Conon sadly concludes that

_They_ wrote those poems - the dimunitives of madness
While at a window someone stood and cried. (130)

Lorenz remarks that 'That someone is Conon. He cries because Melissa, not he, is the creative artist. In “The Anecdotes” (1948) Melissa is Conon’s nurse, now she is the source of wisdom, for she kisses and creates while he only withdraws and pleads’ (1994; 62-64). From the above Conon - Melissa poems we find that Durrell’s poetry is “poised between the private and the public spheres” and also that it “swings between his twin themes of ‘sexual curiosity and metaphysical speculation’ ” (Pine 132).

Patrick Quinn observes how Durrell expresses his stand against England and English life. He quotes Durrell’s poem “Ballade of Slow Decay” (1932) which is a young man’s lament of family woes, and it lists the invasion of the house by pretentious relatives during the Christmas season (34-35).

This business grows more dreary year by year,
The season with its seasonable joys,
When there is so much extra now on beer,
And therefore so much less to spend on toys. (Poems 1985; 32)

In the poem ‘Nemea’, Durrell encapsulates the relations of time and space:
A song in the valley of Nemea:
Sing quiet, quite quiet here.
Song for the brides of Argos
Combing the swarms of golden hair:
Quite quiet, quiet there.
Under the rolling comb of grass,
The sword outrusts the golden helm.
Agamemnon under tumulus serene
Outsmiles the jury of skeletons!
Cool under the cumulus the lion queen:
Only the drum can celebrate,
Only the adjective outlive them.
A song in the valley of Nemea:
Sing quiet, quiet, quiet here.
Tone of the frog in the empty well,
Drone of the bald bee in the cold skull,
Quiet, Quiet, Quiet. (*Poems 1960; 16*)

Richard Aldington observes about Durrell, that he is "a poet who knows what he wants to say and says it agreeably"(24). Jonathan Bolton discusses the poetry of Personal Landscape poets. Writers like Durrell, Bernard Spenser, G.S.Fraser, Olivia Manning, Terence Tiller, Robin Fedden and others formed the nucleus of the Personal Landscape Camp in 1945. These poets sensed that the individual personality was shaped according to the spirit of place.
Bernard Spencer and Lawrence Durrell were the two prime movers behind *Personal Landscape*. Spencer’s poem ‘Delos’ and Durrell’s poem ‘Delos’ which appear in the first issue of the *Personal Landscape* are both concerned with the ways in which island isolation is disturbed by the pressures of the outside world (Bolton 65-68). In an article first written for the *New York Times* Magazine and reprinted in *Spirit of Place*, Durrell clearly states the connection between landscape and character:

But as you get to know Europe slowly... you begin to realise that the important determinant of any culture is after all — the spirit of place. Just as one particular vineyard will always give you a special wine with discernible characteristics so a Spain, an Italy, a Greece will always give you the same type of culture — will express itself through the human being just as it does through its wild flowers. (156)

Reed Way Dasenbrock observes that in both Durrell’s fiction and his non-fiction, place dominates over character and as such can be described as a “topographic artist... for whom character is a function of place”. He links “the linguistic richness of Durrell’s work to his topographic impulse” (1984; 208-09). Durrell was a painter himself, had even conducted exhibitions of his paintings at Paris and his paintings got sold in U.K and U.S.A Susan S.MacNiven observes that painting is one of his “serious pleasures” and that occasionally it is “important therapy” which functions as a “counterbalance to the searching, sometimes brooding poet - novelist - dramatist who explores the dark side of mankind” (225).
The prose-poems 'Asylum in the Snow' and 'Zero' encapsulates all his later work with its focus on such things like madness, revolt and death. As Richard Pine points out, within the canon of Durrell's poetry should be included all his verse from the major to the minor mythologies, the three verse dramas- Sappho, Acte and An Irish Faustus, the prose-poems 'Zero' and 'Asylum in the Snow', some prose passages such as the 'Minsatyricon' which closes Quinx and the 'Conclusion' or 'Cunegonde' passage with which the largely poetic Caesar's Vast Ghost comes to an end, as prose-poetry (124). Ian S.MacNiven notes here what T.S.Eliot wrote to Durrell about his poems: "I regard them as the by-products of a prose writer" (1998; 211).

Durrell talks to Marc Alyn about his preference of poetry to other genres.

Alyn. ....Just supposing (a wild hypothesis) that you had to make a choice between these various genres which would you select as closest to the heart?

Durrell. My poetry, naturally. The poetic form expresses what is most intimate, most profound in man as he relates to the world. It's also the most terrifying form; you have to compress into, say, three lines the most unbelievably complex experience. Poetry is all a question of density. (Alyn 1998; 142)

According to Durrell a poem has the "lightness of an arrow" whereas a novel "is like a heavy lorry" (144).

Poems written at the end of Durrell's fortieth year appeared as The Tree of Idleness (1955) and later work includes L.Durrell, The Red Limbo Lingo.

Mc.Guinness also observes that Durrell’s comments on Auden in *Key to Modern Poetry* are equally applicable to himself:

He seemed at home in every medium — in the short, four-beat rhythm of cabaret jazz, in the ballad, and in the iambic metre . . . . Even his earliest work is positively protean in its range of techniques, and the fearlessness with which it used the available contemporary subject-matter. (86-87)

Although Durrell’s primary inclination was towards poetry, it is as a novelist that he achieved fame. His intention, in the novels is to “interrogate human values” (*The Quartet* 387). The most important thread linking most of his novels is his concern with the act of literary creation. He deals also with the inward chaos of man and Eastern thought and wisdom stimulated his imagination. The renowned critic Lionel Trilling’s remark about Durrell as a novelist is noteworthy.

Mr. Durrell is the first contemporary novelist in a long time to captivate my imagination to the extent of leading me to believe that he is telling me something new of convincing me that he is truly interested in what he is writing about. (51)

Durrell uses novel as a medium to communicate metaphysical notions
and the power of art and love. His first three novels *Pied Piper of Lovers, Panic Spring* and *The Black Book* emerged when he was between his twenty-second and twenty-fifth years, while his fourth *The Quartet* came out a decade later. *Pied Piper of Lovers* contains Durrell's response to India and to the death of his father, while *Panic Spring* records his impressions of Greece and *The Black Book* sums up the artist Durrell had become. His verse and fiction show control over his material, an astonishing range of vocabulary and plenty of ideas. His first three novels centre on alienation, loneliness and death, and the development of the artist.

In the preface to *The Black Book* (1938), Lawrence Durrell states that "With all its imperfections lying heavy on its head, I can't help being attached to it because in the writing of it I first heard the sound of my own voice, lame and halting perhaps, but nevertheless my very own". The "voice" is that of Lawrence Lucifer - a school teacher at Honeywoodsdays school and the first of Durrell's artist-heroes. Durrell describes the book as "a savage charcoal sketch of spiritual and sexual etiolation" in which the "real problems of the anglo-saxon psyche" are articulated (9-10). Lawrence Lucifer recreating "the English Death", leaves Christian England choosing the "pagan" world of Greece. According to Donald P.Kaczvinsky, "Durrell's intention in *The Black Book*, like Eliot's in *The Wasteland* with its contrasting scenes and parodic elements, is to provide at once a 'realistic' depiction of England and a 'spiritual' critique of that world" (1997; 20). In *The Black Book* Durrell pushes forward the notion that man combines both good and evil and he announces that each of us contains many lives, an idea which is complemented in *The Quartet* by stating that "there are only as many realities as you care to imagine" (315).
The structure of *The Black Book* is often seen as a major problem. G.S. Fraser observes that *The Black Book* is "messy" (66). Written in the experimental prose of the previous decade, its method of narration is disorganised.

Durrell's first two novels had not been successful, his third *The Black Book* was published in Paris in 1938 and in the United States in 1960. Eliot, then a senior figure at Faber's greeted it as the first work by a new English writer to give him hope for the future of prose fiction. But Faber and Faber declined to publish it anything other than an expurgated edition until 1973.

Sharon Spencer points out that Rank considered the artist as "processing a mechanism" which enabled him to go through life "resolving guilt" and "transcending" it so as to move to a "more complex and more highly integrated level of development" (1984; 156). Durrell is a writer who tried to achieve such a highly integrated level of development, he is very much concerned with the process of 'self-discovery' in his fiction, with a stripping away of layer after layer of the self of outward social habit, till a hard core is revealed.

In the preface to *The Black Book* Durrell says, "*The Black Book* was truly an agon for me, a savage battle conducted in the interests of self-discovery" (9). In *The Quartet* and in *The Quintet* too, Durrell shows his concern about the process of self-discovery. Darley, in *Balthazar* admits that, "I know that the key I am trying to turn is in myself" (*The Quartet* 217). Similarly, Blanford in *Livia* observes that "All ideals are unattainable" and also that human beings are "in the dark" about their "selves", "predilections" and "ruling passions" (14-15). Durrell examines in his magnum opus *The Alexandria Quartet* and in *The Avignon Quintet*, how man can find happiness in this world, how he can come
to terms with life with all its complexities, joys and sorrows.

Lawrence Durrell lived in Greece from 1935 to 1947. During the war, Durrell took refuge in Egypt and spent four years in Cairo and Alexandria, working as a press officer at the British Embassy. It was during this time that he collected the material for his *Alexandria Quartet*. Durrell explains why he chose Alexandria and Avignon for setting in *The Quartet* and *The Quintet*:

I chose Alexandria and Avignon for other reasons, Alexandria figured as the source of our mathematics, and also through the Gnostics as the home of Greek philosophy. As for Avignon it was Rome for 2000 years, with the great scandals like those of the Templars.... (Montalbetti 197)

For Durrell, Alexandria and Avignon are connected by the historical presence of the Gnostics, and the two cities offered him a romantic framework (197).

Alexandria viewed from a distance was a colorful setting for a novel, but according to the poetic plan of symbolism it was one of the greater centres of our European culture. Historically, it was a sort of vortex in which the East and West met in a deadly embrace. (Realit'ès 65)

Carl Bode remarks about *The Alexandria Quartet* thus: “Here is a novelist who has created a city and peopled it for us; here is a remarkable and complicated achievement which I believe we shall long enjoy” (221). *The Quartet* takes into account Western psychology, dualism, ambivalence, opposition of space and time, Freud and Einstein.
The Alexandria Quartet tells the story of a group of Europeans and Alexandrians entangled in passion, love, incest and political intrigue. But the main character is prewar Alexandria. The four books show the way an artist grows up. Morton Levitt opines that Durrell in The Quartet deals with the traditional theme of “art and the artist, of the artist’s relationship with his art, his society and himself” (301). Pine underlines the same idea:

In Western terms, the book is a Bildungsroman, chronicling the development of the artist’s consciousness as he approaches the fullness of his powers; in eastern terms an ascent to self-knowledge along the ‘way’ of the Tao. (171)

In The Quartet, Durrell conveys the idea that personality is not coherent but made up of a collection of attributes. He himself says so:

It is in fact my own drama that I have tried to describe. I think that our universe is based more and more on a single world. The philosophers are confronted by new questions. Can we keep the mantras and still have clinics? Can science accommodate itself to the Hindu theories of nonpersonality? We must confront these questions from now on. That is the approach I have adopted in the novel. The Alexandrian Quartet is a European novel which suggests that personality is not coherent and distinct but made up of a collection of attributes. (Montalbetti 195-96)

In The Quartet, Durrell puts into question the whole stability of the ego:

It seems to me that in The Quartet and The Quintet I clearly constructed the novel out of the notion of the impossible ego. The
characters there interchange with each other, branch out, improve according to a sort of spiral and not according to that brutal evolutionism too often confused with self-fulfilment. (Montremy 214)

It seemed to Durrell that the revelation of bisexuality in Freud was a major assumption and hence the citation from Freud in the epitaph of The Alexandria Quartet. To Durrell “every sexual act is a process in which four people are involved” and it is precisely the structural device of The Quartet (Graf 210-11). He himself explains in detail what he was after in constructing The Quartet and The Quintet:

...Looking back now on the whole thing, I think what I was after was one Occidental novel and one Oriental. Underneath I hoped to plot, the interesting state of our philosophy — the headlong collision of Oriental and Occidental philosophy. (Christy 227)

He continues:

You see, the four quartets was the four dimensions of the traditional space-time notions of Einstein set to music and the Quintet is based on a pentagram because the individual psychology from an Oriental point of view comes in groups of five... they are called the skandas and they roughly correspond to the Freudian group of four which is the double sex, androgynous thing. It asks questions about human identity, how complete it is. You ask Freud, he’ll tell you we come in several parts. We are all spare parts of each other. (228)
To Durrell’s mind, The Quartet was western in cast and attitude, and is organised along the lines of Einsteinian physics. The range of shifts open to the ego in the Einsteinian universe of The Quartet was limited to the conscious and the subconscious, the male and female. In The Quintet, he draws on the five skandas of Buddhism — form, sensation, perception, conformation, consciousness — those elements of being that determine personality.

John Maynard compares Ondaatje’s The English Patient with Durrell’s Alexandria Quartet. Ondaatje is Srilankan born Canadian, a classical postmodern. Like Ondaatje, Durrell “has set up a world in which worlds collide, French, English, Egyptian, Greek and so many others”. The Alexandria Quartet, is the “last of the colonial novels”, and seen another way, is “a post-colonial exploration of emerging borderlines among peoples and cultures” (71).

Monsieur may be considered as the link between The Quartet and The Quintet in that it takes the reader back to Egypt. Constance herself is the tie between the two sequences since she subsumes the three major women of The Quartet — Melissa, Justine and Clea — while integrating all the trinities of characters that populate The Quintet.

There is a hint in Monsieur that Durrell was not satisfied with The Alexandria Quartet:

. . . .the dissatisfaction with my own rather carefully landscaped novels with their love-motivated actors. I supposed that I was not really ripe to write about the Other thing, which I had vaguely situated in or around the region demarcated off by the word “God”. (214-15)
Durrell describes *The Avignon Quintet*, as his last book, a present to France, which he says, “makes the English stiff”. He continues:

I don’t know that this quintet is more important to me than *The Alexandria Quartet*; in any case, it has a different place in my life. Since I was twenty, I’ve thought my writing ought to follow a spiritual progression, not in a pompous sense of the term nor a religious sense. The three gnostic stages in Greek are called *agon*, struggle, the subtitle I gave to *The Black Book*, my first book; *pathos*, acceptance of experience, the hurly-burly and ripening of experience, the stage of *The Quartet*; and *anagnorisis*, the present, the reconciliation of opposites, the acceptance of reality. That means, simply: one has to die one of these days. . . . (Braudeau 189-90)

About choosing Avignon as the setting of *The Quintet*, Durrell remarks to James P.Carley thus:

Avignon was the seat of one of the greatest heresies which ever shook Christianity. . . . I wanted to do a book about people, but under the people I wanted the city to convey some of the unease, some of the despair, and some of the disgust that I feel about Christianity. (1998; 183)

He describes *The Avignon Quintet* as “an intellectual autobiography”:

My parents packed me off from India when I was a child, and my father’s last post was Burma, a very Buddhist country. I left when I was twelve. Later I went to Greece. I swam in the Mediterranean
but I was also able to reconstruct the ancient link between Greek and Indian philosophers. It was a way of rediscovering my past. But one cannot go back; one has to go forward. To create a work of art — that's the way to reconcile the two. (Wajsbrot 231)

In *The Quintet* far more explicitly than in *The Quartet*, Durrell denies both the discreteness of the ego and the concreteness of events; death was no longer final or even real, a Tibetan belief rather than Christian to his mind. Personality is totally illusory, Durrell reiterates in *The Quintet*. He explains this point to his interviewers Jean Pierre Graf and Bernard Claude:

**Interviewers.** These references to Tibetan Buddhism are very poorly understood in the West. Could you clarify them?

**Durrell.** You know, the components of our European personality throughout the history of psychology upto Freud are located for simplicity's sake between the conscious and the unconscious. For the Hindus, for the Vedantists, these elements are classified into the five 'baskets' the famous ramifications. All the Aristotelian distinctions, for example, perception, comprehension etc are grouped in a single, completely nebulous element, because individual personality doesn't exist, it's an invention, and the farther one progresses in yoga, the more one realises it's an invention. . . . Do you see what I mean? Instead of being solid, very round, forming a complete whole, personality dissolves into several forms. So these forms become my characters. The characters in the
Quartet are trying to become fulfilled. I pour them here and there into the Quintet. (Graf 206-07)

Mac Niven notes that “persona are not wholes but collections of spare parts”, according to Durrell (1987; 234-48). Thus the theme ‘be ye parts of one another’ is emphasised in The Quintet. But Durrell tells Farcet in an interview:

When I finished The Quintet I hoped that toward the end a personality would begin to dominate and that all the different creations presented in the narrative would appear as parts of a single, rounded being. In this way distinctions such as man/woman etc. would be eliminated. All that would remain would be an entity. (Farcet 254-55)

It is to be noted here that Durrell had once said that Constance is the core from which the other characters radiate and if it were possible for them all to be fused into one character, Constance, then there would be an ideal concept. Constance becomes the emotional epicentre of The Quintet — perhaps the culmination of both sequences.

In The Avignon Quintet, Durrell turns to Eastern philosophy, the five Tibetan skandas. The Quintet offers a solution: the East as a way out for the West. Speaking of The Quintet after the completion of the second volume, Durrell said:

...all my new people are aspects of one great person, age, culture. I would like to make a metaphor for the human condition as we are living it now and in order to achieve this the quincunx would contain poems of celebration drawn from the East and the
West. I would like to plant this quintet at the point of tangence between these two cultural principles. (Pine 280)

According to Pine, Durrell’s ultimate expression of the ‘point of tangence’, the metaphor, was in the tragic love affair between Constance and Sebastian:

Being in love with an Oriental is eerie because we are so different. . . . we do not share the same historic pedigree, intellectual connivance. My soul, my heart, is of more recent manufacture, sixteenth - or seventeenth - century — the world where sense, sensibility, sentiment were formulated as modes of enquiry and expression, where romantic love first threw up its narcissisms, its Don Juans. His backcloth is a huge hole in space, something vast, an Egypt of utter blank indifference to actuality. I live in the contingent, he in the eternal — in prose rather than poetry. (Constance 290-91)

Durrell confirmed that this point in Constance marked the quintessence of his entire work (Pine 280-81).

Durrell says that, Monsieur, the first of the quincunx novels is a terrible muddle because it’s got all the themes that he intended to develop. Monsieur, is the centre novel, the keystone of the five. Durrell works in patterns of five throughout The Quintet: the five senses; the five-fold path of Tantric Buddhism; the five traps of Western Civilization, which he characterised in five M-words: “Monotheism, Messianism, Monogamy, and Materialism and ‘The cornerstone of culture. . . another M-merde’”. The last of the quincunx novels, Quinx, seems to be the conclusion of a project. The Quartet’s ending is open whereas in The Quintet the last page is really the last page.
Farcet’s assessment of *The Quintet* is as follows:

... The book is a succession of brilliant aphorisms and the characters seem like multiple facets of same fragmented, explosive self. In general you transpose the Buddhist concept of a non-existent, stable and unified self into the novel. (Farcet 254-55)

However, Pine remarks that *The Quintet* becomes unreadable as it leaves us without “signposts” by placing too great a burden on the nature of a language which we have taken for granted still expecting to be conducted from start to finish by “sequential narrative”. The book is “cerebration”, and not “celebration — a train of thought than of action” (326).

MacNiven voices a different opinion that *The Avignon Quintet* is a work distinct and original in central theme and structural conception (1981; 330).

My point is that the following two passages from *Constance*, thoughts of Sutcliffe, sums up what Durrell’s conception of *The Quintet* structurally and thematically was meant to be:

After all, why not a book full of spare parts of other books, of characters left over from other lives, all circulating in each other’s bloodstreams – yet all fresh, nothing second-hand, twice chewed, twice breathed. Such a book might ask you if life is worth breathing, if death is worth looming. ... Be ye members of one another. I hear a voice say, ‘What disease did the poor fellow get?’ ‘Death!’ ‘Death?’ Why didn’t he say so? Death is nothing if one takes it in time’. (123)

The second passage:
To commingle and intersperse contingent realities — that's the game! After all, how few are the options open to us — few varieties of human shape, mental dispositions, scales of behaviour: hardly more numerous than the available Christian names used by the race. How many coats of reality does it take to get a nice clean surface to the apprehension? We are all fragments of one another; everyone has a little bit of everything in his make-up. From the absolute point of view - Aristotle's Fifth Substance, say — all persons are the same person and all situations are identical or vastly similar. The universe must be dying of boredom. Yet obstinately I dream of such a book, full of not completely discrete characters, of ancestors and descendants all mixed up — could such people walk in and out of each other's lives without damaging the quiddity of each other? Hum. And the whole book arranged in diminished fifths from the point of view of orchestration. A big switchy book, all points and sidings. A Golgotha of a book .... (123)

It would be worthwhile to mention something about Durrell's characterisation and his use of language. Durrell admits that he is poor on character because "ideas" interest him more than people. He sees himself as a creator of characters as portrayals of ideas rather than as representations of real life. John M. Rose observes that Durrell's characters are "amphibious or two-lived". One life is spent in restless activity, moving from one event or plan or relationship to the next and the other life is constituted of being part of larger totality. This kind of part-whole relationship forms the center of Plotinus'
Durrell loved words passionately and felt that language was inadequate to express one's emotions, wishes or knowledge. He was able to create a style of his own, which is inimitable. As Pine observes: "Seldom has a writer been so effective in experimenting with intellectual and emotional concepts within the fabric of language itself, using language as the means of redirecting literature in its aim and purpose" (207).

Durrell is of the opinion that language is very important in one's writing. Eugene Lyons and Harry T. Antrim asks Durrell, in an interview, about his style:

Interviewers. I'd like to ask about your style, your sense of your own language.

Durrell. Of course, Language is terribly important, metaphysically and every other way, and it's changing like an organism. It's like an oyster: you squeeze a little lemon on it and it's delicious.

(Lyons 116)

However, in Monsieur, Durrell talks of language as the "worst invention of man". Sutcliffe writes in his note book: "Language is all very fine and we cannot do without it but it is at the same time the worst invention of man, corrupting silence, tearing petals off the whole mind. . . ." (89). He points out the need for expression: "The art of prose governed by syncopated thinking; for thoughts curdle in the heart if not expressed. An idea is like a rare bird which cannot be seen, What one sees is the trembling of the branch it has just
In one interview, Durrell refers to the "inexhaustible" quality of language:

Inevitably you do tend to go over your own obsessions and your own experiences with a certain amount of repetition. But what is inexhaustible is the language which you’re writing in, and you can always do things with that. T.S. Eliot once said to me: ‘There’s only one thing to say, but we must find as many ways of saying it as possible, and that means we really must try different forms’. (Adam 169-70)

Durrell declares that he is really a poet, that poetry leaks into his prose, that he doesn’t think he writes the “straight, galvanised-iron prose” but what he writes is “poetic prose” (Wheldon 55). According to him, good prose satisfies one’s cerebral instincts, whereas good poetry is like a woman: a perpetual surprise. When prose can be constructed, poetry comes from nothing.

Durrell owes much to Eliot for his style in poems. He always followed Eliot’s advice and whatever reputation he has for exactitude and rigorous precision comes from having had Eliot as a guide.

Durrell himself is surprised to see a continuity which he never suspected between The Black Book and The Quartet. He wrote The Black Book when he was twenty-two, but the same type of obsessions, the same type of presentations, and a great deal of the same type of prose style is simply, slightly improved in The Quartet. About the language of The Black Book, Fraser writes:

Henry Miller, at first rejoicing in the richness of language in The
Black Book quite soon began to be worried by it. He thought that a lot of the Durrellian verbal novelties which sprang very largely from Durrell’s wide reading in psychology and in medical books, were splendid nonsense words. (51)

Durrell wrote to Miller explaining that he was not a nonsense writer, that all the out-of-the-way words in The Black Book both have a dictionary meaning and make precise sense in the contexts in which they are used. He uses in his fiction terms from medicine and psychoanalysis like ankyloses, teratoma, accidie, catatonia etc.

We come across some more observations of Durrell about style, in the interview given to Marc Alyn.

Alyn. In literary terms you are a marvelous landscape painter. One could go on forever quoting memorable sentences and pages in your descriptions of places...

Durrell. In The Quartet I drew on all my poetic resources including word-painting. It’s very difficult to construct four novels around one subject. That’s why you often find three or four metaphors in one sentence... (Alyn 1998; 141-42)

Any number of examples can be given from Durrell’s novels to prove his ability in choosing the precise word. Durrell is able to throw light on Capodistria’s character in a single sentence: “Capodistria has the purely involuntary knack of turning everything into a woman; under his eyes chairs become painfully conscious of their bare legs” (The Quartet 37).

How beautifully is Durrell able to portray human beings in the following
short sentence! “How stupid, how limited we are — mere vanities on legs!” (97). The past events, how they acquire a brilliance, he puts it like this: “Far-off events, transformed by memory, acquire a burnished brilliance because they are seen in isolation, divorced from the details of before and after, the fibres and wrappings of time” (187).

Durrell points out how difficult one finds it to behave with the dead in the most apt words: “It is hard to know how to behave with the dead; their enormous deafness and rigidity is so studied. One becomes awkward as if in the presence of royalty” (189). He describes landscape “as a field dominated by the human wish — tortured into farms and hamlets, ploughed into cities. A landscape scribbled with the signatures of men and epochs” (95).

Durrell’s comment about MonaLisa’s smile is another example of his verbal and imaginative brilliance: “For my part the famous smile has always seemed to me to be the smile of a woman who has just dined off her husband” (105). Another impressive description is about old Scobie:

Lying in bed with the smoky feeble glare of the night — lights glinting in the glass of his compass — lying in bed after midnight with the brandy throbbing in his skull he reminds me of some ancient wedding-cake, waiting only for someone to lean forward and blow out the candles! (106)

See Justine’s comment about poverty and riches: “‘Poverty is a great cutter-off’, . . . ‘and riches a great shutter-off’” (137). How aptly Durrell describes Keats, the journalist’s neurosis that something has happened, or is about to happen:
This haunting fear of missing a fragment of reality which one knows in advance will be trivial, even meaningless, had given our friend the conventional tic one sees in children who want to go to the lavatory — shifting about in a chair, crossing and uncrossing of legs. (219)

About his own technique of presenting events overlapping each other, he says in his characteristic style: “But I love to feel events overlapping each other, crawling over one another like wet crabs in a basket” (293).

In Clea, in the extracts from Pursewarden’s Notebook, Pursewarden declares, and surely, through Pursewarden, Durrell declares that “the choice of a style is most important”. He goes on to give his own opinions of Keats, Ruskin, Shelley, Donne, Shakespeare, Pope, Eliot, Blake, Whitman, Longfellow, Lawrence and Auden, a passage which shows once again, Durrell’s inimitable style. Reading passages like the one which follows is really a pleasure:

How shall we go about it? Keats, the word - drunk, searched for resonance among vowel-sounds which might give him an echo of his inner self. . . . Byron was off-hand with English, treating it as master to servant; but the language, being no lackey, grew up like tropic lianas between the cracks of his verses, almost strangling the man. . . . Donne stopped upon the exposed nerve, jangling the whole cranium. . . . Shakespeare makes all Nature hang its head. Pope, in an anguish of method, like a constipated child, sandpapery his surfaces to make them slippery for our feet. Great stylists are those who are least certain of their effects. The secret lack in their matter haunts them without knowing it! Eliot puts a
cool chloroform pad upon a spirit too tightly braced by the information it has gathered. . . . He induces awkward sprains at a moment when we are trying to dance! He has chosen greyness rather than light, and he shares his portion with Rembrandt. Blake and Whitman are awkward brown paper parcels full of vessels borrowed from the temple which tumble all over the place when the string breaks. Longfellow heralds the age of invention for he first thought out the mechanical piano. You pedal, it recites. Lawrence was a limb to the genuine oak-tree, with the needed girth and span. . . . Auden also always talks. He has manumitted the colloquial. . . . (The Quartet 755-56)

As regards use of humour, Durrell tells Farcet that it is a sort of diversion to transmit the essential.

Farcet. If language is inadequate, humor remains within our disposition to say what cannot be said otherwise. You use it with abandon.

Durrell. Yes, taking recourse in humour is going on a tangent, using diversions to transmit the essential. . . .(Farcet 251)

Durrell’s humour is well represented in his fiction — in The Quartet, The Revolt of Aphrodite and in The Quintet. Mac Niven lists examples of Durrellian humour (1981; 330-34). In The Quartet, Pursewarden quotes an Arabic proverb: “The world is like a cucumber — today it’s in your hand, tomorrow up your arse” (The Quartet 98). In Monsieur, Sutcliffe observes about comedians: “Comedians are the nearest to suicide” (Monsieur 263) and later he announces: “I am for all the soft collisions I can get. I have been
decocted. Soft as a boxing glove by moonlight” (265). Sutcliffe explains his observation about sex as funny thus: “If ever I said sex was funny it was only to emphasize the enormous fragility of the enterprise. Spare us this day our classical pruritus”(271). In many of his passages, Durrell makes fun of the many manifestations of himself — Blanford, Sutcliffe and Bloshford:

Arrived, THE GREAT MAN DUMPED HIS LUGGAGE AT THE hotel and putting on blue-tinted glasses set out to have a little walk and smell, deambulating with caution however because somewhere in this fateful town was Bloshford, the writer he hated most in the world because he was so rich, his books sold like pies; . . . It was vexing that he too spent most of his time in Venice — it was the site of many of his infernal novels. (Monsieur 178)

In Livia, Blanford, after his wife leaves him, finds refuge in comic drunkenness:

He lost his briefcase and his umbrella. . . . He nearly fell over the Pont Neuf, enjoyed the conversation and esteem of several hairy clochards, and was finally knocked down by a taxi in the Place Vendome. . . .

He informed the doctor seriously: ‘The whole of humanity seems simultaneously present in every breath I draw. The weight of my responsibility is crushing. A merciful ignorance defends me from becoming too despondent’. He was told to shut up and sleep. . . . (194)
As Durrell explains to Marc Alyn in *The Big Supposer*, to escape despair “One turns it into farce, into happiness” (137).

Though, in the initial part of this chapter some critics declaring that Durrell did not belong to any particular literary tradition were mentioned, one has to admit that he makes use of many postmodern techniques in his fiction. Chiara Briganti places Durrell in the postmodern tradition referring to “deconstructionists and postmodernist writers like Durrell” (45). Earl.G.Ingersoll states that *The Quartet* is a masterpiece of English postmodernism, a generation before literary theorists would generate the term to characterise either *The Quartet* or Durrell as postmodernist. Durrell was following the path of “an inevitable transformation of the modernist into the postmodern” like the Samuel Beckett of *Murphy*, the Flann O’Brien of *At Swim-Two Birds*, and even the modernist Joyce of *Finnegan’s Wake* (1998; 14-15). The main postmodernist techniques used by Durrell are text within text, “surrogate” author, different observers of same events smashing the barrier between illusion and reality, and inclusion of different genres within the novel. We find in Durrell’s fiction, a mixture of levels, his fiction is not mere fiction, there is poetry in it. He has experimented with space and time and polyphony, that is, many - voicedness, story told from more than one point of view. Like a typical postmodernist writer, Durrell abandons search for unity and there is no sequence of time or place. He believes that the world is a text to be interpreted, that reality is inaccessible and self is itself a text to be interpreted. His fiction is self-reflexive fiction or metafiction, that is fiction that admires itself. In his novels, we find that there is acute self-consciousness about the constructed nature of the work. The novels have a multilayered structure and a multitude of plots are woven into one
structure. Balthazar writes to Darley:

I suppose (writes Balthazar) that if you wished somehow to incorporate all I am telling you into your own Justine manuscript now, you would find yourself with a curious sort of book — the story would be told, so to speak, in layers. Unwittingly I may have supplied you with a form, something out of the way! Not unlike Pursewarden's idea of a series of novels with “sliding panels” as he called them. . . . (The Quartet 338)

Justine says: “Now if I wrote I would try for a multi-dimensional effect in character, a sort of prism-sightedness”(28). The above passage and Justine's utterance actually refer to Durrell's own technique. The books of The Quartet cover the same events, one dancing around another a “four-card trick. . . passing a common axis through four stories. . . ”(757). Pursewarden, the 'real' novelist writes notes to Darley ("surrogate" for the author) which is also a postmodernist device (Lodge 19). The Quartet and The Quintet present multiplicity of texts within the text which Mikhail Bakhtin refers to as "polyphony" or "heteroglassia" (124).

Earl.G.Ingersoll observes that Durrell's novels seem 'difficult' because readers want to see him as a late modernist. According to him, a vehicle for dispelling the confusion of the modernist and postmodernist is the notion of mise-en-abyme, or a text within a text, on the analogy of a set of Chinese boxes or Russian dolls. The modernist uses mise-en-abyme to privilege the reality of the work of art over our conventional notions of reality whereas the postmodernist “foregrounds textual indeterminacy and the impossibility of establishing boundaries between levels of ‘reality’ . . .”. Ingersoll
continues that from the “intricate interrelations of writers and texts” in *The Quintet* it is clear that Durrell is working in the postmodern paradigm. He points out that, reading the end of *Monsieur*, suddenly one sees that the text he has been reading as *Monsieur* is one which Durrell’s writer/surrogate Aubrey Blanford has constructed as a text written by his ‘author’/surrogate Robin Sutcliffe, who problematises this web of intertextuality further by creating a “writer”/surrogate, Bruce Drexel. Sutcliffe rewrites his “creator” as Bloshford. Thus a “bottomless pit of textuality” is implied (1994; 115-17). He cites two passages from *Livia* to show how Durrell problematises “barrier”, “illusion” and “reality”. The first passage:

“Remember, Rob” Blanford retorted, “that everything you write about me is deeply suspect - at the best highly arguable. I invented you, after all”

“Or I you, which ? The chicken or the egg?” (10)

The second passage of Blanford is about *Quintet* itself:

Well, squinting round the curves of futurity I saw something like a quincunx of novels set out in a good classical order. Five Q-novels written in a highly elliptical quincunxial style invented for the occasion. Though only dependent on one another as echoes might be, they would not be laid end to end in serial order, like dominoes — but simply belong to the same blood group, five panels for which your creaky old *Monsieur* would provide simply a cluster of themes to be reworked in the others. Get busy, Robin! (11)

Thus, *The Quartet*, a series of novels with “sliding panels” and *The
Quintet, five Q novels or "five panels" presenting "a cluster of themes" to be worked and reworked so that in the end the textual is the real and the real may be only the textual seems to confirm Durrell as a 'postmodernist' novelist. Anyhow, he stands outside literary mainstreams, he is alone but at the same time with everybody.

Durrell tells Die ter Zimmer in an interview that more than the material in his books, what interests him is the form. As regards The Quartet, Durrell says that the form can only be judged if all the four books are considered together. He continues:

I wanted to represent the modern time - space sense in the novel. The first three parts of my Quartet develop the three dimensions of space, each from a different point of view or dimension, so that they come into conflict with each other. The fourth then adds time to the dimension of space. (Zimmer 37-38)

Durrell leaves his works open as postmodernist writers do. He talks about this: "What is more important to me is to leave the work open, above time, a prey to time, burrowed by time and dominating time. And then to let the reader loose on the work I have written" (Juin 43). In Justine, Durrell notes: "Life, the raw material, is only lived in potentia until the artist deploys it in his work. . . . I dream of a book powerful enough to contain the elements of her. . . . I would set my own book free to dream!" (The Quartet 66-67).

Durrell wants to let the reader also loose on his work. Durrell speaks to McDonald about how he happened to assign The Quartet and The Quintet their particular forms. He felt that the sequential novel had really been mopped up
for our age by Proust, and thought of another form suitable to the contemporary age when "the world inside had been completely disintegrated by the Freudian split of the psyche, the discovery and analysis of an unconscious, and the world outside had been split by the atom, by Einstein". And he wondered if it is not possible to make a kind of "mock-up form" using some of the "philosophic by-products from relativity and psychoanalysis" and thus making "a new kind of mix" (Mc Donald 151).

Both *The Quartet* and *The Quintet* represent "a new kind of mix", books "which, though multiple, embodied an organic unity" (*Livia* 38) which "would be roped together like climbers on a rockface, but they would all be independent. The relation of the caterpillar to the butterfly, the tadpole to the frog. An organic relation" (11). Durrell's comparison of a novel with a poem is interesting.

A novel, you know, Marc, is like a heavy lorry, full of people, places, cries. If the load isn't properly stowed and balanced the whole lot tips off at the first bend. A poem, in comparison, has the lightness of an arrow. (Alyn 1998; 144)

Similarly, in *Livia* Durrell distinguishes between painting and writing beautifully:

Painting persuades by thrilling the mind and the optic nerve simultaneously, whereas words connote, mean something however approximate and are influenced by their associative value. The spell they cast intends to master things — it lacks
innocence... Painting is devoid of this kind of treachery — it is an innocent celebration of things, only seeking to inspirit and not coerce. (245)

The above two observations, about poem and novel and about painting and writing, fully reveal Durrell's unparalleled ability to put across what he intends, so as to impress the reader quite unawares. Peter Collier remarks that Durrell is aware that he is accused of technical overskill, aware also that he stands outside literary mainstreams and that his writing raises some critics' hackles, a fact both he and Miller find amusing (Collier 91).

Lee T. Lemon remarks that "both The Quartet and The Quintet are indeed prototypes of the classic postmodernist novel along with the novels of Barth and Fowles" (1989; 157-160). Dianne Vipond traces Durrell's use of "intra and intertextuality" in his novels — the use of Pursewarden's letters, Justine's diary, the inclusion of numerous literary allusions and characters. Durrell's employment of postmodern techniques made her remark: "Durrell reveals his awareness of the power of context, the impact of art upon art, and the manner in which both of these operate upon interpretative strategies" (63). In The Quartet, Durrell narrates Darley's past history in the present. Linda Hutcheon writes: "Postmodern fiction suggests that to re-write or to re-present the past in fiction and in history is, in both cases, to open it up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological" (110). Anyhow, I wish to state that Durrell remains a class by himself as a writer above comparison, and he can be said to occupy an anomalous position in the twentieth century letters.

Durrell did express his happiness over the formation of Lawrence Durrell Society to venerate him. He says so in an interview:
I am not especially fond of the United States; however, a Lawrence Durrell Society has been founded to venerate me. So I am going to encourage them a bit.... This is the first time I have gained respect.... (Wajsbrot 230)

Buffie Johnson describes Durrell as “a personality with an enormous sense of fun, terrific energy and a kind of wildness very evident when he was young”. She also thinks that Durrell’s visual sense is more vivid than that of any modern writer she could think of (66-71). Ian S. Mac Niven refers to Anais Nin’s first meeting with Durrell which she records in her diary thus:

I walked to Henry’s studio to meet Lawrence Durrell and his wife. What first struck me were his eyes of a Mediterranean blue, keen, sparkling, seer, child and old man. In body he is short and stocky, with soft contours like a Hindu, flexible like an Oriental, healthy and humorous. He is a faun! (1998; 166)

Durrell should be given credit for his “rather undisciplined departure from the ordinary product” (Monsieur 275). As Frederick R. Karl confirms:

Durrell conveys to us the adventure of the novel, gives us the expectancy we should feel when we pick up a work of fiction. He transports us to a world he has created and without making us feel guilty, innocent, edified or even virtuous, he fills in his stylised world with people who experience various shades of emotion, who suffer pain and anguish and joy. (61)

Durrell declares that his fictional enterprise makes a complete whole: the even Western based on the number four and the uneven Eastern based on
five. The four gradually interpenetrates the five - Taoism, Schopenhauer etc. (Montremy 213)

As Donald P. Kaczvinsky observes:

Lawrence Durrell enjoyed one of the longest and most productive artistic careers in our century — a career that recorded the devastating effects of World War II and explored the cultural shift from Modernism to Postmodernism. He wrote in almost every genre available — novels, poetry, plays, short stories, travel and literary essays — and for his work, he was named a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and was the recipient of such prestigious awards as the Duff Cooper Memorial Prize in 1957 for *Bitter Lemons* and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 1975 for *Monsieur or The Prince of Darkness*. (1997; 15)

This chapter is concluded here with the above remark about Durrell, to proceed to a detailed examination of Durrell’s characterisation of women in the chapter to follow. In the following chapters I have made an attempt to bring out the Oriental influences on Durrell, particularly on his attitude to sex.