CHAPTER - 4
THE ILLUSION OF TIME

What is time?

The answer is as simple as the question. There is no other concept that is more familiar to us, but nothing, which is at the same time, so obscure. Whenever we employ it in speech, it seems to be within the limits of comprehension, yet it is the most incomprehensible concept. Time, the tyrant transforms into a number of shapes and forms representing years, months, days — morning, evening, night — past, present, and future, so as to impose a time logic on the movement of the pattern of life. Time is not only there to greet you on the calendar, which hangs on the wall or clutched between the two hands of the clock or spread out against the sky; but lies petrified within the very being of man. The plight of the individual trapped in the time schedule finds expression in Durrell’s Monsieur:

What a mysterious business
Wound up one day like a clock work toy
Set down upon the dusty road
I have walked ticking for so many years.

Why with the same sort of gait

And fully wound up like me

At times I meet other toys

With the same sort of idea of being

Tick tock, we nod stiffly as we pass

They do not seem as real to me as I do; (177)

The hypothetical categories of time, it is believed, is an invention or scientific observation. The entire work of Durrell celebrates the death of clock-time, as he emphatically expresses in the poem "On Mirrors":

Time amputated so will bleed no more

But flow like refuse now in clocks

On clinic walls, in libraries and barracks

Not made to spend but kill and nothing more

(Poems 231 - 232)

In Time Wars, Jeremy Rifkin criticises the modern world and man's obsession with schedules and time-tables. He states that we have "sped ourselves out of the time world of nature into the fabricated time world where experience can only be simulated but
no longer savoured” (224). This obsession received severe attack from
Durrell. His cynicism is at its heights in the poem “Apteros,” where he says:

How much will time exempt in us
How much replace?
Shapes of the carnal void
Cracked smile of marble mouth
Starred emblem of a stone embrace.

Durrell laments the plight of modern man entwined in the web of time, grappling with its “fruits”:

The eyes won’t change, no but the
Going forward or going back
Can be read of as on a clock-face
Here the population of clocks multiplied,
They bore the suffocating fruits of chime, hours

The very concept of time made a drastic change during the beginning of the 20th century. The old idea of time moving only forwards came to be questioned. As two moments never co-exist,
there is no succession or continuous time, says E. M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel*. Thus goes the criticism:

We think one event occurs after or before another, the thought is often in our minds, and much of our talk and action proceeds on that assumption.

(28)

Einstein’s discovery of the relationship of space time totally changed the way physicists viewed time. Stephen Hawking explains this new aspect of space and time thus:

the theory of relativity put an end to the idea of absolute time! It appeared that each observer must have his own measure of time, as recorded by a clock carried with him, and that identical clocks carried by different observers would not necessarily agree.

(22)

Contrary to this, Newtonian concept held that time flowed equally for all observers and interpreted the universe in terms of static things. This idea is attacked by H. V. Routh, who claims that:
modern man is tempted, almost compelled, to regulate this idea (Time) by the face of a clock and the pages of a calendar. This system is indispensable to an age of fixed hours and appointments, but cannot ever satisfy man's consciousness of what passes on his own head. It suggests or confines the fiction that life is a sequence of continuous yet distinct moments, a perpetual birth of instantaneous impressions, whereas all artistic and imaginative experience insists that life as we perceive it is duration . . . but now science was beginning to hint that Time takes place within us . . . 1

The idea that "Time takes place within us," was precisely what the Eastern mystics had stated. Sri Ramana Maharshi's statement bears testimony to it. He claims that:

Time is only an idea . . . whatever you think it is, it looks like that. If you call it time, it
is time. If you call it existence, it is existence and so on. After calling it time, you divide it into days and nights, months, years, hours, minutes, etc. ²

Time, therefore, exists only in our empirical consciousness, which cannot take the real moments in their discrete nature but connects the one with the other, thereby imagining either succession or continuity. Einstein saw time moving differently for each individual in a universe made up of dynamic interactions. Hawking explains it thus: “space and time are now dynamic quantities . . . The old idea of an essentially unchanging universe that could have existed, and could continue to exist forever was replaced by the notion of a dynamic, expanding universe that seemed to have begun a finite time ago, and that might end at a finite time in the future” (33 - 34). Moreover, Einstein’s relativity theory claimed that all space and time measurements were relative and depends on the motion of the observer. There is no absolute space or absolute time but depends on the individual’s relation to space and time. Einstein suggested a marriage of space and time into a four-dimensional volume termed “continuum”. Time, then, came to be given a new
role in contradiction to the materialists; it came to be evolved into a "space-time" hybrid. This space-time continuum in turn, gave a new perspective on reality. Mendal Sachs, a contemporary physicist points out that:

The real revolution that came with Einstein's theory . . . was the abandonment of the idea that space-time co-ordinate system has objective significance as a separate physical entity. Instead of this idea, relativity theory implies that the space and time co-ordinates are only the elements of a language that is used by an observer to describe his environment. (53)

This statement from a contemporary physicist bridges the gap, that was once prevalent between modern physics and Eastern mysticism. Eastern mysticism emphasised that space and time "are nothing but names, forms of thought, words of common usage."³ Science came up with the startling conclusion that time takes place within us. Thus, many serious writers like Eliot, Huxley, Woolf,
Proust, Gebser, Durrell and others related the time problem with that of identity. As Huxley stated: “all changes in the modes of consciousness are correlated with changes in the perception of time.”

As Bakhtin firmly believed that “time in real life is no less organised by convention than it is in a literary text” (Holquist 115). He further clarified that Einstein’s theory of combining space and time and using interchange of language to communicate perceptions, the writer is liberated because, “no purely chronological sequence” exists either inside or outside the text (116).

In Einstein’s “space-time continuum,” the observer also enters into the interactions. Stressing the role of the observer, Robert Geroch claims that the observer is back in his rightful place, not simply a passive receptor of events but an active interpreter, viewing events from a unique place in time. W. J. Leatherbrow, in his work on Zamyatin and Einstein points out that the observer after Einstein became “a participant in the system he observed,” which inevitably presents, “uncertainty into such previously absolute factors as time and space” (150). He further adds that time, and space revealed “the difficulties of perception and the uncertain, relativistic nature of reality” (143).
Bakhtin firmly stated that the perceiver alters the perceived, according to his position in space and time. Commenting on Bhaktin's new concept of the perceiver, Holquist sums up: "the perceiving subject must make choices, and thus values come into play... Values are subjected out of time and space" (160, 163).

Durrell experimented with this new approach to time, space and reality in his fiction and poetry. Working with Einstein's theories, Durrell hoped to create in the Quartet, "a continuum of words... welding time to matter" (Plimpton 278). Durrell's attempt is to "sum up in a sort of metaphor the cosmology of a particular moment in which we are living" (277). This new approach used by Durrell received critical attention from Pauline Beard, who comments: "Durrell's hopes for the modern novel in which time is not held in a never-failing memory but released, so that it can range freely, synchronistically, so that events seem to happen simultaneously, seen from different points of view" (76). As Durrell explained it in a letter to Miller, "the ground plan... is four books of which the first two fit into each other... The next is a big orthodox novella inter-penetrating the two previous ones at many points. Then I hope to add the fourth dimension -- time -- in the last volume"
There is a repetition, interaction and inter-relationship of the four books, like "sliding panels" as Pursewarden suggests (338), the novels cohere in a "relativity dance" (Plimpton 277). He explains thus in the "workpoints":

The narrative momentum forward is countersprung by references backwards in time, giving the impression of a book which is not travelling from a to b but standing above time and turning slowly on its axis to comprehend the whole pattern. Things do not all lead forward or to things which have passed. A marriage of past and present with the flying multiplicity of the future racing towards one.

(198)

Therefore, throughout The Quartet, the narrative momentum is counter sprung by references backwards in time; the time never moves from one point to another but moves to and fro encircling a
whole pattern. Analysing this new approach, John Unterecker comments:

Durrell decides that Einstein's treatment of time, not in serial fashion but rather as a persuasive aspect of the space-time continuum, forced into our more perspective writers a new view of life and a new form in which to express the view.

(22)

As Pursewarden points out:

Our view of reality is conditioned by our position in space and time - not by our personality as we like to think. Thus the very interpretation of reality is based upon our unique position. Two paces east or west and the whole picture is changed.

(210)

Analysing Durrell's use of time in The Alexandria Quartet, Carl Bode firmly believes that:
First and most important, the old idea of time as a flowing river is gone. The plot is no longer a stream of consequential events, with one resulting from the other and following it in chronological order. Instead the order of events is determined by which one first becomes significant to the character from whose point of view Durrell is writing.

Therefore, when Darley, the protagonist, is ready to write his manuscript, he sets out to claim the memories of his experience in Alexandria, not in chronological time but in spatial time, letting each scene fall into place, according to its importance. The time references that exist are not dependent on clock-time or calendar, they are correlated with other remembered events. Darley is often doubtful of the association of time, so while relating some incidents, he uses words like: "Was it about this time that . . ." (Justine 109) or "that second spring . . ." (147) when there is no mention of the first spring. The use of such a time-sense is to make us aware of
the inadequacy of calendar time to narrate such events.

Durrell’s *Quartet* demonstrates that one can never view the same thing at the same point in time. Seen from another point in time, with new eyes and at a different angle, the reality, of the incident takes on a different interpretation. Darley, on his island retreat, trying to “rework reality”, finally realises that, as Pursewarden points out, there are “as many realities as you care to imagine” (315). The more one tries to write about truth from the past, the more time moves on, hence the observer moves, the truth shifts and demands a new outlook. As Durrell emphatically states: “Truth is what most contradicts itself in time” (216). This multiplicity of reality and truths is exploited by Durrell in the presentation of Darley’s and Justine’s relationships. In *Justine*, Darley and Justine seem to be lovers. In *Balthazar*, another observer views the same event from a different angle and makes different judgements. Justine did not love Darley -- she loved Pursewarden, using Darley as a decoy to protect her lover. Interestingly, in the third side of space, *Mountolive*, the observation reveals -- Justine did not love Darley or Pursewarden. She married Nessim to aid him in his plans to evacuate the British from Egypt. Darley becomes
"poor Darley," as Justine makes, "a slow gesture, as of someone removing soiled gloves, or of someone disembarrassing herself of a skein of wool," when she replaces the phone after his call (560). In the last volume Clea, the fourth dimension Time is included completing the relativity dance. Durrell draws together past, present and future and the structure of space and time coheres as one narrative. There is a presentation and repetition of scenes and memories. The love scenes in Darley’s room explicates the importance of this technique. When Darley makes love to Justine, he watches the curtain "breathing softly in that breathless afternoon air like the sail of ship" and he is reminded of his love for Melissa (74). On his return to the same room much later, Darley regrets for not loving Melissa fully, then "the yellow curtain had of course disappeared and had been replaced by a drab piece of white cloth" (141). When the scene shifts to Pursewarden, Melissa watches, "a single curtain (which) moved softly like a sail, reminding her of Darley’s bed" (530). The interlocking and intervening of relationships explicate Einstein’s space-time continuum. Often Durrell employs identical conversations, like when Darley and Justine first make love.
Their conversation, as already quoted in page 170, is significant to Durrell’s concept of time.

Further repetition links the roles of the two women in the deaths of their lovers. When the dying Cohen wants to meet Melissa, she cries out: "Oh, it is so disgusting! Please do not make me go... But if you think I should I will have to" (88). Sometimes later, when it shifts to Clea, the words are repeated: "Oh, it is so disgusting! - - Please do not make me come... But if you think I should I will feel obliged to" (643). Thus Durrell’s attempts to annihilate clock-time led him to present events in his novels simultaneously and seen from different angles. As Pursewarden announces: "Yes, Time is the catch! Space is a concrete idea, but Time is abstract" (764). This proves that man cannot encapsulate time in writing. As J. T. Fraser’s argument in The Voices of Time, proves supportable: "... the fundamental nature of time is not suitable for discursive cognition... For the essence of time, like that of man’s existence is only a permission to partake creatively in a world whose contents and properties we may experience, contemplate and share but never completely desire or precisely formulate" (594). Similarly Darley, while trying to write the story of
Alexandria, seeks out the substance of a truth — time’s usufruct" (370). In the process, Darley initially hopes to discover his proper self. Ultimately, however the usufruct of time brings Darley to the recognition of his individual place in time as an artist. Durrell claims that the artist must show that a more meaningful time exists than the time clocks register. The flutter that time causes in the individual is expressed by Durrell in his poem "Love Poems":

I cannot fix the moment, and my present clock,
The dandelion-puff, lies cruelly;
Let in the action of that hour’s surprise
What will you do or I?

(Poems 39)

The importance should be given to "those deserted spaces which time misses . . . between the ticks of the clock" (Quartet 659). The psychologist Meerloo refers to such spaces as "taking part in time that does not pass," a time he calls continuity: "In the experiences of continuity we break out of the prison of human schedules to grasp the essential and eternal" (141). Rilke’s views on the nature of time, explicates this continuity. He says:
We, of this earth and this today, are not for a moment hedged in by the world of time, nor bound within it: We are incessantly flowing over and over to those who preceded us and those who apparently come after us. In that widest "open world," all are - one cannot say "simultaneously," for the very falling away of time conditions their existing.6

Hence the new concept of time as continuity took on the form of cyclical time or *dejavu* in Durrell's *Quartet*, with events and scenes moving and making a circle. Thus in *Justine*, Darley recalls the image of "Justine bending over the dirty sink with the foetus in it" (20-21). Later Clea becomes pregnant by her brief affair with Amaril in Syria. Sometime afterwards the abortion takes place. She explains it to Darley as: "Afterwards the kindly old anaesthetist called me to the dirty sink to show me the little pale homunculus with its tiny nails and members" (*Clea* 112). There is an obvious similarity between the two scenes and the words used by the two different characters also bear similarity. Further there is a repetition
of love scenes also in the *Quartet*. Darley’s first meeting with Melissa is thus explained by him:

I saw Melissa again sitting in the corner of a coffee shop, alone, with her hands supporting her chin. Her hat and handbag lay beside her and she was staring into her cup with a wry reflective air of amusement.

*(Justine 69)*

Darley also notices that she laughs “wrinkling up her nose: laughing with such candour, so lightly and effortlessly,” that he immediately decides to love her. The romance grows and withers; Melissa dies; Darley leaves Alexandria but to return after many years. Once again he spots Clea sitting exactly where Melissa had sat. “The exact station in place and time where I had earlier found Melissa,” remarks Darley and his observation of Clea is that her blonde head was bent with an air of childish concentration over her coffee cup” *(Clea 76-77)*. When their conversation begins, Darley notices that “she wrinkled up her nose for a moment” *(78)*. The cyclical aspect of time or *deja vu* used by Durrell is closely associated
with Eastern Mysticism where everything is cyclical - - time, nature, seasons, etc. The whole point is that the world’s awareness is circular and cyclic. The cyclical nature implies a situation in which “Zero” is not nullity, but mandala - like, a totality.”7 Durrell moves directly towards the world of space - time continuum. He extrapolates the concrete and existential, making more plausible, the implications of cosmic time. In one of his earliest letters to Miller, he wrote:

I AM SLOWLY BUT VERY CAREFULLY
AND WITHOUT CONSCIOUS THOUGHT
DESTROYING TIME. I have discovered that the idea of duration is false. We have invented it as a philosophic jack up to the idea of physical disintegration... Time, that old appendix, I’ve lopped off...

(19)

According to Durrell, life should never be a tale told by time. Hence this new approach to time had an immense influence, as Durrell claims: “everything changes its shape and meanings, the past
no less than the future, and the poet begins the long trek back through memory and association, to try and paint a picture of his life in terms of the new time he has experienced" (Key 155). Instead of the presentation of the past, present and future, Durrell and many modern writers presented only the "present." Therefore time changed from an orderly series of moments from past, present and future tenses but merged to become an enormous PRESENT. As Giordano Bruno, a renaissance philosopher remarked:

In every point of duration is beginning without end and end without beginning. It is the centre of two infinities. Therefore the whole of duration is one infinite instant, both beginning and end . . .

Hence it has attained eternity as the Unamuno wrote:

The other world and the other life are in this world and in this life . . . eternity lies within time and not outside it; all of eternity in all time and all of it in each moment of time. (17, 19)
Time is not a past, present, future but is a sort of time which contained all time in every moment of time, as James Jeans explains in The Mysterious Universe:

It may be that time, from its beginning to the end of eternity, is spread before us in the picture, but we are in contact with only one instant, just as a bicycle-wheel is in contact with only one point of the road . . . As Plato expressed it twenty three centuries earlier in the Timaeus: “the past and the future are created species of time which we unconsciously but wrongly transfer to the eternal essence.” We say, was, is, will be, but the truth is that “is” alone can properly be used. 9

In An Experiment with Time, J. W. Dunne says that, “neither the past nor the future was observable. All observable phenomena lay in a field situated at a unique “instant” in the Time length -- an instant dividing the past from the future -- which instant be
called 'the present’” (109). The following passage from Herman Hesse’s Siddhartha substantiates the irrelevance of divisions of time:

Siddhartha once asked Vasudeva: “Have you also learned that secret from the river; that there is no such thing as time?” “Yes Siddhartha,” he said. “Is this what you mean? That the river is everywhere at the same time? That the river is everywhere at the same time, at the same source and at the mouth, at the waterfall, at the ferry, at the current, in the ocean and in the mountains, everywhere, and that the present only exist for it, not the shadow of the past, nor the shadow of the future?” Siddhartha further continued: “Was then not all sorrow in time, all self-torment and fear in time? Were not all difficulties and evil in the world conquered as soon as one dispelled time.

(106 - 107)
Similarly Eliot stoutly affirms that all time is contained in an instant of time, where the past and future are expressed in the present. In "Burnt Norton," he opens the poem with this strong conviction:

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable

What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.

(171)

According to the Eastern mystic Nagarjuna, future and past things do not exist because they do not originate and "reality and past are contradictory expressions, as are the expressions, reality and future. The only reality is the present" (64). Hence the three dimensional space and the linear flowing time are limited to our ordinary experiences of the physical world, as D. T. Suzuki points out:
In the spiritual world, there are no time divisions such as the past, present and future; for they have contracted themselves into a single moment of the present where life quivers in its time sense . . . The past and the future are both rolled up in this present moment of illumination, and this present moment is not something, standing still with all its contents, for it carelessly moves on.  

According to Vedanta, all time is an eternal now. Its division into past, present and future is not inherent in time but a function of the human intellect, which, when supported by memory classifies thoughts as past, and, when assisted by anticipation as future. Indeed the aborigines of Australia depict both past and future with a word which means day-dreaming. The past or future is a kind of day-dreaming, hence illusionary. Aldous Huxley in his experiment with the different modes of consciousness revealed his interior relationship with time. He realised that the “Golden - Now” of eastern wisdom means that man has no other time to live except the present. He pointed out that: “The universe is an everlasting
succession of events; but its ground . . . is the timeless now of the divine spirit” (212). Therefore in Durrell’s *The Black Book*, Lucifer, the protagonist, writes of the events of the past - - the time of the English death, interestingly in the present tense. Even the distant past - - the time of Death Gregory is told in the present tense. All times, in effect, are one, a single continuum of history. “It is in order to destroy history,” Lucifer writes, “that I am compelled to experience it, all of it” (154). Durrell’s exploitation of this new concept of time is seen at its best in *Justine*, where time is Kaleidoscopic. There is a merging of recent past with the present. Even Darley is led to confusion. He utters: “Did I know then - - or was it afterwards I discovered - - that Balthazar was perhaps her only friend and certainly the only confidant she had in the city? I do not remember” (*Justine* 98). There is no future time in *Justine*, whereas in *Balthazar*, the past, present and future merge to eliminate completely the possibility of an accurate chronology.

The philosophy of time and space is important in as much as it has a direct bearing on the problem of self. It is this abstraction of time that makes the awareness of consciousness of “oneself.” Time leads to the maintenance of self-hood. As long as time becomes
conspicuous "a private" consciousness exists. When the empirical distinctions between "I" and "You" get obliterated, then time becomes timeless. Time is the enemy of the self, for only when time is defeated and time as day and night get erased, can the self transcend. Durrell states that the "eye" and "time" are illusions under which the self suffers. In the poems "The Sermon," Durrell claims that:

The first law of optics is the eye: and the
first law
Of Life is Time, the endless tepid all
consuming ray.

(Poems 81)

The consciousness of self is in constant interaction with the temporal tyrant time. The philosophy of time and space is directly related to the problem of self-realisation. As Durrell emphasises in his fiction and poetry, the ultimate aim of the artist and the lover is "a search, a quest for a "proper self" (Quartet 370). Where the process of loving and writing is only "a technique of therapy" (763). The artist and the lover in their respective fields confront the self within. The transcendence to the real "self" is possible only after a
battle of self with time and subsequent defeat of time by self. Durrell portrays this struggle of search for the "proper self" in his poems. Thus he moans:

Still the long chapter led me on
Still the clock beside the bed
Heart-beat after heart-beat shed.

(Poems 220)

Only in the context of a cosmic time, can the self be realised. Durrell's advise would be to "Find time hanging, cut it down / All the universe you own" (236) because time is the distractor and "Every poet and hero has to face them / The glittering temptress of his distraction" (220). "The glittering temptress" time creates a centre which is the "me," and the supreme consciousness beyond the "me" never gets realised. In actuality, as Durrell, Eliot or the Eastern mystics claim, there is no beginning or end but an endless continuum this revelation alone can take man out of the abyss of his ego. The individual consciousness clinging on to the "me" is criticised by Durrell, where near the end of Quinx, he has Blanford say effectively:
Your consciousness bears witness to the historic now which you are living while your memory recalls other nows, fading slowly into indistinctness as they move into the prehistory you call the past. . . . But . . . in the course of a few years, about seven I think, every cell in the body of this “I,” this individual, has been modified and even replaced. . . . What then is the permanence which you designate as an “I”? 

(176)

Durrell had recognised, as early as 1935, the disease of the West, which he later called the “sterile apparatus” of “black hearted Descartes” (Poems 162), which had led the Western man to define everything in terms of self and thus to exclude himself from the world around him. The submersion of self is reflected in the Latin epigram to “Letter to Seferis the Greek: Ego dormio sed cor meum vigilat” (99): literally, “I sleep, but my heart maintains its vigil.” Eliot criticises man for his preoccupation with time and not with the timeless, which leads to the realisation of the self, that came to be
regarded as an engagement of the seer, sage and artist. As he says in Dry Salvages V:

Men's curiosity searches past and future
And clings to that dimension. But to apprehend
The point of intersection of the timeless
With time, is an occupation for the saint

(189 - 190)

Dr. Radhakrishnan emphatically reiterated man's urgent need of the hour is to:

... fold up the phenomenal series, go against the grain of our nature, strip ourselves naked, escape from the apparent ego, and get at the abyss of pure subjectivity, the Absolute Self.

(172)

The need to "escape from the apparent ego" is possible only, as Durrell firmly believes, that if we know that calendar time is a convenience and not a truth. Einstein's himself, in an interview given to the American press said:
The individual feels the nothingness of human desires and aims, and the sublimity and marvellous order which reveal themselves both in nature and in the world of thought. He looks on individual existence as a sort of prison and wants to experience the universe as a single significant whole.  

Durrell proposes similar ways and means for man’s ultimate realisation. He makes Balthazar advise people to “penetrate behind the veil of reality and to discover harmonies in space and time, which corresponded to the inner structures of their psyche . . . We are enlisting everything in order to make the wholeness of man match the wholeness of the universe” (85). While reading Durrell’s fiction and poetry, we are transported to a Vedantic landscape where empirical distortions of the temporal, birth and death are obliterated and transcended. In his search for a spiritual way out of the chaos of our times, Durrell goes deep into the primal springs of Eastern thought and wisdom. He admonishes modern man for having illusions of time and consciousness. It is little wonder that Durrell
wrote to Richard Aldington about man and his relation to time and to the cosmos:

But now the space-time scientist is as much of a mystic, a Duns scotus! What I hope to achieve by this piece of cookery was to dig us out of the time-bog and also to indicate the prodigious variety of facets which make up one human identity, who wears a costume -- name, race, job, sexual make-up seen in continuum you do see people in sort of allotropic states, all divine, all perverse, all good-bad.

(75)

Hence Durrell went on to create characters in his works, some real, some imaginary, where, what meets the eye is "real." Thus in the poem "Conon in Exile," he notes in the preface:

Conon is an imaginary Greek philosopher . . .

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.

(107)

The crux of the problem lies in the identification of the true self which becomes impossible because the individual is entwined in the flux of time, as Durrell had stated in the first epigraph to the Balthazar volume of *The Alexander Quartet*:

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

Durrell suggests that we see what we want to see. The existence of the separate individual is an optical delusion. According to perennial philosophy, the removal of the optical delusion of separateness is essential for the "discovery of wholeness" as explained by Einstein:
A human being is a part of the whole, called by us "Universe," a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest -- a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison.

(Wilber 6)

Durrell has followed the concept of "wholeness of works." At the beginning of the Quartet, Darley is caught in the prison of "separateness" and through his relationship with Justine, he fully becomes aware that she had surrendered to him "only one of the many selves she possessed and inhabited" (297). He realises that "we live in the shallows of one another's personalities and cannot really see into the depths beneath" (305). When Clea offers to join him on the island, Darley refuses to send her a reply. His thoughts revolve
around the presence of “real human beings” in the “unreality of time.” He wonders, while trying to write a novel:

Whether these papers record the action of real human beings; or whether this is not simply the story of a few inanimate objects which precipitated drama around time.

(Clea 194-195)

Finally it is with his relationship with Clea that Darley achieves a new vision of his own self and the Universe, as he proclaims: “I felt as if the whole universe had given me a nudge” (877). Even Clea stoutly claims, after having undergone an “interior metamorphosis”, that the self has slipped “through the barriers into the company of Real Ones” (874). As Aldous Huxley firmly stated: “Individuality is not absolute, personalities are illusionary figments of a self-will. That all important ego is a fiction, a kind of nightmare, a frantically agitated nothingness” (309).

Durrell described time as “the measure of our death consciousness” and when the ideas of time change, the ideas of death also change. This is the paradox of the space-time continuum and Durrell states that “we can just as easily situate death in the
present as in the future and the poet's attempt is to capture this multiple birth-life-death” (Key 36). In an interview to Anna Lilllos, Durrell explains this death consciousness thus:

The basic Tantric realisation is impermanence,
and why one is depressed and despairing is because the basic trauma, the basic neurosis is death. It is the unacknowledged trauma.12

The only way to overcome this trauma, Durrell points out is to defeat time and when this is overcome then as Durrell puts it: “You are already dead in a sense.” This is the paradox - - when the individual becomes conscious of cosmic time, then Thanatos strikes in and is “already dead in a sense.” It is the death of the private self and the realisation of a “cosmic consciousness.” Hence time consciousness leads to an acceptance of death and every death invariably is a new beginning . . . a new consciousness. The death denial leads to new beginnings as Eliot says in Little Gidding:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And knows the place for the first time.

(197)

In Durrell's play *An Irish Faustus*, the protagonist has to endure an ordeal in order to understand "reality prime." The journey must be made

Down to the slag heaps of nature's in most processes,
The threshing floor of time and matter

Beyond the regions where only the deadly fictions thrive.

(65)

Faustus must pass behind the forms and conventions by which the essential chaos of the universe is ordered and made intelligible, and he must face the chaos in order to have complete knowledge of the universe. He recognises at last "for the first time I knew I was in reality" (68). In order to realise "prime reality," there is a disintegration and death of the private consciousness. After the suffering, Faustus takes a long journey to refresh and renew his life, "to see the world again through these new eyes" (70).
As Durrell describes in his poem "Letters in Darkness," the death and second life:

So, having dispossessed himself, and being

Now for the first time prepared to die

He feels at last trained for the second life.

(231)

In Livia, Durrell emphatically states: "Is there only one sort of death for us all, or does each death partake of the . . . Valency, so to speak, of the life it replaces" (184).

The paradox of Eros and Thanatos finds expression in Durrell’s Quartet through the last scene, when Darley saves Clea from death. While battling against Clea’s death, Darley finds suddenly that he has certain superhuman strength: “It was as if I were for the first time confronting myself - - or perhaps an alter ego shaped after a man of action I had never realised, recognised” (849). Darley helps in Clea’s rebirth from the water and in turn achieves regeneration for himself. He triumphs over his denial of death, while his fellow expatriates found themselves powerless to act. Darley discovers “wholeness” and realises that “the presence of death always refreshes
experience thus - - that is its function to help us to deliberate on the novelty of time” (99). However, Darley finally attains wholeness after confronting “time’s usufruct,” and he becomes a writer at last. The artist eventually achieves a cosmic consciousness. Coomaraswamy confirms that: “For the superior Ideality is no less a Death and a Darkness than a Life and a Light... (171). What is required in order to conquer death is “to be dead and buried in the Godhead.” Similarly Meister Eckhart opines: “The kingdom of God belongs only to those who are thoroughly dead while still alive in this world.” It is the death of ego, prior to that of the body, which leads to the life everlasting. Durrell’s influence of the oriental is evident from his lectures “From the Elephant’s Back,” when he said that his aim was “to learn the secrets of the jungle and become a seer.” He states quite emphatically in one of his letters to Miller: “I Am A Man... I Am An Artist... I AM GOD ! ! ! (18).

Darley’s crucial question sums up the time problem:

If I have spoken of time it is because the writer I was becoming was learning at last to
inhabit those deserted spaces which time misses . . . like the dead Pursewarden. I hoped I might soon be truthfully able to say: “I do not write for those who have never asked themselves this question”: at what point does real life begin?

(Clea 14)
Notes


4. Quoted in Saher's *Experiments in Spiritual Consciousness, Western Thought and Eastern Wisdom* (116). Qtn from Huxley *Time Must have a stop*.


7. "Zero" in *Seven* (Taunton, 1: 6 (Fall 1939, *Seven*, 8)

9 Ibid. 29.


11 Qtd. in Lawrence Durrell’s “Space, Time and Poetry.” *A Key to Modern British Poetry*. 34.


13 Qtd. in Ananda Coomaraswamy’s *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*. 171.

14 Ibid. 171.