INTRODUCTION

Lawrence George Durrell, poet, novelist, playwright, critic and travel-writer explored the wasteland of the west, only to find consolation in Eastern thought and wisdom. In Durrell, there is an attempt to highlight the primacy of the "self" or "supreme consciousness." The impelling determinant of his art is not only self-discovery but also the decline of the spiritual consciousness of a race swept off its balance by the bedevilled forces of Materialism and Puritanism.

Born in India, educated in England, found his asylum and solace in the Mediterranean islands, Durrell, the writer had an exodus of writings to his credit ranging from poems, novels, criticism, plays and travelogues. Right from childhood, Durrell was disturbed by the influence of the Jesuits, their prayers and their religion. During his lecture at France, he commented on their inappropriate existence among the serenity of the Indian landscape:

... what a paradox these black figures presented in the purity of such landscapes, in the purity of these huge clouds sailing
everywhere like humble space - ships . . .
Once they were factories generating good
behaviour and a kindly disposition towards
men; now they seem like out of work
computers . . .

(Poetry London 3)

He criticised the prayers of the Jesuits, which he later recalled
with contempt: "Often in my dreams I hear the squeak of their
little prayer wheels - - a scientific device of great cunning, worthy
rather of mechanists, who believed that prayers can be said by a
computer - - another unresolved problem of our age! (3). The
barbaric progress the world is making as a result of technological
manifestation and the pace of modern life in its turn appears only to
achieve increasing rapidity and momentum towards its immanent self
immolation. Kathleen Raine reminds us that, "We must again
discuss those values for which Socrates died and Gautama Buddha
renounced his kingdom." Even the great scientist Einstein felt the
need for the mystical. He once said:

... the most beautiful emotion we can
experience is the mystical. It is the sower of
all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger . . . is as good as dead. To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty, which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms - - this knowledge, this feeling is at the centre to true religiousness.

(Wilber 14)

Hence Rilke declared that the task of the poet in the post-war world would be “to prepare in men’s hearts the way for those gentle, mysterious trembling transformations from which alone the understandings and harmonies of a serener future will proceed.”

Therefore as Rimbaud visualised, the poet will become “the instrument of a total transformation of humanity, a seer and a prophet” (Douglas 26).

“The function of the poem,” wrote Durrell, “is to win over the will in man and produce that inner order which is love - in - time.”

Incidentally, in his poems, “Nostradamus’ rose,” appears as a symbol
of a new order, which will arise when, "the rotting walls / of the European myth" (Poems 77 - 78), of the triumphant self are pulled down by people. The final lines of the poem "In Crisis," is Durrell's advice to mankind:

Empty your hearts: or fill from a purer source
That what is in men can weep, having eyes:
That what is in Truth can speak from the responsible dust
And O the rose grow in the middle of the great world.

"The philosophy of the west," says Durrell, is concerned at bottom only with the law of causality; to the East a more fundamental principle seems most interesting -- a morale of balance, of fulcrum. The West aims to establish a notion about reality; the East attempts to possess the Real as a portion of the present." At the age of twenty one, Durrell discovered Greece. In this country, he discovered the ancient Greek philosophers like Heraclitus and traced their Indian parentage, for there was hardly
one, he felt, who had not studied his philosophy in India. This discovery paved the way for his intrusion into Indian thought and wisdom, which gave him solace and serenity. Durrell’s interest in the Mediterranean culture, Buddhism and Hinduism is a result of his abhorrence of the inhuman Christian Calvinism, with its overemphasis in the separation of good from evil and its arrogant assumption of predestined virtue. Through his works, Durrell seems to claim that it is human experience, which is sacred, not its denial. It is the “death of the west,” which seems to be the only and the most accurate message that Durrell conveys through his art. The sanctity achieved on the Eastern soil makes human experiences acceptable and sacred. As G. S. Fraser firmly believed that Durrell is in the end “seeing the world and human life as a grand, though fragmented and ironically riddling, sacramental symbol” (A Study 41).

Durrell’s Indian origin and his association with Indian thought and wisdom is reflected in his writings. This eastern perspective permitted Durrell to accept so readily what others in the west found so challenging and revolutionary. Amidst modern technology and Judeo-Christian faith, Durrell’s eastern aesthetic approach might seem dissentious to the delicate western sensibility.
The first chapter examines the premises of Durrell’s world; the fundamental as well as the motivating forces in his life; his Indian origin and Pudding Island phase; his Grecian existence; his life experiences delineate a clear quantitative transformation compelled by Eastern thought and wisdom.

Chapter II deals with the derogatory status of love in the Western world. Durrell’s discovery of the successful “algebra of love” highlights the profundity of his singular and unorthodox observations. The lover’s submergence of the ego becomes possible after his battle against time to transcend his private consciousness. Durrell’s lovers undergo a slow heraldic progress—a quest for the invisible worlds, above and beyond the western tangible.

In chapter III, the artist’s odyssey and the struggle with many selves, is explored. Creativity, according to Durrell, is a spiritual adventure. Durrell tracks the phenomenon involved in the creative act. He traces the inner growth of the artist and the artist’s relationship to his art, his society and himself.

Chapter IV incorporates the struggle of the artist and lover against time, which hinders the transcendence of the consciousness from the shackles of a private consciousness. The ultimate
annihilation of clock-time paves the way for a clear understanding of reality.

Chapter V focuses on the spoils of the battle of love and art against time — The Heraldic Universe. The achievement of the Heraldic Universe is as a consequence of the riddance of an "ego-petal" consciousness and the attainment of spirituality.

Durrell explores, from an Eastern stance, the experiences of the lovers and artists and investigates the odyssey taken by their consciousness. Incidentally, both the lover and the artist are involved in identical quests — the quest for the "Self." Durrell attempts to chart out the development of the creative faculty through love / sex and through one's own bisexual psyche, involving an intellectual asceticism. Ultimately, the lover, through his multifarious sexual encounters transcends towards the prime aesthetic state, which Durrell terms "luminous island," "private country," or "Heraldic Universe." Almost all artists achieve this state, when their creative faculty explodes into artefacts, be it sculpture, painting, fiction or poetry. This transcendence involves a spiritual journey, which has its origin in Indian aesthetics, that regard art activity as a spiritual adventure. This spiritual adventure is undertaken by the ascetic and
the lover; the finale resulting in artefacts. Hence my attempt has been to delve into the creative nexus of Durrell and explore the psychic corridors of his characters. The greatest barrier for the lover and the artist is clock-time, which projects a private consciousness. The annihilation of clock-time enables the lover and artist to cross the hurdles to reach the “Heraldic Universe.” So it is a “battle of love and art against time,” to inhabit the “Heraldic Universe.”

In the following pages, I have attempted to unravel the mysteries behind the inner growth of the artist and to decipher the process of Durrell’s Heraldic Universe.
Notes


5 Interview with Anna Lillios. Published in Deus Loci. (NS2, 1993) 4.