CHAPTER - 1
THE PREMISES OF DURRELL’S WORLD

Durrell’s art has been unique in the twentieth century specifically because, it has not rebelled but sought its roots. Durrell’s fiction, drama, poetry, criticism and even travel literature is a modulated blend of classical tragedy and comedy, aesthetic delight, humanistic optimism and mystic wonder.

(Nichols 463)

It is indeed a well-deserved praise from a contemporary critic, James Nichols, and in fact the best tribute that can be paid to Durrell, the poet, novelist, playwright, critic and travel writer.

Lawrence George Durrell has rightly earned a place among the twentieth century poets like Rudyard Kipling, George Barker, Anne Ridler, Kathleen Raine, Dylan Thomas and William Empson, who came to prominence in the 1930s and 1940s. The 1930s witnessed the emergence of many young writers through their contributions in the periodical, Seven. With the publication of his essay “Ego” in the
Seven, the young eighteen-year old Durrell came to be recognised in the literary pantheon, among other literary giants like Eliot, Yeats, Woolf and Joyce. Eliciting a comparison of Durrell with Yeats and Joyce, Richard Pine remarks:

Where modern literature had been dominated by two Irish men, 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 also received early recognition from his contemporaries like T. S. Eliot, Henry Miller, Richard Aldington and James Laughlin. Recent years have seen a spate of critical studies on Durrell's works by eminent critics like G. S. Fraser, Elizabeth Jennings, Ian S. MacNiven and Richard Pine. Durrell did not adhere to any one genre and his venture into the different genres resulted in poems, plays,
criticism and travelogues. Justifying his forays into the various genres, he once expressed quite apologetically:

> It is more a question of deep psychological weakness. I'm too excitable, and that means that I'm going from one form to another... Everything that I do is an orgy. And this weakness was even more pronounced when I was young which explains the numerous attempts I made to plumb deeper into various genres: the novel, the music, poetry... As soon as I had pin-pointed this central weakness in my character, I realised that if I didn't move constantly from one art form to another, I shall never be able to relax... Great men have a patience that I never had. It is a serious fault in my makeup. ¹

In spite of the "serious fault" in his "makeup," Durrell's works represent a coherent pattern and a search for meaning, as he informed his audience at the Cercle Pompidou in 1981:
One begins to realise that there exists a kind of coherence about the whole thing, and that one can plot, in shadowy outline, the development of a system of thought, of ideas, but based on the biography of the subject ... Each book illustrates the preoccupation and anxieties of a single human being, and what he wrote and thought first emerged from this jungle of sensations.  

Nevertheless, he created a niche for himself in all genres because of the novelty of his approach which made Lionel Trilling remark: "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 drew little inspiration from the literature of the nineteenth century which made Anthony Storr comment: "It could not satisfy the hunger of his imagination." The modern writers yearned for change which Durrell poignantly portrays in his poem "Lost", where he says: "Quietly we stand aside / and let them pass"
(Poems 27). The twentieth century writers felt the urge to leave the rationalistic, mechanistic and Cartesian view of the world and pay more attention to philosophy and religion. "Religion and art," as emphasised by Ananda Coomaraswamy, "are names for one and the same experience -- an intuition of reality and of identity."4 This is not an exclusively Hindu view of art, as it had also been pronounced by Blake, Schopenhauer, Schiller and recently it has been restated as follows:

In those moments of exaltations that art can give, it is easy to believe that we have been possessed by an emotion that comes from the world of reality. Those who take this view will have to say that there is in all things the stuff out of which art is made -- reality. The peculiarity of the artist would seem to be that he possesses the power of surely and frequently seizing reality (generally behind pure form) and the power of expressing his sense of it, in pure form always.5
Many modern writers would have readily agreed with Heidegger’s view that “the sensitive poet and the original thinkers occupy neighbouring mountain peaks from which they speak to one another across the space.”\textsuperscript{6} The nineteenth century thrust on rationalism was thrown overboard by Durrell, who saw the western world from an eastern stance. He was influenced by Einstein’s theory which altered the western concepts of matter, causality, time and space. Durrell emphasised that “Time and Ego are the two determinants of style of the twentieth century” (Key 117). As a spokesman of anti-rationalism, Durrell emphatically re-iterated:

\ldots the great sickroom, Europe,

With its dull set books,

The Cartesian imperatives, Dante and Homer,

To impress the lame and awkward newcomer.

\textit{(Poems 160)}

The western world was neck-deep in severe intellectual troubles and chronic anxieties, as a result of giving predominance to rational and intellectual aspects of living, as W.B. Yeats stated in his “Meru”:

\ldots but man’s life is thought
And he, despite his terror, cannot cease
Ravening through century after century,
Ravening, raging and uprooting that he may
come
Into the desolation of reality: . . . (333)

Analysing the post-industrial society which would inevitably lead to a scientific holocaust, Theodore Roszak says:

There are dragons buried beneath our cities, primordial energies greater than the power of our bombs. Two thousand years of Judeo-Christian soul shaping and three centuries of crusading scientific intellect have gone into their interment.

(XXV)

As a result, the exploration of the East became irresistible and writers looked up to the Far East for inspiration against the mechanistic march of Western materialism. As a homage to the glorious East, Max Muller declared:

If I were to ask myself, from what literature we here in Europe—-we, who have been
nurtured almost exclusively in the thoughts of the Greeks, and of the Romans and of one Semitic race, the Jewish — may draw that corrective which is most wanted in order to make our inner life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal, in fact more truly human, a life not for this life alone, but a transfigured and eternal life, again I should point to India. 7

It is little wonder that the East became a source of inspiration for writers and philosophers of the West. Victor Cousins, while lecturing at Paris on the history of modern philosophy said:

When we read with attention the poetical and philosophical movements of the East, above all those of India, which are beginning to spread in Europe, we discover there many a truth, and truths so profound and which makes such a contrast with the meanness of the results at which the European genius has sometimes stopped, that we are constrained to
bend the knee before the philosophy of the
East and to see in this cradle of the human
race, the native land of the highest
philosophy. ⁸

The lure of the Orient was seen pronounced in many writers
right from Chaucer’s time to Marlowe, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton,
Dryden, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats down to Eliot, Huxley and
Lawrence Durrell. In his poem, “Endymion”, Keats makes a humble
salutation to his Indian maid with these words:

My sweetest Indian, here
Here will I kneel for thou redeemed last
My life from too thin breathing: gone and
past
Are cloudy phantasms. . .  (148)

The spirits of Marlowe’s Dr. Faustus were to
fly to India for gold
Ransack the ocean for orient pearl,
And search all corners of the new found world
For pleasant fruits and pricely delicates.
In Tamburlaine the Great, these lines are seen:

Men from the farthest equinoctial line

Have swarmed in troops into the Eastern

India,

Lading their shoes with gold and precious

stones,

And made their spoils from all our provinces.

(10)

Echoes of the Upanishads in "The Wasteland" reflect the oriental influence on T. S. Eliot. His use of the immortalised datta-dayadhavam-damyata reveals the essence of Orientalism in its most distinctive aspect. Durrell had been more eloquent in accepting his eastern influence especially of India, about which he once referred to in his lecture "From the Elephant's Back": 9

My thinking is coloured by the fact that I am a colonial, an Anglo-Indian born into that strange world, of which the great poem is the novel "Kim" by Kipling.

(Poetry London 1)
Eastern wisdom stimulated Durrell’s imagination, providing him with the canvas for his colourful panoramic representations. This passion for India and her milieu came to be noticed quite early in his life by his close associate, Henry Miller. Once, while on a tour to the Peleponnese, Miller commented on Durrell’s irresistible fascination for India thus:

Durrell, who was raised near the Tibetan frontiers in India, was tremendously excited and confessed that at times he had the impression of being back in India, in the hill country.

(Maroussi 218)

The dark jungles, the snow-capped mountains and the cool flowing rivers of India offered him the route to a spiritual quest transcending any western sensibility. On the influence of the jungle, Durrell remarked:

“The jungle” That is a keyword for whether you look east or look west the jungle characterises the state of human thought and the impossibility of bringing some order into
it, is the characteristic situation of man at either end of the line -- eastern man, western man. I am both, at least I feel both.  

Durrell was born on February 27, 1912 of Anglo-Irish parentage at Jullunder, near the Punjab province of North-West India. “A child, a poet, a drunken Irishman” (Alyn 113), Durrell’s self-description expressed his pro-Irishness, which helped him in his profession as a writer, as Justine described, “a mental refugee, being Irish” (Quartet 38). His pro-Irish stance was a result of his allegiance to India and anti-English attitudes as he expressed, during a conversation with Richard Pine. He claimed:

The English were monolithically aggressive and unimaginative and philistine to the core and they didn’t take to India, really India (to them) was something to be dominated.  

Durrell’s father Lawrence Samuel Durrell and his mother Louisa Florence came to India, dedicated to a colonial service just before the First War of Indian Independence. During his first lecture given at France, Durrell reminisces about India as:
I have seen the peak of Everest from the foot of my bed in a gaunt dormitory in Darjeeling! My First language was Hindi…

My family came to India before the great Indian Mutiny, so that neither my father nor my mother had seen England or experienced the English at home. We were virgin.

(Poetry London 1)

Commenting on their colonial existence, Durrell once said in an interview: “We weren’t just colonial lumps. None of us had seen England. We were very much more remote than an ordinary Britisher, so to speak.”¹² The Durrells lived in many regions through Punjab to Burma. The young Durrell’s venture into the portals of primary education gets expressed in his autobiographical poem, “Cities, Plains and People”:

Caravans paused here to drink Tibet.

On draughty corridors to Lhasa was my first school.

(Poems 159)
His life at the foot-hills of the stupendous white peaks of Himalayas had a tremendous effect on him, as he says in the same poem:

O world of little mirrors in the light.
The sun's rough wick for everybody's day:
Saw the Himalayas like lambs there
Stir their huge joints and lay
Against his innocent thigh a stony thigh.

(158)

Durrell’s mindscape was always engulfed in a vast snowy landscape as he said in A Smile in the Mind’s Eye: “in my memories it always snowed” (36). His tiny consciousness exposed to the Himalayas, jungles and rivers of India, created an asylum, -- exotic and serene. “Into this honeycomb of silence,” Durrell precisely felt that he had “gained the whole world” (Poems 159). Even Durrell’s mother always remembered India with love and her remark: “Most people talked of home and meant England, when we said home, we meant India,” 13 seems quite astonishing because there were very few Englishmen who would have remembered India with love and reverence, more often it was thought of with disgust and
despair. It is small wonder that the son of such a great lady to have opined:

One part of me has remained a child of the jungle, ever mindful of the various small initiations, which an Indian childhood imposes. The proverb says that whoever sees the world from the back of the elephant learns the secrets of the jungle and becomes a seer.  

Although Durrell was taken away to England at the age of ten, the short spell in India had a profound influence on the boy. After he left India, he was always haunted by a lost childhood -- lost innocence and lost relations. His attempt, was to excavate the snowy corridors of his psyche -- the snow-bound home in Kurseong, which he cherished in one of his letters to Miller: “God what a dream, the passes in Lhasa -- blue sea and thawing softly towards the forbidden city” (52). Durrell brought away from India three affective images: an abiding vision of the jungle; the monastic pathways towards the snow-capped Tibet -- “the roof of the world,” and the bazaars of common-place life.
Durrell, who is now an acclaimed novelist made his literary reputation as a poet. David Gascoyne commenting on Durrell’s popularity as a poet, 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 had himself declared that “If Eliot and George Seferis can recognise and appreciate the quality of my poetry that is enough for me.” 15 He believed that “the really great poet is always absolutely modern by what he has to say and not by how he says it” (Key 203). G. S. Fraser has rightly pointed out that, “As a poet Durrell has not been ignored, but has been a little underestimated. It is worth, by contrast to the usual estimate, emphasising the depth of his feelings and the searching seriousness of his thoughts” (Essays 181). His passion for poetry is evident from the poetic effusions in his novels. In Constance, Sutcliffe sings under his breath: “Dear old Fraud, jolly old Fraud, / we’ll be together, whatever the weather” (120). In “Monsieur,” poems get profusely scattered throughout the pages, producing a tremendous poetic effect, such as:

What a mysterious business
Wound up one day like a clock-work toy

At times I meet other toys 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.

(177)

Durrell used poetry in his plays too. Durrell was proposing as he said in the note on Acte for the German production:

I would like to fuse poetry and dramatic action thoroughly that the audience would not be conscious of poetry as a special ingredient, . . . set up sympathetic vibrations in the psyche, operating not by ideas . . . but by ideograms . . .

In a study of modern contemporary English poetry, Anthony Thwaite's remark about Durrell is noteworthy: "He is a sensuous poet, remote both from Auden's "clinical" clipped quality and the
verbal intoxication of Dylan Thomas, and an elegant one using technical tricks which succeed because he is sophisticated enough to know just how far he can go” (118).

As already mentioned, at the age of ten, he was sent to England to be “educated”. Durrell claims that all money was poured for their education, so that, as he said, “we were much colonial stockpot.” 17 Durrell couldn’t stand the English inhibitions, so he moved over to Corfu, where he was “reborn.” He explains it as: “where England constricted the sensibilities, the Eastern Mediterranean opened them out” (Haag 9). Although England had the most violently creative landscape, Durrell felt “the only thing that’s wrong is the way we’re living in it” (Plimpton 263). From then onwards Durrell travelled far and wide and experiences thus gained, gave his work natural exuberance and lushly cosmopolitan consciousness. Writing about Durrell’s literary stance, Roger Bowen pointed out that Durrell was “unfettered by an ethnocentric identity as English poet with a fixed sense of native culture” and he remained “unburdened by the weight of particular literary traditions and orthodoxies” (483). Durrell joined a band of immigrant writers like Laurie Lee and Bernard Spencer whose writings echo experiences
attained in foreign lands and strange seas. For these writers, English was "a sort of giant pin-table of inhibitions and restrictive legislation and ignoble, silly defences against feeling . . ." (Plimpton 263). The English were worried about "moral uplift" and "moral downfall," so the artist could never be down to earth. Durrell felt that England could prove a haven only to artists for whom:

... steel and running water

Were roads, went westward only

To the prudish cliffs and the sad green home

Of Pudding Island o'er the Victorian foam

( Poems 160 )

Invariably poets became "pariahs" in "Pudding Island" who were forced to sharpen "little follies into hooks / To pick upon the language and survive" (160). The English malaise was working up against the writers and many writers were declaring with Cyril Connoly, "England, not my England" (196 - 210). Henry Miller in The Colossus of Maroussi had written about Durrell's English ancestry: "the Englishman in Durrell (is) the least interesting thing about him to be sure, but an element not to be over looked" (225). Durrell expressed his antagonism in a letter to Miller. He wrote thus about
England: "that mean, shabby little island up there wrung my guts out of me and tried to destroy anything singular and unique in me" (51). Incidentally, some English writers opted for self-made exiles from their own native land to seek asylum in other parts of Europe. Durrell’s self-chosen exile from England as G.S. Fraser puts it as a poet “his isolation from the squabbles, the ganging up, the reconciliation of the London literary world has been fortunate” (A Study 41-42). Thus Durrell also “evolved into Lawrence Durrell world writer in the truest sense, portrayer of many nations, yet beyond nationality, beyond race” (MacNiven VI). Durrell’s immigration to the Mediterranean was essential because “like a damn cuckoo, one has to lay these eggs in someone else’s nest,” and the most favourable nests for writers like him were in France, Italy, and Greece, where “there’s very little chi-chi about writing or artists as such, but with the most extraordinary congenial frames in which a job of work can be done” (Plimpton 264). England laid restrictions on its own writers and many masterpieces like Connoly’s The Rook Pool, Henry Miller’s The Tropic of Cancer and Durrell’s The Black Book were not published in Britain, hence they opted to become literary expatriates. Growing up in such a culture and the psyche
moulded under the snow-capped Himalayas, Durrell intensely felt that he could never be appealing for "a puritan culture’s idea of art is something which confirms its morality and flatters its patriotism." Durrell’s alienation from the English soil got expressed in unprinted matter like: "The one thing on which the sun never sets is British hypocrisy." About the English he wrote: "conscience stricken little thieves." His bitter attack on the British artist is expressed thus: "one cannot deal with the British artist without a great deal of tender pity - such as one extends to a terrible street accident." Durrell ardently wished that the people of "that grubby little English world" banish "that... English system." In his poem "Phileremo," Durrell emphatically reiterates:

... Europe

Also, the whole of our egopetal culture

Is done for and must vanish soon.

(189)

It is little wonder that in 1921 D. H Lawrence wrote: "the thought of England is entirely repugnant." In 1922, he again wrote: "We're rather like Jonahs running away from the place we belong."
Lawrence Durrell’s “literary gardening” includes several novels, poetry collections, literary criticism, plays, travelogues, short stories, letters to contemporaries like Henry Miller and Richard Aldington, contributions to periodicals and journals and also a script for the film Cleopatra. As G. S Fraser strongly felt: “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” (A Study 12). Commenting on his literary pursuits, he once said “since the age of eight I have been madly scribbling” (Plimpton 260). It was at Corfu after the discovery of Miller’s Tropic in a toilet that marked the turning point in his life. His earlier novels Pied Piper of Lovers and Panic Spring claimed little attention. Nevertheless, The Black Book (1938), which Durrell called “The English Death” fetched him immense popularity. He called himself “an angry young man of the thirties” for his fierce attack on English snobbery and morality in The Black Book. This was his first successful endeavour in which he said: “I first heard the sound of my own voice, lame and halting perhaps, but nevertheless my very own” (9). T. S. Eliot had praised The Black Book as “the first piece of work by a new writer to give me any hope for the future of prose fiction.” Blamires’ evaluation
of *The Black Book* is that it "harks back to the ethic of Forster’s *Where Angels Fear To Tread* in its contrasting polarities of England old and devitalized and the Mediterranean sunny and alive" (227).

The protagonist Lucifer in *The Black Book* justifies the author’s abhorrence to English restrictions. He states:

We are lit up in the signs of a new chaos.

We are like patches of tissues, kept warm in sealed flasks, fed, washed and commanded to multiply under the watchful supervision of a scientist. Our world is a world of strict boundaries outside which we dare not wander not even in our imagination; whose season come and go without any sense of change. It is medieval in its blindness, this existence.

(24)

To quote Richard Pine’s comment on the book: “no other writer in English was able to apply himself so extensively and systematically to chronicling "The English Death" and the eventual liberation of the European imagination from its ego-ridden fix (82).
Durrell's experiences at Corfu gave birth to *Prospero's Cell* (1945) and at Rhodes to *Reflections on a Marine Venus* (1953). *Bitter Lemons* fetched him the Duff Cooper Memorial Prize.

Commenting on *Bitter Lemons*, Fraser remarked:

This is the most penetrating and saddest of his island books: it is also the book that reveals the strain of strenuous pragmatic common sense in Durrell, shows the worried, conscientious and efficient public servant.

*(A Study 39)*

At the end of *Reflections on a Marine Venus* and gradually through *Bitter Lemons*, Roger Porter discovers in Durrell:

a complex accounting of different selves, or atleast different attitudes towards the life on the islands he inhabits. Durrell comes to understand that history and modernity must be taken into account, that fantasy must be reconciled with actuality, and that travel is less an imposition of desire upon an untouched landscape than a complex dialectic
between the needs of the voyager and the reality of the visited”

(55).

Durrell also had brief spells in diplomatic service at Athens, Alexandria, Cairo and Belgrade, “lying abroad for his country in diplomatic or quasi-consular engagements, while distrusting the country and scorning the people from which he exiled himself” (Pine 23). Such stints in foreign service provided the satirical flavour in Espirite de Corps (1957), Antrobus Complete and Stiff Upper Lip (1958). Durrell’s humour in Espirite received wide popularity. Fraser’s analysis of the three volumes of farcical stories about Embassy life reveal that “the comedy of these stories, in fact, becomes at times much more than in Wodehouse the comedy of language itself” (A Study 124). Life in Alexandria during the war provided material for The Alexandria Quartet -- a tetrology comprising of Justine (1957), Balthazar (1958), Mountolive (1958) and Clea (1960). “The Alexandria Quartet,” according to George Steiner, “is the highest performance in the modern novel since Proust and Joyce” (122). Thus The Quartet became Durrell’s magnum opus through which he became an established novelist and critical studies began to proliferate making
his place secure in the literary arena. Carl Bode expressed his views on *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 Alexandria Quartet* was a tremendous success in England, America and in translation in Europe. "Durrell has the kind of European renown," says Fraser, "that has belonged in the past only to Shakespeare, to Byron, to Oscar Wilde, to the T. S. Eliot of *The Wasteland* and the Joyce of *Ulysses*" *(A Study 40)*. Durrell's later fiction include *The Avignon Quintet* comprising of *Monsieur or The Prince of Darkness* (1974), *Livia or Buried Alive* (1978), *Constance or Solitary Practices* (1982), *Sebastian or Ruling Passions* (1983) and *Quinx or The Ripper's Tale* (1983) and a double-decker novel *Tunc and Nunquam* (1970). About his second series *The Avignon Quintet*, Durrell explained thus:

In this book I proposed to return to India - - to move from the four dimensions to the five skandas. The old stable ego had already gone, reality has realised itself there, so to speak. In a sense 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.

(Poetry London 7)

Lee .T. Lemon while analysing Durrell’s major works finds that “both The Quartet and The Quintet are indeed prototypes of the classic post-modernist novel along with the novels of Barth and Fowles” (157 - 160). This is a contention which Dianne Vipond also asserts in her essay “Lawrence Durrell’s Alexandria Quartet: The Missing Link to Post-modernism” (54 - 55). She traces Durrell’s use of intra- and inter-textuality in his novels — the use of Pursewarden’s letters, Justine’s diary, the inclusion of numerous literary allusions and characters. Hence there is John Keats, a journalist and would be novelist; Darley named after a minor Irish poet George Darley, Pursewarden’s nick-name: lineaments of Gratified Desire (LGD: Durrell’s initials) evokes William Blake’s poem: “What Is It Men In Women Do Require?” Durrell’s employment of these post-modern 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).
many observers make varied observations of the same incident it leads to a multiplicity of texts within the text, which Bakhtin refers to as "polyphony" or "heteroglossia"... In The Quartet, there is a mixing of genres... letters, speeches, symposia giving the "shift-and-renewal... joyful relativity of all structure and order" (124). In The Quartet, Durrell narrates Darley's past history in the fictional present. In Poetics of Post modernism, Linda Hutcheon writes: "Post-modern 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). The past presented in the present, thus changing it, is what Durrell strongly believed about which he wrote in a letter: "Art now-a-days is going to be real art... IT IS GOING TO BE PROPHECY, in the biblical sense."25 Frederick R. Karl analysing Durrell's fiction confirmed that:

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.

Durrell’s poetic productions 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). According to Derek Stanford, who reviewed his early poetry, his first poems published in A Private Country, display his ability to compose with "profound thoughtfulness" and "sensitivity to landscape" (43). In Selected Poems, Durrell’s sensibility is at its best in his lyrics, biographies, ballads; he exhibits an alert sense of landscape and history which reveal an originality and expertise in the poetic handling. In Collected Poems, edited by James A. Brigham, readers discover his fastidious romantic flavour and concentration on subjects that are exotic, yet circumstantial. The poems have a special quality which would outlast the flamboyance of his prose. While discussing
the impact of Durrell’s range in poetry, Patrick McGuinness comments:

Durrell’s poetry resists classification by movement, school or decade. The sheer range and variety in the Collected Poems testifies to the difficulties of defining him as a particular type “of poet.”

Durrell’s last work Caesar’s Vast Ghost is a book which is part travel, part poetry, part mythology, part autobiography — a blending of genres. It takes Provence as its ostensible subject and Durrell by sifting the soil of Provence, tells the story of his spiritual life. Provence is not just a geographical place but a state of mind which represents the remains of the Roman Empire in present day Europe — bull-worship, witchcraft, black magic, the roots of the European sensibility. It is Durrell’s contention that Provence was the crucible in which European sensibility was forged. Provence happened to become Durrell’s native soil after India and Greece.

Durrell’s astonishing range made G. S. 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" (A Study 9). This includes his literary criticism, the lectures being compiled as A Key to Modern British Poetry. Durrell’s outstanding critical analysis of writers like Empson, Dylan Thomas, Auden, George Barker etc. requires special mention. His comparison of Empson and Dylan Thomas is sharp, severe and subtle, reflecting his awareness of the two major conflicting pulls in English poetry. He enumerates thus:

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.
Durrell also proved to be a remarkable playwright through his plays *Sappho*, *Acte* and *An Irish Faustus*. Congratulating Durrell on his achievement, Richard Aldington wrote to him: “You’re a damn good writer, partly because you have hit the literary public taste and partly because there simply is no one else in your class at the moment.” 26

Durrell’s unique contribution to modern literature is a result of his supra-linguistic talent, rare sensibility and the ability to display the data of perception and imagination in an exceptionally exquisite way. While referring to the need for verbal brilliance, Durrell wrote to Miller: “Words I carry in my pocket, where they breed like white mice . . .” 27 In his poetry the linguistic craftsman reveals exquisite verbal pyrotechnics by choosing the apt adjectives and subtle rhythms. Durrell attempted to consume the whole world in his poetry as he wrote: “I am trying to eat the whole pantheon of spirits with a dictionary . . . I used to go quicker, quicker, until it was no more pen and paper, but a sort of cinema inside my breast, a sort of mass . . . It is quite fatal to approach me unless you have the faith” (*Spirit of Place* 259, 272).
Derek Stanford calls him, "The gaugin of modern poetry" (43), whose paradise was Greece. Corfu proved to be the Elysium, which the expatriate was seeking desperately. The poetry from the island became a celebration and exploration of all nature — sea and land, women and men, the twin themes of "sexual curiosity and metaphysical speculation." The beauty of Corfu became the primary source of inspiration to him 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.

(Poems 57)

The poems spread an aura of Grecian beauty, which could be engulfed prismatically by none other than Cavafy's successor, opined Victor Brombert, who called Durrell, "The Bard of Alexandria, The legitimate heir to the old poet, the Greek Cavafy" (179). The poem "Letter to Seferis, The Greek, is a celebration of Greece, which draws its associations from the myth and legend of the
Mediterranean past. The context of the poem is ancient Hellas and modern Greece. The “letter” is not addressed to Seferiades, the diplomat, who is concerned with the events of the immediate present. On the other hand it is addressed to “Seferis the Greek,” who is truly heroic, because he is identified with his race:

The past, my friend compelled you,
The charge of habit and love.
The olive in the blood awoke,
The stones of Athens in their pride
Will remember, regret and often bless.

(Poems 99)

Durrell claims, “All these things are simply Greece” (101). Durrell sets Seferis in his home, his landscape and passes on to the poet all his knowledge of Greece:

... the rotting walls
Of the European myth are here
For us, the industrious singers,
In the service of this blue, this enormous blue.

(101)
Durrell deserved to be called “gaugin” of modern poetry, because of his ability to conquer the “spirit of the place,” however beautiful and transform its evanescent beauty with his mind and passions. For him, human beings exist in nature as functions of landscape, about which he justified in *Spirit of Place*:

I willingly admit to seeing characters almost as functions of landscape. But as you get to know Europe slowly, tasting the wines, cheeses, the characters of the different countries, you begin to realise that the important determinant of any culture is after all - - the spirit of place.

(154)

Durrell had commented in *The New York Times Book Review*, that the artist must attend “to what the land is saying” conform “to the hidden magnetic fields that the landscape is trying to communicate to the personality.” In another passage in the same article, he came out quite authentically as “I have evolved a private notion about the importance of landscape, and I willingly admit to seeing characters almost as functions of a landscape... My books
are always about living in places, not just rushing through them." 28 Durrell is indeed a verbal painter of a dazzling and protean landscape. The essentiality of a powerful landscape to an artist is emphatically reiterated by Durrell:

One last word about the sense of place. I think that not enough attention is paid to it as a purely literary criterion. What makes "big books" is surely as much to do with their site as their characters and incidents. I don't mean the books that are devoted entirely to an elucidation of a given landscape like Thoreau's Walden i.e. I mean ordinary novels, when they are well and truly anchored in nature, they usually become classics. One can detect this quality to "bigness" in most books that are so sited from "Huckleberry Finn" to "Grapes of Wrath." They are tuned into the sense of place . . . this has nothing to do with the manners and habits of the human beings who
populate them; for, they exist in nature, as a function of place.

(Landscape 30)

Dasenbrock calls Durrell, "a topographic artist," because, as he pointed out, for Durrell, "character is a function of place" (208). Landscape is the catalyst, which ignites the artist, resulting in "big books." This is evident in The Alexandria Quartet, where Darley is awakened to a new reality because of his intimate association with the vibrant colours, sounds and smells of Alexandria. According to Durrell, the ultimate aim of the artist is his ability to realise reality and get "everything undressed." He strongly feels that "it is there if you just close your eyes and breathe softly through your nose; you will hear the whispered message, for all landscapes ask the same question in the same whisper: "I am watching you - - are you watching yourself in me?" (Spirit 158), and when the quite inner identification of the landscape takes place, "everything is blue and smells of sage" (158). The artist always seeks the nourishing soils that would enable him to put down roots and create. The six painters in "Conon the critic on the six landscape painters of Greece" respond to the natural world. Manoli of Circe, one of the six
painters in the poem, spend a life-time writing acrostics. It was only after he took up a brush and started observing objects, he realised that he was actually seeing clearly the objects which he mentioned in his puzzles: "Trees had been trees before. Distinctions had been in ideas. Now the old man went mad for everything undressed and ran laughing into his arms" (Poems 130). Durrell himself was a painter. It was while he lived in Corfu in 1935-1939 that he began painting. Once he told Alyn about his painting: "I've always done water colours. When I was about twenty, I lived on a Greek island with a young painter. It was then that I started to look at things through water colour" (Alyn 101). He even conducted exhibitions of his paintings at Paris. In a letter to Jean Franchette, Durrell claimed: "My paintings have now began to sell in U.K. and U.S.A. This is really a great joke." 29 "Although Durrell jokes about his artistic endeavours," says Susan MacNiven, "... painting is one of his serious pleasures and that occasionally it is important therapy ... and serves as a counterbalance to the searching, sometimes brooding poet - novelist - dramatist who explores the dark side of mankind" (225).
The great natural expanse is the bosom into which the infant artist is cuddled to learn the first lessons of life, art and reality. Only those artists who can delve deep into it and get “everything undressed,” can be adequately rewarded. The barren, sterile artist is enriched by the earth’s ambrosia, as Durrell expressed in “Two Poems in English”:

The ships, these islands, these simple trees
Are our rewards in substance, being poor.
The earth a dictionary is
To the roof and growth of seeing,
And to the servant heart a door.

(141)

Several poets of the thirties had drawn much of their poetic nourishment from their knowledge and love of the Mediterranean. Durrell was one of them, who found the Mediterranean, the “door” through which to leap out into the inner reality. His sensibility, thus enriched by the Mediterranean got translated into ideograms like his “Father Nicholas His Death: Corfu,” where he says:

For the islands will never grow old.
Nor like Atlantis on a Monday tumble,
Struck like soft gongs in the amazing blue.

This fetched a striking praise from Alan Ross, who wrote in his preface to *Selected Poems*: “no one has written more mnemonically about landscape, especially the Eastern Mediterranean but classically allusive, epigrammatic and anecdotal.” Durrell’s incessant harping on landscapes made Carl Bode comment: “The archetypal poem for Durrell is, in fact, the combination of a place with an association” (215).

Durrell’s originality, precise descriptions and clarity make his poems strikingly unique, as Richard Aldington strongly felt: “A great pleasure to have a poet who knows what he wants to say and says it agreeably” (24). In the Poem “A Prospect of Children,” Durrell’s originality, spectacular brevity and prismatic clarity find expression. He delineates children as:

These gruesome little artists of the impulse

For whom the perfect anarchy sustains

A brilliant apprehension of the present,

In games of joy, of love or even murder

On this green springing grass will empty soon
A duller opiate, loving, to the drains.

The "tribe of children" inhabit an elysium, which makes the obnoxious adult crave that "you were like them." This heavenly innocence is acknowledged by Durrell thus:

Cast down like asterisks among their toys,
Divided by the lines of daylight only
From adventure, crawl among the rocking-horses,
And the totems, dolls and animals and rings
To the tame suffix of a nursery sleep
Where all but few of them
The restless inventories of feeling keep.

The greatest tragedy was the twentieth century wars - - the wars, which caused pain and panic to all. The panging throes and utter waste of warfare is rendered very graphically by Durrell. He ponders on with remorse:

This rough field of sudden war
This sand going down to the sea, going down,
Was made without the approval of love,
Burnt guns, maps and firing:

All the apparatus of man’s behaviour.

(142)

Durrell is at his best in his personal poems, where he investigates the creative intelligence of writers from Homer to Rimbaud, Horace to Byron, Fabre to La Rochefoucauld. In the poem “On First Looking Into Loeb’s Horace,” at the outset Durrell recreates Horace and his surroundings; a Horace who is:

This lover of vines and slave to quietness,

Walking like a figure of smoke here, musing

Among his high and lovely Tuscan pines.

(109)

Durrell, not only identifies himself with Horace, but also empathizes with him:

Here, where your clear hand marked up

“The hated cypress” I added “Because it grew

On tombs, revealed his fear of autumn and

the urns.”

(109)
He further renders his salutation to the great artist:

The sad heart of Horace who must have seen it only
As a metaphor for the self and its perfection __
A burning heart quite constant in its station.

He will not know how we discerned him, disregarding
Whose roots live in the barbarian grammar we
Use, yet based in him, his mason’s tongue;

(110)

Towards the end of the poem, Durrell’s investigation of the intellect of Horace is complete. Horace is depicted trapped in the process of “converting all terms into the terms of art” (Davie 59):

Who built in the sabine hills this forgery
Of completeness, an orchard with a view of Rome;
Who studiously developed his sense of death

So perfect a disguise for one who had
Exhausted death in art __ . .

( Poems 110 - 111)
Durrell's picturisation of Horace is complete in the last lines of the poem, which indicate his great self-knowledge:

... 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.

(Poems 111)

Durrell goes beyond the life of Horace or any other poet much before in time because he plunges deep into their consciousness. Durrell seems to identify art also as an inquiry and the relation of art to life. Durrell, once said in an interview, "What I call life I see as an act of imagination, a poem." In the "Limits to Control III" article: No clue to living," he mourns the loss of a coherent system, "a cosmology or religion" from which all branches of inquiry derive their meaning and value. "The scientist," according to him is "fundamentally doing something meaningless because unrelated," whereas his "spastic brother," the artist is busily engaged in composing his own universe to escape the disjunction of the world.

Durrell's experimentation with styles is evident in his poems. The poem "Echo" incorporates plain style. In it, he writes:
Nothing is lost, sweet self,
Nothing is ever lost.
The unspoken word
Is not exhausted but can be heard.
Music that stains
The silence remains

O echo is everywhere, the unbeckonable bird!

Although the poem at first reading exhibits simplicity, certain words like "unspoken," "exhausted," "unbeckonable" indicate complexity. Durrell's peculiarity lies in his ability to use complex and original words and surround them with simple ones - - this is his remarkable use of language. Like Auden, Durrell has the great gift of providing the surprising yet apt verb or adjective. Among the contemporaries, Auden influenced Durrell most, about whom he remarked: "He is a great master of colloquial effects, which no one before him dared to use" (Plimpton 275). Auden advocated flexibility of language and proved that poetry could be written in any form. This was taken up by his successors, specially Durrell. In spite of being influenced, Durrell evolved a new form - - "an amalgam of
everything” that he pinched and the final effect, he admitted was “to pay back these socking debts with a tiny bit of interest, which is the only honourable thing for a writer to do” (275). Durrell’s plain style incorporates a paradox in that it involves a complex contemplation as in the poem “Fabre”:

Children, more baffling than pupae,
Their conversation when alone, their voices,
The sense of intimacy when moving in lines
Like caterpillars entering a cathedral.

(Poems 157)

Durrell’s precision in handling vocabulary, in capturing sense and subtlety make his poetry remarkable. In the poem “Themes Heraldic”, short lines are juxtaposed with complex ideas, as in the following:

If I say what I honestly mean
Its only because
I honestly mean what I say.

(58)
There are such simple, short lines which encompass the complexity of thought:

Delicate desire

She moves in belly’s soft pocket,

Having, holding, folding

Fading and inclining,

Dance into sleep.

As tongue to tongue,

As knife to sheath.

(60)

Durrell harps on the never changing passions of men and women right from ancient times. He excels in depicting this phenomenon by his originality and accuracy of language. In “Delos” the delineation is complete:

And in harbours softly fallen

The liver-coloured sails __

Sharp-feature brigantines with eyes __

Ride in reception so like women:

The pathetic faculty of girls
To register and utter a desire
In the arms of men upon the new mown waters,
Follow the wind with their long shining keels
Aimed across Delos at a star.

Durrell is equally at ease with myth and history. Mythical figures find a place in his poetry. They outgrow all proportions and approximate reality. Thus Chloe is described outrageously like any living heroine:

Under the tongue the bee-sting,
Under the breast the adder at the lung,
Like feathered child at wing.

Similarly Daphni gets correlated to Christ in the most unblasphemous way:

This boy is the good shepherd.
He paces the impartial horizons,
Forty days in the land of tombs
Waterless wilderness, seeking water holes:
Durrell himself confesses, of having sought history and myth as subjects for his poetry. In the poem "Mythology" he writes:

All my favourite characters have been
Out of all pattern and proportion:
Some living in villas by railways,
Some like Katsimbalis heard and seldom seen,

(115)

The whole beauty and wonder which all myths contain is expressed with utmost brevity in this simple line: "Life's honey is distilled simplicity" (91). These legends like history do live for us and so Chloe exists in time:

This was Chloe, the milk and honey,
Carved in the clear geography of Time . . .

(91)

Durrell mingle with history with myth, which is evident in the last lines of "Mythology." The poem concludes:

Ramon de Something who gave lectures
From an elephant, founded a society
To protect the inanimate against cruelty.
The poetry was in the pity. No judgement

Disturbs people like these in their frames

O men of the Marmion class, sons of the free.

(115)

Durrell’s flair for condensation and concretisation of ideas is seen at its best in the poem “Delos,” which is a great religious centre in ancient Greece. The poem opens with a wonderful evocation of the small Greek islands, as spotted by God’s eye:

On charts they fall like lace,
Islands consuming in a sea
Born dense with its own blue:
And like repairing mirrors holding up
Small towns and trees and rivers
To the still air, the lovely air:

(132)

As the poem moves on, we realise that it is not simply a wonderful evocation of the Greek islands but an acceptance of death as a splendid invocation to life. The statues of the dead give a kind of religious grace and piety to the concept of death:

The statues of the dead here
Embark on sunlight, sealed
Each in her model with the sightless eyes:
The modest stones of Greeks,
Who gravely interrupted death by pleasure.

(132)

The religious confrontation of death is compressed in the last line "gravely interrupted death by pleasure." The recurring theme in Durrell's poetry and novels is the evolution of the artist — an artist is born not made, Durrell seems to emphasise. "The poet's battle with his armaments — language and syntax," is vividly portrayed in the poem "Style." The poet's inevitable confrontation with the various modes of poetry finds expression in the following lines:

Something like the sea,
Unlaboured momentum of water
But going somewhere,
Building and subsiding,
The busy one, the loveless.

(243)

Although all the images are from nature, it is a poem about art and artist's relation to his art. In the midst of the struggle, the
artist realises: "But neither is yet / Fine enough for the line I hunt” (244). The poet condescends to “The dry bony blade of the / Sword-grass might suit me” (244). So he seems to have selected a sharper epigrammatic poetry than the simple direct lyric or the great tragedy. In “Style”, Durrell effectively uses a language characterised by its faithfulness to the struggle of the writer and it is a language spiced with great relish for experience, even when the experience is unpleasant and painful:

   Such a bite of perfect temper

   As unwary fingers provoke.

(244)

It is a language uniquely filled to express a vital awareness of concepts like freedom, about which Durrell makes a shocking delineation:

   O Freedom which to every man entire

   Presents imagined longings to his fire,

   Only to the wise may' you

   Restricting and confining be,

   All who half-delivered from themselves
Suffer your conspiracy,

Freedom, Freedom, prison of the free.

(247)

During a time when poetry came to be felt as: "Tone of the frog in the empty well" or "Drone of the bald bee on the cold skull" (88), Durrell's poetry exhibited his supra-linguistic talent; his poem overflowing with verbal pyrotechniques and vivid imagery. A few examples are "The Death of General Uncebunke: A Biography in Little," "On First Looking Loeb's Horace," "Nemea," "Deus Loci" etc. His autobiographical poem "Cities, Plains and People" is a study of writers - - English and French:

Here however man might botch his way

To God via Valery, Gide or Rabelais

Through old Moll Flanders sailed before the mast,

While savage Chatterleys of the new romance

Get carried off in Sex, the ambulance.

All rules obtained upon the pilot's chart

If governed by the scripture of the heart.

(163)
Thus the great artist, who was "governed by the scripture of the heart" was interrupted from his literary meanderings by the colossus crusader. The tragic end came on 7 December, 1990. He left behind a rich endowment in the printed world. Durrell's death brought mixed tributes from the British press. As he had distanced himself from England, Durrell became after Graham Greene, its most famous literary exile. Perhaps the best tribute to Durrell, the writer, is the formation of the International Lawrence Durrell Society with centres in America, France and India. The society publishes a journal, Deus Loci, solely devoted to Durrell studies. It was first published as a newsletter in 1977. International Lawrence Durrell conferences with the title "On Miracle Ground" are held every two years in different parts of the world. A considerable amount of Durrell studies are evolved during these conferences. Only a thorough reading of his works would unravel the many mysteries behind Durrell, the man, poet, novelist, playwright, travel-writer and critic. There is a spiritual progression in his works revealing Durrell's odyssey into the deep recesses of ART, LOVE, SEX, LIFE and REALITY.

Durrell's lifetime work reveals a celebration of the body and mind; an eulogising of the flesh and bodily cravings; an attack on
rationalism, intellectualisation and morality; a voyage of discovery for philosophical and literary vistas, which could nourish his own "mindscapes," his "private country," his "heraldic universe," as Michael Haag’s obituary notice claims: "it found him circumnavigating the "Locus classics," the "middle sea" within him, which was the essential core of his imagination, the island and littorals of his own sensibility." 33
Notes


2 CERLD: Cercle / ts. Durrell’s manuscripts and other private papers held by the Centre d’Etudes et de Recherches Lawrence Durrell at Sommieres.


5 Ibid. 33.

6 Martin Heidegger, *Existence and Being*, trans. Scott, Hull and Cricks (391-2). The fact that this comparison appears in the postscript to *it Metaphysic. 5th ed. (Frankfurt, 1949)* indicates how
close a bond exists between poetical and philosophical studies in
Heidegger's opinion.

7 Quoted in K. D. Pedanekar, "The Lure of the Orient in English
(Madras: Macmillan, 1970) 56.

8 Victor cousins lecture at Paris, 1828-29. Quoted by Max Muller
in Three Introductory Lectures on the Vedanta Philosophy, first
Lecture: 8-11.

9 "From the Elephant's Back." Text amended and slightly
expanded of a lecture first given by Lawrence Durrell in French at
the Centre Pompidou, Paris, April 1, 1981. Published in Poetry

10 CERLD: Cercle/ ts.

11 Conversation of the author with Richard Pine. Quoted by

12 Ibid. 25.

14 The author in conversation with Richard Pine.


18 SIUC 42/15/6

19 SIUC 42/19/10

20 SIUC 42/19/8

21 SIUC 42/19/10


