CHAPTER - 2
LOVE - “NEURASTHENIA” OR “ANANDA”? 

What else

Is love, but the most noble, pure affection

Of what is truly beautiful and fair,

Desire of union with the thing beloved?

— Ben Jonson

Contrary to Jonson’s “noble, pure affection” Durrell discovers love in the modern world, especially in the West, quite obnoxious. Eliot described the sense of despair and deprivation prevalent in the modern world as a “living Hell” in The Waste Land. Eliot’s city is termed “The Burial of the Dead,” where Gerontion symbolises “Death in life.” Similarly in The Black Book, Durrell depicts “The Burial Chamber” as “a scenario of despair.” Living in a sceptical, aesthetic and scientific age, man’s only consolation is “love.” But “modern love” particularly in the West, gives the least consolation and results in “neurasthenia,” defined by the French as “a lasting state of dejection or despondency accompanied by sadness” (Pharand 107). This “neurasthenic love” is dull, spiritless, self-destructive and invariably an “emotional atrophy” (106). The corrosive destructive
force plays havoc with the lives of the present generation, who have "No time for love, no room for love" (Poems 138). All that is left when love withers is a catalogue of fragments: "A whistle, a box, a shawl, a cup" (139). Nowhere else is the sense of a contemporary wasteland so starkly portrayed as in Durrell's poetry and fiction.

Durrell's Sappho represents the age in which she lives, who possesses, as she claims, everything she could possibly want in a materialistic way:

When Young I wanted to be loved: I am
Wanted to be famous and left idle. Well, I am
Then to be rich: I am
Then to be happy: Well, I am . . . or am I?

(26)

Obviously, she isn't satisfied because, "some disturbing / inner climate makes me hot and cold by turns." She sought satisfaction for the malaise by giving her body freely for various reasons. Invariably she was disillusioned as she retorted: "Hating myself so much . . ." (74). This sort of discontent pervaded amidst the lovers, who could not find "union with the thing beloved." They always existed as:

You . . . . . I
They are such very little faces

(Poems 38)

Where the "you" could never merge with the "I" -- the emotion itself being very mechanistic and the lovers "separating each other / further with every kiss" (129). In Sappho, Phaon's concept of love sums up the finality of all love relationships:

Love is a modern invention like the dagger,

Useful, kills many, but in operation

Generally ugly to watch...

... that is why you surrender always

To pleasure, the unsatisfactory goal of everyone.

(74)

There is hardly any "fusion" or "union" but "self-possession" and "self-destruction" ending in utter despair and frustration, as Durrell strongly reiterates in Quinx: "Neurosis is the norm for an ego-petal culture" (180), because "Judeo-Christianity manufactures more I's to become sick me's" (Constance 304). Schwarz, a character in Constance informs us that, "Any poet will tell you that the basic illness is the ego which, when it swells, engenders stress, dislocating
reality" (133), and how the "western man had got his priorities wrong; the target was not between the thighs, but between the eyes" (136). In Caesar's Vast Ghost, Durrell reiterates:

We have never loved anyone
Or believed in anything wise:

An ego poached in salt . . . means WOE

Between conniving thighs an addict lies.

To lead you by syringefuls to the land of sighs.

(24-25)

Justine in The Alexandria Quartet is a representative of the Eros thus turned Neurasthenia, for she suffers from all the colours of neurasthenia; she was suffering from an imagination dying of anaemia, for she could possess no one thoroughly in the flesh. She could not appropriate to herself the love she felt she
needed.

(Justine 78-79)

Justine is often compared to an eagle in The Quartet and in one of Durrell's letters to Miller, he speaks of love being "fierce and glaring, vulture and eagle work" (Wickes 192). Justine, the eagle can be compared to Ted Hughes' hawk, which holds "creation in my foot and kill/ where I please because it is all mine" (280). This sort of totalitarianism or "the old dysentery of human narcissism" (Constance 292) takes place not only in Hitler's psyche, but in the psyche of either of the lovers, who is bent on conquering but can never possess another human creature in love. . . fully and wholly, because the "object is self - possession always" (Sappho 75). The "self" of the lovers never submerge because they never realise that "duality is distress" and it is to be noted that "the magic of your wife or your daughter's / Love" is "so partial a gift" (Poems 81). The deliverance of partial love is the consequence of the giver or receiver never being able to evolve into a whole. The fate of the lovers is:

. . . like swimmers lost at sea,

Exhausted in each other's arms,
Urgent for land, but treading water.

(166)

The inability to love wholly and ego-less is the malaise because:

We never learned that marriage is a kind of architecture,

The nursery virtues were missing, all of them,

So nobody could tell us why we suffered.

(108)

There seems to be a lack of sexual continence in Durrell's fictive world and almost all the characters in his works are enmeshed in weird relationship. All his male characters have relations with whores - - Darley lives with Melissa, while he still continues to have an affair with Justine and finally sleeps with Clea. Pursewarden's incestuous relationship with his sister, who in turn loves Mountolive, who finally sleeps with Justine. These affairs are quite different from the affairs we would find in a Jane Austen or Bronte novel. This made Lionel Trilling remark that the lovers of The Quartet have:

the slightest interest in maturity or in adult behaviour or in mutuality of interest or in
building a life together... The lovers do not expect from each other emotional support or confirmation or a sense of security.

(52)

In The Avignon Quintet also, Blanford has had a miserable time with Constance’s sister, “who had provoked in him a self-destructive calf-love which she only half assuaged while at the same time manifesting an almost equal partiality for his young friend, Felix Chatto” (Constance 4). She was two-timing and had made fools of them both. Livia resembles Justine with all her sexual attachments and detachments: “It was simply that there seemed to be no continuity between successive impulses... she did not bother to reflect upon any hurt she might be causing” (Livia 4). Livia had provoked so much love in Blanford and then dared to desert him. This sort of “bodily love” which the lovers very freely give and take resulted in misery, about which W. B. Yeats describes in the Poem, “A Last Confession”:

What lively lad most pleased me
Of all that with me lay?
But had great pleasures with a lad
That I loved bodily.

Beast gave beast as much.

(313-314)

This beastly bodily love, admits Constance is “the banana-peel that laughter-loving reality leaves on the pavements for men and women to skid on” (Livia 67). Similarly, in Quinx, the following passage testifies this beastly conception of love:

The new day is dawning—women have become sex service stations: no more attachments, just distribution of friendly faceless lust. Modern girls whose body-image is smashed by neglect. Neither caressed enough nor suckled without disgust nor respected and treated with the awe they deserve Pious, loveless lives... (138)

As Durrell emphatically stated in Caesar’s Vast Ghost:

Sex has eaten the heart out of time and money has eaten the spirit out of sex. The
lustful glory will not last. We are living among bankers who are hunting for a suckling experience, milk of the world, quoi!

In epochs when love is at risk, art most unhappily is forced to preach.

(20)

Durrell himself had similar experiences in life and probably this led him to write to Miller in May 1944, about man-woman relationship and the significance of their numerous insignificant attachments and detachments. He wrote very truly and faithfully:

It's funny the way you get woman after woman, and exactly what adds up to I don't know, each more superficial than the last . . .

(Wickes 192)

This superficiality did exist because both the partners were quite superficial to themselves and to others. Their love-bond was too shallow to last forever which Durrell, eloquently expresses in "Cities, Plains and People":

Red Polish Mouth

Lips that as for the flute uniform
Gone round on nouns or vowels

To alter the accepting, calm

“Yes,” or make terrible verbs

Like, “I adore, adore”

(Poems 166)

This modern, hollow love, has degenerated into a “destructive absolute”. Not surprisingly, “the lover, even while loving recognises that he is at the mercy of an uncontrollable doom” (Karl 46). As Philip Sidney had predicted quite early: “All love is dead infected/With plague of deep disdain” (Faber 175). This plague was experienced even by our great writers like Shakespeare who said “most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly” (318). The folly prevailed because one of the partners always felt the need to dominate over the other, about which Sappho in full rage, thunders at Minos:

Egoist . . . you are in love with yourself

Your romance is with your own mind.

(Sappho 24)
Obviously the love is bestowed on oneself quite narcissistically as one of the long excerpts from Justine’s diary explicates:

The loved object is simply one has shared an experience at the same moment of time narcissistically; and the desire to be near the beloved object is at first not due to the idea of possessing it, but simply to let the two experiences compare themselves, like reflections in different mirrors. All this may precede the first look, kiss or touch: precede ambition, pride or envy, precede the first declarations which mark the turning point - - for from here love degenerates into habit, possession and back to loneliness.

(46-47)

One of the themes in The Avignon Quintet is Constance educating herself to love fully, wholly and correctly. For she understands that love is more than a physical act - - it is a spiritual, psychological experience. At the beginning of the novel, Constance imposes herself on Affad:
Even now she felt called upon to assert some of her feminine independence, to assert a loving domination over him by her physical strength.

(266)

But later she learns from Affad that the "sexual act is a psychic one, the flesh and bone enact but psyche directs" (286). There are other instances of ego domination even during the very sexual act seen in "The Nazi" chapter. Von Esslin makes love to his servant maid and Constance realises that he was making "war" and not "love":

They were locked in silent combat now, like two experienced wrestlers and he felt in the spider-like grip of her thin thighs and arms a kind of helplessness, an agony of submission and sexual abasement. She bowed before him as if she desired only one thing; to be trampled, to be spurned . . . She was his, she submitted, and the thought excited his cupidity; he overwhelmed her as his army
would soon overwhelm her country and
people capping it, wading in its blood.

(Constance 37 - 38)

C. S. Lewis in “Amour Courtois” observes that there is a
“feudalisation of love – with solemn courts and usages, modelled
upon the feudal court” (2). The “usages” that the lovers upheld in
their “folly” far extended, breaking the barriers of common sense,
into the realm of hyperbolic and epigrammatic expressions. So the
lover in Andrew Marvell’s “To His Coy Mistress” is seen profusely
pouring out to justify his passion:

    And hundred years should go to praise
    Thine eyes, and on thy forehead Gaze,
    Two hundred to adore each Breast:
    But thirty thousand to the rest.
    An age at least to every part,

    (Penguin 135)

Such monotonous, monstrous strains of poetry flowed from Jack
to Jill. Durrell’s Jack quite sarcastically asks his lady love whether
she would be pleased, if he should:

    Pay down a fee of words to you,
That lesser you, who dwindle, shrink

When formal sentences of fine desire

fix your minute reflection in a shining ink?

Would you have all of this:

(Poems 39)

Such monotonous strains of flattery were used by earlier poets like Robert Greene, who describes his lady love as:

As fair Aurora in her morning grey

Deck'd with the ruddy glister of her love is fair Samela.

Her tresses gold, her eyes like glassy streams

Her teeth are pearls, the breast of ivory of fair Samela

Her cheeks like rose and lily yield forth gleams,

Her brows' bright arches fram'd of ebony:

thus fair Samela.

(Faber 85).

Such flattery had a transience which emphasised only the physical and not the spiritual. In fact "Heard melodies are sweet but
those unheard / Are sweeter. . . ” (Penguin 295) and “the words that lovers use . . . are charged with distorting emotions. Only their silences have the cruel precision which aligns them to truth” (Quartet 179 - 80). The unsaid and unwritten words speak volumes, unfortunately this kind of love communication was alien to the Western lover. As Leila in Mountolive feels: “The richest of human experiences is also the most limited in its range of expression. Words kill love as they kill everything” (427). Durrell described the unexhausted love as:

The bait of feeling was left untasted:
Deep inside like ruins lay the desires
To give, to trust, to be my subject’s equal,
All wasted, wasted.
Though love is not the word I want
Yet it will have to do. There is no other.

(Poems 124)

“Love, the undeclared thought,” cannot be fulfilling and deep because of the importance one gives to the “wild pack of selves / past peace of mind or even sleep” (Quintet 167). This deformity is prevalent as Clea tells Darley: “There is something about love -- I
will not say defective, for the defect, lies in ourselves” (Justine 129). The fault in the individual results in neurasthenia which eventually follows every love relationship - - which the lovers in the West suffer from, as Pursewarden tells us, “One makes love only to confirm one’s loneliness” (Clea 64). The tragic quality of love is:

"... dying of self-importance is the usual thing / the creed of loneliness is all that’s left,” although “the girl you loved was grave yet debonair / Like the French whore I live with I suppose,” (Poems 338) but the destructive power of Eros creeps in. Frederick. R. Karl, discussing about Durrell’s mystical love in The Quartet, compares the love element to a “chameleon” constantly changing colours, formations, positions etc. Even Justine opines that, “we use each other like axes to cut down the ones we really love” (Justine 12)

Durrell is all contempt for “the rationed love” of the West, characterised by the lovers poetic effusions, as he asks his beloved:

What would you have me write?

Scraps, an attentive phrase or two

To soothe your vanity’s delight.

(Poems 39)
Michael. W. Pharand declares that Durrell's "investigation of modern love" (Balthazar 7) in The Alexandria Quartet projects it as "a human predicament tainted with some form of horror" (98). The scene where Justine begs Darley to comfort her exemplifies this "human predicament." She pleads: "Only for comfort Darley. A few strokes and endearments, that's all I beg." But Darley realises that he is now filled with disgust, which had a "fearful magic" earlier. He remembers some lines of Pursewarden's poem which seemed significant to him for this particular condition:

Delivered by her to what drunken caresses,
Of mouths half eaten like soft rank fruit
from which one takes a single bite, a
mouthful of darkness where we bleed

(Clea 61-62)

His animosity towards Justine is thus described:

The once magnificent object of my love lay
now in the hollow of my arm, defenceless as
a patient on an operating table, hardly
breathing. It is useless even to repeat her
name which once held so much fearful magic
... It was as if some huge iron door had closed forever in my heart...

(61-62)

Love has thus turned to revulsion. Modern love is sterile, unwanted, pretentious, inverted and betrayed, as Denis de Rougemont observes in *Passion and Society*: "passionate love at once shared and fought against, anxious for its own happiness it rejects, and magnified in its own disaster" (52). Modern man is caught in the "mechanical world" which "is a giant trap, attractive to the outside but in fact evil and corrupt and, on a closer inspection, self-devouring" (Carley 284). This is evidenced by the inevitable wars which prove that "the world is controlled by the dark God, Monsieur" (Markert 552). Man, in the mechanistic world, tends to seek solace in love, which invariably degenerates into despair and "despondency." There are a number of poems by Durrell, which bear evidence to this detrimental condition. In the poem "The Reckoning", love is referred to as "the crown of thorns, the bridal wreath of love" (303) -- the biting cynicism and sarcasm with which love is described. The early poems reveal a personal loneliness that follow...
the love encounter. In "The Gift" the lover asks his beloved if she remembers:

The crumbled dust
Of ancient adorations, murmurings,
And the dull story of some faded lust,
Will you remember it and, mother-wise
Thank me in these chill after-days
When I am empty-handed... with your eyes?

(Poems 17)

Hence Victor Brombert staunchly believes: "In the world of Durrell, there is no happy sensuality. Love is, at best, a sad encounter. At worst it is a destructive absolute" (183). After the initial ecstasy, every love relationship unequivocally deteriorates into despair which Hayden Carruth terms: "the post-coital sadness" (128). The "empty-handed" essential loneliness of love is again felt deeply in "Sonnet Astray," where there is an absolute sense of loss and inconsolable heartache: "To love you forever alone that night by a star swept sea / built the laughter of the dark turf in your eyes..."

(Poems 19). The initial happiness wears into unhappiness, suffering and pain, as in the poem "Plea": "Pleasure is greatest pain so
dearly bought / And love unfaithfulness” (27). This has received a stinging remark from David. M. Woods that “love is a potentially therapeutic disease” (100). The lover’s ardent desire is to “retreat” and to get “rid of you who bind me so” when the lover realises “all beauty and all transience in love” - - his final resolution:

I would return, hungry, inviolate,

To the sequestered woodland, arched above

With the unchanging skies that graciously await

My sure return from such inconstant love.

(Poems 31)

"Such inconstant love," does leave an imprint on the suffered lover, in spite of the fact that the love experienced, initially was ecstatic:

... in the first few hours I lived with you,

Time beat the generous pulses of desire,

And churned the embers of a faded light to

a livid fever heat;

The fleeting moments laughed in mockery;

Fled with the light abruptness of a dream...
The queer half-witted stagnancy of Love
Passed like a covert whisper in the night.

The “Unbearable enchantment” will eventually “slip to nothingness beneath a kiss” and “You too will pass as other lovers pass”

There will no more be hands to hold you by
Love, like wet fingers dabbled on a glass,
Traces a soon disfigured charactery.

As there is end to every narrative,
So must the string fall silent on the air.

Passion becomes precarious like Icarus’ flight with wings of wax, which ends in disaster. In “Mass for the old year,” the lamenting of the old year coincides with the long lost love liaison, where the “lovely accomplice and I” must be urged so gently and so smoothly away to the dead “selves of lovers” (43). The narcissistic self of Icarus brought doom to him and it is the problem of “selves of lovers” that is the cause of all disaster. Love ends in a “slow destruction of the mind” and eventually “death.” Love and
death seem to be two sides of the same coin, the first invariably leading to the latter, "not as separate or conflicting idea, but as two sides of the human psyche, two great forces in perpetual conflict with one another" (Pharand 98).

Durrell, not only deals with the personal but also with archetypal lovers Adam and Eve, who were doomed in the past, whose sin happens to fall on the modern lovers too. The once idyllic relationship ended in catastrophe and Durrell had once stated in an interview: "I am afraid I am pre-atonement pre-redemption and pre-original sin man" (Young 62). Woman becomes the reason for the rise and the Fall:

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... woman

Can be wilderness enough for body
To wander in: is a true human
Genesis and exodus. A serious fate.
She the last crucifixion on the word.
We press on her as Roman on his sword.
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(Poems 65)

Woman is the personification of inflicting pain and suffering to man. To "press" on her is "crucifixion." "Continuous nature of love"
finds Adam in a fix and he pleads "cover me / lest the prophetic fish follow and swallow me" (67), and he frankly admits to Eve "I am afraid." Eve becomes the source of Adam's inescapable fate. Adam had been a victim of neurasthenia and he urges Eve to "Kiss me, kiss me", the memory of the apple makes Adam sigh: "Ah but the apple, the apple was good!" and it is a clear indication of his self-destruction. The fatal fall is enacted everyday like for instance, "Frankie and Johnny," who were lovers but who slipped into the abyss:

For their race was the race of Adam,
Their mother was the golden Eve,
But they died in the XX\textsuperscript{th} Century
Leaving nothing to believe. \hspace{1cm} (261)

Similarly in The Quartet, Justine's check prevents her from loving wholly. When Nessim Hosnani, a rich coptic landlord loves her, she respects and admires, instead of loving him. This makes her interrogate: "What can I do about not loving you?" Her evaluation is: "All Alexandrian marriages are business ventures after all" (Balthazar 60). This is what Darley himself finds in Alexandria. His estimate of women is: "the women shall be voluptuaries not of
pleasure but of pain, doomed to hunt for what they least desire to find” (Justine 47). Robert Graves experienced similar sentiments in his poem “Never Such Love”:

Love, the near-honourable malady

With which in greed and haste they

Each other do infect and curse.

(Hayward 450)

"The pre-requisite for a successful love-making," Durrell strongly confirmed in an interview to Anna Lillios, is “an anti-ego stance.” Tantric love-making, according to Durrell, “is so much more strong because it is so much more sincere.” He further added, “Usually we make love with ego. We’re showing off. Rather like birds making a display.” In the Indian context, a spirituality is attached to the very sex-act. The Brhadaranyaka Upanishad compares the sex-act to a sacrifice:

Her lower part is the (sacrificial) altar: (her)

hair the (sacrificial) grass, her skin the soma-

press. The two labia of the vulva are the fire in the middle.

(Radhakrishnan 321)
The only remedy would be for the lovers to realise:

... that man and woman

Were in the first creation, both one piece

And being cleft asunder, ever since

Love was an appelleate to be rejoined.

(Mare 88)

As Aristophanes claims in Plato's Symposium, there should be a perpetual urge to find the missing half and get the severed half merged and like "painted dancers motionless in the play / spin for eternity," like Keat's Grecian Urn where there is an endless "mad pursuit" and "wild ecstasy" (Hayward 295). As Durrell once wrote: "the keynote is reintegration and acceptance of warring opposites." (Key 83). The Taoist believed in the influence of the two opposites yang and yin in the dynamic nature of the cosmos. The two opposites do not belong to different categories but are existing poles of a single whole. In man, the yang predominates, in woman the yin - - yet in "each are both" (Campbell 25), which Groddeck has explained as "In the being called man there also lives a woman, in the woman too a man . . ." (14)

In Tao Te Ching we find:
In source, those two are the same, though in the name different.

The source we called the Great Mystery
And the mystery the yet darker Mystery is the portal of all secret essences.7

As Durrell stated in his Caesar's Vast Ghost:

Arrow-faithful love-act, having been halfgirl
And boy, husband and wife in the ancient love-contract

(xiii)

The first step for the lover towards reintegration and finding a unity in duality is to be bereft of logicality and achieve a sense of surrender to his mechanistic attitude. Hence the advice would be:

Lover, cut the rational knot
That made your thinking rule-of-thumb
And barefoot on the plumb-dark hills
Go wander in Elysium.

(Poems 236)

In this "Pruddish Cliffs" and "the sad green home of Pudding Island over the Victorian foam" (160) the ego will never get subdued
and submerged. In such a world even the sky becomes quite artificial and "a december of steel" (160).

"A pure and elevated mind loves with intenseness", so said Blaise Pascal (Mare 95). Only if the intensity prevails, can real love, which is the perfect sum of all delight, be achieved. As La Rouchefoucauld emphatically puts it, "Of true lovers there is one kind and only one kind; but there are a thousand simulacra of it" (275). This is the essence of Eastern cult of passion mysticism, where love becomes a subjective experience and an integration of all emotions. According to P. Lal:

...Lovers are wiser
Than saints or stones
Loving rings round dark eyes
And brittle bones
Love like a flower
Has roots that reach
Beyond fragrance, beyond power
Of loving speech. (18)

The sins of Alexandria and Avignon assert the sacredness of human contact in a way that the horrifying dispassion of Calvinism
never has. It was the lack of sin and passion in English society that made Durrell reject it as a “living death.” Iolanthe is another of Durrell’s prostitutes, whose superior body gives the lie to the inhuman evil of Charlock’s mechanistic brain. In one of his letters to Richard Aldington, Durrell refers to the “metaphysics of mystical illumination shared between lovers” (26), and “sexuality far from being frivolous is transfigured into a quasi-mystical transcendent experience” (Brombert 178). An idea which is dear to the French who recognise “that love is a form of metaphysical enquiry.” 3 The passion mysticism of the east emphasises the essentiality of love, integrating all other emotions. “The ultimate value of sex is what it can teach us about ourselves. Our only world is the world of self-exploration, love gives us the means” (Bode 207). According to Dr. Radhakamal Mukerjee, love is said “to bring the whole psychic being to a single point of apprehension” (287). The two spirits get enmeshed in each other, the attachment becomes so intense resulting in spiritual state. “Only through love the real personality can be comprehended” (Bode 209). This is what George Steiner referred to as “the crucial affirmation of human identity” (124).
The problem and the failure of the west is that as Pursewarden puts it: “very few people realise that sex is a psychic and not a physical act” (Balthazar 103). The folly, as he says, is that: “At first we seek to supplement the emptiness of our individuality through love, and for a brief moment enjoy the illusion of completeness” (200). This is a result of the English prudery, the Anglo Saxons at the bottom of whose soul, “there is still a small voice forever whispering, ‘Is this Quaite Naice’?” (211). The great evils for Durrell are not the sins of the flesh but the false and unnecessary guilt which denies the productive and creative possibilities of that very flesh. The “uncommitted sins” of Aubrey and Constance are those acts of psychological, physical and sexual communication which open up their personal lives to the discovery of each other as flesh and spirit inter-dependent. In less abstract terms, any morality or ethic, according to Durrell, “Puritanism” falsifies the elemental nature of human experience. Love is morality of the flesh, the assertion of what is good and creative in the self. It is human creative energy and acceptance of life without guilt. According to Akkad, love defines a “self-perpetuating cycle of joy which was the bliss of yesterday” (Monsieur 130). The human value of life and experience
is essentially aesthetic, insists Durrell. Living can neither be counted
nor measured independent of emotion and consequences. Beauty is
only in, and rises only from, the flesh. Pursewarden categorically
states that we should "come to terms with our own human
obscenity" (Mountolive 63). Even in the Indian scriptures much
emphasis is made on love and sexual relationships as pointed out by
Mildred Worth Pinkham:

The love life of man and woman is woven
intimately with the religious edicts into the
sacred scriptures. In the epic, as likewise in
other Indian scriptures there is much
description concerning sexual relations of
women and men.

(149)

Durrell comes out very emphatically in the poem "A Patch of Dust,"
where the love process becomes a source of self-exploration and
"self-repair." "... Love, even in inferior versions, is a kind of
merciful self-repair" (Poems 337), says Durrell. Love and self-
realisation are complementary to each other. Durrell had once stated,
"any poet will tell you that real-life, so called lies on the other side
of this experience love, without it ordinary life remains forever inpotentia, unrealized" (Kneller 161). For the realization of reality the lovers should be able to evolve themselves into Taoist lovers, who find complete fulfilment in their “eternal embrace” which is in rhythm with the cosmic process. The complete fulfilment or “the mystic union of lovers is attained only by a few,” so says a modern Russian poet Kuprin. “And so far as love is concerned . . . this has its peaks which only one out of millions is able to climb” (Coomaraswamy 131). “The sex act misses fire if there is no psychic click: a membrane has to be broken of which the hymen is only a parody, a mental hymen. Otherwise one can’t understand, can’t receive” (Tunc 230). Psychosexual equilibrium is attained only when there is a click between the physical and the cerebral. Pursewarden points out “the clumsy coupling of human beings is simply a biological paraphrase of this truth -- a primitive method of introducing minds to each other engaging them” (Balthazar 103). It would seem that for Durrell coitus is a metaphor for the perpetual striving after knowledge of “the other” rather than a fulfilling emotional and physical experience. For the Chinese, the union of the lovers is possible because “ego-less, . . . the “yin” finding solace in
the "yang." The lovers are simply the representatives of a natural process and "caught up in their eternal embrace, gathered into the spiral momentum of the ALL, the cosmic rhythm" (Smile 14). Taoism emphasises that natural modesty which is delightful in woman or man should never be allowed to degenerate into prudishness, for it is an illness in Taoist items. The Taoist never escapes from the sense of belonging to the whole human and cosmic process, neither when he was breathing nor when he was making love. The sex act is a love act which meshed them into the whole of cosmic process; not a pillow fight between egos determined to dominate each other. The couple and its rapport constituted the basic biological brick out of which society was constructed. Sex itself has a commitment to society, for the partners are the "basic brick of all culture" (Constance 303) who:

must both act towards each other with the highest degree of conscious effort; the more they render the orgasm conscious the deeper in phase they will be, thus the purer the child and more harmonious the race. (268)
Most encounters can be defective because it can be with someone who never really suits, since:

the great run of people there is no joining, no chiming, no click. They just rape each other dismally or exploit each other or become prematurely impotent.

(285)

When the brick lacked straw, the whole sexual methodology of the cosmos was faulted. When the couple didn’t work nothing worked, resulting in a "cosmic calamity threatening the race and its mental balance" (289). This is the condition of "the whole sexual gymkhana of the west -- the external plucking at the ego" (Smile 13) and "dying of self-importance is the usual thing" (Poems 335). Hence:

today’s lovers are mostly debased currency, the timid investments of undischarged bankrupts with nothing to offer but undocumented sperm, trivial aggressive lusts, stuff of little richness: sperm without oxygen.
and with poor motility will never reach the Grand Slam.

(Constance 299)

Thus the new biological relationship on which society is built happens to be based on our acceptance of the ultimate reality of love and the metaphor of sexual intercourse:

The act of sexual congress as the spirit-developer, the idea-hatcher, is the source of all science, all art, all information which the spirit needs as its ailment. Psychic growth is nurtured by it. Purifier of mind, sharpener of intuition, procurer of the future. But to fulfil itself and do its job it must be part of a double act, a chiming act.

(Monsieur 244)

The perfect click is experienced by Affad and Constance, who bleeds prematurely and the "dark menstrual flow" itself a sign of the approximation of the perfect "chiming act." Affad puts forth his ideas on this metaphysical union thus:
sperm can be a poison if it is not fresh, or poorly documented, or sick like the sperm of deteriorated schizophrenics and others; . . .

Regarding the female partner he added:

She must feel it psychically coming down the urethra drop by drop, she must welcome and husband it and let the parched womb rush at it, unleashing ova like packing wolves . . .

And a whole society crumbles "when a culture starts going downhill the first victim is the quality of the fucking and the defective documentation of the sperm . . . lack of oxygen, which is race-knowledge, genetic nous" (Constance 268).

Such perfect love relationships were praised by Donne in his poem "The Extasie": "Love, those mix souls doth mixo againe/ and makes both one . . . (Hayward 83). Spenser in "Easter Morning" says: "So let us love, dear love, like as we ought / Love is the lesson which the Lord us taught" (63). On the Eastern ground, successful love is revealed by an Indian Poet Syed Amanuddin, who claims: "When love touches me / Beauty sparks unselfing the self" (223). Even Chandidas, the minstrel of romantic love in medieval
Bengal declares that “we all speak rightly of love but how seldom does one find a person who is spiritually fit to be the recipient of such love” (Mukerjee 285). “He that pervades the universe seen of none can only be found by one who knows the secret of love” (Coomaraswamy 131). Every love relationship results in the discovery and truth of a new self about which William Cartright rightly puts it:

There are two births; the one when two souls

unite

First sticks the new awakened sense;

The other when two souls unite

And we must count one life from thence;

When you loved me and I loved you,

Then both of us were born anew.

(Mare 115)

In one of Durrell’s notes the following statement quite significant to the very concept of love is made: “We need the impossible eternity in every finite kiss, the extension of effect from a single orgasm to encompass the meaning of the whole known world”\textsuperscript{4}
The experience of the lovers attain a spirituality, which Servotte claims: "the erotic relation between man and woman . . . is the common analogy for the relation between man and God" (96). Sex is for the average man and woman what art is for the artist -- the way to transcend the norm and find fulfilment. Darley, at the end is born anew, vitalised and dynamic. He further initiates Clea's rebirth from the water, as Durrell would have wanted "standing with the warm male sperm in me, / Hideously wary of death (Poems 35). In an interview to Anna Lillios, Durrell said:

In the investigation the selfishness of modern love is so necessary because through the narcissism one comes to the poetic realisation and at the end (Clea and Darley) are both fit to marry each other so to speak. They have evaluated sexuality and attachment as its true function, and they use it in the most spiritual way possible, because its formation, its algebra of love they've discovered.5

The French writer and critic Rémy De Gourmont's The Natural Philosophy of Love greatly influenced Durrell. In it Gourmont wrote:
“Love is profoundly animal; therein lies its beauty” (22). He stresses that the sexual urge is a life urge which should not be curtailed and that instinct is a superior form of intelligence. He further added that joy and beauty arise when the mind sheds its rational consciousness and reflects its instinctive power and direction. Durrell illustrates this through Lawrence Lucifer in The Black Book, who finds that through love the whole universe opens “like a door into a sudden garden” (245). Richard Aldington noted that “the true way of civilisation is to refine through liberty the passions which cannot be suppressed without reducing mankind to the level of an ant-hill” (Introduction 23 - 24). Interestingly, Durrell has Balthazar remind us that we must “indulge but refine” (Quartet 85), in order to make our wholeness match the wholeness of the universe. Frederick. R. Karl claims that for Durrell sexual love, “is a form of knowledge, literally as well as etymologically” (45). Clea, the only productive artist in the Quartet writes to Darley:

 Somewhere deep inside me a tide seems to have turned in my nature. I do not know why but it is towards you, my dear friend, that my thoughts have turned more and more
of late . . . Is there a friendship possible this side of love which could be sought and found . . . But is there a friendship possible to attain which is deeper, even limitlessly deep, and yet wordless, idealess?

(194)

Clea realises that sex "is the joint or coupling which unites the male and female ends of knowledge merely - - a cloud of unknowing! When a culture goes bad in its sex all knowledge is impeded" (194). The sexual demand then has the certitude of a cultural demand. Chandidas explains that "Love is a continuous process, perpetually increasing in intensity and gives the soul access to even "subtler insights" which can be achieved through this process called love which can be traced in some of the characters in The Quartet and The Quintet. For instance, Darley's spiritual and artistic progress is seen through his relationship with Justine, Melissa and Clea. Darley plunges into the politics of love first with Melissa but it is the later relationship with Justine that paves the way for artistic achievement through sexual conquest. Durrell's poems also reveal the poet's struggle for poetic creativity which ends with
literary and creative triumph, like Darley after having experienced the fruits of sexual glory. Initially the poet finds himself in:

The bitter emptiness of nothing gained
The queer half witted stagnancy of love
Passed like a covert whisper in the night,
And yet, they say, beneath some other skies,
Grey in the dusk there'll be another one
Another with perhaps diviner eyes.

(Poems 18)

Darley, is also, in search of the one with "diviner eyes" and so he visits the houses of the prostitutes, not to be in unreal surroundings like Mountolive, but to learn, to understand, the meaning of "the whole portentous scrimmage of sex itself..." (Justine 185). Even the whore who promises to give spirituality to the sex experience can be accepted, for, a whore with the heart of gold becomes "the true whore" who is "man's real darling" (Quartet 68). For Durrell, however the purpose of exploring woman, is to explore the self, as Gregory in The Black Book comments: "What a curious adventure another person is!" (47). Hence sex itself is an opportunity for seeing oneself. The purpose of the exploration is to
“try and reduce one’s life to some sort of order” (40). For Durrell, writing like loving is a very personal act involving an expression of “self”. In the Quartet, the artist discovers more about himself with each new love affair. Pursewarden points out that sexual energy and creative energy go hand in hand. Much like the “yin” and “yang” of the East, these energies convert into “the solar sexual and the lunar spiritual holding (their) eternal dialogue,” (762) and “the poetic consciousness which lay coiled like a spring” (579) is triggered, awakening the creative faculty. Sex and metaphysical quest assumes prime importance for “artisthood” in terms of the open secrets of Heraldic Reality which Pursewarden was trying to pass on to Darley. He informs Justine the essence of the real relationship between man and woman. “But most people,” he stoutly states, “are stuck in the physical aspect, unaware of the poetic rapport which it so clumsily tries to teach. That is why all our dull repetitions of the same mistake are simply like a boring great multiplication table, and will remain so until you get your head out of the paper bag and stare to think responsibly” (104).

The women characters in The Quartet become catalysts to their male counterparts triggering in them the writer’s psyche. “Women
have," Virginia Wolf reminds us, "served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and the delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at times twice its natural size." (35).

Likewise Justine offers something more tantalizing than mere sex to Arnauti who says:

Strangely enough it was never in the lover hat I really met her but in the writer. Here, we clasped hands -- in that amoral world of suspended judgements where curiosity and wonder seem greater than order the syllogistic orders imposed by the mind. (72)

During Arnauti's first experience at the Cecil Hotel, he meets Justine and finds that his words to her, "were spoken symbolically enough in the mirror" (65). "The important words," says Leslie W. Jones are "symbolically enough" for clearly the symbolism of meeting "in the mirror exists only in his mind, a writer's mind" (14). Her character is a sort of "twing fiction," an intrigue, the apt situation for the writer's consciousness which "in the mirrors" travels through the many levels of consciousness till the ultimate realisation of the self. Arnauti's relation with Justine becomes the raw material to be
deployed in his work and this journey leads him into his self. This quest or pilgrimage as Durell portrays in The Dark Labyrinth, is a model of life’s “uncoordinated pattern” with “every activity leading back like an arrow on the map to central metaphysical problems of the self,” (250) and all the characters get “lost in the labyrinth of his own spiritual discoveries” (45). Arnauti, like Chandidas finds fulfilment through Justine, who enables him to follow a story to its conclusion. Chandidas says that salvation is possible only for one who knows the secrets of love. This doctrine of romantic love is by no means unique because spiritual freedom or “moksha” is the ultimate purpose and the only true meaning of life: “It is a release from the ego and from becoming it is the realisation of the self and of entity - - when nothing of ourselves is left in us” (Coomaraswamy 131). The individual submerges the ego and merges with the other, only in the true sense of love making, reaching a particular state of spirituality when the two are able to merge and unify into one like our original “Primal being”, who split into two - - a male and a female. Hence every individual basically is constructed of both: “each is both.” Durrell seems to justify in the
poem "Return" that some corner of a lover’s brain holds the famous
treasure of poetic creativity:

There is some corner of a lover’s brain
That holds this famous treasure, some dim

room

That love has not forgotten, where the sane
Plant of this magic burgeons in the gloom
And pushes out its roots into the mind

Grown such on the turned soil of days that pass.

(30)

In Bitter Lemons, Durrell writes about his association with
Claude, after his earlier failures with different women. Similarly
Darley’s catalyst is Clea, who says: “I have the feeling that you too
perhaps have stepped across the threshold into the kingdom of your
imagination, to take possession of it once and for all” (Quartet 877).
Darley muses about Clea as she walks to a window: “She was
naked and slender as an Easter Lily . . . The buoyancy of a new
freedom possessed me . . . I knew that Clea would share everything
with me, withholding nothing” (Clea 99). Darley becomes a writer at
last and it is Clea who instigates the spiritual growth. Through his
suffering over Clea, he finds a new self, a new consciousness. Dostoevsky firmly believed that “suffering is the origin of consciousness” and Hayden Carruth in his introduction to Sartre’s Nausea, makes a comment on that statement that suffering is “the necessary prelude to the re-establishment of the self” (xii). While trying to save Clea from the water, Darley suddenly realises his super human physical strength. He says: “It was as if I were for the first time confronting myself - or perhaps an alter ego shaped after a man of action I have never realised, recognised” (849). The unsuccessful writer of the early Justine manuscript becomes vitalised and dynamic. His super-human effort to retrieve Clea, in fact, helps in his own regeneration. Eventually both emerge out of the depths, Darley a writer and Clea, an artist. Clea herself strongly feels that as a virgin she is unable to create and a sexual relationship, she hopes, will make her creativity flow. Her feelings are expressed in this passage:

For the first time he struck a responsive chord in her by a confession of the heart. To her surprise, to her chagrin and to her delight, she realised that she was not being
asked merely to share his bed -- but his whole life, the monomania upon which it was built. Normally it was only the artist who can offer this strange and selfless contract, but it is one which no woman worth the name can ever refuse . . . He started at her thrilled and a little terrified, recognising in her the perfect submissiveness of the oriental spirit -- the absolute feminine submissiveness which is one of the strongest faces in the world.

(Mountolive 178-181)

In Constance, Blanford finally realises that: "Thus and only thus does one become a great lover, shedding the scar-tissue of old dried up love-poems; despite my chain-smoked eyes and lamprey's smirk I have become at last the One I really was all along" (133). Once Sutcliffe said grimly: "Sex -- the human animal's larder." His double immediately said: "Yes or the fatal power-house. We could do so much with it if we learned the code!" (Quinx 200), and
Constance glories in convincing Aubrey "of the existence of lovers as philosophers" (176).

Durrell finds love an inspiration for creativity; it kindles his inner feelings and helps to pour out all that he has sensed mixed with imagination. This has enabled him to give "perfection" to his hand and the earth has become "an autumn dancing place," and he himself "a traveller in enchanted place" (Poems, 26). In the poem "Eight Aspects of Melissa," Conon insists on linking coitus with cognition:

Some, the great Adepts, found it (Coitus)

A lesser part of them - ashes and thorns -

Where this sea-sickness on a bed

Proved nothing calm and virginal,

But animal, unstable, heavy as lead.

Some wearied for sex

Like science of the known relations

They dipped in this huge pond and found it

An ocean of shipwrecked mariners instead
This has been Conon’s experience, shipwreck and devastation, but Melissa finds her “haven”:

But some sailed into this haven
Laughing, and completely undecided,
And Conon sadly concludes
They wrote those poems - the dimunitives of
madness

While at a window someone stood and cried.

(147 - 148)

He cries because Melissa and not he is the creative artist. The Hindu thinkers envisage love as “the grand passion or Mahabhava.” Jivogoswami described Mahabharatha as “the grand passion gives its own mould to the whole mind so that it becomes one with love and does not exist apart from lover, the senses and desires all turned to the beloved” (Mukerjee 292).

Durrell “Defined the Many and the None/As base reflections of the ONE” (Poems 169). According to Freud: “Every sexual act (is) a process in which four persons are involved.” An idea which has its roots deep in Hindu Mythology, where the union of two halves -- each, half male and half female representing the “Ardhanarishwara”
image of God Shiva. The “many becoming ONE,” this is what sex is intended to establish. This experience has been exalted in Indian mythology, which had a deity “kama” and Vatsayana’s “Kamasutra” has been acclaimed by western scholars as the first definite manual on the art and science of love. The sex experience has been acclaimed as the king of “rasas.” Rasa is the quality of “losing oneself” in the enjoyment. It is not pleasure or joy or even ecstasy as such but the state of losing one’s identity. This is exactly a feeling that distinguishes sexual experience from the other experiences. This “sringara” rasa has been exploited to the maximum by Durrell for the benefit of the lovers in the west in his The Alexandria Quartet, The Avignon Quintet and in his poetry. Love is the absorbing theme in Indian classics, since sringara is the chief rasa in Indian aesthetics — one of the qualifying requirements for a mahakavya was the depiction of amorous dalliance. But sringara rasa has often been looked down by westerners as “erotics” — something obscene, because writers genuinely writing about the aesthetics of sex experience could never be accepted by the English prudishness in the “Pudding Island.” The “Pudding Island” culture could never be tolerated by writers like Miller, Lawrence, Durrell and many others.
So there were series of migrations to Greek Islands and France, seeking asylums in foreign lands.

Therefore all the confusions cited above as experienced by the lovers in the West could never give them a clear perception of love and reality. It has been Durrell's endeavour to pinpoint these manifest in the life of the people in the west, and show how they miss the vital and blissful experience as lovers. His struggle has always been to improve the quality of love, thereby enriching the quality of life. As Blanford emphasises in *The Quintet*:

> To investigate what went wrong with the intellect of a civilisation, one has to start with human perception . . . i.e. sex the original form of knowing which preceded language . . .

(141)

Hence artists and lovers are truly creators, the artist creating a pattern, a wholeness, a purpose in "time's usufruct," so that he can communicate something of value to help his fellow beings. The lovers, on the other hand, create a whole civilisation in all its glory.
Interestingly, the experience of a lover for him is also that of an artist like:

Little grains of splendour,
Little knobs of lust,
Make a writer tremble,
Loving is a must
Nor can he dissemble
When his heart is bust.

(Livia 203)

Cognition in Kashmir Saivism is the result of Sakti consorting Siva. Any amorous relationship results in Union giving rise to ananda of aesthetic relationship. Parvati understands that without Siva consorting her, there could be no ananda and consequently no Jnana for Siva. Ananda is “prakasa - vimar’samaya and can only result from the perfect marriage of Siva and Parvati, the dynamic harmony of subject and object” (Dehejia 161). Earlier in Monsieur, Bruce admits that “the greater the artist, the greater the emotional weekling, the greater the infantile dependence upon love” (157). In that sense, the artist depends on the flesh. Hence Durrell, Aubrey, Sutcliffe and Darley are at the mercy of human experiences, trying
to explore their artistic sensibilities through love and sexual experiences. Love is a morality of the flesh emphatically put forth by Durrell, who had a deep disgust for Puritanism. Love is the assertion of what is good and creative in the self — human creative energy. Durrell problematises and concludes in his novels and poetry that love is an experience, which can trigger the creative faculty. It can lead to the evolution of the writer, for love is a means of self discovery and self-realisation. This is essentially the writer’s quest too, as Durrell stated: “the deathless ideogram for love we writer’s hunt” (225).
Notes

1 The Black Book originally published in Paris in 1938, which was later brought out in 1960 for the first time in an English speaking world.


4 SIUC: 42/19/8 (Southern Illinois University Carbondale.)

5 Interview with Anna Lillios, published in Deus Loci.

6 Earlier published as Cephalu (London : Editions Poetry, 1947)

7 Tao Te Ching 1.3.
8 Freud’s Comment cited in epigraph to Justine.