HESTER, JR.; ERNEST CARRINGTON. Relativity and the Theme of Love in Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria Quartet. (1966) Directed by: Dr. Randolph M. Bulgin.

The Alexandria Quartet is based on the epistemological position that all knowledge is limited by the knower's position in time and space--a position which author Lawrence Durrell links with the Einsteinian theory of relativity. This epistemology influences the form of Durrell's novels. It also shapes his psychology, his characterization, and his treatment of the love theme.

The first chapter of the paper treats the novelist's ideas on relativity and the novelistic form which he has derived from these ideas. The following chapter is concerned with Durrell's psychological position, which is a corollary of his relativistic epistemology. The chapter is concerned further with how his psychology shapes the characters who participate in the love relationships of the tetralogy. The first two chapters treat the effect of Durrell's philosophy upon his work, rather than treating the philosophy itself.

Both chapters in the latter half of the paper work toward a definition of love in the Quartet. In accordance with Durrell's belief that the meaning of love is relative or shaped by the context in which it appears, the third chapter examines the major relationships in the books to determine what love means to the characters involved. The concluding chapter treats love as the characters verbally define its nature, its effects, and its causes. The

closing section of this chapter returns to the initial discussion of relativity and points out how Durrell's relativistic epistemology has led the novelist to create love relationships that are predetermined.

RELATIVITY AND THE THEME OF LOVE
IN
LAWRENCE DURRELL'S
ALEXANDRIA QUARTET

by

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APPROVAL SHEET

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the Alexandria Quartet is Lawrence Durrell's idea of how we know--and how much we cannot know. Despite his claims, his epistemology is not really new. The idea that human knowledge is always subjective and limited by the range of the human faculties is an old theme in literature. Common as it is, Durrell has given it new life by using exotic Alexandria as the setting for his action. The setting does not, however, relieve the novelist, or the commentators upon his work, of the sometimes burdensome subjectivity which is inherent in his theme. Critics have charged him with writing low-grade mystery stories which do not intrigue the reader, but merely baffle him with ever-changing "facts." These accusations are, I think, provoked by the fact that Durrell's magnum opus is strangely elusive. The novelist has no systematic epistemology, psychology, or whatever else, for the methodical critic to analyze.

While I feel that this lack of system is as much a quality of greatness as of meanness, I must point out that it does create problems for the commentator. Rather than discussing Durrell's systems, which of course do not exist, the critic must sort through the aphoristic speeches of the

characters and the sifting "facts" concerning them to find the fundamental thrusts and directions of the work. Or, to use Durrell's term, the critic must discover the various "axes" of the work. It is only upon these that a useful discussion may be founded. The critic's problems are augmented by the fact that it is difficult to talk about plot, characterization, or "reality" in a work which holds that there is no knowable action, or personality, or reality. Durrell's subjectivity is far-reaching.

Another problem facing the critic is the repetition in Durrell's work. On almost every level his theory about relative knowledge is the dominant theme. No matter what approach is used in discussing the Quartet, his epistemology is a central issue. So if my paper appears repetitious to the reader I can only ask his forbearance.

As my title indicates, the objective of my paper is to describe how Durrell's treatment of love in the Alexandria Quartet has been shaped by his understanding of Albert Einstein's theory of relativity. To this end, the first chapter treats the novelist's ideas on relativity and the novelistic form which he has derived from those ideas. The following chapter is concerned with Durrell's psychological position, which is a corollary to his relativistic epistemology. That chapter is concerned further with how his psychology shapes the characters who participate in the many love relationships in the tetralogy. Both the

chapters in the latter half of my paper work toward a definition of love in the Quartet. In accord with Durrell's belief that the meaning of love is relative or shaped by the context in which it appears, I examine in the third chapter the major relationships in the books to determine what love means to the characters involved. The final chapter treats love as the characters verbally define its nature, its effects, and its causes. The closing section of this chapter returns to the discussion of relativity and points out how Durrell's relativistic epistemology has led the novelist to create love relationships that are predetermined.

The bibliography contains entries for all editions of the Alexandria Quartet published to date.

CHAPTER ONE

Durrell's Relativity and the Form of the Quartet

Even before Lawrence Durrell completed the Alexandria Quartet[1] with the publication of Clea, critics were attacking and praising the tetralogy from both sides of the Atlantic. They commented most upon the works' form. Many writers labelled its structure nebulous and criticized it for alleged formlessness. Others, however, found his attempts at "developing a morphological form one might properly call 'classical'" sufficient reason for placing him in a respectable position among such writers as Proust, Ford Maddox Ford and Faulkner.

Of course, critical comment was not restricted to Durrell's form. His style is something of an anomaly in a period when objectivity and verbal economy are almost universally admired. He piles word upon word, and phrase upon phrase, and image upon image to build spires of words that are flamboyant to one reader and splendid to another. In a similar fashion his characterization has evoked comments varying from absolute condemnation to complete approval. I hardly expect to settle the controversy over his art; I

[1] Justine, Balthazar, Mountolive, and Clea were originally published by E. P. Dutton of New York in 1957, 1958, 1959, and 1960 respectively. Subsequent references to the novels will appear in abbreviated form within the text.

hope rather to provide for a better appreciation of the Quartet by exploring it as what he calls "An Investigation of Modern Love."

Actually, love is only one of three topics with which Durrell is concerned. Politics and art also occupy his characters' thought, but except for a few occasions, they remain subservient to his investigation of love. Durrell is outspoken on political issues; however, for our purposes his treatment of politics is simply plot material. He says even more about art than he does about politics; his theories are so numerous and contradictory that he distributes them among four characters. Like most writers he is concerned with the relationship between life and art, and in his novels they often become confused. But for the most part the Quartet shows that Durrell is in agreement with his character Pursewarden when he says "it is not art which is at issue, it is ourselves." (C., 128)

Durrell's own comments about the form of the Quartet are interesting, if perhaps misleading. In a critical work, his Key to Modern Poetry (1948),[2] he expresses a belief that the theory of relativity has shaped all modern art forms. Pursewarden probably speaks for Durrell in Balthazar when he says that "the relativity theory is directly responsible for abstract painting, atonal music, and formless (or at any rate cyclic forms in) literature . . . . In the space and Time marriage" he adds, "we have the greatest Boy meets

[2]A Key to Modern Poetry (Norman, Okla., 1952).

Girl story of the age." (C., 144)

In the note prefatory to Balthazar Durrell states that his intention is to structure the Quartet on the theory of relativity, which will serve as a substitute for the classical unities. "The first three parts", he says in the note, "are to be deployed spatially . . . and are not linked in serial form. They interlap, interweave, in a purely spatial relation. Time is stayed. The fourth part [Clea] will represent time and be a true sequel." He concludes by suggesting that "these considerations sound perhaps immodest or even pompous," and many critics have agreed that they do indeed.

At the outset, however, we should realize that Durrell's understanding of Einstein's theory is, strictly construed, non-scientific. To understand thoroughly the scientist's propositions he would have to be a great mathematician, which he is not. What he knows about relativity he necessarily has had to seek out among the many popularizations of Einstein's thought. In addition, any approximate restatement of the theory would have to be couched in mathematical terms. To attempt to speak of a mathematical concept in a non-mathematical form is like trying to convert one art form into another--the result is related to but obviously not essentially the same as the original. So it is with Durrell. His Quartet is a fictional restatement of a prose restatement of a mathematical expression of a world

view. At best his relativity is third hand.[3] When his pretentious language is dispensed with, his relativity proves to be mainly of the common-sense variety; that is, that values derive their meaning at least in part from the context in which they are found, or from the view from which they are seen.

Whatever its origin, Durrell's novelistic form deserves separate attention because it is the structure without which he would not be able to conduct his investigation of love. So an intensive examination of the narrative is in order to discover how this form frames the multitude of relationships in the Quartet.

Justine, the first of the four volumes, is an account of events which have already happened in glittering and mysterious Alexandria, told in the first person by Darley, a school teacher and unsuccessful writer who has exiled himself on an island in the Mediterranean. He recalls that he was already having an affair with Melissa, a dancer at an Alexandrean night club, when he met Justine, a sensitive and beautiful Jewess who is married to a Coptic banker named Nessim. Justine is an intriguing character in several ways, one of which is her nymphomania. Having been raped at a tender age by a relative, she moves from this gentleman to the next, in what Darley assumes is an attempt to find satisfaction in love, physical and otherwise. She completely

[3]Alfred M. Bork, "Durrell and Relativity," The Centennial Review of Arts and Sciences, VII, 191-203.

captures Darley, but their relationship is beset with problems. Justine is not only unable to derive sexual satisfaction in the affair, but her husband seems to know of the relationship. Darley's guilt at enjoying intimacy with his friend's wife and occasional near-discoveries of their meetings keep him uncomfortable. To compound the difficulties there is Melissa, now rejected and ailing with tuberculosis. Despite the pain they are causing themselves and others, Darley cannot break off the relationship with Justine.

Meanwhile, Nessim has been behaving in a most curious manner--he apparently cannot stop the meetings between Darley and his wife. It is suggested that he understands Justine's affairs as attempts to find her way back to him through other lovers. Justine's former husband, Arnauti, has quite accidently planted this notion in Nessim's mind and a similar one in Darley's by way of a novelette, Moeurs, in which he too has come to this conclusion concerning his beloved, who as all Alexandria knows, was actually Justine. Nessim is suffering from his permissiveness. He watches Justine closely, but says nothing to Darley. Plagued by continuous headaches and by nightmares, he looks for relief. At the end of the novel we feel disaster impending.

Woven into this complex fabric is a series of other characters, two of them artists--Clea, a painter; and Pursewarden, a writer in the vein of Lawrence and Henry Miller. (Pursewarden often serves as a kind of alter-ego

for Darley, whose initials, by the way, are the same as Durrell's.) There are also Cohen, Melissa's wealthy former lover; Balthazar, a cabalist doctor; Capodistra, a sybaritic distant relative of Justine; Scobie, a ludicrously eccentric policeman; Narouz, Nessim's disfigured brother; and a colorful variety of other figures whose relationships are only partially explored.

In the second volume, Balthazar, Darley considers the Justine manuscript which he has sent to Balthazar who has returned it with extensive interlinear notes. These provide Darley as the narrator with considerable new information about the characters, information which was known to the doctor alone. We now have two points of view, that of the only partially informed Darley and that of Balthazar.

With the new information the actions described in Justine take on a different meaning. Balthazar writes that Justine was also engaged in an affair with Pursewarden, and was probably using Darley to deflect her husband's suspicions from this deeper involvement. Pursewarden, however, finds her burdensome and does little to promote the relationship. Justine, says Balthazar, has married Nessim only to have money enough to continue the search for her child by her first marriage. Many of the incidents of this volume are related to this search for the child which has been missing for several years. Many others, however, are not related to this or seemingly any other set of events. The discovery of the dead Scobie, dressed

in woman's clothes; Pursewarden's suicide; and the affair between David Mountolive, a British diplomat, and Leila Hosani, Nessim's mother, are among the events the reader must hold in mind in hopes that the author will return to them later. Among his interlinear notes Balthazar comments: "Unwittingly, I may have supplied you [Darley] with a form something out of the way! Not unlike Pursewarden's idea of a series of novels with sliding panels as he called them. Or perhaps like some medieval palmist whose different sorts of truth are thrown down upon one another, the one obliterating or perhaps supplementing the other." (B., 183) It is in Balthazar that Darley (and with him Durrell) comments pertinently: "I love to feel events overlapping each other, crawling over one another like wet crabs in a basket." (B., 125)

If we have finally accepted Darley's view as misinformed and have adjusted it in accordance with the facts of Balthazar's interlinear commentary, we are not to rest long. The third volume, Mountolive, which is recounted not by Darley but by an "objective" narrator at some distance from the main action, considers the same events for a third time, now from the political viewpoint of a British diplomat. From this angle we learn that both Darley and Balthazar have made false assumptions about the events they have witnessed. Justine has married Nessim not just to recover her lost child (whom, she has discovered, has died as a child prostitute), but to be his helpmate in an international

conspiracy to provide arms to Palestine. Nessim, whom Darley and others have thought so innocuous, proves to be not at all what he seemed. He has not only known of Justine's affairs with Darley and Pursewarden, but has directed her to maintain them in order to throw both these British civil servants off the plot. And she is successful. When Mountolive, recently appointed ambassador to Egypt, asks Pursewarden's opinion on a paper naming Nessim as the chief conspirator in the arms plot, Pursewarden discredits it and thereby prevents its contents from passing to the Egyptians, who would have assassinated the Copt with little compunction.

In a later affair with Melissa, however, Pursewarden learns that Nessim actually is is involved in the plot and poisons himself after writing Mountolive a letter in which he admits his own involvement and subsequent error. Mountolive is now forced to reveal the plot to the Egyptians who, influenced by an enormous bribe, kill not Nessim but his brother Narouz. Perhaps Narouz demonstrates as well as any other character the Alexandrian (and Durrellian) method of searching for truth. Early in Mountolive, Darley tells of the Copt's confrontation with a Negro boy who has lied to him. While berating him for his deception, Narouz draws his knife from its sheath and neatly cuts the lobe from the boy's ear. "Now go", he says, "and tell your father that for every lie I will cut a piece of your flesh until we come to the true part, the part which does not lie." (M., 34) In a less brutal manner, Durrell's characters whack away at

life with the knife of reason, honed by experience.

Clea, the final volume of the tetralogy, returns Darley to wartime Alexandria during a nighttime air raid. While he is on the island time has been stopped; in writing the two novels, he has been recalling events from the past. But after his nocturnal trip over the sea (a thoroughly established Durrellian symbol for time), he is again ejected into time. But, of course, time has stopped only symbolically. Alexandria is now bomb-damaged. Justine is but a shadow of her former self, while living under house arrest with her husband who has lost an eye and a finger and who drives an ambulance. And Clea, the young painter formerly incapable of enjoying any mature sexual or intellectual association with either male or female, has become the whole person with whom Darley enjoys a new erotic and esthetic relationship.

Although Durrell calls this novel a sequel to the other three, it is not entirely that, for in this volume as in its predecessors, Darley and the reader learn that they have had only partial knowledge about the events described several times before. For instance, David Mountolive, we discover, has been involved with Liza, Pursewarden's blind sister, who needs to be free of her incestuous relationship with her brother before she can accept her lover's offer of marriage. Having had his own attempts at marriage wrecked by his sister's presence, Pursewarden realizes the need to remove himself completely from his sister's life. It appears, then, that his suicide was not just a means of

avoiding political embarrassment but may have been a willing self-sacrifice in another cause.

The Quartet closes with Clea painting better than ever with the artificial replacement for the hand she has lost in an accident beneath the sea, with Justine and Nessim reunited in a new conspiracy, and with Darley realizing new creativity as an artist. As Durrell ends the narrative with the first words of Darley's new novel, the reader feels the end is only the beginning. Darley writes: "Once upon a time . . . ."[4]

After having read hundreds of thousands of words to discover time after time that the action did not mean what it seemed, and having then been told inferentially that the story has only begun, the reader is likely to react in one of two ways. Those sympathetic to Durrell's belief that man always operates on incomplete or relative knowledge,

[4]Although this attempt at synopsis is necessary to show how Durrell's structure brings the reader to realize that knowledge about persons and events is always incomplete, it is misleading as a description of that structure because it is very difficult, perhaps impossible, to retell the Quartet story in either a straight chronological order or in terms of cause and effect. To be true to the form one would have to give the synopsis in that form: Darley remembers his first days with Melissa, then his initial encounter with Justine, reads a section of Balthazar's interlinear notes, and recalls Arnauti's comment that . . . , and so on, piecing together the information in the order that it comes to Darley. For guidance in unraveling Durrell's tightly woven plot I am indebted to Frank Baldanza, "Lawrence Durrell's 'Word Continuum'," Critique, IV, ii, 3-17; Matthew N. Proser, "Darley's Dilemma: The Problem of Structure in Durrell's Alexandria Quartet," Critique, IV, ii, 18-28; and to Stanley G. Eskin, "Durrell's Themes in the Alexandria Quartet," Texas Quarterly, V, iv, 43-60.

will be delighted with such a skillful demonstration of this theory. Those hostile toward the idea, however, are likely to inquire in frustration: "Is there no end to the illusions?" In either case, Durrell would be gratified at having made his brand of relativity real, if disquieting, for his reader. And if he were pressed, he would, of course, answer: "No, there is no end to the story and no end to the illusion." He has indicated in notes in the back of three of the four novels that there remain a great number of points from which other accounts could be launched to carry the "word continuum", as he calls it, even further in displaying his faith that everyone's knowledge is limited by point of view. The novelistic structure of the Quartet as it embodies this theme of relative knowledge greatly influences Durrell's mode of characterization, as I shall discuss in the following chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

Characterization in the Quartet

While the author is conditioning his reader to the now-it-appears-real-now-it-appears-not reality that we saw in Chapter One, his main character, Darley, is slowly discovering it also. He complains to Clea that as he sees him now, Mountolive (and he might as well have said everyone else, too) "seems to change shape so quickly at every turn of the road . . . that one is forced to revise each idea about him almost as soon as it is formulated." "I'm beginning to wonder," he says, "about one's right to pronounce in this fashion on unknown people." Clea replies instructively: "I think, my dear, you have a mania for exactitude and an impatience with partial knowledge which is . . . well, unfair to knowledge itself. How can it be anything but imperfect . . . . You have to be faithful to your angle of vision and at the same time recognize its partiality." (C., 119) This motif of relative or partial knowledge developed both in the structure and dialogue of the Quartet directly influences Durrell's manner of characterization and, ultimately, his treatment of the love theme.

Just as the interpretation of each action we see is erroneous because it is based on incomplete knowledge, each

image we have of a person is erroneous for the same reason. In addition, we not only function with partial knowledge of persons, we delude ourselves into thinking that we know them completely by imagining what we do not know. Darley says as much in Clea: "lover and loved, observer and observed, throw down a field about each other . . . . They then infer the properties of their love, judging it from this narrow field with its huge margins of unknown . . . , and proceed to refer it to a generalized conception of something constant in its qualities and universal in its operation." (C., 55) Such "inferred" personalities are the raw material of the many relationships in the Quartet.

Justine tells Darley that he has related to her primarily through his imagination. After returning to Alexandria from his self-imposed exile, Darley meets her at her home. In recalling their affair, she says that she has been dishonest with him only in the terms he has demanded--she has given him only the selected fictions he wanted. He would always, she says, "prefer [his] own mythical picture, framed by the five senses, to anything more truthful." (C., 55)

Justine herself relates not to her husband but to her mental image of him. When he proposes to her, she rejects the easy-going Nessim, saying that she did not and probably could not love him. After discovering Nessim the conspirator, Justine ignores her former impressions of him and is strong in her response to this, his activist side. Later,

when the plot is discovered, she says that she has loved Nessim fully, "but only in one posture, so to speak." She says further that "when he does not act, Nessim is nothing; he is completely flavorless. . . . It was as an actor," she adds, "that he magnetized me." (C., 58)

And in the sense that she was an intentional manufacturer of illusions, it is as an actor that Justine draws Darley to love her. Despite what he now knows as treachery on her part, he continues to think of their relationship as valuable. He rejects her suggestion that he should be angry with her for having invented such a dishonest relationship. "On the contrary," he says, "I am full of gratitude because an experience which was perhaps banal in itself (even perhaps disgusting for you) was for me immeasurably enriching." (C., 46) And so was Justine's relationship with the illusory Nessim. At the end of the Quartet, through involvement in a new international plot, he is able to continue giving her the selected fictions about him that she can accept.

Darley did not intentionally use his imagination to develop images of his beloved, nor did Justine. But the character most experienced in love--Leila--deliberately plans her affair with Mountolive so as to conduct it in her imagination as much as possible. Their relationship while he is on the Hosani's farm is very good, but his training in the consulate is ended and he is called back to Europe. Although their physical relationship is about over she tells him: "Fear nothing. I have already planned our

relations for years ahead; don't smile--it may even be better when we have stopped making love and started . . . somehow thinking about each other from a neutral position." (M., 47)

Darley opines Leila knows that had their passion run free it would not have lasted more than a year. "The passion she [knows] is fading she . . . [redeems] for a bond of a different nature." "She [has] already planned to turn their intercourse away on another plane; a richer one; but Mountolive [is] still too young to take advantage of what she might have to offer him--the treasures of the imagination." (M., 48)

Even if Mountolive does find the treasures of the imagination while he is away from Leila, his reward when he returns is a rather unpleasant one. He finds her completely immersed in her fanciful image of him. Word of his return surprises her. She writes to him: "I have been living with you in my imagination so long . . . that now I must almost reinvent you to bring you back to life." "I can't find the courage to compare truth with reality yet." "I was so angry when I heard you were coming that I cried with sheer rage." (M., 145) Mountolive himself is to be upset when he meets Leila. He finds that she does not at all match his mental portrait of her. "He suddenly realizes that the precious image of her which had inhabited his heart for so long had now been dissolved, completely wiped out." The end of their relationship had come, Durrell says, and simply because "they had lost forever the power to

fecundate each other's minds." (M., 282)

In these illusion-based relationships the characters have little personality in themselves. Pursewarden could have included every one when he said that "Justine and her city are alike in that they have a strong flavor without having any real character." (J., 139) The personalities of the Quartet exist primarily as nuclei around which their lovers spin delusions about their essential natures. They wear vestments of identity forced upon them by their friends. The now-disillusioned Mountolive concludes the deceptive Hosanis are "like the etiolated . . . projections of a sick imagination, they [seem] empty as a suit of clothes." (J., 139) The idea of identity as clothing is again encountered when Darley thinks over his relationship with Justine: "Nymph? Goddess? Vampire? Yes, she is all these and none of them . . . . Under all these masks there was only one woman, every woman, like a lay figure in a dressmaker's shop, waiting for the poet to clothe her, breathe life into her." (C., 56)

The Quartet characters, once they have that life, swap clothes and with them their identity. Scobie dons his dress and Dolly Varden to assume the identity of the other sex. Did he die because he was wearing his get-up; that is, was he beaten to death because he had disguised his identity? Justine was spared from death for that reason. So slight a change as the absence of a ring led Narouz to murder de Toto instead of her.

Identity-swapping is not restricted to clothing or outer appearances. Melissa, Justine, and Clea are forever being confused or merged. When Darley meets Clea she is standing in exactly the same spot where he first met Melissa. When he visits the wounded Clea in a hospital, it is suggested that she might be lying in the same bed in which Melissa died. The two women enter Darley's life from the same "station in space and time," but for him Clea acquires a meaning very different from that of the pale little cabaret dancer, so Clea is to pass from his life under very different circumstances. (C., 76) Pursewarden also has a similar experience when he is with Melissa. He looks at her sitting next to him in bed, but instead of her he sees the image of Justine, her "dark body seated in precisely the pose which Melissa now adopted, watching him with her chin on her knee, holding his hand with sympathy." (M., 175) For the moment the two become one.

Not only do Durrell's characters have shifting personalities and changeable outer identities, they even assume one another's speech habits. Scobie is the object of most of the mimicry: Clea imitates him perfectly, as do both Darley and the policeman, Nimrod. Scobie's parrot simulates his keeper's voice with such fidelity that listening from outside the room, it is impossible to distinguish between them.

Quotations of various kinds comprise the major part of the material in the Quartet. Those which are repeated from

memory sometimes string on for pages, straining credibility with such displays of total recall. In fact, we come to suspect that the speaker may be mixing inventions with what he actually heard. And this is as it should be or as it is. For the casual reader especially, this is an effective device for developing the personality-is-illusion theme because he soon tires of trying to distinguish between first and second hand speeches and resignedly allows them to run together. This is, of course, sensible at least in part, because the fact that a character chooses to repeat someone's words indicates that the idea has some special meaning for him. But the problem with Durrell's characters is knowing just what that meaning is, for their mental associations are often completely untraceable.

Since we usually do not know <u>why</u> one character quotes another, Durrell's use of quotation simply allows the characters to speak for each other. For instance, Darley, Justine, and Clea quote Pursewarden many more times than he speaks for himself. And in so doing they add little which the reader would not infer directly from the words when the speaker first uttered them. Ultimately, then, the extensive use of quotation in the <u>Quartet</u> functions primarily as another device for confusing identities, for mixing all voices, words, and faces into a homogenous whole in which no individual is clearly distinquishable--unless he wears a Dolly Varden.

Of perhaps more significance than the intentional

mimicry and use of quotation are the seemingly accidental repetition of words, phrases, and lines which occur throughout the Quartet. To cite one of several examples, in Mountolive Clea asks her diplomat friend: "We wish for the end of the city man, don't we?" (C., 146) Darley is not present when she asks this but in the opening of Clea he thinks to himself while witnessing the bombing of Alexandria: "We are observing the fall of the city man." (C., 25) This is an extreme example, but it points out a characteristic of the Quartet. Even when the obfuscation is penetrated, there is little about the thought or even the dialogue of the characters which marks them as individuals. Pursewarden will have a thought such as "the greatest love is that which submits to the arbitration of time" (C., 257) and Darley will later have a similar idea. (J., 231) This kind of repetition occurs time after time. It is as if the characters are taps on Durrell's own word continuum--they all issue the same substance. The characters' vestment of identity does impose a modicum of individuality on their utterances, of course. Pursewarden says things worldwisely, Darley naively (usually), Justine self-consciously, and so on; but these general qualities do not go far toward establishing distinct characterizations.

This rather homogenous speech and the obfuscation of identities combine to establish one fact--in the Quartet it is impossible to know persons in themselves. Personality is entirely in the eye or mind of the beholder and changes

as he changes relative to the person he sees. If our knowledge of persons is completely subjective, or even illusory, as Durrell has rendered it, then his "characters" can have no "character" in themselves. Rather than solid characters complete with internal conflicts, the author has created persons who are only reflections of those who "know" them through various relationships. His major image--mirrors--emphasizes their reflected nature. Justine comments on her image in a dressmaker's multiple mirrors. "Look," she says, "five different pictures of the same subject . . . . Why should not people show more than one profile at a time." (J., 27) As Durrell has it we can do nothing else. More pointed are the words he has taken from de Sade as an epigraph to Balthazar: "The mirror sees the man as beautiful, the mirror loves the man; another mirror sees the man as frightful and hates him; and it is always the same being who produces the impressions." In Chapter Three I will discuss the characters as they are reflected in their love relationships.

Durrell's relativity has quietly found a corollary hand-maiden in the personality-is-illusion theme. This has come about because the radical subjectivity of this piece makes the appearance of all reality dependent upon the observer's attitude--both physical and mental--toward the observed. And so much illusion has begotten hollow, exaggerated characters which are perhaps more accurately labelled as characterizations. But in part the hollowness

of Durrell's characters is a direct result of his understanding of man's interior nature, of man's psychology.

Among the great psychologists of the early twentieth century, there is one that Durrell has pointed out above all others as a major influence on modern literature--Georg Groddeck. As the novelist-turned-critic describes them in his A Key to Modern Poetry, the ideas of this German psychoanalyst are strikingly similar to those which dominate the Quartet. Durrell tells us that, as he understands him, to Groddeck the human personality is dominated by a forceful entity which he calls the "It."[1] This It is not a thing in itself; it is merely a concept which the doctor accepts provisionally. He theorizes about Its of cells, of persons, and even of nations, but for our purposes we are most concerned with his theory of the human It, for one reason: the It remains essentially mysterious; it cannot be known except as it manifests itself through various modes of expression. While to Groddeck all human expressions originate in the It as the prime mover of the human personality, none of these expressions have an absolutely determinable meaning. To use Groddeck's medical idiom in giving an example: if he as a doctor cures a paralysis by massaging a patient (his

[1]According to the Key, Durrell is familiar with only one of Groddeck's works, Das Buch vom Es (1923), a collection of letters addressed to an imaginary correspondent to whom Groddeck explains how he arrived at his theory of the It. The German analyst does not develop his theory to any extent in this work, but the manifold implications of his ideas inspired Freud to arrive at his concept of the Id, as he acknowledges in Das Ich und das Es (1923).

most common therapy), it is not necessarily because he has located the physical problem and literally rubbed it out. Indeed, the so-called "Wild Analyst" likely as not could cure a withering leg by massaging the patient's arm. To Groddeck this simply indicates that disease-causing Its do not respond to remedies because they are right for the illness. They respond simply because they want to respond. He characterizes the whole business of living as a game that the It plays with the scales of sickness and health. "The It toys with the scales putting a weight now in the right pan, now in the left, but never leaving either pan empty; this game, which is often puzzling but always significant, never purposeless, is what we know as life." (Key., 77) The It, then, is the essentially unknowable force which capriciously drives the personality and therefore ultimately directs all human history. The ineluctability of the characters in the Quartet strongly suggests that their lives and consequently the whole of Alexandria are grounded in a force similar to Groddeck's whimsical It.

Groddeck speaks directly to the problem posed by the illusiveness of personality when discussing the tension between his It and Freud's concept of the ego. There is no such thing as the ego, no substance to the "I" identity, he says: "Over against the It stands the ego, the I, which I take to be merely a tool of the It, but . . . we are forced to regard [the ego] as the It's master, for whatever we say in theory, there remains always for the final

verdict 'I am I' . . . . We cannot get away from it, and even while I assert the proposition to be false I am obliged to act as if it were true." (Key., 79)

In this light, the proclivity of the Alexandrians toward inventing personalities for their love partners is a natural, unavoidable thing. So if Durrell has created hollow, superficial characters it is probably because he, like Groddeck, does not believe in the discrete human personality.

CHAPTER THREE

The Faces of Love - Part One

Character development in the Quartet is centered around love relationships. A number of minor characters, such as Da Capo, Amaril, and Semira, are sketched through the brief glimpses given us of their relationships with others. The major characters are both outlined in and developed through relationships which instruct them in the ways of loving. Just how this instruction is achieved and how effective it ultimately is, we can best see by looking at the important personages in the novels.

Before we do so, however, we must realize that Durrell sees none of these relationships as ideal. The degree of intensity and freedom of the love in each case is of the utmost importance to his characters, but the kind of love is completely incidental. The path in which Darley searches for love might work for Mountolive, but it probably would not for Balthazar. Likewise, the kind of love Darley finds in his various relationships is at least in part right for him, but Durrell does not suggest that it would be good for anyone else. Each character must find his place in the Quartet's spectrum of love relationships, which Durrell portrays with remarkable neutrality.

Darley, the narrator for three of the novels, serves

as a unifying commentator on the learning-through-love theme. As relationships are flashed before us he is sure to comment or quote a comment that marks something learned from the relationship. And he himself is a major initiate among the already seemingly well-initiated Alexandrians. In retrospect he regards his affairs as instruction through "the strange techniques of self-pursuit." (C., 12)

Darley's first relationship in the novels is a calculated one in which he "decided" (J., 50) to love Melissa because, ironically, she is without guile. He finds her candid and effortless laughter attractive in contrast to his own brooding about his failure as a writer. They share an apartment, budget and bed, but that is all. Melissa's laughter is not strong enough to infect Darley, who is looking for intellectual companionship as well. In Justine he discovers physical and intellectual if not emotional satisfaction. Even in its early stages he finds the nature of their relationship beyond the reach of his analytical powers. When his first mistress asks if he is falling in love with Justine, he replies, "No, Melissa, it is worse than that, though [he] could not [on his life] explain how or why" it was worse. (J., 14)

Perhaps what Darley felt but was then unable to express was something that came to him later: "[Justine] was doomed to try and capture the part of myself which was forever beyond reach." (J., 197) The "unspecified" part is

probably his soul, the prize sought by the female characters of D. H. Lawrence, whose work Durrell admires. Whatever it was she sought, Darley felt he could preserve it only within the last "refuge . . . which was, for [him], laughter and friendship." (J., 197) But while drawing closer to Justine, Darley was leaving Melissa, who had offered him both the laughter and the non-obligating friendship which he claims are so important. Clearly, the intellectual pleasures the sad Jewess offered Darley were so attractive that he continued to risk the mysterious reach she allegedly made for him.

The relationship Darley shared with Justine is an orgy of introspection in which love-making is rather unimportant. And, apparently, Darley ached from over-indulgence. He says: "I know that for us love-making was only a small part of the total picture projected by a mental intimacy which proliferated and ramified daily around us. How we talked! Night after night in shabby sea-front cafes . . . . As we talked we insensibly drew nearer to each other . . . , not from the customary sensuality which afflicts lovers but as if the physical contact could ease the pain of self-exploration." (J., 134) But ratiocination and coitus do not necessarily make a complete relationship, so we are not surprised that Darley suffers no emotional relapse when Justine disappears. He is simply puzzled--in his head. In fact, when he meets Justine after the failure of the conspiracy, he tells her that despite her deceptions he

is "full of gratitude because [the] experience which was perhaps banal in itself was for me immeasurably enriching." (C., 54)

But the enrichment seeped in only after Darley had deeply probed his own mind during his stay on the island. At the end of Justine, Darley is beginning to abandon the rational, calculated approach to life that he took in his affair with Justine. Words--the main ingredient in his intellectual stew--have become so distasteful that he decides to leave Clea's latest letter to him unanswered. "I no longer wish to coerce anyone, to make promises, to think of life in terms of compacts, resolutions, covenants. It will be up to Clea to interpret my silence according to her own needs and desires, to come to me if she has need or not, as the case may be. Does not everything depend on our interpretation of the silence around us?" (J., 245)

Darley returns from this ruminative period with a straightened back, strengthened eyes, and freedom to enjoy a new friendship with Clea. In her are combined Melissa's facility for laughter and a less frantic version of Justine's perspicacity. Early in the final volume Darley says, after leaving the island, that he had discovered "a new element" among his feelings--detachment. And his relationship with Clea emphasizes this fact. When she asks that he do so, he is not pained at all about leaving her alone with her paints for days. Often, he tells us, they would meet by chance before the pre-established end of their self-enforced

separation and, likely as not, they would decide to call it off on the spot. The casualness of their life together is paralleled by the casualness of their language. The word most indicative of attachment--love--never entered their conversations about themselves. The verbal formulae of ordinary love had no place in a relationship founded on personal freedom.

It is my feeling that Darley has never shown a particular attachment for either of his former mistresses. He tells us that he loved them both (at different times), but as he describes them to us in passages throughout the four novels, he seems to regard Melissa as an affectionate house pet and Justine as a cerebral nymphomaniac. It may be that Durrell does not intend for us to take Darley's assertions about detachment too seriously. I do not think this the case, however. Not only does Darley's relationship with Clea illustrate his detachment, but the picture we have of him at the end of the tetralogy is one of a man skipping stones across a lagoon waiting for what will be to be. The detachment is real, but the previous attachments it implies were not.

Darley's relationship with Clea is not the ultimate for him. He feels her affections ebbing and assumes that their emotions are simply out of step. Resignedly, he removes to the island, where he works and waits to see if they will again move together. Whatever is to happen, his modus operandi will be the detachment in which he was

instructed by his first two mistresses and in which he was confirmed by the last.

Durrell relates only a few events in the early years of David Mountolive, the British diplomat, but they have a strong significance for his adult life. From his eleventh year he has in effect only one parent--his mother. His father, who is wholly devoted to Indian studies, has never fulfilled his promise to abandon his pith helmet and books to join them in England. They have not seen him for years; his occasional publications keep him alive in their memories, but "like someone in absentia for a crime . . . which could not be formulated." (M., 97) Mountolive and his mother never openly admit the father's offense against them, but they feel his absence to be a kind of desertion. Certainly, Mountolive's mother cannot fill the emotional gap left by his father--a gap strikingly symbolized by the study he has never occupied. Rather, Durrell tells us, she has grown to feel toward her son an isolating "jealousy--tidemarks of a passion which [has] long since refunded itself into unwilling acquiescence" toward her husband's decision to remain in India. (M., 97)

It appears that even before he is separated from him, Mountolive has no strong feeling for his father nor his father for him. The only time we see them together, Mountolive's father is making a half-hearted effort to find him the toy airplane for which he has asked. The boat is about

to leave for England, we are told, and it is late. "They [have] to rush. Their good-byes [have] been perfunctory." (M., 99) And much of Mountolive's adult life is to be perfunctory also.

Mountolive develops a practice in his life which he may not have acquired from his father, but which is certainly pointed out by the only words we have from the absent scholar. In the preface to a Pali text he writes: "For those of us who stand upon the margins of the world, as yet unsolicited by any God, the only truth is that work itself is Love." (M., 97) As a member of the foreign service, the young Englishman, like his father, passionately involved himself in his work.

Defined through his work, which may be understood as a substitute for love, Mountolive is less than attractive. As he rose in the foreign service, his professional identity encased his private one so that he was increasingly aware of protocol, of diplomatic propriety. After he is appointed ambassador he lacks the temerity to break through this protocol to continue the relationships he had formerly shared with his staff.

But if the Love equals Work equation functioned perfectly for the elder Mountolive, it does not for his son; at least not for more than a few years. He dares not overlook the dictates of protocol, but his diplomacy is only a superficial part of his life; he performs most of his duties skillfully but perfunctorily. Although he seldom comes from

behind the cover of diplomatic manners, Leila happens to find him in the open. Despite his decision not to, he falls in love with the once-beautiful Egyptian who is so skillful in the ways of love. She is more experienced than Mountolive, Durrell writes, and even better read in his own language than he, but as a model lover she hides her advantages and leads him toward his growth in loving. He has to be led away from his naiveté but, "he [is] not altogether a fool; he [is] learning the two important lessons in life: to make love honestly and to reflect." (M., 33) They have but a short time together and much of their relationship develops through the letters they exchange while the young diplomat is serving in Turkey, in Russia, and in the Slavic countries. Leila keeps him busy fulfilling her requests for descriptions of the places she has visited in her youth. He writes her long and detailed descriptions of the places and things she names, and thereby she opens for him a door to European culture which he probably would have overlooked. Her instruction and influence keep his personality from becoming completely emptied by life-denying rituals of a diplomatic career.

Such an epistolary relationship, of course, is incomplete for young Mountolive. The passion which fires his letters, Durrell tells us, is "the hunger for friendship, the fear of being forgotten." (M., 52) And Leila's reconstruction of Europe through his description is only a "parady of love." (M., 52)

But "surrounded as he [is] by eligible young women, Mountolive . . . [finds] that his only attraction lay among those who [are] already married or who [are] already much older than himself." (M., 56) During all the years he is away from Leila, he forms only one other love relationship--that with Grishken, whom he comes to abhor for her lack of social grace. He writes to Leila of this dancer's toying with his neck while they are seated at an embassy dinner. He is shocked beyond all measure. With maneuvering he managed to become free of the pregnant girl who had so rudely offended his sense of propriety.

His feeling for proper behavior is the force which compels him to end his relationship with Nessim's mother. When Mountolive sees Leila again he cannot bear to be near her, not just because her face is now disfigured, but because her unexplainable behavior and the alcohol she uses to calm herself offend his feelings of propriety. He is so strongly repelled by her Arabic wailings that he cannot remain with her long enough to decipher what she is saying. Mountolive may detest the superficialities of the diplomatic life, but the feeling for propriety which grows out of and guides him in that life is in the ascendancy, and it drives him to jump from the carriage in which Leila incoherently pleads with him to save her son.

After leaving Leila, Mountolive drinks heavily, then upbraids himself for his indulgence. "It would be intemperate to drink any more, he [tells] himself as he

[drains] his glass. Yes, that [is] it! He [has] been intemperate, never been natural, out-going in his attitude to life. He [has] always hidden behind measure and compromise." (M., 284-85) As if to rediscover a naturalness obliterated during his career, he does something he has not done since his youth; he dons a tarbush and dines in the Arab quarter like a clerk. This action marks his shedding of propriety. Even as he is rejecting her, Leila is driving him to discover that facet of his personality which prevented him from ever loving completely.

Mountolive moves from this discovery into a freedom which permits him to love Liza Pursewarden. The extent of his new freedom and the depth of his feeling for the writer's blind sister are shown at the end of the Quartet by his marriage to her, although it is an incorrect marriage for advancement in the diplomatic corps. Leila does not bring to Mountolive the prolonged self-consciousness that Justine gives Darley. But like Darley's, his experiences in love endow him with a freedom of spirit which he invests in a more nearly complete relationship.

Clea is more fortunate than many of the characters in the Quartet, for very early in life she finds happiness in a relationship with Justine. She tells Darley: "As for love itself--cher ami--I told you already that love interested me only very briefly . . . . I am still living in the happiness of that perfectly achieved relationship;

any physical substitute would seem today horribly vulgar and hollow." (J., 129)

It is only when Clea's talents as a painter dry up that sex again enters her life. She decides that her virginity is the cause of her artistic impotence, so she asks Pursewarden to relieve her of it. He refuses and tells her that she would simply have to wait for a tide to turn in her life. It finally does turn in a brief, troubled affair with a Syrian by whom she conceives a child. She has foolishly wanted the child, but when she fully accepts the fact that her lover is committed to marry someone else, she says that she realizes she cannot perpetuate "something which [has] no right to exist outside the span of [their] few golden months." (C., 112) She tells Darley that "apart from [having to destroy the child] I [have] nothing to regret." (C., 112)

In fact Clea, like Darley in his relationship with Justine, finds the affair enriching. "I was immeasurably grown-up by the experience. I was full of gratitude, and still am." (C., 102) And where experiences in loving brought Justine the political power for which she reached, Clea is fecundated as an artist. "It is funny," she says, "but I realize that precisely what [wounds] me most as a woman [nourishes] me most as an artist." (C., 112) The Syrian's desertion of her hurt for the moment, but she learned to bear it "and even to cherish it," she says, "for it allowed me to come to grips with another illusion.

Or rather to see the link between body and spirit in a new way--for the physique is only the outer periphery, the contour of the spirit." (C., 112) It is to her experience with the Syrian that Clea traces her new freedom in love-making: "If I am generous in love-making," she says, "it is perhaps because I am . . . refunding an old love in a new." (C., 112)

Clea's relationship with Darley is a balanced one. She is able to enjoy love-making with him, but she is equally capable of ignoring him for days while she paints. Together they construct a stage setting where Darley is confirmed in his detachment, and where Clea exercises the maturity she found in Syria.

All three of these characters, Darley, Mountolive, and Clea, do at least one thing in common. Only after they are separated from their lovers do they come to a self-understanding which increases their ability to love. Darley loses his faith in the ratiocinative approach to life after he goes to the island; Mountolive discards his decorum after his final meeting with Leila; Clea is revitalized as an artist and instructed personally by her experience after she has lost her lover. It appears that Clea may be right when she says: "In a funny sort of way I feel that our love has gained by the passing of the love object; it is as if the physical body stood in the way of the lover's true growth; its self-realization." (J., 129)

Justine's various relationships show evidence of her increasing ability to love with completeness. She comes into the Quartet with a history of affairs which has given her notoriety as a nymphomaniac. As we hear from several points of view, these affairs are efforts to relieve the "Check" or are sorties to gain intelligence for the conspirators--few are relationships of love. (C., 32) Her earlier lovers, including Darley and Clea, give her little but reminders that she is incapable of enjoying love of any kind. It is Justine herself who at one point says: "We seldom learn anything from those who return our love." Of her many lovers, only Pursewarden makes a point of displaying disaffection for her. "As for Justine," he says, "I regard her as a tiresome old sexual turnstile through which presumably we must all pass." (B., 115) And pass they do. But for love she substitutes "a surer but crueler mental tenderness, Darley says, "which [emphasizes her] loneliness rather than upgrading it." (J., 39) Her "mind is so awake," her former husband Arnauti says, that it makes any gift of the body partial . . . . At night you can hear her brain ticking like a cheap alarm clock." (J., 135)

Despite her constant theorizing about her love affairs, Justine remains bound by the "Check", until Pursewarden forces her to face it by saying: "Try dropping this invented guilt and telling yourself that the [rape] was both pleasurable and meaningless." (C., 59) "It was

curious," Justine tells Darley, "that a few words like this, and an ironic chuckle, should do what all the others could not do for me. Suddenly everything seemed to lift, get lighter, move about. Like cargo shifting in a vessel. Then later on a space slowly cleared. It was like feeling creeping back into a paralyzed land." (C., 59)

Having been rid of the "Check," it would seem that she might find fulfillment in her love relationships. But Darley says that because Justine is an Oriental woman she is "not a sensualist in the European sense. Her obsessions are power, politics and possessions." (M., 202) Release from the "Check" restores to her only physical love. It was Nessim's request that she join him in the arms plot that aroused her true ruling passion. Before he tells her of his plans, she feels completely unable to love him; she rejects his proposal of marriage as a mockery after he has brought her into his confidence. Darley says, she realized that "he was asking her not merely to share his bed--but his whole life, the monomania upon which it was built . . . . He was asking, not for her hand in marriage but for her partnership in allegiance to his ruling daemon. It was, in the strict sense the only sense, the only meaning she could put on the word love." (M., 199)

The secret Nessim shared with Justine made her free to act, to finally use her body as something other than a dupe in her search for herself. "There came over her an unexpected lust to sleep with him--no, with his plans,

his dreams." (M., 201) And in making love to him "it was as if she had refilled the treasury of his spiritual power symbolized so queerly in terms of his possessions; the cold nipples of the bombs and grenades which had been born from tungsten, gum arabic, jute, shipping, opals, herbs, silks and trees." (M., 205) Indeed, Durrell is suggesting that in fulfilling her lust for power, Justine has moved through Nessim, the plot, and its multitudinous components and activities, to know the elemental components of the earth.

Sharing in the plot gives sex a peculiar new meaning for Justine. She realizes that discovery of their plans might bring death to both her and Nessim, and "this", we are told, is "all sex could mean to her now! How thrilling, sexually thrilling, was the expectation of their death!" (M., 206) (This would evoke many a smile from de Sade and de Rougemont.)

The self-knowledge that Justine achieves through loving is not the fruit of a gradual process. The way to freedom from her sexual bondage she finds through insight flashed before her as she stumbles about in her emotional darkness; her most complete fulfillment becomes effective only with her marriage into the plot. That Justine is again beset with emotional problems upon the discovery of the plot only supports the validity of her discoveries. In the final account we have of her, she has been revitalized through Nessim's involvement in a new international conspiracy.

CHAPTER THREE - Part Two

Durrell has woven into the Quartet a number of characters who embody various kinds of love which are not encountered in the four major personages we have just studied. These characters develop very little; they are not developed in terms of love so much as they are living definitions of love. They are static representations of love; types so evident that they may be laid off in a catalogue.

Nessim, Narouz, Leila, and the elder Hosani comprise the only complete family in the tetralogy, and at least between Narouz and his father there is the love tie, if over strong, that one might expect to find. (Durrell tells us that the "duties and affections of the Hosani family [are tightly] bound, but that they give us no evidence of their closeness as a family.") (M., 36) Narouz' servile attention to his father's needs indicates an unusually strong love for his father. Nessim's reaction to his mother's death suggests that his attachment to her was of an unhealthy nature also. He tells Balthazar: "While I loved her and all that, her death has freed me in a curious sort of way. A new life is opening before me, I feel years younger . . . ." (C., 265-66) This after having told

Clea: "I sometimes think I shall never be able to fall in love properly until after my mother dies." (M., 195) It is Leila herself who speaks of "the feeble incestuous desires of the inner heart," (M., 54) upon seeing Nessim's naked body reflected in her mirror. And Mountolive remembers that Leila actually loves her husband who is a generation older than she.

Among the relationships in the Hosani family, Durrell develops that between Nessim and Narouz to the greatest extent. At the opening of the Quartet they display an extraordinarily strong brotherly love. After Narouz' religious practices estrange him from his brother, Nessim briefly considers having him silenced. In thinking about the nature of their relationship, he concludes that he has never understood Narouz. Their bond "had not really been deep, founded in understanding: it had been confined by the family convention to which both belonged. And now the tie had suddenly snapped." (M., 230) But this is not his final decision for "he struck the wheel of the car with aching palms and cried, 'I shall never harm him'." (M., 230) He resolves to disband the whole plot in order to save his fanatical brother. "[Nessim] never fully realized," Darley comments, "how much he loved this hated brother." (M., 230)

But Narouz does not reciprocate his brother's love. When younger-brother Narouz cannot bring himself to strike back at Nessim who is attacking him, it is not love but

respect for Nessim's seniority which holds him back. There is perhaps evidence that before Narouz became so hostile toward his brother, his attachment to Nessim was very strong. When he comes to Clea after supposedly killing Justine he says that "This Jewish fox [Justine] has eaten my life." (M., 205) Does he mean that he intended to kill Justine for separating him from his brother, or is he simply declaring his hatred for her because she mistreated Nessim through her unfaithfulness? Whatever he means, Narouz' interest in their relationship indicates his strong concern for his brother.

Liza and Ludwig Pursewarden share the only truly incestuous relationship in the Quartet. Their tie is so strong that it breaks Pursewarden's marriage and allows neither him nor his sister to engage in close relationships with others. Liza says to Darley, "He [her brother] could not free himself from my inside hold on him, though he tried and struggled. I could not free myself from him, though truthfully, I never wished to." (C., 171) They had lived this way for years, enjoying what Liza called "a perfect happiness", until she discovered she was in love with David Mountolive. She did not tell her brother that "the dark stranger" he had always predicted would come had arrived, but "he knew it quite unerringly and wrote after a long silence asking . . . if the stranger had come. When he got my letter he seemed suddenly to realize that our relationship might be endangered or crushed in the way his had

been with his wife--not by anything we did, no, but by the simple fact of my existence. So," she adds matter-of-factly, "he committed suicide." (C., 170-71) As if to disperse objections that her brother had killed himself for political reasons, Liza quotes the final letter she has from Pursewarden: "'I know that truthfully something much more definitive [than blessings] is required of me if you are ever to renounce me and start living. I must really abandon you, really remove myself from the scene in a manner which would permit no further equivocation in our vacillating hearts, ... This [is] a huge novelty! Yet it is the completest gift I can offer you as a wedding present. And if you look beyond the immediate pain you will see how perfect the logic of love seems to one who is ready to die for it.'" (C., 171) The force of Pursewarden's seeming self-sacrifice is mitigated by the probability that he wrote his sister after he had learned of the plot. Nevertheless, only in Alexandria would it be suggested that a modern lover end his life in order to free his partner for another, more complete, attachment.

Amidst the musical-chairs relationships of the Quartet, Pombal's loyality to Fosca is noteworthy. Fosca, out of her own sense of loyalty to her soldier-husband, has forced Pombal to continence. To stop rumors that he had become unmanned he goes to a brothel where he makes a most unexpected discovery about himself. "'I became panic-stricken! My feelings were quite blindés, like a bloody tank. The

sight of all those girls made me memorize Fosca in detail. Everything, even her hands in her lap with her knitting! I was cooled as if by an ice cream down my collar. I emptied my pockets on the table and fled in a hail of slippers and a torrent of cat-calls from my old friends.'" (C., 42) If we are to judge from this incident alone, Pombal is so psychologically conditioned by his love for Fosca that to him infidelity is impossible.[1]

The most fantastic love relationship in Durrell's repertoire is that between Amaril and Semira. When Amaril first encounters Semira she is hidden beneath the disguise of the carnival celebrants--the felt dominoe. She slips away from him at the end of that year's celebration, and would have done so after they had met under the same circumstances the next year, had not Amaril pursued her to her door. There he unmasks her and discovers that she has no nose. The events which follow make up a Pygmalion-and-Galatea story, modified by the existence of modern plastic surgery. Amaril studies in Europe the modern art of moulding flesh, choses from a specially-prepared catalogue a nose for Semira, and reproduces it on her face. Now that his lady is freed from the shyness enforced by her former appearance, he finds that she is dull-witted. Amaril realizes

[1]Not to be overlooked is Pombal's patriotic love for his country. His affection for France identifies him as a Frenchman and rekindles his relationship with Darley after he has returned from the island. Both Pombal and Darley bemoan the conquest of their beloved France (although Darley is not French), and through their common love of the same object they reestablish their old ties.

that he cannot change her mind as easily as he has her face, so he sets her up in a business--a doll shop--where her childlike mind can function creatively. In a sense he has outdone Galatea; he "creates" not only his beloved, but a world in which she can live.

As they define it through their various relationships, love has a different meaning for each of the characters in the Quartet. For Justine "love" means involvement with the leader of an activist group. Mountolive at first equates love with work; later it means an affair with a woman twice his age, with a dull-witted dancer, and with a blind girl. For Pursewarden "love" means incest. Everyone seems to love, in one way or another, everyone else in the Quartet. The only generalization which may be safely made about love in the Quartet is that its meaning is determined by the immediate relationship--it has no universal value.[2] It cannot

[2]Those characters which demonstrate a progression in character and those which do not are alike in that both groups, paradoxically, are static. This is due at least in part to Durrell's determinative form. William Faulkner uses a narrative structure similar to Durrell's; his Yoknapatawphaians talk from various positions about themselves and others, but he writes with an effect quite unlike Durrell's. Faulkner portrays sharply defined persons and their emotions; Durrell renders illusions and their philosophic implications. The difference is like that between seeing an athletic event in person and trying to reconstruct it from a commentator's recapitulation. The "philosophizing" isolates us from the characters who, presumably, we would expect to have feelings of love--we are given instead only their thoughts about love. Durrell may have pointed out his own problem while discussing T. S. Eliot's plays in his Key to Modern Poetry. Truly in the Quartet, "The characters are representative, as in a masque,

be described in a definition which is applicable to all relationships because the uniqueness of each relationship renders meaningless all attempts toward generalizations.

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of various attitudes or passions. The result is that they do not interact upon one another, but each describes his interior state . . . . Instead of movement and drama we tend to get monologue and freize."

In the best fiction meaning is inferred from the action and from the characters' speeches and thoughts. But in the Quartet characters act, someone interprets the action, and someone interprets the interpretation. Little is left to the reader's imagination, not even the task of deciding which interpretation is right for all are wrong. In the Quartet, with their pinch of emotion and scoop of philosophizing, all the love relationships prove to be commentaries on static love.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Nature of Love

The characters in the Quartet spend much of their time theorizing about the nature of love. If collected their notions would probably comprise a volume by themselves. But of course they are not collected; they are sprinkled throughout four volumes, and to discover the central points they must be extracted and pieced together. The problem in making such a synthesis is that the characters pronounce on love in contradictory and ever-changing aphorisms which are difficult to categorize.

Actually, part of the vitality lacking in Durrell's characters is compensated for by the flow of ideas which issue from their hyper-active minds. Durrell's extravagantly fluent style supercharges their notions and aphorisms with a pulsating life that rises and falls as the theories flow from page to page. Whereas critical analysis takes the life from a well-drawn fictional character; a study of only the ideas in the Quartet saps the energy from Durrell's probings into love by excluding his form and style from consideration. The relationship between his theories on love and Durrell's form and style may be likened to the operation of a cinema. His form frames the ideas on love as they flash before us from a projector driven by the

energy of his style. The nature of love in the Quartet can be exhibited only by cutting out and exhibiting isolated frames from this projected continuum.

In the previous chapter we have seen Darley as he went from one beloved to another, learning to love and to accept the illusoriness of those he loves. At the same time his experiences with Melissa, Justine, and Clea are bringing him to a discovery about the nature of love itself. He has spent the first half of Justine recalling his impressions of these three when he remembers that Clea had once said to him:

> "There is [something] which you will perhaps discover for yourself. There is something about love--I will not say defective for the defect lies in ourselves; but something we have mistaken about its nature. For example, the love you now feel for Justine is not a different love for a different object, but the same love you feel for Melissa trying to work itself out through the medium of Justine. Love is horribly stable and each of us is allotted a certain portion of it, a ration. It is capable of appearing in an infinity of forms and attaching itself to an infinity of people." (J., 129-130)

As Clea suggests, Darley does discover the truth of her observations about love time after time throughout the three novels in which he is narrator.

Retrospectively, Darley realizes that indeed a great number of the relationships he has described were the attempts of love to work itself out through a medium. The most striking of these efforts is Justine's trying to find her way to Nessim through her affairs with Darley and Pursewarden. But it is a bit more complex than we first

suppose, as she tells Darley when they meet again in Clea: "[It is] strange to think," she says, "that every word I . . . addressed to you was spoken mentally to him, to Pursewarden! In your bed it was he I embraced and subjugated in my mind. And yet again, in another dimension, everything I felt and did then was really for Nessim, and the plan. My innermost life was rooted in this crazy plan." (C., 60)

Nessim, in turn, attempts to reclaim Justine by means of his short liaison with Melissa. Both he and Melissa are abandoned by their lovers, she by Darley and he by Justine who had gone to Israel as an agent in the conspiracy. Their mutual attraction is born of sympathy, Darley tells us, and "the sensation of a new sympathy . . . enabled [Nessim], magically, to become his own man again--this is to say, a man who could act . . .!" (J., 204) Where Nessim provides with the conspiracy a spark which vitalizes Justine, he himself is renewed by the profound sympathy Melissa holds for him.

Darley says that Nessim, in coming to "explore and love Melissa as an extension of Justine, delineated perfectly the human situation. Melissa would hunt in him for the qualities which she imagined I must have found in his wife. The four of us were unrecognized complementaries of one another, inextricably bound together." (J., 203) They are so tied together in fact that it is Melissa who bears a child to Nessim as a replacement for Justine's lost girl.

Or, as Balthazar puts it: "by one of those fearful displacements of which only love seems capable the child Justine lost was given back by Nessim not to her but to Melissa. Do you see?" he asks Darley. (J., 237) Apparently he does see most clearly, for in the opening pages of the tetralogy he says he will name the child after Justine.

While Nessim pursued his love for Justine through Melissa, Melissa, as Darley understands it, is using Nessim as a medium in her attempt to restore her waning relationship with Darley. As Nessim kissed her, Darley says, he looked into her eyes where he saw born "a new and unsuspected Justine," and at the same time "Melissa's kisses . . . selected in Nessim only the nearest mouth to mine." (J., 208)

At the end of Justine, after his relationship with the Jewess has passed, Darley concludes that his life is somehow to be determined by Melissa. "I realize that what remains unsolved in my life is not the problem of Justine but the problem of Melissa. In some curious way I feel the future, if there is one, has always been vested in her. Yet I feel powerless to influence it by decision or even hopes. I feel that I must wait patiently until we can fall into step once more. This may take years . . . . Or perhaps the hope will die stillborn, broken up like wreckage by the tides of events." (J., 231) Soon afterwards Melissa dies.

If Darley does again match "sequences of history" with Melissa it is through the person of Clea. Before she leaves

for the sanitarium in Israel, Melissa asks Clea to love Darley after she has gone. "Cannot a friend make love on another's behalf?" she asks. "I ask you to sleep with him as I would ask the Panaghila to come down and bless him while he sleeps." (B., 135) We have no reply from Clea, but whether in obedience to the request or not she does make love to Darley, and, in its lack of demands upon him, the relationship she has with him is similar to Melissa's.

As Darley passes from Melissa to Justine he comes to identify Melissa with a single kind of love--charity. It was this quality in her, evinced most obviously by her carefree laughter, he tells us, which initially destroyed his defenses against love. In contrast, Justine "utterly lacked [this endearing] charity of mind." (J., 203) Durrell arranges his paragraphs contrapuntually in one passage to emphasize Melissa's selflessness. Into the account of Nessim's night with Melissa, he places a parenthetical scene of Darley's simultaneous meeting with Justine. While the banker and his newly found mistress sit quietly "enjoying the firelight and the sensation of sharing . . . their common hopelessness," Darley is listening to Justine as she explores her ego--to which, he comments, she is wholly dedicated. (J., 203)

Darley emphasizes Melissa's charity and laments its absence from his affair with Justine ("What on earth could I possibly see in [Justine]?" he asks himself "for the thousandth time" while thinking of Melissa. [J., 203])

But her charity is not the kind of love which proves best among all others in the Quartet, although it is certainly the kind most often mentioned. If Darley finds Melissa's charity in Clea it is mitigated by a moodiness reminiscent of Justine's egocentricity. In his relationship with Clea, Darley does not once mention charitable affection. Had he simply been toying with the word charity, a word which he perhaps trades for another--detachment? Or are we to understand Clea as a partial embodiment of Melissa's charity? If the latter, then the failure of Clea and Darley's relationship may be attributed to the lack of a more complete charity in Clea--or in both of them. (It must be remembered that Darley recognized the singularity of Melissa's love only after the relationship had ended. So, to follow this notion to its end, in the sense that he could not see it for what it was worth, charity did not function in their relationship.) With its failure, Darley must resume his probing into love, and if he has correctly predicted that his future is vested in Melissa, he may be off to seek the charity she has come to symbolize.

Of course, Durrell's repeated emphasis upon the charitable form of love may be an accident of the language, for English is limited in its ability to express the distinctions between one kind of love and another. This limitation would bear hard upon Durrell, who has more than a passing acquaintance with the many sharply-delineated Greek words for the subject of his investigation. Accident or not, Melissa's

charity or openness to relationships is the only form of love which receives Darley's repeated praise.

Upon his return from the island, Darley discovers that Melissa has faded from his memory. "I had worn her out," he says, "like an old pair of socks, and the utterness of [her] disappearance surprised and shocked me. Could 'love' simply wear out like this?" (C., 41) A few lines later he answers his own question when he exclaims: "Melissa had been simply one of the many costumes of love!" (C., 41) Then, for the second time he recalls Clea's words about the nature of love. She had said, he ruminates, "something about its capacity being limited to an iron ration for each soul and [had added] gravely: 'The love you feel for Melissa, the same love, is trying to work itself out through Justine.'" "Would I," he asks himself, "by extension find this to be true of Clea? I did not think so--for those fresh and spontaneous embraces were as pristine as invention, and not like ill-drawn copies of past actions." (C., 97)

But in the Quartet the sincerity, honesty or spontaneity of today's gestures have little bearing upon tomorrow's. Clea's dying affections bring Darley to discover that she too is merely one face of love, one of three faces in what has become a love continuum. In the final volume he concludes that: "The three women [had] arranged themselves as if to represent the moods of the great verb, Love: Melissa, Justine, and Clea.

The love that Darley and others experience in the

Quartet, then, does not change in itself. Its forms simply vary as it is manifest in relationships with different persons. And it is easily transferred from one object to another. Darley and Clea indicate the freedom with which their love is redirected by their frequent use of such words as refunded, and reinvested. It is as if their affections are some universally honored coinage which they pass along--just as Pursewarden, who could not love Melissa, left Darley a small inheritance to spend with the dancer after his suicide.

Love relationships in the Quartet "happen" by accident. They arise from the characters' lives making a completely fortuitous intersection from which they mistakenly conclude that they have in common some mutually attractive qualities. It is "idle to imagine falling in love as a correspondence of minds, of thoughts," says Arnauti, "it is a simultaneous firing up of two spirits engaged in the autonomous act of growing up." "The sensation is of something having noiselessly exploded inside each of them. Around this event, dazed and preoccupied, the lover moves examining his or her own experience; her gratitude alone, stretching away towards a mistaken donor, creates the illusion that she communicates with her fellow, but this is false. The loved object is simply one that has shared an experience at the same moment of time, narcissistically; and the desire to be near the beloved object is at first . . . due to the idea of [letting] the two experiences compare themselves, like reflections in different mirrors." (J., 49-50) Arnauti goes on to say

that love at its worst degenerates into mere possession. Darley experiences this in his relationship with Justine; he often expresses his fear of her possessiveness. But at its best love throws the lover into a gratifying self-consciousness such as that which Darley experiences with Clea. And it is Clea who suggests that as important as the self-consciousness of the love relationship is the knowledge that comes from love-making. "Sexual love _is_ knowledge," she says, "both in etymology and in cold fact; 'he knew her' as the Bible says! Sex is the joint or coupling which unites the male and female ends of knowledge." (_C._, 113)

The effect of both physical and non-physical love in the _Quartet_ is clear--it results in knowledge, often of a profoundly introspective kind. And this knowledge is primarily the realization of one overriding fact about love; that is, that it has no recognizable essential nature nor knowable ultimate cause. Instead of actual knowledge of its essence, the _Quartet_ characters know love only as it appears to them in their relationships. They find that it is constant and that it may exist happily alone among human emotions, intrigued and satisfied with itself. Love applies itself to other objects only if they reflect its image in a flattering manner. The _cause_ of love is hardly ever considered, love simply is and its manifestations may be described, but its origin is seldom questioned.

Nevertheless, Darley raises the causal question about love at least once when he notices Clea's attitude toward

him has changed radically. He thinks: "Perhaps she was simply falling out of love . . . . I mean love can wither like any other plant . . . . Of course one could look at it a matter-of-fact way and class it with the order of natural events which time revises and renews according to its own caprices." Then he speaks more directly to the issue at hand when he says: "But in order to record the manner of its falling out I feel almost compelled to present it as something else--preposterous as it may sound--as a visitation of an agency, a power initiated in some uncommon region beyond the scope of the ordinary imagination." (C., 233) Durrell's characters can describe the effect of love and other emotions in almost behavioral cause-and-effect terms, but this description does not answer the question of its cause. Despairing of an answer, they, like Darley, speak of it in other terms. Before we can fully examine their explanation of love's origin, however, we must, having come full circle, again consider Durrell's understanding of the relativity theory.

Writing again in A Key to Modern Poetry, Durrell says that the relativity proposition interests him not only for its novel considerations of the problem of the observer and the observed, but for its treatment of causality as indeterminable.

If reality, he writes, "is somehow extra-causal, then a whole new vista of ideas is opened up--a territory hitherto colonized only by the intuition. If the result of

every experiment, of every motion of nature, is completely unforeseen and unpredictable--then everything is perpetually brand new, everything is, if you care to think of it like that, a miracle." (Key., 30) He goes on to quote Sir James Jeans, a commentator on relativity, who wrote in his Physics and Philosophy that "if we still wish to think of the happening in the phenomenal world as governed by causal law we must suppose that these happenings are determined in some substratum of the world which lies beyond the world of phenomena and also beyond our access." (Key., 30)

It is important to pay special attention to the last few words Durrell quotes from Jeans: ". . . these happenings are determined in some substratum of the world which lies beyond the world of phenomena." Having been led by his psychology and its consequent epistemology to create characters without definite personalities or wills, the novelist has been forced to abandon traditional theories of motivation. But what does motivate these characters then? Nothing more or less than the city of Alexandria.[1] The splendid city functions as a thoroughly developed metaphor for the forces which affect the characters. In one sense, it is a mammoth symbol for the "It" which drives the fictional Alexandrians. Like the Groddeck's It, and like its own inhabitants, the city has no knowable essence. It can be known only through

[1]Lionell Trilling, "The Quartet: Two Reviews," in The World of Lawrence Durrell, Harry T. Moore, ed. (Carbondale, Ill., 1962), 57-65.

its manifestations. In opening the tetralogy, Darley says that the Alexandrians themselves are manifestations of their city. He also says he realizes that somehow the city had controlled their lives. "None of us," he ruminates, "is properly to be judged for what happened in the past. It is the city which should be judged though we, its children, must pay the price." (J., 13) He continues:

> "I am thinking back to the time when for the four of us the known world hardly existed; days simply became spaces between the shifting floors of time, of acting, of living out the topical . . . . A tide of meaningless affairs nosing along the dead level of things, entering no climate, leading us nowhere, demanding of us nothing save the impossible--that we should be. Justine would say that we had been trapped in the projection of a will too powerful and too deliberate to be human--the gravitational field which Alexandria threw down about those it had chosen as its exemplars . . . ." (J., 18-19)

While the city symbolizes the mysterious psyche of Durrell's characters, then, it is also in itself a force upon them--the force of environment. Alexandria provides the singular "furniture" of the Alexandrian mind, as Justine, Darley, and Pursewarden so often remind us. Durrell has cleverly taken this furniture image from C. P. Cavafy, the modern Greek poet who often writes of events which have occurred in Alexandria throughout its long history. Thus the mental furniture that Alexandria supplies its modern inhabitants is associated with the entire history of this ancient city, half-Western and half-Eastern.

Ultimately, then, the people of Durrell's microcosm are driven by an internal and by an external force. To have

even a chance to love satisfactorily they must give themselves up to these forces. Darley loves with detachment after he recognizes that he cannot truly know the essentially mysterious objects of his love. Justine loves only after she surrenders herself to her lust for power. Mountolive realizes that he has been fighting the city; he submerges in it and is renewed to love Liza. Of course, not all who live in accord with the city are rewarded so generously. Narouz, the shy Copt who epitomizes the spirit of Alexandria in which, ironically, he never lived, died under its crushing force. Like Groddeck's It, Alexandria's caprices cannot be predicted or controlled.

It is ironic that characters allegedly shaped by the relativity theory, which epitomizes modern thought in the West--the traditional sanctuary of the free will--should be controlled by such a typically Eastern determinism. But such is the nature of things in Alexandria, the cross-roads between the East and the West.

A Concluding Remark

The great problem of Durrell's tetralogy is the conflict between his mode of characterization and his understanding of reality. Durrell is aware that despite their protests to the contrary, all men act as if they recognize some reality, some element of each person's identity, which is unchanging and unquestionable. In fact, Durrell's characters go about their living as if they know their lovers. Even when they discover their knowledge is incomplete, they assimilate the new information with the old and behave as if they then have the absolute truth.

The novelist could have written an "objective" narrative, the final volume, say, in which he gives his readers the facts for which the characters in the preceding novels had searched but which they never found. In this way the reader could clearly see the difference between what the characters thought they knew and what was actually the truth. But it would be contrary to human experience, to reality as Durrell knows it, for him to erect in his fictional microcosm an objective reality of fact and personality for the reader's use and comfort. In so doing he would be abandoning one of his main points, namely that while an objective reality may exist, and while persons may have essential

natures, we can never know them. Men and phenomena in the Quartet remain essentially mysterious. Durrell has used his understanding of the theory of relativity, the offspring of modern positivism, to express this, the most poetical of thoughts.

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