

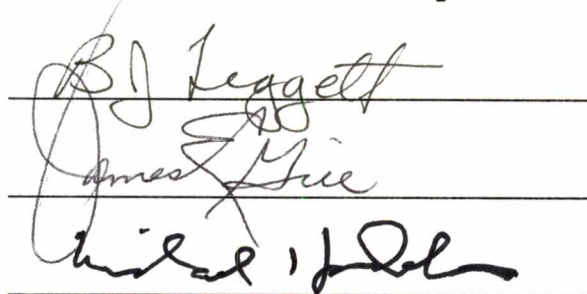
To the Graduate School:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Suzanne McCray entitled "The Beast in the City: Animal Imagery in Lawrence Durrell's The Alexandria Quartet." I have examined the final copy of the dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.



Richard Penner, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:



Accepted for the Council:



Vice Provost
and Dean of the Graduate School

THE BEAST IN THE CITY:
ANIMAL IMAGERY IN LAWRENCE DURRELL'S
THE ALEXANDRIA QUARTET

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Suzanne McCray

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For George McCray

For Mattie McCray

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ABSTRACT

This study offers an analysis of Lawrence Durrell's manipulation of animals, his incorporation of animals as characters, and his dehumanizing ascription of animal characteristics to individuals in The Alexandria Quartet. Such an analysis offers a concrete method of examining Durrell's most basic themes: the bestial nature of love, the human capacity for degradation, the predatory nature of the city itself.

Chapter 1 provides an examination of the controlling force in the Quartet, Alexandria. Durrell creates a city which dominates even the most minute details of its inhabitants' lives. Some react to the city's control with rage and seek to inflict a harm of their own. Through careful manipulation of metaphor, Durrell makes it clear these are the city's predators, and an analysis of these figures is central to the purposes of Chapter 2.

With Chapter 3, the focus shifts to the victims. Children serve as horrifying image of this victimization. Images of pestilence, vermin, and decay are invariably associated with "the true children" of Alexandria, resulting in the complete corruption of innocence and hope identified with children. In Chapter 4, the analysis includes adults reduced to prey. Images normally benign

appear as twisted or broken in the Quartet. Throughout the work gazelles are harnessed, rabbits are trapped, camels are hacked to pieces while still alive, dolphins are pickled, gulls and duck are shot. And in each instance animals are associated with their human counterparts.

In Chapter 5, the discussion turns to art, the only sanctuary Durrell offers as an escape from the bestial world of Alexandria. The artist must surrender the physical in order to attain the aesthetic. Physicality is associated with animality, with mortality. Love is more productive when it is spiritual. Artistic creation opens the door to the eternal while procreation emphasizes the temporal leading ultimately to decay.

PREFACE

Durrell's critical reception and reputation has been one of extremes, both in ascending and descending cycles. He rose on the literary horizon, shot to the top, and fell to eclipse with what must have been first exhilarating but then dismaying speed. In the early 1960s, Durrell's work generated hundreds of serious, admiring articles. Then critics, a little embarrassed by their initial blind, gushing enthusiasm fell silent or became hostile. Only recently has the attention directed to Durrell taken a more analytical, more measured line. Durrell's reputation is again on the rise, but this time, much to the benefit of Durrell's work, the critics are no longer on a bandwagon, they are instead looking carefully at what Durrell did in fact accomplish and what he did not.

The Avignon Quintet, his latest and perhaps final work, has received attention in many major journals. Deus Loci, a journal devoted to scholarship on Durrell, has gained in stature since its inception in 1977. On Miracle Ground, an international Durrell conference, has had five (1980, 1982, 1984, 1986, 1990) productive meetings. In 1987, Twentieth Century Literature devoted two volumes to a reassessment of Durrell's work. Major books on Durrell's works by Alan Warren Friedman, Michael Begnal, Jean

Fanchette, and F. J. Temple have been published in the last two years.

It cannot be ignored that Durrell produced big, interconnected books, quartets and quintets, and it seems reasonable to credit the claim he made for their careful building, the presence of an overriding design. Many have examined Durrell's descriptions of his own work, where the prominence given to structural, even architectonic principles was noted. The attempt of this study is to seek out the principle or principles of articulation. However, this study focuses more on what he in fact accomplishes than what he attempts.

The origins of this essay followed upon the discovery of what I took, and take, to be just such a principle of articulation. The Alexandria Quartet, I found, makes systematic use of animal imagery to deploy and manipulate its fundamental themes. Exploring that imagery in detail confirms that the four novels take shape and come together as a single work. Animal images, I discovered, are a skeletal feature of the work.

What follows then is a detailed examination of the workings of animal imagery in Durrell's Quartet, with occasional ancillary discussions of more general matters relating to such traditions. Durrell is steadfastly anthropocentric in his approach in a way that degrades both

man and animal. I do not offer any critique of this method of metaphorization, though I am aware there are modern critics, such as Margot Norris, who do. The approach is doggedly old-fashioned, even New Critical, in its emphasis upon the collection and juxtaposition of related image clusters for comparative and contrastive purposes. But it is also historicist, even in a very minor way deconstructionist, in its exploration of Durrell's cunning use of mutually cancelling authorities, so that every text or interpretation of events regarded as authoritative from one perspective or by a certain character is revealed from a different perspective or by another character as limited, self-deluding, and involved in agendas of its own.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
PREFACE	vii
I. THE CITY AS CAGE	1
II. ANIMALS AS PREDATORS AND THEIR HUMAN COUNTERPARTS	28
III. CHILDREN AND OTHER PESTS	61
IV. ANIMALS AS VICTIMS AND THEIR HUMAN COUNTERPARTS	88
V. ART: THE LAST SANCTUARY	158
CONCLUSION	198
BIBLIOGRAPHY	202
VITA	215

The City as Cage

Introduction

--Lawrence Durrell, "The City"¹

¹Lawrence Durrell, The Alexandria Quartet (London: Faber and Faber Publishing Co., 1969) 201-2. This edition was chosen as it includes Durrell's corrections, as well as minor additions, including a translation of a Cavafy poem. Consequently, this edition better represents Durrell's final word on the novels. All future references to the Quartet will be included in the text, marked by a capital letter (J, B, M, C,) to denote the individual novel and by page number. "The City" is quoted in its entirety at the end of Justine in the section entitled "Workpoints."

1

Paulette Michote remarks that Alexandria is not really a city but a "condition of being."³ Robert Scholes argues that it is "a country of the mind."⁴ Although Alexandria's role in the Quartet is debated, most agree with the assessment of such critics as Jacques Vallette, who assert that the city is an immutable character around which the entire work revolves.⁵

In his analysis of the historical role of cities, Lewis Mumford concludes that though the city has valuable functions "it has also served throughout history, as a container of organized violence and a transmitter of war."⁶ In the walled city, Mumford continues:

the division of labor and castes, pushed to the extreme, normalized schizophrenia; while the compulsive repetitious labor imposed on a large part of the urban population under slavery, reproduced the structure of a compulsion neurosis. Thus the ancient city, in its very constitution, tended to transmit a collective personality structure whose more extreme manifestations are now recognized as pathological.⁷

me to several articles I might otherwise have missed.

³"Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria Quartet," Revue des Langues Vivantes, XXVI, 361.

⁴Fabulation and Metafiction, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980)34.

⁵Cf. "Durrell's French Reputation" 180.

⁶The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1961)46.

⁷The City in History 46.

Durrell combines the pathological manifestations associated with the ancient walled city with the "normalized schizophrenia" associated with modern Alexandria, a city pushed to extremes,⁸ and out of this emerges the collective personality, the spirit of place that is his Alexandria. In the individual Alexandrian, such as Nessim, the city finds:

a responsive subject through which to express the collective desires, the collective wishes, which informed its culture. He would wake to see the towers and minarets printed on the exhausted, dust powdered sky, and see as if en montage on them the giant footprints of the historical memory which lies behind the recollections of individual personality, its mentor and guide: indeed its inventor, since man is only an extension of the spirit of place.
(J 143)

That place and people share the same basic essence is a lesson that Durrell seems intent on imparting. The narrator of Justine tells us he no longer sees men and women as individuals with discrete identities, but instead "as beings unconsciously made part of place, buried to the waist among the ruins of a single city, steeped in

⁸These extremes are frequently mentioned in the Quartet. The best example of this is when Balthazar tells Darley, "You speak slightingly of syncretism . . . but you must understand that to work here at all--and I am speaking as a religious maniac not a philosopher--one must try to reconcile two extremes of habit and behavior which are not due to the intellectual disposition of the inhabitant, but to their soil, air, landscape. I mean extreme sensuality and intellectual asceticism" (J 83). Again the very soil of Alexandria is blamed for the intellectual and sexual attitudes of its inhabitants.

its values" (B 369), and the emphasis for Durrell is on the ruins of the city and the ruined lives which people it.

An Urban Apocalypse

According to Burton Pike, the modern city is a potent image because of its "multifarious and conflicting associations": "The city as a spatial form presents both the image of the map and the image of the labyrinth" ⁹ What arises is the tension between a sense of orientation and a sense of confusion: "Reflecting this inherent ambiguity, the image of the city functions as a nodal point of anxiety for the reader as well as for the character."¹⁰ Few cities in literature have served more effectively as a nodal point of anxiety than Durrell's Alexandria.

The image of the modern city has become for most writers, and especially for Durrell, "an urban apocalypse with the city dissolving into a desert where voices [sing] from exhausted wells."¹¹ Burton Pike's description of T. S. Eliot's "unreal city" could easily be applied to Durrell's urban apocalypse: "The denizens of the city lead

⁹The Image of the City in Modern Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) 121.

¹⁰The Image of the City 121.

¹¹The Image of the City 104.

encapsulated lives. The poem's disembodied voices seem to emanate from one mind, but they all speak a bleak despair."¹²

Darley, not a native of Alexandria, but of England, is soon after his arrival one of the city's inhabitants. He finds that his thoughts, his actions, even his memories are taken over by the city's hypnotic effect: "This was Alexandria the unconsciously poetical mother-city exemplified in the names and faces which made up her history" (B 285). Darley compares the city to a mother, but it is a mother who is corrupted physically and spiritually, and she is dying.

Unfortunately, those who look to her for succor continue on, oblivious to her dying, nurture's long absence making them forgetful of their own suffering:

I walked slowly among these extraordinary human blooms, reflecting that a city like a human being collects its predispositions, appetites, and fears. It grows to maturity, utters its prophets, and declines into hebetude, old age or the loneliness which is worse than either. Unaware that their mother is dying, the living still sat there in the open street, like caryatids supporting the darkness, the pains of futurity upon their very eyelids. (J 153)

This old dying city becomes the canvas upon which Durrell's story is painted. The "true children of [the] landscape"

¹²The Image of the City 104.

cannot distinguish the city's story from their own.¹³ Even Darley is unable to unravel what part of his love with Melissa or with Justine or with Clea is uniquely his own and what part of it has been shaped by the city:

Here I thought through the whole story
from beginning to end I say that
I thought it through, but strangely enough
I thought of it not as a personal history
with an individual accent so much as part
of the historical fabric of the place. I
described it to myself as part and parcel
of the city's behavior, completely in keeping
with everything that had gone before, and
everything that would follow it. It was as
if my imagination had become subtly drugged
by the place and could not respond to personal,
individual assessments. (J 154)

All of the inhabitants of Durrell's mythic zoo must contend with the "historic" past of Alexandria, "the capital of memory."¹⁴ According to Darley, the city overwhelms her inhabitants with memories both venal and grand: "I am able to see their [his friends' and lovers'] history and the city as one and the same phenomena" (J 96). Later in Balthazar, Darley claims the city "moves not only backwards into our history, studded by the great names which mark every station of time, but also back and forth in the living present" (B 314). This movement of time

¹³See J 39.

¹⁴References to "Alexandria: the capital of memory" can be found in Justine (152) and Clea (657).

crosses a city "of deception and squalor, this betraying landscape which turned emotion to dust, which beggared friendship and destroyed love" (M 631).

The Spirit of Place

The interplay between the city's past and present reflects Durrell's much discussed interest in time. His self-described "four-decker novel whose form is based upon the relativity proposition," as well as his theories about "Space-Time" have been thoroughly scrutinized.¹⁵ But the discussion here is limited to what he achieves rather than what he attempts. The strengths of this work lie not in the vast theorizing about word continuums and the relativity principle, but instead in the work's systematic use of image--the city is a cage, its inhabitants are reduced to their bestial natures, and the only hope for salvation is art.

In the Quartet, the city is the focal point, though certainly its present is blurred with its past. It is the city's past, its memories, reshaped as new information

¹⁵For articles dealing with Durrell's use of time, see Martin Green, "Lawrence Durrell II: Minority Report," Yale Review IL, 469-508; Matthew Proser, "Darley's Dilemma: The Problem of Structure in Durrell's Alexandria Quartet" Critique IV, ii, 18-28; Chet Taylor, "Dissonance and Digression: The Ill Fitting Fusion of Philosophy and Form in Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria Quartet," Modern Fiction Studies XIII, 345-59; A.K. Weatherhead, "Romantic Anachronism in the Alexandria Quartet," Modern Fiction Studies X, 128-36.

comes to light, which molds the present. In her early review of the Quartet, Cecily Mackworth refers to Durrell's use of historic time:

Obviously, it [the Quartet] is concerned with Time. . . . The problem of Time, an uneasy awareness that the span of life is something more than the adding of minutes between birth and death has been part of human psychology from the beginning Much literature proves to be concerned with the desire to escape from the trammels of Historic Time.¹⁶

What Mackworth does not say is that this desire to escape is necessarily frustrated, according to the Quartet. Darley tells the reader that "as poet of the historic consciousness" he is supposed to see the landscape as "a field dominated by the human wish" but he quickly comes to see that this wish is necessarily "inherited from the site; that man depends for the furniture of the will upon the location of his place" (J 95). At the center then is the spirit of place:

Lawrence Durrell has evidently committed his imagination to the idea that the landscape, the scene of life, is the molder of it, that the genius of the place posits its power into the inhabitant so profligately that it makes them over the transient as well as the native; it enslaves them.¹⁷

¹⁶"Lawrence Durrell and the New Romanticism" in The World of Lawrence Durrell, ed. Harry T. Moore (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1962) 29-30.

¹⁷John Arthos, "Lawrence Durrell's Gnosticism" The Personalist, XLIII, iii, 360.

Historic events, such as Antony leaving Alexandria, are "refunded into place," according to Durrell, and consequently color "ordinary" events. The exciting, but obsessive and destructive love of its archetypal lovers, Antony and Cleopatra affects most of the lovers in the work.¹⁸ Darley's decipherings of the present are always dependent on his memories, the memories of others, and the memory of the often personified and vilified Alexandria.

This is not to say, as does Robert Scholes, that Durrell's Alexandria is reduced to a faithful rendering of "the ancient spirit of the place," and that there is little to connect Durrell's fictional Alexandria with the geographical city except a few place names.¹⁹ Scholes' arguments concerning Durrell's fidelity to the ancient spirit of the place are convincing, but certainly the scope of the Quartet is larger than this. The action, after all, takes place in the modern, not the ancient, world. The ancient spirit, pervasive as a part of the city's known heritage, will influence, even delineate the possibilities of the modern course of events, but this influence stops short of a modern replication of past events.

¹⁸For further discussion of the Antony/Cleopatra motif see Chapter II, sec ii.

¹⁹Fabulation and Metafiction 34.

The Downward Turn

Today in Durrell's Alexandria will certainly be forcefully shaped by yesterday, for Durrell repeatedly writes about the cyclical nature of history.²⁰ But the cycle takes a downward turn, the center cannot hold. The modern world, with its emphasis on the commercial, and its ability to wreck global havoc, has its own twist. The new inhabitants, these "shallow imitations," are caught in the same traps as their predecessors, doomed by the same fate of eventual self destruction with none of the original glory.

The history of place serves as another jailor for Durrell's Alexandrians. They must live within the confines of the city's past. Part of the ambiance of this particular place is the contrast between what was and what

²⁰Of course, Durrell's city, whether true to the ancient or the modern spirit of the place, is still a fictional creation, a metaphor for Durrell's sense of the human condition. His claim that "only the city is real" is another layer of the fiction. The city which Durrell evokes is finally "half-imagined." According to Burton Pike, a city described in words, especially when depicted in a fictional text, is "toponymical rather than topographical--their [creative writers'] references to the city outside the topographical--their references to the city outside the text may appear to be direct, but it is actually indirect" [The Image of the City 12].

is and what can never be again. Burton Pike asserts, that the image of the modern city thus displaced backward in time insures its "metaphorization," placing it in the realm of the imaginary while also insisting on its reality: "The result of this procedure is not the evocation of a historically past city but a palimpsestic impression, which results in a tension between the city as past and the city as present."²¹

It is this palimpsestic impression Durrell seeks to capture. Part III of Balthazar begins with Darley quoting the Interlinear:

I suppose (writes Balthazar) that if you wished to somehow incorporate all I am telling you into your own Justine manuscript now, you would find yourself with a curious sort of book--the story would be told, so to speak in layers. . . . perhaps, like some medieval palimpsest where different sorts of truth are thrown down one upon the other (E 338)

Multiple races, multiple times, multiple religions, multiple lovers all serve to render this palimpsestic vision. However, for Durrell plurality does not liberate; it only stifles, adding one more suffocating layer, one more trap to be avoided. For one critic, the variety of involvements in the Quartet "merely underlines the common torment and confusion. All end in defeat and failure."²²

²¹The Image of the City 13.

²²"The Counterlife of Heresy" 361.

Nor does it matter what kind of involvement it is. Whether it be romantic, religious, financial, or political all are entwined with one another. All have been tainted by "Alexandria and its 'infection.'"²³

²³"The Counterlife of Heresy" 361.

II

Groddeck's IT and Alexandria's Infection

I do maintain that man creates his
own illnesses for a definite
purpose

--Georg Groddeck, Book of It

Durrell's Alexandria is a landscape marked by disease and lethargy. Such a landscape serves as a controlling metaphor for the spiritual illnesses of its inhabitants. The city itself is diseased, and those within the confines of its walls have been contaminated. Durrell's characters must contend with illness as a way of life, for they all are either seriously ill physically, or they are mentally ill, or they have been maimed or disfigured.

When we meet Darley, he is ill with syphilis. Balthazar also suffers the ravages of the disease. Melissa is ill from the beginning of the work and finally dies of tuberculosis. Justine suffers from a clinical hysteria and later is disfigured by a stroke. Scobie, Capodistria, and Nessim lose an eye. Clea loses a hand and Nessim a finger; Amaril's wife is born without a nose.

One is not surprised to learn that Durrell is interested in the works of the psychoanalyst Georg

Groddeck²⁴ in general and in his ideas on illness and disease in specific. In 1961, Durrell wrote an introduction to Groddeck's The Book of It, and in his Key to Modern Poetry, Durrell devotes an entire section to Groddeck. For Groddeck, illness and accidents were creative, though injurious, acts. Durrell writes,

Illness . . . bears the same relation to the patient as does handwriting, his ability to write poetry, his ability to make money; creation, whether in a poem or in a cancer, was still creation for Groddeck.²⁵

Of course, this inverted, destructive form of creativity results in pain and even death for its creator.

Given what we know today about the importance genetics plays in disease, many of Groddeck's ideas have lost their appeal. However, much of the recent research on the interplay between stress and health has supported his

²⁴Georg Walther Groddeck (1866-1934) was a friend and an admirer of Freud's. He shared many of the same ideas as Freud. His ideas about the It greatly resemble Freud's on the unconscious, but Groddeck's theories include physiological as well as psychological responses. Though he was an admirer of Freud's and shared many of the same ideas on repression, transference, and the unconscious, he was not a student of Freud's in the traditional sense. He never let his ideas be overwhelmed by Freud's. Though they corresponded for years, each man held to his own ideas relatively unaffected by the other. [See Georg Groddeck, The Meaning of Illness: Selected Psychoanalytic Writings (including his correspondence with Freud) (New York: International Universities Press, 1977).] Groddeck's writings were very much in vogue in the early 30s and 40s, but his work has now lapsed into obscurity.

²⁵Introduction to Book of It, (Das Buch vom Es, 1923), tr. V. M. E. Collins (London: Vision Press, 1950), ix-x.

notion that some illnesses seem to be self-inflicted. For Durrell, though, Groddeck is important because he views a man's physical condition "as the outward manifestation of the internal man. Thus, disease and illness are seen as expressions of a man's personal identity."²⁶

If in Durrell's Alexandria, disease is taken as an outward manifestation of internal distress, then it is clear that the city's inhabitants are seriously distressed indeed. For Groddeck disease is controlled by the It. The It is a concept pertaining to the individual's inner life, controlling both voluntary and involuntary processes, both emotional and physical responses. The It is unknowable in the traditional sense, and it is elusive. Of course, such ideas are necessarily quite vague, and the mystic quality of Groddeck's writing is perhaps the reason he was once very popular and the same reason why now he is not. However, he still provides a key in understanding Durrell's Alexandria: "Durrell attributes an It to the unknowable that is Alexandria; and its forces, conflicts, and will are greater, more 'real' than its uncertain inhabitants."²⁷ The diseases, the maimings, the general

²⁶Alan Warren Friedman, Lawrence Durrell and The Alexandria Quartet: Art for Love's Sake (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 1970) 49.

²⁷Lawrence Durrell and the Alexandria Quartet 69.

physical corruptions, erupting in Alexandria, reflect her personality more so than it does her inhabitants.

III

Gnosticism: Another Layer

When you come to know yourselves,
then you will be known, and you
will realize that you are the sons
of the living Father. But if you
will not know yourselves, then you
dwell in poverty, and it is you
who are that poverty.

--Gospel of Thomas 32.19-33.5

Durrell's Alexandria is a city of religious variety. Copts, Jews, Christians, and Gnostics all people the city, carrying on complicated machinations to insure their own survival and to expedite the demise of their enemies. Religion becomes a way of marking territory. Each fears and suspects the other beyond his own particular domain. Hatred is visceral. Man develops two basic responses. He either becomes a trapped animal, lashing out at whatever comes near him, suspecting any moving object as an agent of force against him, or he takes control of his world through denial. Passivity taken to its extremes becomes the ultimate refusal.

Durrell singles out Gnosticism as a religion of particular interest for several reasons, the most significant being that it more than any other religion described in the work emphasizes the negative aspects of human existence. Just as the present city is at odds with

its past, the gnostic is at odds with the world. The gnostic feels "a sense of inner estrangement from the so-called real world."²⁸ The gnostic freely chooses "death to expose ordinary life as worse than death. The world is a great lie that gnostics refuse to accept."²⁹

Durrell uses gnosticism as a backdrop to underscore the sense of hopeless entrapment that the individual Alexandrian feels, for Gnosticism is "a total and uncompromising rejection of existence. By facing the truth about the world, the gnostic tries to live a life totally against the grain."³⁰ Anthropologist James Fernandez argues that people embrace religious experiences because they want to change the way they feel--about themselves and about their world: "They come into a particular cult with some constellation of feelings--isolation, disengagement, powerlessness, enervation, debasement, contamination--from which they need to move away."³¹ Gnosticism does not help the seeker move away. Instead, it validates his feelings of isolation, of powerlessness, and of contamination:

²⁸Lawrence Durrell, Monsieur (New York: Viking Press, 1974)137.

²⁹Reed Way Dasenbrock, "The Counterlife of Heresy" in Critical Essays of Lawrence Durrell, ed. Alan Warren Friedman (New York: G. K. Hall, 1987)225.

³⁰ "The Counter Life of Heresy" 224.

³¹Myth, Symbol, and Culture, ed. Clifford Geertz (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1971)56.

The force of sex and love, the 'historic consciousness,' the power of the city, are the life the Demiurge has given them, the force asserting itself in the Cretan mountains and in Rhodes and Paris and Alexandria. The universe and all its people are the creation of the false God, all is evil and the embodiment of evil.³²

The initiate learns that all is debased indeed. Durrell himself calls this a "pessimistic gnosticism," and it is this pessimism which infuses the work.

It is this pessimism which is a persistent theme in Durrell's other works as well. Even in such early novels as Panic Spring, Durrell took great pains to depict a state of irremedial helplessness. Characters are trapped in a "doctrine of spiritual passivity." In The Black Book, would-be artists are debilitated by an enormous lack of will. Even if the artist has enough talent to create, the overwhelming question seems to be, "What is the point?"

However, Gnosticism is attractive for Durrell because it advocates looking within.³³ There are similarities between Durrell's vision of the artist and the Gnostic

³²John Arthos, "Lawrence Durrell's Gnosticism" 363.

³³Durrell was attracted to various religions. He hoped to "find a pathway which would lead me to a deeper understanding of myself"; however, though he regarded such study as "productive for the inner man," there was always "a native and inborn skepticism" which kept him "free from the toils of any denominational religion." [John Arthos, "Lawrence Durrell's Gnosticism" 366-367. Arthos quotes Durrell, but does not identify his source.]

search for truth.³⁴ Both are looking for the "illuminating light within":

It is within the image of the Light, which the self is, that man must find his way back to the Light, even, if that image is occluded by the dross of flesh, of cosmogonic irony, of misdirected desire. By discovering the fragment of pure light lost in the self, one intimates the real, primal identity with God ³⁵

Through such an inward search, the Gnostic creates God within himself, the artist his art. Like the Gnostic, Durrell's artist must clear the "dross of flesh" and redirect "misdirected desire" in order to create order of his life's own chaos. The result for both the Gnostic and the artist is a sense of alienation as artist comes closer to his vision and gnostic to "the divine principle," the individual self's "sense of estrangement from the world and all its trappings becomes greater, even as its own powers of creation are increased."³⁶

Both the Gnostic and the artist wish to create order out of chaos. But the order Gnosticism creates, finally, is through a total negation. For Durrell, it is a destructive rather than productive force which finally dead ends. The orthodox and the heretical believer find they

³⁴For a more in depth analysis of Durrell's vision of the artist see Chapter Five.

³⁵Jefferson Humphries, The Otherness Within (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983)5.

³⁶The Otherness Within 5.

are not too different in their life-denying assertions. And both find themselves looking for reasons for "believing in the absurd."³⁷

Elaine Pagels sees the dissolution of early Gnostic sects as politically based. Valentinus (c. 140 A.D.), the most eloquent defender of Gnosticism, proved to be a serious threat to the hierarchy of the orthodox church.³⁸ He claimed, as Justine reports to Darley, that a demiurge, not God, created the world (J 35). The Gnostic initiate, in the tradition of Valentinus, learns to reject the authority of the creator (this demiurge) and his demands:

Before gaining gnosis, the candidate worshiped the demiurge, mistaking him for the true God: now, through the sacrament of redemption, the candidate indicates that he has been released from the demiurge's power. In this ritual he addresses the demiurge, declaring his independence serving notice that he no longer belongs to the demiurge's sphere of authority and judgment, but to what it transcends.³⁹

³⁷Tertullian, an effective orthodox Christian writer (c. 190 A. D.), who was very much opposed to the Gnostic movement, wrote that one must believe in the literal suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ: "It must be believed because it is absurd." [Elaine Pagels, The Gnostic Gospels (New York: Vintage Books, 1981)5.] Balthazar, Durrell's prime Gnostic in the Quartet, tells Darley, "We are all hunting for reasons for believing the absurd" (J 79).

³⁸The Gnostic Gospels 42.

³⁹The Gnostic Gospels 44.

The Gnostics, apparently, served notice on more than the demiurge. The Gnostic's newfound independence would undermine the pope's claim that a bishop rules on earth "as God rules in heaven."⁴⁰ The result is a breakdown of order.⁶¹

Sophia

But the Gnostics suffer an internal breakdown of order themselves, as is indicated by the story of Sophia, daughter of Valentinus, which Darley tells in relation to Justine⁴¹:

In [Justine], as an Alexandrian, license was in a curious way a form of self-abnegation, a travesty of freedom; and if I saw her as an exemplar of the city it was not Alexander, or Plotinus that I was forced to think, but of the sad thirtieth child of Valentinus who fell, "not like Lucifer by rebelling against God, but by desiring too ardently to be united with him."* Anything pressed too far becomes a sin.

Broken from the divine harmony of herself she fell, says the tragic philosopher, and became the manifestation of matter; and the whole universe of her city, of the world, was formed out of her agony and remorse. The tragic seed from which her thoughts and actions grew was the seed of a pessimistic gnosticism. (J 39)⁴²

⁴⁰The Gnostic Gospels 45.

⁴¹Durrell took much of his understanding of Alexandrian Gnosticism from E. M. Forster. According to Forster, Gnostics are for the most part "unsavory charlatans" who perverted logic in order to preach to be "good we must be bad." [Alexandria: A History and A Guide, intro. Lawrence Durrell (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986)76.]

⁴²Durrell quotes Forster here and acknowledges it with an endnote. [See Forster, Alexandria 76.]

Again, the cycle takes a downward turn. This thirtieth child, "broken from herself," tries to find herself through another. This is not possible for Sophia, and by extension it is not possible for the religious man or the artist. And it is on Sophia, this woman who senses an enormous lack, this woman who will not know herself, that the city is based. It is her tragic seed of pessimism, says Durrell, which gave rise to Alexandria, and all "dwell in poverty." The Gnostics were a group originally seeking the "eternal light" only to find it irrevocably corrupted by a city of darkness.⁴³

Finally, in the gnostic belief system in Durrell's world, the light is no longer sought; only a rejection of the darkness is hoped for. Suicide becomes an act of defiance, an obligation of all in the inner circle. Though Durrell has several strong characters including Pursewarden who do indeed commit suicide, he clearly is not supporting this "grand refusal" as a potentially correct or appropriate response.

In Monsieur, the first novel of the Avignon Quintet, Durrell again uses Gnosticism as a symbol for unrepenting

⁴³Images of darkness (J 93, 118, 138, 145, 149, 150, 156, 171, 172, 173, 178, 183, 190), shadows (J 70, 75, 87, 116, 161) and sightlessness (J 86, C 743) abound in the Quartet.

passivity and total defeat. Akaad tells Piers, a potential initiate, about the rejection of the "physical envelope":

Everything lies in the act of acceptance, to join finally the spiritual trust of the mature who have tasted the world to the full and wish to be purged of the physical envelope. They join the inner circle and make an act of acceptance--that is what constitutes the gnostic suicide. They accept, then, their own execution, but it is not their own hand that is raised against them. . . . The person who is the instrument [the executioner] is chosen by lot, and is always one who himself has joined the inner circle of the faithful and renounced temporal life. The procedure is of impeccable order.⁴⁴

In Monsieur, the Gnostic circle becomes a microcosm of the world at large. Man's fate seems chosen by lot. The Gnostic imposes an order on the universe even though that order is destructive rather than productive. For Durrell, gnosticism is itself a symptom of a world gone awry. Though the word acceptance is repeated here, the gnostic suicide is in reality a grand, albeit passive, refusal to accept life on its own terms. Darley refers to Pursewarden's own suicide in a similar manner. However, for Durrell, the true artist, the truly great man does not say no. In one of his long perorations, Pursewarden says that he is full of hope:

For always, at every moment of time, there is a chance that the artist will stumble upon what I can only call The Great Inkling! Whenever

⁴⁴145-46. The emphasis is mine.

this happens he is at once free to enjoy his fecundating rôle Yes, I believe in this miracle. Our very existence as artists affirms it! It is the act of yea-saying about which the old poet of the city speaks in a poem you [Darley] once showed me in translation.* The fact of the artist being born affirms and reaffirms this in every generation. . . . (C 761)

The language here is very positive including such words as yes, yea-saying, fecundating, affirms, and reaffirms. The artist accepts, not rejects his responsibilities. He truly affirms and not merely accepts.

The poem Pursewarden refers to in this passage is further evidence in support of this point. Durrell includes the entire poem, "a free translation from C. P. Cavafy," at the end of Clea:

Che Fece...Il Gran Fifiuto

To some among us comes that implacable day
Demanding that we stand our ground and utter
By choice of will the great Yea or Nay.
And whosoever has in him the affirming word
Will straight way then be heard.
The pathways of his life will clear at once
And all rewards will crown his way.
But he, the other who denies,
No one can say he lies; he would repeat
His Nay louder if pressed again.
It is his right--yet by such trifles,
A "No" instead of "Yes" his whole life stinks and
trifles.⁴⁵

The poem makes clear Durrell's support of the great yea. Or does it? After all the poem is by Cavafy not

⁴⁵The Complete Poems of Cavafy, intro. W. H. Auden (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1961)10.

Durrell.

However, a look at translations other than Durrell's own reveals more about Durrell's personal attitudes. Rae Dalvin's translation of "Che face" is less "free" than Durrell's and reveals some interesting differences between Durrell and Cavafy:

To certain people there comes a day
when they must say the great Yes or the great No.
He who has the Yes ready within him
reveals himself at once, and saying it he crosses over

to the path of honor and his own conviction.
He who refuses does not repent. Should he be asked
again,
he would say No again. And yet that No--
the right No--crushes him for the rest of his life.

In Durrell's translation, the man who affirms will have all rewards to crown his way. In Dalvin's translation the word No dominates, and we learn that it is the right No. Durrell is as hostile to those who say no, to the Celestines of world, as is Dante himself.

Durrell wishes to get to the original Gnostic premise, to know oneself, to seek an inner light or truth which will provide the base for a creative, productive life. But in the Alexandria Durrell depicts, returning to such principles is very difficult, nearly impossible, for it is a place where love has been replaced by violence, asceticism by fanaticism, art by disease. It is this place, this cage that reduces man to animal, emphasizing

his physical and therefore corruptible nature. Now to an examination of Durrell's menagerie.

CHAPTER TWO

Predatory Animals And Their Human Counterparts

I

Introduction

"Quel tableau que la Création!
Un massacre général! Les lois les
plus féroces, les plus barbares,
les plus horriblement inhumaines:
luttent pour la Vie, l'élimination
des faibles, l'être mangeant
l'être et mangé par l'être . . ."

--Lawrence Durrell, Monsieur

Predation is a theme common to many works by Durrell, and in The Alexandria Quartet it is central. Durrell's Alexandria is a world where prey abounds. The question arises to whom or to what do these victims fall prey. In Durrell's animal kingdom, there is a Blakean opposition--the lamb on one side and the tiger on the other. But the Durrellian lamb is not a Christ figure sacrificing himself for the common good. He is a victim of biological and environmental forces larger than himself. He comprehends little, and the harm he endures is in no way an historical investment. His suffering accomplishes nothing, teaches nothing, creates nothing but pain.

Nor is there a fearful symmetry in the Durrellian tiger. The Alexandrian predator is driven by forces other than instinct, forces other than simply desire and power. The predator is as uncomprehending as the prey. There is no victory, no sense of elation, no glorying in domination. Only the drive to continue exists, the urge to maintain oneself, to survive. Eventually, even that drive weakens and the predator becomes the prey--"l'être mangeant l'être et mangé par l'être."

In the natural world, animals act instinctively, "surrendering to biological fate and evolutionary destiny."¹ But cultural man or woman is driven by "an imaginary lack that gives birth to desire, language, intersubjectivity, social life."² Durrell creates a world that has become stagnant where the "imaginary lack" no longer gives birth to creativity and art, but instead creates hysteria and careless destruction. Again, Lawrence Durrell erodes the distinction between human beings and animals and neither group betters itself by such an erosion. The individual Alexandrian becomes the beast instinctively sensing a lack, and either surrenders passively to it or blindly strikes out against it. Justine

¹Margot Norris, Beasts of the Modern Imagination (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 4.

²Beasts of the Modern Imagination 4.

and Capodistria embody those who act in order to fill up the void. Their actions are often destructive to others and even to themselves. But their actions, at least momentarily, empower them.

II

Justine and other Man-Eating Cats

Anthony: Betray'd I am.
O this false soul of Egypt! this grave charm
Whose eyes beck'd forth my wars and called
them home,
Whose bosom was my crown, my chief end,
Like a right gypsy hath at fast and loose
Beguiled me to the very heart of loss.

--Shakespeare, Anthony and Cleopatra

Cleopatra

In the Quartet, the figure of Cleopatra, so strongly attached to and equated with Alexandria, appears repeatedly. Most of the male characters in the novels have their Cleopatras, and her mythic figure is invariably associated with cats. Balthazar says of Arnauti and Justine, "she preyed upon all that he might have kept separate--his artisthood if you like. He is when all is said and done, a sort of minor Antony and she is a Cleo" (J 82). And so again we see the predator image, one closely associated with the city itself. Justine is a Cleo, characterized by her own "imaginary lack." Jane Pinchin writes, "Justine--this Cleo--will defeat you, sap your energies, give you over to the abyss Or she may judge you unworthy, not potent

enough to arouse her, to solve the riddle, to release the sword."³

Justine seeks out artists, men of talent, and proceeds to drain them of their potential. She is another of Alexandria's vampires, forced to draw on the life blood of others because of her own anemic spirit. She is one of the city's great lovers who place "Lips not on lips, but on each other's wounds" (B 349). Darley says of her:

She could not help but remind me of that race
of terrific queens which left behind them the
ammoniac smell of their incestuous loves to hover
like a cloud over the Alexandrian subconscious.
(J 23)

In his travel guide to Alexandria, E. M. Forster describes the world of the Ptolemies which originally fostered these "terrific queens": "The average Ptolemy is soft . . . not naturally cruel, he is easily hurried into cruelty; he is unexpectedly shy; in his old age he grows fat. . . . And as the men soften, the women harden."⁴ The phrase "terrific queens" is actually Forster's:

The dynasty is interwoven with terrific queens.
There is the Arsinoe whom Philadelphus married;
there is Arsinoe III who faced the Syrian army
at Rafa; there is Cleopatra III who murdered her

³Jane Pinchin, "Durrell's Fatal Cleopatra," Modern Fiction Studies, XXVIII, ii, 229.

⁴E.M. Forster, Alexandria: A History and A Guide, Introduction by Lawrence Durrell (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982)23.

son; and there is the last and greatest Cleopatra, with whom the tangled race expires.⁵

This "tangled race" of women is characterized by violence and indifference. In Cleopatra, who does "not differ from the other able and unscrupulous queens of her race," these traits culminate in the quintessential courtesan. She is a passionate figure, but she is not "a slave of passion, still less of sentimentality. Her safety, and the safety of Egypt were her care; the clumsy and amorous Romans, who menaced both, were her natural prey."⁶

Cats

Justine is the modern femme fatale in this "city which remembers Cleopatra."⁷ Durrell says explicitly of Justine, "I think Cleopatra was probably something like her."⁸ Justine, like the other Cleos in the work, can use her charms like a professional to put forward her hidden agenda. She, too, has become hardened, and like the original

⁵Alexandria 23. For further examples of Durrell's creative "plagiarism" see William Godshalk, "Some Sources of Durrell's Alexandria Quartet," Modern Fiction Studies, XIII, 361-74.

⁶Alexandria 25-26.

⁷"Durrell's Fatal Cleopatra" 229.

⁸First quoted in "Lawrence Durrell Answers a Few Questions," Two Cities (1959), later reported in The World of Lawrence Durrell, ed. Harry T. Moore (New York: Dutton, 1964)158.

Cleopatra, she chooses as prey those from less fevered lands, those who have gone soft. The animal most often associated with Cleopatra is the cat. In ancient Egypt the cat was not only a sacred symbol, representing fertility and mystery, but it was also a magical being, a living deity. Cleopatra likened herself to the cat, emphasizing its mysterious aloofness, its unpredictable nature, and its deadly playfulness.

In ancient Egypt, the cat, once a symbol for a deity, became a deity itself: "Those Egyptians who worshipped their cats appear to have been confusing the animal with the archetype Egyptians endowed the cat with the image of Bastet, the goddess."⁹ The cat became so sacred that it could not be exported.¹⁰ Subsequently, in places like Rome and Greece the cat took on more sinister associations. Aloofness and mystery were still associated with the cat, but it also became the "concomitant of supernatural evil: Hecate, goddess of the underworld, transformed herself into a cat according to Ovid; the witches in Apuleius' Golden Ass became cats."¹¹ Even in Egypt the black cat was "ritually

⁹Patricia Dale-Green, The Archetypal Cat (Dallas: Spring Publications, Inc., 1963)143.

¹⁰Beryl Rowland, Animals with Human Faces: A Guide to Animal Symbolism (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1973) 50-51.

¹¹Animals with Human Faces 51.

burnt . . . [because] many people saw them not as animals but as witches, whom they were naturally anxious to destroy."¹²

In the Christian world, the cat was often a symbol of the devil. Heretics were often accused of worshipping the devil in the form of a black tom, "The devotees kissed the Devil's feline posterior and then proceeded 'to the most abominable fornication with no regard for shame or relationship.'"¹³ After Pope Innocent made legal the execution of witches, thousands were burned at the stake for the mere crime of owning a cat.¹⁴

Nor has the imagery completely vanished today in either the Christian or non-Christian worlds. In Nepal, for example, animal sacrifices are still made when a new jet is getting ready for its first take-off. A cat is never sacrificed; in fact, cats cannot even be found on the animal-choked streets for "they embody evil spirits."¹⁵ Cats are still associated often with heretical factions, with evil and darkness, and with the occult.

¹²The Archetypal Cat 143.

¹³Animals with Human Faces 51.

¹⁴The Archetypal Cat 128.

¹⁵Robert Craft, "On Top of the World: A Nepal Diary," The New York Review of Books, XXXVII, viii, May 17, 1990, 22.

As Justine finds herself involved in the occult world, including mysterious Gnostic rites and Coptic plots of vengeance and sacrifice, such associations seem quite appropriate.

For Durrell, Alexandria is a place where different worlds meet. In his introduction to Forster's Alexandria: A History and a Guide, Durrell writes that coming ashore in Alexandria "is like walking the plank for instantly you feel, not only the plangently Greek city rising before you, but its backcloth of deserts stretching away into the heart of Africa."¹⁶ In his manipulation of feline imagery, Durrell combines these disparate views of the world. In doing so, Durrell creates the perfect image to use in connection with Justine.

The cat of Egypt adds mystery and a sense of the supernatural while the Greek and European cat adds threat and danger. In this combination we have Darley's sense of Justine. Her mysterious manner and the aura of menace which surrounds her transform her into more than a hysterical nymphomaniac. Justine becomes the Cleopatra that can seduce an otherwise sensible man into betraying his work, his friends, his family, even his vision of himself. She is so seductive, so mysterious, that a victim can "hardly bring himself to fear" (J 63).

¹⁶ E. M. Forster xvi.

Justine plays a cat and mouse game with several men in addition to Darley, including Arnauti and Nessim. These men, even as they are aware of what is happening to them, cannot escape. Darley, while watching Justine dance with Nessim, notices that "she gazed about her like a half-trained panther" (J 30). Justine's first husband, Jacob Arnauti, makes a similar observation: "Suffering, let us say, from some imagined slight at a dinner-party she would patrol the strip of carpet at the foot of the bed like a panther" (J 62).

This "half-trained panther" attacks those who grant her proximity. She preys on those who most want to pay her homage. Then just as they are psychologically exhausted and are ready to be done with her, she retracts her claws, and attempts to entice her victim with promises of sexual ecstasy. Durrell's Cleopatra acts partly out of design and partly out of biological necessity. Arnauti writes that Justine is "like women who think by biological precept and without help of reason" (J 120). Without reason, the divide separating humanity and animality collapses: "To such women how fatal an error it is to give oneself; there is simply a small chewing noise, as when the cat reaches the backbone of the mouse" (J 120).

When Justine first begins toying with Darley, she sits in a restaurant with him eating olives, "spitting like a

cat" (J 32). Pursewarden finds it comical that Darley thinks of himself as the predator. Darley publishes a short story in which he clearly is describing his relationship with Justine as he would like to see it. A thinly disguised Justine character exclaims, "In his arms I felt mauled, chewed up . . . as if between the paws of some great excited cat" (M 481). Pursewarden reels at such an image, for he knows that "'this is just what Justine is doing to the poor bugger [Darley]--eating him alive!'" (M 481).

After Justine and Darley make love for the first time, Justine starts to pace and "getting out of bed she walked over to the dressing-table with its row of photos and powder-boxes and with a single blow like that of a leopard's paw swept it clean" (J 75). Nor is the blow simply intended for the powder-boxes. The blow is symbolic of the blows dealt those most loved:

"That" she said "is what I am doing to Nessim and you to Melissa! It would be ignoble to try and pretend otherwise." This was more in the tradition that Arnauti led me to expect and I said nothing. She turned now and started kissing me with such a hungry agony that my burnt shoulders began to throb until tears came into my eyes. (J 75)

Sex and animal violence constitutes the tradition of Justine and by extension of all of Alexandria. Lovers--the poor buggers--are eaten alive.

Justine says of Pombal that he is "one of the great primates of sex." Clearly, the same is implied of her. Justine, "a true child of Alexandria" (J 28), traps her lovers in a cage like that of the city, and though they cannot leave her, she deserts them with ease. For example, when Capodistria is thought to have been killed during the duck shoot, Justine leaves both her husband and her lover without saying a word, and her desertion is permanent.

Justine is only one of the many Cleopatras in the Quartet, for Alexandria's history has left a permanent imprint (a permanent scar) on its women, its lovers.

Mountolive also falls under the power of such a woman:

"Soon he would be overtaken: but warm in the circle of Leila's arms, as if he were Antony, at Actium" and again like many of the other Antonys "he could hardly bring himself to fear" (J 63).

Darley is first attracted to Melissa after meeting her at a party where the smell of "briny paws" is overwhelming. Melissa is drunk and has taken Spanish fly. With Pursewarden's help, Darley wraps the nearly unconscious Melissa in a Bakura rug: "Together we staggered with her down the corridor and into the blessed privacy of my box-room where, like Cleopatra we unrolled her and placed her on the bed" (J 53). The original Cleopatra wrapped herself in carpets to be delivered at the feet of Caesar, conquering

him with her wit and charm, securing his support in her battles against her brother/husband. Melissa is not so calculating. She is literally unconscious of the effect she has. She conquers by pity rather than by charm. Later Darley also has Clea, yet another Cleopatra, and as if her name were not a sufficient clue, he affectionately refers to her as his "little Cleo." The modern version has been reduced to a pet.

These contemporary reproductions are at best inconsequential caricatures. Because of the history, the memory of the city she inhabits, Justine is only temporarily able to become more than a "tiresome, hysterical Jewess." Clea tells Darley that Justine is a whore in the Alexandrian tradition, with that true power of her predecessors to wound men:

But of course our friend is only a shallow twentieth-century reproduction of the great hetaerae of the past, the type to which she belongs without knowing it, Lais, Charis, and the rest Justine's role had been taken from her and on her shoulders society has placed the burden of guilt to add to her troubles. It is a pity. For she is truly Alexandrian." (J 63)

This historic comparison both adds to and detracts from the image of Justine. She becomes more exotic, more mysterious when linked with these powerful figures of the past, but she is only a "shallow reproduction." The contemporary woman is found lacking. By constant juxtaposition with the grand past, the quotidian present can only suffer. Alexandria

imposes such comparisons and diminishes in the process whatever is unique about the present. Justine becomes a mélange of her own past and the city's past, losing her integral personality in a succession of masks, and as Balthazar tells Darley, "All our [Alexandria's] women are Justines" (J 81).

Antony

For every Cleopatra in the Quartet there is an attending Anthony. These Antonys--Arnauti, and Darley, and Mountolive--are, like the original, from more temperate, less fevered lands. Nursed on control and restraint, they are at once caught by the seductiveness, the very physicality, even animality of this city and her women. And all have difficulty seeing through the rich, breathy haze of Alexandria.

The modern day Antony is for the most part rendered in beastly terms, characterized as "a sweaty porcupine," "a tame seal," or even "one of the beasts of the Apocalypse." The old furrier Cohen, for example, the cast off lover of Melissa, is explicitly compared to Antony. He is yet another man whose energies have been sapped.

When dying, the deserted Cohen sings a bit of "Jamais de la Vie," and Darley ironically associates his song with the "heart sundering choirs" Antony hears before he relinquishes Alexandria. This man whom he compares to

Antony, this Cohen, whom Darley says has become an "historic figure" (J 89), is the same man Darley once could not bear to look at because of the furrier's physical, bestial appearance:

I for my part could not bear to look at that heavy pock-marked face with its bestial saturnine cluster of tormented features smeared on it--could not bear to think of his gross intimacies with her [Melissa]; those sweaty hands covered as thickly as a porcupine. (J 25)

This modern day Antony is also a much diminished imitation. His dying is more dignified than his living, yet even here Durrell associates him with a pathetic beast: "To be forgotten in this way was to die the death of a dog" (J 25).

The parallels between Antony and Darley are less surprising, less bestial, but still there is the underlying image of a trapped animal. Both Antony and Darley love passionately, and for both the act of loving is destructive. Antony's love for Cleopatra leaves him powerless as a leader; Darley's love for Melissa, later Justine, and finally Clea leaves him impotent as a writer. (Mountolive also falls under the power of such a woman: "Soon he would be overtaken: but warm in the circle of Leila's arms, as if he were Antony, at Actium, he could hardly bring himself to fear" [J 63].)

Like Antony, Darley is able to conceive of a love that is "as perfect as it was wrong-headed" (J 10). Antony loses Rome, and eventually his life; Darley, if only temporarily,

loses art. But finally both Antony and Darley realize that they must give up their loves, must surrender Alexandria. The night before he is to leave the city, Darley hears much the same music that Antony heard when Alexandria deserted him--unlike Cohen and Mountolive, who hear "Jamais de la Vie," or Narouz who hears inhuman cries and the wild beating of a drum.

Durrell's inclusion of poems written by Constantine Cavafy, the poet who a few decades earlier had celebrated Alexandria's history and perpetuated her memories in his poetry, anchors this departure scene even more completely in the poem "The City." This poem, quoted earlier in Chapter 1 and again here, is central to an understanding of Durrell's Alexandria. Cavafy (and subsequently Durrell) depicts the city as a usurper. Like a vampire, she alters the very core, the very chemistry of the person who has come into contact with her:

There's no new land, my friend, no
New sea; for the city will follow you
In the same streets you'll wander endlessly,
The same mental suburbs slip from youth to age,
In the same house go white at last--
The city is a cage. (J 201)

Alexandria cages in its men, reduces them to powerlessness, renders them incapable of disciplined rationality necessary for governing or for art. What remains is a mindless, helpless beast who diverts his attention from his loss through physical indulgence. Once

the degradation is complete, the enslavement total,
Alexandria deserts the very man she fought so hard to
overpower. In "The God Abandons Antony," Cavafy points to
Alexandria's desertion of Antony:

When suddenly at darkest midnight heard,
The invisible company passing, the clear voices,
Ravishing music of invisible choirs--
Your fortunes having failed you now,
Hopes gone aground, a lifetime of desires
Turned into smoke. Ah! do not agonize
At what is past deceiving
But like a man long since prepared
With courage say your last good-byes
To Alexandria as she is leaving. (J 201-202)

According to Jane Pinchin, the city is a metaphor for life
itself:

The city that Darley and Nessim, like Cavafy's
protagonist, contemplate leaving, encompasses
history, "the whole biological scale of the
heart's affections": life itself. It cannot be
avoided, nor can Durrell's Alexandrians avoid
re-enacting life's crucial events. They are
Antonys. They are Cleopatras. The present and
the past are one.¹⁷

The city does indeed encompass history, and its inhabitants
are caught, as we have seen, in repetitive, destructive,
degenerating cycles.

But to break with Alexandria is not necessarily to
break with humanity or with love or with life. To break
with Alexandria is to break with man's physical, animalistic
nature, to redeem personality and rationality, and thereby

¹⁷Alexandria Still: Forster, Durrell, and Cavafy
(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977) 183.

reassert humanity. To truly leave Alexandria would be to break the spell of Cleopatra. This is a feat that Antony at least cannot manage. But Darley, when he hears the analogous music, is strengthened in his resolve to leave Alexandria and Clea, his Cleopatra. He is determined to get distance--to be an Aeneas, not an Antony.

Darley must retreat to "the island" to get a perspective on the city and its inhabitants, to make his effort to comprehend what really happened to him while he was there. The island is free of the fevered, physical intensity of Alexandria. Part of the reason for this is that it lacks an historic memory:

Surrounded by history on all sides,
this island alone is free from every reference.
It has never been mentioned in the annals
of the race which owns it. Its historic past
is refunded, not into time, but into place--
no temples, groves, amphitheaters to corrupt
ideas with false comparisons. (J 97-98)

Though Darley escapes to this unstoried, and therefore Edenic island, his mind continues to dwell on Alexandria. Just as the old poet promised, the city has followed him. Darley determines to put his world into an historic context. He studies Alexandria carefully, recognizing the tenacity of her siren-like lure and wishing to succeed where all the other Antonys have failed. He does not wish to succumb, to become one of "those whose memories had been appropriated

by the fevered city, clinging to the minds of the old men like traces of perfume upon a sleeve" (J 69).

Durrell emphasizes the depth of Darley's dilemma by repeating this image of the perfume. Even on the island, where he has fled to recover himself and his art after his disastrously Alexandrian relationship with Justine, Darley smells his sleeves "for traces of Justine's perfume" (J 170), as if she were an animal who had "marked" him as part of her own territory.

Finally, the mask of predator is stripped away. The perfume that had once lured Darley comes at last to repel him. He recognizes it as cheap and tawdry, and finds it repulsive. When Darley next sees Justine, she is no longer a great beauty, but is instead an overweight, dull, complaining woman. Her ever-present perfume no longer has the same hypnotic power over him: ". . . The Perfume! At such close quarters the spilled perfume was overpowering, almost nauseating" (C 692).

When the image of the cat was in some way tied to the ideal woman, even to the gods themselves, then it held great fascination for Darley. But Justine is subsequently reduced to mere animality. Sensuality falls to mortal physicality, and Darley is repelled:

I lay awake for a long time to taste,
with perplexity and wonder the disgust
that had now surged up in me, blotting out
every other feeling. From where had it come?

The perfume! The unbearable perfume and the smell of her body. (C 699)

Mystery is explained, to its incalculable loss, and only a kind of baseness remains. Darley has lost his ideal woman. The real woman, imagined as a decaying residue, falls far short. K. Boulding discusses this phenomenon in terms of whole cultures:

Like the gods and goddesses of ancient mythology one almost gets the impression of ideal types battling it above the clouds for the minds and allegiances of men. It is the fall of the ideal image that leads to the collapse of empires and the decay of cultures.¹⁸

In Alexandria the ideal Cleopatra has fallen a great deal, if Justine is to be taken as her contemporary reincarnation. The powerful image of the cat cannot survive the newly "Roman" gaze that Darley brings with him from the island, and the image of the modern day Alexandrian woman is brought up to date for him as well. On Darley's return to Alexandria, Justine seems no longer the mysterious and predatory courtesan, infinitely interesting and infinitely desirable. She appears instead as aged and worn by hardship and war. At best she is catty and hysterical; at worst merely harmless and dull. She can no longer conquer or seduce. Strip away the layers of history and what is left is a fat, empty woman who is herself a victim:

¹⁸K. Boulding, The Image: Knowledge in Life and Society (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1956) 144-145.

The once magnificent image of my love lay now in the hollow of my arm, defenseless as a patient on an operating table, hardly breathing. It was useless even to repeat her name which once held such fearful magic that it had the power to slow the blood in my veins. She had become a woman at last, lying there, soiled and tattered, like a dead bird in a gutter, her hands crumpled into claws. (C 699)

To become a woman at last, in Alexandria, is to become a victim, an animal, soiled and tattered. The Justine who once was magnificent, a dangerous predatory cat, has declined into that beast's archetypal victim, a lifeless bird.

III

Capodistria and the Metamorphosis of Thieves

His tongue which had been undivided
and apt for speech, split; and the
forked tongue
united; then the smoke stopped.

The soul that had become a brute
fled hissing through the ditch,
and after it the other, talking and
sputtering.

--Dante, "Inferno," Canto XXV

According to Robert Frost in The Ax-Helve, the snake stands up for evil in the Garden. In the City, it is Capodistria who stands up for evil. Durrell employs the traditional image of the serpent, pointing to Capodistria's propensity to charm those he does not love and to harm those he does not hate simply because he, like Milton's Satan, is participating in his own personal, grand scheme.

Fertility

Durrell introduces Capodistria as a "goblin" who has "the flat triangular head of the snake with the huge frontal lobes; the hair grows forward in a widow's peak. A whitish flickering tongue is forever busy keeping his thin lips moist" (J 33-34). He is a Dantean beast, a Geryon figure, whose smiling face is a seductive facade covering the

monster below. Capodistria's main vice is women--he has the "purely involuntary knack" of transforming everything he sees into a woman: "Under his eyes chairs become painfully conscious of their bare legs. He impregnates things" (J 38). He can even force a water-melon to "become conscious under his gaze so that it felt the seeds inside it stirring with life!" (J 38). At first this sounds almost positive, as if Capodistria is a great life giver, a bearer of seeds, a virile progenitor.

Certainly, included in the snake's symbolic baggage is fertility. In his discussion of this aspect of serpent mythology, Robert Marteau analyzes a Memling painting hanging in the National Gallery in Washington D.C. The painting includes "le serpent issant du calice eucharitique . . . là encore est signifie de subtil élément de vie se propageant selon le mode ondulatoire et vibratoire."¹⁹ Durrell tempts us with this image, toying with it, twisting it. Durrell embraces the "mode ondulatoire et vibratoire"; however, the promise of fecundity is broken. The potential fertility of Capodistria is strikingly never brought to fruition.

¹⁹"Les mues du serpent," Études françaises, X, iii, 310-311.

Sterility

Though Capodistria and others like him seem to be a necessary part of the life cycle of Alexandria, this necessity does not arise from any sort of productivity. He is needed in the same way the serpent is needed in the Garden of Eden:

Le Principe créateur, ou Dieu, c'est lui
qui, dans notre Genèse, à partir de son
Unité, crée l'Univers contenant-contenu du
Jardin où le Serpent va jouer un rôle fondamental,
puisque c'est à cause de ce serpent que
l'Univers créé . . . va passer au Monde manifesté
(la pomme, la masse, la matière, le couple, le
deux, la génération); puisque c'est à cause de
lui que le Logos va se dédoubler, ramifier,
diversifier, multiplier en mille langues de
Babel.²⁰

But Alexandria is not the Garden; it is a modified Babel with its "dédoubler, ramifier, diversifier, multiplier" encompassed in its "five races, five languages, a dozen creeds" and its "five sexes," creating a world which is "staggering in its variety and profusion" (J 17). As mentioned earlier, in Alexandria, such profusion becomes inverted upon itself and stagnates. The particular diversity Capodistria helps perpetuate is both sexual and infernal: "You would never mistake it for a happy place" (J 17).

In Egypt, the snake was also once a symbol of wisdom: "En Egypt, nous le voyons pareillement se confondre aux

²⁰"Les mues du serpent" 310.

vertèbres pour surgir au front de Pharaon en tant qu'uroeus,
signe de lumière et connaissance."²¹ In the Quartet,
the association with the Pharoah is repeated, but the
reference is usually to their mummification, and such
"lumière et connaissance" are tightly wrapped with them.
Spiritual wisdom in the Quartet degenerates into carnal
knowledge, and Capodistria is the best representation of
this "connaissance."

In Yeats' "Leda and the Swan," Zeus rapes Leda and
engenders "the broken wall" and "Agamemnon dead."
Clytemenestra and Helen are his progeny. Yeats wonders
if Leda, so caught in this brutal act of rape, understood
the consequences: "Did she put on his knowledge with
his power/before the indifferent beak could let her
drop?"²² Unlike Zeus Capodistria is not all powerful or
omniscient, but he generates as much havoc in the individual
lives that he touches. The women he violates are not
"caught up." They are brought low to his serpentine level.
Nor could they possibly put on any knowledge, for he has
none to offer. Only his indifference achieves Olympian
heights.

²¹"Les mues du serpent" 310.

²²William Butler Yeats, Selected Poems, ed. M.L.
Rosenthal (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1962)
114.

Nor does Capodistria impregnate women. He consumes them. Capodistria watches women as if they were prey. Sitting on the terrace of the Broker's Club, he gazes upon the passing women, "with the restless eye of someone endlessly shuffling through an old, soiled pack of cards" (J 34). Here the image is garish, but not overtly evil. However, Durrell carefully constructs his images, so that quickly the picture builds from a lecherous but harmless, dirty old man into something far more menacing and evil. As surely as Dante's Cianfa, Capodistria transforms into a reptile:

From time to time there is a flick, like a chameleon's tongue striking--a signal almost invisible to the inattentive. Then a figure slips from the terrace to trail the woman he had indicated. (J 34)

The Snake as Phallic Totem

The snake as phallic totem becomes the perfect symbol for Capodistria. According to Beryl Rowland, the snake's phallic associations are strongest in the ancient Hebrew myth: "The Tempter in the Garden of Eden was the serpent, and the first thing Adam and Eve did was to cover their genitalia: their sin was sexual."²³ Capodistria is himself a great tempter. As we have seen, he cannot

²³Animals with Human Faces 142.

offer power or knowledge, but then that is no longer required or even desired. He does, however, offer money, a more persuasive bargaining chip in Alexandria, and what he cannot buy, he is willing to take by force. He is a Satanic figure complete with vaguely sinister demonic subordinates diligently working to further his causes.

Often in various mythologies the snake's victim is a woman. The snake is frequently seen as having a great seductive power over women including the first Biblical woman, Eve. Jewish influence caused the snake's many positive associations found in other cultures to turn very negative because of the religious and moralistic attitude concerning the snake's accepted corruptive powers:

. . . La femme (Vierge, Mère, Terre, Matière, Matrice, Mer, Marie) n'étant en fait que posée sur le serpent, onde lumineuse, élément subtil et vital émané du Père, et qui ondoie la Mère. Il s'est produit qu'on est passé de la lecture à l'interprétation, le sacré se dégradant en religieux, le religieux en morale. Selon cette voie descendante, dans un monde voué de plus en plus au profane, le serpent est devenu le symbole du mal.²⁴

In Western tradition, where the idea of the Immaculate Conception offers comfort to many, the "vital émané du Père" and especially the "ondoie la Mère" become suspect, even appalling. The snake in the Garden becomes the detached phallus. God is further spiritualized being symbolically

²⁴"Les mues du serpent" 311.

disassociated from such physical, sexual imagery by his banishment of the snake, and evil is sexualized.

Durrell combines Western and Eastern traditions. In Alexandria the once sacred image of the snake is degraded not by religious misinterpretation or by a repressive morality, but instead by a stifling decay. The asp, once the symbol of power and wisdom, becomes the agent of death for Cleopatra, the symbol of Marc Antony's destructive power over her. In Durrell's Alexandria, the serpent has become a symbol of sexual evil, sexuality which is indifferent to the harm it causes. The monomaniacal Capodistria becomes the quintessential detached phallus.

Sexual Incontinence

In the Dantean scheme of things, the sin of sexual incontinence is a relatively minor crime. Snake imagery is reserved for those in the deeper circles of the Inferno. Geryon, with his smiling human face and his serpent body introduces the reader to fraud. For Durrell, mere sexual incontinence is more comic than serious. Capodistria's father, for example, is a sexually comic figure. Like Capodistria he is a man given to sexual excess, but at least by the time he is an old man, he does no harm:

When he was very old he had a model
of the perfect woman built in rubber--life
size. She could be filled with hot water
in the winter. She was strikingly beautiful.
He called her Sabina after his mother, and

took her everywhere. (J 34).

Though the father is obviously Oedipal, he is not overtly evil. Though psychologically damaged himself, he does not damage others. He is simply ridiculous. However, Capodistria's indiscretions are more sinister. His apparently sexual desires are in fact only superficially sexual. He is in fact devoted to evil itself, an evil which knows no boundaries, and so he finds his true home in the lowest circle of sinners, reserved for those who betray close associates who have some reason to trust them.

Betrayal

Capodistria's rape of Justine is more than a sexual crime--she is his relative, and she is a child. Here the more malignant associations with the snake come to the foreground, symbolizing a destructive force which relies on guile or violence. According to Rowland the snake most resembles a phallus just before it strikes its victim: "Some snakes even expand the head or neck just before they kill."²⁵

Darley reports that women immediately feel "like birds confronted by a viper when they gaze into that narrow flat face with its tongue always moving across the thin lips" (J 38). Again the image combines sexuality and violence. The

²⁵Animals with Human Faces 142

viper has been associated with unnatural and violent coupling.²⁶ These characteristics fit Capodistria perfectly--he is the serpentine phallus which rises not to love but to destroy. Capodistria the snake best expresses his nature by sexual assault, but sex is the adjectival means, assault the substantive end. The end result is the consumption of his victim. Darley, associating Capodistria with snakes, is immediately reminded of Melissa. She was once he recalls, the helpless bird trapped in his viper's gaze.

Early in his relationship with Melissa, Darley finds himself deeply in debt to Capodistria, and soon the reptilian figure becomes a "less accommodating companion." Darley is "mad with worry" until one evening when a half drunk Melissa hands to Darley the I.O.U. that earlier Darley had been forced to give to Capodistria. Darley finds himself out of debt for the note has "the curt word 'discharged' written across it in green ink These memories wound" (J 35). Capodistria ensnares Melissa, the great gull of the novel, through her love for Darley. Repeatedly in Durrell, love will serve as the great trap. In his poem "Letter to Serafis the Greek," Durrell outlines the fate of such innocents who love:

²⁶Animals with Human Faces 158.

Lover and loved exist again
By a strange communion of darkness.
Those who went in all innocence,
Whom the wheel disfigured: whom
Charity will not revisit or repair,
The innocent who fell like apples.²⁷

Melissa is indeed disfigured on the wheel, "broken in her sex," left to die, unloved and unmourned.

Cleopatra and the Asp

However, Capodistria strikes out even harder against Justine.²⁸ This modern day Cleopatra has her modern day asp. The asp becomes a symbol of the death and destruction of beauty. The asp recalls the image of the young Queen of Egypt, dying on her bed, defeated by passion. Philippe de Thaon discusses the symbolism of the asp in a twelfth-century bestiary, a symbolism that seems very appropriate for this modern day reptilian figure:

Aspis is a serpent which signifies people; it is cunning and sly and aware of evil; when it perceives people who want to enchant it and capture it, it will stop up its ears; it will press one against the ground, and in the other it will stuff its tail firmly that it hears nothing of it, and this signifies a great thing. In such a manner do the rich men of this world; one ear they have on the ground to obtain riches, the other is stopped up by sin, by the bad deeds they have performed and by which

²⁷Lawrence Durrell, Collected Poems (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1960)184.

²⁸Capodistria's violation of Justine as a child will be treated in fuller detail in Chapter Three, sec. ii.

they are ensnared.²⁹

Certainly this describes Capodistria. He is cunning and sly and aware of evil. He also refuses to acknowledge his own actions. He has stopped his ears, so he cannot hear about the harm he has caused Justine and others like her.

Capodistria rapes Justine as a child. At this time, she is no Cleopatra figure, but only a child. For Capodistria, the act simply serves to temporarily fill the void. For Justine, however, this incident changes her life forever. Her childhood, as well as her peace of mind, has been irretrievably violated by one whom she had reason to trust. This is a crime of some magnitude. Dante places those who betray family members deep in the final circle of hell, in the Caina section, buried to their necks in ice. However, for Capodistria, the event does not make any impression. When confronted with his enormous crime, he cannot even remember it. Justine tells Pursewarden:

He was so terribly shocked and alarmed to be told he had raped me when I was a street arab [sic], a child. . . . He had completely forgotten, it is clear, and completely denied the whole thing from start to finish. In fact, he was outraged and began to protest. I wish you could have seen his face! Do you know what slipped out in the course of his self-justifications? A marvelous phrase. "Il y a quinze ans que je n'ai pas fait ça!" (B 309)

²⁹Philippe de Thaon Le bestiare de Philippe de Thaun, discussed in Thomas Wright's, Popular Treatises on Science, London, 1965, 102-3.

Capodistria denies everything. There are no pictures.

There is no proof. He points to fifteen years where nothing has happened between them as a strange sort of testimony of his innocence. No proof. No crime. And so crimes are allowed to continue.

CHAPTER THREE

Children and Other Pests

I

Introduction

Image, Image, Image answer
Whether son or whether daughter,
The persuader or the dancer:
A bird's beak poking out of the flesh,
A bird's beak singing between the eyes.

--Lawrence Durrell, "For Nursery Mirror"

In The Alexandria Quartet, young children, traditionally strong avatars of innocence, potential, and futurity, are associated with the disease and corruption that surrounds them. Children are depicted not as individuals, but as victims of monstrous proportions, images of absolute animality. They are Durrell's most visible link between animal and human worlds. And they are an endangered species, for they are frequently murdered or crudely aborted; the few who do survive are often child prostitutes, scampering "across rotten woodwork" speaking in "ant-like voices," part of what Durrell terms the "swarming vermin" of Alexandria. In the Quartet, from the cradle, a bird's beak pokes out of the flesh. The ceremony of innocence is drowned.

II

Lost Childhood

Children do not invent, but imitate or mimic very largely and in many of these games we have, there is little doubt, unconscious folk-dramas of events and customs which were at one time being acted out as a part of the serious concerns of life before the eyes of children many generations ago.

--Alice Gomme, Traditional Games of England, Scotland, and Ireland

Children's Games

The games of the children of Alexandria reflect what have been the serious concerns of life for the past and for the present generations. The traditional game of diving for a rock or solid object in a pond or a lake, for example, takes a sinister turn in the Quartet. Children can be seen by the "rotting canals" diving "for coins in the ooze" (J 49). The water is as polluted as their lives and like the generations of adult Alexandrians before them, according to Durrell, their focus is money. Children playing marbles is a sight known the world over, but in Durrell's Alexandria, the children place their marbles on the tramlines hoping "to see them ground to powder when the next tram passed" (C 817). And this is the most innocuous of the games.

More insidious is the game of children playing at adult sexuality: "There in the dimness, clad in ludicrous biblical night-shirts with rouged lips and cheap rings, stood a dozen furry-haired girls who could not have been much above ten years of age" (J 42). Little girls dress up in the tarty garb that captures the imagination of young girls everywhere, only these are child prostitutes, true Alexandrians, "children of our landscape." They have been bought and sold like cattle.

Barbara Estrin's study of the image of the child in Renaissance literature notes that "the child who survives in an evil world feels doubly burdened; first, by a blow coming from outsiders ...second, by a curse inherited from inside the family."¹ In Alexandria, the blow coming from the outside is World War II, and the corruptions that Alexandria embodies; and the curse from the inside is the inability of the adult world to resist such corruptions, thereby rendering impossible the very existence of a family.

The Abominable

The degree of decay that the city has suffered is symbolized by the association of its children with rats,

¹Raven and the Lark: Lost Children in Literature of the English Renaissance (London: Associated University Presses, 1985) 159.

cockroaches, and ants--the animals classified as abominable in Leviticus, and those which most modern readers view with revulsion as carriers of filth and disease.² Justine deliberately searches the brothels for her daughter who disappeared years before. She also seems to be looking for her own lost childhood, taken from her when she was raped by Capodistria.

Capodistria easily forgets his intrusion on a young girl's life, for his is a very selective memory. He is like Humbert Humbert's father, who has an affair with Humbert's aunt: "Somebody told me later that she had been in love with my father," and that he had carelessly, "lightheartedly taken advantage of it one rainy day and forgotten it by the time the rain had cleared."³ Humbert Humbert himself proves to be no innocent either, seducing Lolita when she is twelve, citing de Sade's treatment of Thérèse with some approval. However, even a Humbert figure has a greater power to understand the extent to which he has invaded the child's life than do the figures which

²For a detailed analysis of clean and unclean animals including the abominable see Mary Douglas' Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo (London: Routledge Press, 1966) and her article "Deciphering a Meal" collected in Myth, Symbol, and Culture, ed. Clifford Geertz (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1971) 61-82. Or as Mary Douglas recommends see Genesis 1:20 and Leviticus 11:10.

³Vladimir Nabokov, Lolita, ed. by Alfred Appel (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1970) 12.

people the Quartet. For Humbert tells us that it had gradually become clear to his "conventional" Lolita "that even the most miserable of family lives was better than the parody of incest, which, in the long run, was the best I could offer."⁴

Humbert internalizes this himself, for at the end of his memoirs, as he is listening to the sounds of life going on outside his cell window, he tells the reader:

What I heard was but the melody of children at play, nothing but that, and so limpid was the air that within this vapor of blended voices, majestic and minute, remote and magically near frank and divinely enigmatic--one could hear now and then, as if released, an almost articulate spurt of vivid laughter, or the crack of a bat, or the clatter of a toy wagon And then I knew that the hopelessly poignant thing was not Lolita's absence from my side, but the absence of her voice from that accord.⁵

The games of the children of Alexandria do not include the "vivid laughter, or the crack of a bat, or the clatter of a toy wagon" or their equivalents. Laughter is replaced by the squeaking noises like that of rats and ants, and the games are replaced, as we have seen, by the struggle to survive. The hopelessly poignant thing here is not the absence of Justine's voice or her child's from the general accord, but the absence of the accord altogether.

⁴Lolita 289.

⁵Lolita 310.

Even before Capodistria, the "innocence" of Justine's childhood is suspect. Arnauti, her first husband, describes their first meeting. She refuses to let him take her home, for she is "ashamed of her house in the slums" not unlike the slums of the Corniche. She freely talks about her home, however, with Arnauti. She describes for him coming back to her house late and seeing her father "breaking walnuts with a hammer on the table by the light of an oil-lamp," a scene to warm a young girl's heart (J 60). But this picture is juxtaposed immediately (in the very next line) with a more barbaric one: "Also the kiss of the Berberin, the enormous rigid penis like an obsidian of the ice age; leaning to take her under lip between beautiful unfiled teeth" (J 60).

Durrell constantly juxtaposes youth, and what could be innocence if it were simply left alone, with grotesque, invasive corruption in much the same way that Nabokov does in Lolita. Like Nabokov, Durrell often employs references to de Sade to underscore this. Durrell frequently alludes to de Sade's Justine, or, the Misfortunes of Virtue (1791) which centers on a young girl whose sole reason for existence, according to Alfred Appel, is to provide pleasures for "an infinite succession of sadistic libertines. She undergoes an array of rapes, beatings,

and tortures as monstrously imaginative as they are frequent."⁶ Before each of the four books of the Quartet, there is at least one epigraph from de Sade, including this one on happiness: "There are two positions available to us--either crime which renders us happy, or the noose, which prevents us from being unhappy"(J 15). This is addressed to "lovely Thérèse." De Sade goes on to ask his lovely twelve-year-old mistress, "Where will your little mind find an argument able to combat that one?" Where indeed? And with this quotation Durrell introduces Justine.⁷

The final quotation from de Sade introduces Clea, and it too focuses on crime: "The Primary and most beautiful of Nature's qualities is motion, which agitates her at all

⁶Alfred Appel, in the introduction to the annotated Lolita (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1970)429-430.

⁷See Edmund Wilson's, "The Vogue of the Marquis de Sade," New Yorker Oct, 18, 1952, 163-174. In this article Wilson explains why the Marquis has held such a fascination for writers of the twentieth century. In doing so, he also inadvertently outlines why de Sade is an appropriate figure to be included in a work about a terror-filled, war-torn Alexandria: "In Europe, since the Second World War, the professional intellectual has found himself under a frightening pressure: he has had to try in some way to accommodate--morally, intellectually--to the world, as the educated man has conceived it, the murderous devices for large scale murder, for suffocating, harming, or blowing up one's enemies . . . ; and here is a writer, the Marquis de Sade, of whom one knows that he always insisted that such things were perfectly normal The atrocities he loves to describe do not totally seem as outrageous as they did" (173).

times, but this motion is simply the perpetual consequence of crimes, it is conserved by crimes alone" (C 657). The Quartet itself seems to be kept in motion by the perpetration of a variety of crimes and by their resulting consequences, and the crime that is at the core of the book, the crime that leads to many others, is the incestuous rape of the child Justine.⁸

Years later, Justine witnesses a scene in a house for child prostitutes which echoes her own childhood encounter with an adult, "the Berberin":

The peculiar innocence of childhood which shone out from under the fancy-dress was in startling contrast to the barbaric adult figure of the French sailor who stood in the centre of the room on flexed calves, his ravaged and tormented face thrust out from the neck towards Justine who stood with her half-profile turned toward us. (J 42)

The sailor with his "face thrust out from the neck" is an image reminiscent of the snake imagery associated with Capodistria. The situation--the violation of a child--is also reminiscent of him. The implication is that there are many out there ready to harm carelessly, to defile thoughtlessly. That lost innocence cannot be recovered is underscored by one of the children who is "horribly shrunk

⁸Incest is a recurrent theme in Durrell's work, appearing here, as well as in Tunc, Nunquam, and The Avignon Quintet. Cf. Sharon Spencer, "The Ambiguities of Incest in Lawrence Durrell's Heraldic Universe: A Rankian Interpretation," Twentieth Century Literature, Winter 1987, XXXiii, iv, 436-448.

up in its nightshirt" lying on the divan "rotting in one corner of the room" (J 42). The physical and spiritual decay has rendered the child less than human, an it. The child is lying in an "attitude which suggested death" (J 42).⁹ This is not a landscape for children. Childhood quickly withers, dying an unnatural, premature death, leaving only the corrupted flesh of this malformed child-adult.

After this scene, Darley describes Justine as a "child of the city," a voluptuary "not of pleasure but of pain, doomed to hunt for what they least dare to find" (J 44-45). Again, she is hunting her lost child and at the same time her own lost innocence, frightened by what she knows to be true--that both are irretrievably lost. Justine says of her child, "I found it, of course. Or rather Mnemjian did. In a brothel. It died from something, perhaps meningitis. Darley and Nessim came and dragged me away" (C 765).

The child on that rotting couch was her own, but she tries to pretend otherwise:

I would have been able to forget it even perhaps, and dream that I had never really discovered it, but for Mnemjian, who wanted the reward There was some talk of an autopsy by Balthazar. I was foolish

⁹Alan Friedman discounts the child entirely as "a further 'check' from Justine's mysterious past rather than created life." [Lawrence Durrell and The Alexandria Quartet, (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970) 65.]

enough to go to his clinic and offer to bribe him to say it was not my child. I wanted him to deny a truth which I so perfectly knew to be true I wanted to go on passionately searching for what I did not dare to find.
(C 765-766)

Mnemjian, who will not let her forget, is an ever present figure in the book. The reader is introduced to him immediately at the beginning of Justine. He is described as "the Memory man, the archives of the city, and he is himself childlike in a grotesque fashion: "Little Mnemjian is a dwarf with a violet eye that has never lost its childhood" and he talks in a "sing-song voice" (J 36). This enfant terrible is focused on money, and he will not let Justine forget, for he is "the archives of the city." According to Jung, in folklore the dwarf or the elf appear as the "personifications of the hidden forces of nature."¹⁰ The hidden forces of nature in Durrell's Alexandria are themselves unnatural. Adults desire and demand immediate

¹⁰C.G. Jung, "The Psychology of the Child Archetype," collected in Essays on a Science of Mythology: The Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963)77. Though I am making no claim of direct influence, it is clear from his A Key to Modern British Poetry (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970)49-90, and his letters to Henry Miller that he [Durrell] had read extensively in both Freud and Jung. In the Lawrence Durrell/Henry Miller: A Private Correspondence, ed. George Wickes (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1963), Durrell writes to Miller: "Freud . . . You've made these statements about my absorption of him and the influence several times. True, I've read him well, but as for 'influence,' I'd rather say Rank or Jung . . ." (261).

gratification as if they were children, and the children imitate the adults.

Justine wants to escape the physical reality but "the city is a cage," and she is trapped in a world characterized by "darkness and pestilence," and by the "copulations of boabs shaking the house like a palm tree" In the darkness are the "veils, the screaming, the mad giggles under the pepper trees, the insanity and the lepers. Such things as children see and store up to fortify and disorient their lives" (J 56). And fortify they must for as Clea tells Darley, "Alexandria has become a huge orphanage, everyone is grabbing at the last chance of life. You haven't been here long enough to feel the strain. The disorientation" (C 732).

The couch where Justine finds her daughter lying becomes a symbol for conflicts in her own life, representing the hope of rest and comfort, and the reality of animal passion and death. She tells Pursewarden, "I have become attached to that old divan. It must be knocking about somewhere" (C 732).¹¹ The it that was her

¹¹The image of the furniture knocking about comes from Cavafy's "The Afternoon Sun," a poem about a man who has returned to a small room where years before he and his lover shared tender moments. The place has changed, but he feels that "somewhere all these old sticks of furniture/Must be knocking about," and so does Justine. But, unfortunately, for both, such relief is only temporary. Durrell includes the poem in its entirety at the end of Clea (882).

child is gone, but the divan "is still knocking about" giving her hope that through this tangible object she can recapture her memories--good and bad--of her child.

Pursewarden and Justine search for the divan in a hopeless attempt to physically regain what is spiritually irretrievable. They return to the brothel which again is characterized by the "scurrying of immense rats," those "fat wet glittering bodies" that "feast on garbage" (C 767). In an atmosphere that is "dense, foetid like the lion's cage," Justine's thwarted maternal instincts are unleashed on the divan with leonine ferocity. She sits beside the divan resting her cheek on it while softly stroking it with the palm of her hand: "She stroked it with a calm voluptuous gesture and then crossed her paws on it, reminding me of a lioness" (C 768). The children come "through a sort of hatch" into the darkness like mice. Sitting on the divan, she suffers the little children to come unto her, but she is as far removed from a savior figure as they are from the saved. She cannot extend to these motherless children the maternal feelings she directed toward the couch.

Reference to "The Afternoon Sun" also occurs when Darley returns to his old apartment trying to recapture his own innocence. He tries to piece together the past, but it eludes him. At best he can recall "bits of old furniture 'Those old things must be knocking about somewhere' I thought in quotation from the poet of the city" (C 680).

To fill the emptiness, "in the voice of a professional storyteller," she tells the children a parable, "a wild sort of poetry for the place and time" (C 768). She tells them of Yuna and Aziz, star-crossed lovers, who lived in a time "when many heads fell and armies watched." She tells them a story of doomed lovers, not the usual fairy tale with a happy ending. Bruno Bettelheim, in his study The Uses of Enchantment, argues that a child loves fairy tales even though the stories do not conform to his own view of the world, but instead, "despite all the angry, anxious thoughts in his mind to which the fairy tale gives body and specific content," the child loves them because "these stories always result in a happy outcome," and unfortunately this is something "the child cannot imagine on his own."¹²

Durrell's Alexandrian child, even more than most, cannot imagine a personal happiness, having no experience with happy endings in life. The implication also seems to be that child will not find a model for it from the fairy tales of his world, for these tales are dominated by the adult imagination, an imagination that has already accepted the defeat of these two lovers in specific and the doomed enterprise of love in general. Justine finally finishes this story of romantic love, a love that, like Justine

¹²The Uses of Enchantment 123.

herself, they will never know, and gives them money of which they know all too much already. She is in search of a child; they are in search of a mother. Yet they are unable to make any true connection just as the multitude of lovers are unable to connect in any meaningful way. The child in Alexandria is a stray animal to be petted or kicked depending on the mood of the adult at hand.

In a paragraph entitled, "Little scenes for the street life," Durrell depicts his typical Alexandrian mother:

A mad wild witch of a woman who suddenly burst into the street, foaming at the lips and uttering curses so terrible that silence fell and everyone's blood froze. Her eyes blazed like a bear's under the white matted hair. Being mad she was in some sort holy, and no-one dared to face the terrible imprecations she uttered which, if turned on him, might spell ill luck. Suddenly a grubby child darted from the crowd and tugged her sleeve. At once calmed she took his hand and turned away into the alley. The festival closed over the memory of her like a skin. (C 859)

This mad woman's situation is the same as Justine's: she has lost a child. Like Justine, her behavior seems crazed to those around her, but no one is willing to confront either. For this crazed woman, foaming at the mouth like a mad-dog, the situation is resolved. The child finds her, and assuming the adult role, provides what is at least momentary comfort. Whether the child is lost or found, childhood is lost, and an indifferent city quickly forgets.

The scene with the child prostitutes is repeated in Mountolive, the title character, a British diplomat, as the central figure. This scene is in some ways even more jarring than the one with Justine and Pursewarden because Mountolive is an individual who has been nursed on control and restraint. He is a man whose childhood has been uneventful and unadulterated. Mountolive climbs the same "worm-eaten staircases" and hears the same "scramble of rats" together with a sound "vaguely reminiscent of human beings" (M 628).¹³ The "rat chirping" blends with "the other curious susurrus composed of whispers and chuckles and the movement of bare feet on boards" (M 828). Because of his own background, he immediately thinks of a girls' dormitory at a boarding school. But this is not Mountolive's England. This is Cavafy's Egypt, in one of

those quarters of the town
Which only wake at night in shameless orgies
And pitiless debaucheries of flesh and mind.¹⁴

Finally, Mountolive realizes with some horror that the creatures filing in "like defeated angels" in "white soiled

¹³The world that Durrell depicts is very similar to Cavafy's description of the same quarter found in several poems including "On the Stairs" and "One Night" collected in The Complete Poems of Cavafy, trans. Keeley, Edmund, and Sherrard, ed. George Savidis (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1975).

¹⁴This is Durrell's "free translation" of Cavafy's "One of Their Gods" which Durrell includes in its entirety at the end of Clea under "Notes in the Text."

robes" are not school children, but are instead child prostitutes.

This time the children do not want a story. He is an affluent customer who must not be allowed to escape, so the "motherless" children who had eagerly clung to Justine hoping for some show of tenderness, here are reduced to something less than human, more animalistic. To Mountolive, they smell like goats, bleating their obscene whispers, their cajoleries, and their curses (M 629). This image of the goat is associated with animal lust and abandon, and often appears in the form of Pan, giving an obvious clue to its intended sensual interpretation. Finally, even the image of the goat dissolves, and a more insidious picture replaces it. Once again, the dominant image is that of the "swarming vermin." Formication turns into a bizarre kind of fornication:

Fingers roved over him like ants--indeed, he had a sudden memory, buried from somewhere back in his remembered reading, of a man staked down upon a burning sand over a nest of white ants which would soon pick the flesh from his very bones. (M 629)

Mountolive's mind wanders back to his childhood when he sat beside his mother in front of a fire with a storybook open on his knee and his thoughts drift to the image of Gulliver tied by "a cobweb of guy-ropes" and of the ant-people who "roved all over his huge body." The Lilliputians' attitude suggests a "feverish ant-like frenzy of capture"

identical to that of these little girls with "their sharp arms turning about his waist" (M 629-30). The animality of it overwhelms Mountolive, who faints. He eventually finds himself on the embankment of the Corniche unable to remember how he made his escape. He is picked clean like a man staked to the burning sands. His shirt and trousers are torn, his studs, his cuff-links, his tie pin, his keys, and his wallet taken, his tarbush and his dark glasses gone.

Much later in the Quartet, Darley returns to this quarter of the city, but this time, he is with Clea. He is not looking for any specific child this second time, and he is able to take in the scene more completely, which has been only slightly altered by the advent of the war:

Even the war had come to terms with the city and indeed stimulated its trade with its bands of aimless soldiers . . . their own demagnetized women were all in uniform now which gave them a ravenous air--as if they could drink the blood of the innocents while it was still warm. The brothels had overflowed Balconies crowded with wet linens and tittering girls Voices of girls, stabbing of Arab quarter-tones, and form in the synagogue a metallic drone punctuated by the jingle of the sistrum. On the floor of the Bourse they screaming like one huge animal in pain. (C 702).

Darley finds himself wandering among the harmed--the girls, a dwarf playing the mandolin, an "enormous eunuch with a carbuncle the size of a brooch," and a "legless man propped on a trolley, dribbling" (C 702). This is only a slight

variation on what Mountolive has witnessed earlier. Alexandria is kept in motion "by the perpetual consequence of crimes." The consequences, the sufferings of its denizens remain a constant, so much so that a world war is barely noted. Emphasis is placed on what has not changed. Darley sees the same "worm-eaten" room that so horrified Mountolive, a room that has housed enormous barbarity, the place where Cavafy, the "old poet of the city," had come to recite his poem "The Barbarians."¹⁵

The Slaughterhouse

These children in the brothels have adapted to the barbarous, animalistic world that is Durrell's Alexandria. Though their "screaming like one huge animal" is reminiscent of the camel being hacked alive, some do, at least for the moment, survive. Many do not. Pursewarden and Liza's child, born blind, dies while still an infant. Fosca, nine months pregnant with Pombal's child" is accidentally shot, resulting in the death of both mother

¹⁵Durrell loosely translates the title of this poem "The Barbarians" from the Greek Rae Dalven in The Complete Poems of Cavafy (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World Press, 1961) translates the title of this poem "Expecting the Barbarians" and Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard in C.P. Cavafy: Collected Poems (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975) translate it "Waiting for the Barbarians." Durrell deliberately shortens the title, for he wishes to enhance the notion that, unlike the Greeks, Alexandrians do not have to wait. This is where, according to Durrell, the barbarians originated.

and child. Justine finds in her car a dead baby wrapped in newspapers like a fish. These deaths make a ripple, but soon a resigned calm is restored--a resignation that is not unlike that of the whiskey priest in Graham Greene's The Power and the Glory: "Why afterall should we expect God to punish the innocent with more life?"¹⁶ The innocent Corals die; the Brigidas--born of corruption teeming with animal vigor--live.

In the first ten pages of Justine, Durrell describes the slaughterhouse in a hidden valley and the screams of the cattle. Darley immediately thinks of the "glimpses" he has had of Justine including the picture of her "bending over the dirty sink with a foetus in it" (J 23). Like so many other of Durrell's tableaux, this one is repeated. Late in the Quartet, Clea confesses to Darley her recent love for Amaril, a man betrothed to someone else, and of her resulting pregnancy. There is no future for them or for their child: "I knew that I should have to destroy the child" (Q 738).

She goes to the clinic, and afterwards "the kindly old anaesthetist" shows her (in yet another "dirty sink") this "little pale homunculus with its tiny members.... It looked like a smashed yolk of egg. The old man turned it

¹⁶Graham Greene, The Power and the Glory, ed. R.W.B. Lewis and Peter Conn (New York: The Viking Critical Library 1970) 209.

over with a sort of spatula--as one might turn over a rasher of bacon in a frying pan" (C 738). The "cold scientific curiosity" that the old man displays is similar to the bantering indifference of the men who axed the camels while they were still alive.

Several scenes are fused here--the clinic merges with the slaughterhouse, and with the slaughter that abounds in the streets. Justine is indistinguishable from Clea, the aborted child from the abandoned baby wrapped in newspapers. Throughout the Quartet, Justines and Cleas abound to mourn the loss of innocence, the loss of childhood which Durrell seems to imply is imposed on them by external forces, by the city itself. It is as if Durrell's Alexandria is saying, "I knew I should have to destroy the child."

This child of Alexandria is an archetype, a symbol of the bleakness of the future. Of child archetypes, Jung writes, "The child motif represents the preconscious, childhood aspect of the collective psyche."¹⁷ In Durrell the child-figure becomes a mythological character and not merely a representation of individual children. The Alexandrian child is "brought up in quite extraordinary circumstances" and its deeds can be as "monstrous as its nature and physical condition. Only on account of these

¹⁷"The Psychology of the Child Archetype" 80.

highly unempirical properties is it necessary to speak of the 'child motif' at all."¹⁸

Capodistria and the Ten Homunculi

Durrell is even more direct in this assertion in Clea than he is in the earlier novels. Balthazar receives a letter that he has Clea read to himself and Darley. The letter comes appropriately enough from Capodistria, and describes a baron who "had actually produced ten homunculi They were preserved in the huge glass canisters which they use hereabouts for washing olives or preserving fruit" (C 809).¹⁹ It is not mere chance that one is reminded of Clea looking at the homunculus in the sink. However, these are still "alive," and they form their own social sphere: "They consisted of a king, a queen, a knight, a monk, a nun, an architect, a miner, a seraph, and finally a blue spirit and a red one" (C 809). All of Alexandria is represented. Its government, its religions,

¹⁸"The Psychology of the Child Archetype" 80.

¹⁹Of this rather remarkable tableau and other "incredible" sections of the novel Lionel Trilling writes, "Some of the things he tells I listen to with one or another degree of incredulity. I don't believe in homunculi made in a bottle by Cabalists. . . . Maybe this is all the storyteller's nonsense, the usual mystery of the East, but it consorts with my sense of the way people ought to be, in a novel at any rate--that is to say objects of wonder." ["Lawrence Durrell's 'Alexandria Quartet,'" in The World of Lawrence Durrell, ed. Harry Moore, (New York: Dutton, 1964) 64-65.]

its workers, its good and evil spirits. Inside the jars these homunculi grow:

. . . the male figures had come into possession of heavy beards. The nails of their fingers and toes had grown very long. Those which bore a human representation wore clothes appropriate to their rank and style. They had a kind of beautiful obscenity floating on their faces. . . . Eyes turned up, fish's lips drawn back to expose small perfectly formed teeth. (C 809-810)

These homunculi have the power of prophecy, and they are informed on subjects that concern their stations in life: "The King could only touch on politics, the monk religion.... In this way I witnessed what the Baron called 'the annals of Time'" (C 811).

But animality takes over even with these homunculi. The king escapes his embryonic bottle, and tries desperately to get into the Queen's bottle, clawing with his nails to break the seal. He is caught and "pushed, scratching and biting" back in his bottle, inflicting wounds as he goes, and fouling the air as well. These creatures--whether or not they are simply a figment of Capodistria's imagination--constitute a microcosm that symbolizes the macrocosm of Alexandria in specific and the world in general. And they represent man "through the annals of Time." They become corrupt Everymen.

The kings and the religious men spring directly from the homunculi into their appropriate positions. Their

beards form while they are still in the foetus position. And so does their lust. Childhood disappears. Innocence is nonexistent. And theirs is the future. Finally, they disintegrate entirely. In most child motifs one essential feature is futurity.²⁰ However, Durrell turns the motif on its head in order to create a world that looks to a corrupt past rather than to a future salvation.

That Durrell's Alexandria itself is corrupt and diseased is underscored in the summation of Capodistria's letter which ends with a quotation from Paracelsus (an often quoted figure in the Quartet):

"Innumerable are the Egos of man; in him are angels and devils, heaven and hell, the whole kingdom of the animal creation . . . and just as the individual man may be diseased, so the great universal man may have his diseases, which manifest themselves as the ills which affect humanity as a whole. Upon this fact is based the prediction of future events." (C 812)

The little homunculus, even before it is destroyed entirely, is diseased, and it grows into a diseased man. It grows into a Mnemjian, a key to the city, one dwarfed in spirit as well as in body.

The Evil Eye

The children who do survive infancy, who make it out of the jar and who are old enough to understand the decayed corrupt force that bears upon them, desperately try to keep

²⁰"The Psychology of the Child Archetype" 83.

the city at bay. In the brothel the children have covered the walls with blue imprints of their hands, "the talisman which in this part of the world guards a house against the evil eye" (J 42). Mountolive also notices the "the dark palms," those painted symbols which are supposed to "guard the superstitious against the evil eye" (M 629). To Pursewarden the little blue hands look "as if a lot of pygmies had gone mad with blue paint and then galloped all over the walls standing on their hands!" (C 767) This decorative game of the children is a hopeless attempt to thwart the evil eye, to protect themselves and their innocence. Justine's child lies dead underneath the blue hand. The evil eye of the bestial world is too powerful; the struggles of innocence are child's play.

Just before Mountolive finds himself trapped in the brothel he hears the little children, going from shop to shop, singing the same song again and again:

Lord of the shaken tree
Of Man's extremity
Keep thou our small leaves firm
On branches free from harm
For we thy little children be.
(M 626)

It is the eve of mid-Shaaban, the time when the Tree of Eternity is to be shaken, and "the falling leaves of the tree bear the names of all who will die in the coming year" (M 626). The children hope their names remain on the branches free from harm, but in Alexandria remaining on the

branch offers no real protection. Here whole communities have been "cut down like the branches of trees, lacking a parent body, dreaming of Eden" (J 57).

The children like the camels in the street are cut down--maimed, murdered, stripped of their innocence. In one way or another the children are brought low. This is emphasized by the fact that whenever children are present dirt, disease, and vermin abound. Only one surviving child escapes the brothels and the squalor--the unnamed child of Melissa and Nessim. But even she belongs to the great orphanage that is Alexandria, for her mother is dead, and at birth, she is not wanted by her father. On the day of Melissa's funeral, Darley meets with Nessim at a bar where Melissa used to dance. Darley is both shocked and surprised when Nessim suggests they meet there, but he does so anyway, "prompted both by curiosity as to his [Nessim's] own feelings and a desire to discuss the transaction which concerned the child--the mythical child" (J 190). This "mythical child" of Alexandria represents the host of unwanted children which have been reduced to the worth of the transactions which concern them.

When their business is concluded, they walk together "down the narrow airless stairway into the white light of the place"; as they do so a cry goes up and the girls come "running to him from every corner like cockroaches" (J

190). Although Nessim has refused his own daughter any affection or recognition, he opens his arms to these little girl prostitutes, but then they require less than one's own child, for these children can be satisfied by pressing their hands "to the breast pocket of his coat so that they might feel the outlines of the thick wallet he now carried, stuffed with banknotes" (J 190). Clearly, in this "vulgar double" of Nessim the banknotes have replaced the heart that once truly cared for such children. The scene reminds Darley of a time when he was accosted by a pregnant woman in the streets:

She took my hand, as if to give me an idea of the pleasure she was offering . . . and pressed it upon her swollen abdomen. Now, watching Nessim, I suddenly recalled the tremulous beat of the foetal heart in the eight month. (J 191)

Violation begins before birth and continues thereafter.

Nessim is behaving in the tradition of the city: "The truth was that he had become like all Alexandria" (J 191).

Children, according to Aristotle, can only be appreciated for what they will become. In the Ethics, he wrote, "Both children and the lower animals share in voluntary action but not in choice."²¹ They must be taught to choose. Education is essential, for left to

²¹Ethics IIII, included in The Basic Works of Aristotle (New York: Random House, 1941) 167-68.

their own devices, they will be like brutes pursuing only pleasure (Ethics 1152). In Alexandria, many never even face the issue of education, for they are aborted or die in infancy. Those who do survive are left to their own devices, and find their only tutors in the brothels and on the streets. Alexandria's children are like "fallen angels" dressed in "their soiled white robes," marked by a kind of beautiful obscenity" (M 628). The Alexandrian child is an only thinly disguised adult, bewildered perhaps by the barbarity he sees, but a ready participant nonetheless. For Durrell, the city reduces her "true children" to an animal image, whether son or whether daughter--a bird's beak, raptor or scavenger, poking out of the flesh, singing between the eyes.

CHAPTER FOUR

Animals as Victims And Their Human Counterparts

I

Introduction

Charity will not revisit or repair,
The innocent who fell like apples.

--Lawrence Durrell, "Letter
to Serefis the Greek"

In Lawrence Durrell's consistent interpretation and manipulation of animal images one can see a unity of vision and purpose. In Durrell's Alexandria, the animal world, like the human, divides inexorably into victims and victimizers, killed and killers, eaters and eaten. Predator or prey, Alexandria offers no middle ground. This chapter discusses those animals and their human counterparts who are overwhelmed, and finally defeated, in this polarized world of Durrell's. Animal images that are ordinarily benign appear in the Quartet as twisted or broken. Such typically gentle animals as pigeons, doves, eagles, camels, and dogs appear most often as victims. Throughout the novels gazelles are harnessed, rabbits are trapped, gulls and ducks are shot.

At first the oppression and violence seem random, even gratuitous; however, on closer examination a pattern begins to emerge. Of course, Durrell's bestiary is not as predictable, as openly allegorical or didactic, as a medieval beast fable. There is no Mondo Simbolico for the modern literary world. According to Edwin Honig, an explanation for the "elusive pattern and increasing ambiguity" in the modern use of literary devices is the "destruction of a rigid base of cultural authority, and in the relatively greater stress put upon the autonomy of the artist" in the twentieth century.¹

Certainly, there is no "cultural authority" present to interpret fully and consistently Durrell's intent in using certain beasts. However, what seems at first a chaotic and indulgent overuse of such imagery is instead a consistent, methodical manipulation leading to an overall effect. Cultural authority is replaced by an individual authority which has a very definite code of its own.

An animal or man, in The Alexandria Quartet, is either victim or predator, a polar opposition that is a

¹Dark Conceit: The Making of Allegory (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1959)89. Perhaps a main goal for some of those filled with passionate intensity in World War II (the backdrop for much of the Quartet) is the re-establishment of such a political, religious, and cultural authority. Such an authority would be inimical to Durrell, for he celebrates the autonomy of the artist.

structuralist's dream. The victim may transform into predator, or the predator may age or degenerate into victim, but the metamorphosis must be complete. In Durrell the beast/individual may be one or the other at any given time, but only rarely a combination of the two. The complexity thus lost in individual episodes is recovered in the cumulative effect.

More often than not the characters that people the Quartet are viewed as victims rather than as predators. As we have seen, Durrell's world is characterized by the bleak vision of Gnosticism, and according to Chet Taylor, Durrell's novel is highly compatible with an existential pessimism as well: "An over view of the characters sees them as determined by forces beyond their control, they are victims."² The controlling force is not a god. Pursewarden points to God's indifference:

For years one has to put up with the feeling that people do not care, really care, about one; then one day with growing alarm, one realizes that it is God who does not care one way or the other. (J 102).

For Durrell, the controlling force is the city, Alexandria. An indifferent god and an out-of-control demiurge are merely other occupants of the city. The city itself is a force characterized by indifference at its best and malevolence as

²"Dissonance and Digression: The Ill-fitting Fusion of Philosophy and Form in Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria Quartet," Modern Fiction Studies, XIII, iii: 170.

its norm. Darkness and disease contribute to a force which in one way or another brings Alexandria's inhabitants--beast and man, adult and child--to their knees.

II

Durrell's Aviary: the Broken and the Caged

I found Melissa, washed up like a half-drowned bird, on the dreary littorals of Alexandria, with her sex broken. . . .

Lawrence Durrell, Justine

Durrell's use of bird imagery is extensive, and provides a good example of his manipulation of such images in pursuit of a deliberate cumulative effect. The analysis of his use of birds as victims thus offers a concrete method of examining some of Durrell's most basic themes: the human capacity for degradation and capitulation, the enormity and passivity of human suffering, the city as cage and zoo. Durrell uses a variety of birds--gulls, quails, swans, pigeons, ducks, parrots, roosters, pelican, herons--but all in one way or another have been brought low. They have been either shot or caged, blinded or crippled. In their association with their Alexandrian counterparts, the birds of the Quartet serve to reinforce the overwhelming implication that neither the bird nor the man can fly past the nets of Alexandria.

The Eagle

In ancient literature the bird was often a source for epic similes. The eagle, for example, was frequently associated with the great hero's strength, and with his ability to ruthlessly destroy his enemies. The bird was also often associated with omens, with dreams, and with visions. In the Odyssey when Telemachus is searching for news of his father, he sees an eagle carrying in its talons a goose. Helen interprets this omen for him:

Just as yonder eagle left the mountain
that holds his eyrie and his brood, just
as he snatched the goose that was fattening
in this house, so, after all his trials and
travels, Odysseus will come back home and will
be avenged; or it may be he is home already,
sowing for all the suitors the seeds of doom.³

Later in The Odyssey, Penelope dreams that an eagle swoops down and kills many fat geese, a vision that clearly marks the fate of the suitors.⁴ In Aeschylus' Agamemnon, Calchas interprets the eagle killing the pregnant hare as a sign indicating that the Greeks will destroy not only the Trojans, but their future generations as well.

Durrell, aware of the reader's almost automatic association of certain traits with birds such as the eagle,

³Homer, The Odyssey, trans. by Walter Shewring (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) 181-182.

⁴The Odyssey 240-241.

heightens reader response by placing those birds in unaccustomed or exaggerated circumstances. The eagle, for example, traditional symbol of strength, often appears in Durrell as a stuffed animal. In one scene Durrell compares Scobie, a man given to drink and "tendencies" such as dressing in women's clothing, with a stuffed eagle. Scobie is a man who "has drawn heavily on the replacement department" (J 103). His teeth, his hair, and even an eye have been replaced. He is well on his way to becoming a taxidermic specimen himself.

It is the replaced eye that draws Darley's attention, "The minute he becomes animated the disparity between his two eyes become obvious. There is a small technical problem--his own eye is permanently bloodshot" (J 103). While Scobie is singing "Watchman, What of the Night," Darley notices that the right eye "seemed then to be a larger imitation of the stuffed eagle's eye which lours so glumly from a niche in the public library" (J 103). The bird that is usually the symbol for freedom and power here is grotesque in the disparity between its present situation and its former self. The once fierce predator now has a frozen, false lout, and is trapped forever in the public library, a beast worthy of comparison to Scobie, the least heroic figure in the Quartet.

Durrell does at one point compare Justine to a more traditional eagle. However, even here, the comparison is uncomplimentary to both. "'Where the carrion is' she [Justine] once quoted proudly from Boehme, speaking of her native city, 'there the eagles will gather.' Truly she looked and seemed an eagle at this moment" (J 46). The eagle that will gather "where the carrion is" is not the eagle Telemachus speaks of. Boehme was perhaps a better theosophist than ornithologist--eagles are raptors. He may have been thinking of buzzards or vultures. But whatever the error, intentional or accidental, it works to Durrell's purpose to degrade both the animal and the individual. If traditional comparison of person to eagle is one that aggrandizes, here both eagle and woman are reduced in stature, becoming opportunistic and shameless, gathering at a scene of death and putrefaction.

Mythic Birds

In the Medieval period the eagle represented Christ rather than Zeus, and it was often pictured in association with the snake. The combat pictured between the two represented the cosmic battle between darkness and light, evil and good.⁵ The pelican also came to be associated with

⁵Cf. Beryl Rowland, Animals with Human Faces: A Guide To Animal Symbolism, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1973)143. See also Beryl Rowland, "The Eagle" in Birds with Human Souls: A Guide to Bird

Christ, and was a symbol of rejuvenation.⁶ Because of its Biblical associations the dove came to symbolize the holy spirit, peace and love.⁷

At the same time the swan became the symbol of love, "l'oiseau de l'amour."⁸ According to Buffon, the swan's grace and beauty made it an appropriate symbol for a feminine mystique that took on mythic proportions:

Les grâces de la figure, la beauté de la forme répondent, dans le cygne, à la douceur du naturel; il plaît à tous les yeux, il décore, embellit tous les lieux qu'il fréquente; on l'aime, on l'applaudit, on l'admire...tout dans le cygne respire la volupté, l'enchantement que nous font éprouver les grâces et la beauté, tout justifie la spirituelle et riante mythologie, d'avoir donné ce charmant oiseau pour père à la plus belle des mortelles.⁹

Durrell also uses images like the swan, but always with a new twist. The bird is no longer a symbol of all that is

Symbolism, (Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1978)51-57.

⁶Cf. Birds with Human Souls: "According to the bestiaries the pelican had excessive love for its young. When the young began to grow, however, they struck their parents in the face. The parents in turn struck and killed them" (131). Durrell retains the violence eschewing redemption or rejuvenation.

⁷Matthew 10.16 "Be ye wise as serpents and harmless as doves." Matthew 3:16 "The Spirit of God descending like a dove."

⁸Bonnefon, Pages choisies des grands écrivains: Buffon, Introduction de P. Bonnefon, (Paris: Armand Colin, 1903)226.

⁹Pages choisies 226.

beautiful and graceful. In Durrell, the swan becomes "le père à la plus dominée des mortelles." When a swan appears in the Quartet, its color is black, and the comparison is to servants with their heads bowed. The obvious implication is that all that was once light and lovely is now dark and overwhelmed by its subjection to a stronger will.

Other traditional birds like the ibis and the pelican also appear in the Quartet. In more conventional works, the pelican and the ibis are associated with religious figures--the pelican with Christ and ibis with Osiris--and both are associated with the hope for rejuvenation. Sharon Spencer argues that rejuvenation or salvation is also an important theme in Durrell: "In Durrell's fiction, the myth of Isis and Osiris provides a paradigm for the belief in salvation through rebirth magically achieved through the sister."¹⁰ This may well be true in the case of the Avignon Quintet, but the validity of this generalization when applied to the Quartet is questionable. Isis and Osiris are mythical figures frequently associated with Pursewarden and Liza, it is true. But as Liza tells Darley, Pursewarden reads to her about these Egyptian mythical figures as a way of justifying their relationship. Their love is based on a world of fantasy that began in their early childhood. They are no

¹⁰"The Ambiguities of Incest in Lawrence Durrell's Heraldic Universe: A Rankian Interpretation," Twentieth Century Literature, XXXIII, iv: 439.

more like these mythical figures than is the farmhouse they discovered and played in as children a palace. Pursewarden and Liza are sterile imitations--the best Alexandria now has to offer of the once great powers of rejuvenation.

For Durrell rejuvenation is replaced by isolation, and the pelican and the ibis "evolve their slow destinies in complete seclusion" (C 686). Liza and Pursewarden feel isolated even when they are together. At Pursewarden's death his sister is not able to put back the pieces. There is no magical resurrection. Instead she burns his letters and sighs with relief, "It is over at last" (C 804).

The Caged Bird

Durrell repeatedly plays on the image of the caged bird. In Durrell a bird in a cage sings love songs to an imagined companion, a mirrored image of himself. The lover in reality loves himself, and the song is fruitless, bringing nothing. Durrell directly connects these birds with their human counterparts: "How heartbreakingly they sang, these illustrations of human love" (M 624). Incest in the Quartet fits within this context. Brother and sister are mirror images. Balthazar explains, "Here [in Alexandria] the cult of Serapis was founded. For this etiolation of the heart and reins in love-making must make one turn inwards upon one's sister. The lover mirrors

himself like Narcissus in his own family" (J 82).¹¹ The result is the stagnation of a Narcissus rather than the rejuvenation of an Osiris.

Another caged bird is Scobie's parrot Ron. Here Durrell points to the bestiality of man by giving animals unsavory human characteristics. Scobie acquires Ron for "a very keen price" because the bird frequently recites the Kalima, in Arabic, a very sacred text from the Koran, in ports where this could prove dangerous. Not only is it unacceptable for a non-Moslem to recite this text at all, but Ron's method of delivery--farting between every other word--leaves something to be desired as well. After Scobie's death the police find the bird in Scobie's room dead drunk, singing in what "was a perfect imitation of Scobie's voice" (B 331). Clea wonders, "Do you think one's soul could enter the body of a green Amazon parrot to carry the memory of one forward a little way into time?" (B 333). This is certainly a new ironic twist to the "Oh, Immortal Bird" idea.

In the Romantic prose piece Aurélia, Gérard Nerval depicts a man given to visions and frightening dreams. Often the hallucinatory episodes are introduced by the voice of a bird. At one point while looking at a tapestry the

¹¹Cf. Ann Gossman, "Some Characters in Search of a Mirror," Critique, VIII, iii: 81-82.

persona hears a voice: ". . . Sur cette horloge un oiseau qui mit á parler comme une personne. Et j'avais l'idée que l'âme de mon aieul était dans cet oiseau."¹² The bird speaks of his family "vivante ou mortes en divers temps." The bird is a voice of his past, his ancestry. He looks to the bird to help him find his own place in that history, but the dream becomes confused. The bird transforms into a man, but the bird's voice remains:

Je le reconnus poir le même qui m'avait
parlé par la voix de l'oiseau . . . il
devenait clair pour moi que les aieux
prenaient la forme de certains animaux pour
nous visiter sur la terre, et qu'ils assistaient
ainsi, muets observateurs, au phases de notre
existence.¹³

But this observer is not silent. It is a bird after all, and it recounts in song-like fashion Gérard's history. Ron also reflects Scobie's history. Nerval's bird, a product of his own psyche appearing in a dream, reveals to Nerval, at least partially, the nature of his identity. Ron, a bird in actuality, is a mirror image of Scobie, reflecting that identity for as long as his memory holds:

I [Clea] took his parrot, which by the way was inhabited by the old man's spirit for a long time afterwards. It reproduced with perfect fidelity the way he got up in the morning singing a snatch of "Taisez-vous, petit babouin" (do you remember) and even managed to imitate the dismal cracking of the old man's

¹²Aurélia (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1972) 16.

¹³Aurélia 17.

bones as he got out of bed. But then the memory gradually wore out, like an old disc, and he seemed to do it less often and with less sureness of voice. It was like Scobie himself dying very gradually by silence. (B 383)

Nerval, in his dreams and visions, is hoping to find an eternal identity, one that will grant him an immortality. Nerval searches for the ideal, the timeless. He finds neither. Scobie, a staunch celebrator of the present, lives a life of physical and spiritual corruption, searching for nothing. His bird, Ron, is the voice of present, a present that dies of its own corruption, spouting as it dies empty meaningless phrases, celebrating debauches Scobie no longer enjoys.

Other birds figure even more prominently in the Quartet. Durrell has Leila tell the story of the boy Jesus playing, "breathing life into the clay models of birds he was making with other children" (M 425). The bird here is of unidentified species--perhaps it was a dove or pigeon, or a gull or quail. All these appear frequently in the Quartet, but where the youthful Christ's goal, in Leila's telling of the story, is the addition of life, the artist Durrell's purposes tend toward exposing the corruption of life.

It is also interesting that in the Apocryphal version of the story, Jesus does indeed create twelve birds. He claps his hands, and they fly away chirping and happy, but

Jesus is not so kind to his fellow playmates. One of the children takes a willow branch and disperses the water that Jesus has gathered. Jesus is furious, "What hurt did the pools and the waters do thee? Behold, now also thou shalt be withered like a tree, and shalt not bear leaves, neither root, nor fruit."¹⁴ The child immediately withers and dies. Another child, while running, dashes against Jesus' shoulder: "And Jesus was provoked and said unto him: Thou shalt not finish thy course. And immediately he fell down and died."¹⁵ The story Leila tells about the positive aspects of Christianity, and her respect for its benevolence, is called into question. Again Durrell's use of birds takes a sinister turn.

The Fallen

Durrell is not interested in the bird's capacity for flight, but in the various strategies men employ to curtail that flight, to make it fall. In Mark Twain's The Mysterious Stranger, Ursula snaps at Satan, "Not a sparrow falls to the ground without his [God's] seeing it." "But it falls just the same." Satan responds, "What good is

¹⁴The Gospel of Thomas, Greek Text A, III, 1-3, collected in The Apocryphal New Testament, trans. Montague Rhodes James (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950) 50.

¹⁵Gospel of Thomas IV, 1.

seeing it fall?"¹⁶ Robert Jackson, in analyzing the symbolic importance of the fallen bird, notes "the fallen bird defines man's fate" as long as he "bases his freedom and happiness upon illusion, deception, evasions of reality."¹⁷ The fallen bird symbolizes the Alexandrian fate of the citizens of Durrell's Alexandria, whose lives are indeed based on "illusion, deception" and evasions of reality. Though no good can perhaps come in witnessing the bird (or the lives of others) fall, these fictional Alexandrians often take a considerable voyeuristic pleasure in causing and witnessing that fall, knowing that no hand will reach out to save it. And fall the birds do, by the hundreds.

The Hunt

The duck hunt is an often repeated scene in the Quartet. The great duck hunt at Mareotis is a central scene of Justine, filled with a sense of foreboding. The darkness is emphasized as the hunters go out at a pre-dawn hour: "Nessim is busy in the darkness"; "All is darkness now"; "Capodistria sits for a while in the darkness"; "Premonitions of the dawn are already in the air as we cross

¹⁶The Mysterious Stranger and Other Stories, intro. by Edmund Reiss (New York: New American Library, 1962)186.

¹⁷"The Symbol of the Wild Duck in Dr. Zhivago," Comparative Literature, XV: 39-45.

the darkness of this world"; "My bones feel as if they have been soaked in the darkness" (J 171-173).

Then the shooting begins. The birds, flying "faster and higher than they seem," are shot down in rapid fire. Darley watches every detail of their fall: "If hit squarely a bird staggers and spins, pauses for a moment, and then sinks gracefully." The birds panic and begin flying "at every conceivable angle and every speed. . . . Some of the flights though nimble are obviously war-weary after heavy losses." The shooting continues, and soon the punts are full "of the sodden bodies of the victims, red blood running from shattered beaks on to the floor-boards, marvelous feathers dulled by death" (J 174). The dead birds have their human counterpart, too, for Capodistria, under mysterious circumstances, has been shot as well.¹⁸

Later in the novels, Narouz tells Mountolive what he describes as an even easier way to hunt ducks: "Dive under the water and take them by the legs" (M 398). How this could possibly be easier is unclear, but it is certainly more direct, more physical, and finally more violent. Narouz and Mountolive are in the midst of a fish-drive while

¹⁸As the reader learns later it is not Capodistria who has been killed, but rather someone who is to be taken for Capodistria. However, the imagery of the hunt and the "fall" of Capodistria combine effectively as the reader is as of yet unaware of the true situation.

they are talking. Thousands of fish are being pulled together in a huge net. Again there is a surrounding darkness, interrupted only by an occasional artificial light. Then suddenly the darkness is swollen "with unidentifiable shapes . . . hundreds of pelican, flamingo, crane and kingfisher" (M 401). The birds are tempted by the fish, but many "break their necks outright upon the decks of the boat," and the men fight off the rest until "amid the swarming scrolls of captured fish one could see surprisingly rainbow feathers of magical hue and broken beaks from which blood trickled upon the silver scales of the fish" (M 401-402).

There are numerous other examples where birds are killed for no other reason than the gratification of seeing them fall. Melissa watches from a distance as Nessim drives along the shoreline, and as the gulls "rose I saw that Nessim had the old repeating-gun in his hands. He raised it and fired again and again into the cloud of gulls, until the magazine was exhausted." But Nessim is not interested in the catch: "Three or four fell fluttering into the sea, but the car did not stop" (J 142).

An even more malevolent scene occurs when Nessim visits the home of his mother, and his brother Narouz demonstrates his abilities with his new whip. Narouz singles out a

rooster from a dozen or so chickens by cutting it out of the group with his horse:

Narouz' arm shot up, the long lash uncurled slowly on the air and then went rigid with a sudden dull welt of sound, a sullen thwack, and laughing, the rider dismounted to pick up the mutilated creature, still warm and palpitating, its wings half-severed from its body, its head smashed. (B 255)

This mutilation of birds foreshadows the mutilation which awaits Narouz himself. He will become a victim of the violence that he now perpetrates on the helpless. He too will be picked out of a crowd and will be brought down.

As if to emphasize this point, Durrell includes another violent scene with Narouz and his whip at the center. Again, Nessim has come visiting and witnesses Narouz's frenzied, proud attacks on birds. In this later scene, Nessim does not initially understand what is happening, "The birds were collecting their families. How peaceful it all seemed" (M 571). But then he sees his brother--"black against the darkness"--in action:

A bat ripped across the light and he saw Narouz' arm swing with an involuntary motion and then fall to the side again; from his vantage point at the top of the stairway he could shoot, so to speak, downwards upon his target . . . the factor came out of the outhouse with a broom with which he started to sweep up the fragments of the fluttering bodies of Narouz' victims which littered the earthen floor of the courtyard. (M 572)

In addition to the carnage caused by Narouz and his whip, there is something sinister in the image of the bat itself.

It is dark and goes about its business in the darkness.¹⁹ We associate it with stories of vampires, stories that are in fact discussed in the Quartet. In this scene the bat is a detail, but it is a detail which adds to the horror. An animal viewed as a terrifying predator is reduced to a victim of terrifying proportions.

This time the action fills Nessim with disgust. Nessim has come to talk to Narouz about the sermons Narouz has been delivering, for they are politically dangerous, and this scene only serves to increase his sense of foreboding. Nessim fears a time may be coming when Narouz is transformed from predator to prey, himself reduced to a tattered body to be swept away. His fears, of course, are well founded, and Nessim may, in order to avoid his own death, find himself involved in his brother's.²⁰

There are other human counterparts as well. One image that is recurrent in the Quartet, especially in Justine and Balthazar, is the telescopic lens. As we have already seen,

¹⁹Cf. Birds with Human Souls: "Appearing mainly at night, they [bats and owls] are commonly thought to be predatory and sinister, emblems of spiritual darkness" (7).

²⁰There is some question as to Nessim's direct involvement in the death of Narouz. Long before Narouz is shot, Nessim informs Justine, "I am faced with the terrible possibility of having to do away with Narouz. That is why I have been feeling half-mad. He has gotten completely out of hand. And I do not know what to do" (M 563-564). Whether or not he does participate in his brother's death is never made clear.

animals and people alike are hunted down with little mercy in Durrell's Alexandria. One way to achieve emotional distance from a target is to simply get physical distance.²¹ A person seen through a telescope seems unreal, just another target, just another bird.

One day while Darley is walking along the beach he sees the word, Beware, written in the sand. Later, he goes into Nessim's observatory where he notices that the telescope is not pointed toward the sky, but instead toward the beach. Noting that this is unusual, he looks through the scope and is amazed at what he sees:

I was astonished to see--quivering and jumping,
yet pin-point clear--the little reed hut where
not an hour since Justine and I had been lying
in one another's arms, talking of Pursewarden
. . . . I stared at this image for a long moment
and became afraid. (J 138).

For the first time Darley becomes aware that he is a potential target. Justine begs him not to go to the duck hunt at Mareotis, "Of course you will not go You are not to tempt providence" (J 159). It is not so much providence that should not be tempted as a jealous, or at least, politically overwhelmed husband. Darley ignores Justine's advice and goes to the hunt, fearing all the while

²¹The inclusion of telescopic lenses to denote physical as well as emotional distance is not unusual in contemporary literature. The structure of Joyce Carol Oates' "Did You Ever Slip on Red Blood?" is dependent on the image of the telescopic lens and its use in a manhunt.

for his life, not realizing that there is bigger game than he.

The Trapped

There are additional ways in which Durrell manipulates standard features of bird imagery. In fairy tales birds often represent both a beautiful and a benevolent guiding force. According to Bruno Bettelheim in his The Uses of Enchantment, in märchen birds often come to the rescue of little children: "Since early Christian times the white dove has symbolized superior benevolent powers."²² In the "Hansel and Gretel" of the Brothers Grimm, white birds help the children find their way. A white dove sits on the roof of their house as if to say good-bye, a snow-white bird leads them to the gingerbread house, a large white duck helps them across the river and enables them to return to their father.²³ In other stories, such as Cinderella, birds represent a controlling, guiding force. According to Bettelheim's analysis of The Three Feathers, such white birds characteristically represent a superego:

White doves--which in religious symbolism stand for the Holy Ghost--inspire and enable the hero to achieve the most exalted position on earth; he gains it because he has learned to

²²The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales (New York: Random House Press, 1977) 163-164.

²³The Uses of Enchantment 164-165.

listen to the doves and so as they bid him. The hero has successfully gained personality integration, having learned to understand and master his id (the ferocious dogs [of the story The Three Birds]), [and] listen to his superego (the birds) (The Uses of Enchantment 102)

In many oral traditions, as well as in poetry and in prose, the white bird is associated with goodness or gracefulness. In the Quartet, the great white bird, in this case a gull, is not particularly good or graceful, but it is strikingly vulnerable.

Melissa sleeps, "breathing as lightly as a gull," while the air fills with sounds of prayer, "like a serpent, coil after shining coil of words" (J 27). Melissa, finally, is in fact the great "gull" of the novel, victimized by all, harming none. According to Sharon Spencer, Melissa has been victimized, but "she is not a victim."²⁴ This seems to be a tenuous distinction, and the animal imagery suggests a different conclusion. Darley tells us, "I found Melissa, washed up like a half-drowned bird, on the dreary littorals of Alexandria, with her sex broken. . . ." (J 26). She has been harmed by those she loved and by those she did not love. Her own body seems not to want her. She is like the dazed quail that the Bedouin youth carries on his head, making no effort to escape her fate. She simply waits, utterly passive, to see what finally will be done with her.

²⁴"The Ambiguities of Incest" 443.

Darley thinks of proverbs or adages, including one image in which a "quail from the burst cage spread upon the ground softly like honey, having no idea of escape," and then he associates this image with a pregnant Melissa who cannot have the abortion Nessim desires because of illness and a weak heart (B 368).²⁵ The city may be a cage, but its bars are finally unnecessary. Even if they "burst," the denizens have "no idea of escape."

Symbol of the Soul

The bird is a universal symbol of the soul--in Durrell the trapped soul.²⁶ The dove is the embodiment of the Holy Spirit, the essence or soul of the Trinity. While there are infernal birds like the Harpies, representing souls, feeding on torment and pain, for the most part, the image of the bird is traditionally a positive one symbolizing strength or procreation, divine or magical guidance. The bird can be maternal as well: "The bird is also the maternal breast, the life giving milk: . . . the [ancient] mother deities, such as Ishtar, Aphrodite, and Diana, display prominent breasts and have a bird as their totem."²⁷

²⁵A similar saying is included in the Workpoints of Justine: "A basket of quail burst open in the bazaar. They did not try to escape but spread out like spilt honey. Easily recaptured" (199).

²⁶Birds with Human Souls xiv.

²⁷Birds With Human Souls xiv.

Aware of the standard association with birds, Durrell has them tracked down, and then caged, or mutilated, or killed. As the bird is destroyed so is the human spirit, and with it the ability to create and procreate. The paternal is given over to bestiality, to the raping of one's own. The maternal is thwarted until it finally becomes by necessity nonexistent.

Such a use of bird imagery is not totally without precedent. Durrell's aviary often resembles that of the English and French Romantic poets. Of course, some Romantics continue to employ birds like the eagle in traditional ways, as symbols of strength, for example, in such poems as Nerval's "Horus" and Vigny's "La Chêne." Birds also at times retain their roles as emblems of benevolence and can be heard singing happily in poems such as Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" and Musset's "Souvenir" as well as Thoreau's Walden.

Such traditional uses of avian imagery tend to be eclipsed in the Romantic period, however, by birds in a new and darker mode as representations of defeat and death generally, and more especially of the death or defeat of poets and artists. A striking example of this can be found in Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale." In this poem, the poet searches for a deliberate derangement of his senses. He wishes to escape his sorrow, and "leave the world

unseen,/And with thee fade away into the forest dim."²⁸ He wishes to fade with the nightingale whose song he listens to in the night:

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death
Call'd him soft names in many a muséd rhyme.
(ll. 52-54)

In these famous lines, the persona considers the possible release in death, and these thoughts are entwined with the song of the bird. The song of the bird is also entwined with the song of the poet. The poet listens, but he has "muséd rhymes" of his own. In stanza VII, the persona exclaims:

Thou was not born for Death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown.
(ll.61-64)

Clearly, more is being referred to than an individual bird. The song is all. Without the song the bird would not be immortal, and it is such a song the poet envies, for to attain such a song would mean immortality for him as well. The poem ends with the fading of the bird's song. Then the persona asks a final question--a question that is recurrent in romantic literature: "Was it a vision, or a waking dream?/Fled is that music:--Do I wake or sleep." Fled is

²⁸Collected in Literature of the Western World, (New York: Macmillan Press, 1988)797-799.

the song or the bird, and in its place is the fear that the poet's ability to create will also disappear. The anxieties that are the poets are clear.²⁹

Gérard de Nerval's Aurélia is also very similar in many ways to "Ode to a Nightingale" even though it is a piece of prose rather than poetry. Like the persona of the Keats' poem, the narrator is also interested in the "systematic derangement of the senses." And he too is torn between wakefulness and sleep. Aurélia opens with a discussion of dreams: "Le Rêve est une second vie. Je n'ai pu percer sans frémir ces portes d'ivoire ou de corne qui nous séparent du monde invisible. Les premiers instants du sommeil sont l'image de la mort . . ."³⁰ Again, there is the association

²⁹Gautier uses the nightingale symbolically in a similar way in his "Les Rossignols." In this brief prose piece, Gautier depicts two sisters who sing as beautifully as birds. Their voices become more and more perfect as they become less involved in the world. The paler their complexions, the more beautiful their voices. Finally, a nightingale becomes jealous of the sisters and challenges them to a singing duel. The bird dies trying unsuccessfully to defeat the sisters. The sisters are barely alive themselves, for producing such beautiful music has taken a physical toll. Recognizing the bodily harm that is coming to them, the two women attempt to give up their music, but to no avail. The piece ends when the sisters become so caught up in a song that they perish at its end, but the song itself is not dead, for the other nightingales continue to sing it long after the two women die. Achieving the height of artistic beauty can have its physical costs. Finally, they knowingly sacrifice their health. The implication is that the artist must be willing to sacrifice all if he or she is to create a song of lasting value.

³⁰Aurélia 3.

of sleep and death, of dream and unique vision. The bird will also play an important role for Nerval in this work though, of course, it will not be as central an image as it is in "Ode to a Nightingale."

Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" begins with a latin epigraph from Thomas Burnet that would have been equally appropriate for Nerval's Aurélia. It translates: "I readily believe that there are more invisible than visible Natures in the universe" ³¹ The major vehicle for demonstrating visibly these invisible forces is Coleridge's famous albatross. The mariner is punished for killing the albatross, for it too was a special creation, and in an aesthetic sense mariner marred the picture framed in the sky.

In Baudelaire's poem "L'Albatros" the connection between bird and artistic creation is made even more direct. In this poem a similar fate befalls the albatross. The crew of a ship has caught one and tied it to the deck:

A peine les ont-ils déposés sur les planches,
Que ces rois de l'azur, maladroits et honteux,
Laissent piteusement leurs grandes ailes blanches
Comme des avirons traîner à côté d'eux. ³²

³¹Collected in The Norton Anthology of English Literature, ed. by M.H. Abrams (New York: Norton Publishing, 1979)337. The translation is provided in a footnote by the editors.

³²Charles Baudelaire, Les Fleurs de Mal, (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1972)179.

The new awkwardness of the bird is emphasized, and the sailors have no understanding of what they have captured. They treat the bird cruelly, putting a stick in its beak and mocking its awkward movements. This is the poet, Baudelaire tells us:

Le Poete est semblable au prince des nuées
Qui hante la tempête et se rit de l'archer;
Exilé sur le sol au milieu des huées,
Ses ailes de géant l'empêchent de marcher.³³

The poet also seems awkward, but that is only when he is restricted to the ground, for he has great wings. When he is allowed, to fly, to produce poetry, he again becomes a thing of beauty. When the imagination of the poet is allowed to take flight he is above the shots fired by those below.

It is important to remember that these imperilled poets/artists, elevated in these same works into "unacknowledged legislators," are contemporary prophets who speak for no god beyond themselves. Christ is marginalized; the poet is centralized: "In proclaiming the priority of the individual, the typical English Romantics saw in Christian analogy mainly the blandishments of a discredited priestcraft."³⁴ Edwin Honig argues that the romantic

³³Les Fleurs de Mal 179.

³⁴Edwin Honig, Dark Conceit: The Making of Allegory (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1959) 39.

replaces the social hierarchy under God with an aesthetic hierarchy based "on the prerogatives of the man of feeling, the immoralist, the artist, the confidence trickster."³⁵

Having rejected the "eschatological symbols of Christian allegory," the romantic must look elsewhere in "folk superstitions, transcendental communication with the demiurge, the correspondences of nature, and the systematic derangement of the senses."³⁶ Certainly, Durrell's hierarchy is an aesthetic one based on "the prerogatives of the man of feeling, the immoralist," and "the artist," the ultimate "confidence trickster."

In Durrell's Alexandria the drunken man with "tendencies," the gullible woman, the immoralist and the artist alike are all caged or wounded birds, trapped by an indifferent city. They no longer are looking to God to set themselves free but have instead turned to folk superstitions and to the demiurge. Balthazar tells Darley: "I mean, that God neither created us nor wished us to be created, but that we are the work of an inferior deity, a Demiurge, who wrongly believed himself to be God" (J 39). Man is no longer the beloved creation of a loving God but the toy of a demiurge. For Darley, as for the Romantic, only the artist can fly past such formidable nets of

³⁵Dark Conceit 40.

³⁶Dark Conceit 40.

degradation and of meaninglessness. The true poet can create a world of his own, fly above the shots. For the majority, however, there is no flight; there is just the dark cage or worse.

III

Beasts of Burden: Narouz and Other Animals

You know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun
 beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the
 cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water.

--T.S. Eliot, "The Waste Land"

Every nuance of suffering and innumerable varieties of pain are depicted in The Alexandria Quartet. As we have already seen, women are "broken in their sex," and children are victimized. The city itself provides a cage, entrapping the wild with the tame, creating an atmosphere of violence and harm. There is no place to hide, and many of the city's victims do not even bother to run. They have become passive, accepting a violent world they cannot begin to comprehend.

In "Medieval Beasts and Modern Cages," Arnold Clayton Henderson argues the best literature successfully depicts "the universal process" by placing the "interpretations and their underlying logic so clearly on the page; they record the living choices of living persons, choices drawn from the entire universe of meaning by available habit of

reasoning."³⁷ It is this "habit of reasoning" that Durrell plays with in the Quartet, manipulating traditional animal images to meet his own specific purposes.

The Camel

Durrell clothes the universal idea of "big fish eat little fish" in Alexandrian garb. The little fish are not always so little in Alexandria, and they are robbed of sympathy by the sheer enormity of their helplessness. A good example of such monstrous impotence is Durrell's inclusion of the camel both literally and figuratively throughout the Quartet. Durrell plays on the camel's standard image as a beast of burden. Because of the animal's habit "of kneeling down to receive heavy loads" it is often depicted in art and literature bowing "humbly to the earth" and allowing "a man to brandish a whip beside it."³⁸

Durrell manipulates this image of the camel, exaggerating the animal's passivity. He deliberately ignores the animal's reputation in Egypt as an obstinate, ever-complaining brute. According to Beryl Rowland, in the East the camel's capacity for complaint is proverbial: "the camel curses its parents when it has to go up hill,

³⁷Arnold Clayton Henderson, "Medieval Beasts in Modern Cages," PMLA, Spring 1963, 46-47.

³⁸Animals with Human faces 48.

and its Maker when it has to go down."³⁹ Durrell chooses to exclude this characteristic of camels and instead to develop the image to which an unfamiliar West has become more accustomed.

The fate of this passive, relatively uncomplaining camel, in the course of the work, becomes inextricably tied to his human, equally passive, counterparts. In Justine, a camel is hacked to pieces while still alive:

A camel has collapsed from exhaustion in the street outside the house. It is too heavy to transport to the slaughterhouse so a couple of men come with axes and cut it up there and then in the open street, alive. They hack though the white flesh--the poor creature looking even more pained, more aristocratic, more puzzled as its legs are hacked off. Finally there is the head still alive, the eyes open looking around. Not a scream of protest, not a struggle. (J 56)

A grisly scene, and one which is metaphorically associated with the human community found in Alexandria. We are told that Alexandria is made up of "fragments of every language" and that communities have been "cut down like the branches of trees, lacking a parent body, dreaming of Eden" (J 57). Those trapped masses, dying of spiritual as well as economic poverty in Alexandria (depicted at the end of the same paragraph), are clearly to be associated with the dying camel: "Even the harbour does not exist for us here." This is striking, for Alexandria is a built on the

³⁹Animals with Human Faces 49.

water's edge, but the very existence of the harbor is a blow in itself for those who find there is no escape.

The sea that should be life-giving, traps and drowns instead.⁴⁰ The sea that should open horizons, cuts off and stifles: "...Ah! the misery of harbours and the names they conjure when you are going nowhere. It is like a death--a death of the self uttered in every repetition of the word Alexandria, Alexandria" (J 57). The repetition of Alexandria has the desired onomatopoeic effect; we hear the waves, and we hear the blows being dealt these passive, quietly suffering Alexandrians.

In the Quartet, the image of animals being hacked to death recurs. A scene almost identical to the one in Justine also appears in Mountolive:

The camels of Narouz were being cut up for the feast. Poor things, they knelt peacefully with their forelegs folded under them like cats while a horde of men attacked them with axes in the moonlight. My blood ran cold, yet I could not tear myself away from this extraordinary spectacle. The animals made no move to avoid the blows, uttered no cries as they were dismembered.

⁴⁰François Truffaut uses the sea in a similar way in his famous 1959 film Les quatre cents coups. In that film Truffaut captures a Paris that is very similar in its indifference and corruption to Durrell's Alexandria. Truffaut depicts a young boy who is trapped, victimized in every aspect of his life--family, school, friendship, society. At the end of the film, the boy tries to run away, but he finds himself at the sea's edge, surrounded by water with no place to go, no solace to be found. He is trapped by the sea just as he is trapped by the circumstances of his life. The ironies present in the Truffaut film are also present in the Quartet.

The axes bit into them, as if their great bodies were made of cork. Whole members were being hacked off as painlessly, it seemed, as if a tree were being pruned. (488)

In Justine, they are dismembered because they have collapsed and are in the way. Here they are cut up for a celebration. In both cases, the animals are passive, uttering no screams or cries. And the world is indifferent to this monstrous suffering: "The men doing the axing were shouting and bantering as they worked" (M 488). The world is equally indifferent to man's plight.

Remembering that these camels belong to Narouz Hosnani--a dominant presence in the Mountolive section of the novel--the reader is better prepared to comprehend his death. Narouz, "the least distrustful, the most innocent of creatures," is executed, his body riddled with bullets, his horse shot through the lips. According to G.S. Fraser, Narouz has "the only heroic death among many deaths in The Alexandria Quartet . . . Narouz with his primitive simplicities of violence and tenderness is the only epic hero."⁴¹ But Fraser immediately backs off this perhaps unwarranted statement, saying that Narouz is "a maimed and abashed epic hero" and that his "abasement before Leila and

⁴¹Lawrence Durrell: A Study, (London: Faber and Faber, 1968) 133.

before Clea is not, even if one thinks of Samson and Delilah, properly epical."⁴²

That Durrell intended Narouz as an epic figure is doubtful, given the imagery invariably associated with him. Durrell makes a point of associating Narouz with the image of camels well before he is shot. In fact we are introduced to Narouz as a man who physically resembles a camel: "His upper lip was split literally from the spur of the nose--as if by some terrific punch; it was a hare-lip . . ." and the split in his lip "exposed the ends of a white tooth and ended in two little pink tongues of flesh in the center of his upper lip which were always wet . . ." (B 252). Even his laugh is a "hissing shy laugh," and his movements are "ungainly." Later when Lelia, Narouz's mother, is talking to Mountolive about the torn lip, she makes the comparison overt: ". . . the village children teased him, calling him a camel, and that hurt him. You know that a camel's lip is split in two?" (M 410)

When Narouz is sad or hurt, we are told that he even makes the sounds of a camel. He is in agony when he thinks that he has murdered Justine in a fit of rage. Clea reports that he falls to his knees and starts to sob. She is "horrified and disgusted," as he, from time to time lets out "a small harsh cry--the noise of a she-camel crying" (B

⁴²Lawrence Durrell 133.

373). The image is repeated again after Narouz has delivered himself of a rousing sermon: "When we got back to the tent the new preacher [Narouz] was lying wrapped in his blanket sobbing in a harsh voice like a wounded she-camel" (M 491).

And so the reader is well prepared for the young man's death which closely resembles that of the camels who are dismembered in the street. Nessim's killers are as indifferent to him as the workers are to the camels. The real target, the one for whom Narouz's death is intended as a warning, is his brother, Nessim. And like the camels, a bewildered Narouz seems to ignore the process of his dying and its pain: "Despite the internal hemorrhages, the drumming of the pulses in his ears, the fever and pain, the patient was only resting--in a sense--husbanding his energies for the appearance of Clea" (C 644).

Narouz does not understand the world around him any more than the camels who are axed in the street. Like them, he cannot seem to believe the axe has fallen or that it could possibly fall again. But Clea, even though begged by Nessim, refuses to come to Narouz; consequently, the final blow of the axe does indeed fall. At his death, the mourners refer to Narouz as "my camel." Narouz is reduced, like the camel, to one-sidedness; his is a beastly passivity. He is not an epic hero at all. His

vulnerability is not simply that of Ulysses crying quietly but proudly at a banquet when his many glories are recounted. His passivity, his vulnerability is at the center. There will be no resurgence, no revenge, no vindication for Narouz.

Throughout the Quartet, Durrell extends the image of the unprotesting camels being axed to death to describe lovers who hack away indifferently at more or less passive partners; Narouz is only one of many. The use of the camel in this connection is very effective because of the association of the camel with sexuality and promiscuity. "The camel's most conspicuous role was sexual" writes Beryl Rowland. Rowland goes on to quote the monk Bartholomaeus Anglicus concerning the camel's sexuality: "the female camel boweth herself and goeth on her knees, when she will be coupled with the male and her talent and desire is strong and fervent in time of love."⁴³

For most of us, the camel is not an image that we immediately associate with sexuality. However, in the Quartet, the image is a successful one when pointing to the

⁴³Animals with Human Faces 49. Rowland also includes other examples of the lascivious nature of the camel: "It was a medieval nymphomaniac. Alan of the Isles stated that the camel ministered to the wants of men like a bought slave (quasi servus emptitius), and this idea may have contributed to a belief in the camel's passion for sexual intercourse. In the Old Testament the camel in heat was a metaphor for Israel whoring after foreign gods (Jeremiah ii.23)" (49-50).

grotesque nature of unrequited love or desire. The ignored lover is marked by the enormity of his pain and by the cosmic absurdity of his position. In Durrell's "Pearls" from Cities, Plains, and People, a fairy tale is recounted in which a lady "to refresh her pearls" gives them back to the sea for ten summers and ten winters in order to restore their luster:

The pearls drink and recover
But their lovely Neck
Becomes one day the target for an Axe,
Bows swan-like down.⁴⁴

The inanimate thrives while the animate is destroyed. No explanation is given. No explanation is demanded. The victim is passive, bowing down with swan-like dignity, but bowing down all the same.

We are told this story of the Lady and her pearls is as fragmented as this woman without her head:

Something is incomplete here,
Something in the story is unfinished,
A tale with no beginning,
The fragment of a voice that interrupts,
Like this unbroken coast,
Like this half-drawn landscape,
Like this broken torso of a poem.⁴⁵

The story is a fragment, but it is at the same time cyclical. A tale with no beginning is also a tale without

⁴⁴Lawrence Durrell, Cities, Plains, and People (London: Faber and Faber, 1946), later collected in Collected Poems (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1960) 32.

⁴⁵Collected Poems 32.

end. Fragmentation encompasses all for Durrell. The landscape, the individual, even art and yet at the same time such stories, such lives are repeated. Victims continue to passively sacrifice all. Art continues to be replenished.

In the Quartet the word axe occurs only in connection with camels or with lovers. The camels we have already seen. As for the lovers, Darley says of Justine, "in her passional life she was direct--like an axe falling" (J 72). Justine reinforces the image when she later remarks to Darley, "We use each other like axes to cut down the ones we really love" (J 94). Darley's very first meeting with Justine seemed as if an axe were falling "cleaving my life in two" (B 297). That lovers do each other harm in Alexandria is undeniable. However, laying blame is impossible, for here "all are victims, none is guilty" as long as "unpredicable but powerful Chance impart[s] a marionette quality . . . [in] Durrell's implacable and enigmatic Alexandria."⁴⁶

In all of this the literal camels are employed figuratively, serving the fable's end, underscoring human parallels. Here Durrell adopts the traditional image of the camel, manipulates our "habit of reasoning," but with a

⁴⁶Alan Warren Friedman, Lawrence Durrell and the Alexandria Quartet: Art for Love's Sake (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970)171.

twist, for he pushes the image to its extreme into the realm of the grotesque.

L'abbatoir

All the long-suffering animals in the Quartet, whether they are oxen, or camels, or baggage animals, meet a torturous end. All are slaughtered in one form or another. The song "Jamais de la vie" which is so frequently heard in the city is constantly punctuated by the screams of the dying, the city's victims. From Justine's diary, Darley read the following passage:

Clea speaking of her childhood . . . Blows first in the hovel behind the Stadium . . . Blows and curses, and printed everywhere on the red mud walls (like the blows struck by conscience). . . . With these blows we grew up, aching heads flinching eyes. . . . And then add screams" (J 56).

The blows being dealt to the camels are symbolic of the blows being dealt the people. Balthazar, a representative Alexandrian, tells Darley, "There is no merit in suffering as I did, dumbly like a pack animal, galled by an intolerable sore it cannot reach with its tongue" (C 705). All suffer, and all are eventually headed for l'abattoir. Gervaise's vision of the ideal life in Zola's L'Assomoir is a vision shared by the average Alexandrian:

Mon idéal, ce serait de travailler tranquille, de manger toujours du pain, d'avoir un trou un peu propre pour dormir, vous savez, un lit,

une table et deux chaises, pas davantage . . .
ce serait de ne pas être battue, si je me
remettais jamais en ménage; non, ça ne me
plairait pas d'être battue . . . Et c'est tout,
vous voyez, c'est tout.⁴⁷

To live quietly and die in one's own bed, and most importantly not to be beaten, this is Gervaise's ideal life, but she is not successful in attaining such a dream, nor are the inhabitants of Alexandria. There is no quiet life to be found, and the world is divided into the beaten and those who beat. Ever-present are the screams, and Alexandrian sexuality is inextricably entwined with the screams: "For a moment it relinquishes the torn rags of the flesh, while from some hidden alley by the slaughterhouse," amid screams of cattle, "comes the nasal chipping of a Damascus love-song; shrill quarter tones, like a sinus being ground to powder" (J 22). Again such a love song is appropriate in a city that deals love such hard blows.

The use of animal imagery as a symbol of the debasement and corruption of human sexuality is similar to the passage in Madame Bovary which describes the seduction of Emma by Rodolphe:

Et il saisit sa main; elle ne la retira pas.

"Ensemble de bonnes cultures!" cria le président.

--Tantôt, par exemple, quand je suis venu chez vous . . .

⁴⁷Emile Zola, L'assommoir (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1983) 49.

"A M. Bizet, de Quincampoix."

--Savais-je que je vous accompagnerais?

"Soixante et dix francs!"

--Cent fois même j'ai voulu partir, et je vous ai suivi, je suis resté.

"Fumiers."

--Comme je resterais ce soir, demain, les autres jours, toute ma vie!

. . .--Aussi, moi, j'emporterai votre souvenir.

"Pour un béliet mérinos . . ."

--Mais vous m'oubliez, j'aurais passé comme une ombre.

"A M. Belot, de Notre-Dame . . ."

--Oh! non, c'est-ce pas, je serai quelque chose dans votre pensée, dans votre vie.

"Race porcine, prix ex oequo: à MM. Leherissé et Cullembourg; soixante francs!"⁴⁸

In this passage sexuality is associated with animality. The romantic love that Emma has previously dreamed of is literally reduced to a roll in the hay. The lovers' trite expressions of love are constantly being undermined by the intrusion of the physical, animal world that surrounds them and which they have become inextricably a part. Rodolphe comments are "fumiers," and it is all reduced to a "race porcine." The repetition of money--"soixante et dix francs," "soixante francs" underscores the notion that

⁴⁸Gustave Flaubert, Madame Bovary (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1983)182-183.

theirs is not love at all, but instead a commodity to be bought and sold.

Similarly, in Alexandria lovers cannot overcome the backdrop of violence and trade. Durrell uses images of camels and other beasts of burden to show the debasement of individual lives, and individual loves. Animal and lover alike are headed for the l'abbatoir, and they do so quietly, uncomprehending at first and at last resigned. There is no escape for they know only a heap of broken images in this place "where the sun beats, and the dead tree gives no shelter."

IV

Domestication: A Final Violation

Do his eyes, after such long exposure to the gloom, begin to pierce it? No, and this is one of the reasons why he shuts them more and more, more and more often for ever longer spells. For his concern is increasingly to spare himself needless fatigue, such as that come of staring before him, and even all about him, hour after hour, day after day, and never seeing a thing. This is not the time to go into his wrongs, but perhaps he was wrong not to persist, in his efforts to pierce the gloom.

--Samuel Beckett, Fizzles

He who hopes for nothing and fears nothing can disarm the fury of these impotent men; but he who is burdened by fears and desires is not master of himself. He throws away his shield and retreats; he fastens the chain by which he will be drawn.

--Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy

In Durrell's The Alexandria Quartet domestication is the ultimate fizzle. Domestication in animals and in humans for Durrell represents a defeat even worse than death or dismemberment. Domestication for Durrell is not simply that a creature--human or otherwise--has had its ferocious nature tempered, but that its imaginative and cognitive powers have been arrested as well. The

domesticated animal may serve a useful function, but it has become a slave to that usefulness. It has been reduced to a one-sidedness that makes it impotent outside its main function. Domestication is a mutilation more serious than any physical dismemberment because it maims the soul.

The domestication of an individual may render him socially useful, but he loses his own individuality in the process. Perhaps the most cogent, succinct description of this is found in Frank Budgen's ground-breaking Joyce study, discussing in particular the Circe episode of *Ulysses*, where Joyce's "Nighttown" phantasmagoria is by the author's own testimony "an animal episode, full of animal illusion, animal mannerisms."⁴⁹ In his analysis of Joyce's use of animal imagery, Budgen summarizes man's general view of animals in relation to himself:

Animals have always been for man something more and something less than he. He desired to be brave as a lion, cunning as a fox, patient as an ox, grandly soaring as an eagle, wise as a serpent and innocent as a dove, but he desired neither to be neither lion, fox, ox, eagle, serpent, or dove.⁵⁰

Man singles out a trait of an animal he admires and ascribes the trait to himself. Focussing on one trait

⁴⁹Frank Budgen, James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses (New York: Harrison Smith and Robert Haas Pub. Co., 1934) 228.

⁵⁰The Making of Ulysses 228-229.

results in both an aggrandizement and a reduction of status. Budgen gives an analysis of this one-sidedness:

The essence of the animal into man metamorphosis seems to be that man becomes an animal when he loses his many-sided wholeness. One of his functions gets out of hand and usurps the powers belonging to the governing authority of his virtuous republic. Beastliness is one-sidedness.⁵¹

For Durrell, this metamorphosis of man into animal has less to do with enlarging man's status than with reducing it, and it is at its worst when the animal man is transformed into is a domesticated one. It is one thing to be "brave as a lion, cunning as a fox," etc., but it is another to be as obedient as a "dachshund" or as satiated as a "fat pigeon." Durrell views this one-sidedness as insidious and deadening. A striking example of the reductive power of domestication can be found in Darwin, who quotes a farmer concerning "the complete metamorphosis" of the pig raised for human consumption:

The legs should be no longer than just to prevent the animal's belly from trailing the ground. The leg is the least profitable portion of the hog, and we therefore require no more of it than is absolutely necessary for the support of the rest.⁵²

⁵¹The Making of Ulysses 228-229.

⁵²Charles Darwin, The Variation of Animals and Plants Under Domestication, 2 vols. (New York: Appleton and Company, 1896)2: 178.

For Durrell, the limited focus on the razorback or the wild boar as the embodiment of ferocity and independence is certainly preferable to that of this domesticated, infinitely consumable, barely mobile pork product.

Fluke

Mountolive, the British ambassador to Egypt, lives a life totally governed by others even in its most minute details. In the entire Quartet no one is more caught up in the quotidian than Mountolive. He wears circumspection like a dog wears a collar. And it is no accident that images of lap dogs and hang-dog expressions abound in connection with him. Mountolive realizes that though his days are full of social engagements they are really devoid of any human, personal exchange. While looking in the mirror and very carefully tying a tie suitable for his morning calls, he muses, "I shall soon have to change my life radically...or it will become completely empty. How best should that be done?" (M 585).

His solution is to find companionship, to get a dog. But he finds even the simple task of choosing a dog, wrought with social implications. Finally he asks someone in the Chancery "very seriously what sort of dog would make a good house pet." A long discussion of the various breeds ensues and they decide that a "fox-terrier might be the most suitable pet for a bachelor. A fox-terrier! He

repeated the words, as he crossed the landing to visit the Service attachés, smiling at his own asininity. 'What next!'" (M 585).

After this discussion, Mountolive feels on several occasions that a dog is following him around. One night he goes out for a long walk trying to make sense of various political machinations in Egypt. When he comes back, "walking on his own two legs as no Ambassador should ever be allowed to do," he gives the servants "a civil good evening," sheds his coat, and "limps across the lighted hall still followed by an imaginary dog which left wet footprints everywhere upon the parquet floors" (M 593). This entertaining, brief picture is laden with possibilities. The literal meaning of "walking on his own two legs" is, of course, that the Ambassador never walks but is instead driven; however, the implication is that he is not a man used to standing on his own two feet. Standing upright and independent is something no Ambassador should be allowed to do, for he is a functionary, a position, not an individual. He is in no sense the "governing authority" of his republic, virtuous or otherwise.

Mountolive is a man who limps across a hallway that has been lit for him by someone else. The wet footprints left in the hallway are not that of a dog, but his own. He

is a creature that only seems to be walking on two feet when in fact, according to Durrell, like other ambassadors before him, this is not so.

These footprints can be interpreted in another way as well. Mountolive's imagination is limited to the real, the tangible that which is, bounded by time and place. Mountolive seems to be transforming his one dalliance with the fanciful--this imaginary dog--through an act of will, making what was only wished for, a tangible, real object. It is no accident that of the four novels which comprise the Quartet only Mountolive has no work points, no consequential data, no translations of poems, no notes at its end. There is nothing to explain; all is obvious. No poetry emerges from this book. There is nothing to interpret, and nothing on which to expand in the future.

The limitations of Mountolive's concerns are reified in the acquisition of the dog, for finally, a dog is secured for him. Mountolive is sitting in despair thinking of the muddle the political situation in Egypt had so quickly, and to him so mysteriously become, and he finds himself "incapable of thought, of making the smallest decision" (M 634). Then his door opens and "a dispirited-looking sausage dog waddled into the room." The woman who is delivering the dog announces, "...I came on behalf of the Chancery wives, We thought you seemed rather lonely so

we decided to put our heads together. Fluke is the result" (M 634).

These Chancery wives are themselves the epitome of the domesticated animal. They are constantly referred to as "the wives" or as the "Chancery wives" as if they are a herd of cattle. They put their heads together to come up with a dog that resembles Darwin's domesticated pig. Theirs is a very limited vision indeed. To Mountolive these "sausage dogs with legs so short that they [the dogs] appeared to flop along like toads rather than walk" are quite a comedown even from his idea of a fox-terrier (M 634). But he accepts it, for he is thoroughly domesticated himself. The gift horrifies him, for it shows how he is viewed by the world, as well as how he is beginning to view himself. The dog's "lustreless eyes" are his own. He has worked very hard. He has sacrificed love and his own vision of life to end up finally as a well-dressed, highly paid "garde-malade, a male nurse to a short-legged lap dog" (M 635).

In his play Happy Days, Samuel Beckett creates two characters, Willie and Winnie, who have also been thoroughly domesticated by circumstance. Winnie asks Willie a recurrent question: "What exactly is a hog, Willie, do you know, I can't remember. . . . What is a hog, Willie, Please!" Willie responds, "castrated male

swine. (Happy expression appears on Winnie's face) Reared for slaughter."⁵³ Certainly, Mountolive is not castrated physically, but emotionally he has been. When supposedly in love with Lelia, he is unable to act. She is in control of every situation. He follows her passively, obediently. Finally Mountolive gives up his love for Leila, at first because it is convenient to do so. He must leave anyway to fulfill his bureaucratic duties elsewhere, and besides his love for Lelia is socially unacceptable. Leila is after all married, and Mountolive is a diplomat. Such a love would cause a mess, and a mess is just what Mountolive cannot tolerate. Later he rejects her again, not any longer because she is married (for her husband has died), but instead because she is no longer lovely. He simply cannot imagine associating with a woman whose face has been savagely scarred by smallpox.

Leila's Great Cobra

After his initial departure, Lelia quickly replaces Mountolive with a "great dusty, cobra, tame as a cat. It is company enough. Besides I have other plans now, other plans. Desert without and desert within" (M 436). The

⁵³Happy Days (Oh Les Beaux Jours), a bilingual edition ed. by James Knowlson (London: Faber and Faber, 1978)60. Beckett released the English version first (1961), and the French text soon followed (1963).

plans she has Mountolive will have difficulty even imagining, the image of the desert within having to do as much with Mountolive as it does with Lelia.

This indolent snake that Lelia nurses is fed milk from a cup. Often when Lelia cares for the snake she thinks of Mountolive. Again, as with Capodistria, the serpent here clearly has some sort of phallic meaning; however, it is not altogether complimentary to Mountolive. As we have already seen, in traditional Coptic and Christian imagery, the serpent tempts Adam and Eve to fall. The result is their awareness of their own sexuality. They become ashamed, and try to cover themselves. Their knowledge is a self-awareness. The serpent here is indolent, domesticated, hopelessly unaware. Any sexuality he represents is of a very sluggish nature. In fact the snake has cast off his sexual associations as easily as he casts off his skin.

The presence of a snake or snakes, as already discussed, usually implies menace: "Because it was chthonic, the snake frequently represented the destructive principle. Its malignant role is most strikingly depicted in conjunction with the eagle" which represented "lightness or good overcoming evil."⁵⁴ The total absence of such

⁵⁴Animals with Human Faces 143. In his section on the serpent, Rowland goes on to write that the symbolic meaning in Christian culture retains such polarities.

menace in a cobra is striking.⁵⁵ Here the snake is fed milk and an occasional bird. There is no battle between good and evil. There is no battle at all, for this snake has been thoroughly domesticated. The cobra and Fluke are one in spirit, distinguishable only by physical form. Otherwise, like Mountolive, they share a similar spirit.

After his initial encounter with Leila, Mountolive is posted to Russia. There he imagines himself in love with a ballerina. But he is soon "cured" of these feelings. In a series of letters to Leila, he writes to her in great detail--which in itself could seem rather cold--the developments and eventual end of this affair:

It is true that I even considered at one time marrying her. I was certainly very much in love. But she cured me in time.... Fortunately she once or twice risked public familiarity which froze me; once when the whole ballet was invited to a reception I got myself seated next to her believing that she would behave with discretion since none of my colleagues knew of our liaison. Imagine their amusement and my horror when all

As mentioned before, the snake was and is strongly associated with sexual drives, especially by the early church: "Since the church attributed pacts with the Devil to primarily sexual motives . . . he [the devil] continued to be represented as a gigantic serpent or dragon with tail, penis, and even arms composed of snakes" (143).

⁵⁵See Durrell's The Avignon Quintet (Monsieur), (New York: Viking Press, 1974)121-126. This passage contains a very similar snake, a domesticated cobra that drinks milk from a cup and is petted by strangers as if it were a lapdog. However, this snake is not a household pet. He is part of a Gnostic ceremony that for Durrell seems to have lost its true fervor and become a very domesticated rite left with only hints of its once former ferocity and power.

of a sudden while we were seated at supper she passed her hand up the back of my head to ruffle my hair in a gesture of coarse endearment! (M 433)

Mountolive is a man who is easily frozen by any sort of familiarity.

Later, he loves Liza, Pursewarden's lovely sister, but he is very reluctant to make a commitment to her because she is blind. The effort involved with caring for a blind person does not intimidate him. However, the unseemliness of an ambassador having a blind wife does. Clea inadvertently, and unknown to Mountolive, witnesses a savage fight at an otherwise deserted beach between Mountolive and Liza over this issue. Clea sees Liza shout at Mountolive through tears, "No, you could not have a blind Ambassadress" (C 743). Liza violently turns her head from side to side "as if trying to find a way of escaping this fearful truth"; however, this provides no relief, and soon she is running toward the sea (C 743). Mountolive hesitates, after all as Clea tells us, he is wearing "that beautifully cut suit of pepper and salt, the flower in his button-hole and the old brown waistcoat he loves....He looked a strangely ineffectual and petulant figure" (C 743). Liza is rescued and the couple hurry back to a chauffeur driven car. Clea is left to contemplate what she has seen:

I thought to myself "A blind Ambassadors?
Why not? If David were a meaner-spirited
man he might think himself: "The originality
alone would help rather than hinder my career
in creating for me artificial sympathies to
replace admiration which I dare only to claim by
virtue of my position!" But he would be too
single-minded for any such thoughts to enter
his mind. (C 743)

Mountolive is not a cruel man, merely a thoroughly
domesticated one. His monochrome vision is a simple one of
order and restraint. He sees Clea after Liza's near
suicide and calls out gaily, "We had a little accident."
And it would, of course, be indecorous for him to ever
mention it again. No wonder it is difficult for Darley "to
imagine Mountolive capable of any very deep feeling" (C
865). According to Cecily Mackworth, Liza and her love
affair with Pursewarden and later her love affair with
Mountolive are "symbols of sterility, of everything coming
to a dead end," and Mountolive is a "negative character
bogged down in his 'definitive education.'"⁵⁶

Liza is problematic for Mountolive because she is a
person who is not domesticated. She is wilful and strong
and dramatic, as the scene at the beach would indicate,
quite used to standing on her own two feet. At one point
Darley compares Liza to a snake, a snake very different
from the tame cobra. Darley visits Mountolive and sees

⁵⁶Cecily Mackworth, "Lawrence Durrell and the New
Romanticism," in The World of Lawrence Durrell, ed. Harry T.
Moore (New York: Dutton Press, 1964)35.

Liza sitting on a sofa, "staring sightlessly at me, with her hands folded in her lap--those rapacious, avaricious hands Had she coiled herself, like a small hateful snake, at the centre of his peaceful life?" (C 784)

Rapacious, avaricious, hateful--now the snake is again in its destructive, menacing avatar. Liza will be the master of the domesticated Mountolive, and not a kindly master at that.

Mountolive's circumspection finally pays off, and he is made ambassador to Paris. There the climate will be cooler, less intense, and therefore more suitable for a Mountolive. Once he is given this prized position Mountolive does marry Liza; but he does so secretly, and one can imagine that he immediately retreats into a very insulated diplomatic life. One is reminded of the admonition Winnie gives Willie in Happy Days when she tells him, "Go back into your hole now, Willie, you've exposed yourself enough. Do as I say, Willie, don't lie sprawling there in this hellish sun, go back into your hole."⁵⁷ Mountolive is a character who is only too willing to retreat back into his diplomatic hole. He will "increasingly enjoy the 'rotting smells' of mediocrity and negation produced by the artificiality he has chosen as a substitute for what apparently could have

⁵⁷Samuel Beckett 36.

been a brilliant and satisfying life."⁵⁸ Mountolive frequently senses that he has lost his will, and that he is quickly becoming little more than a uniform: "I shall become like that dreadful person in Sussex who feebly swears in order to prove that he is really quite an ordinary human being despite the dog collar" (M 497). This, as it turns out, is an entirely accurate prediction. Liza will be there to hold the leash, and to give instructions.

Darley and Pursewarden--Brother Asses

Darley, the Quartet's would-be novelist, is another character endangered of becoming too onesided, too overwhelmed by a tunnel vision. Pursewarden makes fun of Darley's tendencies to pomposity and pretense in a section of his notebooks entitled, "My Conversations with Brother Ass." Brother Ass is, of course, Darley.

Darley joins Pursewarden at a bar and talks incessantly about the writing process. Pursewarden effectively depicts the scene:

The one speaks in a low, modulated voice, using language with tact and intuition; the other shifts, shamefacedly shouting in his own mind, but only answering with an occasional affirmative or negative to these well-rounded proposition which are for the most part true! (C 749)

⁵⁸Art for Love's Sake 113.

While Darley carries on with his pronouncements on art and what he conceives as the artistic vision, Pursewarden silently instructs him, constantly referring to him as Brother Ass. Pursewarden chides Darley, but even as he does so, he is chiding himself: "Together we will circumvent the furies and become celebrated for our depiction of the English scene, of English life which moves to the stately rhythm of an autopsy" (C 750). But Pursewarden doubts Darley's ability to comprehend, and finally he ends by asking, "Do you hear me, Brother Ass?" Of course Darley does not hear him, for these are silent conversations. The question is at the same time both humorous and serious. Pursewarden assumes that Darley would not be able to understand him even if his words were audible.

"Brother Ass" becomes Pursewarden's epithet for Darley, but because they are "brother" artists it applies to himself as well. It is a very effective epithet, for the characteristics associated with the ass are numerous and often contradictory, much like these two authors themselves. Of course, the slang word ass may have more to do with a specific anatomical area than with the four-legged beast. However, it is clear that Durrell's use includes the imagery associated with the animal, for in

this section Pursewarden uses the word jackass in reference to Darley as well (C 771).

According to Beryl Rowland there was in Egypt an ass cult which was "superseded by the cult of the goddess Isis, and the ass came to be regarded with abhorrence as the insignia of the god Set (Typhon), the murderer of Isis. The ass symbolized lust and cruelty."⁵⁹ Because of their incestuous relationship, Isis and Osiris are figures that Durrell associates with Pursewarden and Liza. Their love is powerful, wrongheaded, and destructive. In the case of the Quartet, the murderer of the Osiris figure is Osiris himself. Pursewarden kills himself, for a multitude of reasons, one of which is to protect his sister. He is both abhorred and respected for his actions. He is a very limited reproduction of the Osiris figure. Lustful and cruel, Pursewarden seems to enjoy the suffering of Justine, a woman he repeatedly rejects. But he can also be tender and restrained, refusing Clea's request that he deflower her.

In Greece the ass represents wisdom and prophecy because Silenus rode an ass, and because the sacred animal of Bacchus was an ass as well; however, at the same time Apollo gives Midas asses' ears as punishment for his

⁵⁹Animals with Human Faces 23.

foolish behavior.⁶⁰ Originally in Christian Europe the ass also stood for wisdom and humility, but it soon came to represent opposing qualities as well:

The ass had been solemnly introduced into the church to represent the animals of the prophet, of the Nativity, of the Flight into Egypt, or of the entry into Jerusalem. Now it became part of the ceremonies burlesquing church ritual, in which dancing, feasting, and buffoonery soon provided an occasion for utmost licence.⁶¹

In the church the ass was a creature embodying humility. In the "Feast of the Asses" revellers drank heavily, wore women's clothing, and carried "their 'assing' to remarkable extremes. In such festivities the ass was a complex symbol."⁶² In Durrell, the symbol is also complex, certainly more complex than is the dog Fluke, for a Darley is more interesting and has more potential than a Mountolive.

⁶⁰Animals with Human Faces 24. Durrell uses the Midas story in the Quartet, replacing Midas with Alexander. Narouz tells Mountolive: "'Listen' he said, listen to the sakkias. Do you know their story? At least, what the villagers say? Alexander the Great has asses' ears though only one person knew his secret. That was his barber who was a Greek. Difficult to keep a secret if you are Greek! So the barber to relieve his soul went out into the fields and told it to the sakkias; ever since the sakkias are crying sadly to each other 'Alexander has asses' ears'" (M 417).

⁶¹Animals with Human Faces 22.

⁶²Animals with Human Faces 23.

Pursewarden's unspoken inquiry "do you hear me, Brother Ass" is very similar to the question Philosophy puts to Boethius: "Do you understand...have my words impressed you at all, or are you 'like the ass which cannot hear the lyre?'"⁶³ Boethius, original thinker and astute statesman, is caught in a political mire not unlike the one in which Pursewarden and Darley find themselves sinking. For Boethius, the ass is a symbol of incompetence. Boethius himself fears that he has not clearly understood what Philosophy has to tell him. Both Pursewarden and Darley fear they are not the writers they have dreamed of being. Pursewarden has achieved a certain amount of fame, but he knows such fame is fleeting and fears he is all reputation and no substance.

In their correspondence Henry Miller writes to Lawrence Durrell about this "Brother Ass" section: "This part--like an interpolation--seemed weakest to me, though containing much profound observation on art and life."⁶⁴ Miller finds Pursewarden the least attractive of the characters in the Quartet because "one is not sure at times

⁶³Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy, trans. by Richard Green, (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1962) 9. According to a note by Richard Green Boethius is citing the Greek proverb: . A more literal translation than the one given in the text is "lyre before an ass," similar in connotation to "pearls before swine."

⁶⁴Lawrence Durrell and Henry Miller, A Private Correspondence (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1963) 361.

whether the author is taking his double-faced protagonist seriously or ironically." The character of Pursewarden is problematic. He is often "sententious and tedious and feeble." For many readers, Joyce's Stephen Dedalus can pose some of the same problems. Dedalus is, or at least aspires to become, an artist, and we are to respect that, but he too can be sententious and even tedious. Is Pursewarden, like Dedalus, an artist portrayed in the moments of realizing his vocation, or merely a poseur convinced of his own act, a ridiculous mockery?⁶⁵

Some of the same debate surrounds Durrell's Pursewarden. Henry Miller writes to Durrell before the publication of Clea encouraging him to slice down Pursewarden's remarks: "I never get the conviction that he

⁶⁵Innumerable articles surrounding Joyce's attitude concerning Dedalus exist. Wayne Booth's, "The Problem of Distance in The Portrait of the Artist, published in "The Rhetoric of Fiction [(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961)323-336] and Robert Scholes', "Stephen Dedalus, Poet or Esthete," [PMLA, LXXXIX (Sept. 1964)484-489] outline the two basic approaches in dealing with this question. For further analysis of the question of Durrell's attitude toward the artist in general and toward Darley and Pursewarden in specific see: Alain Bosquet, "Lawrence Durrell ou l'azure ironique," La Nouvelle Revue Française, (168)1116-23; Reed Way Dasenbrock, "Lawrence Durrell and the Modes of Modernism," Twentieth Century Literature, XXXIII, iv: 515-527; Bonamy Dobrée, "Durrell's Alexandrian Series," The Sewanee Review, 1960: 197-204; G.S. Fraser, Lawrence Durrell: A Study (London: Faber and Faber, 1968)134-139; Alan Warren Friedman, Lawrence Durrell and The Alexandria Quartet: Art For Love's Sake (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1970)136-165; A.K. Weatherhead, "Romantic Anachronism in The Alexandria Quartet," MFS, X: 128-136.

was the great writer you wish him to seem."⁶⁶ However, Durrell makes no changes after receiving this advice. For in Pursewarden he has successfully created a character who can never get the conviction himself that he is the writer he wishes to seem. Pursewarden is a Dedalus who never matures.⁶⁷ Pursewarden is a figure for whom achievements actualized will never live up to achievements visualized. The confusion is Pursewarden's, not Durrell's.

Irony is Pursewarden's shield from his own doubts. If he is not really a serious writer after all, it is because he does not take anything seriously. God is a Humorist, Pursewarden's magnum opus, reflects his philosophy that life is a joke. However, his irony is often thinly disguised bitterness, a bitterness that frequently manifests itself in arrogance and cruelty. Pursewarden claims, "I am not being cruel. It is simply that I am not indulgent" (C 750). But, in fact, Pursewarden is both cruel and self-indulgent, as the entire Brother Ass section proves. He pontificates on different authors just as Darley does, often using his sharp wit for ridicule and

⁶⁶Correspondence 361.

⁶⁷In The Black Book, there are two writers, Herbert Gregory and Lawrence Lucifer, who are cut from this same mold. Both have the pretensions of being great writers. The question is, do they also have the talent. Cf. Sharon Lee Brown, "The Black Book: A Search for Method," Modern Fiction Studies, XIII, iii: 319-328.

harm. He celebrates himself and his own work--focussing on substance while Darley focusses on style. It is easy to see why Miller felt compelled to write: "Darley and he seem to be the two halves of a coin."⁶⁸ However, Darley will eventually make his escape. Pursewarden will not. Because Pursewarden's attacks on Darley are written in a first person narrative, the reader is allowed a deeper understanding of Pursewarden. Like the narrator of Bartleby the Scrivner or the priest in "Soliloquy of a Spanish Cloister," Pursewarden reveals more about himself than he does about the person he scorns. It is Pursewarden who is the ass.

Pursewarden's career is already for the most part behind him. Darley is in the process of molding his. Darley can still choose. He is not yet trapped by his own persona as is Mountolive:

To this extent Mountolive serves as a foil to Darley, for his story is a Bildungsroman with a difference: first, there are the maturation and success of the sensitive and apparently deserving adolescent . . . but, second, there follows a spiritual decline when compromise and vacillation replace firmness and dedication as a way of life.⁶⁹

If Darley is to avoid spiritual decline, he must come to grips with his talent before it is too conventional, too

⁶⁸Correspondence 361.

⁶⁹Art for Love's Sake 113.

commonplace. He must learn to combine substance with style rather than have to choose between them. In order for Darley to avoid being as domesticated a writer as Mountolive is a diplomat, he clearly must struggle against his own inclinations. It is this struggle which is one of the main focal points the Brother Ass section.

As Darley discusses endlessly the importance of a choice of style, Pursewarden mentally laughs at this young writer who is shopping for style the way a person shops for a cut of meat:

Oh, to write like Ruskin! When poor
Effie tried to get to his bed, he shoo'd
the girl away! Oh, to write like Carlyle!
Haggis of the mind. When a Scotman comes
to toun [sic] Can Spring be far behind? No.
Everything you say is truthful and full of
point; relative truth, and somewhat pointless
point, but nevertheless I will try and think
about this invention of scholiasts, for clearly
style is as important to you as matter to me.
(C 755)

Darley is correct about literature the way Mountolive is correct about diplomacy. It requires a dangerous, deadening correctness. Pursewarden urges Darley to be more like a Byron than a Ruskin: "He [Byron] really lived, his life was truly imaginary" (C 756). He chides Darley for his excessive concern for style: "Great stylists are those who are least certain of their effects. The secret lack in their matter haunts them without knowing it!" (C 756).

Pursewarden tells Darley he must decide whether he is going to be a Longfellow or a Lawrence: "Longfellow heralds the age of invention for he first thought out the mechanical piano. You pedal, it recites....Lawrence was a limb of the genuine oak-tree, with the needed girth and span" (C 756). Again, Pursewarden is speaking as much about himself as he is about Darley, for Pursewarden has long played his own mechanical piano. He pedals and irony spews.

In Pursewarden, Durrell has created a character who has failed at love and who has failed at life. His art fails because, like everything else, it becomes too one-sided. Like Mountolive, he becomes a slave to his own image, to what is expected. Certainly, Pursewarden is more lively and more compelling than Mountolive, but finally he is just as trapped. Romantically, he is trapped by a incestuous love that feeds on itself, but that cannot really grow. He is trapped by his background, and by "the gaunt faces of the English muses." He knows that the formula for success is to write a book "characterized by the desired quality which will make us rich and famous: it will be characterized by a total lack of codpiece!" (C 760) He is making fun of the taste of the general public, but at the same time he is mocking himself and his own success. He becomes a "Cry-baby of the Western World" as he calls

it. However, unlike Mountolive, Pursewarden is unwilling to live a life of total capitulation and so he kills himself. Pursewarden writes the "Brother Ass" piece assuming that Darley will never read it; however, Darley does read it and benefit from it after Pursewarden's suicide. The advice Pursewarden gives, that he himself did not follow, helps Darley escape a similar fate.

Domestication of animals and men, makes of the wide world a zoo. The bars are often, as for Mountolive and Pursewarden, invisible constraint not of body but of spirit, but they are no less effective. They form a portable cage, a dungeon within, where the frustrated beast pads restlessly back and forth behind walls that went up silently and with their passive acceptance:

With no consideration, no pity, no shame,
they've built walls around me, thick and high.
And now I sit here feeling hopeless. . . .
When they were building walls, how could I have
not noticed!
But I never heard the builders, not a sound.
Imperceptibly they've closed me off. . . .⁷⁰

In Durrell's Alexandria, the walls are built high, trapping man and beast alike. There is no escape. Birds, traditional symbols of flight and freedom, are caged, or they are shot down. All passive, harmless beasts are invariably harmed, their feet, and other parts, literally

⁷⁰C.P. Cavafy, Collected Poems trans. by Edmund Keely and Philip Sherrard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975)3.

cut out from under them without explanation or apology. The weak in spirit are yoked both physically and spiritually, harnessed to the purposes of the powerful. The innocent are ravaged. It is a savage, constantly shifting world where the strong and powerful dominate ruthlessly while they are able and are pitilessly victimized the instant they are not. The city is a zoo, an assemblage of cages for predator and prey alike. All who huddle inside are its victims. Only the artist has a key to the cage, and it is the rare artist who can hold his hand steady in order to turn that key.

CHAPTER FIVE

Art: The Last Sanctuary

I

Introduction

Masterless and still untamed
Poet, lead the race you've shamed.

--Lawrence Durrell, "Poem"

In Darwinian fashion, Lawrence Durrell collapses the boundaries between the world of animals and that of human beings, pointing again and again to a similar kind of intelligence, which is often at the mercy of instinctive forces responding with blind obedience. Unlike Darwin, however, Durrell is decidedly anthropocentric in his approach. Even though he deliberately obscures the distinction between man and animal, it is clear that the lack of such a distinction is to be mourned, and that we must look to the artist to redraw the line, to secure us from an inferior animal world characterized by a lack of vision, a lack of history, a lack of soul.

For Durrell spiritual and artistic survival depends necessarily on the repression of physical, sensual aspects of human existence, the denial of anything smacking of animality. Durrell in actuality celebrates the difference

between animal (including the average human animal) and artist. But such a denial of the physical is difficult in the world of teeming physicality that is Alexandria:

Capitally, what is this city of ours?
What is resumed in the word Alexandria?
In a flash my mind's eye shows me a thousand
dust-tormented streets. Flies and beggars own
it today--and those who enjoy an intermediate
existence between either. (J 47)

The city propagates a hybrid creature--half-animal, half-human. It is populated by "those who enjoy an intermediate existence." For such beings, a specifically human activity (art is for Durrell the pre-eminent example) becomes impossible. Alexandria is dominated and, in Durrell's scheme, corrupted by the physical: "The City, for Durrell, is a metaphor for modern life, the battle ground upon which man, the artist must struggle to survive."¹

Profusion run wild issues in decay and sterility. For order to emerge from the chaos, the lines must be redrawn, the tangled skein repatterned. What God did before history--establish land upon water--man must in history renew, appointing to all creation its place and name. A human maker and namer must be found to redefine

¹Jane Pinchin, Alexandria Still: Forster, Durrell, and Cavafy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977)6.

boundaries, to restore old Hellenic and Aegean glory. For Durrell this hero can only be the artist.

The Quartet, approached from the perspective of this end, reveals itself finally as a künstlerroman,² an account of the coming of age of an artist who seeks a liberating literature, an art that can provide individuals with a base for self-understanding and self-definition. Life could imitate such an art, and in so doing transcend not only nature but also the debased culture of contemporary Alexandria.³ To escape the intolerable temporal conditions, the artist must find a "new light, a new city of light" (J 148).

Such an artist prepares for his vocation by experiencing life without succumbing to it. Though he may experience bestial impulses, he must not become a beast. Darley must both experience life and then finally withdraw from it. Like the great heroes, he must make his purgative trip into the inferno. But he must also find his way out

²Durrell comments to Kenneth Young in an early interview, "The whole business of the four books, apart from other things shows that way an artist grows up." ["A Dialogue with Durrell," Encounter, XIII, vi: 62.]

³References to life imitating art appear frequently in the Quartet. Darley sees his relationship with Justine imitating the fictional account of Claudia's relationship with Arnauti. When Darley sees the body of Melissa lying in the same hospital and in the same bed where he had earlier ministered to Cohen, he says "It would be just like life to imitate art . . ." (J 188).

again, achieving a distance that will permit rejuvenation
and make creation possible.

II

The Book of the Dead

Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge,
so many,
I had not thought death had undone
so many.
--T.S. Eliot, "The Waste Land"

If art has any message, it must be
this: to remind us that we are dying
without having lived.

--Lawrence Durrell, Key to Modern Poetry

The purpose of Durrell's methodical use of degraded animal imagery is to include man in a portrait of natural victimization, a prey to environmental forces which are indifferent to his plight. Durrell depicts a world of decay, a decay that produces only more of itself, without a fertilizing regeneration. Durrell's Alexandria is an Inferno peopled by the dead of one kind or another, who fill the void by torturing one another--much as Garcin, in Huis Clos, cries "L'enfer, c'est les Autres."⁴

When Darley complains to Justine that she has victimized him, she replies by berating him:

⁴John Paul Sartre, Huis Clos/ Les Mouches, (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1947)93.

You talk as if there was a choice. We are not strong enough or evil enough to choose. All this is part of an experiment arranged by something else, the city perhaps, or another part of ourselves. (J 28)

The inhabitants of Alexandria are reduced to laboratory animals, part of an experiment they cannot begin to fathom.

In 1945, while serving as press attaché in Alexandria, Durrell wrote to Henry Miller, "I have drafted about twenty pages of the new version of The Book of the Dead--it's about incest and Alexandria, inseparable ideas here"⁵ The Book of the Dead became the Quartet, of course, but Durrell's first choice of titles is not surprising. Corpses abound in the work. And those who remain physically alive are spiritually dead, caught up in a world of desperate, meaningless sexuality that is narcissistic or incestuous, a modified narcissism. The zombies outnumber even the corpses.⁶

Durrell was overwhelmed by Alexandria; for him it

⁵Lawrence Durrell/Henry Miller: A Private Correspondence, ed. George Wickes (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1963)201.

⁶The Egyptian Book of the Dead, of course, contains many of myths, including Isis and Osiris, that Durrell uses in The Quartet. Durrell's first choice of titles would have played on the idea of the spiritual dead as in Joyce's "The Dead," and on those actually physically dead, as well as the Egyptian allusion.

was a city which exuded an "atmosphere of sex and death."⁷ He was, therefore, happy to leave in 1945 when he moved to Rhodes to become a press secretary. In Reflection on a Marine Venus, Rhodes is depicted as a heaven: "After Egypt with its swarming vermin, its population of Apes in nightgowns, its dirt, disease, and truncated beggars on trolleys," Rhodes is "preciously close to paradise"⁸

Durrell uses animal imagery to more closely associate man with his own physicality and consequently his own mortality. If man is merely and entirely animal then he has not been singled out by a benevolent force. There is no promise of an immortality designed specifically for him. His own intelligence becomes a cruel joke for it allows him the ability to anticipate his own demise which undermines and mocks his accomplishments. Life becomes meaningless, and many, (as we have seen in association with the Gnostics) like Pursewarden, cease their struggle.

⁷A Private Correspondence 189.

⁸Reflections on a Marine Venus (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1960)42.

An Investigation of Modern Love

According to many critics, even Durrell himself, the Quartet offers an investigation of modern love.⁹ And certainly love would seem to provide a means of escape to the trapped Alexandrian. In his discussion of love in the Quartet, one critic notes:

For love is all about us and all-encompassing, our one standard of good and evil in an otherwise amoral and valueless world; and since love is, without contradiction, something different for every viewer, it presents an endless potential for variations on a theme.¹⁰

Certainly, there are endless variations in the Quartet on the theme of love, but none of them offers much in the way of comfort or rejuvenation. As we have already seen, Durrell's Alexandrians have difficulty mustering sufficient love or even attention for their own offspring. Nor does

⁹For the best examination of this theme see: Eskin Stanley, "Durrell's Themes in The Alexandria Quartet," Texas Quarterly, V, iv: 353-56; G. S. Fraser, Lawrence Durrell: A Study (London: Faber and Faber, 1968) 114-1168; Ann Gossman, "Love's Alchemy in the Alexandria Quartet," Critique, XIII: 83-96; Frederick Karl, "Lawrence Durrell: Physical and Metaphysical Love," in The Contemporary English Novel (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy, 1962) 40-61; Alan Warren Friedman, "Balthazar and the Enigmatic Pursuit of Love," in Lawrence Durrell and the Alexandria Quartet: Art for Love's Sake, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970) 87-110.

¹⁰Alan Warren Friedman, Lawrence Durrell and the Alexandria Quartet: Love for Art's Sake (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970) 157.

fraternal love come any easier.¹¹ But it is in their involvement in "romantic" love that we see the most vicious and "unloving" side of Durrell's characters.

Couples abound in Durrell's Alexandria--Justine and Nessim, Justine and Darley, Melissa and Nessim, Justine and Pursewarden, Pursewarden and Liza, Clea and Narouz, Clea and Justine, Melissa and Cohen, Clea and Darley. This list goes on, but it alone suggests the degree of loyalty love breeds in the work. Darley, in trying to analyze what love has meant to all these different people, looks to the events, hoping the concrete can somehow explain the intangible:

Only I think to the facts themselves; for they might enable me to see now a little further into the central truth of the enigma called "love." I see the image of it receding and curling away from me in an infinite series like the waves of the sea; or, colder than a dead moon, rising up over the dreams and illusions that I fabricated from it My "love" for her [Justine], Melissa's "love" for me, Nessim's "love" for her [Justine], her "love" for Pursewarden there should be a whole vocabulary of adjectives with which to qualify the noun--for no two contained the same properties; yet all contained the one indefinable quality, one common unknown in treachery. Each of us, like the moon, had a dark side--could turn the lying face of "unlove" towards the person who most loved and needed us. And just as Justine used my love, so Nessim used Melissa's One upon the back of the other, crawling about like "crabs in a basket." (B 297-298)

¹¹Nessim is a good example of this. His relationship with Narouz has always been a distant one, and it degenerates even further.

Love is colder than "the dead moon," with one consistent trait--treachery.

Betrayals

Love, in the Quartet, if it ever exists at all, is very fleeting. It offers no permanent answers, no lasting consolations. After Melissa's death, Darley has difficulty recalling what it was that brought them, or kept them, together even though at the beginning of their relationship, he felt that "a door had suddenly opened upon an intimacy with Melissa--an intimacy not the less marvelous for being unexpected and totally undeserved" (J 124). Though they have sex, Darley and Melissa are never really intimate. Too many events, too many people divide them. Darley does not even know of Melissa's illness. He learns of her child after her death. Modern love is the symbol "of communication that never happens."¹²

Melissa too is guilty of her own betrayals. Melissa feels toward Cohen the way Darley feels toward her. At one time, Melissa had spent a great deal of time with Cohen, begging him to divorce his wife and marry her. But when he is dying and asking for her, she refuses to go. Of this, Darley surmises, "Cohen was in a sense already dead and

¹²Cf. B 328. The exact line reads, "The telephone is a modern symbol for communications which never take place."

buried. He had lost his place in our history, and an emotional expenditure on him seemed to me useless" (J 88). When Narouz is dying, he asks for Clea. Nessim calls to plead with her to come. Clea responds with protest: "What can I do, Nessim? He is nothing to me, never was, never will be. Oh, it is so disgusting" (M 643). Love in the Quartet often rouses disgust rather than affection or even pity. For Clea, Narouz has never really existed. Many in the Quartet, like Cohen and Narouz, are in a sense already dead and buried.

Obviously, Capodistria will not provide us with an example of uplifting love. His rape of Justine turns "her first into a nymphomaniac and then, with his supposed death, into a 'tubby little peasant' humbling herself by digging her hard paws into the adamant earth."¹³ We assume that Capodistria and treachery are no strangers. However, even in those couples from whom we could expect to see an examination of love--Justine and Darley, or Justine and Nessim, or Darley and Clea--none is forthcoming.

Darley sees Justine and Nessim as "the magnificent two-headed animal a marriage could be" (J 33). But this particular animal has more heads than Darley anticipates. In fact, with the help of Balthazar's Interlinear, Darley begins to understand that the Hosnani marriage is based on

¹³Art for Love's Sake 65.

political rather than emotional compatibility. Nessim "loves" the fact that Justine is Jewish, a necessary asset for Nessim's role in a Coptic plot against the Egyptian state and against English interests. Justine's "love" for Darley and for Pursewarden is part of that plot.

Nessim, not in the least the jealous husband, sets up both affairs. Darley must be watched because he is seeing Melissa, who is the mistress of Cohen. Nessim and Justine worry that Melissa knows more of their endeavors than she should. After Justine's affair with Darley, they decide quite erroneously that she knows nothing. (It is in fact Melissa who reveals to Pursewarden Nessim's Palestinian connection.) Pursewarden must be watched because of his political clout. Both are watched, but neither is loved. As for Nessim, it is his political machinations which attract Justine to him. As soon as danger and intrigue subside, so does "love," and Justine goes about the task of creating her own intrigue, her own danger, her own world of harm.

The elusive nature of love is also a compelling theme in the work of Constantine Cavafy, as we have seen a much quoted poet in the Quartet. According to Edmund Keely, in Cavafy's Alexandria where "the unresurrected Adonis presides," love is "apparently doomed to last no more than

a passing moment, and the principle recompense for its inevitable frustration and dissolution" is the intensity of the moment.¹⁴

Cyclical Lack

In the Quartet, the moment, though often confusing and frustrating, is not even that intense. Clea tells Darley, "The love you feel for Melissa, the same love, is trying to work itself out through Justine" (C 728). Darley wonders if the same could be said of Clea. Regardless of the face, the final outcome will be the same, for this is Alexandria which has "everything but happiness to offer its lovers" (B 215).

Darley first meets Melissa in a coffee shop where he is struck by her "wrinkling up her nose: laughing with such candor, so lightly and effortlessly, that there and then . . . I decided to love her" (J 54-55). He kisses her and later remembers the kiss fondly for "it symbolized the passion we enjoyed, its . . . lack of intenseness: its charity" (J 55). Later he meets Clea in a café in the "exact station in place and time where I had once found Melissa" (C 66). Clea wrinkles up her nose in a similar fashion. Jane Pinchin points out that "over an interval of years both women even appear in the same dress with its

¹⁴Cavafy's Alexandria (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976) 58.

leaf-veined pattern."¹⁵ Not only are the physical circumstances familiar, but so are the emotional circumstances. Darley's relationship with both Melissa and Clea is characterized by a strange "lack of intenseness" as well.

This "lack" is underscored in another pair of love relationships involving Darley and Justine, and later Darley and Clea. After Darley and Justine have made love for the first time, there is no sense of elation on either one's part:

When we had made love and lay once more awake she said:

"I am always so bad the first time, why is it?"

"Nerves perhaps. So am I"

"You are a little afraid of me." (J 75)

When Darley and Clea make love for the first time, the conversation which follows is identical:

And when we awoke to find everything silent once more she lit a candle and we lay by its flickering light, looking at each other, and talked in whispers.

"I am always so bad the first time, why is it?"

"So am I."

"Are you afraid of me?"

"No. Nor of myself."

"Did you ever imagine this?"

"We must both have done. Otherwise it would not have happened. (C 728)

Darley has done more than imagine it. What was started with Justine is continued through Clea. Neither relationship ultimately satisfies. Darley is unable to

¹⁵Alexandria Still 173.

find the intensity in consummation that Cavafy describes in his poetry, but even in Cavafy,

these moments of abandon in the presence of uninhibited Eros are rather few . . . and however intense the pleasures that characterize them, they nevertheless belong to the unmetamorphosized, transient, and partial world of the poet's actual city. No relief from the influence of time and fate is possible with the confines of this world; the only true relief, the only lasting consolation, comes with its transformation into art.¹⁶

For both Durrell and Cavafy, art makes the transitory permanent, the partial whole: "It is art that realizes the ephemeral and the unrealized, the shabby and commercial . . . to another region where the mind holds power and sway."¹⁷

Illusions of Love and Personality

According to Pursewarden, people live "lives based upon selected fictions. Our view of reality is conditioned by our position in space and time--not by our personalities as we like to think" and thus reality is "based upon a unique position. Two paces east or west and the whole picture is changed" (B 210). He goes on to deny the very existence of personality: "And as for human character, whether real or invented, there are no such animals. . . . Personality as something with fixed attributes is an

¹⁶Cavafy's Alexandria 59.

¹⁷Cavafy's Alexandria 59.

illusion--but a necessary illusion if we are to love" (B 210).¹⁸

Critic Carl Bode is convinced the Durrell believes it is "only through love that the real personality can be comprehended. And he believes that it is the act of love itself which is the most revealing."¹⁹ Love, in this context, is indeed a revealing act, but what is revealed is an illusory personality, a construction upon which to base an equally illusory love:

The characters of Durrell's books are never ascetic, and he approves of their efforts to use sexuality as the means of confirming individuality and as a testimony of the divinity within them. But if personality is an illusion, necessary if there is to be love, and sex is a psychic rather than physical act, the problem is to tell if the tortured consciousness . . . is the proof of eternal imprisonment in the flesh or the sign of an ultimate freedom.²⁰

One illusion is based on another. Love, like personality, is illusory in the Quartet so long as it is fixed in "time and space," that is to say imprisoned in the flesh. Only "the dreams and illusions" Darley and other

¹⁸Cf. Phyllis Read, "The Illusion of Personality: Cyclical Time in Durrell's Alexandria Quartet," Modern Fiction Studies, XIII, iii: 389-99.

¹⁹Carl Bode, "A Guide to Alexandria," in The World of Lawrence Durrell, ed. Harry T. Moore (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1962)209.

²⁰John Arthos, "Lawrence Durrell's Gnosticism" The Personalist, XLIII, iii: 369.

artists like him fabricate from "love" are real, for then the entire construct--love, personality, and the actions they enable--is free from temporal and spatial constraints. In other words, it only through art that the real personality can be comprehended.

For Cavafy, Alexandria was the "Sensual City." His poems, which have as their backdrop the modern Alexandria, focus exclusively on eroticism, and this eroticism often leads to deep abiding love, a love celebrated and relived long after the lovers have parted. But for Durrell there is "no 'happy' sensuality. Love is at best a sad encounter. At worst, it is a destructive absolute."²¹

Clea tells Darley:

Love is horribly stale, and each of us
is allotted only a portion It is
capable of appearing in a variety of
forms But it is limited in quantity,
can be used up, become shop-worn and faded.
(J 130)

In fact, in Durrell's Alexandria love is a disaster, a carnage. Only when the battle is over, when love is lost, or at least distanced, can it be redeemed in art. Only when love is liberated from the actual can it offer consolation and rejuvenation. Thus, the divination of love as infernal, the isolation love engenders as purgatorial,

²¹Victor Brombert, "Lawrence Durrell and his French Reputation," in The World of Lawrence Durrell 183.

the art resulting from the artist's love and isolation as our best paradise, is at the heart of Durrell's vision:

Art, like a skilled masseur on a playing-field, is always standing by to help deal with casualties; and just as the masseur does, its ministrations ease up the tensions of the psyche's musculature. That is why it always goes for the sore places, its fingers pressing upon the knotted muscles, the tendon afflicted cramp--the sins, perversion, displeasing points which we are reluctant to accept. Revealing them with its harsh kindness it unravels the tensions, relaxes the psyche. (C 762-763)

Art, not love, gives answers and meaning. Art restores to love what loving destroys. That is why Clea and Darley must separate. Their love can thrive only when they are not together. Darley is not really looking for a woman he can spend endless hours with. He is looking for his Beatrice, a woman he can spend countless hours writing about.

The lover in this scheme becomes an artist creating his own Pygmalion. Darley tells us that in all his writing he has been celebrating,

the power of an image which I had created involuntarily by the mere act of seeing Justine. There was no question of true or false. Nymph? Goddess? Vampire? Yes, she was all of these and none of them. . . . Under all these masks there was only another woman, every woman, like a lay figure in a dressmaker's shop, waiting for the poet to clothe her, breathe life into her. (C 694)

Separation from this created persona is necessary if love is to continue. Darley senses this--even as he feels great sorrow at Justine's desertion, he "shrank from the thought

that she might return" (J 66). He is glad to have loved, but at the same time he tells himself, "Spare me the pangs of love requited with Justine" (J 66). Justine herself tells Darley, "One learns nothing from those who return our love" (C 694). Darley accepts this as wounding but true. Unrequited love is the great teacher.

Pombal has a whirlwind, one-month affair with a model, Sveva, and describes for Darley the horrors of requited love:

I very nearly married her. It is infuriating.
Thank God that the veil lifted when it did.
It was seeing her naked in front of the mirror.
All of a sudden I was disgusted--though mentally
I admitted a sort of Renaissance dignity in the
fallen breasts, the waxy skin and the little
peasant paws. All of a sudden I sat up in bed
and said to myself "My God! She is an elephant
in need of a coat of whitewash!" (J 119).

She is a model, hardly an elephant. But her physicality, her animality looms large, and in the mirror Pombal sees not only her potential for physical decay but also his own. It is too overwhelming to face directly. But art is the great healer. It fulfills the unrealized, and brings to the center the peripheral. Cavafy outlines the restorative power of art in his poem "I've Brought to Art":

I sit in a mood of reverie.
I've brought to Art desires and sensations:
things half-glimpsed,
faces of lines, certain indistinct memories
of unfulfilled love affairs.
Let me submit to Art:
Art knows how to shape forms of Beauty,
almost imperceptibly completing life,

blending impressions, blending day with day.²²

Mirror On The Wall

The mirror, like art, is a way many of Durrell's characters attempt self discovery.²³ Ambrose Gordon refers to Durrell's mirrors as representing Eros, a world of blindness. Lovers look but they do not see.²⁴ Here Pombal can "see" his lover, but not himself. The mirror like art separates the object from its actual self. It can deform or it can beautify, either way distortion occurs.

The mirrors are also, of course, tied to the myth of Narcissus, and Justine the most narcissistic of all spends considerable time in front of mirrors. In her article, "Some Characters in Search of A Mirror," Ann Gossman writes of Justine's self-discovery through mirrors:

²²Cavafy, C. P. The Complete Poems of Cavafy, trans. Edmund Keely and Philip Sherrard, ed. George Savidis (Princeton: Princeton University Press)219.

²³For a more extensive examination of Durrell's use of mirrors see Bonamy Dobrée, "Durrell's Alexandrian Series," Lawrence Durrell, ed. Harry Moore (Southern Illinois University Press, 1962)188-91; Ambrose Gordon "Time, Space, and Eros," Six Contemporary Novels, ed. William Sutherland (Austin, Texas, 1962)14-16; Ann Gossman, "Some Character in Search of a Mirror," Critique, VIII, iii: 79-84; Eleanor Hutchens, "The Heraldic Universe in the Alexandria Quartet," College English, XXIV: 57-60; Ray Morrison, "Mirrors and the Heraldic Universe in Lawrence Durrell's The Alexandria Quartet." Twentieth Century Literature, XXXIII, iv: 499-514.

²⁴"The Heraldic Universe in the Alexandria Quartet," College English, XXIV: 58.

Justine, in her sharkskin costume at the dressmaker's, cries in delight: "Look! five different pictures of the same subject," but even she draws the analogy to art: why not try for "a prismatic view" of the many profiles of the subject (Justine, p. 18)? She seems almost to invite her lover to write of the five Justines in as many mirrors."²⁵

Justine sees that from different angles she is viewed differently. The mature Darley will attempt to incorporate these multiple visions in his art, to have "sliding panels," as Pursewarden calls them. Gossman further analyzes Arnauti's Moeurs as a mirror through which Darley sees his relationship with Justine. Justine's diaries and Balthazar's Interlinear, as well as Pursewarden's notebooks work in much the same way. The final story, Darley sees, must be told in layers.²⁶ As discussed earlier, the artist creates a palimpsestic impression.²⁷ Pursewarden outlines a possible formula:

. . . You might try a four-card trick in the form of a novel; passing a common axis through four stories. . . . A continuum embodying not a temps retrouvé but a temps délivré. The curvature of space itself would give you a stereoscopic narrative, while human personality seen across a continuum would perhaps become prismatic. (C 757-758)

²⁵Critique, VIII, iii, (Spring, 1966) 79.

²⁶According to G. S. Fraser in Lawrence Durrell: A Study, the artist develops a philosophy of art, like the Principle of Indeterminacy which Durrell celebrates, which emphasizes in human behavior, "ambiguous and multiple causation" (120).

²⁷See Chapter 1, section ii.

Darley begins to realize that he cannot examine facts as a means of getting at the truth. Darley's Cahiers, Balthazar's Interlinear, Justine's notebooks all describe the same events with very different interpretations. Which mirror reflects the true image? Darley comes to the conclusion that "if two or more explanations of a single human action are as good as each other" then action itself is "but an illusion" (C 791). There is no true image. It is life itself that is a fiction (C 792). Given such a vision the succeeding generations of artists then form a chain like those people who line up "to pass buckets of water up to a fire, or to bring in a lifeboat. An uninterrupted chain of humans born to explore the inward riches of the solitary life . . ." (C 792).

Art is the lifeboat for society, offering a haven. It provides protection and solace. It can transform a tubby woman into a Cleopatra. It can conceive of an enduring love. As Pursewarden asserts, "People will realize one day that it is only the artist who can make things really happen; that is why society should be founded upon him" (M 566).

Mythic Memories

Art can make things happen permanently. An action that would otherwise be fleeting is freed from time, rendered eternal. It can also falsify the record, creating

mythic figures out of less than ideal people. Scobie's death is his best career move. It takes him out of the public eye, and allows myth to grow. Scobie, a comic booby in life, is after his death a figure of religious awe, a saint. By brewing a lethal whiskey in his bathtub, Scobie is responsible not only for his own death, but also for the deaths of many in "the Quarter." Despite this the community makes a shrine of his bathtub reverently referring to him as El Yacoub or El Scob. The Coptic Church registers the shrine. The fictive El Scob will have a much greater longevity than the deformed old man, who was Clea's friend and loved dressing up in his Dolly Varden hat.

His friends' memories of him, however, are not enough to render him immortal. It is his transformation into myth that makes Scobie a permanent part of the Egyptian landscape:

The act of recollection, however, honest and complete, is not enough in itself to effect this resurrection, this gift of new life to the dead or dying past: it must result in a re-creation that can pass as a work of art and the work of art must be promulgated at some point if the exercise (not to say the ritual) is to rise above the mere self-indulgence.²⁸

²⁸Edmund Keeley, Cavafy's Alexandria: Study of a Myth in Progress (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976) 58.

Another character apotheosized after his death is Pursewarden. His death occurs relatively early in the Quartet, but his presence is felt throughout the four novels. Frequent references are made to his work (especially the trilogy, God is a Humorist), his letters, and his essays. Each character has special--though often apocryphal--memories which keep Pursewarden alive, making him more revered after his death than he was during his lifetime. Darley explains:

It was as if in dying he had cast off his earthly character, and taken on some of the grandiose proportions of his own writings, which swam more and more into view as the memory of the man itself faded. Death provided a new critical referent He was only to be seen now through the distorting mirror of anecdote or the dusty spectrum of memory. (J 150)

Though his posthumous fame is true to Pursewarden's spirit, it is a distorted picture of him as an individual:

He [Pursewarden] has simply stepped into the quicksilver of the mirror as we all must--to leave our illness, our evil acts, the hornet's nest of our desires, still operative of good or evil in the real world--which is the memory of our friends. (J 102)

Pursewarden the individual is consistently critical, even brutal, with his friends. Yet by dying he allows each to create a fiction about him. Liza assumes he killed himself because their affair had ended badly and their child had died. Nessim and Mountolive attribute Pursewarden's death to his discovery of Nessim's political intrigues. Darley

fears Pursewarden despaired because his work had come to a standstill.

For Darley, the "real" world is the one of the individual memory. What Darley remembers in Justine is just as real as the corrected version in Balthazar. Durrell emphasizes this repeatedly. At the beginning of Balthazar (as mentioned in Chapter One), Darley tells us that "The city, half-imagined (yet wholly real), begins and ends in us, roots lodged in our memory" (B 209). Reality, in such a view, is finally psychological. Regardless of what actually happened, what is remembered, what is imagined, is real. That reality transformed into art becomes an eternal and integral part of the city's history.

Darley creates a Justine according to mythical, historical ancestors. That Justine is altered by Moeurs, by Nessim's diary, by Justine's own diary, by the Interlinear, by Clea and by Pursewarden. At various moments in time Justine gains then loses then gains again a mythical stature. As we have seen already, much the same thing happens to a number of Durrell's characters. Darley's comment on Pursewarden indicates his sense of the fleeting nature of the individual and the lasting quality of art: "It was amazing how quickly the human image was dissolving into the mythical image he created for himself in his trilogy, God is a Humorist" (J 137).

Darley becomes much more attached to Pursewarden after he is dead, for Darley can then create a Pursewarden who is the greatest artist who ever thought or wrote and the actual man who was bitter and tormented by self-doubt will never contradict Darley's vision. It is no accident that Pursewarden's greatest works are the letters Liza destroys. There is no evidence to prove the contrary. Pursewarden hints of this to Darley: "The artist's work constitutes the only satisfactory relationship he can have with his fellow-men since he seeks his real friends among the dead and the unborn" (M 439). The Durrellian artist often withdraws from society and from love, not only to get a clearer perspective on both, but also so he can impose his own perspective.

Redemption through Art

Like many of the dead in the Quartet, the defeated Pursewarden is redeemed through art. There is no other refuge--not the city, not love; only art offers true spiritual redemption, true immortality. In Yeats' "Sailing to Byzantium" we have the essence of the artist's dilemma:

Consume my heart away; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
I know not what it is; and gather me
Into an artifice of eternity.²⁹

²⁹"Sailing to Byzantium," Selected Poems of William Butler Yeats, ed. M.L. Rosenthal (New York, Macmillan Press, 1962) 96.

The physical is subject to corruption and decay, and must therefore necessarily find a replacement. Cavafy writes in his poem "Artificial Flowers" that what is mortal is also pedestrian. It smacks of the quotidian, and it is the artist who must rise above the ordinary drudgery of life, and seize the eternal:

I do not want the real narcissus--nor do lilies
please me, nor real roses.
They adorn the trite, pedestrian gardens.
Their flesh embitters, tires, and pains me--
I am weary of their perishable beauties.³⁰

Durrell like Cavafy is weary of perishable beauties, perishable love. Like Cavafy, Durrell wants to fashion artificial flowers of "never-wilting, never-spoiling, never-aging forms" which come from another land where "Contemplations and Rhythms and Learning Dwell."³¹ These are preferable to the physical reality the world has to offer where flowers sprout "unclean in dirt and mire." The implication is not only that art has an immortality that the real cannot offer, but also that art can simply do it better:

I love flowers fashioned of glass or gold,
genuine gifts of a genuine Art,
dyes in hues lovelier than natural colors
wrought with mother-of-pearl and enamel,
with ideal leaves and stalks.³²

³⁰The Complete Poems of Cavafy, tr. Rae Dalven, 210.

³¹The Complete Poems of Cavafy, tr. Rae Dalven 210.

³²The Complete Poems of Cavafy, tr. Rae Dalven 210.

Again, for Durrell, it is only the artist "who can make things really happen." (M 566).

The Vision of Orpheus

A key to understanding Durrell's vision of the role of the artist can be found in his poem "Orpheus." In this poem Durrell analyzes the fleeting nature of the individual, of his life and loves. Orpheus is the perfect symbol for Durrell, for he is the archetypal artist. A rather spectacular failure in love, he redeems all with art. And so Orpheus becomes a means of analyzing the artistic self:

Because of its protean nature, generalization about the creative self is difficult. One thing we can say perhaps is that it is that quality of linguistic intentionality envisaging both symmetrical and asymmetrical relations between the personal and mythic terms of the self. It is the deliberate consideration of the nature, presence, and role of this creative self that Lawrence Durrell takes up in his poem "Orpheus."³³

As we have seen, the work of the Durrellian artist must strike a balance between myth and individual memory.

Christopher Middleton argues that the Quartet is based on a combination of the Homeric myth of quest and Virgil's

³³John Vickery, Myths and Texts: Strategies of Incorporation and Displacement (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983)188.

myth of Foundation.³⁴ His 1988 article on Durrell's use of myth is based on an April 1957 radio broadcast after the publication of Justine, before the entire Quartet was finished. Middleton was extremely insightful in pointing out the primacy of myth in Durrell's treatment of Alexandria:

Durrell appears to have telescoped two ancient mythic images into a single modern one. The two hero-types of the classical Mediterranean world are Odysseus and Aeneas. . . . Odysseus is the wandering hero of the Quest; Aeneas is the hero of the Established Order. In the classical Mediterranean world, their destinies run in opposite directions. But what Durrell has done in Justine is to integrate the world of the Quest with the world of Establishment, to integrate the world of the Goddess with the world of the City. He explores then the dimensions of the Goddess-haunted world as these appear in the perspectives of the City.³⁵

G. S. Fraser sums up Middleton's argument succinctly:

"Durrell, in The Alexandria Quartet, sets the erotic myth of the quest within the framework of the political myth of foundation, of the establishment of the City."³⁶

Certainly, the city is the focus, and intrigue and politics are an integral part of the work. However, the city Darley encounters is already well established, nor is

³⁴Christopher Middleton, "The Alexandria Quartet: From Psychology to Myth" in Critical Essays on Lawrence Durrell ed. Alan Warren Friedman (New York: G. K. Hall, 1987)20.

³⁵"The Alexandria Quartet: From Psychology to Myth" 20.

³⁶Lawrence Durrell: A Study 118.

Darley an adventurer seeking his way back to a home he rules and to a faithful Penelope. Darley's quest is internal; his external difficulties merely serve to point out the need for self knowledge. The City is not being established; it is dying. As the work as a whole makes clear, Durrell is concerned with the myth of visionary creation, of the establishment of art. His is not a tribal celebration or a national justification. He is seeking that which will outlast the tribe, and that which will transcend national boundaries.

Consequently, a perhaps more appropriate choice for mythic comparisons would be the Orpheus myth, a myth of the power and the limits of both art and the artist. The Orpheus myth is a recurrent one in modern literature, as the artist tries to determine his place in a world that prizes technology and expediency. How does the past tie in with this new world? Nor is Durrell the only writer of the twentieth century to do so. Denis Delvin, Robert Lowell, Maria Rilke, David Gascoyne, Jean Cocteau have all examined the same themes using the Orpheus myth as a metaphor for the artist and his need to produce and the subsequent sacrifices he endures.

According to critic John Vickery, John Delvin uses the Orpheus myth in his "A Dream of Orpheus" to point to the artist's negations of his personal self:

Strikingly enough, it [the poem] effects the negation of the personal self by the creative self's meditation of the mythic self as substantial reality. That is to say, the poem's reality statement simultaneously presents the mythic self in a negative relation to the personal self and in an affirmative relation to the creative self.³⁷

That is to say, the artist is driven to create even at the expense of his own life, his own personal development.³⁸

Myth is over powering and all consuming. The artist is absorbed into his work. In Gascoyne's "Orpheus in the Under World," the landscape is harsh and unmoving as is Orpheus himself:

Curtains of rock
And tears of stone,
Wet leaves in a high crevice of the sky:
From side to side the draperies
Drawn back by rigid hands.³⁹

In order to draw back the curtains, in order to create his own landscape, the artist must harden himself.

Jean Cocteau is another writer who examines the Orpheus myth in an attempt to depict the role of the contemporary artist. It is his treatment which is perhaps

³⁷Myths and Texts 192.

³⁸On the surface this level of self denial seems related to the Gnostic's life-denying, self-destructive impulses. However, the artist focuses relentlessly on the good and bad of life rather than denying the nature of existence. He creates for himself a permanent place rather than a permanent absence.

³⁹Collected Poems, (London: Faber and Faber, 1965) 37.

most similar to Durrell's own. In his depiction of Orpheus, both in the play Orphée (1925) and in the film version (1950) and in Le sang d'un poète (1929), Cocteau creates a world controlled by forces larger than the individual poet or artist.⁴⁰ The artist's struggle to create is overwhelmed by his debt to the artistic past, and by his inability to perceive what the present has to say to him. He is also at the mercy of the whimsy of the gods or of fate. Out of this web he struggles to create that which is original, but which is in reality, merely a copy of someone else's work (Orphée) or an ace pulled out of a dead man's pocket (Le Sang d'un Poète).

In Orphée and Le sang d'un poète, Cocteau has his artist/poet descend into an underworld, as much later

⁴⁰In adapting his play Orphée (1925) for film, Cocteau makes obvious changes like that of the horse--an image associated with treachery and destruction by the ancients--into the automobile. Other such differences between the two works clearly abound. Heurtebise in the play is "le vitrier" for the symbol of the mirrors (and windows) is also important here. "Le vitrier" in the film is instead only a nameless boy who wanders aimlessly in the world below. Heurtebise becomes a chauffeur--Orphée's guide to and through the underworld. Also in the film, Death, not Eurydice, is seen as the quintessential femme fatale. However these changes are rather superficial. Despite the numerous alterations that Cocteau makes in adapting his play Orphée for the cinema, the essential thematic fabric remains in tact, undisturbed. In both works, the artist must sacrifice everything--his personal life, his popularity, his own well being--if he is to be able to follow the Muse, if he is to create that which will give him an artistic immortality. Most, including Orphée are simply not up to the task. Most look back.

Durrell has Darley descend into Alexandria. Each of Cocteau's artists undertakes a nekyia (an instructive and purgative trip to the underworld) demanded of all who would be true leaders of a culture. Both Orphée and the painter in Le sang d'un poète, himself an Orpheus figure, see a level of existence, a level of the imagination that most do not perceive. Orphée sees the very face of death and witnesses Death's own trial. The painter sees a kaleidoscope of images locked behind various doors buried deep within his own imagination. But unlike Dante, whose descent into hell is monitored by a guide and inspired by a heavenly spirit determined upon his enlightenment, neither Orphée nor the painter is equipped to understand what he has seen.

Durrell's Orpheus also makes the descent into his own secular inferno--the world of Alexandria. But unlike Cocteau, Durrell not only allows his writer to make his eventual escape, but also to reach an understanding of what he has seen and capture that vision in art. The Alexandria Quartet opens with Darley telling us that he has left Alexandria, "escaped" to the island, one not unlike Rhodes, the haven where Durrell himself found refuge. He has come to the island to rebuild, to heal himself, to purge the illness contracted by all who live in Alexandria. Darley, unlike most who number themselves among the harmed,

knows he has been injured: "The villagers on the island say jokingly that only a sick man would choose such a remote place to rebuild. Well, then, I have come here to heal myself" (J 17). In the Quartet the artist must heal himself in order to heal others. Pursewarden speaks of this power, "In my art I am free to be what I most desire to seem--someone who might bring resolution and harmony into the dying lives around me" (B 381).

However, Pursewarden's wounds are too deep, and he is unable to heal himself. He becomes one of the spiritually dead, acting with difficulty, ceasing to share or even experience any emotion. Like Cocteau's artist he has intimations of art and immortality, but he cannot create his own vision, or at least he cannot impose it on art in any personally satisfying or redemptive way. Like Cocteau's Orphée, Pursewarden's appears to die from a lack of will.

Darley looks into the mirrors like Cocteau's Orphée and like his painter. However, instead of staring endlessly at his own reflection, Darley studies the mirrored images of Justine and Melissa and Pursewarden and through an analysis of their experiences, their psyches, he is able to devise a vision of his own. He does not look at himself in the mirror directly--such a view would perhaps be too narcissistic, too debilitating--but instead he looks

at his life and his loves from a variety of positions. The result is the "prismatic view," one which provides Darley with the necessary artistic perspective.

Durrell's Orpheus, then, is also to some extent threatened by the past, known "to us in a dark congeries/Of intimations from the dead."⁴¹ But what Durrell attempts to outline is the process through which the artist learns to break from both that past and the present in order to create that which will secure himself forever a place in the future.

If any modern Orpheus is, as John Vickery says, a "conflation of the Orphic tablets and poems, testimony of ancient authors, and subsequent deceased mythographers and scholars,"⁴² this is only to say that the artistic task remains true to its original aim: to resist the domination of mutability, to order ephemeral life into lasting art. This is the essence of Orpheus' gift--he charms the very flux of nature, he redeems time. Ovid's account is vivid: Ixion's wheel is stilled, Sisyphus sits on his stone, the very Furies weep. This is the Orpheus celebrated by Durrell as "the dancer's only perfect peer":

Encamping among our verses--
Harp-beats of a sea-bird's wings--

⁴¹Lawrence Durrell, "Orpheus," in Collected Poems (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1960)17.

⁴²Myth and Texts 193-94.

Do you contend in us, though now
A memory only, the smashed lyre
Washed up entangled in your hair,
But sounding still as here,
O monarch of all initiates and
The dancer's only perfect peer?⁴³

The individual, actual Orpheus may be dead, his lyre broken and still. But Orpheus lives on in every artist who recreates his odyssey. Finally, Durrell answers this question "do you contend in us" affirmatively in a way which views the artist "as Orpheus defined as the perdurable celebrator of love and loss, terms whose reference is infinitely broader than the erotic, the personal, the material."⁴⁴ Durrell attempts in *Darley* to create an Orpheus who will not merely be a representation of the past, or simply a voice of the present, but also an oracle of the future:

In the fecund silences of the
Painter, or the poet's wrestling
With choice you steer like
A great albatross, spread white
On the earth-margins the sailing
Snow-wings in the world's afterlight:
Mentor of all these paper ships
Cockled from fancy on a tide
Made navigable only by your skill
Which in some few approves
A paper recreation of lost loves.⁴⁵

The past is steered by the artist through the present and

⁴³Lawrence Durrell, Collected Poems 17.

⁴⁴Myths and Texts 188.

⁴⁵Lawrence Durrell, Collected Poems 17.

into the future. The way is not easy, as the image of the albatross suggests. Much must be sacrificed, there are many who are ready to pull, or shoot it down. These artists, "some few," must withdraw like Orpheus from life, each from his Eurydice or Justine, whatever her reincarnation, in order to render themselves and their loves immortal.

G.S. Fraser asserts that Durrell does not want to shatter reflective consciousness in the name of instinctive drives which seems to be clearly true; however, Fraser also claims that neither does Durrell wish "to dissolve the experience of living into pure reflection."⁴⁶ But the artist, as Durrell see him, does indeed dissolve the experience of living.

In A Key to Modern British Poetry, Durrell writes, "There is no doubt that for the West until now the artist had been forced to purchase his art at the cost of his life--his ordinary living."⁴⁷ Durrell presents Otto Rank's ideas from Art and Artist as a possible alternative to such sacrifice:

The artistic individual has lived in art-creation instead of actual life, letting his work live or die on its own account, and has never really surrendered himself to life. In

⁴⁶Lawrence Durrell: A Study 115.

⁴⁷A Key to Modern British Poetry (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964) 89.

place of his own self the artist puts his objectified ego into his work, but though he does not save his subjective mortal ego from death he withdraws himself from real life. And the creative type who can renounce this protection by arts and can devote his whole creative force to life and the formation of life will be the first representative of the new human type, and in return for this renunciation will enjoy, in personality-creation and expression a greater happiness.⁴⁸

While in the abstract Durrell clearly finds this attractive, he demonstrates throughout the Quartet that he has no intention of being "the first representative of this new human type."

Darley and Pursewarden, at least, belong to the old school of suffering for art. Art is a compromise, but it is "the joyous compromise [which allows us to heal] all that wounded us or defeated us in daily life" (J 20). Durrell himself asks, "If, as Otto Rank suggests, we are in a transitional stage, and the artist is becoming a new kind of person--a seer--what is to become of art?"⁴⁹ While Durrell celebrates the artist as seer, he seems unwilling to renounce the redemption art offers, for the act of personality-creation as we have already seen does not validate, does not immortalize. The artist is free in a way that the ordinary man is not: "Nobody can own an

⁴⁸A Key to Modern British Poetry 89.

⁴⁹A Key to Modern British Poetry 89.

artist" (B 293). The implication is that nothing can own the artist either, including time and space.

Even G.S. Fraser cannot hold to his argument that Durrell does not wish to dissolve the experience of loving and living into pure reflection. In discussing the maiming of Clea's hand, Fraser contends that pain and violence can for the artist be a means of rebirth, and he offers this incident as the most obvious and extreme case. Fraser correctly sees that Clea must nearly die as a woman before she can be "reborn as an artist and she has to lose her painting hand before she can paint with it. She and Darley have to renounce each other physically . . . before their love runs true."⁵⁰ The experience of living and loving has dissolved a great deal.

That Clea paints better with an artificial, mechanical hand is no accident. According to Durrell, Clea's loss and subsequent gain is a symbolic castration.⁵¹ The artist must surrender the physical in order to attain the aesthetic. Physicality is associated with animality, with degradation and decay. The image of the suffering, sacrificing artist in Durrell is taken to its extreme, but

⁵⁰Lawrence Durrell: A Study 123.

⁵¹Cf. Joan Goulianos, "A Conversation With Lawrence Durrell About Art, Analysis, and Politics," Modern Fiction Studies, XVII, ii: 159-66.

his rewards are also extreme--his are the keys to the kingdom. Immortality is necessarily based upon artifice.

CONCLUSION

Under normal conditions, in their natural habitat, wild animals do not mutilate themselves, masturbate, attack their offspring, develop stomach ulcers, form homosexual pair-bonds, or commit murder. Among human city-dwellers, needless to say, all of these things occur. Does this, then, reveal a basic difference between the human species and other animals? . . . The zoo animal exhibits all these abnormalities . . . The city is not a concrete jungle it is a human zoo.

--Desmond Morris, The Human Zoo

The human zoo that is Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria contains within its walls a people deeply harmed, reduced to an unnatural, bestial existence in part by the very fact of their residence. They have become chained animals, shackled by history and by place. Self-mutilation and paralyzing guilt are a part of life in the Quartet. Some characters strike out aggressively pretending to a control they do not possess, averting their eyes to avoid seeing the bars of their own fate surrounding them. Others simply watch to see what will happen to them.

Durrell blurs the line that traditionally separates the world of animals from that of human beings, emphasizing through repeated and systematic use of metaphor the bestial impulses of individuals, their instinctive responses to

forces beyond their direct control. The human animals who are the focus of Durrell's attention are caged in an overcrowded, under-attended city/zoo. As we have seen, like any other higher primate forced to live in these conditions--they do not thrive. Instead they exhibit a wide range of pathological symptoms and psychoneurotic behaviors. They are ill.

Instinct (in such an environment) is no longer adaptive and becomes perverted. According to Freud, the tension between the confines of a strict superego and the "ego that is subjected to it is called by us a sense of guilt" which in turn manifests itself as "a need for punishment."¹ This drive for punishment is ever present in the Quartet, often manifesting itself in acts of self-destruction. Pursewarden commits suicide, of course, but other characters such as Melissa, Narouz, even Justine and Nessim also harm themselves by deliberate acts of mortification.

Victims often feel extreme guilt for crimes perpetrated against them. Justine spends most of her adult life trying to exorcise the guilt of having been raped as a child. The city's inhabitants seem to assume a collective guilt for their own captivity. Because of this need for

¹Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: Avon Books, 1965) 70-71.

punishment Alexandria's denizens not only tolerate, but actively seek out debilitating relationships. Individuals, sensing that they are not somehow whole in themselves, follow narcissistic phantoms in finally pathetic attempts to achieve integrity.

Sex becomes a masturbatory act; though often practiced, it rarely satisfies. Art, the only redemption offered in the Quartet, is for the most part thwarted. Disease becomes the most commonly indulged creative act. Religion no longer promises immortality or spiritual enlightenment, but instead focuses on negation--the absence of being.

The human zoo that proliferates in the Quartet is overcrowded, so that the focus is on the physical. Sexuality becomes a public forum. Privacy is not possible. The Alexandria presented is a world dominated and, therefore debased, by the merely corporeal. The spirit of Alexandria rules a chaotic, overgrown natural world that has spawned five races, five languages, five sexes:

The sexual provender which lies to hand is
staggering in its variety and profusion
The symbolic lovers of the free Hellenic world
are replaced here by something different,
something subtly androgynous, inverted upon
itself (J 17).

All of these are corralled together in very close quarters. The city's inhabitants are "trapped in the projection of a will too powerful and too deliberate to be human"; it is a

"gravitational field which Alexandria threw down about those it had chosen as its exemplars" (J 22). It is a caged environment where profusion chokes and becomes "inverted upon itself."

Again, lines are deliberately blurred, but the absence of boundaries here loses us the Hellenic world which is in itself a blurring of the antecedent classical order. Ethical and religious homogeneity has in Durrell's Alexandria given way to something more cosmopolitan. All the borders are down, all taxonomies melded, all taboos annulled. It looks like freedom, perhaps, at first glance--a zoo with all the cages open, all constraints dissolved. Here, one guesses is the trap for those who would read the Quartet as a celebration, as if Durrell's Alexandria is a Levantine Haight-Ashbury, a place to visit with flowers in one's hair. But as I hope I have demonstrated a nightmarish quality dominates the scene. There are no bars, but there is restraining force all the same. A darkness pervades. Some rage against the dying of the light, but most sit dumbly in the darkness, paralyzed by a debilitating confusion. Far from art's Peaceable Kingdom, the human zoo is the worst of all jungles.

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