

CHARACTERS AND CHARACTERISATION IN DURRELL'S THE ALEXANDRIA QUARTET

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When **The Alexandria Quartet** appeared in the late fifties (**Justine** 1957; **Balthazar** 1958; **Mountolive** 1958; **Clea** 1960) it was given a very mixed reception. Some critics were enthusiastic, making sometimes exaggerated claims for Durrell's originality and greatness; others were more sceptical. George Steiner for instance praised the richness of Durrell's style, saying: "No one else writing in English today has a comparable command of the light and music of language ... Who is to say ... that **The Alexandria Quartet** will not lead to a renaissance of prose" ? ⁽¹⁾, while Angus Wilson disagreed, claiming that "Durrell's aims are magnificent, but his execution is often slipshod and pretentious, and the language floridly vulgar" . ⁽²⁾ It is interesting to note that Durrell's most severe critics tended to be British, and his popularity was much greater in America and on the Continent than in his own country. Durrell's biographer, G.S. Fraser, says that the prevailing view in England was that the **Alexandria Quartet** "is a most impressive but in some ways flawed or imperfect work, extraordinarily vivid, but too rich, too gaudy" . ⁽³⁾

A similar difference of opinion can be noticed in critical comments on Durrell's methods of characterisation and his ability to create convincing characters . Here again, most British critics were not impressed by characters in **The Quartet** . The following quotations illustrate the dominant attitude :

"For the most part the characters in these novels remain flat surfaces ... they never become three-dimensional figures ..." ⁽⁴⁾

"His leading people are not people at all ... They are vehicles of events, they are poet's notes; they are fables, subjects of one another's conversations ..." ⁽⁵⁾

"(Durrell's characters) are inhabitants of a fairyland that seems, the more one examines it, the less related to life as commonly experienced anywhere in the world ..." ⁽⁶⁾

The terms used by the British critics ('flat' ; 'three-dimensional' ; 'non-realistic') reveal their traditional assumptions about characters in fiction . As Bergonzi remarks in **The Situation of the Novel**,

On the Continent it seems to be assumed that the realistic novel of character has had its day... But in Britain it is widely held that such novels can and should go on being written, with few overt concessions to the changed Weltanschauung of the twentieth century. Here character is seen, not as an obsolescent feature of the novel whose existence can no longer be justified... but as something self-evidently essential. (7)

On the other hand, Durrell rejected the tenets of the conventional realistic novel and placed himself in the tradition of modern experimental fiction . According to Erich Auerbach, "One of the major trends in twentieth-century characterization is away from the attempt to penetrate the individual psyche and toward a focus on the apprehension of 'impressions' which claim no absolute validity as facts" . This approach "dissolves reality into multiple and multivalent reflections of consciousness" . (8) Durrell himself commented on several occasions on his characters and the concept of human personality which underlines the **Quartet** . In one of his interviews he says :

Human character ? A sort of rainbow, I should say, which includes the whole range of the spectrum. I imagine that what you call personality may be an illusion, and thinking of it as a stable thing we are trying to put the lid on a box with no sides. (9)

And in another interview , he counters his critics' objections to his characters , saying :

If in the Quartet my people tend, as some people complain, to be dummies, it's because I'm trying to light them from several different angles, I'm trying to give you stereoscopic narrative with stereophonic personality ... (10)

The Alexandria Quartet consists of four volumes , each of which could be read as an independent novel , but can be fully understood only as a part of a larger pattern . The key to the tetralogy is the concept of individual consciousnesses as so many separate mirrors , each producing different images of the phenomena they reflect . In the very first pages of **The Quartet** , Durrell uses the symbolism of mirrors to alert the reader to his method of character portrayal . As she looks at her reflection in the multiple mirrors in a lobby of an Alexandria hotel , Justine , the main character in the novel , becomes the writer's mouthpiece :

Look ! five different pictures of the same subject . Now if I wrote I would try for a multi-dimensional effect in character , a sort of prism-sightedness . Why should not people show more than one profile at a time ?
(J ., p . 28) ⁽¹¹⁾

The narrator in **Justine** , Darley , is a young teacher and writer , who from the vantage point of his voluntary exile on a small Greek island looks back at his experiences in Alexandria a few years earlier . He hopes that from a distance in time and space he can impose some meaningful pattern on this strange and confusing period of his life , and that reality can be "reordered, reworked and made to show its significant side "(J ., p . 20) In recording his reminiscences Darley shows no concern for chronology or for cause-effect sequence ; his narration ranges in an apparently random way all over the period of his stay in Alexandria and seems to follow the strange logic of dream or reverie rather than that of conscious recollection .

Even though **Justine** is basically a record of Darley's personal experiences , his is not the only voice heard in the novel . Other characters' points of view are incorporated into the main stream of narration in the form of excerpts from letters and diaries that Darley apparently had access to , passages from an autobiographical novel by Arnauti , Justine's first husband and another writer-character in the novel , as well as conversations Darley claims to remember almost verbatim . However , the interpretation of people and events rests ultimately with Darley , who selects and rearranges facts to fit into his version of reality .

While reading **Justine** , a perceptive reader should become aware that Darley is an unreliable narrator, and detect certain gaps and inconsistencies in his story . It is only in **Balthazar** , however , that the full extent of Darley's bias is made obvious . Durrell uses the following quotation from de Sade as a motto to this second volume in the tetralogy : "The mirror sees the man as beautiful , the mirror loves the man ; another mirror sees the man as frightful and hates him and it is always the same being who produces the impression" . At the beginning of the novel **Balthazar** , an Alexandria doctor and a friend of most of the characters introduced in **Justine** , reads Darley's account of events and 'corrects' it by supplying his own version of what really happened . **Balthazar's** "Interlinear" shows the main actors of the drama in a com-

pletely different light revealing their secret motives and providing unexpected answers to questions asked in **Justine**. Looking at an old photograph which shows most of his Alexandrian friends, Darley realises that the familiar scene has assumed an entirely different meaning for him. On the surface, all the characters are still there, in the same postures as before, but now Darley - and the reader - can project upon the familiar figures the new knowledge of their hidden motives and complex relationships.

In trying to re-tell his story, Darley follows Balthazar's advice: "I suppose ... that if you wished somehow to 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 ... like some medieval palimpsest where different sorts of truth are thrown down one upon another, the one obliterating or perhaps supplementing another ..." (B. 388). Apart from Balthazar's comments, the voices of other characters are again heard through extracts from their writings and recalled conversations giving us different interpretations of the same events and people, sometimes overlapping and complementing each other, sometimes contradictory.

Mountolive, the third novel of the Quartet, differs considerably from the first two volumes. According to Durrell, it is "as tame and naturalistic in form as a Hardy; yet it is the fulcrum of the quartet and the rationale of the thing"; ⁽¹²⁾ First-person limited point of view has been replaced by what some critics call 'multiple selective omniscience'; that is, third person narration in which the story comes directly through the minds of the characters with the author remaining in the shadow and rarely, if ever, intruding with his own comments. The chief figure in the novel is Mountolive, the British Ambassador to Egypt, and most of the other characters are seen through his eyes. However, Mountolive is not the only third person "reflector", to use Henry James's term, as parts of the novel are related from the standpoint of other characters, in particular Nessim, an Oxford-educated Copt and Justine's husband, and Pursewarden, yet another character who is a writer.

The change of narrative perspective in **Mountolive** results in an entirely different picture of the events and people known to us from the preceding novels. There is a shift of emphasis from their love affairs to their involvement in politics and power struggles in Egypt just before World War II. Moreover, some previously minor figures move to the foreground while others are relegated to the background - most strikingly Daley, the main narrator of the first two volumes, who in **Mountolive** appears briefly as a minor and insignificant character. In spite of its more objective tone and use of traditional techniques of story telling, **Mountolive** does not purport to give us the final and the only true interpretation of **Quartet's** characters and their behaviour. Like **Justine** and **Mountolive**, it helps to light the characters from yet another angle, revealing more clearly their place in the complex pattern of human interrelations, where private and public lives are different sides of the same coin, and where everything is relative and there is no such thing as an absolute truth.

Clea, the last volume of **the Quartet**, is the only one which moves forward in time. Darley, now again the central character and the first person narrator of the novel, goes back to Alexandria and meets his former friends and lovers. The past is never absent from his narration as Darley's mind moves constantly between the present and his past experiences; there are also scenes which are an almost exact repetition of situations from the preceding novels, giving us an uncanny sense of 'déjà vue'. Most of the characters first introduced in **Justine** reappear in **Clea**; some seem unchanged others are clearly marked by the passage of time. Talking about his past misjudgements, Darley hopes to "strip the opaque membrane which stands between me and the reality of their (his friends) actions - and which I suppose is composed of my own limitations of vision and temperament. My envy of Pursewarden, my passion for Justine, my pity for Melissa. distorting mirrors, all of them...". Yet, having reached this point in the tetralogy the reader knows that Darley is hoping for the impossible. The 'opaque' membrane which stands between him and reality can never be removed; his vision of reality will always be subjective, and so his account of other people's actions can be only one of many possible interpretations.

As can be seen, Durrell's narrative technique results in giving the reader multiple 'images' of his characters as seen from a number of viewpoints. On some occasions it is not just the interpretation of the characters' actions and motives but the factual evidence itself that seems to differ from one narrator to another, so that we can't tell what really happened and what the narrator only imagines might have happened. A good example of this is the fate of Justine's daughter; we find several conflicting accounts of her mysterious disappearance and at some point it is even implied that the child may have never existed.

The multiplicity of viewpoints within the tetralogy raises the question of the reader's response to Durrell's characters. Is no final judgement possible because each interpretation is subjective, and sometimes we cannot even be sure of the facts themselves? Or are we entitled to form our own conclusions, and judge the characters on the basis of their actions and the kind of moral choices they make? In traditional novels, to quote John Bayley, "the most fundamental thing about characters in fiction is that by a complex process of rapport between the author and ourselves we know what to think of them..."(13) In many modern novels, including the **Quartet**, this kind of 'collusion' of reader and author is no longer possible.

While reading the tetralogy, the reader is frequently warned off any attempt at forming moral judgements, however unconventional and questionable the conduct of some of the characters. In fact, the world created by Durrell is in many ways strikingly amoral; there is a marked absence of any moral judgements in the narrative, and the characters seem to live outside any system of accepted norms and values. Most of them are uprooted people, living away from their original communities, in a city which is a meeting-place of different cultures and

religious traditions, a city harbouring "communities cut down like the branches of trees, lacking a parent body. dreaming of Eden" (J., P. 57).

This suspension of moral judgement is also connected with what could be described as the lack of autonomy of Durrell's characters. If a character is to be judged on the basis of his behaviour, we must assume that he has at least some freedom of action and can be held personally responsible for what he does. By contrast, Durrell's characters appear to be strangely will-less; things seem to just happen to them as if they had no control over their lives. Lionel Trilling has remarked that "all the novels, and the **Quartet**, as a whole, stand in a peculiar negative relation to the will".(14) And another American critic comments:

In the **Quartet**,... character becomes, in effect, anti-character: it does not so much impose itself upon its surroundings as it is imposed upon, and all the qualities normally associated with the traditional literary hero are either lacking or are attributed to something other than individual characters - largely to the city of Alexandria.(15).

Alexandria is presented in the **Quartet** as an all-pervasive force, dominating and shaping the lives of its inhabitants who seem to be "trapped in the projection of a will too powerful and too deliberate to be human - the gravitational field which Alexandria threw down about those it had chosen as its exemplars..." (**Justine**, P. 22). The dominant role of the city of Alexandria is the result of Durrell's belief in the close relation between people and their natural environment, reflected in the writer's travel writing as well as in his poetry and fiction. In his essay "Landscape and Character" Durrell says: "... I will willingly admit to seeing 'Characters' as functions of a landscape"(16); similar ideas are expressed in the tetralogy through the mouths of Durrell's characters. In **Justine**, for instance Darley comments: "... We are the children of our landscape; it dictates behaviour and even thought..." (J., P. 40); "... man is only an extension of the spirit of place" (J., P. 143).

The inhabitants of Alexandria are presented as victims of this city "impregnated with the sense of deracination and failure" (J., P. 147), where the air is "dry, palpitant, harsh with static electricity", (J., P. 18) with a dry desert wind blowing through its "dust-tormented streets", a city which is said to drain away life energy and undermine the will.

The notion that people are products, and often helpless victims, of their environment leads to the denial of any moral responsibility for their actions: "I return ... to the city which used us as its flora, precipitating in us conflicts which were hers and which we mistook for our own: beloved Alexandria ... I see at last that none of us is properly to be judged for what happened

in the past. It is the city which should be judged, though we, its children, must pay the price" (J., P. 17)

At this point the following question could be asked: moral judgments apart, are Durrell's characters as chameleon-like and elusive as the writer himself suggests, or are there some constant elements in their make-up, some dominant personality traits that remain stable? As was mentioned before, Durrell seems to reject the traditional concept of human personality as a stable and definable entity. In one of his interviews he says: "They (the novels) should raise one terrific problem, namely, personality. In this stereophonic context, I think it does raise a question in your mind as to whether the human personality is not a selective fiction or a polite figment ..." (17) In his comments on the subject, Durrell often echoes ideas current in modern psychology, as when he talks about the concept of the ego as "a series of masks, which Freud started, a depersonalisation which was immediately carried over the border by Jung and Groddeck and company ..." (18).

The questioning of the traditional concept of the self as something solid and substantial is reflected in a number of modern experimental novels in which character often 'dissoves' or becomes symbolic. Durrell saw himself as an experimental novelist, following in the footsteps of the great modernist writers. I would argue, however, that in his approach to characterisation Durrell is more traditional than his comments would lead us to believe. Although the writer rejected the notion of the "old stable ego of the character", his protagonists remain throughout the **Quartet** recognisable individuals with certain constant attributes of personality as well as appearance. This is mainly due to the use of the method of characterisation which consists in the presentation of an initial portrait, later supplemented by other descriptions and confirmed by events.

Durrell is a writer endowed with a strong visual imagination, as can be seen both in his descriptions of landscapes and in his portraits of people. Durrell's "portraits" are among the best passages of his writing. In a few phrases he can create a suggestive image and capture the essence, the specific "aura", of a given character. Some of Durrell's character sketches are but brief impressions, more like poet's notes than complete prose portraits; others are more extended. The characters' dominant traits are often suggested by means of startling comparisons and metaphors. These first images or 'vignettes' have a haunting power and are instrumental in shaping the reader's response to a given character. This is especially the case with Durrell's portrayal of Alexandria's women, in particular Justine, Melissa and Clea.

The figure of Justine dominates the **Quartet**, especially in the first three volumes of the tetralogy. Justine is the character that surprises us most as each successive novel brings new

revelations about her past and her relations with several of the protagonists. However, even though she plays different roles and wears different masks, to use Durrell's phrase, she is a well-defined character with certain constant characteristics and patterns of behaviour.

In our first glimpse of Justine as she passes below Darley's window, she is smiling to herself "as if at some private satisfaction" (**Justine**, p. 22) with a mischievous smile which reminds Darley of the way she laughs, "showing these magnificent white teeth" (*Ibid*). This apparently irrelevant remark of the narrator takes on a somewhat sinister and ominous meaning as we turn to the next page and learn that Justine seemed to belong to "that race of terrific queens which left behind them the ammoniac smell of their incestuous loves to hover like a cloud over the Alexandria subconscious ... The giant man-eating cats like Arsinoe were her true siblings" (**Justine**, p. 23).

Thus from the very beginning of the **Quartet** we are made to feel that Justine is potentially a dangerous woman, a **femme fatale**, a "man-eater". Our initial feelings about her are confirmed later as Justine proves to be a destructive force in the lives of many of the **Quartet** characters. The first description of Justine also gives us a hint of her narcissism and her total absorption in the private world of her feelings and obsessions, while the mention of her mischievous smile foreshadows later revelations about her unlimited capacity for mischief, treachery and intrigue. Destructiveness, mischief, narcissism - these are the dominant traits of Justine's character. They are still manifest in the last glimpse that we have of her at the end of **Clea**. Here Justine is seen in the full exercise of her power to charm and subdue men. After a long period of imprisonment and illness she triumphs again, leading the once formidable Memlik Pascha "like a poodle on a leash". We are told that she looked radiant and her eyes sparkled with impish mockery and clever malevolence. "It was as if, like some powerful engine of destruction, she had suddely switched on again" (**Clea**, P. 876).

The predatory character of Justine is underlined in **The Quartet** by means of figurative language. Justine is several times compared to birds and animals of prey, such as the eagle, panther or leopard. We are told that she "looked and seemed an eagle" (J., p. 46) and "gazed about her like a half-trained panther" (J., p. 30). When Justine decides to make use of Darley, she sets out to destroy his love for Melissa and starts by obliterating all traces of the girl's presence in Darley's flat: "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., p. 75). The bird imagery is used again in the description of Justine in **Clea**. At that time Justine is under house arrest, ill and broken down by the failure of the political intrigue engineered by her husband. Darley, now emotionally detached and even faintly disgusted, watches his former love "lying there, soiled and tattered, like a dead bird in gutter, her hands crumpled into claws"

(**Clea**, p. 699). The image is reminiscent of the earlier description of Melissa as a "half-drowned bird" (J., p. 26), but it does not call forth the same sympathy on the part of the narrator and of the reader. Our pity for Justine is tempered by the reminder that even in defeat and misfortune she has retained some traces of her predatory character - suggested in the quoted passage by the use of the word "claws".

Apart from establishing certain dominant character traits, Durrell's descriptions create in the reader's mind an image of Justine as a beautiful woman using her beauty to manipulate men. We are told that she had "magnificent troubled eyes" (J., p. 28), "glossy black hair" (J., p. 59), a "lovely head" (J., p. 30), and beautifully shaped hands with long fingers (p. 114). She is referred to as a "dark-browed, queenly beauty" (M., p. 506), a "magical dark mistress" (C., p. 691), and in the so-called "Character-Squeezes" at the end of **Justine** as an "arrow in darkness". Although in **Clea** Justine is presented as looking less attractive as a result of her long illness, she remains in the reader's memory as a beautiful "femme fatale" surrounded by admiring men.

The portrait of Melissa, another important female figure in the **Quarter**, is drawn by similar methods. Melissa is introduced to the reader at the beginning of **Justine**, and the initial sketch of the character comes again from Darley as he recalls his first impressions of the girl: "I used to see her, I remember, pale, rather on the slender side, dressed in a shabby sealskin coat, leading her small dog about the winter streets. Her blue-veined phthisic hands, etc. Her eyebrows artificially pointed upwards to enhance those fine dauntlessly candid eyes..." (J., p. 21). In the same paragraph we are told that Melissa won Darley's affection "not by any qualities one might enumerate in a lover - charm, exceptional beauty, intelligence - no, but by the force of what I can only call her charity, in the Greek sense of the word" (Ibid.).

Thus already in this introductory description of Melissa all her essential qualities are suggested - her poverty, humility, courage, honesty and charity. The desired effect is achieved by a careful choice of adjectives and the selection of significant details. Adjectives like pale, slender, shabby, phthisic are used to create the impression of Melissa's fragility and poverty, while the phrase "fine dauntlessly candid eyes" suggests someone courageous and free from guile. These features of Melissa remain unchanged throughout the **Quartet**.

The initial sketch of her character is confirmed by further descriptive passages and the comments of different narrators. The delicacy of her classical type of features is conveyed in a number of lyrical descriptions - as when Darley recalls her "long bereft Greek face, with its sane pointed nose and candid eyes", her "pale reflective fingers". (J., p. 50). Her child-like qualities are also frequently hinted at: she has "the satiny skin that is given only to the thymus

- dominated", a "slender stalk of the neck" (J., p. 50): and she is once described as a "pale waif of the Alexandrian littoral" (B., p. 30). We also learn that she had a light, effortless and candid laugh (J., p. 55).

Melissa's character is more fully revealed by her behaviour, and especially in her relation with Darley. She is always eager to help and she never tries to assert her rights or fight for Darley's love when he neglects her. As Darley puts it "In her there was a pliancy and resilience which was Oriental - a passion to serve" (J., 48). Another characteristic feature of Melissa is her sadness, her "profound and consuming world-weariness" (M., p. 529), which occasionally drives her to hashish-smoking and leads to periods of complete lethargy (J., p. 49). In the "Character Squeezes", she is named a "patron of sorrow", and it is her melancholy and passive acceptance of her fate that makes her such a poignant figure.

Our overall impression of Melissa is also greatly influenced by the use of flower and animal imagery in connection with her. Thus, for instance, Darley gives the following poetic description of his mistress: "Melissa was a sad painting from a winter landscape contained by a dark sky; a window box with a few flowering geraniums lying forgotten on the window-sill of a cement-factory" (J., p. 46). The image conveys Melissa's humbleness and sadness, the **cafard** which is part of her attitude to life. Later in the tetralogy, Pursewarden defines her beauty as "the soft bloom of phthisis" (M., p. 526) and describes her "slender body with its slanting ribs (structure of ferns) ..." (M., p. 529).

In addition to flower imagery, bird imagery is repeatedly used to characterise Melissa. Recalling his first meeting with the girl, Darley reflects: "I found Melissa, washed up like a half-drowned bird, on the dreary littorals of Alexandria, with her sex broken..." (J., p. 26). The image expresses the pathos and hopelessness of Melissa's situation; it also emphasizes her fragility and vulnerability. Melissa is also compared to a gull - "... that shabby room where Melissa lay, breathing as lightly as a gull" (J., p. 27) and a sparrow (M., p. 526). Finally, her timidity and delicate charm, quite out of place in the sordid night club where she has to work, are evoked by the description of her dancing with "the air of a gazelle harnessed to a water wheel" (J., p. 27).

Clea is not only the main female character in the last volume of the tetralogy but has an important role to play from the very beginning of the **Quartet**. The other characters turn to her with their problems, knowing that she is always ready to help and give advice. She is, in effect, a kind of "good spirit" of the city, warm-hearted and generous. Her essential qualities are suggested in the first description of her.

Everything about her person is honey-gold and warm in tone; the fair, crisply-trimmed hair which she wears rather long at the back, knotting it simply at the downy nape of her neck. This focuses the candid face of a minor muse with its smiling grey-green eyes. The calmly disposed hands have a deftness and shapeliness which one only notices when one sees them at work, holding a paint-brush perhaps or setting the broken leg of a sparrow in splints made from match-ends.

I should say something like this: that she had been poured, while still warm, into the body of a young grace: that is to say into a body born without instincts or desires (J., p. 107).

This passage summarises all the dominant features of Clea - her warm nature, good humour, inner calm, candour, innocence, and kindness towards all living creatures. In fact Clea has all the qualities required of the ideal nurse, and she is frequently portrayed in situations where she brings comfort to those physically or mentally ill. This association of Clea with healing processes is enforced by the fact that she is the clinic painter, employed by Balthazar to record in paint certain medical anomalies. Darely describes seeing her in the clinic garden, dressed in a white medical smock and painting with her "capable and innocent fingers" one of her "large coloured drawings of terrifying lucidity and tenderness" (J., p. 109). Clea's "generous innocence" (J., p. 239) is referred to repeatedly; it is also evident in her behaviour towards others. The predominant traits of her character are also expressed in her artistic work - we are told that her "bold yet elegant canvasses radiate clemency and humour" (J., p. 108).

Apart from the portraits of female characters, we find in the **Quartet** several extended character sketches of the male protagonists - for instance Balthazar (J., pp. 78-79), Nessim (J., pp. 29-30) or Narouz (B p. 252). In most of these portraits a similar technique is used: a brief description of the character's external appearance in which the most striking features are indicated (e.g., Balthazar's hypnotic eyes, or Narouz's hare-lip), followed by the narrator's explicit statement pointing to the character's dominant personality traits. There is no essential difference between the character sketches in the three novels narrated by Darley and those in **Mountolive**, although Darley's character sketches tend to be more impressionistic than the ones in **Mountolive**.

In this third volume of the tetralogy, there are a number of brief character sketches of minor figures representing the different ethnic communities of Alexandria, as well as expatriates and diplomats connected with various foreign missions. Several of the latter are comic characters verging on caricatures, as Durrell exaggerates national characteristics and eccentricities. Metaphoric language and animal imagery are again used to suggest the characters' dominant features, or often a single dominant trait. Most of these secondary characters do indeed fit Forster's category of 'flat' characters or types.

To conclude, it could be suggested that there is a certain discrepancy between Durrell's theoretical pronouncements and his actual practice as a novelist. Durrell repeatedly stated that he did not believe in the conventions of the realistic novel of character still upheld by the majority of British novelists in the fifties. In **the Alexandria Quartet** he introduced innovative narrative techniques to create, as he put it, "prismatic" or "stereophonic" characters, reflecting his view that personality as something with fixed attributes is an illusion. Nevertheless, most of Durrell's fictitious people remain in the reader's memory as well-defined individuals with certain distinct and persistent characteristics. In this respect, Durrell is much more traditional than some American and European novelists who were his contemporaries, such as the "nouveau roman" writers. Although Durrell's later novels marked a more radical departure from the conventions of realistic fiction, **The Quartet** can be seen as occupying a middle position between the traditional and the experimental works of the period. In its blending of these two approaches, **The Alexandria Quartet** remains an interesting attempt to cope with the problems facing novelists in the second half of our century.

NOTES

1. George Steiner, "Lawrence Durrell: The Baroque Novel" in **The World of Lawrence Durrell**, ed. H.T. Moore, New York, 1964, pp. 15-16.
2. Angus Wilson, "There's a Tyrant in the Critic's Corner" in **Opinions and Perspectives**, ed. Francis Brown, Cambridge, Mass., 1964, p. 227.
3. G.S. Fraser, **Lawrence Durrell**, London, 1970, pp. 11-12.
4. Gilbert Phelps, "The Novel Today" in **The Pelican Guide to English Literature**, v. VII ed. Boris Ford, London, 1964, p. 492.
5. V.S. Pritchett, "Alexandria Hothouse" in **The Working Novelist**, London, 1965, p. 33.
6. Walter Allen, **Tradition and Dream**, London, 1965, p. 307.
7. Bernard Bergonzi, **The Situation of the Novel**, London, 1970, pp. 42-43.
8. See Scholes and Kellog, **The Nature of Narrative**, New York, 1971, p. 203.
9. Lawrence Durrell, "The Kneller Tape" in **The World of Lawrence Durrell**, p. 163.
10. Lawrence Durrell, Interview in J. Mitchell and G. Andrews, **Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews**, New York, 1963, p. 278.
11. This and all subsequent references to **The Alexandria Quartet** are to the one-volume edition (London, Faber 1970). Page references are preceded by J for **Justine**, B for **Balthazar**, M for **Mountolive** and C for **Clea**.
12. Lawrence Durrell in **Lawrence Durrell and Henry Miller; A Private Correspondence**, ed. G. Wickes, New York, 1964, p. 326.
13. John Bayley, "Character and Consciousness" In **New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation**, v. 2, (Winter 1974).
14. Lionel Trilling, "**The Quartet: Two Reviews**" in **The World of Lawrence Durrell**", p. 57.
15. Alan Friedman, **Lawrence Durrell and The Alexandria Quartet: Art for Love's Sake**, University of Oklahoma Press, 1970, p. 76.
16. Lawrence Durrell, "Landscape and Character" in **Spirit of Place**, ed. A.G. Thomas, New York, 1971, p. 156.
17. Lawrence Durrell, Interview with Kenneth Young in **Encounter** XIII:6, (December 1959), p. 64.
18. Lawrence Durrell, Interview in **Writers at Work**, p.279.