THE REPRESENTATION OF THE ARAB WORLD BY TWENTIETH CENTURY ENGLISH WRITERS: LAWRENCE DURRELL, EDNA O'BRIEN & JONATHAN RABAN.

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AHMED T. HUSSEIN

TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LITERATURE,

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW.

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ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

With gratitute to my father & my mother.

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Abstract

In the European narration of the Orient, there is a deliberate stress on those qualities that make the East different from the West.

In his Orientalism Edward Said offers perspectives for studying the Western works that depict the Orient and its people. He argues that the orientalist discourse has managed - and till now continues - to exile the Orient into an irretrievable state of "otherness".

This thesis contains an analytical and critical examination of Said's views as presented in his book. It attempts to test Said's formulations against a deliberately assorted collection of English literary works.

The First Chapter sketches the general background to the theory of the orientalist discourse and to Said's views of the latter in regard to the Western documentation of the East and the Arabs. This chapter also offers an explanation for the deliberate choice of 'primary texts'.

The Second Chapter introduces Lawrence Durrell's work The Alexandria Quartet and examines how far Durrell adheres to the 'rituals' of the orientalists as defined

by Said. The chapter's main focus is on Durrell's depiction of Alexandria as an Arab city.

Chapter Three is primarily concerned with Durrell's treatment of the 'desert'. This is compared to the introduction of the theme of the desert in the writing (The Seven Pillars of Wisdom) of T. E. Lawrence who is cited as a representative of the traditional English 'desert' writers.

Chapter Four contains an appreciation to Durrell's treatment to the theme of the 'quest'. The quest of Mountolive is compared to the treatment of that theme in William Beckford's Vathek.

Durrell's portrayal of the Alexandrian woman—and 'Egyptian sexuality' is discussed in Chapter Five, with a retrospect to Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra. The Chapter examines the differences and the similarities between old and modern presentations of the Alexandrian woman.

Chapter Six looks at Edna O'Brien's Arabian Days. This Chapter investigates the representation of the Arabs in the post-colonial post-oil modern time. It attempts to see if O'Brien's writing still conveys the old dogmas of the orientalist discourse.

Chapter Seven deals with Jonathan Raban's

representation of the Arab World in his Arabia Through The Looking Glass. Raban's expedition to Arabia comes a few years after O'Brien's, and it is worth considering how far the two experiences are similar or different. The Chapter also tries to demonstrate the weight of Raban's work when taken in the context of mainstream representation of the Arabs and their world especially in the work of Durrell.

The Conclusion emphasizes the need for a fairer stand in relation to the depiction and the portrayal of one culture by another. It also poses the question of how far should portrayals be trusted or, indeed, be judged. It calls for the lifting up of the fog that clouds the visions of both sides in question.

CHAPTER ONE

The Orient Vs. The Occidental Discourse: Introductory Remarks.

Edward Said's fundamental argument in Orientalism is based on the contention that Western thought and scholarship regarding the Orient, the Arabs, and Islam in particular, have been largely determined by a canon, a network of prejudices and unexamined assumptions; a text with roots in the Middle Ages and one that persists to this day. This text has gradually served to bolster a Western sense of identity, and to rationalise imperialism. Since World War II it has been instrumental in the quest for control, manipulation, and domination. Among the victims of this text have been the Arabs and the Muslims; who have been talked about and *not* talked to; been represented rather than presenting themselves; been reduced to objects in a Procrustean fashion, and have been subjected to aesthetic, psychological, and political exploitation.

In his work Said traces the origins of the text to the confrontations between Islam and Christendom in the Middle Ages, to which accretions were progressively made

from the sciences of philology and history and from the pens of figures such as Barthélemy d'Herbelot, Silvestre de Sacy, and Ernest Renan. These Orientalists - and others succeeding them - confirmed and elaborated upon stereotypes of the Arabs as passive, irrational, authoritarian, and the rest of it. Renan, for instance, himself established the cliché of the Arabs as a people of "tent and tribes". Such texts serve to support both latent and manifest Orientalism; the former is relatively constant, the latter, while increasing in sophistication, remains structurally unchanged. And it is this text that continues to serve as the basic intellectual structure of the Orientalist enterprise. Said traces the evolution of these ideas from the eighteenth to the late nineteenth centuries to show that fields of learning are constrained and acted upon by society, by schools, libraries and governments; moreover, that both learned and imaginative writings are never free but are limited in their imagery, assumption, and intentions:

> The work of predecessors, the institutional life of a scholarly field, the collective nature of any learned enterprise: these, to say nothing of economic and social circumstances, tend to diminish the effects of the individual scholar's production. A field like Orientalism has a cumulative and corporate identity, one that is particularly strong given its associations with traditional learning (the classics, the Bible, philology), public institutions (governments, trading companies, geographical societies, universities) and generically determined writing (travel books, books of

> exploration, fantasy, exotic description). The result for Orientalism has been a sort of consensus; certain things, certain types of statement, certain types of work have seemed for the Orientalist correct...[1]

Orientalism means to Said not merely the erudite or imaginative interest in a region (more specifically the Levant), but the traditions and vested interests of a scholarly guild (Oriental Studies) alleged to work hand in hand with colonialism and imperialism. To him Orientalism - whose development coincides with the period of greatest European expansion, from Napoleon to 1914 - is a political doctrine, and Orientalist scholars, explicitly or implicitly guilty of racism and ethnocentrism, have been the architects of a vast enterprise of usurpation. They have thus constructed a harmful fiction. To make his point more tellingly, Said begins his exposure of the language of Orientalism by quoting, not - as one might expect - from some learned text, but from a speech by Balfour to the House of Commons (pp. 32-36) and from an article about "subject-races" by Lord Cromer (pp. 36-45). This is meant to indicate the deep convenience, in the Western establishment, between scholars, politicians, and colonial administrators.

A "bookish" Orient that corresponds not to the reality it pretends to represent but to the structures of Western ideologies is a subject of great potential. Said

correctly speaks of the essentially hermeneutical relation between Orientalist and Orient. Flaubert, whose Dictionnaire des idées reçues he evokes, would have read with a chuckle the catalogues of tautologies and clichés he so abundantly provides.

Said has a talent for detaching and displaying the damning quotation. He brings to his enterprise considerable vigour, fervour, and skill. He dwells on the ways in which putative knowledge about the "Orient" in fact grows within a complex milieu of institutions, social and religious customs, and the exercise of power. Within such context he would define Orientalism as:

> a manner of regularised (or orientalised) writing, vision, and study, dominated by imperatives, perspectives, and ideological biases ostensibly suited to the Orient. The Orient is taught, researched, administered, and pronounced upon in certain discrete ways.(2)

And,

> Insofar as it was a science of incorporation and inclusion by virtue of which the Orient was constituted and then introduced into Europe, Orientalism was a scientific movement whose analogue in the world of empirical politics was the Orient's colonial accumulation and acquisition by Europe.(3)

The persisting reality of Western predominance over the Orient in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Said maintains, was a vital factor in the formation and

refinement of Orientalist assumptions, subject matter, language, and conclusions.

Said also argues that as the artifacts of Orientalist thought piled up, the Orientalist landscape was itself transformed; the discourse took on a life of its own. Where at first Orientalists had *represented* Islam, had *represented* Egypt to their country's readers (a form of aggression and expropriation itself), the accumulation of Orientalist lore reached a point where the lore created the Orient - constituted, as it were, an Orientalist Orient that in turn became the object of the most tangible kinds of political, military, and cultural assault from the Orientalist West. Thus, Said's ultimate aim is to unearth the matrix within which ideas, vocabularies, and structures of power are woven together. He looks for evidence of how and why this attitude to the Orient developed in the vast literature generated by enquiring Europeans which, he argues, cumulatively established a complex of assumptions which he designates 'Orientalism'.

Although he is concerned primarily with Orientalism as represented in the academic tradition and milieu, Said considers the contribution of poets, novelists, and travel writers -the "literary pilgrims" who sought and found an Orient of the mind, a fantasy Orient which they appropriated and used to 'fertilize' their aesthetic

imagination. Lamartine, Chateaubriand, Flaubert, Nerval - all participated in the conspiracy of Orientalism - to the extent that they all accepted as faith the "irreducible" distinction between East and West and went on to invent, elaborate, and embellish the details of an Oriental woman, an Oriental mind, or an Oriental culture.

In comparing Flaubert's and de Nerval's use of travel to that of E. W. Lane, the paradigmatic Englishman, Said tries to combine the history of culture with the history of colonialism and allow for the differences between English and French colonial history. The continental, Said argues, was more likely to be a philologue in his library. When and if he travelled, it was for the fulfillment of a personal aesthetic, as in the case of de Nerval, not as a resident scientific observer like Lane. Said shows that where Lane abandones scientific procedures in his text sabotages his own narrative, blocks smooth transitions, and in a word, symbolizes "the growing organization of academic Orientalism". Said also considers the case of Richard Burton and concludes that Burton's concern with science is difficult to disengage from his personality.

Said's analysis is not concerned to show up discrepancies between 'reality' and the orientalists' picture of it. Instead, it seeks to draw out the structures of underlying assumptions, themes and motives

by which Orientalism, as a complex, occasionally shifting, political-intellectual phenomenon, has been concerned with its object. The outstanding contribution of Said's work lies in its attempt to analyse the authoritative structure of the orientalist discourse - the closed, self-evident, self-confirming character of that distinctive discourse which is reproduced again and again through scholarly texts, literary works of imagination, and the *obiter dicta* of public men of affairs. In Said's words,

> What we must respect and try to grasp is the sheer knitted-together strength of Occidental discourse, its very close ties to the enabling socio-economic and political institutions, and its redoubtable durability. After all, any system of ideas that can remain unchanged as teachable wisdom...from the period of Ernest Renan in the late 1840s until the present in the United States must be something more formidable than a mere collection of lies. Orientalism, therefore, is not an airy European fantasy about the Orient, but a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable investment. Continued investment made Orientalism as a system of knowledge about the Orient, an accepted grid of filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness, just as that same investment multiplied ...indeed, made truly productive - the statements proliferating out from Orientalism into general culture.(4)

The basic thrust, then, is not that Western scholarship on the Orient must be rejected (whether altogether or in part) but that the authority of the orientalist discourse - that which enables this discourse to reproduce itself

essentially unchallenged - must be seen as a problem, and understood as such within the context of the institutional, political and socio-economic conditions in which Orientalism has flourished.

It was in this very process of inventing the idea of the Orient and appropriating its reality through systematic exposition, study, and interpretation that the West gained in confidence and grew in cultural strength. For after all, the West was the dynamic actor which was discovering, explaining, and reconstructing a passive East lying there in a somnambulistic stupor waiting to be called to life. The sexual imagery here is not fortuitous, and Said draws attention to a latent sexual motif found in the writings of European writers, travellers, and scholars alike. The West is presented as active, virile, masculine, and powerful; the East is *re*presented as passive, mysterious, silent, and weak. Said cites the writing of Flaubert's experiences in Egypt and Flaubert's uniform association of the Orient with sex. He states that:

> in making the association Flaubert was neither the first nor the most exaggerated instance of a remarkedly persistent motif in Western attitudes to the Orient...the Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise and threat, untiring sensuality, unlimited desire [and] deep generative energies.(5)

Parallel to the process of scholarly investigation went that of exploration. Some travellers to the Orient, like Lane, went as scholars to gather materials; some, like Chateaubriand, to discover or assert their identities; others, like Burton, from a mixture of motives. In a subtle analysis not only of what they said but of the ways in which they said it - arrangements, style, and "tone" - Said uncovers the "latent Orientalism" beneath their differences of approach. For all of them, the fact of Empire, the assertion and domination of Europe, was a present reality; the Orient appeared as a fallen being, attractive but full of danger, in particular sexual danger. The modern Orient that the travellers found was not the real Orient but a dead shell into which only Europe could breathe life again; travel in the Orient was a kind of pilgrimage, which bore fruit only when the traveller had encountered dangers and overcome them, seen strange places and turned his back on them, and returned to his own self enriched. In spite of the similarities, Said is aware of differences between British and French attitudes, and perhaps he overstates them. For the British, securely established in India, he says, the Muslim Orient is a region of potential domination; for the French it is haunted by a "sense of acute loss." But in this period the French had not irretrievably lost the Middle East, and they had won themselves a new province of the imagination in Algeria.

There are, however, other broad issues raised whose importance clearly transcends the Eastern Mediterranean basin. What is the point of articulation between knowledge and power? Can objectivity be attained, or is truth in language, as Nietzsche affirmed(6), nothing but a mobile arsenal of metaphors? Can there be true representation of anything - specifically of another culture? And in dealing with other cultures, do ethnic and racial differences matter as much as sociopolitical and economic divergences? How is one to measure the political impact of the Romantic imagination? What are the proper roles for the modern intellectual, and what are the modalities of betrayal? Above all, does methodological self-consciousness provide us with the means of liberating ourselves from ideological strait-jackets?.

Said's premise is that any body of knowledge and beliefs, made manifest in scholarly texts as well as in the web of popular culture, constitutes a discourse, that can be analysed in terms of style, figures of speech, recurrent themes, and narrative devices. He argues that the Orientalist discourse, as it has been spun and institutionalized, unmistakably betrays a will to cultural hegemony and repression. The grammar and tropes of this collective discourse seemingly correspond to a system of ideas which speaks of immobilizing structures, authority, and the will to dominate and appropriate the

Orient as "the Other". Orientalist knowledge in general and Orientalist scholarship in particular are thus perceived as a form of rape. This rape is performed by textualising reality _ that is, by transmuting the living reality "into the stuff of texts", which robs the subject (the Orient) of its existential status.

Old stereotypes are retained, but the updating and systematisation of data and its analysis enhanced the authority of Orientalist analysis which poised eastern inferiority, western superiority, eastern decadence, western vibrance, etc. Simultaneously Orientalist discourse permeated western culture, providing themes, stereotypes and even texts for figures such as Flaubert, de Nerval, Lamartine, T. E. Lawrence, Burton and Chateaubriand.

Through his own analysis of the institutional complexity of Orientalism Said casts doubt upon the possibility - surely at least the range - of individual scholarly achievement in area study. Moreover, he appears to be in general sympathy with Michel Foucault[7], among others, in dethroning the primacy - certainly the arrogance - of the freewheeling subject/knower versus passive object/known as the only acceptable pattern for knowledge itself to assume.

In the tradition of Foucault, Said assumes that

Orientalism is also somehow immanent and buried in discourse; not committed to any one discipline; it cannot be divorced from the world of painters and poets, or the world of Government officials and businessmen. Rather, Orientalism is a broad and diffuse domain.

For Foucault, power and knowledge are co-terminous, power is knowledge; Said thinks that they are "analogues". He believes that cultural orientalism preceded institutional orientalism and notes that "to say simply that orientalism was a rationalisation of colonial rule is to ignore the extent to which colonial rule was justified in advance by Orientalism, rather than after the fact"[8]. He stresses that "the focus of interest in Orientalism for me has been the partnership between a discursive and archival textuality and worldly power, one as index and refraction of the other"[9]. To Said, a representation is "*eo ipso* implicated, intertwined, embedded, interwoven with a great many other things besides the "truth", which is itself a representation.[10]

The central argument of Said's theory is strongly set in place from the outset. The aim is to be at once selective and comprehensive. He ranges through the worlds of scholars. One is made to realise that no cultural phenomenon can be isolated, that the images and myths a society projects are a collective product.

Said argues that Orientalism has put into circulation

as valid currency some of the smuggest and most contemptuous beliefs: that the Arab mind, mired in an atomistic view of things, is incapable of accuracy and logic; that the typical Oriental is sensuous and lustful, but his sexuality, being essentially of a passive nature, cannot be taken seriously; that the "timeless wisdom" of the Orient goes hand in hand with exhaustion - and that, of course, the European identity is superior. Said gleans these tiresome clichés from a variety of resources, and it does not seem to matter whether they are derived from scholarly works, medieval superstition (even Dante makes a contribution), travel accounts, journalistic cartoons and movies, political prejudice, or plain ignorance.

Given the strong sense of coherence Said perceives, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that we are dealing with an inevitable distortion in the framework of knowledge of the Other, a fundamentally warped, uneven discursive terrain where it is impossible for the writer to think straight because the available vocabulary is itself uneven, biased.

Said's work has opened many new doors in the discussions of one culture's depiction of others, its connotations and limitations. Orientalism is frequently called an angry book, and the reader need only read the section on the Orientalist Bernard Lewis [pp. 314-320] for ample evidence. There are many disclaimers and

qualifiers scattered through the argument that it could be read as an apology for Orientalism's unavoidable misdemeanors: "nor is it representative and expressive of some nefarious 'Western' imperialist plot to hold down the 'Oriental' world. It is rather a distribution of geographical awareness" [p.12]. "There is nothing especially controversial or reprehensible about such domestications of the exotic; they take place between all cultures, certainly, and between all men" [p. 60]. At times the qualification follows so immediately upon the attack as to erase its effect:

> It is therefore correct that every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric. Some of the immediate sting will be taken out of these labels if we recall additionally that human societies, at least the more advanced cultures, have rarely offered the individual anything but imperialism, racism, and ethnocentrism for dealing with 'other' cultures.(11)

Said makes of Orientalism a sin of omission: "Orientalism is better grasped as a set of constraints upon and limitations of thought than it is simply as a positive doctrine"(12). In his book, Said deals with a passage from Marx's 1853 study of British rule in India, where Said traces over the course of a twenty-line quotation a successive crumbling of Marx's human compassion for the Indians, underlined by a condescending citation from Goethe's Westöstliche Divan: "That Marx

still able to sense some fellow feeling, to identify even a little with poor Asia, suggests that something happened [that Marx temporarily evaded an Orientalist mode of thought] before the labels took over, before he was dispatched to Goethe as a source of wisdom on the Orient"[13]. The casting of the Orient in monolithic terms; the characterization of Orientalism as a struggle with labels and preconceived ideas is perhaps as close as Said comes to reconciling the definition of Orientalism as an actionable offense, where the image of the Orient as the mirror in which the West sees itself, always its best self, recurs frequently transformed into a related image, the East as " a theatrical stage attached to Europe"[14], T. E. Lawrence being perhaps Said's simplest historical example, whose vision of the desert becomes something like a vast backdrop for his own more or less private heroism.

Said argues that within the Orientalist discourse narrative is often defeated by vision. Monumental recording and description alternate the narration of events. Then, the Orientalist looks into every detail through the device of a set of reductive categories (the Semite, the Muslim mind, the Orient). And since these categories are primarily schematic ones, and since it is more or less assumed that no Oriental can know himself the way an Orientalist can, any vision of the Orient ultimately comes to rely for its coherence and force on

the person, institution, or discourse whose property it is.

Said argues that the Orientalist writers essentially adopt two forms of style. Either one writes science like Lane or personal utterance like Chateaubriand. The problems with the former are its impersonal Western confidence that descriptions of general, collective phenomena are possible, and its tendency to make realities not so much out of the Orient as out of its own observations. The problem with personal utterance is that it inevitably retreated into a position equating the Orient with private fantasy, even if that fantasy is of a very high order indeed, aesthetically speaking.

Still, between the dense tissue of secondary references which characterizes the field and the synchronic pattern he finds written across them, remains the question of power and, indeed, the distinction between 'pure' and 'political' knowledge to be further developed. Said writes almost from the conviction that 'pure' scholarship does not exist. Knowledge, in his view, is inextricably tied to power. Hence, when it becomes institutionalized, culturally accumulated, overly restrictive in its definitions, it must be actively opposed by a counter knowledge. Orientalism is polemical, its analysis corrosive.

In the West as well as in the East, Said's argument was

received with mixed feelings. Generally, it was either welcomed with relative courtesy (like Clifford Geertz's "Conjuring With Islam", New York Review Of Books, May 27, 1982, p. 2828) or rejected with bitter hostility (like Bernard Lewis': "The Question of Orientalism", N.Y.R.B., June 24, 1982, pp.49-56).

Among the critics who rejected Said's suppositions is Jeffrey Meyers who thinks that Said's assumptions - as set out in his Orientalism - are "formless, repetitive, irritating, muddled, and wrongheaded". Meyers argues that Said over-emphasizes the issue of cultural relativism. He adds that Said "does not seem to recognise that even authors as sympathetic and sophisticated as Stendhal and Henry James, when writing about the more accessible and intelligible Italians, were inevitably dominated by the cultural values of their own ages and countries"(15). The awareness of an alien culture, according to Meyers, is *naturally* more tense when Europeans are confronted with the Orient hence a "value-free apprehension is virtually impossible". In Meyers' view, Said "does not pay sufficient attention to the historical reasons that helped to determine the syndrome he calls Orientalism"(16). Meyers justifies the dominance of the Western view. He claims that "there was no correspondingly strong eastern counter-image of either the Occident or the Orient ("the Orient would not represent itself") to oppose and balance

this view"[17].

Consequently, Meyers thinks that Said has ill-judged and misinterpreted the works of Forster, Orwell, and Lawrence through what Meyers, unjustifiably, designates as Said's "polemical distortions".

In his defense of T. E. Lawrence, Meyers stresses the suggestion that Lawrence "was responsible for inspiring and leading the Arab revolt"[18] and that "it was the West, not the East, that discovered the archaeological and petroleum treasures of the Orient, and by doing so preempted its prestige and its power"[19]. In his attempt to refute Said's thoughts Meyers suggests that the East cannot represent itself simply because there is still no single decent library in the entire Middle East; there is no major journal of Arab studies published in the Arab World today; there are no institutes devoted to studying the Arab or the Western World. "The Modern Orient", he announces, "in short, participates in its own Orientalizing"[20].

Rather than succeeding in disclaiming Said's fundamental arguments (of the limited attitudes Western scholars adopt in treating the theme of the Orient), Meyers' criticism, by and large, work in favour of Said's views. When Meyers talks about the West's great contribution in discovering the Oriental, Meyers is, in fact, giving credibility to Said's assumption that the

West justified its presence in the Orient in delivering it into being; breathing life into its dead soul; and, hence, creating, or recreating, its very existence. And when Meyers proclaims that in throughout today's Middle East there is no one "decent library" or a specialized journal, he is again supplying an example of the 'practice of generalization', which is itself one of the rituals that Said argues as essential to the production and legalization of the Orientalist discourse.

Dennis Porter, on the other hand, looks at Said from a different angle. He thinks that Said "was unable ...to suggest alternatives to the hegemonic discourse of Orientalism "simply because", Porter states, "Said overlooks the potential contradiction between discourse theory and Gramscian hegemony". And the core of Porter's essay strives to illustrate that. Porter also claims that Said faced another failure in not being able to "distinguish the literary instance from more transparently ideological textual forms; he does not acknowledge the semi-autonomous and overdetermined character of aesthetic artifacts", and that Said finally fails to show how literary texts may in their play establish distance from the ideologies they seem to be reproducing."[21] To this end, Porter deploys the two cases of Marco Polo's Travels and Lawrence's Seven Pillars of Wisdom. Porter's argument is, however, vague and it is not very clear if the two extended examples help his

ends.

Bernard Lewis'[22] attack is, without any doubt, the most harsh. He rejects Said's entire thesis in Orientalism. He first claims that the field (Orientalism) - as a learned discipline - can be compared with classical philology. His argument, thenafter, becomes self-refuting as he accuses Said with 'hidden' intentions in omitting the German Orientalism (a case that only Lewis raises against Said) and deliberately not referring to the attack of Soviet Orientalists on Mohammed.

Said states that his intentions (through the book) were not to "write a biographical dictionary of Orientalists"...nor was he offered any substantive reasons why he should mention the German Orientalists. The Soviet Orientalists, on the other hand, did not only attack Islam as such but they, in fact, attacked Christianity, Judaism and other religions for being opiates of the people. Said stresses a difference between that, however, and singling out Islam - a practice more common among Western Orientalists.

Lewis attributes, to an astonishing degree, meretricious arguments to Said, deliberately wrenches Said's words out of context, overlooks the explicit context of Orientalism when it fails to suit his purposes, and repeatedly demonstrates his own inability

to comprehend Said's purpose in writing. Lewis's assault, despite its claim of magisterial objectivity, is a venomous outburst stimulated by Said's own ferocious criticism of Lewis in Orientalism as well as in the past (e.g. "Arabs, Islam, and the Dogmas of the West", New York Times Book Review, Oct. 31, 1976, pp.4-5).

In contrast, Stuart Schaar receives Said's arguments favourably. He saw in the "bold book" an "appropriate occasion to discuss the nature of western scholarship to the Orient...and the need for new ways of looking at the Middle East"[23].

As a contribution to historiography Said's work stands as a valuable reminder that all historical writing is subjective and that in the post-decolonialization era it is essential to question, and usually to modify, most of the European stereotypes concerning the rest of the World that were built up during the centuries of overseas expansion.

In my study an attempt will be made to look at a particular set of twentieth century English writings through the perspective set forward by Said's work in Orientalism. The study will try to demonstrate how - and how far - could Said's views be applied to a certain choice of literary productions. The main focus will be on: Lawrence Durrell's The Alexandria Quartet (1963), Constance (1982), Sebastian (1983); Edna O'Brien's

Arabian Days, (1977), and Jonathan Raban's Arabia Through the Looking Glass (1979).

The choice is intentionally made hybrid. The study will attempt first analysing the Oriental themes of Durrell's Quartet. There will be an appreciation - through the perspectives of Said's Orientalism - of Durrell's portrayal of the Egyptian city and its Arab inhabitants. This will be linked to the recurrence of these tropes in Durrell's later works (Constance and Sebastian). T. E. Lawrence's Seven Pillars of Wisdom (1922) is introduced to draw some lines of comparison between Durrell's treatment of the theme of the 'desert' and its utilization by Lawrence as a 'traditional desert-writer'. Similarly, the examination of the theme of the 'quest' in the Quartet will be dealt with in comparison to William Beckford's treatment of that topic in his Vathek (1782). It will be essential to establish how far the two works meet or diverge from each other taking into consideration that Vathek was produced at a time when, for instance, a word like 'colonialism' did not have some of its present connotations.

According to Said, the theme of 'Oriental sexuality and submissiveness' is recurrent within the spheres of the Orientalist discourse. It will be essential, therefore, to establish how - and if - Durrell adheres to the rules of 'the orientalist game' in his depiction of the

Oriental women and introduction of the 'Alexandrian Cleopatras'. In this line, Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra is cited for local references.

Said makes "allowances for the difference between candidly personal writing (letters, travel books, diary jottings) and formally aesthetic writing (novels and tales) [p. 185]. He also talks of travel books as "generically determined writings". O'Brien's Arabian Days and Raban's Arabia through the Looking Glass are both travel books set in post-petroleum post-colonial Arabia. It is worth investigating, then, if these works use 'typical Orientalist genres' or not and how far the style in depicting the Arabs as 'others' is similar to or different from the works of the predecessors, especially Durrell's. It will be worth stressing in this respect the relevance, if any, of O'Brien's particular case of 'double alienation' (the Western and the female factors).

It should be stated here that although the study is mainly concerned with twentieth century English writing, the introduction of 'old' literary works - works produced at times other than the twentieth century - is made to examine Said's claim of the consistency within the Orientalist discourse. The historical background is, I think, not insignificant and the study would aim, therefore, at investigating if it is ever just to look at a work produced in the eighteenth century (Beckford's),

by a Westerner who has never set a foot in the Orient, from the same angle when the product at hand is based on a few years residence in Egypt of the 1940s (Durrell's) or a tour to Abu Dhabi of the 1970s (O'Brien's).

Finally, I would like to state that although oriental themes and motifs are treated separately in the course of the study, repetitions, however, of certain extracts (particularly from the Quartet) are only done when the same quotation is vitally important for the demonstration of the presentation of more than one theme within the one extract. Hence, some passages in the Quartet that are cited to display Durrell's presentation of the city are repeated again in analyzing his treatment of the desert since these themes - within the Arabian arena - are interwined.

Notes:

1. Edward W. Said, Orientalism, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978, p. 202.
2. Ibid, p. 202.
3. Edward W. Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered", in Europe And Its Others : The proceedings of the Essex Sociology of Literature Conference (1984), Colchester: Unviersity of Essex, 1985, p.17.
4. Said, Orientalism, op. cit., p. 6.
5. Ibid., p. 188.
6. Quoted in Said, p. 203.
7. See e.g. Orientalism, p. 3.
8. Ibid., p. 39.
9. Edward Said, "Interview", Diacritics, vol. 3, (1976), p. 41.
10. Said, Orientalism, op. cit., p. 272.
11. Ibid., p. 20.
12. Ibid., p. 42.
13. Ibid., p. 155
14. Ibid., p.63.
15. Jeffery Meyers, "Orientalism: by Edward W. Said", The Sewanee Review, vol. 88, (1980), p. xlv.
16. Ibid, pp. xlv-xlvi.
17. Ibid, p. xlvi.
18. Ibid, p. xlviii.
19. Ibid, p. xlvi.
20. Ibid, p. xlvi.
21. Dennis Porter, "Orientalism And Its Problems", The Politics of Theory: Essex Sociology of Literature Conference, July 1982, p. 192
22. Bernard Lewis, "The Question of Orientalism", The New York Review of Books, vol. 29, no. 11, (June 24,

1982), pp. 49-56.

23. Stuart Schaar, "Orientalism at the Service of Imperialism", Race & Class, vol. 21, no. 1 (1979), p. 67.

CHAPTER TWO:

Between The Alexandria Quartet (1962), Constance (1982), And Sebastian (1983): Durrell's Representation Of Alexandria

From the time of Durrell's first encounter with Alexandria, his portrayal of the city displays the pressure of Orientalist discourse. This is manifest in the Alexandria Quartet, as it had been in the correspondence of the 1940s (his first tentative writings about the city). This pressure, however, continues to show in his later writings of which Constance (1982) and Sebastian (1983) are characteristic.

"Only the city is real" writes Durrell in the prefatory note which opens the Quartet:

> The characters in this story, the first of a group, are all inventions together with the personality of the narrator, and bear no resemblance to living persons. Only the city is real.(1)

However, his critics are not in agreement. G. S. Fraser finds the setpiece description of Alexandria "not

realistic" and claims they "do not evoke, so to say, one street in Alexandria as seen by Darley at one particular time".[2] He also argues that the passages of elaborate and highly coloured description of Durrell's Alexandria are patterned from a multiplicity of facts, profiles, or inflexions and thus seem, while graphic in their vividness, to carry what Fraser calls a heraldic meaning.

M. Manzalaoui is more severe. He accuses Durrell's writings of both inadequate observation and, indeed, of dishonest reporting. He speaks about Durrell's "pseudo Orientalism", and he shows many of the religious and geographical errors in the Quartet.

Durrell's portrayal of the city fails, Manzalaoui adds, in covering some of the very simple facts of the Egyptian life: "The water of Lake Mariour is brackish and no one would use it for irrigation (Mountolive, 35)...To say that in Egypt, Alexandria is the only capital which bore the remotest traces of a European way of life is gross hyperbole...The British Summer Residence was not new in the thirties (Mountolive, 168); I doubt if Clea would have used gold nail-varnish (Clea, 51); No fashion shop in Alexandria would have the Anglo-Indian name 'Ghoshen's Emporium'(Clea, 213)"[3].

Manzaloui's article, although at times it seems less coherent, could, nevertheless, offer a 'typical reply' any Egyptian might supply in return to the ill-reported

Alexandrian scenes withwhich Durrell stuffs the Quartet. This, however, is measuring the worth of fiction against the yardstick of factual accuracy.

The Quartet's portrayal of Alexandria sways away from the city's depictions in the works of the other writers who visited the place at the time when Durrell was stationed there.

D. J. Enright saw an Alexandria very different from Durrell's fictitious city. In describing the Quartet, Enright says:

> Alexandria is a rather melodramatic city, and not only by British-provincial standards. Its extremes of wealth and poverty are staggering. Its beggars are the most horrifying in the world. Its population ranges from a simple fellahin through a cartoonist's cotton-pashas to the ultra-sophisticated society of Boudort, L'Alelier and the big houses. Its sea is bluer than the most unlikely Mediterranean postcard. In the Khamseen ...the city honestly looks like the end of the world. Why, then, did Durrell feel obliged to paint the lily and throw an extra stench on the putrescence?(4)

Enright does not seem to be romanticizing over the diversity of Alexandrian life. In fact, it touches a saddened social conscience.

Enright as well as Robert Liddell(5) could have been further witnesses to the Alexandria that Durrell experienced. They might have also had the eye for the

mundane and the bizzare but this had never become the overwhelming theme of their articulation on Egypt the way the Quartet does.

Liddell sketches a whole cast of anciently vulgar, comforting, and humorous Alexandrians. What is interesting about his Alexandrians is that they link social and intellectual pretensions. Similarly, in Enright's Academic Year, fashionable Alexandrians are constantly giving "causeries", or "conversaziones", or "conferences", intellectual fashion shows where hats and -isms are on view, where desert is nearly a "gateau existentialiste"(6).

Jacqueline Carol, an American 'Alexandrian', witnessed a different Alexandria from the city Durrell presents in his works. The Alexandria she saw was a social city. Unlike Durrell, she, ironically, found the city spacious:

> Alexandria was the foremost port of Egypt, and a hive of activity for the country's brokers...with wide streets flanked by palms and flame trees, large gardens, stylish villas, neat new buildings, and above all, room to breathe. Life was easy. Labour was cheap. Nothing was impossible, especially when it involved one's comfort.(7)

Alexandria's "room to breathe" could, in fact, be set in sharp contrast with - what will be highlighted later in this chapter - Durrell's depiction of Alexandria as an 'Oriental jail'.

Jane L. Pinchin makes the observation that Durrell's is very much like William Thackeray's description of the Egypt of the 1844. Thackeray wrote:

> The character of the houses by which you pass is scarcely Eastern at all. The streets are busy with a motley population of Jews and Armenians, slave-driving-looking Europeans, large-breeched Greeks, and well-shaven buxom merchants, looking as trim and fat as those on the Bourse or on 'Change; only, among the natives, the stranger can't fail to remark (as the Caliph did of the Calendars, in the "Arabian Nights") that so many of them *have only one eye*. It is the horrid ophthalmia which has played such frightful ravages with them. You see children sitting in the doorways, their eyes completely closed up with the green sickening sore, and the flies feeding on them."(8)

Pinchin quotes this and declares herself "startled, for Durrell meets the same natives, a century later, unchanged"(9).

Pinchin is concerned, on the other hand, with The Alexandria Quartet as fiction, and as such she finds it hyperbolical. She summarises her view of Durrell's Alexandria as "a place where one comes to expect kidnapping, child prostitution, murder, international intrigue, poisoning, and suicide; where marriage is a business venture". She feels that Durrell paints a "fevered city, a dying city, a prodigal, stranger-loving,

leaf-veined city. A city of deep resignation, of spiritual lassitude and self indulgence, of jealousy and retribution".(10)

Robert Alter seems to agree with Alfred Kazin in his view of Durrell's Quartet. In his Motives For Fiction, Alter states that:

> At a moment when Lawrence Durrell was being widely celebrated as the legitimate heir to Proust and Joyce, Kazin was able to see that The Alexandria Quartet was no more than an alluring confection, and he could sum up the limited nature of Durrell's gift with beautiful precision: "Mr Durrell seems to me fundamentally a writer concerned with pleasing his own imagination, not with making deeper contact with the world through his imagination, as Proust and Joyce did.(11)

Alter and Kazin's impressions seem to be that in his imaginative Alexandria Durrell's tropes led to traps - an inaccurate reporting.

"Everything is reduced to a vaguely different sensuousness of word and sensations", comments Kazin on Durrell's Quartet. So gloomy is the scene of the Quartet that it has led Kazin to announce:

> I have never been to Alexandria, but having read Justine and Balthazar and now Mountolive - the first three novels in Mr Durrell tetralogy - I plan never to be disenchanted by experience of the real thing.(12)

In a similar tone, Walter Allen complains about the

lack of a moral dimension in the Alexandria Quartet. He claims that the characters exist entirely on the surface because they possess only "Alexandrian attributes" and because:

> They are inhabitants of a fairyland that seems, the more one examines it, the less related to life as commonly experienced anywhere in the world, irrespective of geography, religion, or race.(13)

Stanley Eskin, on the other hand, seems concerned with the same problem though from a different angle. Eskin stresses that the pressure that accompanied Durrell (which will be highlighted later in this section) has opened the door for the Quartet's faults. Eskin stresses that since Durrell "wrote The Quartet under considerable pressure (in Balthazar he says that he finished The Quartet in six weeks)...[that] has led to the "thematic and accidental formlessness of the work"(14). Apart from the pressure of time, Stanley refers to the harsh circumstances that formed the Alexandrian atmosphere which confronted Durrell as he was first introduced to the city. Stanley seems to be linking the visions of personal disappointment to images of Alexandria, hence Durrell's dim view of Alexandria.

Anatole Broyard saw dream-like Durrellian Alexandria. In expressing his impression of Durrell's city, Broyard states:

> Durrell's Alexandria *is* actually like the landscape of a dream. A hot, dry city, surrounded by desert, raked by winds and by contradictions. A relentless yet voluptuous city, beautiful and squalid, overcivilised and primitive. There comes a time in the life of a great city when the place and its people exist in a kind of a collusion or symbiosis, when they are unimaginable without each other, and Durrell's Alexandria has reached that condition.(15)

These critics are working from different standpoints but they all agree in their dissatisfaction and in contradicting Durrell's own claim. Their judgements, however, are the outcome of either specific position (Manzaloui, for being a native Egyptian) or remain at the level of impressionistic criticism (Enright, as another Western witness). More solid grounds for the disapprobation they voice may be found by analyzing the devices of Durrell's writings, which we will see are devices of the Orientalist discourse.

Early in the Quartet, the narrator Darley rhetorically remarks:

> 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.
> Five races, five languages, a dozen creeds...You would never mistake it for a happy place...I remember Nessim once saying - that Alexandria was the great winepress of love; those who emerged from it were the sick men, the solitaries, the prophets - I mean all who have

been deeply wounded in their sex.[16]

Two devices evident in these sentences require to be examined separately; they are: the presentation of landscape and scene through visual impressionism ("*my mind's eye*") and the presentation of the city as a puzzle and mystery (*"What is this city of ours?"*).

The scene in Alexandria is first described as its own atmosphere. Alexandria, simply, becomes the landscape -a collective noun encompassing ambience, atmosphere, essence, a way of life, all the innumerable forces impinging on the writer during his stay at a given place, as well as his imaginatively felt and reconstructed reactions to them and consequently his representation of the city:

> Long sequences of tempera. Light filtered through the essence of lemons. An air full of brick- dust – sweet-smelling brick-dust and the odour of hot pavements slaked with water. Light damp clouds, earth-bound yet seldom bringing rain. Upon this squirt dust-red, dust-green, chalk-mauve and watered crimson-lake. In summer the sea-damp lightly varnished the air. Everything lay under a coat of gum.[17]

The vocabulary here is that of art-criticism. The central theme is light. There is a vocabulary of colour (dust-red), (dust-green),...but it does not treat colours in a concrete way. If it can evoke any physical sensation, then that can only be by virtue of its *im*preciseness. It

is vague rather than precise. It is concerned with a variety more than it is with the specific. It is not, in any proper sense, analytical. It is impressionistic.

In the sentences preceding this attempt to catch the colours of multi-coloured lights, a literary synesthesia is apparent. Light is described in a vocabulary of smells, at first sharp and precise ("essence of lemon"), and then more indefinite ("brick-dust - sweet-smelling brick-dust"), and at last light is set in relation to a smell which can only be related to a more intangible experience ("the odour of hot pavements slacked with water"). This mode of describing a visual scene belongs to the art criticism of old fashioned 'Belles-lettres'.

In describing the city primarily as if it were a painting, seen in the literary equivalent of visual impressionism, it becomes the object of a gaze. It is something to be looked at, inspected. It is a spectacle, as exotic as the Orientalist paintings of the nineteenth century. It is a picture such as Durrell conveys to his friend Miller, that makes the latter exclaim: "You gave me a striking picture of Cairo. Don't tell me there's nothing more to it than that."(18)

In deploying visual terms to evoke his Alexandria, the writing places the narrator and renders him outside, in a position of observation. The exoticism excludes the observer from participating and communicating with the

city. Instead the observer is an investigator, looking in on behalf of other outsiders not at the spot on the scene. As an "envoy", Durrell is representing Europe. Europe, in fact, is looking into the Egyptian scene by virtue of the narrator's spectacles. In Darley's question, of "What is this city of ours?", the "ours" cannot be the mark of some inhabitant of the city, rather it exhibits a colonialist manifestation of the power to possess. Representing the whole west, Darley is putting his European talents on display in 'manipulating' and then claiming the city, for himself as well as the mother Europe, 'ours'. This is a sign of the imperial grandeur of reach and grasp. It is, at the same time, an illustration of the weight of the dominating culture he is representing and its 'naturalization'. Thus, the city and its local inhabitants become the private property of the writer, his 'entree´ interdite'.

Moreover, the question of "What is this city of ours?" connotes also the attempt, on the part of the writer and his protagonist, to present the city as a puzzling mystery demanding solutions. Alexandria is now treated as a phenomenon that needs to be analysed:

> And yet, strangely enough, it is only here that I am at last able to re-enter, re-inhabit the unburied city with my friends; to frame them in the heavy webs of metaphors which will last half as long as the city itself - or so I hope. Here at last I am able to see their history and the city's as one and the same

phenomenon.[19]

This is another manifestation of Western virtuality. Durrell is, in fact, displaying here the stance of what Said calls the 'power-intellectual'; a characteristic of the Orientalist discourse. Such power controls and helps the Orientalist to practice more freely the Western canons of taste and value. It is the kind of power that renders Alexandria no more than "some great public urinal".[20] It, nonetheless, also makes more vivid the sense of a layer upon layer technique of building interest, official learning, and institutionalized pressure that shapes Durrell's Alexandria as a literary and as a geographical territory.

This would probably, in a way, justify Durrell's request for Forster's Alexandria: History and Guide to be sent to him as he sat down to grapple with Justine. Jane Pinchin views that as a necessity since "Durrell would make specific references to the History and Guide when looking at Amr or Valentinos' Sophia".[21] Durrell's list of references, in fact, does not end at Forster. He, for instance, acknowledges Miller and Eliot as his "guides and mentors".[22] Miller's influence on Durrell as a writer is described by his friend Alfred Perlés as "discernible though only faintly in the overpolished Alexandria Quartet."[23] In a letter to Miller, Durrell expresses his delight that the Tropic of Cancer has

boosted in him the motive to write about the people he *knows* "something about":

> It freed me immediately...Tropic taught me a valuable thing. To write about people I knew something about. Imagine it! I had this collection of grotesques sitting inside and I hadn't written a line about them - only about heroic English men and dove-like girls... The whole collection of men and women opened up for one like a razor".(24)

In the course of his lectures in A key To Modern British Poetry, Durrell displays his wide range of reading. What most of the critics seem to agree to emphasize in this respect is how far he - as a writer - is being affected by others, or to what extent he would derive from other writers' works, whether he acknowledges that or not. He may acknowledge some of his 'sources' for The Quartet(25). Equally he may not reveal, or only in an indirect way, his debt to others. But he does certainly mould images, modify and repeat ideas in a local scenery without indicating where they were drawn from. William Godshalk provides (in parallel columns) a comparison between Durrell's narration of Narouz's visit to the 'moulid' of Sitna Mariam (in Balthazar) and similar details that J. W. McPherson presents in his book Moulids of Egypt (1940).(26) Similarly, he suggests that Durrell's debt to Forster's Alexandria "is greater than acknowledged" and that there are many details from Forster's work found in the Quartet.(27)

Herbert Howarth states that when Durrell began Justine he appears to have thought that a classic guide-book to Egypt such as E. W. Lane's 125-year-old Manners and Customs Of Modern Egyptians would completely supply the Arabic side of the story.[28] Howarth also notes that Durrell draws on Lane's book for the words of the dawn prayers, and adopts the text almost verbatim, pruning only a word or two for the sake of concision. It is by these means, Howarth adds, that Durrell has 'managed' to project the people he scarcely met - the local inhabitants of the 'real' city - and the psyche that lives in a language he scarcely knew.

What ought to be stressed here is that all Durrell's references - acknowledged or not - comply with the Orientalist's need to consult what Said refers to as the doxology, the praxis, the library which would provide him with the near designs and early patterns in the treatment of his Oriental subject-matter.

We need not look for the little correspondence between Alexandria and Durrell's depiction of it, not simply because Durrell's account is inaccurate but mainly because the language does not offer any evidence of the narrator's endeavour to be accurate. "I am making every attempt to be matter-of-fact"[29] repeats Darley in the Quartet. But Durrell's city, compared to the Alexandria

presented by Arab novelists[30], is a world of the imagination, the intangible, the highly unlikely, the improbable.

There are autobiographical reasons for Durrell's hostility towards the Alexandrian place. Although it is not within the scope of this study to examine them in detail, it is essential, however, to shed some light on them and see how they confirm Durrell's subjection to the Orientalist discourse when forming his narrative on Alexandria. The harsh circumstances that accompanied his stay in Egypt right from the start have severely shaped his Quartet and left indelible marks:

> When I came to Cairo I was a Churchill's prisoner. I was a refugee, you see. All our passports had been taken away until security had cleared it, and it was useless my saying I was a member of the British Embassy in Athens. They put me in a concentration camp for four days, at Agami, and they let us out slowly for inspection.[31]

Such a hostile reception as Durrell received stays with him throughout the years of his stay in Egypt. Obviously, his hatred for the place was being excited.

Together with Robin Fedden, Edmund Spencer, and others, Durrell, as a consolation, formed a circle called "Writers in Exile", and they started editing a magazine entitled Personal Landscape, expressing their malaise and estrangement. In an anthology of the magazine edited by

Fedden, in his introduction article "An Anatomy of Exile", Fedden analyses the vexation and difficulties a European might encounter in Egypt:

> First of all there are the difficulties of climate. Egypt was designed for Northern Europeans to visit, not to live in. The winter is incontestably perfect, like an ideal English Summer, but then one outstays what was once the tourist season and drags on for three or four years, as is inevitable in war-time, become all too apparent...The landscape too, though beautiful in its own relaxed way, is as flaccid as the year. Except for the deserts where only the soldiers have lived, it is boneless... No rock, no gesture on the part of the earth, disturbs the heavy Nilotic mould which is cultivated Egypt.. Flat, alluvial and spineless, the fields turn out their bumper crops month after month.(32)

The tone here conspicuously resembles that of the Quartet. Prolonged involuntary exile in Egypt, Fedden explains, is bitter for the European. He lacks definite changes of season. He faces flat and unarticulated landscape. Durrell echoes Fedden's feelings in his Quartet. Fedden's impressions, in fact, come into line with Durrell's thesis in regard to the landscape and its impact upon the individuals. "Human beings are expressions of their landscape", Durrell says in his series of lectures in the Spirit of Place.(33) When applied to his Quartet, the city is always the incentive. Movements, actions, moral depredation, social degeneration and subsequently every eccentric and

grotesque is piled upon the city. It alone stands accused. In the Durrellian world, Alexandria alone shapes its inhabitants and their sensibilities.

Cavafy, "the old poet of the city" felt very much that same power of Alexandria. At the end of Justine, two of the most evocative and resignedly mournful poems by Cavafy are quoted in full. The city as antithesis of freedom is the burden of a poem titled "The City" by the Greek poet, translated by Durrell in Justine:

> There's no new land, my friend, no
> New sea; for the city will follow you,
> In the same streets you will wonder endlessly,
> ....
>
> The city is a cage.
> No other places, always this
> Your earthly landfall, and no ship exists
> To take you from yourself...(34)

Darley regards the events in which he is caught up not as a personal history with an individual accent so much as part of the historical fabric of the place. And Durrell's insertion of a translation of Cafavy's poem is a way of vindicating his verdict over the city's mysterious power in which he found himself caught. In his other poem "The God Abandons Antony", there is again very much the spirit of Alexandria the imprisoning city. But, unlike Durrell, Cavafy always seemed addicted to his city. That 'unexplainable' spirit of Alexandria, for him, attracts rather than repels.

If for E. M. Forster Alexandria was a cross-roads of East and West, a subtle place for lovers and theologians, reverberating with Alexander's dream of harmony and the love-song of Antony and Cleopatra, then Durrell, indeed, paints a different picture. In the poem, "Canon in Alexandria", he sees it as the "ash-heap of four cultures", as a place where people are "born dead", a place where people "lost their character but kept their taste".(35) In his other poem "Alexandria", the city is "like /The wife of Lot _ a metaphor for tears".(36) This is reflected extensively again in the Quartet. In fact, each of these poems works like a miniature "Quartet" floating free of its characters.

Consequently, he will not succeed in shaking himself from it. Egypt becomes for Durrell the writer his prison. He starts feeling cut adrift. He is now being divorced from a more 'cultural atmosphere'(37). He starts longing for a change. This has extensively been echoed in the Quartet:

> Egypt, flat and unbosomed, flowed back and away from me on either side of the car. The green changed to blue, the blue to peacock's eye, to gazelle-brown, to panther-black. The desert was like a dry kiss, a flutter of eyelashes against the mind...I gibbered into the city after a drink or two under a new moon which felt as if it were drawing half its brilliance from the open sea. Everything smelt good again. The iron band that Cairo puts round one's head (the

> consciousness of being completely surrounded by burning desert?) dissolved, relaxed - gave place to the expectation of an open sea, an open road leading one's mind back to Europe...Sorry. Off the point.[38]

Darley's identity-confirmation is presented here. For some one feeling "landlocked in spirit like a ship in a bottle sailing nowhere"[39], the exit from this cage is only artificial ("after a drink or two"). The mere reminiscing ("leading one's mind back to Europe") would (mistakably) familiarize and "the iron band" that cages would "dissolve" and "relax".

Throughout the Quartet this sense of imprisonment governs the style. A monotonous ambience prevails over the city. It is always made eminently melancholy and gloomy:

> Our room bulging with darkness and pestilences, and we Europeans in such disharmony with the fearful animal health of the blacks around us. The copulations of boabs shaking the house like a palm-tree. Black tigers with gleaming teeth. And everywhere the veils, the screaming, the mad giggle under the pepper-trees, the insanity and the lepers. Such things that children store up to fortify or disorient their lives. A camel has collapsed from exhaustion in the street outside the house. It is too heavy to transport to the slaughter-house so a couple of men come with axes and cut up there and then in the open street, alive. They hack through the white flesh - the poor creature looking ever more pained, more aristocratic, more puzzled as his legs are hacked off. Finally there is the head still alive, the eyes open, looking round. Not a scream of protest, not a struggle. The animal

> submits like a palm-tree. But for days afterwards the mud street is soaked in its blood and our bare feet are printed in the moisture.(40)

The contrariety of the narrator's 'white identity' is set against the 'black' background. The identification: "We Europeans" is more than to insure the contrast of his 'white' skin in contrast to the "blacks around us". The whiteness of the Europeans is enhanced by the surrounding blackness. In fact, the 'blackness' of the place is made more vivid by the virtue of his 'white European' presence amidst it as the only source of light. In other words, it is only through him that the real 'ugly' detailed features on the face of the 'black' Alexandria are made more graphic.

The heavy and slow rhythm of the above passage adds another stroke to the brush that is painting the city 'darker', gloomier, more barbaric, and out of 'our' world. To assert not only the 'jungleness' of the city - which is extensively confirmed here- but also his 'humanness', a story of the slaughtered camel is told with a deliberately laggard diction. By the lazy pace of the detail: "a camel has collapsed from exhaustion", then..."men come with axes and cut up"... "they hack through the white flesh", and..."his legs are hacked off", but..."there is the head still alive, the eyes open", so "for days afterwards the mud street is soaked

in its blood", Durrell wished a presentation of minor incident such as the above - when compared to the numerous incidents more serious and related to themes of the book - would surely leave imprints in the minds of his readers. In fact, the same incident and with a similar cast is repeated once again later in Mountolive.

One of the results of Durrell's use of this technique is the obvious one of emphasis by repetitions. It also allows Durrell to comment implicitly on the world he is describing simply by the type of incidents he is selecting.

It is worth looking, though, at this stage, at the private correspondence that went on between Durrell and his friends - particularly Miller - for if the Quartet stems from Durrell's experience during the years of his stay, (and there is a good deal of evidence for the assumption that such a project had been in Durrell's mind as early as 1937[41] when he completed his Black Book), then the correspondence, which covers that period as well as the time during which the Quartet had been written, suggests how important changes in Durrell's personal life during the period of writing, had led equally to important changes in the Quartet.

The autobiographical element in Durrell's narrative is vague. And even in his correspondence with Henry Miller and Richard Aldington he permits us only glimpses of his

childhood or personal life. One may identify certain affinities between Durrell or a member of his family and a certain character, but direct, definite resemblances are totally lacking. In short an autobiographical reading of Durrell's work is truly precarious.

The sensuality and exoticism evoked in Durrell's first letters from Egypt, made his friend Miller long to give up the 'bright civilized' world of America for a share with Durrell in that 'dark and exotic' world of Egypt:

> So, when you write me about Alexandrian vacuum with razor blades flashing and all that I am in a paroxysm. Let's get there! Christ, it is dead here.(42)

But later, Durrell's correspondence would reveal a more discontented, more resentful person who is forced to stay, impatiently waiting for a release:

> I haven't felt like writing a line to anyone, being so dead to the world in this copper-pan of a blazing town with its pullulating stinking inhabitants - Middle East is far enough east for me... I wish we are all in the Orkney instead of in this terrible blinding sandpan with its mocking hideous tombs and minarets. Such a country - cripples, deformities, opthalmia, goitre, amputations, lice, flies. In the street you see horses cut in half by careless drivers or obscene dead black men with flies hanging like a curtain over their wounds and a crowd hemming them in with ghoulish curiosity. Dust in the air carrying everything miasmic, fevers, virus, toxins, - One writes nothing but short and febrile like jets by this corrupt and slow Nile; and one feels slowly walked upon by the

feet of elephants...[43]

Though modernised, in a flash the narrative invites William Beckford and his Vathek to the scene: "cripples, deformities, opthalmia, goitre, amputations, lice, flies...horses cut in half". This sense of aggravation and exasperation prevails. It is expressed by Durrell and being echoed by Darley in the Quartet:

> It is like a death - a death of the self uttered in the repetition of the word *Alexandria, Alexandria.*[44]

'Death' is an essential part of the Alexandria scene. Ian W. Friedman, in fact, states that "the original title of the Quartet was the "Book of the Dead".[45]

So strong is the blow, that the city is taken to be the most appropriate paragon for death every inhabitant should strive to run away from.

In another letter from Alexandria to his friend Diana Gould in March 1944, Durrell writes:

> ...meanwhile we sing your duck song in tragic voices Gwin and I by Mareotis and wonder how soon we can get out of this country.[46]

Again, these very scenes are later dramatized on the stage of the Quartet.

But as the 'intruder' continues to penetrate deeper and

deeper into the heart of the dark city, the paranoia extends its grip over him. Then comes the cry:

> Four years is a long time to spend without even once counting a person who has an interest besides making a woman or making money; and I've forgotten almost how to express my self.(47)

But this is striking. For if the dominating feeling is that of loss, death and depredation then his vision cannot ultimately claim accuracy. Everything will be seen through the fog of fear, harassment, and imprisonment. There is, then, very little hope of sincere reporting. In this context, even what have been known as 'clear-cut facts' would, nevertheless, undergo certain modifications. The Mediterranean would be ridiculed as "an absurdly small sea"; and that it is only "the length and greatness of its history makes us dream it larger than it is".(48)

Consequently, the city would be treated as one of the characters suffering a kind of schizophrenia. At times, it is seen as a romantic 'depot' with historical and mythological associations, at others it is a mundane Oriental spot populated by ape-like beggars, incest, intrigue, and disease. The two images juxtapose and never reconcile; nothing is true, probable or convincing. Such dichotomy cannot be but the product of, again, the Orientalist bent of mind which Durrell adopts.

Beyond all these levels, however, Durrell believes that the responsibility -if any imbalance in the vision was apparent- should always be laid upon the city itself. "As one of those poor clerks of conscience...a citizen of Alexandria"[49] he blames the city for giving birth to all the torture encompassing:

> It is the city which should be judged though we its children must pay the price.[50]

Durrell's city, thus, "half imagined (yet wholly real), begins in us, roots lodged in our memory".[51] The pattern adopted here is that the city creates its very inhabitants while the inhabitants design the city. The relationship is hermaphroditic:

> We are the children of our landscape, it dictates behaviour and even thought in the measure to which we are responsive to it. I can think of no better identification.[52]

Landscape embodies parallels, even motivates and controls the intrinsic and extrinsic workings of his characters. Thus, the individuality seems suffused, subordinated, to the *deus loci* who is the pantheistic deity of the place - as, on the largest scale, Alexandria dominates the various characters of the Quartet, for in it "only the city is real". Hence, the major themes and motifs seem to be expressed as interrelationships of character and place: alienation, non-communication, a condition Durrell expresses in terms of illness, result

when the individual clashes with a place of negative influence which Alexandria is. When the dominance is overwhelming, the individual becomes will-less, passive; and if he manages to escape to a land fertile for him, he becomes cured, attains a new sense of selfhood usually expressed metaphorically as spiritual regeneration, begins to create (again, or for the first time), and becomes capable of love. When in the closing sentences of his Quartet Durrell writes "Once upon a time", he is metaphorically experiencing birth.

Though it can seldom be taken as a happy place, the city's power, however, is mysterious. The 'spirit' of Durrell's Alexandria seems always to render its inhabitants weak under its grip. It is that very "strange equivocal power of the city"(53) that Darley feels as Justine recites him lines from the old poet of the city. Alexandria has a grip on its Durrellian inhabitants; rather, it is a juncture through which they must pass. They are subject to its necessities; and the dimorphic relation between the city and the individuals inhabiting it, then, is a vital, not a mechanical, union.

Confronted with this strange power Darley starts feeling that even his 'European will and powers' offer little support. He, thus, becomes incapable of challenging a task he set himself to fulfill; that of decoding the mysteries of 'his' city:

> You talk as if there was a choice. We are not strong or evil enough to exercise choice. All this part of an experiment arranged by something else, the city perhaps, or another part of ourselves. How do I know?(54)

It is 'neo-Gnosticisim'; adhering all this loss and state of chaos to supernatural forces. The tension of the city's power over him is obvious but it is its fearful dangerous spirits that he starts fighting now. It excites more the wish in him to quit and flee.

It has been suggested that Durrell first fixed on Athens when he decided to portray a city but switched to Alexandria because it, quite clearly, had enough colour to support four volumes.(55) But the city, essentially, having been chosen refuses to remain passive and its massive presence multi-racial, multi-lingual, multi-sexual, demanded "of us" [says Darley] "nothing save the impossible - that we should be". Justine complains that "we had been trapped in the projection of a will too powerful and deliberate to be human - the gravitation field which Alexandria threw down about those it had chosen as its exemplars".(56)

Paradoxically, the city that 'gave' Durrell ample material seems to have left him impotent for 'using' it. To deliver his material he has to deliver himself from it. In his dreams, Darley hears:

> ...the dry voice of my friend repeating as I fell asleep: "How much do you care to know? ..how much do you care to know? - "I must know everything in order to be at last delivered from the city" I replied in my dream.[57]

Failing to achieve that, the cry grows louder:

> How will I deliver my self from this whore among cities _ sea, desert, minaret, sand, sea?[58]

In a dramatic way Alexandria marks (for Durrell, by Durrell) the end of 'innocence'. After Greece - which was for him a paradise in which to live and work - the change of scenery necessitated the other changes. "The loss of Greece has been an amputation", Durrell writes in the "Epilogue in Alexandria" that closes his Prospero's Cell.[59] To Durrell, a believer in the influence of landscape, Egypt was a chief conspirator in the plot against his Greek joy.

By the end of the war Durrell writes from Alexandria in August 1944 to his friend Henry Miller:

> Now the war seems to have taken a definite turn and we hope it will be over in a month or so, I am written down for Greece. I terribly need to recover my sanity a bit - disoriented and bruised a bit still, and haven't seen anything but sands and palms for two years.[60]

Durrell is heaving here a long sigh of relief. Both the war and the instability of his married life (his wife and

daughter departed for Palestine in 1945) added to the state of depression; but, ironically enough, it is the experience of these years recorded and transformed into his famous work about Alexandria that has really established his reputation as a novelist.

Greece becomes, once again, the resort where he could resume breathing after the years of 'asphyxiation' he suffered in that big Oriental jail known to him as Egypt. "...Can't tell you what a feeling of cloud lifting to get out of Egypt" he expresses in a letter to his friend Miller.(61) But Durrell is not "out" of Egypt yet. Later, he returns to it in his works as if to break the city's deadly spell by recreating it.

Joan Goulianos aptly describes the association of Greece with healing and Alexandria with wounding as recurrent themes in Durrell's writing especially his poetry. "For Durrell", Goulianous writes, "Corfu ...seems to have been a return to the lost soul".(62)

Even before reaching Corfu, Durrell falls in love with the island only through the letter of his friend George Wilkinson who left England to settle in Corfu in 1934. Replying to Wilkinson from Bournmouth as early as 1934 - and without having actually visited the island - Durrell tells him that "Corfu is the ideal place to use as a base for the Mediterranean exploration."(63)

In his poems as well as in the Quartet, Greece, for Durrell, is productivity; Egypt is sterility. Greece is marriage; Egypt, divorce and loneliness. Greece is a chosen homeland; Egypt, a place of refuge. In his poem "In Arcadia"[64], he implicitly contrasts the Egyptian culture with the Greek. Whereas religion, "divination" created Arcadia, commerce, "gum, oats and syrup", created the Levant. The Arcadians "taught /the rock to flow with odourless water. /Fire and a brute art came among them." In Arcadia, "something died out by this river: but it seems/ Less than a nightingale ago". But in the Levant, "nothing changes...the human type 'Levant'" is fixed.

Other places might stir in Durrell the frustration, sense of boredom, and monotony but it would never be like Egypt. He illustrates this in a letter to Mary Hadkinson:

> Argentina is a large flat melancholy.. One eats endless beef and is so bored one could scream. It is the most lazy-making climate I have struck: not as bad as Egypt, of course: but I'd give a lifetime of Argentina for three weeks of Greece.[65]

This very sense has left its marks on the Quartet. But, what still needs to be highlighted is how Durrell manipulates the literary devices sometimes to cover - at other times to show - his long lasting contempt of the city and how to make these devices serve him to add something about the city.

One of these devices is the manipulation of his characters - the inhabitants of 'his' city - as keynotes. Justine, Nessim, Balthazar, Scobie, and others are all introduced to serve Durrell's greater aim of 'elucidating' the character of the city and then being able to represent it. In so doing, Durrell's characters are - or at least a selection of them become - the mouthpiece of his own ideas.

Durrell and the English characters he creates may still assume a reassuring distance from rude peasants, nomadic tribesmen, or the scum of the bazaars, but they seem to accept wealthy and Western educated "natives" as at least their match. The polarization of race and nationality that was the primary social fact of the colonial era weakened along with political domination. Durrell indeed takes obvious pains to establish the kinship of David Mountolive and his friend Nessim Housnani, both of whom possessed a "stylish difference", like product of "perfect breeding"; "the two men indeed were much alike". "By candlelight", in fact, they seemed not only "exactly of an age", but almost "of the same family".(66)

Nessim, who is presented as a native Alexandrian banker, is deployed to ratify Durrell's record of the 'Alexandrian idiosyncrasies'. And when Nessim - a local - is made to state that there is "nothing easier to arrange in our city than a death or a disappearance"(67), that

would have a different colour had Durrell made any other character pass similar judgements. Durrell's choice, however, does not altogether work in his favour. Nessim's manners are viewed by the locals of the city as adhering to Western education and hence he seems always at odds with the city. Durrell plays on that tune as well and when Nessim tells that "all Alexandrians marriages are business ventures.."[68], he is, in fact, echoing not only Durrell himself but the common Western view of the subject in question. To hold off the wish of his friend Miller to join him in Egypt, Durrell warns:

> No, I don't think you would like it...Even love is thought of in money terms.[69]

Love and marriage in the Quartet have, to a great extent, been shaped within the framework of the above statement.

Balthazar, on his part, plays the role of the informant, a rapport that feeds Darley with new insights in the latter's long struggle with the city:

> To have written so much and have nothing about Balthazar is indeed an omission - for in a sense he is one of the keys to the city...There was much that I did not understand then, much that I have since learned.[70]

Alan Friedman suggests that Darley "has changed for the better by the end of Balthazar, for the Interlinear has

convinced him that another observer - non malevolent and at least *equally honest* - may well arrive at far different, and perhaps "more valid", conclusions with regard to the same circumstances"[71]:

> The wicked Interlinear, freighted with these doubts, presses like a blunt thumb, here and here, always in bruised places. I have began to copy it whole - the whole of it - slowly and painfully; not only to understand more clearly wherein it differs from my own version of reality, but also to catch a glimpse of it as a separate entity - as a manuscript existing in its own right, as the determined view of another eye upon the events which I interpreted in my own way, because that was the way I lived them - or they lived me.[72]

The 'Interlinear' might supply Darley with different interpretations to the various events taking place in their city but Balthazar as another Durrellian creation moves within certain "realities" - that Durrell chooses for him - concerning the city as the 'damned' source of every aberration. Hence, Durrell sets a task for his reader to piece the Quartet together with the light refracted from Darley - as the central consciousness and narrative voice of Justine, Balthazar, and Clea - as well as Balthazar's Interlinear.

Within such parameters, other characters are introduced. Through the character of Scobie, Durrell opens the wretched native part of his city - the Arab quarter. Via Scobie, the Egyptian rituals and customs are

revealed. Earlier, Darley tells that "few Europeans ever came into this part of the city". Scobie resides in it.

Among the European characters of the Quartet Scobie's identity as the "white man" is, though comically, being over-emphasised. The 'white man' in him is always surfacing:

> When he was in the upper town his walk and general bearing had an artificial swagger - it suggested a White Man at large, brooding upon problems peculiar to White Men - their Burden as they call it. To judge by Scobie, it hung heavy. His least gesture had a resounding artificiality, tapping his knees, sucking his lip, falling into brooding around him as if from stilts.(73)

Durrell here renders the burlesque performance of one Joshua Scobie, the officer in the Egyptian police, on stage in the European quarters of the city, giving an inept and certainly comic imitation of the super-human White Man in the east.

An ageing transvestite who is ultimately brought to grief by his "Tendencies", Durrell's Scobie attempts to justify them by invoking a name hallowed in the annals of White Men: "after all", he protests, "even Lawrence of Arabia wore a night shirt".(74) By means of this ludicrous reference to Lawrence, Durrell shows himself versed in the tradition of the colonial hero; neither is he impervious to its attractions.

Discussing the literature of Empire in his critical work, A Key to Modern Poetry, Durrell defends Kipling, insisting that the "virtues and attitudes" he extols are, in their way, "deserving ones".(75) Durrell's Metheun, the British Secret agent, who is the courageous protagonist of White Eagles Over Serbia, lives a monastically solitary life and begins the mission recounted in the book fishing in the mountain streams of Serbia and reading religiously from Walden until he can make perilous contact with a doomed band of royalist guerrillas. In so many ways..from his fluent Serbian and his regard of discomforting orders, to his physical and mental toughness and his conception of himself as player of a "lone hand"..Methuen is an anachronistic brother to T. E. Lawrence, and hence - in a certain way - to Scobie. Thus at the time he faced the painful realities recorded in Bitter lemons and had at least begun in earnest to chronicle his Alexandria, Durrell was simultaneously indulging in an atavistic fantasy in which the English man was still hero.

Consequently, Scobie - though essentially framed as a character of scorn and ridicule - is turned into the 'holy' El-Yacob. Durrell's contention is that even when his lack of 'Europeanism' - and hence his lack of logic - is emphasized, he is the only European character who is allowed to enter, live and become immensed in a quarter

that carries the real diseases of the city. Durrell wishes, in other words, to convey that if a 'naive' European does manage to become a sacred person among the "smudged" Arabs of the city's native quarter, hence, a 'normal' European could do much better on the wider scale. Scobie the comic saint offers parallels to the noble Mountolive who is admired by many locals and Darley whom most Alexandrian women fall in love with:

> By the time we had reached the outskirts of the Arab quarter, however, he had all but shed these mannerisms. He relaxed, tipped his tarbush to mop his brow, and gazed around him with the affection of long familiarity. Here he belonged by adoption, here he was truly at home. He would definitely take a drink from the leaden spout sticking out of a wall near the Goharri mosque (a public drinking fountain) though the white man in him must have been aware that the water was far from safe to drink. He would pick a stick of sugar-cane off a stall as he passed, to gnaw it in the open street. Here, everywhere, the cries of the open street greeted him and he responded radiantly.(76)

"Here he belonged by adoption, here he was truly at home" could be, along with "the white man in him" the key-sentences of Scobie's role as defined by Durrell. The first designates the imperialist power of possessing - the 'adoption' of one culture by another - a traditional Orientalist trope of colonial domination. The other (the white man in him) has not only all the prints of racism - the "white" illuminating and offering enough light for all the darkness surrounding - but also plays the role of

the 'constraint' which is activated in times of need (in discovering, for instance, that "the water was far from safe to drink"). The white soul acts again when Scobie disapproves to his friend's son (Hassan's) circumcision though he appears local enough, in the preceding pages, to agree to buy Hassan a shop and "a little wife".(77) Subsequently, Scobie becomes Durrell's representative in the native Arab quarter.

In the endearing figure of Joshua Scobie, Durrell administers him a *coup de grâce*. Scobie resumes the role superficially much as he dons his dingy dress and hat for forays into the night when his "Tendencies" get the better of him. Despite the "English weather" he always seems to carry with him, "his past proliferates through a dozen continents like a true subject of myth".(78)

Character description as caricature functions in a different way; it not only slackens the narrative but it also forms a clear digression from the story. It, however, constitutes the only pause to retire momentarily from the complex, often bleak world of Alexandria. The long description of Scobie is a superb example of caricature:

> Frankly Scobie looks anybody's age; older than the birth of tragedy, younger than the Athenian death. Spawned in the Ark by a chance meeting and mating of the bear and the ostrich; delivered before term by the sickening grunt of the keel on Ararat...It was not

> blood which flowed in Scobie's veins but green salt water, deep sea stuff. His walk is the slow rolling grinding trudge of a saint walking in Galilee. His talk is a green-water jargon swept up in five oceans...When he sings, which he so often does, it is the very accents of the Old Man of the Sea. Like a patron saint he has left little pieces of his flesh all over the world, in Zanzibar, Colombo, Togoland, Wu Fu: the little deciduous morsels which he has been shedding for so long now, old antlers, cuff-links, teeth, hair..[79]

Such pauses play a role similar to that of comic relief in tragedies; although the Quartet is not a tragedy, the humour in it is a mitigation from the dismal world of unachieved love, desperate quests, war, lost political causes, death (Melissa, Narouz, Pursewarden, Fosca, Toto, Scobie himself, all died; Balthazar and Clea encounter death), and disfigurement (Leila, Clea, Nessim, Narouz, Samira are disfigured).

When the old man dies, the people of the poor quarter of the city where he lived (part of the "Egypt of rags and sores") flock to the funeral. "You would have thought", a more sophisticated mourner observes, "he was a Saint".[80] This utterance proves prophetic. It is as a Saint that Scobie survives in his East.

Justine, on her part, is for Durrell not only an Alexandrian but also one of Alexandria's 'Cleopatras':

> In her, as an Alexandrian, license was a curious way,

> a form of self-abnegation, a travesty of freedom; and if I saw her as an exampler of the city it was not of Alexandria, or Plotinus that I was forced to think, but of the sad child of Valentinus.(81)

By coupling Justine with Cleopatra, Durrell wishes to make that serve his aims in relating to the history of the city. Durrell hopes that his characters would gain more Alexandrian colour and would look 'darker'. This relates to the technique of 'root-knowledge', in fact, another technique for which the Orientalist discourse is known.

The Oriental Justine is presented as "simply a victim of that Oriental desire to please.."(82); in her the European Darley unearths "a pliancy, a resilience which was Oriental - a passion to serve."(83) And here the interplay between "pliancy" and "resilience" really confirms more the narrator's identity of alienation and manipulation in regard to the native Oriental whose character he is sketching. The "pliancy" registers his first reception among the natives. The "resilience" registers his rejection by the natives. Such scenes are another manifestation of the epitome of exploitation of an underprivileged-culture representative (Justine) by a member of a privileged one (Darley). Thus Justine is associated with Alexandria:

> Justine and her city are alike in that they both have a strong flavour without having real character.(84)

In the opening of the Quartet, Darley keeps echoing "What is this city of *ours*?", but when his fatigue with the garish city grows he starts disassociating himself from it. The city, by now, looks different. Hence, Justine becomes the means through which Darley - or, more appropriately, Durrell - would like to decode the mysteries of the city.

The characters of Durrell's city are prey to hysterical impulses (Justine, Nessim, Narouz, Leila) and to contradictions (Scobie, Amaril, Pursewarden) that Durrell makes appear to symbolize the very soul of the city.

From Durrell's picture of the city, only the real inhabitants of the city escape. There is little heard of them. What is offered is no more than faint sketches here and there: glimpses of groups in the dark..shrieks and cries..and some dark "ape-like" faces. If they do appear, they are faint. Their name seems only to crop up in peculiar and unique similes: there is "a sort of giving really shocking because it is as simple as an Arab"(85); Justine "turning her head she made the Arab motion of spitting"(86); Nessim "spent in Arabian fashion".(87)

Arabs of the Quartet are cautiously kept in the dark. Mountolive saw them and saw "the light gleamed upon their dark thighs..the darkness was full of their barbaric blitheness". When one of their shadowy figures comes

under a spot-light, his darkness, ugliness, naivety, and Oriental submissiveness are revealed:

> He was a small sad man...his anxiety to please, to accommodate, was so great that he fell easily into postures of friendship, almost of mawkishness.. He mopped his brow continually, and gave his ingratiating pithecanthropoid grimace...as Mountolive delivered his strongly worded protest..Nur listened, shaking his head doubtfully from time to time...If he was interested in the massive document lying before him it was (or so it seemed to Mountolive) only that the photostats intrigued him. He had not seen things like these before. They belonged to the great foreign worlds of science and illusion in which these Western peoples lived - worlds of great powers and responsibilities - out of which they sometimes descended, clad in magnificent uniforms to make the lot of the simple Egyptians harder that it was at the best of time.(88)

The gulf between the two worlds is emphasised by the very presentation of the Egyptian Nur as truly other to the British Mountolive. The Western prejudice that runs through the above passage is meant to confirm the inferiority of the Arab subject. Similarly the 'smudged' Arab quarter of the city can only be noticed at times marginally through Scobie and once through Mountolive's trip. In introducing the native quarter of his city, Durrell writes:

> Money falling into the tin bowls of beggars..; communities cut down like the branches of trees, lacking a parent body, dreaming of Eden. These are the

> poor quarters of the white city; they bear no resemblance to those lovely streets built and decorated by foreigners where the brokers sit and sip their morning papers.(89)

The 'black' picture of the native quarter of the city is confirmed by the 'whiteness' of the other 'beautiful' part where white Europeans lived.

Since Egypt which Durrell could visit was already objectively penetrated, his account of it opens itself to the ineluctable discourse of Europe.

He might seem to have wanted to absorb the Orient in his texts rather than seeking to absorb himself within it as it has been suggested earlier in the chapter. The result is that despite all Durrell's intentions, the pages of his Quartet appear - as the text of his consumption of the Oriental Alexandria - as a carefully composed instruction manual for the proper exploitation of a foreign culture. The other culture is conceived as inferior on account of its very availability, its subjection, its powerlessness against such exploitation. What is striking is the imposition in the foreign country of a set of paradigms designed for seizing it by another 'dominating' culture. No doubt such a paradox was invisible for Durrell himself. But, inevitably, through his objectification of the 'foreignness' of Egypt, he caused an alien system to intervene in and ultimately

determine its representation. He captured it in images and surveyed it in "Interlinears". His procedures, however, functioned to render accessible to fellow-Europeans an Egypt portrayed as mute, powerless, lacking any consciousness of itself, any desire to record its monuments, write its own history, derive its own meaning. Consequently, Egypt becomes his text.

Durrell's lack of the 'real' knowledge of the place and his ever remoteness from its 'real' inhabitants never restricts him from representing them and their culture in pompous generalisations and inane overstatements. In his writing, there is an unquestionable assumption that the Arab world can always be characterized limitlessly by means of a handful of recklessly general and repeatedly deployed clichés. In this context, analytical statements on the structure of the Arabic language - of which he is completely ignorant - often pass. In introducing Leila, Durrell justifies her knowledge of four languages for "Nobody can think or feel in the dimensionless obsolescence of Arabic".[90]

Similarly, arbitrary statements on the inhabitants' rituals and belief are always delivered unchallenged. These are, ironically enough, often articulated by the 'local' Alexandrians of Durrell's characters. Ali tells Mountolive of the evil djinns[91]; "The old servant with the cropped ears took a pinch from the ground before Nessim's feet and pressed it to his forehead before

extending his hand for a handshake"[92]; "Egyptians regard the snake as too lucky a visitant to a house to kill.."[93]; "Tuesday for the Moslem is the least favoured day for human undertakings, for he believes that God created all the unpleasant things"[94]; "In Islam every man has his own star which appears when he is born and goes out when he dies"[95]; "the steward, according to custom, had stopped all the clocks".[96]

Obviously, Durrell would wish for the 'naturalistic' fidelity to 'fact'. He hopes it would appear in the amount and quality of detail he offers to his readers and the constant flow of detailed diagrams interspersed throughout the Quartet. Durrell's quest is to capture the spirit of this extraordinary place. In his frantic search, however, to register the 'moeurs' of Egypt, Durrell sometimes falls in the trap of unskilfully inserting representations of the 'moeurs' in his narrative. Leila informs her Western lover that :

> And here in Egypt no Moslem feels anything but respect and love for the Christian God. Even today. Ask anyone, ask any *muezzin*?' (This was as if to say 'Ask anyone who speaks the truth' _ for no unclean person, drunkard, madman or woman is regarded as eligible for uttering the Moslem call to prayer).[97]

Durrell tries to cover the whole canvas..to make every attempt not to leave any historical stone unturned. But, this often does not work in his favour. Durrell's placing

of the remark on the muezzin makes the narrative uncemented. The remark is redundant as well as irrelevant; and does not follow in the main stream of information Durrell wishes to feed. By associating such remarks to his 'local' Alexandrian characters and by annexing others - sometimes carelessly - to his narrative sequence, Durrell hopes this would enable him to cover whatever was borrowed from the Orientalist library as well as making these comments escape any vindication.

Within such a frame other remarks slip in:

> He proceeded slowly, for to register an idea in a Moslem mind is like trying to paint a wall: one must wait for the first coat to dry (the first idea) before applying a second.(98)

What strikes one, here, is the quality of timelessness of these articulations. This follows in part the logic of the canonical hymn to the beleaguered Western ethos which appears and reappears periodically in the modern history of the west. Here, it does seem that the normal rules for evidence have been suspended, or that the writer knows neither the language nor the society on which he is pronouncing, or that common sense withdraws when the Moslems and the Arabs are discussed. The prejudice of a statement such as the above especially when Durrell makes clear the gulf he digs up between him and the native inhabitants of the city, clearly exhibits an Orientalist

practicing his own will with the city, its history, people and their nature. The above extract shows more than anything else Durrell's sincere adherence to the Orientalist discourse.

Within such a context Durrell offers the city as an incongruous synthesis of various prejudices, myths, or 'facts' belonging to different periods of history.

By the end of Clea Durrell feels Alexandria "fading inside me, in my thoughts, like some valedictory mirage".(99) In the "Workpoints" that follows the last part of the Quartet, Durrell states:

> 'Time is memory, they say; the art however is to revive it and yet avoid remembering. You speak of Alexandria. I can no longer even imagine it. It has dissolved. A work of art is something which is more like life itself!' The slow death.(100)

With the return to Alexandria in his later work (Constance, 1982), Durrell sets himself up as a European possessing memory. To have a memory consequently means to have undergone change. This, logically, indicates having history. However, the object of this memory (Arab culture) is presented as unchanging. Time in Durrell's Orient stands still. The implication is that the Arab world is a world without change, a world of timeless, atemporal customs and rituals, untouched by the historical processes that were 'afflicting' or 'improving' but, at any rate, drastically altering

Western societies at the time. The cultural concern of the hero is to get it right, to register accuracy. This concern makes the assumption that the past and the present - which are different for the European observer - are however the same for Alexandria and the culture of its native inhabitants. The point of this concern with accuracy is to cover the colonialist assumption that only the colonialist has history.

The absence of a sense of history, of temporal change, in introducing the new narrative, is ultimately related to another striking presence; that of the telltale presence of the Western man. The white man's gaze is always *the* controlling gaze. Only this gaze would bring the Orient into being. In Constance as well as in Sebastian this gaze, Durrell is conveying, need not necessarily be made from within, the 'over there' (Alexandria). It can instead be made from the 'over here'(Geneva).

"I feel it [Alexandria] fade inside me, in my thoughts", writes Darley to Clea at the end of the Quartet. Durrell's later works Constance and Sebastian prove the contrary. Thus, familiar Egyptian images are interspersed throughout his new work. 'Quartetian'-like imprints -left on Durrell's 'mind's eye; memories of the first encounter- are again made prominent.

Twenty years after "being delivered from the city" Durrell writes with the same tone that marked the Quartet:

> "Conscience?" he exclaimed sharply. "No one comes to Egypt to struggle with his conscience!". He gazed keenly round the table under frowning eyebrows. "Egypt is a *happy* country", he went on, "and when you think that, in terms of gross inequality of wealth, criminal misgovernment and civic profligacy it takes the highest place of any nation in the world, one wonders how this can be. The poor are so poor they have already starved and died and come out the other side, roaring with laughter. The rich are negligent and callous to an unimaginable degree. Yet what is the result? A *happy* people! Indeed the people, whenever you go, throw up their clothes and show you their private parts, roaring with laughter as they do so."(101)

If the four volumes of the Quartet failed to draw certain lines, Durrell is presenting here more of the anomalies of 'his' Egyptians. These new lines tell, in fact, of the Orientalist fertile provider that keeps feeding with fresh sketches that would, in their own ways, intensify the old images; hence "the people, whenever you go, throw up their clothes and show you their private parts, roaring with laughter " is passed here.

The same old Egypt unfolds again. Here is the Narouz of the Quartet being sent with Abdul-Rahman's head wrapped up to the Cairo souk to sell to 'Europe's new representative' Blanford:

> He produced a large scarlet velvet-covered hat-box, the kind a conjuror might carry about, or an actor. It was a sort of oriental wig-box, in fact, but inside it there was a shrunken human head, a male head, coated heavily in resin but with the eyes open. Blanford was startled. "Good Lord!" he said, and the Prince chuckled appreciatively at his reaction. "It's the head of a Templar; it comes from the Commanderie in Cyprus - I had it traced when I bought it in the Cairo Souk.(102)

Durrell is apparently painting the city with the old brushes of Alexandria and its images of crime and chaos. Even his choice, in fact, to guide the reader round the imaginary city he is portraying is very much identical to that of the Quartet. The Coptic banker, the homosexual British practitioner, and the Greek cabaret dancer were the 'examplers' of Durrell's Alexandria. Now, Aubery's friends are a prince and a Lord Galen telling more about the 'miserable' Egypt.

Soon the love story starts. Aubery, like Darley before him, finds himself enthralled with the new world:

> I realised I was going to fall in love with the place. I saw that huge temple of inconsequences.(103)

"Inconsequences" connotes for Aubery the exotic and the picturesque. Durrell searches for the 'picturesque. Hence, people encapsulated by it, defined by its presence, are irredeemably different from, more backward than and culturally inferior to those who construct and

consume the picturesque product. They become irrevocably 'other'.

The timing of Constance, similar to the first three parts of the Quartet, seems to be printed in Durrell's memory. The two novels take place before the Second World War and go on with the war.

Mountolive, the British Ambassador, when disguised in local Arab clothes entered the native Arab quarter of the city. He was even taken for a Syrian business man. The same guise is being put on here by Blanford:

> Strangely enough, both Prince and Princess were deeply moved when I walked in on them, dressed in full fig complete with tarbush. "Now you are really one of us", she cried, and tears came to her eyes, I looked an awful fool in the flower pot.(104)

This is another display of Western talent; being able to disguise hence penetrate and gain a 'Lawrentine-like' confidence of the local Arabs. But Blanford is like Darley, like Mountolive. They are all kept carefully at bay from the heart of the Arabian scene. Durrell does not allow it that Blanford would dress in Oriental clothings, and "I looked an *awful fool*" is set in such a way that would attach Blanford to the Western signifier at the time when it would also confirm his estrangement to the local scene.

Blanford, "dressed in full fig complete with tarbush" when walking in here on the Prince and the Princess, is adopting a 'Scobie-like' walk when he entered the Arab quarter of Durrell's Alexandria; compelling to its 'mannerisms', feeling at home. It is the guise, the passport into the private quarters and the souls of the locals. Only then he would authorize himself to pass judgements, write histories, and offer anthropological studies on the species he found himself among:

> "I have been told that the Egyptians are mad about pink flesh, hence the pimp at Port Said who offered his little daughter, crying 'all pink inside like English lady'"...But we have put our foot in it...We realised this when we caught a glimpse of our fellow-scribe's face - the face of poor Khanna the Copt. He was crimson with anguish and evidently deeply shocked.(105)

There is no room here for any challenge. "I have been told that the Egyptians are", and this should be taken at face value. By whom? and how? are all out of the question. Aubery is now the latest Western envoy whose task it seems is to take his chance, since Egypt is his topic now, to pass unequivocally all his judgements no matter how imprudent they may seem.

In this context, it would seem so natural that his impression, about the whole affair - his own encounter with Egypt - was unconditional:

> "O everything" would have been at once easy and not

> sufficient, exact; for my part what has assailed me was an extraordinary sense of similarity. To throw open one's shutters at the Mena House and find oneself with, so to speak, a personal sphinx squatting outside one's window patient as a camel...And the desert itself had been a complete surprise.(106)

When, eventually, the lust for that love story with exoticism is over, he comes under a dreadful nightmare, in which everything becomes dark, dusty and in essence fearful.

Like Darley when left alone struggling to break the bars to his Alexandrian jail, Aubery starts to suffer from nostalgia:

> Yes, it was true - we lived the parvenus, linked vulgar provincials in the city of God. And now to be helpless in a foreign land, far from love and its familiarities,...(107)

Durrell deprives the place of any love. Love can only be associated to the 'European feelings'. The picture is contradictory. Earlier, Aubery himself deeply applauds the fertility of love on this very land; now it is all being swept away:

> I felt extraordinary heartened to see people who could love each other so devoutly; it was so unlike Europe where serious thinking about passion has already come to a standstill.(108)

Constance is, then, constituted of some framed

recollections of fragmented memories left from Durrell's first experience when he wrote the Quartet. Both flow in the same stream; that of the authority-making Western discourse.

Similarly, in Sebastian -the fourth volume of Durrell's "Avignon Quintet", where the setting again is far remote from Egypt, typical 'Quartetian' scenes creep into the narrative.

Although it is set in Geneva of 1945 with a war drawing to an end, the new work as an anecdote presents a Sebastian (normally known as Affad) an Egyptian banker and a Constance, his lover, an English psychiatrist working in Geneva. The coupling of the Freudian Constance and the Gnostic Affad is the encounter between Western science and Oriental metaphysics. Affad's religious obligation and commitment to a Gnostic suicide is of vital significance.

Although Durrell has, by and large, stopped trying to fill in on the details of the Egyptian hermetic arcana, he, nonetheless, would make use of the fragments left on his 'formidable' memory from the first encounter.

It is the same, though smaller, exotic picture of Egypt that Sebastian, the recent Alexandrian, is instructed to present:

> But now I had entered a new domain of total

> joylessness. I felt the strain. You see, right from the beginning this man has enslaved me against my own will. It's common enough in Egypt, this sort of magic. When I refused his first advances he used magic. His wife Fatma told me long afterwards how it worked.(109)

The Gnostic Egypt of mysticism and magic is being presented here: "It's common enough in Egypt, this sort of magic".

There is also a deployment of Durrell's old 'Quartetian' technique of affirming the identity of his Western as well as Oriental characters through overemphasizing the gulf that separates their two cultures:

> The very idea was of course immoral and unthinkable in the gnostic context, but then it was not for nothing that the Prince was a man of the Orient and impregnated with its labyrinthed strategies.(110)

Scenes are identical and descriptions not very different from those that fill the Quartet. The new works are full of repetitions of the same threadbare accounts of what goes on in Durrell's Orient

The desert that tormented the 'Arabs' of the Quartet, is terrifying Affad here:

> He sighed as he thought of the desert. It too was an abstraction like the idea of death -until the life of the oasis made it a brutal reality. Yet what terrible longings the desert breeds in its addicts.(111)

Durrell is again recalling those figures whose names were associated with the 'desert'. The desert is significant to him only because he is using it as a epitome of death. This would eventually contribute to the picture he has chosen to paint of the Orient.

The works, therefore, the old and the new seem even to be related in their scents and sounds. "Jamais de la vie" the perfume and the song that filled the Darley's Alexandrian air[112] seems to have reached Sebastian:

> The old lady..turned her large dark operatic eye on Constance and said, "You are not wearing the scent today".
> "It is probably..."
> "You mean Jamais de la vie?"[113]

"Jamais de la vie" the scent, "Jamais de la vie" the music; Durrell, in a peculiar way, seems to wish to prolong the sense of defeat that the city has inflicted over her inhabitants. Antony, the Roman Alexandrian who heard his own (music) 'Jamais de la vie' of the god Hercules, fading as the god left the city, and recognised it as an omen of his own defeat.[114] Darley's defeat is reverberated by the very music. Now it seems that it has been left so indelibly on Durrell's memory so that he had to bring it back here again.

Through the pages of the four volumes, the city is made to live as a chaotic and contradictory metropolis, now

it looks as if Egypt would always encompass loss and deprivation. Consequently, 'traditional' Egyptian anomalies will be familiarized into the new scene:

> In Cairo is so much confusion, noise, light, dust, fleas, people, daylight and darkness that nobody who disappears is really missed.(115)

Extracts like the above could easily slip into the pages of the Quartet. Egypt is yet again reduced into one sentence conveying 'otherness'.

By the deployment of the old techniques and ultimately the producing of the monotonous narrative whenever Egypt is the theme, Durrell is, in fact, clearly displaying his adherence to the pressures of the Orientalist discourse which alone can justify the twinning between his recent writings and the Quartet. The return to the Orient in his recent writing leaves the Durrellian view always incarcerated within the boundaries of Western discourse.

Notes:

1. Lawrence Durrell, The Alexandria Quartet, London: Faber & Faber, 1980. p. 4. Quotations from and citations to The Quartet, throughout this study, are all made according to the 1980 edition. The first one-volume edition of The Quartet, however, was first published by Faber & Faber in 1962).
2. G. S. Fraser, Lawrence Durrell: A Study, London: Faber & Faber, 1981, p. 131.
3. Mahmoud Manzaloui, "Curate's Egg: An Alexandrian Opinion of Durrell's Quartet", Etudes Anglaises, vol. 15, no. 3. (1962), pp. 248-260.
4. D. J. Enright, "Alexandrian Nights' Entertainments: Lawrence Durrell's Quartet", in Conspirators and Poets, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), p. 111. Bandrot was an elegant cafe; L'Atelier the Art Society.
5. Robert Liddle, Unreal city, London: Jonathan Cape, 1952.
6. D. J. Enright, Academic Year, London: Secker and Warburg, 1965, p. 52-53.
7. Jacqueline Carol, Cocktails and camels, New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1960, p. 16.
8. "Notes of a Journey from Cornhill to Cairo", in The Works of William Makepeace Thackeray, London: Smith, Elder, 1869, vol. xiv, p. 481.
9. Pinchin, op. cit., p. 26.
10. Ibid, p. 163.
11. Robert Alter, Motives For Fictions, Cambridge, Mass.: Harverd University Press 1984. p. 196.
12. Alfred Kazin, "Lawrence Durrell's Rosy-fingered Egypt", in Contemporaries, London: Secker & Warburg, 1963, pp. 188-192, p. 188.

13. Walter Allen, The Modern Novel in Britain and the United States, New York: E. P. Dutton co., Inc., 1965, p. 285.
14. Stanley G. Eskin, "Durrell's Themes in The Alexandria Quartet, The Texas Quarterly, vol. 4, (Winter 1962), p. 46.
15. Anatole Broyard, "Alexandria Revisited", New York Times Book Review, (10 Oct. 1982), p. 39.
16. Durrell, op. cit., p. 17-18.
17. Ibid, p. 18.
18. George Wickes (Ed.), Lawrence Durrell and Henry Miller: A Private Correspondence. London: Faber & Faber, 1963, p. 178.
19. Durrell, op. cit., p. 96.
20. Ibid, p. 732.
21. Pinchin, op. cit., p. 169.
22. Wickes, op. cit., p. 343.
23. Alfred Perlés, My Friend Lawrence Durrell: An Intimate Memoir On The Author Of The Alexandria Quartet, London: Scorpion Press, 1961, p. 10.
24. Wickes, op. cit., p. 61.
25. At the end of the Justine, Durrell has included in the "Notes In The Text" [p. 203] two extracts from Forster's Alexandria, two rather obscure references to Paracelsus. Eugene Marais' Soul of The White Ant is the source of a long citation in Balthazar: "...the hundred little spheres which religion and lore create cohere softly together like cells to form the great sprawling jellyfish which is Alexandria". This seems to have come from Marais [pp. 78-79]. See William Godshalk's "Some Sources Of Durrell's Alexandria Quartet", Modern Fiction Studies, vol. 13, no. 3, Autumn 1967, p. 362.

26. J. W. McPherson, The Moulids Of Egypt (Egyptian Saint Days). Sudan: Pocala, 1960.
27. William L. Godshalk, "Some Sources Of Durrell's Alexandria Quartet", Modern Fiction Studies, vol. 13, no. 3. Autumn 1967, pp. 361-374.
28. Herbert Howarth, "A Segment Of Durrell's Quartet", Toronto University Quarterly, vol. 32, (1962-63), p. 285.
29. Durrell, op. cit., p. 210.
30. See Nagieb Mahfouz' Miramar. Translated from Arabic by Fatma Moussa-Mahmoud; Edited and revised by Maged el Kommos and John Rodenbeck; Introduction by John Fowles; London: Heineman, 1978.
31. Mahmmoud Al-Shafaki, "Lawrence Durrell Talks To Al-Katib" (in Arabic) Al-Katib. Cairo, May 1978. p. 145.
32. Robin Fedden, et. al. (ed.) Personal Landscape. London: Turrett Books, 1966. "An Anatomy Of Exile", An Introduction by Robert Fedden, p.8.
33. Lawrence Durrell, Spirit of Place, Alan G. Thomas (ed.), London: Faber & Faber, 1969, p. 157.
34. Durrell, The Alexandria Quartet, op. cit., p. 201.
35. Lawrence Durrell, Collected Poems, London: Faber & Faber, 1960, (1968 ed.), p. 139.
36. Ibid, p. 75.
37. In July 1944, Durrell wrote to Miller: "Books here have got a Middle Ages quality owing to their rareness; all the popular editions are out of print of EVERYTHING", (Wickes, op. cit. p. 191). This theme of the lack of a cultural atmosphere will be further developed in the subsequent pages of this chapter.
38. Durrell, The Alexandria Quartet, op. cit., p. 482.
39. Ibid, p. 213.
40. Ibid, p. 56.

41. Durrell stated that each book of the Quartet had taken him only "two to three months" since "I had the books in my mind for ten years". Ramez El-Halwan, "An Extraordinary Humble Sorcerer: Lawrence Durrell speaks to Ramez El-Halwan", The Egyptian Gazette (Arabic), 6 Nov. 1977, p. 4. Carl Bode also claims that Durrell has stated to him that "almost all the ideas of The Quartet are to be found there [in A Key to Modern Poetry (1952)] in germ form. See Bode's "A Guide to Alexandria", in The World of Lawrence Durrell, Harry T. Moore (ed.), Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962, p. 207.
42. Wickes, op. cit., p. 185.
43. The extract is taken from a letter that Durrell sent to his friend Ann Ridler as he was first settling down in Egypt in 1942, in his Spirit of Place, op. cit. p. 74-75.
44. Durrell, The Alexandria Quartet, op. cit. p. 57.
45. Ian W. Friedman, "A 'Key' to Lawrence Durrell", Wisconson Studies in Contemporary Literature, vol. 8, no. 2, 1967, p. 41.
46. Durrell, Spirit Of Place, op. cit. p.75.
47. Wickes, op. cit. p. 189.
48. Durrell, The Alexandria Quartet, op. cit., p. 213.
49. Ibid, p. 22.
50. Ibid, p. 17.
51. Ibid, p. 209.
52. Ibid, p. 39-40.
53. Ibid, p. 28.
54. Ibid, p. 28.
55. Carl Bode, "A Guide To Alexandria", Modern Fiction Studies, vol. 13, no. 3, Autumn 1967, p. 207.
56. Durrell, The Alexandria Quartet, op. cit. p. 22.

57. Ibid, p. 216.
58. Ibid, p. 217.
59. Lawrence Durrell, Prospero's Cell: A Guide To The Landscape and The Manners Of The Island Of Corcyca, London: Faber & Faber, 1945.
60. Wickes, op. cit. p. 195.
61. Ibid, p. 210.
62. Joan Susan Goulianos, "Lawrence Durrell's Greek Landscape". (Ph. D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1968) p. 78.
63. Durrell, Spirit Of Place. op. cit. p. 29.
64. Durrell, Collected Poems, op. cit., p. 90.
65. Wickes, op. cit. p. 195.
66. Durrell, The Alexandria Quartet. op. cit., p. 235.
67 Ibid, p. 195.
68. Ibid, p. 246.
69. Wickes, op. cit. p. 195.
70. Durrell, The Alexandria Quartet. op. cit. p. 78.
71. A. W. Friedman, Lawrence Durrell And The Alexandria Quartet, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970, p. 108. (Italics added)
72. Durrell, The Alexandria Quartet, op. cit, p. 340.
73. Ibid, p. 223.
74. Ibid, p. 232.
75. Lawrence Durrell, A Key to Modern Poetry, London: Neville, 1952, p. 92.
76. Durrell, The Alexandria Quartet, op. cit, p. 224.
77. Ibid, p. 227.
78. Ibid,p. 103.
79. Ibid, p. 106.
80. Ibid, p. 332.
81. Ibid, p. 39.

82. Ibid, p. 243.
83. Ibid, p. 48.
84. Ibid, p. 48.
85. Ibid, p. 243.
86. Ibid, p. 35.
87. Ibid, p. 29.
88. Ibid, p. 595.
89. Ibid, p. 57.
90. Ibid, p. 408.
91. Ibid, p. 414.
92. Ibid, p. 253.
93. Ibid, p. 258.
94. Ibid, p. 603.
95. Ibid, p. 425.
96. Ibid, p. 261.
97. Ibid, p. 425.
98. Ibid, p. 614.
99. Ibid, p. 872.
100. Ibid, p. 878.
101. Lawrence Durrell, Constance or Solitary Practice, London: Faber & Faber, 1982, p. 10.
101. Ibid, p. 14-15.
102. Ibid, p. 52.
103. Ibid, p. 61.
104. Ibid, p. 61-62.
105. Ibid, p. 408.
106. Ibid, p. 80.
107. Ibid, p. 97.
108. Ibid, p. 27.
109. Lawrence Durrell, Sebastian or Ruling Passions, London: Faber & Faber, 1983, p. 14.
110. Ibid, p. 33.
111. Durrell, The Alexandria Quartet, op. cit., p. 49.

112.Durrell, Constance, op. cit., p. 85.

113.Ibid, p. 26-27.

114. William Shakespeare, Antony And Cleopatra, iv, iii.

115. Durrell, Sebastian, op. cit., p. 100.

CHAPTER THREE:

The Desert in The Alexandria Quartet

It has been a tradition for Orientalist discourse to present - rather, represent - paragons, images, and long established paradigms that would, in one way or another, feed the fears and fantasies of the west.

Edward Said states that "In the system of knowledge about the Orient, the Orient is less a place than a *topos*, a set of references, a congeries of characteristics, that seems to have its origin in a quotation, or a fragment of a text, or a citation from someone's work on the Orient, or some bit of previous imagining, or an amalgam of all these."(1)

Said also argues that down in the depth of the Oriental stage stands a remarkable cultural repertoire whose individual items evoke a fabulously rich world of the desert, the Sphinx, Cleopatra, the Genii, and dozens more; settings, in some cases names only, half imagined, half-known; monsters, devils, heroes, terrors, pleasures. The Orientalist imagination nourishes itself extensively from such a collection. Ideological myths seem to pass

into service even when 'genuine knowledge' is advancing.

In most of the western writings on Arabia, the desert has always constituted a major Orientalist topic . Mystic as well as exotic, it has often been the platform where the search for the quaint, the unknown, and the bizarre often commences. The glamour of the black tents and the natural aristocracy of the desert have always been appealing. The desert, in the words of T. E. Lawrence, "made the character of Arabia". English 'traditional' scholars and writers registering Oriental fantasies have, long ago, chosen it as their main Oriental arena through which they could establish 'classical' and 'traditional' Orientalism(2). This, however, seems to have encouraged modern writers to feel free in practising dramatic forms on the Oriental scene. But Orientalists are never restricted. What is striking is that *"actual"* seeing or touring of a particular Oriental scene is never a prerequisite for the exercising of the western rituals.

How dramatic form and learned imagery come together in the Orientalist theatre is manifest in Durrell's The Alexandria Quartet (1961), as, indeed, in some of his later works [Constance (1982), and Sebastian (1983)].

Durrell's treatise on Alexandria, though set up mainly over a city, *an* Alexandria, nonetheless, provides and covers - obviously for various reasons - at times,

compendiums and adumbrations, at others, heavily sketched detailed pieces of descriptive passages of those very paradgims long ago nominated (by the earlier pioneers of the field) to designate the Orient and its inner life. In the list of these prototypes, the desert has a priority. In fact, even when Durrell's later writings (Constance and Sebastian) take somewhat different themes away from the Oriental setting of the Quartet, they are, by no means, an exception in *re*presenting and reviving the old traces ... similar tropes in which the desert and its camels are, once again, to be caged.

In so doing, and throughout the limited number of passages in which the desert and the camels appear, Durrell's portrayal of them, to a great extent, adheres to the very old patterns set up by the 'traditional' Orientalists.

Even when judged by the dramatic consciousness, Durrell fails to provide an evidence that any of the protagonists of his Quartet (or the later writings) is made to present such an image of the desert in the same way the earlier travellers' writings to Arabia were able to do. The records of the first experiences, the first fantasies on Arabia and its desert were mainly set up by people who undertook the adventure of going there, penetrating the heart of the desert...in order to be *allowed* to deliver their discourse on it which was - albeit at its best - a half imagined replica of the *real* Arabia. As a record of

a personal adventure, the greatest drama of Durrell's work is that it fails in this respect.

Durrell's objective is to make Egypt and the Egyptians totally visible to keep nothing hidden from the reader, to deliver the Egyptians without depth in swollen detail. As a rapporteur, his propensity is to cover every titbit of the fantasy. Unchallenged, this would include where he has never been. He, when all is said and done, is never handicapped. He can always lay on texts, citations from others, and even bits of some previous imagining.

It took a generation of the earlier pioneers in the field long years of residence among the natives and adventures - and through different ambitions - to put forward, arrange, regulate, and, later, be able to institutionalize their discourses on the helpless Arabia and its desert. Indeed, a good number of them seemed even to have taken their sympathies as far as identifying with the Arab natives of the land in order to achieve their missions. T. E. Lawrence is a supreme instance.

Determined and as a man who "wrote his will across the sky in stars"[3], Lawrence was a westerner who tried, and perhaps at times succeeded, to emulate the Bedouins or, even, beat them in endurance. He managed, also, to evoke for his compatriots the mystic heroism of the British Empire as well as the Arabian desert.

emphasizes for the very reader the challenge set up between, on one hand, his western power such as that which would enable him to measure from a distance the "great slabs *ten feet* each way and, perhaps, *four inches* thick"; and, on the other, the strength and extremity of the desert in which "*we, ourselves,* felt tiny in it".[7]

If the native Bedouins have, long ago, succumbed to the same monstrous desert and its tormenting winds, Lawrence, in a stark contrast to them, favours the Khamsin: "I always rather liked a Khamsin, since its torment seemed to fight against mankind"...whose epitome is no one else but him. This is a western power-display fully-fledged. In his preference for the Khamsin, Lawrence is, in a way, containing the local inhabitants; rendering them powerless. Moreover, Lawrence's readiness in "*challenging* its strength", and "*conquering* its extremity"[8]...; is meant to show more than the passivity of the native inhabitants who lived for long years mostly in harmony with their 'monstrous' desert. It, further, conveys that this desert - and this Orient - is justifiably *ours*. He is, thus, better off claiming every dominion *his*. He is different from the natives; mostly, in the sense, that he is better gifted. He is *powerful*. They are *powerless*. He can, therefore, claim the land to be *his*. Eventually, his role becomes to enlighten the natives...and "orchestrate their Arab revolt". Through all the difficulties, his Western, British ego is retained in the vast ocean of the

Edward Said argues that "the Orientalist can imitate the Orient without the opposite being true."[4] What the Orientalist says about the Orient is, therefore, to be understood as descriptions obtained in one-way exchange: as the locals behaved and spoke, the Orientalist observed and recorded down. His power is to have existed amongst them as a native speaker, as it were, and also as a secret writer - an agent. What he writes is intended as useful knowledge, not for these locals, but for Europe and the west and its disseminative institutions.

The power of existence among the natives would allow him to tour their world; determine its measurements and eventually be enabled to manipulate it:

> A little later we were marching over a low ridge of slivers of sandstone with the nature of slate, sometimes quite small, but other times great slabs ten feet each way and, perhaps, four inches thick. Auda raged up beside my camel, and pointing with his riding-stick told me to write down on my lap the names and nature of the land.... I cried Auda mercy of his names, swearing I was no writer-down of unspoiled countries, or pandar to geographical curiosity; and the old man, much pleased, began to tell me personal notes and news about the chiefs with us...and today we rode .. without seeing signs of life; no tracks of gazelle, no lizards, no burrowing of rats, not even any birds. We, ourselves, felt tiny in it, and our urgent progress across its immensity was a stillness or immobility of futile effort. The only sounds were the hollow echoes, like the shutting down of pavements

over valued places... [5]

As a narrator, Lawrence is both exhibit and exhibitor; winning both confidences at once. He is, in fact, displaying two appetites for experience: the Arab one for being engaged in companionship (or so it seems: a friendship with Auda and Faisal and some other Arabs); and the western one for authoritative useful knowledge. The ego, the first-person pronoun that is moving through the Arab Bedouins, registering their customs, making them and their world more vivid, is in reality both an Oriental masquerade (a Lawrence in the Arab head-robe), and a westerner's device for capturing and, then conveying, valuable, otherwise inaccessible information:

> At this stifling price they kept their flesh unbroken, for they feared the sand particles which would wear upon the chaps into a painful wound: but, for my own part, I always rather liked a Khamsin, since its torment seemed to fight against mankind with ordered conscious malevolence, and it was pleasant to outface it so directly, challenging its strength, and conquering its extremity...; but, as we rode further into the desert and the hours passed, the wind became stronger, thicker in dust, more terrible in heat. All semblance of friendly contest passed...[6]

Lawrence might disguise in some Oriental clothings, but his western powers can never be covered. Amidst the particularly pieced and detailed description of the above passages which deliver horror to his reader, Lawrence

Arabian desert. He often leans on epic language. In the Epilogue to the Seven Pillars, he states:

> There was left to me ambition, the wish to quicken history in the East, as the great adventurers of old had done. I fancied to sum up in my own life that new Asia which inexorable time was slowly bringing upon us. The Arabs made chivalrous appeal to my young interest, and when still at the High School at Oxford already I thought to remake them into a nation, client and fellow of the British Empire.(9)

This overexcited language is almost equivalent to the romantic fantasies of Lord Jim: "I mean to make a nation, to restore a lost influence, to give twenty millions of the Semites the foundation on which to build an inspired dream-palace of their national thoughts." Here, Lawrence's vision of himself as hero has affinities with Conrad's vision of heroism. He told Liddell Hart that as a boy he had dreamed of leading a crusade. "Naturally, it would be a crusade in the modern terms - the freeing of a race from bondage"(10). Later in his Seven Pillars Lawrence writes: "I was sent to these Arabs as a stranger, unable to think their thoughts or subscribe to their beliefs, but charged by duty to lead them forward and to develop to the highest any movement of theirs profitable to England in her war"(11). Lawrence found the Bedouins "a people of primary colours, or rather of black and white, who saw the world always in contour. They were

a dogmatic people, despising doubt, our modern crown of thorns."[12] As a 'modern system' man, he lacked something, which he found in the Bedouins. This makes it clear how chivalric-romantic his vision was even though he sometimes denies it. "The epic mode was alien to me, as to my generation. Memory gave me no clue to the heroic, so that I could not feel such men as Auda in myself. He seemed fantastic as the Hills of Rumm, old as Malory."[13] Lawrence denies any feeling for the epic and heroic, but obviously in doing so he asserts it.

Alongside this rhetoric runs an awareness that he would later put his heart into the revolt and tune the Arabs to such a pitch of faith in him. He describes so vividly what seemed to *his* people his transformation from an Englishman into an Arab in order to lead the Arabs into victory. In a scene where English soldiers join with Arabs on the march to Damascus, Lawrence tells how he 'belonged' more to the Arabs than to his fellow British soldiers. Many of his critics agree that life with the Arabs resulted in a metamorphosis for him whose consequences were to haunt him till the end of his life. What most of these critics seem to have overlooked, however, is that Lawrence himself makes vivid what the cut-adrift life in the desert caused him, not from the hatching of his Western skin, rather from the disguising under an Arab one. This Lawrence makes clear in the very

first chapter of his Seven Pillars when he writes,

> In my case, the effort for these years to live in the dress of Arabs, and to imitate their mental foundation, quitted me of my English self, and let me look at the West and its conventions with new eyes: they destroyed it all for me. At the same time I could not sincerely take on the Arab skin: it was an affectation only. Easily was a man made infidel, but hardly might he be converted to another faith. I had dropped one form and not taken on the other, and was become like Mohammed's coffin in our legend, with a resultant feeling of intense loneliness in life, and a contempt, not for other men, but for all they do. Such detachment came at times to a man exhausted by prolonged physical effort and isolation. His body plodded on mechanically, while his reasonable mind left him, and from without looked down critically on him, wondering what that futile lumber did and why. Sometimes these selves would converse in the void; and then madness was very near, and I believe it would be near the man who could see things through the veils at once of two customs, two educations, two environments.(14)

This passage clearly illustrates why Lawrence, despite his efforts in indirection of self-revelation, called the book "an introspective epic".

Lawrence, showing his capacity to penetrate through the heart of the Arabian desert, looked like Conrad's Kurtz who "could get himself to believe anything - anything"(15). "The practice of our revolt fortified the sense of nihilism in me". Lawrence's saving grace, the thing that prevents him from becoming totally like Kurtz,

is his sense of the western conscience: "My will had gone and I feared to be alone, lest the winds of circumstances, or power, or lust, blow my empty soul away".(16) Like a piece of pliable metal, Lawrence is bent back and and forth between the two worlds. When he is with the Bedouins, he is an Arab; when sipping tea with Dawnay, British.

Later, however, the desert for him would stimulate the struggle within him to impose the western shape as well as to contain the personal vision whose retrospective mode includes a powerful sense of failure and betrayal. Lawrence enters the Arabian desert as a young and energetic man, yet by the end of The Seven Pillars of Wisdom he emerges broken. The desert which, for him, once "was held in a crazed communism by which Nature and the elements were for the free use of every known friendly person for his own purposes, and no more"(17), eventually becomes the record of his failure. Then follows a series of frustrations and abortive efforts during which Lawrence is tested to the limit of endurance. Arabia, the desert, and the whole encounter served Lawrence, among other things, primarily to achieve some kind of introspection. Eventually he is left with the feeling of having "prostituted" himself to "another race"(18).

Only in a world of imperial glory, the preposition 'of' is put to work..Lawrence 'of' Arabia; not "in" Arabia,

not 'and' Arabia, but 'of' Arabia: derived or coming from; possessing; having: characterised and identified by. Lawrence of Arabia; Gordon of Khartoum; Clive of India, the one among the many, a figure in a landscape, the white man's burden, dangerous journeys through "anters vast and desert idle".

But when for Lawrence, Arabia constituted the personal kingdom he tried - and probably failed - to claim, it is for Durrell something whose very existence is - like the whole of Arabia-static in time as well as in place. The dilemma Lawrence entangles in and the subterfuge he so vividly ravels with in The Seven Pillars takes the desert as the main theatre to which Durrell never really comes near.

Edward Said rightly argues that

> in natural history, in anthropology, in cultural generalization, a type had a particular *character* which provided the observer with a designation and, as Foucault says, 'a controlled derivation'. These types and characters belonged to a system, a network of related generalizations.

Said quotes Foucault as saying:

> all designation must be accomplished by means of certain relation to all other possible designations. To know what properly appertains to one individual is to have before one the classification - or the possibility of classifying - all others.[19]

If 'traditional' Orientalism, if T. E. Lawrence and the other earlier travellers to the region have decoded and designated 'their' Arabian deserts and 'their' Bedouins, to certain classifications and patterns according to what they have seen - or, indeed, limited themselves to 'see' - it is, in any way, by the virtue of being there.. of being somewhat immersed (as, or so it seemed, in Lawrence's case) in the real life of the natives. Durrell would not allow - not even in his fantasies - such a thing to happen.

The comedy of Durrell's search for the desert is not so much that he fails to find it; rather it is that he looks for it as something that texts have told him about. What he relies on are no more than a handful of western clichés and over-blown emotions that have been taken - sometimes verbatim - from fables (about Eblis and the Ginn) such as earlier Orientalists (like Lane) have described. Durrell exhausts every effort to keep the *real* Orient, and the *real* desert carefully at bay. But, this does not include their designations. The desert, the camel, the Bedouins are all used here pejoratively:

> 'We shall be alone, shan't we?' Narouz nodded and smiled. The desert is such a torture for them that I always send them back at the fringe, the servants!
> 'Yes', Nessim well knew that Egyptians believe the desert to be emptiness populated entirely by the spirits of demons and other grotesque visitants from

Eblis, the Moslem Satan.[20]

The value, efficacy, strength, and apparent veracity of such a statement written about the desert and its people relies very little and cannot depend on the desert as such. On the contrary, such a statement is a presence to the reader by virtue of its having excluded, displaced as superogatory any such real thing as Arabia. The above extract again demonstrates Durrell's exercise of a total manipulation of the Alexandrian character. The affirmative tone of Darley's comment that the Alexandrian Nessim "*well knew* that Egyptians believe the desert to be emptiness populated entirely by the spirits of demons...and the Moslem Satan" is being presented in a narrative that carries a matter-of-fact voice. It is as if Durrell wanted to convey that such knowledge is commonplace in Egypt. In addition to that, the 'Alexandrianism' of the data being fed is confirmed in defining "Eblis as the Moslem Satan" for Durrell could have easily used Satan - a word known to Europeans and Alexandrians alike - alone without having to allude to Eblis - a word only associated with the Moslems. The extract, on the other hand, presents Durrell as the disciple of the pioneers of the field. Lane, Doughty, Lawrence and many others talked about the primitiveness of the desert Arabs and their belief in what is viewed in the West as fairy superstitions. Durrell - whose expedition comes decades

after them - feels somehow the urge to allude to this feature in the character of his Arabia.

The Quartet is, hence, a work of recapitulation whose author not only searches out sources and origins of western culture in the Orient but redoes - in his fantasies - the earlier western travellers and their voyages to Arabia and its desert.

There is enough ground to argue that The Seven Pillars is a book first and foremost about its author's quest for the absolute in the Arabian desert. If T. E. Lawrence has presented himself as the "uncrowned king of the desert", as the representative Orientalist who therefore has been able to come out with the records of the inner desert and discovered the Bedu "empty vessels ready to be filled with some vision"; and if he was able to touch their love of simplicity, their feeling of the "emptiness of the world and the fullness of God", their only luxuriousness and happiness in "abnegation, renunciation, self-restraint"[21], Durrell is no more than a remote observer who kept himself and his characters cautiously aloof from the surroundings. For instance, in the scene when Pursewarden is driving to Cairo the narrative is of a white man facing a creeping darkness that starts at the edge of a far, yet so near, desert:

> I drove steadily and thoughtfully on. Egypt, flat and unbosomed, flowed back and away from me on either side of the car. The green changed to blue, the blue to

> peacock's eye, to gazelle-brown, to panther-black. The desert was like a dry kiss, a flutter of eyelashes against the mind. Ahem! The night became horned with stars like branches of almond-blossom. I gibbered into the city after a drink or two under a new moon which felt as if it were drawing half its brilliance from the open sea. Everything smelt good again. The iron band that Cairo puts around one's head (the consciousness of being completely surrounded by burning desert?) dissolved, relaxed - gave place to the expectation of an open sea, an open road leading one's mind back to Europe....Sorry. Off the point.(22)

The sequencing of the colours is clearly set to indicate the mystery of the desert world as much as it also demonstrates the trauma (that Pursewarden and all the other Europeans suffer) of the shift from brightness and darkness. The open sea designates the exit out of prison. If he goes towards the inner desert there is blackness, if he goes towards the sea (where Europe lies on the other side) there is whiteness. Egypt is dark; Europe is bright. The desert, as the source of the prevailing darkness, should be caged then in the descriptions of imprisonment, harshness, and otherness.

But Durrell cannot be limited. He, therefore, becomes the incorrigible maker of *some* Orient...*an* Egypt. And to coincide with his Oriental narrative, he would not waste any effort in deploying whatever is available to his grip so as to allow a room in *his* Orient for one "city of aberrations"(23)...*his* Alexandria.

Durrell's Quartet, then, hovers on the city. The prime task is to sketch a portrait of that city - and not the vast desert surrounding it. But, nonetheless, as a western "scientist" dealing with some "Oriental phenomenon", Durrell feels the need to decode all the factors involved in the given phenomenon, however recalcitrant they might be. The desert is one vital component of the Arabian scene Durrell wishes to convey to his readers. At one stage or another his city's desert needs to be introduced:

> I studied her harsh Semitic profile in the furry light flung back by the headlights...It belonged so much to the city which I now saw as a series of symbols stretching away from us on either side - minarets, pigeons, statues, ships, coins, camels and palms; it lived in a heraldic relation to the exhausted landscapes which enclosed it - the loops of the great lake; as proper to the scene as the Sphinx to the desert.(24)

The scientist is in action. Darley - whom many critics agree to be very much representing Durrell himself(25) - is applying here his own anthropological categories to the people of the city ("I *studied* her harsh Semitic features and" - with a strangely assertive tone found that - "it belonged to the city"). Most importantly, the passage puts the desert and the Sphinx in one category... symbols, of some desert power, to be reckoned with

whenever the attitude of viewing the city is in question. The desert moulds the city. The camels of the desert invade the city and hence are included here among the "symbols" in which Darley see the city. And it is these very symbols that made the city - for Darley - "stretch away from us" confirming "our" estrangement from such soils. The transference of the camels from the desert into the streets of Durrell's city adds more to its chaotic features. In fact Durrell's discourse is made more individual for 'normally' western texts on Arabia speak of the desert and its camels as always attached to each other, never separated.

Negative factor as it might be, the desert, for Durrell, becomes the means through which he adds more to that morose image which he always seems to prefer for his city. The desert, its Bedouins, camels, and Khamsins are all manipulated in such a way that would serve within the Quartet's network of dullness and eccentricity (frequently, if not always, woven from some Alexandrian web):

> Landscape-tones: brown to bronze, steep skyline, low cloud, pearl ground with shadowed oyster and violet reflections. The lion-dust of the desert: prophets' tombs turned to zinc and copper at sunset on the ancient lake. Its huge sand-faults like watermarks from the air; green and citron giving to gunmetal, to a single plum-dark sail, moist, palpitant: sticky-winged nymph. Taposiris is dead among its tumbling

> columns and seamarks, vanished the Harpoon Men...Mareotis under a sky of hot lilac.(26)

The "*lion*-dust of desert" registers here the heavy but brief presence Durrell feels forced to allocate for that tight, powerful grip with which the desert seems to be holding his city. In fact, the insertion of such a phrase, in a context that opens his "Landscape-tones", marks the way Durrell is able to manipulate further the 'fact' of the desert in attracting his reader's sympathy. This adds more of the dull paints of the already gloomy picture of his city:

> ..here our bodies were chafed by the harsh desiccated winds blowing up out of the deserts of Africa and for love we were forced to substitute a wiser but crueller mental tenderness which emphasized loneliness rather than expurgated it.(27)

And here the desert is again treated as the source of fear and disturbance. The desert is the conspirator for Darley's "loneliness" which confirms his alienation for the 'foreign' world in which he finds himself.

Durrell's desert, then, refuses to be secluded. If Lawrence felt the desert shaping the characters of its Bedouins, it is shaping now the character of Durrell's city. In Alexandria, everything is moving under the black cloud of dreariness and monotony:

> The sulking bodies of the young begin to hunt for a

> fellow nakedness, and in those little cafés where Balthazar went so often with the old poet of the city, the boys stir uneasily at their backgammon under the petrol-lamps: disturbed by this dry *desert* wind - so unromantic, so unconfiding - stir, and turn to watch every stranger. They struggle for breath and in every summer kiss they can detect the taste of quicklime...[28]

The tone of such a passage adds new images -to the old ones- of Alexandria. It is such images which, eventually, incorporate to present Alexandria as "flesh-pot, sink-pot, melting-pot of dullness"[29]. Within the Durrellian parameters, the mundane, bizarre, and eccentric of the city's behaviour becomes quite justified. It is moulded by the "so unromantic, so unconfiding dry *desert* wind". Durrell singles out from this chaotic and unpleasant atmosphere "the sulking bodies of the young" as fresh victims of the city, and "every stranger" who is always at odds with Durrell's Alexandria and its harsh desert winds.

The Bedouins, in their part, are also 'manipulated' to serve the same ends. They - who are reported by T. E. Lawrence to have "love for simplicity, feeling of the emptiness of the world and the fullness of God"[30], and "whose luxuriousness was in abnegation, renunciation, and self-restraint" - are here presented, by Durrell, participating in the most grotesque of behaviour in this city of anomalies:

> I was full of misgivings. Alexandria, outwardly so peaceful, was not really a safe place for Christians. Only last week Pombal had come home with a story of the Swedish vice-consul whose car had broken down on the Matrugh road. He had left his wife alone in it while he walked to the nearest telephone-point in order to ring up the consulate and ask them to send out another car. He had arrived back to find her body sitting normally in the back seat - without a head. Police were summoned and the whole district was combed. Some Bedouin encamped nearby were among those interrogated. While they were busy denying any knowledge of the accident, out of the apron of one of the women rolled the missing head. They had been trying to extract the gold teeth which had been such an unpleasant feature of her party-smile.(31)

Imagery of the desert is utilized by Durrell together with the imagery of death, disease, decay, and desiccation to indicate the decadence of the culture of his Oriental world. The narrative of the above passage makes vivid Durrell's vintage point. "Alexandria, outwardly so peaceful, was not really a safe place for *Christians*" marks the warning Durrell wants to convey to the reader as it also reaffirms his authority for delivering such a warning; that of simply being there in Egypt, and, thus, being capable of reporting; unveiling the "outwardly peaceful image of Alexandria" to its *real essence*. It also displays the engulfing desert of his hopeless city. The Bedouins who 'naturally' belong only to the desert have left it and are now practising their

barbaric deeds on the streets of Durrell's city, themselves contributing to the anarchic ambience. Durrell's, obviously deliberate, choice of such incidents (as the one depicted in the above extract) works, beyond any doubt, for the bigger aim of blackening the Alexandrian atmosphere.

But it is the unhappy choice which fails him. The insertion of the previous passage amidst the flow of the narrative voice makes the whole context look untidy. This is done in more than one place of the Quartet:

> Monday. Ali says that shooting stars are stones thrown by the angels in heaven to drive off evil djinns when they try to eavesdrop on the conversations in Paradise and learn the secrets of the future. All Arabs terrified of the desert, even Bedouin. Strange.(32)

Awkward as it might be, Durrell, it would seem, cannot write without alluding to every Alexandrian titbit, in his Egyptian world. This would, or so he thinks, incorporate it and make it as a whole the product of some efficient western-agent-touring; faithful and adhering to the rules and patterns of the Orientalist heritage. The introduction of the desert in the above passage demonstrates Durrell's keen wish to exploit its theme. The notion of the desert and the Arab fear of it is injected in a narrative whose mood is displaying the idiosyncrasies and the flaws of his Alexandrian world: the Arab belief in "evil djinns [who] eavesdrop on the

conversations in Paradise" and the Arabs are "terrified of the desert, even the Bedouins". The remark about the djinns serves as perhaps the best introduction to the essential qualities of such a genre as it has been treated by its foremost practitioners. From the time of the Arabian Nights, djinns were associated with Arabia. When the white man from Europe (in the person of Doughty, Lawrence, and the rest of the fleet) was able to invade the desert, the remark about the Arab's fear of the desert adds more to the privileges of Europe.

And to back all this, he turns to long, often sadistic passages of general observation, which constitute, on their part, an important feature of the Orientalist discourse(33):

> Outside all this - the white desert was turning under the moon to a great field of skulls and mill-stones. Trumpets and drums sounded...; but treading unwarily I came upon a grotesque scene which I would gladly have avoided if I had been able. The camels of Narouz were being cut up for the feast. Poor things, they knelt there 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. The axes bit into them sinking deep under every thrust. Whole members were being hacked off as painlessly, it seemed, as when a tree is pruned. The children were dancing about in the moonlight picking up the fragments and running

> off with them...The camels stared hard at the moon and said nothing... I felt frightfully ill all of a sudden and retired back to the lighted quarter for a drink; and sitting on a bench watched the passing show for a while to recover my nerve.(34)

It is by virtue of this first-person pronoun, fully in action, ("treading unwarily *I* came upon...*My* blood ran... *I* could not tear *my*self from the spectacle... *I* felt"..then, "on a bench recover *my* nerve") that the reader is capable to share the digging-up of the rotten soil of Durrell's Alexandria. In fact, Durrell is pursuing here more than one end. The passage is, first, confirming the westerner's unconformity with (and thus remoteness from) the surroundings - obviously beating the inhabitants in their humanity: "a grotesque scene which *I would gladly have avoided*...My blood ran cold...sitting...to recover my nerve". Feeling is a merit that only Mountolive is made to enjoy: "I *felt* frightfully ill all of a sudden". This is all put in a stark contrast to the Bedouins' 'barbarism': "a horde of men *attacked* them with *axes*...they were shouting and bantering as they worked...the children were *dancing...picking up the fragments*", the very passage is, on the other hand, presenting a reporter's self-portrait, challenging and fighting his own feelings, sincere to fulfilling the task, worthy of the trust: "a grotesque scene which I would gladly have avoided if I

had been able"...and "My blood ran cold, yet I could not tear myself away from this *extraordinary* spectacle."

Egypt and its deserts are watched since this offensive behaviour issues out a reservoir of infinite peculiarity: Mountolive - a Western agent - whose sensibility tours Alexandria, is only a watcher, never involved, always detached, ready for new examples of "eccentricity". Durrell chooses singular images of deprivaty in order to make Egypt into "a living tableau of queerness"(35).

If Durrell runs short of new visions of the desert, its camels, and Bedouins...of new 'representative' examples, then, the same vision is made to recur again and again:

> Our room bulging with darkness and pestilence, and we Europeans in such disharmony with the fearful animal health of the blacks around us. The copulation of boabs shaking the house like a palm-tree. Black tigers with gleaming teeth. And everywhere the veils, the screaming, the mad giggle under the paper-trees, the insanity and the lepers...A camel has collapsed from exhaustion in the street outside the house. It is too heavy to transport to the slaughter-house so a couple of men come with axes and cut it up there and then in the open street, alive. They hack through the white flesh -the poor creature looking ever more pained, more aristocratic, more puzzled as its legs are hacked off. Finally there is the head still alive, the eyes open, looking round. Not a scream of protest, not a struggle. The animal submits like a palm-tree. But for days afterwards the mud street is soaked in its blood and our bare feet are printed by the moisture.(36)

It is Darley's turn to be the witness now. And in Durrell's Alexandria it is only the Europeans who are allowed to show their extra human qualities for not one local inhabitant is able to comment on the bloody scenes of the city. Blood seems to pass undetected. To Durrell's local Orientals - Durrell tries to convey - "men come with axes...cutting it...the head still alive...legs are hacked off...mud street soaked in its blood"...and every barbaric scene becomes a norm. Everything becomes part of the Alexandrian 'blood-scenario'. The above passage is very similar in tone and structure to that preceding it. The carefully slowed, heavily elaborate description of the two passages does not only make them participants in the general melancholic shades of Durrell's 'Alexandrian colours', but it also makes them share in the conveying of the very same message. Durrell seems to be trying, through these passages, and other similar ones, to put forward his own theory in regard to the 'eccentricity' of the land. He is conveying that within this negative and *bloody* atmosphere, the eccentric, the mundane, the deviant of behaviour of *his* city are all intrinsic - are born within - and, therefore, should be presented as such. Thus, the camel is caged into an image that would introduce local colour:

> From time to time, a small harsh cry - the noise of a she-camel crying...[37]

Durrell relies on texts; those belonging to the pioneers who 'investigated' the desert long before his own Oriental encounter commenced. And it is, indeed, these texts that fetch the desert into his city.

So unlike T. E. Lawrence who took himself into it, the desert, nevertheless, forms - as it did before - for Durrell's characters a line of tension. Every European traveller to the Orient has had to protect himself from its unsettling influences. There are threats that wear away the European discreteness and rationality of time, space, and - quite possibly - personal identity. The desert's unlimited power that tightly holds the Durrellian Alexandria, has caused its European inhabitants confoundedness and ennui. It is not only menacing but also exasperating. It has irked everyone and made it strenuous to live:

> That second spring the Khamseen was worse than I have ever known it before or since. Before sunrise the skies of the desert turned brown as buckram, and then slowly darkened, swelling like a bruise and at last releasing the outlines of cloud, giant octaves of ochre which massed up...And now unseen in the darkness of shuttered rooms the sand is invading everything, appearing as if by magic in clothes long locked away, books, pictures, and teaspoons. In the locks of doors, beneath fingernails. The harsh sobbing air dries the membranes of throats and noses...Clouds of dried blood walk the streets like prophecies...From time to time a cracked wind arrives from directly above and stirs the whole city round and round so that one has the

> illusion that everything -trees, minarets, monuments and people have been caught in the final eddy of some great whirlpool and will pour softly back at last into the desert from which they rose...(38)

It is a cry of despair seeking sympathy. Everyone is being alarmed, for "the sand is *invading* everything". Nonetheless, the strong ego is still alive. It is on the move even in the time of the creeping danger. The city is never safe from the desert surrounding it: "...wind arrives from directly above and *stirs* the whole city round and round...everything - trees, minarets, monuments and people have been *caught*". The passage on the other hand, demonstrates that the western ego is always there to *know* before anyone else including those sincerely belonging to the land. "Worse than *I* have ever *known it*" obliterates any role which might be given to the local inhabitants in the issue in question.

When the challenge becomes more fierce than ever, the desert becomes one factor, among others, causing disparity:

> How will I ever deliver myself from this whore of cities - sea, desert, minaret, sand, sea?(39)

Durrell's propensity is to grip and grasp everything around him. The Egyptians, their desert and camels are all there for him to be disemboweled for exposition and to be, later, put together admonishingly. And whenever,

one "symbol" in the sprawling 'Oriental panorama' displayed before him shows resistance, it, will, then, eventually constitute a line of testing for his endurance. With "the incomprehensible desert"(40), his colonial powers are put to test. As an Oriental 'item', the desert is there for him to be dealt with...and, if necessary, 'invaded'. When his powers let him down, he starts to acknowledge the might of the desert:

> The tide washed them up onto the swampy littorals of their own personalities - symbols of Alexandria, a dead brackish lake surrounded by the silent, unjudging, wide-eyed desert which stretches away into Africa under a dead moon.(41)

The vocabulary in his description of the desert is introducing the threat of some 'monster'. The tone, here, is of the whole city being tortured under the mysterious power of the surrounding desert.

Unlike Lawrence, Durrell never shows defeat. The introspection which Lawrence underwent in the aftermath of his encounter, is covered here by Durrell through the deployment of various aiding devices.

Durrell turns first to the limited number of characters whom he decodes as local inhabitants of his city. They are now made to present the power of the utopian desert:

> 'We shall be alone, shan't we?' Narouz nodded and

> smiled. 'The desert is such torture for them that I always send them back at the fringe, the servants'. 'Yes', Nessim well knew that Egyptians believe the desert to be an emptiness populated entirely by the spirits of demons and other grotesque visitants from Eblis, the Moslem Satan.(42)

Since the locals do voice their fear of the desert, Durrell goes on to say, then it would not be strange if it looked for Darley "incomprehensible"...an 'element' alien in this, already, 'known' land:

> He reached the desert fringe in half an hour, having seen nothing untoward though he looked about him carefully under his bushy brows...He neglected none of the smaller signs which might indicate a foreign visitation, tracks in the desert...He was still on the alert, however, and rode in short swift spurts, reining in every now and again to listen for a full minute...He was still puzzled but not ill at ease.(43)

The heavily slow motion of the tone of this description depicts the equally slow torture and sufferings of the Durrellian local Bedouins. Narouz is exposed here as a breed of some Durrellian desert; he looks all alert in such a way that will offer the justification for the incompetence (or defeat, as it is in T. E. Lawrence's case) of the westerner vis-á-vis the desert. Hence it becomes incomprehensible and ambiguous, and all that is left is to wait circumspectly for the unknown dangers:

> Indeed, one was conscious of the desert here although one could not see it - melodramatically tasteless as a

communion wafer.[44]

It is in such respect that the desert starts creating the agony he is to face up to. Hence, for him, the vision of 'that' desert becomes perdurable.

The later novels, which came after quite a considerable stretch of time, still give the same old Alexandrian flavours:

> But before we reached our objectives we were taken by the whole solid weight of the desert. It was flung over us like a mattress. We collapsed like surfers overtaken by the rollers of the ocean, like ants overwhelmed by a landslide. [45]

For Durrell - as it did for the earliear practitioners of the orientalist discourse, before him - it is this strange and exotic power of the desert that counts. Attracting and, then, defeating; its challenge becomes sweet then sour. Thus, its hugeness; its fierce and mighty powers are, almost, omnipresent and never obliterated from the Durrellian archive of Alexandria. The desert has a similar imagery in his later writings:

> "Tell me what surprised you most about Egypt", said Affad curiously..., "O every thing" would have been at once too easy and not sufficiently exact...And then of course the desert itself had been a complete surprise. One came upon it, came to the edge of the carpet of human plantation and there it was a great theatrical personage, waiting serenely...The desert was a

> metaphor for everything huge and dangerous, yet without so seeming...the desert offered a different sort of providence; its terrible frugality engendered introspection and compassion. God![46]

Despite the gulf of time that separates the Quartet from the later works, this passage, nonetheless, harmonizes with the tone of those descriptive pieces which dotted Alexandria with, more and more, fear, dullness, and peculiarity.

Likewise, the desert which constitutes to the local Alexandrians' - and even the Bedouins - a major source of fear and tension, terrifies Sebastian's Affad. Durrell, in fact, introduces the desert, here, clothed with death:

> He sighed as he thought of the desert. It too was an abstraction like the idea of death _ until the life of the Oasis made it a brutal reality. Yet what terrible longings the desert breeds in its addicts? [47]

If these passages have, collectively, affirmed the pervasive presence of the desert and its ever-lasting impact on shaping the writing, then every passage confirms and emphasizes Durrell's European identity as someone possessing memory. Records of the early adventure are still, and safely, kept. They are *the* useful knowledge.

Hence, such examples consolidate the argument that Orientalists do view the Orient as something whose

existence can be easily displayed and also which remains static; the time, the place are disregarded. Could only this justify the recurrence of identical 'Oriental' visions and images in various Durrellian writings?

Notes:

1. Edward Said, Orientalism, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978, p. 177.
2. "Classical" or "Traditional" Orientalism, throughout this study, refers more to the Orientalism as practised by Westerners in the colonised Arabia of the pre-oil era. "Modern" Orientalism refers to the western writings of the post-oil era.
3. T. E. Lawrence, Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph, London: The Alden Press, 1935, p. 5
4. Said, op. cit., p. 170.
5. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 246.
6. Ibid, p. 247.
7. My italics.
8. My italics.
9. Quoted by John Mack, A Prince of Our Disorder: The Life of T. E. Lawrence, New York: Little, Brown, 1976, p. 191.
10. Liddell Hart, T. E. Lawrence: In Arabia And After, London: Jonathan Cape, 1934, p. 16.
11. Lawrence, op. cit. p. 30.
12. Quoted in Paul Zweig's The Adventurer, New York: Basic Books, 1974, p. 237.
13. Quoted in Ibid, p. 235.
14. Lawrence, op. cit. p. 31-32.
15. Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness, London: Penguin, 1973, p. 65.
16. Lawrence, op. cit. p. 502.
17. Ibid, p. 450.
18. Ibid, p. 31.
19. Said, op. cit., p. 119.
20. Lawrence Durrell, The Alexandria Quartet. London:

Faber & Faber, 1980, p. 264.

21. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 39.
22. Durrell, op. cit., p. 482.
23. Ibid, p. 142.
24. Ibid, p. 367.
25. See e.g. Joan Susan Goulianous, Lawrence Durrell and Alexandria", Virginia Quarterly, vol. 45 (1969), pp. 664-73. Also Mona Louis Morcos, "Elements of the Biographical in The Alexandria Quartet", Modern Fiction Studies, vol. xiii, no. 3 (1967), pp. 343-59.
26. Ibid, p. 209.
27. Ibid, p. 38.
28. Ibid, p. 18. My italics.
29 Lawrence Durrell and Henry Miller, A Private Correspondence, George Wickes (ed.), London: Faber & Faber, 1963, p. 195.
30. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 41.
31. Ibid, p. 125-6.
32. Ibid, p. 414.
33. Said, op. cit., p. 227-31.
34. Durrell, op. cit., p. 487-488.
35. Said, op. cit., p. 103.
36. Ibid, p. 56
37. Ibid, p. 373.
38. Ibid, p. 121.
39. Ibid, p. 217.
40. Ibid, p. 280.
41. Ibid, p. 352.
42. Ibid, p. 264.
43. Ibid, p. 639.
44. Ibid, p. 256.
45. Lawrence Durrell, Constance or Solitary Practice, London: Faber & Faber, 1982, p. 90.

46. Ibid, p 80.

47. Lawrence Durrell, Sebastian or Ruling Passions, London: Faber & Faber, 1983, p. 49.

CHAPTER FOUR:

THE QUEST IN VATHEK & MOUNTOLIVE

Many critics agree that Vathek[1] is the work on which Beckford's literary fame survives.

Written in 1782, Vathek attracted so many critics. Various claims have been made, some of which have perhaps over-emphasised its "unique position both as an Oriental tale and as a work of art."[2] Some went even further to suggest that Vathek is not a mere literary *tour de force*, a flight of unregulated imagination. J. W. Oliver states that:

> Beckford, with his Oriental enthusiasm, was almost bound to produce a full-dress Eastern tale sooner or later. Such a tale would, inevitably, have been far superior, in point of fidelity to actual Eastern models, to the conventional eastern tales which stuffed out with grandiose verbiage the magazines of the Eighteenth Century. Most of these, in fact, were not eastern, and were not even, except by courtesy tales. Their authors knew nothing of the East and in some instances probably cared less... Their aim was not to capture the Oriental spirit, to convey to their readers something of the magic of the East or any nonsense of that sort.[3]

Brian Fothergill stresses Beckford's distinction among his contemporaries "in being more authentic to Western readers and in being based on a wider knowledge of Eastern literature and custom than most other authors of superior Oriental tales possessed."(4)

Other critics, on the other hand, see Vathek within the context of the late Eighteenth Century's Gothic themes, and suggest that like many of his contemporaries, Beckford "had the same love for the sadistic and the macabre; this was the beginning of modern psychological interest in the curious by-ways of the human spirit, and was a characteristic of Romanticism, of which Beckford was a pioneer.."(5)

Most of these critics agree, however, to relate the work - as, indeed, Beckford himself clearly indicated - to the events and setting at the old Fonthill House, especially the great "Egyptian Hall" at Christmas 1781. The novel, many critics agree, has put the East to Western satirical ends. "Beckford appears to identify variously with the perplexities, frustrations, and longings of all three of his main characters"(6). The moral is, after all, that a material self-indulgence might lead to a catastrophe.

Whether Vathek was a mere and immediate response to the imaginative and emotional stimulation of the events at Fonthill or was only a vehicle to descry aspects of his

parents and, hence, pour into it the complications of his private life, the fact is that while most of the reviewers, when refusing to believe it was a genuine Arabian tale (translated from Arabic), had no difficulty in relating it to the Arabian Nights, first translated into English early in the century. Following the practice of the Arabian Nights[7] and its imaginative glamour, Beckford based his tale on a historic personage.

Although certain descriptive passages were said to have been suggested to him by a mass of Oriental literature and engravings[8], Vathek's eventual popularity and influence upon writers was immense. It was followed by numerous picaresque tales with an Oriental setting.

As a product of a heated and highly sensitive imagination, long impregnated with the readings of the Arabian Nights, the Persian Tales[9] and other works of early travellers to the East, Vathek had a great impact on the verse of the Romantics. Southey read it when he was working on his Thalaba (1801)[10], Thomas Moore (Lalla Rookh, 1817) utilised the romantic picture of the East it evoked. Byron was greatly influenced by it[11]. He offered Beckford's tale the most lavish praise and acknowledged his indebtedness to it in a footnote to the Turkish narrative poem "The Giaour", "for correctness of costume, beauty of description, and power of imagination it far surpasses all European imitations...as an Eastern tale,

even Rasselas must bow before it"[12], Byron states. Vathek has, in a way, set the tone of the English Oriental fiction that followed.

The authenticity some critics liked - following Byron - to attach to Beckford needs first to be brought into focus. To his western readers, the accuracy of Beckford's details and the intensity of his conception are so impressive that those travellers who - after him - wanted to exercise their Oriental fantasies, think of his work as a translation from the source, from the heart of the authentic Orient, rather than a story made by an outsider. Yet Beckford is a secondary, detached figure. His work was based on a 'library Orientalism' whose touch of authenticity, however impressive, had to be mediated through the experience of others. Since he is far from the East, he stands somewhat apart from the otherness in it. Therefore, his authenticity is second-hand, his Orientalism parthenogenetic. Not him, rather his consciousness that tours the Orient and its labyrinths, digging its eccentricities out.

Here, however, the purpose is richer. For Beckford, the protagonist Vathek - essentially as an Oriental - is the Other who gains most of the 'significance' due to his 'difference'. The Oriental, then, is a version of that which stands over against us and, by virtue of its unlikeness, helps us to understand what we are in

ourselves. It becomes a curious mirror, the magic mirror in which by staring at the Otherness, we come to see ourselves more clearly. The need for that, however, is not only Beckfordian. Edward Said has argued that the Orient is one of Europe's "deepest and most recurring images of the Other". When the Orient - according to Said - helps to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, and experience[13], it becomes part of the process of self-making; an element in 'our' most essential activity, and it is in that light that the 'treatment' of the Orient gains a large part of its meaning for Beckford. The Orient - though essentially other - becomes the mirror that reflects the opposite and thus enhances and achieves self-realisation.

Beckford's Oriental world is a vast field in which consciousness can seek its opposite and thereby make it possible for the self to realise itself. Beckford made out of the world of Vathek a context which is perspicuous and dense with detail, lavish, sensous, and ironic. As the narrative moves from one moment of melodrama to another the context moves along and supports those moments, contributing by its own intensity of surface to the concentrated force of the text. The world of Vathek is densely and intensely other, parading its difference with a mock solemnity which is remarkable for its deftness of touch. For the self in the making the

combination of density and detail means that there is that much more Otherness to deal with, that much for the self to devour and grow fat on as it seeks its necessary opposite.

Hunger and thirst are the impelling forces of Vathek's personality:

> He sat down indeed to eat; but, of the three hundred dishes that were daily placed before him, he could taste of no more than thirty-two.(14)

All these feasts, the women, the craving of knowledge, are finally instances of this desire to touch at his world in every possible way, from every possible angle, to make it all part of himself. Beckford infused the world with specificity because the more concreteness there is in it the more points there are at which the self can make contact with Otherness and come out to realise itself more fully.

For the observer of such a context, for Beckford as well as his readers, the Caliph Vathek himself is part of that Otherness. He is the object of Beckford's (and our) devouring, as well as being, in himself the apostle of ingestion. Thus, the high order of the attentiveness to detail which characterises Beckford's text is more than a matter of correctness of costume which had impressed Byron.

In some elaborate and garnished narrative, the Orient

serves Beckford, then, to create his own private mythology. This, in effect, is not the product of direct seeing but, of the perusal of other texts. He does *not* possess the matter of the Orient but the matter of other texts which have brought the Orient to him. It is not immediacy, rather it is mediation. Thus, Beckford's text does not speak only of facts of popular culture but of models of possessing experiences. The self is authenticating itself, not only by testing itself against Otherness but rendering the way in which it sees that Otherness and seeks to *possess* it. It is an imperialism of the imagination.

In April 1781, Beckford wrote to Lady Hamilton: "I fear I shall never be...good for anything in this world, but composing airs, building towers, forming gardens, collecting old Japan, and writing a journey to China or the moon."(15) In 1782, he wrote Vathek.

When Beckford, the 'Oriental scholar' who had never set foot in the Orient, chooses to train his fantasies, he restructures *an* Orient by his art and makes its colours, lights, and people visible through his images, rhythms and motifs. Earlier reviewers in the west would, then, see Vathek as a remarkable imitation of an Orient, and welcome such an Orient as the text offers.

The novel, nonetheless, whether taken as exploiting the

imaginative terror and the psychological shock tactics which were entering the English novel at about this time, or whether overtaken by the tide of the vogue identifiable in the romantic Eighteenth century (i.e. the Romantic trend), frames through Beckford's elegant and ironic prose a rich picture of the bizarre, sadistic, grotesque, violent, and highly improbable. "You could scarcely find anything like the Halls of Eblis in the Eastern Writings, for that was my own"[16], Beckford confessed to Cyrus Redding fifty years later.

The narrative, on the other hand is written in a dead pan prose, bristling with a wicked humour, which entirely redeems the conventional setting and makes the follies and inconsistencies of the story - its viciousness - rather entertaining. But there are always the shades of the violent, the vicious, and the sadistic:

> ...the Princes remained in the company of her negresses, who squinted in the most amiable manner from the only eye they had; and leered with exquisite delight, at the sculls and skeletons which Carathis had drawn forth from her cabinets.[17]

Scenes in the tale (especially like that involving the Giaour, who is kicked, kicked again, and finally rolled like a ball through the city of Samarah) demonstrate that when no more exaggeration is possible, the only option remaining is self-satire:

> The Caliph, raising his arm as high as he was able made each of the prizes glitter in the air but, whilst he delivered it, with one hand, to the child, who sprung forward to receive it; he with the other, pushed the poor innocent to the gulph; where the Giaour, with a sullen muttering, incessantly repeated; 'more' 'more'![18]

The supernatural is more of faerie than Gothic; and it presents the bizarre tale of the Caliph with some puckish humour and enlightened good sense.

To add to the horridness and grotesqueness of this world, every thing becomes painted in dark hues. The nightfall which always seems to be overtaking Vathek and his attendants accentuates the starkness and potentousness implicit in the natural setting:

> The curtain of night seemed dropped before him, everything appeared disclosed. The falling waters filled his soul with dejection...Extending himself on the brink of the stream, he turned his eyes towards the blue summits of the mountain, and exclaimed, 'What concealed thou behind thee, pitiless rock? What is passing in thy solitudes?[19]

The brooding and ominous landscape complements the events of the plot by creating an atmosphere of Gothic terror and imminent disaster:

> At length she arrived at the opening of the glen; but instead of coming up to the light, she found herself surrounded by darkness; expecting that, at a considerable distance, a faint spark glimmered by fits. She stopped, a second time: the sound of the

> water-falls mingling their murmurs; the hollow rustlings among the palm-branches: and the funereal screams of the birds from their rifted trunks: all conspired to fill her soul with terror.[20]

There is no normal activity, there are no ordered events. The scenery encourages us to suspend all logical analysis and to accept the validity of the extravagant episodes that transpire.

But everything is too violent to be true and this is what makes Vathek unembarrassedly improbable, an embodiment of the bizarre and fantastic. Yet it leaves the impression that the tale is true of life, that it states profound truths about the nature of humanity.

The juxtaposition of magnificence and absurdity is used consistently in the presentation of Vathek's character and position. Combined with each incident presenting Vathek in an heroic or majestic light is a reminder of the burlesque or the merely human. The supernatural and the 'natural' are blended in a cast of characters that includes Mohamet and Eblis and their respective servants, the Genii and the Giaour at the supernatural level, as well as a host of people who bear an unmistakable humanity, sometimes staggering under its burden and sometimes delighting in its variability. The human characters range from low to high, from the sweating, breathing populace of Samarah to Vathek himself. Naivety

is found in the behaviour of the fifty children, unknown sacrificial victims; sublimity in Vathek's displays of magnificence. What follows is the blending of the ludicrous and the fearful:

> As their strokes were repeated, a hollow noise was heard in the earth; the surface hove up into heaps; and the ghouls, on all sides, protruded their noses to inhale the effluvia, which the carcasses of the woodmen began to emit. They assembled before a sarcophagus of white marble, where Carathis was seated between the bodies of her miserable guides. The Princess received her visitants with distinguished politeness; and, supper being ended, they talked of business.(21)

The tension here is between the terrifying nature of the ghouls and their revolting act of eating corpses on the one hand, on the other, the ironic reserve of the narrator, demonstrated in his choice of the conventional expression, "supper being ended, they talked of business." indeed, most of the shocking excesses presented in the tale are narrated in a similar tone. Vathek's attempted sacrifice of the fifty beautiful children to the appetite of the Giaour, the murder in the tower of one hundred and forty men attempting to rescue Vathek from what they think to be a dangerous fire, Vathek's sacrilege in fouling the sacred broom carried to him by pilgrims from Mecca, all are narrated in a tone of restrained amusement, sympathizing neither with the victims nor with the perpetrators of vicious acts but

encompassing all with sardonic observation. The discrepancy between style and content forces an uncomfortable fusion of the ludicrous and the terrifying. The assumption of the normalcy inherent in the tone creates in the reader an ethical disorientation. The world presented has no apparent moral meaning, yet the ambivalence of the narrator's ironic reserve will not permit that conclusion to be drawn.

Among the figures populating the pages of Vathek are a surprisingly large proportion of the physically grotesque. They are "fifty female negroes mute and blind of the right eye"[22], who are particularly talented in the use of the garotte. Beckford offers also the description of another strange assortment of people, the objects of the charity of the Emir Fakreddin:

> Whenever the Caliph directed his course, objects of pity were sure to swarm round him; the blind, the purblind, smarts without noses, damsels without ears, each to extol the munificence of Fakreddin, who, as well as his attendant grey-beards, dealt about, gratis, plasters and cataplasms to all that applied. At noon, a superb corps of cripples made its appearance; and soon after advanced, by platoons, on the plain, the completest association of invalids that had never been embodied till then. The blind went groping with the blind, the lame limped on together, and the maimed made grotesque gestures to each other with the only arm that remained. The sides of a considerable water-fall were crowded by the deaf; amongest whom were some from Pegu, with ears uncommonly handsome and large, but who were still less

> able to hear than the rest. Nor were there wanting others in abundance with hump-backs; wenny necks; and even horns of an exquisite polish.[23]

What is significant in this passage is not the description of the physically abnormal creatures, but the manner in which that description is presented. The particular fascination with the physically abnormal gives rise here to a tension between the comical and something else that jars with merriment. Beckford presents this spectacle in a form of derisive burlesque that assaults humanity. The material imagery in this context amuses but it also repels by the lack of charity both in the description and in the very act of being amused. To present one or two grotesque personages might be amusing or disturbing enough, but Beckford's canvas teems with grotesques. Not only does he offer platoons of invalids but also a succession of scholars proudly sporting interminable beards, two pious dwarfs who recite the Koran monotonously and endlessly (they are reciting it for the hundred and ninety-ninth time in the course of the tale), the abnormally fat and conceited Bababalouk, Vathek's chief eunuch, whose voice resembles "the ringing of a cracked jar"[24], and an unusually large number of silly, decrepit, and pious grey beards.

Vathek's pursuit of Nouronihar is merely an interlude in the dominant action of the tale, Vathek's quest for

the Subteranean Kingdom, where the tailsman and the treasures of the pre-Adamite kings and of Soliman-Ben-Daoud were deposited. And even the quest, here, is ironic. Vathek's mother, Carathis, is an ironic parody of the mother-figure in the traditional romance. Her wisdom is in the form of knowledge of the occult and her device is accompanied by a domineering power that Vathek finds impossible to resist. When Vathek strays, she places him firmly on the true path, the one which leads ultimately to his damnation. Nouronihar, the lady of pleasure, is similarily an ironic refraction of the traditional figure. The temptation she offers leads Vathek away from the route obtained by his mother from the Infernal Power.

Vathek's quest for the key to the secrets of nature leads him more and more deeply into evil. When Vathek is later damned, the reader does not receive a sense of tragic waste. Beckford conveys his moral.

However, Vathek, Carathis, and the gibbering figures who surround them are both intense and flat, their grossness never more than two-dimensional, their passions never quite credible. They are so unlike the hero's of modern Orients. In contrast to Beckford's, the Durrellian characters are sophisticated ones.

Mountolive is first presented as a scholar soon to be indulging in a scientific expedition. Later, he is set the task of seeking the exoticism of the East, equipped

with his "excellent" Arabic and the other powers of the western world:

> He had been formally educated in England, educated not to wish to feel. All the other valuable lessons he had already mastered, despite his youth - to confront the problems of the drawing-room and the street with sang-froid; but towards personal emotions he could only oppose the nervous silence of a national sensibility almost anaesthetized into clumsy taciturnity: an education in selected reticences and shames...He had heard and read of passion, but regarded it as something which would never impinge on him, and now here it was, bursting into the secret life which, like every overgrown schoolboy, lived on autonomously behind the indulgent screen of everyday manners and transactions, everyday talk and affections.(25)

After that his western talents are to be put on display:

> Out of the corner of his eye he could see his companion's sturdy braced legs. 'Shall I take a turn?' he asked in Arabic. He had already noticed how much pleasure it gave his hosts when he spoke to them in their native tongue. Their answers, smilingly given, were a sort of embrace.'Shall I'?(26)

And,

> Mountolive hardly looked at her, for the thrilling voice alone set up odd little vibrations in his heart which he registered but did not wish to study...His genuine interest and desire to learn filled her with the emotions of a gratitude which surprised her.(27)

The vocabulary of the above passages ("*Out of the corner*

of his eye he could *see*", "he *registered*,'and "did not wish to feel") is all carefully chosen to present the scientific aura surrounding Mountolive's mission. Mountolive, on his part, and like Lawrence of Arabia before him who surprisingly "always rather liked a Khamsin"[28], "found he rather enjoyed the rotting smells of the estuary."[29]

Durrell's characters have, within their strange and garish world, an unmistakable credibility. It is a new Orient. It is colonized now, a possessed one. It should not be a 'library Orientalism' now for the reporting should have the first-hand genuineness and immediacy of its source. It is through immediate sensation that the writer is writing now. The Orient has been normalized:

> It was a complete departure from everything he had known to be thus included in the pattern of a family life based in and nourished by the unconscious pageantry of a feudalism which stretched back certainly as far as the Middle Ages, and perhaps beyond. The world of Burton, Beckford, Lady Hester...Did they still exist? But here, seen from the vantage point of some one inside the canvas his own imagination had painted, he had suddenly found the exotic becoming completely normal. Its poetry was irradiated by the unconsciousness with which it was lived. Mountolive who had already found the open sesame of language ready to hand, suddenly began to feel himself penetrating a foreign country, foreign *moeurs*, for the first time.[30]

The exoticism which marked the Orient for centuries

suddenly disappears from the Alexandrian scenery.

The grotesqueness of this Orient clings to a new dimension. The typical Otherness of the Orient, rather than being a vehicle to descry warnings of the bad self (as in it was in the Beckfordian Orient), is now a confirmation of *our* superiority and *their* inferiority.

Although Durrell has limited the movement of his characters carefully in certain lines of the city, they, nevertheless, seem to be able to pile up more of the eccentricities even those of the real inhabitants of the city, the people, of the wretched Arab quarter of Durrell's city, with whom Durrell seems determined not to intermingle his characters:

> So the young Mountolive noted and pondered upon the strange ways of the people among whom he had come to live, painstakingly as befitted a student of manners so remote from his own; yet also in a kind of ecstasy to find a sort of poetic correspondence between the reality and the dream-picture of the East which he had constructed from his reading.(31)

Durrell's insertion of Mountolive's detailed diary(32) is not done in a very successful way. It makes it patently obvious the layer upon layer technique of piling up more of the eccentric and the queer which is offered to his readers although some of the detail, at times, is out of context. On the other hand, it saves Durrell fantasising incidents since, indeed, most of the detail belongs to

the writings and the early fantasies on the Orient. These notes, in fact, reveal more than a man scrupulously reporting events, persons, and settings, delighting in their bizarreries, never attempting to reduce the incongruities before him.

Durrell's main contention is to present as dark a picture of his Alexandria and as eccentric an ambience as possible. Here, Mountolive's quest for the exotic might come into use:

> She stood, slightly darker than the darkness, and their hands met as if guided by some perfected instinct which found no place in their conscious mind. (33)

The introduction of Leila as "darker than the darkness" confirms the grotesqueness Mountoilve seeks in her. Ironically enough, Mountolive will later lose the enchantment and find no exoticism in the scene in hand. In the few lines prior to the above description, Durrell makes an initiation to the fearful dark setting when describing *some* real inhabitants:

> The light gleamed upon their dark thighs. The darkness was full of their barbaric blitheness. (34)

The mere reoccurrence of the word 'dark' in these two short sentences together with the 'barbarism' add a Gothic touch to the whole scene. Every thing is carefully

presented as some kind of warning. Yet, Mountolive's hand instinctively reaches for Leila whom, by now, we know as darker than the dark.

In his tour through the labyrinths of the Durrellian Orient, all the incidents cited are to be as "representative of the moeurs" of the land:

> But there were other scenes, less palatable perhaps, but nonetheless representative of the *moeurs* of Egypt. One morning early he had witnessed a short incident which took place in the courtyard under his window. A dark youth stood uneasily here before a different Narouz, scowling fiercely yet with ebbing courage into those blue eyes. Mountolive had heard the words 'Master, it was no lie' spoken twice in a low clear voice as he lay reading; he rose and walked to the window in time to see Narouz, who was repeating in a low, obstinate voice, pressed between his teeth into a hiss, the words 'You lied again', perform an act whose carnal brutality thrilled him; he was in time to see his host take out a knife from his belt and sever a portion of the boy's ear-lobe, but slowly, and indeed softly, as one might sever a grape from its stalk with a fruit-knife. A wave of blood flowed down the servant's neck but he stood still. 'Now go' said Narouz in the same diabolical hiss, 'and tell your father that for every lie I will cut a piece of your flesh until we come to the true part, the part which does not lie'. The boy suddenly broke into a staggering run and disappeared with a gasp. Narouz wiped his knife-blade on his baggy trousers and walked up the stairs into the house, whistling. Mountolive was spellbound![35]

Mountolive, unlike Beckford before him, shows sympathy to

the victims of the Orient: "Mountolive was spellbound". This, however, is not done to associate Mountolive with the local victims. It intensifies his otherness to the opposite. Hence it detaches him further from his subject-matter. He is a mere watcher, a surveyor, always reporting, never involved. While the above scene reaffirms Moutolive's *other* identity ("Mountolive was spellbound") in front of the staggering opposite ("Narouz...walked up...whistling"), the scene also would serve in furbishing the gloomy image Durrell prefers *his* Orient to acquire. It, above all, and like many other incidents would easily slip into the old world of the Caliph Vathek. In fact, Mountolive himself reminds of the Beckfordian world:

> By the time we reached it dusk had fallen, and here one entered a brilliantly-coloured engraving which could have illustrated ...what? *Vathek*![36]

And now Durrell is building his own 'Alexandrian Towers of Senses'.

In Mountolive, the narrative consciousness is a constantly energetic voice, moving through the wilderness of the Oriental existence armed with some excellent Arabic which enables him selectively to confront the antithetical Oriental world, to confront it and draw out from it its secret principles.

Mountolive's night journey into the Arab quarter of the

city where but few Europeans ever go in a tarbush and dark sun-glasses has parallels with the older journeys undertaken by the earlier travellers (mainly, Lawrence and Burton). When Mountolive, dressed as an Arab, examines himself in the hall mirror, he sees a "Syrian business-man, a broker from Suez..."[37]. Later, on his way to the child brothel, he imagines himself fulfilling some secret mission "on behalf of that unseen, the numinous, carefully guarded world of hermetic doctors" [38]. Though he has learned to handle public crises, Mountolive has not learned to cope with Eastern personal dilemmas, and, thus confronted with painful realities, he escapes into fiction which builds a defensive wall against self-discovery. His Egyptian experience, which began with youth, love, romance, and freedom, ends on this night in the native quarter in middle-age, futility, and, upon his return to the Embassy, surrender to the arms of the political octopus which controls his present and future.

In contrast, Darley - before Mountolive - also visits a house of prostitution (of which the city is full), as he sits there waiting his turn, he also dons a tarbush which is lying upon the chair beside him. Seeing himself in the mirror, he says, "I want to know what [love making] really means", [39]. He has come there, not to be swept, like Mountolive, into 'unreal' surroundings, but to learn, to understand, the meaning of "the whole portentous scrimmage of sex itself."[40]. Sex and the

Eastern sexual promise are 'traditional' tropes in the Western fantasies.

Darley is seeking self-discovery in a dead, and sexually diseased culture. Alexandria becomes home of the medieval quest. Like the medieval quest of Arthurian legend that underlies Eliot's Waste Land, Durrell's quest involves a ritual journey across water to a 'sick' land. The sickness is both physical and spiritual. When Durrell sets up his parallel designs, his picture is filled out with a whole host of wounded men and women (Darley, Justine, Arnauti, Leila, Clea), with medical doctors (Balthazar, Amaril), with psychologically twisted characters (Scobie, Narouz, Justine), and with psychoanalysits (Balthazar, Pursewarden, and, to an extent, Clea). Wounds, in fact, spiritual and physical ones, are the bulk of Durrell's Egyptian scene. The function of the wounded characters is redemptive. In Alexandria, the hero seeks balms to cure his own wounds and those of his city. There he does battle with all the forces that threaten to destroy. The 'recovery' of the protagonist takes place when he departs from the city for the Greek island.

Others are involved in their own quests. Like a scientist, ready to make sacrifices to fulfill the mammoth task, Mountolive - apart from taking the adventure into the native quarter of the city - uses

other techniques to dig more gems out of the bizarre Alexandrian soil. He, for instance, synchronizes with the 'ugly' Narouz in his prayer:

> ...dismounting, Narouz said in the most natural manner in the world: 'I always say a prayer here - let us pray together, eh?' Mountolive felt abashed, but he dismounted without a word and they stood side by side at the dusty little tomb of the lost saint, Narouz with his eyes raised to the sky and an expression of demonic meekness upon his face. Mountolive imitated his pose exactly, forming his hands into a cup shape and placing them on his breast...Mountolive imitated him, deeply touched.(41)

Mountolive is, here, the Marlow of the Alexandrian jungles. Now even when the two Beckfordian and Durrellian worlds stretch away from each other, they are, nevertheless, bridged by similar scenes of the grotesque, the bizarre, and the barbaric. The Orientals of the two worlds are never different. For instance, these Orientals seem to be always superstitious. Vathek "imagined that the planets had disclosed to him the most marvelous adventures"(42), the Durrellian Leila tells Mountolive that "in Islam every man has his own star which appears when he is born and goes out when he dies?"(43). There is in Durrell's Alexandria, 'an' "Ali, the negro factor, an immense eunuch"(44), who most certainly has his companions in some other world, in Beckford's. Of the numerous slaves belonging to the Caliph, there is a "Halima, a

freed slave from the Sudan" among the Durrellian Alexandrians[45]. One-eyed negresses of Carathis[46] have Hamid, Samira, Mnemajian - the humped-backed dwarf -, Narouze - the harelipped -, his invalid father, and others as their Alexandrian counterparts. The Genii, on the other hand, seem to be omnipresent in any Orient.

These parallels are, by no means, the product of mere co-incidence. They are significant since they display, to a large extent, the very way Durrell has been able to derive images, borrow patterns and techniques from the Orientalist archives (what Said calls the Orientalist doxology)[47] which should contain Beckford's Vathek as one the pioneering works in the field.

Notes:

1. Citations to Vathek in this study are to William Beckford, Vathek, Roger Lonsdale (ed.), Oxford University Press, 1983.
2. S. Sitwell, Beckford And Beckfordism: An Essay, London: Duckworth, 1930, p. 21.
3. J. W. Oliver, The Life Of William Beckford, Norwood Editions, 1977 (A reprint of ed.: London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1932) & Brian Fothergill, Beckford of Fonthill, London: Faber & Faber, 1977.
4. Brian Fothergill, op. cit., p. 128.
5. Boyd Alexandre, England's Wealthiest Son: A Study of William Beckford. London: Cantures Press, 1962, p. 89.
6. Roger Lonsdale, (ed.) in William Beckford, Vathek, London: Oxford University Press. 1970, p. xxix.
7. c. f. various English editions including E. W. Lane (3 vol., 1839-41), and Richard Burton (16 vol., Benares 1885-88).
8. James Lees-Milne numerates Le Brun's Voyage Par la Moscavie en Perse et aux Indes Orientals, Jean Chardin's Voyage en Perse, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's Letters from Turkey, and even The Arabian Nights, as some of the source books in which Beckford was well versed. See Lees-Milne's William Beckford. London: Compton Russell, 1976, p. 25.
9. Persian Tales, or The Thousand and One Days, (compiled by Francois Pétis de la Croix), fourth edition, London: Richard Ware, 1739.
10. Robert Southey, Commonplace Book. London 1849-51, p. 185.
11. Fatma M. Mahmoud suggests that the echoes of Vathek in "The Giaour" might have come naturally to the poet

after his careful reading of Beckford's tale. See Fatma Mousa Mahmoud (Ed.), William Beckford of Fonthill: Bicentenary Essays. London: Kennikat Press, 1972, p. 111.

12. The Poetical Works of Lord Byron, vol. 3, London: John Murray, 1855, p. 49.
13. E. W. Said, Orientalism, London: Routledge & Kegan, 1978, pp. 1-2.
14. William Beckford, op. cit., p. 7.
15. Lewis Melville, The Life and Letters of William Beckford of Fonthill, London: William Heinemann, 1910, p.92.
16. C. Redding, "Recollection of the Author of Vathek", New Monthly Magazine, June 1844.
17. William Beckford, op. cit., p.31.
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19. Ibid, p. 64.
20. Ibid, p. 70.
21. Ibid, p. 92.
22. Ibid, p. 31.
23. Ibid, p. 61-2.
24. Ibid, p. 51.
25. Lawrence Durrell, The Alexandrian Quartet, London: Faber & Faber, 1980, p. 403.
26. Ibid, p. 398.
27. Ibid, p. 409.
28. T. E. Lawrence, The Seven Pillars of Wisdom, London: The Alden Press, 1935, p. 247.
29. Lawrence Durrell, op. cit., p. 398.
30. Ibid, p. 406.
31. Ibid, p. 414-5.
32. The full page of 414.
33. Ibid, p. 402.

34. Ibid, p. 401.
35. Ibid, p. 415-6.
36. Ibid, p. 486.
37. Ibid, p. 624.
38. Ibid, p. 628-9.
39. Ibid, p. 185.
40. Ibid, p. 185.
41. Ibid, p. 416.
42. William Beckford, op. cit., p. 5.
43. Lawrence Durrell, op. cit., p. 425.
44. Ibid, p. 414.
45. Ibid, p. 415.
46. William Beckford, op. cit., p. 31.
47. Edward Said, op. cit., pp. 121-22.

CHAPTER FIVE:

TROPES OF SEXUALITY AND SUBMISSIVENESS IN THE ALEXANDRIA QUARTET

Arrayed in the brilliant colours of exoticism and exuding a full-blown yet uncertain sensibility, the Orient, where unfathomable mysteries dwell and cruel and barbaric scenes are staged, has fascinated and disturbed Europe for a long time. It has been its glittering image but also its mirage.

Orientalism, according to Said, has made its contribution towards the definition of the variegated elements of the sweet dream in which the west has been wallowing for more than four centuries. It has set the stage for the deployment of phantasms. There is no fantasy, though, without sex, and in this a central figure emerges, the very embodiment of the obsession: the Oriental woman.

Tropes of sexuality and Oriental willingness and submissiveness so traditional within the Orientalist sphere, have already institutionalized themselves.[1] And it is this very persistent motif in Western attitudes towards the Orient that finds a way into Durrell's

Quartet. What remains for Durrell is to find the proper vehicle that would lift this particular motif into the quarters of 'his' Orient and put it at the service of his particular ends; of portraying a city of intrigue, corruption, and incestuous love:

> 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.(2)

In Justine as an exemplar of the city, mysticism and sexual promiscuity strangely and conflictingly blend as in most of the inhabitants of the baffling city.

Pursewarden has a long incestuous love affair with his blind sister, Liza. Once in Alexandria, the city witnessed a Cleopatra who had a brother-husband. But, far from attempting to comprehend the 'unfamiliar' phenomenon of 'incestuous love' that marks his city, Durrell, in fact, by linking his characters - a technique so characteristic in Durrell's narrative by now - to figures that relate, in one way or another, to the history of the city is only familiarizing the unfamiliar within the Alexandrian soil and hence making it easier - or so he hopes - for him to depict the city as one big brothel; a city of incest.

Durrell's Alexandria, in fact, suffers from a kind of 'nymphomania'. In a peculiar way, every movement in the

city, every individual, should be analysed, looked at and judged through the touchstones of the city, the incestuous love, and the licentious sexuality that - for the writer - wrap the history of the city. Justine, who a while ago forced Darley to feel the presence of "the ammoniac smell of their incestuous loves to hover like a cloud over the Alexandrian subconscious", again reminds him of one of the city's major figures (who, for Durrell, can include a figure out of Gnostic mythology) in 'its long history of ill-famed love':

> Nevertheless I can still see a direct connection between the picture of Justine bending over the dirty sink with the foetus in it, and poor Sophia of Valentinus who died for a love as perfect as it was wrong-headed.(3)

For Darley Justine resembles Cleopatra as well as Sophia. Hence she is, like Cleopatra, an exampler of the city. Then, this 'wrong-headed' sexuality - which the modern Alexandrians force him to 'think' of - becomes, in fact, an indelible mark of the city itself.

Woven through all Darley's Alexandrian experiences, exciting or disappointing, is a recurrent association between Alexandria and sex:

> Ceylon? Santos? Something about this Egypt, with its burning airless spaces and its unrealized vastness - the grotesque granite monuments to dead pharaohs, the tombs which became cities - something in all this

> suffocated him. It was no place for memory - and the strident curt reality of the day-world was almost more than a human being could bear. Open sores, sex, perfumes, and money.(4)

In the Orientalist world of *idées reçues*, sex is associated with the Orient. It also adds to its exoticism. And the representation of the Oriental woman must, therefore, come in accordance with the necessary 'requirements' of shaping the portrait into which Durrell's Alexandria and the whole of Egypt should fit. In doing so, Durrell shows no manifest desire to free himself from the driving force of the Orientalist discourse which, involuntarily or not, shapes his style.

The problem - the love affairs between Western males and Oriental females - needs to be placed within the context of the dynamic consumption of the Oriental referent which organises the text of Durrell's Quartet.

But his task is probably more demanding. He is to present both images simultaneously: the city's and its women's. Hence, the Alexandrians become the recipients of some (European) desires and consequently the Quartet becomes a catalogue of the Western man's (Darley's) exotic exploits. Alexandria becomes a personal record of the sexual experiences and romance adventures of Durrell's Darley. The city registers the elusive love affairs of the protagonist with almost all its Cleopatras; the 'lustful' Oriental females, who

collectively seem always to surrender to the protagonist's virile Western (charming) powers. The Quartet, however, is more than an Alexandrian portrait of an artist as a young man.

It all comes as a part of the frantic series of attempts to seize - at least - the representational plenitude of a collection of objects observed, of cities explored, of women *possessed*.

In the opening of the Quartet, Darley sketches the main features of the city:

> 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...The sexual provender which lies to hand is staggering in its variety and profusion. You would never mistake it for a happy place. The symbolic lovers of the free Hellenic world are replaced here by something different, something subtly androgynous, inverted upon itself. The Orient cannot rejoice in the sweet anarchy of the body - for it has outstripped the body. I remember Nessim once saying - I think he was quoting - that Alexandria was the great winepress of love; those who emerged from it were the sick men, the solitaries, the prophets - I mean all who have been deeply wounded in their sex.(5)

The "sexual provender" is made to dictate the general mood of the Alexandrian setting. The 'various and

profound sexual provender recalls the association, made by the nineteenth-century travellers (like Flaubert, Burton, ..etc.), between the Orient and the freedom of licentious sex, after which sex in the Orientalist discourse has become a standard commodity. In the nineteenth century, the Orient was the place where a European could enjoy sexual fantasies otherwise unattainable in Europe.(6) "But the Orient is no longer the dreamland. It has inched closer. Colonialism made a grab for it, appropriated it by dint of war, bound its hand and foot with myriad bonds of exploitation, and handed it over to the devouring appetite of the great mother countries, ever hungry for new material".(7) Yet here, it is a feature of Durrell's city just as it has always been an everlasting characteristic of the whole Orient in the Occidental repertoire. It is actually more convenient for Durrell's purposes to come out with a portrait (that will be simultaneously comprehensive and unexceptionable in its technique) of the Alexandria he prefers to present as - among other things - a "city of incest". His ultimate aim would always be to "deliver it all"; to present and represent the whole scene. Sexuality and love are one part but an essential part of this Oriental panorama. In portraying the sexual Alexandrian scene, Durrell feels free and the narrative is spontaneous since there is nothing to stop the flow; no corresponding (native) Alexandrian counter-view to hinder

it. Balthazar makes the point for Durrell's Alexandrians:

> Sex has left the body and entered the imagination now; that is why Arnauti suffered so much with Justine, because she preyed upon all that he might have kept separate _ his artist-hood if you like. He is when all said and done a minor Antony, and she a Cleo. You can read all about it in Shakespeare. And then as far as Alexandria is concerned, you can understand why this is really a city of incest - I mean that here the cult of Serapis was founded'...(8)

Two issues stand out here and they incorporate each other. "He is a minor Antony, She is a Cleo", and then "this is really a city of incest".

Homosexuality, infidelity, infant sexuality, prostitution and child prostitution... all become the major features of Durrell's city. It comes, in its own way, as a major step in fulfilling what seems to be the mammoth task of framing a grotesque image of the city, an image so spectacularly alien as almost to be tinged with the supernatural. But Durrell is never confined. And only within the limitations - if there are any - of such an enclosure, such a portrait would allow the legalization of child prostitution, incest relationships, and sexual intrigues.

In the light of the above the theme of Antony and Cleopatra is being introduced. This theme is manipulated to serve in a similar way the Durrellian aim and is made

to fit within the current mode of writing.

The theme of Antony and Cleopatra appeals to Durrell as it did to the European writers and travellers to Alexandria before him. Each of these writers, however, seems to have deployed that particular theme as a key to the general shape of the depiction of their 'private' Orients. Many of these orients are not necessarily identical with Durrell's.

To E. M. Forster, Cleopatra was a rare flower opening before a simple Roman soldier. The Cleopatra he saw was:

> Voluptuous but watchful, she treated her new lover as she had treated her old. She never bored him, and since grossness means monotony she sharpened his mind to those more delicate delights, where sense verges into spirit. Her infinite variety lay in that. She was the last of a secluded and subtle race, she was a flower that Alexandria had taken three hundred years to produce and that eternity cannot wither, and she unfolded herself to a simple but intelligent Roman soldier.(9)

Forster is leaning on a Shakespearean-like language in his depiction of Cleopatra: ("She was the last of a secluded and subtle race, she was a flower.."). In this way Cleopatra becomes one of the ways Forster could show that "Alexandria has always been a city of love".(10) Forster's narrative clearly contrasts with Durrell's. Forster's emphasis on the rarity of the Alexandrian Cleopatra: "she was a flower that Alexandria had taken three hundred

years to produce" contradicts Durrell's presentation of many 'cheap' replicas of her in his 'Quartetian' Egypt. The 'nobleness' that Forster casts upon Cleopatra is stressed in comparing her with a "*simple* Roman soldier". With Durrell she is to lose all these glories.

For C. P. Cavafy, the old poet of the city, from whom Durrell draws extensively in his Quartet, Cleopatra was merely a figure to be written around. His interest was her sons, lovers, and subjects. He was less inclined towards Cleopatra than her lover.(11)

In the Quartet, however, Cleopatra is first presented - among others - as an "exemplar of the city". Here is Balthazar reminiscing:

> I wish I knew. I wish I knew. So much has been revealed to me by all this that I feel myself to be, as it were, standing upon the threshold of a new book - a new Alexandria. The old evocative outlines which I drew, interwining them with the names of the city's exemplars - Cavafy, Alexander, Cleopatra and the rest - were subjective ones.(12)

Durrell's presentation of Cleopatra as an exemplar of his city is by no means meant to add some royalty to his city; rather it takes away a great deal of the aura of mightness which (especially the Shakespearean Cleopatra) Cleopatra enjoys particularly when she is introduced with her noble Roman Antony. When Darley encounters in the

domino "many people are superstitious about the dress...you will see...many an Antony and Cleopatra as you walk the streets of the city"[13], Cleopatra could now be associated with any of the naive, ridiculously superstitious Alexandrians, as presented by Durrell.

Sexuality is defined by Durrell as "root-knowledge"[14]. Cleopatra has ever represented the sensuality of the whole Orient. But sensuality and mysticism are, in fact the two traditions of Alexandria; and the tension between these polarities defines the soul of Durrell's city. Since Antony and Cleopatra, on the other hand, are genuinely rooted into the 'Alexandrian soil', the insertion of their theme would make - or so it seemed to Durrell - the set pieces of description 'original'. The image of Cleopatra would always cling to her city; and when she is introduced into the narrative, the depiction of the city - Durrell would like to claim - faithfully adheres to the essence of the matter in question.

In this context, Durrell accommodates many Alexandrians in his Quartet as a reenactment of the famous couple.

When Balthazar says of Arnauti and Justine that "he is when all is said and done a sort of minor *Antony* and she is a *Cleo*"[15], he is in fact not only absorbing their nobility by merely associating them with the 'ordinary' Alexandrians, but also displaying his own powers to play with the history of the city. The nicknaming of Cleopatra

as "Cleo" can only be justified within such a context.

In another scene, Mountolive dreams of being on a lake with the brothers Nessim and Narouz armed and stalking him in another boat: "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 feel fear".(16) Even his entrance and exit from Alexandria is clearly framed by Antony's music. As he drives into the city to meet his Cleopatra after so many years, Mountolive finds himself humming an old song, "Jamais de la vie". "Even the hateful song helped him to recover the lost image of an Alexandria he had once found charming".(17) Melissa enrolls herself into Darley's life "like the dangerous queen".(18)

Consequently the whole city becomes the larger stage on which Durrell would perform his own version of Antony And Cleopatra. Mountolive, the English Ambassador, representing the whole West enters on - or so it seems - a love affair with Leila; an Alexandrian Cleopatra. In more than one scene, Mountolive is affirmed to resemble the Shakespearean Antony as well as - deliberately enough - differing from him.

This new Antony is now in Egypt a colonialist, a scholar, and a representative of the west. His old Cleopatra who signified the East once is representing

here once again, in the form of Leila, some 'other' Orient. The modern East, however, does not seem to constitute any danger or a flaw to the noble visitors as it might have done to the noble Roman Antony.

Through cultivation, domestication, and possession the Orient has now been tamed. Consequently, Egypt the woman and Egypt the country both presently *belong* to Mountolive and to his empire respectively:

> In a sense, she had *been* Egypt, his own private Egypt of the mind.(19)

"Private Egypt" here recalls the same private world the Shakespearean Antony felt in Egypt. Egypt, in the person of Cleopatra, and her court, is the private world of love and (by Roman standards) of irresponsibilities.

In the Egypt of the Quartet, however, the domination of the mighty and powerful, hence noble, England - representing the West - over the weak and powerless Egypt - representing the Orient - corresponds with - and indeed facilitates - Mountolive's western male domination and possession of Leila as an Oriental female: "she was his own *private* Egypt". It is an extra privilege that he is enjoying.

In Durrell's Alexandria, the landscape, the time and the space is the woman. And when Mountolive betrays his city, the meeting with Leila is horrifying: "she smelt

like some old Arab lady!", even "the dark skin, ...looked coarse as the skin of an elephant. *He did not recognize her at all!*"[20]. The exoticism of the woman and her place seems to be fading now. Mountolive deserts affection, retreating into his official self. Following their meeting Mountolive is attacked by a troop of child prostitutes; the city has become a nightmare, and this Antony leaves it "hurriedly like a common thief"[21]:

> He would waste no more upon this Egypt of deception and squalor and memories, this betraying landscape which turned emotions into dust, which beggared friendship and destroyed love.[22]

The landscape betrays when its 'dark female principle' withers. Leila, like all other Alexandrian women, is not only an 'extension' of the Egyptian landscape; she is rather its representation. Her 'terrifying' powers can be better grasped as part of the overwhelming powers of the place as a whole:

> He stared at her, thrilled and a little terrified, recognizing in her the perfect submissiveness of the oriental spirit - the absolute feminine submissiveness which is one of the strongest forces in the world.[23]

Although she is the helpless subject of the male gaze, she is able, nonetheless, to thrill as well as terrify him. For him her powers stem from the powers of the city for she and her city are alike for they both have a

strong flavour without having any real character.

The Shakespearean Antony who once discovered his "space"[24] in Egypt is never similar to his Quartet counterpart:

> Let Rome in Timber melt, and the wide arch
> Of the ranged, empire fall! Here is my space.[25]

The old Antony, caught up between "the opposition of power and duty, the East and West", seemed to have fallen victim to that East as has been suggested by some critics.[26] Mountolive is caught between duty - as an Ambassador for England or, indeed the whole West - and passion. When Leila pleads with him to intervene and save her son (Nessim) Mountolive's western reason dominates and he rejects the pleas of his mistress.

The Durrellian Antony is more like Cavafy's. In "The God Abandons Antony"[27], Antony is treated with a remarkable degree of sympathy, viewed by Cavafy as if he were a Greek, ready to face defeat with the knowledge of who he is, and with full pride of the knowledge. In "Antony's Endings"[28] Cavafy's protagonist feels that he is "worshipped blindly till then, - /his wild Alexandrian life/ -, now seemed dull and alien". And, then, by disdaining "madam with her Oriental gestures", by abandoning the city, he regains his dignity. Mountolive, the Durrellian Antony, would fit better here. It is "through her (Leila's) eyes that he began to see Egypt

once more - but extended through a new dimension"[29]. Later when he rejects his Cleopatra, suddenly the whole of Alexandria, the whole of Egypt, becomes "distasteful, burdensome, wearisome to his spirit".[30]

If the Shakespearean Antony was not able to break his "strong Egyptian fetters" and "lost himself in dotage"[31], Durrell's presentation in the Quartet is as if each Antony pulls his Cleopatra from her pedestal, and must both affirm and reverse history; save and desert his queen.

In the encounter of the English Mountolive and the Egyptian Leila there seems to be more than one analogy linking the imperialist project of colonizing other lands and peoples with the fantasy of appropriation of the (what has now become) unveiled, exotic female. There is a similarity between penetrating the secret, fantasized recesses of what is traditionally defined by the Orientalist discourse as the harem and making the masqueraded pilgrimage to Mecca and the holy Kaaba of Islam, which the nineteenth-century travellers (like Sir Richard Burton and A. Kinglake) undertook. This similarity reveals the different guises under which 'European envoys' penetrated the native lands.

Mountolive's intrusion into Leila's life is, thus, that of a saviour. She is first set free from her Egyptian

jail. Although essentially always an Oriental, she is, in fact, initially presented as having undergone the tide of some Oriental affection to the West which exhibits her as a 'westernized Oriental'. Once she dives deep into that affection, she becomes 'caged' into the western symbol manifested, here, by Mountolive her lover.

This theme recurs with the Quartet Antonys. Darley similarly saves Clea from death as he has Melissa before her and tells that "together we staggered with her... [and], like Cleopatra, we unrolled her and placed her on the bed".(32)

Cleopatra, for Durrell, is the city as well as the woman; and the reincarnation of the two is relevant. Cleopatra, in fact, herself becomes Alexandria as well as a Justine, a Melissa, a Leila, a Clea, or any other Alexandrian woman.

It is Egypt - the Cleopatra - that Shakespeare's Antony addresses repeatedly through his last dying words:

> I am dying, Egypt, dying; only
> I here importune death a while, until
> Of many thousand kisses the poor last
> I lay upon thy lips(33)

Later, a similar tone is echoed yet again:

> I am dying Egypt, dying
> Give me some wine and let me speak a little(34)

It is as if the Shakespearean 'noblest and greatest prince of the world' then wanted to affirm that he belonged till the last breath to Egypt the woman as he might have, perhaps, to Egypt the country.

The historically reversed Durrellian Antony also repeats his call to Egypt. It is here, however, for the confirmation of his identity first as a part of the Western colonializing power and later as a dominant male:

> Mountolive smiled. 'Egypt' he said to himself as one might repeat the name of a woman. 'Egypt'.(35)

This repetition of the word 'Egypt' would be better comprehended if linked to Durrell's confirmation of the identity of his Antony:

> He had been formally educated in England, educated not to wish to feel. All the other verbal lessons he had already mastered, despite his youth - to confront the problems of the drawing-room and the street with sang-froid.. He had heard and read of passion, but he regarded it as something which would never impinge on him...It was absurd. To *love* was absurd, like being knocked off the mantelpiece.(36)

The education of "not to wish to feel" is part of Mountolive's training. Durrell's aim, here, is to throw as much glamour as possible on his Mountolive to give him the might and nobility as a true representative of the western scholarship...a 'freshly equipped' Antony:

> And here his English education hampered him at every step. He could not feel happy without feeling guilty.(37)

If Mountolive can be taken as the latest Antony, it is an image of an academic Antony, a scholar engaged in a quest, that Durrell seems to be portraying here.

And it is this very conflict between passion and duty - which formerly seemed to have shaped the Roman Antony's defeat - that stands confronting the current Antony:

> Leila had turned him out as one might turn out an old trunk, throwing everything into confusion. He suspected himself now to be only a mawkish and callow youth, his reserves depleted. With indignation almost, he realized that here at last there was something for which he might even be prepared to die - something whose very crudity carried with it a winged message which pierced to the quick of his mind. Even in the darkness he could feel himself wanting to blush... He caught himself wondering what his mother would think if she could picture them riding among the spectres of these palm-trees by a lake which mirrored a young moon, knee touching knee.(38)

So the conflict commences. But he is in Egypt for other purposes:

> His genuine interest and desire to learn filled her with the emotions of a gratitude which surprised her. It was absurd; but then never had a stranger shown any desire to study and assess them, their language, religion and habits.(39)

The new love affair becomes the means for certain ends. Through it, Mountolive is *able* to achieve a more noble mission...'seeing' Egypt.

Consequently the new Cleopatra succumbs. Like all the other Cleopatras of the Quartet, she suffers - or rather enjoys - that "Oriental desire to please"[40] which is exploited here to achieve Antony's 'noble' ends.

It seems that these virtues and merits, the modern Antonys enjoy, are, indeed, the main attractions for their counter Cleopatras:

> 'But why me, Leila?' as if there was all the choice in the wide world before her, ...
> 'Why you? Because'. And then, to Mountolive's amazement, she recited in a low sweet voice a passage from one of her favourite authors.
> 'There is a destiny now possible to us...And we are rich in an inheritance of honour, bequeathed to us through a thousand years of noble history, which it should be our daily thirst to increase with splendid avarice, so that Englishmen, if it be a sin to covet honour, should be the most offending souls alive'.
> ...It was clear what she saw in him was something like a prototype of a nation which existed now only in her imagination. She was kissing and cherishing a painted image of England...
> 'You asked me *why*' She said, still with contempt. 'Because' with a sigh 'You are English, I suppose'.[41]

Durrell tells how Leila has "elected to love Mountolive's England through him rather than Mountolive himself"[42].

Leila answers "with contempt" as if her love for Mountolive is something that should be taken for granted since he is English. And the affection ("with a sigh") is that of someone addressing a superior idol: "Because.. You are English, I suppose".

Later when she fades and ages into pitiful decay ("she smelt like an old Arab woman"[43]), the whole of Egypt becomes distasteful for him. Consequently, Durrell has Mountolive take revenge for the old Shakespearean Antony. He deserts his Cleopatra as Shakespeare's Cleopatra had deserted her Antony.

She, as an Alexandrian, is submissive and gentle and, in her own way, virtuous and pitiful: "Leila was obedient and pliant, loyal as a finely-bred animal"[44], and "she was simply a victim of that Oriental desire to please"[45]. In all of Durrell's Alexandrian women there is a "pliancy, a resilience which [is] Oriental - a passion to serve".[46] She becomes an occasion as well as an opportunity for Mountolive's musings; first, he is entranced by her self-sufficiency, by the emotional carelessness (accepting the marriage to an invalid, much older husband), and also by what - lying next to him (like Justine and Darley) - she incites him to 'think':

> 'Are you happy?' She whispered and he felt her lips brush his wrist...'Mountolive' she said again, 'David darling' - 'Yes' - 'You are so quiet. I thought you must be asleep'. Mountolive frowned, confronting his

> own dispersed inner nature. 'I was thinking' he said. Once more he felt her lips on his wrist.(47)

Less a woman than a display of impressive but verbally unexpressive femininity, Leila becomes the prototype of Durrell's Alexandrian woman. Although, in her interest in languages and the world of books, she is presented as being different from the 'typical' Egyptian woman. She, nonetheless, acquires, for Durrell, the essential Oriental features:

> She gave everything, knowing the value of nothing, a true *parvenue* of the soul...Her body meant nothing to her. It was a dupe. Her modesty was supreme. This sort of giving is really shocking because it is as simple as an Arab, without precociousness, unrefined as a drinking habit among peasants. It was born long before the idea of love was formed in the fragmented psyche of European man - the knowledge (or invention) of which was to make him the most vulnerable of creatures whose subject-matter would otherwise have belonged to religion - its true sphere of operation.(48)

For Durrell, what adds to Leila's inferiority to her lover is not only her un-matching culture but also the simple fact of her gender. In this she shares the same complex with the rest of the Alexandrian female cast. Durrell, the artist, as part of the 'great' male tribe, becomes an adventurer: Justine's chevalier, Semira's knight in search of the Holy Grail, and Leila's crusader on some medieval quest.

Every Antony is re-magnified by the association with his Cleopatra:

> I began to realize with awe the enormous reflexive power of woman - the fecund passivity with which, like the moon, she borrows her second-hand light from the male sun.(49)

"Woman have," Virginia Woolf tells, "served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size"(50). Durrell works his characters within the limitation of such parameters. Although he is, in a way, acknowledging the female "enormous" power he is, nonetheless, defining it only as a mere reflection of the associating male.

Jane L. Pinchin(51) rightly suggests that in the Quartet sex and hate are heterosexual. In fact, one is behoved to believe that the mating couple here is Alexandria and *its* artist, Cleopatra and her academic Antony. The woman of the pair becomes the man's landscape and history, his time and his space in the way the Shakespearean Cleopatra was her lover's space. In the Quartet, however, such a space acquires new definitions. As an explorer, Durrell is veiling and unveiling the city; "Alexandria, princess and whore, the royal city and the *anus mundi*"(52). Durrell's lady is alternately passive and a treacherous queen, seldom indifferent or benevolent.

Subsequently, some Antonys are pushed to create their own Cleopatras. They seem to be drawn now to a new story of Pygmalion. Through the love story of the European Amaril and the local Alexandrian Semira, the modern Antony sets the Orient's numerous oddities right, creating new images out of the most 'familiar' ones:

> You see, he is after all building a woman of his own fancy, a face to a husband's own specifications; only Pygmalion had such a chance before! He is working on the project as if his life depended on it - which in a way I suppose it does.(53)

Amaril creates a nose for Semira; and - asked by Darley - again creates an arm for Clea who surprisingly starts to paint better. Liza, similarily, overcomes her blindness when she starts seeing through the eyes of her Mountolive. The story of creation reverses the sexuality of birth, allowing the new Antony to create his idle Cleopatra and thus calm the fears he has of her seductive powers. This, after all, speaks more of the colonialist's mission, of building up, creating and looking after the colonies as personal properties. The land and the people are within his domain; and, ultimately, he is their 'creator':

> I am a doctor from Europe and I will give her a new nose.(54)

Another confirmation of the identity is stressed here: "a doctor *from Europe*". For the local Semira her 'mender' is

not only a male but a European as well. Her dependence on his mercy towards her (to give her a new nose) very much correlates to her country's dependence on her doctor's culture to give birth and exist. In other words her face is only completed by his European touch like the discovery of her country which was only unearthed -and hence represented- by European hands. His Europe is the 'Professor Higgins'; her Egypt is the 'Eliza Doolittle'.

The result is that all this works to ease the way for Durrell's endeavours to add more to the anomalies of his Orient and thus to highlight the grotesque images of the city and its - in more than one sense - mutilated citizens. This, consequently, shapes for Durrell the uniqueness as well as the exoticism within the Alexandrian World.

Notes:

1. In E. W Lane's Account of the Manners and customs of the Modern Egyptians, London: John Murray, 1860. Also in Gustave Flaubert's Voyage en Egypt, octobre 1849 - juillet 1850, Paris: Entente, 1986.
2. Lawrence Durrell, The Alexandria Quartet, London: Faber & Faber. 1963 (1980 edition), P. 23.
3. Ibid, p. 23.
4. Ibid, p. 522-3.
5. Ibid, p. 17.
6. For a further insight into the theme of Oriental sex in the writings of nineteenth-century travellers, see Said's extensive study of Flaubert in Orientalism, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978, pp. 186-90.
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CHAPTER SIX:

Arabs Ancient & Modern:
The Arabian Days of Edna O'Brien

According to Said, there are certain features - long ago adopted by Western travellers - that seem omnipresent within the Orientalist discourse throughout its history since it started taking its first shapes by the latter part of the eighteenth century. Said feels that in the Western writings there is a certain uniform of authority exercise and prejudice towards the Orient. And although there is, in Said's view, some accommodation for individuality in style and approach to the Orient by the Western writer who "believed his vision of things Oriental was individual, self-created out of some intensely personal encounter with the Orient, Islam, or the Arabs", Said mainly stresses that in the final analysis the great majority of Western writers have "expressed the traditional Western hostility to and fear of the Orient"(1).

In her brief trip to Arabia, Edna O'Brien provides an appropriate example to 'examine' Said's notion of the

consistency of western discourse's belligerence towards the Orient, Arabia, and the Arabs.

Through the different texts examined this study has been trying to demonstrate where it is valid to apply Said's theories. O'Brien's text on Arabia, however, primarily diverges from all the works already discussed (except Raban's) for it is neither the product of years of residence among the Arabs (of Durrell and Lawrence) nor is it the creation of a 'long-shot' fantasy (of Beckford). Her expedition is only a brief one. Her text, then, comprises of those reflections and emotions of those few weeks of touring some Arab states in the Arabian Gulf area. Nonetheless, her work is eligible to be tested - as will be demonstrated later in this chapter - within Said's indictment of the adversity that sweeps a number of western writings that adopt the Orient and the Orientals as their main themes.

Perhaps, what makes this text particularly significant among the works surveyed in this study is the simple fact that it is the memoirs of a trip to Arabia by a *woman* writer. Arabia has long, and still is, viewed (by Western eyes) as no heavenly place for (even its own) women. What is significant here, then, is to see O'Brien's moods and perspectives as a woman-writer in treating Arabia as the main genre. Similarly and since local women have always been portrayed as aliens (by Western travellers) within their male-ruled societies, it is equally important to

highlight O'Brien's own double 'otherness' when viewed by Arab eyes first as an alien (by belonging to the West) to the land and later as a woman-alien (for belonging to the female gender).

O'Brien seems first keen to ratify the experiences of her Western pioneers or, at least, the female travellers among them. She herself ostensibly makes every endeavour to touch the exoticism and the mysticism that attracted and haunted most western travellers to the East. The earlier travellers become her guiding lights. Her idols are Lawrence, Thesiger, and Doughty. She wishes to breathe into their worlds; her ultimate aim is to relive Lawrence, Thesiger, Doughty each in his own world. She wants to comprehend what has driven to the Orient a Lady Jane Digby who "flung herself headlong into it...and married a Bedouin chief"?(2) Her task is to prove the Orientalist hypothesis of the Arab as she sees it within the western reservoir:

> I am thinking now of the East. The East where Holman Hunt travelled for two years sketching the faces that resembled the face of Christ. Arabia, where Mr Robin Bidwell in his book Travellers In Arabia says more people have gone to discover themselves rather than the Peninsula.(3)

O'Brien makes it clear that she is not indulging in any adventure but, surely, through her trip she is keen to feel Arabia the mirror; the land that offers the western

adventurer self-discovery. T. E. Lawrence sets an ideal example for O'Brien in this respect. For him, Arabia - the other - was the purifying instrument. Out of its desert he achieves self-revelation. When she sets out on her trip, O'Brien wishes to experience that medium; to feel Arabia's forces; to perceive how 'other' is the 'other'. It is a comparison, then, that she would like to set up between the picture offered by the traditional Orientalist depiction of Arabia and those photographs - of Arabia - a 'modern' camera could show her. Because, for once, even the ambience seems to be different now: "The simple life is now a figment"(4). There are no longer the harsh settings, the dull atmosphere that run almost monotonously in most of the 'traditional' Orientalist writings on Arabia and, indeed, almost in all the writings already cited in this study. In the new Arabia, everything smells fresh:

> From my room I could see a variety of pale colours that called for as yet uncrystallized adjectives. Suffice it to say that the water was of the softest, lightest, merest blue, and on the near horizon the blue was so hazy that it was as if the lining had dropped out of the clouds. The air itself was full of nourishment before the sun came up.(5)

Clearly this description in general differs from any of the "landscape-tones" that fill the pages of Durrell's Quartet. At the same time, it opposes the stereotyped Arabian scenery (of shabby deserts and merciless winds)

as presented in the works of the Orientalist Arabian Classics. The vocabulary of the above passage is by no means deployed to register a mundane, squalid or imprisoning surrounding as it was depicted by Lawrence, Durrell, and - in some instances - even by Raban. Rather the description speaks of fertility, openness, and fecundity: "The water was of softest, lightest, merriest blue...and the air..was full of nourishment".

When O'Brien travelled to Arabia, she was equipped with most of the Classics of British Arabism:

> I brought Mr Thesiger, Mr Doughty, Mr Burckhardt, Miss Sybille Bedford,...[6]

Even the emphasis on the titles, she is attaching to her guiding figures (*Mr* Thesiger, *Mr* Doughty, *Mr* Burckhardt, *Miss* Sybille Bedford), is introduced to indicate that in the records of this field of adventure it is more men than women of the West that took the risk to penetrate the unknown of Arabia.

But to her amazement..."there is no romance here, how could there be? The air murmurs with money".[7] This is being presented as some kind of disillusionment; even a 'betrayal' to her by her guiding companions.

As a western writer touring Arabia, she is, essentially, required first to register the exotic, the mystic, and the strikingly other of the alien land. Again, her idols and rivals are her guides, the western

pioneers of the field. She calls upon her informants to witness the poignant metamorphosis taking place. The muddle of westernizing Arabia has disarrayed everything. Everything is unrecognizable; every corner incomprehensible. Hence, Mr Thesiger, Mr Doughty, Mr Burckhardt, and Miss Bedford are all summoned by the genii of the new change to face up with the new challenge of each finding his or her own Arabian World from the modern 'jumble'.

O'Brien has now travelled to the land of oil. She finds out that Arabia "has taken a plunge into the twentieth century". The Orient of Doughty and Burckhardt seems to be disappearing and fading away: "the incalculable leap from poverty and obscurity"(8). Her ultimate dream is to see the tribesmen and their desert. It is as if O'Brien's whole encounter would be rendered to some unsuccessful 'Vathekian quest' for the key to a 'Doughty-Arabia'. The vision that hovers in O'Brien's mind before commencing the journey has all become a will-o'-the-wisp:

> I had not imagined towers of concrete as far as the eye could see, cranes, tanks, a sense of unfinishedness as if the place had just been dropped higgledy-piggledy from the sky.(9)

In his reading of some of Joseph Conrad's works, V. S. Naipaul states that he saw in Conrad "a man offering, as in Nostromo, a vision of the world's half made societies as places which continuously made and unmade

themselves...dismal, but deeply felt: a kind of truth and half a consolation".[10] O'Brien's modern Arabia is being presented within the parameters of such a definition; the lines "..a sense of unfinishedness as if the place had just been dropped higgledy-piggledy from the sky" encapsulate the abrupt metamorphosis from emptiness to urban activity.

O'Brien's Arabia is the land of disillusioning and, at best, of "half a consolation". While the strong desire in her to relive past ages of heroism remains ignited at the unconscious level, the realities of the present changes – which seem to be the main cause of her discomforts – become too intrusive for her to disregard.

As her Arabian days pass, she becomes more disillusioned:

> Very soon I felt homesick. The savage loves his native shore. The domestic life that I normally rail against, struck me as being dear and purposeful. I wanted a disguise, to wear Eastern clothings, to put Henna on my hands and feel, and to pass as one of them. I wanted to understand.[11]

The "disguise" O'Brien is contemplating here is - for her - the licence that 'enabled' the pioneers (Lawrence, Thesiger, Doughty, Burckhardt) to produce each in 'his' own way his own Orient. "To pass as one of them" registers not only the gulf between her and the people she found herself among but also the 'sine qua non' of

otherness of those very people as her own 'subject-matter'. Therefore the desperate dilemma of "I wanted to understand" could designate a wish for some 'comprehension' of the oriental panorama being displayed as well as a justification for the drastic shift from the 'normal' visions that every Classic of the field would transmit to those visions that her eyes are currently conveying. Therefore, O'Brien seems to be aware that the convention of travel as adventure is out of context here.

However, not everything comes according to her wishes. In her search for Arabia and the Arabs she has read about, she meets a solid wall of procrastination and flannel. What makes the wall (that is blocking the way into her Arabs) even thicker is the fact of her own womanhood. Her reception is hence different from her predecessors. In the land of Arabia, there is already the quality of otherness often associated with the figure of women in these male-ruled societies. O'Brien, therefore, suffers the burden double. She is not only a traveller from the foreign worlds but also a woman who by the 'common sense' of the land should not intrude into the male spheres. What makes matters worse for O'Brien is that she seems to be rejected even by her own gender: the Arab women:

> All through my stay I found resistance. The woman would not speak to me although I made it clear that I really did not want to cross their bedroom doors...At

> any rate my stay was without that fine correspondence between their life and mine, between our two cultures.(12)

Always refused access, O'Brien starts longing for the wildness as well as the openness of the Doughty-Lawrence-Thesiger Arab. Now every route seems to be blocked:

> Hegel identified the East with nature and saw the whole process of our civilization as an escape from nature. If he were alive today he would revise his thoughts.(13)

The sense of freedom the old travellers enjoyed in the once 'natural' Arabia, is being denied to O'Brien now. The degenerating and corrupting tide of westernizing hinders her access to the hearts of the natives. She strives for "that fine correspondence between their life and mine, between our two cultures". When she is asked to wait long she is more reminded of the rift between the two worlds:

> Here for me was the crux of it all and to my mind the biggest cultural conflict - the difference between movement and stasis, between concealment and self expression, between being a woman of the East and a woman of the West.(14)

This awareness (of the cultural conflict) is one striking quality of O'Brien's brief work. It even constitutes her divergence as a Western writer dealing with Arabia from the more 'common' trends of 'handling' the Arabian theme in the way it was demonstrated in the traditional

writings of Beckford, Lawrence, and, later, Durrell (as a representative of the modern era). Her endeavour to bridge between the two cultures is, at no point, shown to be strictly tied to the dichotomy of the powerful West and the unprivileged East as this was probably made more manifest in Durrell's writings among the group of English writers already cited in this study. The main action of O'Brien's work is not framed by the interaction between the personality of the western traveller and a *totally* different and for her utterly unassimilable environment and set of mores as it had been materialized in the works of Lawrence and Durrell.

It is from a vantage point such as the above that O'Brien starts visualizing her Arabs. What is lacking is an exit from the air of confusion the old imprints left on her mind. This was even made worse with the absence of 'cultural channels'. Therefore:

> I could see that they were creatures of passion but knew alas that I would not be the recipient of it...I wonder if they watch me with the same confoundedness as I was watching them.(15)

Unable to communicate - in the Lawrentine and the Thesigerian sense of the word - she is never able to exercise the western power of 'clairvoyance' that was so symptomatic of Durrell's western characters for instance. Hence she can only sit and "*wonder* if they watch me with

the same confoundedness as I was watching them". The "confoundedness" in the above passage sums up O'Brien's position as a Western traveller in line with the other adventurers who preceded her. Not enough room is allowed in the extract above for the notion of superiority in treating the Arabs as subject-matter. Moreover, when O'Brien "wonders" if the locals watch her with a similar "confoundedness", she is in fact allowing the possibility that she herself could be seen as the other of "her own" other. At the same time, the lack of communication with the natives which O'Brien mourns is never related to some 'natural' lacking within the Moslem mind as, for instance, was the case for Durrell's Alexandrians.

The reflection of those few hot and uncomfortable days that O'Brien spent in her Arabia, is a rueful comedy, set mainly in lonely, air-conditioned hotel rooms where the heroine waits for unkept appointments while her Irish temper rises. When she succeeds in meeting the Arabs, they seem to evade her questions with infuriating generalities:

> Please, they were saying, what kind of book was I writing? I said I would like to see the desert, see the tribes, see the Arabia that I had read of.(16)

It looks as if she was shown a different Arabia. In O'Brien's Arabia everything is perpetually moving, changing, and forever unattainable. Changes that were long denied to the Orient of the Orientalists seem to

start taking place. O'Brien finds, however, everything ugly and devoid of interest. The 'richness' of the old Arabia has vanished. O'Brien's Arab world is now similar _ and much closer _ to her Western world. Hence, it is dry. It is never appealing.

What strikes more about this Arab world is that it is instantly recreated. Therefore, O'Brien seems to agree with Durrell that the spirit of the place and the fate of its inhabitants are interlocked. Now, the Arab and his Arabia share the same fate as a film-star. Arabia the rising, after it has been "discovered, made famous, and is struggling for the first time with the different demands of fame, necessity and glamour":

> Once upon a time the desert, still the desert, and now city, instant city at that.(17)

The "instant" and the urgency of the new Arabia O'Brien is stressing here once again recalls Naipaul's theme that the places which continuously made and unmade themselves are half-made societies. The transformation of the Arabian desert into a modern city O'Brien is contemplating here also exhibits the heavy impact of the well-established Arabia's image-printing. For once she discovers some major change within that image, the present scene would, then, look "instant": "Once..the desert, still the desert, [but] now city".

Surveyed from above, hence from a distance and never near, the desert daunts O'Brien as it did her Western guides before her:

> But then of course I had not seen the desert, not yet experienced the great sensation of light, space, immense solitude, and the fear or thrill of levitation. I had to wait.(18)

O'Brien makes no secret her indebtedness to her guides. The detailed expressions of various - yet unfelt - feelings the desert incites in her ("sensation of light, immense solitude, fear or thrill of levitation") are only recollections of some past experiences of past travellers. Such feelings are excited only by the virtue of her 'official' knowledge. The reliance on the Classics can also be understood in view of her incapacity and limitation to undertake a personal adventure of penetrating the heart of the desert. Her willingness to "wait" marks her Arabian encounter in conjunction with her idolized predecessors who never seemed to be restricted in pursuing their ambitions. She is, in fact, trying to compare their freedom of movement to hers.

Afterwards, the desert, typically, becomes the cause of her puzzlement, awe, and fear:

> My first experience of the desert was profound, even daunting. What struck me was the scale of it _ a visual eternity. A herd of camels, statuesque in their course, were ambling towards a well... The desert drives other thoughts away. It is compelling ...Breathtaking, as well as frightening. It is the

> immensity of the desert that daunts one. Did God make this world? So little to see, so little to distract, nothing to cling to, a sort of silence of ethos. Mr Robin Bidwell was right. A person could not pretend here. So little, so much. A figure, perhaps a man, yes probably a man, with a cloth on his head bound tight and over it a bunch of faggots. Where did he get them and what is he doing? To comprehend eternity perhaps one should live like this. I ached for my own house, for my fireside, for a rug over my shoulders. I felt transplanted. Now the colour had changed and some sand was red and some was ochre. Then suddenly, a factory, for making silicate bricks.(19)

This description belongs to the desert scenery of The Seven Pillars and Arabia Deserta. Yet, perhaps it is not much like both in the sense that it denotes O'Brien's physical and spiritual detachment from her scene. It is not so much as an individual possessing experience but as a way of confirming her otherness as a Westerner ("it struck me with the scale of it", "I ached for my own house") and as a female ("a figure, perhaps a man, yet probably a man"..."nothing to cling to"), that these passages are set. O'Brien's portrayal of the desert, therefore, seems to support Said's observation of the consistency and uniformity within the western discourse when a prominent oriental motif - such as the desert - is in question. Lawrence as well as Doughty - the two 'traditional desert' writers - measured themselves as O'Brien does ("It is compelling ...breathtaking, as well as frightening.. It is the immensity of the desert that

daunts one") against the dimensionlessness of the monstrous and fearful desert.

O'Brien's introduction to the desert, on the other hand, differs from Durrell's since all the articulations of the Quartet's characters regarding the desert are not presented as a reflex to some actual experience from within (Lawrence's) or immediate reactions based on even a brief encounter (like O'Brien's) that might endorse some 'legitimacy' to the passed judgements. In contrast to O'Brien, with Durrell the desert is always a negative component of a much larger hostile environment.

Yet as a broader issue O'Brien's desert is given a new dimension. The desert is now touched, explored and consequently degenerated. The Arabian desert is tamed now: "Now the colour had changed and some sand was red and some was ochre. Then suddenly, a factory, for making silicate bricks". If the desert has once engulfed Darley and his city with fear, then, it is all vanishing now. Indeed, the desert is itself becoming the city:

> We drive through a city that is suburbia stuck in the desert: lock-up shops whose wares are impossible to describe, with dwellings above. Of all the things I see a sign for Kentucky Chicken. It was such inauspicious unlyrical things that made me long for Piccadilly Circus though normally I eschew it.(20)

For O'Brien, Arabia suffers from schizophrenia. At times, it belongs to some Lawrentine desert world. At

others it would resemble a modern city but not "like Piccadilly Circus" where a "Kentucky chicken" sign would seem 'inauspiciousally unlyrical'.

O'Brien, however, never feels contented with this. Her ultimate aim is, after all, to re-live some of the experiences of Doughty or Thesiger. And when observed from above, essentially the same desert - which is domesticated now - incites in her old "excitements of other travellers, very often male travellers". It is as if she even wanted to relate her fear of the place to the essence of her femininity:

> Soon the helicopter was scudding over the city and its sprawling outskirts, and in the most sudden and radical way we were presently introduced to the real desert. To say this was startling is not to give an adequate impression of what it did to me - the very mind was turning into sand. I had read of immense plains strewn with numberless undulating hills, and sand with not a trace of vegetation to animate it or a bird to off-set the calm. But to read is one thing, to see is another...My eyes look up, down, left, and right, and on all sides there are these enclosing universes of sand. But over it all an unspeakable wizard strangeness. One's images are to be infused by this.(21)

The heavy vocabulary and the detailed recording of the encounter deployed in this passage tells more of the consternation that fills the shivering air of such scenes: "the very mind was turning into sand",.. "My eyes look up, down, left, and right",.."on all sides there are

these enclosing universes of sand", and "over it all an unspeakable wizard strangeness...One's images are to be infused by this". Yet "the strangeness" in the closing statement of the passage confirms more her alienation to one essential (most familiar) constituency within the Arabian sphere. In fact this is more affirmed when she strives to break the barrier she feels throughout the whole encounter with the people on whom she would like to write.

Rather than adding to the privileges (as it probably once did to Lawrence of Arabia and to most of the European Alexandrians of the Quartet), O'Brien's singularity among the modern Arabs as a European and as a female leaves her in a predicament:

> I was the only woman there but now I was used to that and felt neither brave nor meek, just singular.(22)

The singularity, here, is a feature of limitation - or the lack - of the power that is needed in treating the subject matter. It is a confirmation of weakness rather than a display of uniqueness. This is no match with the 'Lawrentine White *Man*' - at the heart of the dark Arabian desert - whose virtues alone would uplift, educate, enlighten the Arabs and orchestrate their revolts. And this is only part of O'Brien's dilemma in modern Arabia:

> There I was...the recipient of several handshakes and as many sips of coffee, a mere writer in a total

dilemma about what she should write.[23]

The aura, prestige, and uniqueness, Doughty and Lawrence enjoyed in their times as envoys from the western world as well as authoritative writers (in the field), is all missing now: "There I was...a mere writer in a total dilemma". The individual personality of authors like Lawrence and Doughty, expressed through the medium of powerful and individual styles of writing, came to constitute the most important and striking qualities of their works. This is not to be applied to O'Brien's. When the male Western travellers crossed the hareem quarters and visualized the Oriental woman in stereotypes throughout centuries, O'Brien, who - by gender - belongs to them, feels handicapped even to get across to the hareem of the new, open Arabia. She is refused the means into Arabia's 'neo-hareem' after they have been set free from their oriental jails and only just started to establish themselves (like Western women) as individuals. These are no longer desert-women. Today's Arabian hareem are unveiled and look 'westernized' enough. This, nonetheless, did not make O'Brien's task of communicating with them any easier.

Confronted with such difficulties, and, so unlike the traditional western travellers, O'Brien seems very much aware of the cultural gulf that separates her from the people whom she has chosen as the subject-matter. In her

attempt to bridge the gap, she often seems to be viewing them with equal status to herself. In so doing, she is equally ratifying and rectifying the old experiences of past travellers. She discovers that most are invalid to her modern Arabia:

> I wondered if they were as ignorant of my world as those who asked Mr Doughty if the moon might be seen in western lands, or the number of eunuchs Queen Victoria had.(24)

In contrast to her predecessors, only in the O'Brien world the subject-matter does not seem to be static and monotonous. There is first a clear distinction between time and place which was absented by the eternal tense of the earlier writings of Lawrence, and more specifically Durrell. The current ("my world") is carefully split from the past ("Mr Doughty's"). There is, in addition, probably for the first time a supposition that the locals themselves might have their own images of the 'alien world' the touring traveller belongs to: "I wondered if they were..ignorant of my world". To O'Brien's, then, the "other" is the 'peculiar' other, the 'not-like me' other, in comparison to Durrell's, for instance, the 'rejected' other, or, at times, the 'inferior' other.

Said makes the observation that "constantly, among themselves Orientalist treat each other's work in the same citationary way". To this effect he introduces the example of Burton. He says that "Burton, for example,

would deal with the Arabian Nights or with Egypt indirectly, through Lane's work, by citing his predecessor, challenging him even though he was granting him very great authority".[25] Edna O'Brien does allude to the predecessors (especially to Doughty) but at no point does her intention confirm their great authority nor does she give any validity to their utterances upon the Arabia she is contemplating at a given stage of time which is being presented as completely different from theirs.

The theme of the time/place change is made more vivid in another occasion:

> Some Bedouin woman of the past has asked Mr Burckhardt to whom he had lent his wife while he was travelling. No such ignorant thralldom pervades today's thinking but a quality does persist and it is the quality of reserve...The theme and torments of any modern Western woman's novel would be deemed irrelevant here.[26]

The distinction she is making between her Arabs and Doughty's is very significant. But although her Arabian women are different from that of Burckhardt's, to O'Brien they essentially still display the old distinctive quality of reserve often alluded to within the traditional western discourse as one of the peculiarities attributed to the Arabian hareem. Thus, more space is made to display the disjunction between her western world and theirs.

For O'Brien the image of the modern Arab woman is

hybrid. She is once presented through some traditional stereotyping vocabulary (of submissiveness and reserve) designating her imprisonment, backwardness, and naivety or else as a modern figure of some modern Arabian Nights extravaganza and lavishments in which she would appear to be shallow, self-contented but surprisingly happy:

> The interior of their houses are brown, enclosed and sunken... The window was in fact the sky. They would have to fly in order to get out. But the world outside is perhaps one they would recoil from.(27)

There is here a touch of the old stereotyping of hareem quarters though reconciled with a treatment of a modern issue. Women of the new Arabia still seem to be locked in their detached cells, reserved. This quality, however, could be one of their own choice as O'Brien emphasizes in the final sentence of the above quotation. And now O'Brien is stressing more her feminine tones by defending the oriental woman who is still kept as 'the man's subject'.

She, on the other hand, feels, like Durrell, that the Orient is not an Orient without its bizarre, mundane, and mystic zones:

> Next evening I saw a couching camel's throat being slit. It was for a wedding. Looking away I directed my eyes instead to the feet of the men rehearsing the dance that they would do next day. Yet all the time I knew that on the far side of the tent the beast was

> falling to its feet and was presently being skinned.[28]

This passage carries a remarkable similarity to the tone of both Darley's and Mountolive's account of some similar incidents on the streets of the Quartet. The significance could be the same as well. While confirming on one side the alienation of the first-pronoun of the passage ("I saw"), confirming her humanity as well as her 'feminine' squeamishness ("looking away"), is all put in a stark contrast to the grotesque (and, by western standards, undercivilised) spirit of the place (which is dominated by the males: "I directed my eyes..to the feet of the men") in which slaughtering is a common ritual ("a couching camel's throat being slit...presently being skinned"). But, yet again, O'Brien, unlike Durrell, was able to see that in the whole event there were "elements of ritual, of strangeness, of beauty and of cruelty".

In approaching her subject-matter like a scholar, O'Brien shares the Europeanism of the Quartet's Mountolive when she refuses to let her emotions interfere with her scholarly mission:

> I said emotiveness was not on my agenda but that I wanted to know the people, soul speaking back to soul, cadence, truth, these things.[29]

Unlike the supreme Mountolive there does not seem to be any hierarchy in her approach to the natives. There is a

rejection of all guises in her desire for intimacy. Her perspective is different from Durrell's. It is non-representative; non-manipulative.

Edna O'Brien is a passer-by in Arabia. She is not like Lawrence or, to that effect, any of the characters of the Quartet. Her impressions are therefore brief but by no means insignificant. Her task of investigating the new Arabia in view of the west's Arab Classics is a mammoth one.

She is very much aware of limitations of her short tour through Arabia; in fact, she thinks that "it takes a life time to discover.."[30]. Nevertheless, on certain occasions O'Brien falls victim and starts deploying textual attitudes that belong to the world of *idées reçues;* the old western traditions of generalizing and passing judgements on Arabia that do not relate to any evidence but to the writer's circumscriptions and, at times, biased preconceptions. Despite her endeavour to the contrary- she falls prey to the inevitable exotic veil of subjective, particularly archaic colouring of the English 'Arabian'. In the O'Brien diary this is illustrated in her rather long statements (if compared to the length of the whole book) that she passes on Islam and other aspects of the Arabian world. O'Brien announces that "Islam means to surrender.. [Muhammad] was a military man ..His creed did not say turn the other cheek [and] at sundown on the roads cars would suddenly stop and men

jump out for the praying rituals"[31]. Similarly her statement on the local women - that they "are reticent and guarded in the extreme"[32] - cannot be seen but as wrapped with generalisation for it is quite difficult to accept that O'Brien did meet every woman in Arabia and was therefore able to pass such a judgement. In so doing, O'Brien provides a strong evidence for the realization of Said's remark that

> years of tradition had encrusted discourse about such matters as the Semitic or Oriental spirit with some legitimacy. Primitiveness therefore inhered in the Orient, *was* the Orient, an idea to which anyone dealing with or writing about the Orient had to return, as if to a touchstone outcasting time or experience.[33]

Compared to the exercise of this Orientalist ritual as performed by Lawrence, Durrell, or even Raban, O'Brien's practice of generalisation is nonetheless a mild one.

O'Brien's Arabian diary largely differs from that of Durrell or of Lawrence in its generous supply of photographs.

Susan Sontag argues that "the most grandiose result of the photographic enterprise is to give us the sense that we can hold the whole world in our heads _ as an anthology of images".[34]

O'Brien's Arabian path-way to her audience, once,

seemed to be blocked. The photographs opened and cleared it. If she was denied access to the greater grip of the oriental panorama, the photographs enabled her to achieve that. In fact, her Arabian Days opens with a photograph. O'Brien wanted to achieve the marriage between the picture and the story. Accordingly the story of Arabia's change of shape occupies the largest number of the book's photographs. The opening black and white close up of three withering and unhealthy camels with a background consisting of some modern brick-houses and a piece of land that seems to be undergoing change, seems to sum up her whole image of modern Arabia. The following photograph also conveys the same message. It is a twofold black and white photograph showing some chaotic scene mainly focused on different vehicles, the majority of which are lorries carrying the change into modern Arabia. It is as if O'Brien wanted to give her synopsis of the whole tale through the single camel occupying the opening page of her book and representing the more familiar Arabia, directly followed by a modern - though untidy, designating urgency: "instant city at that"(35) - scene that can belong to any other world but surely not to the 'familiar' Arabia she 'knew' of. What follows is a series of various photographs (coloured and black and white) all adding up to that very theme. Some are deliberately taken in black and white (like the two-folds on pp. 25-29) putting forward a justification for the writer's own feelings of lack of interest and of bareness. These

photographs display Arabia in its transitional period, undergoing the change, hence the muddle that fills most of these pictures; while the coloured ones display the golden flames of oil, glowing symbols of the very cause to every change (covering the pages of 16-22 and also 44-48).

Photography captures history. If O'Brien failed to find her way to the desert, she found it in photographs. Photographs of the desert seem again to solidify O'Brien's own excitement towards the desert and her account of it (photographs on pp. 72-75 all work to that effect). All that is exhibited by this set of photographs is what seems to be limitless heaps of hot sand and space. They purport to state that any other creature would undoubtedly be minute when engulfed by such hugeness. This is followed by another set of coloured photographs that depict an old man with a small herd of camels, with the camel being put to service as the vehicle of the desert. What follows is set in stark contrast. There are two pictures of four neglected camels in a barren land with a background of two modern buildings (at the back of which stand two hardly visible minarets) in front of which there are cars parked, replacements for the camels. The picture is divided into two halves by a modern paved road separating the two worlds of modern Arabia.

Sontag argues that "photographs furnish evidence". She adds that "something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we are shown a photograph of it"[36]. Only the visual codes would testify Arabia's catastrophic changes.

After the set of coloured photographs displaying the various aspects of the oil industry by virtue of which every change was possible, O'Brien inserts a photograph that faithfully adheres to her main views of modern Arabia. It shows a mosque, a (Western) Mercedes, two camels raising their heads as high as the two minarets of the mosque. Similarly, the last photograph of O'Brien's book works to the same effect. It shows a barren land, a few Arabs, and two tents in the foreground while the background is occupied by the huge building of Al-Ain's Hilton. What is striking about this photograph is that first the bottom half of the Hilton building looks foreshadowed with - what seems to be - mist. This is really recalling O'Brien's literary photograph that the new Arabia looks as if it had "just been dropped higgledy-piggledy from the sky"[37], with the mist resembling the cloud of dust the 'dropping' caused. And if this is not enough, there is also a clear dividing line (what seems to be like a building up of a new road) separating the ground of the two wretched tents from the huge Hilton building.

In the photographs on pp. 121-128, in which the writer herself appears, the normalization of the change is being confirmed. Sketches of Western music, Western dancing, and Western swimming suits, all do not seem to have left any impression of alienation or bewilderment on the faces of the Arabs participating in the western crowd. This particular set of photographs is, however, immediately followed by a half-cut black and white sketch of an Arab embracing his camel. It is probably conveying the other part of O'Brien's message that in her new Arabia there seems to be a strange readiness to change yet with equally peculiar clinging to the roots. Within such a context a repetition is made of an old man's face through the pages of 97-101 alone or with a small child resembling the old and the new generations of Arabia and their ever closeness. Arabia, the new and the old are always interrelated. Arabia the city is but a stem from Arabia the desert.

In fact in the closing paragraph of her diary, O'Brien argues that - what she sees as - securing the bondage between the past and the present in modern Arabia is what builds the new Arabia and uplifts it from the stage of being half-made.

Notes:

1. Edward W. Said, Orientalism, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978, p. 237.
2. Edna O'Brien, Arabian Days, London: Quartet Books, 1977, p. 9.
3. Ibid, p. 10.
4. Ibid, p. 147.
5. Ibid, p. 36.
6. Ibid, p. 16.
7. Ibid, p. 16.
8. Ibid, p. 147.
9. Ibid, p. 30.
10. V.S. Naipaul, The Return of Eva Peron, London: André Deutsch, 1980, p. 216.
11. O'Brien, op. cit. p. 36.
12. Ibid, p. 56.
13. Ibid, p. 147.
14. Ibid, p. 149.
15. Ibid, p. 61.
16. Ibid, p. 34-5.
17. Ibid, p. 12.
18. Ibid, p. 37.
19. Ibid, p. 80.
20. Ibid, p. 91.
21. Ibid, p. 134.
22. Ibid, p. 144.
23. Ibid, p. 146.
24. Ibid, p. 144.
25. Said, op. cit., p. 176.
26. O'Brien,op. cit., p. 149.
27. Ibid, p. 134.
28. Ibid, p. 144.
29. Ibid, p. 146.

30. Ibid, p. 159.
31. Ibid, p. 107-8.
32. Ibid, p. 31.
33. Said, op. cit., p. 230-1.
34. Susan Sontag, On Photography, London: Penguin Books, 1979, p. 3.
35. O'Brien, op. cit., p. 12.
36. Sontag, op. cit., p. 5.
37. O'Brien, op. cit., p. 30.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

It Is Not All So Familiar: Jonathan Raban Through The Labyrinth of New Arabia

Jonathan Raban's journey through the labyrinth of Arabia presents an image of the new Arab after the cultural, political, and economic shifts that began when oil was first discovered in the late 1930s. Arriving from London in the Gulf State of Bahrain, he immediately saw "two cultures in crisp silhouette...fleet of camel-necked cranes and earthmovers immediately behind them.[1] This sketchs the new portrait and conveys the "technicalness" of the new Arabia. And, indeed, throughout the trip he seems determined to find symbolic images of the changes taking place in Arabia. He wanders from the labyrinth of the Bahraini souk out onto modern avenues lined with high-rise office buildings.

Arabia looks different. And the effect of the drastic change seems to infect the locals and their visitors alike and is made the over-riding phenomenon of Raban's memoirs:

> It was impossible not to be infected with the excitement of this headlong plunge into modernity.[2]

This instantaneous "headlong plunge into modernity" has been recorded in a startlingly similar way by O'Brien before him. O'Brien complains that:

> Abu Dhabi had taken a plunge into the twentieth century but how was I to know that? I had not imagined towers of concrete as far as the eye could see, cranes, tanks, a sense of unfinishedness as if the place had just been dropped higgledy-piggledy from the sky.(3)

There is little difference between the two spectacles; depicted by O'Brien and Raban. But does the modern Arabia, like the old, have little room for diversity in Western representation of it?

Arabia would, then, become an edited transcription of the author's notes to himself — an inquiry into the mysteries of his new Arab neighbours in Earl's Court. The investigation into the culture and the history of the Arabs that Raban undertakes is all incited by the compelling fact of having these people as 'our' neighbours:

> It happened in a summer; one day Arabs were a remote people who were either camping out in tents with camels and providing fodder for adventurous photographers, or a brutish horde threatening the sovereignty of the state of Israel; the next, they were neighbours.(4)

This is the crux of Raban's book. The Arabs, who were known to 'us' from a distance - a far distance - who were the 'other'; detached from 'us', who always happened to be there for those of us who risk the adventure of investigating them, bringing photographs of them, studying and consequently suggesting to 'us' the best ways to 'handle' them, are 'nearer' to us now. All that is to vanish and 'we' have to accommodate to the fact that they are becoming 'our' new neighbours.

There is, consequently, very little room left for what were once known as the 'classical' Arabs:

> She was a business girl from Nerven Square; an urban savage, all lipstick and gristle, in a belted coat that gave her the air of a fat little stormtrooper lording it over an occupied territory. ....She clearly knew about Arabs. His cheap sandals, the rents in his jacket, the week-old grime of his robe and head-dress, simply were not visible to her. Looking at him, all she saw was a figure of contemporary legend, a creature of rumour and newspaper headlines. Her head must have been awash with them. *Arabs* had bought the Dorchester; *Arabs* owned half of Holborn; *Arabs* tipped business girls with Cadillacs and solid gold watches; Arabs closed down the whole of Harrods for an afternoon, just so that their wives could shop in decent privacy....She was close to his robe now, scenting money.(5)

This is no longer a Lawrence-Arab nor a Thesiger-Arab. Raban is sensing the distortion in the familiar image of the Arabs; the old, 'traditional' portraits which were

moulded and constantly shaped throughout the long tradition of the West in the Middle East; of T. E. Lawrence, C. M. Doughty, Wilfred Thesiger and others: envoys of Europe who set out on long expeditions, individually and in groups, to experience, investigate, scientifically study, and, consequently, to sketch, present and represent portraits of Arabia and its people to their 'hungry-for-knowledge' western motherlands.

As for now, Raban finds out that the new Arab has so swiftly become "a figure of contemporary legend", that he could even pass as one of "us" in the neighbourhood of the Earls Court Road. And, this, indeed, would alternatively constitute for Raban his main *topos* as it did for O'Brien before him. It all forms the quest that Raban assigns himself to undertake when the investigation commences into the 'nature' and the history of 'our' new neighbours.

Although Raban sets out in his grand tour armed with the 'classics' of Lawrence, Thesiger, and Stark, he is never able to relive their experiences and encounter *their* kind of Bedouins:

> Years before, I'd read Seven Pillars of Wisdom by T. E. Lawrence; I went on to C. M. Doughty's Arabia Deserta, Wilfred Thesiger's Arabian Sands and a clutch of books by Freya Stark. Along with Richard Burton and St John Philby, these are the classic 'British Arabists' _ the writers who have done most to create a vivid, affectionate special relationship between the

> English and the Arabs. It was hard, though, to pick out Doughty-Arabs or Lawrence-Arabs or Thesiger-Arabs among the new nomads of the Earls Court Road; harder still to find them among the brisk millionaire-businessmen who were flying in and out of Heathrow and Kennedy and propping up the sagging economies of the West with petrodollars..(6)

Raban sets, here, a challenge to his predecessors; to pick out for themselves *their* own type of Arabs among this current sprawling and completely changing phenomenon. He is, nonetheless, verifying their contribution (to the field of 'Western investigation into the Orient; the other') by annexing each one of them to *his* Arabs, and in doing so, he is calling upon and reasserting their Western powers of possession: a Doughty-Arab, a Lawrence-Arab, a Thesiger-Arab. But, in fact, he finds that such annexations can - decisively - break down.

> The plane was like a cheerful country bus. We rattled on in the dark over the Empty Quarter while I gnawed a cold chicken leg and tried to concentrate on Thesiger's *Arabian Sands*. It wasn't the right place to read the book. Our flight was on almost exactly the same course that Thesiger and his companions had taken across the empty Quarter in 1947, but the coincidence served only to stretch the thirty years between Thesiger's journey and my idle plane-reading into centuries. His Arabia seems an impossibly far-off place.(7)

This distance, that he experiences from Thesiger which

stretches the thirty years into centuries, is shaped by the content of change in the image of the two Arabias; the old and the new.

Nonetheless, at certain times of urgency, Raban trusts to the "torches" supplied by the early 'path-fiders' in the dark alleys of his labyrinthed Arabia:

> Seeing the remote, indifferent faces of the beggars, I thought of the most famous of all C. M. Doughty's remark about the Arabs: 'The semites are like to a man sitting in a cloaca to the eyes, and whose brows touch heaven'.(8)

Never challenging Doughty's qualifications for producing this statement, Raban rather chooses to highlight its 'privileged' authenticity. C. M. Doughty sets the 'facts' for Raban not only on the Arabs but on the whole race of the Semites, and thus he becomes - for Raban - an essential part of what Said calls the Orientalist doxology: the rich archive-library that constantly provides the fodder of ready-made patterns, ample vocabularies, descriptions, techniques, and conceptual repertoire. This, in fact, develops into a ritual that Raban seems to enjoy practicing whenever confronted with new experiences or, in some cases, even when witnessing them from a distance. Geographical regions start, then, to be classified in reference with their 'stars'.

While Doughty's remarks would serve him as a general guide into the different quarters of the Arab land, when

passing in the plane over the Empty Quarter, he "tries to concentrate on Thesiger's Arabian Sands"[9] rather than any other book he might have picked for that trip. In the Yemen, he cannot but submit to Evelyn Waugh:

> I did what I could to make myself at home, laying out my stock of books on the creaky table. Trollope and Wilkie Collins looked sadly out of place; Thesiger and Freya Stark didn't seem right either. Levi-Strauss was merely intimidating. The only book which offered the prospect of good company and cheer was Evelyn Waugh's When The Going Was Good.[10]

Waugh had been to Aden (The South Yemen) and this was clearly what - for Raban - had given him the 'authenticity'. The Going Was Good becomes Raban's Yemeni 'Gospel':

> I gloated over his description of the Yemenis with vindictive joy:
> "They are of small stature and meagre muscular development; their faces are hairless or covered with a slight down, their expressions degenerate and slightly dotty, an impression which is accentuated by their loping, irregular gait".
> *That* was the man downstairs. I would have liked to have been able to translate the passage into Arabic, inscribe it in poker-work, and hang it over the surly little bastard's head.[11]

The "vindictive joy" into which Raban sank as he was reading the pages of Waugh's work registers, in fact, Raban's limitation of his *own* encounter with his *own*

'East'. His disability, incapability, and impotent fury to try to stretch by his full right - as a Westerner - the Orientalist western discourse to deal with the phenomenon in hand (a 'rude' Yemeni hotel-keeper) compels him to lean heavily on Waugh's pronouncement which was originally made, or so it seemed for Raban, to look eternal. He does not, in any case, question Waugh's authoritarian use of the 'present simple tense' when passing his anthropological statements regarding the local people of the Yemen: "They *are* of small stature..."; "their faces *are* hairless..."; "their expressions *degenerate*...., an impression which *is* accentuated by their loping, irregular gait".

Later, the banks of the River Nile serve to verify Kipling's pronouncement regarding the whole East. Raban writes:

> The River Nile, when we eventually broke through to it in a sudden glare of sunshine, seemed an affront. It was actually dotted with lateen sails. Kipling was right, as usual, when he wrote:
> "The East is wherever one sees the lateen sail - that shark's fin of a rig which for hundreds of years has dogged all white bathers round the Mediterranean. There is still a suggestion of menace, a hint of piracy, in the blood whenever the lateen goes by, fishing or fruiting or coasting."(12)

And once again, the key words here are not that "Kipling was right"; they are rather that he "was right, as

usual". This would again reaffirm in its own way Kipling's credibility and Raban's indebtness and loyalty to the long established western discourse in regard to the whole East.

Similarily, the Pyramids recall Kinglake. As he looks at them from a distance, Raban starts cherishing Kinglake's remarks about them:

> His remarks about the Great Pyramid deserve to be inscribed in neon and set on a conspicuous post beside the thing:
> "The truth seems to be, after all, that the Pyramids are quite of this world; that they were piled up into the air for the realization of some kingly crotchets about immortality - some priestly longings for burial fees; and that as for the building - they are built like coral rocks by swarms of insects - by swarms of poor Egyptians, who also ate onions for the reward of their immortal labours! The Pyramids are quite of this world."(13)

This extract displays clearly the pressure of the moment. Kinglake "went to Giza in 1834 and narrowly escaped being murdered in the tombs"(14) and no wonder he tries his best to ridicule the scenery in hand or, particularly, those who helped to accomplish it (the swarms of insects..who ate onions for the reward of their immortal labours). And now Raban is ready to take such view at its face value.

Yet while acknowledging the contribution of the predecessors, Raban feels tantalized by the loss of the 'classical' Arabs whom he, no doubt, had every wish to

meet.

Raban's trip and the text narrating it was undertaken to answer a peremptory need. This is true of most of the twentieth (as well as the nineteenth century) travellers to the East. His was personal (to investigate 'our' new neighbours). But their needs were more than that. They defined themselves against a background of ideological and cultural structures throughout the centuries which transcend the peculiarities and suspectibilities of any of these writers as individuals. Orientalism is a political, scholarly, and social institution which played an important role in constituting the mentality of the period within the West as a whole. It seems - according to Said - to have determined the literary project to depart from Europe and the Occident for Arabia and the Orient and thereby at the same time dictated the conditions of its internal contradiction.

In such a perspective - as defined by Said's study - Orientalism exhibits all the attitudes of an ideological apparatus including the will to totalization and transparency, the ability to naturalise its own context, which in the operation of such apparatus represents the most tenacious and the most internalized elements. Raban and Durrell might transform and rework such structures but cannot obliterate them. Raban's text, nonetheless, cannot work as a simple reproduction of the structures of

Orientalist discourse the way that Durrell's does. This, however, is not done by the virtue that Raban has the intense desire to liberate himself from the constraints of a pre-formed ideology rather he is encouraged to do this because of the very change in the scene of the subject matter that he is compelled to convey. He, therefore, seems situated at the intersection of two conflicting representations: an original fantasy project of personal re-creation and liberation within 'his own' Orient on the one hand, and on the other a textual realisation which inscribes clearly conventional, predetermined structures and 'protocols'.

For reasons better known to Durrell - as, indeed, to most of the Western travellers to the East - Raban cannot be constrained from displaying to his readers his 'mastership' of the native language. This, in fact, constitutes another factor that works to negate his intentions. His misuse, in many occasions, of certain Arabic phrases and words leads him into traps that he is unaware of. Not realised -broadly speaking- by his western readers, these mistakes could easily slip by as a manifestation of his qualifications into the penetration into the heart of Arabia. But he would never tell his reader of his confusion of the Egyptian colloquial Arabic, for instance, with the standard more acceptable Arabic upon which he gives himself full license to judge:

'Ana Haktb Ktab' I said. 'I am going to write a book.'

> 'You must be careful,' said Fatama. 'It can mean "I am going to write a book". But people think you're saying "I am going to get married"...you see, you are going to write the contract of marriage, you understand?[15]

Unconscious about what he is doing, Raban inserts these 'useful' Arabic language lessons for his readers amidst others in which he cites genuine Arabic verb roots.[16] There are, on the other hand, many incidents in which he shows no reluctance to use, ironically enough, the most popular word in the Arabia of today *Naft* (oil or Petrol) is mispresented as *Zayit*[17] (which designate any other oil; olive oil; corn oil...etc.). I doubt very much if the Jordanian driver said "I think all Arabya is bad now"[18] for that particular word would not only be incomprehensible to him but to any other Jordanian.

This apart, and to exhibit more of his dominant discourse Raban is never restricted by his - as he confesses - 'useless' Arabic to pass some authoritarian and academic-like judgements over that language:

> As a conversational instrument, My Arabic is useless. I am limited to greetings, street directions, words for food and thank-you. Yet the Wehr Dictionary, and the comprehension of the alphabet, seemed to shed far more light on the Arabs I saw in London than either Thesiger, Lawrence or the Koran. To live in Arabic is to live in a labyrinth of false turns and double meanings. No sentence means quite what it says. Every word is potentially a talisman, conjuring the ghosts of the entire family of words from which it comes. The

> devious complexity of Arabic grammar is legendary. It is a language which is perfectly constructed for saying nothing with enormous eloquence; a language of pure manners in which there are hardly any literal meanings at all and in which symbolic gesture is everything. Arabic makes English look simple-minded, and French a mere jargon of cost-accounts. Even to peer through a chink in the wall of the language is enough to glimpse the depth and darkness of the forest of ambiguity. No wonder the Koran is so notoriously untranslatable.(19)

By his rights as a Westerner, Arabic becomes the accused, he the judge and the jury. As some who one cannot but rely on the Wehr Dictionary and who only receives Arabic lessons from Fatama, Raban is astonishingly bold in passing his judgements on the philology of Arabic and, in his own way, would challenge, not any of the Arab grammarians, but Thesiger and Lawrence who together with the Koran form - for him - sources of 'perfect' Arabic.

Another manifestation of his Orientalist identification is his power to 'melt' into the crowd even without the guise that other travellers to the land might have been compelled to put on (Lawrence, for instance). Like the fictional Darley and Mountolive, Raban becomes the centre of attraction. He receives offers for friendship from the local people who always seem to be driven towards him:

> 'Please,' Hamud said. 'Yesterday, we were not friends. Today you are my friend.'
> 'Hamud, really, I would like to pay-'

'You are my friend, now, yes?'
'Yes-'
'Because you are my friend, you give me fifty rials more than what you say yesterday. I think that is right. For friendship.'(20)

As it was in The Alexandria Quartet, these friendships are exploited. Since they seem always to be working only in one direction - from the local to the western 'intruder' - such affairs become the traveller's keys into the less tangible corners of the land. Through Hamud, for instance, the mosque is introduced. Suddenly it becomes a familiar place. And the muzzin who kept most of the characters of The Alexandria Quartet awake is doing the same to Raban here. Similarily the Khamasin that was made the overriding phenomenon that swirled Durrell's city is prominent in Raban's Cairo.

Consequently, Raban's tactic to produce his text as a break with tradition fails. Despite the plenitude which stems from a constant reference to places, monuments, items, and mores which are 'exotic' for him, his use of the classical means that he has not definitively broken with the dominant Orientalist discourse. On the contrary: such structures are unexpectedly inscribed at the centre of a mode of writing whose mission is precisely to exclude them. The result is a profound sense of disappointment which floats over these pages (on Arabia) every time Raban comes to reflect upon his own writing activity and on the texture of his text. For that reason

alone, Raban's treatise on Arabia hardly becomes reducible to a simple reproduction of the structures of Orientalist discourse as Durrell might have managed to provide such an impression, in one way or another, of his text.

Raban, later, starts cherishing the old thoughts of his precursors. He starts feeling envious of them and their 'loving desert portraits and rich detail'. He seems to be striving to have a grip even of a smaller piece of *their* world:

> For Lawrence and Thesiger, Arabia was an alternative kingdom; a tough utopia without either money or machines. In the bedu tribesman they professed to find all the simplicity, the powers of personal endurance, the stoic independence, which they feared the Englishman was losing. They loved him for his poverty, his spiritual leanness, his ignorance of the 'soft' life from which they themselves were on the run. In his desert they found a perfect theatre for the enactment of a heroic drama of their own _ a drama whose secret subject was not really the desert at all but the decadent life of the London drawing-room.(21)

It is the Bedouin with two television sets - one for the women and one for the men - that Raban encounters. Raban is not a traveller in the tradition of Lawrence or the epic explorers. He is a visitor who spent only fourteen weeks on the edges of Arabia. His accounts are thus brief and impressionistic. And the new Arabia has evoked some 'cultural homesickness' in him since he knew it only

through the classic British Arabists.

This can emerge as some kind of disillusionment, disappointment, or rather a dispossession:

> ...the Arabs had betrayed an essentially English dream of what Arabs ought to be. We had learned to love them for being heroically simple and poor; now, with their multi-national investment corporations, their Concorde-flying businessmen, their English country houses, their expensive cameras, cars, and hi-fi equipment, they were flinging our sentimental illusions back in our faces. Back came Arabia Deserta. Back came Seven Pillars of Wisdom. Back came Arabian Sands.(22)

The use of 'we' and 'them' in "*we* had learned to love *them*" clearly separates the writer from his subject matter. It makes vivid the fact that he belongs to the "we" and not the "them". The tone of the above passage implies a recognition (at least partial) of delusion by the 'betrayal' of the "essentially English dream" and the "flinging [of] our sentimental illusions back in our faces". However, the extract primarily voices disappointment, and "betrayal" designates the dramatic change in the 'affair'. It is being presented as a deceit, an unfaithfulness, a breaking of a bond, when the Arab alters some side of the image with which Europe is familiar. Raban, in addition, while alluding to the theme of 'betrayal' is, however, consciously or not attaching the credit to his own nation ("an essentially *English*

dream") in initiating the affair between the powerful, superior Europe on one hand and a powerless, inferior Arabia - the mistress - on the other. Most of all, the above extract seems to concur with what Said skilfully puts as the West's representation of the whole Orient:

> For a number of evident reasons the Orient was always in the position both of outsider and of incorporated weak partner for the West. To the extent that Western scholars were aware of contemporary Orientals or Oriental movements of thought and culture, these were perceived either as silent shadows to be animated by the Orientalist, brought into reality by him, or a kind of a cultural and intellectual proletariat useful for the Orientalist's grander interpretive activity, necessary for his performance as superior judge, learned man, powerful cultural will.[23]

In this context, and like any of the characters of the The Alexandria Quartet, Raban would inevitably feel the huge gap that stretches between the two worlds. Everything would look 'other' in this "singular and alien landscape"[24]. There is, subsequently, too much detail to feed the eye. It is this varied and heavy detail which makes Arabia more labyrinthed in Raban's eyes:

> Throughout my trip the idea of the labyrinth had never been far away. I had seen labyrinths used again and again as decorative motifs; I had been inside consciously labyrinthine houses; the souks I had visited had all been constructed on labyrinthine principles; and I had sensed that the large structure of Arab society was - unlike the vertical hierarchies of the West - a labyrinth too....Whenever I turned,

> there were new riddles and contradictions. If I thought I was in one place, it turned out to be another. I was beginning to behave like a scared rat in a psychologist's maze - bolting into blank walls, jumping at shadows, and shouting obscenities at the drivers who seemed determined either to run me over or to send me mad. Sana'a is functioning exactly as a labyrinth should: it was a close protective hive for insiders; but for an outsider it was a trap with no apparent means of escape.(25)

It is the kind of trauma and fear that Darley experiences in the The Quartet.(26) It operates here, as it did in The Quartet, to illustrate the 'foreignness' of the Westerner, his 'alienness' to the place. Raban seems to be shocked and starts losing his 'self-control'. Arabia is now the bright and exotic snare into which outsiders can be lured. But Raban is a mere passer-by. The strange and incomprehensible power which the Arab city seems to exert over its foreign inhabitants (as conveyed extensively by Durrell in The Quartet) is going now to equally infect the passers-by:

> I think everyone is frightened of Cairo. I am. I always have been. It's partly why I love it, I think, because it scares me.(27)

Darley, Mountolive, and Balthazar felt the same mixture of love and fear (towards the city) which Jan Morris is expressing to Raban in the above passage. It is a kind of a 'masochistic' love. Suddenly the expatriate strives for his native shore. As if in a resting station, the

expatriate longs for a place in the middle of his long and exasperating adventure; a place in which he could be 'refreshed' again:

> I didn't want to leave the embassy. It was a nice, cool English place, and I prevaricated with the Indian clerk who kept on coming into the waiting-room and asking me my business.....
> 'I really only came in for a breather, actually. I don't think I am ready for a 'briefing' yet'.
> 'Oh, good' said the Head of Chancery, and invited me to dinner.
> I left the embassy feeling buoyant and restored.(28)

The embassy is a facsimile of home. But the above passage adds a melodramatic colour to the scene. Here is the protagonist, like Darley (who used the British Summer residence as his only real breathing space) having an interval in which he has to refresh and get ready for the next phase of his adventure.

This interval, furthermore, tells more of the impure and stagnant atmosphere beyond the only token of home in this alien land; the embassy. This, in fact, is a symptom of the defeat and the catharsis still to come.

Then the confusion starts. He summons all his western powers to comprehend but fails:

> I had never seen a city which was so literally legible. It stretched all round my feet, an enormous code in three dimensions. If I half-closed my eyes, I almost thought that I could read it. The message

> didn't have a beginning, a middle or an end. If it had any structure at all, it was a crazy circular epic about colliding worlds. On the page-like walls of every house, the paradoxes were written up: religious clashed, the realms of nature and culture bled into one another, the domestic and the metaphysical were set in brute juxtaposition. The literate shaded into the pictorial, the pictorial into the literate. It was as if the entire city was conspiring to tell one that the world really is like a scrambled book. You could look at the walls of Sana'a for a year, finding more and more hidden meanings in them; you could read moral lectures from them; you could, no doubt, discover from them that Bacon wrote Shakespeare, that the world is flat, that spacemen from another planet conquered the Yemen a few millennia ago, that fluoride does terrible things to drinking water, that God was a mushroom, and that the world will end on June 14 1987.[29]

A first look at such a passage might tell of Raban's control over his text. In fact, it does the contrary. His will to see the city as some text to be read invites glimpses of Darley before him as he struggled with his Alexandria. The heavy metaphysical detail into which Raban sinks designates the very 'fact' that the city was not "legible" for him but full of muddles and puzzles that all his powers could not solve. It becomes like some kind of 'hallucination' that runs through such passages as:

> When I woke at five on my last morning in Sana'a I felt stale and hungover. Too many jigsaw puzzles had got muddled up with each other, and I had spent the night trying to match pieces from the wrong pictures. Salisbury Cathedral, the Cottage Garden and the

> Laughing Cavalier had come together in a frightful mess of botched colour, and Sana'a seemed to have been lost somewhere at the back of the cupboard.(30)

Clearly this cannot be the style of some one who felt that the city might be in his own grip and that it "was so literally legible".

In this as well as in his presentation of Egypt he introduces, throughout the narrative, techniques better known from Durrell's treatment of his city and its Egyptian settings.

Raban's deviation from the Durrellian line is more vivid, perhaps, in his presentation of Egypt as a replica of home; "the England of the Attlee government, just after the war." It is mistaken for home:

> Dizzied by the flight, I seemed to have left my thoughts behind in other places, and at first I mistook Cairo for home. I passed through its miles of dun-coloured suburbs with the inattention one reserves for things which are so drearily familiar that it is an annoyance to notice them. It was the outskirts of Birmingham - the same tacky estates of municipal flats, the same tired shuffling look of people who've got used to spending half their lives in queues.(31)

Only then, he will realise that the spectacle in front of him, though, in one form or another, looks familiar. is, nonetheless, an obsolete portrait of 'our' own home:

> It was only when I was back on the bridge taking the

> full blast of the *Khamsin* that I traced the nagging half-memory which the circling crowd had triggered in my head. It was of an England which I barely knew — the England of the Attlee government, just after the war. The trams belonged there. ..The clothes, too, fitted the period...It was the faces that brought the image of the 1940s so vividly: I might have seen them in old copies of *Picture Post* with its grainy photographic studies of London street scenes after the blitz. They looked in a phrase from the time 'whacked'...They belonged, in the world that I came from, to the age of Woolton loaves, ration books, clothing coupons and whalemeat steaks...If Cairo really was a version of home, something peculiar had happened to the clock.(32)

The last sentence in the above passage ("If Cairo *really* was a version of home, something *peculiar* had happened to the clock") sums up Raban's dilemma of having to come to terms with the reality of the changing Arabia which one side of him refuses to accept.

But Raban also calls into question the automatic Western sense of superiority:

> 'It really doesn't matter,' he said huffily. He had the tired air of a man who had grown used to being pestered by fools. While perfectly prepared to put up with people like me, he was not willing to go so far as to pretend to enjoy the experience.
> He was an Arabist of the old school . He had read Arabic at Cambridge in the 1930s, and had spent his diplomatic career in the Middle East. I sensed that he felt that almost everyone in the room was a trespasser or a vandal. The oilmen and I were much alike: ignorant of the country's history, unable to speak its

> language, we existed in order to goad the Consul-General with stupid questions or, worse, to make known to him our even sillier opinions.(33)

This Consul-General is a blood-brother to Mountolive. Unlike Durrell, in his presentation of the Consul-General Raban does not idealize the British diplomat. Rather, he places him.

Moreover, in Raban's Arabia there is a multiplicity of images. His Arabia is never monolithic. His Arabs are not homogeneous. In Arabia, Raban meets Mohammed Mannei the shop owner, Emil Kobrussi the TV producer, Hamoud the poet, Abdel Rahman the playwright, Hisham Gaddoumi the town-planning adviser, Nussibeh, the New York intellectual. The variety and heterogeneity of modern Arabia do not encourage generalisations. Yet Raban falls into the traps of the Orientalist practice in passing some generalizations and mere exaggeration:

> He caught my stare. 'Just checking,' he said. 'I find in these countries you have to give them a question that'll make them think. They always tend to agree with anything you say, you see: so if I'm on a flight to, say, Abu Dhabi, I always ask "Is this the right plane to Teheran?" You might find it a useful dodge yourself.'(34)

This conversation as reported by Raban can ironically be seen to sum up his position. Set comically, the above extract serves again to demonstrate the pressure of the

colonialist discourse over Raban as it did to his predecessors before him. "They always tend to agree with anything you say, you see" seems to root the inferiority deep into Arabia's soil. Moreover, the above passage does not differ in content from the old justification of Lord Balfour that "We are in Egypt not merely for the sake of the Egyptian, though we are for their sake, we are there also for the sake of Europe at large...Look at the Oriental countries. Do not talk about superiority and inferiority"(35).

However, the multiplicity of Raban's Arabia also enables him to experience disorientation and exasperation. He makes every endeavour to grasp the differences between the Arab countries he visits. He manipulates different devices for that purpose. He uses a place like the Creek in Dubai: "The Creek gives Dubai a shape, a direction and a certainty of character which I have seen in no other Arab town"(36). He associates necrologia with Cairo and sees it as a city of tombs: "The appalled satisfaction with which Cairo seemed to contemplate its own impending death, as its arteries clogged up, broke down, and fell out of connection, made it a front-runner candidate for being the necropolitan capital of the world"(37). Even those works to which he, before, failed to associate a certain world can suddenly make sense:

> I had tried to read Sybil once before, when I was a student, and had found its version of Victorian England too melodramatic and theoretical; I couldn't connect it with any society that I knew. One day in Cairo, though, had given the book the force of vivid documentary. By the time that I fell asleep, Disraeli's noblemen were wearing white robes trimmed with gold, and his mean industrial streets - the 'close courts and pestilential culs-de-sac' swarming with their 'infinite population' - smelled of the *Khamsin*.(38)

In Jordan he uses a phrase: "We couldn't actually see these places, but they were there somewhere in the haze. The beer was as warm as cocoa, the view stretched no further than the Israeli lines, the salt flats were passing gas, but we were being all right"(39). In the Yemen the theme of disorientation is felt most acutely at a climax. He fails to read what he sees: "I had never seen a city which was so literally legible. It stretched all round my feet, an enormous code in three dimensions"(40). Later, this will leave its marks when he starts needing the orientation to his own country:

> Their guns flashed, and the little puffs of smoke settled in the misty air under the trees. I leaned half-way out of the car window to see more of this extraordinary spectacle. The only thing that seemed in any way ordinary or familiar about it was a small group of men in dishdashas and head-dresses in the watching crowd.
> 'What on earth is that?' I said.
> My Friend didn't even turn her head to look. The battle of Waterloo, or whatever it was, wasn't worth

the effort of a glance. (41)

The extract displays Raban's sympathy with the foreigners who visit his native land and try to orientate themselves. It also shows the impact of the Arabian scene which has left a prevalent mark on Raban's mind that made "the small group of men in dishdashas and head-dresses in the watching crowd" the only familiar item in the scene.

Raban does not seem to suffer O'Brien's inability to get access to the locals.(42) His dilemma, rather, is not so much that he fails to find the Arabs or their desert, but that at times he tries to look for Arabia - despite the change - as something other texts (Lawrence's, Thesiger's, Doughty's) have told him about:

> Not far from the Saudi Arabian border I got a distant glimpse of a bedu encampment. I mistook it at first for a used-car lot. It did not at all resemble the airy tent in the grounds of the museum. The carcasses of old automobiles had been hammered together to make temporary shelters, while new Range Rovers stood parked near by. Remembering Lawrence and Thesiger and the legendary hospitality of the bedu, I stopped the car. From somewhere inside this great scrapheap, dogs set out a ferocious yowling, and a young man waved his fist and shouted at me to go away.(43)

It is quite clear, yet again, that Raban could not escape the heavy impact of the 'traditional discourse' upon his style. He seems to be always "*remembering* Lawrence and Thesiger" when he is about to encounter the Bedu and

innately tends to be "*thinking of* the most famous of all C. M. Doughty's remarks about the Arabs". And this, in fact, could be understood as another characteristic that marks the Orientalist discourse whenever the depiction of Arabia is in question. The point of reference to predecessors is allocating and subdividing the Arabian scene into small entities that are being attached each to a former figure; the Empty Quarter to Thesiger, the Yemen to Waugh, the desert to Lawrence, the Bedu to Doughty, the pyramids to Kinglake...etc.

Nevertheless his account of the Bedu's family and social structure breaks decisively with the old monolithic and timeless representations of earlier writers or, for that matter, even with O'Brien's as a contemporary. Raban suggests that the openness of the Bedu enables them to cope with the impact of the new modern world. While his predecessors stressed the freedom of the Bedouins and idealized their constraints (as in Lawrence's and Doughty's accounts), O'Brien feared that the new look of Arabia left it an identity-dilemma and hence in the new Arabia there is a half-made society split between the clinging to the old roots and trying to accommodate the necessities of the modern age. Raban sees the rigid social rules as designed to withstand the stress of motion and hence better prepared to the modern world of cars and planes:

> More than any other people in the world , the nomadic tribes of Arabia had equipped themselves for life spent continuously on the move, holding the family together and dealing easily and amicably with strangers. Their social code, with its ritual language and elaborate formalities, was a highly developed instrument for negotiating a passage through other peoples' territories. Their family structure, with its rigid roles and divisions, had been designed to withstand the stress of constant motion and the consequent threat of dissolution. In a sense, the bedu had been better prepared for a world of cars and sky-scrapers and jet travel than anyone in Europe or the United States. Modern Abu Dhabi, with its migrant tribes of exiles, had not made the skills of the desert nomad redundant; rather, it was testing and straining them in a way that they had never needed to be fully exercised before.(44)

Raban has no 'Lawrentine' romantic sentiment about the deserts. His desert, nonetheless, is not 'Lawrentine'. He cannot see the desert as "a romantic image of a kaleidoscope of changing moods and colours" rather it is, for him, "simply boring..., stretching away like a flat Sunday afternoon"(45). But his Arabia is not the same familiar one:

> Out in the desert again, I saw the 'countryside' which Hisham Gaddoumi had talked of. Money, determination and main force had created it against all natural probability. In the middle of nowhere a juvenile forest had been placed on the sand like a new wig.(46)

It is the new, urban Arabia built by petrodollars, full

of skyscrapers and green with grass imported from Mexico. His Bedouins have sodium street-lights, air conditioning and Land Rovers that replaced the camels:

> It was at the refinery, though, that I saw the first camel I'd seen outside a zoo. It was a poor, scrawny, moth-eaten creature, and it was grazing joylessly in the shadows of a gasometer. It looked as if it was all too well aware that its days had come and gone. None of its legs appeared to know what the others were doing, and it lurched about in the oily sand, grabbing forlornly at single blades of marsh grass with hairy, elephantine lips.(47)

In Raban's Arabia, even the camel - Arabia's everlasting emblem - becomes incongruous. And it is more than coincidental that Raban's first introduction to Arabia's emblem commences in - what Arabia was always known to lack - a refinery, another emblem to the technology which is changing its face. Nevertheless, this does not take anything away from the aura that surrounds the camel as it is first presented to its western 'examiner'. It is viewed as the faded beast which looked "poor, scrawny, moth-eaten creature...grazing joylessly in the shadows of a gasometer". Then it is likened to another beast (with hairy elephantine lips) the elephant, the beast of yet 'other' foreign spheres - the African jungles.

Like many travellers to Arabia, Raban suffers the lack of access into the "heart of the land", the locals and their private quarters:

> At embassy after embassy I had assured the appointed representatives of the family that I wanted to see the real Arabia, to visit the new cities, to see what contemporary Arab life was like, to try to begin to understand my neighbours.(48)

It is almost a similar restriction that O'Brien feels although she has the double burden of being a 'typically' underprivileged member of the society - in these lands - a woman.

On his part, Raban makes no secret in approaching his project, again, in the old tradition of the earlier Orientalists, with the zest of the scholars and scientists who would seek every 'fact' concerning their subject-matters. He echoes, once more, O'Brien's cry to wish to see the real Arabia.(49)

At times when he actually fails to get access, Raban tries another Orientalist technique - when a 'foreigner' does not succeed in gaining the confidence of the natives - of dealing with the new ambivalent sphere he is struck with. He tries hard to judge it with local spectacles. He makes every effort to see things the way the local does:

> I found myself suddenly panicking. I was without bearings. The city offered offered no point of rest or perspective. It was an impossible jumble. Carved wooden doorways gave on to building sites of steel and concrete; at street level, neon signs clashed and bled into one another. The faces of the storekeepers were Pakistani; their goods, perspiring in cellophane

> sachets, came from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, America. In the crowd on the pavement, other faces loomed - all of them displaced and temporary. Europeans looking sick with the heat swam by like fish against glass, followed by sallow Levantines, Sudanese Negroes and wild day-labourers from Baluchistan. It was like being caught in the middle of a vast, fatal, cultural car-crash. I leaned against the half-demolished remains of a mud wall, and tried to get my breath, taking in lungfuls of hot fog...
>
> I tried to look at it as a Qatari might. What on earth would Abdel Rahman, his head full of princesses and singing donkey-men, make of it?... One would have to be a lord of miscegenation to feel a citizen of this place...The Europeans looked shipwrecked.(50)

The style here evokes both Durrell and Beckford at the same time. First, there is a typical Durrellian expression of 'imprisonment' and confinement (Europeans looking sick with the heat swam by like fish against glass), and later we are introduced to another corner of some Vathekian scenery (sallow Levantines, Sudanese Negroes and wild day-labourers from Baluchistan). In addition, through the "remains of a mud wall", Raban is both alluding to the new change in the Arabia of today as well as making a reverse escape-exit for himself through which he could breathe into the history of the land and all the joyful memories and old portraits it carries ("I leaned against the half-demolished remains of a mud wall, and tried to get my breath, taking in lungfuls of hot fog"). Thus he is explicitly exhibiting his displacement from the place - or at least its recent image - ("One

would have to be a lord of miscegenation to feel a citizen of this place", and "The Europeans looked shipwrecked").

In his Tristes Tropiques[51], Lévi-Strauss disparages 'travel writing' as a synthesis between 'useless shreds of memory' and 'pitiable recollections'. Jonathan Raban approaches his own project with the modesty which this reflection compels. His point of departure is what he perceives as the existing Western stereotype of the Arab:

> Something of the same problem afflicts the European who writes about Arabs: he sees their money with the same diverted and exclusive attention. It exerts a diseased fascination. Finally, like the vice which it so resembles, it makes him go blind.(52)

It is not until the last pages of his book that Raban makes vivid the diversity of his work which is constituted into what is perceived, and therefore taken for granted, as the extant Western stereotype of the Arab:

> This was the beginning of the season, too, for 'Arab stories'. 'Arabs' (their nationalities were hardly ever mentioned; Qataris, Yemenis, Saudis, Egyptians were all lumped in together under the same opprobrious title) were shoplifting. Their purses, when they were caught, were invariably stuffed with disgraceful amounts of money (money which, in fact, they usually dared not leave behind in their hotels for fear of having it stolen). There were stories of their rudeness to decent English shoppers, stories about

> their 'barbaric' behaviour in their own countries, gleeful lapses from the sanitary straight-and-narrow in public places. Anti-semitism against Jews had been outlawed, Anti-semitism against Arabs had become a licensed national sport.It seemed ugly and frightening, the more so since hardly a single voice was being raised to check it. No one bothered to point out that the Arabs were much more stolen-from than stealing. No one voiced the dull truth that very few Arabs - even very few of the Arabs who were staying in London - had nearly as much as the Fleet Street journalists who poured such envious, moralizing scorn on them.(53)

Raban's aim is to cover more than a lot of ground. And these remarks about the anti-Arab prejudice and ignorance, to which Raban, himself - periodically - consciously or not, in one way or another, make his own contribution, are far less tentative in the closing pages than they had been in the opening ones.

To that effect, Raban introduces his Arabs with more awareness of their portrayal by foreigners:

> 'What do they tell you to write?' asked the official.
> I explained that no one had told me to write anything. I would write about what I saw and heard; it would be a personal view.
> 'They must tell you that you are writing something.'
> 'No. The idea for the book was mine. It was something that I wanted to do to satisfy my own curiosity'.(54)

The local consciousness is all novel. The Arabs, for the first time probably, are presented as aware of the way

others are portraying them...No more the innocence and the naivety of the Lawrence-Bedouins. This is reflected once again in:

> When Ahmed left me at the hotel he said: 'Please, I am telling you all this because I love my country. I don't expect you to love it, but I would like you to understand it. It is very difficult, I think, for someone from the West to understand. Either he sees a hopeless chaos, or he thinks it is all very pretty and quaint. I would like you to see it as something else.'(55)

This is certainly part of the new and dramatic change that Raban wishes to register in his presentation of the 'new' Arab.

Notes:

1. Jonathan Raban, Arabia Through The Looking Glass, London: William collins, 1979, p. 28. (All citations are made here to the 1982 Fontana edition).
2. Ibid, p. 35.
3. Edna O'Brien, Arabian Days, London: Quartet Books, 1977, p. 30.
4. Raban, op. cit. p. 11.
5. Ibid, p. 9-10.
6. Ibid, p. 15.
7. Ibid, p. 199.
8. Ibid, p. 41.
9. Ibid, p. 199.
10. Ibid, p. 201-202.
11. Ibid, p. 202.
12. Ibid, p. 263.
13. Ibid, p. 285-6.
14. Ibid, p. 285.
15. Ibid, p. 18.
16. See his citation of the root of the Arabic word 'tifl', p. 18; the word 'Umm', p. 67.
17. Ibid, p. 171.
18. Ibid, p. 340.
19. Raban, op. cit., p. 19.
20. Ibid, p. 229.
21. Ibid, p. 15.
22. Ibid, p. 16.
23. E. W. Said, Orientalism, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978, p. 208.
24. Raban, op. cit., p. 283.
25. Ibid, p. 207-8.
26. In The Quartet, Darley feels "landlocked in

spirit...like a ship in a bottle, sailing nowhere", Lawrence Durrell, The Alexandria Quartet, p. 213.

27. Raban, op. cit., p. 282.
28. Ibid, p. 209.
29. Ibid, p. 252-3.
30. Ibid, p. 256.
31. Ibid, p. 261.
32. Ibid, p. 267.
33. Ibid, p. 192.
34. Ibid, p. 62.
35. Quoted by Said, op. cit., pp. 32-33.
36. Raban, op. cit., p. 164.
37. Ibid, p. 296.
38. Ibid, p. 273.
39. Ibid, p. 317.
40. Ibid, p. 252.
41. Ibid, p. 348.
42. He was, nonetheless, not granted an entry Visa to Saudi Arabia.
43. Raban, op. cit., p. 101.
44. Ibid, p. 146-47.
45. Ibid, p. 160.
46. Ibid, p. 101.
47. Ibid, p. 102.
48. Ibid, p. 26.
49. In her book, O'Brien speaks of her keen wish to see the 'real' Arabia: "Please, they were saying, What kind of book was I writing? I said I would like to see the desert, see the tribes, see the Arabia I had read of", O'Brien, op. cit., p.34.
50. Raban, op. cit., p. 77.
51. Claude Lévi-Strauss, Tristes Tropiques, London: Jonathan Cape, 1973, pp. 45-69.

52. Raban, op. cit., p. 26.

53. Ibid, p. 343.

54. Ibid, p. 127.

55. Ibid, p. 237.

Conclusion

Literary Orientalism as a broad field of dealing with the Orient, polarizing and presenting its themes, is polemical.

Edward Said's study makes a substantial contribution to the study of cultures by members of a different culture. His analytical methods and professional insights as set forward in his book offer new perspectives on how certain Western attitudes developed and adapted themselves throughout the centuries in regard to the Orient, its cultures, and its inhabitants. Said stresses that whenever the Orient is in question the Western stance is one of power acquisition. In this respect, he also allocates certain privileges to the roles of society, official institutions, and other cultural bodies at large.

This study has argued that some of Said's central claims so far as they are factual are substantiated.

Lawrence Durrell's treatment of the Arab motifs in the Quartet confirms Said's argument of the great pressure the Orientalist discourse exercises on the Western writings (in shaping up and 'tailoring' the general

style, its imperatives, and moods) that 'lean' on it in treating the Orient as its main theme. In Durrell's later works there is further evidence to support the Said observation of the recurrence of the Orientalist themes are founded on which the traditional dichotomy of the superior white West contrasted to an inferior black East. The study has demonstrated that within the Durrellian narrative there are some 'local' texts that could not be the product of 'actual' seeing or experiencing rather of consulting or referring to other preceding Orientalist productions.

Durrell's treatment of Oriental sexuality was introduced within the context of the above. Similarly his use of Mountolive ties in with the notion of the imperialist Westerner who can go native. However, Durrell's use of impressionistic description is distinctive.

Having concluded this, the study cautions that the consistency within the English literary treatment of the Orient and Arabia should not be overstated. And a genre such as travel writing can give play to the variety. There is still enough room for both complexities of history and individual subjectivity. It is not wise to sweep together all modern English literary works as reflections of past experiences or to announce that they *all* show loyalty to the rituals of the Orientalist dogmas (at least as these are defined by Said). If we step

outside the modern period, Beckford's use of the Orient as the 'other' cannot be viewed from the same perspective as is taken when discussing T. E. Lawrence's or Durrell's works. In Beckford's case, though he never set foot in the Orient, the long-shot fantasy, then, is 'legitimate'. There is nothing in Vathek to suggest that Beckford presents the Oriental World through the concepts of Western dominance and Eastern decadence.

Similarly, Said does not sufficiently discriminate the developing of historical conditions under which the 'authoritative' Western discourse was produced. Is it valid to read the varied works from a single dominant perspective, taking treatises with novels with travel impressions and diary jottings. When Said categorizes the latter as "generically determined writing", he does not sufficiently consider how determined might be those modern travel books. And they engage in experiences which surpass those of the eras of Lane and de Sacy. There is not enough space allocated in Said's account for those writings that simply do not appear to have adopted the Orientalist 'cast of mind'. This study has found that O'Brien's Arabian Days would fall into such a category. In his tight and 'un-elastic' classifications, it is not clear where one would catalogue a work (like O'Brien's) which is composed by an author who supposedly suffers the forced teachings of the bigger institutionalized Orientalist system but who could be viewed as a member of

a oppressed group within the world she herself belongs to.

The study, nonetheless, has shown that even when the surface images of Arabia change, some modern depictions (like those by Raban, or even, on occasions, by O'Brien) still relate to the old stereotypes of past decades.

Finally it needs to be pointed out that there is no ideal pattern to follow - certainly, not among the texts selected for this study - in approaching and portraying Arabia, or for that matter, any other culture. What is needed is some kind of balance-striking or, at least, a more discriminating account of how particular texts are working, how and how far they push against, extend, modify, or succumb to the pressures of the Orientalist discourse.

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