

**Traces of Self-Reflexivity and Meta-Poetics in Lawrence
Durrell's
*Cities, Plains, and People: The Transition from Modernism
to Postmodernism***

Emad Said Elsayed Ibrahim

**Assistant Professor, Department of English, Faculty of Science and
Humanities, Shaqra University, Saudi Arabia**

Abstract:

The present study focuses on Durrell's transition to postmodernism through investigating the self-reflexivity exposed in his long poem "Cities, Plains, and People" (1946). Integral to the study also is Durrell's ardent passion for corresponding landscapes to art. No wonder, thus, to find Durrell as a devotee to the Einstein's concept of time-space continuum which views time as the fourth dimension of space. Consequently, guided by a Bakhtinian chronotopic structuring, Durrell fuses time and place in one unit. Therefore, through selecting a chronotopic structure of the journey, the development of Durrell as an artist and the revealing of his views on the artistic creative processes shall be investigated in studying the sixteen-part poem "Cities, Plains, and People" as a meta-poem.

Key Words: Chronotope, meta-poetry, Postmodernism, self-reflexivity, Tao.

إقتفاء آثار الانعكاس الذاتي والشاعرية الفوقية في قصيدة "المدن والسهول والناس"
للورانس داريل: الانتقال من الحداثة إلى ما بعد الحداثة
عماد سعيد السيد إبراهيم
أستاذ الأدب الإنجليزي المساعد بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية بكلية العلوم و الدراسات الإنسانية
بشقراء , جامعة شقراء , المملكة العربية السعودية

ملخص:

تركز هذه الدراسة على انتقال دوريل إلى ما بعد الحداثة من خلال محاولاته الأولى في شعر انعكاس الذات التي كشفت عنها قصيدته الطويلة "المدن والسهول والناس" (1946). جزء لا يتجزأ من الدراسة هو أيضا شغف داريل بربط المكان والطبيعة المصاحبه بالفن. لا عجب، إذن، أن نجد داريل محباً لمفهوم أينشتاين لسلسلة الزمان والمكان الذي ينظر إلى الزمن على أنه البعد الرابع للمكان. وبالتالي، وبتوجيه من هيكلية "الكرونوتوبية" البختينية، يدمج داريل الزمان والمكان في وحدة واحدة. لذلك، من خلال اختيار بنية كرونوموضوعية للرحلة، سيتتبع الباحث تطور داريل كفنان والكشف عن وجهات نظره حول العمليات الإبداعية الفنية في دراسة القصيدة المكونة من ستة عشر جزءاً "المدن والسهول والناس" كقصيدة من الشعر الفوقي.

الكلمات الرئيسية: كرونوتوب، الفوقية الشعر، ما بعد الحداثة، الانعكاس الذاتي، تاو.

**Traces of Self-Reflexivity and Meta-Poetics in Lawrence
Durrell's
Cities, Plains, and People: The Transition from Modernism
to Postmodernism**
Emad Said Elsayed Ibrahim
**Assistant Professor, Department of English, Faculty of Science and
Humanities, Shaqra University, Saudi Arabia**

Introduction:

Lawrence Durrell has paid a considerable concern to the influence of place on the forming of artistic experience. "Cities, Plains, and People" (1946) is a long poem that investigates Durrell's concept of the nature of artistic consciousness. Such interest endows the long poem with a meta-poetic character further enhanced by an autobiographic nature. The poem records Durrell's actual journey through different places, a journey that echoes his metaphoric journey seeking the illusive artistic experience and awareness. It is a journey of life starting from the Tibetan childhood experience until his settlement on the shores of the Mediterranean; a journey that symbolizes his metaphorical journey towards artistic consciousness. The poet, thus, has a conviction that places have got certain influence on the shaping of the artistic creativeness. The spirit of place, hence, has its power of inspiration and creation of the artistic. According to Durrell, place extends to encompass time to form a Bakhtinian chronotope that marks the poet's initiation towards postmodern experience of self-reflexivity.

Fundamental to the study also is Lawrence Durrell as a poet at the transitional crossroads towards postmodernism. Durrell's modernist tendency can be seen in his incorporation of Einstein's concept of space as n dimensional meaning that time is the fourth dimension of space. More clearly, it means that each place a body reaches has its own dimension of time, and that existence functions through a time-space continuum. Nevertheless, Durrell shows a keen interest in extending the modern mode of examining consciousness into a mode of self-reflection in the realm of meta-literature. Nonetheless, viewing the issue from another angle, Einstein's theories especially that of relativity could impart a postmodern influence; individuals' peculiar awareness concerning reality could thus be relative. Einstein supposes that if two vehicles travel in space at different speed levels, time procession for passengers in each vehicle will differ. Vipond finds that "Durrell's

appropriation of Einstein's relativity theory as a metaphor for perception in an attempt to refine a metaphysics of consciousness connects him with modernism, but the relativity proposition, in fact destabilizes the old unities as it manifests the relativity of points of view and absence of absolute truth" (Vipond:1987, P. 57). This supposes, in turn, the existence of two different versions of reality, hence deconstructing the established concept of a unified time consciousness.

In fiction writing, "Durrell differs from the high modernists in his attempt to transcend the Bergsonian *durée* exemplified by Proust and his followers and drawing upon Einsteinian relativity to create a new fictional chronotope" (Vipond: 1987, P. 53). Durrell's attitude is echoed in the words of his fictional novelist Pursewarden:

Space is a concrete idea, but Time is abstract. In the scar tissue of Proust's great poem you see that so clearly; his work is the great academy of the time-consciousness. But being unwilling to mobilize the meaning of time he was driven to fall back on memory, the ancestor of hope! (Durrell: Alexandria Quartet, P. 764).

Duration for Bergson is originally a continuous and inter-connected process, a process that cannot be broken into separate moments. Thus, whenever Bergson speaks of time, he definitely means duration. For, he means that the time units do not exist separately. This case cannot be applied on space which can be separated into parts. Bergson states that "the parts of time inter- penetrate, they are inseparable parts of a single continuous, connected process" (Bergson: 1999, P.72). However, Durrell is a proponent of time-space continuum depending on Einstein's concept of space as n dimensional. Time-space continuum is a concept that fuses the spatial and the temporal into a chronotope of place-time units. This means that a place in itself could be a time indicator. Applying Einstein's concept of time as one dimension of space, thus, time can be separated and even fragmented to echo a fragmented reality.

Echoing the Einstein's concept of space-time continuum, Mikhail Bakhtin put forth the theory of the literary chronotope to refer to the unity of time and space in a narrative. Bakhtin introduces the notion of chronotope into the study of literature by placing the hero and his adventures within the fictional time/space frame. Bakhtin, thus, describes the chronotope as an "organizational matrix of place" (Bakhtin: 2011, P.251). Considering narrative structures, Bakhtin

speaks of a chronotope as imparting a concretizing form to a literary work. "Thus the chronotope, functioning as the primary means for materializing time in space, emerges as a center for concretizing representation. All the novel's abstract elements gravitate toward the chronotope and through it takes on flesh and blood. (Bakhtin: 2011, P.250) Bakhtin introduces chronotopes based on the presentation of time in a work of art. He has introduced various types of chronotopes such as the adventure narrative chronotope. One important type is the chronotope of the adventure narrative of everyday life functioning through different types of space corresponding to periods of time. In other words the adventure chronotope shows the relationships between the hero and spatial forms fused within temporal units. Adventure or journey chronotope is the one selected for the present study.

On the other hand, meta-poetry, or even meta-literature has been taken as an indicator of self-reflexivity which is always correlated to postmodernism. This is so because of the assumed negotiation between two worlds; the world introduced by the poem and the *Other* world of the poem about itself. For this reason, it has become a frequent theme tackled by postmodern writers. The term meta-literature is used to refer to a literary work whose main concern is the process of its making. In fact, there are some serious attempts to define and theorize about them; meta-poetry and self-reflexivity. Wheeler has defined meta-poetry as "Poetry about poetry, especially self-conscious poems that pun on objects or items associated with writing or creating poetry" (Wheeler: 2014). In addition, Alfred Weber presents self-reflexive poetry as a "genre". According to him, this genre "denotes the poem's treatment of at least one aspect of the author's theory, or poetics, as its primary and overt thematic concern. This thematic genre includes all poems that deal with the poet, with the writing of poetry, and/or with the poem"(Weber: 1997, P. 10). Durrell in the poem concerned is theorizing about poetry. His main concern is the defining of the process that leads to the creation of art.

Moreover, "Cities, Plains, and People" is a poem that exposes Durrell's poetics as a thematic concern; the same poem also deals overtly with the poet's creative process of writing as a conscious business. Meta-poetry is poetry about its aesthetics and about its themes concerned with its creative process. However, self-reflexive poetry, or meta-poetry "does not only refer to its aesthetic objects. Meta-lyric poems refer to lyric inspiration, to the poetic creative process, to the

social task of literary creation, or to the intended reader's reception” (Zettelmann: 2005, p.132).

Artistic creation, including that characterized as self-reflexive, has been correlated to the spirit of the place by various artists. Durrell is a proponent of the influence of the spirit of the place, landscapes and seascapes, as having a paramount impact on an artist’s creativity and inspiration. One of the principle features of Durrell’s journey from India to Europe in "Cities, Plains, and People" is its extension to reach a level of becoming a metaphor for knowledge. Durrell in "Cities, Plains, and People" is shown essentially as a traveller who gains artistic consciousness and self-knowledge as he progresses in the journey.

Durrell is a poet who attributes considerable importance to the spirit of place as factor in literary creation. Attention to landscapes has influenced much of the English literary tradition. Geoffrey H. Hartman writes about the importance of landscape and its impact on poetry stating that “...The poem becomes, in a sense, a seduction of the poetical genius by the genius loci” (Hartman: 1970, p. 319). The belief that landscape does influence creative powers has led many artists to search for that special locale with which to establish a rapport which will stimulate them to create. Lawrence Durrell, influenced by the English literary tradition mentioned above and a prominent writer of poetry and prose has been a rootless wanderer. He has lived all over the world and has deep emotional feelings about the effect of landscape upon artistic creation.

The present study explores "Cities, Plains, and People" as a meta-poem, rather an archetype of meta-poem. The development of the poet’s artistic consciousness, the main theme of the poem concerned, occurs as the poet moves through various places marking the various periods of the poet’s life. Consequently through a technique of establishing an adventure chronotope, Durrell explores his journey towards artistic consciousness and creation. Representations of chronotopes as technique have always been correlated to fictional works; however this study attempts to show Durrell’s application of the concept of chornotope on poetry. In his development towards artistic consciousness, "Cities, Plains, and People”, four main places unfold a four- part chronotope in which the spatial and the temporal are viewed as inseparable. Thus, the Himalayan Tibet represents Durrell’s childhood, while London stands for his traumatic adolescence and the feeling of not at home. Paris denotes the didactic period and the

initiation of maturity. Finally, the Mediterranean Corfu and Alexandria signify complete maturity and the final attainment of artistic consciousness. Hence, through four places representing the chronotopic journey via distance and time, Durrell's journey towards artistic consciousness develops:

- I- The Tibet- idyllic childhood.
- II-The London-traumatic adolescence.
- III- Paris; the initiation towards maturity.
- IV-The Corfu-Alexandria experience; the attainment of artistic maturity.

I- The Tibet- idyllic childhood:

The Himalayan Tibet as a locus is so saturated in eastern philosophy and culture that it becomes temporally linked to Durrell's Greco-Roman culture of ancient Europe. Such a time-place continuum presents the Tibet period as a chronotopic unit concerned with Durrell's childhood consciousness. It also has an impact on the shaping of his initial steps towards artistic awareness. "Cities, Plains, and People" opens with offering an idyllic childhood experience; Durrell correlates the Himalayan Tibet with an ideal childhood period:

Once in idleness was my beginning,
.....
Night was to the mortal boy
Innocent of surface like a new mind
Upon whose edges once he walked
In idleness in perfect idleness. (Durrell, *Cities, Plains, and People*, L. 1-5) abbreviated hereafter as *CPP* followed by line number.

The opening line reflects on the poet's "beginning" which is a necessary stage in the development of the artist. He starts with a "new mind". To some extent, Durrell's work can be viewed as a kind of an *Ars Poetica* in which the poet shows his development as an artist. In "Cities, Plains and People" Durrell traces his development as an artist and extends the scope to offer advice for other writers. For this reason, the poem can very well be categorized as a meta-poem because it "tries to designate a coherent and systematic set of poetics, and poetics, in turn, is a systematic theory or doctrine of poetry" (Weber 1997, 10).

In an epic like manner Durrell speaks of his childhood as having some affinities with Greek Dionysus's. The poet gives an image of the child's "innocent thigh" resting against the "stony thigh" of the Tibetan mountain, thus alluding to Dionysus's prenatal experience of being sewn to the thigh of Zeus. In mythology, "Zeus consented to [Semele's] request of seeing him in his true image, and Semele was consumed by the fire of his thunderbolt. The unborn Dionysus was removed from the corpse and the fetus sewn up in Zeus's thigh, to be born three months later." (Dixon-Kennedy: 1998, P.114) Allusion to Dionysus, the god of tragic art and sensuality, services Durrell's purposes, namely the defining of his artistic consciousness. More precisely, the reference to Dionysus foregrounds a tendency towards the favoring of the sensual over the intellectual. The artist takes his initiative move with establishing an affinity with nature which is seen - through alluding to Dionysus - as a compensation for a lost mother, for the Himalayan mountain, personified as having a "stony thigh", stands now for Zeus. The young child imagined that he:

Saw the Himalayas like lambs
Stir their huge joints and lay
Against his innocent thigh a stony thigh. (CPP, L. 8-10)

Very close to postmodern ideals, Durrell abolishes the concept of the *Other* as an unacceptable different, rather he finds himself as an offspring of that *Other*. Therefore, he links himself to the Tibet in a bond like that of Dionysus's to Zeus in Greek mythology. Durrell shows a deep belief in the gnostic concept of the assimilating of the *Other* to reach the level of the *Same*. This gnostic assimilation of the *Other* closes Durrell to Lévinas's "ethics of alterity". Durrell emerges as a proponent of the "ethics of alterity" investigated by Emmanuel Lévinas who looks upon "receiving the *Other* as an ethical possibility manifests itself in an unconditional responsibility for the Other that derives from the precedence of the Other to the ego" (Herbrecher: 1999, p.7). Derrida himself judges Lévinas's ethics of alterity as an "immense treatise on hospitality" (Derrida: 1997, p.49).

Durrell, as a "mortal boy", idealizes his experience as innocent and profitable for a promising poet. In the Tibet he has his;
.....first school
In faces lifted from saddles to the snows:
Words caught by the soft klaxons crying
Down to the plains and settled cities.

So once in idleness my beginning.
Little known of better then or worse
But in the lens of this great patience
Sex was small,
Death was small,
Were qualities held in a deathless essence,
Yet subjects of the wheel, burned clear
And immortal to my seventh year. (*CPP*, L. 22–33)

In this section of the poem Durrell starts his didactic journey setting from India, a place that he was reluctant to leave. He enjoys an idle “beginning” of a childhood life where “Sex” and “Death” were “small”. Referring to the experience of an artist, Durrell speaks of the affinity with nature that colors the place seen as his “first school”. Durrell is the passive observer in a place that enhances the artistic experience. It is a place that is inundated in religious implications such as “prayer-wheels”. According to the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, spinning such a wheel will have the same religious effect as orally reciting the prayers. Thus, the verbal could be sacrificed and still the grace of the written and the spoken word could still be felt.

II-The London-traumatic adolescence:

The London period marks the leaving of his innocent world of the Tibet signaling another developmental chronotopic unit. Addressing those like him who have just departed childhood period to experience the traumatic instead of the idyllic, Durrell speaks of pain and sadness:

To all who turn and start descending
The long sad river of their growth:
.....
Until your pain become literature. (*CPP*, L. 34–40)

The poet moves to the fallen world of metropolitan London of:

... the prudish cliffs and the sad green home
Of pudding island o’er the Victorian foam.

Here all as poets were pariah
Some sharpened little follies into hooks

To pick upon the language and survive. (*CPP*, L. 51–55)

Living in England has formed a negative experience for the initiating poet. However, Durrell cannot ignore the effect of passing by moments of “pain” as motivating the primary stages towards the creative literary experience. The poet is quite sure that later on the London experience will serve as an important phase; a chronotopic unit of “pain” that will “become literature”. Durrell concentrates on the poetic experience as he refers to the state of artistic stagnation that he felt in England. Unlike the Tibetan grace, England exposes “Victorian foam”. Durrell alludes to the Victorian literary works concentrating on imperialist chivalrous stories impressed on the people of the empire. England thus, is seen as a place that excludes the *Other*. This principle goes in contrast to Durrell’s own convictions about the *Other*. Durrell takes the issue from the stand point of a gnostic perspective, a very close philosophy to that of mystic ideals. In England Durrell’s stance puts him in the camp of postmodernism through the adoption of a similar philosophy. Postmodernism is similar to certain gnostic ideas in which “the central insight of the gnostic philosopher is that of wholeness [Ganzheit]. At the same time, in gnosis, the entirely Other becomes perceivable beyond the fallen world (Koslowski: 1988, p.9).

However such feeling of wholeness is still illusive as he finds himself estranged from the world of London. This results in a sense of pain. Since pain is a frequent stimulus for cathartic writing, Durrell alludes to his own expression of the stifling “English death” depicted in *The Black Book* (1977); the regrettable period in his life after leaving India. Referring to this regret John Unterecker writes: “when Durrell at the age of eleven left the College of St. Joseph in Darjeeling and set sail down the “long sad river” of adolescence, his westward path took him not toward literal but toward metaphoric death.” (Unterecker: 1964, p.8)

As for the craft of poetry writing, Durrell finds that poets in England are treated like outcasts or “pariah[s]”. While “some” poets “sharpened little follies into hooks / To pick upon the language and survive.” This time Durrell reflects on the thematic grounds and on the stylistic aspects of the poetry written in England. Durrell attacks the “follies” of style especially the forced figurative language. It seems that Durrell adopts T.S.Eliot’s views on the contrived metaphor as a method of the irrational. Those poets sacrifice the traditional and genuine of expressions for the sake of surviving as second rate-poets. Irony springs

from Durrell's use of a metaphor in attacking the figurative language of some poets. For, "follies" which stand for the contrived metaphors is likened to fishing "hooks". Again Durrell proves the self-reflexiveness of the poem for it has poetics as main concern.

Further basing his views on the perspective of an artist, the concept of home has been contradicted; London seems to be hostile and corrupt. So that, at a climatic point Durrell announces: "so here at last we outgrow ourselves." A turning point in his life lurks and he finally acknowledges the fake nature of his mother country, England. And : "As the green stalk is taken from the earth, / With a great juicy sob, I turned from a Man / To Mandrake, in whose awful hand I am." (*CPP*, L.113–116)The sterilizing aspect of England is indicated by the uprooting of the fertility symbol "green stalk" from the earth. Durrell creates this image to parallel his own reaction in being uprooted from the landscape with which he felt no correspondence.

Durrell has been playing on the binary oppositional pair of home versus displacement or even exile. Here Durrell is supplementing the concept of home. Upon applying Derrida's concept of supplementation, the hierarchy of binary oppositions thus turns unstable. In this Derrida deconstructs the binary hierarchies, "he wants to show the fragile basis of the establishment of such hierarchies and the possibilities of inverting these hierarchies to gain new insights into language and life" (Bressler: 2011, p.114). Durrell chooses to leave home as England looks upon him as "pariah".

III-Paris; the initiation towards maturity:

Leaving London is his next step: now he identifies himself with Prospero who was forced into a voluntary exile:

Prospero upon his island
Cast in romantic form,
When his love was fully grown
He laid his magic down.

Truth within the tribal wells
Innocent inviting creature
Does not rise to human spells
But by paradox. (*CPP*, L.117–124)

The unity of the self that was felt previously in India is now lost, he seeks it using the “spells” of Prospero; however, spells prove to be useless as they are of a “romantic form”. At this point Durrell follows the classists in attacking the fanciful and the formless. Therefore, as he is “fully grown” upon reaching maturity Durrell “laid his magic down” and starts his actual search for “Truth”. England cannot provide for those moments of truth that were found in the innocence of childhood, so effective as to be equal to the “tribal wells” from which the primordial source of tradition issues. For this reason, he announces again that a poet needs no “spells” upon the act of creation: true poetry does not have the incantation-like nature of romanticism. Commenting on his condition, Durrell is speaking of the “paradox” that lies in the idea that truth can be found only by those who do not seek it, a fact that recalls the child who had no need to search for self-unity because he had never been told that he was not unified.

Thus to Paris he moves seeking what he lacks in London; artistic growth. In Paris:

.....he waited
For black-hearted Descartes to seek him out
With all his sterile apparatus.
Now man for him became a thinking lobe,
Through endless permutations sought repose.
By frigid latinisms he mated now
To the hard frame of prose the cogent verb. (*CPP*, L. 135–141)

Again through Derridan supplementation Durrell counters the hierarchy of the binary oppositional pair of the intellectual/sensual. Descartes has immense influence on the European philosophic legacy: the ontological western philosophy. Descartes questioned everything he could question and reached the conclusion that he could not question that he was thinking, which means he exists (i.e., “I think therefore I am”). This statement is often cited as the beginning of modernism. Moreover, the same statement asserts that all knowledge must be built from this basic foundation of knowledge. Descartes began with rationalism, but his theory evolved into a more scientific approach which combined rationalism and a form of empiricism.

In Paris Durrell encounters the Cartesian philosophy of dualism which hypothesizes the superiority of the mind over body. Consequently, Durrell can be described as an early postmodernist as he starts with deconstructing modernism. Hoffman and Kurzenberger

found that “The early phase of postmodernism deconstructed modernism and the second phase began developing alternative epistemologies and methodologies” (Hoffman & Kurzenberger: 2008, p 83). Descartes looks upon man as a “thinking lobe”. Durrell counters such a view. For this reason, he refers to the intellectual procedures of Descartes as “sterile” a word which refers to the sterility of the clinical laboratories of scientists and that of the writers who are over concerned with the dissection of language rather than with creation. Artistic creation is not the product of laboratory-like processes on language. Moreover, Durrell refers to “endless permutations” or the poor endeavors of some English writers who veneer their poor talent with contriving new word combinations, alternations, and variations.

However, following intellectual “teachers” of laboratory “sterile” maneuvers and “frigid latinisms” proves to be not profitable, as they do not afford for a “critic and a nymph” to the “heart” so as to be a “doctor to the spirit”:

To many luck may give for merit
More profitable teachers. To the heart
A critic and a nymph:
And an unflinching doctor to the spirit.
All these he confines in metaphors,
She sleeping in his awkward mind
Taught of the pace of women or birds
Through the leafy body of man
.....
To these hot moments in a reference of stars
Beauty and death, how sex became
A lesser sort of speech, and the members doors. (*CPP*, L. 142–153)

The dissectors of language, or “teachers”, with their laboratory-like “sterile” operations lead to futile results. Perhaps this is the first reference Durrell makes about his approaching new “doors”; let’s say deconstructing the Saussurian hierarchies. Supplementation thus occurs when Durrell contradicts the mainstream modernist concept of favoring the mind over the body, intellect over sensuality. Consequently, Durrell compares the world to the body whose “members” turn into “doors” leading to the entrance of the self. Thus, a shift in interest from the intellectual to the physical is witnessed as Durrell speaks of “sex” as “sort of speech”. Meaning then is no longer the fruit of an intellectual

construct but of a sensory experience. Thus he uses “metaphors” to draw an analogy between the creative act and the sensual act of: “the pace of a woman.../ Through the leafy body of a man”.

Further taking the “endless permutations” to another level, Durrell is overtly referring to stylistic issues in the writing of poetry:

Faces may settle sadly
Each into its private death
By business travel or fortune,
Like the fat congealing on a Plate
Or the fogged negative of labour
Whose dub fastidious rectitude
Brings death in living as a sort of mate.
Here however man may botch his way
To God via Valery, Gide or Rabelais. (*CPP*, L. 154–162)

Durrell criticizes the stylistic features of the dissectors of language whose ostentatious writing appears as if “fat congealing on a Plate”. The capitalized “Plate” which chimes with Plato brings to the mind the spiritless style of those writers. This reminds Durrell of the over idealization of Plato who was the first to abolish poets - treated as “pariah[s]” - from his Republic. The “fastidious rectitude” or the righteousness of style appears as a forced expression of feelings seen as a condition leading to the loss of genuinely created works. The practices of second-rate poets distort art until it becomes much like “fogged negative of [previous great] labour”.

As a mature poet, Durrell is aware of T.S. Eliot’s , modern, classical definition of a good poet: ”A good poet will usually borrow from authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest” (T.S.Eliot: 1960, P.125).Eliot invites the poets to establish a tradition, a personality, admitted through the doors of old masters. For this reason, Durrell declares: “I don’t think anyone can... develop a style consciously... I think the writing itself grows you up, and you grow the writing up, and finally you get an amalgam of everything you have pinched with a new kind of personality which is your own” (Durrell, *The Paris Review*, pp.52-53). For this reason, “the private death” Durrell is referring to in the previous extract is the private endeavors of artists who work creatively without consulting the legacy of classical masters. Otherwise, the end product could be “like the fat congealing on a plate” or a “fogged negative”. Consequently, the “way to God” or

artistic style can be reached through the copying of such masters as; “Valery, Gide or Rabelais”. Durrell’s positive attitude about the French is recorded in his *Spirit of the Place* (1969). In it he writes about the influence of landscape upon the French character which he admires.

I believe that you could exterminate the French at a blow and resettle the country with Tartars, and within two generations discover, to your astonishment, that the national characteristics were back at norm - the restless; metaphysical curiosity, the tenderness for good "living and the passionate individualism: even though their noses were now flat. (Durrell: 1969, P. 157)

IV-The Corfu-Alexandria experience; the attainment of artistic maturity:

Progressing through his journey, towards self-knowledge and artistic consciousness, Durrell moves to Corfu, one of the Greek islands. There, he reaches his final chronotopic unit in the journey-chronotope which gives structure to the poem. It is clear that, as the poem opens with a chronotopic unit that fuses the Tibet with the Greco-Roman culture in alluding to the myth Dionysus, the Corfu-Alexandria chronotopic unit fuses again the ancient Greco-Roman culture with that of the eastern Tao philosophy. Durrell follows his instinct to anchor at the idyllic Mediterranean world of Corfu. Part VIII opens with recording this procession:

So Time, the lovely and mysterious
With promises and blessing moves
Through her swift degrees,
Towards the sad perfect wife,
The rocky island and the cypress-tree. (*CPP*, L. 205–209)

In Corfu Durrell salvages his previous childhood unity of the self. The idyllic experience of the Himalayas is regained in the Mediterranean island of Corfu, where Durrell has advanced closely towards artistic awareness. At this point Durrell trusts the “the senses” instead of the intellect:

Here for the five lean dogs of the senses
Greece moved in calm memorial (*CPP*, L. 217–219)

Island life seems to have a catalytic agent influencing Durrell's poetic creation, Greek islands turn out to be a counterpart in opposition to London described as chaotic. In the Mediterranean world Durrell has found a place: "in which the artist can compose his fragmented experience by linking it to a landscape soaked in the past, a landscape richer and older and more meaningful than the modern, chaotic one" (Unterecker:1964,p16) thus, referring to Corfu he states:

Here worlds were confirmed to him.
Differences that matched like cloth (*CPP*, L. 233–236)

The affirmation Durrell speaks of issues from the crystalizing of a poetic vision. He allows the sensual Mediterranean world around to shape artistic consciousness. This is indicated by the "naked Ionian fauns" in reference to his daughters. Thus, the Dionysian sensuality is brought to counter the other extreme of the Apollonian imagination. Durrell's self-identification with Dionysus in the adoption of Dionysian sensuality clarifies more his disagreement with the superior position of the mind over the body proposed by the Cartesian philosophy. In ancient Greece, Dionysus was the God of wine, vegetation, the life-force and of ecstasy; he was also the god of tragic art. In Greece Durrell emerges as a new Dionysus having his procession of the cult of "Ionian fauns". This cult "wore fawn skins and crowns of ivy" (Dixon-Kennedy1998 pp.114 -115). Durrell images his actual daughter as his cult of followers:

'Look' she might say press here
With your fingers at the temples.
Are they not the blunt uncut horns
Of the small naked Ionian fauns? (*CPP*, L. 245–248)

Again Durrell alludes to the Cartesian dualism of the mind and the body. He also counters the well-established concept that shows the mind as superior to the body:

Here is all my growth
Through the bodies of other selves,
In books, by promise or perversity
My mutinous crew of furies. (*CPP*, L. 277–280)

Through the supplementing of the mind to the body, Durrell is approaching the postmodern threshold again after deconstructing the duality of the home/ diaspora pair as he supplements London to Paris, and Corfu.

Greece and its landscape correspond to his youthful experiences in Tibet, but because of his maturity of insight his new experience within the Greek landscape surpasses that Himalayan experience. The artist is in complete accord with the beauty of nature surrounding him. However the war experience has made his stay in Greece impossible,

Now darkness comes to Europe
Dedicated by a soft unearthly jazz.
The greater hearts contract their joys
By silence..... (CPP, L. 326-329)

Durrell has to move to Alexandria where he would artistically develop to reconcile with his bodies “of other selves” or the “mutinous crew of furies” so as to establish his independent voice. Durrell resolves his dilemma through assimilating all the conflicting *Others* via the eastern philosophy of the Tao. Such a philosophy is very close to the gnostic acceptance of the *Other*. The general rule on which the Tao philosophy is based states that,

.....the many and None
As base reflections of the One. (CPP, L. 347-348)

According to Derrida “the *Other* is understood as a heterological entity since it is neither an essence nor a phenomenon; it is “irretrievably plural and cannot be assimilated, digested, represented, or thought as such, and hence put to work by the system of metaphysics.” (Gasché: 1986, p 103) Durrell’s concept of the *Other* is identical to that of Levinas’s. According to Levinas “Receiving the *Other* as an ethical possibility manifests itself in an unconditional responsibility for the Other that derives from the precedence of the Other to the ego” (Lévinas: 1986, p.180). Consequently, “the body of the other selves” and the “mutinous crew of furies” can very well be reconciled to the “ego” in the realm of the Tao which is a philosophy of the “many and None / reflecting the One”. This philosophy advocates a pluralistic vision about truth. Such a vision is identical to postmodernism whose; “...primary epistemological position demonstrates an epistemological pluralism and a metaphysical holism, which does not privilege any one way of knowing” (Murphy, 1996). Again “postmodernism suggests that multiple epistemologies and methodologies should be utilized regardless of the assumption of whether or not ultimate truth exists” (Hoffman, L. et al: 2009, p.136).

According to Durrell, art needs a self-recognition, a full knowledge of the “personal world”, enabling the artist to be part to his environment. In turn, Durrell resorts to the eastern philosophy of the Tao introduced by the “yellow emperor”. This philosophy is built on the basis of the necessity of knowing the self as prerequisite for knowing the world. Durrell consults the “yellow emperor” who once,

Published the first great Tao.
Which all confession can only gloze
And in the unconscious can only spoil
Apparent opposition of the two
Where unlocked numbers show their fabric. (*CPP*, L. 340–344)

The “Tao” is the “way” or rout proposed by the Lao Tzu, the “yellow emperor”. It is a way that is beyond all and yet part of all: the unconscious is part of a person but not fully understood by everyone. Another part of Lao Tzu’s philosophy is the “apparent opposition reconciled” so that, “where one thing exists in the world so must its opposite which is in no way considered as an extreme” (Tzu, Lau: 1963, p.89). This idea of holistic truth rests on the concept of the artist as a passive observer and a torn individual who is caught in the dilemma of self-realization on the one hand, and controlling his environment on the other. Art could, thus, spring from the reconciliation of opposites. Examples of artists who fit this pattern are Rimbaud and Goethe seen as “doppelganger[s]”. They have succeeded in bringing the two extremes of the internal or personal world of the artist and the external world of his environment to harmony:

.....the doppelganger
Goethe saw one morning go
Over the hill ahead; the man
Sow gnawed by promises who shared
The magnificent responses of Rimbaud. (*CPP*, L. 350–354)

Another opposition facing the artist is that of appearance versus reality, for the artist’s world:

.....fell to ruins
But his heart was in repair. (*CPP*, L. 384–385)

The artist has his personal world “in repair” once he can contain his wild “body of the other selves” the controlling of which calms and repairs the personal world leading to a state of contemplation and

observing of a world in “ruin”. This condition is prerequisite for the actual act of writing.

Upon the act of writing, the artist records objectively aspects of human nature; the poet develops from observation into participation in the foregrounding of human experience. Thus the “cowardice”, which is socially attributed to artists as making nothing in actual life to happen, is really a wrong social judgment: at least artists have brought “Hamlet and Faust to the front page news”.

The artist by his greater cowardice

In sudden brush-strokes gave us clues –

Hamlet and Faust as front page news. (*CPP*, L. 356–358)

Therefore, the concept of duality first introduced by the Cartesian philosophy can be refuted in the reconciliation between apparent opposites as preached in the Tao philosophy. This Tao philosophy is capable of causing a kind of psychological unity leading to the unity that an artist needs for creation. It is a psychological unity reached through the reconciliation and even marriage between the conscious, “ego”, and the unconscious, “id”:

Ego, my dear, and id

Lie so profoundly hid

In space- time void, through feeling,

While contemporary, slow,

We conventional lovers cheek to cheek

Inhaling and exhaling go. (*CPP*, L. 407–412)

The “ego” passes by moments of agony during the time of creation, it is playing the role of a female as seduced by the male “id”. Both are “hid” in the no place and time or “the space- time void” to practice the act of love “cheek to cheek / inhaling and exhaling”. In a “slow” process the physical act consummates and the agony increases “until ... pain become a literature” as indicted in part one of the poem line (40). The “spirit” which is part of the artist must suffer and feel in order to be able to express itself. The creative act occurs, thus, with the discovery of the “inner suffering word” which is still reached through approximation.

Dear Spirit, should I reach,
By touch or speech corrupt,

The inner suffering word,
By weakness or idea,
Though you might suffer
Feel and know,
Pretend you do not hear. (*CPP*, L. 420–426)

The “suffering” word, the poem, is waiting to be born. Durrell asks: can it be reached by the sensuality of “touch”, “speech”, and “weakness” or by the intellectuality of “idea”. This issue is traced back to the traditional Cartesian mind/ body, or sensuality/intellectuality duality. However, at first the “Spirit” must “suffer, / Feel and know” the world so that the artist could start writing. Feeling and knowing the world are thus Durrell’s final haven in his journey tracing the development of his artistic consciousness. In the Mediterranean especially in sensual Gothic-like Alexandria that Durrell takes the side of the body rather than the mind. Allyson Kreuter, believes that through Alexandria "Durrell constructs an urban Gothic cityscape, one that represents the incarnation both of erotic desire and the death-drive" (Kreuter, Allyson:2016, p.73). Thus, according to Durrell, sensuality is the basic force of life that an artist needs to charge his poetic stamina with. Alexandria can be the right place to charge such stamina. However, Durrell now he opens his eyes to the society he has first shunned, even though the war experience has left indelible scars on the surface of earth.

.....Athens or Bremen seem
A mass of rotten vegetables
Firm on the diagram of earth can lie;
And here you may reflect how genus epileptoid
Knows his stuff; and where rivers
Have thrown their switches and enlarged
Our mercy and our knowledge of each other; (*CPP*, L. 434–440)

The chaotic defilement of the earth has been done by the “genus epileptoid” who have started the war and cannot control it. They turned cites like “Athens” and “Bremen” into a “mass of rotten” stuff. However, the rivers can change the face of earth as they run. Streams then are imaged as if artists creating a harmonious world of art with some strikes of their brushes. The “rivers” the same as artists can enlarge the “mercy” and “knowledge” and consciousness of humanity; of each *Other*.

As the poem ends, Durrell reaches the unity of self not through the intellectual but through the sensual to resolve the Cartesian debate, he finally takes the side of the senses rather than the mind. This time he is Prospero at harmony with the world he fled previously.

For Prospero remains the evergreen
Cell by the margin of the sea and land,
Who many cities, plains, and people saw
Yet by his open door
In sunlight fell asleep
One summer with the Apple in his hand. (*CPP*, L. 457–462)

Durrell has now reached Prospero's "evergreen" cell the loss of which he had suffered in his pursuit of intellectual knowledge. Thus, Durrell is tempted to "fell asleep" rather than to follow the intellect. It seems that he has finally regained his earthly paradise which he had lost upon leaving the Tibet. He has reached a paradise in which he attains truth found in the sensuality of "sunlight", and the "Apple" of the first sin, not in the "sterile" pursuits of intellect. Thus Durrell in "Cities Plains and People" has traced his development as an artist. This fact about the poem colors it with a self-reflexive hue, the very proof of his procession towards postmodernism. Weber refers to the conditions associated with poetics being the milestone of self-reflexivity as follows: "In our specific context, it also means the overall view of the aims, norms and problems of his art held by one poet, developed out of, and along with his poetic practice (Weber: 1997, pp.10-11).

In "Cities Plains and People" Durrell's consciousness of his poetics submerges his modernism and puts him on the threshold of postmodernism. A postmodern mode prophesying two parallel realities, that of the actual journey he made from the Tibet to the Mediterranean and the journey towards artistic development. Thus, his transition to postmodernism is first anticipated by his attempt to tackle topics about art, its aim and norms.

Conclusion:

Two important concerns have frequently been tackled in the poetry and fiction of Lawrence Durrell: landscape and the artistic experience. However, critics have given considerable attention to Durrell as a novelist and few studies have been devoted to his poetry. Trying to draw more attention to the poetry of Lawrence Durrell the present study

has focused on pinpointing the turning point of transition towards postmodernism by approaching his long poem “Cities, Plains, and People” (1946) as a meta-poem. “Cities, Plains, and People” emerges as an *Ars Poetica* in which Durrell gives views, theorizes, about art and the artistic creative process. The meta-poetic character of the poem reveals two parallel and non-conflicting worlds. First, there is the world of the journey the poet executes from the Tibet to the Mediterranean world. Second, there is the *Other* world in which the poet journeys towards artistic creation or as he is engaged in defining the process of artistic creation. Consequently, postmodern and gnostic concepts of the *Other* find their well-established position in Durrell’s initial stages towards the transition to postmodernism.

References:

- Bakhtin, Mikhail**, (2011). *The Dialogic Imagination – four essays*, University of Texas press: Austin.
- Bergson, Henri**, (1999). *Duration and Simultaneity*, Clinamen Press Ltd: Manchester.
- Bressler, E. Charles**, (2003). *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*, Longman: New York.
- Derrida Jacques**, (1997). *Adieu à Emmanuel Lévinas*, Galilée: Paris.
- Dixon-Kennedy, Mike** (1998). *Encyclopedia of Greco-Roman Mythology*, ABC-CLIO: London, pp.114 -115
- Durrell, Lawrence**, (1962). *The Alexandria Quartet*, Faber & Faber: London.
- Durrell, Lawrence**, (1969). *Spirit of Place*, New York: Dutton.
- Durrell, Lawrence**, (1977). *The Black Book*, London: Faber.
- Durrell, Lawrence**, (1985). *Collected Poems 1931–1974*, Faber:London.
- Eliot, T.S.** (1960). *The Sacred Wood*, London University: London.
- Gasché, Rodolphe**, (1986). *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection*, Harvard Univ. Press: London.
- Hartman, Geoffrey H.** (1970). *Beyond Formalism*, Yale Univ. Press: New Haven.
- Herbrecher, Stefan**, (1999). *Lawrence Durrell, Postmodernism and the Ethics of Alterity*, Rodopi B.V: Amsterdam.
- Hoffman, L. & Kurzenberger, M.** (2008). "Premodern, modern, and postmodern ways of interpreting the miraculous and mental illness from religious and psychological perspectives". In H. Ellens (Ed.), *Miracles: God, science, and psychology in the paranormal* (Vol. 3, pp. 65-93). Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Hoffman, L. et al** (2009). "Toward a Sustainable Myth of Self An Existential Response to the Postmodern Condition" *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* Volume 49 Number 2 April. 135-173
- Koslowski, Peter**, (1988). "Philosophie, Mystik, Gnosis," *Gnosis und Mystik in der Geschichte der Philosophie*, ed. Peter Koslowski (Zürich and Munich: Artemis,)
- Kreuter, Allyson**, (2016) "The Urban Gothic City in Lawrence Durrell's The

- Alexandria Quartet" *English Academy Review-Southern African Journal of English Studies* Volume: 33 issue: 2 pages: 68-80
- Lévinas, Emmanuel**, (1982). "La Trace de L'autre," In *Découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, Vrin: Paris.
- MacNiven, Ian**, (1998). *Lawrence Durrell: A Biography*, London: Faber.
- Massingham, Hugh & Pauline**, (1962). *The Englishman Abroad*, Phoenix House: London.
- Michel, Julian & Andrewski, Gene**, (1960). "The Art of Fiction XXIII: Lawrence Durrell" *The Paris Review*, No.22, Autumn-Winter.37
- Muller-Zetzelmann, Eva**. (2005). "A Frenzied Oscillation": AutoReflexivity in the Lyric", In *Theory into Poetry: New Approaches to the Lyric*. Edited by Müller-Zetzelmann, Eva & Margarete, Rubik, Rodopi: New York.
- Murphy, N.** (1996). *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda*. Trinity Press International: Harrisburg, PA
- Pine, Richard** (1994). *Lawrence Durrell: The Mindscape*, St Martin's: New York.
- Tzu, Lao**, (1963). *Tao Te Ching*, Trans. D.C. Lau (G.B) Penguin.
- Unterecker, John** (1964). *Lawrence Durrell*, Columbia Univ. Press: New York.
- Vipond, Dianne L.** (1993)."Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria Quartet: The Missing Link to Postmodernism." *Deus Loci: The Lawrence Journal* NS2.
- Weber, Alfred**. (1997)."Towards a Definition of Self-Reflexive Poetry", In *Poetics in the Poem: Critical Essays on American Self-Reflexive Poetry*. Edited by Dorothy Z. Baker. Peter Lang: New York.
- Wheeler, L.K.** (2014)."Literary Terms and Definitions." In Dr. Wheeler's Website. Last updated September 3.

