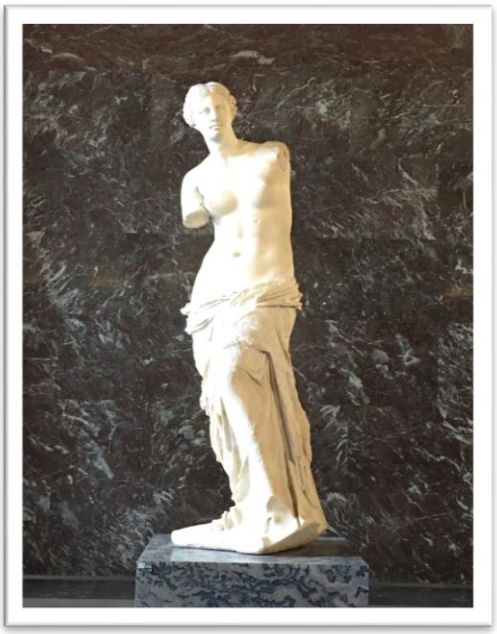
Université Toulouse II Jean Jaurès
UFR de Langues, Littératures et Civilisations Etrangères
Département des Etudes du Monde Anglophone
Session: Juin 2025

The Divine Feminine in Lawrence Durrell's Island Books



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Mémoire de Master 2 Recherche

Présenté par

Asmaâ Bouzid

Sous la direction de Monsieur le Professeur

Philippe Birgy

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The Traveller

Byways and bygone

And lone nights long

Sun rays and sea waves

And star and stone

Manless and friendless

No cave my home

This is my torture

My long nights, lone

- Maya Angelou -

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Introduction

From ancient olive groves to the shimmering waves of the Mediterranean, the essence of the Greek landscapes flows through the works of Lawrence Durrell. He was an errant poet born in 1912 in India, and his life of wandering influenced his writings. At the age of nine, he went to St Joseph's College, as mentioned in his biography by Ian MacNiven, where "non-Catholics were given a 'strictly secular and not religious instruction,' Larry would recall. 'So I can say I was brought up by Jesuits, though only as an out-patient so to speak!'".[1] This contact with spirituality is reflected in Durrell's writing, as we will perceive in this dissertation. When the situation became difficult in India, Lawrence Durrell and his family moved to England and settled there when he was eleven. During the "long voyage to England. Larry went with decidedly mixed feelings. He was already nostalgic for the India that he sensed he was losing".[2] In England, he went to St Olave's Grammar School and then to St Edmund's School. However, he did not like school even though he was interested in poetry. Therefore, he began to write poems at the age of fifteen and published his first collection *Quaint Fragments* in 1931.

Furthermore, Lawrence Durrell travelled a lot and lived in many places such as Egypt, France and Greece thanks to his work for the British government. During the years of his travel life, he wrote his most famous novel, *The Alexandria Quartet,* published between 1957 and 1960. Long before, in 1945, he had already published the first island book of a trilogy: *Prospero's Cell*, which he started writing in the form of memoirs when he was in Corfu and finished during his stay in Egypt. *Prospero's Cell* was well received and praised among critics, and *The New York Times* reviewed it as being "among the best books ever written". The first book of the trilogy was followed by *Reflections on a Marine Venus,* published in 1953, about Durrell's stay in Rhodes during the post-World War II period. Then, in 1957, *Bitter Lemons of Cyprus* was published.

Lawrence Durrell is also known as a postmodernist writer because of his style and influences. In Europe, the dominant movement was modernism from the late 19th century until the 1940s of the 20th century. It manifested itself in literature as the break with traditional forms of writing, aiming at new ways of expression. The First World War was one of the triggering

[1] McNiven, Ian S. *Lawrence Durrell: A Biography*. Faber and Faber, 1998, 37.
[2] McNiven, 1998, 50.

factors that contributed to the birth of modernism. This movement was based on self-consciousness and a subjective experience of place and time. It was also interpreted as a reaction to WWI's terrors and atrocities. Therefore, themes such as destruction and fragmentation are common in literary works at that time. We find these themes in some of Durrell's writings, such as *The Alexandria Quartet,* which may suggest that he still felt part of the modernist era. He was influenced by modernist writers and poets such as T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence and above all, Henry Miller, with whom he sustained a long-lasting relationship. As maintained by Reed Way Dasenbrock:

> The *Quartet* was so popular largely because it worked comfortably within modes of modernist fiction writing already assimilated by mainstream taste, modes largely created by D.H. Lawrence, Proust, and Joyce. *The Revolt of Aphrodite*, Durrell's collective title for the two later novels, represents a revolt against those modes and a searching critique of them.[3]

Yet, this modernist influence did not prevent Durrell from breaking its rules in some of his works. In short, Dasenbrock explains the success of *The Alexandria Quartet* by its submission to the dominant movement of the period. On the other hand, he asserts that Durrell's other works did not have the same positive reception because they did not align with the taste of the readership of the time. Nevertheless, Durrell's travel narratives are rather postmodernist. They are marked by fragmentation, intertextuality and the use of metafictional patterns.

The modernist movement reached several fields and caused a scientific, artistic, literary and religious change. Kevin J.H. Dettmar states that:

> Whereas the work of nineteenth-century scientists such as Lyell and Darwin had, as an unintended consequence, thrown the religious establishment into disarray, the most significant philosophical forebear of modernism, Friedrich Nietzsche, set out to dismantle the foundations of the Judeo-Christian tradition with malice aforethought.[4]

This break with religion opened the door to a more rebellious writing and allowed writers and artists to approach forbidden subjects. During the modernist era,

> In the years from 1900 to the First World War, the 'realist' texts had not disappeared, but, much travel writing became less didactic, more subjective, more literary. By the inter-war years, which saw a surge in the popularity of travel and travel writing, the literary travel book had become the dominant form: many of the best known examples of the genre were written by writers equally or better known for their fiction or poetry.[5]

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[3] Dasenbrock, Reed Way. "Lawrence Durrell and the modes of modernism." *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 33, no. 4, 1987, p. 515, https://doi.org/10.2307/441164.

[4] Dettmar, Kevin J. H. "Modernism." *The Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature*, edited by David Scott Kastan, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

[5] Youngs, Tim, and Peter Hulme, editors. *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*. Cambridge University Press, 2002, 75.

In order to understand why travel writing emerged and had such magnitude during this period, it is important to define the genre.

A narrative "is a story, whether told in prose or verse, involving events, characters, and what the characters say and do". [6] Indeed, a story could be real or fictional. In the travel narrative, it is both. Regardless of its historical and cultural importance, the travel narrative is a hybrid literary genre that draws a thin line between reality and fiction. The part of fiction is what makes it difficult to define this genre and to distinguish it from another similar genre, that of the novel. This difficulty comes from the complexity of travel narrative writing. Nevertheless, if the travel narrative genre used to be popular in the modernist era, it is facing lots of difficulties nowadays. Scholars' points of view are contrasted in the first place because of the context in which the genre developed. This divergence is due to the colonial ground on which the genre was cultivated. This created a debate on whether travel narratives were propaganda instruments or purely literary reflections on people and cultures of fantasised remote corners in the planet.

In *The Best Travel Writing, 2010: True Stories from around the World,* William Dalrymple states that:

> Travel writing was suddenly where the action was, and it remained so for nearly ten years. Among writers the form became popular for it re-emerged at a time of disenchantment with the novel, and seemed to present a serious alternative to fiction. A writer could still use the techniques of the novel—develop characters, select and tailor experience into a series of scenes and pieces, arrange the action so as to give the narrative shape and momentum—yet what was being written about was all true; moreover, unlike most literary fiction, it sold.[7]

Otherwise stated, the travel narrative genre knew a sudden surge and a huge success among writers when they were undergoing a sense of discontent with the novel. The travel narrative as a form allows for elasticity in the writing process and creativity, which provides the necessary tools to use both the stylistic and structural elements to build a vigorous narrative flow that could replace fiction while preserving the same patterns. Yet, travel narratives are based on real experiences, which adds some authenticity and appeals to readers who appreciate factual accounts. Dalrymple highlights the commercial aspect of the travel narrative genre, which sold well, unlike the novel that struggled to achieve outstanding sales. He adds: "Two

[6] Abrams, M. H., and Geoffrey Galt Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Ninth ed., Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009, 208.
[7] O'Reilly, James, et al., editors. *The Best Travel Writing, 2010: True Stories from around the World*, Travelers' Tales, Palo Alto, CA, 2010, xx.

decades later, however, the climate in the more elitist literary circles has long changed from enthusiasm to one of mild boredom. Academics have begun accusing travel writers of orientalism and cultural imperialism".[8] Therefore, after about twenty years of success, the travel narrative shifted from being popular to controversial due to its relation to colonial expansion. Many travel writers wrote accounts to serve the imperial policies and used their writings to romanticise the image of the colonial empire while nourishing the stereotypes about Eastern civilisation, depicting them as exotic and uncivilised. The term Orientalism was coined by Edward Said in 1978 to explain the Western perception and representation of the East. Yet, there were other reasons than imperialism behind many travels.

Furthermore, the thirst for freedom and the will to change social and artistic structures are the main motivations for the need to explore other territories.

> It is also true that travellers tend often by their very natures to be rebels and outcasts and misfits: far from being an act of cultural imperialism, setting out alone and vulnerable on the road is often an expression of rejection of home and an embrace of the other: the history of travel is full of individuals who have fallen in love with other cultures and other parts of the world in this way. [9]

In other words, travellers are perceived as people who reject societal norms in search of meaning. This point of view challenges the traditional perception of travel as a privilege. It suggests that travellers often position themselves in opposition to their culture's paradigms. O'reilly et al. portray travelling as an act of vulnerability and openness rather than an act of conquest. This situates travel within the context of intercultural exchanges. The idea of falling in love emphasises the concept of global citizenship and suggests that travel can be transformative for both individual and collective identities. However, the author gives a romanticised image of travelling, which may perpetuate stereotypes and not take into account inequalities and unethical travel.

The position that Durrell occupied as press attaché for the British government in the Mediterranean placed him in the role of a colonialist diplomat, according to some scholars, such as Afroditi Athanasopoulou. She criticises in one of her papers,[10] the last of Durrell's travel trilogy *Bitter Lemons of Cyprus.* She insists on the fact that Durrell worked for the British government (the colonial government) and she argues that *Bitter Lemons of Cyprus* is written

[8] O'Reilly et al., editors, xx.
[9] O'reilly et al., editors, 21.
[10] Athanasopoulou, Afroditi. "Durrell in Cyprus. Orientalism and Nationalism in Literary Perspective." 2014.

from a British point of view to describe one of the British colonies. Roger J. Porter explains in the first line of his article "Durrell and the Dilemmas of Travel Writing".

> Travel writing tends to express a systole-diastole movement: on the one hand it moves outwards to liberation from conventional norms to a questing for knowledge, progress, and newness, an exploration beyond the horizon; and on the other hand it portrays a going home, a return to the familiar, to origins, to the primal self.[11]

Porter's description of travel writing invokes a biological rhythm similar to a heartbeat. This idea suggests that the structure of travel writing mirrors a natural life process that allows liberation from societal conventions and, conversely, a return to origins or even a reconstructed sense of self. Colonial travel writing, for instance, grappled with this tension. The exploration of the new was framed within a desire to impose familial or colonial worldviews. This dual movement allows the travel narrative genre to oscillate between adventure and introspection, change and continuity. It underscores the idea that travel writing is as much about the journey inward as the journey outward. William Dalrymple defends the idea of writing for the sake of discovery by claiming:

> Moreover, as Colin Thubron has pointed out, it is ridiculously simplistic to see all attempts at studying, observing, and empathizing with another culture necessarily "as an act of domination—rather than of understanding, respect or even catharsis… If even the attempt to understand is seen as aggression or appropriation, then all human contact declines into paranoia. [12]

Thurbon criticises the idea of seeing every attempt to represent other cultures through the lens of colonialism. He argues for a nuanced understanding, where studying other cultures can be cathartic rather than an act of domination. He explains that this restrictive vision could lead to fear of the other and a reluctance to engage in cultural exchanges. Thurbon advocates for a balanced view of cross-cultural engagement. This perspective resonates with Isabelle Keller-Privat's statement:

> For obvious autobiographical as well as literary reasons, Lawrence Durrell has long been considered as a Mediterranean writer. Yet, when looking into the bulk of academic papers devoted to Durrell's Mediterranean narratives (his fiction, essays, or travel books) one realizes that his Mediterranean is most often dealt with as mere sensuous backdrop that has often been criticized for its Neo-Romantic, colonial undertone, while his Mediterranean poems are simply ignored. And yet, Durrell's fate epitomizes that of a whole generation of writers across the world who were then forced away from their native homelands by war and major geopolitical upheavals.[13]

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[11] J. Porter, Roger. "Durrell and the Dilemmas of Travel Writing". *Deus Loci, The Lawrence Durrell Journal NS3*, 1994.
[12] O'Reilly et al., editors, xxi.
[13] Kaller-Privat, Isabelle. "Lawrence Durrell's Mediterranean Hinterland: The Secret Flow of the Poet's Heraldic Universe." *Caliban,* no. 58, 2017, pp. 115–134., https://doi.org/10.4000/caliban.4676.

Durrell's personal experiences thus shaped his artistic identity in some way. Isabelle Keller-Privat suggests that the scholarly treatment of the Mediterranean setting in Durrell's fiction and essays as an exoticised landscape rather than an active and complex cultural entity aligns his works with other British expatriate writers who engaged with colonial areas, considering that they perpetuated Orientalist and imperialist perspectives. Isabelle Keller-Privat also highlights an academic blind spot, which is the neglect of Durrell's Mediterranean poetry, which suggests that his poetic engagement, which is perhaps more introspective or complex, remains overlooked. She also explains that Durrell's biography, which is marked by constant travelling and an ambiguous relationship to his national belonging, serves as a representative case of a generation of uprooted writers. This statement calls for a re-evaluation of both Durrell's Mediterranean prose and poetry. It also raises questions about the role of exile in shaping literary identity. In our dissertation, we will aim to study Durrell's Island books as, first and foremost, tools of self-discovery. This is why it is important to contextualise his works within the broader landscape of travel narratives, which leads us to consider contemporary perspectives on travel writing as explored by William Dalrymple, who raises important questions about the position of the travel narrative and its relevance nowadays:

> But is there really any point to the genre in the age of the internet, when you can instantly gather reliable knowledge about anywhere in the globe at the click of a mouse? Why bother with someone else's subjective opinions, when hard information about the world is now so easily available? Why read a travel book when you can just go on Google Earth and look for yourself? [14]

Scientific and technological progress are among the reasons for the decline of the travel narrative genre. People are no longer interested in reading travel accounts since they can have access to every corner of the world using their phones and computers. For many people, islands are no longer intimate places.

The word Island is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "a piece of land completely surrounded by water".[15] It is also a transitive verb that means "to make into or as into an island; to place as an island; to place, settle or enclose on, or as on, an island; to insulate, isolate".[16] In accordance with this definition, islands are places of retreat and mystery. Diana Cooper-Richet asserts that:

[14] O'Reilly et al., editors, xxii.
[15] *Oxford English Dictionary*, https://www-oed-com.gorgone.univ-toulouse.fr, Accessed 2022.
[16] *Oxford English Dictionary*.

> Au voyageur, qu'il soit né à l'époque romantique ou à l'ère contemporaine, qu'il soit désireux de découvrir le(s) mystère(s) des îles ou en quête d'une retraite paisible, l'île apparaît le plus souvent comme un mirage, un milieu utopique dans lequel le bonheur, ne serait-ce que le temps d'un séjour, lui est assuré. Pourtant, si l'île se situe quelque part entre rêve et réalité, si son mythe tient beaucoup grâce ou à cause des écrivains, de la construction culturelle, son image peut être ambivalente et les imaginaires qu'elle suscite extrêmement variés.[17]

This statement recalls the different motivations that made islands appealing places for travellers from different eras, who sought seclusion or mysteries to uncover. Diverse and multiple literary contributions underscore the ambiguous position of the islands that reside between dream and reality. She also points out the nuanced perception of islands as utopian places where myths reside and grow, owing to writers and their accounts biased by cultural representations. This indicates that islands embody not only peacefulness, calmness and happiness but also contradictory and paradoxical feelings in people's consciousness and reflections.

Catherine Delmas illustrates the complexity of Durrell's vision of the Mediterranean, like a poetic figment blending myth, memory and imagination. According to her, Durrell's narratives create a space that transcends historical and geographical realities, offering a fragmented yet holistic vision of the Mediterranean as both an external landscape and an inner world of emotions and memories.

> Lawrence Durrell's "idea" of this Mediterranean is thus a poetic attempt to reconfigure the world through a correspondence between man and place, due to "the real genius loci, the animating spirit which informs everything here" (1990a, 153). The Deus Loci assembles heterogeneity and connects different plateaus, ideological and poetic discourse, farce and vision, past and present, in an attempt to transcend time.[18]

Durrell's poetic aim is to reconfigure the world through a dialogue between the physical and metaphysical, which creates a space where personal and collective histories converge. By connecting past and present, Durrell's vision of the Mediterranean becomes a timeless mythopoetic space which defies linear temporality. This invokes a living Mediterranean that shapes and is shaped by human consciousness.

Islands are also the lands of divinities and Gods. It is important to remember that islands allowed the birth of Greek literature that is imbued with myths that honour divinities and recount their heroic acts. The divine is the idea of a sacred entity that is present everywhere,

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[17] Cooper-Richet, Diana, and Carlota Vicens-Pujol. *De L'île réelle à L'île fantasmée: Voyages, littérature(s) Et insularité (XVIIe-XXE siècles)*. Nouveau Monde éditions, 2012, 11.
[18] Delmas, Catherine. "Islomania and Lawrence Durrell's 'Idea' of the Mediterranean Landscape." *Caliban,* no. 58, 2017, pp. 99–113., https://doi.org/10.4000/caliban.4633.

yet invisible. In Lawrence Durrell's Island books, this invisible sacred entity is feminine. The Greek islands are sacred and revered, and feminine characteristics are attributed to their natural elements. The concerned natural elements are the Greek landscapes and their characteristics. Durrell deals with the natural landscapes of the Greek Islands as if they were real persons and uses them as an inspiration in the creation of his characters. The interaction with the islands makes them more realistic and personal. In fact, the described landscapes function as silent yet very expressive and imposing characters.

In Isabelle Keller-Privat's analyses of *Prospero's Cell* and *Bitter Lemons*, she explains the introspective effect of the island that leads to self-exploration. She also evokes Nancy's status in the book, which she qualifies as "ambiguous"[19] because she does not appear in the list of real characters, which leads to the idea of re-creating reality and the limits between fiction and reality. Isabelle Keller-Privat also mentions "L'île femme" (193) and the anthropomorphism of the island by associating it with the figure of Aphrodite. "Le récit d'île, ou "island book", devient alors récit d'un regard, ou : "eye-land book", celui de l'île conquise et rappelée à la surface de la mémoire qui observe son créateur en lui renvoyant le reflet de son art" (199). This suggests a shift in perspective. The island becomes an active element in the construction of the artist's reflection rather than a mere object of narration. The island itself becomes an observer. It is not just a passive territory rather than its colonial history.

As for Murielle Philippe, she argues that Rhodes is portrayed as a deserted, almost museum-like space; a land that is haunted by its history and the remains of war. Philippe highlights Durrell's struggle to reconcile an idyllic vision of Greece with a post-war reality. She also suggests that Rhodes is a narrative and emotional "detour" in Durrell's journey from Corfu to Cyprus. Durrell uses a narrative strategy where he retreats into a historical reverie and literary exploration to avoid the present reality of Rhodes.

> En dépit de scènes pittorèsques animées, en dépit de ce qu'annonçait le titre du premier chapitre, « Of Paradise Terrestre », La Rhodes de Reflections ne serait souvent qu'une îles-relique, désincarnée, axsangue, absente. Réflections décline bien, comme les deux autres récits, le paysage féminisé de la Grèce […] Cependant, la sensualité féminine du paysage, elle-même étouffante, est enfouie sous des strates successives données à lire et se retrouve, comme la voix narrative, étouffée par le palimpeste.[20]

[19] Keller-Privat, Isabelle. "*Prospero's Cell* Et *Bitter Lemons of Cyprus*. Aux Frontières De La Fiction Et Du Récit De Vie : Les Îles De La Création ." *Lignes D'horizon: Récits De Voyage De La littérature Anglaise*, edited by Jean Viviès, Universite de Provence, Aix-En-Provence, 2002, pp. 187–205.
[20] Philippe, Murielle. "*Reflections on a Marine Venus* (1953) : Le Détour Par Rhodes Dans La Trilogie Des Îles De Lawrence Durrell." *E-Rea*, no. 3.1, 2005, https://doi.org/10.4000/erea.535.

This suggests that the island's vibrancy is superficial. It masks a sense of emptiness. The quote highlights the feminisation of the Greek landscapes, which romanticises Greece as a maternal or eroticised space. However, this sensuality is hidden beneath layers of narratives, which evokes the metaphor of the palimpsest. It signifies that historical and cultural narratives overwrite the sensuality of the landscapes, making it muted. Philippe evaluates the narrative construction of the place as sensual and spectral, present yet absent, vibrant yet devoid of life.

Moreover, Françoise Dupeyron-Lafay evokes Durrell's double-personae that helped draw both a realistic and artistic portrayal of Cyprus in Bitter Lemons. She conjures a double travel as well, internal and external, that leads to a "patchwork"[21] gathering poetry, prose and painting within the narrative. She also hints at Durrell's literary references, such as Samuel Brown and W. Hepworth Dixon, while he quotes only insignificant parts of *A Lady's Impressions of Cyprus,* which ridicules her. She also argues that Durrell describes the sea as a nurse and a carer, which is key to understanding his representations of female characters.

In what concerns the interplay between space and identity, Jack F. Stewart discusses an aesthetic reconfiguration of space in Durrell's writings. He claims that Durrell uses "musical and painterly metaphors" to describe landscapes, which he believes shape people's personalities. Stewart also points out that isolation is part of Lawrence Durrell's artistic process. He states:

> Isolating himself from urban civilization, he identifies with the Spirit of Place and concentrates on being there. He believes that one can get in touch with a timeless "essence" or cultural spirit through visible forms – a suitably Platonic notion for a lover of Greece. He is convinced that landscape, or the genius loci, molds character and consciousness, so that attuning oneself to islands (as he does on Corfu, Rhodes, and Cyprus) involves orientation to cultural and topographical otherness plus self-discovery.[22]

Jack F. Stewart explains how, for Durrell, the *genius loci* influences personal identity, and he emphasises the importance of isolation from urbanity in order to seek a deeper connection between the individual (the artist) and the landscape and its essence, which can be accessed through physical manifestation. The role of islands in discovering the self and the other is highlighted, which explains Durrell's love for Greece.

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[21] Dupeyron-Lafay, Françoise. "*Bitter Lemons* (1957) De Lawrence Durrell: Le Patchwork Et Le Palimpseste." *Récits De Voyage Et Romans Voyageurs : Aspects De La Littérature Contemporaine De Langue Anglaise*, edited by François Gallix et al., Publications De L'Université De Provence, Aix-En-Provence, 2006, pp. 47–63. Ecritures Du Voyage.

[22] Stewart, Jack F. "'Painterly Writing: Durrell's Island Landscapes.'" *Deus Loci* , NS 6, 1998.

In examining the transformative power of landscape in Durrell's island books, Virginia Allen Terry-Sherman puts forth the idea that he re-imagines traditional landscapes as "sensecapes"[23] by engaging the five senses and even a sixth sense, which is spiritual. The use of sacred foods such as olives, bread and wine contributes to the creation of a mystical and metaphysical bond between people and the land. Terry-Sherman presents Durrell as a poet-philosopher who bridges the sensual and the spiritual. She explains how he uses food and landscape, which indicate the presence of several forms of the divine, as metaphors to explore the themes of identity, belonging and memory and create a mystic and metaphysical link between the author and the landscapes.

In our study, we will put an emphasis on the spiritual and sacred, yet non-religious dimension of the representation of the feminine in Lawrence Durrell's Island books. Thus, the complexity of Durrell's characters and his capacity to create complete human structures from fragments and different material and immaterial elements and places. In order to do so, we will adopt a structuralist approach to question and explain the paradoxical representations of the female and the feminine representations in Lawrence Durrell's Island books. Our object of study is a corpus of three Island books by Lawrence Durrell: *Prospero's Cell: A guide to the landscape and manners of the island of Corcyra* (1945), which is the first book of the trilogy. It is the first successful attempt by Durrell to compose a work that gathers his experiences on a Greek island and his thoughts and observations about its history and local folklore. The second book is *Reflections on a Marine Venus: A companion to the landscape of Rhodes (1953),* which is also about Durrell's life on a Greek island, Rhodes, by the end of World War II. This book is a tribute to the island that he fell in love with despite the ravages of the war. The last book is *Bitter Lemons of Cyprus* (1957), winner of the Duff Cooper Prize in the same year.

Our study will start by discussing the relationship between writing and the process of self-discovery throughout the travel narrative as a genre. We will attempt to explain the development of the genre through its origins and its importance in the process of self-discovery. It will provide an analysis of the use of language as a tool of self-discovery and the discovery of others throughout the act of writing, and more precisely, thanks to travel writing. This will lead us to tackle Durrell's poetic language and how it establishes intimate relationships with

[23] Allen-Terry Sherman, Virginia. "Landscape to sensescape—sacred fruit as sensorial landscape in the island residence works of Lawrence Durrell." *Caliban*, no. 58, 1 Dec. 2017, pp. 253–268, https://doi.org/10.4000/caliban.5021.

inhabited places that function as a mirror of the soul. The last chapter emphasises the discrepancy between female and male representations in the trilogy of the island books. It also covers the representation of the feminine element and its sacredness, which makes it both a close and distant place to explore.

Chapter One

Writing and the process of self-discovery

A) The origins of the Travel Narrative and its impact

The need to recount and document travels and adventures in far foreign places gave birth to a hybrid literary genre, melting between the real and the unreal, the lyrical style and the prose. The travel narrative is an old genre. Its origins go back to Greek civilisation, with epic poems, such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey,* that tell stories about long voyages, wars, and adventures.[24] The theme of the voyage, whether physical or metaphorical, is essential in both works. Regarding real travel narratives, the Greek geographer Pausanias –in the 2nd century CE–wrote *Description of Greece (Periegesis Hellados)*, which became an important reference for understanding Greek civilisation. "The famous anthropologist and classical scholar Sir James Frazer said of Pausanias: "Without him the ruins of Greece would, for the most part, be a labyrinth without a clue, a riddle without an answer".[25] Otherwise stated, *Description of Greece* plays a significant role in elucidating the mystery of Greece and provides essential elements that could be a guide through the intricate historical and archaeological landscape of Greece. Pausanias gave meticulous descriptions of the Greek ruins and offered a better understanding of Greece. In the same way that travel accounts were important for the Greek civilisation, they were significant in other cultures as well. Travellers from different parts of the world have developed multiple styles and writing techniques in order to narrate their observations and anecdotes and collect facts from their travels. Thus, we have multiple versions of accounts about the same places.

In the incipit of *Bitter Lemons of Cyprus*, Lawrence Durrell writes that while he was heading for Cyprus, he was reading *A Lady's Impressions of Cyprus* by Agnes Smith Lewis[26].

[24] According to Lesher, the Homeric texts were originally oral. The very limited spread of literacy in the Greek civilisation explains that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* did not appear in a written format until the 4th century in the "*Hipparchus* of the Platonic corpus." Lesher assumes that the absence of a written text did not protect the Homeric epics from possible corruption. Thus, it was difficult to prove the authenticity of the texts and their sources.
[25] "Pausanias, Description of Greece." *Exploring Celtic Civilizations*, https://exploringcelticciv.web.unc.edu/pausanias-description-of-greece/.
[26]Agnes Smith Lewis was one of the rare female travellers who enjoyed the liberty of travelling and studying. D.S. Margoliouth wrote about her: "Born in 1843, the daughter of Mr. John Smith, of Ivrine, Ayrshire, she travelled in Egypt, the Holy Land, Greece, and Cyprus before her marriage, and took advantages of the opportunities which

It is interesting that the book should begin with a description of what the writer did in preparation for his journey. It is like entering the place before landing on its shores. Like offering an appetizer to the reader. Durrell describes the experience of reading this book as an intimate experience:

> It is still warm on deck, and from the glow of light coming from the salon I am able to return once more to the pages of Mrs Lewis, who in 1893 made the same voyage as ourselves, and who, in *A Lady's Impressions of Cyprus*, has left us a spirited and observant record of life in the island when British suzerainty was only a few years old.[27]

The narrator describes the warm atmosphere that surrounds him while reading a travel book about Cyprus. This cosy atmosphere is underscored by the adjective "warm" which contrasts with the potential coldness that characterises the temperature on a ship. He also uses "the glow of light" that may symbolise knowledge or spiritual awareness, in opposition to darkness or uncertainty. This description allows the reader to observe the opening of a time window where the narrator takes him on a journey to the past, to the first years of British control over Cyprus. The narrator describes Mrs Lewis' book as "spirited" and "observant" which signifies that she noted some details and aspects of the Island that other writers or travellers did not notice or did not take into account. This particularity is what makes *A Lady's Impressions of Cyprus* different from other works written about the same topic. Reading previous texts by writers and travellers who followed the same paths as him allowed Durrell to identify with them and start his journey before landing on the island. Besides, by reading another person's vision of the island he was about to settle on, Durrell could make a first impression through the lenses of a precedent travel writer who was a woman.

It should be noted that women did not have the same privileges as men to travel and experience their freedom. Travelling and exploring the world used to be chiefly masculine privileges. Lucie Azema explains that: "dans la mythologie et l'imaginaire collectif, le voyage est le rite de passage par excellence, celui qui va transformer le garçon en homme".[28] In other words, travelling used to be a step to confirm boys' virility and transform them into men. As for women, it was considered dangerous for them to travel and take risks. It was reflected as

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these journeys afforded to acquire Arabic and Modern Greek". D. S. Margoliouth. "Agnes Smith Lewis." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland*, vol. 58, no. 2, Apr. 1926, 385–387, 385, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0035869x00069902.

[27] Durrell, Lawrence. *Bitter Lemons of Cyprus*. London: Faber and Faber, 2021, 6.

[28] Women were also supposed to stay at home and raise the kids while men considered themselves as "sans attaches", thus, free to travel away. The social value of women remained in being passive and waiting for the absent men. The Homeric Odyssey presents the example of Penelope, who raised her son alone and waited while Ulysses multiplied adventures and exploits. Azema, Lucie. *Les Femmes Aussi Sont Du Voyage*. Flammarion, 2021, 13, 31-34.

an activity that only men could support and endure because they were supposed to be stronger physically and mentally in the eyes of their society. Despite this masculine-centred vision, some women have infringed the rules and defied the social conventions. Some of them were brought up like boys, so they could benefit from some liberty to travel and meet other horizons.

The urge to transcribe travel experiences did not stop at the Greek borders. The genre had spread to other areas and planted its roots worldwide. In every culture, one can find a pioneer figure in travelling and writing. It is important to cite examples of these figures to understand the development of the genre not only as a literary phenomenon but also as a lifestyle and a tool for cultural conquest. For instance, the travel narrative as a genre had known great success within the Arab civilisation as well thanks to Ibn Battuta (1304-1377)[29] and his book *The Rihla (The journey),* where he wrote accounts of his pilgrimage to Mecca and his travels to other areas in the Islamic world. Ross Dunn asserts that: "written in the conventional literary style of the time, Ibn Battuta's *Rihla* is a comprehensive survey of the personalities, places, governments, customs, and curiosities of the Muslim world in the second quarter of the fourteenth century. It is also the record of a dramatic personal adventure".[30] The travel narrative genre mixed the emotional and the documentary styles from the beginning. It is an important key to understanding a civilisation and its culture. The language and structure used in the composition of *The Rihla* corresponded to the norms of the 14th century. The way the stories were told had to reflect the cultural, and linguistic patterns of that era, which is essential to reach a large readership and help the reader identify with the text and the characters. The variation of the topics that shifted between politics, traditions, different places, factual notes and personal elements make *The Rihla* a more realistic and intimately engaging account. Besides, it became one of the most precious literary works in Arabic for his language and style.

In the absence of aeroplanes and trains, travelling was not an easy matter in the times of Pausanias or Ibn Battuta, hence the need to put on paper travel experiences and share them with the rest of the people, especially those who did not have the opportunity to go abroad. The genre continued developing over time and occupying a significant space when people started travelling more often. The new destinations were chosen according to political and cultural attractivity.

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[29] His full name is Abu 'Abdallah ibn Battuta. He was born in Morocco, where he studied law. He started travelling to Mecca for spiritual reasons, then travelled to other Arabic countries and began documenting his travels. According to Ross E. Dunn, he "has been rightly celebrated as the greatest traveller of postmodern times".

[30] Dunn, Ross E. *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta a Muslim Traveler of the 14th Century*. University of California Press, 2012, 4.

In the 18th century, this genre developed and became one of the pillars of British literature. The Grand Tour era helped spread travel accounts. It became fashionable to travel through Europe and record one's journey during this era. According to A.V Seaton:

> The term 'Grand Tour' had first been used in 1670, but only achieved wide currency in the eighteenth century, notably after 1749 when four-volume guide by Thomas Nugent first made the term the title of a book, claiming to provide 'an exact description of most of the cities, towns and remarkable places of Europe', including the distances and costs of travel involved.[31]

Seaton underscores the importance of literature in shaping social practices and its role in helping the "Grand Tour" to gain widespread recognition. Travel gradually became formalised as a rite of passage for the British elite, especially after it had been an individual act for a long time. Thomas Nugent's book played a pivotal role in standardising the Grand Tour's experience and made it easier and more accessible by giving detailed information about the logistics of such travel. This accessibility is crucial because it marks the transition from an individual to a structured experience. Furthermore, Chloe Chard states:

> As a practice, the Tour is generally considered as part of the education of a gentleman, adopted first by the British gentry and aristocracy and then by other northern Europeans, and by men and women of the middle classes; it is sometimes defined with reference to a particular itinerary through Italy, and sometimes seen as sufficiently flexible to include almost any European destination. Within the discourse of European travel, the concept of the Grand Tour as a culturally and socially privileged way of travelling allows a speaking subject to claim specific forms of authority in commenting on certain specific domains of objects. Some of these forms of authority depend upon an identification with a British, male, patrician figure: it is assumed, in travel writings, that the traveller can speak as one enjoying the prestige that such a figure would enjoy, no matter what identity he or she actually claims.[32]

Chard underscores the significant role that the Grand Tour played in the making of notable young aristocrats. Travelling through Europe, especially to France and Italy was a sign of a good education and of a cultured spirit for young men who belonged to upper-class society. Chard gives a critical view of how the Grand Tour was associated with authority, identity and cultural capital in travel writing. The Tour was a journey through space and also through social and cultural hierarchies. It was a way of asserting one's social position. However, it was based on the assumption that the traveller was a British, male, patrician figure. Even when they did not fit this profile, they could appropriate the social prestige associated

[31] A.V Seaton contends that "the word 'Grand' did not just describe the tour but the status of the tourists". The tour was reserved for a specific group of young men who were supposed to handle high positions in politics and diplomacy. Seaton, A.V "Grand Tour". Charles Forsdick, Zoë Kinsley and Kathryn Walchester, editors. *Keywords for Travel Writing Studies: A Critical Glossary*. Anthem Press India, 2019, 108.

[32] Chard, Chloe. *A Critical Reader of the Romantic Grand Tour: Tristes Plaisirs*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014, 9.

with it in their writing as a performative act. This suggests that travellers could adapt to fit the ideals of the Grand Tour, regardless of their backgrounds and real identities. Chard also asserts that the Tour was a male-dominated experience that became more inclusive. Yet, despite this change, it continued to favour male voices. Those travellers used to collect art pieces and write accounts about the details of their journeys. According to Jean Viviès : "Les voyageurs étaient censés accumuler un certain nombre de données qui correspondaient à des rubriques mentalement ordonnées : la géographie, l'histoire naturelle, les hommes".[33] In other words, travellers had a structured approach to data gathering by organizing them into categories such as geography, natural history and observations about people, their manners and lifestyles. This list, detailed by Jean Viviès, that travellers had to include in their travel accounts, confirms what we claimed previously about travel literature value in terms of historical, geographical, and sociological interest. This approach is similar to academic research methods. It makes the travel narrative genre more objective and less fictional. Nonetheless, postcolonial scholars consider travel narratives as a propaganda instrument in the service of the British Empire.

The profiles of the travel writers and the use of their travel narratives in ways that differ from their original intention transformed the genre into a controversial instrument. Stacy Burton states in her book *Travel Narrative and the Ends of Modernity* that "travelers – often diplomats, explorers, or entrepreneurs – wrote narratives and ethnographic studies that presented themselves as truthful accounts of first-hand experience and thus important sources of knowledge. Their work often played a formative role in imperial policy.[34] It is to say in other words that the travellers who wrote accounts about colonized territories had privileged positions within the imperial entity and claimed to be objective regardless of their cultural and political backgrounds. Their writings can be considered as a form of propaganda, as they served the imperial goals. The expansion of the British Empire enabled people to travel more often and more easily. Lawrence Durrell himself was born in India and occupied the position of press attaché in various places such as Egypt and Greece, which were under British rule then. Burton goes further in her explanation and adds that:

> Travel writing began to lose this distinctive status as European domination of the globe accelerated, more people lived abroad for imperial enterprise or travelled for leisure, new scientific disciplines were created for the study of people and places, and photographs and films were disseminated widely. (Burton, 3)

[33] Viviès Jean. *Le récit De Voyage En Angleterre Au Xviiie siècle: De L'inventaire À L'invention*. Toulouse: Presses Universitaires Du Mirail, 1999, 48.
[34] Burton, Stacy. *Travel Narrative and the Ends of Modernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 3.

Stacy Burton discusses the transformation of the travel narrative's status with the expansion of European hegemony. This factor helped increase international mobility and the creation of new fields of study besides disseminating propaganda images and films. Within this context, other scientific disciplines took the place of travel narratives. This evolution of the genre placed travel writers like Durrell in a doubtful position. Their works were addressed to a European public, who needed to see an attractive image of the dominated territories in order to approve colonial policies and consider discovering these territories. Taking into account the cultural heritage of Western travel writers, they tend to present more biased narratives written with a colonial filter. Nevertheless, Nancy Lewis claims that:

> Nothing can change the fact that Durrell is technically English/European, but I believe that the way he transforms the binary opposites Center/Margins and Self/Other constitutes an insightful, serious perspective which has significant parallels with a strong affinity for postcolonial literature.[35]

Otherwise stated, Durrell is positioned within a colonial legacy, whether he embraces it or not. This creates tension about how his works can be read as representatives of colonial power or as criticisms. In postcolonial studies, "Center" and "Self" refer to the imperial powers, while "Margins" and "Other" refer to colonised areas. The "Center" dictates narratives, and the "Margins" remain voiceless or "Othered". By transforming these binary concepts, Durrell's works may be perceived as destabilising the conventional hierarchy between the "Center" and the "Margins", especially in the *Quartet*, where he presents a diversity of cultural backgrounds, which aligns with postcolonial perspectives. Lewis suggests that Durrell's representations of colonial landscapes, subjects and cultures are nuanced and complex, moving beyond simple exoticism. In *Bitter Lemons of Cyprus,* for instance, the reader finds several episodes where Durrell tries to speak in Greek rather than English (BL 9), which is different from the usual dynamics where the coloniser tries to impose his language on the colonised and the local people appreciated this.

Durrell was aware of the change of perspective when it came to representing a place. In *Bitter Lemons of Cyprus*, He writes about his encounter with the Italian "cabin-steward" (BL, 3-4) who describes the island for him before and after knowing he was about to settle there. The passage is situated in the first chapter entitled "Towards an Eastern Landfall" when the ship leaves Venice heading to Cyprus. The title of this first chapter, opening the book, gives an idea about the major theme. The use of the preposition "towards" suggests the direction of

[35] Lewis, Nancy. "Lawrence Durrell and The Postcolonial Context", *Deus Loci*, NS10 2006-2007, 31.

the author physically and metaphorically. The direction is the East. It can be read either in a geographical or literary sense. The East becomes the symbol of a historical or cultural notion related to Eastern philosophy or spirituality. The noun "Landfall" refers to reaching land after a sea voyage. It refers to the beginning of a new chapter in the narrator's life in a foreign territory or a new turning point in the narrative. It marks the end of an era for the narrator and the beginning of his life on an Eastern island, at the same time that it marks the beginning of the book,

> My secret was out. His manner changed, and his picture of Cyprus changed with it, for politeness does not permit an Italian to decry another's plans, or run down his native country. Cyprus was to become mine by adoption – therefore he must try to see it through my eyes. At once it became fertile, full of goddesses and mineral springs; ancient castles and monasteries; fruit and grain and verdant grasslands; priests and gipsies and brigands… he gave it a swift Sicilian travel-poster varnish, beaming at me approvingly as he did so.
> 'And the girls? I said at last.
> But there he stuck; politeness battled with male pride for a long moment. He would have to tell the truth lest later on, in the field, so to speak, I might convict him – a Bolognese, above all! – of having no standards of female beauty. 'Very ugly,' he said at last, in genuine regret. 'Very ugly indeed.' This was disheartening. We sat there in silence for a while until the streamer towering above us gave a loud lisp of steam *fffff*, while beaded bubbles of condensing steam trickled down the siren.
> It was time to say good-bye to Europe. (BL 3-4)

Previously, the Italian man drew a pessimistic portrayal of Cyprus. In this passage, he suddenly changes the tone that he is using to talk about the island when he discovers that Durrell is about to live there. The narrator explains this change of tone by cultural behaviour. Politeness forced the Italian man to talk positively about the other man's country. Durrell specifies that Cyprus was "to become" his country "by adoption", which suggests that he was aware that he was a foreigner but was willing to integrate into the island's life and be part of it. So, the cabin-steward starts describing Cyprus in a mythological way. He uses signs like "fertile" and "goddesses" trying to describe it like an attractive woman. Durrell is aware of this. He knows that the man is telling him what he would want to hear rather than what he really thinks about the place. This sudden change in the island's description adds an ironic tone to the text. It is reinforced by Durrell's awareness of the situation and the use of free indirect speech to comment on the Italian's discourse and its funny shift. This shift is signalled by "at once it became". The narrator asks the man about "girls" with the intention of making him tell the truth. He uses the verb "stuck" to show that he succeeded in putting him into a corner. He describes the difficulty the man is in by contrasting "politeness" with "male pride" and using the verb "battled" to underscore the man's struggle with telling his real opinion. The narrator highlights the difficulty level and adds more irony by using the verb "convict" and makes it

look like a serious matter: that of not having "standards of female beauty". His "male pride" makes him answer by describing the girls with the adjective "ugly" which is pejorative and condescending for women. The misogynistic description is highlighted by the repetition of the adjective "ugly" and the adverb "very" which intensifies the degree of ugliness and creates an effect of exaggeration in the text. This contrast between the feminised, almost sexualised description of the island and the unattractive description of the women of the island who are only qualified as "ugly" gives an idea about the aim of the whole journey and the book, which is "the place" rather than its inhabitants. It is the place that replaces the people by becoming the characters.

This embellishment of the Eastern lands to please a Westerner is defined by Edward Said as "Orientalism". To explain this concept, Edward Said writes:

> […] what they shared, however, was not only land or profit or rule; it was the kind of intellectual power I have been calling Orientalism. In a sense, Orientalism was a library or archive of information commonly and, in some of its aspects, unanimously held. What bound the archive together was a family of ideas and a unifying set of values proven in various ways to be effective. These ideas explained the behaviour of Orientals; they supplied Orientals with a mentality, a genealogy, an atmosphere; most importantly, they allowed Europeans to deal with and even to see Orientals as a phenomenon possessing regular characteristics.[36]

Otherwise stated, the Western dominance over the East was not affected only by military and political forces. It was also achieved by an intellectual power that reduced the Orient and its people into a shared group of ideas developed in different fields, such as literature, art, and science. These ideas were spread among Europeans and unanimously accepted and held as truths. The Orientals, as the Westerners called them, were given, most of the time, caricatural characteristics. They were painted as a hegemonic group of people with predictable behaviour in a stereotypical way. This framework made the people of the East appear like a cultural phenomenon, making them look profoundly different from the Europeans.

Furthermore, in an article entitled "Durrell in Cyprus. Orientalism and Nationalism in Literary Perspective", which was published in 2014, Afroditi Athanasopoulou compares Durrell's *Bitter Lemons of Cyprus* and the Cypriot writer Montis's *Closed Doors*. She states that Lawrence Durrell has a colonial eye on Cyprus and its inhabitants in *Bitter Lemons*. She quotes descriptions that Durrell uses in order to qualify Greek Cypriots, and she criticises what

[36] Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Penguin Random House, 2019, 41-42.

seems like a condescending perception of the natives. Taking into account Durrell's position as a representative of the British government and his ambiguous political position, she states:

> However, this 'naturalistic description', which puts the natives of Cyprus under the microscope (or on a window display) is not as 'objective' as it seems at first sight, since it is obfuscated by the familiar stereotypes (poor hygiene, illiteracy, sleepiness…) with which many Western travellers-writers over time have tried to describe the phenomenon of the 'native of the East' to the readers of the West.[37]

That is to say, Durrell's narrative is biased by his cultural and political background. Athanasopoulou reminds the stereotypes circulated by Westerners about the East and brings to the reader's attention that these writers address their books to a targeted audience who wanted to read stories about different lifestyles and manners. She suggests that this way of studying the natives of Cyprus is merely subjective and oriented to convey a specific image full of stereotypes in order to entertain the Western public and validate its beliefs about the East. Putting the natives "under the microscope" as she describes Durrell's way of describing them may objectify them and take out their humanity. It is easier to justify the domination over a group of people if they are caricatured as vulnerable and lacking good judgment.[38] Nevertheless, Durrell's position is ambiguous because while he gives caricatural descriptions of the Cypriots, he is also being ironic about British culture. He even left England because he did not feel that he belonged with its culture, nor did he feel understood as an artist. In a letter to Henry Miller when Durrell was in London in 1937, he writes: "Fuck the English eh? Henry the English are everywhere, all around me – like mutilated black beetles".[39] These lines are full of hostility towards "the English". The expletive "fuck" used in the letter establishes a tone of anger and rebellion. Durrell compares the English to "mutilated black beetles". This metaphor dehumanises the English and reduces them to insects. It also conveys a sentiment of

[37] Athanasopoulou, Afroditi. "Durrell in Cyprus. Orientalism and Nationalism in Literary Perspective." 2014.
[38] "… since the middle of the eighteenth century there had been two principal elements in the relation between East and West. One was a growing systematic knowledge in Europe about the Orient, knowledge reinforced by the colonial encounter as well as by the widespread interest in the alien and unusual, exploited by the developing sciences of ethnology, comparative anatomy, philology, and history; furthermore, to this systematic knowledge was added a sizable body of literature produced by novelists, poets, translators, and gifted travelers. The other feature of Oriental-European relations was that Europe was always in a position of strength, not to say domination". Edward Said depicts two main aspects of the relationship between the East and the West. The first aspect is the accumulation of organized, studied knowledge within the emerging scientific and literary fields. Writers and travellers contributed to the understanding (or misunderstanding) of the romanticized exotic places they described in their works. The second aspect was the power dynamic since Europe was the dominant force in its relationship with the East. These major aspects created for Europeans a desire to discover what is different from their culture. The curiosity to know about the Orient was reinforced by creating and spreading a narrative about that geographical area and its inhabitants. Since this narrative came from the part that maintained power, it was easy to believe it. Said. *Orientalism*. 2019, 39-40.
[39] Durrell, Lawrence, and Henry Miller. The Durrell-Miller Letters, 1935-80. Edited by Ian S. MacNiven, London: Faber and Faber, 1989, 92.

repulsiveness of something unwanted and infectious. Besides, the image of "black beetles" is associated with decay in literature.

Moreover, Durrell claims that he is not writing about politics. In the preface of *Bitter Lemons of Cyprus*, he writes: "This is not a political book, but simply a somewhat impressionistic study of the moods and atmospheres of Cyprus during the troubled years 1953-6". (BL ix) This statement, however, is contradictory since Durrell uses the adjective "troubled" to qualify the years of his stay on the island, which means that he evokes political circumstances if he is to give a realistic account of his journey. Similarly, in *Prospero's Cell*, Durrell also wrote a preface in order to precise that this island book was written against the backdrop of war. Among the first lines of the preface, one can read: "A mixture of piety and overwhelming nostalgia motivated me to set down what I knew about the island which had for several years been my home, and which in those dark winters of 1941-2 seemed a place I would never see again in this life" (PC xi) The reader touches on a sentiment of fear of losing a place that had been a "home" for the writer. The "nostalgia" of an idyllic place that suffered from war and transformed into a battlefield was the main motivation for Durrell to freeze time and preserve the beautiful and peaceful image that he was used to years before what he calls the "dark winters" of World War II.

This contextualisation clarifies that the events described in both *Prospero's Cell* and *Bitter Lemons of Cyprus* cannot be fully perceived without considering the wartime incidents. By setting his texts in these agitated periods, Durrell's Island books, whether deliberately political or not, are immersed in the political and historical atmospheres of the islands. The meshing of his literary creations and the political context underscores the difficulty of setting apart subjective experiences from the broader political map.

Reflections on a Marine Venus is the only book of the trilogy that does not include a preface. However, the narrator talks about the remains of the war[40] and describes its impact on the aesthetics of the island.

[40] The Italo-Ottoman conflict ended by placing Rhodes under Italian occupation from 1912 to 1943 when the German army attacked the Italians to take Rhodes. Guidi, Andreas. "School Protests and the Making of the Post-Ottoman Mediterranean: Student Politicization as a Challenge to Italian Colonialism in Rhodes, 1915–1937: International Journal of Middle East Studies." *Cambridge Core*, Cambridge University Press, 27 Dec. 2021, www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-journal-of-middle-east-studies/article/school-protests-and-the-making-of-the-postottoman-mediterranean-student-politicization-as-a-challenge-to-italian-colonialism-in-rhodes-19151937/2EA8291020185E52A3EAEBBE8B7CC1A1.

> Taken in by the uncritical eye of a visitor the town looked lovely that morning despite the infernal wreckage of war and there was plenty of it. Transcribed from a letter which remained unposted in the back of an old writing pad, these few lines give an impressionist view of Rhodes as I found it, 'Absolute chaos still reigns…' (RMV 14)

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the adjective "uncritical" as "lacking good judgement, undiscerning, not questioning what they see". The narrator implicitly tells us that the visitor's view is superficial and does not take reality into account. The "town" is personified in this excerpt. It is presented as a feminine entity. It is described as "lovely" which suggests physical attractiveness. This description is said to be untrue by the use of the verb "looked". The use of the verb "looked" intensifies the superficial aspect of the view. It gives a subjective aspect to the description of the town as the narrator sees it. After describing the town as "lovely", the narrator expresses a contrast by using the preposition "despite" and the adjective "infernal", which intensifies the contrast because it is related to hell and is usually used to refer to the underworld. This description gives an apocalyptic vision of the island in opposition to the image of the idyllic island that is compared to heaven most of the time. Durrell also uses the noun "plenty", which is an indefinite quantifier that emphasizes the abundance of the remains of war. The narrator sums up what he sees in one sentence: "Absolute chaos still reigns". He uses the verb "transcribed" to mark the shift in the medium. The sentence was relocated from a private letter to a book, which is considered as a public form of communication. He assumes that his description gives "an impressionist view" (2015, 14). It suggests that his view is subjective. The description is filtered through the perceptions of the narrator. The reality is fragmented, and the use of the personal pronoun "I" makes the statement more subjective.

Subjectivity is fundamental for artistic creation. Indeed, it is important in a travel narrative to read the author's perception of the visited place. This is what differentiates the works written about the same place. This study will demonstrate the importance of giving different interpretations of reality and the role of writing a narrative in the reconstitution of reality according to the artist's vision and life experience.

B) Fiction and the (re)creation of reality

Artistic inspiration usually comes from real subjects. Artists look at the details of the world that surrounds them and they reshape these details in a way that corresponds to their own perception of life. According to Aristotle, artists are imitators. "[…] For as there are persons who, by conscious art or mere habit, imitate and represent various objects through the medium of color and form, or again by the voice; so in the arts above mentioned taken as a whole, the imitation is produced by rhythm, language and harmony, either single or combined".[41] Otherwise stated, Aristotle asserts that arts are fundamentally based on *mimesis*. It suggests that art is a reflection of reality. Art captures the essence of the human experience. The idea of imitation is to convey universal experiences and evoke emotions using art. Artists recreate real-life objects using different techniques separately or together, based on the nature of the art or the imitated object. While painting and sculpting use colours and forms, poetry uses voice, rhythm, language and harmony, in the process of imitation aiming to recall colours and forms or emotions and thoughts. Aristotle suggests that some forms of art tend to combine all the modes of imitation.

Writing fiction is an act of creativity and recreation. An imitation of reality, as mentioned previously. In *Prospero's Cell*, we notice that the narrative is structured as if it were a collection of poems or short texts written in a poetic language. Lawrence Durrell wrote this book in the form of a memoir, when he was in Egypt, years after he left Corfu, as if to conjure up his memories of the island and to bring them back to life again. In the preface of *Prospero's Cell*, Durrell writes:

> I set about trying to memorize its beauties before they faded from my mind and ceased to spur the poems I was then writing. In Alexandria a hospitable Greek business man made me free of an excellent library of reference books and I used his books, not so much as crutches, but as provocations to memory, correcting myself by this precious information so that the book would not only be a poetic evocation but also a sort of guide to the place. (PC xi)

Writing the travel narrative is presented as an act of resistance against forgetfulness. This statement can be interpreted as a definition of the genre. Durrell contrasts the personal experience, poetic writing, with the collective experience that resides in using "reference books". He underscores the importance of the scholarly by the use of the present participle verb

[41] Aristotle, and S. H. Butcher. *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, with a Critical Text and Translation of The Poetics by S.H. Butcher*. Macmillan, 1898, 7.

"correcting", which evokes the ephemeral aspect of the individual experience in contrast with the remaining collective experience that he accessed through the books. It also draws the reader's attention to the use of intertextuality in the text, notably in "Chapter ix: Appendix for Travellers". Besides, mentioning Alexandria and the Greek businessman may be a nod at cultural and historical codes. Alexandria is a city with rich historical significance which evokes a sense of cultural exchange. And the Greek businessman is the symbol of the cultural bridge and the transmission of knowledge. One can notice that Durrell is seeking some sort of balance. he tries to play on both strings to create both "poetic evocation", which implies an emotional and creative production, and a "guide to the place", which implies a factual and instructive narrative. This mix between the subjective and the objective creates a layered understanding of the place and the writer's experience.

Moreover, Warren Friedman argues that:

> *Prospero's Cell* is a product of the creative imagination, a re-creation rather than simply a remembering. Its narrator (not simply Durrell, but Durrell as interpreted by Durrell) rejects the maps, tables, and statistics offered for inclusion by a helpful friend: 'If I wrote a book about Corcyra,' he says, 'it would not be a history but a poem.[42]

Warren Friedman suggests that *Prospero's Cell* is not a factual recounting of his staying on Corfu. It is not a scholarly book. It is a "re-creation" of memories and experiences that Durrell reorganised in order to transform his stay on Corfu into an artistic and poetic product. Even the narrator, according to Friedman, is reinvented. Durrell reshapes the character of the narrator based on his own vision of himself. One may imagine that Durrell wrote *Prospero's Cell* from a perspective that is detached from the events and the spatiotemporal framework. Besides, writing a narrative includes choosing to write about specific topics and to represent/recreate specific aspects of reality. For instance, Durrell was in Greece with his family back then. Nevertheless, he decided not to write about them in his island books. Even though he mentions some of them, this choice gives reality another side which is semi-realistic. It alters the facts. Friedman adds that "Durrell's first island book employs many of fiction's techniques. For, in ways typical of his novels, Durrell here creates characters indeterminate and variable, yet of imposing stature".[43] He puts an emphasis on the similarities of the fictional patterns between Durrell's novels and island books. Even though Durrell's island books are supposed to be non-fictional, he crafts his characters as if they belonged to fictional texts. His characters do not fit

[42] Warren Friedman, Alan. "Place and Durrell's Island Books". *Modern Fiction Studies (Volume XIII, Number 3 -Autumn 1967- Lawrence Durrell special number)*: 329-341, 330.
[43] Warren, 330.

into a rigid grid. They are not predictable, yet they make a remarkable impression on the reader. In order to nurture his creative process, Durrell chose islands as a fertile ground for writing. Islands offer a unique experience of insularity that permits the liberation of the mind and the immersion in the artistic process.

Islands are by definition places of reclusion and isolation. According to Massimo Scotti, the word "exilé" means "ex-îlé, 'isolé hors'".[44] Exile has been, for a long time, associated with political isolation. In the case of Durrell, the exile was literary above all. For the first book of his trilogy of island books, Durrell chose the title "Prospero's Cell", inspired by Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. He compared himself, or Durrell as the narrator, to Prospero who was exiled to the same island. He gave this title to the house he lived in with his wife Nancy. In "Chapter VI: Landscape with olive trees", the narrator asks: "'And I? I say. 'What sort of picture will I present of Prospero's Island?'" (PC 116). As we stated previously, every artist gives his or her own perception of a given place and presents it from a specific perspective that has not been explored by other artists so far. Durrell is questioning his own perspective and wondering how he will create a different picture of the island, which he assumes to be Prospero's Island, than the one given by Shakespeare in *The Tempest.*

Islands with their isolating aspect are prosperous grounds for artistic creation. However, this isolation is double-faced. Massimo Scotti contends that:

> Les îles se révèlent dans leurs aspects doubles: libres en tant que solitaires, emprisonneuses parce que ségrégatives. […] Comme chaque symbole, chaque lieu topique, la figure de l'île présente simultanément une idée et son contraire. Elle est le signe de l'ouverture et aussi de la fermeture, d'un début et d'une fin. On rêve des îles pour chercher la liberté, pour s'évader des obligations de la compagnie humaine et de l'existence structurée qui devient oppressive. La sphère accablante des autres est brisée par une hypothèse de fuite individuelle (ou à deux, au maximum). (Scotti, 89)

Otherwise stated, this aspect of isolation is considered liberating and constraining at the same time. On the one hand, the idea that islands are open on the sea inspires a sense of freedom and openness. On the other hand, the idea of the islands as "imprisoning because segregating" suggests isolation and reclusion. This contrast gives islands an attractive and repulsive dimension at the same time. Scotti explains that islands are symbols of duality. They represent an idea and its antithesis. The complexity of what islands offer to the imagination enhances their mysterious aspect. Isolation, which is meant to provide a respite from the company of other human beings, whether positive or negative, is explored by oneself or with another

[44] Scotti, Massimo. "Lieux De Liberté, Lieux De Réclusion. Duplicités De l'Image Insulaire Dans La Littérature Occidentale." *Les Lettres Romanes*, vol. 66, no. 1-2, 2012, pp. 87–97., https://doi.org/10.1484/j.llr.1.102875.

person. Islands allow exploring the depths of the human mind and rearranging thoughts. Durrell observes in *Reflections on a Marine Venus*:

> Space, light and solitude will have to be rediscovered again here, in all their ramifications. The silence seems saturated with a thousand forgotten essences: contained and held, somehow, in the bright peasant carpet, the crude warm pottery of Rhodes on which Huber has traced so lovingly these dancing figures, this silver-green olive tree, this donkey trotting along a dusty road. It is much the same feeling as comes over one when a poem forms in the mind, its outlines misty, inchoate: until the white paper on which you have scribbled a dozen words and crossed them out, blazes in your face like a searchlight and paralyses you by the multiplicity of possibilities it presents, by the silence it opposes to your inner tension. (RMV 48)

In this passage, Durrell reflects on three essential elements of creation: space, light and solitude. First, let us define the three terms to explain why they are linked to the process of creation and writing. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines the noun "space" as a « physical » place with multiple dimensions. In Old English, "space" is a variant of the verb "to speak" and of the act of "expressing one's thoughts by words". Space is often associated with time. "Light" in Old English is "the natural agent which emanates from the sun" (OED). On a Mediterranean island, light is omnipresent in this sense. It can also be used as an intransitive verb that means "to illuminate" something or "to provide (a place or space) with light". It is also opposed to "darkness". The title of the chapter, "Orientations in Sunlight", where the excerpt is situated, evokes the importance of sunlight in the process of self-discovery. In other words, sunlight is a natural element that characterises islands most of the time, yet sunlight does not orient itself. The word "orientations" is placed as the subject of the title. It refers to human agency, while "in sunlight" suggests that "orientations" occur within a context where "sunlight" is present. This mix between natural and human elements refers to existential questioning in the process of self-discovery thanks to the interactions with nature. Finally, "solitude" is "the state of being or living alone" (OED). It is "seclusion" and "loneliness". These three elements are in contrast with what is implicitly absent: "saturation, forgotten essences and silence". The narrator enumerates material objects that symbolise Rhodes in contrast with immaterial objects like "a poem that forms in the mind", a poem with a "misty" and "inchoate" outline first. This indistinct, not fully formed poem transforms gradually. Durrell uses adjectives such as "bright", "warm", and "silver-green" to describe colour and temperature, and he uses the present participles "trotting" and "dancing" to describe movement. This enumeration is symmetrical and balanced. It mixes light, colour, movement and temperature. It forms a whole and constructs a rhythm like in poetry. In this passage, the immaterial is transcribed by the material, and the details given in the enumeration draw a visual representation that echoes the

representation of abstract poems. The narrator evokes “silence”, but the text is crowded with long sentences and enumerations of objects, movements and images. He evokes space, but his mind is saturated with thoughts and words. He opposes the “white paper” that gets full of words and transforms into “a searchlight” that “paralyses” when oriented towards the face. It is a metaphor for the illumination provided by writing and creating. It is an almost spiritual image that illustrates a possible poetic revelation. This excerpt depicts the idea of exploring the inner self and one’s creativity through the process of writing, thanks to the islands’ insularity.

Islands are also depicted in the literary imagination as feminine. Their isolatedness intensifies the image of the female island that waits for male navigators to come and explore her. Massimo Scotti argues that : “l’idée de l’île féminine entourée par le désert des eaux comme une forteresse à conquérir par les navigateurs - masculins - est révélatrice d’un monde d’imaginations peuplé de voyageurs mâles et solitaires” (Scotti, 91). Massimo Scotti studies the gendered portrayal of islands, giving the image of “the feminine Island” surrounded by a “desert of waters” conquered by male explorers. The use of the image “fortresse à conquérir”, reflects an aggressive, almost military language used to describe the pursuit of women and land conquest. It reveals a power dynamic that places the man in a position of agency while the woman remains passive. This perspective reveals the imaginary stories of solitary male travellers such as the Homeric heroes.[45] It can be interpreted through the concept of the male gaze, where everything is seen through masculine filters. This representation allowed the creation of lots of myths that had been built around islands because of the mystery created by insularity. In the incipit of *Prospero’s Cell*, Durrell writes: “You are aware not so much of a landscape coming to meet you invisibly over those blue miles of water as of a climate. You enter Greece as one might enter a dark crystal; the form of things becomes irregular, refracted” (PC 1). The narrator highlights the contrast between the invisible meeting with the island, which remains immobile, and the implicitly sensed “climate”. The encounter with Greece is metaphysical in this text because it is described abstractly. The landscape is personified as a passive woman waiting for the narrator to discover her. The narrator opposes the “blue” of water to the “dark crystal” and “refracted” light. It offers a two-sided vision of the island. On the one hand, it is exciting to discover it. On the other hand, it could be a challenging experience with the unknown which is highlighted by the phrase “the form of things becomes irregular”. This phrase is in opposition to an implicit expectation of clarity. Besides, this description of the meeting of the narrator with the island is subtly described as a sexual fantasy. The phrase

[45] See page 18.

"you enter Greece as one might enter a dark crystal" can be interpreted as a "penetration" with the use of the verb "enter", while the "dark crystal" suggests a place of hidden desires and sets a sensual tone because of the way shadow and light interact on the surface that could evoke smoothness, cold or warmth. Besides, it could evoke the author's subconscious, which may be confronted with instincts and emotions that he either fears or craves.

Furthermore, the image of islands and their feminisation results from decades of male-centred narratives, as explained by Massimi Scotti:

> Les marchands, les géographes et les explorateurs arabes découvrent, décrivent ou inventent monstres et îles, curiosités et magies, animaux humains et êtres surhumains, dans des odyssées multiples où chaque navigateur redevient Ulysse et fait son tour en dessinant la Mer Close à sa manière, tout en la disséminant de merveilles ; l'île devient alors femme à conquérir, terre à posséder, mystère à résoudre, sphinx aux multiples énigmes. (Scotti, 91)

Massimo Scotti suggests that islands became subjects of fascination since merchants, geographers and explorers, who were mainly male travellers, described islands as places of wonders, monsters and mysteries. This portrayal transforms islands into places of conquest and male exploits. Islands became the symbol of feminine territories to be conquered by masculine heroes. The comparison to Ulysses reinforces the heroic aspect. It transforms their explorations into metaphorical journeys and builds a story based on their perception of the islands that take the image of female entities to be discovered and conquered.

As developed in the first part of this chapter, mobility allowed the appearance of the travel narrative genre and its success despite the controversy around travel writers and their intentions. Travel writing does not only target a readership aiming to discover other places. It is also a key to self-discovery. It is important to clarify the difference between travelling and living in places or merely being a tourist. This will help us in our study of the discovery of places, others and oneself.

C) Travelling, dwelling, and discovering:

In an article published in 1960 in *The New York Times*, Lawrence Durrell suggests a new and different way of travelling. He underlines the fact that places deserve to be lived in. He describes himself as a "residence-writer", not a "travel writer". This notion of "residence" suggests that in order to know a particular place in depth, one must dwell in it to perceive its tangible and intangible elements. In other words, the writer becomes an active agent in the place by being among its population and within its landscape. He or she participates in the

creative and artistic production and becomes a part of the place's cultural atmosphere. Durrell claims: "My books are always about living in places […] not just rushing through them".[46]

This is linked to writing and reading. A place is like a book, an open and visual one, nevertheless, it is important to read between the lines if one wants to really understand the message behind the book. One must dig deep in order to get to the spirit of the place. Usually, those who live in a particular place are the ones who know it better than those who travel across a place without trying to create a real relationship with it. Durrell draws the reader's attention to the opposition between being simply a tourist, merely passing through places and being a resident, a part of the visited places. The use of the term "rushing" gives the reader the image of speed and hurry, while the present participle "living" suggests a deep engagement with the environment and its elements.

In *Reflections on a Marine Venus*, Durrell describes a landscape through a metaphor, comparing it to reading a poem behind a door that opens and lets us read/see its meaning. Durrell writes: "You come upon Lindos through a narrow gulley of rock. It is as if you had been leaning against a door leading to a poem when suddenly it swung open letting you stumble directly into the heart of it" (RMV 137). This metaphor portrays the island as a poetic experience or a revelation. It is an invitation to read places like poetic texts. Of course, no one could understand a text before reading it. It also suggests that landscapes are as beautiful as literary images. The special thing about poetry is that you must take your time while reading and go along with the rhythm, which brings us back to the idea of dwelling. This metaphor gives the image of a transition between an outside world and an inside world, the Eye/land and the I/land. "The narrow gulley rock" is the symbol of this transition. It is compared to a door that opens on the inner world and allows its exploration. The adverb "suddenly" marks the surprise effect created by entering the place, like diving into the heart of a poem unexpectedly. It is also an implicit invitation for the reader to experience the same immersion in the book and create meaning while making the connection between the physical elements and the poetic language that helps in the construction of metaphors. It is similar to a mystical experience that begins with immersing oneself in a place full of sublime and poetic elements. This gives a touch of sacredness to the writing process that places the writer in the position of a God, a creator.

[46] Durrell, Lawrence. *The Lawrence Durrell Travel Reader*. Edited by Clint Willis, New York: Avalon Publishing Group, 2004, 3.

In the *New York Times* article, Durrell defines the question of residence as a "literary criterion" and explains that "big books" are those rooted in places rather than those focused on "their characters and incidents". A landscape is a reinvention, a rewriting when it is described by a writer. Durrell explains that when you see a beautiful landscape "you begin to paint it for yourself in words".[47] This metaphor sheds light on the power of language in transforming real elements into pieces of art. It highlights the role of metaphors and literary images in the process of describing, which becomes a creative process allowing the writer to compose a vivid representation. The writer changes into a sort of divinity who creates texts and characters using the natural elements that he or she sees and transforms those elements into poetic sentences. According to Barthes: "[il y a une conception] qui fait du narrateur une sorte de conscience totale, apparemment impersonnelle, qui émet l'histoire d'un point de vue supérieur, celui de Dieu : le narrateur est à la fois intérieur à ses personnages (puisqu'il sait tout ce qui se passe en eux) et extérieur (puisque il ne s'identifie jamais avec l'un plus qu'avec l'autre)".[48] In other words, the writer has a superior point of view because he or she creates the characters. He knows everything about them because he has an internal view. Nevertheless, he remains at a distance because he does not identify with one of them more than the others. Moreover, in Durrell's texts, natural landscapes are transformed into characters. The creation of characters is inspired by what surrounds them. Durrell believes that "so long as people keep getting born Greek or French or Italian, their culture –all productions will bear the unmistakable signature of place". This means that the immediate physical and cultural environment shapes human behaviour. In this sense, individuals are determined by the milieu. The same idea is present in writing. When Lawrence Durrell says: "I willingly admit to seeing characters almost as functions of a landscape", it suggests that characters are parts of the landscapes that create them. They activate the landscape's soul. The place is what shapes people. It is not only a backdrop but an active element in the narrative. This leads us to another important point which is the self-discovery brought about by travelling and writing. The landscape is not only important in the making of a character, but it also works as a mirror to the human soul. The landscape reflects the human image and shows you who you are. In "Spirit of Place Lawrence Durrell's Greece", a BBC Arts documentary produced in 1976, Durrell says to the landscape: "I am watching you, are you watching yourself in me?"[49] as if a natural landscape could express

[47] Durrell, Lawrence. *From the Elephant's Back: Collected Essays & Travel Writings*. Edited by James Gifford, Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 2015.
[48] Roland Barthes, Wolfgang Kayser, Wayne C.Booth, Philippe Hamon, *Poétique du Récit*, Editions du Seuil, 1977, 39.
[49] Adam, Peter. *Spirit of Place* . 1976, https://youtu.be/EIOjaroRfEI.

its thoughts and share them with people. Durrell conducts a dialogue with the Greek landscape and starts an existential interaction with what surrounds him.

Just as Durrell turns people into landscapes, he reverses roles by turning landscapes into characters in his writings. In chapter I of *Reflections on a Marine Venus,* he writes: "Gradually Rhodes becomes people, by living people" (RMV 35). The transformation is progressive and takes time. Interestingly, he makes this observation after introducing the characters he met during his travels. When we look at the text about "Cos" in *Reflections on a Marine Venus,* we notice that Durrell tends to personify the landscape. Remarkably, he describes places as women in his writings. He uses metaphors to create a mix between human beings and landscapes. He first compares the island to a child, "Cos is the spoiled child of the group" (RMV 57). When reading this metaphor, the reader imagines the amount of energy and life on the island. Comparing the island to a child emphasises its innocence and spontaneity. And that makes this particular landscape closer to the reader, without really giving too many details about the place. In contradiction with the adjective "spoiled" that the writer uses to qualify the island of Cos to set it apart from the other islands, the text does not reveal everything about it. This text suggests a secret invitation to the reader to go and visit the place because the passage only reveals its spirit. It is a poetic description rather than a realistic one. Moreover, the island is described as a woman, which sheds light on its fecundity and its ability to give life. Cos is depicted as a "Nubian woman", and this emphasises the link between the different Mediterranean landscapes that Lawrence Durrell visited, particularly Egypt.

In the same way, books become places we visit. Reading is travelling while sitting under a tree, in a library, in a café or even in bed. In *Bitter Lemons of Cyprus,* Durrell evokes sitting under "the Tree of Idleness" (BL 53), where people are described as permanent *tourists* on their own land. Time expands and the moments spent on the islands become "timeless". Durrell describes the moments that people spend on the island as "the little eternities of their island life" (RMV 2-3). The perception of time on islands is different. The rhythm of life is slower, it is different from that of big cities where everyone is in such a hurry. Therefore, the moments of pleasure and happiness are expanded and last like some "little eternities"(RMV 2). He also describes the slow rhythm of time by a metaphor saying, "in Rhodes the days drop as softly as fruit from trees" (RMV 2). Trees symbolise life and fertility, and days on Rhodes are the fruits that take their time to bloom and ripen, which makes them sweeter and delicious.
Thus, reading is a way of travelling and exploring metaphysical places. *Reflections on a Marine Venus* takes the reader on a voyage to Greece without completely revealing it. If we observe

the path followed by the writer, we notice that he visits the Greek Isles in a back-and-forth movement; he remains on the borders and does not get into the heart of Greece. This distinguishes the traveller from the tourist. Rodolphe Christin claims that:

> Le voyageur, lui, aurait de l'esprit, voire une philosophie. Il chercherait à mettre en pratique un « art du voyage ». Sa démarche se voudrait individuelle, hors des circuits touristiques, justement, car le touriste serait au contraire celui qui exécute un tour, selon « un parcours quasiment fléché ».[50]

A simple tourist already knows what he/she is going to see or experience because they prepare their journey and follow the plan step by step. The traveller, on the contrary, does not know what to expect; he does not stick to a specific program. He does not give detailed and realistic descriptions of the visited places like a tourist guide. The most important element is not the physical place. The reader discovers the "Spirit of Place" first. Véronique Elfakir states that:

> Il y a une part du voyage et de ses motivations qui échappe au voyageur lui-même et qu'il va tenter de saisir par le biais de l'écriture. C'est cette opacité même qui permet en lui l'émergence ou la découverte d'un nouvel espace intérieur. C'est même précisément parce qu'il est souvent porteur d'une énigme ou d'une interrogation sur son désir, ce qui va au-delà de la simple question d'une quête identitaire, que le voyageur va tenter de retrouver cette part d'étrangeté projetée à l'extérieur pour en percer l'énigme. L'on voit bien dès lors que la seule visée du voyage ne serait être d'échapper à sa condition sociale et culturelle.[51]

In other words, writing a travel narrative amounts to discovering the intimate space that the traveller ignores, even though it harbours the motivations that prompt him to travel. It is not only a quest for identity but also a quest for the strangeness – that lies inside and outside one's soul – abroad. Therefore, the writer tries to understand and identify the hidden part that he does not understand or see. Curiosity is the driving force behind travel writing. Véronique Elfakir adds : "C'est ce parcours intérieur qui fait du voyage l'aventure d'une vie ou de toute vie une forme de voyage. De sorte que le départ n'est pas seulement rupture mais aussi construction et création". Otherwise stated, the interior path is what transforms travel into a lifetime adventure and can also transform life into a sort of *voyage*. It makes leaving more interesting because it is not only perceived as a departure from one's homeland, old life, places, or former companions. A departure becomes a starting point for new projects. Durrell himself left England because it was not the place for him as an artist, as he explains: "England wrung my guts out of me and tried to destroy everything singular and unique in me".[52] Therefore, the travel narrative is a process of reconstruction, world-reconstruction, and self-reconstruction.

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[50] Rodolphe, Christin. *L'imaginaire Voyageur ou l'Expérience Exotique.* L'Harmattan (2000), 22.
[51] Véronique Elfakir , *Désir Nomade, Littérature de voyage : regard psychanalytique*, L'Harmattan (2005), 16.
[52] Hassan, Ahlam Fathy (1980) Lawrence Durrell and the Alexandria quartet: influences shaping his fiction., Durham theses, Durham University. Available at Durham E-Theses Online: http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/7265/

The process of writing is a voyage even though the writer remains in his place, his imagination travels and allows him to experience travelling. Christine Montalbetti explains that : "L'auteur s'absente du monde dans lequel physiquement il figure pour évoluer en pensées dans les espaces imaginaires (…) [l'auteur est] celui qui est là tout en n'y étant pas, qui participe d'un double lieu physique et imaginaire".[53] In other words, a writer shifts between two different places: the physical and the imaginary. He is the one who decides when and where he will travel. The imaginary places that provide the writing tools allow the discovery of the writer's intimate space. We also find these elements in some spiritual traditions such as Sufism and Taoism. Durrell uses words such as "*pèlerinage*" (RMV 14) as Gideon describes his tour of the town in the first chapter of *Reflections on a Marine Venus*. "*Pèlerinage*" is a voyage to places of spiritual devotion. We also find this in the Sufi tradition, where the notion of travelling in order to find the spirit of God and to discover the depths of one's soul. Idries Shah declares that "the Sufis are poets and lovers".[54] We can compare Durrell to a Sufi if we consider that he is a poet as well, and a "lover" of islands: an "islomane" (RMV 1) as he defines himself (RMV 2). Durrell attempts to define the concept of "Islomania" in the first lines of the book,

> Somewhere among the note-books of Gideon I once found a list of diseases as yet unclassified by medical science, and among these there occurred the word Islomania, which was described as a rare but by no means unknown affliction of spirit. There are people, Gideon used to say, by way of explanation, who find islands somehow irresistible. (RMV 1)

The book opens with a presentation of Gideon through his "note-books". The term "somewhere" creates a sense of ambiguity and suggests that the notebooks are multiple and perhaps disorganised, but at the same time, full of treasures. The narrator, using Gideon's notebooks, evokes an intimate relationship between the two characters and implies that Gideon is scientific, intellectual and reflective. Note-taking hints at a sense of observation and curiosity about the world. The word "Islomania" appears in the list of diseases that the narrator qualifies as "unclassified by medical science", which suggests that Gideon's research transcends formal knowledge. The disease that catches the narrator's attention in this context seems metaphorical. It refers to a state of mind. The central term "Islomania" is a creative name that blends "island" and "mania" which evokes a pathological obsession about islands. The formula "affliction of spirit" frames islomania beyond physical or psychological disorder. It ties this condition to the

[53] Christine Montalbetti*, Le Voyage, le le Monde et la Bibliothèque*, puf écriture ; Presse Universitaire de France, 1997.
[54] Shah, Idries. *The Sufis*. London: ISF Publishing, 2015.

soul and existential experiences. The narrator describes this term as "rare" because it is not a common disease. Yet it is not "unknown" because it is recognisable by anyone who feels an irresistible attraction to a place, especially islands. This description gives Islomania a poetic, almost romantic dimension beyond clinical diagnosis. The narrator also gives Gideon's interpretation of "Islomania". "Gideon used to say" foreshadows Gideon's characterisation as a wise philosophical figure who speaks from experience and observations. The formula "by way of explanation" suggests that Gideon would offer these explanations in a conversational manner which portrays him as an informal thinker. The last sentence hints at the essence of Islomania: a magnetic attraction towards islands. The use of the term "somehow" suggests a sense of mystery, as if even Gideon could not entirely explain the sense of irresistibility that transcends logic. This idea suggests a deep psychological or spiritual longing and perhaps a desire for isolation and discovery.

Poetry and nature are inseparable, especially since nature has been the muse of poets since the dawn of time. As previously mentioned in the introduction, Lawrence Durrell was also interested in Taoism[55], which is a philosophical tradition that suggests that human beings should be in harmony with nature, both visible and invisible, with both feminine (Yin) and masculine (Yang) parts, and must experience things to know them. Durrell states:

> The word Tao […] suggests to me different stances (all truth being relative) – a state of total *disponibilité*, total availability, a total and comprehensive and wholehearted awareness of that instant where certainty breaks surface like a hooked fish. Only at this point is the spirit fully tuned in to the great metaphor of the world as TAO. Reality is then prime, independent of the hampering conceptual apparatus of conscious thought. It is the flashpoint where the mind joins itself to the nature of all created things. That poetry is Tao.[56]

Durrell suggests that the nature of Taoism is not dogmatic, but instead, it is fluid and open. Taoism emphasises the natural flow of life. This suggests that all truths are relative rather than universal. The term "*disponibilité*" conveys the idea of being receptive. Durrell uses the metaphor "certainty breaks surface like a hooked fish", which suggests that certainty emerges only momentarily before disappearing again beneath the surface of consciousness. Contending that "poetry is Tao" allows us to understand the importance of art and creative expression, where poetry becomes a tool for explaining existence. The creative expression, much like the Tao, emerges spontaneously from a connection with reality rather than through intellectual effort. In this manner, poetry becomes a mode of awareness that allows the spirit to be "fully

[55] See Durrell's biography by Ian MacNiven, 618-619.
[56] Durrell, Lawrence. *A Smile in the Mind's Eye*. London: Wildwood House, 1980, 1.

tuned to the world". Durrell suggests that poetry captures the "prime" reality and unity that can be perceived as a moment of enlightenment and allows a holistic and interconnected understanding of existence.

After studying how travel writing has evolved and become not just about physical journeys but also about internal exploration of identity, the focus will shift to the language and its role in the process of creating links. The genre allowed Durrell to navigate between the physical world and the sphere of imagination, helped by the mysterious allure of islands that emphasises the quest for meaning and the understanding of oneself and others. The language that Durrell uses is rich in metaphors, and it intertwines poetry and prose, which makes the experience more personal and helps the reader understand the physical and metaphysical relationships that grow on the Greek islands.

Chapter two

Poetic language and the creation of intimate relationships between characters and (I)slands

A) Relationships within language (language, literature and the Inner World)

Durrell's island books are linguistic representations of what the writer experienced as visual elements of natural and urban landscapes during his stay on each Greek island he lived on or visited. Part of these island books is constituted of Durrell's own interpretation of other texts and points of view. According to Michael Sharwood Smith, the inner construction of one's ideas over time forms the basis of one's perception of the world:

> Thoughts and ideas, constructed as they are during our lifetime, go to make up our accumulated knowledge of, and beliefs about the outside world. These too, must be "represented somewhere in our inside world so that we can use them on repeated occasions to make sense of what we experience whether awake or when dreaming. And there must be systems in our minds (and brains) that take care of all this complicated representing.[57]

In other words, we need a system to make sense of our conscious and unconscious thoughts and ideas. Language is the system that allows us to transcribe real and imaginary representations we experience daily when we are awake and even when we are dreaming. Writing becomes a tool in the service of language. It allows exteriorizing one's inner interpretation of the outside world. It also helps to reproduce one's visual, sensory, and metaphysical experiences, aesthetically and artistically, in order to give them "sense". Thus, there has been a strong relationship between language and literature. In fact, it is a relationship of dependency. Literature is a linguistic game based on structure and style. Playing with words and sentence structures transforms a literary text into an experimental field of images and metaphors. The writer becomes the master of the text because he or she can manipulate the different elements within the system and activate the (re)creation process. In the corpus under study, the interactions with inner thoughts gave birth to a unique and interesting form of literary expression that combines two different and opposed techniques which are prose and lyrical

[57] Michael Sharwood Smith, *Introducing Language and Cognition, A Map of the Mind*, Cambridge University Press 2017, 8.

style. According to Gérard Cordesse: "'la poésie' (poetry) […] se définit par son opposition à la prose comme formellement identifiable par la présence de la versification".[58] In other words, poetry distinguishes itself from prose by versification, rhyme, rhythm and line break, while prose has no specific metrical structure. Yet, this point of view on poetry is narrow, especially because it restricts the definition of poetry to its form. In contemporary texts, the boundaries between prose and poetry are obfuscated. Some texts, defined as prose could be perceived as poetic, thanks to the metaphors and rhythmic structures. In *Reflections on a Marine Venus*, Durrell gives a different definition of poetry that presents it as a bridge between the inner self and the outside world. He asserts that:

> Writing poetry educates one into the nature of the game — which is humanity's profoundest activity. In their star-dances the savages try to unite their lives to those of the heavenly bodies to mix their quotidian rhythms into those great currents which keep the wheels of the universe turning. Poetry attempts to provide much the same sort of link between the muddled inner man with his temporal preoccupations and the uniform flow of the universe outside. Of course everyone is conscious of these impulses; but poets are the only people who do not drive them off. Poems, like water-colours, should be left to dry properly before you alter them _ six months or six hours according to the paints you use. These reflections are the fruit of an afternoon spent alone, reading under a cypress tree on Mount Phileremo. (RMV 41)

Durrell explains in this passage that poetry is the thread that links a human being's inner self to the outside world. He identifies poetry as a part of humanity's innermost ventures. He uses the concept of the "game" to draw a metaphor for life. A game is an activity structured by rules. Similarly, life follows a certain number of patterns that should be respected. Poetry is described as a medium that helps to understand life and its features. This description suggests that poetry has an educational aspect. The poet learns about the world and life through the procedure of writing. In this excerpt, Durrell relates poetry to the "star-dances" of the savages. The image of the "savages" reflects the idea of "the noble savage" (le bon sauvage) conceptualised in Montaigne's essays *Des Cannibales*. The "noble savage" is portrayed as a figure of purity and simplicity despite the lack of the comforts provided by civilisation.[59] This passage evokes the indigenous and ancient rituals that aim to harmonise human beings with the universe by performing the "star-dances". The "star-dances" allude to the rituals that ancient peoples would perform in order to connect with the gods. It indicates a deep connection to the cosmos. The

[58] Cordesse, Gérard, et al. *Langages littéraires*. Toulouse: Presses Universitaires Du Mirail, 1983, 13.

[59] Joseph R. de Lutri explains Montaigne's position towards Western civilisation and towards the cannibals. The author claims that Montaigne does not criticize the "corruption" of the western culture. He is just "eulogizing" the observed qualities of the cannibals "such as beauty, devotion, observance of the law, oddness, liberality, and candor among others". de Lutri, Joseph R. "Montaigne on the Noble Savage: A Shift in Perspective." *The French Review,* vol. 49, no. 2, Dec. 1975, pp. 206-211. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/388691.

author uses images of "the heavenly bodies" and "great currents" to highlight the idea of a wider universe. These rituals, compared to poetry, constitute an intimate experience that keeps showing in Durrell's poems. Isabelle Keller-Privat states about Durrell's poem "IV At Rhodes":

> L'expérience intime apparaît comme le seul mode de connaissance qui peut agir et transformer le sujet dans une opération proche de l'alchimie par laquelle le corps solide change d'espèce. Cette renaissance de l'insoluble sous une forme liquide est métaphorique de l'éveil de la conscience que le poète appelle de tout son être : 'the Many and the None' se fondent dans 'the One'.[60]

The intimate personal experience is described as the most authentic event that changes the individual. It is about something that is felt deeply rather than viewed through external observation. Isabelle Keller-Privat compares gaining knowledge (intimate) to a transformation process. Spiritual or personal transformation is defined by alchemy. Similarly to transforming metal into gold, the "solid body" is transformed into something more refined, which takes a "liquid form" like the "heavenly bodies" evoked in the text under study. It suggests that it becomes more adaptable and reaches the state of "awakening of consciousness" that the poet aims to achieve through his poetic expression. The subjective experience merges into the collective experience and allows a form of spiritual and existential growth. It is an almost mystical process. This idea is reinforced in the passage under study, with the use of the verb "mix" which suggests the close relationship between the visible and the invisible. The acts are defined as "rhythms", which emphasises the role of poetry. This "mix" is what creates harmony. The universe is personified as a machine that has "wheels", and harmony is like the fuel that allows them to turn. The author suggests that poetry is also a ritual that creates a link between the universe and the "muddled inner man", which is a personification of the inner self that is disoriented and disconnected from the universe because of everyday life and activities in the civilised world become linked to material objects, as opposed to "the savages" who are aligned with the cosmic rules. The poetic themes of the passage are echoed by the subtle alliterations in "star dances of the savages" and "muddled inner man" which creates a rhythm similar to the one described as that of the universe's rhythm. Furthermore, Durrell suggests that these "impulses" of harmony are almost instinctive, that everyone is aware of them, but "poets" do not dismiss or push them away. They embrace them with their art and contemplation. They transform them using their words and images. Poems are compared to "water-colours". Writing

[60] Keller-Privat, Isabelle. *Between the Lines. L'écriture du déchirement dans la poésie de Lawrence Durrell.* Nanterre: Presses Paris Nanterre, 2018, 159.

a poem is similar to painting, it is an artistic process that requires time to become accomplished. Watercolour paintings need time to dry up before adding other layers or details, like a poem that needs to settle before being observed with a fresh eye and modified.

This simile leads us to comment on the concept of the "poème-dessin"[61] in Durrell's works. In the chapter entitled "In the Garden of the Villa Cleobolus", Durrell marks a poetic pause that interrupts the narrative:

> I am a bronze girl sculptured
> And set up here on Midas' monument.
> Believe me, so ever long as water
> Flows in the plains and the sunrise
> Delights men as the brilliant moonlight does:
> So ever long as rivers rush
> Between steep flanks, so ever long
> As oceans surge on beaches I
> Shall be seen reclining on this
> Old unhappy tomb to tell the passer-by
> 'Midas lies here interred.' (RMV 99)

It is a poem attributed to the Greek poet Cleobolus[62], which Gedeon was translating. The act of translating from ancient Greek, and the poem itself helps to build a bridge between the past and the present, between the author of the poem/translation and the reader. The poem's layout in the text marks a shift point that allows the narrator to stop the narrative progression and invite the reader to reflect on the poem's theme, which is based on the passing of time and eternal existence through art. The poem's structure is similar to a visual representation of a personified statue on the tomb of Midas[63] that has the ability to talk and tell a story in one long sentence. This bridges the gap between the animate and the inanimate and gives objects the ability to speak, a form of power.

The poem is placed within the narrative like a picture that illustrates the idea of timelessness and the eternity of art and nature. It is written in free verse. It does not adopt a fixed meter or a rhyme scheme. This creates a conversational tone within the text, enhanced by the use of the

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[61] The "poème-dessin" or "the poem-drawing", according to Cordesse et al in *Langages Littéraire* (33), is a form of writing that uses the blank space of the page to allow the symbolic arrangement of words and distinguish poetry from prose. Apollinaire's Calligrammes are a form of figurative poetry that allows the poem to take the shape of an object. In the case of Durrell's texts under study, the poems are used as visual illustrations to create a lyrical pause that fragments the text and allows reflection on time and the transition to other ideas.
See also "Painterly Writing: Durrell's Island Landscapes" by Jack F. Stewart.

[62] Cleobolus was one of the Seven Sages of Greece. According to Diogenes Laërtius, "he was a native of Lindus […] and he is reported […] to have studied philosophy in Egypt." Laertius, Diogenes. *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers Diogenes Laertius*. G. Bell and Sons, LTD : London, 2015, 41.

[63] It is ironic that the sculpture in the poem is made of bronze because Midas in Greek mythology made the wish to transform everything he touched into gold, which did not prevent him from dying. Especially that he was presented "as a figure of ridicule". Roller, Lynn E. "The legend of Midas." *Classical Antiquity*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1 Oct. 1983, 299–313, https://doi.org/10.2307/25010800.

personal pronoun “I”. The structure of this poem echoes the eternal, timeless movement of natural elements such as “water”, “sunrise”, “moonlight”, “rivers” and “oceans”. Besides, the assonances, alliterations, and anaphors suggest the extension of temporality and create a musical effect that makes the reader impatient for the last sentence that breaks the rhythm and announces an ending with two meanings: the end of the poem and death. It sends us back to the last image of Durrell’s text: Reading “under a cypress tree in Mount Philermo.” Nikolas Dimakis states that “in modern Greece, cypress trees are the ultimate symbol of death as they mark or surround the position of cemeteries, while ‘going to cypress trees’, a modern Greek euphemism, is regularly used as a metaphor for the afterlife”.[64] Cypress trees are usually planted around cemeteries and tombs against evil spirits. They are the symbol of eternal rest because of their tallness and height. Besides, their dark green colour is linked to mourning. But this evergreen colour is a symbol of immortality and the enduring nature of the souls, which suggests the belief in an afterlife. Using the phrase “going to Cypress trees” as a metaphor for death suggests a deep acceptance of death as an unavoidable part of the human experience and reflects a peaceful and calm passage to the other state of being. Being alone allows the author to dive into reading and reflecting. This illustrates a peaceful and reflective scene. In parallel with the other images in the passage, it gives an image of a dream. It can be compared to the idea of harmonising the soul with the universe and entering an in-between state where the narrator's spirit leaves his body to meet his ideas. The last sentence describing the narrator in a state of what looks like daydreaming marks a shift. It cuts the paragraph and returns the reader to reality after a poetic and temporal pause in the narrative. It also marks a transition to introduce one of the Rhodian characters of the book that the narrator has announced earlier (RMV 35): Manoli, the net-maker. This physical (the narrator is physically resting under a tree) and intellectual pause enables the activation of the creation process and connection with the inner world through poetry.

In an attempt to define poetry, Cordesse et al assert that : “[…] poésie, fidèle au sens premier du mot grec "ποίησις" sous-entend création, fabrication”.[65] In short, poetry is an act of creation. It brings something new into existence. As previously stated, Aristotle considers poetry as a form of imitation, that replicates reality. Cordesse et al defines it as a form of creation that is independent of “mimesis”. However, he uses both the word “creation”, which carries a connotation of spontaneity, and “fabrication” which suggests building and

[64] Dimakis, Nikolas. “Ancient Greek deathscapes.” *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology and Heritage Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1 Feb. 2015, 27–41, https://doi.org/10.5325/jeasmedarcherstu.3.1.0027.
[65] *Langages littéraires*, 13.

constructing. This aligns with the idea of crafting, assembling words, manipulating language and building an aesthetic experience out of the poet's complex inner experience of life.

The fabrication concept is opposed to the idea of death and destruction. Yet, Durrell presents an image of poetic mourning offered by a local figure compared to "Mother Hubbard" on the occasion of Taki the fisherman's burial in *Prospero's Cell*. As seen previously, poetry embellishes life and the afterlife. On the tongue of one of the characters in *Prospero's Cell*, "the old Count D", a Greek philosopher, Durrell draws a portrayal of the cultural poetic ritual after an individual's death and how grief is exteriorised with words and rhythm as a celebration of the lost one.

> 'And think of the piercing lamentations of the professional mourners. I have made a collection of them – all spontaneous poetry, and some of the best known to the language. But there is no trace of the good-and-evil preoccupation. No, we Greeks are not religious, we are superstitious and anarchic. Even death is less important than politics. There is a kind of old Mother Hubbard who lives on the hill there; she is much in demand at funerals because of her poetic gift. Last year when Taki the fisherman died you should have heard her singing. It would have moved a stone.
>
> 'My silver boy,
> My golden one,
> Softer the down on his face
> Than breast of the woodcock;
> Keener his mind than a snake striking.
> The silver person has left us.
> The golden man has gone.'
>
> 'We carried him in his open box to the cemetery on the hill, and all the time this poetry was flowing out of Mother Hubbard in a continuous stream, keeping pace with her tears, for she really loved Taki.'
> 'Was the coffin open?' says Zarian.
> 'Yes. There again a point is proved.'
> 'Is that a religious custom of the island?'
> 'No. But under the Turks it was a law to prevent the smuggling of arms in coffins under the pretence of carrying corpses to the grave. In some places it has lingered on among the superstitious. So Taki's pale aquiline features were visible all the way as the ragged little procession wound up the hill. He looked as if he were about to smile. Of course no sooner was he dead and buried than Mother Hubbard, who was some vague relation, took out an injunction against his mother, to prevent her disposing of Taki's twenty olive-trees, which, she said, had been given to her as a gift. You see, there seemed to her no incongruity in making poetry for a dead man whom you love, and whose heirs you are trying to swindle. The case dragged on for months and I believe she lost it.' (PC 111)

The passage distinguishes between being "religious" and being "superstitious". The supernatural and the mystical do not align with conventional religious beliefs within Greek society. The phrase "we Greeks are not religious", foreshadows a firsthand experience and suggests that the given information is authentic. This adds a layer of objectivity to the narrative.

The narrator in this passage is not Durrell but another character, the Greek Count D. The author uses direct speech in order to make the passage more convincing and objective using a local figure. The adverb “even” highlights the surprising information about “politics” being more important than “death” which points out a subversion in the expected cultural values. It also indicates that the idea of prioritising social living events over the metaphysical or existential reality of death is treated ironically. In contrast with this idea, the narrator emphasises the role of poetry in expressing “mourning”. The formula “Spontaneous poetry” refers to the cultural preference for the organic and natural as opposed to a rigid and structured form of mourning, which opposes the ideas of death and inanimation. Lamentation and mourning are described as a public and performative act by the evocation of “professional mourners” that emphasises the tragic and theatrical aspect of the event, which contrasts with the individual and intimate experience of death itself as an act of transformation. The narrator emphasises the absence of spiritual authority. Yet, he points out the established codes of mourning with the use of “professional mourners”, which symbolises the transfer of the soul and the body from a material to an immaterial place and its transformation from a “solid” to a “liquid” form as described by Isabelle Keller-Privat. Moreover, the narrator mentions the most famous and talented “professional mourner” on the island: “Mother Hubbard”. This represents a blending between the narrative and the local and British mythology. It allows the reader to experience a deeper immersion into the spirit of the island. This leads us to the last expression: “It would have moved a stone”. This is a metaphor that suggests that poetry is so powerful that it could tender the hardest of hearts. The lamentation poems are strong enough to physically move an inanimate and rough object such as a stone. It implies that poetic language helps create an emotional link that speaks to those who are typically indifferent. The verb “moved” suggests a reaction provoked by the power of words. The metaphor points out the discrepancy between these two states. At the same time, it highlights the power of poetic expression to bridge the gap and change an emotional state. This sentence is also a hyperbolic statement that serves the amplification of the significance of mournful poems and their ability to create empathy. Durrell uses the poem sung by “Mother Hubbard” after “Taki”’s death, as an illustration. One can perceive the features of the “poem-dessin” as explained previously. The melancholic tone is highlighted with the rhythm of the poem which is close to crying. The use of the possessive pronoun “my” foreshadows the subjectivity and the intimate link between the poet and the mourned person. It adds a maternal touch to the poem, which draws a parallel with the

comparison of the woman to Mother Hubbard.[66] The poet uses two opposing terms, "silver boy", which refers to youth, and "golden man", which relates to maturity, in order to describe the lost person's value. The repetition in the two first and two last verses creates a rhythmical effect that mirrors the cycle of life and death. The passage takes an ironic turn when the narrator reports that "Mother Hubbard" who expresses her deep sorrow through poetry, attempts to swindle Taki's mother. Her opportunistic behaviour reflects the complexity of human nature. This duality adds depth to the character and her interactions with other members of her town. Besides, this exposure of true intentions is underscored by the description of the open coffin. Mother Hubbard's conflicting emotions are bare, just as Taki's body. The narrator explains that the open coffin used to be a practical measure in the time of Turkish rule. However, it becomes a metaphor for the transparency of death. Taki's "pale aquiline features" are visible. This suggests that death is confronted directly. This creates a tone of amusement and irony. The narrator is aware of the absurdity of the situation and the complexity of the characters and their cultural environment. The passage also criticises the intersection of politics, traditions and personal interests. The continuation of the open coffin custom hints at how political laws can leave lasting marks on cultural practices.

Thus, poetic language merges into social interactions and becomes essential in processing intimate emotions. It also creates a relationship between the reader and the narrator or the author of a text since it addresses emotions through the linguistic system that transforms and transcribes internal experiences and allows external interactions. These interactions within the narratives will be studied next, with an emphasis placed on personal relationships.

[66] "Mother Goose, who used to be a wise and witty teller of fairytales and then was seen as a legendary writer of nursery rhymes, now apparently was beginning to be depicted as a champion of the conception of the world associated with the obsolete witchcraft. And this old conception was now seen as a fit subject of comedy. In fact, judging from the extant engraving, Mother Goose was played by Samuel Simmons as an old hag with some grotesquery. It is true that the association of an old woman with traditional fairytales or nursery rhymes looks natural and long standing. 'Mother Hubbard' as an old woman telling stories must have been known already in 1590, since Edmund Spencer entitled one of his satires 'Mother Hubbard's Tales', it is an animal fable supposedly told by 'Mother Hubbard', a simple old country woman, and develops into politico-religious allegory." The comparison of the professional mourner to Mother Hubbard emphasises the irony of the situation and the contradiction between the poetical talent of the woman and her grotesque behaviour with Taki's mother.
Tsurumi, Ryoji. "The development of Mother Goose in Britain in the nineteenth century." *Folklore*, vol. 101, no. 1, Jan. 1990, pp. 28–35, https://doi.org/10.1080/0015587x.1990.9715776.

B) Personal and intimate relationships

Once the text is in the reader's hands, an interaction begins. This creates an intimate relationship between the narratee, the text, and the narrator. The reader is alone in front of the text, and the writer addresses him or her through the narrator's voice. Roland Barthes describes this relationship as a cultural or literary transaction:

> De même qu'il y a à l'intérieur du récit, une grande fonction d'échange (répartie entre un donateur et un bénéficiaire), de même homologiquement, le récit, comme objet, est l'enjeu d'une communication: il y a un donateur du récit, il y a un destinataire du récit […] il ne peut y avoir de récit sans narrateur et sans auditeur.[67]

Barthes draws an analogy between the narrative structure and a social exchange. A narrative involves a "giver" and a "receiver". This idea suggests that a narrative is perceived as a transaction in which information, emotions and ideas are transferred from the "giver" to the "receiver". The "giver" may be the author of the text or may be impersonated on the figure of a character within the narrative such as the Greek Count D in *Prospero's Cell* (111) or Mills in *Reflections on a Marine Venus* (26). The narrative is involved in the process of communication. This draws a parallel between the narrative's internal exchanges and its external function as a communicative object. Barthes concludes that the existence of a narrative depends on both the narrator and the audience. Without the audience, a story would be a set of events without meaning. Barthes underlines the idea that texts are constructed and governed by systems of signs, rules and structures. He also foreshadows the reader's role in creating meaning for the text. The reader's interpretation is what puts life into a text.

In Durrell's travel books, the reader lives an immersive experience in the narrative where he or she creates an intimate relationship with the text, the author/narrator, and also attends to creating other relationships where he or she is not included. These relationships exist mainly between the narrator and the characters or between the characters without the interference of the narrator. This reinforces the reader's relationship with the text and allows him to take the narrator's place to build his judgment. In the following passage, the narrator enters a discussion with the reader and invites him to make his opinion about the subject.

> I am told by Hoyle that in parts of the island a rainbow is known as 'Helen's Cord' because, say the peasants, a great queen hanged herself with a rainbow from a tree? Is this perhaps one of those curious survivals which delight him so much to unearth? According to one ancient source when Troy fell Helen was driven out by her step-sons and took refuge in Rhodes where Polyxo hanged her from a tree to avenge the death of Tlepolemos in the

[67] Barthes, Roland, et al. *Poétique Du récit*. Paris: Éditions Du Seuil, 1977, 38.

> Torjan War. Torr has already noted the tree-cult of Helen Dendritis in Rhodes during ancient times. The reader must draw his own conclusions. Yet the line of descent seems clear enough. As for Tlepolemos, he enjoyed the posthumous honours of a hero, but there is no record which tells us where his temple stood. (RMV 34)

This passage is heavy on intertextuality and references to myths. The author sets the narrative on a historical-mythological continuum, intertwines the past and the present, and relies on the reader's knowledge of Greek mythology to understand the text. The passage presents a contrast between life and death. Helen being hanged or executed contrasts with the image of the colourful, vibrant and hopeful symbol of the rainbow. The narrative structure of the passage is built around Helen and her worship by the peasants, which refers to the concept of survival of ancient beliefs through time. The narrator gives his interpretation of the connection between myths that involve Helen. He cites his sources, Hoyle and Cecil Torr, the author of *Rhodes in Ancient Times* (1885) that Durrell refers to in the bibliography at the end of *RMV* (222). Helen is perceived as a figure of beauty and desire in the Greek folklore. In this passage, she is associated with the natural phenomenon of a rainbow which ties her to the divine symbolism. The metonymy "Helen's Cord" signifies the instrument of her hanging. By calling the rainbow a cord, it attaches it directly to the story of her execution. Besides, Durrell evokes the "tree-cult of Helen Dendritis". Dendritis signifies "of the tree" in Greek. It highlights the strong connection between Helen's story and the symbolism of trees that gives them a divine dimension.[68] This connection intensifies the worship of Helen and her strong presence in Greek tradition. As for Tlepolemos, the narrator underlines his "posthumous honours" which signifies his worship after death, which contrasts with the absence of references to the location of his temple. Giving the information about the story of Helen, the narrator suggests that the reader is free to make his own opinion and interpretation. Including the reader in the interpretation of the narrative creates a conversational dynamic and allows an open discussion around the text where the reader takes part in the narrative thread and practices active reading.

What is striking about the island books under study is the discussion of the reading and writing process within the narrative, as if Durrell were inviting the reader to think with him about the structure and content of his books. During an evening among the characters of *Reflections on a Marine Venus'* long evenings in Villa Cleobolus[69] around various discussions, Mills suggests that Durrell needs to write a book about Rhodes.

> I remember him repeating in his clear voice: I do so hope you'll write a book about the island sometime when you feel like it. I don't feel Gideon's history will ever get written

[68] See Annex 1.
[69] See Annex 2.

> somehow, nor Hoyle's study of the dialect: but it needs a book. Not history or myth – but landscape and atmosphere somehow "A companion" is the sort of idea. (RMV 26)

The narrator uses terms such as "history", "myth", "landscape", "atmosphere", and "companion" as a sort of enumeration. By setting these terms against each other, he gives the book its structure and constructs a vision that defies traditional categories, intertwining the factual and the sensory. The term companion suggests that *Reflections on a Marine Venus* is to take the place of the guide during the reader's journey on the island or in the narrative. Hence, the conversations that include the reader in the character's debates and allow him or her to build a personal reflection about the subject discussed in the text, which makes the reading active. In the passage, there is a shift between two narrators, Durrell and Mills. Durrell reports Mills's reflections in direct speech using the personal pronoun "I". He expresses his ideas in long sentences, extending the space devoted to his reflection. It is similar to a monologue. Especially because Durrell writes earlier in the chapter with a humoristic tone that Mills' wife Chloe fell asleep after several attempts to make her husband take her home while he was "roasting chestnuts before the fire" (*RMV* 26). In this intimate and warm atmosphere, highlighted by the night's calmness and the crackling fireplace, time is extended. The reader is invited to the listening process with Durrell, who establishes a subjective first-person perspective by showing an act of memory with the use of the verb "remember", which implies a selective process. The narrator recounts only what he judges crucial within the long conversations in the Villa Coleobolus. The main subject in the discussion is the book as a project. A book that is described as a companion, a friend that shares the journey with the reader and describes the atmosphere of the island.

The next piece of advice that Mills considers crucial for the success of the book is the construction of the relationship between the reader and the main characters. Mills assumes that the early introduction of the main characters is what determines whether the reader will carry on the reading or close the book and put an end to the journey. He requests: "Above all, introduce your main characters right away. Give the reader a chance to see if he likes them. It's only fair. So he can close the book if he doesn't. that's how you should begin.'" (RMV 27). Mills suggests that the reader's engagement in the text is linked in the first place by the introduction of the book's main characters. This approach gives the reader the liberty to stop reading if he or she does not like the characters, which implies the role of the characters in maintaining the reader's attention and interest in the narrative. The narrator plays the role of the one establishing the relationships and takes the responsibility of making the characters attractive. Mills prescribes a structural strategy for the opening of the narrative, highlighting

its influence on the reader's experience. The statement "it's only fair" suggests an ethical dimension to introducing the characters from the beginning in order to accommodate the reader's preferences. The use of the imperative verbs "introduce" and "give" suggest a set of instructions that guide the author to build a successful storytelling. Mills' advice is pragmatic. His short choppy sentences focus mainly on actionable guidance rather than artistic or linguistic considerations, which emphasises the informal tone of this statement and gives it a friendly dimension.

One can notice that Durrell listened to Mills' advice and introduced the main characters from the beginning. Nonetheless, he did not introduce only human characters but also the statue of the marine Venus. The statue is the incarnation of the place's soul and may be considered an inanimate character who is activated by the importance given to her by the narrator. He underlines the difficulty of describing her with words and leaves the reader free to go visit her and see her visual representation. Durrell writes: "There is only one portrait I shrink from – that of the Marine Venus. If the reader should ever visit her in her little cell he would know why. The presiding genius of a place or an epoch may be named, but she may not be properly described" (RMV 27). This statement functions as a confession to the reader. The narrator discusses the limitation of language by opposing "portrait" to the act of describing. A portrait suggests a visual and possibly more concrete representation, while a description is verbal and abstract. Durrell puts the Marine Venus in the position of a unique figure associated with mythological elements. He portrays her as "the presiding genius" which suggests a sacred presence tied to a specific spatial-temporal frame. It indicates that she transcends ordinary representations. His incapacity to describe her properly reflects the idea that she belongs to those essences that language cannot fully capture. The description of the room where the statue is exhibited as a "little cell" is a metaphor for the limitations that she faces. The little confined space within which she exists sets her out of space and time. The reader is implicated in the process of understanding and the narrator addresses an indirect invitation to visit the statue to learn what the narrator is talking about. It is also an invitation to break her solitude and loneliness.

In Durrell's island books, the reader attends to the creation of personal relationships between the characters of the narratives. These relationships exist mainly between the narrator and the characters or between the characters. After building a bridge between the narrator and the reader. The narrator starts introducing the narratee to the other characters who will be present in the rest of the storytelling. One of the main characters in *Reflections on a Marine*

Venus is Gideon, whom Durrell introduces from the first pages of the book. The beginning of their relationship is narrated as follows: "'Heavens, I feel well' said Gideon. We had carried our third cup of tea out on the terrace, and were full of the warmth and well-being of that spring sunshine. Idling there upon that terrace we first began our exploration of each other" (RMV 12). Gideon's exclamation interrupts Durrell's peaceful thoughts, like a verbal validation of the serene atmosphere that reigned that morning. It evokes a sense of satisfaction and both physical and emotional well-being. This suggests that the environment is nurturing for the body and the spirit. This moment acts as a catalyst for the profound connection that follows. The author uses the word "exploration" to describe the process of knowing each other, which implies a deep emotional or intellectual engagement between these two characters. Sharing tea works as a metaphor for nurturing a relationship thoughtfully and taking time to discover each other. In several cultures, tea is a symbol of hospitality. It is a social act that conveys a message of acceptance and welcome. Sharing cups of tea and the readiness to explore someone else means that the person aims to establish a form of relationship with the other. This "exploration" ushers in the presentation of a new character whom the reader will find throughout the text in the narrator's company. It also provides the reader with extra information about the narrator. Moreover, the use of the gerund "idling" refers to the act of relaxing and spending time without doing something in particular. This allows the two characters to take their time to know each other without the pressure of a busy life, which contributes to the understanding of the narrative rhythm, especially since the narrator gives a detailed description of Gideon and their shared activities that turn around the island's exploration. The perception of time takes another dimension. The narrator offers an evocative description of time on the island by claiming that "in Rhodes the days drop as softly as fruit from trees" (RMV 2) Trees are symbols of life and fertility, and days on Rhodes are the fruits that take their time to bloom and ripen, which makes them sweeter and delicious. The metaphor of the fruit that falls from the tree gives a visual representation of the passing of time. The verb "drop" evokes a liquid form and makes the reader think of the water drops that fall slowly. The adjective "softly" transcribes a sensory experience and reflects a quiet atmosphere where time passes without hurry. The use of alliteration enhances this image. The first one is highlighted by the occurrence of the sound /d/ in "days drop" and the second one with the occurrence of the sound /f/ in "fruit from". The use of alliteration contributes to the construction of the sentence's rhythm and mimics the gentle motion of fruit dropping. It also draws attention to the words "days" and "drop" which emphasise the image of the gentle passage of time. Likewise, the /f/ sound in "fruit" and "from" is soft and airy, which enhances the natural imagery of fullness and ripeness, reflecting the idea

of something on the verge of fading and reinforcing the passage's central theme: the serene natural flow of time in a restful place. The intertwining of the iambic meter at the beginning of the sentence and the trochaic meter in the rest of the phrase enhances the musicality and poetic effect, mirroring the slow rhythm of the fruit dropping and the passage of time. This metaphor allows the narrator to reflect on different eras in Greek history until he gets to recount how he found himself in Rhodes in 1945.

The reader is quickly aware that time is a central theme in the trilogy of the island books. Durrell reflects on the perception of time on the Mediterranean islands and how it affects social interactions. He follows the same rhythm of Greek life in order to build the narrative structures of his books. In the chapter that he dedicates to the recounting of the story of buying his own house in Cyprus, he writes:

> In the main square Jamal sat uneasily under the tree of Idleness beneath an open umbrella, drinking coffee. I was about to engage the owner of the house in discussion as to the sort of price he had in mind for such a fine old relic when Sabri motioned me to silence. The coffee-house was gradually filling up with people and faces were turning curiously towards us. 'You will need time to think,' he said. 'and I have told him you don't want to buy it at all, at any price. This will make the necessary despondence, my dear.
> 'But I'd like to have an idea of the price.'
> 'My dear, he has no idea *himself*. Perhaps five hundred pounds, perhaps twenty pounds, perhaps ten shillings. He is completely vacant of ideas. In the bargaining everything will get cleared. But we must take time. In Cyprus time is everything. (BL 53)

This passage underlines the contradictions between Western and Eastern societies regarding the complex constructions of social relationships. The narrator starts setting the scene in the main square, which is an emblematic place of public and social life in the town. Jamal is a local figure sitting under the tree of idleness, which metaphorically suggests a place where time is slow. This image sets the décor for the exploration of time and cultural interactions. The adverb "uneasily" evokes a sense of discomfort, as if the character had not chosen idleness and found himself there despite his will. The "tree of Idleness" is also the coffee house with a big Cyprus tree in the middle of the terrace. This place becomes a metaphor that encapsulates Jamal's idleness and Durrell's action. Durrell was about to negotiate the house price he wanted to buy when Sabri ordered him to remain silent to make him understand that negotiation was not a simple transaction. Sabri represents the local wisdom. He gives Durrell advice and thinks for him. His advice about creating "the necessary despondence" reveals his deep understanding of the psychology of negotiation in Cyprus. He understands that showing indifference is a tactic that can influence the house's owner's mindset. Sabri's attitude creates irony in the passage. He takes the initiative in Durrell's place, and the fact that Durrell misunderstands the situation

enhances the irony and highlights his ignorance of the local dynamic of relationships. The tree of idleness is a symbol that represents a cultural attitude toward time. Sabri puts an emphasis on the importance of taking time. It contrasts with the narrator's goal-oriented perspective. This highlights the difference between Western and Eastern approaches to life. In Durrell's opinion, idleness here not only signifies laziness but also social patterns and different rhythms of life adopted in the Mediterranean culture. The passage also carries a subtle critique of the Western rush to conclude transactions with a clear and immediate outcome. Sabri's statement and advice highlight the importance of understanding the local customs and rhythms for successful social interactions. The tone of the narration is both observational and ironic. The narrator's internal dialogue and interactions with Sabri reveal a puzzlement and a growing respect for social practices. This passage gives a vivid sense of place and atmosphere and extends the narration time. Durrell does not simply tell the reader that he bought a house, but he gives details of the entire process and creates suspense. The passage is part of a whole chapter about the process of purchasing the house where Durrell was about to dwell. It symbolises Durrell's journey of discovering the place and understanding its social and cultural codes while becoming a part of it through owning a house, which signifies creating a deep, long relationship with the island.

In *Reflections on a Marine Venus*, the author also sheds light on intimate and complex relationships, such as the couple Chloe and Mills. These two characters are gathered in a double relationship: they are both work colleagues in the hospital and a married couple. They come from different cultural and geographical backgrounds. However, they constitute a harmonised couple together. Chloe is "a delightful Greek girl" (RMV 25), and Mills is English, but according to the narrator, he "seemed more like an Italian in his bursts of enthusiasm" (RMV 26). Mills acts like an agitated and restless child full of energy. He has lots of interest centres that go from "poetry" to "biochemistry" (RMV 26). Durrell describes an anecdote concerning the couple:

> His wife found him a delightful trial. I still hear her grumbling musical tones protesting: '*Mais voyons, chéri*,' as he proposed some new field of study – such as the guitar, or the clarinet. 'ça, alors,' his wife would groan. 'Soyez raisonable.' But Mills did not believe in reducing his enthusiasm to normal proportions; there was so much energy to be get rid of, life was so short…. I can hear him protesting in his fluent French and Greek. (RMV26)

On the one hand, Mills is depicted as a cultivated man with boundless curiosity. He constantly desires to explore new fields of study and try different activities. This trait hints at an intellectual and somewhat eccentric personality. His fluency in multiple languages emphasises his cosmopolitan nature. On the other hand, Chloe is contrasted with her husband. Chloe saying

‘soyez raisonable’ to Mills shows a form of exasperation, which underlines her role as a grounding force in their relationship. This scene represents the tension between Mills’ eagerness to embrace life and all its possibilities while Chloe embodies a pragmatic vision. The indirect speech reflects Mills’ awareness of time that fuels his constant pursuit of new fields of interest. The narrator does not pass judgment on Mills’ way of being or his wife’s exasperation. He shows the dynamic of their relationship in a humorous tone, reflected by Chloe's reactions to her husband’s suggestions. The oxymoron “grumbling musical tones” blends two contradictory ideas. Grumbling is associated with complaining and displeasure while musicality is associated with harmony. The choice of these two words captures the complexity of Chloe’s emotions towards her husband. He is both frustrating and delightful. Furthermore, the formulas “I still hear her” and “I can hear him” indicate that the narrator attends the characters’ intimate conversations, which implies that he has an affectionate relationship with the couple. He also uses a detached tone while recounting the memory of this conversation. He is in the position of the observer and does not interfere. This indicates a deep understanding of the complexity and dynamics of their relationship.

Another interesting relationship in *Reflections on a Marine Venus* is the one between Durrell and his wife, Eve Cohen, who is referred to as “E” in the text. The reader can notice that “E” has a special place within the narrative as a figure of emotional attachment and comfort for Durrell.

> As we rounded the old fort I turned back to catch a last glimpse of E standing and waving to me from the corner of the esplanade before the mist began to settle and the whole scimitar-like sweep of minarets and belfries of the upper town dissolved in soft pearl and gold. Egypt and Greece – for a moment the conflicting loyalties of love and habit assailed me. But E was following me to Rhodes after an interval of weeks: and she was my only tie with Egypt. I saw her enter the old office car, and watched it move slowly off in the murk. The journey had begun! (RMV 4)

This imagery evokes a Middle Eastern landscape that presents the architectural influence of Islam with the presence of minarets and the influence of Christianity with the presence of belfries. The comparison of the skyline to a “scimitar” evokes a sense of sharpness and perhaps of conflict regarding the context of the narrator’s departure from Egypt because of war. This image of the landscape that fades under the mist into “soft pearl and gold” mirrors the narrator’s emotional state. The mist symbolises uncertainty and obscure transition. The mist literally hides the landscape, and metaphorically, it represents the fading of Durrell’s life chapter in Egypt. The act of turning “to catch a last glimpse of E” is a familiar human gesture. It symbolises the reluctance to let go of a beloved one. This moment seems to be frozen in time because of the

description of the landscape and melancholic atmosphere. The narrator describes a feeling of "conflicting loyalties of love and habit" when he evokes Egypt and Greece. Egypt is connected to "E" who is described as Durrell's "only tie to Egypt". Greece, on the other hand, is the symbol of a new life experience and it is what Durrell describes as his "second home" later (RMV 199). Durrell's relationship with "E" lies at the heart of his emotional conflict in this passage. Although Durrell is leaving a familiar place, the idea of "E" following him "to Rhodes after an interval of weeks", which suggests a short period of time, comforts him. Yet, this temporal gap suggests a form of uncertainty as well, which highlights the complexity of relationships in times of transition. Moreover, by describing "E" as "the only tie to Egypt", Durrell emphasises the deeper attachment to "E" than to Egypt itself. The image of the car that transported "E" "slowly off in the murk" marks the beginning of the narrator's new journey and enhances the melancholy tone of the passage because it creates a more significant physical distance between the two characters. "E" fades into the place and becomes one with Egypt.

This balanced and harmonised vision of heterosexual couples in Durrell's texts is the fruit of the Taoist conception of the unity of the feminine and the masculine. "When Yin and Yang embrace each other, they reveal that they are not a world that can be divided into black and white, but black in white and white in black, forming a unity".[70] Yin and Yang are fundamental concepts in Taoism. They represent the dual yet complementary forces that exist in everything. Yin and Yang are symbolised by the Taijitu[71], which is divided into two equal parts. The black part is associated with femininity, receptivity and passivity, while the white part is associated with masculinity, assertiveness and activity. Yin and Yang are opposites, but they complete each other. In each part there is a dot with the colour of the other part, which represents their interconnectedness and unity.

> 1. En faisant que ton âme spirituelle et
>
> 2. Ton âme corporelle soient en unité,
> Peux-tu obtenir qu'elles ne se séparent pas ?
> […]
>
> 5. En ouvrant et fermant les portes du Ciel,
> Peux-tu jouer le rôle féminin ? [72]

[70] Tang, Lei. *The Chinese Consumer Market: Opportunities and Risks*. Oxford: Chandos, 2009.
[71] See Annex 3.
[72] Zi, Lao. *Tao-Te King*. Translated by Marcel Conche, Paris: Presses Universitaires De France, 2016, 82.

Marcel Conche explains that Lao-tseu suggests the existence of two forms of the soul "the spiritual and the physical. Both forms need to be in unity in order to achieve harmony. Otherwise, the human being dies and finds himself in a position of non-life. He also explains that "le Ciel" symbolises nature. The human being needs to use all his senses and be able to receive/adopt a passive attitude comparing this attitude to the bird female "tz'u". Put differently, it means that one has to be contemplative and aware of the different textures, odours and shapes that surround them.[73] This concept is illustrated in *Reflections on a Marine Venus* through the couple formed by the Greek Manoli and his Italian wife. The couple seems to be the conclusion that Durrell drew at the end of his journey in Rhodes. While they are sleeping on the terrace, the narrator starts an internal monologue reflecting on the symbolism of these two characters and how they represent harmony and complementarity as representations of feminine and masculine landscapes.

> Sitting between these two sleeping figures, who will wake to a new meaning of life, a new daylight, I see them as symbols more than as human beings. Italy and Greece, if you like, the lovers: the Italy of the domestic arts, the passionate feeling for husbandry and family order, the feeling of a vineyard built with fingers, pinch by pinch, into terraces of household wine: Italy that conquers as a wife or nurse, encroaching on nature with the arts of love. Then Greece: the vertical, masculine, adventurous consciousness of the archipelago, with its mental anarchy and indiscipline touched everywhere with the taste for agnosticism and spare living: Greece born into the sexual intoxication for the light, which seems to shine upwards from inside the Earth, to illuminate these bare acres of squill and asphodel. It seems to me so clear that their arts of life are not divergent ones, but the complementaries of each other. How unlucky that here, among the humps of Aegean stone, islets dropped red hot from the trowels of the Titans, among the windmills and the springs curdled by moss-grown cisterns, the truth should not have been made plain. They both belong to this sacred territory, husband and wife, as the myrtle and olive do. (RMV 203-204)

This passage is an allegory of the world's political situation within the context of World War II and civil wars. The two sleeping characters Manoli and his Italian wife are objectified. The passage is built like a tragic theatrical scene where the narrator starts an internal monologue reflecting on the situation using the still bodies as accessories to illustrate his ideas. He uses the term "figures" to describe the characters. The reader can imagine these characters as figures representing two neighbouring countries on a map: Italy and Greece. In the same way the characters are objectified, Greece and Italy as places are personified. They are described as living entities with evolving identities rather than merely inanimate places. The narrator makes it clear that he is sitting "between" them. This detail of localisation signifies concrete and metaphorical positions. The sleeping characters symbolise their places of origin. The description of both characters/countries is full of sexist stereotypes. The use of enumerations

[73] Marcel Conche. 84-88.

with terms such as “domestic”, “husbandry”, “family order”, “household”, “wife” and “nurse” reinforces the stereotypes in the binary vision of the role of women in the text. Italy is metaphorically described as a woman in the role of a wife or a nurse. It suggests a vision of a nurturing and caring land. This description reflects the traditional rootedness in the land in Italian culture. It also evokes stability and passivity. The stereotypical description continues with the depiction of Greece that represents the man as “vertical”, possessing a “masculine adventurous consciousness” and “indiscipline”. This description highlights the search for intellectual freedom and philosophical boldness. It also hints at an unpredictable and adventurous spirit. The juxtaposition between these characteristics creates a dynamic tension that reflects harmony and complementarity. The narrator notices that he perceives them as “complementaries with each other” rather than “divergent”. The use of these two terms brings us back to the signification of the Yin and Yang in the Taoist tradition. This idea is emphasised in the passage by the use of the image of “myrtle and olive”, which are two plants that thrive together in the Mediterranean regions. The narrator uses them to illustrate the image of the married couple. Besides, the use of the image of plants “squill and asphodel” helps set the passage in the natural landscapes. It evokes their beauty and significance. It also refers to fertility and creation. Furthermore, the mythological references such as “Titans” symbolises the importance of Greek’s mythology and history in the construction of its identity and spirit. So, as for the formula “Greece born into the sexual intoxication for light”, the narrator puts an emphasis on Greece’s almost erotic or primal desire for intellectual enlightenment. The light that “seems to shine upwards from inside the Earth” signifies a profound sense of philosophical and artistic endeavour linked to the land and its history. Both Greece and Italy are described as “sacred territories”. This theme of sacredness is recurrent in Durrell’s island books and structured within the relationships established between the characters that meet on the same almost mystical ground.

C) Metaphysical Connections to the Feminine

The relationships and connections created and developed between the reader, the narrator and the characters of the narratives are part of the framework of discovery of the other embedded in the place that shelters these interactions. In *Bitter Lemons*, Durrell captures this dynamic by illustrating islands as unique settings that become places of profound encounters. He writes: “But that is what islands are for; they are places where different destinies can meet

and intersect in the full isolation of time" (BL 20). The author juxtaposes the idea of meeting and intersecting with "the full isolation of time". Isolation is not only geographical but also temporal. This creates a tension between moments of convergence and the context of isolation, which suggests that these moments are distinct from the regular flow of time and the continuity of everyday life. The term "destinies" evokes a preordained path and suggests that, metaphorically, individuals are guided by a higher, unknown force. The word "places" may signify literal locations or metaphorical spaces such as books or different time eras. This statement comes in the middle of a reflection on various historical personalities who visited or lived on the island during different eras: Mrs Lewis, Kitchener, Rimbaud and others such as "Haroun Al Rashid, Alexander, Coeur de Lion: women like Catherine Cornaro and Helena Palaeologus" (BL 6-7). The enumeration of different people who were on the same island during similar or different periods reinforces the sense of sharing a common experience with other human beings. This helps discover those people and become immersed in one's own journey toward self-discovery.

From the first page of *Prospero's Cell*, Durrell informs the reader about the unique experience that he was about to live in Greece. Self-discovery is at the heart of the island book. The narrator draws a comparison between Greece and other places he visited or lived in. He asserts that: "Other countries may offer you discoveries in manners or lore or landscape; Greece offers you something harder – the discovery of yourself" (PC 1). Durrell acknowledges that other countries may provide the opportunity to discover landscapes, manners or lores. Yet, these elements are visual and tangible. This makes the discovery superficial, while Greece offers a more profound discovery. The use of the adjective "harder" evokes that the journey is challenging and full of inner reflection and questioning. The author implies that Greece allows an inner-self exploration and allows access to the I-land. Besides, Greece is a land of philosophy and mythology. For instance, Socrates in the *Apology* encourages self-discovery and considers knowing oneself as fundamental in philosophy.[74] Moreover, self-discovery is reached through the discovery of the other.

The process of self-discovery begins with isolation. Going out of the traditional, familiar environment and meeting other horizons and people allows creating a different connection to the outside and the inside world. Christine Rodolphe asserts that: "l'altérité du rapport du voyageur au monde provient d'une rupture dynamisant une mise à distance du

[74] See: Plato. *Apology of Socrates: As Written by His Friend and Pupil, Plato*. Translated by Henry Cary , Alwil Shop: New Jersey, 44.

voyageur d'avec son milieu, distance aussi bien sociale que géographique".[75] The concept of alterity refers to the state of being different. Rodolphe explains that alterity or otherness shapes the traveller's experience and perception of the world. Alterity involves the recognition of oneself and others and the difference between familiar surroundings and the unfamiliar. In the context of travel, it suggests that the traveller experiences a profound sense of otherness when encountering new places. The sense of otherness, according to Rodolphe, comes from a break that constitutes a metaphor for leaving one's familiar environment to enter a new, unfamiliar space. It is crucial to experience this disruption in order to create new perspectives. She also explains that this break is an active process. It stimulates both social and geographical distancing. It is social because it implies the traveller's removal from the familiar social environment, and geographical because it literally signifies a physical distance from the place of origin. This social and geographical distancing indicates the impact of travel on internal and external spheres of human experience. This distancing is crucial for the transformative potential of travel. Encountering the other allows the understanding of the self and the other. Furthermore, the concept of islands has captured the collective human imagination. It symbolises isolation and solitude because it offers a physical and spiritual separation from society. Richard Pine evokes Durrell's point of view about this subject. He reports that: "Islands, he wrote, represent "visionary intimations of solitude, of loneliness, of introspection… because at heart everyone vaguely feels that the solitude they offer corresponds to his or her inner sense of aloneness".[76] The physical separation that islands offer becomes a metaphor of personal solitude. The description of islands as "visionary intimations" implies that islands are also imbued with spiritual significance besides being real locations. The solitude that islands offer is internal above all. They serve as a mirror to the individual's inner world. It encourages introspection without the distractions of society. This idea is a contradiction within the context of Durrell's island books because the characters experience introspection together and dive into their inner selves by sharing their thoughts and intellectual and human experiences. These characters are put in a geographical space surrounded by waters and cut off from the rest of the world within the island's geographical location. Durrell's characters are gathered in smaller symbolic spaces such as Durrell's house, Prospero's cell in Corfu (PC), Villa Cleobolus in Rhodes (RMV) and the Tree of Idleness coffee house in Cyprus (BL). In addition to these places, there is a museum where the statue of the Marine Venus is exhibited. All these places encapsulate the concept of time historically, literary and

[75] Christin, Rodolphe. *L'Imaginaire Voyageur Ou L'expérience Exotique*. Paris: Harmattan, 2000.
[76] Pine, Richard. *Lawrence Durrell: The Mindscape*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994.

geographically. The characters of Durrell's narrative are gathered around the idea of the place as a vivid entity. The landscapes become characters that participate actively in the narration.

The reader notices the presence of a sort of female energy that envelopes the descriptions of the landscapes that are personified. According to Dennis Baron:

> The earth, which in turn is feminine in all languages "from being the grand *Receiver*, the grand *Container*, but above all from being the *Mother*" […] cities are feminine because they contain, mother and nurse their inhabitants. […] the ocean would be feminine, because it receives rivers and is the container and "productress of so many Vegetables and Animals," but in fact "its deep Voice and boisterous Nature" make it masculine.[77]

Dennis Baron explains how gender characteristics are attributed to natural elements. The earth is described as feminine in different languages and characterised as the "receiver" and the "container" which is in keeping with the traditional view of women as caretakers. This vision is extended to cities because they "contain, mother, nurse their inhabitants". The metaphor of the earth as feminine is based on the idea of life-giving and nurturing, which evokes archetypal roles assigned to women. Connecting women to nature can both empower and oppress. On the one hand, it values women and nature's roles in supporting life. On the other hand, it reinforces stereotypes that put women into rigid categories. The personification of the earth and cities as feminine reflects romanticised and idealised cultural expectations. At the same time, the ocean is perceived as masculine because of its "deep voice and boisterous nature" despite its capacity to "receive" and "contain". The ocean's masculine attributions are linked to its active and sometimes violent nature in contrast to the passive femininity assigned to the earth. This shift implies that gendered characteristics are confronted with interpretation based on selective traits. The ocean is characterised as masculine because of its association with danger and adventure, which used to be the domain of male explorers. Anthropomorphising the earth and the ocean reflects the human tendency to project social categories on the surrounding natural world to make sense of its elements. Nevertheless, these gendered personifications can reinforce binary gender norms and limit a more nuanced comprehension of these entities. Durrell describes his relationship with the island as a love relationship. The feminised islands become a part of a metaphysical relationship with the narrator. While he recounts his first encounter with Rhodes and gives what he calls "an impressionistic" (RMV 15) description, he writes "[…] the island which I was to come to love so much" (RMV 15). The statement "I was to come to love" foreshadows a future emotional journey. The narrator is not involved, yet he is in love with Rhodes. This suggests that his relationship with the island will evolve over time.

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[77] Baron, Dennis E. *Grammar and Gender.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.

This intensifies the suspense and creates the reader's curiosity about how this love relationship will occur throughout the narrative. This declaration is written from a point in the future where Durrell is reflecting back on his experience in Rhodes. The verb “to love” evokes a deep engagement with the place and implies that time and experience allowed the creation of the bond. This also suggests a personification of the island as if it were a living entity with a character of its own. The narrator expresses his attachment to the island, which breaks the image of isolation and loneliness. The island becomes a place of comfort. The future tense and the use of “so much” that emphasises the strength of the link indicate the development of the narrator’s feelings and symbolise the self-discovery journey. The physical space of the island becomes the mirror of the narrator’s inner landscape.

The encounter with the island is described as a clue for creating balance and stability. The first meeting with the land provides a sentiment of relief and marks a shift in the journey as a physical journey and as a narrative. The simple overview that permits the detection of the island is described as a significant event that marks the start of a new relationship and a new beginning for both the narrator and the narrative:

> Someone had spotted land – the merest etching of darkness upon darkness – and for an hour we thundered along a black and rocky coast, catching fitful glimpses of its capes and cliffs through the shifting packets of mist. To add to the rising emotions of optimism and relief came the pleasant sensation of a calmer sea. (RMV 9)

The description of the land as “the merest etching of darkness upon darkness” creates an atmosphere of uncertainty. The repetition of the term “darkness” enhances the mysterious atmosphere and the difficulty in distinguishing land from blackness. It also sets a foreboding tone and suggests that the journey has been difficult. This passage precedes the meeting with the island. The narrator uses the terms “optimism”, “relief”, and “pleasant sensation” to describe his emotional response to a calmer sea. This suggests a positive shift in the narrative. The contrast between the gloomy atmosphere enhanced by darkness and unclear vision and the calm sea's relief creates confused, contradictory emotions for the reader and intensifies suspense.

The creation of balance and stability is also embodied in the relationship between Durrell and Gideon who is an essential character in the text. Their friendship allows them to discover the Rhodian natural and artificial landscapes. They also share long conversations that add to the text's depth and invite the reader to join the flow of their thoughts. Their exploration of the town is a symbol of a shared self-discovery journey. The readers find the contrast between darkness and light that occurs with every experience of discovery in the text.

> We walked arm in arm down those narrow unlit streets, losing our way once or twice, until we stumbled upon the squat gate of St Paul, and sneaked through its shadow into the twentieth century. A few sporadic points of light shone in the new town but the street-lighting had not yet been restored and we walked in a deep calm darkness as the first stars began to take shape upon the evening sky. (RMV 19-20)

The narrator starts the description with him walking "arm in arm" with Gideon to emphasise their close friendship and intimacy. They are leaning on each other so as not to fall since they are both drunk. This adds a layer of humour to the text, especially because he specifies that they lost their way "once or twice" which implies a sense of confusion and may signify the search for direction in life during their journey in a broader meaning. He describes the streets as "narrow" and "unlit", creating an intimate and mysterious atmosphere of unpredictability. The use of the imagery of "a few sporadic points of light" conveys an idea of resilience and guidance amidst darkness. "The deep calm darkness" contrasts with "sporadic points of light" and emphasises the idea of venturing into the unknown. It also creates an atmosphere of quiet reflection and exploration. The contrasts between darkness and light symbolise the passage from uncertainty to clarity and from the past to the future. This shift is highlighted by the mention of "the squat gate of St Paul", which is described as a bridge to make the transition "into the twentieth century". The shift between the past and the modern period marks a turning point in the plot and emphasises the complex combination of time on the island. This passage foreshadows the encounter with Hoyle and announces a flashforward that allows the narrator to introduce the character of Hoyle and the context of their encounter. Besides, the game of light and darkness is central within the passage. Pointing out that "the street-lightening had not yet been restored" refers to the post-war context and the transition between a difficult past and a brighter future. The stars also symbolise guidance and emphasise the presence of their eternal and unchanging light amidst a world that is permanently in flux. The tone of the passage blends the beauty of walking in darkness with witnessing the night's first stars. This evokes a sense of contemplation in the company of a friend who provides support and comfort, which counterbalances the uncertainty of their surroundings.

The poetic language in Durrell's trilogy of island books fosters intimate relationships between fictional and real persons, connecting the books to the natural Greek landscapes. Durrell offers unique interpretations of his surroundings. The accumulations of thoughts, personal and collective ideas, and experiences shape these interpretations. His writing is also marked by a tapestry of symbolic figures, representations, and intertextual references, which make his vision of people and islands more complex and sometimes abstract or ambiguous,

particularly when it comes to the representation of female characters and feminised concepts. An imbalance between them becomes visible, prompting one to question the construction of Durrell's characters, which appears problematic and sometimes misogynistic, despite the feminine being sacralised.

Chapter Three

The Feminine and the Sacred

A) The unbalanced representation of gender

The fictional works by Lawrence Durrell give varied portraits of feminine characters. On the contrary, his island books present chiefly male characters. In the few occasions when female characters are present, their role is minimal, and they are reduced to stereotypical representations. Conversely, James R Nicholas asserts that in the novels:

> Durrell's women are strong personalities in their own right, even when they fail. Next to the men they must so often endure, they exhibit a sense of self, an honesty and courage, and a clarity of vision that is the essence of Durrell's new worldview – woman as the centre of, and in control of, civilization itself.[78]

James R Nicholas' analysis of Durrell's characters in novels such as *The Alexandria Quartet* tends to compare the female and male characters and underscore the discrepancy between their representations. Nicholas contends that Durrell's female characters in the novels possess "strong personalities", which suggests that these women have inner strength and autonomy. They are not defined by their success or failure but by their inherent qualities. This vision demonstrates that Durrell's female characters are complex, and they assert agency, which goes against traditional gender roles. The idea of enduring women goes together with a harsher treatment of male characters. They are lacking in some way, while female characters are more resilient. Nicholas claims that characteristics such as self-awareness, honesty, courage and clarity of vision are central to what he calls "Durrell's new worldview". This implies a shift in perspective in Durrell's novels where traditional gender roles are questioned or inverted. This statement repositions women from the periphery to the centre of cultural and civilisational issues in his fiction. It subverts the portrayal of women playing secondary roles. Durrell's representation of women appears as progressive and complex. This suggests that female characters do not only play a central role within the narratives, but they also represent a critique

[78] Nichols, James R. *The Stronger Sex: The Fictional Women of Lawrence Durrell*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011, 26.

of patriarchal structures. However, in his travel books, the reader notices the imbalance in representation between female and male characters. The space that female characters occupy regarding speech and dialogue is insignificant. On the other hand, male characters take a more expansive space and participate in the construction of the narratives by sharing their thoughts and points of view. They even give advice concerning the books' writing process, as we have demonstrated in the previous chapter.

Let us notice that the island books under study were published between 1945 and 1957. In this period, women did not fully enjoy their rights. Anna Whichmann claims that: "For centuries, Greece, particularly in the rural areas, was an incredibly patriarchal society in which women were not afforded equal rights in the home, school or workplace. Women in Greece did not gain the right to vote until 1952".[79] Whichmann explains that Greek society has long been influenced by patriarchy, and that it became rooted in its traditions, particularly in the rural areas where the social and economic factors were more pronounced. She highlights that women in Greece gained the right to vote only in 1952, which is relatively recent. This context is significant when considering the period of Durrell's stay in Greece and the publication of his trilogy of island books. He experienced a Greek society where women were under patriarchal domination. Their isolation and limited accessibility may explain their absence from his texts. It might seem that Durrell had adopted the local manners or tried to represent them. Furthermore, the place of women in Greek culture was ambivalent. On the one hand, there were female divinities in Greek mythology. On the other hand, in the real world, women were locked away from political and social life. Donald C. Richter evokes "women's seclusion" or "oriental seclusion". This seclusion was justified by the desire to protect them from the dangerous outside world reserved for men.[80] However, in *Bitter Lemons*, Durrell's position as a teacher enabled him to be in contact with female students. When he presents them to the reader, he enumerates their names and their fathers' social status to define them, and he projects onto them the spirits of antique goddesses and intertwines the present with the past of Greece and its mythology. He writes:

> They rose politely enough and repeated a prayer under the prompting of the head girl. Then I read out their names from the register – like the dramatis personae to a Greek tragedy: 'Electra, Io, Aphrodite, Iolanthe, Penelope, Chloe'. Like the boys, they were a mixed group in the social sense; Electra's father was a gardener in Kythrea, Io's father a judge, Penelope the daughter of a shoemaker. They comprised a cross-section of Nicosia and the

[79] Wichmann, Anna. "The History of Feminism in Greece." *GreekReporter.Com,* 16 May 2022, greekreporter.com/2022/05/16/history-feminism-greece/.
[80] Richter, Donald C. "The Position of Women in Classical Athens." *The Classical Journal,* Oct. – Nov., 1971, 1–8.

> surrounding districts. But they were uncomfortably united in one thing, besides Enosis, and that what a passionate, heart-rending determination to marry their English teacher. (BL 133)

The passage begins by describing the girls' attitudes before revealing their names and characteristics. They seem to follow a ritual or a specific pattern in class. This ritual is orchestrated by "the head girl", who symbolises a form of authority and structure. The civilisational values are reflected by the use of "prayer". The beginning of the class is described as a symbolic mystical moment that is followed by calling the register that the narrator sees as a list of "the dramatis personae to a Greek tragedy". This comparison evokes the idea of destiny in Greek tragedies, which suggests that the students have roles that are predetermined by social expectations. The use of the register adds a formal dimension. They become individual characters playing roles within a larger narrative. The enumeration of the girls' names carries a mythological and literary weight. Electra, Io and Aphrodite represent love, passion and struggle, while Penelope alludes to fidelity and patience and Chloe to blooming and youth. These names hint at the girls' complex identities and backgrounds, mixing them with their mythological namesakes. Comparing them to the boys emphasises the contrast between the two genders and specifies that they "were a mixed group in the social sense", pointing to the diversity of social backgrounds and statuses. This remark on their social hierarchy prepares the reader to consider these differences in their interactions. The juxtaposition of their fathers' professions from gardener to judge illustrates a spectrum of different social classes, which reflects a "cross-section" of society. These details add depth to each character. Nonetheless, it reduces the girls' identities to their fathers' social status, which reflects a patriarchal vision regarding degrees of privilege and aspirations. One notices that Durrell wrote his trilogy in the same period when Simone de Beauvoir published *Le Deuxième Sex.* However, there is obviously a gap between Durrell's writing and her feminist theory about gender and social class not defining one's personality or destiny.[81] The formula "uncomfortably united" reflects

[81] Simone De Beauvoir suggests that gender is a social construction. She declares : "On ne naît pas femme: on le devient. Aucun destin biologique, psychique, économique ne définit la figure que revêt au sein de la société la femelle humaine ; c'est l'ensemble de la civilisation qui élabore ce produit intermédiaire entre le mâle et le castrat qu'on qualifie de féminin. Seule la médiation d'autrui peut constituer un individu comme un *Autre*." Otherwise stated, she argues against the essentialist view of gender. She explains that biology does not determine one's destiny as a woman, asserting that "woman" is a social construction that is imposed on female individuals. In other words, a person with female anatomy is not inherently tied to femininity. Beauvoir expands her argument by adding psychological and economic determinants, which implies that any essence does not define human beings. She insists that civilisation is what shapes gender roles by considering women as a diminished version of men by invoking the metaphor of castration. This idea underlines that femininity is associated with deficiency as opposed to the completeness of masculinity within patriarchal societies. Beauvoir also suggests that one comes to understand oneself through one's relationship with the "Other". However, in patriarchal societies, women are placed in the position of the "Other" in relation to men. This implies that men are considered as the normative

a shared experience that is both binding and disturbing. By referring to "Enosis", Durrell intertwines the girls' personal desires and the broader political context. Their "Passionate, heart-rending determination" underscores the identity of their feelings and creates an ironic tone by comparing their socio-political interests with their will "to marry their English teacher", who symbolises foreignness, which complicates their aspirations within the context of colonisation. Further in the text, Durrell describes the profile of one of the students who, in his opinion, was different from the others. Nevertheless, he also ties her character to her father's wealth.

> Aphrodite, appropriately enough, was the most spirited and most difficult of the girls. Her father was a rich confectioner of the town and she had all the confidence and repose which comes of never having been short of money. She was indeed as beautiful as her counterpart in myth was supposed to be; but she was something more – she was a writer. She read poetry to herself in low murmuring voice and behaved for most of the time as if she were succumbing to ether. (BL 133-134)

The narrator compares Aphrodite to the other students. He describes her as the "most spirited" and the "most difficult", which suggests her sense of independence and strong personality. He also mentions that her father was "rich" to underline that her "confidence" and "repose" were due to her economic and social status. Then, he describes her physical beauty by comparing her to her mythological namesake, the Goddess of love and beauty, who often combines physical allure and emotional power. He suggests she was "beautiful" like Aphrodite "was supposed to be". However, this comparison hints at silent representations of Aphrodite, such as statues and paintings, which are silent representations. Nevertheless, Durrell writes: "But she was something more–she was a writer". This phrase marks a shift in the description. The "something more" is directly linked to her identity as a writer. The use of the en dash indicates the differentiation from the mythological Aphrodite, which symbolises beauty. It also suggests that she is different thanks to her intellectual traits. This subtle pause emphasises the contrast between the passive trait of beauty and writing as an active form of creation and self-expression. So, the character is not reduced to being a beautiful figure to admire. This shift is important in the passage because it defies the limited roles attributed to women, especially women who are considered beautiful and put in a limited frame because of their physical characteristics. Nevertheless, she is described as an exception among the other women, which may reflect a disparaging opinion about them. Moreover, Aphrodite's description is enveloped in a sacred halo. She is associated with a goddess, and at the end of the passage, the narrator

category, while women are perceived as secondary in a male-dominated world. De Beauvoir, Simone. *Le Deuxième Sexe L'expérience Vécue*. II, Paris: Gallimard, 2020, 13.

describes her reading poetry "in low murmuring voice" as if she were reciting a prayer. The author's remark on her behaviour underlines his deep reflection and sense of observation in the building of the character. The narrator describes her behaviour "as if she were succumbing to ether". It is an almost surrealistic description that implies that she is somehow floating above the ordinary world due to her social privilege or artistic and literary temperament. The narrator shifts the focus to Aphrodite, presenting her as a complex individual and a figure that stands out within the group of students. While he puts an emphasis on her unique qualities and social privilege, it is important to recognise the context in which such privileges existed.

Anna Whichmann also argues that: "across Greece, women were still associated with the home and domestic life, except in few isolated cases". In other words, excluding women from public and political life used to be the widely accepted view of gender roles in Greek society back then. This conception is similar to the ancient Greek culture during the Classical period, when women's activities were confined to the household while men dominated the public sphere. Mary Beard contends that: "as far back as we can see in Western history there is a radical separation – real, cultural and imaginary – between women and power".[82] Beard explains that the separation between women and power is a deep-rooted issue that was perpetuated across different eras and societies within the Western tradition that were predominantly patriarchal and established power structures that excluded women from political, economic and social spheres. This implies a profound divide, not just an occasional exclusion. She depicts this exclusion as "real", which evokes a tangible separation within political institutions. She also defines it as "cultural" and "imaginary" which includes cultural norms and attributed roles reinforced by the symbolic barriers set up thanks to an imagined concept of power reserved for masculine figures. One of the examples in Durrell's texts where a woman is marginalised is found in the chapter entitled "The Little Summer of Saint Demetrius" when Durrell and his companions visit the Abbot. The narrator observes: "He issued some impatient orders over his shoulder to the aged woman and began to tell us of the war" (RMV 71). "He issued some impatient orders" highlights a dominant position. The adjective "impatient" reflects the man's personality and presents him as easily irritated. His issuing orders highlights his privileged position. The woman's description focuses on her age, which indicates that her age and vulnerability do not protect or prevent her from being treated poorly. This description implies a sort of distance. She is reduced to a functional role. She receives orders and serves. The discrepancy between the man's "impatient" temperament and

[82] Beard, Mary. *Women & Power A Manifesto*. London: Profile Books, 2018, 70.

the woman's age hints at a lack of respect and underscores the power imbalance in their relationship. Especially when the woman is silent and does not react. This sentence functions as a transition. The narrator uses this small, intimate scene to shift focus to a more serious subject: war. The depiction of a man giving orders may function as a critique of how women are treated within a patriarchal society. Yet, the author does not provide space for the woman's point of view on the situation and participates in silencing her voice. The reader witnesses the scene with the characters thanks to the use of "us" and takes part as a silent listener in the discussion about the war. He or she is possibly included in the narrator's opinion about how the old woman is treated. This reinforces male domination and puts women in a vulnerable position. Simone De Beauvoir argues that in order to assert his dominance, a man : "laisse tomber des ordres, d'un voix sévère, ou bien il crie, frappe sur la table" (*Le deuxième sexe II* 294). Otherwise stated, a man's voice is used violently to dominate and oppress, while the woman is supposed to remain silent and serve him.

Silence is a symbolic act, whether it is imposed or chosen. Mary Beard states that "the silent woman has actually been held by many language commentators to be the ideal woman, and tracts that codify the behavior of women often praise silence as one of the highest virtues that sex may aspire to".[83] Beard explains that patriarchal societies have controlled women's voices and, by extension, their power. Silence is associated with passivity and submission. Therefore, idealising the "silent woman" prevents her from speaking out and challenging male authority. Rather than being a personal virtue, silence becomes a tool for maintaining the hierarchical order that benefits men. In *Reflections on a Marine Venus,* the author reflects on situations where female voices are marginalised within brief anecdotes without expressing his opinion. In chapter III: "The Little Summer of Saint Demetrius", on their way to Patmos, Durrell and his companions meet an old shepherd and his daughter. The conversation is mainly held with the old man. The only moment when his daughter speaks is to repeat his words.

> 'We'll be going', I said.
> 'God be with you,' he responded, reluctantly, for conversation with strangers is a rare pleasure among islanders who have known each other from childhood. 'God be with you', repeated his daughter, enchanted by her own grownupness. (RMV 67)

The repetition of "God be with you" evokes the islanders' spiritual and cultural values. This phrase is a form of a well-wishing that invokes divine protection. It points out the fact that social interactions and even greetings are intertwined with faith. In this passage, it also builds

[83] Baron, Dennis E. Grammar and Gender. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986, 57.

a bridge between people with different cultural backgrounds. However, the use of the adverb reluctantly implies that the old man hesitantly expresses this response, which reflects the social weight on the conversations with strangers. As for the daughter, this phrase symbolises access to adulthood. The term "enchantment" mirrors the daughter's emotional state. With the innocent eye of a child, repeating her father's blessings signifies entering the adults' world and using their social codes. Nevertheless, the only way for her to grow up is to imitate a patriarchal figure rather than build her own social and linguistic codes. This character mirrors Echo, which Mary Beard gives as an example from literature where speaking causes trouble for women. She writes: "The chatty nymph Echo is punished so that her voice is never her own, merely an instrument for repeating the words of others".[84] Echoe's punishment can be perceived as a metaphor for the silencing of women. This mirrors the authority imposed on women by echoing male voices rather than asserting their own identities. Echo becomes an "instrument" of imitation, which prevents her from expressing her own thoughts. Her punishment evokes a loss of self-determination. It also altered her love for Narcissus, to whom she could not express her feelings. She exists only through the external world, so she is in a state of dependency. Her self is fragmented. This highlights not just the personal consequences of such suppression but also its broader implications on female identity and agency.

Regardless of the silencing of women in Durrell's residence books, female characters express themselves differently. They read or paint like Nancy, and they are poets like his student Aphrodite. For instance, Manoli's daughter "reads the newspaper for him" (RMV 42). This detail in the passage symbolises a moment of care, where the younger generation assists the older. Manoli's daughter lends him her voice. She is the one allowing him access to the world's news. Moreover, the daughter has the power to control information. She can choose what to emphasise or omit, which can influence her father's interpretation of the news. Nevertheless, Manoli is the one discussing politics with the other characters, and the reader does not know his daughter's opinion about what she reads. While this moment of agency highlights the complexity of Durrell's female characters, it also mirrors moments where they are framed as idealised objects of beauty and inspiration. This duality invites us to examine how these characters are also portrayed as artistic muses deeply connected with the landscapes and aesthetic features of their surroundings.

[84] Beard, Mary. *Women & Power.* 9-11.

As previously mentioned, the reader observes that most of Durrell's female characters in the trilogy are described as paintings, statues or ethereal creatures resembling Greek divinities or classical artworks. In the first chapter of *Prospero's Cell*, the narrator describes the place where he lived with his wife, Nancy (N.). He starts by describing the rooms and the objects and finishes with Nancy's description in one paragraph.

11.6.37

> The straw from the packing-cases will go to cover the floor of the magazine where the goat is tethered. The rooms look lovely and gracious with their white-washed walls, and few bright paintings and books. The windows give directly on to the sea, so that its perpetual sighing is the rhythm of our work and our sleeping. By day it runs golden on the ceilings, reflecting back the bright peasant rugs – a ship, a gorgon, a loom, a cypress-tree; reflecting back the warm crude pottery of our table; reflecting back N. now brown-skinned and blonde, reading in a chair with her legs tucked under her. Calm eyes, calm hair, and clear white teeth like those of a young carnivore. As Father Nicholas says: 'What more does a man want than an olive-tree, a native island, and woman from his own place?' (PC 10-11)

The narrator introduces a rustic setting that evokes a sense of simplicity. The presence of the "tethered goat" grounds the passage in a physical, earthy reality. The description of the rooms conveys an idea of a warm and beautiful place. The "white-washed walls" evoke purity and openness, reflecting the Mediterranean setting. It also sets a neutral background for the "bright" colourful paintings and the books, which adds a personality to the décor. This minimalist description signals a focus on aesthetics and essential material for an artist. The window is a symbol of openness, and the fact that it opens on the sea evokes extended perspectives and a sense of freedom. The perpetual sighing of the sea transforms it into a living entity. It has a living presence. The sound of the sea becomes the "rhythm" of Durrell and Nancy's work, and sleep implies harmony with nature and a slow, endless pace and a sort of routine that evokes a calm, tranquil life. Besides, the golden reflection creates a magical, dreamy atmosphere and suggests that light is a part of the house's décor. In her analysis of this passage, Isabelle Keller-Privat contends that:

> The traditional perspective is inverted: the open window, which used to frame natural vistas, is subverted to disclose the intimate scene in place of the Mediterranean, and refracts the reading process through the image of Durrell's wife, Nancy (N.), holding what might well be the narrator's manuscript. Instead of the Mediterranean landscape we are given to see the perspective act itself whereby, as Ingold argues, the viewer pictures himself "engaging perceptually with the environment that is itself pregnant with the past" (Ingold 189).[85]

[85] Keller-Privat, Isabelle. "Lawrence Durrell's Mediterranean Hinterland: The Secret Flow of the Poet's Heraldic Universe." *Caliban,* no. 58, 2017, 115–134., https://doi.org/10.4000/caliban.4676.

Keller-Privat explains that Durrell modifies the "conventional perspective" of landscape representations in literature. In the scene, "the open window" reveals "the intimate scene within a personal, domestic space. This inversion shifts the focus from an external interaction to an internal one within a closed space. This emphasises the focus on intimate details. The window connects the viewer/the reader to a personal world. Nancy is presented as a mediator between the text and the reader, which adds a layer of metanarrative. The image of Nancy reading the manuscript implies that the focus has moved from the outside world to the subjective world created by the narrator. Moreover, the reference to Ingold adds a temporal dimension to the analysis. It suggests that the reader does not passively observe a static landscape but that he does actively engage with a landscape that holds fragments of history and memory. In the passage, the enumeration of specific motifs, "a ship, a gorgon, a loom, a cypress tree" points at Greek cultural richness and gives a mythological reference. The ship is a symbol of trade and journeys, the gorgon hints at Medusa, and the loom symbolises craftsmanship. Besides, the cypress tree is the symbol of time, death and afterlife. Together, these symbols evoke a tapestry of tradition and the connection between sea and land. The "warm and "crude pottery reflects the handcrafted and simple nature of the narrator's domestic environment. N. is described as being in an informal, position in a chair while reading. The contrast between her brown skin and blond hair implies that she spends much time outdoors in the sun. This underlines the couple's connection with nature. Her relaxed posture reinforces the serene atmosphere. This description evokes the paintings of women sitting on chairs and reading in a calm atmosphere, such as Jean Honoré Fragonard's "Young Girl Reading".[86] The repetition of the adjective "calm" puts an emphasis on the peaceful atmosphere and creates an almost meditative presence of N. However, Durrell compares her teeth to those of a "young carnivore" which introduces an intriguing tension. It contrasts with "calm", which evokes serenity. The image of the "carnivore" underlines power, aggressiveness and a primal nature. This comparison creates complexity in N's character. N seems serene on the surface but hides a wild strength beneath. In *The Stronger Sex,* James R. Nicholas sheds light on Durrell and Nancy's complex relationship and the juxtaposition of their external appearances that reflect their internal relationship dynamics.[87] The last statement, by Father Nicholas, one of the characters that

[86] See annex 4.

[87] Nicholas points to the unbalance in Durrell and Nancy's relationship that was characterized by Durrell's intellectual dismissal of Nancy and his infantilising her. He highlights Durrell's struggle with maintaining traditional masculinity and reinforcing patriarchal norms that marginalise women's voices. Nicholas also gives a physical description that confirms stereotypical gender roles: fragile, passive and ornamental femininity against solid, grounded, and dominant masculinity. Yet, emphasising Durrell's insecurities suggests an overcompensation through intellectual dismissal. The marginalisation and intellectual diminishment reflect a broader cultural and

Durrell quotes in the text, is used as an adverbial reflection. It mirrors a patriarchal and conservative vision of life that turns around land and tradition. The "olive tree" symbolises peace and fertility, the "native island" suggests belonging and roots, and the "woman of his own place" refers to personal familiarity and companionship. It also hints at a possessive dynamic in the relationship between men and women. The woman does not need to be just a woman from his point of view, but she also has to be from the man's homeland. This constrains the role of women within the frame of companionship so as to guarantee a balanced, simple life for men. The narrator uses Father Nicholas' voice in order to illustrate the sense of fulfilment. However, he employs direct speech because the statement reflects a specific vision from someone with a different cultural background. The simplicity of the enumeration demonstrates a need for stability in life.

Moreover, Nancy is not the only female character portrayed as a piece of artwork. Eve, Durrell's second wife, who inspired Justine in *The Alexandria Quartet*, is also depicted as a statue in the chapter "Orientations in Sunlight" in *Reflections on a Marine Venus.* The narrator describes "E with her splendid dark head propped on her arm listening to them and smiling" (RMV 49). Eve takes the position of the observer. She does not seem to participate in the conversations among masculine characters. She stays on the edge, "listening" and "smiling". Her "dark-head", which suggests depth and mystery, contrasts with the brightness of the adjective "splendid". She is described as a statue or a figure "propped on her arm" which implies a state of relaxation. She is calmly absorbed in the moment. "Listening" and "smiling" suggest a sort of passivity and maybe amusement. She is an observer rather than an active participant. The smile conveys warmth and understanding. The focus is not on her words or thoughts but on her physical presence. She seems distant, like a mysterious figure frozen in the moment, like a statue.

B) Body and spirit

The trilogy of Durrell's books of residence is composed of fragments that create a certain formal unity among them. The fact that these three narratives were built within contexts of war, division and displacement makes them different from the habitual travel narratives, and the fragmentation of the writing and the structure somehow creates a harmonious universe.

social context where women are expected to fulfil traditional roles as nurturers and carers. This contrasts with Durrell's construction of strong female characters in his novels. However, Durrell's prejudeces about gender roles are mirrored in the island books. James R. Nicholas. *The Stroger Sex*, 15.

Isabelle Keller-Privat compares Durrell's first chapter of *Prospero's Cell* to Alain Roger's description of the Japanese garden. In her article that explains Durrell's heraldic universe, she states:

> In his essay *Court traité du paysage*, the critic Alain Roger asserts that "the Japanese garden is certainly the best illustration of the monadic function of art which consists in the highest density within a minimal form" (Roger 37). The first chapter of Prospero's Cell, symbolically entitled "Divisions upon Greek Ground," precisely seems to respond to Roger's description of the Japanese garden: it is composed of a series of short fragments that offer as many piecemeal visions of Corfu. After a short introduction, each fragment is introduced by a diary entry, suggesting that the reader is entering a private world.[88]

The concept of the "monadic function of art" highlights the capacity of art to convey emotional depth and meaning within minimal forms. The Japanese garden as an artefact illustrates this concept by creating a dense sensory and philosophical experience from simple layouts. The structure of *Prospero's Cell* mirrors the idea of minimalism and depth. Keller-Privat explains that the use of short fragments serves to build an interconnected vision of Corfu. This fragmentation allows multiple interpretations, and the diary entries invite the reader to a private, introspective space. By structuring the narrative this way, Durrell creates a personal experience that invites the reader to explore his perception of the island. Fragmentation becomes a pattern in Durrell's residence books, a feature that can be found both in modernist and post-modernist texts. It helps the author to capture and explore his personal experiences and organise his narrative in a way that unifies the structure that constitutes the body of his texts as well as their spirit which is represented by the Greek landscape that becomes a common symbol in the three narratives. In the last chapter, "A Pocketful of Sand" of *Bitter Lemons*, the narrator sums up his experience in Cyprus in the remains of his memories. In a nostalgic and sad tone, he writes:

> I busied myself in the little study, turning out a case of books. I found the old wicker basket which had accompanied me on all my journeys in Cyprus. It was full of fragments collected by my daughter, buried in a pocketful of sand which leaked slowly through the wicker mesh. I turned the whole thing out on to a sheet of newspaper, mentally recalling as I turned over the fragments in curious fingers where each had been acquired: Roman glass, blue and vitreous as the summer sea in deep places; handles of amphorae from Salamis with the hallmark thumb-printed in the soft clay; tiles from the floor of the villa near Paphos; *verdeantico* fragments; Venus's ear seashells; a Victorian penny; fragments of yellow mosaic from some Byzantine church; purple murex; desiccated sea-urchins and white chalk squid-bones; a tibia; fragments of a bird's egg; a green stone against the evil eye… All in all a sort of record of our stay in Cyprus. 'Xenu, throw all this away,' I said. (BL 268)

[88] Keller-Privat, Isabelle. "Lawrence Durrell's Mediterranean Hinterland: The Secret Flow of the Poet's Heraldic Universe." *Caliban*, no. 58, 2017, pp. 115–134., 122. https://doi.org/10.4000/caliban.4676.

The first words, “I busied myself”, suggest that the narrator is nostalgic and in a state of introspection. This idea is emphasised by the use of the adjective “little” to qualify the narrator’s study, which suggests a personal retreat. The item that he describes as “the old wicker basket” symbolises travel and memory. It becomes a little world that contains Durrell’s experience in Cypress. The narrator uses the verb “accompanied” and reinforces his intimacy with it and reflects the symbolic value of the basket. The use of “fragments” emphasises the piecemeal nature of memory. Besides, the image of “sand which leaked slowly” evokes the passage of time. It also implies that this period of the narrator’s life is over but full of personal experiences. The act of emptying the basket onto “a sheet of newspaper” creates a contrast between the symbolic value of these objects and the way the narrator explores them after a certain period of time. Describing the fingers as “curious” personifies them and implies a tactile exploration which suggests that the narrator tries to recall his memories with all his senses, which enhances the nostalgic tone and the immersive experience of the passage. The narrator gives a long enumeration of the content of his basket. He mentions every object as if the reader were touching them at the same time. The “Roman glass” is compared to the beauty and the depth of the sea. At the same time, it reflects the fragility of both the glass and the memories. The “handles of amphorae” allude to history and cultural significance and the mention of “thumb printed” evokes human interactions with these objects and the personal touch. Durrell continues to ground the passage in the place by mentioning “the villa near Paphos” and the “verdeantico fragments” which refers to green marble. This adds a sense of richness and a connection to art and beauty. The alliteration in “Venus ear seashells” and “the Victorian penny” highlights the contrast between natural and manufactured elements, creating an intersection between the divine and the human. The term “fragments” keeps appearing to evoke historical and cultural objects that reflect the heritage of Cyprus. This idea is emphasised by the mention of the “Byzantine church” and natural elements that refer to Cyprus’ marine life such as “squid-bones”. This combination reflects the complexity of the memories and the context of their collection. “The tibia” and the fragments of a “bird’s egg” evoke both mortality and fragility. The “green stone” against the “evil eye” emphasises the superstitious side of Greek culture. These fragments are talismans of memory and mysticality. After the long enumeration, the narrator qualifies these “fragments as a tangible “record” of his experience on the island. The nostalgic tone of the passage, enhanced by the use of the past tense contrasts with the last command to throw “all this away”. This brief order cuts the flow of both the reader's and the narrator’s thoughts threaded by the long sentences and enumerations of the objects and the memories linked to them. Thus, a desire to get rid of the burden of the past is expressed. It

reflects a conflict between the memories created on the island and having to leave the place that contained these fragments of the narrator's life. Yet, he cannot throw these fragments away himself. He orders Xenu, the maid, to do so. Nevertheless, despite throwing away the objects that document his life in Cyprus, Durrell creates one symbolic object he shares with the readers and transforms his intimate memories into collective memories. His transcription of his island experiences focuses on interpreting the place's spirit.

Additionally, one can notice that the female characters within the narratives are present like fragments as well, uninhabited bodies, in contradiction with the usual characteristics of Durrell's novels' heroines. In fact, the Taoist influence on Durrell's worldview is reflected in his writings. In an attempt to seek a form of balance, he presents his male and female characters as components of the same body. They are supposed to complete each other like a puzzle. James R. Nicholas contends that "Durrell came to assert both a classical view of human experience as body and feeling and to rediscover what the Greeks (and Romans) had always suspected – that woman was the central actor and stronger personality within the human comedy".[89] Nicholas portrays Durrell as advocating for a "classical" vision which aligns with the duality of body and feeling. This vision was inspired by Greek and Roman civilisations, which believed in the importance of balance between the physical and the emotional components of the self to understand human nature. This assertion reflects a critique of modern, overly intellectualised approaches to human nature. It emphasises a holistic understanding of humans as creatures of both physical desire and emotional depth. The second idea implies rediscovering the role of women as the "central actor and stronger personality." This may refer to mythological women who were depicted as strong and powerful. Nevertheless, real women are also constrained by societal structures, which creates a paradox here. One can notice the presence of strong, fulfilled female characters who play active roles in Durrell's novels, such as *The Alexandria Quartet*. Yet, his island books are different, which makes his representations of women ambiguous. The comparison of life to a "human comedy" reflects this complexity. As we have seen, women in the Islands trilogy are fragmented and incomplete. For instance, Nancy and Eve in both *Prospero's Cell* and *Reflections on a Marine Venus* are referred to as "E." and "N.". This choice not to present their full names may be justified by a wish to preserve the author's private life. Yet, it also presents these two women as shadow characters. E, for instance, is compared to a ghost/angel. "The faithful E was awake,

[89] Nichols, James R. *The Stronger Sex.* 26.

combing her dark head by the light of a candle and yawning. I sat and watched her dress eating some bread and butter, talking in whispers so as not to wake the others" (RMV 61). Referring to Eve simply by "E" creates a sense of both intimacy and distance. Her name is fragmented, which makes her seem anonymous or withdrawn. The narrator describes her using the adjective "faithful". This suggests the importance of her character during the narrator's journey and emphasises the sense of intimacy between the two characters. The statement "E was awake" contrasts with the fact that the other characters who were in the house were sleeping, which makes E a focal point in the passage. Moreover, using "dark head" instead of "dark hair" may diminish her physical presence to that of a ghostly figure seen "by the light of a candle". The use of the candle as a stage prop in the passage emphasises the warmth, softness and calmness of the atmosphere. It also romanticises the description and implies a sense of the fragility of E, who is "yawning", which adds a human and realistic dimension to her and suggests that she is not fully alert even if she is awake. The narrator specifies that he "sat" and "watched" her. This suggests a theatrical scene where the narrator is a passive observer "eating bread and butter" which emphasises the ordinariness of the scene where they are talking in "whispers". It also gives a voyeuristic dimension to the episode where the reader looks at Durrell who is looking at E's body. The character is also transformed into a tableau-vivant that can be compared to William Mcgregor Paxton's painting "Girl Combing Her Hair"[90] (1909). Moreover, the ghostly description of Eve echoes the description of the mythological spirits of the island in the chapter "Orientations in sunlight":

> As for the Nereids – they are the presiding spirits of these islands; almost every spring is haunted by them, and everywhere in the long verdant valleys beyond Monte Smith you will find dells and glades where the circles of daisies mark their dancing floors. They are benign spirits, fond of running water and shade; though not all their manifestations are harmless, and the superstitious fear them. All the half-witted children are supposed to have been bewitched by Nereids and woe to the man who unwittingly intrudes upon one of their dances, for they will force him to join in and dance till he drop […] (RMV 51)

In Greek mythology, the Nereids[91] are associated with water. They are sea nymphs who are considered to be the protectors of sailors. The author uses the en dash in order to specify their identity as "the presiding spirits", which suggests that they hold a special dominion over the islands. The word "spirits" hints at a land influenced by mysticism and ancient beliefs. It suggests that the island is not only a physical place but also a spiritual ground. Spring, which is a season of flourishing, is "haunted" by the Nereids. This highlights the relationship between

[90] See annex 5.
[91] See annex 6.

the vivid representation of the Nereids and their close tie to nature. The geographic reference to "Monte Smith" is illustrated by vivid and lush landscapes. The valleys are described as "verdant", which refers to a rich green and abundant vegetation. The "circles of daisies" conjure an image of a motif associated with magical and supernatural creatures. This image blends the serene natural landscapes with enchantment. This suggests that the Nereids chose this place to dance in circles and practice their rituals because it was sacred. The narrator depicts the Nereids as "benign" spirits because of their peaceful nature tied to natural elements such as water and shade that evoke calmness and serenity. However, he also mentions that "not all their manifestations are harmless". Despite their description as "benign spirits", they are also a source of fear and danger. The narrator adds that "the superstitious fear them", which emphasises the complexity of the relationships between the human and the supernatural. He goes further in this explanation and mentions the belief that "all half-witted children" are "bewitched by Nereids". This reflects on old beliefs and the explanations given of people who are different. Bewitching implies curse or possession, which suggests that the Nereids have power over human beings, especially vulnerable ones, like children. The narrator shifts from the description of the ambiguous position of the Nereids in Greek culture to using the warning "woe" in order to highlight the dangerous consequences of disturbing the dance of the Nereids. This idea underlines the thin boundary between the human world and the supernatural, where what was once peaceful and calm transforms into a dark and dangerous entity that can cause damage.

The Nereids are unseen spirits, yet they impact people's perceptions of their environment. They are absolute entities in the sense that Jane Bennett gives the term:

> The absolute is often equated with God […] When de Vries speaks of the absolute, he thus tries to point to what no speaker could possibly see, that is, a some-thing that is not an object of knowledge, that is detached or radically free from representation, and thus no-thing at all. Nothing but the force of effectivity of the detachment, that is.[92]

In other words, the absolute is something complete, independent and unconditioned. It has often been linked to the concept of God, which is considered omniscient. In metaphysics, the absolute refers to the ultimate reality. Jane Bennett discusses de Vries' point of view of the absolute, whether it is God or an ultimate reality. It is something beyond human perception or language. In this view, it cannot be objectified or represented. This detachment implies that any attempt to fully understand the absolute through language or images would be incomplete. The

[92] Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010, 3.

formula “thus no-thing at all” suggests that the absolute is not an object among others, and while being the source of all things, it is itself not a tangible reality that can be identified. Bennett adds: “nothing but the force of effectivity of the detachment”. This idea reflects the mystical notion that the divine is experienced in terms of absence, not presence, so that it exerts its influence through detachment from finite forms of representation. The concept of the absolute is omnipresent in Durrell’s island books, where the feminine is represented through spirit, sacrality and sexuality. These themes can be found combined in some parts of the narrative, such as in the second chapter of *Reflections on a Marine Venus*, where the narrator announces E’s arrival on the island.

> Being an Alexandrian she speaks fairly good Greek, and so found herself at home. She has brought with her a couple of Carpathos songs which Mills will soon be singing. One has a delightful chorus:
>
> ‘O sweet lemon tree, with lemons up
> When will you lean and lemon me?’
>
> Lemons are identified with breasts in the popular literature, and this is supposed to be sung by a young girl. By the same token ‘olive’ in poetry stands as a symbol for the mole upon the dark face or arm of a girl. (RMV 33-34)

The narrator specifies that E is an Alexandrian which emphasises her cosmopolitan background. He highlights her linguistic abilities by stating she “speaks fairly good Greek”. The use of the adverb “fairly” suggests that she may not be completely fluent. However, she is presented as a character that straddles different cultures and tongues. The narrator also states that she “found herself at home” in Rhodes, which evokes belonging and suggests that her cultural background allows her to adapt to different environments with ease. The reference to “Carpathos songs” adds a layer to the folkloric tapestry in the narrative. Besides her linguistic skills, the narrator highlights E’s artistic performances and includes Mills in the description. This reflects the universal appeal of music and its role in building social bonds. The term “delightful” suggests joy and gives a light tone to the passage. Durrell’s choice to put the emphasis on a specific chorus invites the reader to engage with the lyrics and suggests that it is significant. The use of the oxymoron “sweet lemon tree” evokes both sweetness and sourness, which reflects the duality of life and love. The “lemon tree” symbolises freshness, fertility and abundance. The formula “with lemons up” personifies the tree and invites the reader to connect intimately with nature. “Lean” and “lemon me” convey a sense of affection. It suggests desire. This playful language evokes flirtation. The interpretation of “lemons” shifts from an innocent imagery to a more sensual connotation. Durrell refers to “the popular literature” and situates the song within a broader literary and cultural context, which suggests

that such an association is widely understood. The narrator also specifies that the singer is supposed to be a "young girl". This juxtaposes the innocence of youth with emerging sexuality. It reflects the societal point of view on femininity and youth. It also reverses the gender roles because Durrell previously specified in the passage that Mills was supposed to sing these songs. Judith Butler explains, "[…] If sex does not limit gender, then perhaps there are genders, ways of culturally interpreting the sexed body, that are in no way restricted by the apparent duality of sex. […] If gender is not tied to sex, either causally or expressively, then gender is a kind of action that can potentially proliferate beyond the binary limits imposed by the apparent binary of sex".[93] Butler argues that gender is a series of cultural actions. She questions the binary distinction between male/female and masculine/feminine. Her statement reflects a non-essentialist approach where the categories of gender and sex can be considered as fluid. Butler also asserts that there are more than masculine and feminine genders corresponding to the two biological sexes. She describes gender as a performative act. In this view, gender is not something inherent but continually constructed and reconstructed through personal choices and social interactions. This idea aligns with the notion of gender fluidity, where a person can identify with different genders or shifts gender identities. This subversion challenges hegemonic gender norms and goes against rigid gender roles within social structures. Mills singing songs that are supposed to be sung by young girls illustrates this subversion of gender roles and opens the way for diverse artistic and cultural interpretations. The narrator refers to the "olive" as another symbolic fruit that grows in the Mediterranean. He explains that olives are linked to beauty marks, "moles", on girls' bodies. This comparison enhances the relationship between nature and femininity. He mentions the girl's "dark face", which suggests that it is reserved for a specific type of beauty, that of the face or "arms", which are body fragments.

The alternation between the body and the spirit that haunts the physical place is found in the chapter entitled "The Little Summer of Saint Demetrius". The chapter is constituted of short texts that describe Symi, Kalymnos, Cos, and Leros before arriving in Patmos. Durrell introduces the islands as if they were characters with human traits. The descriptions are like invitations to meet the islands not only as places but also as living entities that could interact with the visitor/reader. In order to introduce Kalymnos, Durrell writes: "This is Kalymnos. High up, under the walls of the Church of the Golden Hand a woman is singing, slowly,

[93] Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York ; London: Routledge, 2007, 152.

emphatically, while from the wharves across the way, a man in a blue overall is hammering at a coffin" (RMV 57). The narrator introduces the location in the opening line. He immediately grounds the reader in Kalymnos. The use of "this is" participates in anthropomorphising the place. It serves as a direct introduction, which creates an intimate connection between the narrator, the reader and the place that becomes a character in the narrative. The localisation "high-up under the walls of the Church" conveys the sense of verticality. This description evokes elevation and both physical and emotional distance. The Church suggests a spiritual presence in the place, and the woman singing mirrors a ritualistic and artistic act. Her voice represents the essence of the place. The act of singing in a church may be related to mourning or celebration and sometimes to storytelling. Cordesse et al states that : "historiquement, le prestige de la littérature dérive du sacré. En marge de la parole pragmatique, utilitaire, la parole rituelle de la religion est inchangeable, rythmée, chantée ou accompagnée de musique et donne accès au divin, à l'extase" (23). They suggest that the earliest forms of literature were not just for entertainment or education but also connected deeply to sacred traditions. He distinguishes between two types of language use: pragmatic speech serving everyday communication needs and ritualistic speech used to connect the human to divine realms. This suggests that literature draws its power from rhythm, ritual and performance rather than mere content. The association between rhythm, song and divinity goes back to old traditions. For instance, Georgian chants in medieval Christianity were perceived as means of divine revelation. Cordesse et al. portrays literature as a transcendent experience, much like religious rites. The use of adverbs "slowly" and "emphatically" in Durrell's text (RMV 57) implies a powerful, touching performance. "Slowly" reflects a sense of introspection or sorrow, while "emphatically" mirrors a deep emotional state. This invites the reader to feel the weight of the woman's song, which becomes a part of the place's atmosphere. The act of "hammering at a coffin" and the woman singing are two distinct actions, yet both are connected to the place. This highlights the smallness of the island and the consistency of distinct actions within this space. "The wharves" are places of transition. They are linked to the "coffin", which represents death and grief. The description of the man's clothes, "a blue overall", mirrors his working-class identity and sets the scene in everyday life, which suggests that it is common and habitual in this place. The man is given a tangible presence through the description of his clothes. At the same time, the woman is identified by her voice as if she were unreal, invisible, or did not have a human appearance. This is a typical pattern for Durrell's female characters.

C) The omnipresence of the Divine Feminine

Despite the absence of female characters and the small space they occupy in the narratives, the feminine is given a sacred and omnipresent identity. The title of the second book of the trilogy is inspired by Venus, the "ancient Italian goddess associated with cultivated fields and gardens and later identified by the Romans with the Greek goddess of love, Aphrodite".[94] Venus is associated with fertility, vegetation and agriculture within pre-Roman Italic traditions. Then, her domain was expanded to love and beauty. Durrell states that: "the book is to be dedicated to the resident goddess of a Greek island" (RMV 2). The idea of dedicating a book to the "resident goddess" mirrors ancient worship acts of offering works of art or poetry to the deities who were often associated with natural elements. Dedicating a book to Venus implies a relationship between the artist (Durrell) and the divine spirit of the island. The author acknowledges that his book is inspired by something beyond the tangible elements of his surroundings, which implies an almost mystical act of communication between the human artist and his divine muse. The act of writing the island book is almost ceremonial; it shows a deep respect for Greek tradition and connects creativity and timelessness. Thus, the book offers more than just a personal artistic expression. Furthermore, in *Reflections on a Marine Venus*, women are not real characters. They are observers or divinities. The idea of a divine muse is mirrored by the personification of the statue of Venus in the book. Durrell gives a slow, detailed description of the moment the statue was pulled from the sea. He writes:

> The Venus, when she was raised that sunny morning from the damp crypt in which she had lain hidden; when the packing-case which held her had been broken open: when the pulleys finally raised her out of the darkness, slowly twisting on the end of her cable – why, which of us could fail to recognise the presiding genius of the place? ('A statue of a woman: period uncertain: found at the bottom of Rhodes harbour: damaged by sea-water.') (RMV 27)

The narrator uses two opposite parallel structures: "sunny morning" and "damp crypt" to highlight the transition from darkness to light. The Venus is revealed after being "hidden" for a long period. The crypt represents things buried by time and forgotten, and the adjective "damp" foreshadows the description of the damaged sculpture caused by humidity. The "packing case" symbolises the artificial attempt to preserve the statue, which creates a barrier between the statue and the rest of the world. The narrator uses the formula "had been broken open" to announce a moment of revelation. However, the use of "broken" implies that the revelation of the statue is not gentle. It invokes violence. This contrasts with the fragile nature

[94] "Venus: Roman Goddess." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., 11 July 2023, www.britannica.com/topic/Venus-goddess.

of the statue. The use of "pulleys" emphasises the difficulty of the revelation process. Besides, "finally" suggests that the process took a lot of time and emphasises that the narrator was looking forward to seeing her. The use of the adverb "slowly" expends time and enhances the importance of the moment. Besides, "twisting" highlights the statue's vulnerability. The description of the movement "twisting" and the slow pace of the process of pulling the statue out creates excitement and offers a spectacular scene involving the statue. The rhetorical question, where "why" is used, invites the reader to reflect on the significance of Venus and the power of her presence. It also intensifies the feeling of wonder and stirs the reader's curiosity. "The presiding genius of the place" suggests the idea that the statue of Venus becomes the dominant spirit of the island once it is recovered. The word "genius" evokes the concept of deity, which reinforces the symbolic power of the statue. Moreover, the term "place" refers to the physical place where the statue is discovered and a metaphysical location within cultural and historical contexts. After a long poetic description, the narrator ends the passage with a sort of archaeological report that grounds the mystical and the symbolic statue in reality with factual, almost clinical, note. The author divides the sentence by using colons, which creates a jerky rhythm that mirrors the emotionless tone of the sentence because it disrupts the flow of the sentence, mirrors the lack of fluidity and gives an impression of distance. Natural elements have impacted the statue. This last sentence creates a contrast between the poetical language of the description that enhances the grandeur and the symbolism of the statue and the end, which seems like an interruption of the narrator's flow of reflections. Afterwards, the narrator describes the statue while pulled from the water as follows:

> She rose as if foamborn, turning that elegant body slowly from side to side, as if bowing to her audience. The sea-water had sucked at her for centuries till she was like some white stone jujube, with hardly a feature sharp as the burin must originally have left it. Yet such was the grace of her composition – the slender neck and breasts on that richly modelled torso, the supple line of arm and thigh – that the absence of firm outline only lent her a soft and confusing grace. Instead of sharp classical features she had been given something infinitely more adolescent, unformed. The ripeness of her body was offset by the face, not of a Greek matron, but of a young girl. […] She has surrendered her original maturity for a rediscovered youth. (RMV 28)

"Foamborn" is a mythological reference to Aphrodite, the Greek Goddess of love and beauty born from sea foam. This comparison evokes an image of divine, ethereal beauty. The narrator describes the movement of her "body" in detail, which creates a slow, graceful rhythm. "As if bowing to her audience" suggests that she is conscious of her beauty and willing to offer a performance. The scene is described as if the statue were brought to life like a mythical figure. The sea is a symbol of the timelessness of nature's force. The long sentence mirrors the

progressive and slow transformation process that lasted for "centuries". The comparison of the statue to a "white stone jujube" implies that her sharp, defined features have been smoothed over time. The use of the word "burin", which is a tool used by sculptors, emphasises the idea of the crafted and refined piece of art that has been softened by time because of natural elements. The current appearance of the statue is contrasted with the classical norms of beauty associated with sharp and defined features. This contrast is emphasised by the word "confusing". The narrator puts an emphasis on her sensuality and feminine forms by using details to describe her, such as "slender neck", "breasts", "richly modelled torso", and "supple line of arm and thigh". Despite the loss of her sharp features, her body is described as if it had an innate elegance. The narrator confirms that the grace of her composition remains intact. The sight from "sharp classical features" to something "infinitely more adolescent" implies that the statue lost the maturity and perfection associated with classical art. Nevertheless, she gained a more youthful beauty. The use of "unformed" suggests that she is in a state of becoming an in-between rather than a finished creation. The idea of "an adolescent" state reflects transformation and rebirth. The narrator highlights the contrast between "the ripeness" of Venus' body which suggests maturity and sensuality, and the face of "young girl". The juxtaposition of a mature body and a youthful face creates a tension between the spiritual and the physical aspects of her being. The reference to a "Greek matron" recalls the classical image of mature femininity. On the other hand, the face of a young girl suggests innocence and inexperience. This discrepancy underlines the complexity of her character. The notion of time is represented as cyclical in this passage. The use of "rediscovered" suggests that youth is not something new but something that has been recovered. What was mature in the past returned to a youthful state. This causes one to reflect on the themes of regeneration and immortality. The word "surrendered" implies a voluntary relinquishment of Venus' former self as if she had full control over her existence. The passage is a reflection on time, transformation and beauty. It also mirrors other pictural and sculptural representations of Venus, such as "The Birth of Venus"[95] by Sandro Botticelli and the "Venus de Milo".[96]

In both the passage and Botticelli's painting, there is an emphasis on the fluidity of Venus' "elegant body". In the painting, she stands poised on the shell with a "soft confusing grace". Durrell describes her body almost as if it were alive and in motion, while Botticelli transcribes the motion by painting her flowing hair and the V-shaped waves. Interestingly, Durrell

[95] See annex 7.
[96] See annex 8.

describes the statue's features as "not sharp but adolescent, unformed", which can be noticed in Botticelli's painting where Venus's face is dreamy with soft traits rather than having the sharp and realistic features of later Renaissance paintings. It is the same for her "slender neck and breasts on that modelled torso" that are elongated in the painting, reflecting a blend of softness and structure. Her body is not anatomically correct. It is stylised to shed light on her divine, ethereal beauty. The passage is composed of long sentences. Each phrase builds on the last one, emphasising the description of the statue's fluid and timeless nature. Botticelli's Venus also embodies this sense of timelessness because she is set in a mythological background not tied to a specific historical moment or reality. As for the "Venus de Milo", her nudity is more assertive, and most of her weight is on her right leg, which represents a moment of stillness. Her facial features are classical but softer and less rigid than other classical works. Nevertheless, her broken arms symbolise her vulnerability and the time impact on her fragile body. Durrell's description of Venus builds a bridge between pictural and sculptural representations, highlighting the intersection of divine beauty and human vulnerability.

We find another representation of Venus in *Prospero's Cell*, where the characters parody Botticelli's "The Birth of Venus" and enjoy playing with its representation during a brief moment.

> 9.8.38
>
> Riding south from Paleocastrizza in a fair wind we come to Ermones beach just before dawn; and swimming ashore in the grey half light we build in gleaming sand the figure of a gigantic recumbent Aphrodite. N. and Veronica model the face while Dorothy and I shape the vast thighs. We give her a crown of pebbles for pearls and a belt made from withes of sapling, like snakes. She lies staring at the lightening sky, her mouth open in an agonizing shriek, being born. While the sea creeps up and gnaws her long rigid fingers. By first sunlight we are away again, wondering what the wide-eyed fisher-boys will make of this great relief in sand. Aphrodite rising from the foam. (PC 129)

The author sets the spatio-temporal frame of this scene on the beach before dawn, a time of day that often marks transformation or revelation in mythology. The "Fair wind" suggests

movement and guidance while also alluding to Botticelli's painting. The verb "build" is used to describe the process of creating Aphrodite, evoking the goddess rising from the sea. Sculpting Aphrodite's body is a structured activity in this text, with two groups working on shaping her face – reflecting her identity – and her thighs, which reflect her physicality and fertility. This scene mirrors Botticelli's painting as the characters of *Prospero's Cell* take the place of the figures of the painting on the beach. In addition, the goddess is humanised as her

pearls, symbols of purity, are replaced with rough and imperfect pebbles, which implies a deconstruction of traditional beauty. The "snakes" refer to Medusa, who evokes dangerous femininity. This reinforces the tension between beauty and danger, birth and destruction. Though inanimate, Aphrodite's expression suggests suffering, which inverts the serene myth of her birth as represented by Botticelli and described in *Reflections on a Marine Venus*. The sea that "gnaws" her fingers refers to the inevitable return to chaos and natural destruction. The sculpture is meant to be discovered and interpreted by fisher boys, much like the myth itself. The "wide-eyed" fisher boys represent the naïve gaze encountering the mythic, which reinforces the pattern where gods are revealed to mortals in unexpected ways in mythology. The final line invokes the original Aphrodite myth, in which she emerges from the sea foam and mirrors Botticelli's painting. The irony is that Botticelli's Aphrodite is an immortal goddess, while Durrell's version is doomed to disappear with the tide.

Moreover, the statue's description is followed by a criticism of the male gaze. In this section, the narrator describes the transfer of the statue to the museum and the conditions of her exhibition that contrast with her historical and artistic value.

> We carried her, swaddled in sacking, down the Museum corridors, up a staircase, to the little room in which you will find her today. It is an ugly enough stone cabin – and chosen for her by a man who had some silly theory that she was too damaged to look beautiful except from certain angles, hence the theatrical north light which plays up the fine modelling of her back and throws those innocent features into dark relief. (RMV 28)

The statue of Venus is personified by the use of the object pronoun "her". This personification reflects its value, which suggests an emotional and cultural connection between "we" and the statue. The verb "carried" puts an emphasis on the statue's passivity and, combined with the formula "swaddled in sacking" creates a sense of protection. It is a metaphor that evokes the image of a baby being wrapped in cloth. However, the "sacking" indicates a rougher and aggressive behaviour. The formula "down the Museum corridors up a staircase" illustrates the journey through the museum and allows the reader to imagine the journey through the building and the effort to relocate the statue. The museum reinforces the idea of the statue's value and, at the same time, freezes its existence in time. The narrator shifts from the pronoun "we" to "you" in order to include the reader by addressing him or her directly and subtly invites the reader to visit the statue by declaring: "the little room in which you will find her today". The invitation helps to personalise the reader's experience by suggesting that he or she can encounter the statue in the Museum. Referring to the room where they put the statue as "little" conveys an idea of seclusion. It suggests that the statue is hidden away in a place that requires

efforts to access. The narrator expresses dissatisfaction by describing the room as "ugly". Moreover, the "stone cabin" evokes a cold, harsh environment, contrasting with the statue's value. It suggests that it is not the kind of place where pieces of art should be conserved or exhibited. The narrator also mocks the person who decides where to place the statue. The use of "silly theory" sets an ironic tone and mirrors the narrator's anger about the situation. Durrell criticises the male gaze on a woman's body, explaining that he finds the man's point of view silly because he thinks that "she was too damaged to look beautiful except from certain angles". The reference to damage raises questions about time and history. "The theatrical north light" implies an artificial and exaggerated effort to create a dramatic aesthetic effect. The use of "north light" is significant because it refers to a soft and less direct light coming from other directions. The "north light" and "dark relief" emphasise the contrast between light and shadow over the statue's different parts. Light is used to accentuate "the fine modelling of her back", which casts her "innocent features" into darkness. This dichotomy hints at the statue's beauty and the damage it has suffered, as well as her innocence and maturity. The passage offers a reflection on time and the symbolic resistance of the statue. Dennis Baron states that "time is masculine, as is death, because of its "irresistible Power". According to Haris, "the idea of a female death would be ridiculous".[97] Otherwise stated, time and power are two concepts beyond human control. Baron explains that they are depicted as masculine. This reinforces the patriarchal vision of masculinity and power. Both time and death are omnipresent and unstoppable, which aligns with traditional stereotypes about feminine and masculine representations. Femininity is associated with passivity, fertility and nurturing. These attributions and associations to life-giving contrast with the idea of finite, active and destructive elements such as time and death. The statue of Venus, as described by Durrell, reflects an act of resilience and resistance against time. This leads us to reflect on Durrell's relationship to the feminist tradition in Greek lands, which is explained by John Maynard as it follows:

> Durrell loved Greece, especially the wonderful Greek islands, Corfu, Rhodes, Cyprus, and Lesbos. I look here at his relation to the feminist tradition strongly attached to the islands he loved. In these Greek islands and Crete, we are, in fact close to sacred ground for feminism […] this part of the world was a place, some feminists tell us, of gynocracy. […] though so much is lost in the absolute mists of time.[98]

Greece occupied a significant physical and symbolic space in Durrell's life. It represented an idealised place that allowed him to connect with classical antiquity, history, mythology, and his

[97] Baron, Dennis E. *Grammar and Gender*. 102.
[98] Maynard, John. "Durrell and the Sapphic Feminist Tradition." *Deus Loci*, Council of Editors of Learned Journals, 2010.

inner world. Maynard sheds light on the deep relationship between the Greek islands that Durrell used to cherish and the feminist tradition rooted in mythological and historical interpretations. The term "gynocracy" refers to a form of societal structure where women hold power. However, Maynard claims that it is difficult to verify and prove the existence of matriarchal societies in Greece. The pieces of evidence are fragmented and based on mythological constructions and interpretations rather than historical data. Durrell himself is not considered a feminist writer and was criticised for some of his stereotypical representations of women. However, his fascination with Greek islands and engagement with their ancient traditions and myths link him with the feminist discourse. He did not claim to join the feminist movement, but the landscapes he revered aligned with the feminist vision of cultural histories and created a complex reinterpretation of history.

In *Prospero's Cell*, Durrell includes the Shakespearean characters in his narrative and offers the reader new interpretations. The most striking interpretation is the one that links the name of the island to one of the marginalised female characters in *The Tempest*. The spirit of Sycorax haunts the island of Corfu and gives another interpretation of Shakespeare's play.

> The count has taken a small silver-hilted pencil from the pocket of his cardigan and is busy tracing meaningless little shapes on the marble table. He dusts some specks of cigarette ash from his clothes, and writes the word SYCORAX before Zarian. 'Look', he says, 'Caliban's mother, the mysterious blue-eyed hag who owned the island upon which Prospero was cast – her name is almost too obvious an anagram for CORCYRA.' (PC 82)

The count uses a "small silver-hilted pencil", which refers to a refined or delicate object. This contrasts with the "marble table" on which he is "tracing meaningless little shapes". Marble is a strong, cold, and fragile material. This material suggests wealth but also a sort of emotional coldness. This indicates that the character values subtle, intricate things. The narrator describes him as "busy" with the act of "tracing meaningless shapes". The word "meaningless" puts forward attempts to make sense of something in the character's mind. The narrator uses the historical present in order to include the reader in the discussion and to enhance the dramatic hallow around the Count. He uses the image of dusting "specks of cigarette", which refers to the remains of something burned that suggests transformation and destruction in order to add suspense and mark a pause before revealing the word written on the table: "SYCORAX". This unseen Shakespearean character is Caliban's mother in *The Tempest,* as the Count declares. She is known for her magical powers. The narrator sheds light on Sycorax, whose influence is powerful yet invisible, rather than Caliban, Miranda or Ariel. The Count draws his companions' attention to the connection between the anagrams "SYCORAX" and "CORCYRA", which is

the ancient name of Corfu. This intertextual reference implies that the mysteries of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* echo those of the natural world in Corcyra. Sycorax is described as "blue-eyed", which contrasts with the traditional image of dark-eyed witches. This detail contributes to a visual, tangible representation of the woman and provides her with a presence that places her at the heart of the discussion. It also reflects the idea of the sacred feminine spirit residing in Corfu, to which Durrell dedicates his book.

Another symbolic figure that Durrell places in the centre of the narrative is the prostitute at the end of the chapter "The Little Summer of Saint Demetrius". The narrator uses the encounter of "G" with the prostitute to reflect on the theme of poverty in Greece and to describe the essence of the Greek lands. This character only occupies one page in the book; however, she becomes the epitome of Greek identity.

> She was lean and half-starved and her clothes tasted of sea-salt. Her poverty was poignant in a way that no one who has not experienced the Mediterranean can understand. In her I tasted the whole of Greece, its sunburnt airs, dazzling bony islands, and the chaste and honourable poverty which the people has converted into a golden generosity. Her name was Aphrodite. (RMV 78)

The physical description of this character depicts her as someone who endures hardship. The adjectives "lean" and "half-starved" reflect both physical deprivation and vulnerability. The narrator adds a sensory detail about her clothes that "tasted" of sea salt. This detail hints at her relationship with the sea and grounds her in the geographical setting of the Greek island. The narrator implies that he profoundly feels her poverty by using the term "poignant", which conveys both sadness and beauty. He introduces poverty as something specific to the Mediterranean experience. This idea suggests that people from the outside would not understand the mix of beauty and destruction within this geographical era. The woman becomes the symbol of Greece. She embodies the essence of the country. The narrator explains that he experienced Greece through her. The woman is evocative of the exposure of the land to the sun, much like the woman. The "bony" suggests the island's rocky nature and the physical appearance of the prostitute. The use of "dazzling" contrasts the harshness of the arid landscapes with beauty. This illustrates the dual image of Greece's landscapes as both severe and admirable. The description of poverty as "chaste" and "honourable" implies respect and draws a pure, dignified portrait of the prostitute. Besides, the formula "Converted into a golden generosity" contrasts material poverty with the richness of spirit. The use of "golden" implies wealth despite the miserable conditions. At the end of the passage, the narrator reveals the prostitute's name, "Aphrodite". This creates a discrepancy between the physical description of

the prostitute as "lean" and "half-starved" and the goddess' association with beauty and sensuality. This suggests that the idea of beauty transcends physical appearances. Giving her this name elevates her to a symbolic status that connects her to beauty, love and the divine. Moreover, Dennis Baron asserts that "*Love* may be feminine, as its goddess, Venus."[99] The gendered notion of love reflects traditional and historical gender norms where women are associated with emotions, nurturing and tenderness. This vision is opposed to more rational traits attributed to men. This idea of love as feminine may reduce women's identities to romantic and emotional qualities, neglecting their intellectual capacities. Moreover, associating love with Venus mirrors the artistic and literary traditions that celebrate the muse or the female figure as an object of male desire, reinforcing the idea of love and beauty as feminine attributes.

Among other gendered attributes, Durrell puts his female characters in the roles of motherly nurturers and carers.[100] According to Fabienne Brugère: "La symbolique masculine se fait selon la mécanique, la construction et les combats, la symbolique féminine invite au *care*, au « prendre soin » des autres et du foyer."[101] In other words, the patriarchal ideas about gender roles reflect an essentialist vision that ties masculinity to external and action-oriented tasks. At the same time, women should be given control of the domestic sphere, where they are tied to emotional and relational roles. These symbolic associations reinforce the undervaluation of the labours traditionally done by women and prioritise those done by men. In *Reflections on a Marine Venus*, the reader finds several examples of nurturing women. For instance, when Durrell and his companions meet the Abbot, "an old woman had laid out supper for three" (RMV 71). She did not join them, and as explained previously, she was given orders and treated gracelessly. In addition, the same chapter presents Eve as the one who thinks of feeding the others. "E, unpacking the sandwiches and the little bottle of cognac" (RMV 63). The character of E is reflected through a simple action of care. The passage describes a moment of relaxation and escape. The evocation of "sandwiches" contrasts with the fancy idea of "cognac", which suggests celebration or escape. She reminds the other characters to eat even when they do not ask for it: " 'Come', said E, 'we should eat now'" (RMV 65). This description portrays her as a mother who looks after her children, is responsible for preparing their meals and thinks about

[99] Baron, Dennis E. *Grammar and Gender*. 103.
[100] In an article entitled "Women of the Mediterranean", Durrell describes Mediterranean women as stronger than men because they fulfil the roles of mothers and caregivers. He also links their strength to the historical and mythological female figures of the era and emphasises the discrepancy between Western women, who claim equality with men, and Eastern women, who accept their power in being mothers, in his opinion. *Spirit of Place: Mediterranean Writings*. Edited by Alan Gradon Thomas, London: Faber and Faber, 1990, 369-377.
[101] Brugère Fabienne. *On Ne naît Pas Femme, on Le Devient*. Paris: Stock, 2019, 60.

their well-being. This creates a discrepancy between the different representations of Durrell's female characters as artists and readers who are nonetheless reduced to traditional and limited roles that exclude them from the significant moments in the narrative structure.

Conclusion

This dissertation has sought to elucidate the paradoxical representations of the female and the feminine in Lawrence Durrell's trilogy of island books, composed of: *Prospero's Cell*, *Reflections on a Marine Venus,* and *Bitter Lemons*. One can notice the absence of female characters in these books, which contrasts with the omnipresence of the feminised and exalted Greek landscapes. The divine and mystical depiction of these landscapes is clearly not religious. It stems from the insular aspect of the island life that is linked to introspection and observation, and the idea of fertile Mediterranean lands that takes the form of a nurturing and caring mother. The conducted research contributes to the previous scholarly works on Durrell's island books with a deeper analysis of characters and gender representations.

This study has discussed the origins of travel literature, a genre that has historically evolved and served to document cultural encounters, self-exploration and both personal and collective experiences. Nevertheless, many travel writers were suspected of having propaganda-oriented goals. Colonial travel narratives have been criticised for their Western male-centric perspectives, which often exclude the viewpoints of women and local inhabitants of the East. Moreover, as Edward Said has argued, East and West are mostly imaginary, constructed locations. Through this study, we were able to showcase the travel narrative genre, which has evolved into a hybrid form that blends reality with fiction, personal reflection, and cultural documentation. It is significantly shaped by colonial and orientalist perspectives. Lawrence Durrell's dual role as both an artist and a colonial official, for instance, complicates his portrayal of Cyprus in *Bitter Lemons*, causing his text to shift between cultural admiration and imperial bias. However, travel writing becomes a means of self-exploration and identity formation, hence its role in shaping relationships with other people while cultivating a deep and strong relationship with the place that becomes an active-living entity. Furthermore, we studied the role of travel narratives as tools that mirror the inner self and help to create and recreate reality, as is the case with Lawrence Durrell's island books that demonstrate how writing about one's experience in living in places activates the process of self-discovery and how this literary journey can be lived as a spiritual journey as well.

Moreover, alongside the cultural and philosophical dimensions of Durrell's island books, we thought it was crucial to consider the formal and stylistic aspects of his work as well. Notably, the blend of prose and poetry in his island books evokes a sensory experience for the

reader. The connection between poetic language, literature and personal perception makes the act of writing a tool for the externalisation of internal experiences. Besides, poetry in Durrell's texts builds a bridge between the human and the natural world that shelters different relationships, which makes his island books an interactive experience where the reader is also a part of the creation process and participates in shaping the structure of the narrative. Durrell's blending of poetry and prose creates a lyrical and immersive experience that transcends mere factual accounts, with poetry serving as a medium for philosophical reflections and emotions while transcribing cultural and historical narratives. Time is also a central element in the texts. It impacts the construction of the storytelling and helps nurture the different relationships we have mentioned. In addition, Durrell's island books illustrate how the travel narrative shapes perceptions through a male Western lens, merging historical and mythological references to interpret Greece. His fragmented narrative style imitates a heart beating and mirrors the fluidity of island life, emphasising impressionistic storytelling over linear accounts; islands themselves emerge as symbols and central characters embodying the intersection of history, culture, and personal transformation.

Nonetheless, despite the importance given to the divine feminine landscapes, Durrell's island books largely feature male figures, with women who appear only in passive or stereotypical roles. These women are depicted as muses, statues of deities, or silent observers. While criticising the male gaze, women's bodies are being fragmented and incomplete when they are not given a ghostly or divine appearance. Durrell relates his female characters to classical mythology and art, which highlights their symbolic rather than functional and active presence in the narratives. The representation of gender in these works reveals a significant imbalance, as male characters dominate the narratives while female figures are constrained by traditional gender roles, where they are reduced to caregivers or nurturers. They are often marginalised, silenced, consumed, idealised, or rendered sacred, lacking the agency necessary for a balanced representation. The feminised and sacralised landscapes that represent Greece as a fantasised Mediterranean woman are more visible and more important than real women. Greece is depicted as an ethereal woman to be conquered

This dissertation aimed to study the omnipresence of the feminine within the descriptions of the Greek landscapes in Durrell's texts. However, this work remains limited because it does not include fictional works by Durrell, such as *The Alexandria Quartet* (1957-1960) or *The Avignon Quintet* (1974-1985), which are longer and richer in terms of characters. Thus, this study seeks to pave the way for a broader analysis of gender representation within

the wider context of Durrell's novels. By analysing the depiction of the feminine and female characters in *The Revolt of Aphrodite* (1968-1970) —which differs from his island books, and was less successful than *The Alexandria Quartet* and *The Avignon Quintet*— a comparative study can be conducted based on Durrell's novel, which is composed of two parts, *Tunc* and *Nunquam*, alongside two other works with similar incipits: Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962) and D. H Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1920). In doing so, we might gain insight into how portrayals of women evolve across different environments and eras. Durrell's *The Black Book* (1938) could be added to the corpus because its structure is similar to that of *The Golden Notebook,* serving as a crossroads between D. H Lawrence and Durrell, both of whom have been criticised for their misogynistic representations of women.

Ultimately, the sacred femininity woven into Durrell's landscapes intensifies the silence that envelops his female characters, exposing a literary vision as fragmented and mythologised as the islands he adored.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1

Evelyn De Morgane, *Helen of Troy*, 1898.

Oil on canvas, 124 cm x 73.8 cm x 9 cm

Cannon Hall Museum, Barnsley.

ANNEX 2

Villa Cleobolus, Rhodes.

Lawrence Durrell's house between 1945-1947.

ANNEX 3

Taijitu

ANNEX 4

Jean-Honoré Fragonard*, A Young Girl Reading,* 1770.

Oil on canvas, 81.1 cm x 64.8 cm

National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C, USA.

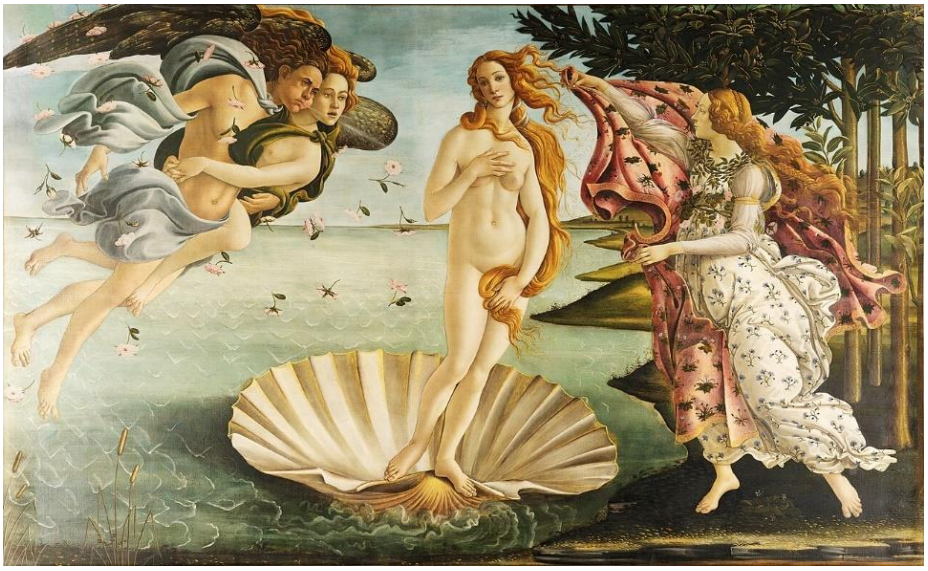
ANNEX 5

William McGregor Paxton, *Girl Combing Her Hair, 1909.*
Oil on canvas, 55.9 cm x 68.6 cm
Private collection

ANNEX 6

Nereid riding Hippocamp, Greco-Roman Mosaic from Carthage C3rd A.
Bardo National Museum, Tunisia.

ANNEX 7

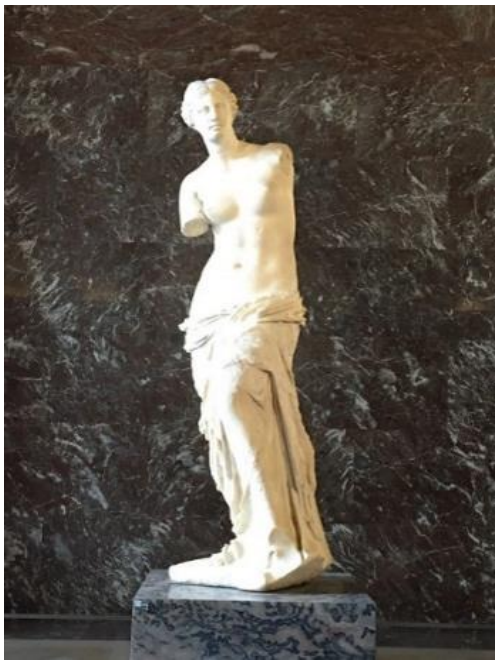


Botticelli Sandro, *The Birth of Venus*, 1483-1485.

Tempera on canvas, 172.5 cm x 278.9 cm

Uffizi Gallery, Italy.

ANNEX 8



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