

Reinterpreting The Black Book: A Postcolonial Approach

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ABSTRACT

Since its first publication in 1938, Lawrence Durrell's *The Black Book* had attracted much criticism that tended to focus on its form, style, and significance in anticipating Durrell's later mega novel *The Alexandria Quartet* (1962).

A linguistically rich and thematically layered novel, *The Black Book* continues to offer the critic many avenues of investigation, including its political and historiographic implications as they are played out in an implicit critique of colonialism, which is basically related to the aesthetics of the novel.

This study intends to reinterpret Durrell's *The Black Book* as a critique of colonialism.

Reading Durrell's work from a post-colonial perspective shows how Durrell writes of the interconnections of the private and the public, the personal and the political, the aesthetic and the historiographic in *The Black Book*, which is at once an act of revelation and resistance, a wake-up to and for personal, artistic, and political freedom.

إعادة قراءة الكتاب الأسود من منظور ما بعد الكولونيالية

ملخص

منذ ظهورها الأول عام 1938، أثارت رواية لورنس داريل "الكتاب الأسود" الكثير من المراجعات النقدية التي ركزت على شكل الرواية وأسلوبها ودورها في التمهيد لرواية داريل الكبرى "رباعيات الإسكندرية" عام 1962. بيد إن عملاً كالكتاب الأسود غنياً بلغته وزاخراً في موضوعاته، لا زال يوهن للناقد قنوات عديدة للبحث ومن ضمنها دراسة الدلالات التاريخية والسياسية التي يمكن أن تشكل انتقاداً ضمنياً للكولونيالية التي ترتبط بشكل أساس بجمالية الرواية. يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة رواية الكتاب الأسود على أنها نقدٌ للكولونيالية. إن قراءة متأنية لرواية داريل من منظور ما بعد الكولونيالية تبين كيف أن الكاتب حاول إظهار العلاقة ما بين الخاص والعام وما بين الجمالي والتوثيقي حيث يمكن اعتبار "الكتاب الأسود" عملاً من أعمال المقاومة ودعوة للصحو ونداءاً للحرية الفردية والفنية والسياسية.

Reinterpreting The Black Book: A Postcolonial Approach

Since its first publication in 1938, *The Black Book*⁽¹⁾ had attracted much criticism that tended to focus on its form and content. Many hailed its literary merits and contribution to the English fictional canon after World War I. T. S. Eliot described Lawrence Durrell's first major novel as "the first piece of work by a new English writer to give me any hope for the future of prose fiction".⁽²⁾ Durrell's "agon", the first part of the tripartite literary plan he outlines in a letter to Henry Miller in 1937, has not received as much critical treatment as it deserves.

Much of what has been written about *The Black Book* tends to focus on its form as well as its style and significance in anticipating Durrell's later meganovel *The Alexandria Quartet* (1962). A linguistically rich and themati-

cally layered novel, *The Black Book* continues to offer the critic many avenues of investigation, including its political and historiographic implications as they are played out in an implicit critique of colonialism, which is intrinsically related to the aesthetics of the novel.

This study intends to reinterpret *The Black Book* as a critique of colonialism. Reading Durrell's work from a post-colonial perspective shows how Durrell writes of the interconnections of the private and the public, the personal and the political, the aesthetic and the historiographic in *The Black Book*.

In the preface that Durrell wrote nearly twenty years after the initial publication of *The Black Book* he reveals that, in writing it, he "first heard the sound of my own voice" (p. 9). He describes how in his attempt to find his own unique literary voice he was driven

to dry and break the mummy wrappings - the cultural swaddling clothes which I symbolized here as 'the English Death'...I wanted to break free, to try my hand at a free book. Underneath the phantasmagoria real values are discussed, real problems of the anglo-saxon psyche articulated and canvassed (pp. 9-10).

In this novel, Durrell attempts to shake off the spiritual English Death artistically and politically by exposing the stultifying oppressive imperialist mindset of empire. In another letter to Henry Miller, Durrell refers again to *The Black Book*: "I tried to say what I was:...NUMB, really- that infecting terrible english provincial numbness: the english death my poor little colonial soul and so on" (*Letters*, p. 72; emphasis added).⁽³⁾ The deliberate use of the lower case "e" in "english," appearing twice in this quotation, is a telling detail. His diction -particularly, the use of the diminutive "provincial" and "little"- clearly communicates his dissatisfaction with most things English, as does his refusal to capitalize "english" and "anglo-saxon".

Durrell underscores his awareness of the prophetic nature of literature by his perception of the artist as prophet/healer (*Correspondence*, p. 90) and art

itself as prophecy (*Letters*, p. 18). The narrator of *The Black Book*, Lawrence Lucifer (whose name suggests he is taking a contrapuntal position with respect to many of the issues raised in the novel - his role is that of devil's advocate), writes about his first book that it "is a hypothetical prophecy", a prophecy that exposes the seeds of destruction (for both colonies and Empire) inherent in the imperialist world view. Durrell anticipates postmodernism in the *Quartet* and goes beyond it in *The Avignon Quintet*. It should come as no surprise that *The Black Book* is equally progressive.

On the second page of *The Black Book*, the narrator says:

...this is an agon for the dead, a chronicle for the living...There is a correspondence between the present, this numbness, inertia, and that past reality of a death, whose meaning is symbolic, mythical, but real also in its symptom (p. 20).

This notion that the present is directed by the past is commonplace and self-evident, but it may be equally important to consider why and how the "past should be altered by the present" (Eliot, p. 5). Revisionist history provides one example; literary theory has also revised critical approaches to literary artifacts. Current theories of colonialism and post-colonialism are new lenses that may be trained on dimensions of *The Black Book* that heretofore have been neglected.

The novel abounds with numerous cartographic metaphors, specific mention of adventurers, pilgrims, and colonizers, implicit and explicit references to colonial mentality, characters who embody imperialist attitudes or stereotypes, and allusions to other writers whose work either valorizes colonialism (like Kipling) or critiques it (like Conrad). A central passage devoted to Miss Smith, the young African woman who is studying Chaucer, is replete with colonial rapacity and is as important to the text as a whole as the oft-quoted "Dear Alan" letter that also offers clues for re-interpretation; *The Black Book* is riddled with language associated with colonialism.

The main setting of the novel is the Regina Hotel, ⁽⁴⁾ obviously an allu-

sion to Queen Victoria, the monarch whose reign is most often associated with colonial expansion. The atmosphere of death and disease which envelops the Regina Hotel and informs everything it symbolizes (e.g., the metropolitan center and the home-country)⁽⁵⁾ fuels the major chronicles of *The Black Book* - Herbert Gregory's diary and Lawrence Lucifer's narrative - that are interwoven throughout the seasonal structure of the novel. These are the confessional fictions that constitute *The Black Book* and set up the *mise en abime*, the reflexive textual model that underscores the acts of reading and composition foregrounded in the narrative. Durrell uses the self-reflexivity that is the imprimatur of his narrative prose to interrogate the values of the time, including those perpetuated by colonial discourse.

Lawrence Lucifer, like Darley in the *Quartet*, is self-exiled on an Ionian island trying to recapture his memories of England on paper as he examines Gregory's diary, literally the black book which provides the title for the novel. The diary is the catalyst that precipitates Lucifer's escape from the English Death by warning him of what he might have become: "That is why I am marking down these items in the log of that universal death, the English death, which I escaped" (102). In this context, "universal" seems to suggest the extent to which colonialism poses a global threat. The following quotation captures the urgency of this revelation:

A holiday! From what? And, above all how, when every latitude is swollen with desire and unrest, every meridian poisoned? Here I will show you my wounds like Mercator's projection. A new cartography (104).

Although certainly on one level, the "new cartography" alludes to the journey of self-discovery that Lucifer engages in as he rejects the conformity demanded of him by the prevalent standards of the English worldview, on another level, it serves as a reminder that mapping is a practice of colonial cultures in which the renaming of spaces operates symbolically and literally as an act of mastery and control. The Mercator projection Atlas, drafted in 1636, reflects a Eurocentric vision of the world in which space is encoded

hierarchically (Ashcroft et al, 1998, pp. 31-34). Durrell's palimpsestic narrative replicates the inscriptions and erasures that constitute historiography.

The Black Book is written in what both Durrell and the narrator, Lawrence Lucifer, refer to as the gnomic aorist, a surrealist (or Durrealist), almost magic realistic ironic river of poetic prose set in the historic present. Lucifer describes "this writing... [as] ballet...not the emotion of personalities, but a theatre of the idea" (pp. 162-63). Those passages in which Durrell's colonial critique is most concentrated are weighted with irony. According to Linda Hutcheon (1995), the doubleness inherent in the trope of irony is a "powerful subversive tool" (p. 133), definitely an appropriate technique in a text which incorporates social criticism. The primacy of this device is highlighted in Gregory's diary where it is described as "almost my only literary wear" (p. 186). Readers recognize once again the inseparability of form and content in Durrell's work as aesthetic considerations, which reflect thematic ones. He attempts to revivify the English narrative tradition, which has become contaminated by the malaise of the English Death, by mounting a stylistic exorcism consisting of parody, irony, hyperbole, and Manichean allegory in *The Black Book*. It takes the shape of a hybrid masque peopled by grotesques generically situated somewhere between Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake* but bearing Durrell's inimitable stamp. Shades of Henry Miller and D. H. Lawrence (*Herbert Gregory* and *Lawrence Lucifer*) are evident in the novel's style and manifest content and readily acknowledged by Durrell but transmogrified for his own purpose into something new. Like Eliot, Durrell depicts an English wasteland of the spirit in a genre that mirrors, on an aesthetic level, what is occurring thematically in the form of a serious of British imperialism as it is exhibited in the attitude of the "anglo-exposaxon psyche" toward race, class, gender, sensuality, and sexuality. He launches a frontal literary attack on the colonial consciousness.

According to Homi Bhabha, anti-colonialist discourse "requires an alter-

native set of questions, techniques and strategies in order to construct it" (qtd. in Parry, p. 43). *The Black Book* exploits the plasticity of language and narrative form in the service of colonial critique. Bhabha reminds us that "the emblem of the English book... [is] an insignia of colonial authority and a signifier of colonial desire and discipline" (p. 144). Colonialist epistemology is as oppressive as its material conditions. On an aesthetic plane, i.e., at the level of form and style, the text of *The Black Book* itself operates as a symbol of rebellion against the "English book", the English literary tradition or canon. By exhibiting signs of the English Death in all its possible manifestations -personal, psychological, spiritual, religious, aesthetic, social, historical,, and political- *The Black Book* illustrates how Bhabha's concept of colonial space as "agonistic space" (p. 152) is a site of struggle and rebirth. The first line of the novel foregrounds its centrality: "The *agon*, then" (p. 19). And on more than one occasion, Lucifer refers to his "battle with the dragon," casting himself in the role of St. George who must slay the English Death (the dragon) to save England.

Durrell perceives the aetiology of the colonialist disease in the paternalistic attitude (one of the components of the English Death) that gave rise to the British Empire. An entry in Gregory's diary reads:

I am tempted to write a little about my father ... the world's disease... the illusion of action ... This is the death I am participating in (p. 206).

He contemplates bequeathing to his father "a copy of *The Waste Land* and a kiss on his uncomprehending, puzzled face" (p. 212). Chamberlain, too, refers to England as "the Puritan Father of the world" (p. 221). The patriarchal figure represents the imperialist mentality, in Lacanian terms "the Law of the Father". The implication is that the "father" is ignorant of his own state and of any transgression.

The reader learns that Gracie, Gregory's "street girl" and an antecedent to the *Quartet's* Melissa, was sexually assaulted by her father and brother: "They knew it wasn't right but what could you do if it was your own father?"

(p. 45). Parental authority is taken to an intolerable extreme - abuse of power which ignores the personhood of the other - as Grace is treated as an object to be used by her father for his own selfish pleasure, a crime exacerbated by the taboo of incest . But it is only one small step from the personal arena to the socio-political one, because it is in the mindset, the attitude, that such action originates.

In its most naked form, colonialism is the exercise of raw power, the imposition of self upon the other, and the denial of the other's autonomy. For Ashis Nandy, "Colonization dehumanized the colonizers as much as it brutalized the colonized" (Sardar and Van Loon, p. 85), except that the single-minded tunnel vision and inbred sense of superiority of the imperialist blind him to his fate. Traits traditionally perceived as masculine are valued and appropriated by the colonizer; those generally associated with the feminine are discounted and attributed to the colonized (p. 85), thus revealing the dual oppression of colonial subjects who are women. In *The Black Book*, Durrell reverses the value of these binary opposites.

Gregory, in recording his failed relationship with Grace (her name resonates with meaning), finally recognizes that his inability to love and value her -he buys her with "the promise of a cup of coffee" (p. 43) and says she "became even more wonderful as a sort of pet" (p. 46) - was his Achilles heel. It is what prevented him from living fully, from becoming whole. On a microcosmic level, their relationship echoes the dynamic described by Ashis Nandy. Lawrence Lucifer, on the other hand, maintains a vision of and a relationship with an unnamed woman whom he values, the "you" in the novel. This is *his* saving grace. By escaping the emotional and spiritual sterility of England and the threat of the English Death, he acknowledges and protects his anima; he becomes a complete person. Although he leaves one island for another as he wrestles with loneliness and isolation, he learns to live in the "Now" (p. 244) and finds his way back to authentic selfhood as the closing metaphor of rebirth in the novel suggests.

One of the passages most resonant with colonial connotations in *The Black Book* describes Chamberlain:

[Chamberlain's] rhetoric... represent[s] an attempt to herd back into the enclosure again.... Chamberlain would like to take his own cage with him, and pitch it in the deserted stratosphere of life. He is nothing but a spiritual colonizer, to whom the wilderness is intolerable until it is cultivated, pruned, transformed into a replica of home. He does not respect its own positive laws. He would transplant his own. To such a man there is no meaning in the word "exile." (p. 218)

Chamberlain, whose name refers generically to a high ranking officer of the king's court and to several actual colonial secretaries⁽⁶⁾, expresses attitudes that are prototypically imperialistic, i.e., lack of respect for territories other than his own by reference to them as "the wilderness," and the imposition of material, mental, and spiritual models upon other societies, a kind of exported provincialism, more specifically, the English Death. In addition, the words "rhetoric" and "enclosure" signal the power of colonial discourse and the reverence for property respectively.

The "Dear Alan" letter, which occurs mid-way through the novel, is clearly an account of Alan's tempting Lawrence Lucifer to stay in England by evoking lush green images of the medieval past that reflect a pastoral existence very different from the one that he is living at the Regina Hotel. However, it is worth noting the irony inherent in the fact that the England of the Middle Ages was also imperialistic insofar as the crusades were an attempt at religious domination akin to colonialism or neocolonialism. Durrell is only too aware of this, as three pages into the novel he invokes "the rotten smell of the crusades" (p. 21) lest we forget the origins of the colonialism he is about to tackle head on.

The second sentence of the letter warrants some scrutiny:

This book is not a statement of a path, but a quarrel with destiny, that is why it is necessary for you to understand it (p. 134).

At first reading, "the quarrel with destiny" seems to suggest that Lawrence Lucifer is quite self-consciously rejecting and struggling against what would seem to be his preordained path; remaining in England, absorbing the common values, and ultimately succumbing to the English Death and all its ramifications, i.e. being a good "son". In the context of colonial critique, it is worth re-examining the word "destiny". In a letter to Miller dated early 1936, when Durrell was immersed in composing *The Black Book*, he concludes by asking, "Who is it that talks of the decline of the west?" (*Letters*, p. 12). Clearly, Durrell had read Spengler, and imperialist concerns were on his mind.

Spengler theorizes that "Civilization is the inevitable destiny of...Culture" (p. 31), and when culture becomes civilization it begins to die (106), just as Freud argues in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Spengler also identifies the Greek soul with culture, and the Roman intellect with civilization (p. 32), and describes "Imperialism as Civilization unadulterated" (p. 36). Lawrence Lucifer, in an effort to include "everything" in his narrative, does not ignore the things of the soul and other non-rational phenomena; in fact, it is precisely these elements which he finds missing in imperialist England, an England with many remnants of its Roman past intact. It is also worthy of note that Lawrence Lucifer exiles himself to a Greek island and often alludes in his writing to Greek mythology, as in the reference to Ion, whose ghost Aeneas of future perils. He aligns himself with culture as he abandons a dying civilization. His method of combating the English Death, of quarrelling with destiny, is to focus on these very aspects of human being the spiritual and the emotional, in his symbolic, historiographic narrative. In what he calls his valediction to England, he weeps for his generation and devises "a legend to convey the madness that created us in crookedness, in dislocation, in trot" (p. 138), diction evocative of colonialism. By pointing out the dangers of a civilization that egomaniacally thrusts itself upon other cultures in the name of empire, Durrell reveals one of the many symptoms of the English death and

provides an artistic antidote to it in *The Black Book*.

Spengler's influence is evident once again in the novel when one considers his equation of the power of civilization with economic gain for the imperialist city-centers. Tarquin, whose name echoes that of the last king of Rome, has an American sister with a voice described as "The cash-register voice of new a continent" (p. 129), perhaps a prophecy of America's materialistic and imperialistic destiny. Tarquin, a symbol of "civilization," has taken to his bed; he is recumbent, "surrounded by the bones of history, dying piecemeal in life, dying" (p. 105), in Durrell's epitaph for colonialism. Spengler writes: "We men of the Western Culture are, with our historical sense, an exception and not a rule. World-history is our world picture and not all mankind's" (p. 15). He distinguishes between this sense of history and "the particular momentary present" (p. 8), which he calls the "pure Present [which]... in itself predicates *the negation of time*" (p. 9). This may provide some insight into Durrell's use of the gnomic aorist and historic present in his effort to defeat time that he writes of to Miller during the composition of *The Black Book*: "I am slowly but carefully and without conscious thought destroying time... There is only space" (*Correspondence*, p. 19). It also foreshadows the importance of the heraldic reality of the "Now" with which the novel ends.

Lucifer further probes the relationship between time (history) and space (geography) as he writes: "It is time that kills one. Space is more durable than logic can suggest" (p. 176). The interdependence of the two parameters is dramatized when one considers how the telling of time was dependant upon markers in space in pre-modern and pre-colonial times (Ashcroft et al., p. 178). Numerous references to explorers such as Ponce de Leon, Eric the Red, Christopher Columbus and Sir Water Raleigh further reinforce the connections among the motifs history, place, and colonialism.

In *A key to Modern British Poetry*, Durrell quotes Freud's hypothesis that temporality is deployed spatially in the structure of dreams (p. 55). A similar

technique would lend itself to rendering memory, Lawrence Lucifer's literary quest. The surrealist style of *The Black Book*, which relies heavily upon parody and hyperbole, supports the contention that Durrell is conjuring up in an alternative reality in the novel, one which simultaneously critiques and subverts the existing English Death. Another way of thinking of the structure of *The Black Book* is in terms of Freud's conception of the psyche. As pointed out earlier, Durrell refers specifically to the "anglo-saxon psyche" in the preface. Gregory's Diary -Gregory's prescience in the novel- is described as the "id of this book" (p. 55), and Lucifer calls himself "the interrogative ego" (p. 55). The superego may well be regarded as "the Puritan Father" (p. 221), England depicted as the English Death, one of whose incarnations is colonialism.

Durrell's attention to space in *The Black Book* is highlighted by his use of cartographic imagery. There are many references to the map that Lobo will never finish, and a key passage in which Lucifer writes:

I live only in my imagination which is timeless. Therefore the location of this world which I am trying to hammer out for you on a blunt typewriter, over the Ionian, is the location of space merely. I can only fix it with any certainty on the map (p. 56).

Similarly, Herbert Gregory Confesses:

I am writing for the public of the damned. Let this become a piece of superb cartography. Let me be laid out here in relief, to be pored over by professional students of the soul's geology (p. 187).

The ambiguity of whether the "public of the damned" refers to the colonizer or the colonized provides yet another example of Ashis Nandy's concept of reciprocal brutalization. The use of a temporal medium, writing, to destroy time in an effort to see relationships kaleidoscopically is definitely an ambitious task. In general, maps evoke images of the world, and to some extent Spengler's "world-as-history," which in turn leads to a contemplation of the relationships among the various countries and continents that consti-

tute our world. At the time Durrell was writing, British colonialism was at its height, and the sun literally did not set on the British Empire, an image problematized by connotations of global domination. But maps are infinitely revisable and do change during the course of history. The prophecy contained in *The Black Book* was realized within a decade of its publication, as the dismantling of the Empire following World War II began.

The names of the characters in the novel are symbolically loaded; some of these have already been pointed out - Tarquin and Chamberlain, for example. While admittedly a blatantly anachronistic observation, it is interesting how the names and personalities of such characters as Lobo and Clare seem to be echoed in the plays of Samuel Beckett, who might be said to have written of the "European Death" in general, and in the drama of Jean Genet, who targets colonialism and neo-colonialism, most notably in *The Blacks*. Perez and Lobo, whose names reflect their origins in Spain and South America, point to yet another case of imperialism, that of Spain.

Other characters are implicated in the motif of colonialism. The ironic depiction of the French teacher's faade at Honeywoods, Madame About's "qualitative superiority of aristocracy" (p. 117), is implicitly an indictment of French imperialism. And Morgan, the Welsh janitor at the Regina Hotel, may be regarded as a victim of imperialism, neo-colonialism, and class oppression. But by far the most dramatic critique of class oppression occurs in Gregory's cruel description of Gracie's suburban pretensions. English, French, and Spanish colonialisms are all condemned via characterization.

Honeywoods, an institution that specializes in teaching "the principles and practice of big business" (p. 109), teaches "commercial" Spanish and economics in its perpetuation of the English Death. It supports imperialist interests by providing its students with the skills of commerce through which the colonies are exploited.

The central role that language plays in the creation of cultural constructs is not ignored by Durrell in *The Black Book*. Lucifer expatiates on ownership

in a discussion of the personal pronoun "my": "It is a rapacious mechanism which attempts to swallow the world" (p. 114). Further instances of his meditation on the logos reveal the casualties of cultural imperialism in a description of Mess Smith's reading as in: "the Nile emptied word by word into a glass of milk" (p. 125).

One of the most striking passages in the novel occurs about half way through the text and consists of an extended five-page description of Miss Smith, the African student of Chaucer. This character may be seen as the fulcrum upon which the critique of colonialism rests. She is "segregated from the pallid nothern pupils of the school" (p. 122) in her upstairs room. She has been Europeanized: her hair is styled into a fashionable bob "against the natural grain," she "powders her face heavily," and wears European clothes (p. 123). Her name and circumstances alone suggest that she is a victim of neo-colonialism.

Durrell exploits the device of catachresis and allude to the process of appropriation inherent in colonialism as he piles up image after image in an attempt to render the meaning of Miss Smith in what Edward Said calls an Orientalist discourse (Ashcroft & Ahluwalia, 1999, p. 67-72) exoticism, mystery, myth, fertility, sensuality, and sexuality. Lucifer depicts her as "an inky personality which belongs purely to the world of the image" (p. 122) - a literary figment loaded with symbolism. But she is also a representation of the Other, who, according to Nigel Leask is "often figured as an (often Oriental) female" who is a "wishful projection of the ego of the male protagonist" (p. 6), in this case, several of the male characters in the novel, including Tarquin. Lucifer thinks to himself: "I have seen women like you carved in ebony and hung on watch chains" (p. 123), a prime example of appropriation and symbol of imprisonment and dehumanization. In his *Black Skin, White Masks*, Franz Fanon (1965) locates racism in the projection of the white man's desires onto the black man and in the subsequent interpretation of his behaviour in terms of this attribution (p. 165). Miss Smith's name im-

plies that, on one level at least, she is Everywoman. Male desire and female subjugation are often used analogously to depict sexual and political power (Ferguson, 1993, p. 2). Miss Smith symbolizes the continent of Africa raped and exploited by European imperialist interests for economic gain: "She has no idea of the disease of which she is the victim" (p. 125), which is the pathology of the English Death or some European variation thereof.

The insidious and invasive nature of neo-colonialism is underscored by the use of italics in the following simile: *Like a black saucer her mind is, shattered among a million white saucers* (p. 125); and it reflects Bhabha's description of the encroachment of colonialist epistemology and cultural artifacts, in this case, literature.

According to Gauri Viswanathan, the "split between the material and the discursive practices of colonialism" is nowhere sharper than in the progressive refraction of the rapacious, exploitative, and ruthless actor of history into the reflective subject of literature" (qtd. in Ashcroft et al., p. 117). Following a catalogue of the contents of Miss Smith's studies in the literature of the Middle Ages, Lucifer writes: "All this beautiful stuff circulating in the veins of the Negress, poisoning her" (p. 149). After a far-ranging spatial and temporal mediation on culture and civilization, he reveals that "it is in order to destroy history that I am compelled to experience it, all of it" (p. 149) ⁽⁷⁾, not least of which is the destructive ethos of imperialism.

Over all of the assembled images of the English Death in *The Black Book* loom the sphinx-like, snow-covered peaks of Tibet. In opposition to the established symbolism of winter and snow throughout the novel, the connotation here is not of coldness and death but rather of freedom and purity, the antidote to the English Death: "This is the theme of travel...the passes open like flowers in the setting sun, the delicate gates of the unknown country's body, the Yoni of the world" (p. 230) ⁽⁸⁾. Tibet becomes the objective correlative for Durrell's heraldic reality, a mindscape that synthesizes the rational and the irrational, the material and the spiritual, the self and the Other, as a

new day dawns with the demise of the Empire.

Despite Durrell's protestations to the contrary (*Correspondence*, pp. 18-19), *The Black Book* is a political novel. In his characteristically prescient manner, Durrell writes of the intersections and interconnections of the private and the public, the personal and the political, the aesthetic and the historiographic in *The Black Book*, which is at once an act of prophecy, revelation, and resistance, a wake-up call to and for personal, artistic, and political freedom.

Notes

- 1) Quotations from *The Black Book*, throughout this study, are made to the 1977 Faber edition. The first edition of *The Black Book*, however, was published by Faber & Faber in 1938.
- 2) This quotation is taken from the dust jacket of the 1959 Faber hardcover edition of *The Black Book*.
- 3) Although Durrell is a product of the settler population in India, he usually identifies himself as an Anglo-Indian and frequently refers to his Irish background on his mother's side of the family, thus indicating his access to the experience of two colonized countries.
- 4) The Regina Hotel is fictionalized version of the Queens Hotel where Durrell and his family lived in 1930 (MacNiven, p. 70).
- 5) Rosemary M. George (1996) notes that "home-country' expresses a complex yoking of ideological apparatuses." (p. 2).
- 6) For the various references of the name "Chamberlain", see *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 46 1965 ed., pp. 245-500.
- 7) There are over thirty explicit and countless implicit references to history through out the novel.
- 8) According to Rosemary George (1996), "travel was represented as the very antithesis of being at home" (p. 73), following the imperialist expansion of the late 1800s.

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