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## POLITICAL DISILLUSIONMENT AND CULTURAL ENCHANTMENT IN LAWRENCE DURRELL'S *MOUNTOLIVE: NEW PERSPECTIVES*

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### ABSTRACT

Lawrence Durrell's *Mountolive*, the third volume of his most famous literary work *The Alexandria Quartet* is a document of Durrell's personal experiences in Alexandria, Egypt. The title 'Alexandria' refers to the historical city and the 'Quartet' to the musical pattern of the four novels – *Justine*, *Balthazar*, *Mountolive* and *Clea* which combine together like a symphony. *The Alexandria Quartet* reflects experiences in his love life, diplomatic life and his career. It was during the war years in Egypt, Durrell conceived the idea of writing *The Alexandria Quartet*. As head of the Information Office in Alexandria in 1943 Durrell was close to Egypt's diplomatic affairs with Britain and his third novel *Mountolive* is laid against this political background. The Egypt which Durrell re-creates in his novel is one already re-shaped following the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936.

This article tries to illuminate our understanding of the way in which Durrell's *Mountolive* re-creates and interrogates the political history of Egypt and Britain against the backdrop of the city of Alexandria and his re-interpretation of the fascinating oriental cultures in his portrayal of Alexandria. Durrell gives us a glimpse of a relationship between the Eastern world and the Western world. In doing so, he exposes the rationalism of the western man and the mysticism of the east. This relationship is presented throughout the four novels both elegiacally and ironically.

Durrell has been able to display how environment and sociological setting play a significant role in the novel. Being a less romantic novel, than the other books- *Justine*, *Balthazar* and *Clea* (though that element is present), rather it is a story of wartime political intrigue with heavy doses of diplomacy, foreign policy and espionage. Durrell was greatly influenced by the Mediterranean places and the enchanting multi-dimensional cultures that he experienced. He experimented with various modern fictional techniques and could very well depict a city which was in fact alien to his culture. Durrell romanticized and loathed this exotic city at the same time and viewed it as a meeting point of oriental and occidental cultures.

Key words: Alexandria, Egypt, colonial, reality, political, cultural, diplomat historical perspective, human relationships

Political disillusionment And Cultural enchantment In Lawrence Durrell's *Mountolive* : New Perspectives

*Mount olive* , the third novel of *The Alexandria Quartet* ,published in 1958, according to Durrell's description is a naturalistic novel in which the narrator of *Justine* and *Balthazar* becomes an object that is, a character. *Mount olive* is the name of the principal character in the novel and is symbolic of peace as in the *Bible*, the Mount of Olives is the place from where the dove got the olive leaf to Noah in the ark when the flood waters receded. The Mount of Olives also was a place that Jesus used to frequent for His prayers. The olive leaf is generally considered as a sign of peace and therefore is indicative of the career of the Mount olive as a diplomat in Egypt. His first name David which was the name of one of the most powerful and just kings of Israel is also very significant. The epigraph of the novel is very important as it gives the central idea of the novel as "the story of mental wrong doing" and that "the accursed reverie is vivified and its existence is a crime." ( *Mountolive* 10)

Just as *Balthazar* is a book of masks *Mount olive* is a book of intrigues. The first two novels of *The Alexandria Quartet* offer private false faces, the third offers the public false face of political action and intrigue. Written from an entirely different perspective, it can be read independently of the previous two novels despite the links between them. It differs from the other two previous novels-*Justine* and *Balthazar* and also the fourth novel or sibling' *Clea*, in technique for it intrudes upon the narrative of the first two novels, by breaking the first person illusion and progressing in a new direction to establish objective reality. The narrative is in the objective third person interspersed now and then with notes from diaries and personal musings. Thus a new sliding panel is drawn back to expose a totally new vista. It is told from the point of view of an omniscient narrator and Darley, the narrator of the first two novels takes an objective stance while seeking to portray the public and political counterpart to his private vision of Alexandria.

According to Carol Pierce:

It is a highly complex work, rich in allusions to the past- to history, legend and myth.

Durrell not only incorporates in its atmosphere an impressionistic feeling of ancient Alexandria but also reveals the many ages of the city(of Kings, of God, of man) still existing as a symbolic reality within the "historic present. (Pierce 485)

Durrell's technique of writing has been simplified in this novel and it attempts to portray a truth about life and human relationships. A literary work must capture at least something of the quality of an ultimate reality. Durrell believed profoundly in the artist and his capability of presenting his own special vision of reality. Durrell offers a new means of approaching "reality"- an integration of appearances illuminated by imagination to achieve a likeness of truth to resolve the conflict between appearance and reality. Durrell's theme follows the pattern of reason intuition and imagination- from characters of contradictory traits, to illusion, to reality and ultimately to truth. Thus in this novel the protagonist *Mountolive* learns much about externals from his experiences in public and personal life which is contrasted with private passivity, but he also realizes that mere facts are less significant, less accurate than 'felt reality.' Thus reality and truth are presented on personal levels, in a particular environment within a definite time frame.

According to the critic Keith Brown:

No set of ideas can wholly tell us the truth about the reality from which we extrapolate it; if, therefore, we accept any such set of ideas too rigidly, too Whole heartedly it becomes a set of prison bars, obscuring and distorting the world that we try to see through its grid. (Brown & Dodsworth 103)

The narrative is built around David *Mountolive*, who is not mentioned at all in *Justine* and only alluded to in *Balthazar*, a young British diplomat who first visits Egypt in 1918 as a junior officer in the High Commission and who later returns to Cairo, Egypt as British ambassador. The third novel of *The Alexandria Quartet*, *Mountolive* , may cover the same events for a third time, but it is quite different from both *Justine* and *Balthazar*. The action in the novel begins much before the events of the first two

novels, taking place at a time when Mountolive was first in Egypt. More and more background is presented that elucidates events and relationships that were incomplete or confusing before. *Mountolive* digresses from the first person narrative in the first two novels of *The Quartet*, by a young poet, Darley who is significantly similar to the writer Durrell, and who appears as a minor character in this novel. Darley takes an objective stance while seeking to portray the public and political counterpart to his private vision of Alexandria. Mountolive and Darley also have symbolic roles to play- Mountolive symbolizes the British involvement in Egyptian affairs and Darley is the literary interest in Alexandria.

The novel very relevantly starts with the above description of Mountolive. Mountolive is a great influential man after Egypt had been colonized by Britain for nearly half a century. Nevertheless, he is the least colorful of the male characters and the least captivated by the mysteries of Alexandrian life. Occupying a very high diplomatic post, he is a man not meant for friendship or any close relationship with others but nevertheless is drawn into the maze of political and cultural network and brought into a conflict of interests.

As a junior of exceptional promise, he had been sent to Egypt for a year in order to improve his Arabic and found himself attached to the High Commission as a sort of scribe to await his first diplomatic posting ; but he was already conducting himself as a young secretary of legation, fully aware of the responsibilities of future office. Only somehow today it was rather more difficult than usual to be reserved, so exciting had the fish-drive become. (Mountolive 11)

Mountolive's father had served in India as a judge and later on chose to become a scholar and interpreter of rare and neglected Indian texts. The narrator Mountolive's father:

belonged to the vanished India, to the company of its rulers whose common devotion to their charge had made them a caste. (Mountolive 97)

Since Mountolive had left India when he was only eleven years old, his memories of India and also his father were very faint. Mountolive's mother was a self-respecting English lady who respected the decision of his father to stay on in India for a few more years after her husband's demise and hardly ever spoke about him; and also casually disregarded Mountolive's disappearances and returns. It is for that there is a sense of alienation from his parents as Mountolive had never experienced the love and charm of a family life. Thus, Mountolive was a lonely character and always had doubts about his happiness.

Though Durrell seems to share much with Darley and Pursewarden as far as mentality and perspective is concerned, it is possible that the character of Mountolive most corresponds to Durrell biographically. The episodes described in *Mountolive* are mostly autobiographical and based on Durrell's time working in similar posts in Alexandria. Mountolive served as an officer in the British Foreign Service in Egypt and shared Durrell's distaste of the position. After a stint as foreign officer in other countries, Mountolive returns to Egypt on promotion as British ambassador. Both Mountolive's father and Durrell's father were invested in the British colonial efforts in India and both of them are absent in Durrell's life as well as in 'The Quartet'. Like Durrell, Mountolive did not see his father since his departure from India on his eleventh birthday. Thus the fictional reality in the novel is based on an actual reality in the life of the author. Mountolive's attitude towards women is based on a presumably oedipus complex as he was close to his mother and alienated from his father.

The novel is saturated with a sense of time, tracing the lifelong effect of an early love affair on the British diplomat. Except for Mountolive's love affair with Leila, the facts are presented as they are in the traditional novel. Much of the novel is devoted to political intrigues and almost all the characters in this novel are concerned with political affairs. So the young Mountolive pondered upon the strange ways of the people among whom he had come to live. He later came to find a sort of poetic correspondence between the reality and the dream-picture of the East which he had constructed

from his reading. Much of the novel is devoted to political intrigues and almost all the characters in this novel are concerned with political affairs.

But what a brilliant twist Durrell has achieved; taking what appeared to be a love story steeped in the mysterious city of Alexandria and turning it into a post Commonwealth critique of the underlying intentions of nations, leaders, diplomats, fanatics and businessmen. He reveals all of it like a Pandora's box. (Judy "Mountolive" 1 July 2011)

Mountolive is the British ambassador while Darley and Pursewarden are intelligence agents. Kenilworth is the Head of the Military Intelligence in Alexandria. Nessim and Justine are involved in an anti-British conspiracy to protect their interest against the threatening power of the hostile Arab world. Both the Hosnani brothers Nessim and Narouz being Copts are at the centre of the plot to aid Palestine and form a new Middle Eastern order. Cohen, another character is Nessim's chief agent in smuggling arms to help his people in Palestine.

Durrell gives a glimpse of the relationship between the East and the West and the decline of the British power in Egypt. Thus in the novel Durrell draws the political and cultural layer between the British, Copts, Jews and the Egyptian government. The outburst of Nessim's father about the British influence on the Copts and Muslims and how they were instrumental in bringing about a difference of opinion and antagonism between these two sects is very relevant. This is the frank opinion of Durrell about the typical British political hypocrisy and colonial attitude all over the world. They had originally come with the tradesman's view. This was later coupled with the missionary zeal and later lapsed into scheming and intrigue which had brought more disharmony than peace.

Yes, we are genus Pharaonicus- the true descendants of the ancients, the true marrow of Egypt. We call ourselves Gypt-ancient Egyptians. Yet we are Christians like you, only of the oldest and purest strain. And all through we have been the brains of Egypt – even in the time of the Khedive. Despite persecutions we have held an

honoured place here; our Christianity has always been respected. (Mountolive 41)

Taking the historical perspective and subsequently the political aspect, the elaborate oriental fictions in character and setting are laid against the various scenes of Western presence and authority. The Arab nationalization of the Suez Canal and the decline of the British power are the historical events that had taken place and hence those events had become the core of this complex sequence of novels. The historical perspective of this novel dates from the late 1930's to the end of 1945. The characters in the novel are influenced by these historical events and the novel contains almost the entire history of Britain in Egypt from 1882 till the bombardment of Alexandria in the II World War.

The Alexandria Quartet carries the history of Alexandria and Egypt to the end of the Second World War. A history of the British presence in Alexandria is recounted and this gives another glimpse of Durrell's vision of life- Alexandria as a battleground. Egypt had been occupied by the British in 1882. In that year, the British defeated the nationalist leader, Arabi and occupied Egypt, in the battle of Telel- Kabir. After a long struggle Egypt gained her independence in 1936. The fear of an Italian aggression made Egypt retain British troops in the vicinity of the Suez Canal and establish British naval bases at Alexandria. From 1950 to 1957 relations between Britain and Egypt became strained because of King Farouk's aggressive attitude to the British occupation of the Suez Canal. A military coup ousted King Farouk in 1952 but his successor Nasser insisted on British evacuation from the Suez area. British troops were accordingly withdrawn in 1954. The third novel, Mountolive is laid against this background of political history of Alexandria.

Durrell witnessed at first hand some of the debacles attendant on the dismantling of the British Empire( his experience in Cyprus being documented in *Bitter Lemons*), and it is not surprising that a book which appeared at the same time as the Suez canal crisis, even if not set at the time, should bring to mind some of the political

chaos of the period. (Simon Mcleish July 2005)

The political story is also perfectly exemplified in the figure of Maskelyne, a brigadier whose grandfather had played a significant part in Britain's domination of Egypt by fighting in the battle of Tel-el-Kabir and winning the Egyptian war medal. The novel's political denouement is marked by the oriental despot and power broker, Memlik Pasha who wields political and financial power in Egypt. He even represents the nadir of power in *The Alexandria Quartet* as a corrupt official. Memlik's appearance and character resembles that of King Farouk of Egypt. The house of Memlik situated across the river from Mountolive's official residence is a vivid example of the oriental space striving for power in the novel.

The Alexandrian harbour represents the colonial space where the Europeans and the Europeanized exiles survive temporarily in their host environment. During British occupation and later control, Egypt developed into a regional commercial and trading destination. Immigrants from the other parts of the region including Greeks, Jews and Armenians, began to flow into Egypt. The number of foreigners in the country rose from 10,000 in the 1840s to more than 1.5 million by the 1930s. This was the time when Durrell lived in Alexandria as foreign Press Officer. Durrell spent four years in Egypt from 1941-1945 (Friedman, Chronology XX). He wrote for the Alexandria-based Egyptian Gazette before working as a Foreign Press Service Officer for the British Embassy in Cairo and, in 1944, became the Press Attaché to Alexandria.

Durrell develops his own spatial colonial world dividing it into the European and Arab domains. The most elaborate description of alien space in Mountolive is The Cecil Hotel, Cervoni Mansion, Nessim's city house, Pursewarden's Mount Vulture Hotel, the Atelier, the countless nightclubs and cafes which provide time and space for the exiles. Egypt is identified as a country overshadowed by war and conflict. Alexandria is imbued with the spirit of the city founded by Alexander and ruled by Cleopatra. It holds deep memories of an old Egyptian civilization. The city of Alexandria had never been an Egyptian city. It had

been a city of Italians, Greeks, Syrians, Lebanese, European Jews and Jews of native origin. All the characters are from different nations and they lose stature by being placed against the background of Alexandria. The spirit of this ancient city lives on in modern Alexandria. The spirit of place is so strong that the characters exhibit a variety of intellectual, religious and sexual passions in the depraved society of Alexandria.

Equally important is Durrell's essentialist notion of culture, where, what he called the "spirit of place": that is, where a person lives, determines who he/she is. Therefore, according to him, one should also plant oneself in an agreeable environment. In his opinion cultures produce the same type of people: culture will express itself through the human being ... (Kacvinsky, "Introduction" 16-17)

Durrell altered his vision of the city because he was conquered and enchanted by the spirit of this peculiar place. He transforms place and time and develops a mythology of place and character by transcending the historical. Durrell's Middle East and Egypt are not described or represented but are re-fabricated through character, myth and the timeless spirit of place and the palimpsest of cultural history. Thus he captures the essence of the people and the land. The characters wander back in time and history in search of themselves and their own lost past. Memlik Pasha, Leila and her son Narouz are some of the typical Egyptian characters in the novel. According to the Westerner's perception of the East-the Orient is a place of romance, with haunting memories and exotic landscapes. It is also perceived as a voyage away from the self and a place of refuge from the dictates of moral behaviour.

*Mountolive* deals with four main topics: Mountolive's history until his return to Egypt, Pursewarden's entrapment into suicide, political intrigues and the death of Narouz. It covers Mountolive's life as a youngman introduced as a diplomat. His diplomatic career includes his two month love affair with Nessim's mother, Leila and maintained in letters for some thirty years. While the earlier novels concentrate on Darley's affair with Justine, wife of wealthy Coptic merchant

Nessim, in this novel it is almost incidental, that this novel projects Mountolive's affair with Nessim's mother when he was a young man and this is where the novel begins, with what is effectively a long prologue. Though the memory of this affair and his time and work in Egypt is strongly emotive to Mountolive, his concern with Justine and Nessim is more political. Later he is finally disillusioned with Leila, Egypt and with the possibilities of power. Mountolive begins to lose his old self and grow a new one through the influence of Leila and Nessim in Egypt. He feels that his life -pattern is against him and sees Egypt through Leila in a new dimension. Chapter XV, in which Mountolive finally meets Leila again, is really the key to the novel. According to Mountolive:

Leila appeared to be somehow fading, receding on the curvature of a world moving in time, detaching herself from his own memories of her. The foreground of his new life was becoming crowded with the expensive coloured toys of his professional life- banquets and anniversaries and forms of behavior new to him. His concentration was becoming dispersed.. (Mountolive 50-51)

Durrell sketches the various stages and posts of Mountolive's career while examining the character of the diplomat's life. It is these two spells of Mountolive's service in Egypt that hold the secret of his life and experience. Mountolive brings with him the same handicaps and the same potential as those possessed by the narrator Darley, whose potential for awareness is defeated. Being soft- spoken Mountolive is unable to withstand the compromises demanded by the British diplomatic service. Consequently he becomes an object responding to the social and political demands made upon him. The two incidents which affect his social life and political career are the suicide of Pursewarden and Nessim's intrigue and conspiracy.

Leila and her husband belonged to a sect named Copts, who were Christian Egyptians. They were the only Christian Orientals who thoroughly integrated into a Moslem state, as they were the true descendants of the ancient Egyptians. Widely respected by the Moslems for their abilities and

integrity, the Copts were given high positions in the government and occupied key positions as mudirs and governors who had complete powers over revenue and taxation. This state of affairs was changed entirely after the British took over Egypt. The highest and important positions occupied by the Copts were removed and orders were passed against fresh appointments. The Copts felt this state of affairs was brought about by the British to inculcate hatred in Moslems against the Copts.

Janice Terry, a Wafd ( the Egyptian delegation) historian points out that:

"the inclusion of the influential Coptic community, the largest Christian minority in Egypt, unified the nation and in the process provided the Wafd with some of its most able strategists. Nor should the considerable financial contributions of the Copts be underestimated." ( Diboll, "The Secret" 82 )

Nessim, a typical Copt, can be compared with Mountolive in his dignity, pride and nobility. The only time he seems to be perfectly into something occurs, when he talks of the Copt conspiracy. Like all other Copts, Nessim felt that the British were solely responsible for creating this discrimination and so resolved to work against the British. Nessim and Justine are suspected of working with Zionist groups in Palestine in anti-British and anti-Arab terrorism there. Nessim's main objective was to defend the lives of his sect and their rights to belong to their own country Egypt. To carry on this dangerous enterprise he needed a partner who could take this objective as her only passion and proceed in the task ahead. It is in the power and danger that induces Justine to marry Nessim.

The novel at this point goes back to a period of some years, when Nessim sought Justine's hand in marriage without success. At last he offered her the supreme temptation to which Justine succumbed to become his partner in a vast political intrigue which is anti-British and pro-Zionist and which is intended to further the aims of the of his own group, the Copts. He reveals to Justine the extent of his complicity in the Palestine conspiracy and emphasized that their underground activities be kept secret from Melissa who was once Cohen's

mistress. Cohen a hideous old man is a key figure in the conspiracy.

The novel imagines a superior British community displaced by incompetent Egyptians who do not possess the skills needed to administer an efficient modern state. This imagined community of dispossessed Britons, like Durrell and his parents, no longer has access to colonial posts previously facilitated by its privileged position under Empire." (Mahmoud "Fictions of Revolution" Preface)

On Mount olive's assignation to Egypt as Ambassador he is told by Kenilworth, Head of the foreign office that Purse warden is unreliable as an Embassy Intelligence Agent. He should be dismissed as he would be a security risk in future. Mount olive does not heed his advice as he is already in love with Purse warden's sister, Liza and his first independent decision to keep

Purse warden proves to be a great blunder. Later, Purse warden kills himself on learning from Melissa that Nessim is at the centre of the conspiracy. Thus Purse warden's suicide which is the central event of the four novels is interpreted in this novel in yet another light. It appears that he killed himself on a point of honour and partly for 'official reasons', as he did not want to betray either Nessim or Mount olive. In his letter to Mount olive before his suicide he reveals that Leila and Narouz were also in the conspiracy. This revelation of Nessim's involvement induces him into a state of apprehension and shock. He felt that his personal relationship with Nessim should not come in between his official duty but his sense of loyalty pricked his conscience. As an ambassador, the whole responsibility of dealing with this affair lay in his hands. The discovery of Nessim's involvement attained a new dimension in his view of Nessim and Justine. He realized that now he would never be able to maintain his good old friendship with the Hosnani's.

Mount olive's friendship for Nessim turns to anger and contempt- angry that he should be forced into such a situation by his dear friend's indiscretion. Mount olive on the other hand, suspected Leila's hand behind Nessim's play. Now

his anger towards Nessim extended to Leila also as he imaginatively sees her hand behind this conspiracy. Leila's pleas to save Nessim from the Egyptian hands were unheeded. He rejected her crudely and left, refusing to discuss diplomatic affairs with her. As, Justine who was not a native Egyptian is partly a symbol of Alexandria, so Nessim's mother in her turn is something of a symbol for Egypt as a whole. Mountolive's disillusionment with the place Egypt, is seen by the unexpected discovery of Nessim's conspiracy and Pursewarden's suicide. A parallel description of the city of Alexandria symbolises a new dimension in Mountolive's view of Nessim.

It was already late in the afternoon by the time he reached the desert fringe and began the slow in-curving impulse which would lead to the city's bristling outer slums. The sky was covered with clouds. A thunderstorm was breaking over Alexandria. To the East upon the icy green waters of the lake poured a rainstorm-..(Mountolive 276-277)

With this shocking experience, Mount olive's life and work in Alexandria seemed distasteful and wearisome. All this time, he had identified Leila with Egypt but now that old image was shattered. He felt that he lost contact with reality and the real picture of Egypt which had previously nourished him. In disgust he decided to leave this land of deception and squalor and go to the country of his choice. He was in a sort of bondage all this time, now the links seem to have snapped. Mount olive suffers a spectacular defeat at the hands of Leila, Memlik, Narouz and finally Egypt itself which is identified as the East. Thus the East invented by the West identified by Mount olive, rebels against its inventor and finally it is the East which defeats the West. Western imperialism was fast declining but the Orient could not offer a satisfactory solution in terms of metaphysical and philosophical ideas. It is very symbolical and significant that the novel ends in death of Narouz and the ritualistic customs which follow death. The "multidimensional mirror image" are shivered into "thousand fragments" and the reality is

Everything that might suggest the order and continuity of earthly life, domestic, personal or social must be discarded now and obliterated. The systematic destruction of the memory of death itself in plates, pictures, ornaments clothes....(Mountolive 315)

Mountolive is presented as a man at war with himself. He is a gifted individual who must conform to the demands of his profession. Even though he is placed near the centers of power, he is unable to initiate anything. He is a dedicated professional member of the English ruling classes but an immature person. Mount olive brings the mechanical world to Egypt in his mission and in this respect he is counter to the other characters. Finally, Nessim's and Justine's conspiracy is discovered and Mount olive reports it to the Egyptian authorities, though he personally loved and respected Nessim. Mount olive and Nessim represent the moral zeniths of power. While Mount olive was trained to use power within the context of public service, Nessim used power to keep up his family tradition. For both of them, power is only a duty an added responsibility and burden.

According to Rania M.Mahmoud:

Durrell's *Mountolive* de-contextualizes its narrative presenting it as a timeless Egyptian story of government corruption resulting from the Egyptian's flawed nature and their illogical proclivities. The novel imagines a superior British community, displaced by incompetent Egyptians who do not possess the skills to administer an efficient modern state. (Mahmoud "Fictions of Revolution" Preface)

It is observed, in the novel that Mount olive, Nessim and Justine become increasingly bound in the ego and the will and in their pursuit of power. They become a prey to gravitational forces of their own acts. Nessim and Justine survive the conspiracy at the expense of Nessim who loses an eye, a finger and much of his wealth. He is also bereft of his brother, Narouz and above all, he loses the love of his wife, Justine, who is kept under house arrest. Purse warden commits suicide. Darley proves to be a gentleman as he is an unfailing source of help and

sympathy to Nessim and Justine even though he is exploited and deceived by them. He finally arrives at the conclusion that love is not the only impetus for human actions. He rejects Justine on finding her glamour less. Thus almost all the characters in this naturalistic novel find their misfortunes bear their own fingerprints amidst the isolation and remorse prevalent in the atmosphere of the novel. All the agents in this novel are like pawns in a big, perfidious game that the city plays on them as if it were bent on experimenting on human beings.

The political quests of the characters in *The Alexandria Quartet* finally end in the streets and alleys especially in the case of Mount olive, who had fallen in love with Egypt but at the end of the novel is frustrated and disillusioned. Political intrigues are only a means of self-deception but do not give the solution to self-realization and self-discovery. Mount olive does not concur with Purse warden's attitude towards the artist. Despite their comradeship at the Embassy, Mount olive and Purse warden are contrasting personalities having opposite views:

The artist's work constitutes the only satisfactory relationship he can have with his fellowmen since he seeks his real friends among the dead and the unborn. That is why he cannot dabble in politics, it isn't his job. He must concentrate on values rather than policies. (Mountolive 63)

Death seems to be the final answer to the author's vision of reality but there is still a question about the nature of truth, which can be answered only by a further self-analysis of various experiences and encounters in life. The journey of the artist cannot end so abruptly and Lawrence Durrell leaves the ending of *Mount olive* open with a possibility of a continuation in his next novel.

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