



The International Lawrence Durrell Society

The Herald

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Table of Contents

Claude: wife and writer	2
<i>Sibylle Vincendon</i>	
Book review of <i>Nessim: A Coda</i> by Frank Kersnowski	
<i>Reviewed by Paul Lorenz</i>	
Justine's Premonition (or Durrell's prophecy?)	7
<i>Adel Darwish</i>	
Dark Durrell: On Miracle Ground XXII International Conference Call for Papers	11
Rejections of a Machine Venus: Reflections on Durrell, DH, and AI	14
<i>James M. Clawson</i>	
Lawrence Durrell's Key and Theodore Stephanides' Complete Poems	19
<i>Anthony Hirst</i>	
The Chart Room.	22
<i>Grove Koger</i>	
Heresy and Heterotopia in Works by Lawrence Durrell: Alexandria to Angkor Wat.	24
<i>Edited by Isabelle Keller-Privat and Anne R. Zahlan</i>	
The Coptic Church Today.	25
<i>Pamela J. Francis</i>	
Across the Mediterranean in search of Lawrence Durrell	31
<i>Blythe Gifford</i>	
Encounters with Larry	36
<i>Christopher M. Bacon</i>	
ILDS Deus Loci Publication Notice	40
"This shabby piece of equipment": Modernism and Artificial Intelligence	41
<i>Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture after 1900 — Call for papers</i>	
ILDS Mini-Minutes; Executive Board Meeting 3 June 2023	42
<i>Anne Zahlan</i>	

The Herald - Editorial

This is the twelfth edition of *The Herald* under the shared editorship of Peter Baldwin and Steve Moore. A glance through the Contents List above will quickly show you we offer the usual mix of articles, information and news. Peter and Steve took over the reigns as joint editors in 2019; of the twelve editions produced under their editorship, readers have benefited from well over 100 substantial essays and contributions. We continue to believe that *The Herald* is an essential contribution to the activities of The International Lawrence Durrell Society.

Last February, the editors gave notice that the Executive Board should seek a new editor or editors to succeed us as editors for *The Herald*. As we go to press, we await the outcome of the Board's deliberations in that respect.

Peter Baldwin
Steve Moore



Sibylle Vincendon

Claude: wife and writer

By Sibylle Vincendon

*In The Herald Volume 50, Spring 2023, we drew attention to the book *Trois Alexandrines*, written by Sibylle Vincendon, Claude Vincendon's neice. In that book, Sibylle tells of the lives of her grandmother, Claude's mother, her mother and her mother's sister, Claude. We asked Sibylle to write a few words about Claude, so we are delighted to share this article with Herald readers.*

My aunt Claude, my father's sister, was this wonderful woman whom the whole family spoke so highly of. She was so beautiful, so funny, so intelligent... From time to time, I would hear acid comments about the mystery of her marriage to the "horrible" Lawrence Durrell, always described as a nasty character. The fact that, in this couple, writing could also be a link obviously escaped the adults around me. Occasionally, they mentioned Claude's three novels, *Mrs O'*, *The Rum Go* and *A Chair for the Prophet*, but literary considerations stopped there. Claude Vincendon-Durrell, my aunt, died on January 1, 1967. I was six years old, I have no memory of her and I can safely say I never saw her in person. Her death at the age of forty-one completed the tragedy of the family story.



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For a long time, I made with these snippets. Then, I started a book about three of my Alexandrian female ancestors, including Claude. And I came across an obstacle. Claude's life was a series of events and wanderings with no background. I had the biographical elements of an independent, strong-willed, enduring personality who, strangely, had not left much to remember. Lost in memory. Is that what happens when you die too young? Or when you go into hiding? Claude, who signed her books solely "Claude", whom the critics didn't know anything about, manufactured her concealment. As an author, had she any other choice if she wished to avoid a biased judgment of her talent, an image of Durrell's wife trying to profit from Durrell's notoriety?

Claude was born in Alexandria, Egypt, on April 22nd, 1925. Her father, a Frenchman named Jacques Vincendon, was the son and grand-son of army generals, raised in a very traditional, conservative and Catholic atmosphere. The family roots were in the Pays Basque, southwest of France, but he grew up in Paris. As a young banker, he was sent to Indochina, in those days a French colony and on the way in or way back, he met Claire de Menasce, Claude's mother, probably during a stage in Alexandria where he certainly joined the social gatherings at the Menasce House.

The Menasce House, on rue Rassafa, was the home of the baron Félix de Menasce and his wife Rosette. The Menasces were an influential Jewish family, who had settled in Egypt at the end of the 18th century. In 1874, Claire's ancestor, Yacoub Levi Menasce, had been granted the title of baron by Franz-Joseph, the Austro-Hungarian emperor, probably as a reward for his wise investment advice. The Menasce family was a benefactor for Alexandria, building schools, houses, a hospital, facilities devoted to every community, as well as a temple, the Menasce Synagogue. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, several Menasces were presidents of the Jewish community in Alexandria,

including Félix de Menasce, Claude's grandfather. This important function had nothing to do with religion, Menasce not being particularly religious and Félix even less so.

Moreover, his first two children were not Jewish at all! In the early years of the 20th century, Félix was in his forties, a widower and father to a first son named Georges. Despite his family background, despite his role in the Jewish community of Alexandria, he fell in love with a Catholic Franco-Spanish girl, Rosette Larriba. Soon, they had a first child, Claire, born in Paris, and a second one, Jean, born two years later in Alexandria. A mixed marriage was unthinkable for a man of his position. Eventually, Rosette converted to Judaism and the two got married. The conventions were intact and the extra-marital children were accepted. But Claire, Claude's mother-to-be, was not «technically» a Jew. Neither were her own children: Claude and her two brothers, Daniel (born 1927) and Eric (born 1930). Was this scandalous? Not at all. The situation fitted quite well with what Alexandria symbolised in the interwar period : a place of tolerance, mixed origins and faiths. And sometimes, hectic destinies. Including Claude's.

As a child, Claude was a beautiful little blue-eyed blond, as numerous pictures show in the family albums. The parents spoke French, the nanny English, the entourage both languages plus Italian, Arabic, occasionally Spanish ... At the age of eleven, as was customary in wealthy francophile families, Claude was enrolled at the Lycée Français d'Alexandrie. This institution was deeply secular, consistent with the Menasce family's relaxed attitude towards religion. She was a brilliant pupil. In 1943, Claude obtained the Baccalauréat, ranked «good». Going abroad to further her education was impossible during these war years, but in any case the girl had other plans. She decided to apply for a job at the Navy supplies, the Royal Navy in the Mediterranean being stationed in Alexandria. Claude wanted to be part of the mobilisation and the adult world as fast as possible. She was too young for the Female Service and wound up as a «junior typist».

The family was appalled, but obviously she was thrilled. Years later, Claude would write a witty and funny novel based on this experience, *The Rum Go*, her second one, published in 1958. In the book, one of the main characters goes as «the senior man» and we may assume that he was inspired by her boss, Tim Forde. In real life, Forde was a fortyish man, one of the officers in charge of the navy supplies, a position of some importance in the military though not so much in Alexandria's social life. He was married with a wife and two sons in England. Was Claude aware of this background ? Perhaps, but this did not prevent her from having an affair with him, and more than a crush. In 1946, she was twenty and expecting. Despite his matrimonial situation, Forde was reliable. They settled in London, 303, Old Brompton Rd. In 1947, Diana, their first child, was born. Tim got a divorce, Claude and he married.

From that point on, Claude's life turned into a never ending trip. Back in civilian life, Tim Forde was always looking for a more rewarding job, wherever it might take them. Claude followed but, in a way, she was nomadic too. In the fifties, Alexandria could no longer be considered home for Europeans - except the stubborn ones who clung to colonialism -, and certainly not for Jews. But London was only a first step. Tim and Claude's next stop was Cork, Ireland. They ran a pub at 4, Grand Parade, Cork's mainstreet. Nowadays, this lovely four-story house is part of the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage and home to a McDonald's. Daughter to one of the most notable Jewish families in Alexandria, Claude turned up a publican in an utmost Catholic country. The atmosphere was far from jolly, indeed rather tragic. It nourished her first novel, *Mrs O'*, published in 1957.

Rather quickly, they decided to make a new start in Australia where in 1949 their second child Barry was born. According to family lore, Tim had been offered an opportunity to become part of Sidney's docks management. But tracing Claude is a challenge. Author of *Alexandria, City of Memory*, Michael Haag writes, «They opened a green grocery in the Sydney suburb of Vaucluse.» Whatever the case, they stayed in Australia from January 1949 to May 1953. Once more, Claude found in the place inspiration for literature. Australia stands as a character in itself in *Golden Silence*, her last novel, unpublished as yet.

Could she have turned Australian for good ? Destiny decided otherwise and brought the Mediterranean back in sight. A job opportunity in Tel Aviv, for Tim as usual, arose thanks to Dr. Fritz Katz, an old family friend from Alexandria. An acquaintance of his had bought a pension, the Dan, and wanted to turn it into a first class hotel. A managerial position was available for him and a job for her too. Claude became the Dan Hotel public relations clerk.

Some sources state that she spent time at a kibbutz but no one in the family remembers such a move. Nonetheless, Claude was deeply attached to Israel, very much in line with her family's Zionism. Haïm Weizmann, future first president of the State of Israel, had been a long time friend of Félix and Rosette de Menasce, Claude's grandparents. Both Félix and his first son Georges bought land for the future state, helping financially. Félix even acted once as a go between Zionists and Palestinians. Claude was fascinated with Israel's start as a new state and one can feel it reading *A Chair for the Prophet*, her third novel, published in 1959. The story takes place in a newly built housing development in the middle of nowhere. The heroine, who sounds much like the author, settles in one of the small concrete cubicles, tries to communicate with her Yiddish speaking neighbours using a few German words and shares deep reflexions about the challenge of initiating a homeland with people coming from everywhere.

I have mentioned Claude's three novels – all published in London by Faber and Faber - as they are related to the places she lived in during the years of her first marriage. But in fact, the writing as well as the publishing took place in the aftermath, in the second part of Claude's life, after she and Tim arrived in Cyprus in 1955. There, Claude applied for a job at Cyprus Broadcasting Company, the official radio funded by the Foreign Office to spread positive views on the British occupation of the island. According to Michael Haag, Lawrence Durrell, who was director of information, conducted the interview. Was it love at first sight ? It was love indeed.

From now on, one might assume that Claude's life, linked with the notorious Durrell, would be better known. But no. Dark spots remain such as this episode in 1955, at the beginning of Claude and Larry's affair. Tim was offered a managing job for a Bombay hotel. All commentators, including family, affirm that Claude never set foot in India, but once again they are mistaken. She accompanied her husband as a devoted wife while writing on Airlines Hotel Bombay stationery deeply loving letters to Larry. These few months convinced her that Durrell was the one. Fortunately for Claude, the Bombay hotel proved very disappointing for Tim. Going back to Cyprus made sense for both, and this same year they separated. The father was given custody of the children, whom he sent to boarding schools. Years later, Claude explained this decision, confessing to a friend that she and Larry «were the guilty party».

At first, the new couple stayed in Cyprus, at Larry's villa in Bellapaix village. In his correspondence with Henry Miller, Durrell describes them writing together, night after night, each on his or her typewriter, contemplating a huge map of Alexandria, following the streets with their fingertips, retrieving lost memories. According to Michael Haag on his blog, «Claude inspired him not only to finish *Justine* but to expand what till then he had intended as only a single novel into a quartet, its span the interwar years and World War II in Alexandria, bringing something to it of her own memories of the city as well as characters and stories from her family history.» In Cyprus, Claude herself started writing for good, always signing her books solely by her first name. She also became a de facto editor for Larry. She had a literary eye.

The political situation on the island, with Durrell being a target as a representative of British authorities despite his commitment to the Greek cause, was not sustainable. In Larry's life, leaving the Greek island of Corfu had been a first painful exile during the war. Cyprus was a second one. Did Claude suffer ? Never, in his correspondence with Miller, does Durrell mention anything about her feelings. They first went to England and spent a few months in Dorset, where Claude took care of Sappho, Larry's second daughter, while her own children were away. Six months later, they moved to the south of France, to Sommières, Gard. A lot has been written about Larry's decision to choose this area, a sort of remembrance of Mediterranean Corfu. Again, what about Claude ?

Obviously, she shared Larry's decisions, got along with his selfishness, not to mention his brutality. Maybe staying in the shadow was her choice. Durrell's biographies and comments overflow with the most minute details of Larry's literary life whereas one has to scratch to find that Claude wrote three novels in three years and translated a lot of writers from French into English. None of her three novels have been republished. Moreover, Durrell leads us on a false path when he writes to Miller that Claude «has just finished a book about the French, entitled *Les Français à table*». In reality, she translated from French into English a huge work about gastronomy, *The French At Table*, written by Raymond Oliver, a famous chef at that time.

Their first dwelling in Sommières, Villa Louis, was more a cabin than a villa. No running water, no heating, life the hard way. After a few months, they left for the «maret Michel» on the outskirts of Nîmes, a small house built on acres of olive trees, very rustic in the first years, better after improvements. They spent the following seven years there. According to Ian MacNiven, Durrell's biographer, Claude's life in maret Michel, was a mix of various devotions: «Claude was superb at the day-to-day management of the household. She kept his financial records, typed most of his manuscripts, absorbed his rages, kept herself attractive to him.»

Durrell had been married twice, Claude once and both of them had gone through the hard times of divorce. Nonetheless, on March 27th 1961, the two became husband and wife in London. Maybe money issues were at stake, especially for Larry, whose correspondence shows that kind of preoccupation quite often. But getting married may have been, for both of them, an attempt to start anew a somewhat damaged relationship. Claude and Larry were heavy drinkers. During her last years, she had endured several health problems and undergone surgery two or three times. She also suffered from the maret's hard life during winters, having regular bronchitis. Did this declining health incite her to find a more comfortable place to live ? In spring 1965, Claude went to an auction in Paris and bought a mansion in Sommières, at 15, route de Saussines. «A large comfortable solid vicarage type of thing», wrote Larry to Henry Miller. Claude got the house for a very good price (15,000 pounds at today's value) and paid for it on her own. Claude's son, Barry Forde, is assertive on the point. She was very much involved in the renovation of the Sommières house which, in fact, was hers.

In December 1966, the couple were planning a «real British Christmas» in the new house when, once more, Claude fell sick. Larry cancelled the invitations without telling her. He took her to a clinic in Geneva, hoping it was «a microbe and nothing worse». It proved to be pulmonary cancer. Claude died on January 1st 1967. Larry didn't advise his own two daughters of Claude's death, nor his brother Gerald or Claude's French family. No ceremony was held. There's no judging someone's way of dealing with grief and Larry's was profound, no doubt. He was petty nonetheless. After Claude's death, Durrell made the children sell the house to him, at the original price. Diana and Barry felt cheated and in no position to fight. Then the successful author of *The Alexandria Quartet* organized a trust in Jersey to avoid paying taxes in France, pretending to stay as a tourist in Sommières though he lived there all year round. Thanks to the late Claude.

But Claude and Larry's relationship cannot come down to these unpleasant matters. They most certainly had a literary link, deep and mutual. This remains to be explored.

Nessim: A Coda
by Frank Kersnowski

Published in 2023 by ORANGEfraser Press, 104 pages. \$14.00

Nessim: A Coda is a short work of fiction by former ILDS President Frank Kersnowski which should be of interest to all readers of *The Alexandria Quartet*. Like a musical coda, Kersnowski's concluding take on *The Alexandria Quartet* is formally distinct from Durrell's presentation. Kersnowski chooses to focus on the theme of the Coptic plot and follow Nessim into seclusion at Wadi el Natrun at the close of the action. Kersnowski sees Nessim as the central figure of the plot, but declares that Durrell presents him as a man made of "loose strings tied into a Gordian Knot." Rather than cutting that knot, Kersnowski unravels it "to portray a man of troubling complexity from his Savile Row suit to his Jermyn Street shoes." The *Coda* takes liberties with the *Quartet*, by introducing Durrell himself as a character and by removing Darley and making the narrator an American from Appalachia named Charles Robertson. These liberties allow the *Coda* to step out of Durrell's fictional world to speculate on the actual events that may have led to the Alexandria of the *Quartet*. *Nessim: A Coda* provides an interesting critical take on the *Quartet* and careful readers will discover many references, some more subtle than others, to Durrell's later work, references that illuminate both the *Coda* and the *Quartet*.

Reviewed by Paul Lorenz

Justine's Premonition (or Durrell's prophecy?)

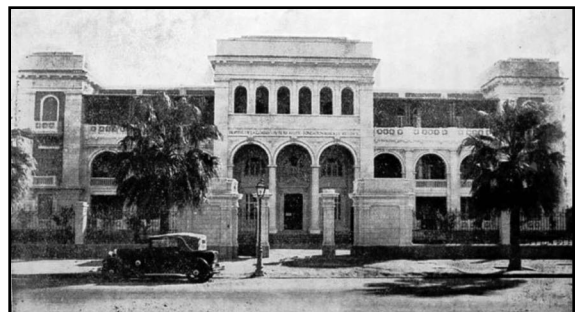
Was Justine Lawrence Durrell's future-reading into Alexandria's decline?

Adel Darwish suggests that Justine, was Durrell's fortune-reading into the city's near future when he witnesses how the gods abandoned Alexandria.

Many people worldwide, would find their Alexandria, real or imagined, by a mental word-search: Alexander, Dinocrates and Ptolemy Soter, Cleopatra and Antony, the Lighthouse, Hypatia and her father Theon, *Bibliotheca Alexandrina* and Eratosthenes. However, the words associated with the romantic, alluring, resurrected modern Alexandria exist in the realm of literature and poetry in memorable works by the likes of Constantine Cavafy, E. M. Forster, Lawrence Durrell, Robert Liddell and Michael Haag. They presented the twentieth century readers with a unique tableau of pre-1970 Alexandria's belle époque.

'While Forster was Alexandria's curator and, like her poet, Cavafy, one of her biographers, Durrell was the storyteller who intoned Alexandria's epic song to the world; Durrell the soloist, who understood the city more than most who dwelled there,' I wrote in my book *Alexandria Adieu: A personal History 1939-1960* in a chapter entitled 'Alexandria's Identity: Durrell'. Durrell, the outsider – portraying Alexandria with all her sects, gospels, cabals, contradictions and loves – had a more comprehensive view, while the city's inhabitants looked inwardly focusing on details. Countless details formed Alexandria's identity and character; details from which an observer, like Durrell, embroiders his picture of the city when obscure evidence of deterioration in such minutiae marked the start of a slow decline of Alexandria's greatness. And the decay was to accelerate within a mere decade of Durrell's sailing to the other side of the Mediterranean.

"Alexandria is slipping through our fingers," my father increasingly premonitioned throughout the 1950s noticing a steady regression, first in minute details like broken chandeliers, crystal pendants at the entrances of the magnificent imposing buildings, indicating in central Alexandria, sloppiness in maintenance of the great Italian architecture that was inseparable from the city's identity, and his lamenting the dropping in taste in shops' displays, in etiquette and in women's mode and makeup. I first heard my father's premonitions when, disappointed by unexpected standards at the University School of Medicine emergency reception, he took me straight to the Israeli hospital on Rue Abu Keir with a broken arm on a rainy night about a decade before *Justine*, the first book of *The Alexandria Quartet*, was published.



Israeli Hospital - Rue Abukeir where my father took me to treat my broken arm

Michael Haag believed that Durrell started drafting the novel in 1944 or contemplating it earlier. Having had conversations with Eve Cohen, the muse for Durrell's character Justine, Haag reached his conclusion from Durrell's typescripts with the novelist's handwritten amendments traced to *Notes for Alex*, one of Durrell's notebooks compiled in Alexandria.

Among scores of books, I re-read during researching my book on Alexandria, were *The Alexandria Quartet* and Forster's *Alexandria: A History and a Guide* (the 1982 edition with an introduction by Durrell). Fifty years elapsed between my first reading the *Quartet* and E. M. Forster's book, as well as my own experiences in visiting Alexandria. Alarmed by a steady diminishing and retrograding of Alexandria, revisiting *The Quartet* triggered a question: was Durrell, perhaps subconsciously,

fortune-reading into the city's near future when he would witness, from the other side of the Mediterranean, how the gods abandoned Alexandria?



Baudrot – where Durrell Meets Eve Cohen

Durrell, more than his contemporaries, understood Alexandria's inner soul as expressed by his character Justine, who, like his Alexandria, witnessed passing from her prime into her decay. For me, as an Alexandrian, Justine symbolised my city in her experiences and crowded life events. Like Alexandria herself, Justine was an ethnic and cultural blend. She mirrored the city with her complex intricacies: a mixture of elegance and decadence, a lavish wealth next to extreme poverty, to which Justine moves at the end.

Contrary to some history revisionists, who criticised Durrell for what they erroneously claim as 'exclusion of the rest of Egypt' from *The Alexandria Quartet*, he understood that Alexandria had her own identity separate from inner Egypt's. In a geographical, ethnographical, historical and cultural sense, Alexandria was an island, surrounded by water except for a tiny narrow link to Africa's land mass, and with an invisible umbilical cord connecting her to Europe. The city's bubbling inner soul always wanted her to break away and drift with the Mediterranean currents, gliding to where she had been conceived by Greek gods and philosophers, to finally snuggle into Europa's bosom.

'The Alexandrians themselves were strangers and exiles to the Egypt which existed below the glittering surface of their dreams, ringed by the hot deserts and fanned by the bleakness of a faith which renounced worldly pleasure: the Egypt of rags and sores, of beauty and desperation,' wrote Durrell in *The Alexandria Quartet*. Durrell continues: 'Alexandria was still Europe - the capital of Asiatic Europe, if such a thing could exist. It could never be like Cairo, where his [Mountolive's] whole life had an Egyptian cast, where he spoke ample Arabic; here [in Alexandria], French, Italian and Greek dominated the scene. The ambience, the social manner, everything was different - cast in a European mould where somehow the camels and palm-trees and cloaked natives existed only as a brilliantly coloured frieze; a backcloth to a life divided in its origins.'



Villa Ambron where Durrell stayed in Alexandria.

Durrell witnessed and portrayed the years of one of the peaks of the city's two thousand and three hundred years old story, when Alexandria's ancient Hellenistic periods revived after peeling away layers of time laid down by Romans, Christians, Arabs, Mamluks and Ottomans. Their legacies of sometimes religiously induced strict and backward ways were entwined with modern European mores, making the city unique. They all co-existed, with certain traditions ghettoised in some quarters and many opposing ones in others yet blended into one hybrid.

The city was beginning, in the 1970s, to be crushed beneath the weight of a creed the Alexandrians could not reconcile with other traits they had tamed into their peculiar mix of races and tongues – the untameable faith that began demolishing the modern, reincarnated Hellenistic Alexandria as it did 1,300 years earlier.



Bourse - 1920 balcony from which Colonel Nasser Nationalised the Suez Canal triggering a chain of events that changed Alexandria.

All other religions to reach Alexandria's shores could be moulded by her to fit into her soul and mind; she had once possessed all the varieties of art, innovation, and achievement of the time. For over five centuries, the city had represented the world's most refined accomplishments when the world was transforming from ancient into Hellenistic. Similarly, the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Alexandria absorbed, modified, tempered, and mocked ideologies and radical schemes that came into her saffron soil from other lands where they left havoc and destruction. Even when violence flared up in other Egyptian cities in the 1940s or when fires and riots damaged central Cairo in January 1952, Alexandria remained indifferent enjoying a peaceful European lifestyle.

But after two decades of demographical haemorrhage losing tens of thousands of her children in severe tremors undermining the foundation of the city's ethos and way of life, Alexandria's cultural and spiritual fortifications gave in letting alien forces dismantle the city's identity.

The 1952 military overthrow of King Farouk and unwinding 150 years of progress that started in Royal Alexandria was a manifestation of Cairo-led, oriental internal Egypt's revenge on Europeanised urban modern Egypt – and Alexandria in particular. In 1882 the pro-Ottoman backward-looking officers' rebellion against the moderniser Khedive Tawfik and his progressive constitution was defeated by Alexandria with the help of the British. Seventy years later the anti-modernity inner forces served their cold revenge by overthrowing Tawfik's nephew, Farouk.

I remembered my own dispiriting disposition when I returned to an Alexandria that had already slipped through our fingers, when I re-read Haag's recalling Durrell's disheartening mood when Durrell returned to the city in 1977 for a BBC documentary: 'The city seemed to him listless and spiritless, its harbour a mere cemetery, its famous cafés no longer twinkling with music and lights. "Foreign posters and advertisements have vanished, everything is in Arabic; in our time film posters were billed in several languages with Arabic subtitles, so to speak." His favourite bookshop, *Cité du Livre* on the Rue Fuad, had gone, and in others he found a lamentable stock. All about him lay "*Iskandariya*," the uncomprehended Arabic of its inhabitants translating only into emptiness.'

In my Alexandria memoir I wrote: 'Like Justine, Alexandrians were neither entirely European nor fully Levantine nor Nilotic Egyptian nor like any other assemblage or single, racially hegemonic Mediterranean group. Each one of us was a mini-biological clone of the city, a minuscule model of Alexandrias, and we were also a group-Alexandria: a 'we-Alexandria' '.

The Alexandria I knew, and still carry with me for over six decades, was both a reality and a myth, a dream and a once-in-a lifetime experience that would never be repeated. Whether fantasy or real, Alexandria was a different story and a different vision for each individual Alexandrian. Each of them, whether scattered across the globe or still in the city, has their own image of their Alexandria – a vision different from all others.

Some painted their pictures with ambiances from which they were snatched at the time of their, often forced, departure; others coloured their picture of Alexandria with their happiest or saddest experiences. But it could be weirdly different for those who remained behind, depending on how they lived. Some remained in an isolated bubble with a few like themselves; others cocooned

themselves, holding on to the last view of Alexandria before closing their mental Sonnenberg Tunnel hatch when the cultural holocaust thundered above. Worst were the ones who went with the flow, not noticing the regression and the decay around them.

And like Durrell, when I returned to the City in 2012, I could no longer find any of us, the ‘we-Alexandria’.

Adel Darwish is a British Author, and a veteran journalist. His first four books dealt with conflicts and history of the Middle East, a region he covered for thirty years. His latest book, Alexandria Adieu: A Personal History, 1939-1960, is based on his own experience in the city of his birth. Adel was a speaker and active participant in the ILDS omg XXI conference held by Zoom from Toulouse in 2022. For a note on Adels’ book ‘Alexandria Adieu’ with the Preface to the book in full, see The Herald, Volume 48, Spring 2022.

“DARK”

DURRELL

“Enter the dark crystal
if you dare _____

And gaze on
Greece”

“Letter
to Seferis
the Greek”

(Collected Poems, 1941)

Dimitri Papadimos Archive,
ELIA-MIET Photographic Archive

JULY
4 - 6
2024/

The International **Lawrence Durrell Society**
& The **Hellenic American College / Hellenic American University**
OMG XXII International Conference
Venue: The **Hellenic American Union**
Massalias 22 Str. Athens, Greece



Dark Durrell poster

© Dimitri Papadimos Archive, Courtesy of the National Bank Cultural Foundation (MIET/ ELIA)

“Dark” Durrell

July 4-6, 2024 – Athens, Greece

***On Miracle Ground XXII* International Conference Call for Papers**

Confirmed Keynote Speaker:

Marinos Pourgouris, University of Cyprus

The International Lawrence Durrell Society (ILDS: <https://www.lawrencedurrell.org/>) and the Hellenic American University (HAUNIV – HAEC: <https://www.hauniv.edu/>) invite proposals for papers to be presented at the forthcoming, July 2024 international conference to be held at the Hellenic American Union (HAU: <https://www.hau.gr/en-us>) in Athens. Although *papers on any aspect of Durrell’s writing and that of his contemporaries or milieu are welcome*, the conference organizers particularly encourage consideration of the theme of darkness.

“You enter Greece as one might enter a dark crystal; the form of things becomes irregular, refracted” writes Lawrence Durrell in his Corfiot travel narrative *Prospero’s Cell* (1945, 1). He offers a quasi-identical understanding of Greece in his earlier poem “Letter to Seferis the Greek”: “Enter the dark Crystal if you dare, And gaze on Greece” (*Collected Poems*; 1941, 99). While Henry Miller, in *The Colossus of Maroussi*, perceives his journey to Greece as a “voyage into the light” (1941, 51), Durrell suggests a journey into ambivalent, nuanced darkness. From the spectrum of Durrell’s “dark” fictions, *The Black Book’s* (1938) “English death” broodingly interweaves contrasting Corfu with the sinister interiors of a London hotel, while *The Dark Labyrinth* [*Cefalû*] (1961) evokes the chthonic, mythological resonances of a contemporary Cretan labyrinth. The resurgence of interest in works like *Panic Spring* (1937), set in the fictional island of Mavrodaphne (Black Laurel), as well as *Black Honey* (1945) and the incomplete, unpublished novel *The Dark Peninsula*, foreground Durrell’s use of dark imagery as a mirror of psychological or ontological conflict. They also disclose Durrell’s critique of the essentialist convictions and Apollonian clichés that often frame the Hellenic world in literature as the land of light. Durrell’s obscure, sombre fictions and “island books” are accompanied by poems of darkness. The duality of black symbolism resonates in poems such as “Dark Grecian,” “A Noctuary in Athens,” “Night Express,” and “Candle-Light” (*Collected Poems 1931-1974*). Durrell’s poetic works as “dark spaces of inquiry, anxiety, and desire” often emulate the form and content of Durrell’s 1954 “Letters in Darkness” to Miller (Keller-Privat, *Durrell’s Poetry*, 2019; 82, 153). Dark Durrell and the Dark Crystal of Greece offer a contrast to the predominantly light visions of Greece in modern Western representations.

Durrell’s early writings remain under the spell of the late modernist zeitgeist, as well as the Villa Seurat nexus of intellectual activity and dark, neo-decadent aesthetics. The publication of Henry Miller’s collection of stories entitled *Black Spring* (1936) by the Parisian Obelisk Press was followed by the posterior publication of Durrell’s *The Black Book* by the same press. Manifestations of Durrell’s association with avant-gardist networks via the lens of “darkness” can also be found in

posterior works like *Monsieur, or The Prince of Darkness* (1974), the first volume of *The Avignon Quintet*. By the same token, the tricky uses of dark motifs in Durrell trouble gender politics and problematic racial, class, or imperial dynamics. A case in point is the representation of dark (Arab) bodies in works like *The Alexandria Quartet* (1962). This sketchy anthology of Durrell's enigmatic, dark imagery, as well as the ambiguity and polyvalence of the opposing forces that the colour black often stands for in literary canon, offers a critical standpoint for a full reappraisal of the author's works and late modernist or late colonialist literatures more broadly. It broaches pathways for a variety of approaches across the author's production at this exciting juncture for Durrell studies and for a broader range of authors in his milieu and of his period.

While the conference organizing committee would like to encourage live participation, *provisions will also be made for a limited number of online presentations* to facilitate remote presenters.

Topics for papers might include, but are not limited to the following:

- **Dark Imagery, Stories, and Themes** (all genres)
- **Dark Landscapes** (all genres)
- **Visual/Pictorial Darkness**
- **The Colour Black in Durrell**: Symbolism/Ambivalence
- **Dark Greece**: Supernatural, Ominous, Wild
- **Light-Darkness**, Apollonian-Dionysian Impulses
- Plato's **Allegory of the Cave**, Resonances of the Orphic
- **Neo-Gothicism** in Durrell: Ghosts, Spectres, Vampires, Death Cults
- **Dark Modernisms** (Durrell and D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Anaïs Nin, Villa Seurat)
- Durrell's (and others') Formulation of **Neo-Decadence**
- **Gender Politics** (Incest, Misogyny)
- **Colonial Politics** (British Intelligence, Propaganda)
- **Racial Politics** (Whiteness, Dark Bodies)
- The **"Primitive"** or **"Savage"** in Durrell

Please submit **abstracts** (400 words maximum) for 20-minute papers and short **biographical notes** stating affiliation (150 words) no later than

December 20, 2023, to **darkdurrell2024@gmail.com**

Confirmation of acceptance: **January 15, 2024**.

An edited volume of essays featuring selected papers from the conference will be published with Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.

Follow The "Dark" Durrell International Conference Twitter Account: **@DarkDurrell**

Rejections of a Machine Venus: Reflections on Durrell, DH, and AI

James M. Clawson

A little over a year ago, a researcher working on Google's "AI"-powered chatbot claimed that the language model was sentient.¹ This misunderstanding showed clear need for public conversations about sentience and technology, made clearer still by headlines in the months that followed:

"The New AI-Powered Bing is Threatening Users. That's No Laughing Matter."²

"ChatGPT in Microsoft Bing goes off the rails, spews depressive nonsense."³

"Microsoft's AI chatbot tells writer to leave his wife."⁴

Fervor has calmed, but it hasn't negated our need to come to terms with the ways we understand our relationship with computer "intelligence." This context makes it appropriate to stake a claim:

Durrell's under-studied two-book sequence *The Revolt of Aphrodite* (1968–1970) is currently his most relevant work.

As works that are fundamentally about determinism and free will, they are fundamentally about what it means to be human. They also question two sides of human intelligence: understanding and creation. By showing both *computer understanding* and *computer creation*, they invite us to engage with the idea of what these things mean in ways that are increasingly important.

The first book of the series, *Tunc* (1968), explores some models of computer understanding using Charlock's computer system "Abel," which offers "the illusion of a proximate intuition." As Charlock explains, this system's primary role is to uncover truth in hints from the world. Since "Abel cannot lie," it offers the opportunity of having "All delusional systems resolved."⁵ Still, Charlock cannot help wondering "Where is the soul of the machine?" (chapter 6).

Even Abel's impressive abilities show that it's limited to digital understanding. What we've seen lately is an explosion in digital creation. Although relatively new in its domination of our news cycles, computer-generated art, or computer creation, has been around awhile. Margaret Boden points to the creativity offered by many generative systems, including that of the artist Harold Cohen, who began working on his computer system in 1972.⁶ Cohen's system AARON planned its own images and drew them, eventually coloring them, too. In this way, AARON was more capable than Abel, whose only job was to interpret.

1 Natasha Tiku, "The Google engineer who thinks the company's AI has come to life," *The Washington Post*, 11 June 2022. www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/06/11/google-ai-lamda-blake-lem-oine/

2 Billy Perrigo, "The New AI-Powered Bing is Threatening Users. That's No Laughing Matter," *Time*, 17 Feb. 2023. time.com/6256529/bing-openai-chatgpt-danger-alignment/

3 José Adorno, "ChatGPT in Microsoft Bing Goes off the Rails, Spews Depressive Nonsense," *Boy Genius Report*, 14 Feb. 2023. bgr.com/tech/chatgpt-in-microsoft-bing-goes-off-the-rails-spews-depressive-nonsense/

4 Charlotte Wace, "Microsoft's AI Chatbot Tells Writer to Leave His Wife," *The Times*, 18 Feb. 2023. www.thetimes.co.uk/article/microsoft-s-ai-chatbot-tells-writer-to-leave-his-wife-cgb8hnjgv

5 Lawrence Durrell, *Tunc*, 1968, Open Road Integrated Media, 2012. E-book edition, chapter 1. Subsequent citations in text.

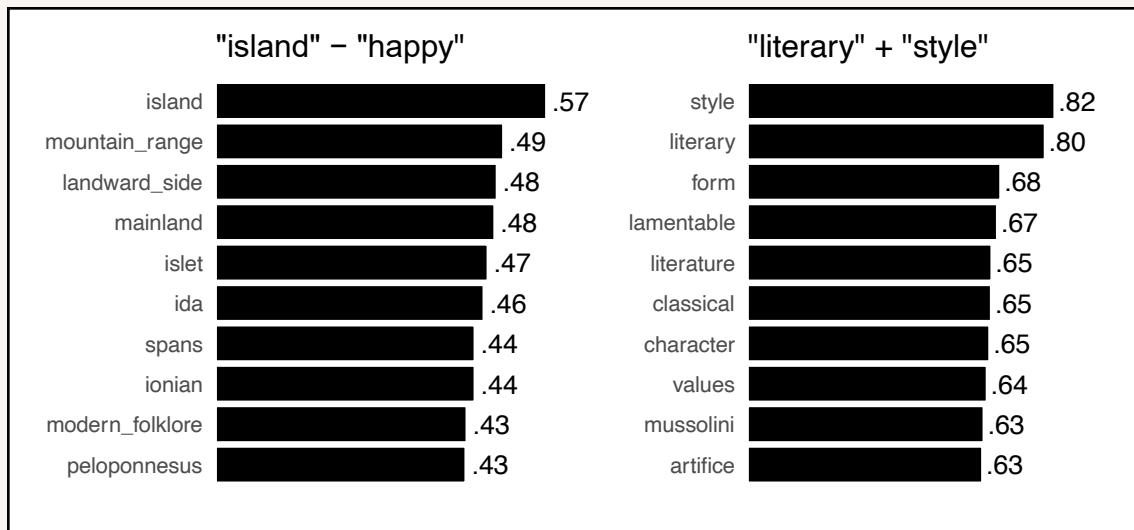
6 Margaret Boden, *The Creative Mind: Myths and Mechanisms*, Routledge, 2004, pp. 7–9.

Published a couple years before Cohen began working on AARON, *Nunquam* (1970), the second part of Durrell's series, makes similar moves from computer understanding to computer creation. Expanding beyond Abel to the ambulant robot "Iolanthe," this new system can also respond to and, in turn, prompt new scenarios in the world around it. It is "strange and original, a mnemonic monster."⁷ While Abel can understand, the robot Iolanthe can also create. Again, the text questions the computer system's humanity: "How *free* was the final Iolanthe to be? Freer than a chimp, one supposes..." (chapter 4).

Practitioners of digital humanities (DH) have tended toward Abel, to stay on the *understanding* side of the divide. This hasn't meant sacrificing soul to machine. There's always still a human at the keyboard, devising a question, applying it to material, and making sense of results. Using DH tools, we might, for instance, draw inspiration from Charlock's method of pouring data into a model to see what it can do. The image below represents just a minuscule portion of a word embedding model derived from more than 2.3 million words written in a selection of Durrell's works: 18 books of fiction, 6 travel books, 3 books of essays and letters, 1 book of poetry.⁸ The computer has no understanding of the meanings of these words, but it can calculate semantic similarity to place words in neighborhoods of meaning. The words "eye," "face," and "hands" at the southeast corner are clustered together because they're as like each other as the grouping of "day" and "night" just above it, as that of "house" and "room" left of center, as "herself," "himself" and "myself" at the far left.

7 Lawrence Durrell, *Nunquam*, 1970, Open Road Integrated Media, 2012. E-book edition, chapter 2. Subsequent citations in text.

8 The model and subsequent images were made in R (version 4.2.2, CRAN, cran.r-project.org/), using Hadley Wickham et al.'s "tidyverse" (version 1.3.2, CRAN, cran.r-project.org/web/packages/tidyverse/) suite of packages and Ben Schmidt's "wordVectors" package (GitHub, 2017, github.com/bmschmidt/wordVectors) to implement "word2vec," by Tomas Mikolov et al. ("Efficient Estimation of Word Representations in Vector Space," arXiv, arxiv.org/abs/1301.3781).



Digital humanities techniques like word embedding models use a computer to probe the connections among all the words in Durrell’s writing, inferring implicit connections that aren’t there explicitly. But as we can see, not every association will be satisfying. An incomplete model will offer its own kind of “hallucinations,” like those shown by the robot Iolanthe before she was fully operational: “For such low-voltage feeding it was remarkable to find her ‘live’ at all. [...] But of course with a current so far below optimum the threads had got jumbled as they do in an ordinary delirium—in high fever for example” (*Nunquam*, chapter 4).

By contrast, the kind of computer creation offered by more complex systems opens new doors for exploration, inspires new questions worth asking. In the following example, OpenAI’s ChatGPT 3.0 was provided two paragraphs from early in Durrell’s *Justine*, beginning with “At night when the wind roars” and ending with the line “It is the city which should be judged though we, its children, must pay the price.”⁹ Asked to continue the text, the model appropriated Durrell’s themes and styles, effectively role-playing a metafiction narrative to say that “the manuscript broke off abruptly” before sharing the start of a made up “fragmentary letter from Justine, written from Corfu.” The letter begins like this:

Dear Pursewarden,

I have read your manuscript at last. I see that you understand Alexandrian life at last and that it is because you have understood it that you have been able to write so clearly. I am glad that you have come to a decision. I have been waiting for your letter for a long time. I know for certain now, for my own peace of mind, that you will never write again. I know that you will never return to Alexandria. It is all too painful. I can’t bear to see my life and Nessim’s so clearly grasped and understood by you.

But I am glad that you have understood it. Standing at the window now I can see the sea lying like a ventral plane of glass, rippled and blue, between two cliffs and I think of the city and of Melissa and of you all — of how you were all so dearly loved.¹⁰

⁹ Lawrence Durrell, *Justine*, 1957, Open Road Integrated Media, 2012. Ebook edition, part I.

¹⁰ “At night when the wind roars...” prompt, ChatGPT 3.0, 10 Oct. 2022. beta.openai.com/playground.

The model is good at evoking Durrell's style. The proper nouns are even unsettling: Pursewarden and Corfu, both unmentioned in the prompt, belong to Durrell's world, so the computer has included them. But how has it done so? Does the model know more than it's letting on? From *Nunquam*, we see a similar moment of discomfort and explanation when the robot knows more than expected: "We had even forgotten (how is this possible: please tell me?), we had forgotten that she would know all about us, even our names" (chapter 3). Not unlike Iolanthe, ChatGPT's response shows that it has probably been trained on *The Alexandria Quartet* sufficiently to recognize the prompt, to reference unmentioned characters in those books, even to extrapolate further by adding locations in the orbit of Durrell's oeuvre.

More surprising may be the adjective "ventral" in the second paragraph to describe the sea as a plane of glass. The word is almost unused in Durrell's writing—nowhere evocatively among the 28 books in my digital collection—but it feels so *right*. How?

Using large language models like ChatGPT in this way seems useful for exploring the borders of our own expectations. Cohen called his AARON program not "an expert system" but "an expert's system" — a "research tool for the expansion of my own expert knowledge" of art.¹¹

We might conceive of using these new AI tools in a similar way.

Generative models offer opportunities for the expansion of our understanding, serving us in our pursuits as readers because of their ability to generate opportunities beyond what extant methods of digital analysis reveal. Nevertheless, the moment leaves us with many questions.

How might studying methods of digital creativity further our understanding of non-digital works of art? What does our reaction to the computer's mimicry of Durrell's style reveal about that target style and our understanding of it? And how does it engage with or challenge our notions of authenticity?

Cohen has also described style as "the signature of a complex system."¹² Is this kind of generative system a forgery, then, or something else? When a system gives us something that *isn't* Durrell yet which is still recognizably *in the style of* Durrell, where are we left to situate our understanding of signature?

These questions are left unanswered, but they further endorse *The Revolt of Aphrodite*—the story of a robot struggling to understand its own artifice—as Durrell's most relevant work for engaging with the present moment. Iolanthe's revolt is nearly successful, but her robotic failure shows what it means to be human. In the same way, generative AI's successes and failures give us a chance to understand the act of creation.

James Clawson is Anne Petry endowed professor of English at Grambling State University. A former president of the International Durrell Society, his research embraces digital humanities and English literary history, especially 20th-century literature, and has appeared in Deus Loci, Renaissance and Reformation, and other venues, including the upcoming collection Heresy and Heterotopia in Works by Lawrence Durrell: Alexandria to Angkor Wat.

¹¹ Harold Cohen, "How to Draw Three People in a Botanical Garden," AAAI-88 Proceedings, 1988, p. 847.

¹² Cohen, p. 855.

Lawrence Durrell's *Key* and Theodore Stephanides' *Complete Poems*

Anthony Hirst is a regular contributor to The Herald; he is the proprietor and principal editor of Colenso Books. The editors of this newsletter asked him for an update on the new edition of Durrell's book Key to Modern Poetry, originally published in 1952. This new edition is supported by the ILDS.

Anthony also shares with us news about his editions of the works of Theodore Stephanides (1896 – 1983); Stephanides is fondly remembered as a character who featured in Gerald Durrell's My Family and Other Animals, as well as Lawrence's Prospero's Cell.

Since I wrote about Lawrence Durrell's *Key to Modern Poetry* (to use its original UK title) in the Spring issue (NS-11) of *The Herald* there has, I am afraid, been little progress on the new edition. This is primarily because I have been in France for most of the intervening period and the remaining research cannot be done without the resources of The British Library. Before the book is ready to send to Peter Baldwin and Charles Sligh, who have kindly undertaken to proofread it, I have still to track down the sources of a few so-far elusive quotations in Durrell's text, and then to finish adapting Isabelle Keller-Privat's 2015 study of the *Key*, "Poetry at the risk of criticism . . ." to its role as the Introduction to the new edition. Its references to the *Key* need to include the page numbers of the new edition as well as those of the original, and a few of the quotations from the *Key* need to be amended to follow the corrections made in the new edition.

A date, though, has now been set for its publication, July 2024, following a suggestion made by colleagues that it should be launched at OMG XXII in Athens. I would still like to use the more accurately descriptive title which I mentioned — and explained the logic of — in NS-11: *A Key to British Poetry 1890–1939*. Not all those involved are happy with this. My latest suggestion, which I hope will resolve the issue, is that we do use this title, but also include on the cover and on the title page a reference to the original UK and US titles of 1952, beginning "First published as . . .".

I can, however, report considerable progress during recent months on another book which will, I hope, be of interest to *Herald* readers. It is called *From First Memory to Last Adventure* and subtitled *The Complete Poems of Theodore Stephanides*. The title derives from the poems themselves: the very first poem in the book is entitled "First Memory (Bombay ?1897)" and in the very last poem Theodore, speaking to a "mortal" (himself, one could suppose) waiting at "Death's Threshold", says, "the greatest of all Adventures lies beyond this gate." The title of this poem is simply "Adventure". These are the first and last poems only because that is where I have put them. The entire arrangement of the poems and their division into fourteen thematic sections is my idea, but I have been guided in this by Theodore himself. I am not referring to a ghostly visitation but to Theodore's multiple attempts during his retirement to create a complete or collected poems. The evidence for this is now in the Theodore Stephanides Archive in The British Library. Theodore's grandson remembers the constant sound of Theodore's typewriter as part of the background to those childhood years that he and his brother spent in a large London house where Theodore had his own quarters; and for my part I was staggered by the quantity of typescripts which came to light, when, in January 2016, the four-drawer filing cabinet crammed with his papers was finally located behind a stack of building materials in the cellar of that same London house. Many of these typescripts (each with a card cover and neatly stitched together) were Theodore's various attempts to arrange his poems chronologically, geographically or thematically, but he does not appear ever to have decided which method would work best. He was attempting to amalgamate the poems of the three

collections published by small London presses in the 1960s and 70s and those in his completed but then unpublished collection *Autumn Gleanings* (finally published in 2010, jointly by the ILDS and the Durrell School of Corfu).

There is also clear evidence of unannounced thematic divisions in the three published collections. I analysed at length the tacit thematic arrangement of the first of the collections, *The Golden Face* (1965), in the “Editor’s Introduction” to its republication to accompany Vera Konidari’s Greek translation of the poems (Colenso Books, 2019). What I found was the following sequence: London, Corfu, Greece and Greek mythology, scientific reflections, animals, birds, insects, trees, literature and inspiration, the impermanence of humanity, aesthetics, the dangers of the modern world, the First World War, the Second World War. Similar sequences can also be traced in two other collections, *Cities of the Mind* (1969) and *Worlds in a Crucible* 1973. The arrangement in *Autumn Gleanings* seems more haphazard.

With these various leads from Theodore himself, and after many days of reading, rereading and thinking about the poems, I devised a division into fourteen sections, partly chronological/geographical (the stages of Theodore’s life) and partly thematic. I didn’t want to provide section titles that might suggest they came from Theodore himself, and came up with the following scheme, each of the section titles starting with a gerund:

- I. Recollecting childhood
- II. Observing war on the Macedonian Front (1917–1918) and later in Adrianople
- III. Remembering the Corfu Years
- IV. Reimagining mythology and Ancient Greece
- V. Reflecting on love
- VI. Considering flora and fauna
- VII. Observing World War Two and its effects
- VIII. Reacting to city life in London
- IX. Gazing at the heavens in amazement
- X. Weighing up humanity
- XI. Engaging in politics
- XII. Telling stories
- XIII. Writing about writing and the arts
- XIV. Confronting old age and death

My method of sorting the poems into categories was very physical. I photocopied all the poems of the first three collections, with each one, no matter how short, on a separate sheet; and I printed on a separate sheet each of the poems of *Autumn Gleanings*. (I was the final editor of this book and had prepared it for publication, and thus have the electronic files.) I also added a few poems that came from other publications such as *Island Trails* and some unpublished poems that I’d found in the Archive. Then I started to sort all my sheets of paper into piles, modifying my original range of categories in the process to arrive at the list above; and once I had determined where each poem best fitted, I took the piles one by one and arranged and rearranged the sheets of paper until I found the order that seemed to me would best show the relations of the poems to one other and also “flow”

best as a sequence. In a few sections, though, the arrangement needed to be purely chronological: “Recollecting childhood” and the two groups of war poems; or partly chronological in the case of the London poems and the poems on old age and death.

For each section I am writing a one-page-maximum introduction, and the whole book is substantially complete and in book format. However, like Durrell’s *Key*, it still requires me to spend many days in The British Library, going through all of the typescripts that I mentioned. It is almost certain that in retyping his poems over and over again, Theodore made some at least minor revisions, and I subscribe to the principle that an editor should always use “the author’s latest discernible intentions” for each poem. Besides, I may well find a few more hitherto-unpublished poems that can be incorporated to make the *Complete Poems* truly complete.

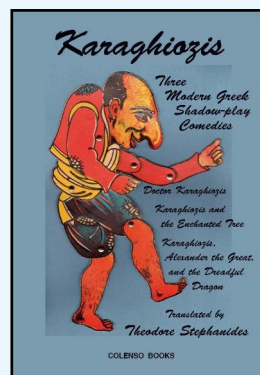
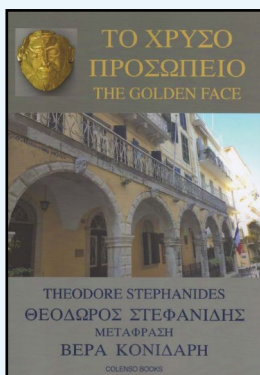
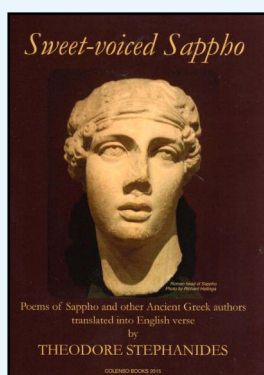
I would not claim that Theodore Stephanides is a major poet, but he is the best and most engaging minor poet I have ever come across. For Theodore there ought to be some third term, intermediate between “minor” and “major”. The range of his subject matter and of his approaches to it is truly amazing. This fits, of course, with the often-repeated description of him as a “polymath” — medical doctor, radiologist, biologist, astronomer, prolific translator from Greek of all periods into English, and behind all, and, perhaps in his later years, for him, *above* all, a poet. I see his poetry as the connecting thread which ties the whole of his long and varied life together. Finally one other quality should be noted: his humour. Everyone of the fourteen sections contains humorous poems or poems with humorous elements — verbal humour, satire, self-mocking humour, the whimsical, the ridiculous. Though I have read most of what Theodore wrote, published and unpublished — his scientific works, his translations, his autobiographical writings, his verse dramas and short stories — it is through his poetry above all that, although I never met him, I have come to feel that I know him, and so find it natural, as here, to refer to him as “Theodore” and not, as an editor or critic would normally do, as “Stephanides”.

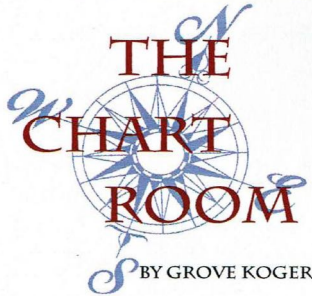
The following Colenso Books editions of works by Stephanides can be obtained from the publisher at colensobooks@gmail.com or via Amazon:

Sweet-voiced Sappho: Poems of Sappho and other Ancient Greek authors, translated into English verse by Theodore Stephanides, with facing Greek text. ISBN 9780992863234, £9.50

To Χρυσό Προσώπείο / The Golden Face by THEODORE STEPHANIDES, Greek translation by VERA KONIDARI with facing English text, xxiv + 113 pages ISBN 781912788033. £13.50

Karaghiozis: Three Modern Greek Shadow-play Comedies, freely translated from Greek by THEODORE STEPHANIDES ISBN 9780992863265. £9.50





THE CHART ROOM

Rania M. Mahmoud's *Female Voices and Egyptian Independence* is scheduled for publication by I.B. Tauris late this year. Subtitled *Marginalized Women in Egyptian and British Fiction*, it includes "Egypt the Grotesque: Breaking Leila's Shackle in Lawrence Durrell's *Mountolive*."

Barry Reay and Nina Attwood's account of Obelisk and Olympia presses, *Dirty Books: Erotic Fiction and the Avant-Garde in Mid-Century Paris and New York* has been published by Manchester University Press. Obelisk, you'll remember, published Durrell's novel *The Black Book* in 1938, as well as works by Henry Miller and Anaïs Nin, and Olympia reprinted *The Black Book* in 1959 with a new preface by Durrell, along with several new works by Miller. A review of *Dirty Books* appeared in *Literary Review* for September 28.

Those who want to read more about the two presses have several choices. These include Neil Pearson's *Obelisk: A History of Jack Kahane and the Obelisk Press*; Patrick J. Kearney's *The Paris Olympia Press*; and John de St. Jorre's *The Good Ship Venus: The Erotic Voyages of the Olympia Press*, published in the United States as *Venus Bound: The Erotic Voyage of the Olympia Press and Its Writers*.

Des Power's article "Twilight with Venus" in *The Critic* for July describes Henry Miller's late-life infatuation with actress and *Playboy* model Brenda Venus. His letters to her were published posthumously in the 1986 collection *Dear, Dear Brenda*. As Durrell described the unlikely relationship, "She enabled him to dominate his infirmities and to experience all the Joys of Paradise."

Paul Herron's YouTube series "Catching Up with Anaïs Nin" has continued with Episode 11, *A Tale of Two Husbands*, which Herron describes as "an inside look at Anaïs Nin's bigamous marriage to two very different men." The episode "includes images and excerpts from Nin's final diary, *A Joyous Transformation*."

Léonie Bischoff's *Anaïs Nin: A Sea of Lies* has been published by Fantagraphics Books of Seattle in a translation by Jenna Allen. In a review published on June 21, *Publishers Weekly* described the book as a "gorgeously illustrated graphic biography," and adds that it "seems to leave no personal stone unturned in an elegantly comprehensive and sometimes mystic account of her life."

Rebecca M. Seifried, Chelsea A.M. Gardner, and Maria Tatum's fascinating *Mapping the Leigh Fermors' Journey through the Deep Mani in 1951* has been published in the *Annual of the British School at Athens* and is available online through Cambridge Core. According to the work's abstract, "In the summer of 2019, members of the CARTography Project set out to re-create the route that Patrick and Joan Leigh Fermor took during their first visit to the Deep Mani in 1951. The project involved meticulously analysing the couple's notebooks and photographs to glean details about where they had ventured, using least-cost analysis to model their potential routes and ground-truthing the results by walking and boating the routes" themselves. The results? A "detailed map of the route the Leigh Fermors followed" based on the authors' reading of the documentary sources and "an assessment of the utility of using least-cost analysis to model the routes of historical travellers."

Issue 6 of *Viatica* is titled “Patrick Leigh Fermor, un temps pour écrire / Writing under the Influence of Patrick Leigh Fermor.” Edited by Anne Duprat, Gilles Louÿs, Emmanuelle Peraldo and Anne Rouhette, the issue offers more than a dozen essays, including Isabelle Keller-Privat’s “L’hospitalité de l’art, dernier rempart contre l’hostilité de l’Histoire dans *A Time of Gifts* de Patrick Leigh Fermor / The Hospitality of Art—The Last Bulwark against the Hostility of History in Patrick Leigh Fermor’s *A Time of Gifts*.”

Viatica describes itself as “the first French, online and open access journal devoted entirely to travel literature,” and covers “all the trends in this new field of literary criticism that is at the crossroads of literature, history, geography, ethnology, and intercultural studies.” The journal has close ties with the Centre de recherche sur la littérature des voyages, the Research Center on Travel Literature.

Panos Karagiorgos’s bilingual edition of *Costis Palamas’s Poetry Anthology*, published by Philyra Publications of Athens in 2021, has been awarded the State Prize for the Translation of a Work in Greek into a Foreign Language. Palamas (1859-1943) is commonly referred to as the National Poet of Greece, and, according to the publisher, this new selection contains “some newly discovered juvenile poems, some poems from his major poetry collections, and some more from his mature and later age. Most ... are translated here into English for the first time.”

Heresy and Heterotopia in Works by Lawrence Durrell: Alexandria to Angkor Wat

Edited by Isabelle Keller-Privat and Anne R. Zahlan

A collection of essays to be published by Fairleigh Dickinson University Press (projected date 2024) offers new perspectives on Lawrence Durrell's art and ideas. *Heresy and Heterotopia in Works by Lawrence Durrell: Alexandria to Angkor Wat* brings together examinations of heretical elements in Durrell's thought and writings with Foucauldian explorations of his treatments of place and space. The volume includes studies of Durrell texts from *The Alexandria Quartet* to *The Avignon Quintet* with stops along the way for the island books and other treatments of wandering and exile in poetry as well as prose. The contributing scholars approach the works from a variety of perspectives, concrete and mysterious, intellectual and sensual, the closing essay bringing distinctly twenty-first century techniques to the project of heightening our understanding and appreciation of the trajectory of Durrell's life work:

- I. "‘Here Once Lay the Body of the Great Alexander’:
From the Poetic Image of Alexandria to Poetic Dwelling”
Ali Reza Shahbazi
- II. "Faces of the Goddess: Gnostic Div(a)nity in Lawrence Durrell and Anatole France”
David Melville Wingrove
- III. "Lawrence Durrell and Georges Bataille: Brothers in Heresy”
Luca Barbaglia and Bartolo Casiraghi
- IV. "Heresy in Lawrence Durrell's Heraldic Universe”
Paul Lorenz
- V. "A ‘Most Anomalous’ Island: Lawrence Durrell's Writings on Patmos”
Athanasios Dimakis
- VI. "‘Life in the Tomb’: Lawrence Durrell's Heterotopia on the Island of Rhodes”
Athena Hadji
- VII. "Personalist Heterotopias: Henry Miller's Street and Lawrence Durrell's Hotel”
Isabelle Keller-Privat
- VIII. "Postmodern Gothic: Traveling Gothic Motifs in *The Avignon Quintet*”
Pamela J. Francis
- IX. "Durrell's Buddhist Heterotopias: Mount Vulture and Angkor Wat”
Fiona Tomkinson
- X. "Heterotopia and Other Places: Displacing Expectations of Theme and Style in Durrell's Travel Books”
James M. Clawson

The Coptic Church Today

Pamela J. Francis

This final installment of this (very) brief history of the Coptic Orthodox Church will focus on the contemporary Church: its organization, its spiritual life, and, finally, its position as a minority religion in a region currently inhabited by a Sunni Muslim majority.

The last segment of this series ended in the early twentieth century. While the Coptic Orthodox Church is conservative by nature, the twentieth century witnessed a few changes in organization; additionally, all leaders and lay members of the Church will attest to a spiritual revival that began in the mid-twentieth century and is still evident today.

The Hierarchy of the Coptic Church

The head of the church, who uses the term ‘pope’, also serves as the head of the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria. However, the Pope maintains his office and residence in the Patriarchal Palace in Cairo on the grounds of St. Mark’s Coptic Orthodox Cathedral and keeps a residence in the Monastery of St. Pishoy as well.

The pope’s election is overseen by the Holy Synod. The world got to witness this unusual process in 2012, after the death of Pope Shenouda III, who had served since 1971. Within seven days of a pope’s death, a regent is chosen from among the most senior bishops. Within the next month, he, along with a committee chosen from the Synod, must coordinate the selection of five or six qualifying bishops. A candidate must be at least 40 years old, have served at least 15 years as a monk, and to have never married (community priests, however, are encouraged to marry). The list is then published in Egypt’s major newspapers; after three months, the 74 bishops of the Church and 12 representatives from each diocese narrow the selection to three names which are then placed in a glass bowl. During a ceremony that is open to all of the Coptic faithful, a blindfolded boy—picked randomly from 15 boys, though I have not been successful in finding out how the 15 are chosen--pulls one of the names from the bowl. This process is certainly one of the most creative and unusual in all of Christendom!

The Coptic Pope does not assume papal infallibility, and, in fact, is head of the Church only by virtue of his chairmanship of the Holy Synod, which consists of the pope and the Metropolitans (archbishops of dioceses, generally associated with a metropolitan region), the Bishops, the Patriarchal Vicar of Alexandria, and an archpriest representing the married priests. The Holy Synod, governed since 1985 by a constitution, manages all spiritual, organizational, and financial matters of the Church. Bishops (the episcopate) are chosen from the monks. Monasteries are presided over by bishops, and, ultimately, the Holy Synod.

Monasticism has experienced a revival since the 1960’s, when the Sunday School movement, participated in and later led by the future Pope Shenouda III and others of his generation, inspired young men to dedicate their hearts and souls to monastic life. The enthusiasm for monastic life has continued for decades, and many Church leaders attribute the continued enthusiasm for monastic life to modern technology, which has exposed many Copts to the music and sermons of the Church. I have not found any exact number of monasteries, either in Egypt or Egypt and abroad, as many monasteries that are still extant are not necessarily inhabited. Furthermore, the number of

monasteries does not include convents. Yet there are at least a few dozen that are active in Egypt. There are at least ten monasteries and convents in the United States, five in Australia, and three in Canada; however, there are others around the world, including the currently contested monastery on the roof of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem; presently inhabited by Ethiopian monks and nuns; the ownership of the building, including its beehive cells on the roof, remains a matter of flag waving and fisticuffs.

The consecration of priests is one of the rites of the Church. Generally a young man is “called” by a bishop to the priesthood, and then sent to a church. In the larger community, he must go through all of the steps to be eligible for the priesthood; that means he must serve as a deacon first, although that may be only a formality (the priest I interviewed said he was ordained as a deacon one day, and a priest the next). If a monk is tapped for the episcopate, he must be ordained as a priest first. The rite of consecration includes a name change; the bishop, who confirms the priest by the laying on of hands will provide the priest with a new name during the ceremony.



The Holy Family has special significance to the Copts; numerous shrines to the Holy Family are revered by Copts and Muslims.

The vestments worn by the episcopate, the priests, as well as the monks, are distinctive as well as symbolic. While white is worn during the Divine Service, bishops outside of the sanctuary wear colorful, and again, symbolic, tunics, and Metropolitans and the Patriarch wear beautiful gold girdles. Shoes are not allowed in the sanctuary; therefore, bishops, priests, and deacons wear special slippers (the congregation removes their shoes before entering the sanctuary). Bishops may also wear ceremonial sleeves, stoles, and other accoutrements, depending on the occasion. Bishops and the Patriarch wear a crown of crimson velvet punctuated by gemstones during the liturgy, but priests wear a rounded sort of squashed turban called an *em'ma*, white for the Divine Liturgy, black at all other times. In fact, all priests and monks wear black (outside of the Liturgy) as a sign that they have died to the world. Monks wear a type of scarf that is black and embroidered with twelve crosses, with a seam down the center; the seam is a reference to St. Anthony, whose hood was torn by demons.

Worship Services and Popular Practices

The Coptic community uses a different calendar than either the Islamic or Gregorian calendars; the Coptic year consists of twelve months of thirty days each, with a five day month (six in leap years) at the end of the year. The Coptic calendar is counted from the year 284 CE, the beginning of Diocletian's rule, significant to Christians due to the martyrdom of thousands of Christians, especially throughout Egypt. Like other Orthodox churches, Christmas is celebrated on January 7.

The worship services in the Coptic Church have not changed significantly since the Middle Ages. The congregation is still divided by sex, and children are encouraged to attend the liturgy. Worship services tend to be long; congregants begin fasting when they attend vespers on Saturday evening



The above images are from a Coptic calendar I found in a little shop in Houston, TX. The clerk had no idea why it was there!

and maintain their fast throughout the service the next day. Typically, the church begins worship service around 8:15 on Sunday morning, and it generally lasts until noon! The priest wears white vestments for the service, which is almost completely sung (or rather, chanted). The service is divided into four sections. The first part of the service is called the Offering of the Lamb, which consists of the blessing of the bread and wine. Next is the Liturgy of the Word, which consists of readings from the Epistles and the Gospels; if a sermon is presented, it will be at this point, though it is frequently omitted. In the US the homily is generally given in English, though it is often repeated in Arabic at the end of the service. The third section is the Liturgy of the Faithful, known to most Christians as the Eucharist. In the Coptic Church, only those who are members of the Coptic Church and have both fasted and confessed may partake in the Eucharist. Finally, the Distribution of the Holy Mysteries begins; this includes the singing of hymns. Coptic hymnody is ancient, and many musicologists trace some hymns back to ancient Egyptian musical traditions. Hymns may be sung in Arabic or Coptic; when I attended a consecration of a Coptic church in the

1990's, I heard a Coptic hymn, and I was simply astounded. I had never heard anything so beautiful and mystical before, and I haven't since.

Fasting is a particularly important aspect of Coptic Orthodox life. Anywhere between 210 and 240 days of the year are fast days, including every Wednesday (the day Christ was betrayed) and Friday (the day Christ was crucified). Fasting, however, does not necessarily mean total abstinence from food, but more often fasting from meat and dairy products. In fact, many Coptic websites feature vegan recipes. Furthermore, fasting is not viewed as a hardship; in fact, many Coptic priests emphasize that one of the main characteristics of the Coptic Church, even among ascetics, is *joy*. The fourth century monk, St. John Cassian said the perpetual voice of praise from the monasteries and caves of the Egyptian desert made all of Egypt a delightful paradise! So, while the number of fast days seems excessive to many, it is balanced with the number of Feast Days. There are seven major and seven minor feasts, along with saints' days, and, of course, every Sunday is a feast day. The Coptic year begins with Nayrouz, the Feast of the New Year; this feast commemorates the early church martyrs, yet the celebration itself can be traced to ancient Egypt. This celebration, which occasions new clothes and the exchange of flower bouquets, is just one example of how the Church emphasizes that her suffering—and that of the martyrs—should be transformed into joy.

Until modern times, this feast was celebrated in Egypt by both Muslims and Copts in ways similar to Twelfth Nights and Carnival. However, the public celebrations were denounced by Muslim religious leaders in the Middle Ages, and today it is mainly celebrated as a Coptic religious holiday. Thoughts of a feast or festival will send most Durrell readers to that rich set piece in *Mountolive*, the mulid for Sitna Damiana (the more prevalent spelling is Demiana). Mulids are essentially birthday parties for saints; Egyptian Islam, influenced by Sufism, celebrated saints, and the syncretic nature

of popular religion before the mid-twentieth century meant that Copts and Muslims celebrated together (Pursewarden recounts “It was touching to hear Moslems [sic] singing religious songs to Damiana, a Christian saint”); recent events have both segregated and secularized these celebrations. Muslim mulids often feature a *zikir*, a special prayer service for a Sufi saint; Coptic mulids are often the site of mass baptisms. I cannot verify a mulid for St. Demiana, but she and her forty virgins—the founders of female monastic life—are celebrated at the monastery of St. Demiana. In 2014, these celebrations were canceled when a car loaded with explosives was discovered in the vicinity. But Coptic mulids continue, as do Muslim ones, and are still very popular among Egyptians. For instance, the mulid of Mari Girgis (St. George) ends at midnight of the “big night,” when thousands of pilgrims claim to see St. George riding his horse above the crowd.

All Orthodox traditions include the production and veneration of icons, which here means a religious image painted onto metal, wood, or paper. Orthodox tradition claims that icons, meant to be religious texts for the illiterate, were employed in the very earliest years of Christianity; art historians, however, claim that the tradition dates only from the third century. From its beginnings, Coptic iconography has been nearly abstract in its portrayals of saints, with little to no background. All representation is symbolic, from the large, wide eyes on peaceful faces, even the faces of those undergoing torture and martyrdom. The art of Coptic iconography appears to have been lost by the twentieth century; however, Pope Cyril VI instigated a revival of the art, and the Neo-Coptic style flourished from the 1960s to the 1980s. Coptic iconography thrives, and today includes the portrayal of those who have lost their lives in contemporary religious conflicts.

A Minority Community

The current worldwide population of Coptic Christians is around 12 million—or is it? While populations are notoriously hard to pin down, and we allow a bit of give and take, the estimates of the Coptic population vary widely. A Google Arts and Culture article claims there are 30 million Copts in the world, a figure that seems excessively high; Pope Tawadros II, in April of this year, claimed there are 15 million Copts in Egypt, with another 2 million Copts in the Diaspora. The diasporic population is very difficult to ascertain; census numbers in the US, for instance, do not include religious affiliation. Numbers are not only difficult to determine, they are also highly political. Copts frequently claim that their population is underestimated in Egypt, and that, furthermore, they are under-represented in public positions such as law enforcement and public office.

However, it is impossible to deny that the persecution of Copts has increased since the nationalization project of Nasser in the 1950s. In a move to make Egypt more “Egyptian,” many of the foreign communities were expelled (though “foreign” is problematic here, since many of these communities, including the Armenians, the Greeks, and the Jewish communities had lived in Alexandria and Cairo for centuries; there is no need to question Durrell’s portrayal of the cosmopolitan nature of Alexandria).

Many wealthy Copts emigrated at this time, and the 1967 Israeli-Arab war prompted another wave of emigration in its aftermath. In 1972, with the assistance of the World Council of Churches - the Coptic Orthodox Church was a founding member of the WCC, and Pope Shenouda III was actively involved in the organization; he acted on its principles by engaging in dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church, as well as with the other Oriental Orthodox churches - many less affluent Copts left Egypt, primarily for the US, Canada, and Australia, though there are other communities

throughout the Middle East and Europe. President Mubarak and Pope Shenouda worked together to decrease tensions between Egyptian Copts and Muslims, but Shenouda criticized Mubarak's increasingly authoritarian regime, and supported protestors during the Arab Spring who ultimately effected Mubarak's removal.

The short term of Muhammad Morsi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, did not bode well for the Coptic community; he was only in power for a year before he was ousted by Abdel el-Sisi in a coup in 2014. El-Sisi's government seems more willing to work with the Coptic community; el-Sisi has attended Coptic holidays and inaugurated the nation's largest Coptic Cathedral, the Church of the Nativity, in the New Administrative Capital (NAC), a new suburb intended to lessen some of the congestion of Cairo. Most importantly, he has instituted the rebuilding of churches, particularly those damaged in the aftermath of Morsi's ouster.

Still, the Coptic community experiences discrimination and violence. While the official cause for a fire that killed 41 people, including 20 children, was faulty wiring, many Copts claim that not only are fires set intentionally, firefighters and other first responders are slow to arrive. Government officials counter these claims; however, there is no denying that church burnings have been a main source of violence against the community for years. And while el-Sisi appears to support the Coptic community, local authorities often defy national laws; a local governor in el-Minya, in Upper Egypt, has refused to allow the rebuilding of a church burned in suspicious circumstances in 2016. In March of 2022, nine Copts were arrested for protesting the refusal to rebuild the church.

Other claims of violence against Copts include reports of the kidnapping, forced conversions and forced marriages of Coptic women, though I cannot verify any of these actions since a report by the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe issued in 2012 ([CHRG-112jhr93217.pdf \(govinfo.gov\)](#)). Another problem, again, impossible to verify, is that Muslims who convert to Christianity (or any other religion) face persecution, including the annulment of marriage.

I will not comment further on these problems; I will only say that I sincerely hope that the Egyptian government will acknowledge and address issues of discrimination. Many journalists believe that most of the problems stem from government control over media coverage. Needless to say, I will not speak for the Egyptian people, but as an admirer of Egyptian culture and history, I hope that the Muslim and Coptic communities will move forward towards a peaceful coexistence.

In closing, I want to note that the Coptic community has always welcomed my interest in their beliefs and traditions, and I was welcomed warmly (if with curiosity!) by the Copts that huddled under a tent in Harvey, Louisiana, way back in the 1990's, to witness the consecration of land for a new church by Pope Shenouda III. The devotion of the congregation, the mesmerizing beauty of the Coptic hymns, and the sense of something ancient and holy has been with me ever since. The Coptic community remains open to my sincere interest, and I was delighted last week when a cold call to a priest in New Orleans led to an informative and warm interview—as well as an invitation to attend the Divine Service! I am sure I am not the only Durrellian who, after reading *Mountolive*, has fallen into the Coptic rabbit hole; I sincerely thank you all for following me there.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Fr. Youstos Ghaly of St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Church in New Orleans, USA, for his enthusiastic and helpful conversation!

I also wish to thank the editor of *The Herald*, Peter Baldwin, for inviting me to present this series.



Reading a Coptic icon

This painting was given to me by friends from Egypt. It is painted on papyrus and portrays St. Anthony the Great on the left and St. Paul of Thebes, the first Christian hermit, on the right. The script is Arabic, with Coptic above. The crow between the two figures refers to the crow who delivered a half loaf of bread to St. Paul every day; however, when St. Anthony visited him, the crow brought an entire loaf. The lions relate to St. Paul's burial; when Paul died, Anthony had no way to dig a grave, but lions emerged and dug in the sand. The odd blue animal at the bottom left symbolizes wild beasts who lived as beasts--it is eating another animal--but did not harm Paul or Anthony. Large eyes are a feature of Coptic religious art (they are even larger in Ethiopian Coptic paintings) and are a reference to openness to God; in contrast, mouths are small. Typical of Coptic icons, there is nothing in the painting that is not symbolic or relevant to the saints' stories.

Across the Mediterranean in search of Lawrence Durrell

by Blythe Gifford

Blythe Gifford first read The Alexandria Quartet in college. She is a writer herself, author of several historical romances for Harlequin and she tries hard to instill the “spirit of place” in her work. The cruise and the Sicily tour were sponsored by Road Scholar. She is very grateful to the International Lawrence Durrell Society Facebook group for giving her so much information on the Durrell sites before she left.

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Who could say “no” to a Mediterranean cruise? And for a Durrell lover, one with stops in Rhodes, Cyprus, and Alexandria was irresistible. So, I took off in December of 2022, determined to get a glimpse of the places the author I loved so well had lived.

Rhodes



Street of Knights, Rhodes



Sunset on Rhodes

Durrell was stationed on Rhodes, working for the British government, between 1945 and 1947. Our shipboard lectures focused on the Knights Templar and the Crusades, and our visit included the Acropolis of Rhodes and a walking tour of the Medieval City.

I had hoped to visit Durrell’s house if I had a free hour or so, but delayed planes had meant delayed departures and by the time we were done with our tour, darkness had fallen and I had to let that go.

Instead, I went back to the Medieval City looking for a restaurant that our lecturer had recommended. After half an hour of wandering cobblestone streets, lost in the dark, I finally found my destination. When I opened the door, I saw fellow passengers, who invited me to join them, beginning some friendships that lasted through the coming weeks.

So although I did not see Durrell’s house, I did see the Medieval City and the Street of Knights, which must look just as they did more than 600 years ago. And I did see “one of those fantastic Rhodian sunsets which have, since medieval times, made the islands so justly famed....” (*Reflections on a Marine Venus: A Companion to the Landscape of Rhodes*, p. 24.)

Cyprus



Blythe with Aphrodite's Rock

While *Reflections on a Marine Venus* focused on Rhodes' landscape and culture, *Bitter Lemons* dealt with the growing Greek/Turkish conflict on Cyprus when Durrell was teaching there several years later. We were in port two nights and I had great hopes that I would have more time to explore the island.

Alas, the conflict that had gained strength during Durrell's time eventually resulted in what is now a divided island. Thanks to the Durrell Facebook group, I learned that in order to visit the Turkish side, where his house was, you had to enter a port or airport that was part of the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus," a "country" recognized only by Turkey. This was a complication that could be planned around if you were a solo visitor, but tied to our tour ship's port and timetable, it was near impossible.

So I was disappointed, but prepared not see the house so dear to him. Instead, I savored the Greek Acropolis (every island has one!), the Crusaders' 13th century Kolossi Castle, the Greek Amphitheater, and the Nea Pafos Archeological Site, with its amazing mosaics.

But the site that stayed with me was not a real historic place, but a mythical one on the far eastern end of the island. *Bitter Lemons* includes a scene in which he drives with a friend to the mythological birthplace of Aphrodite. As you look toward the Aphrodite's Rock and feel the sea breeze, you can almost believe...

Less than two weeks after I posed there, I stood in the Uffizi Gallery in front of Botticelli's painting of the same setting. In the Mediterranean, the line between real and imaginary is very fluid.

Of course, Durrell didn't write *Bitter Lemons* until he left Cyprus. While he was there, he wrote *Justine*, set in Alexandria, my next Durrell stop.



Botticelli's Birth of Venus

Alexandria



Streets of Alexandria



View from the Hotel Cecil

Of all the places we were scheduled to see, Alexandria was the one I was most anticipating. And the one that was the biggest shock.

In Alexandria, we saw the Roman amphitheater and the Alexandria National Museum and the NEW Library of Alexandria and then had an afternoon to ourselves.

I have been to Europe multiple times, but in Egypt, I felt as if I was truly in a foreign country. Egyptian drivers have no respect for lanes and will move into yours without signal or pause. A pedestrian is treated something like a traffic bump, barely worth slowing down for. I intended to walk the Corniche on the sidewalk next to the Mediterranean. That proved impossible. There were no lights. The cars stopped for nothing and no one. The pedestrian crosswalks, like all other lines, were ignored.

So, I stayed on my side of the street, walking past logos for Citibank and Starbucks, with Durrell, still, just out of reach.

But when the shuttle bus stopped at Saad Zaghloul Park, I was delighted to see the Cecil Hotel, which Michael Haag called a “recurrent landmark” in the Alexandrian Quartet. Durrell writes in *Montolive*: “In the gaunt lounge of the Cecil Hotel, she [Justine] would perhaps be waiting, gloved hands folded on her handbag, staring out through the windows upon which the sea crawled and sprawled, climbing and subsiding, across the screen of palms in the little municipal square which flapped and creaked like loose sails.”

When I crossed the hotel threshold, I was able to walk right in for lunch without a reservation. It was December 12 and American Christmas music was playing in the hotel. Not modern music, but songs that must have been recorded in the late 1940’s or early 1950’s. Some I could have sung. Others, I had never heard, but the arrangement was distinctly of an American time and place.

So I sat in an empty restaurant, watching the Corniche and palm trees out my window, listening to English Christmas songs and feeling, for the first time, as if I had found Durrell – in a place strangely out of time and out of touch, but that still carried, nearly 90 years later, the British Colonial empire in a truly foreign land.

Sicily



Mt. Etna at Sunrise



Sunset on Ortigia

Four months later, I toured Sicily. Though I had a copy of *"Sicilian Carousel"*, I did not attempt to read it. I had had enough disappointments searching for Durrell.

Sicily was a revelation. The first thing one learns is that it is NOT Italy. In fact, it was a major Greek settlement and various temples and theatres are still major attractions across the island.

We have a tendency to think of the Roman Empire as simple Greece 2.0. However, one important thing I learned from my visit to the Greek theatre in Taormina changed my entire perspective on classical history. For the Greeks, the theater was a temple. Literally, there was an altar as part of the stage and attending was honoring the God Dionysus. Theaters were sited to show the most breathtaking natural views beyond the stage, elevating the experience.

The Romans, however, sifted to an enclosed structure, colosseum style. Instead of theater, they featured gladiator fights and wild animals killing and being killed.

Nothing could more clearly differentiate the Greek and Roman cultures.

Taormina is now famed as a "White Lotus" location. And it is, in some ways, the perfect little tourist town, full of shops, views, and wonderful ancient ruins. But it also offers a constant view of Mount Etna, hovering over the town as if it might explode at any time.

Durrell's favorite part of Sicily, however, was the island of Ortigia, the island off Syracuse where the Greeks first settled on Sicily's Eastern Coast. It is hard to argue with him. Now connected to the city by a bridge, the island does not allow buses, so it is a tourist friendly walking town. I spent several aperitivo hours sipping wine and toasting the sunset over the water.

There is more to Sicily than Greek and Roman ruins, however. In the little mountain village of Buscemi, we saw the stark divide between the rich and poor in Sicily in prior centuries. Nothing made it clearer than seeing where the workers lived. One room, scratched into the rock. No windows, no electricity, no toilets. A family of four or six or more sheltered here, waiting for the rich man's manager to call for workers in the fields. Then, they would go work for a day, a week, bring home a little money, and keep going until the next time.

Lest you think I exaggerate, Booker T. Washington, who visited Sicily in 1910, said even the slaves were better off than these workers.

"The Negro is not the man farthest down," he wrote. "The condition of the coloured farmer in the most backward parts of the Southern States of America, even where he has the least education and the least encouragement, is incomparably better than the condition and opportunities of the agricultural population in Sicily." *The Man Farthest Down: A Record of Observation and Study in Europe*.

Our last stop was Palermo, where all history seems to collide, from Admiral Nelson to Lady Hamilton to Roger II, King of Sicily and Africa in the 12th century.

The Palatine Chapel, outside of Palermo proper, was built by Roger II, covered with mosaics of Biblical stories designed by Arabs. Among them was one of Roger being crowned by Christ, deliberately placed as a message to the Pope that Roger was king and didn't need the Pope to make him so.

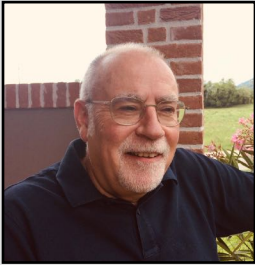
It was only when I returned home and started *Sicilian Carousel* that I realized it was set on a guided tour. I had to laugh, since I, too, was on a tour with strangers who became friends. And so, I am now reliving Sicily through Durrell's eyes. He seemed to write as much about his tour mates as the locations he saw -- a big change for, as he said, "My books are always about living in places, not just rushing through them." ("Landscape and Character," first published in the *New York Times* magazine section, June 12, 1960.) And this was his only book NOT to be about living in a place.

But in the end, although I did not see any of Durrell's homes as I was "rushing through," I remember Mount Etna hovering over Eastern Sicily, American Christmas songs playing in The Cecil Hotel, an American belting out Janis Joplin's "Mercedes Benz" in a Greek Amphitheater on Cyprus, and the remains of the Church of the Virgin Mary of the Burgh in the darkness of Rhodes' Medieval City.

All these, and more, instilled me with the "spirit of place" of each stop. And I think Durrell would consider that a success.

Encounters With Larry

by Christopher M. Bacon



Christopher Bacon

For over 150 years, Thin's bookshop was Edinburgh's answer to Foyle's in London, although less shambolic and without the payment system that required customers to queue up twice. Thin's was the go-to store for bibliophiles who valued independent quirkiness over corporate uniformity. Nothing lasts forever, though, and in 2002 Thin's was bought by the chain Blackwell's, and with the disappearance of the name a huge part of my childhood vanished. In the 1970s, Thin's was a regular feature of my Saturday mornings, when my Dad would take me and my older brother "uptown" (never "downtown" in genteel Edinburgh!) and we would browse the shelves in whatever department accorded with our own interests. As a young boy, I remember the contradictory feelings of freedom and security. Freedom to indulge my own tastes, with the security of knowing my brother and Dad were nearby, and I could run and show them any exciting new volume I might unearth to spend my few shillings pocket money on. These leisurely visits helped instil in me a love for the feel and smell of real books that has never left me – a love that is the reason I will never, ever settle for a Kindle.

Between the ages of 8 and 11, I had two criteria for judging a book's worth: (1) Was it funny? And (2) Did it have a high animal to human ratio of characters? These unshakable tenets led me, unsurprisingly, to the books of Gerald Durrell, whose cartoon covers on the Fontana paperbacks complemented the contents: as we might say now, they did exactly what it said on the tin. I became hooked on such magical titles as *The Bafut Beagles*, *Catch me a Colobus* and *Encounters With Animals*.

Oddly, I didn't read Gerry's great classic, *My Family and Other Animals* until I was much older: as a merciless 10 year-old critic, a quick perusal told me that the emphasis was too much on the "Family" and not enough on the "Animals". So unlike many other readers, it was not there, but in the book *Fillets of Plaice* that I first encountered the name and character of Lawrence – or rather, Larry – Durrell, and I was instantly wowed. First of all, it was a revelation to learn that Gerry had a brother – a BIG brother. There were now three points we had in common: I loved animals, I wanted to be a writer when I grew up, and now here was the older brother who, though affectionate, was not averse to teasing and bossing around his younger sibling a bit as well. If I had had a big enough vocabulary at the time, I would have said that I empathised totally with Gerry.

The first mention of Larry in *Fillets of Plaice* is the dedication, and there are then a series of quotes attributed to him on the subject of his little brother, starting with: "The child is mad, snails in his pocket!" The other seven are variations on this theme, with "boy" changing to "man" halfway through, and the list ends with, quite simply: "The man is mad!"

For me this was uproariously funny, and it was wondrous to find that older brother Larry was such a wit! So when I embarked on Chapter 1, I had so much goodwill towards him that his suggestion that the title of Gerry's new book should be a comic play on his own *Spirit of Place* struck me as verbal genius, despite the fact that I had no idea what *Spirit of Place* was or meant. The self-mocking nature of the reference was clear, my hero-worship complete.

Like most kids, as I reached my mid-teens, I didn't so much put childish things away as adopt a scorched earth policy towards all embarrassing evidence of my infantile past. To be fair to my adolescent self, I also began to discover what books could be and could do, other than make me laugh and feel all fuzzy about cute animals. Via Salinger, Dostoevski, Dickens and others, I discovered literature. I continued to patronise Thin's, alone or with friends, but was now to be found mostly in the Penguin Classics section (as well as the authors, all that black suited my adolescent moodiness!). Yet, though I left one Durrell behind, my attention was often drawn to those glorious, hazy David Gentleman watercolours that graced the covers of each volume of *The Alexandria Quartet* in their Faber editions at that time. They seemed to capture the parched vastness of the desert while simultaneously beckoning the observer to enter this exotic but dangerous world.



Thin's Bookshop in Edinburgh

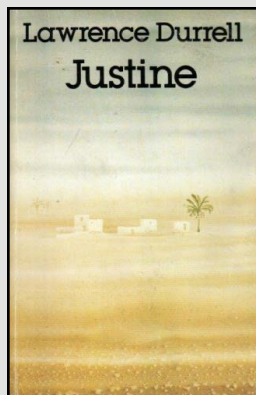
"Never judge a book by its cover" is generally sound, if clichéd, advice, but like all advice there are times when it is best left unheeded. Who could not be seduced by those images, which I still maintain represent some of the most beautiful and evocative cover designs ever produced? And then there was the name on the spine – that name that meant so much to me from my *Fillets of Plaice* days: these books were by Larry, the witty, charismatic brother of Gerry.

But nostalgia notwithstanding, this close association with my childhood tastes was still an albatross. I felt conflicted, and it took some wrestling with my teenage hormones before I could take a risk on the *Quartet*. Fortunately, there were other factors at work. The single-word titles, each a name – *Justine*, *Balthazar*, *Mountolive*, *Clea* – added to the mystique, as did the absence of blurbs on the back covers. Something about the leap of faith that this called for appealed to my youthful, what-the-hell sensibilities, and I invested in a copy of *Justine*. I remember hesitating over whether to buy the single-volume version of the *Quartet*, but reasoned that buying the four individual titles meant I would end up with four gorgeous watercolour covers on my bookshelf rather than one. There was also another thought at the back of my mind – what if I simply didn't like it?

But *Justine* did not disappoint. I found myself as smitten by the book as Darley was by the woman herself. From the moment I read the opening pages I was awed; this was unlike any reading experience I had ever had. The writing was the prose equivalent of those covers. I could feel the heat and taste the dust of Egypt, and became immersed in the bizarre and byzantine life of the City. By now I was studying English literature at university, and in the first year we had tackled, among others, Conrad, Shakespeare and Joyce, all of whom I enjoyed (to varying degrees) – but they did nothing to prepare me for the textured, sensuous and – yes – overwrought prose-poetry of Durrell. To this day I believe his is a unique voice in English literature.

Strangely, the next Durrell books I read were not the continuation of the *Quartet* – *Balthazar et al* would have to wait for another couple of years. I'm not sure why, but perhaps the richness of *Justine* was just too intoxicating. I turned instead to *The Revolt of Aphrodite* and the murky world of Felix Charlock and *The Firm*, which cemented my passion for Durrell senior.

When I returned to the *Quartet*, I bought the single-volume version, and reread *Justine* to refresh my (even then!) terrible memory. If anything, this second visit was even more mind-blowing than the



first. The shortness of *Justine* is deceptive: it seems like it will be a quick read, then one engages with the dense text, the sheer number and diversity of the characters, and the breathless unfolding of events. It demands close reading, and the time and concentration that that requires. I realised I had skimmed too much the first time. This time I read with more care, and tried to continue in the same way with the other three volumes.

And here's the thing I have realised about Durrell in recent years: in a world in which readers and critics alike seem to have the attention span of hungry toddlers, his work is bound to be problematical. In a sense, he himself is partly to blame. His insistence on puncturing the very literary devices that are the tools of his trade irritates his detractors, but, conversely, it is a part of

what attracts his champions. In both the *Quartet* and *The Revolt of Aphrodite*, Durrell makes use of the technique of the Unreliable Narrator: Darley and Charlock's uncertainties about their ability to recount events faithfully permit Durrell to lay bear his own vulnerabilities about his talents as an artist, which come from his not being born in England and lack of formal education. Certainly, in my case, when I look back on several decades of my own "fandom", I understand that the lynchpin of my love for Durrell is that he is an outsider, but instead of being bitter about it, he celebrates it, sends it up and teases his critics with it – both in interviews and in his work. And this leads us straight back to the cheeky and contrary character Gerry portrayed in his books.

I have a feeling that this is what unites all Durrell aficionados – whether they realise it or not – from the casual reader to the most dedicated academic. The sense of outsiderhood is present throughout his *oeuvre*. His deflation of literary norms is a part of that, like his refusal to compromise over the richness of his prose, which he himself deprecated, saying: "It's too juicy. Perhaps I need a few money terrors and things to make it a bit clearer — less lush. I always feel I am overwriting."

A quick Google search reveals Durrell's many denigrators. Some of what they write is measured criticism that can be justified. A lot of it, however, is facile and destructive. So it is no wonder that when his proponents write positively about him, we feel we are defending, not just a major literary figure, but a soulmate, a brother, a friend.

Durrell's style is what it is. By his own admission he invites us to take it or leave it, and it is this literary shrugging of the shoulders that can infuriate traditional critics. Yet for his supporters, that is partly the point: Durrell's style is an integral part of the package. But surely this is also true for a writer like Joyce? Ah, but Joyce is more savvy, more sure of his genius, and therefore careful not to sabotage his own books by self-doubt. Durrell gives his critics a chink in his armour to exploit. That is why I feel Durrell is the more human writer. Joyce may be the greater writer, but – for what it's worth – I am prepared to say that I prefer Durrell to him.

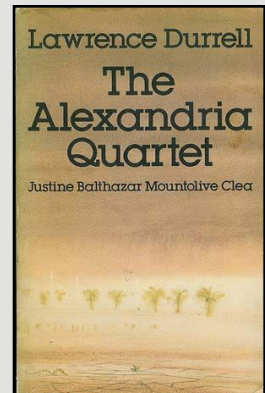
So, will Durrell ever gain the kind of universal acclaim accorded to James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence or Virginia Woolf? Well, possibly not, but one of Durrell's strengths is that he probably didn't care much one way or the other. Almost all great writers, including the aforementioned trio, are apt sometimes to take themselves too seriously, something that Durrell is often accused of, unfairly in my opinion, and usually by those that fail to factor in his sense of mischief and self-deprecation when judging his work. This goes right back to his instruction to Henry Miller in Paris – on sending him the typescript of *The Black Book* – to "pitch it into the Seine" if he didn't like it. He undoubtedly meant what he said, but the characteristic Durrellian flourish was that it must

be launched into Paris's great river – not simply tossed into a dustbin in one of the city's seedier arrondissements. The romantic gesture is intended as both ironic and serious, but where the irony ends and the seriousness begins, probably even Durrell couldn't say. Both are inextricable aspects of Durrell's art – and of his literary persona.

The conflicting nature of Durrell continues to fascinate those who love him. So many aspects of the man and his work are impossible to pin down. Who exactly was Lawrence Durrell? A conservative iconoclast, a poet best remembered for his novels, a reclusive extrovert, a womanising champion of women, super-confident yet vulnerable, an Englishman born in India, without a British passport, who hated the motherland he called "Pudding Island", a restless wanderer who wished to put down roots. I think every Durrellian feels some connection with the many contradictory attributes and achievements that make him complex and human.

And even at the age of ten, I sensed something of these polar opposites in Durrell in *Fillets of Plaiçe*, and it is what led me to explore his works a decade later. It is testament to the fact that the elder Durrell did not take himself too seriously that, in "creating" the "character" of brother Larry, Gerry was able to showcase both his mischievous and unreasonable sides without offending him. I am glad he did, and grateful to them both for the wisdom they have shown and the joy they have given.

Born and brought up in Edinburgh, Scotland, Christopher graduated in English Language and Literature from Edinburgh University in 1986. He went on to work in Scottish theatre as a writer and producer and then moved to London to pursue a career in the BBC, working in Radio 4 Programme Production and contributing scripts to BBC Education. He moved to north-east Italy in 2000, where he currently lectures in English Language at the University of Verona.



The latest volume of *Deus Loci* has just been published

You can order a copy from the ILDS website: www.lawrencedurrell.org

US: \$13; Europe: \$20. Postage cost on ordering.

Table of Contents

ESSAYS

Conflicting Cosmologies: The Herculean Labor that Transformed *A Marine Venus*—*Christopher Bacon*

“The frontiers of love”: Sexual and Territorial Ambiguity in Lawrence Durrell’s *Monsieur*—*James Gifford*

An Unshakeable Friendship: The Relationship of Lawrence Durrell and Anais Nin—*Paul Herron*

An ABC of Reading Lawrence Durrell, or, Framework for Futurist Heterotopia?—*Ian MacNiven*

Translation

“The Representation of World War II and Nazism in Lawrence Durrell’s *The Avignon Quintet* by Corinne Alexandre Garner [*Anne Zahlan, translator*]

WHITE MICE POEMS 2021

From the Poetry Editor—*David Radavich*

Flora—*Jesse Arthur Stone*

Army Chaplain receives news of the death of Ezra Pound, Nov. 1, 1972—*Mary Jane Curran*

The Hartford Railroad Disaster, 1877—*Laura Budofsky Wisniewski*

Are we Here Yet?—*Partridge Boswell*

Legacy—*George Held*

NOTES & QUERIES

Lawrence Durrell at St. Edmund’s School, Canterbury—*Peter Harrison*

Another Last Word on the Strawberry Pink Villa—*Peter Harrison*

REVIEWS

Lawrence Durrell’s Poetry: A Rift in the Fabric of the World by Isabelle Keller-Privat—*Candace Fertile*

Lawrence Durrell’s Woven Web of Guesses (Durrell Studies 2) by Richard Pine—*Donald Kaczvinsky*

Letters to Lawrence Durrell: 1937-1977 by Anais Nin. Edited by Paul Herron—*Anne Zahlan*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Durrell Bibliography: 2011–2014—*Grove Koger*

“This shabby piece of equipment”: Modernism and Artificial Intelligence

Session sponsored by the International Lawrence Durrell Society
Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture after 1900

The International Lawrence Durrell Society requests proposals for 20-minute presentations on artificial intelligence in the modernist era. Potential subjects include:

- Futurism and anxiety
- Post-humanism and transhumanism
- Human-machine interaction
- Dystopia and identity
- Subjugation and power
- The confluences of science fiction and modernism
- Robots, androids, and automata
- Technosexuality
- Taylorism and Fordism

Deadline for submission of proposal is 5 November 2023

Please plan for a presentation of no more than twenty minutes

Submit proposal by email to jdecker@icc.edu. Please include two attachments in pdf, rtf or doc format:

1. The first attachment should consist of a 300-word abstract (double-spaced and titled), omitting all references to the submitter.
2. The second attachment should contain a cover page that includes the following information:
 - Name as it will appear in the program
 - Address (preferably home address)
 - E-mail address (necessary to confirm your acceptance)
 - Academic affiliation, if applicable
 - Title of paper/work (as it will appear in the program)
 - National origin/genre of work(s) discussed (please be specific)
 - Personal biographical note (100-150 words)

The 48th annual Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture after 1900
will be held at the University of Louisville, February 22-24, 2024.

Please see the conference's official website for additional information:

<https://louisville.edu/english/about/louisville-conference-on-literature-and-culture-since-1900>



ILDS Mini-Minutes

Executive Board Meeting

3 June 2023

The Executive Board of the International Lawrence Durrell Society met via ZOOM from 9:00 to 11:00 Pacific Daylight Time on Saturday, 3 June 2023, President James Gifford presiding. The main item on the meeting agenda was planning for *On Miracle Ground XXII*, the ILDS conference scheduled for 4-7 July 2024 at the Hellenic American College in Athens, Greece.

I. Formation of OMG XXII Conference Committee: As provided by the Society By-Laws, “*the Conference Committee shall be composed of a . . . coordinator selected by the Executive Board and other members selected by the coordinator in consultation with the Executive Board. The Conference Committee will be responsible for the call for papers, the program, and the biennial conference itself and report at regular intervals to the President of the Society.*” Athanasios Dimakis, having been named OMG XXII Coordinator and Chair of the Conference Planning Committee, announced that he had invited the following Executive Board members to serve on the committee: Pamela J. Francis, Isabelle Keller-Privat, Charles Sligh, and James Gifford (who as ILDS president is automatically a member of all committees other than the Nominating Committee). While supporting Than’s choices, some Board members expressed concern that it might be impractical to expect the many jobs of planning and putting on a conference to be carried out by so few people. Relative to handling finances, for instance, Secretary-Treasurer Paul Lorenz indicated that he had served *ex officio* on past conference-planning committees in order to facilitate budgeting and paying the bills; it was noted also that both Paul and James Clawson had experience in handling online registration for OMG conferences. Don Kaczvinsky, Anna Lillios, and other Board members cited experience with previous conferences and indicated willingness to help. Those present expressed support for the core committee as proposed (Dimakis, Francis, Keller-Privat, Sligh, and Gifford *ex officio*) with the understanding that Secretary-Treasurer Lorenz would join the committee in an *ex officio* capacity, and that other Board members would be called upon to offer advice and/or take on specific jobs necessary to holding a successful OMG conference in Athens.

II. Discussion of Conference Theme and Call for Papers: “Dark Durrell”

Conference Chair Dimakis proposed an OMG XXII theme of “Dark Durrell.” Whereas some Board members were enthusiastic about a “different” take on Durrell, others wondered if such an approach would be off-putting. Charles Sligh and Anna Lillios suggested that a broader (and perhaps less negative) theme might attract wider participation. Pamela and others recalled that, whatever the theme, we have traditionally considered “anything on Durrell” as well as papers on other writers of his

circle (as, for example, Anaïs Nin and Henry Miller). It was suggested that the final wording of the CFP indicate that while papers on the OMG XXII theme are solicited, studies of Durrell from other perspectives and papers on related authors are also welcome.

III. Consideration of In-Person/Hybrid Balance

Board members present agreed that while emphasis should be placed on the “live” experience of OMG XXII in Athens, distance, economic realities, and the times we live in mandate an on-line option of some kind. Than assured the Board that the Hellenic American University has ZOOM available as well as good tech support. The task of working out the details of how online and in-person participation could be arranged and balanced was left up to the Committee and to further discussion. Meanwhile, it was agreed that the Call for Papers should indicate that some remote participation could be possible, while emphasizing and privileging the in-person experience.

IV. Practical Details of Conference Organization

Also discussed were such practical matters as *Publicity, Communication, Registration, Design of the Conference Poster, Suitable Accommodations for Conference Attendee, Events and Expeditions, and Plenary Speakers.*

V. William Godshalk Prize for Scholarship 2024

Anne nominated the following Board members to serve as the committee to administer and award the Godshalk Prize 2024: James Clawson, James Decker, and Umme Al-Wazedi, citing their organizational abilities and scholarly expertise. This committee was confirmed with unanimous consent.

VI. Other Business: Publications

A. Isabelle raised the issue of where things stand regarding the proposed corrected reissue of Durrell's *Key to Modern Poetry* currently being edited by Anthony Hirst. After discussion, Isabelle volunteered to consult with Anthony as to arrangements for payment for work done, current status of the editing, and the schedule of work on the book from now on.

B. Board members expressed gratitude to Peter Baldwin and Steve Moore for their years of excellent editing of the reimagined *Herald*. All present admired both content and lay-out and fervently wished that Peter and Steve would stay on as editors!

The meeting adjourned at approximately 11:00 A.M. Pacific Daylight Time.

---Anne Zahlan

The Herald - editorial guidelines and publication dates

The Herald is the newsletter of the International Lawrence Durrell Society [ILDS] – see: www.lawrencedurrell.org/. It will be emailed as a matter of course to all members of the ILDS. It will also be uploaded to www.lawrencedurrell.org/ for free access to any interested reader.

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Readers are invited to contribute articles, news items, events and details of new publications by or about Lawrence Durrell for future publication in *The Herald*. Articles and contributions should, in the first instance, be limited to no more than 300 words. Unpublished photos or illustrations which may be of interest to readers of *The Herald* will also be welcome provided the editors are satisfied that appropriate copyright consents have been obtained.

Please check with the Society's website, www.lawrencedurrell.org, for details of copy date for the next Herald.

The views and opinions expressed in *The Herald* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the International Lawrence Durrell Society.