

## Dwellers in the Greek Eye (George Seferis and Lawrence Durrell)

“All my favourite characters have been / Out of all pattern and proportion,” Lawrence Durrell announces at the start of his poem “Mythology” (*Collected Poems*: 251)<sup>1</sup> which he once sent to Seferis, primarily to amuse him. Seferis became sufficiently interested in the poem to translate it into idiomatic Greek appropriate to the style of the original (*Andigrafes*: 133). Durrell’s claim to have a predilection for extraordinary characters is certainly true about his fictional characters, especially those of the *Alexandria Quartet*, the work which made him famous. It was also true about some real characters whom he had known, either personally, like George Katsimbalis, Miller’s *Colossus of Maroussi*, who figures in “Mythology,” or Cavafy, the Alexandrian poet whom he knew through his work. To some degree, Durrell’s assertion may also be taken to include himself as well as Seferis.

The two men, the extroverted Durrell and the introverted Seferis (senior to Durrell by twelve years) were close friends through most of Seferis’ life and sources of inspiration for each other, particularly during the early part of their acquaintance. The Cyprus conflict eventually found them in different camps and may have soured their friendship (judging from Seferis’ diaries and correspondence), but the break seems to have been temporary. Through the 60’s they kept in touch and exchanged letters, though less frequently than in the early years. They also wrote brief memoirs about each other. Durrell’s on Seferis postdates the latter’s death in 1971.

In his memoir on Durrell (originally published in French),<sup>2</sup> Seferis turned to the war period when he, Durrell and several other writers, English and Greek, were self-exiles in Egypt, and to Durrell’s poems on Greek themes. Seferis had received about twenty letters from Durrell during the wartime period. Some of these were written, in the words of Seferis, “on anything that came to hand,” some “decorated

in the margins with multicolored drawings," some with "the sender's profile quickly sketched in place of the signature, like an ideogram." Seferis used two of these letters in his memoir. The first letter dated from around the end of April or beginning of May 1941, and the second from around October 1943.<sup>3</sup> The letter from 1941 is short, almost telegraphic in its urgency. Durrell and his family (first wife Nancy and baby daughter Penelope, or "Pinkie") had to be evacuated to Egypt from Crete, and Seferis—also in Crete but destined himself to leave the island very soon, although he did not know this at the time—was asked to take care of Durrell's luggage when it arrived by ship from Kalamata, Greece. Seferis was never able to do that, and the luggage was lost or captured by the Germans. One result was the loss of several letters from Henry Miller to Durrell—the very opposite happened when Miller lost several of Durrell's letters to him from the period 1941–1943 while travelling around America, studying the habits and mores of what he called *Homo Americanus*. In a letter of Seferis to Miller, dated 25 December 1941, we read about Seferis's and Durrell's time on Crete.

I love Larry, he's got wonderful moments. I remember him in Crete. He came from Kalamata, on a sort of boat like the one you used to go to Spetses—with Nancy and Bouboulina.<sup>4</sup> We were starving when we met that night. Nancy waiting with her child for some food in a very sad hotel. Everything was full up in the town. The taverna stuffed with a queer crowd of soldiers and homeless civilians, sweeping the dishes like grasshoppers on a vineyard. After a tremendous struggle we succeeded in getting some cold rice, and left without paying, because the waiters were drowned in the compactness of this mad crowd. We parted in the blacked-out narrow street, under the extraordinary clusters of the sky. After one or two days he was gone to Egypt.<sup>5</sup>

The 1943 letter of Durrell to Seferis, printed in Seferis' memoir on Durrell, discusses the poem "Mythology" mentioned earlier, and gives us hints that Durrell had already started what much later became *Justine*, the first part of his *Alexandria Quartet*. The commentary on "Mythology" reflects material which we also find in Seferis' *Meres D*: 283–285.

The three letters of Durrell to Seferis, now first published below,<sup>6</sup> come from the periods 1940–1941 and 1944 and thus bracket, chronologically, the two letters published by Seferis in his memoir and a third, intermediate letter from Seferis to Durrell which has been

printed in *Meres D*: 159–160 and which will be mentioned later. But before we discuss these letters and other material from the war and later years as illustrations of the Seferis-Durrell relationship we should describe its background.

## II

In 1935 all the Durrells, that is the widowed mother and four children aged 10 to 23 (Lawrence was the oldest and Gerald the youngest) moved to Corfu, Greece, from England in search of an agreeable climate and inexpensive life. The background of this eccentric move and many picturesque details of the Durrell sojourn in Corfu are given in two books by Gerald Durrell, *My Family and Other Animals* (first published in 1957) and *Birds, Beasts and Relatives* (1969), and in Lawrence Durrell's more poetic but equally personal *Prospero's Cell* (1945). Lawrence had written and published poetry but his main ambition was to be a best-selling novelist. His first two books in prose, *Pied Piper of Lovers* and *Panic Spring*, were neither commercially nor critically successful. He wrote his third book, *The Black Book*, under the liberating influence of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*. Durrell had written a fan letter to Miller and this started a long and rich correspondence between the two. In *Blue Thirst*: 17, Durrell says that he was virtually bombarded by Miller (who was then living in Paris) with "a great deal of encouragement and documentation and masses of ideas." In *Prospero's Cell*: 22 we hear of Miller's "rambling exuberant letters from Paris" being received in Corfu and read to the delight of Durrell's friends who included the Armenian writer Zarian, the Anglo-Greek physician and encyclopedic "monster" Theodore Stephanides, and others. Durrell finally met Miller in Paris, in September of 1937, and decided to have *The Black Book* brought out by the Obelisk Press, which had also published Miller's book. Durrell's publishers, Faber and Faber (where Eliot had been very helpful), were prepared to publish the book themselves but with cuts which Durrell did not want to make.

In 1939 Miller visited Greece, as a first step in a long itinerary he was planning, with Tibet as the ultimate destination! Up to that point, he was not especially interested in the Mediterranean world, but he gradually became interested in Greece through Betty Ryan, a young lady who was living in the same building with him in Paris,

and the "poetic" letters he received from Durrell. Once in Greece, he was captivated by it. The outcome of his affair with that country and people was, of course, *The Colossus of Maroussi*, which he always considered to be his happiest book and which Durrell considers one of the two best books about Greece, the other being his own brother Gerald's *My Family and Other Animals*. Durrell appears several times in *The Colossus*. When war was breaking out in Europe, Durrell—Miller wrote—sought to enlist in the Greek Navy for service on the Albanian frontier, "because he thought more of the Greeks than he did of his own countrymen." We are also given a portrait of a different Durrell in Miller's description of a trip to Mycenae and Sparta, where Durrell's fussiness over an order of boiled eggs at some humble restaurant revealed to Miller "the Englishman in Durrell" and to himself his own "American" identity.

In Edmund Keeley's "Postscript: A Conversation with Seferis" (*Modern Greek Poetry: Voice and Myth*: 198–199) we learn that Durrell was with Miller when they first met Seferis (via Katsimbalis who knew Theodore Stephanides) and that Seferis appreciated the fact that those two non-Greek writers seemed to understand his poetry much better than some of his Greek friends. The encounter is described more fully in *Meres C*: 131–132.

At Katsimbalis', in Maroussi, Henry Miller and Lawrence Durrell. I found them all in the dining room finishing their tea. George [Katsimbalis] had read them translations of my poems. So when I arrived I found an air of interest in me. I think that they [that is, Miller and Durrell] are the first English writers whom I have met. Durrell is a short and sturdy young man with the intelligent head of a satirist (. . .). [He] told me that he was struck by the absence of sentimentalism in my poems (they are unsentimental in a good sense). This he found surprising in a Greek writer. He asked me whether I was brought up with English literature. He thought it odd that before the summer of 1931, as I pointed out, I had barely any contact with the English writers (. . .). At the end of the evening, Miller said to me: "What is peculiar about you is that you turn things inside out."

We recall that Seferis had first come upon the poetry of Eliot in 1931 and that up to that time his education had been overwhelmingly French. Durrell may have eventually understood that Seferis' unsentimentalism was, partly at least, due to Seferis' exposure to modern French writers like Valéry, Apollinaire, Laforgue and Corbière.

In *Meres C* Seferis appears struck primarily by Miller while he

seems to take Durrell for granted. This is understandable. A forty-eight year old American like Miller, penniless but full of Dionysiac spirit, was more impressive than the much younger British expatriate Durrell, who had fallen out with his own people and was then searching for his identity in Greece, under what he called in *Prospero's Cell* the Greek "eye." Miller had to sail to America at the end of 1939. "For a long time," Durrell writes in *The Greek Islands*: 232, in reference to that period, "we had lived in the penumbra of a war declared on all sides but not implemented" in Greece, which technically was still a neutral country. "It was in the twilight of European history that I said goodbye to Henry Miller, who was ordered back to the States by his Consul."

The Durrells had already returned to Britain, except for Lawrence and his wife, who stayed on in Greece and moved to Athens from Corfu. There, Lawrence worked first for the British Embassy as a press officer and then for the British Council. He continued associating with men like George Katsimbalis, Seferis, Elytis, the painter Ghika and others who were linked with the literary magazine *Nea Grammata* (New Letters), which was then ceasing its publication. He contributed to plans for a new magazine this group hoped to use as a showcase for their work. Durrell wanted something really daring, something "in a smooth Dada way," which might secure for them a larger public. "What is important," he remarked, "is that poetry circulate, never mind the means." Seferis was sceptical. He thought that the lack of *kefi* (humour) in the Greek literary life of the time did not allow for such ventures (*Meres C*: 168).

On 1 August 1940, shortly before the Durrells were to move South to Kalamata, Seferis visited them at their home in Athens:

Last night at Larry's in Psihiko. Their house is high on the hill, below the quarries. As soon as I entered, I felt that I had left Greece behind; I was at some suburb of London (. . .) the entrance hall with the exotic knives, the books on shelves, the drapes, the cheese after the fruit, and something beyond all these, an indefinable mood emanating from every piece of furniture, every fabric (. . .). After dinner, Larry read us the first act from a drama on which he was working: the foreman, his wife, the convict, the prompter—he is planning a chorus of murderers. A terribly gloomy story, in the line of 16th century English drama.<sup>7</sup> Nancy (who I think can judge) finds it too *grand guignol*. I observed that the characters seemed to lack verisimilitude: their truth was not their own but the poet's. I also

thought (but said nothing about this) that the English sometimes harbor inside them such a wild world—the civilized English as they usually call them. Consider only *Wuthering Heights*. Where else could a thirty year old girl have written such a thing? (*Meres C*: 218.)

As for Durrell's mood while in Athens, we have a poem which is quite explicit (*Collected Poems*: 112):

*Exile in Athens*

(1940)

To be a king of islands,  
 Share a boundary with eagles,  
 Be a subject of Sails.

Here, on these white rocks,  
 In cold palaces all winter,  
 Under the salt blanket,  
 Forget not yet the tried intent,  
 Pale hands before the face: face  
 Before the sea's blue negative,  
 Washing against the night,  
 Pushing against the doors,  
 Earth's dark metaphors.

Here alone in a stone city  
 I sing the rock, the sea-squill,  
 Over Greece the one punctual star.

To be king of the clock—  
 I know, I know—to share  
 Boundaries with the bird,  
 With the ant her lodge:  
 But they betray, betray.  
 To be the owner of stones,

To be a king of islands,  
 Share a bed with a star,  
 Be a subject of sails.

In an earlier poem, "Finis" (*Collected Poems*: 25), by Durrell, the sea is cast as a mirror of the poet's pale thoughts: "There is a great heart-break in an evening sea; / Remoteness in the sudden naked shafts / Of light that die, tremulous, quivering / Into cool ripples of blue and silver . . . / So it is with these songs." Later, the sea off the coast of Corfu made Durrell ecstatic rather than sadly contemplative.

"Blue" became an obsessive word with him. It is used as a kind of magic stone in many of his poems and often surfaces in his letters ("We are dwellers in the Eye [of Greece], dedicated to the service of this blue," Durrell wrote to Seferis in 1941 from Cairo).<sup>8</sup> But as "Exile in Athens" suggests, the blue could darken and become alien. Durrell idealized the country from the confines, the claustrophobia of the big city, the "stone city" (which reminds us of Seferis' remark about Durrell's house being near quarries).

### III

The second half of 1940 found the Durrells at Kalamata, where Larry taught English. It is from there and in the excited atmosphere of war—Greece had just been invaded by Mussolini's forces which were driven back deep into Albania—that Durrell wrote to Seferis on November 9:

Institute of English Studies

Kalamata 9 November 1940

Dear George:

Just a line to thank you for your note; at last we begin to see the star of Greece rise in all its splendour. I'd love to see Katsimbali on his horse riding over the Albanian hills, and Tonio scouring the sea for the Italian Fleet. Great moments. By contrast we are in a tomb. These people are all paralyzed with terror at losing their money and their lives and cringe about in shelters all day long. No parades, no celebrations—only an occasional air-raid alarm.

When I heard the news I telephoned Burn, asking [him] to close down the school but he thinks not; I have already applied for a liaison job with the British in Greece, but was informed that they are not doing anything worth mentioning! Still I'm waiting to hear. Perhaps naval intelligence could use me. I've just been reading *News of the Week* which we wanted to print ourselves last year! There is a wonderful letter in number II which begins "Englishmen! You are the ancient Greeks of modern times!" Send it to Henry [Miller]: he will like that. As for the Greeks—the spirit is wonderful! They deserve to enjoy their shattering victories in Albania. It seems as simple as eating cheese to them.

Here we have had many visitors but as yet no bombs, which is curious because Kalamata is quite important. The people are very wild and savage—the country people, I mean the Maniotes. They talk now of fighting Germany by themselves without help. We are living on the sea-coast in an awful house, and the bad weather is beginning. I have no *kephi* [that is, I am not in the mood] to write these days, unless it be a saga for

Katsimbalis riding to battle or an ode to Churchill. The last speeches of Churchill, by the way, have been *great prose* as well as popular oratory. T. E. Lawrence once said: "When a man does a job that is bigger than he is, he grows to the size of it." That's rather what Churchill has done. As for Metaxas—salut! O president of the Anglo-Hellenic league. He has become Barba-jani [that is, Uncle John] to the troops—with him and Tonio and you and Katsimbalis and Karageozi we do not need to worry. Between us we will make a new myth of Greece, and a new style of heart for Europe: and a souvlaki [that is, skewered meat] of the Eytalians [sic].

Love from us all,  
Larry

Tonio is the poet Antoniou, whom Durrell had met through Seferis, and Burn is A. R. Burn, the classicist and philhellene (and translator of Greek folk poetry into Scottish and vice versa), who was then in charge of the British Council's activities in Greece. Metaxas was the Greek dictator Ioannis Metaxas, who, in the eyes of many Greeks, was redeemed from the abuses of his regime by not surrendering Greece to Mussolini in 1940. Durrell also uses "Karaghiozis" (in allusion to the popular shadow theatre hero) to represent the anonymous Greeks, mostly peasants, who, as soldiers, were victorious in opposing the Italian invasion. Both here and in Seferis' translation of Durrell's "Mythology" (where, prompted by Durrell, Seferis rendered the poem's last line "O men of the Marmion class, sons of the free" by "O fitra tou megalou Karaghiozi, yi ton eleftheron,")<sup>9</sup> Karaghiozis seems to be an equivalent of the "innocently crazy" and "spontaneously free" individual, who might be either a Greek soldier defending his country against overwhelmingly superior forces or an avant garde writer, like Ramón Gómez de la Serna, who had founded an association for the protection of inanimate objects—Seferis had remembered Ramón in his delirious talk after an antityphus injection and Durrell had been intrigued.

The letter also foreshadows a poem which Durrell must have written about this time—despite his disclaimer of being in the mood for writing serious verse. It is cast as a letter to Seferis and shares in the euphoria that pervaded Greece in the period between the two invasions, the Italian and the German.



*Letter to Seferis the Greek*  
'Ego dormio sed cor meum vigilat'  
(1941)

No milestones marked the invaders,  
But ragged harps like mountains here:  
A text for Proserpine in tears: worlds  
With no doors for heroes and no walls with ears:  
Yet snow, the anniversary of death.

How did they get here? How enact  
This clear severe repentance on a rock,  
Where only death converts and the hills  
Into a pastoral silence by a lake,  
By the blue Fact of the sky forever?

'Enter the dark crystal if you dare  
And gaze on Greece.' They came  
Smiling, like long reflections of themselves  
Upon a sky of fancy. The red shoes  
Waited among the thickets and the springs,  
In fields of unexploded asphodels,  
Neither patient nor impatient, merely  
Waited, the born hunter on his ground,  
The magnificent and funny Greek.

We will never record it: the black  
Choirs of water flowing on moss,  
The black sun's kisses opening,  
Upon their blindness, like two eyes  
Enormous, open in bed against one's own.

Something sang in the firmament.  
The past, my friend compelled you,  
The charge of habit and love.  
The olive in the blood awoke,  
The stones of Athens in their pride  
Will remember, regret and often bless.

Kisses in letters from home:  
Crosses in the snow: now surely  
Lover and loved exist again  
By a strange communion of darkness.  
Those who went in all innocence,  
Whom the wheel disfigured: whom  
Charity will not revisit or repair,  
The innocent who fell like apples.

Consider how love betrays us:

In the conversation of the prophets  
Who daily repaired the world  
By profit and loss, with no text  
On the unknown quantity  
By whose possession all problems  
Are only ink and air made words:  
I mean friends everywhere who smile  
And reach out their hands.

Anger inherits where love  
Betrays: iron only can clean:  
And praises only crucify the loved  
In their matchless errand, death.  
Remember the earth will roll  
Down her old grooves and spring  
Utter swallows again, utter swallows.

Others will inherit the sea-shell,  
Murmuring to the foolish its omens,  
Uncurving on the drum of the ear,  
The vowels of an ocean beyond us,  
The history, the inventions of the sea:  
Upon all parallels of the salt wave,  
To lovers lying like sculptures  
In islands of smoke and marble,  
Will enter the reflections of poets  
By the green wave, the chemical water.

I have no fear of the land  
Of the dark heads with aimed noses,  
The hair of night and the voices  
Which mimic a traditional laughter:  
Nor for a new language where  
A mole upon a dark throat  
Of a girl is called 'an olive':  
All these things are simply Greece.

Her blue boundaries are  
Upon a curving sky of time,  
In a dark menstruum of water;  
The names of islands like doors  
Open upon it: the rotting walls  
Of the European myth are here  
For us, the industrious singers,  
In the service of this blue, this enormous blue.  
Soon it will be spring. Out of  
This huge magazine of flowers, the earth,

We will enchant the house with roses,  
The girls with flowers in their teeth,  
The olives full of charm: and all of it  
Given: can one say that  
Any response is enough for those  
Who have a woman, an island and a tree?

I only know that this time  
More than ever, we must bless  
And pity the darling dead: the women  
Winding up their hair into sea-shells,  
The faces of meek men like dials,  
The great overture of the dead playing,  
Calling all lovers everywhere in all stations  
Who lie on the circumference of ungiven kisses.

Exhausted rivers ending in the sand;  
Windmills of the old world winding  
And unwinding in musical valleys your arms.  
The contemptible vessel of the body lies  
Lightly in its muscles like a vine;  
Covered the nerves: and like an oil expressed  
From the black olive between rocks,  
Memory lulls and bathes in its dear reflections.

Now the blue lantern of the night  
Moves on the dark in its context of stars.  
O my friend, history with all her compromises  
Cannot disturb the circuit made by this,  
Alone in the house, a single candle burning  
Upon a table in the whole of Greece.

Your letter of the 4th was no surprise.  
So Tonio had gone? He will have need of us.  
The sails are going out over the old world.  
Our happiness, here on a promontory,  
Marked by a star, is small but perfect.  
The calculations of the astronomers, the legends  
The past believed in could not happen here.  
Nothing remains but Joy, the infant Joy  
(So quiet the mountain in its shield of snow,  
So unconcerned the faces of the birds),  
With the unsuspected world somewhere awake,  
Born of this darkness, our imperfect sight,  
The stirring seed of Nostradamus' rose.

*(Collected Poems: 99-102)*

Here we have a paean or a hymn to victory which is also an elegy to the dead. The language is highly metaphoric, some of the imagery has to be pondered, but the tone holds to a strong key and the reader is swept along from stanza to stanza. "Letter to Seferis the Greek" is moulded by the archetypal concepts of love betrayed, hubris and nemesis, sin and remission of sin. Bankrupt Greece, which, just as in the Persian invasions of the fifth century B. C., had acted against the gloomy predictions of the wise, "the calculations of the astronomers, the legends / The past believed in could not happen . . ." We will not find a Greek equivalent of this poem in Seferis, where "ecstatic" moments are rare, but rather in Odysseus Elytis' *Heroic and Elegiac Song for the Lost Second Lieutenant of the Albanian Campaign* (1945).

The other Durrell letter to Seferis from this period, published below, shows Durrell making efforts to improve his Greek:

Institute of English Studies

Kalamata 20 February 1941

Dear George:

It was good to hear from you and to know that I am here because I speak Greek: life is disposed to be ironic. But now the good weather has begun things are not too bad here: plenty to eat at any rate; only lack of good company is boring—and nothing to read. I suppose you couldn't gather up Henry's Greek book and post it to me: I would love to read it and would gladly pay postage whatever it may be: or better still, our Kalamata consul is now in Athens: his name is Kostopoulos and he would bring me the MSS when he comes. You will see from the enclosed how famous I am getting as a modern Greek translator! If there's anything new you want 'translated' according to my bastard method send Greek with *full English text*. Otherwise I can't do it! How about us doing *The Woman of Xante* [sic] together: you would do all the work and I would get the fame! I am sure Eliot would print it by Faber. Does the idea amuse you? I will try and find a Greek text here and we could do it by post. It's a good moment now! What do you say?

Love from us all.

Larry

[P. S.] Seriously let us collaborate on Solomos: you could write a critical introduction and appendix and I could help with the Englishing of the poem.

Henry's "Greek book" is of course *The Colossus of Maroussi*, as yet

unpublished but in the hands of Seferis in manuscript form—long chunks of it, if not the entire work. It is not clear what Greek text Durrell had translated, taking the opportunity to deprecate himself as a translator. The work which he proposes to Seferis for translation, *The Woman of Zaky[n]thos* by Dionysios Solomos, an incomplete narrative which the great poet left behind when he died, together with a number of unfinished poems, was, for Seferis, like the *Memoirs* of General Makriyanis, a model of the simple and honest style of writing. But it presents many problems of interpretation and leaves questions unanswered. For these reasons it is doubtful whether Faber and Faber would have ventured publishing it.<sup>10</sup>

#### IV

In Chapter VIII (“Epilogue in Alexandria”) of *Prospero’s Cell*, Durrell mentions several of his fellow exiles in Egypt during the war, giving brief but expressive citations of Seferis and his wife: “Maro, the human and beautiful, in her struggle against apathy (. . .) . the solemn face of Seferiades with its candour and purity.” Early in this period, Seferis had to serve several months in Pretoria, South Africa, before returning to Egypt in the Spring of 1942 to serve at the Greek Embassy in Cairo. While still in Pretoria, Seferis wrote to Durrell (in Cairo), enclosing in his letter the translation of a limerick he had written (“I think that limerick writing is a good exercise for lonely men, and suppose that the genre has been created in England because all of you are lonely like islands”), asking about Miller, whose *Colossus* he would have liked to translate into Greek. “I have all the feelings of a marooned man,” Seferis added. “It is much better than not having feelings at all, as one of your distinguished essayists would have observed, I mean Thomas Stearn [Eliot].”<sup>11</sup>

While in Egypt, Durrell first supported himself and his family as a journalist, then served in Cairo as a Press officer for the British Embassy, which subsequently posted him to Alexandria as an information officer. His wife took their daughter and moved to Palestine when there was fear of a German invasion in Egypt. The separation proved permanent. Durrell met another woman, a Greek-Jewish girl, Eve, whom he was to marry later. In 1943 Durrell was quite active as a man of letters, editing, together with the writers Robin Fadden and Bernard Spencer, the magazine *Personal Landscape*, finishing

his *Prospero's Cell*, publishing his first real collection of poems, *A Private Country*. During this time, Seferis was pouring out his frustrations through poems, like "Days of April '43" and "Actors, M. E. [Middle East]" (*Collected Poems*: 305, 511, 513) whose biting and darkly humorous style set them apart from his other, more introspective and solemn poetry.

Apart from his other activities, Durrell had been translating, with Bernard Spencer, poems of Seferis into English, intending to bring out a book as soon as it was completed. Durrell had been in fact drafted by Katsimbalis to do this job even from before the outbreak of the war. Both of the following letters of Durrell to Seferis concern this project.

29 March 1944

Dear George,

Thank you for the corrections—we are having trouble in translating you so that you don't sound like Eliot—the technical similarities are quite astonishing as the temperamental similarities.

1. You are both 'tentative' poets—not positive and dominated by an idea, but searching and feeling, a little faded and ridiculous: Prufrock and Pascalis.
2. You both are after a statement of the unnameable thing and find it in a landscape. The rose-garden in Burnt Norton—Asini Acropolis.
3. You both quote like hell.
4. You are both elliptical.
5. You both write bits of jazz and invent mythological characters.

Eh bien quoi?

[Lawrence Durrell]

The second letter is undated but seems to come from the same period and is illustrated in a similar fashion with the other, with Durrell's "profile quickly sketched in place of the signature," as Seferis observed in discussing his correspondence with Durrell (p. 2 above).

Dearest George,

Your little piece of autobiography is charming. I am glad to have teased you into doing it—of course I knew the facts: Have you forgotten that evening at Maroussi when Theodore, George and I were battling with Pascalis—and the question of your common origin from the French symbolists together with Eliot was discussed by G[eorge Katsimbalis] with so

much erudition? Perhaps you don't remember—at any rate we are forging ahead and will send you scripts a day or two hence. I want to hurry the book off so it doesn't conflict with the poems of all of us due to appear—the King of Asyny (*sic*) is a very great work, my dear—and it is lovely in English.

[Lawrence Durrell]

Durrell's comparative sketch on Seferis and Eliot is quite perceptive but may have revived a ghost in the mind of Seferis. As early as 1933, Seferis had predicted that Greek critics would overplay his dependence on Eliot (*Meres C*: 118). In time, he grew touchy over the subject, especially after critics like Timos Malanos divided, rather too neatly, Seferis' development as poet between his early Valeryan period and his later Eliotic one. We do not know exactly how Seferis took Durrell's remarks which were obviously made in good faith—"Seferis is the Eliot of Greece," Durrell had also written in 1941 to Eliot's secretary Anne Ridler (*Spirit of Place*: 67)—but he may have tried to enlighten Durrell on Mathios Pascalis, one of several personas which Seferis had adopted in the writing of certain poems with the purpose of representing different sides of his personality. Durrell also wrote poems under the name Conon (*Collected Poems*: 127, 130).

The "evening at Maroussi" may be the same occasion at which Seferis met Durrell and Miller in 1939, although we would expect a reference to Miller as well. The remark on the poem "The King of Asine," last in Seferis' *Logbook I* poems (1940), foreshadows the title of Durrell's and Spencer's book of translations, *The King of Asine and Other Poems*, which was eventually completed with the collaboration of the Greek poet Nanos Valaoritis and published, with a preface by Rex Warner, in 1948 (by John Lehmann),<sup>12</sup> after various delays which had to do with the instability in the lives of those involved with the project as much as with the shortage of paper in Britain right after the war. In the papers of Seferis there is a brief letter to Seferis by Bernard Spencer in which we read: "If you like the translations, please give your consent *as soon as possible*, because Lehmann has got some paper—a rare thing in England (commoner in lavatories than in publisher's offices)."

In his memoir on Durrell, Seferis remembered Spencer, the prematurely deceased poet, whom he called "a beautiful soul / like none

that are made today" (quoting Laforgue). Spencer had joined the British Council in 1940 and was posted to Thessaloniki when Durrell was teaching at Kalamata. During the war he too was in Egypt and edited, as noted earlier, *Personal Landscape* with Durrell and Fadden. The magazine was published from 1942 to the end of the war, drawing on the work of several writers stranded in or posted to the Middle East. Spencer's first book of verse, *Aegean Islands* (1946), was highly thought of by Seferis (according to the recollection of Mrs. Maro Seferis). On the other hand, Kenneth Young (1950:61) found Spencer's "more pictorial, less metaphysical" poetry lacking in comparison to the work of Durrell and Seferis, who may have influenced Spencer.

## V

Durrell did not return to Greece, as Seferis did with the other members of his government, towards the end of 1944. He remained in Egypt until June 1945, at which time he was appointed Press and Public Relations Officer for the Allied Government in the Dodecanese until March 1947. *Reflections on a Marine Venus* (1953) recounts his experiences in Rhodes, and more broadly the Dodecanese, an area of the Greek archipelago which went through a stage transitional between its Italian occupation and its union with Greece in 1947. In the meantime, civil war had erupted in Greece, and Durrell remembers, in his memoir on Seferis, in the Tunisian magazine *Alif*, Seferis' bitter comment on these developments: "En 1918, après la Grande-Guerre, Dada s'est installé dans la littérature. Après cette guerre-ci, voilà Dada entré dans la vie politique!" The comment harbors tragic overtones which are very different from the playful connotations and Dadaist echoes of Durrell's "Mythology." As a diplomat and, particularly, as director for a time of the Regent's (Archbishop Damaskinos') political office, Seferis registered and felt to the marrow of his bones the Greek political troubles of the period. The poem he wrote in 1947, *Thrush*, is a mirror of his war experiences as much as a reflection of his current anxieties and an overwhelming desire for at least a spiritual transcendence.

Before returning to England, in 1947, Durrell called on Seferis, who invited Katsimbalis, the painter Ghika and Rex Warner to gather around a phonograph record of Henry Miller's voice reading from



his works. Miller had sent the record to Durrell and he left it with Seferis. The publication of *The King of Asine and Other Poems* in 1948 and the good reviews it had in Britain must have pleased both Seferis and Durrell. The latter was now in . . . Argentina to work for the British Council, teaching English in the university town of Córdoba. But he did not stay there more than a year. He did not like South America much, although he found it somewhat better than North America which he had not visited yet! He longed for a post in Greece, but a suitable one could not be found; so he accepted the position of Press Attaché in the British Embassy at Belgrade and stayed there until 1952.

Durrell liked the landscape of Yugoslavia but was unable to meet and get to know the people on a human level, as he had done in Greece. In Communist Yugoslavia everyone was suspicious of each other, and the break between Stalin and Tito made the problem even worse. "The people are like moles," Durrell wrote to Henry Miller in the Spring of 1950, "frightened to death, shifty, uneasy." (Durrell-Miller: 281). A writer associated with Durrell was thrown into jail for falling under the influence of a Western imperialist! But Durrell continued writing and his Yugoslavian experience resulted in the novel *White Eagles over Serbia* (1957)—an adventure for young people—and *Esprit de Corps* (1957), a series of farcical short stories about Embassy life in the Balkans.

In his memoir on Seferis, in *Alif*, Durrell says that Seferis "was never overwhelmed by diplomatic life and took a wry and ironical view of it." The same holds true about Durrell, who dramatized the funny side of diplomacy not only in *Esprit de Corps*, but also in two other books, *Stiff Upper Lip: Life among the Diplomats* (1958) and *Sauve Qui Peut* (1966). The lecture "Propaganda and Impropropaganda" (in *Blue Thirst*) is, similarly, a candid exposé of his repeated attempts at diplomacy during periods of crisis. The ephemeral and precarious world of politics, which Seferis had to endure for most of his adult years, and Durrell for different periods of his life, is contrasted in the following poem which Durrell wrote probably before or shortly after leaving Greece in 1947 and which he dedicated to Seferis, with the internal and undefinable, yet very real world of the poet, the domain of the existential why.

*Politics*

## To George Seferis

Chemists might compare their properties:  
 The Englishman with his Apologising Bag,  
 The Ainu with interesting stone-age cuffs,  
 Or whoever invented stars as a witness:  
 Nations which through excess of sensibility  
 Repose in opium under a great leaf:  
 The French with their elastic manual code:  
 And so comparing, find the three common desires,  
 Of hunger, smiling, and of being loved.  
 Outside, I mean, the penumbra of the real  
 Mystery, the whole world as a Why.  
 Living purely in the naked How, so join  
 As the writer unites dissimilars  
 Or the Doctor with his womb-bag joins  
 The cumbersome ends of broken bones in  
 A simple perishable function,  
 To exhale like a smoke ring the O: Joy.  
 (*Collected Poems*: 191)

When Durrell wrote this poem, he could not of course foresee that a few years later he would be playing "The Englishman with his Apologising Bag" himself, I mean with his book on Cyprus *Bitter Lemons*. It all started "poetically." In the fall of 1952, Durrell was still in Belgrade but ready for a move. "I'm quitting the service in December and we are setting off to Cyprus, I think," he wrote to Miller. "No money. No prospects. A tent. A small car. I feel twenty years younger. Heaven knows how we'll keep alive, but I'm so excited, I can hardly wait to begin starving" (Durrell-Miller: 291).

## VI

To earn money Durrell got a teaching job at the Greek Gymnasium in Nicosia and settled in the Kyrenia district of the island after buying a Turkish house. One 20 November 1953 he wrote to Miller: "Night before last there was a bang on the front door and a shout and Seferiades walked in. You can imagine how warmly we embraced each other. He had not altered by a day, still the graceful and lovely humour—man and poet. He had never been to Cyprus before and is ravished by it." And in another letter, of 5 January 1954: "It was so lovely too to see Seferis again after so many years, as gentle and

humorous as ever. I teach, you know, at the Greek Gymnasium and he was brought down as a distinguished poet and given an oration, so I was able to be present as a master. He made a touching address to the boys full of thoughtful things very gently said." (Durrell-Miller: 298, 300). Seferis was Greek Ambassador at Beirut at the time, and though he had stopped over for two hours at the port of Limassol in December 1952, on his way to Lebanon, he considered his 1953 visit to Cyprus to be truly his first one. During this visit he met several times with Durrell, Maurice Cardiff, director of the British Council in Cyprus, and several Greek Cypriot educators, writers and artists.

The conflict between Greece and Britain over Cyprus was growing at the time, but Durrell was still in the "neutral zone." Seferis was apprehensive that his private visit might become the object of political abuse. He had an opportunity to discuss developments with the Greek and British authorities, but on the whole the functions which various Cypriot cities organized in his honour had a broad cultural character. His diary notes from the period (*Meres F*: 1986) suggest the starting points of several of his *Logbook III* poems.

Several months later, Durrell accepted the position of Press and Information Director. According to the Cypriot painter Diamantis, in a letter he wrote to Seferis in August 1954 (just before Seferis' second visit to the island) (Diamantis-Seferis: 1985: 50), when Durrell asked Maurice Cardiff whether he should accept this position, he received the answer: "Do what you like but you will lose all your Greek friends." Cardiff thought, however, that something good might come out of Durrell's appointment to that sensitive post, since Durrell knew the Greeks so well. During his second visit to Cyprus, Seferis, who was again there for essentially private reasons, met Cardiff and learned that Durrell had become a nationalist after his service in Yugoslavia. He now trusted the official policy of the British Government. If Cyprus was thought to be indispensable to the Empire, so be it. "I remember," Seferis noted in his diary *Meres F* (1986: 147), "when he [Durrell] thumbed his nose against the English generals—and before that when he spoke ill of England, the time he was a pacifist." And in a letter to George Theotokas, dated 28 December 1954, Seferis made the comment, particularly sarcastic for an old friend, that he was afraid that Durrell was heading towards becoming a subvice-Kipling! What annoyed Seferis above all

was the attempt of British propaganda, which inevitably issued from Durrell's office, to present Greek Cypriots as being not of Greek origin but of Phoenician origin!

The political situation worsened in 1955, with the start of the guerilla war after the failure of the tripartite (England, Greece and Turkey) conference of London and the Turkish atrocities against the Greek community of Constantinople, and in 1956, when Archbishop Makarios was arrested and sent to exile. Durrell resigned his post and went to England where he wrote to Miller in October 1956: "Cyprus is so tragic it doesn't bear talking about." (*Ibid.*: 306). He wrote *Bitter Lemons*, his "apologia pro vita sua" in Cyprus, in a few weeks, and announced its publication to Miller in a letter from France, dated from February-March 1957: "My book on Cyprus comes in September and will rustle a few doves, I hope." (*Ibid.*: 311). The book was very successful, both for literary and political reasons, and was awarded the Duff Cooper Memorial Prize. 1957 was in general a turning point in Durrell's career, for soon he was famous on both sides of the Atlantic after the publication of several of his books including *Justine*, first part of his *Alexandria Quartet*. He settled in Southern France meaning to stay put, but still regretting the loss of his house on Cyprus. In January 1958 he wrote to Miller, "I sympathise with you not wishing to voyage around. One's own house is such a step. Alas, I shall never get back to mine [in Cyprus] thanks to our fatuity and Turkish imbecility and Greek pottiness" (*Ibid.*: 328).

Whatever its biases, Durrell's *Bitter Lemons* is an open and honest account of its writer's Cypriot experience with its dilemmas and conflicting loyalties. Seferis distilled his own experiences in Cyprus in the poems of *Logbook III* (1955), dedicated "To The People of Cyprus, in Memory and Love." The collection has many facets and displays a variety of moods, from elation to a sense of doom and tragedy, from sorrow to affirmation; but it can also be seen as a resistance to the British attitude towards Cyprus, a resistance couched in figurative terms. The poem "Helen" (*Collected Poems*: 355-361) is certainly a parable questioning the value of sacrifices which *bona fide* people, Greek and non-Greek, made in the Second World War in view of Britain's persisting post-war imperialism; and those who are spoken to in "Salamis in Cyprus" (*Ibid.*: 383-389) as

“Friends from the other war” are those honest fighters, some of them now dead, with whom the poet once felt united in a common cause:

Friends from the other war,  
on this deserted and cloudy beach  
I think of you as the day turns—  
those who fell fighting and those who fell  
    years after the battle,  
those who saw dawn through the mist of death  
or, in wild solitude under the stars,  
felt upon them the huge dark eyes  
of total disaster;  
and those again who prayed  
when flaming steel sawed the ships:  
“Lord, help us to keep in mind  
the cases of this slaughter:  
greed, dishonesty, selfishness,  
the desiccation of love;  
Lord, help us to root these out . . .”

The quoted prayer echoes, as the poet has informed us in a note, the wartime prayer of a British Commander, Lord Hugh Beresford, R. N., who fell in the battle of Crete. The poem ends in a dialogue, where the one speaker is the poet and the other may be an English friend like Durrell or Maurice Cardiff, or even another, resigned part of the poet himself:

—Now, on this pebbled beach, it's better to forget;  
talking doesn't do any good;  
who can change the attitude of those with power?  
Who can make himself heard?  
Each dreams separately without hearing anyone  
    else's nightmare.

—True. But the messenger moves swiftly,  
and however long his journey, he'll bring  
to those who tried to shackle the Hellespont  
the terrible news from Salamis.

Voice of the Lord upon the waters.  
There is an island.

Salamis, Cyprus, November '53

A forewarning that hubris leads inevitably to tragedy and that the island of Cyprus will make its stand.

The inability of the British to assimilate the island into their own

world or fuse themselves with it is sketched in light satirical terms in the rhyming poem "In the Kyrenia District," where the "cynic and philehellene" poet mentioned may be Durrell. One of the two ladies chatting in the poem confesses not to feel entirely at home in Cyprus:

—Ah, this view  
 that questions and questions. Have you ever  
 noticed how the mirror sometimes  
 makes our faces death-like. Or how that  
 thief the sun  
 takes our make-up off each morning? I'd prefer  
 the sun's warmth without the sun; I'd look for  
 a sea that doesn't strip one bare: a voiceless  
 blue  
 without that ill-bred daily interrogation.  
 The silent caress of the mist in the tassels of  
 dream would refresh me:  
 this world isn't ours, it's Homer's—  
 that's the best description I've heard of this  
 place.

It is significant that the poem ends with a reference to some Englishman called Bill (probably to be identified with the fallen Commander of "Salamis in Cyprus") who died in Crete. The casual reference to this man in the middle of an idle chat (that weaves together details pertaining to Britain as well as to Cyprus and is interrupted, at some point, by a dog called "Rex") is bitterly ironic of course: the supreme sacrifice which an English soldier made in a cause that united Greece and Britain during the Second World War has now lost its meaning and value in the new, cynical, and at best touristic view of Cyprus by its British masters.

Durrell's synopsis of his Cypriot experiences was, by analogy, given in a poem which one could see as a prologue or an epilogue to his book *Bitter Lemons*:

*Bitter Lemons*

In an island of bitter lemons  
 Where the moon's cool fevers burn  
 From the dark globes of the fruit,  
 And the dry grass underfoot  
 Tortures memory and revises

Habits half a lifetime dead  
 Better leave the rest unsaid,  
 Beauty, darkness, vehemence  
 Let the old sea-nurses keep  
 Their memorials of sleep  
 And the Greek sea's curly head  
 Keep its calms like tears unshed  
 Keep its calms like tears unshed.

(*Collected Poems*: 238)

## VII

In 1960, by the time the Cyprus issue was resolved with the signing of a treaty between Britain, Greece and Turkey, Durrell had settled permanently in the Midi of France with his third wife Claude, whom he had originally met in Cyprus. In 1962 he travelled to Israel and Greece on a journalistic assignment. On 24 September 1962 he wrote to Diana Menuhim (formerly Diana Gould) (*Spirit of Place*: 153–154):

As you can imagine the Greek visit was most exciting though Israel was interesting and rather moving and I hope to write something about it. But Athens gave me back at a blow all my old friends whose touching warmth was really like a home-coming; made it like one I mean. We did a swift autumn tour of the Peloponnesus—deserted, bare and blue! Dug out old taverns, discovered new. Above all had Katsimbalis and Seferis to ourselves for *days* on end. Such shouts, such gales of laughter, such memories exchanged! It was like a gasp of rare air and I felt twenty years younger.

In 1964 and 1967 there were reunions at Corfu where much had changed from the pre-war days. Durrell wrote an essay, "Oil for the Saint; Return to Corfu"—the Saint being the patron saint of the island, St. Spyridon—to commemorate his comeback.

In 1966, when Alan G. Thomas was planning *Spirit of Place*, he wrote to Seferis with the request that Seferis lend him, for use in the book, some of Durrell's letters to him. Thomas' letter lies among the papers of Seferis with a handwritten comment by Seferis that he had written to Durrell on the matter. "There are no Durrell-to-Seferis letters in *Spirit of Place*, which probably means that Seferis' response to that request was negative—not surprising, since Seferis hardly let any of his private letters to others or such letters to him be

published while he was alive. He only made moderate use of such letters in his own writing, as we have seen in discussing his memoir about Durrell.

In 1972, a few months after the death of Seferis, Durrell wrote an obituary poem:

*Seferis*

Time quietly compiling us like sheaves  
Turns round one day, beckons the special few,  
With one bird singing somewhere in the leaves,  
Someone like K. or somebody like you,  
Free-falling target for the envious thrust,  
So tilting into darkness go we must.

Thus the fading writer signing off  
Sees in the vast perspectives of dispersal  
His words float off like tine seeds,  
Wind-borne or bird-distributed notes,  
To the very end of loves without rehearsal,  
The stinging image riper than his deeds.

Yours must have set out like ancient  
Colonists, from Delos or from Rhodes,  
To dare the sun-gods, found great entrepôts,  
Naples or Rio, far from man's known abodes,  
To confer the quaint Grecian script on other men;  
A new Greek fire ignited by your pen.

How marvellous to have done it and then left  
It in the lost property office of the loving mind,  
The secret whisper those who listen find.  
You show us all the way the great ones went,  
In silences becalmed, so well they knew  
That even to die is somehow to invent

(*Collected Poems*: 321)

The poem is rhyming and thus approximates better a traditional funerary encomium or elegy. Seferis is portrayed as a sower of words which will invigorate those who will listen to them. He is also a worthy promoter of Greek traditions and a man whose silences are as pregnant with meaning as his words. Seferis' supreme silence, that is his death, is as eloquent as his life and work. This reminds us not only of Durrell's own "tears unshed" of the poem "Bitter Lemons" but also, and above all, of Seferis' work; the poem "Last Stop," for



instance (*Collected Poems*: 309–315), where Seferis' mind is with the anonymous heroes who "walk in the dark," or Seferis' comment on the poetry of Bernard Spencer, at the end of his memoir about Durrell. Quoting some verses of Spencer: "Separated, young lovers hold hands through letters / Between them the world is a factory of fear. We admit / That it is better not to admit the reason why. . .," Spencer had read him those verses but nothing had changed. The factory of fear was still there, "either in front of the stage lights or waiting in the wings." In fact there is an echo of Spencer's lines in Seferis' "Last Stop," when we read: "And if I talk to you in fables and parables / It's because it's more gentle for you that way; and horror / Really can't be talked about because it's alive, / because it's mute and goes on growing."

Although Seferis did not find it natural to write heroic poetry, he had a passionate and painful attachment to Greece. Miller called Seferis a "patriot" in allusion to that peculiar attachment which Miller felt he could not have for his own native land. But in the end, America proved large enough to accommodate even the disgruntled Miller. He settled and lived in California for the rest of his life. Durrell, who had a "simple, old-fashioned, perhaps slightly prickly British patriotism: his Kipling side," as G. S. Frazer put it in his essay on Durrell (*The Writers and their Work*: 26), also compromised by settling somewhere between England and the Mediterranean, an area which he recognized as his true spiritual centre. But Seferis could not escape Greece, even though he had written "Wherever I travel Greece wounds me." ("In the Manner of G. S.," *Collected Poems*: 107). He was an expatriate, like the other two men, alienated from his own society, and judging from his diaries and indirectly from his poetry, often very unhappy in his professional career. Yet, he belonged in the Greek landscape and always explored its emblematic meanings. The freedom with which Durrell moved for so many years from private to public life and vice versa is quite remarkable. Seferis saw the futility of leaving his job as a diplomat; he had earlier recognized the need for a "breastplate," however heavy that might be (cf. *Meres A*: 11: "It would be horrible if I were unable to pass my examination. My position is intolerable. As long as I do not have a surface or a cuirass, I cannot do anything (. . .).")

In any case, opposites do attract each other, and the freer temper-

ament of Durrell must have initially attracted the reserved Seferis. He saw in the first of the two letters from Durrell which he discusses in his memoir on Durrell a "faith in happiness, a mystique of happiness" which also Miller seemed to embody—the latter was to advise Seferis, in 1942, to keep his wits and go to explore Timbuctoo! Seferis, who, as his fellow Greek Nikos Gabriel Pentzikis has written (*Ya ton Seferi*: 152–54), found it difficult to get up and dance off his worries, so to speak, seemed to be both fascinated by, but also mistrustful of his opposites, that is men who overreacted to things. Above all he appreciated genuineness. He recognized, for example, the poet Sikelianos as a giant of sorts but also felt that Sikelianos could be carried away. He disliked the rhetoricism of Kazantzakis and wondered whether his *Odyssey* is real poetry—by the way, Durrell thought that, in Greece, Kazantzakis was someone whose work could be compared with his own. To an interviewer's question on what modern writers he found himself most naturally in sympathy he replied: "In France, with Montherlant and Proust; in America with Henry Miller; in Greece with Kazantzakis; in Argentina with Borges; in Italy with Svevo" *Labrys*: 42).

Miller and Durrell exchanged many accolades through the years. Miller was very old and half-blind in the late 70s when they asked him to contribute a statement about Durrell for the special issue of *Labrys* referred to earlier, but he did not mince his words. He wrote that he considered Durrell to be "the finest writer in the English language today (a writer *par excellence*, as they say)." Seferis liked the poetry of Durrell but confessed not to be very fond of his fiction. He wrote in his memoir on Durrell: "Novels do not mean a lot to me, and I never gave much importance to the civil servant whose diplomatic buffoonery has made numerous people laugh in the chancelleries." He does not say why he did not like Durrell's novels, but we may suppose that he agreed with several English critics who found them overwritten, too rich and gaudy. Again, it should be pointed out that both Kazantzakis and Durrell were better accepted in America (which is still going through its epic period) than in England where nuance and understatement are valued more than vigour and directness of expression.

The meeting ground of Seferis and Durrell (whatever their affinities or differences of character) was of course Greece, in a real and

also imaginative sense. In his memoir on Durrell, Seferis starts with Durrell's calling Greece (at the end of *Prospero's Cell* "not a country but a living eye," an eye that records and measures the traveller, and recalls the riddle of the Theban Sphinx to which there was only one answer: Man. Seferis quoted the story with the Sphinx also in his Nobel acceptance speech in 1963 and described, in his diaries and essays, the Greek landscape as a landscape made in the measure of man. And it is Durrell's Greek poems which he discusses in his memoir.

Durrell was inspired in several poems, as we have seen, by the work of Seferis, but Seferis never dedicated a poem of his to Durrell—the only two non-Greeks who were "given" poems by Seferis were Henry Miller and Rex Warner; nor is there a Seferis poem which relates directly to a work of Durrell. But this does not mean that Seferis did not respond consciously or subconsciously to things which the poet or travel-writer Durrell produced. If we try, we can find echoes or similarities of tone and imagery between the two poets. For instance, when we read "And those who abandoned the stadium to take up arms / struck the obstinate marathon runner / and he saw the track sail in blood, / the world empty like the moon / the gardens of victory wither: you seem them in the sun, behind the sun" (Seferis' *Thrush*, III) we may recall "Those who went in all innocence, / Whom the wheel disfigured: whom / Charity will not revisit or repair, / The innocent who fell like apples" (Durrell's "Letter to Seferis the Greek"). The angle of vision is different in the two passages but there is a likeness of tone and a similar succession of images which lead to some still point, like a punctuation mark, which both finishes and recapitulates dramatically what has been said. But a search of such parallels could lead us astray. The field of influences is at best vague and uncertain.

In conclusion, we may add that, with the Greek landscape and culture as mediators, Seferis and Durrell often shared thoughts and feelings which transcended their personal and national boundaries. The ways in which they described the light of Greece, for example, are idiosyncratic but reflect a similar sensibility. It would be appropriate to finish this essay with the words of Durrell and Seferis on what particularly united them: the landscape of Greece.

From a letter by Durrell to Diana Gould (*Spirit of Place*: 82):

Ah but Diana you should see the landscape of Greece—it would break your heart. It has such pure nude chastity; it doesn't ask for applause; the light seems to come off the heart of some Buddhistic blue stone or flower, always changing, but serene and pure and lotion-soft on the iris (. . .). Lots of love and a bit of blue broken from the sky.

From Seferis' *Meres E*: 20:

I sometimes think that the only thing that makes a difference between us and them [the English] (in thought, expression, architecture, language) is the light.

*Ibid*: 25:

[In Greece] a ruined lintel with two or three leaves is really *something*. It is the light. The most insignificant objects toy and dance in the light and you observe their transubstantiation by it.

#### NOTES

- 1 Durrell had initially titled his poem "Mythology II" to distinguish it from "Mythology I," which he later changed to "Coptic Poem."
- 2 An English translation of the memoir was printed in the special issue on Durrell of *Labrys* 5 (1979). I am quoting from, or referring to this English translation in the present article.
- 3 Durrell half-dated or did not date at all most of his letters. The problem was noted also by A. G. Thomas, in his preface to *Spirit of Place* (1969).
- 4 "Bouboulina," another name for Durrell's daughter "Pinkie." The name (of a well-known heroine of the Greek revolution of 1821) was also applied by Nikos Kazantzakis to Lady Ortense of his *Zorba the Greek*.
- 5 I am quoting from the letter as it was printed in *Labrys* (n. 2 above). Another, slightly doctored version of this letter was published in Seferis' *Meres D*: 169–171.
- 6 With the permission of Mrs. Maro Seferis, to whom I am grateful.
- 7 In Durrell's *Collected Poems*: 80–81, we find "The Sermon, from a verse play," which most probably comes from the play mentioned by Seferis.
- 8 Quoted in a letter to Miller by Seferis (included in the *Labrys* issue, n. 2 above).
- 9 Seferis explains his translation in *Meres D*: 284; in *Andigrafes*: 160; and in his memoir on Durrell (n. 2 above).
- 10 *The Woman of Zaky[n]thos* can now be read in two different English translations: by Marianthe Colakis, in *The Charioteer* 24–25 (1982/83): 118–136; and by Peter Colaclides and Michael Green, in *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* 1 (1985): 153–171. The first translation is accompanied by the Greek original; both carry introductions and notes.

- 11 The letter, dated from the beginning of November 1941, is printed in the Appendix for 1941 in Seferis' *Meres D*: 159–160.
- 12 The book was preceded by Robert Levesque's *Séféris, Choix de Poèmes*, which was published in Athens in 1945. Levesque was another draftee of Katsimbalis and worked on his translations during the war with the assistance of Seferis' brother Angelos.
- 13 See also Peter Levi's "Lawrence Durrell's Greek Poems," in *Labrys* (n. 2 above), 101–103.

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