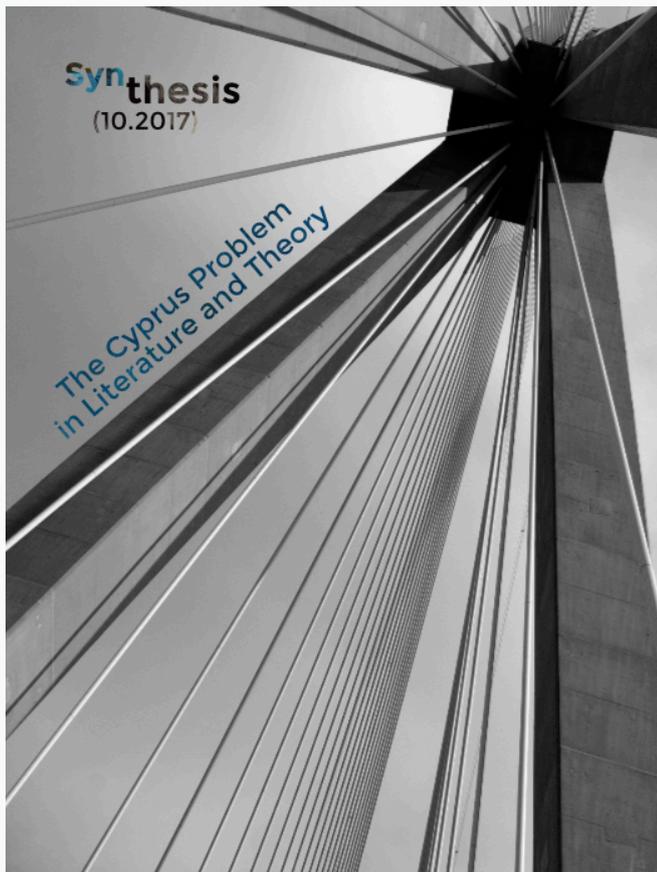


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A Selected Fiction? Lawrence Durrell and the Overgrown Typescript of Bitter Lemons

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A Selected Fiction? Lawrence Durrell and the Overgrown Typescript of *Bitter Lemons*

David Roessel

Abstract

This article looks at previously unmined archival documents in order to explore the pre- and post-publication history of Lawrence Durrell's *Bitter Lemons*, a travelogue written during the 'emergency years' of the EOKA campaign against British rule and for union with Greece. It examines the ways in which paratextual documents surrounding this publication history illuminate the awkward, sometimes contradictory, relationship between Durrell's book and the last years of the British colonial government in Cyprus, a government for which Durrell worked as an employee in the Public Information Office.

Pursewarden, the famous novelist that Durrell created as a character in the *Alexandria Quartet*, remarked, "We live...lives based on selected fictions" (*Balthazar* 138). As Durrell's masterpiece unfolds, the reader is made keenly aware of how important Pursewarden's observation is to the narrative. Balthazar, in the volume named after him, corrects Darley's account in *Justine* by making a new, interlinear text with the comment:

our view of reality is conditioned by our position in space and time—not by our personalities as we like to think. Thus every interpretation of reality is based upon a unique position. Two paces east or west and the whole picture is changed (*Balthazar* 138).

Bitter Lemons has uncanny similarities to the first novel of Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet*, *Justine*. This is hardly surprising, as Durrell was writing the Cyprus book just after the completion of *Justine*. In both books, we are offered a naive narrator whose interpretation of events is limited by his angle of vision. It is striking

how often in *Bitter Lemons* Durrell refers to his changing angle of vision; for example, he moves from “purely personal angle of sight” (119) to “another, by no means reassuring, angle of sight” (160) when he takes a government position¹ It is as if the Cyprus book contains and uncovers the multiple levels of interpretation provided in the multi-volume *Quartet*. Further, *Bitter Lemons* generated responses from other authors who were ‘two paces to the east or west,’ such as Costas Montis’s *Closed Doors*, Charles Foley’s *Island in Revolt*, and Rodis Roufos’s *The Age of Bronze*, all of which were written after *Bitter Lemons* had become the leading account of the Cyprus problem. Just as *Balthazar* constructed an interlinear critique of Darley, these works, in their own ways, comment on the inadequacy of the angle of vision of *Bitter Lemons*.

In *The Age of Bronze*, Rodis Roufos set out precisely to provide a kind of interlinear correction to Durrell’s book. In a passage directly addressing *Bitter Lemons* that was excised when the text was published, Roufos’s narrator says that Durrell’s effort was:

not exactly the kind of book I had had in mind. It was too selective. The author is so respectful and complimentary to high ranking officers, and so obviously thrilled by the splendour of the British army in action, that he forgets to talk about some of its less attractive duties or gives a bowdlerized version of them. The book is not only very British—which is natural enough—it is Tory British... Another book was needed to fill in the gaps, to give the Greek view (“Sour Grapes” 138).

Roufos had served as Greek consul for Cyprus from 1954 to 1956, the very years that Durrell was employed by the Public Information Office (PIO) of the Colonial Government. The two men knew each other and would meet socially. Roufos was a fierce proponent of Enosis, union of the island with Greece, and conveyed messages between the Greek government and George Grivas, the leader of the guerilla organization EOKA, whose initials stand for the National Organization of Cypriot Fighters (Kranidiotis 159). Dion, the character based on Roufos in *The Age of Bronze*, describes what such a diplomatic post entailed, and the comments would also apply to Durrell’s position with the PIO. “I had trained myself to think and talk of Cyprus in crisp, clear-cut facts and figures, arguments and counter-arguments. I had repeated them countless times, in various languages, to the people to whom it was my job to explain the Greek view,” so that there were times he “felt like a tiresome parrot” (10). Durrell had to be just as much of a tiresome parrot in his job, just as much a mouthpiece for the British view, but he never makes that role as clear to the reader of *Bitter Lemons* as does Roufos.

In this paper, I explore one aspect of the idea of ‘selected fiction,’ one that is quite literal in application. When Roufos submitted his novel to Heinemann, the publisher told him that they would take the book if he cut a section of about five pages that discussed a book called *Sour Grapes*. Roufos’s text begins, “Everybody—at least anybody who was anybody in the small international set that cultivates culture—knows about Maurice Ferrell, so I do not need to expatiate on his literary merits” (134). Indeed, it was so clear that everyone would know that *Sour Grapes* was *Bitter Lemons*, that Heinemann insisted that the pages be removed from the published text.² An argument might be made that the discussion of *Sour Grapes* interrupts the flow of Roufos’s story, for as it stands, it amounts to a digression that takes the reader out of the fictional world of the novel into a critique of another book. But Roufos was not persuaded to make the excision for aesthetic reasons, and he had always wished that the pages had appeared in the published text. In 1994, his wife Arietta Roufou seized the first opportunity to publish the pages in the English in which Roufos had written them, and then included them in the 2011 edition of the reprinted Greek translation. The Roufos family would insist that these pages appear in any new English edition, if that could ever be arranged.

Sour Grapes, Roufos says, was “worthy of a great novelist. Its beautiful writing more than makes up for any deficiencies of a pedantic fact-finder” (“*Sour Grapes*” 136). After Roufos goes through all of the ways that ‘Ferrell’ had made the *Sour Grapes* an engaging read, he concludes:

The result was the British public swallowed *Sour Grapes*, bait and hook, and was left with the comfortable feeling that, whatever mistakes might have been made in the past, there was not much wrong with British policy at present: only a continuation of British rule could spare the island further anarchy and bloodshed (“*Sour Grapes*” 136).

Roufos accurately reflects Durrell’s own strategy for dealing with Greek Cypriots:

The Greeks were naive and trusting. A vague promise of self-determination in the remote future—say twenty years—would have kept them quiet. Meanwhile by stepping up propaganda and granting more scholarships, Britain had a reasonable chance of winning over to its side an appreciable proportion of the population and making the Greeks forget Enosis; if they still remembered at the end of twenty years it would be time to consider the question afresh (“*Sour Grapes*” 136).

This is as good a summary of what Durrell advocates in his own book as any I have seen (for example, see *Bitter Lemons* 120).

The Age of Bronze was published without a note by the publisher or the author that the book had been cut. And yet page one, which has the heading “The Prelude,” carries two epigraphs from Durrell’s work. The first, from *Reflections on a Marine Venus* of 1953, praises the Greece that he knew and loved.³ The second, from *Bitter Lemons* itself in 1957, wonders why the Cypriots could possibly want union with a poor and dysfunctional Greek state. Roufos cleverly uses Durrell’s own words against him, and the epigraphs make plain to the astute reader that *The Age of Bronze* is aimed at *Bitter Lemons*. Did Durrell give approval for the use of his passages in Roufos’s novel? No evidence for that has yet come to light. Since the epigraphs function as an arrow pointing toward Durrell and his book as the target, why was Roufos’s critique of the man and his book taken out? Perhaps a study of the files at Heinemann will one day clear this matter up.

If *The Age of Bronze* appeared as a ‘selected fiction’ due to editorial excisions, Roufos’s book appears to share that fate with *Bitter Lemons*. At least that is what Durrell implies in the preface to the book. The fourth paragraph reads as follows:

I much regret that the cutting of my overgrown typescript removed the names of many friends to whom I am deeply indebted for material about Cyprus; let me briefly make amends by thanking the following for many kindnesses: Peter and Electra Megaw, G. Pol. Georghiou, Fuad Sami, Nikos Kranidiotis, Paul Xiutas, and Renos and Mary Wideson (11).

This passage certainly deserves more attention than scholars have paid to it.⁴ Durrell’s editor at Faber and Faber, Anne Ridler, had drastically shortened and shaped the text of *Reflections on a Marine Venus* removing nearly 80,000 words and, for some reason, all references to vampires.⁵ “Cut in half as it was,” Durrell lamented to a friend, “I can’t bear it.” (*Spirit of Place* 119). If the emendations for *Bitter Lemons* were even half of those for *Reflections on a Marine Venus*, as the phrase “overgrown typescript” encourages us to suppose, the contents could hold some very enlightening material. Further, in addition to the question of what was cut, there was the issue of who did the cutting. Did Anne Ridler or someone from Faber take a blue pencil to the Cyprus book and leave a large section on the cutting-room floor? On the other hand, Durrell had just left a post in the Public Information Office of the Colonial Government of Cyprus, and may have had to submit the manuscript for review. In 1954, the novelist Francis King, teaching for the British Council in Athens, was required to submit his novel *The Firewalkers* for review by his employer. He was told that he could either publish the book under his own name and resign his position, or publish under a pseudonym and

stay on the with British Council (King 1). Penelope Tremayne had worked for the Red Cross in Cyprus, indeed had lived in Durrell's house after his departure from the island. When she published her book about her experience on Cyprus, *Below the Tide*, the Red Cross insisted that she change the real names of all villagers (MacNiven 465). So it would appear the Red Cross, if they did not review the manuscript, at least asked to be informed and issued guidelines. And there was the experience of Arthur Campbell and his book on the British effort in Cyprus from 1955 to 1957 entitled *The Flaming Cassock*. Campbell was encouraged to write his account by the then Governor of Cyprus, Sir John Harding, only to have the book suppressed by his successor as Governor, Sir Hugh Foot.⁶ Gordon Bowker reports that, when Durrell arrived in London from Cyprus in need of money, he proposed to go on the BBC to talk about "Politics and Terrorism on Cyprus." But the Foreign Service did not allow that discussion because it thought Durrell was "unsound on Cyprus" and his interview with the BBC was on poetry instead (Bowker 232). These examples lead one to ask whether *Bitter Lemons* had to be submitted for review. If so, is that when the overgrown typescript became shorter?

The textual history of *Bitter Lemons* was, chronologically, rather brief. On August 26, 1956, Durrell left Cyprus. At the beginning of October Durrell went to Stepping Stone Cottage in Dorset to work on the book and by early December he sent the typescript to Faber and Faber. Durrell told a friend that he "had finished the book in twenty-seven days" (MacNiven 445), and in a later interview said that he had written "*Bitter Lemons* in six weeks and sent it off with only the typescript corrected. It was published as it stood" (Ingersoll 26). The book appeared in July 1957 after the publication of *Justine* earlier in the year. Durrell was already thinking of a book on Cyprus before his departure from the island and had chosen the title *Bitter Lemons*, "very bitter I'm afraid" (MacNiven 437). Charles Foley thought that Durrell left Cyprus "with the manuscripts of *Bitter Lemons* and *Justine* under his arm" (111). Yet, while Durrell had a manuscript of *Justine* when he left Cyprus, and he had certainly thought about a Cyprus book, Foley was wrong about the existence of a typescript under Durrell's arm on the way to Nicosia airport.

The manuscript material at the Morris Library of the Southern Illinois University-Carbondale supports Durrell—there is a single typescript that Faber accepted almost exactly as it was. If, as Durrell seems to suggest, he himself had made the corrections to the typescript then it would appear that neither Faber nor anyone else asked for changes or omissions. The corrections on the typescript are usually minor edits written

by hand on less than half of the pages, alterations such as “grandfathers” for “graybeards” (T. 41), “made one live once more” for “made one breathe once more” (T. 55), or “I had to work through” to “I found myself imprisoned by” (T. 105). On T. 137, “Our problem” became “The Cyprus problem” and on T. 149 “turned upon us” became “turned upon Cyprus.” These changes seem a bit odd as at other places in the published text Durrell did indeed use the pronoun “our” for the British view (see, for example, “our national credit,” 37). If he was trying to appear a bit more neutral in making these changes, he certainly was not consistent throughout. On T. 145, he deleted “by the same token it is usually innocent civilians who get killed when opposing forces clash.”

The most noteworthy edit may well be when “the disgusting, and typically Greek, murder of civilians suspected of being informers” became “the disgusting, and typically Balkan, murder of civilians suspected of being traitors.” On the typescript, “informers” is crossed out and “traitors” had been written in hand above it. “Greek” became “Balkan,” one assumes, at the proof stage as that does not appear as an emendation on the typescript. It is the most curious and interesting of the alterations not recorded on the typescript itself. On the whole, however, the emendations do not change the political viewpoint of the typescript. The published book appeared pretty much as Faber received it, minus a grand total of maybe three or four or pages.

Of the longer cuts to the “overgrown typescript,” one came near the end of the book in a description of the landscape through which Durrell and his schoolteacher friend Panos travel on their way to pick cyclamens and other flowers. These lines were omitted simply for aesthetic reasons, and this was probably wise, for it makes the description of “the flowers which dusted these quiet terraces to a starscape—thick as the Milky Way” more powerful (*Bitter Lemons* 221).

A description of Kruger, a colleague in the colonial government, was also crossed out. Kruger was:

only one of a gallery of rogues who inhabited the town of Nicosia and enjoyed some vague mandate as a consultant—I never discovered in what.. He had a habit of crucifying himself at the enormity of the Cyprus Government’s mistakes, throwing out his arms to their full span for a few seconds while his face worked and he uttered the phrase which became in the course of time a sort of slogan; “My dear boy, you can’t run a sweet-shop like that” (T. 104).

As this is the only mention of Kruger, and the paragraph has no further value for the book, again this seems a judicious pruning. The passage omitted on T. 112 was different in nature:

Locked as we were in a position which offers no space for manoeuvre on either side, we still had time to smile at one another, to exchange vague gestures of friendliness across the gulf—like the last endearments of friends about to be parted for years, perhaps forever. The equations of power are thrilling in their geometrical completeness and accuracy; we were faced with the following proposition: “If the police should founder and the military take over, the resulting effect of force upon public opinion might unseat the moderates among the Enotists and replace them with fanatics.

It was a time that seemed to call for sweeping decisions, yet there was no way of taking them without surrendering the situation to forces far stronger than those possessed by the police, with the consequent danger of inflaming the man in the street under the goads alike of Athens and the so-called “provocations” of the Administration. He was the human charge which lay between the two factions, waiting to be ignited like a percussion cap waiting for the hammer to fall.

These remarks come just before Durrell recorded the capture of a ship running guns at a cove near Paphos, and just after he mentioned that troops had opened fire on demonstrators in Limassol and wounded three. It seems clear why Durrell cut this musing about the problems of using the military against a civilian population. When Harding replaced Armitage as the Colonial Governor in 1955, he instituted just such a policy. The sentiment expressed in the passage above can be found in the published text in much more qualified way: “From all of this followed another unpalatable fact—and one which from the point of view of Public Relations I found alarming. What the police could not enforce the military would have to undertake at gun-point” (158). Durrell never explicitly challenges government policy in *Bitter Lemons*. He does, at times, ask questions or offer a point of view restricted by his own angle of vision.

The longest excision comes from the chapter “The Swallows Gathers,” covering the period in 1953 before Durrell began teaching at the Pancyprian Gymnasium. I have cut the passage a bit; but as it introduces two important figures in Durrell’s first year on the island most of it has been kept:

I have started to earn a little money by copy-editing for a local wine-firm managed by the island’s solitary millionaire, Mr. Manglis. It was the greatest fun. Manglis himself was a solitary and work-mystic of a peculiarly interesting kind, and he carried about a formidable persona of an American tycoon purely to protect something guileless and boyish in himself which was always threatening to lapse into ample generousities which, he felt, do not become a millionaire. I liked him, but never hesitated to cross him when he became tiresome as he sometimes was; but our relations were founded on a real respect for one another. His office was full of odd fish, among them a roaring character, half poet, half politician, lapsed communist, lapsed anti-clerical, wild, bedeviled, punch-drunk, dotty and utterly Greek...called Paul Xiutas. [. . .]

Manglis himself arrived punctually at six every morning, and spent a couple of hours before the staff arrived in quiet meditation over his papers. He had all the Greek’s most mystical approach to material matters, and I never failed to find him at his desk, as devout as a Moslem at prayers.

He suspected me of being a frightful bohemian and could not understand why a Foreign Service officer of some standing should bury himself in a Greek village—unless he happened to be chief of the secret service. The prompting of natures not concerned with gain for its own sake, or preoccupied with things that have to be felt and thought, were foreign to him and he made no pretence of trying to understand them (T67).

Durrell does not relate how he met Constantine Pericles Manglis, the owner of the KEO wine, beer, and spirits company. Manglis undoubtedly would have hired Durrell for the same reason that he was offered the position at the Pancyprian Gymnasium. Durrell not only knew British philhellenes from the war like Patrick Leigh Fermor, but also leading Greek intellectuals like George Seferis and George Katsimbalis. Durrell himself indicates that Manglis was suspicious of Durrell's motives—the text had read “Gestapo” before that had been crossed out and “secret service” was written above. It is the only time in the typescript where Durrell acknowledges that, after he took the job as Information Officer, many of the Greeks thought that he had been planted in the Pancyprian Gymnasium to gather information.⁷

Further, at the time that Durrell was writing this passage, he was well aware that his portrayal of Manglis was erroneous and misleading. For it was Manglis who had brought about the creation of *The Times of Cyprus*, an English language newspaper that was a thorn in the side of the Colonial Government, and especially the Public Information Office that Durrell directed. Michael Davidson has related that Byron Pavlides, an emissary of Manglis, approached him about starting the paper (305). Davidson brought Charles Foley on board to edit and own the newspaper to provide a veneer of independence. Still, Manglis guaranteed enough advertisements to ensure that the paper would be financially viable (Davidson 309). According to Davidson, *The Times of Cyprus* was established to maintain “an oasis of honesty in a wilderness of lies by exposing the Harding Administration (there weren't so many lies on the EOKA side, they did not need them)” (305). *The Times of Cyprus* started publication in April 1955, but the planning had begun months earlier. I have seen no evidence that Manglis ever spoke to Durrell about his desire to start an opposition newspaper in English, or ever considered offering Durrell a role in the effort.⁸ But it seems highly improbable, if not impossible, that Durrell could have worked for Manglis and would not have known what everyone knew, that Manglis had a cause of his own, Enosis, that was not for gain's sake, and was willing to put a large amount of his fortunes to that end.

And then there is the mention of Paul Xiutas, who is thanked in the preface of *Bitter Lemons*. In a letter to Austen Harrison, Durrell had described Xiutas as follows:

He is a really interesting man; anc. Greek scholar, modern poet, friend of Kavaphis. He is really so nice. While other people were setting fire to Storrs [the government house set on fire in 1931] he, with more practical sense blew up bridges and took possession of a mountain range in the Troodos for over a fortnight—and he has been expelled from the Gymnasium as a dangerous influence. He is KEO's sales manager and every week does a round trip of the island—has a large comfortable car; he stops off at all unusual places and interviews weird characters. The trip to Limassol was most amusing. He knows anc. Greek as well as modern and like Katsimbali has that marvelous sense of existing continuity between them. You really travel with him, back into time. He is also a great specialist on Digenes Akritas. Being educated in Greece makes such a difference—he has escaped our baby-culture here, and while he really is an educated classics master has remained a Greek and a human being. I don't know whether F. S. [Freya Stark] would like him, but for me, he is the key to Cyprus. There is not a corner he doesn't know and love—and his personal folk-lore collection of notes, stories, and peasant beliefs is enormous. He is much feared by my employers [at the Gymnasium] and I think I shall be sacked if I go on being seen with him...between us, we are going to blow something up while Manglis is away in England" ("Letters of Lawrence Durrell to Austin Harrison" 15-16).

According to this letter, Durrell met a Cypriot version of Katsimbali just as Henry Miller and Durrell had met the real one in Athens. Xiutas not only brought the island to life, he seamlessly connected past and present. He was "the key to Cyprus." So why was the passage about him in *Bitter Lemons* so much less lyrical about his learning and knowledge, and then completely removed? First, in *Bitter Lemons* Durrell is not interested in a marvelous sense of continuity with the past, especially if that past was a Greek past.⁹ Durrell's argument is that the Greek Cypriots have an emotional, not a real, attachment to Greece, so Xiutas as "the key to Cyprus" would undercut Durrell's basic theme. Not surprisingly, Xiutas was in favor of Enosis—indeed it is noteworthy that before he took the PIO job Durrell almost celebrates the fact that Xiutas has taken active steps against British rule and that they were going to blow something up together. None of that even gets into the passage that was cut from *Bitter Lemons*.¹⁰

It is not really surprising that Durrell removed Xiutas from the text, as the description simply attempts to make Xiutas another of the rogues of Cyprus (a "half-poet," who was "wild, punch-drunk" and "dotty") without any of the intelligence and charm that is found in the portrayal of Xiutas in the letter to Harrison, in which Durrell notes that Xiutas was friend of Cavafy. Unlike Sabri Tahir, the higher class Turk who gets to express his views about the Cyprus conflict, neither Manglis nor Xiutas could say what they really thought in the book Durrell was to publish for a British audience.

This is characteristically Durrell; once again Roufos seems to be on point in the following observation:

Harry spoke of Athens and I realized that he disliked Athenians, just as he disliked most mainland Greeks who did not conform to his conception of what a Greek should be like. He particularly disapproved of the educated; they were too different from his own pets: the picturesque illiterate shepherds and fishermen described in his book about war-time Greece. I knew the symptoms; they were common to most Philhellenes. (60)

In *Bitter Lemons*, as in *Prospero's Cell* and *Reflections on a Marine Venus*, Durrell exhibited a condescending attitude toward the native inhabitants of the island.¹¹ Why, one wonders, could Henry Miller in his one book about Greece pay such homage to Katsimbalis, Seferis, and Ghika, while Durrell in his prose never manage to bring on stage a Greek who was his equal, with the exception of the Anglo-Greek Theodore Stephanides on Corfu? So Xiutas was not necessarily removed solely for political reasons. It fits a pattern that runs throughout Durrell's writing on Greek islands. And Xiutas was in EOKA. Durrell spends nearly all of *Bitter Lemons* linking EOKA to terrorists and suggesting that his beloved Greek friends were either bullied or shot by them. One oddity in *Bitter Lemons* is that there is not a single Greek Cypriot or Greek connected to EOKA in the text, as if they were some shadowy and rare beings. The truth is that Durrell, like Roufos's Harry Montague, had known and met with such people often. In Durrell's 1957 text, Tahir could be the voice of Turkish Cypriots by speaking in favor of partition, but Xiutas could not be the "key to Cyprus" if he was an advocate of Enosis. The real Xiutas does not appear in the passage of the typescript, so the removal of the punch-drunk rogue version from the published text hardly matters.

Curiously, the real George Katsimbalis does appear in *Bitter Lemons* in the most unlikely manner. Durrell had gone to Athens, where,

the few friends I could find writhed over the Cyprus question like worms halved by the ploughshare—hardly able to believe their own eyes and minds I was able to spend one memorable afternoon forgetting Cyprus, however, with George Katsimbalis in a favorite taverna below the Acropolis (192).

Is it really plausible that, at a time when there were "Homeric quarrels" between Katsimbalis and Leigh Fermor over Cyprus (Cooper 291), and when Leigh Fermor's companion and later wife, Joan, wrote to Seferis to say that "George Katsimbalis refused to dine with Paddy and me on our last night in Athens" because of the Cyprus issue (Cooper 292), the same George Katsimbalis spend an afternoon with the Public Information Officer of Cyprus "forgetting" Cyprus? And if Durrell and Katsimbalis had spent an afternoon at a taverna "forgetting" Cyprus, Durrell was not doing Katsimbalis

a favor by mentioning it publicly in a book that was published while the struggle in Cyprus was continuing.

There is only one reason for Durrell to mention Katsimbalis, and that is to suggest that he still had cachet with Greek intellectuals, which, in truth, he no longer had. One assumes this is why Nikos Kranidiotis, is mentioned in the preface with the Cypriot painter G. Pol Georghiou. Kranidiotis was an intellectual in the model of Seferis and Roufos, who in addition to being secretary to Archbishop Makarios, wrote poems and stories (Durrell and Cardiff had translated one of his stories in 1954). Kranidiotis and the painter Georghiou appear in a single sentence in the published text. "Through him [Maurice Cardiff] I met Nikos Kranidiotis, the poet, who is the Archbishop's secretary, and G. Pol. Georghiou, the only Cypriot painter of his generation who is of European significance" (110). Despite their mention in connection with the "overgrown typescript" in the preface, that is the only time that they appear in the typescript. Durrell creates the impression, if not the illusion, that there was a text, which contained more about these Cypriot intellectuals and their point of view.¹²

As mentioned above, Charles Foley had thought that Durrell left Cyprus "with the manuscripts of *Bitter Lemons* and *Justine* under his arm." Roufos has one of Harry Montague's colleagues chide him as follows:

'You know your colleagues at the Education department complain that you write your stuff during office hours.' 'Nonsense,' said Harry with dignity. 'Those philistines only understand vulgar bureaucratic toil. My own work is much more important. I want to write a book about Cyprus, which helps solve the Cyprus question.' 'In that case, ...you'd better hurry up with it' (54).

While everyone knew that Durrell "had come to Cyprus to write a novel" (Cardiff, *Friends Abroad* 30), at some point Durrell indicated to his friends and acquaintances that he was going to write a book on Cyprus. Do the notebooks in the Durrell Papers hold any evidence that he had started?

The handwritten notebooks of the Cyprus years alternate between passages related to *Justine* and some related to *Bitter Lemons*; they are more like quarry books than early versions of the text. But some of these notes about Cyprus are enlightening. An entry for the May 28, 1956 contains the following list (Box 11, folder 1):

- 1) Turko-Greek riots
- 2) Prisons
- 3) Suspension of habeas corpus

- 4) Left and Right wing locked up
- 5) 18,000 armed police
- 6) No political outlook– it is what we have come to by live politics of repression. Paradoxically enough there now remains only one obstacle to a Cypriot settlement–Harding himself. Any drama presupposes Archbishop’s return–over whose dead body?

There is another list, somewhat longer, on June 2, 1956 (Box 11, folder 1), first published by Pine (255-56):

Achievements of HMG [Her Majesty’s Government] this year

- 1). Total wreck of NATO
- 2) Turko-Greek discord
- 3) Community strife in Cyprus
- 4) 22,000 troops disguised a police
- 5) State Dept. anxiety
- 6) Suspension of Habeas Corpus
- 7) Concentration camps
- 8) Completely muzzled press
- 9) Right and Left wing in prison
- 10) No hope of constitutional issue.

Roufos had accused *Sour Grapes/Bitter Lemons* of observing “a prudish silence over some aspects of the repression,” adding that “indirectly, he even denies their existence—for such things are in bad taste and likely to make the book unpalatable to the public” (138). While it is not clear exactly how Durrell would have dealt with the items in this list, it certainly seems to address the aspects of the repression that Roufos found lacking—including the words “repression” and “concentration camps.” In *Bitter Lemons*, Durrell notes that the detention laws indirectly “save[d] a number of lives among the apprentices and schoolboys who were locked up summarily when they could not, for lack of witnesses, be charged” (198) and his description of a visit to one such facility offers no criticism of its existence or conditions. Perhaps another book would not have been needed to fill in the gaps if Durrell had included all of the items in the lists above in his published text.

There is another comment on June 2, 1956 on Harding’s policy. “The moral effect of terrorism is now complete. The Cypriots have been turned into Greeks. Their hatred

of us is now complete. It is idle of it to rail about defeating 'the terrorists.' He has successfully made all the Cypriots terrorists" (Box 11, folder 1). Here again, Durrell comes to the conclusion that it is not EOKA activities, but British tactics, specifically Harding's, which have turned the Cypriots against the British. This fits with Michael Davidson's observation that "I don't think he [Durrell] was a very good government propagandist—I don't think his heart was in it—especially after Harding came. He was too 'cultured' for the vulgarisms of political publicity: when I arrived he was bent on launching a literary journal" (316). But if Durrell had criticisms of Harding, these do not resonate loudly for readers of *Bitter Lemons*. Indeed, Durrell had a copy of the book sent to Harding and received the following reply (Box 1, folder 8). For the record, and to show that nothing has been taken out of context, the full letter appears below.

12 August 1957

Dear Durrell,

Thank you very much for the copy of your latest book "Bitter Lemons", which your publishers sent me with your compliments. My wife and I have both read it with the greatest interest and, if we may, would like to add our congratulations to those of the reviewers. We very much hope it will meet with the success it so clearly deserves.

If I may, I would like to thank you very much for the very fair, and indeed generous, way you have treated my part in the business. To me, the tragedy of Cyprus all forms part of the unhappy situation in the world at large, which has led to this lovely and historic island with its charming and interesting people being, as you so aptly put it, "dragged into the stock-market of international affairs". I spent a considerable time quite recently trying to convince John Clerides that it is unfortunately quite unrealistic to ignore this fact and to go on thinking that this problem could be settled directly and amicably between the British Government and the people of Cyprus. But he seemed quite incapable of hoisting that in.

With very many thanks again for giving me a copy of your book, and all good wishes for the future in which my wife joins. We both hope that one day we may have the opportunity of meeting you again.

Yours Sincerely,

John Harding

Clearly, if Durrell really thought that Harding had turned all the Cypriots into terrorists by his policy, that sentiment was not found in *Bitter Lemons*. Apparently Harding could read the book and feel vindicated.

One of the entries in the notebooks reads: "But to persist in supporting the Turkish case...is a dangerous precedent to be created" (Box 19, folder 9). Yet throughout *Bitter*

Lemons, Durrell takes the administration line about the “Turkish case.” Again, Roufos seems to sum up Durrell’s position fairly accurately.

‘It doesn’t take much to make a Turkish mob hysterical. They are a suggestible lot, and might believe your friend Montague’s sly insinuation about the Greeks aiming at the extermination of the Turks and so on.’
‘Is that what Montague is doing?’
‘Well, only in a manner of speaking. He doesn’t deal personally with the Turkish side. I was thinking of the propaganda machinery of which he is a part’ (116).

When Montague was asked whether in his statements he condoned ‘Turkish riots,’ he answered “Oh no, by no means. I was merely explaining their inevitability” (169).

While the entries in the notebooks do not make a consistent argument, they do suggest that Durrell had problems and disagreements with the policy of the administration and give some credence to his public comment about his time in Cyprus: “I became something like the head of propaganda. I quickly saw that the issues had been ‘tried’: the Turks, the Greeks, the English were like rocks, unshakeable. I resigned” (Ingersoll 40). Durrell was consistently sidelined by his colleagues, and, in essence, demoted when Leslie Glass was brought in as the Director-General of Information in March 1955 (see Holland 126 and Stubbs 178). If there is one thing that nearly everyone on the British side could agree upon, it was, as Davidson said, that Durrell was not a very good government propagandist and his heart was not really in the job. The reporter Nancy Crawshaw, author of *The Cyprus Revolt*, wrote in a letter to her husband from Nicosia on Sept. 16, 1955, that “Larry has cast off care completely and is enjoying watching his new boss mess up.” In another letter, dated December 16, 1955, she noted that,

L. D. is pretty well bottled up most of the time. He was furious about my article on press facilities. Said he had had many insults before but no-one had ever called him a bottle-neck before he seemed to think it was an oblique reference to his alcoholism (claimed I don’t know the difference between a boozer and a dipsomaniac).

Charles Foley said that Durrell took refuge “in the *Cyprus Review*, a richly subsidized magazine used by the Government to patronise poets and painters and win them over to his side, and his home in Bellapaix” (39). Foley also gave the following account of the sorts of things that happened at the Information Office in the Durrell era:

Most remarkable of all was a broadcast interview on C.B.S. [Cyprus Broadcasting Service] with the mysterious Dighenis, who appeared, like Aphrodite, rising from foam at Kyrenia, but wearing a snorkel mask. The leader of Eoka said that he was preparing a new coup; a series of explosions along the coast had followed his departure. Several of the older

English ladies in Kyrenia had palpitations and listeners called up in alarm. Larry Durrell had to explain it was all a joke. (39)

It brings to mind Orson Welles's famous 1938 broadcast about Martians landing in Grover's Mill, New Jersey. Except that the Martians were not real, and Welles was not a government spokesman.

Indeed, Roufos's portrayal of the ineffective and almost comical Harry Monague appears, again, fairly adequate. One character says: "You shouldn't take Harry's politics seriously. He hasn't got any real convictions. He just likes playing the pocket Machiavelli" (169). And after Montague is challenged for telling the left-wing press that EOKA is Fascist, and the right-wing press that EOKA has "Communist infiltration," he responds: "I believe in nothing, Alexis. Now let's talk of more interesting things. I've got a hold of a most interesting book on Zen Buddhism" (122). However, the comical Montague fades in the novel as the figure of a serious intellectual and powerful British official emerges in Terence Fitzgibbon, just as within the Cyprus Government the ineffectual Greek-speaking Larry Durrell was eclipsed by the more influential and significant Greek-speaking John Reddaway. Reddaway rose rapidly under Harding to be the colony's Administrative Secretary in charge of both propaganda and information. Reddaway was everyone's *bête noire*, except perhaps for the Turkish Cypriots (Holland 99). He may have been the one British person on the island more disliked by the Greek and liberal British communities on Cyprus than Governor Harding. Of course, Greek Cypriots, like Manglis, thought that Durrell's behaviour was an act and he was really working for the secret service. "Most of my countrymen were convinced that he had been an imperialist spy in disguise, who had fooled us by posing as a philhellene," a Greek Cypriot says about Montague in Roufos's novel (169). They could not fathom that the British would have appointed someone whose view of the situation was, as Montague says, "This is the place for Evelyn Waugh. He could write a side-splitting book about Cyprus—something like *Black Mischief*" (32).

But Durrell did not, as he said in the interview, resign his position:

It was time to leave Cyprus, I knew. ... My contract still had several months to run, however, and it would be wise to let it lapse than to hurry away and perhaps give the Greek press grounds for believing that I had resigned on policy grounds, which would have been unfair to my masters (*Bitter Lemons* 214).

If Durrell had indeed resigned on policy grounds, he would probably have regained his standing in the Greek world. Indeed, it may well be that the Colonial government allowed Durrell's contract to run out rather than fire him because they, too, did not

want the Greek press to believe that he was dismissed on policy grounds. One would think that Durrell would grimace at appearing as a stiff upper lip civil servant. But there might have been practical reasons for his decision. At the time of his resignation, he did not know that the success of the *Alexandria Quartet* would mean that he would not have to think about another government position, whatever it might be. Certainly, a resignation on policy grounds would close that door in the future.

And then came *Bitter Lemons*. As Ian MacNiven has said, it “is certainly a political book and HMG [Her Majesty’s Government] was grateful to Larry for having written it” (465), and “the high-profile official recognition accorded the volume, over and above the Duff Cooper award [given to Durrell at a ceremony by the Queen Mother], suggests that Colonial Office policy was still a factor in Larry’s life” (464). Since there is no evidence that *Bitter Lemons* was censored by the authorities, it would appear that Durrell engaged in a form of self-censorship. Or, to be more precise, constructed the whole book from the naive and trusting “Darley” character, who wants everything to turn out fine and can’t quite understand why that cannot happen. *Bitter Lemons* made the British people and their government look reasonable except, perhaps, to Durrell’s co-workers in Cyprus. As John Reddaway opined when Campbell’s *The Flaming Cassock* was suppressed:

It would be a pity if this book were to be dismissed as superficial and lacking in understanding of the problem by those circles who have been so fulsome in their praise of the percipience of Mr. Durrell’s book and, by implication, the lack of percipience of anyone else in Cyprus except Mr. Durrell (quoted in Bell 173).

Even Roufos cannot quite solve the dilemma of Durrell and his book, although he comes closest to framing the question. His Harry Montague is a Tory who believes in the empire, as Durrell does, but he is also cynical and detached, someone more prone to drink too much and make jokes than to have any real impact in a discussion of the island, let alone on policy. Harry Montague, the person, can best be described as an engaging intellect with a lack of interest in the politics around him.¹² In some ways, Roufos cleverly replaces Durrell’s naive and Darley-like narrator of *Bitter Lemons* with a Durrell who resembles the cynical Pursewarden, equally inefficient in the government’s bureaucratic machine.

Montague’s book, *Sour Grapes*, on the other hand, is

a book that will explain the Cyprus problem to a general public. Here the work of a sincere heart and a gifted mind, written with real insight into the mechanisms of both the

British Administration and the Greek soul. Here is the key to everything—unassumingly disguised as a book of personal impressions of course, with no pretention to omniscience; but this charming modesty only enhances its value. (134)

How did a person who thought that a book about Cyprus should be like *Black Mischief* create *Bitter Lemons*? *Bitter Lemons*, we should note, came out in 1957 while the Cyprus issue was unresolved. Although the book ends with Durrell's departure from the island, nothing in the text suggests that the British should leave the island, that the cause is not good, and, most saliently, that the sacrifice of British lives has not been worth it. In the end, Durrell was found to be a very good propagandist, whether his heart was in the job or not.

In Roufos's novel, there is a character who, because of an accident in her youth, has had facial surgery that does not let her show emotion—she has a plastic face. The novel ends when, as she reads the last letter of a condemned man, her reconstructed face becomes beautifully human. Certainly one factor in this theme of the plastic face was Roufos's decision to write his novel in English. Roufos knew that, although his English was very good, his prose would seem a bit wooden and unlovely next to Durrell's and so ends with the hope that the awkwardness of writing fiction in a non-native language will shine through in the end. But I have come to wonder whether Roufos, who had known Durrell quite well on Cyprus, also saw *Bitter Lemons* as a constructed plastic face, one that hid Durrell's real feelings and emotions and offered only what he knew Her Majesty's Government would accept. As I noted earlier, there is no evidence that *Bitter Lemons* was censored, but there is certainly some evidence that it very well might have been censored if that had been necessary. As a former Director of Public Information, Durrell would know what he could and could not say in public.

Durrell, it turns out, has a last surprise to spring on the reader in *Bitter Lemons*, one more "felicitous invention of the novelist." There never was an overgrown typescript. Even the author's preface to *Bitter Lemons* turns out to be a selective fiction. The reader is left to ponder narratives that were never pursued, in a vein similar to the "workpoints" attached to the end of volumes of the *Alexandria Quartet* indicating threads that the published novels could have followed but did not pick up. It is telling that at a time when in his fiction Durrell was exploring the multiplicity of narrative strands, *Bitter Lemons* offers the prospect of an overgrown typescript that might, conceivably, contain the material that the reader of the published work finds missing. This might explain why others, like Montis and Roufos, have felt compelled to write their own versions of the story.

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Note

In this paper, I have referred to the *Bitter Lemons* typescript by page number preceded by a capital T and other material by the box and folder number. The Nancy Crawshaw Papers are in Manuscript Collection of Firestone Library at Princeton. The letters of Nancy Crawshaw quoted in this paper are to Jack Crawshaw and are referred to by date.

¹ See Roessel's discussion of Durrell's use of 'angle of vision' in *Bitter Lemons* in "Bitter Lemons as British Propaganda," 241-43, and Calotychos's valuable discussion of the narrative strategy of the Cyprus book.

² For more on Roufos and Durrell Calotychos, 176-81.

³ The first three paragraphs of the preface have been analysed in some detail by Roessel, "Bitter Lemons as British Propaganda," 235-45.

⁴ The excisions to *Reflections on a Marine Venus*, including those about vampires, are discussed by Roessel, "Cut in Half as it Was."

⁵ Martin Bell gives a full account of this episode in his new book, *The End of Empire* 171-83.

⁶ Pavlidou 8, MacNiven 412-14, and Beaton 316-17 discuss the Greek Cypriot and Greek reaction to Durrell's acceptance of the position of Public Information Officer, with references to more sources in both Greek and English.

⁷ Foley commented that Durrell later tried to get the newspaper to hire his wife, Eve, as a society columnist, with no apparent concern about the conflict of interest for the paper or for his position (27).

⁸ See Given on Durrell's tendency to diminish the Greek past on Cyprus in *Bitter Lemons*.

⁹ Pavlidou, "Another Dark Side of Durrell," was the first person to notice the importance of the relation of Xiutas and Durrell.

¹⁰ For a fuller discussion of the portrayal of Greeks and Turks in *Bitter Lemons*, see Tournay, 160-65.

¹¹ Davidson description of Durrell seems eerily similar: “I enjoyed his wit and intelligence and slightly derisory friendliness, his jolly laughing cynicism and his air of an endearing chimpanzee” (316).

¹² Davidson description of Durrell seems eerily similar: “I enjoyed his wit and intelligence and slightly derisory friendliness, his jolly laughing cynicism and his air of an endearing chimpanzee” (316).

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