

## LAWRENCE DURRELL IN CYPRUS: A PHILHELLENE AGAINST *ENOSIS*.

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### ABSTRACT

In this article I endeavour to explain Lawrence Durrell's opposition to enosis (that is, the Greek Cypriots' dream to be politically united to Greece) whilst he resided and worked in colonial Cyprus as an English teacher, as the editor of the *Cyprus Review* and as the head of the British Public Information Office in the island, despite his convinced philhellenism, acquired during his residence in Corfu in the 1930's. I analyse Durrell's travel book *Bitter Lemons* (1957), published only a year after he left Cyprus, his correspondence to his friends and other minor works. *Bitter Lemons* is based on his three-year stay on the island, a sojourn which coincided with the climax of the enosis crisis and the EOKA troubles. Even though Durrell insisted that *Bitter Lemons* «was not a political book», I try to prove that in this work he not only expresses support for the cause of the Turkish-Cypriots in Cyprus, who aspired to obtain the partition of the island in two, but also for the British policy of encouraging communalism and the dehellenization of the island. Indeed, in *Bitter Lemons*, Greek-Cypriots are depicted by Durrell as non-Greeks, in spite of their overt pride in their Greekness.

### 1. INTRODUCTION: CYPRUS'S ASPIRATIONS TO *ENOSIS*

*Enosis* or «political union with Greece» was to the Greek-Cypriots a XXth-century version of the XIXth-century romantic belief of the *meghali idhea* («great idea»), by which the downtrodden Greeks that were subjects of the Ottoman Empire dreamt to be made part of an independent and greater Hellas that would collect all of the Greeks

scattered around Europe. In fact, during the first half of the XXth century the Greek-Cypriot community of Cyprus, a colony of the British Empire, still aspired to have the island made part of Greece, the country which they believed to be their mother land. However, both the Turkish-Cypriot minority (amounting to a fifth of the total population of the island) and the British administration, rulers of Cyprus since 1878, would not hear of such a demand and did everything that was in their power to refrain the Greek-Cypriots from achieving Union with Greece.

When World War II broke out the Greek-Cypriots believed that in exchange for their participation with the Allies against the enemies of the British Empire, Britain would finally grant them *enosis* (Panteli 1999:122-134). However, once the war was over, the population of Cyprus found that the British administration was retarding the moment of handing their power over to Greece. Therefore, during the 1950's the Greek-Cypriot community openly and loudly demanded *enosis* once more. The British were reluctant to give away Cyprus, as they alleged that the Turkish-Cypriot community did not wish to be made part of Greece. The Greek-Cypriot pro-*enosis* organization EOKA («Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston»), led by a Robin Hood-like mysterious leader, «Dighenis» (Colonel George Grivas), began a terrorist campaign against the British army, politicians and residents as well as against the Cypriots that collaborated with the British, in an infuriated attempt to obtain *enosis* once and for all.

At the end of the 1940s and beginning of the 1950s the British government had begun to promote «communalism» in Cyprus in an attempt to counteract *enosis*. This policy, favoured by the Turkish-Cypriots, consisted of highlighting the different identities of the two ethnic and religious communities, the Greeks (who were Christians) and the Turks (Muslims) towards the eventual partition of the island. The *enosis* crisis reached its zenith in the 1953-56 period. It was during these very three years that Lawrence Durrell (1912-1990) resided in Cyprus.

## 2. LAWRENCE DURRELL IN CYPRUS.<sup>1</sup>

Durrell became a convinced philhellene ever since he spent a few years with his family as an expatriate resident in Corfu in the 1935-39 period, an experience that he recounted in his first Greek island book, *Prospero's Cell* (1945)<sup>2</sup>. In the last months of

<sup>1</sup> For more information on Durrell's stay in Cyprus from a biographical point of view, see chapter 10 («The Bitter Lemons of Cyprus») in Bowker (1997: 211-235) and chapter 9 («Cyprus: Paradise Regained and Lost») in MacNiven (1998: 385-442).

<sup>2</sup> In his retrospective essay «Oil for the Saint; Return to Corfu» (published originally in *Holiday* in 1966), Durrell wrote that, in spite of his discovery about Greece in general, crucial to his life and literary work, he still tended to regard Corfu as special: «After all this island was where I first met Greece, learned Greek, lived like a fisherman, made my home with a peasant family (...) [,] had made my first convulsive attempts on literature, learned to sail, been in love» (1971: 286-87). Besides, Durrell also worked at the British embassy at Athens and at the island of Kalamata, where he was sent by the British Council to teach English from 1939 to 1941, until the Nazis invaded Greece. During WWII he stayed and worked in Egypt as a press attaché, finally returning to Rhodes in 1945 for a one-year period. His life in Rhodes provided him with material for his second Greek island book, *Reflections of a Marine Venus* (1953). Then he spent a short but unpleasant span as the Head of the British Institute in Argentina -«I'd give a lifetime of Argentina for three weeks of Greece», he wrote to his friend Mary Hadkinson from Buenos Aires in 1948 (1971:94)-, and as a diplomat in Yugoslavia: «[Eve and I] are never happy unless we are in Greece», he wrote to Theodore Stephanides from Belgrade during the winter of 1950-51 (108).

1952 he expressed his intention to move to Cyprus with his family in search of peace and quiet<sup>3</sup>. However, his choice of Cyprus was not a completely free one. The reason why he did not move to Greece but to the then British colony is expressed in *Bitter Lemons* (1957)<sup>4</sup>. In the ship that is taking Durrell to Cyprus, an Italian cabin-steward starts a conversation with him:

«But why not Athens?» he said softly, echoing my own thoughts.  
 «Money restrictions».  
 «Ah! Then you are going to live in Cyprus for some time?»  
 My secret was out. (1961:17)

Durrell arrived in Cyprus in February 1953 with two purposes in mind: to give himself a rest from strenuous diplomatic work in Yugoslavia and to encloister himself «for a golden year of freedom to write». The result was his third island book, *Justine* (1957). The writer settled in a refurbished Turkish house in the northern coastal town of Kyrenia, in the whereabouts of the Lousignan Monastery of Bellapaix, in the company of his mother, who kept house for him, and his little daughter, Sappho. His wife had been forced to go back to England due to illness. His finances were none too buoyant and he felt obliged to sacrifice some of his precious daily writing time in order to commute to Nicosia to work as an English teacher at a «Gymnasium» (Greek Secondary school).

Being a fluent speaker of modern Greek, having wide experience as a press officer and as a diplomatic attaché, and being acquainted as he was with many prominent members of the Greek-Cypriot community on the island, Durrell was certainly of great use to the British administration, especially during the so-called «troubled years» that the colony was experiencing at the time of the writer's residence. First he was appointed editor of the *Cyprus Review*, a magazine that followed the policy of communalism. His tasks were to revive the magazine, to promote British interest and culture and to gain Cypriot supporters (Severis, 2000:240-41). In 1955 he became the head of the Press and Information Office in the colony, up to 1956.

Indeed, Durrell was forced to leave the island for good in August 1956, as he recounts in the last chapter of *Bitter Lemons*. His life had become very difficult in the last few months. His movements were being watched by the Greek nationalists, he could not meet his Cypriot friends without putting their lives at risk and his own safety was already at stake. These were dangerous years for the ruling British class and their Greek and Turkish-Cypriot collaborators, and especially for an official figure like himself, who was thought to have taken such an active part in promoting anti-*enosis* feelings. In «Troubadour», an autobiographical sketch on his friendship with a Cypriot poet, Janis, originally published in *The Sunday Times* in 1960, Durrell describes the atmosphere of tension and distrust that filled Cypriot life during the EOKA troubles:

<sup>3</sup> In a letter dated in November 1952 Durrell asked Stephanides for his opinion of Cyprus, a fact that seems to prove that he knew little (if anything) about the island before he set foot on it: "What do you think of Cyprus yourself? Is it as pretty as other islands? Water? Grass? Where would you live if you had to live there [?]" (1971:114).

<sup>4</sup> Although *Bitter Lemons* was originally published in 1957, I quote from the 1961 reprint of the Faber and Faber paperback 1959 edition.

I had several meetings with Janis and we became quite good friends; and later that year I got him to agree to let me take some photographs of him to illustrate an article which I had in mind to write. But the wretched crisis intervened before I could do so, and his friendship, like that of so many Cypriots, was temporarily submerged in the hate and despair of the times. We nodded when we met, but I was careful not to force my company upon him lest his acquaintance with a British official might earn him the unwelcome attentions of the nationalists. (1971:281)

### 3. DURRELL'S *BITTER LEMONS*: A TRAVEL BOOK WITH A POLITICAL PURPOSE.

As soon as Durrell left Cyprus and moved back to England, he set himself to write his well-known *Bitter Lemons* (1957). In its Preface Durrell describes his book as «not a political, but simply a somewhat impressionistic study of the moods and atmospheres of Cyprus over the troubled years 1953-6» (1961:ii). Said in another way, this book was meant to look like a travel account on Cyprus which happened to depict the tension during the three key years of the *enosis* crisis — which coincided with his three-year stay in the island— between the Greek-Cypriots on one side, demanding the granting of union with Greece, and the Turkish-Cypriots and the British under the other, who rejected it altogether and threatened to the partition of the island. In this personal account of his Cypriot stay, Durrell described the blow that he received on finding out that the peaceful island that he expected to find, ideal for relaxation and writing, was no longer nothing of the sort. The troubled state of the colony during the peak of terrorist activities of EOKA —«its moods»— comprise the background melody of the book.

One thing is certain. Contrary to what Durrell affirms at the beginning of the Preface, his *Bitter Lemons* is indeed a political book, a political book that openly favours the British presence on the island and accepts the Turkish Cypriots' aspiration to the partition of the island as a way out of the *enosis* crisis. According to Roessel (2000:235), «the simple fact that the author [Durrell] was to tell us that the book [*Bitter Lemons*] is not political is clear proof that it is». However, Durrell wished to appear as if he was a mere narrator of events, a neutral and innocent observer and collector of scenic impressions of Cyprus who merely happened to be present during the troubled years, pretending not to be in favour neither of the Greek-Cypriots' nor the Turkish-Cypriots' sides. He was nevertheless conscious that the audience of the book was going to be British, including those what were part of the Government that had employed him to fight the Cypriot cause back. Proof of this is that often enough he speaks of himself as «one of them [the British]» or shows concern for «our [British] national credit» (239).

Durrell's book is intentionally generous in descriptions of the tense atmosphere that could be felt in the Cyprus of the time. Its abundant images of tension clash with the traditional reputation of the isle as a place of idleness, relaxation and a laid back life of a people previously depicted in travel books by English-speaking visitors, a genre which,

incidentally, Durrell proves to be fully familiar with<sup>5</sup>. The troubled state of the island is blamed on the *enosis* crisis and EOKA's terrorist activities, a fact that even the local Cypriot population, Durrell writes, is perfectly aware of and laments. His Greek-Cypriot friend Andreas is made to represent the usually unheard sensible citizen who does not understand his fellow countrymen's follies. Durrell himself answers with an equally sensible voice that summarises the British government's intentions in Cyprus. Durrell has granted himself the role of spokesman of the British interests, of «our responsibilities»:

«Tell me, sir, soon England will solve all this and we can be at peace -is it not so? I am getting worried about the boys; at school they seem to spend all their time singing nationalist songs and joining demonstrations. It will all end soon, will it not?» He sighed, and I sighed with him. (...) «I don't say you will get Enosis because of our responsibilities in the Middle East; but I'm sure we will come together» (1961:141).

Ever since Cyprus was acquired by Britain in 1878, the island had always been considered as a peaceful resort all over the English-speaking world. In *Bitter Lemons* Durrell does not fail to include the same typically Cypriot issues that most British visitors had already included in their travel accounts during the 1878-1950 period and does not disguise it: «Through them [these travel accounts]» —he says— «I caught a glimpse, not only of Cyprus as she is today, but of the eternal Cyprus which had for so long attracted the attention of travellers like them» (103). They had invariably endeavoured to show the kindest face of the island, emphasising, above all, its optimistic future prospects now that it was under the British administration and free from the Ottoman yoke. Life in this realm of Aphrodite was described as an eastern Eden. They always mentioned the Cypriots' hospitality and pleasant orientalist idleness<sup>6</sup>. In *Bitter Lemons* Durrell also makes sure to include references to the typical issues mentioned in every travel book on Cyprus. His purpose may have been to give the impression that

<sup>5</sup> Evidence of Durrell's interest and familiarity with English travel books on Cyprus is that in *Bitter Lemons* he mentions and/or quotes from the following travel accounts: W. Hepworth Dixon's *British Cyprus* (1887), Mrs Lewis' *A Lady's Impressions of Cyprus* (1893), Samuel Brown's *Three Months in Cyprus during the Winter of 1878-79* (1879), C. W. J. Orr's *Cyprus under British Rule* (1918), Rupert Gunnis' *Historic Cyprus* (1936), C. D. Cobham's *Excerpta Cypria* (1908), Sir Ronald Storrs and B. J. O'Brien's *The Handbook of Cyprus* (1930) and Patrick Balfour's *The Orphaned Realm* (1951). For more details on English-speaking travellers and their travel books on Cyprus, see Demetriou & Ruiz Mas (forthcoming).

<sup>6</sup> These travel books included abundant mentions about coffee, brandy, wine and *mezes*; excursions to the Gothic, Lousignan and Venetian abbeys and castles; spending beatific nights at the Greek monasteries; visiting the usually unkempt Turkish mosques; enjoying the tranquillity of the Troodos mountains, especially in the fierce summer months. They would not have been complete without the usual narrations of Cyprus' historical highlights such as St Paul's evangelization of the island aided by the local saint Barnabas and a reference to the conversion of the Roman consul Sergius Paulus, the first Roman government high official to become a Christian; the sad story of the last Venetian monarch, Queen Katherine Cornaro; Marc Brigandino's tragic fate under the Turks at Famagusta's siege, St Lazarus' definitive death and burial on the island; other multiple sketches on the Greek Orthodox Church and its major role in the preservation and development of the Greek identity of the Greek-Cypriots under the Ottoman and the British rules, etc. Landmarks of Anglo-Cypriot relations such as King Richard I the Lionheart and his crusaders' conquest of the island, Shakespeare's Othello, Disraeli's unexpected acquisition of Cyprus back in 1878, etc. were also included in these travel books with the undisguised purpose of justifying the British presence in Cyprus.

*Bitter Lemons* was a book based on fact, as, by definition, all travel books are based on the author's assumed real and truthful experiences and impressions acquired while visiting a foreign land.

Though reluctantly, the British travellers in Cyprus did not fail to dedicate at least a few lines to the state and development of the aspiration to *enosis* among the Cypriots at the time of their particular visits to the island, most of the times carried out in a peaceful way. However, instead of finding this legendary peaceful isle of previous travel books, Durrell laments encountering the first signs of turmoil and local discontent «of Cyprus as she is today» as soon as he arrives (103). The word *enosis* was the ubiquitous piece of decoration in every small village that his taxi crossed on the way to his residing town, Kyrenia: «We moved slowly inland now along a road which winds steeply through a green belt of vine-country, through little whitewashed villages bespattered by the slogan ENOSIS AND ONLY ENOSIS» (25).

In Durrell's book *enosis* is the main and nearly sole protagonist. In fact, he is the English-speaking traveller in Cyprus who dedicates the highest number of pages to the issue. Whereas in previous English travel accounts *enosis* was merely a secondary topic within a huge display of other typically Cypriot ones, in *Bitter Lemons* these topics only serve now as mere fill-ups in an essentially political narration of impressions that give *enosis* its leading role.

#### 4. DURRELL'S ANTI-ENOSIS PROPAGANDA IN BITTER LEMONS.

Durrell's privileged positions as a «Gymnasium» teacher at the beginning, as the editor of the *Cyprus Review* later and finally as head of the Press and Information Service on the island allowed him to be always in a front row seat watching «the unfolding of the Cyprus tragedy both from the village tavern and from Government House» (ii). He claims to have been able to collect first hand opinions of Greek-Cypriots from all walks of life, from Turkish-Cypriots and from British residents as well as from British and Greek politicians.

Durrell admits a certain degree of blame should be laid on the British handling of the issue. In *Bitter Lemons* he also criticises «the rigidified formulae of the Colonial Office» (1961:154), in which he felt himself imprisoned during his two-year period of office as head of the Information Service (1955-56). As far as the English residents of the island are concerned, Durrell insists that they kept a narrow-minded attitude to the Cypriots' demands. The British, he writes, did not understand why the Cypriots aspired to union with Greece. Greece is no paradise, they say. The expatriates living in the colony cannot comprehend what the advantages of leaving the protection of Britain and becoming part of Greece may be (135). Indeed, from the English point of view, the Greek-Cypriots' aspiration for *enosis* is full of idealism and naivety. To start with, they idealise the virtues of the Greeks from Greece, a land they believe to be «Paradise on earth - a paradise without defect» (114-15). To the Greek-Cypriots all human virtues are thought to belong to the Greeks in Greece.

When Durrell decides to go to «the village tavern» and collect the opinions about *enosis* of the lay Cypriots, he also finds surprising that all the Greek-Cypriots claim to

have no ill feelings against the English. Despite their public and private vociferous *pro-enosis* demonstrations, he says, they never fail to declare their faith in the United Nations and their love for England (125-26). For Durrell the Greek-Cypriots show a unique and strangely suspicious combination of «quixotic irrational love of England (...) in blissful co-existence with the haunting dream of Union» (127). Even his young Gymnasium students, he says, proclaim their wish for *enosis* and love for England at the same time (131-32). In their school compositions they declare their admiration for England. After all, they reason, England's history boasts an impressive record of fights for the welfare of people and for all legitimate struggles for freedom from foreign powers (132). Besides, they add, did England not help the Greeks be rid of the Ottoman yoke? Byron, the leading poet of the Romantic period, is praisingly remembered by Durrell's students as the perfect epitome of Anglo-Greek relations (128).

Despite his open criticism of Greek intransigent political policies, Durrell finds most striking that Greek *pro-enosis* propaganda also includes pro-English elements, like the exultation of the mythical figure of the «phileletheros» or freedom lover, personified in the British poet *par excellence*, Byron, who fought and died for the independence of Greece from foreign tyranny, in other words, for the truthful realization of the *meghali idhea*; or even the British politician *par excellence*, Churchill, who once said that *enosis* was a rightful demand of the Greek-Cypriots.<sup>7</sup>

Durrell finds the Greek-Cypriots' combination of admiration and friendliness towards the English with their firm wish to rid themselves of the English yoke and be made part of Greece rather disconcerting. He attributes such a suspiciously diplomatic policy to the fact that they have been politically brainwashed to the incredible extent of even believing that a terrorist like «Dighenis», the leader of EOKA and the scourge of the British, really feels love and respect for Britain. The taxi driver that takes the writer to the airport declares so; Durrell cannot believe his ears:

«Even Dighenis, [the taxi driver] said thoughtfully, "they say he himself is very pro-British." It was one of those Greek conversations which carry with them a hallucinating surrealist flavour — in the last two years I had endured several hundred of them. "Ye", he continued in the slow assured tones of a village wiseacre, 'yes, even Dighenis, though he fights the British, really loves them. But he will have to go on killing them — with regret, even with affection.» (251)

In spite of his love for all things Greek, Durrell is, obviously, not in favour of granting Cypriots *enosis*. After all, he is an «Englishman», not a Greek. In 1955 Durrell was given the task by the British government in the Crown Colony to counteract the efforts of the Greek-Cypriots towards union with Greece, first with the *Cyprus Review* and later as head of the Information Service. This «moribund house magazine» — as Durrell once described it in *Bitter Lemons* (1961:152) when he took over the post of Director of the Information

<sup>7</sup> Churchill is only mentioned once in *Bitter Lemons* as a supporter of Cyprus' freedom. According to Durrell, «even the great Churchill had said it was to be so one day ...» (133). Indeed, Panteli (1990: 80) writes that in a visit to Cyprus in 1907 the future Prime Minister, at the time Under-Secretary of State in the Colonies, declared that «such a desirable consummation [of *enosis*] will doubtless be fulfilled in the plenitude of time», a message of hope that excited the Greek-Cypriots of the time and of all times.

Service in Cyprus—, as well as the desire to incite the Turkish-Cypriot community to aspire to achieve partition were the few options left to the British administration to regain lost ground. Durrell's mission as editor of the *Cyprus Review* was to bombard the minds of the Greek-Cypriots with the sensible and more practical British position and at the same time to try to gain supporters to their cause, a task for which he did not spare any means. He asked the most prestigious names of the time in relation to Cyprus to write contributions in his magazine<sup>8</sup>. According to Roessel (1994a: 38), ever since its creation in 1948, the magazine had always been a voice of the government, but with Durrell as editor (from August 1954), it became far more sophisticated propaganda than ever before. In *Bitter Lemons* Durrell hints at his propagandistic plan, which consisted of transmitting the British ethos and providing the island with a British-filtered Cypriot identity (Roessel 1994a: 48). Naturally suspicious of this subtly anti-Hellenic touch of the magazine, all relevant Greek living writers, the most famous of whom was the 1963 Nobel prize winner Georgios Seferis, refrained from collaborating in it. Needless to say, the *Cyprus Review* never included any reference whatsoever to the Greek-Cypriot aspiration for *enosis*.

For Durrell the effective popularization of the demand of *enosis* among the Greek-Cypriots was the successful result of an «official direction» coming from Athens by means of «the press» and «the heady rhetoric of local demagogues and priests» (133). Teachers — «local demagogues» — are efficient propagators of the propagandistic issue: «we must mobilize opinion for our appeal, and everyone is so slack in Cyprus», one of them confesses to Durrell (133). As regards the Orthodox Church, the writer laments that «most of this fire and brimstone came from the pulpit» (145). According to Durrell, even the very Archbishop «formally and deliberately committed sedition from the pulpit» (155)<sup>9</sup>. But the medium employed to spread anti-British propaganda that Durrell fears the most is the «new metal God» of the times, the radio. Its pro-*enosis* wavelengths are described as «the distant drums» and «the noisy contentions of Athens radio». Athens Radio insists on transmitting what Durrell believes are nothing but «values based on hate, in spite, in smallness» (140). On another occasion he describes Athens' political broadcasting as «scurrilous and inflammatory material, inciting Greeks to rise» (153). Together with EOKA, Athens Radio has become not only Durrell's main enemy in the island (in his capacity of Head of the Press and Information Office) but also of the British administration in general thanks to the «poison» that they constantly pour on the easily-manipulable population. To Durrell, all students' civil disturbances and hysteria are encouraged by Athens Radio, who takes advantage of the credulity of the Cypriot youth:

Disorders increased under the stimulus of rhetoric and the envenomed insinuations of Athens Radio, and we [the British] were already floundering in a sea of upheavals caused by the students and the apprentices of the five [main Cypriot] towns. (157)

As an official of the Information Office in Cyprus Durrell feels obliged to defend the British Government's and the British Governor's anti-*enosis* position by counterattacking

<sup>8</sup> These were Patrick Leigh Fermor, Freya Stark, Sir Harry Luke, Patrick Kinross, Anne Faber, John Lehmann, Steward Prowne and Colonel Franklyn Lushington, among others.

<sup>9</sup> Makarios was banished by the British to the Seychelles islands in March 1956 and was released one year later.



the Greek propagandistic efforts to encourage Greek-Cypriots to demand freedom from the British yoke. For him, the Greek nationalistic press was falsely and unjustly accusing «our rule in Cyprus» of resembling Attila's methods and of «plucking Hellenism out by the roots and decreeing a 'perpetual enslavement of Greeks'» (144).

##### 5. DURRELL'S ANTI-GREEK AND PRO-TURKISH PROPAGANDA IN *BITTER LEMONS*.

As part of the pro-British and pro-Turkish policy of communalism, it was Durrell's duty to aim at the dehellenization of life and feeling in Cyprus. Though subtly, *Bitter Lemons* offers abundant evidence of this attempt. Durrell wishes to make clear to the — naturally, British— reader that one thing is Greece and another is Cyprus, an island always described as being «in the Levant». He concludes that «Cyprus (...) was more Eastern than its landscape would suggest» (32). By these innocent-looking allusions, Cyprus is made to look spiritually apart from Greece and more in the area of Turkey and other Levantine countries<sup>10</sup>. Given (1997: 58) insists on Durrell's intentional depiction of the landscape of Cyprus to convey a political purpose. Cyprus's Gothic, Anatolian and Levantine landscapes form the national character of the Cypriot. But, as Given remarks, «nowhere in *Bitter Lemons* is Cyprus allowed to participate in Hellenic or classical civilization» (58). This dehellenization of the island's classical past is a key element in Durrell's travel account. By creating a combination of Anatolian, Levantine and Gothic landscapes, the author is omitting Cyprus's Hellenic character (59).

Durrell's first impression of the island as described in *Bitter Lemons* is also a revelation: he repeatedly addressed the customs officials in Greek and they answered in English. In spite of the alleged Greekness of the island (this being presumably one of the reasons why he chose Cyprus), «[he] was beginning to think that successive occupations had extirpated any trace whatsoever of the Greek genius (...)» (22). Durrell finds Cypriots completely different in temper from the Greeks from Greece: «(...) I made my first acquaintance with the island temperament which is very different from the prevailing extrovert disposition of the metropolitan Greek» (28-29). Besides, he adds, the Greek spoken in Cyprus was not «true Greek» but a *patois* (29). Durrell completely subscribes to the XIXth-century British traveller Samuel Brown's words on the Greek-Cypriots. In 1879 Brown had written — and Durrell agreed and quoted — that the Christian inhabitants of the island were not physiologically Greek, neither in spirit or character, even though they believed themselves to be so due to their language and religion (107).

The policy of dehellenization of the island encouraged by the British government was already in force when Durrell accepted a post in the British administration of

<sup>10</sup> In this respect Severis (2000:244-46) affirms that «there is a detailed exposition of Durrell's attempts to declare the Cypriot landscape as basically Anatolian and Gothic and to a lesser degree Greek and he tries to relate this view to the character of the people. The island's Hellenic past is virtually omitted from Durrell's book on Cyprus, *Bitter Lemons*, and therefore its Hellenic character is minimized". Severis (240-51) offers ample evidence of the policy of dehellenization encouraged by Durrell while he was the editor of the *Cyprus Review* in its section of art during the 1954-55 period. Given (1997:62) also insists on this idea by affirming that in this magazine Durrell consciously tried to construct a very specific image of Cyprus's landscape and history and therefore a very Cypriot character that was devoid of all Hellenic traits.

Cyprus. However, the newly appointed head of the Information Service —ex-editor of the *Cyprus Review*, teacher of a Greek Gymnasium, a fluent Greek speaker and listener of Athens Radio— pretended he had not heard about or taken any notice about this policy before. He «could hardly credit it» when he learnt of its existence; and even adds that «had [he] been able to discover what the formulated policy on the island was», he would have done everything possible to stop it on the grounds of its irrationality (153). Durrell gives actual examples of the application of this «irrational» policy and accuses it of being absurd: he describes how there were official attempts to ignore uncomfortable political issues like *enosis*, and how it was forbidden to mention the Archbishop (spiritual and political leader of the Greek-Cypriots) on the local radio, etc (153).<sup>11</sup>

Durrell also tries to justify his incapability or impossibility to fight a war —*enosis*— that had already almost been lost by the British. Durrell blames the British fiasco on the chaos he encountered in the Information Office when he arrived, that is, «the pitiable shape of [his] inheritance» (152), the inertia of the public servants (his «fellow-satraps»), accused of suffering what journalists at the time called «Potterism» (154), the slowness of colonial red tape, the deplorable state of the police (a corps that had remained almost unchanged since 1878) (157). Nevertheless, Durrell, evidently showing self-interest, excludes the current British governor of the time, Sir John Harding, and, of course himself, when laying the blame for the failure to handle the Cypriot crisis:

He [The Governor], like myself, found himself in the toils of that small committee of minor dignitaries which chipped and pared at them without the faintest knowledge of the particular needs of the department concerned, and certainly with no imaginative grasp of the current urgency of our needs. (158)

Durrell's personal attitude towards his Greek-Cypriot friends is not a completely honest one. He does not hesitate to take advantage of their good will in order to achieve his goals —«I am afraid I have become quite unscrupulous in my use of this weapon» (115)—, he confesses, to the extent of even feeling guilty about it:

Now if I wish to bring pressure to bear upon my [Greek-Cypriot] neighbour I simply say to him: «My dear fellow, no Greek would do that, charge that, think that, etc. You astonish me.» And this phrase acts like a charm, for everyone is jealous of the good character of the Greeks and tries to be as like them as possible. (115)

His perfidy towards the Greek-Cypriot community reaches its highest level when he admits to lying for his own «political» benefit. When Durrell publicly is challenged by a drunken Greek-Cypriot on the issue of *enosis* and runs the risk of appearing «in shame», he disarms his opponent through lies:

«And what do you reply to me, Englishman? What do you think sitting there in shame?»  
«I think of my brother,» I said coolly.

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<sup>11</sup> According to Hadjidemetriou (2002:379), «in the Summer of 1954 the British authorities, in order to stem the intensification of the struggle, introduced legislation against meetings and banned reference to the union of Cyprus with Greece in speeches and written texts».

«Your brother?» he said, caught slightly off his guard by this diversion which had just occurred to me.

«My brother. He died at Thermopylae, fighting beside the Greeks.»

This was a complete lie, of course, for my brother, to the best of my knowledge, was squatting in some African swamp collecting animals for the European zoos. I put on an air of dejection. (40)

His psychological and political victory over his opponent is clear. The Greek-Cypriot felt ashamed. His shy expression and the writer's conscience seemed to be speaking the same words: «“How damned unfair of you to introduce your brother just when I was getting into my stride. Perfidious Englishman!” I must say I sympathized; but I was unwilling to lose my advantage» (41).

This devious policy applied by Durrell to his own convenience runs parallel to the contents of the brief political report for the British government that he wrote after he was appointed head of the Information Service in Cyprus. To summarise, his proposal to the British administration in the Cypriot crisis was to gain time to Britain's advantage in order to dodge Greek-Cypriot political demands:

The conclusions I had reached were roughly these: the present situation might be captured yet and manipulated while it was still in its operatic phase, so to speak, and capable of being turned to advantage with fair words. There was a good chance of our gaining perhaps fifteen or twenty years on the bare promise of a democratic referendum. This would be a valuable gain -indeed an inestimable one— for it would give us time to overhaul the entire administrative machinery as well as the police; (...) (175)

«Manipulating», «turn[ing the situation] to advantage with fair words», «gaining perhaps fifteen or twenty years' [time], »promise[s]: these were Durrell's intended items of his political agenda for Cyprus. In Charles Foley's political account on the state of Cyprus during the troubled years (*Legacy of Strife*, 1964), Durrell's true face is revealed. This is Durrell's description of the British attitude on the Cyprus issue during the last years of the 1950's, which, Foley says, is «the official point of view [of the Government Information Office]» (1964:17):

No nation was more devoted to the principle of self-determination than our own [Britain] (...), but in Cyprus it was simply «not on». The long chain of British withdrawals, of which Suez was the latest, must end; the island could not be allowed to pass into the hands of an unstable Greek Government. That might undermine the Eastern bastion of NATO. There was also the Turkish-speaking minority to consider, eighteen per cent of the population, who were against any change. We had a duty to them; besides, Turkey played a vital part in NATO... (17) <sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Durrell had already hinted his real opinion on the British intended policy with the Cypriot crisis in *Bitter Lemons* when talking to a Greek-Cypriot who favoured the British presence in the island: “I don't say you will get Enosis because of our responsibilities in the Middle East; (...)” (1961:141), he said.

In *Bitter Lemons* Durrell also reports on revealing conversations that he held with Greek and British governments and UNO officials. A British senior government official is made to declare that «the Cypriots could claim no Greek heritage, since they didn't speak Greek, that they were Anatolian hybrids» (1961:121). Nicosia is also described as «some fly-blown Anatolian township» (156). In a previous article written by Durrell for an American Institute of International Relations bulletin, he recalls having declared that «Cypriot Greeks» and the Greek Orthodox Church were descendants of Byzantium. For the writer, «even in a consideration of the Enosis problem [,] the cultural heritage of Byzantium and its institutions illuminated everything» (121), and added that «Byzantine culture was something more than the sum of the elements it drew from languishing Hellenism and the influences of the Near East» (121).

Whereas Durrell proves to be clearly contrary to *enosis*, his opinion on the Turkish-Cypriots' aspiration to the division of the island in two parts, one for each different ethnic/religious community, is not, nevertheless, so overtly evident. Not a single time does the writer make a remark allegedly coming from his own mouth that may lead us to think that he supports this idea. His only concession to his favourable leaning towards the Turkish-Cypriots' cause appears when he occasionally drops the odd remark where Turkish-Cypriots are depicted as happy to be demanding partition or as critical towards the Greek-Cypriots' demand for *enosis*. Sabri, a good-looking and clever Turkish-Cypriot property landowner that becomes friends with Durrell, exclaims that everybody in such a small island is friendly with each other, Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots alike, «though very different» (74), a clear allusion to the latter's aspiration to be politically separated from the Greek-Cypriots. When the Turkish-Cypriot caretaker or *muktar* of the Abbey of Bellapaix meets Durrell, he recommends the writer to be careful about the Greek-Cypriots: «(...) well -many of them feel strongly about Enosis these days. But take it calmly» (80).

Durrell always describes the members of the Turkish-Cypriot community in favourable eyes, in contrast to the less positive adjectives used to describe the Greek-Cypriots. To Durrell «Turks are endowed with that wonderful Moslem quality which is called *kayf* —the contemplation which comes of silence and ease» (73), a characteristic that contrasts with the Greek-Cypriots' rebellious and vociferous spirit, especially at the time of so many demonstrations for *enosis*. His friend Sabri is «a Turkish gentleman» (49). He is described as «ha[ving] the sleepy good looks —a rare smile with perfect teeth, thoughtful brown eyes— which one sees sometimes in Turkish travel posters» (48). A Turkish policeman keeping company to a Turkish musician called Clito at a bar in Kyrenia is «sleepily smiling» (38). Even when Clito (naturally, dressed in baggy Turkish trousers), who «had a fine head and a thick untrimmed moustache» (38), was drunk, he was «gorgeously drunk» (38). The Turkish *muktar* of the Abbey of Bellapaix was «a thick-set, handsome man in his late forties, slow in manner, with a deep true voice and a magnificent smile» (75). Even the *muktar's* wife was described to be «handsome dark» (75). When the crisis reached a stage in which the Turkish-Cypriot community threatened to complicate the political and social situation of the island with bloodshed, Durrell blames the «medieval compost of religious hatreds» (not the British doings, of course) and the fact that Turkish feelings had been aroused (with no mention to the arouser) (160). On the other hand, Athens Radio's poisonous broadcasting, among

other sources of inflammatory pro-*enosis* propaganda, is perfectly and repeatedly identified as one of the biggest inciters of the Greek-Cypriot civil disturbances: «Radio Athens blared and rasped out its parrot-like imprecations» (172).

Durrell takes a completely different attitude towards the Greek-Cypriot community. He presents Frangos, a drunken Greek-Cypriot friend of his, as a big-mouth who embarrasses English guests like Durrell himself by boasting in a loud voice: «As for the English I am not afraid of them —let them put me in irons» (39). Indeed, Roessel (2000:237) is of the opinion that «Durrell characteristically puts pro-Enosis sentiments in the mouth of a drunk». Between [Greek-] Cypriots and British expatriates, Durrell adds, «the divorce was complete, and the exceptions rare» (1961:27). «The Cypriots forget many things», Durrell reproaches a Greek-Cypriot acquaintance (41). To Durrell, even Greek buildings and villages are personalised in order to depict uncomfortable Greek-Cypriot human attitudes that resemble their human counterparts: «The belfry of the church towered over us, its bell banging aggressively for every service, the lazy blue-and-white ensign of Greece softly treading the wind above the blue harbour» (28).

On the other hand, the long-gone ideal landscape of Kyrenia is described by Durrell with suspicious preference for the Turkish-Cypriots:

Sitting in the long grass among the spiked and abandoned British guns on the Kyrenia walls, I would watch the Turkish children flying their coloured kites in the quick fresh evening wind which ushers in the summer twilights of the capital. (164)

When Durrell refers to the Greek-Cypriot population of the island, he usually calls them «Cypriots», hardly ever «Greeks» and seldom «Cypriot Greeks», as he always reserves the term «Greek» for the population of Greece or for their language. For Durrell, «Cypriot» is a synonym of «Greek-Cypriot» or «Cypriot Greek», as he occasionally calls them: «Certainly I was astonished to find how few Cypriots knew good English, and how few Englishmen the dozen words of Greek which cement friendships and lighten the burdens of everyday life» (37).

Durrell's identification of the term «Cypriot» to «Greek-Cypriot» is also shared by the British expatriate population of the island: «How can the Cypriot want Enosis?» (135), they wonder. By presenting Greek-Cypriots as merely Cypriots Durrell is denying their longed-for identification with Greece. Durrell's intention is to differentiate the alleged «Greekness» of the Greek-Cypriots, of which they feel and have always felt so proud, from the genuine Greek identity of those coming from Greece. Even his efficient secretary in the Colonial Secretariat, Achilles Papadopoulos, obviously a Greek-Cypriot, complimented by the writer for his great talent and fidelity to Britain, is merely described as «typical of the best Cypriot product» (155); not once is he called a Greek-Cypriot. However, Durrell has no qualms about speaking of the Turkish-Cypriot population of Cyprus as «Turks» or «Turkish» (as if they were already fully-fledged inhabitants from Turkey), rarely «Turkish-Cypriots», thus leading the reader to think that this ethnic community could well be assimilated to or be made part of Turkey, to which they obviously feel so attached.

## 6. IS DURRELL A GENUINE PHILHELLENE?

Durrell's office as a servant of the Crown was not a fruitful one. He had achieved nothing, he admits (246). Both his life and that of his Greek and Turkish Cypriot friends were in danger and the tense «atmosphere and moods» of the island at the time of his stay were too much for somebody who had moved to Cyprus with the idea of relaxing and of finding time to write. His account of his Cypriot residence and service to British interests is described in *Bitter Lemons* in a suspiciously self-exculpatory tone. His words cannot help giving away his real feelings for the Cypriots. He had to fight *enosis*, a pro-Greek issue, and declare himself contrary to it. His philhellenism, first acquired while residing in Corfu as a young man and developed during further stays in Greek lands, is put to a test in *Bitter Lemons*, being forced as he was to follow and support the British efforts to disguise the Greekness of the Greek-Cypriots and exalt the virtues of the Turkish-Cypriot community in an attempt to reduce the Greek-Cypriot people's desire for union with Greece as much as possible.

Nevertheless, many genuine philhellenes, both Greek and British, did realise Durrell's duplicity. While he pretended to be in favour of both Greek and Turkish Cypriots in their political demands, he supported the British official anti-*enosis* position. In his poem «Sta Perichora tis Kerynias» [«In the District of Kyrenia»] Seferis describes an English poet residing at Kyrenia, who is generally assumed to be Durrell, as «a cynic and a philhellene», a fact of which the English poet seemed to be aware (as he himself proved when he wrote an undated letter to his friend the architect Austen Harrison on approximately December 1st, 1953) (Roessel 1994b:11-12). Durrell's ambiguous attitude in Cyprus and in *Bitter Lemons* collected numerous frowns from British and Greek friends. Apart from the above mentioned case of Seferis, we know of the Cypriot novelist Costas Montis, author of *Kleistés Portes* [«Closed Doors»]; Marie Aspioti (Director of the Corfu branch of the British Council) who even returned her MBE in protest to the British attitude to *enosis* and who accused Durrell of betraying his philhellene feelings for a few coins (Karagiorgios, 1999-2000:201-201); or the Greek novelist and diplomat Rodis Roufos, author of *The Age of Bronze* (1960), a parody of *Bitter Lemons* (Roessel, 1994c:129).

After Durrell's and the British government's failure, the writer remarks with relief: «It was good to be leaving [Cyprus]» (246). His rush to try to sell his Bellapaix house proves his wish to leave. Needless to say, he never went back. But his propagandistic service for British interests in Cyprus did not seem to finish with his departure, in 1956, as one year later, in 1957, he published *Bitter Lemons*, his last service rendered to the British administration in the *enosis* crisis.

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