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PIED PIPER OF LOVERS

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Editor's Introduction

James Gifford

Lawrence Durrell holds a strained position in modern literature, particularly in relation to the British Empire. Regarded as a British author, he was born and raised in India by parents who had not been to Britain. After returning "home" for his education at 11, he left Britain in 1935, aged 23, and never made it his long-term residence again. This experience of colonial privilege mixed with his sense of exile prompted his first novel, *Pied Piper of Lovers*, and appears to have driven his creative energies for the rest of his life. Yet, he worked for the British Foreign Office for most of his professional career in contentious places and periods: Kalamata and Athens during the Nazi invasion of Greece, Alexandria in World War II, Rhodes during the accretion of the Dodecanese by Greece, Belgrade under Tito, Argentina in Perón's first term as president, and Cyprus during Enosis. He also wrote in and of these locations, just as he wrote of India and England in *Pied Piper of Lovers*, and there is a general discomfort in his works between the exotic and the familiar. He then settled permanently in Southern France and published *Bitter Lemons* and *The Alexandria Quartet* in 1957 in the direct wake of the Suez Crisis, alluding to it in both works, and he also released the politically charged espionage thriller *White Eagles Over Serbia* in the same year. Contested and revolutionary locations dominate Durrell's life and works, and his concerns vacillate between the views stereotypical of colonial privilege and the irony that characterizes resistance to Imperial power, particularly so given his individualist and neo-anarchist associations in the 1930s and 40s. How, then, do we ap-
proach the interpretively and politically complex problems that dominate his writing and began his career in Pied Piper of Lovers?

To make the matter more complicated, it has been a popular myth among scholars that Durrell's writing career began in 1938 with The Black Book, published through Jack Kahane's infamous Obelisk Press. This was an error Durrell promoted despite the overlapping nature of his first three novels. The most regularly stated reason was that he disliked these early works, although even a cursory reading reveals their careful construction and grand aims, which mark them as more serious works than his later "entertainments," as he called them, such as his comedy series Antrobus. A more likely purpose behind the disappearance of Durrell's early works is that they, like so many first writings, reveal far more than the mature author would later prefer to have made public. Pied Piper of Lovers is heavily autobiographical and develops as a bildungsroman, emphasizing the protagonist's struggles against his father's authority, his divided position within Empire, his uncertainty over his artistic gifts, and his first conflicted sexual experiences. While these themes, which first emerge in Pied Piper of Lovers, would resurface throughout Durrell's writing career, they would never do so with the same clearly autobiographical impetus. Durrell, as author, would later shield himself carefully from any overt associations with characters or events, and Pied Piper of Lovers violates that construction of privacy.

By the time his novel first appeared in print, Durrell had already written a significant body of work and had amassed experiences from his childhood in India, his school years at St. Edmund's School Canterbury, several years in London and Bloomsbury in particular, and emotionally significant travels to Paris while preparing for his university entrance examinations. He had already published three collections of poetry, a pseudonymous play, and had begun to build the complex literary network that would mark him throughout his career. He also moved to Corfu in March, 1935, and from there he corrected the final proofs for Pied Piper of Lovers. In many respects, these circumstances set the work apart from any other in Durrell's career – it is both a beginning and an end, completing as it does Durrell's life as a Londoner. His subsequent concerns with landscape and the Mediterranean find their origins here in India, but the image of Bohemian London would not recur, and it is a very different London, one of poverty and stagnation, that returns in Panic Spring and The Black Book.

The novel also had a long incubation and brief construction. It was largely composed during his residence in a cottage much like the one in which the novel's "Epilogue" takes place, Chestnut Mead in Sussex. Ian MacNiven has retraced this period thoroughly in his biography, and it culminated in Durrell's submission of the novel for a contest run by
Cassell (with a £300 prize). Moreover, while Durrell had yet to publish any major works, he dedicated serious efforts to his poetry and developed very close literary and personal relationships with other significant poets in London, including George Barker, John Gawsworth, and Mulk Raj Anand who also published his first novel in 1935. *Pied Piper of Lovers* was, in this context, Durrell’s first attempt at a professional publication and reflects his literary and personal concerns during his development as a writer. After this, he and his wife Nancy Isobel Myers departed for Corfu, a Greek island in the Ionian, and he never made England his home for an extended period again. The submission did not win the prize, but Cassell offered publication, and Durrell completed revisions on Corfu while writing his second novel *Panic Spring.*

However, *Pied Piper of Lovers* has a more complex series of links to its circumstances and Durrell’s personal demons than its quick composition suggests. The deeply felt conflict between Mother India and Father England echoes in the sense of exile that remains prevalent in all of Durrell’s subsequent works. This ranges from the loss of Greece when he fled to Egypt in World War II, as recounted in *Prospero’s Cell,* to his flight from Cyprus during Enosis in *Bitter Lemons,* and the community of exiles in *The Alexandria Quartet.* As Durrell would admit in an interview when recounting his childhood and being sent “home” to England away from his family and birthplace, “That vague sense of exile has never quite left me” (*Supposer* 24). More than in any later work, *Pied Piper of Lovers* makes this loss of home overt: “home” was “a peculiarly inspiring word…applied to England it meant less than nothing.” The novel also emphasizes Durrell’s sense of home in India and anticipates later difficulties he would experience when a 1968 amendment to the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962 left him redefined as a non-patrial without the right to enter or settle in Britain without a visa. In effect, he became an Indian non-patrial without having become an Indian, which reflects the in-between position he creates for his protagonist Walsh in *Pied Piper of Lovers.*

The novel also draws extensively on Durrell’s autobiographical experiences. Direct reflections of his own life appear in Walsh’s aunt Brenda, Isobel’s horrific cooking in the later portions of the novel, Walsh’s school experiences, the importance of playing and writing jazz, the death of his father, living in Fitzrovia, and perhaps most importantly, being sent to England for a solitary life. With such emphatically autobiographical echoes, the reader is encouraged to relate the novel’s events to the author’s private life in a way that even Durrell’s later travel narratives would resist. In *Prospero’s Cell,* Durrell’s first wife becomes “N.”; in *Reflections on a Marine Venus* his second wife becomes “E.”; and in *Bitter Lemons* she and his daughter all but vanish, leaving only their mementoes in
the book, disembodied objects of affection that remain after the owners have vanished. Even in his ostensibly autobiographical travel books, the major emotional crises in his life are tidily pruned and set aside – he had already separated with Nancy when he wrote _Prospero’s Cell_ and with Eve when he wrote _Bitter Lemons_, in both instances with the mother retaining custody of a young daughter. Yet, in this first novel, which Durrell did not allow to be reprinted, we find an autobiographical protagonist who echoes Durrell’s childhood and adolescence closely; experiments with homosexuality and rebuts homophobic comments from his friends; struggles with his developing sexuality; is frantically broken over his social role as a colonial; is traumatized by realizing his own mortality; fails to reconcile with his father who dies in India; and who is strikingly excluded from the colonized nation he considers home while remaining unable to accept the nationality forced upon him. All of these themes resurface in the later works but always at a significant distance from any character that could be associated with the author. Moreover, their recurrence suggests that this unresolved nexus of anxieties and traumas was perhaps the most important source of Durrell’s creativity.

As a novel, _Pied Piper of Lovers_ had a short first life. It received tepid reviews and a vicious attack in _Janus_ by John Mair who perhaps recognized his own circumstances too clearly, leading to his attack on Durrell as a person rather than the novel as a work. As Ray Morrison comments,

To some extent, this goring by Mair may help to account for why Durrell remained so dismissive of his first novel and why he would never consent to having it republished. It also seems to have warned Durrell away from using personal materials which could be used in another sneak ambush of this sort. Asked later about his characters, Durrell claims they are “persona...not real people” and maintains (probably too vigorously) that “there is hardly a snatch of autobiography.” (71; quoting Mitchell 49)

This may overstate the case, but the novel’s profoundly autobiographical nature is so convincing that Durrell’s first biographer, Gordon Bowker, significantly elides it with Durrell’s life. What remained of the novel’s short print run was later destroyed in the London Blitz during World War II, and barely a dozen copies survive in libraries around the world. After this, it appeared only through a brief excerpt in two anthologies edited by Alan G. Thomas and Caryl Phillips, the latter posthumously. Its potential influences, however, continued on. The affinities with George Orwell’s inter-bellum novels are uncanny. In his 1936 novel _Keep the Aspidistra Flying_, Orwell later used some of the same character names and a windfall of fifty dollars when his protagonist, Gordon Comstock,
sells a poem, which sends the budding poet off on a foolish spree of
dining and drinking. This is in close parallel to Walsh's experiences in
Pied Piper of Lovers, published in 1935. Walsh follows a similar spree on
five pounds, but without Orwell's conclusion with drunken incarceration,
and he receives a windfall of fifty pounds for the sale of his first song.
Orwell's Gordon also works as a copy-writer in an advertising house,
as does Durrell's Gordon. Durrell repays the favour from Orwell in
his next novel, Panic Spring, by using the same class-based pun on the
pronunciation of "Ro-mance" that Orwell emphasizes and by setting the
chapter "Francis" in a firm in which the titular character makes good
by producing expert advertisements, very much in parallel to Orwell.
This reverses Orwell's gender dynamic in Keep the Aspidistra Flying, in
which his protagonist attempts to escape an advertising firm, although
in both novels success comes by writing commercial copy. In a public
row, the two young authors subsequently bickered in The New English
Weekly in 1937, with Orwell condemning the individualist politics of The
Booster, a magazine to which Durrell was closely tied. Durrell's response
quipped that such critiques "could be turned on George Orwell's own
flying aspidistras with more profit" ("Booster" 78). The row mirrors
Orwell's later disagreements with the anarchist publications that followed
in London during the war, most of which were edited by or included
writers who had already appeared under Durrell and Miller's editorship
or were linked to them: Julian Symons, Nicholas Moore, Antonia White,
Rayner Heppenstall, and Oswald Blakeston.²

Despite these ties to other works, Pied Piper of Lovers reached a
small audience, and the rarity of copies has led to a scarcity of scholarly
responses. The significance of the novel in inter-bellum British literature
has yet to receive significant discussion, nor has its reflection of the
tropes and social concerns of this period been addressed. This is parti-
icularly striking given the increasing attention that is granted to South
Asian voices in London's literary scene of the 1920s and 30s. Pied Piper of
Lovers reacts to several of the concerns that drive Orwell's works from
the same period, including British colonialism in particular (Burmes
Days was published the previous year in 1934). Yet, Durrell was younger
than Orwell and engaged far more extensively in the experimental
movements of the time;³ and Orwell's mildly misogynist protagonists
do not mesh with Durrell's "Love and let love" rebuttal to homophobic
comments against gays and lesbians in his novel nor his close friendships
with George Barker, Elizabeth Smart, and David Gascoyne. Both Durrell
and Orwell, however, were keenly aware of the interdependent captivity
of the colonizer and colonized, and this marks their works.

Durrell stated his in-between position directly: "my thinking is
coloured by the fact that I am a colonial, an Anglo-Indian" (MacNiven,
Lawrence 1). Ravindran Nambari likewise notes, "Unlike Kipling Durrell believes that the East has a major role to play" (43). Yet, the brute fact of colonial rule is almost written on the mother's body, and Durrell certainly does not elude culpability. Even though the novel is dedicated "To my dear mother, but for whom," the prologue describes the death of Walsh Clifton's Indian mother, whose makeshift coffin bears a displaced advertisement for Indian pleasures ready for British consumption:

'The Kulu Apple'
'The Kulu Apple'
(The white man's delight) (21, 105)

The function of this scene is opaque, but it immediately emphasizes the unresolved tension between colonial pleasures, domination, Walsh's position as an Anglo-Indian (both the white man and the apple), and the nexus of anxieties that go on to dominate the novel: mortality, paternal love, control, trauma, and loss. Moreover, this racial distinction marks Durrell's intentions in a book that is so autobiographical that scholars often fail to distinguish between Walsh as a character and Durrell as author. This does not mean that we do not find Indian servants referred to as "childish" or as having "paws," but such descriptions invariably derive from the adult colonials around the child Walsh, who instead retreats to be among his peers: the Indians. Such conflicts are often situated in striking juxtapositions, such as Brenda's arrival and disparagement of the Bhutias, which is followed by Walsh's fascination with the Indian cremations that lead him to recognize his own mortality. This is succeeded by Brenda's beating the servants, which is directly juxtaposed to Walsh's retreat into the jungle to meet an Indian boy of his own age, his double, who can quote Shakespeare and teaches him the secrets of sexuality.

Most notable, however, is the narrator's commentary on the above inscription on the nameless mother's coffin: it is a "symbolic illustration of an already formulated ideology," and a clearly imperialist ideology at that. Moreover, this symbol of colonial power leads the Indian workman preparing the coffin to realize "Clifton sahib would smack him hard over the back of the neck!" (21), for allowing such marks to remain on the boards of the coffin. The effect is for the reader to recognize, before the main body of the novel has begun, that the mother's body has been symbolically marked by an "epitaph, some parting tribute to hollow flesh" that voices an unrecognized ideology of the Indian worker, which is then related directly to "the inscribed tombstones of the oppressors of his race, scattered about plots of weed-grown land in his own country" (21). The mother's burial rather than cremation is also a final inscription of authority from the colonizer.
Despite these latent critiques of imperialism, Durrell is typically viewed by the majority of critics as a pro-colonial voice of imperial privilege and exoticism. Notably, such views have never accounted for *Pied Piper of Lovers*, nor could they be expected to given the scarcity of the text. Nevertheless, the novel prompts significant reconsideration of Durrell’s later works and the potential for ironical readings. The novel is a product of its times and can strain modern postcolonial sensibilities, yet it was created at the same moment as Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* after a period of three years in which Anand and Durrell had been friends in London, both frequenting Fitzrovia and sharing a common circle of colleagues as well. Durrell went on to publish Anand’s Urdu poem “Nightmare” in *The Booster* in 1937, and they continued to have a genial literary friendship until Anand returned to India in 1946, which suggests that Anand’s complex and highly political views of India prompted a sympathetic interpretation of *Pied Piper of Lovers* or at least a friendly acceptance of its author’s position. Much like E. M. Forster’s *A Passage to India* (Forster also contributed the introduction to Anand’s novel), irony would seem central to Durrell’s critiques of colonial privilege and the power dynamic sustained by the British in India. Durrell also began a lifelong friendship with the Ceylonese poet Meary James Thuraírajarah Tambimuttu, and almost at the same moment that Tambi arrived in London in January 1938, the two began a series of mutual publications including a series of attempts to publish Durrell’s *The Black Book*, which appeared in full later in the same year in Paris but remained restricted by censors in England. While Tambi was largely apolitical and pacifist, their rapid contact and friendship points to Durrell’s continuing interest in South Asians in London during his brief visits in the later 1930s.

Developing out of this context, through Walsh’s Anglo-Indian background, Durrell uses race as a marker of ambiguity and difference from his birthplace, and he is adamant in interviews that his own banishment from India by his father was a childhood trauma marking his symbolic loss of Mother India for Father England (*Supposer* 24). He repeated this trend in his ongoing (biologically unlikely) assertion of his Irishness, which gave him an escape from being English. The tension between Mother India and Father Britain is made clear in the first image of England in *Pied Piper of Lovers*. Caryl Phillips describes, in an uncanny parallel, his vision of such a moment at sea in his Arthur Ravencroft Memorial Lecture at the University of Leeds. He comments on the immigration policies that restricted non-patrial citizens of the Empire, constitutionally British, from entering or settling in Britain from the West Indies, the same act that defined Durrell as a non-patrial in 1968:
I have imagined the scene many times…. Crowds of West Indians are peering from the deck of a ship, eagerly securing their first view of the white cliffs of Dover…. At the moment of that first sighting I imagine that their dominant emotion would have been that of a profound sense of loss, for clearly they knew that it would be many years before they would return home to loved ones and familiar landscapes. (106)

The poignancy for Phillips is that these “Crowds of West Indians” are British non-patrials under increasing limitations in the Commonwealth to enter or settle in Britain. To expand his scope, Phillips need only have returned to *Pied Piper of Lovers*, a portion of which he anthologized for Faber & Faber in his collection *Elegant Strangers* only one year prior to delivering this lecture. Durrell’s vision is equally poignant in a remarkably similar manner:

It would perhaps be impossible to define accurately the feeling of disappointment he experienced as he stood on the deck of the liner and watched the pearly cliffs insinuate themselves out of the light sea-haze…. [I]t was smaller than he had imagined!…. [T]his observation implied some sort of intuitive deduction…. [T]hose who shouted, pointed and exclaimed were in the minority. A great number stood silent, gripping the rail, and experiencing that emotion of country-love which is occasioned in exiles. (109)

Walsh’s distance from Father Britain’s “White as white” cliffs – cliffs that recall his less than white background – is compounded by his difference from Mother India. He turns to a “small and gentle-looking ayah…her hands folded inside her sari” and feels “sick with an undefined regret, as though the beauty of the hills which he had left behind for ever still worked in him” (111). As Gordon Bowker points out, “the young colonial is returning ‘home’, but also setting off into exile” (18). Walsh asks her, “You are of the hills?” to which she responds, “Yes. Of Nepal.” He asserts his home in the same manner – “He said shyly: ‘I, too, am from the hills. Kurseong.’” However, she became silent and “seemed to regard him as yet another of the alien race with whom she had nothing in common save the coincidence of a common dwelling; a birth-place and a country for her, for him no more than a temporary house” (111). This perspective places Walsh in the doubly estranged position of exile from India and life in an England that would not accept him. It is also telling that this young ayah’s recognition of race leads immediately to thoughts of nationality, a fact that could not have been overlooked by the young Durrell, who was sent to England in the same year that Nepal’s independence was recognized by Britain.
Durrell returned to a similar scene over twenty years later in the third volume of his *Alexandria Quartet*. Two figures again glance at each other across national and racial divides, and again only a failure to communicate echoes across that chasm. For David Mountolive (a diplomat trained to regard the Orient through the apparatus of his books and formal Arabic), the Orient explicitly comes alive via his unconscious desires. Egypt is “seen from the vantage point of someone inside the canvas his own imagination had painted, [and here Mountolive] had suddenly found the exotic becoming completely normal. Its poetry was irradiated by the *unconscious* with which it was lived” (410). Mountolive’s Orientalist construct of Egypt and of his lover Leila Hosnani becomes overt – his brutal, sensual, thrilling Orient is immediately juxtaposed to Leila’s Occidentalist construction of a sexualized and conquering Other. When asked by Mountolive why she loves him, a foolish question for any lover to ask, Leila quotes her favourite author, whom Zakhan (227) recognizes as John Ruskin in “Imperial Duty”:

“There is a destiny now possible to us – the highest ever set before a nation to be accepted or refused. We are still undegenerate in race; a race mingled of the best northern blood….” Mountolive listened to her voice with astonishment, pity and shame. It was clear that what she saw in him was something like a prototype of a nation which existed now only in her imagination. She was kissing and cherishing a painted image of England. It was…the oddest experience in the world. (*Alexandria* 411)

Mountolive, as might be expected, also lost his father to colonial service in India, and the link between the two scenes suggests a far more ironic narrator in the later work than has hitherto been acknowledged. Only in this invasion of his own identity does Mountolive confront the nature of projection, which dominates the thematic contents of *The Alexandria Quartet*. In his paroxysm over Leila’s misprision, David finally speaks:

“Stop. Stop,” he cried sharply. “We are not like that any longer, Leila.” It was an absurd book-fed dream this Copt had discovered and *translated*. He felt as if all those magical embraces had been somehow won under false pretences – as if her absurd thoughts were reducing the whole thing, diminishing the scale of it to something as shadowy and unreal as, say, a transaction with a woman of the streets. Can you fall in love with the stone effigy of a dead crusader? (412)

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Through Leila’s Occidentalism, Mountolive becomes aware of the psychological construction of Others. Nonetheless, he does not recognize “the canvas his own imagination had painted…irradiated by the unconscious.” She fell in love with him because “[he is] English”; he because she is Egyptian. The East becomes the receptive canvas for his projections of the West, but only the reader is allowed to recognize this, and the participants in this painful drama of colonialism remain unaware.

Durrell’s difficulty with this tension between race and nationality, marking as they do the frail fabric of identity, is made palpable, yet its resolution is elusive. This difficulty drives Durrell’s later work just as readily as it directs our interpretive ventures. He brings the reader to only one conclusion, although it is hardly presented as a consummation devoutly to be wished. With Walsh’s lover gravely ill and his own future prospects uncertain, and with all this disrupted by the traumas of his past, Durrell turns us back to the problem he first encountered through an ankle-bone jutting out of an Indian funeral pyre. It tells him “I know something…very startling – absolute mental dynamite. That is: ‘I am, and quite soon I will not be.’ Isn’t that enough?” Attempting to answer that problem required the rest of his career.

CRITICISM

Included with this edition is a reprint of an early article by James A. Brigham that contextualizes the novel. Durrell’s works have attracted an eclectic range of scholarly criticism since his rise to prominence in the 1950s, although his ties to his Modernist predecessors and late Modernist contemporaries are often neglected in favour of his works from the same period of the Angry Young Men. In part, this text seeks to correct this oversight. The scholarly work on Durrell has developed into an impressive body on its own, but it is only now becoming more fully integrated into twentieth century literary studies.

Also, while many critical investigations discuss Durrell’s early works, due to their rarity for the past seven decades, very few scholarly essays have focused exclusively on the novels on their own, preferring instead a comparative approach to Durrell’s later fiction. The bibliography includes these comparative works, which analyze *Pied Piper of Lovers* in relation to Durrell’s *oeuvre* and his development as a writer, as well as entries for Durrell’s contemporary writings.

THIS EDITION

This edition draws on the Cassell and Company, Ltd. first edition in 1935. A few obvious typographical errors have been silently corrected, and spellings with ligatures have been modernized throughout.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the assistance of several people, and my appreciation is profound. Paulomi Chakraborty helped with translations for this work when I first taught it in 2003. Candace Fertile first made Durrell’s early novels available to me, the University of Alberta afforded me the opportunity to teach such works, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada supported my research while preparing this text. I am also indebted to Edward Bishop, who encouraged my interests in editing, the Special Collections staff of the University of Victoria for extensive assistance with their astonishing holdings, and the International Lawrence Durrell Society for its long-standing academic support. I am particularly thankful for the Durrell School of Corfu’s ongoing encouragement of these activities, for providing a location for intensive research, and for developing networks to support this project in particular. Were it not for the dsc, I would not have been able to complete this project.

I must also make a special note for James A. Brigham, who first called for the publication of these materials in 1979. Jay’s papers were donated by his widow to the University of Victoria while I was there as a post-doctoral fellow conducting research in the McPherson Library. I had the opportunity to organize these papers early in 2007. During several late nights sorting his correspondences and manuscripts, I realized the staggering extent of his humble and private labours to aid others in their scholarly work. I discussed this editing project in its earliest stages with Jay in 2003, to which he responded with much enthusiasm. I can only hope that bringing these works back to the public, nearly thirty years after his first call to do so, is a suitable tribute to his contributions to literary studies.

Notes
1 Homelessness and unstable national identity are poignant themes in his wife, Claude’s, 1959 Zionist novel A Chair for the Prophet, which contains several passages clearly under his influence.
2 For more detail on the political tensions involved in Durrell’s ties to the Surrealists and his intrusions into the Miller-Read correspondence, see Gifford, “Surrealism’s Anglo-American Afterlife” (36–64).
3 Note, for instance, the symbolist repetitions of phrases and images across the novel (ankles and ankle-bones, “he must not think,” and so forth), or the Lawrentian repetitions of words and phrases in close proximity.
4 For instance, see Manzalaoui (248–260), Said (220–221), Rodenbeck (524–572), and Marrouchi (63–64).
5 This failed attempt to circumvent the censors and publish The Black Book was previously unrecognized until the Tambimuttu archives were recently acquired by the British Library. Similarly unsuccessful attempts were made in the USA by Robert Duncan and George Leite.