

## “Dark” Durrell

July 4-6, 2024 – Athens, Greece

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

**Confirmed Keynote Speaker:**

**Marinos Pourgouris, University of Cyprus**

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

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(1937), set in the fictional island of Mavrodaphne (Black Laurel), as well as *Black Honey* (1945) and the incomplete, unpublished novel *The Dark Peninsula*, foreground Durrell’s use of dark imagery as a mirror of psychological or ontological conflict.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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**December 20, 2023**, to [darkdurrell2024@gmail.com](mailto:darkdurrell2024@gmail.com)

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

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

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