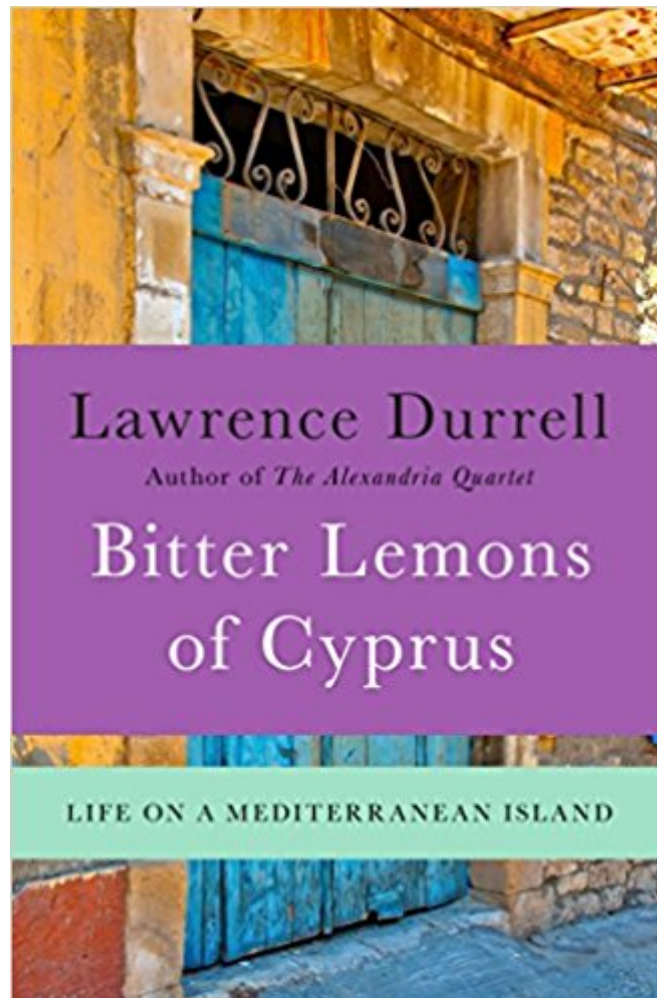




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Bitter Lemons Of Cyprus: Life On A Mediterranean Island



Synopsis

On a Mediterranean island divided, a man finds peace in a time of perilous unrest in this stunning memoir. In 1953, as the British Empire relaxes its grip upon the world, the island of Cyprus bucks for independence. Some cry for union with Athens, others for an arrangement that would split the island down the middle, giving half to the Greeks and the rest to the Turks. For centuries, the battle for the Mediterranean has been fought on this tiny spit of land, and now Cyprus threatens to rip itself in half. Into this escalating conflict steps Lawrence Durrell—a poet, novelist, and a former British government official. After years serving the Crown in the Balkans, he yearns for a return to the island lifestyle of his youth. With humor, grace, and passable Greek, Durrell buys a house, secures a job, and settles in for quiet living, happy to put up his feet until the natives begin to consider wringing his neck. More than a travel memoir, this is an elegant picture of island life in a changing world.

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Customer Reviews

Yes, Durrell's writing as this book begins is overblown, flowery, as some others have said. It starts off as a paean to village life in Cyprus. (Durrell is caught up in the life of the "noble savage", the Cypriot villagers who live much as they did eons ago. He even buys, and settles into, a home in an

obscure village.) But, then this memoir morphs into a sad look at the push for Cypriot self-determination in the 1950s. The author changes from an optimistic lover of all things Cyprus to a man who is just not sure where his allegiances lie between the English, Greeks and Turks. To give Durrell credit, he is open-minded on the issues---wants to avoid the problems or postpone them. But, this is not to be. Conflict comes. War comes. He's been hired by the British government. He ultimately is a colonial power. Durrell's voice is gentle and seems to be of the past--which it is. As a side note, he gives an interesting take on how ordinary villagers become partisans--revolutionaries. This is still applicable today, I think.

During WWII Durrell served as a press attache to the British Embassy. After a life spent in various locales, he moved to Cypress as a private individual, settling in the Greek village of Bellapaix. He wrote this memoir as a tribute to the Cypriot peasantry and the island landscape. Durrell got to know the people of the island by working in many different jobs, eventually serving as an official of the Cyprus government the last two years he was there. The home he chose to make livable was a portion of the ruined monastery of Bellapaix, a Gothic remnant "with huge carved doors made for some forgotten race of giants and their oxen." This is the third in a trilogy of island books, earlier ones about Corfu and Rhodes. In this last one, Durrell set out to describe the moods and atmospheres on Cyprus during the unfolding of the tragedy (1953-6) when English and Greek governments brought military forces to Cypress to fight for the domination of the island. In a poem to Cypress Durrell wrote, "In an island of bitter lemons, where moon's cool fevers burn ... Beauty, darkness, vehemence ... and the Greek sea's curly head keep its calms like tears unshed."

I'm a great fan of Durrell, and this book fulfills my highest expectations. A story of what happened to the people and culture of Cyprus (what great human hearts these people had!) in the mid-1950's, with powerful, compassionate analysis that sheds light on the situation in Syria, Iran, Greece, etc., today,.our attention is especially drawn to what was lacking in Cyprus that the Cypriots' minds supplied by idealizing others (the Greeks) along with the influence of ancient Byzantium -- an influence Western minds apparently can't wrap themselves around. Thanks to for making this book readily available.

Interesting experiences and fascinating information on the events and attitudes that led up to the divided Cyprus we have today. This island is VERY popular with tourists from all over Britain and Europe and we would love to visit one day.

Having lived in Cyprus during this same time period, albeit a lot younger than Lawrence, I found this book very reminiscent to my own recollections and personal stories from my parents. Durrell always writes wonderful prose and poignant literature. I love everything he has written, particularly the Alexandria Quartet and *Esprit de Corps*/Stiff Upper Lip. He writes humor equally well as pathos.

I read this book about three years ago before moving to Cyprus. I bought it for my husband's birthday this June, and he enjoyed his first read of *Bitter Lemons*. I have just finished rereading it and found it much more interesting reading the descriptions of places I know well, especially Bellapais. I wonder who owns the house now? An excellent story setting the scene for the troubles of the 1950s that is even more poignant right now since the new memorial stones in the British Cemetery in Kyrenia list all the military personnel killed in those troubles. Many of their relatives attended the unveiling service last November 2009. Most of the soldiers, air personnel, sailors and police were under 25 when they died. Lawrence Durrell's book just shows how (in my humble opinion) unnecessary it all was. Cyprus remains a beautiful place. We have lemons in our garden. The Tree of Idleness still stands. All we need now is a sequel.

Fans of Durrell will delight in his adept use of the English language in *Bitter Lemons*. His easy facility with words is matched by only a few others of similar repute. But one does not have to be a Durrell-phile to revel in this book. If you cleave to travel writing, if you are fascinated by Cyprus or simply yearn to learn about it, if you fancy yourself a historian (or actually are one), then this book is for you. Fortunately for us, Durrell lived in Cyprus during a pivotal point in its calamitous history. Not only is he a sharp and clever observer of all things Cypriot, but he details events so clearly that the reader feels she is standing right next to him. We marinate in the rich culture and crescendo of conflict--understanding their essence in a visceral way.

I love books like this that explore an area of ideas or the world where it would never have occurred to me to go. Well, this guy was there and had the knowledge (like the Greek language) to understand the situation. I read about the trouble in Cyprus at the time, but understood nothing. Some may say 'how could a political situation that happened 50 years ago matter now?' Just read the book. It is just great. The subject may not matter to many (I consider it tragic, but no more than an hundred other areas of the world with similar problems), but the fact that this guy was on the ground there is brilliant. The book is so well written that I think most anyone will be absorbed

by the narrative, and lack of knowledge or interest in this remote area will not affect the reading. I know this is all a little vague, but I'm not the writer Durrell is.

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