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Bookends Literary lives

Exile is a useful state for a writer to dwell in. Not only does it often provide the seclusion necessary to put pen to paper, it also provides an alibi for professional voyeurism: tourists may stand and gawp, but writers are observers engaged in the serious study of their new-found lands and neighbours. That's the theory, anyway. The cover photo of Ian MacNiven's **'Lawrence Durrell'** (Faber £25) shows his subject as a fetching young man in black swimming trunks. Durrell, who was born in India, had a liking for hot spots. Sent away to school in England, which he dubbed 'Pudding Island', he later persuaded his family to leave Bournemouth for Corfu. A career with the Foreign Office enabled him to travel the world at someone else's expense. He once claimed to have taken up writing out of 'sheer ineptitude' and there are times, especially when plodding through the more purple patches of his 'Alexandria Quartet', when the reader can only agree. However, his genius lay in capturing the 'spirit of place' and his book on Corfu, 'Prospero's Cell', is his masterpiece. MacNiven's massive, engrossing biography, which includes many holiday snaps, proves Durrell's assertion that 'other countries may offer you discoveries in manners or lore or landscape; Greece offers you something harder - the discovery of yourself.'

Ariel Dorfman, who wrote 'Death and the Maiden', was born in Argentina, grew up in New York, then lived in Chile until the 1973 coup which ousted Salvador Allende forced him to leave the country. He has subtitled his autobiography, **'Heading South, Looking North'** (Hodder & Stoughton £17.99), 'A Bilingual Journey'. The twin poles he oscillates between are not just Spanish and English or South and North America but past and present and life and death. Wherever he goes, 'the swirling blue sky

of exile' is above him. He lives in North Carolina now, but you get the impression he wouldn't be happy anywhere.

Karl Miller is a misery-guts as well. Literary London is rarely a place of sweetness and light so it is only fitting that he has called his memoir **'Dark Horses'** (Picador £16.99). The Edinburgh paper-boy went on to found the *London Review of Books*, a unique publication in which writers were given as much space as they wanted and flourished within it. Unfortunately, Miller has given himself too much here: his accounts of dealing with the likes of Seamus Heaney and Kingsley Amis are revealing, but details of who reviewed what in which issue are dry as dust. His hesitant and convoluted prose style doesn't help matters either. The result is so sad as to make you feel almost sorry for the old curmudgeon. When he left his periodical after a tiff with the publisher, he says he lost half of his friends. Exile is a state of mind as well as geography.

No one under the sheltering sky knows this better than Paul Bowles. The Morocco-bound minimalist continues to attract maximum attention from his fellow writers. The latest Tangerine ream, **'You Are Not I'** (University of California Press \$27.50), is by Millicent Dillon, who has already published a book on Bowles' wife, Jane. It is an unusual, intriguing portrait which may not uncover anything new but does manage to say a lot about the nature and processes of biography.

TE Lawrence's views on sun, sand and sodomy are different to those of Bowles but, as John E Mack demonstrates in **'A Prince of Our Disorder'** (Harvard University Press £12.50), by no means negative. Here's a quote from one of Lawrence of Arabia's letters: 'I've seen a lot of man-and-man loves: very lovely and fortunate some of them were.' When it was first published in 1976, this groundbreaking biography was awarded

Karl Miller



the Pulitzer Prize.

'WH Auden: A Commentary' (Faber £14.99) by John Fuller has grown out of his 1970 'Reader's Guide' to the great poet's work. Such superb scholarship furnishes every student with more than they will ever need to know about the Solihull supernova.

The Sitwells were not great poets, but they were, as Philip Ziegler shows in his brilliant biography, **'Osbert Sitwell'** (Chatto & Windus £20), great publicists. They even kept a bowl of press cuttings about themselves on a coffee table. Osbert, like his siblings Edith and Sacheverell, was an outrageous egotist. He attempted most forms of writing but only succeeded at autobiography. He loved men but hated his father. The Derbyshire lad died in his Italian castle in 1969. If you must endure exile, you might as well do it in style. *Mark Sanderson*

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