

## Drifting Cities by Stratis Tsirkas

(translated by Kay Cicellis; Knopf;  
710 pp.; \$10.00)

James A. Goodman

With the dissolution of the Allied front into its cold war components Greece found itself at the center of the political arena—a bone of contention between Churchill and Stalin (with Stalin giving in to Churchill in exchange for a free hand in the Balkans) and later a prime target of the Truman Doctrine. Even before the war's end British-Greek relations had deteriorated over representation in the Greek government-in-exile, which took refuge in the Middle East following the German occupation of Greece in 1941. Tensions came to a head in the April, 1944, mutiny by dissident factions of the Greek army and navy, and by December the conflict overflowed to mainland Greece.

While there are many histories devoted to this prelude to cold war diplomacy, Stratis Tsirkas's *Drifting Cities* has the rare quality of integrating personal observations with the larger political scene. Tsirkas, an Alexandrian Greek who has lived more than fifty of his sixty-three years in Egypt, tells the story of three cities—Jerusalem, Cairo, and Alexandria—between the years 1942 and 1944. It is an insider's view of the world beneath the diplomatic table, yet he maintains an historian's grasp of the broader situation.

*Drifting Cities*, first published in Greek a decade ago, is in the tradition of the nineteenth-century historical novel. Tsirkas details for 710 pages the web of political deceit and intrigue that the politics of war impose on these cities. We follow Manos, the idealistic Greek Communist who deserts the Allied army to join the Greek resistance, through a Middle East labyrinth where he finds humanity corrupted by war.

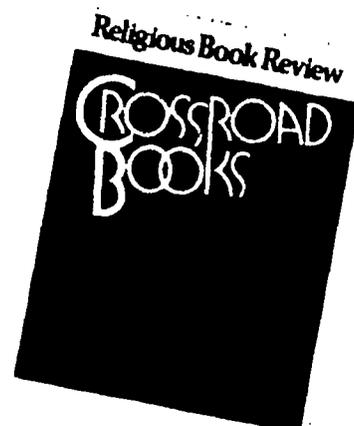
Tsirkas, like his Greek predecessors Cavafy (about whom he has written two books) and Seferis, is

haunted by the tragic. Disillusionment besets the most idealistic of individuals, many of whom must conform to a political ideology warped by war or face the fate of a pariah. Manos, although disenchanted with the strong-arm tactics of the Greek Stalinist Little Man, ultimately conforms to the Party line; Dr. Roberts is forever ostracized because he "crossed over to the 'natives'" by sympathizing with the Greeks. Yet even Ariagne, "the purest of the pure," whose compassion knows no political boundaries, cannot escape the callousness of war; she emerges a tattered woman with her family decimated.

The Middle East has become a haven for refugees ("one would

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never have thought that so many people had reasons to fear Hitler"), and Tsirkas excels in communicating a sense of uprootedness of these cities. His characters are impure, often victims of their historical predicaments. Cultural ties are frequently all that hold communities together. Tsirkas spins an intricate network of cities within a city, subtly drawing the relationship of one cultural community to another.

Tsirkas's prose steers clear of Manichaean simplisms. He explores the reality beneath the rhetoric; he is sympathetic to the idealism of the Greek Left and cynical about Churchill's attempt to secure a British solution to "the Greek Torment." But throughout Tsirkas maintains a healthy skepticism toward all institutions of political power.

Page after page he exposes the twisting of truth for political expedience or personal gain. In this atmosphere Tsirkas finds little salvation beyond survival; his pessimism borders on that of Céline. Betrayal runs deepest for those Party faithfuls who took part in the April mutiny only to find the Greek Communist Party's line ("the whole April business had been instigated by the British") at odds with the truth. Tsirkas's portrayal of the mutiny is reminiscent of a letter from delegates of the Greek Left at the Lebanon Conference, which disowned anyone involved in the mutiny.

Tsirkas's contention that the destiny of Greece was molded by British intervention and an increasingly Stalinized Greek Left foreshadows Dominique Eudes's *The Kapetanos Partisans and Civil War in Greece, 1943-1949*. Eudes, a French journalist whose use of oral history adds fresh insight to earlier scholarship, breaks with a number of revisionist studies in that he emphasizes the predominance of the Greek Communist Party in EAM, the largest indigenous resistance organization. Whereas Tsirkas does not share Eudes's rather romanticized view of the Greek guerrillas, they agree that the maneuverings of big power diplomacy condemned Greece to become a prisoner of the cold war.

The sobriety of Tsirkas's message is complemented by vivid description and rich language. Yet the compactness of style is flawed by a lack of organizational cohesiveness. *Drifting Cities* is presented as a trilogy of three cities sharing a common condition. But Tsirkas at times confuses his reader by abrupt transitions from one subplot to another and sudden jumps in narration. He is skilled at relating the immediate

to its historical context but obviously does not feel bound by a lineal progression of events.

These structural difficulties should not, however, detract from the larger contributions of Tsirkas's work. Tsirkas offers a lucid picture of the Middle East at a critical time in Greek history. Most important, Tsirkas creates an empathy for his subject that is often lacking in the histories of this period.

## The Liberal Theory of Justice by Brian Barry

(Clarendon Press; 168 pp.; \$3.95)

### Alan Emdin

It may be remembered that in his *A Theory of Justice*, published two years ago, John Rawls postulated a group of individuals attempting to formulate the basic rules of their society. The actors were thought of as in an "original position," aware of certain general social and psychological facts but ignorant of the particular goals they might later wish to pursue. Rawls claimed that they would unanimously grant each other (1) "an equal right to the most extensive system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all." They would also decide that (2) "any social and economic inequalities be arranged so that they are both (a) to the greatest advantage to the least advantaged consistent with the just savings principle, and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity." These would be (lexically) ordered such that the first had absolute priority over part (b) of the second, which (in economically developed societies) would take absolute precedence over part (a).

In what I believe is the longest study devoted exclusively to Rawls to date, Barry subjects to careful scrutiny each aspect of the original position and of the two principles

of justice Rawls deduced from it. He also comments upon several statements by Rawls which are not, strictly speaking, part either of the principles themselves or of their derivation. In this connection Barry makes many of his most interesting and telling points. Oddly, they serve as specific corrections to what are some of the most engaging general features of Rawls's own work.

Most academic philosophy hardly deigns to consider what the practical implications of its doctrines might be. It was even necessary to start a new journal, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, to insure an outlet for such work. To his credit, Rawls outlined policies enjoined by his principles of justice in such areas as taxation, savings, social welfare legislation, and the range of permissible civil disobedience. Unfortunately, his policy proposals are often rather disconcerting. Rawls's economics seems to be a direct throwback to classic liberalism. He neglects the possibility that some structural features of a modern economic system might not be correctable through what were once thought of as standard solutions. Barry performs a commendable service in pointing out that, contrary to Rawls, a competitive economy and open-class system