

Occasional Paper 14

Editor: Neni Panourgiá

***Merrill, Greece, Poetics
A Conversation between Stephen Yenser and Stathis Gourgouris***



***James Merrill in a kimono ca. 1980, at the Yenser house in West Los Angeles.
Photograph by Stephen Yenser.***

This is a section of Journal of Modern Greek Studies hosting occasional papers on current Greek matters. Some of these are interviews, others are short commissioned position papers, yet others are reports of collaborative projects.

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This year marks the 90th anniversary of James Merrill's birth on 3 March. It is also the year that the first biography of Merrill appeared, written by Langdon Hammer and published by Alfred Knopf. Occasional Papers hosts a commissioned discussion between Stathis Gourgouris and his first poetry teacher Stephen Yenser on the poetry of Merrill, the significance of Merrill's relation to Greece, as well as the art of poetry and poetics in general. The conversation took place at UCLA on April 19, 2016.

Stephen Yenser is a poet and a critic, as well as Professor of English at UCLA and (along with J.D. McClatchy) literary executor of the James Merrill estate. He has written three critical studies, including *The Consuming Myth: The Work of James Merrill* (Harvard UP, 1987), and has co-edited five volumes by Merrill, whose *Selected Letters* are underway. *Stone Fruit*, Yenser's third book of poems, is forthcoming in October from Waywiser Press.



Photograph by Kathryn Ballsun

Stathis Gourgouris is Professor of Comparative Literature and Society at Columbia University and author of several books of criticism and poetry, including most recently *Lessons in Secular Criticism* (2013). His essay on Cavafy and Merrill "Cavafy's Debt" is forthcoming in *boundary2*.



Stathis Gourgouris: The impetus for this conversation is my recent immersion in James Merrill's poetry as a result of an essay I wrote, which you've read, on Cavafy and Merrill. The essay came out of the remarkable experience of reading (and teaching) Merrill's translations of Cavafy. I consider these the best translations of Cavafy in English because Merrill manages to capture Cavafy's rhythm, and he is the first one really to do so. As you know, translations of Cavafy have reinforced the common notion of him being a prosaic poet of ideas, which was also the prevalent view in Greek criticism through most of the twentieth century.

Stephen Yenser: Yes, I remember the argument in the essay – that's an important point to make. But I don't know how Merrill would feel about your term "rhythm." He *is* very interested, of course, in sonics, and he says so when he talks about translating poems – the rhymes, meters, syllabics, and so on. Some people don't pay much attention to that, of course.

SG I do want to get to the issue of rhythm – it's an important point of discussion between us – but let's do so a little later. One of the things that Merrill did, which other translators had not dared, was that he didn't bother to stick to Cavafy's verse breaks. As a result, he managed to gain something that is hard to transfer when you stick to the original form. I am not suggesting that translators throw verse breaks out of the window. But Merrill is Merrill and no one can tell him how to proceed – he took this chance and produced something that no one had done before. It seems as if he took on Cavafy holistically – I know these are dangerous terms to use – and the poem then was constructed from the standpoint of having been absorbed, instead of what we usually do when we translate line by line.

Anyway, the translations were the impetus for me to enter the world of Merrill. But I want to ask you specifically about the relation between Merrill and Greece – not so much biographically but poetically. And I don't mean what would be Merrill's views of Greek poetry. It's not about influence. It's more about what the Greek poetic universe – or the poetics of Greece, although that's a terrible phrase – and what this might have meant to Merrill's work throughout, including what would definitely be poetically formative years.

SY Well, we can say safely that Merrill knew the Greek poetic world better than any American poet because he committed himself so early to the culture. And of course, to the language in the first place, which he learned quickly. He was never fluent, or rather he was fluent in the everyday stuff, but he couldn't talk ideas fluently—at least, that's what he said. And I, more or less, believe him, although I never saw him at a loss for words. Wherever he would go in Greece he would talk to people. I never saw him talk to a philosopher – but who talks that way anyway?

SG Of course he was very demanding of himself in that way, very demanding of precision in language.

SY Yes! He was a real precisionist, that's absolutely true. It's a reason why he was such a good critic. He could be a very disabusing critic... because you never did anything perfectly. *He* never did anything perfectly. And he always looked for criticism of his own work, which also made him easy to talk to because if you had a criticism, if it was any place within reason, he was ready for it. He always had the good of the poem at heart. Ego was not a factor. It's quite rare. He was very open in that sense and I think he was open to things Greek in a similar way.

SG There is nothing in Merrill's poetry that would be identifiable as Greek or linked to Greek traditions. There are numerous things identifiable in the American tradition – you know this better than anyone – and nonetheless unprecedented, but there is nothing that makes us see in Merrill the poetry of Seferis or even Cavafy in a full sense. Merrill's sort of poetics does not really exist in Greek poetry. Even with poets younger than Merrill—although to be fair, younger Greek poets who are learned and Anglophone do know Merrill by now.

SY Well, I am glad to hear this. But he must be enormously difficult to render in Greek—I mean, he is difficult for people whose only language is English.

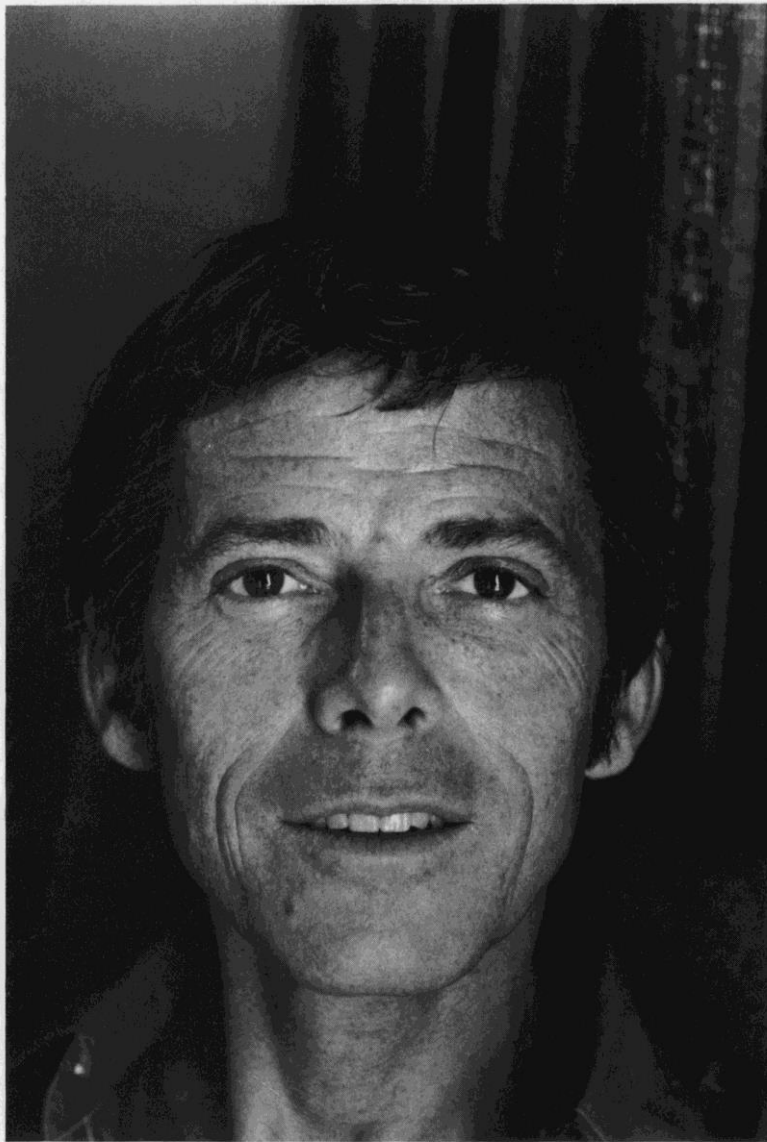
SG Yes, translating Merrill is difficult, although I must say that trying my hand at translating “After Greece” was a great experience.

SY I was just thinking of “After Greece” because you were talking about his poetics in relation to Greece, and that's the poem that comes to mind. If you think there is anything Greek in his poetics it would be there.

SG Perhaps. There is the encounter with the elemental – he is interested in the elemental as such. There is, yes, in this poem an encounter with “Greek elements” – although again, I am not comfortable with such phrasings. Anyway, the translation of “After Greece” worked, I am happy to say, and “Last Words” too, but that's easier. I am interested in translating other poems—“Strato in Plaster” for example. This poem particularly brings up a question for you: Do you think that Merrill did a lot of word-play from Greek to English?—Greek phrasings that he would transfer poetically to English, not so as to translate the Greek concept, the referent, but more as poetic ideas, as sources.

SY Well, you would know better than I.

SG It seems to me that in this poem particularly it may be the case. Especially at the end, when he is quoting Strato using some of his idiomatic language.



New wrinkles (I guess)
from many a summer day
when one Hellenophile
made his Old Master smile.
SY for JM. 1971

Photograph taken in 1971 by Tom Victor in Athens and inscribed by Merrill to Stephen Yenser. The photo, now at the Beinecke Library archives, appeared on the pamphlet James Merrill in Greece published by the Foundation for Hellenic Culture in 1996 on the occasion of an exhibit and a series of lectures on James Merrill. Published with permission.

SY One of the things about that poem that always struck me – and I didn't see it at first – was how much, in writing about Strato, Strato's failures, he was writing about himself. At first the poem looks kind of condescending. But in the end this portrait seems to me to be a self-portrait. James is writing about himself: the fractures, the breaks that happened, I think, were breaks that happened to him.

SG I would accept that. In many ways, Merrill is very kind to others, even when others behave badly toward him...

SY He could be— but he could also be very sharp...

SG No, I don't mean in terms of interpersonal relationships, but in terms of how these relations become poetic. When the biographical material becomes poetic, as this poem exemplifies the broken relationship – but even the poems about his parents, which are canonical – I see there something magnanimous in him, even when things are really painful.

SY There is a statement by Valéry, which I can't quite get right in my head but I remember James quoted to me early on: Valéry is talking about the joys of being a poet, and one of the joys is being in the poem the person you would wish you could be in life, but it's only in the poem that this can happen.¹ I think that often he is that way—many of us are probably wiser when we really have to face these ideas up close and see that somebody else might look at them and see the best we might think and feel.

SG You are right. Poems are creations and presumably we love them for that alone. And if the creation is of our self as part of a poem, it is of a different kind than when we act out ourselves...

So, it's very easy to say typical things about Merrill and Greece, you know, and I want to avoid that— the biography of the expatriate, etc. A lot of these aspects are historically interesting to me because of his perspective on things as they are happening at a certain point in time, which I lived through as a child, but really the most interesting question is the poetic: how this extraordinarily talented poet – born a poet, in a rare way – would nonetheless form himself as a poet in relation to a series of experiences in Greece, from very early travels to a whole way of everyday life for two decades. And yes, we can say that his family is a cauldron of formative power for him poetically (which can also be reduced to triviality), but Greece – the accident of coming into contact with Greek life – might be almost as crucial.

¹ The exact phrasing is actually much stronger: "Grandeur des poètes de saisir fortement avec leurs mots, ce qu'ils n'ont fait q'entrevoir faiblement dans leur esprit" (Stephen Yenser, in subsequent correspondence).

SY Yes, his investment was profound. That's why he was later disappointed— not in Greece, but in the way that life in Athens had changed.

SG Well, he was right. That's another thing that's fascinating. He saw the deterioration of daily life in Athens from the 1970s onwards, the decline to a commodified existence, in ways that many Greeks didn't.

SY You really think so? I always wondered how much this was James growing tired, as anyone would, of a certain culture. I mean, after a while it becomes your second home and then you're looking for something new.

SG Well, that's also true, and there are things about his personal life... I understand that, it's important. But I do think he sees something greater.

SY That's interesting.

SG And I don't think it's about "morals" changing or anything of that sort. Just the fact that Athens is getting built up, developed in rapid and careless fashion, becoming noisier and dirtier...

SY So it's about materiality...

SG Yes, the materiality of life. It seems to me that this was incredibly important because of his alertness to these things, these barely tangible things, which are micro-levels of daily life, these details, whether they are sounds or language, or sights, or interpersonal relations. Because he is so alert to these things, because he is so sensitive to them, he can tell what's changing. We can say, I guess, that here is an expatriate for whom Paradise has ended—we can cynically say that he is looking for some other pristine place to invest in, etc., but in the end we can't say it, because Key West (his next home) certainly isn't the same.

SY Right. Language, for one thing. In Greece, he had this whole new language to get into and to connect with. And it must have made an enormous difference, the way he committed himself to Greek. I don't know... There is something to "After Greece"—when he talks about ideas and things together, when he looks at the elements. He sees Greece and he *sees* ideas, although he doesn't care much for ideas, but anytime they are in things they begin to make something different happen. You can correct me, but I think that the Greek word for "idea" comes from an Indo-European root that means "to see." In "After Greece" he finds "ideas . . . lying open to the elements," like broken columns and capitals. Greece was a very physical place to him, and at the same time he knew everything about the intellectual burden that it bears, but what really interested him, in light of that, lay in the physicality of the place. Of course, the Greek experience was an erotic adventure for him, at the same time that it was a linguistic adventure. It is

characteristic that his poem “To My Greek” addresses a lover who is equally the language.

SG That’s clear. This erotic freedom – which is a fact, particularly in that era, for a homosexual person – he could not find in the States, especially for a person of his class. But, of course, he is a poet, so the erotic is in everything. That’s the incredible thing— he finds the erotic in everything, not just in eros as such.

SY Yes! That’s what I was trying to get at. The connection between the physical and the spiritual is crucial in Merrill.

SG We have to think of the spiritual as the intellectual too, in the sense of *Geist*, because the whole *Changing Light at Sandover* project makes more sense to me this way than it ever did before. I know the experiments with the Ouija board were happening before he settled in Greece, but poetically, one might say, he is getting something profoundly spiritual/intellectual from things Greek, and at a certain point this switches, poetically speaking, to the Ouija board motif of producing poetry, while the investment in Greece as poetic material begins to wane.

SY You mean, the difference between the early material having to do with Greece and the later work starting with “The Book of Ephraim”...

SG Yes. “Ephraim” is a kind of transition – the persona himself being a Hellenistic figure, in many ways quite Cavafyan, an ancient figure who is totally contemporary...

SY Absolutely! The two would get along well!

SG I guess what I am trying to say is that what Merrill was getting out of things Greek spiritually/intellectually – and of course, erotically – is transferred to this other framework. I’m only talking poetically, not in terms of personal life; I am not suggesting that he abandons his commitment to the Greek experience. I am talking about the transition to the core of the great work. Does this make sense?

SY I think of “[The Book of] Ephraim” as the heart of that work, to which he became totally committed. Commitment was very important to him. There is this passage in the poem where Ephraim – who here sounds to me very much like Merrill, Merrill in an inspired state – is saying that the key is “devotion”: the capacity to devote yourself, to pledge yourself, to commit yourself to something regardless of what it is. It doesn’t have to be poetry, although in James’s case it was. It could be family, as Ephraim says, or something else, but for James it was poetry. So, all experience – the erotic experience, number one – was a way to get into the poetry. When he met Strato, he didn’t just meet Strato; he met a poem, the opportunity to write poems. He met several poems...

SG That's a great way to put it.

SY And I expect the same must be true about Cavafy— it must be! The immediate experience was not an end in itself. He had to go home and write poems. Proust had to go back to his room after all those dinner parties... And Merrill aspired to the same devotion to his work that Proust had. This is why Proust was such a heroic figure to him, a figure he always wanted to live up to.

SG Cavafy was also enthralled by Proust, whom he read in French—although I am not sure he read the whole work.

SY Merrill said that he used to reread Proust every year!

SG Unbelievable! So, devotion is the right word, and so is spiritual, also – without getting religious about it. He understood the difference very well. And the relation between spirituality and materiality is a very close one for him. They are not antithetical, as one would conventionally think.

SY Well, that's a core Christian belief. It's in the Word incarnate that this world crosses into the other world.

SG My resistance to such language certainly blocks me from putting it this way...

SY I'm no Christian, but this is an idea that James comes back to several times in "Ephraim." There is a sense that this is what "Ephraim" is about: making the word flesh. Those words coming over the Ouija board, we now make stories of them, many stories of them.

SG But also the reverse. As you say, Strato is a poem. The erotic of the actual body is poetic as such. It becomes words. It's not just poetics in an idealistic way.

SY Quite right.

SG So, that's a long way around to confirm what I was trying to say: that there is something poetic in his experience of Greece at the core of his formation, even his poetic constitution.

SY I think so. You know, I don't think he ever read that much philosophy...

SG Although I was amazed to discover that he read a significant part of Gaston Bachelard' work...

SY Yes, he loved *The Poetics of Space*, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*...

SG So, I know that his explicit position was to be suspicious of philosophy and of ideas, but he is a profoundly thinking man.

SY You're dead right. And one has to take that suspicion with a grain of salt. You cannot talk about Merrill without talking about ideas. They're just so hard to pry out of the other stuff, the physical and social stuff.

SG Yes, even the political. As for example, in the fantastic poem about the blown up townhouse by the Weather Underground — “18 West 11th Street”— his birth home, the way he weaves things together, the family and history, America of the era of his father with America of the contemporary era of the poem, his own personal rebellion with the disaffection of '60s youth, the generational gap then and now. I find this to be a political poem, even though when I first went to it, looking for it to be a political poem, I didn't get it. It took me a long time to understand what is political in Merrill.

SY Well, he didn't like what was political in him. He shied away from it. But he had to have positions somehow, even if he didn't address them.

SG That's why that easy mark of the esthete poet is clearly wrong.

SY Oh, I think so too. One sees where it comes from, and it's probably going to be there forever in one sense or another, except for those people who really care about Merrill and get beyond that, as they get beyond the “rich guy” image. But it's very hard for some people to overcome. They never get over it – that resentful, dismayed prejudice about the wealthy gay guy who can do anything he wants to and he writes poetry!

SG Yes, totally instrumentalized. He's got nothing else to do, so he writes poetry. Completely devalues the art.

SY Writing poetry, where's the work in that? It's the attitude we often find in the academic profession too: the separation of pleasure from work – as if there is no work in the pleasure of writing poetry. I remember overhearing a colleague in the corridor scoffing at a another colleague's application for a research grant that would allow him to return to a foreign country he knew well in order to write some poems about it *in situ*.

SG Well, you know... Protestant ethics...

SY Which is precisely not Greek! And which is one thing that probably James responded to.

SG But also he is extraordinarily disciplined. Perhaps the discipline and, as you say, the devotion could be read probably as a kind of inherited Protestantism, especially given the burden of not having a family to take care of. I could see that. However, the pleasure that

is actually driving Merrill's life is so entwined with his writing that it cannot be reduced to just work ethic. This is not some monastic guy...

SY Almost the opposite, where the brothel becomes the holy place...

SG Yet, this too does not lead to the opposite conventional extreme – total decadence, where art does not happen. It's quite remarkable. Anyway, let's pick up on the issue you raised at the beginning, your questioning of my use of the term "rhythm." You realize, I am not talking about metrics, or prosody, etc. I don't know what else to call it.

SY I know you don't... See, we have a basic divide here. We've talked about this before, and you deny it. It looks to me that you are looking for an essence which by nature cannot be found. It looks to me that you are trying to put a transitory label on an essence, whereas I tend to be, at least in this regard, more of a materialist. And I love to think that poetry is next to God, but the only way I can talk about it is through things like meter, and figure, and trope.

SG Yes, its elements. Of course, I will resist the charge that I am an essentialist. What you are saying I agree with, and so my term "rhythm" would not differ from what you call figure or trope.

SY The word "rhythm" brings up all kinds of problematic stuff.

SG Yes, Romantic stuff, I agree. And I may be a Romantic in many ways, but I am not a Platonist. I definitely don't separate the material from the immaterial.

SY That's why you like James so much... And that's why you care about his relation to Greece so much.

SG But it took me so long to get it, Stephen. It took me so long to understand this in his poetry...

SY It's always been there for you, really. I mean, it's Heraclitus...

SG But I didn't see it right away. Anyway, I don't mean to reduce poetry to rhythm. I am not saying that the essence of poetry is rhythm, although, yes, I do think that music and poetry are linked. They are different arts, but they are linked. They are more linked, say, than poetry and the visual arts...

SY For one, they both take place in time...

SG Yes! And despite the lettrist poetry tradition and all that, which is fascinating, I see the visual as a side aspect of poetry, a little game, while the other, the aspect of sound, is

insurmountable. I think that even poems that are meant to exist as written, meant to be visualized on the page, don't work if they don't pursue something that is rhythmically poetic.

SY I couldn't agree more...

SG So, that's why I call it rhythm. It's not an essence, but it's probably the best way that I can point to the link between poetry and music, which are kindred beings.

SY Well, there might be a more fruitful way to articulate it. If there's a way to identify what these two have in common with any accuracy, it would be preferable to the notion of rhythm. Rhythm comes with such baggage. It's so broad and yet so narrow.

SG And then there is another thing – another word with terrible baggage: image. Poetic thinking – I call it thinking, it is a specific mode of thinking, different from and even antithetical to philosophical thinking – is also imagistic thinking. The image is its primary element.

SY Again, this takes us to the relation between the spiritual and the material, the concrete. Where ideas come as things.

SG But one might say, just for argument's sake, that the spiritual is given in the abstract word, which is somehow made animate. You see, the word-become-flesh here can lead in the other direction. Which is why many times philosophy becomes theological. And people of ideas can be fanatics, in many ways, for that reason. They themselves become abstracted. They lose track of all those things you mentioned, the concrete things, the trope, the figure, the meter – the things that ground a person in a poem.

SY Yes, and in “After Greece,” when James mentions what he calls “the essentials,” what he names are the elemental factors: salt, wine, olives, and so on. Not abstractions, but things that are here on this earth.

SG So, at the level of the elemental, rhythm is no more important than image, even if both terms are problematic. Or, no less important. You use the word “figure” which I think is a better word, because figure can also attach itself to image. And it also has some other really useful elements in that it can be attached to the language of poetry as such – trope. I mean it's not just reducible to image. So you see how I'm resisting the charge of the essentialist...

SY Well, I think you should!



James Merrill and Stephen Yenser in 1990. Photograph owned by Stephen Yenser, taken by Marie Cosindas during the videotaping of “Voices from Sandover” at the Agassiz Theater at Harvard University.

SG Yes. However, I do think there is something special about poetry, but this special thing does not mean *the* thing bar none. Still, I am trying to understand what that is. And I recognize how this search might lead to essentializing this thing, to turning it into *one* thing. And you are right to remind me that it's never one thing, that when you go looking for a thing in a poem it's always going to be more than one thing, a whole slew of elements. It's important and I need to keep this in mind. But this still does not stop me from arguing that there is something in poetry that is itself, that is poetic. I don't know how to say it. Language fails me.

SY We all have this problem. It's a basic problem that we have with language. Language mediates between concepts and things. Or shall we say *mud-iates*? Because language inevitably muddies the connection between concept and thing even as it makes it possible. This chair, insofar as it exists, resists the word "chair." In fact, as you know, in French, the word "chair" means "flesh." So, we got a problem. It's not *your* problem.

SG Yes, I see. Still, there is something idiosyncratic. Maybe it's because music is such a passion of mine that I have selected the word "rhythm" to speak of poetry. Which, I repeat, is not reducible to metrics...

SY Absolutely not!

SG In fact, it's more interesting when there are no recognizable metrics...

SY ...that you feel there is a rhythm that is poetic. You know, you might consider Susanne Langer's work because that's an aesthetics based on music – she began there anyway – but went on to work on her *Mind* project, a philosophy of mind that would resonate here with what you are saying. So, what is it about song and poetry? What's the connection for you?

SG Good question. I've always wanted to write an essay on "the song as a form"...

SY Look out, you will be writing about "the lyric"...

SG Yes, danger! Perhaps that's why I haven't written it. Anyway, I'm not thinking it from the standpoint of poetry per se. I approach it from the standpoint of music. Obviously, a song has to have words; therefore you can't avoid poetry in that sense. And songwriting is a very interesting art form – writing both music and words and performing them as well; it may be the most archaic art form, the oldest of all performative forms. If you take the instrument out – of course, the human voice is an instrument – but let's say we do so, then this is what we might be doing when we write poems not attentive to ideas but still aiming at something that may be beyond the words, the semantics of the words.

So, in these terms let's come back to Cavafy, where we started. Of course ideas are important to Cavafy. There are things he says about eroticism, history, or Greek civilization that are extremely valuable. But the fact that he has been reduced to a poet of ideas, or if not just ideas, to a poet of style, dry ironic style, is unfortunate when you realize that his peculiar use of language – this Alexandrian peculiarity – produces a unique poetic musicality.

SY It's interesting, the last full letter that James wrote – to André Aciman to congratulate him on his memoir *Out of Egypt* – expressed how much he identified with Alexandria, how much he thought himself to be some kind of Alexandrian.

SG I also remember a remark to that effect during his first visit to Alexandria in the early '60s, before he and Jackson settled in Greece actually, where he also mentions Cavafy, perhaps for the first time, as kindred spirits in that kind of Alexandrian sharing.

SY Contrary to his disapproval of Durrell's *Alexandrian Quartet* – “that liqueur-ish stuff” he used to call it.

SG But this is what I love about Merrill, too: how he is nothing like the Hellenophiles of his era, Durrell, Henry Miller, etc. His relation to Greece does not have that kind of Orientalizing, exoticizing glance. There is a huge history of this, as you know, before Byron...

SY Of course! The German Romantics were the biggest Hellenophiles of the world.

SG And in the process they created this fantasy. Actually, in the history of Philhellenism Byron was one of the better figures, because at least he took some interest in the contemporary and the vernacular. Despite his Orientalism, he found something living in the contemporary, unlike the general necrophilia of the others... But Merrill is not there at all. No indulgence of fantasy. His attitude was to give himself over to this reality, which after all was fun! And it's uncanny because the burden of the poetic tradition is enormous and he had to resist falling into this trap.

SY Your points of view here are great departure points. I mean, no Anglophone reader says about Cavafy that he is an essentially musical poet, and I think James would have understood what you mean. And you're right about his connection to Greece. It's through the bars and the bouzoukis, street life. It's not through Plato and Byron. Byron mattered to him as an English poet, but not in terms of his relation to Greece. Merrill wasn't interested in Greece that way. He didn't even go to the Parthenon – I mean, he'd been there, but never as a pilgrimage. Anyway, I think there is an essay here that only you can write, about Merrill's understanding and maybe adaptation of Cavafy's singular music – *and* the two poets' relationships to Alexandrianism.

SG Well, I've already written an overly long and burdened essay about their poetic encounter which emerges from these concerns. One can write a whole book, no doubt. But it will have to be someone else. What I need to write out now, following our discussion, are my thoughts on "rhythm as figure" in ways that would overcome the pitfalls you have alerted me to. Then, perhaps we can have this conversation again...

Stephen Yenser
UCLA

Stathis Gourgouris
Columbia University

Occasional Papers suggests

James Merrill reads

"Broken Home" at Washington University, 1968
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JYF5K0cNq38>

"For Proust"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xy4mAM0jW0o>

"Days of 1964" at Washington University, 1985
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mbL1V9vBOQk>

Carl Phillips reads Merrill, Washington University at Saint Louis, 2015

"The Black Swan"
"The Charioteer of Delphi"
"Last Words"
"My Father's Irish Setters"
"An Upward Look"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CR14uH0XQgc>

Sylvia Plath reads "After Greece" 1962
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jayjXKODO1s>

Stephen Yenser reads "Christmas Tree" and a letter by Merrill, Washington University at Saint Louis, 2015 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pIo0g8I6MfI>