Daily life in the two establishments does not appear to be much different. All the prisoners either work or are in full time education (and finding work for the prisoners is a problem in both Britain and Holland), and all can take part in sport. One fascinating aspect of life in Norgerhaven, which perhaps symbolises an important difference from the British system, is that new arrivals are shown a video in which the prison staff introduce themselves. The video was made by prisoners and is available in eight languages.

Punishment systems in the two prisons are similar in outline, but when I visited Long Lartin its punishment block was full, while only one prisoner was locked up at Norgerhaven—and that was because he refused to get up for work; in effect he “chose” to stay in bed.

Conclusions

Penal reformers travel from all over the world to visit Dutch prisons because the Dutch have managed to reduce their prison population at a time when it has risen fast in most other countries. The Dutch have not in consequence suffered a crime rate that has risen appreciably faster than in other countries, and it does allow them to treat their prisoners in a much more civilised way than most other countries. The smaller population is due mostly to Dutch prison sentences being much shorter than in other countries. Another important factor in the superiority of the Dutch system is that they spend about three

times as much per prisoner per year than Britain (£18 000 compared with £6000 in 1979), but as the Dutch have about a third as many prisoners per head of the population this means that the Dutch spend roughly the same amount on prisons per head of the population.

This is the first of two articles on the Dutch prison system. The next article will deal with medical care for Dutch prisoners and the unique Dutch system for dealing with dangerous, violent offenders.

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Reading for Pleasure

Durrell's Quincunx

TONY SMITH

Only a handful of authors are so predictable in the pleasure they give that I would buy their next book unexamined and without reading the verdicts of the professional reviewers. One book, however, I am waiting for impatiently—the fifth and final work in Laurence Durrell's series of novels set in Avignon, Geneva, and Egypt. *Monsieur*, the first of the series, appeared in 1974; next came *Livia*, then *Constance*, and last year *Sebastian* (all published by Faber and Faber). Durrell describes the series as a quincunx (the pattern of planting sometimes used in orchards in which four trees are arranged in a square with a fifth in their centre), for the books do not form a sequence; instead they are concerned with interlocking stories with common characters—“only dependent on one another as echoes might be . . . a cluster of themes to be reworked in the others.”

The device of describing a series of events first through the eyes of one character and then through another is familiar enough. Durrell's design is far more complex. The first book,

Monsieur, is an account of the life and death of Piers (owner of Verfeuille, a decaying château near Avignon), his sister Sylvie, and their introduction by the Egyptian Akkad to the beliefs of the gnostics. In *Livia* we learn, however, that these and other characters are fictions based on another brother and two sisters, Hilary, Constance, and Livia, who live in Tu Duc, a decaying manor house near Avignon. To complicate matters further, one of the “fictional” characters, Rob Sutcliffe, is a novelist invented by Blanford, the author of *Monsieur*; and as *Livia* opens Blanford is talking (by telephone) to Sutcliffe about the relations between the real characters and the fictitious ones.

Do not be put off, however, by these complexities (or conceits, depending on the reader's reaction). For me the appeal of the books—strong enough to provide the incentive to reread all four in the past month in an attempt to unravel their interrelations—lies in a succession of beautiful descriptive passages interpolated with intellectually exciting ideas.

Durrell's earlier novels (especially the Alexandrian quartet) presented some lyrical descriptions of Egypt. The set pieces in the quincunx include a marvellous account of Christmas at Verfeuille, with the family and servants gathered in the stone flagged hall; a summer spent at Tu Duc, with long conversations in the cool waters of the lily pond; a ride on horseback across the desert to the oasis of Macabru for a gnostic ceremony

held in a tented village set up for three days only; and Prince Hassad showing Fawzia, his wife to be, the sunset from the church of St Mary the Virgin at Battersea and sitting her in the chair used by Turner year after year to study the changing light from that very viewpoint. On a grimmer note, *Constance* gives a chilling account of life in Avignon under German occupation in the second world war (Durrell has lived for nearly 20 years in Provence and his description is based on the experiences of his neighbours).

Monsieur is subtitled "The Prince of Darkness," and the books are much concerned with the gnostic systems, the central belief of which is that the Good God has been replaced as ruler of the world by a usurper, a God of Evil, the prince of darkness. The prince, explains Akkad, "is usury, the spirit of gain, the enigmatic power of capital value embodied in the poetry of gold." Toby Goddard, an Oxford don who figures in *Monsieur*, argues that the annihilation of the Knights Templar in 1307 was due to their having become gnostics (probably contracting the heresy during the Crusades). Their heresy was considered to be so dangerous that the issue was clouded by other accusations—of sodomy, usury, and freemasonry.

Constance, the central character of the later books, is not only mistress of Tu Duc but also a doctor. After some years in general practice she becomes interested in psychoanalysis and eventually becomes an analytical therapist at a clinic in Geneva. There she has long talks with Sebastian Affad about gnostic beliefs about sex and attempts to reconcile these with her own psychoanalytic training.

These are, then, novels of ideas interspersed with sustained episodes of descriptive writing. They are also entertaining—often very funny—with some hilarious, bizarre sexual episodes, word games, and some of the appeal of a good detective story.

By some extraordinary coincidence another book read in 1983 which demanded my full attention until the end—*The Name of the Rose* (Secker and Warburg)—was also a detective story concerned with 14th century heresies. The author, Umberto Eco, is a professor at the University of Bologna with an international reputation as a historian and philosopher. First

published in Italian in 1980, *The Name of the Rose* appeared in English last year and quickly became a best seller in the United States. At one level it is a classic "who dun it," with the part of the master detective played by an English friar, William of Baskerville, who, true to tradition, has the inevitable young assistant and stooge, Adso of Melk. They arrive at an Italian abbey on the same day as the first of a series of murders, which have to be investigated against a background of fear and suspicion as the inquisition is attempting to seek out and eliminate members of heretical sects including the Cathars, the Waldensians, and a score of others less well known.

Once again, as in Durrell's quincunx, the intellectual arguments about heresy (and the Cathars' beliefs share much common ground with the gnostics) are intertwined with narrative and puzzles. Professor Eco transports the reader back to 1327 so successfully that within a short time he becomes absorbed into the life of the huge, rich, powerful abbey, with its monks spending hours each day in silent scholarship; he also challenges the detective story aficionado (of whom I count myself one) with a plot whose complexities rival those of John Dickson Carr; and he manages to convey the mixture of fear and intellectual challenge presented by a visit by the inquisitor Bernard Gui (who was, indeed, one of history's sinister figures, notorious throughout Catholic Europe for his ruthless interrogation of heretics and all their contacts).

For me, detective stories are mostly "bath books"—which can be speed read in an hour or so, and which I often finish off in the bath (so inducing a pleasant torpor that guarantees sleep). Ingenuity of plot and reasonable English style are all that is needed. Some in the Rolls Royce class—such as Michael Innes's *Hamlet Revenge*—justify a slower approach and can be reread after a gap of 20 to 30 years: he entertains and informs as well as he plots. I find after that time I have forgotten the details but I can be certain that the book will please again. Eco's story passes that acid test; I have put it on my list of books for rereading in the future. As the years pass, that list grows longer; adding to it is, in a double sense, reading for pleasure.

MATERIA NON MEDICA

Memory of medical school

It had never happened before and in any case it was absolutely unexpected—only five out of a batch of 65 medical students were going to be sent up for the final examinations. It was unbelievable that a shortfall in attendance would have 60 of us detained.

There was clearly some mistake. Then we learnt that some of the attendance registers of the surgical unit had been missing and our attendance for the period in question had been taken to be zero. The principal obviously did not know that he had been badly let down by his office.

We did not yet know who were the lucky five and a strategy had to be chalked out. In the best traditions of British jurisprudence we took the line that each one of us should be deemed to have attended all the classes in surgery during the period in question. In practical terms it meant that each one of us had to be sent up. This was certainly outrageous but then "justice" is often based on outrageous assumptions. The principal was in a tight spot and we were absolutely prepared to take full advantage of his predicament.

In due course the names of the lucky five were put up on the notice board. But these lucky ones had already decided to cast their lot with us, so now the finals were to be held with no candidates to appear at them. The incongruity did not seem to bother our principal very much and the fact that his own niece was one of us did not seem to make any impression on him either.

So now something more drastic was called for. We had not yet heard of *gherao* (literally encirclement), nor were we aware of the sophisticated coercion involved in a "sit in." But Gandhi, though dead for over a decade, was still very much in our minds and what better way to achieve our ends than a mass hunger strike?

At the appointed hour we sat in the beautiful lawns of the principal's bungalow and the battle of nerves began.

Minutes ticked by. We did not know whether the principal was worried—we were certainly very worried. But hardly had an hour gone by when the professor of pathology appeared on behalf of the principal and announced that each one of us was going to be sent up. The great Mahatma's technique had brought about complete surrender of the "enemy" and we had not found it necessary to dig into our pockets for the biscuits hidden therein.—MOHAN MISHRA, professor of medicine, Bihar, India.

What treatment is advised for an otherwise normal healthy man in his 60s who develops an anxiety state when away from home for a long period? Anxiolytic drugs have not proved satisfactory.

This mild phobia is best treated with prolonged exposure to the feared situation until the anxiety subsides, which usually takes a few hours. As sedatives may retard improvement from exposure, these and alcohol are best omitted. The patient should repeatedly rehearse, in his mind's eye and for up to an hour at a time, an extended trip abroad until this bores him. A month before his Antipodean journey he could try a practice trip for a few days in a nearby country. During his exposure exercises he could carry out any self regulatory manoeuvre which is useful for him—for instance, slow deep breathing or paradoxical intention. Many phobics can treat themselves successfully with the help of an exposure self help manual.¹—I M MARKS, professor of psychiatry, London.

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