analysed to discover what the couple want and do not want from each other. Behaviour must be changed mutually so that it becomes more rewarding. The couple are given mutual contracts to reward each other when things are done well and to avoid unacceptable behaviour. Behaviour can be changed only gradually. "If you do this for me, I will do this for you." Much counselling is based on behaviour therapy, and provided the problems are accurately assessed much can be achieved.

This is the tenth in a series of 11 papers. No reprints will be available.

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Reading for Pleasure

A bad conscience about novels

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I have always been fond of reading novels; as a schoolboy there was little impediment, but the shadows cast by examinations came all too soon and caused me some unease. How could one read fiction when the solid facts of physics and biology remained to be mastered? Far too early in life the schoolboy becomes a specialist and has to sacrifice the pleasure of indiscriminate reading of general literature. Unfortunately, this still seems to happen.

Life as a medical student did not allow much leisure for long novels, but I was always fascinated by those which dealt with medical life. Among many was *The Citadel* by A J Cronin, published in 1937, where, many years before Richard Asher put "myxoedema madness" firmly on the map, I learnt that myxoedema could cause mental changes and mania. Similar books are still written and continue to be of interest. If an elderly hospital doctor wants to catch up with what his juniors think he can do no better than read *The Houseman's Tale* by Colin Douglas. In spite of a lurid cover and lurid passages there is a fundamental seriousness that conveys accurately the spirit of a modern centre of excellence.

A thousand miles from his teaching hospital, the hero of Mikhail Bulgakov's novel *A Country Doctor's Notebook* wrestled single-handedly with the problems arising in a small country hospital in the Russia of 1916. Newly qualified, and without any postgraduate experience, he had to take full responsibility for all medical, surgical, and obstetric emergencies—continually watched by the midwives and the "feldsher," who took care to let him know how wonderful his predecessor had been. The author delineates with great sensitivity the fears and anxieties of a conscientious young doctor in such circumstances. Although written in the 1920s, the work was translated into English only a few years ago.

One of the greatest of novels with a doctor-hero is *Middlemarch* by George Eliot. I had read some of her books as a

schoolboy and was left with a memory of dullness and sentimentality, but here I was impressed by the intellectual force and the artistry with which she depicted the emotions and the dilemmas of the characters. One of the most important is John Lydgate, who settles down to practise in a small provincial town, fired with the ambition to emulate the great French physician, Bichat. The details of small-town life in the early nineteenth century—including the intrigues and attitudes of the local medical men—are described with conviction and humour. This masterpiece is worth setting alongside the best of Dickens.

After qualification, I went into general practice as an assistant. There was little time off, but I could read a lot. Much of interest had been produced by living writers or those recently dead, thus giving an insight into the contemporary world. Arnold Bennett was a favourite, especially with his Clayhanger novels, the *Old Wives' Tale*, and *Raceyman Steps*. Wells, Hardy, Conrad, and Somerset Maugham loomed large and, of course, Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga* was regarded as a classic in its time. There was the excitement of the young Aldous Huxley; D H Lawrence I found hard going and rather a bore, in spite of studying an illicit copy of *Lady Chatterley*.

I had a continuing interest in foreign literature, particularly French. I found Balzac, with his intimate description of bourgeois life, absorbing, and I enjoyed Flaubert, but it was Stendhal who impressed me most deeply with *The Charterhouse of Parma*, and *Scarlet and Black*. That master of the short story, Guy de Maupassant, gave me constant pleasure. I also remember being much struck by *Jean Christophe*, a novel about a Beethoven-like musician, written by Romain Rolland. Years later when I read Thomas Mann's *Dr Faustus* I found something of the same quality and was reminded of it.

The busy years

Working for the MRCP made novel reading a fugitive pursuit but, with that examination out of the way, I tackled the great Russians. What an impressive mountain range, with the peaks towering in the distance: Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Turgenev, Chekhov, Gorky down to present-day Pasternak and Solzhenitsyn. Over the years they furnished a deep insight into the strangeness of human behaviour, the power of the emotions,

and the survival of the spirit in the most adverse circumstances. I must take the opportunity to recommend *Story of a Life* by Konstantin Paustovsky. This is not a novel but an autobiography. It is warm, tender, and civilised, in the tradition of Turgenyev and appealing to Western taste. Luckily, he survived the Stalin terror.

The responsibilities of a consultant job with its accompaniment of committee work—especially when I held office—made further inroads into reading time and led to further conflicts of conscience. How could I read the dull turgid effusions of official documents and minutes when the limpid prose of Graham Greene lay waiting at hand?

A lot of reading can be done at bedtime. I do not take sleeping tablets, but a bedside book is a must. In that way I began to read Proust in Scott-Moncrieff's translation of *La Recherche du Temps Perdu*, at first out of curiosity and later obsessively. It is a masterpiece of psychological and social observation. There is a background of medical interest—Marcel was a lifelong sufferer from asthma; his father, Adrien, was a distinguished physician; and his brother, Robert, a surgeon. This led me to one of the greatest biographies of recent years, *Marcel Proust* by George Painter, a book I found as absorbing as the novels themselves. To continue the French scene in somewhat lighter vein, for many years I was a devotee of Simenon and bought paperback after paperback of the Maigret stories as they appeared. In Maigret I found a worthy successor to Sherlock Holmes, though their styles and backgrounds were different.

There have also been many excellent German novels which I have enjoyed, of which perhaps the most distinguished was Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*. It took two attempts to scale that massive height, but the effort was rewarding. The description of the way tuberculosis was treated in the pre-streptomycin era is of special interest. There are many philosophical questions raised—for example, is a doctor who is suffering from a certain disease better at treating his patients? "Sympathy between doctor and patient is surely desirable, and a case might be made out for the view that only he who suffers can be the guide and healer of the suffering. And yet—can true spiritual mastery over a power be won by him who is counted among her slaves? Can he free others who himself is not free?" Fortunately, good German writers are still at work and Günter Grass and Heinrich Böll maintain a great tradition.

My experience on committees gained added piquancy after reading C P Snow's books on Cambridge life. I could see many resemblances in the manoeuvrings behind and in front of the scenes, the struggles for power and influence, and the promotion of departmental interests—activities always found in any group of intelligent ambitious men eager to make their mark. The same topic, more lightly and more humorously expressed, I found in such novels of William Cooper as *Memoirs of a New Man*.

Looking for leisure

As time passed and younger men took over, I looked forward to more freedom and more leisure: I would read what I liked at will. But no, I found that what I had regarded as a particular interest in my medical work was turning into a specialty. Surrounded by learned and erudite colleagues, leaders in their subjects, flanked by eager and highly knowledgeable registrars excited by every picogram of change, I had to make every effort to keep up to date. It was imperative to follow the specialist journals and proceedings. The mantle of omniscience had to be donned on a few brief occasions, and I hoped that it was not too transparent.

My unease was made worse when I read somewhere that most educated people give up reading novels in their early 30s. Was I, then, immature or in my second childhood? Perhaps my justification lies in Sir Isaiah Berlin's remark in a recent interview in the *Observer*: "Great novels convey the true moral centre of gravity of human predicaments; they can expand the frontiers of experience and open windows as events in one's life may not have done." I would add that they can interpret the spirit of the times, the "zeitgeist" as it were, more surely and more quickly than any other medium. Last year while on holiday I read three novels: *The Word Child* by Iris Murdoch; *The Doctor's Wife* by Brian Moore; and *The History Man* by Malcolm Bradbury. I realised afterwards that, however different the stories were, their attitudes were reflections of the present and could have been written only in the 'seventies.

I have now attained the age of retirement. Surely I can now reach out for the latest Graham Greene without any qualm. I wonder.

MATERIA NON MEDICA

A hall porter's art

Sympathising recently with an elderly rural gentleman in a Dublin hotel who told me that he "was after forgetting the name of a bird" which he had been given, I was reminded of similar incidents during the summer I spent working in a luxury hotel in London.

I was a chasseur, one of those oily individuals who lounge around hotel lobbies giving directions and doing errands for the guests and the hall porters. My position was an early stage in the career of a hall porter; most work their way up from pageboy or chasseur, picking up a number of languages, and gaining experience of every aspect of hotel work. Their professional society of the Clef D'or is renowned for its power and influence, especially on the Continent. Connections in the society enable them to provide exceptional services for VIPs and friends. Acutely sensitive to status, they instantly assess anyone approaching. Often the opinion formed, generally accurate, would dictate the attitude shown, which varied from barely concealed contempt through friendly helpfulness to frank ingratiating, which was as rare as it was nauseating.

In fairness, they gave an irreproachable service most of the time, if only because their income directly depended on its quality. Depositing thousands in cash to the head porter's personal account made clear to me that if I was interested in such sums I was an apprentice in the wrong profession. Their income came, in cash, from restaurants and nightclubs they recommended; bus companies whose tours they sold; travel agents they gave business to; car hire firms they employed; and a variety of businesses whose services they

used or endorsed, as well as financial appreciation from grateful guests. There was little seasonal variation, though they did better in the winter when guests stayed longer and spent more.

In idle moments, the assistant porter used to teach us to identify the call girls in order to contact security before they made the rendezvous with their client, when they were free from interference. He described three varieties; the street-walkers, who were easy to spot—"What's a girl like you doing in a nice place like this?"; an intermediate kind, who were betrayed by details of dress and behaviour; and the generally unidentifiable sophisticated call girls, some of whose faces we learnt in time by seeing them leave early in the morning, resplendent in evening dress, but tired and drawn after the working night.

The guests were of all nationalities, with Americans and Arabs predominating. Many gave the impression that they had more money than they knew how to spend. The Arabs were especially extravagant. I once bought a box of 25 cigars costing £70 for a young Arab who wouldn't have known good tobacco from brown paper; he said he didn't mind what cigars he smoked so long as they were expensive. Another time, a veiled Arab woman came with her son for advice about shopping. She had £9000 in cash on her and nothing in particular to buy. The two young Arabs who left £1500 in a paper bag in a taxi received only cursory sympathy from us. Such alien dissipation and carelessness was summed for me by the assistant porter, an Italian, muttering "bloody foreigners" under his breath as the two men left.—MARK J TOWERS (medical student, Dublin).