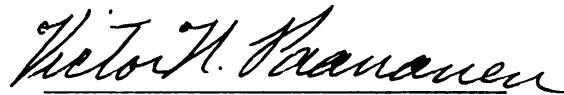




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LAWRENCE DURRELL'S AVIGNON QUINTET:

A BOOK OF MIRACLES

By

Helen Mary Kay

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English

1987

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ABSTRACT

LAWRENCE DURRELL'S AVIGNON QUINTET:  
A BOOK OF MIRACLES

By

Helen Mary Kay

Lawrence Durrell's interest in Gnosticism achieves its most complete formulation in The Avignon Quintet, where a Gnostic structure of thought informs the spiritual progress of the protagonists. Conversely, their Nazi antagonists, who seek to emulate Gnosticism, actually invert its principles, with the result that National Socialism embodies the worst traits of Judeo-Christianity. Gnosticism also supplies the foundation for alchemy, in which Jung has discovered a kinship with the individuation process. The attempt to transmute base metals into gold signifies man's desire to redeem the divine spirit from its imprisonment in matter. It is therefore, Jung argues, a symbolic statement of the psychological imperative to recover the content of the unconscious and, through its reconciliation with the conscious mind, create an integrated psyche. Aubrey Blanford, the narrator of the Quintet, illustrates this psychological and spiritual movement from fragmentation to self-realization. Sexual love, as the primary alchemical



coniunctio and traditional Gnostic means to man's fulfillment of his own capacity for godhead, effects the transformation.

The protagonists eventually converge upon Avignon, to find the Templar treasure for which they have all been searching. The resolution of their political, theological and sexual differences culminates in the production of the quincunx, and hence the ultimate reconciliation of matter with spirit. Blanford is now able to realize his role as Logos, and so to "write" the Quintet. In Monsieur, he creates a "fictive" representation of the "real" events which comprise the remaining volumes. Thus the structure of the novels echoes their content; from the prima materia of the first come the four differentiated versions of the succeeding novels, which lead, when read together, to the apprehension of "reality prime." Just as the characters discover the quincunx which designates the location of the Templar treasure, so does the reader discover the quincunx which the novels form. As the sign for Mercury, who is also Hermes Trismegistus and the Egyptian Thoth, the quincunx clearly designates the hermetic elements of the spiritual illumination which Durrell advocates.





## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## INTRODUCTION

Lawrence Durrell is both a prolific and versatile writer. Since the publication of his first full length work in 1935, he has produced novels, travel books, several volumes of humor and a substantial collection of poetry. He has also tried his hand at detective fiction, verse drama and the autobiographical essay, as well as venturing briefly into literary criticism. In addition to this already prodigious output, Durrell's anecdotes and correspondence are the subject of some four editions. In all, he has twenty-three works of prose, three plays and nearly twenty volumes of poetry to his name.<sup>1</sup>

The extent and variety of Durrell's writing reveal a man as eclectic as he is industrious; a man whose interests embrace wine, women and material pleasure as passionately as the more intellectual pursuits of philosophy, psychology and religion. These somewhat diverse concerns are reflected in a number of his novels, where the conflict between hedonism and mysticism is a recurring theme. The Avignon Quintet, in particular, explores the antithetical relation of spirit to matter. All the oppositions it addresses, whether they be



mental, sexual or political in nature, prove ultimately to be aspects of this fundamental dichotomy.

The Quintet is clearly the product of Durrell's maturity. Not only is it the last of his works to be completed, but it is also the final articulation of issues which have continued to engage him throughout his entire artistic career.<sup>2</sup> Lee Lemon remarks that, in "a lesser writer, . . . such repetitions indicate a paucity of imagination . . . . In Durrell, as in other great writers, it indicates rather a persistence of vision" ("The Uses of Uncertainty" 41). Durrell has indeed been faithful to that vision. With the completion of the Quintet, he has fulfilled the ambition he first formulated in 1937.

Writing to Henry Miller of his gratitude for Miller's exuberant comments on the manuscript of The Black Book, Durrell observes that he has "planned AN AGON, A PATHOS, AN ANAGNORISIS. If I write them," he adds, "they should be The Black Book, The Book of Miracles, The Book of the Dead" (Wickes, A Private Correspondence 83). Some three months later, in July 1937, he had changed their sequence, telling Miller that "the B.B. [would] come out, and be followed by the Book of the Dead, the Book of Miracles, etc." In the same letter, he defends himself from Miller's criticism for agreeing to the publication by Faber and Faber of an expurgated edition of The Black Book: "You see, I CAN'T WRITE REAL BOOKS ALL THE TIME," he explains. "It's like an electric current: increase the dose very gradually. Already





the B.B. has played havoc with me." Significantly, Durrell then predicts the pattern his own work was to follow. "Once every three years or more," he remarks, "I shall try to compose for full orchestra. The rest of the time I shall do essays, travel books...." From an early age, therefore, Durrell has expressed the intention to create a series of related novels which would represent his "real" work, as distinct from the "kind of literary gardening" designed to produce an income and preserve his health (Wickes, A Private Correspondence 104-105).

By the spring of 1945, he was already engaged in the second part of this sequence. Writing from Egypt to inform Miller of his progress, he reports, "I have drafted about twenty pages of the new version of the Book of the Dead--it's about incest and Alexandria, inseparable ideas here, but will take me a year or so to do" (Wickes, A Private Correspondence 201). In July 1947, Durrell had "about 200 pages of material and a mass of notes" (Wickes 245), but personal circumstances then intervened to prevent him from finishing. In the years which followed--an unhappy time for Durrell, as he coped with his wife's collapse, the subsequent responsibilities of single parenthood and a political profession--the opportunity to complete his book steadily receded. This enforced period of gestation, during which he revised the title, hoping now "to make Justine a worthy successor to The Black Book" (Wickes 298), ended in 1956. Only a year later Justine was published and, by 1960,



Durrell had concluded all four volumes of The Alexandria Quartet. Fifteen years after its inception, he had at last produced his "Book of the Dead."

The success of the Quartet transformed Durrell from an obscure novelist into an author of international repute. His critical reception was mixed, but he was clearly recognized as a writer who could not be ignored. In fact, the more positive responses ranked him with Joyce and other acknowledged giants of the literary world. Profiting from this acclaim, Durrell turned his full attention to writing. No longer beset by the monetary difficulties which had previously diverted his energy, he began, early in 1960, to envisage his next task. A letter to Richard Aldington, his neighbour and recently acquired friend, expresses the desire to "try a big comic book if I could; something like the Satyricon!" (MacNiven and Moore, Literary Lifelines 129). With the publication of Tunc and Nunquam, in 1968 and 1970 respectively, Durrell achieved his aim. The Revolt of Aphrodite, as the two volumes were called collectively, was partly inspired by the work of Petronius, although it was equally an experiment in science fiction. Ironically, however, this "double-decker" novel, in which he attempted "to take a culture-reading" ("Postface," Nunquam), did not secure his reputation. It was generally regarded as an interesting failure, and Durrell himself as an author in decline.

Yet, even in the process of conceiving The Revolt of



Aphrodite, Durrell seems to have been contemplating a more serious project. The very letter which indicates his intention to write a comedy reveals a concurrent preoccupation with "Jung's work on alchemy and psychoanalysis in which the search for the Philosopher's Stone is studied." Durrell explains that he is "trying to use these things like crude symbolisms" and, thinking always of how his reading may be turned to advantage in his writing, remarks that he "may later do a book on Da Capo in Smyrna; we shall see" (Literary Lifelines 129). Now Capodistria, to whom he thus refers, is the satanic figure whose interest in Paracelsus provides a subsidiary theme of Clea. It is obvious, therefore, that Durrell was already speculating upon a sequel to The Alexandria Quartet, and hence a work to conclude his related series of "real" novels.

The Avignon Quintet fulfills that role. Completed only in 1985, it is the culmination of a vision first articulated in The Black Book. Indeed, Durrell himself acknowledges that, with the publication of the Quintet, he has finally accomplished the plan which he formulated some fifty years ago. Writing to James Carley, he depicts his literary development in the following terms:<sup>3</sup>

an  
Agon  


The Black Book

a  
Pathos  


The Quartet

an  
Anagnorisis  


The Quinx





Durrell's conception of the Quintet as an anagnorisis, or recognition, is a useful, and much needed, clue to its interpretation. If The Black Book is a kind of genesis, The Avignon Quintet is most certainly a book of revelations. In fact, the words of Rob Sutcliffe, one of its two putative authors, suggest the precise nature of this evolution. Describing his exposure to Gnosticism, Sutcliffe expresses a "dissatisfaction with [his] own rather carefully landscaped novels with their love-motivated actors." He realizes, however, that he is "not really ripe to write about the Other Thing," which he has "vaguely situated in or around the region demarcated off by the word 'God'" (Monsieur 214-214). Durrell, too, has produced "rather carefully landscaped novels" and, in the Quartet particularly, claims to have investigated the various forms of modern love. But the Quintet demonstrates that, like Sutcliffe, he finally discovered the capacity "to write about the Other Thing." The result is a "Book of Miracles."



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> These figure exclude the letters and essays, which appear under the name of their respective editors. However, they do include Durrell's second novel, which was published under the pseudonym Charles Norden, and the four volumes of his selected or collected poetry.

<sup>2</sup> Durrell has said that he has no intention of writing another book, and claims that he is planning his retirement to a Tibetan monastery in southern France, where he has made his home for the last thirty years.

<sup>3</sup> "The Avignon Quintet and Gnostic Heresy" 240.



## Chapter One

### A Quincunx: The "relation of form to content."

Begun in 1974 with Monsieur: or, The Prince of Darkness, Durrell's "quincunx" of novels which comprise The Avignon Quintet spans eleven years in its composition. In common with The Alexandria Quartet, the titles of the individual volumes are generally derived from the names of important characters, although in the helpful addition of subtitles which summarize major themes Durrell has departed from his earlier pattern. Thus Livia: or, Buried Alive (1978) evokes the medieval punishment for heresy and homosexuality, of which the Knights Templar were convicted by Philippe le Bel; the action of Constance: or, Solitary Practices (1982) occurs largely in the isolation of Avignon during the Nazi Occupation; and Sebastian: or, Ruling Passions (1984) explores "the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself" (Faulkner, "Address upon Receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature"). Similarly, Quinx: or, The Ripper's Tale (1985) suggests the religious quest which concludes, in this last volume, with the dramatic moment when the Veil of Maya is finally removed. Neither the



volumes nor their themes exist entirely independently of each other, however, for the narrative resembles a tapestry in which different strands recur. In this respect, it is like the medieval quest literature in which contemporary romance has its origins, and better read as one text containing five interdependent novels that "belong to the same blood group, five panels for which your creaky old Monsieur would provide simply a cluster of themes to be reworked in the others" (Livia 11).

The approach adopted in the following pages is likewise structured on that "cluster of themes." The first chapter addresses those issues which inform both the style and substance of Durrell's work. Amongst the various interests he has expressed, and applied in his novels, are an untutored but nonetheless extensive concern with the concepts of modern physics and a substantial knowledge of psychology. Durrell has also studied a number of occult practices, in particular, the symbols which originated with the Orphic cults, but are equally embedded in the mystical systems of alchemy and the tarot. A preliminary discussion of these ideas is especially valuable in ascertaining the immediate implications of the quincunx, which functions as the presiding symbol of The Avignon Quintet.

The remaining chapters examine those themes in greater depth. Hence Chapter Two explicates and evaluates the Gnosticism to which several of the protagonists adhere. Chapter Three traces its ramifications: in the alleged link





between the Gnostics and Knights Templar, and in the Nazi regime, which Durrell portrays as a perversion of Gnosticism. The fourth chapter considers the related topics of alchemy and individuation. It analyses the manner in which the characters mature through a process analogous to the alchemical procedure. Here, the evidence of Jung's influence upon Durrell is quite obvious. The focus of Chapter Five is Durrell's eventual synthesis of these ideas. The convergence of protagonists whose affiliations have earlier conflicted results in a reconciliation of the opposites for which they stand. Collectively, they form a quincunx and, in so doing, create the conditions for their mystical experience of what Durrell calls "reality prime." More immediately, Durrell suggests that the apparently disparate models of physics and religion are mediated by the "divine" function of number, from which the quincunx itself is ultimately derived.

This brief statement of the direction to be pursued in the present study indicates the extent to which Durrell's themes are not simply clustered, as he disarmingly implies, so much as they are actually connected by a common symbolic foundation. The complexity of those connections is reflected in the structure of the narrative, which appears superficially chaotic, but on closer inspection reveals a detailed "relation of form to content." It seems profitable, therefore, to preface the discussion of Durrell's interests, as they apply to the Quintet, with a necessarily concise



recapitulation of the events which supply its subject matter.

The sequence begins with an apparently autobiographical account by Bruce Drexel of the "conventional menage à trois reversed" (Monsieur 110), in which he, Piers and Sylvie have all become entangled. The various manifestations of their love (heterosexual, homosexual and incestuous), together with their exposure to the Gnostic religion in its present eastern form, supply the content of "Monsieur," a sub-plot which later proves to be Aubrey Blanford's fiction. This narrative gives way to a second "autobiographical" version of events, "The Prince of Darkness," which is allegedly written by Rob Sutcliffe, brother-in-law to Bruce and husband of the lesbian Pia. Eventually, however, the reader discovers that this too is a fiction within a fiction, for Blanford has invented Rob as an alter ego and is thus the author of both works. Rob decries his creator, whom he names Bloshford, "that apotheosis of the British artist, the animated tea-cosy!" (Monsieur 178). But Bloshford-Blanford is in turn displaced by Durrell, whose novel comprises the two subsidiary texts and, of course, their respective titles. His "Envoi," which concludes this composite, depicts the relationship between the various writers as a hierarchy of realities:

So D.  
     begat Blanford  
         (who begat Tu and Sam and Livia)  
         who begat Sutcliffe  
         who begat Bloshford (Monsieur 296)



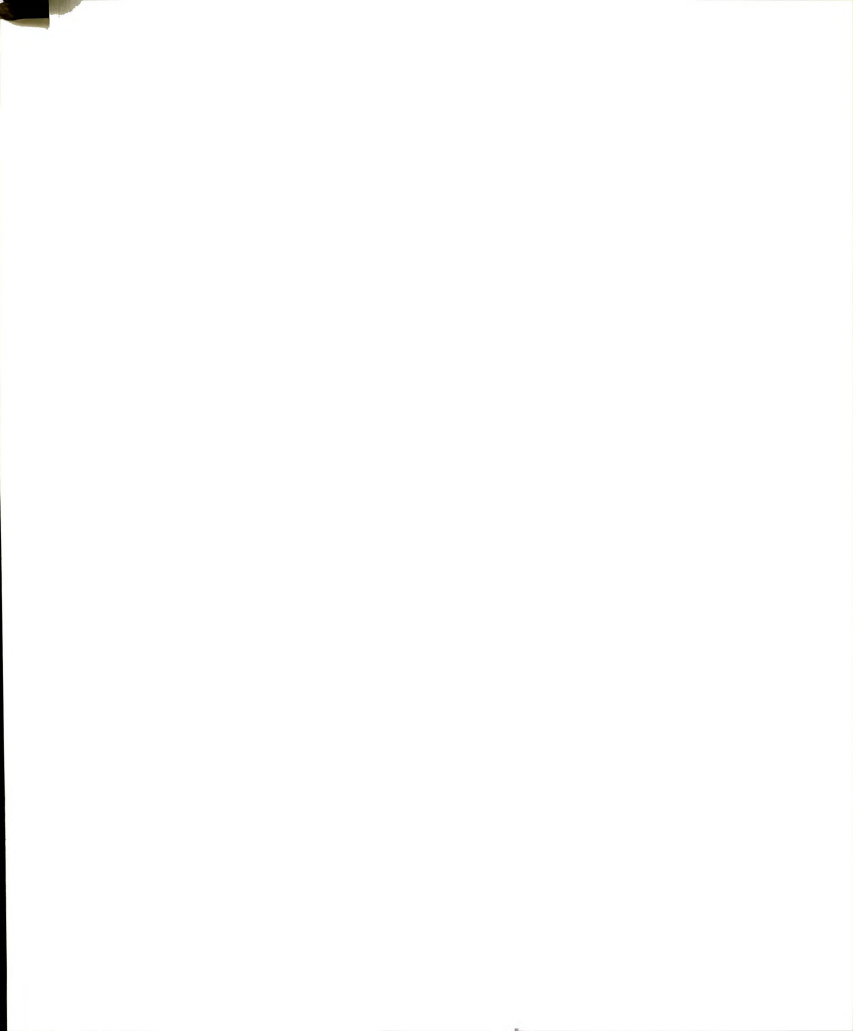
In the ensuing volumes Blanford decides to abandon the fictive enterprise, recognizing that he has distorted the complexities on which it was based. He determines instead to cooperate with Sutcliffe, who appears to symbolize the affective part of his temperament, in telling "the true story of your love, our love, for Constance and indeed for Livia despite what she did to you, to us, to me" (Livia 7). He narrates the details of his disastrous marriage to Livia and subsequent relationship with her sister Constance, both of whom have supplied aspects of Pia and Sylvie. Each of his earlier fictive characters is revealed, in fact, as having one or more counterparts in "reality." Thus Akkad, the Gnostic businessman from Monsieur, is a fusion of the genuinely ascetic Affad with the rather more worldly Prince Hassad; Trash and Thrush are virtually interchangeable, as the disruptive female lovers of Pia and Livia respectively; while Rob Sutcliffe is derived in part from Sam, husband to Constance, and in part from Blanford himself. However, the boundaries between fiction and reality are not to be so easily maintained, for Rob resolutely refuses to stay conveniently relegated to the world of Blanford's fiction, and reappears in Constance entirely independent of his creator's wishes. Any demarcation of material reality is proved to be unstable, as, indeed, is the existence of personality, for "people are not separate individuals as they think, they are variations on themes outside themselves" (Constance 378).



The activities of the protagonists, real and fictive, unfold against the panoramic backdrop of World War II. Both Sam and Aubrey Blanford are casualties of the war, though the latter survives, crippled in body, as he is in his emotions, until he can be healed through his love for Constance. Meanwhile Livia, who has previously deserted Blanford to enlist in the Nazi party, is literally blinded, a fate which echoes the metaphorical blindness she has displayed for much of her life. Finally, she commits suicide, disillusioned by the Nazis, who have executed her brother Hilary. On a broader perspective, Hitler's persecution of the Jews is linked with the persecution of the Knights Templar, both being inversions of a spiritual quest that result in its opposite, an inquisition conducted for material gain. Yet the war is only one symptom of a world-wide spiritual disease, against which the protagonists fight by resorting to various systems of knowledge, or "gnosis." Thus Constance becomes a psychoanalyst, while her lover, Sebastian Affad, is a Gnostic. But each is humbled by the discovery of the limitations of his or her system of belief, and forced eventually to acknowledge that no single system can prevail. If there is a solution, it lies only in rejecting the principle of exclusion, and remaining open to multiple possibilities.

The palimpsestic quality of Durrell's narrative, in which one "truth" continually replaces or contradicts another, is hardly surprising to those familiar with The





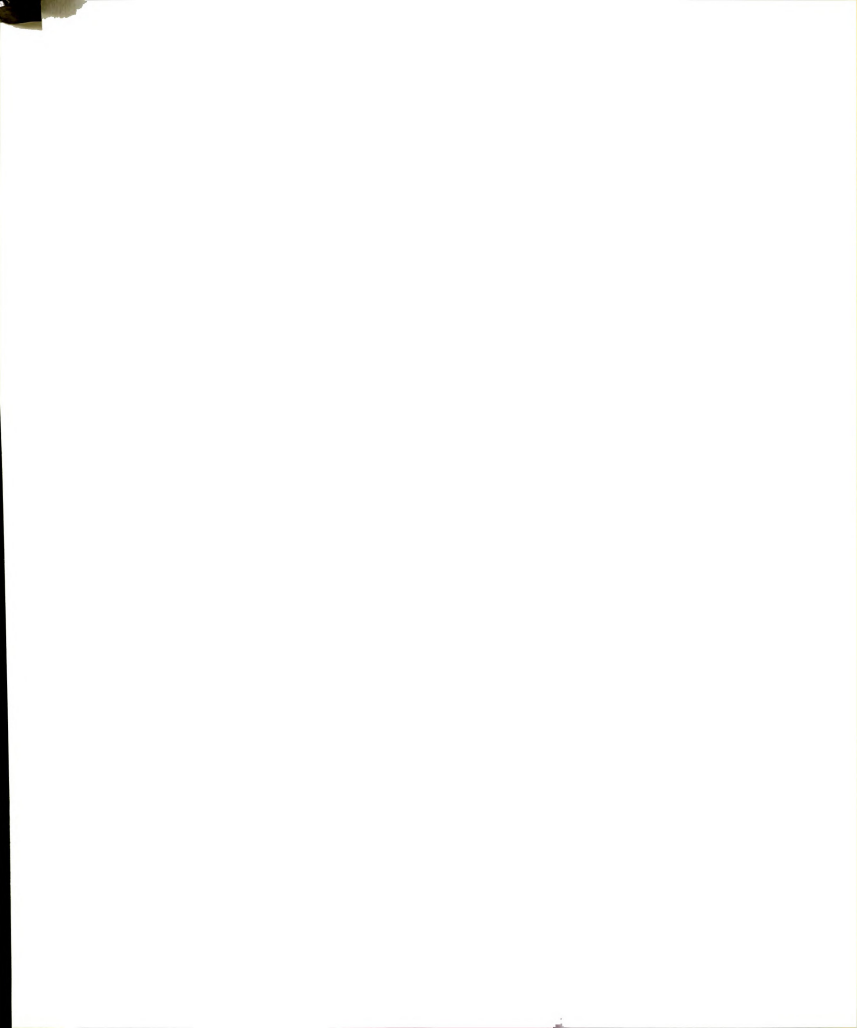
Alexandria Quartet, where Darley is forced to revise both his understanding of events and his story. There, however, it is the individual volumes which supplant each other, whereas the Quintet lacks such obvious demarcations. The assumption of some reviewers has been that Durrell's most recent work is therefore a roman fleuve.<sup>1</sup> The term suggests a narrative as meandering as the river from which it takes its name; a linear chronicle that functions through association of ideas rather than a strict architectural form. But, when the Quartet was likewise classified, Durrell denied it, claiming to have "adopted, as a rough analogy, the relativity proposition." He insisted, moreover, that "even if the group of books were extended indefinitely the result would never become roman fleuve" ("Preface," The Alexandria Quartet).

Both the vehemence of his remark and the internal evidence of the Quartet itself are enough to indicate the importance to Durrell of form. His correspondence with Henry Miller, initiated in 1935 with an ecstatic response to Tropic of Cancer, confirms Durrell's long struggle to become a "conscious artist" (Wickes, A Private Correspondence 224). From a young disciple's lavish praise for that "freedom from literary canons of style which was necessary to write the Tropic of their age" (Wickes 6), he shifts to condemnation of "the American artist [who] has no sense of form" (Wickes 247). By 1949, nearly a decade before the publication of the Quartet, Miller's Sexus is the object of his criticism, for



its "moral vulgarity" and "chunks of puerile narrative." "This book," concludes Durrell, "needs taking apart and regluing" (Wickes 265). Clearly, the divergence between patron and pupil, tempered though it is by mutual respect and affection, emerges as a result of Durrell's increasing artistic and technical discipline.

Yet neither a history that demonstrates his profound concern with form nor his warning in the "Preface" to the Quartet has ameliorated the confusion which The Avignon Quintet apparently elicits. The reason may be partly attributable to our expectations as readers, since, as Alan Warren Friedman observes, "only a few multivolume novels seem capable of this sort of length without assuming the form of the roman fleuve." Amongst such novels he includes Proust's A la recherche du temps perdu, which has been one of Durrell's acknowledged sources of inspiration, Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha cycle and Salinger's Glass family saga, "all complexly dynamic in their unfoldings, highly wrought and richly imaginative fictional constructs" ("The Modern Multivalent Novel" 126). The characteristics Friedman identifies within those three works are, in fact, equally true of the Quintet. Furthermore, Durrell himself has reiterated the claim he made for the Quartet, remarking that the Quintet also "ne deviendra jamais un roman fleuve" (Durrell's italics).<sup>2</sup> But a second source for this confusion about its form may perhaps be traced to the observations of Rob Sutcliffe, whose avowed aim in collaborating with



Blanford, the primary narrator of the Quintet, is

that ideal book--the titanic do-it-yourself kit, le roman appareil. After all, why not a book full of spare parts of other books, of characters left over from other lives, all circulating in each other's bloodstreams--yet all fresh, nothing second-hand, twice chewed, twice breathed. (Constance 122-123)

The description is a little misleading in its suggestion that the reader must assemble the novel--except insofar as that is entailed by any act of interpretation. In Durrell's work, at least, there is a structure so carefully designed that permutations of identity and reality occur without loss of authorial control. The result is, rather, as Blanford has planned all along, "a roman gigogne" (Livia 11). It is often dangerous to attribute to a writer the intentions of his character, but Blanford, like his predecessors Darley and Pursewarden, does frequently function in this manner. His claim within the text is reinforced by Durrell's statement that he "was intending to go over five books this time . . . a telescopic form, what the French call gigogne."<sup>3</sup>

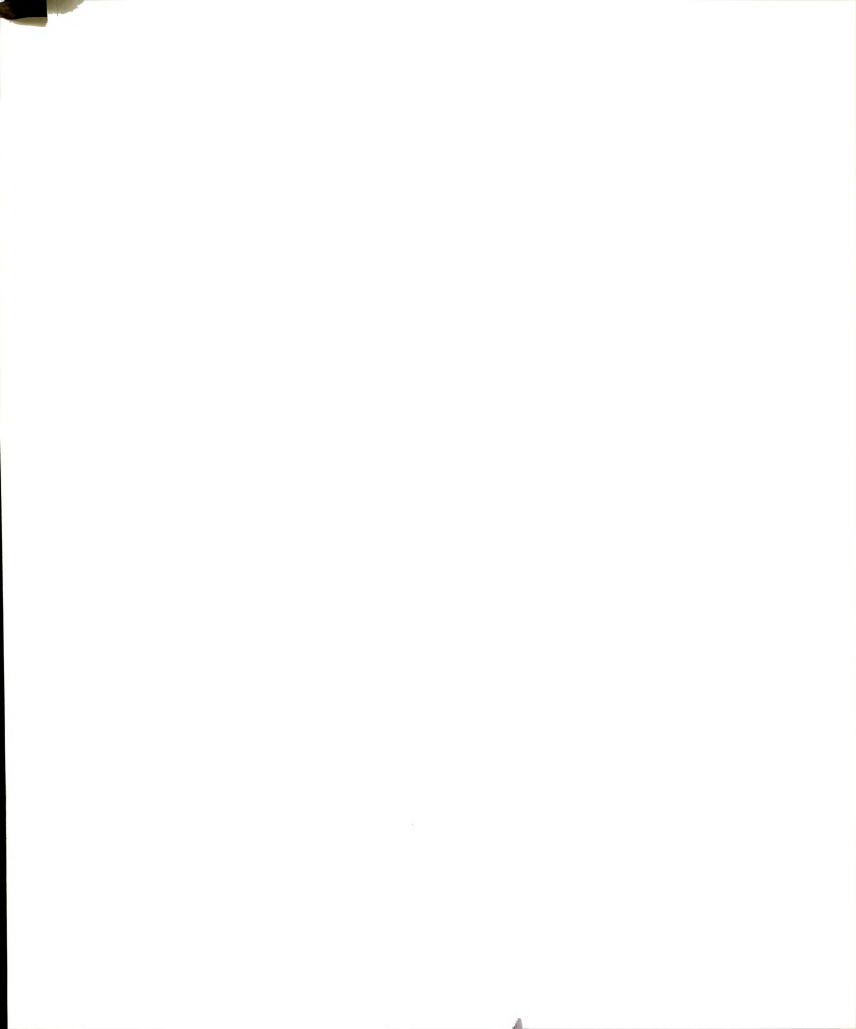
One characteristic of the roman gigogne is its emphasis upon structure as an integral aspect of meaning; hence the importance of determining in what form The Avignon Quintet has been written. The issue is as central to the reader's understanding of the novels as it is to the putative authors' ambitions for them. Indeed, it is actually Rob Sutcliffe who first questions "the relation of form to content." Blanford tells him that the "books would be roped together like climbers on a rockface, but they would all be



independent. The relation of the caterpillar to the butterfly, the tadpole to the frog. An organic relation" (Livia 11). Clearly, Durrell envisages a dynamic kinship between structure and subject matter, between the individual texts and the whole. Additional illumination of the analogy can be gleaned from A Key to Modern British Poetry, in which Durrell compares the way ideas work with the activities of the siphonophora. This single cell organism was alleged at one time to join up with other such cells, thereby forming an equally complete but entirely different animal. The originally self-sufficient cell then performed only one of the biological functions of the larger entity and ceased to remain separable. "So," says Durrell, "it is with ideas. Existing singly, they also have the power to modify, and form greater wholes in other contexts."<sup>4</sup> In this sense, both the books and the ideas that inform them are "organic."

Closer study of A Key to Modern British Poetry proves instructive in isolating some of those ideas for, whether or not this series of lectures delivered in Argentina in 1948 lives up to its name, it is certainly a key to the intellectual substructure of Durrell's vision. As he remarks himself, "the artist is often dependent on the armature of philosophic ideas or religious concepts, and we can sometimes surprise his intentions if we examine them" (Key 7).





### **The Intellectual Substructure of Durrell's Vision**

For Durrell all temporal concepts reflect the irreversibility of process and hence the inevitability of death; time "is the measure of our death-consciousness" (Key 4). When those ideas are revised, as they have been in recent years through the discoveries of physics and psychology, our concepts of life and death alter accordingly, eventually to infiltrate the domain of the arts. It is important to recognize that Durrell does not claim to possess more than a layman's understanding of these developments.<sup>5</sup> Instead, he is concerned with the changes in our epistemological paradigms that arise from them.

### **The Universe Outside Man**

In the realm of physics, the divergence of contemporary models from the mechanistic perception of the universe which prevailed after Newton's day is what interests him. Durrell suggests that the theory of relativity did not simply effect a synthesis of earlier scientific discoveries about radioactivity, but also "joined up subject and object in very much the same way as it joined up space and time." The importance of Einstein's achievement, then, is the possibility it offers (on a theoretical level only) for the reconciliation of man and his environment; it is "the symbolic act of joining what is separated" (Key 26). However, the theory has further implications, since it



radically changes our notion of time. The new conception of it, Durrell observes, is "not a past-present-future object" but "a sort of time which contain[s] all time in every moment of time" (Key 28-29). In addition, he argues, relativity theory calls causality into question, while the Principle of Indeterminacy establishes that we "cannot observe the course of nature without disturbing it" (Key 29). The picture of the universe which emerges from these findings is, Durrell concludes, a highly provisional one:

If reality is somehow extra-causal, then a whole new vista of ideas is opened up--a territory hitherto only colonized by intuition. If the result of every experiment, of every motion of nature is completely unforeseen and unpredictable--then everything is perpetually brand new, everything is, if you care to think of it like that, a miracle. (Key 30)

Durrell is fascinated by these developments both for their intrinsic value and as they pertain to literature. He suggests that modernist poetry "unconsciously reproduces something like the space-time continuum in the way that it uses words and phrases: and the way in which its forms are cyclic rather than extended" (Key 26). The artist struggles to depict past, present and future--or birth, life and death--as synchronic in each moment of time, not as a linear progression. This portrayal of a multiple state, birth-life-death, can be discerned, he believes, in the work of poets such as Rilke. For Rilke,

Death is the side of life that is turned away from us: we must try to achieve the fullest consciousness of our existence, which is the same in the two unseparated realms, inexhaustibly nourished by both. There is neither a here nor a



beyond but the great unity . . . . (Key 38)

In Rilke's words, which he actually cites, Durrell sees a mysticism that also expresses something of the philosophy implicit in relativity theory.

Now the conception of time which results from contemporary physics requires that we "accept two contradictory ideas as simultaneously true." Time is paradoxically "always-present yet always recurring" (Key 31). Durrell observes that the duality inherent in this model was quite alien to materialist thought, although the identity of opposites was an accepted premise long before. He speculates, then, that, if the influence exhibited by modern physics has effected a change in literary forms, a second consequence has been the rediscovery of an analogous duality in language. In other words, we acknowledge that "the use of a phrase calls up its opposite--for if we had no idea of evil we should be unable to measure goodness." Statement is therefore "a relative affair," rather than absolute in its value, as the more simple minded of our Victorian predecessors once thought (Key 46-47). The impact of modern physics on literature has thus been both conceptual and semantic, Durrell concludes, for "art is only a dialect of a language, and . . . we get a wider view of it if we don't rope it off from everything else and try and consider it as an isolated phenomenon" (Key 44).



### **The Universe Within**

The epistemological paradigm resulting from quantum mechanics and relativity theory obviously unites the dichotomy between mind and matter. Simultaneously, however, in the realm of psychology a similar union was being effected between mind and body. Freud's study of dreams establishes that they are meaningful productions of the unconscious mind, and the psychic disturbances of the patient can be mediated by their interpretation. He originally assumed that dreams express a repressed fear or desire originating from an actual experience, recollection of which would result in removal of the associated inhibition. But the case history of the "Wolf Man" compelled him to reformulate his hypothesis in a direction that brought it significantly nearer to the concepts underlying modern physics. The patient's childhood dream about wolves outside his bedroom window was interpreted as the symbol of an infantile experience in which he had observed his parents engage in sexual intercourse in the manner of animals. Yet, although both psychoanalyst and subject agreed as to the validity of this interpretation, there seemed to be no "objective correlative." That is, the patient could not recall such an event taking place, even after the interpretation had been negotiated, nor was there any other evidence to confirm its truth. Freud surmised that the dream had been a retrospective fantasy, created by the young boy in the Oedipal stage of his relations with his father. He





recognized, moreover, that the interpretation had achieved a therapeutic effect precisely because his patient had experienced the fantasy as though it were objectively true. He concluded from this that,

If neurotics are endowed with the evil characteristic of diverting their interest from the present and of attaching it to these regressive substitutes, the products of their imagination, then there is nothing for it but to follow upon their tracks and bring these unconscious productions into consciousness; for, if we disregard their objective unimportance, they are of the utmost importance from our point of view, since they are the bearers and possessors of the interest which we want to set free so as to be able to direct it on to the problems of the present. (Three Case Histories 237)

This revision of his position is significant in a number of respects. It accepts the indeterminacy of dream causation and, even more importantly, acknowledges that the goal of psychoanalysis is not the recovery of facts but the exploration of a reality subjectively created and then translated into the symbol system of the dream world.

The impact of this new paradigm on modern poetry is, of course, the focus of Durrell's enquiry in A Key to Modern British Poetry. He suggests that "the literature of our age is distinguished by two sorts of compression which reflect both the changes in the idea of time . . . and also the change in our attitude to the psyche" (Key 64-65). Poetry, that is, functions in a manner analogous to the dream, where temporal relations are represented in a non-linear fashion and a multiplicity of associations is compressed into one symbol. Moreover, the multivalence of those symbols, and of



language itself, enriches the poet's medium, for he can draw upon meanings which have been made newly conscious. Some of those associations are actually in conflict with each other and thus it is the poet's task to establish a "creative balance" between opposing forces, in much the same way that for Jung the aim of treatment was "not a pure cause and effect operation, but a spiritual reintegration" (Key 63). Indeed, Durrell goes so far as to claim that this oxymoronic function is a moral imperative; the modern artist must shoulder "his responsibility as a creature entangled in opposites which it is his business to resolve in the interests of the general pattern" (Key 67).

Clearly, the direction of Durrell's thought is metaphysical. He sees in the convergence of physics and psychology the possibility of "an attitude which might have the sanction of the realistic physicist no less than the mystic" (Key 70). It is no surprise, then, to find him returning to Georg Groddeck, whose work he had earlier described in a letter to Henry Miller as a "Heraclitean adaptation of Freud which makes organic sense of the discoveries as a system, instead of a mechanistic attachment to Victorian physics" (Wickes, A Private Correspondence 209). In The Book of the It Groddeck articulated the view "that man is animated by the Unknown, that there is within him an 'Es,' an 'It,' some wondrous force which directs both what he himself does, and what happens to him" (16). The It expresses itself symbolically through both man's illness and



his health, for "sickness, whether it be called organic or 'nervous,' and death, too, are just as purposeful as playing the piano, striking a match, or crossing one's legs" (The Book of the It 117). Thus man's physical and mental condition are treated as an organic whole that is motivated by a power largely beyond the limits of consciousness. When the It conflicts with man's rational understanding of himself, its repressed wishes, distorted and translated into symbolic form, must be reinterpreted in the language of the ego for reintegration of the warring opposites to take place. Groddeck's "ego-It polarity" is, then, in Durrell's view, "a brilliant rationalization of the Eastern mystic's position--who seeks to free himself from the opposites of being, and to emerge into Reality" (Key 83).

It should by now be apparent that the reconciliation of opposites is a common feature of the several avenues of thought which inform Durrell's intellectual perspective. Seeing literature as "only one facet of the prism we call culture," he explores physics and psychology as "different dialects of the same language, all contributing towards an attitude to life" (Key 1). Redefinition of the universe--both internal and external--permits the healing of that earlier fracture between man, his mind and his environment. Art, as a dialect of this language, shares in the moral responsibility to resolve the conflicts in human experience and admit the possibility of a transcendent principle that will bridge even those differences in dialect:



in the last resort great poetry reflects an unknown in the interpretation and understanding of which all knowledge is refunded into ignorance. It points towards a Something which itself subsists without distinction....at its highest [power] it reflects a metaphysical reality about ourselves and the world. (Key 90)

### **The Occult Perspective**

Durrell's version of that metaphysical reality is the "heraldic universe," a term he first coined in 1936. He explains in a letter to Henry Miller that he has chosen the word "heraldic" "because in heraldry I seem to find that quality of magic and spatial existence which I want to tack on to art." A very confused description of what he means by the expression immediately follows: "I am trying to isolate...the exact moment of creation, in which the maker seems to exist heraldically. That is to say, time as a concept does not exist, but only as an attribute of matter--decay, growth, etc. In that sense then, it must be memoryless" (Wickes, A Private Correspondence 23). The following year he admits, "my pet [sic] is in a very muddled state just at the moment" (Wickes 65), but by 1945 the heraldic universe had begun to take much clearer shape in his mind, partly through his association with a small cabalistic group directed by one Mr. Baltazian. He writes:

What they have to say is interesting: the pure symbol, which is non-formulable in the rational sense. You have to grow the extra-sensory awareness of the symbol and accommodate it in your experience--not express it. I think I have mastered the first two thought-forms, whose "contemptible" representation are the circle and the square. It is very exciting. It is as if everything to date had taken place on the minus side of the equation--with the intention of



producing One-ness.

Dividing his page into two columns, Durrell then uses the left part to explain this minus side as the necessary psychological preparation for entry into the heraldic universe. It is

the establishment of a non-conscious, continual STATE or stasis: a point of cooperation with time. In order to nourish conceptual apparatus, moralities, forms, you imply a deficit in the self. Alors all this WORK or STRIVING--even Yoga--aims at finding Rest or relaxation in Time. It aims at the ONE.

In the right-hand column, he shows how, having achieved that STATE, the mind moves onto a different level of consciousness, in which

NEW FORMS EMERGE. Because "contemptible" numbers are the only way to label them, you can say 1st State, 2nd State, 3rd State, like an etching. This is what I have called THE HERALDIC UNIVERSE. You cannot define these forms except by ideogram: this is "non-assertive" form. THE HERALDIC UNIVERSE. (Wickes, A Private Correspondence 202-203)

What Durrell seems to be suggesting here is the mystical apprehension of a "One-ness" akin to Rilke's "great unity." The preliminary stage of this process requires a suspension of the intellect in order simply to experience. Subsequently, in the act of "non-conscious" contemplation, whereby the mind is emptied of all conscious knowledge, the mystic strives to transcend the boundaries of time and space, and enter into the eternity of the One. The achievement of this final state results in a vision of the universe as a totality. In effect, therefore, the heraldic universe is, as J. Christopher Burns has remarked, the "full



consciousness of the universe and one's self within that universe" ("Durrell's Heraldic Universe" 377).<sup>6</sup>

It is especially important to note, moreover, that the ideograms which first emerge in Durrell's cabalistic studies are the circle and the square. He explains in another context that the "rectangle is the system; the circle is the organism. The struggle for our culture is played out between the two forms" (Alyn, The Big Supposer 42). By "system" Durrell makes it clear that he means all logical structures of thought, for "the word 'system' implies a Cartesian approach" (Alyn 40), whereas organisms possess a spiritual dimension as living matter. In one of his numerous epigrams, Durrell remarks that "Once an organism learns to think, it loses the ability to regenerate an amputated limb" (Alyn 145). Presumably he intends to suggest that human evolution has resulted in cognition at the expense of intuition, with a corresponding estrangement from nature. Man, then, "must try to fit the rectangle inside the circle, which represents health, in the Pythagorean sense. Health equals balance" (Alyn 42). The mathematically insoluble problem of squaring the circle symbolizes the integration of the rational mind with the capacity for intuition. As Balthazar, the foremost exponent of Gnosticism in The Alexandria Quartet, comments about Cavafy, the "old poet" of the city, "To the Cartesian proposition: 'I think, therefore I am,' he opposed his own, which must have gone something like this: 'I imagine, therefore I belong and am free'" (79-80).



In fact, Durrell's "heraldic universe" which, in the Quintet, he has renamed "reality prime," closely resembles Jung's unus mundus, the one world preceding its realization in matter. Similarly, the inner reflection which leads to this perception of cosmic unity approximates what Jung has termed "active imagination": that is, the undirected exercise of imaginative meditation, "by which one may deliberately enter into contact with the unconscious and make a conscious connection with psychic phenomena" (Man and his Symbols 219). Jung, too, is of the opinion that in the "civilizing process, we have increasingly divided our consciousness from the deeper instinctive strata of the human psyche, and even ultimately from the somatic basis of the psychic phenomenon" (Man and his Symbols 36). These instinctive strata remain part of the unconscious, however, and periodically manifest themselves in symbols, either individual or collective in their nature. The latter are what Jung calls archetypes, because they "are without known origin; and they reproduce themselves in any time or in any part of the world--even where transmission by direct descent or 'cross-fertilization' through migration must be ruled out" (Man and his Symbols 58). Amongst such collective symbols, or archetypes, are the circle and square, both, typically, functioning as representations of the Self. In the words of Aniela Jaffe,

the circle is a symbol of the psyche (even Plato described the psyche as a sphere). The square (and often the rectangle) is a symbol of earthbound matter, of the body and reality. In most modern



art, the connection between the two primary forms is either nonexistent, or loose and casual. (Man and his Symbols 284)

This, she concludes, is evidence of modern man's dissociation from his psyche.

A second, and related, meaning resides in their history as religious symbols. The circle was traditionally used to represent the deity, dormant and concealed in matter, while the quaternity signified the differentiated aspects of the divinity. With Christianity the image of God was reformulated as a Trinity and the fourth element separated to represent matter, or the lord of matter--the devil himself. Alternatively, it was relocated in the Virgin Mary as Mother of God on earth. The difference between the two symbols illustrates the antithetical nature of their underlying moral and philosophical premises, for, in its complete division of spirit from matter, the Trinity places God outside man, while the quaternity insists on the essential identity of the two. Moreover, the entirely masculine character of the Trinity excludes the feminine principle of the unconscious mind.<sup>7</sup> In contrast with this the quaternity expresses the integration of the unconscious and acknowledges the element of evil. As Jung observes, it "needs no particular effort of imagination to guess the far-reaching spiritual consequences of such a development" (Psychology and Religion 63).

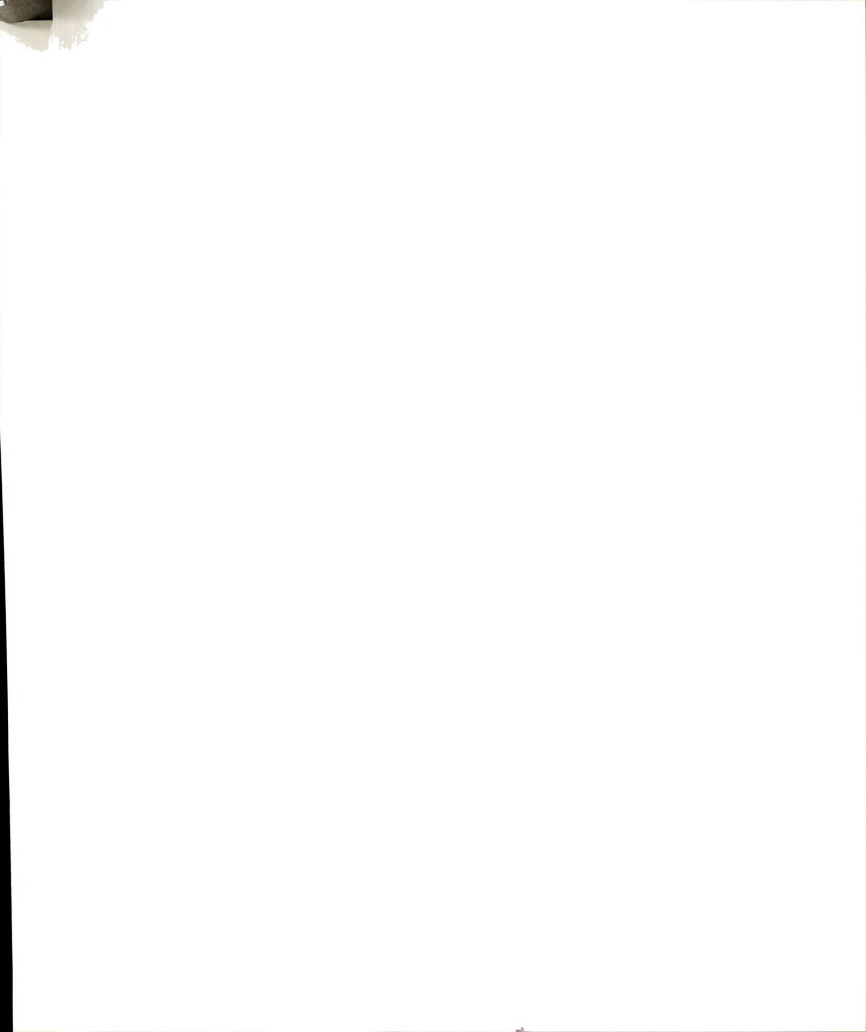
Jung has also pointed out the extent to which the idea of quaternity was "familiar among students of the Hermetic





philosophy," whose four-horned serpent was "a symbol of Mercury and an antagonist of the Trinity" (Man and his Symbols 62). In fact, he goes substantially further in concluding that "if the historical roots of our symbols extend beyond the Middle Ages they are certainly to be found in Gnosticism." The psychological condition prevailing within Gnosticism, he argues, continued "under the disguise of alchemy," with its "two parts indispensable to each other--on the one side the chemical research proper and on the other the 'theoria' or 'philosophia'" (Psychology and Religion 97-98). One of the central symbols of hermetic alchemy was the quadratura circuli, which signified the fusion of matter with spirit, and hence the wholeness of man as mind and body. This is an unmistakably Gnostic notion. Moreover, the metaphysical aspect of alchemy bears a close correspondence to the Gnostic creation myth, according to which the world was created by an evil demiurge, the product of an aborted passion. Jung's formulation of these somewhat confusing religious and alchemical views is particularly helpful for its lucid exposition:

The anima mundi, the demiurge or the divine spirit that incubated the chaotic waters of the beginning, remained in matter in a potential state, and the initial chaotic condition persisted with it. Thus the philosophers, or the "sons of wisdom" as they called themselves, took their prima materia to be a part of the original chaos pregnant with spirit. By "spirit" they understood a semimaterial pneuma, a sort of "subtle body," which they also called "volatile" and identified chemically with oxides and other dissoluble compounds. They called this spirit Mercurius, which was chemically quicksilver...and philosophically Hermes, the god of revelation,



who, as Hermes Trismegistus, was the arch-authority on alchemy. Their aim was to extract the original divine spirit out of the chaos, and this extract was called [amongst other things] quinta essentia. (Psychology & Religion 98-100)

In chemical terms, this quintessence was endowed with the power of turning ordinary compounds to gold as the perfect (and most stable) substance; hence the pursuit of alchemy by such characters as Chaucer's Canon's Yeoman, whose dreams of material wealth perverted the original metaphysical meaning of his profession. The search for the Philosopher's Stone was more properly understood as a search for the divine spirit, for which gold was but one more metaphor. Its figurative character was actually obvious from its representation as a circle, the symbolic expression of the deity.

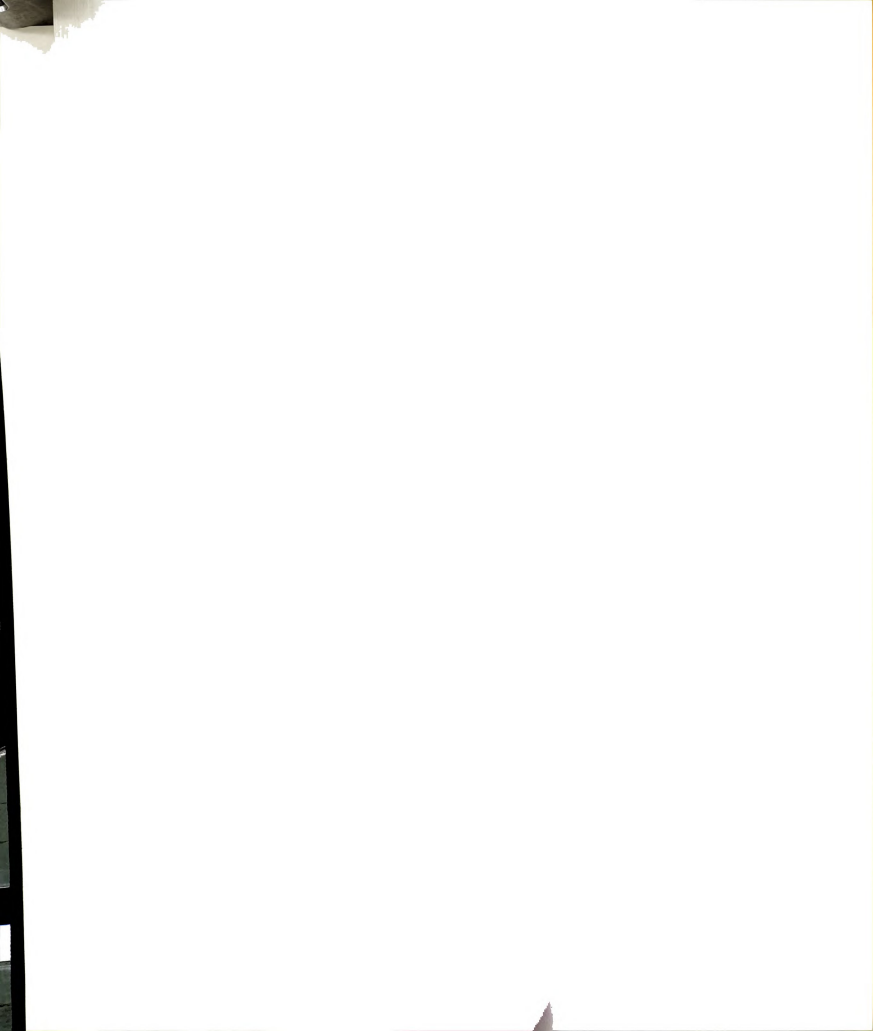
The source and history of such symbols is clearly known to Durrell, both through his reading of Jung's work and his own hermetic studies under Mr. Baltazian. In an interview with Marc Alyn, he directly acknowledges that, in trying to understand "the pure and dedicated quest for a new ascetism," he "studied all kinds of religions--secret religions as well as openly practised ones." Amongst these were the Gnostics, whom he sees as "the original Christians, the precursors, as it were, of the Cathars," and whose theology supplies "the hidden weft of the Quartet" (Alyn, The Big Supposer 17). Few people seem to have read The Alexandria Quartet in this fashion, since Durrell's claim that it is a "word continuum" has received far greater



attention ("Preface," The Alexandria Quartet). But in this sense, perhaps, the Quartet can be seen as having "a preserving Heraldic structure . . . which puzzles [its] enjoyer" (Wickes, A Private Correspondence 203). It also illuminates Durrell's insistence that The Avignon Quintet be read as a roman gigogne. For the quincunx is surely its "preserving Heraldic structure," and relevant not only as an organizing principle but also, indeed to a much greater extent, as a part of its meaning.

#### **The Hermetic Context of the Quincunx**

The word "quincunx" originates from the Roman coin valued at five-twelfths of an as, but is more commonly used to designate the pattern of trees planted in intersecting diagonal lines, or extended quaternities. It is with this aspect that Sir Thomas Browne begins The Garden of Cyrus, his disquisition on "the quincuncial, lozenge, or network plantations of the ancients, artificially, naturally, mystically considered" (139). He remarks that "since even in paradise itself the tree of knowledge was placed in the middle of the garden, whatever was the ambient figure, there wanted not a centre and rule of decussation" (145-146). Thus the pattern is seen to have divine application. Within the Christian tradition, of course, it recalls the fall of the human race, but it is significant to note that in the Gnostic version the tree of knowledge awakened man to the evil of the demiurge and hence began his quest for the real



God. Appropriately enough, then, the quincunx is also alleged, in its cruciated character as the Greek chi, to have been invented by Hermes Trismegistus (Browne 166), whose cult produced the Poimandres, "an outstanding document of gnostic cosmogony and anthropogony independent of the speculations of the Christian Gnostics" (Jonas, The Gnostic Religion 147). Moreover, as the alleged descendants of the hermetic tradition, the Knights Templar are supposed to have buried their wealth under a quincunx of trees, and in the Quintet the various characters seek its location.

It is, however, a fundamentally human symbol in several respects, for five is the number of digits on each hand and foot, the number of the senses that man possesses. Moreover, according to Plato, the quincunx symbolizes the first hermaphrodite, divided by Jupiter into the original man and woman, both of whom sought thereafter for the half from which they had thus been separated (Symposium 189-193). This idea finds its counterpart in many myths and religions through the figure of the Cosmic Man, or Gnostic Anthropos, who embraces and contains the whole cosmos. As an omnipresent being the Cosmic Man expresses the unity of all humanity beyond its individual manifestations, and hence the harmony of the entire universe. In its bisexual nature the symbol also "reconciles one of the most important pairs of psychological opposites--male and female" (Man and his Symbols 216).<sup>8</sup> The quincunx, then, symbolizes totality both in its shape and in its numerical significance. In the





latter aspect, it is, as Browne points out, "the conjugal or wedding number" of antiquity, while "in the Hebrew mysteries and cabalistical accounts [it] was the character of generation" (The Garden of Cyrus 184 & 185). In fact, the use of the quincunx to signify a mystical marriage leads logically to its designation as the quintessence, for, in hermetic alchemy, the essence was either to be extracted, or to be created by a sort of synthesis called the conjunctio. The author of the "Rosarium Philosophorum," for instance, instructs his reader: "Make a round circle of man and woman, extract therefrom a quadrangle and from it a triangle. Make the circle round and thou shalt have the Philosopher's Stone."<sup>9</sup> It is clear from his remarks that the Stone, the quintessence and Cosmic Man are one and the same.

In its architectonic application the quincunx also supplies the form of the four-sided pyramid. Smirgel, the German double-agent in Durrell's Quintet, specifically comments upon its metaphysical properties within architecture, where "the quincunxial shape was considered a sort of housing for the divine power--a battery, if you like, which gathered into itself the divinity as it tried to pour earthward, to earth itself--just like an electrical current does" (Quinx 131). His explanation actually refers to the five contiguous caves which are alleged to hold the long sought Templar treasure, but it applies equally to the pyramid as a three-dimensional quincunx. Of course, the spiritual significance of the pyramid shape is obvious from



its use for the tombs of the Pharaohs, but at least one scholar has attempted to link it directly with the cult of Thoth, the Egyptian precursor of Hermes Trismegistus. According to Mead's summary of the argument, Marshall Adams claims that the long misnamed Book of the Dead, which depicts the rituals of the mystery-cultus, was called by its initiates The Book of the Master of the Secret House, that Secret House being, in fact, the Great Pyramid. Mead, himself a leading theosophical scholar at the turn of the twentieth century, remains somewhat sceptical of Adams' argument, but considers it an interesting hypothesis.<sup>10</sup>

Yet another unverified claim connects the Major Arcana cards in the tarot to the hermetic tradition. Writing in Monde Primitif in 1781, Court de Gebelin argued that the cards constituted the Egyptian hieroglyphic Book of Thoth and contained the sum of all mystical knowledge. As god of wisdom and the occult, to whom was attributed the invention of numbers and sacred writing, Thoth was clearly the appropriate deity to invoke, but the discovery of the Rosetta Stone in 1799 and the solution of its cipher in 1822 did nothing to confirm de Gebelin's theory. Despite the lack of evidence, however, his argument was taken up by others and, with the French occult revival of the nineteenth century, became still more widely disseminated. It was linked with, amongst others, the Knights Templar (themselves undergoing a dramatic metamorphosis from failed military order to practitioners of the arcane mysteries), and



introduced to England in 1888 through the publications of MacGregor Mathers, a founding member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. His fellow members Waite and Crowley continued to advance the theory, the latter publishing a guide to the tarot and its predictive uses, which he actually called The Book of Thoth (Kaplan, The Encyclopedia of Tarot 12 & 22-23). There exists, in fact, little but romantic speculation to support the theory in this form, but in recent years it has reappeared with modifications that suggest a less direct connection. As late as 1975 it was argued that the "Tarot cards, invented by some unknown in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, would seem to be the sum of a system of belief in death and resurrection up to that time" (Butler, Dictionary of the Tarot 13). The cards, that is, borrow from the symbol systems of hermetic alchemy and the Jewish kabbalah, which are derived, in turn, from the Gnostics and thus the cult of Hermes Trismegistus, or Thoth in his Egyptian manifestation.

The degree of truth in this particular version of the theory is difficult to ascertain, but what is clear is the importance of the number five in the tarot cards themselves. Of the twenty two Major Arcana cards, five fall within each suit. Moreover, five is the number signified by the suit of Pentacles, or coins, an association which recalls the symbolic meaning of gold in alchemy. The five Major Arcana cards which represent the most powerful forces in this suit include the High Priestess, Hierophant, Wheel of Fortune,



Devil and the Tower. The High Priestess is generally associated with wisdom in its various forms, while the Hierophant symbolizes a religious or spiritual leader, as his name implies. Both the Wheel of Fortune and the Tower express the idea of mutability, of process and sudden alteration respectively, characteristics which are also attributed to Thoth in his role as a god of equilibrium. The Devil, who is often depicted with an inverted pentagram, traditionally symbolizes evil, bondage, self-destruction and inversion. However, in more recent decks there have clearly been attempts to link this card with the Gnostic demiurge, who inverts the natural order by usurping the throne of Christ. Thus Crowley incorporates the winged caduceus of Hermes in his design and, in the B.O.T.A. cards produced by the American occultist Paul Foster Case, the planetary sign of Mercury marks the Devil's belly (Butler, Dictionary of the Tarot 167). Spurious or not, the association of the tarot with Hermes Trismegistus is persistent, and something of which Durrell is obviously aware.

In her study of the Quartet Carol Marshall Peirce in fact observed over twenty characters and situations corresponding to the Major and Minor Arcana of the Rider tarot deck ("Intimations of Powers Within": Durrell's Heavenly Game of the Tarot" 200-213). Similarly, Ian MacNiven argues that the card of the Devil

fits almost exactly the main themes and action of the Quintet: the protagonists operate on half-knowledge, especially in their often futile applications of that incomplete science,





psychoanalysis; black magic is suggested as a means of combatting Hitler; . . . the pattern of inversion covers not only man's loss of his natural place as lord of terrestrial creation, guaranteed in Genesis, but the many sexual inversions which poison at least three of the marriages; finally, the bondage theme is everywhere: from Sutcliffe as "bondsman" to his creator, Blanford, to the bondage of Lord Galen to the Templar treasure, to the bondage of various lovers to one another. ("The Quincunx Quiddified" 12)

In addition, a number of characters within Quinx have their fortunes predicted by the gipsies through divination of the tarot. Sabine, the renegade bourgeois daughter of Lord Banquo, explains "the provisional nature of prophesy" (186), but some, at least, of the predictions are confirmed in their metaphorical validity. Thus Blanford is told that he is "worried about a building, a structure, something like a house which you wish to make beautiful. But it takes much writing" (Quinx 87). He immediately interprets this as a reference to his novel, as does the reader of that novel, the Quintet itself. Likewise, the treasure-seekers Lord Galen and Prince Hassad are warned that the Templar trove is protected by dragons. They prove to be the Austrian sappers who have mined the caves and whose emblem is indeed the dragon. The avarice of Galen and the Prince recalls the suit of Pentacles, as Ian MacNiven remarks ("The Quincunx Quiddified" 11), for Galen, certainly, has succumbed entirely to the lure of gold in its literal rather than its figurative sense. He displays none of the philosophical understanding for which his namesake, the Greek philosopher



and physician, was renowned. In contrast, Quatrefages, whose name "suggests 'the eating of the four'" (Carley, "The Avignon Quintet and Gnostic Heresy" 238), the gipsies and many of the other characters in the novels seek the far larger treasure of illumination. In this way they remain true to the principle of quintessence, and hence the four-in-one of the quincunx, instead of being seduced by the materialism of the Pentacle.

### Conclusion

What becomes increasingly apparent is the importance of the quincunx as both a structural and a thematic device, and the corresponding need to examine the symbol systems that supply its meaning. Durrell is neither a modern-day Gnostic nor a Jungian, but it is plain from the subject matter of The Avignon Quintet that his own metaphysical ideas have been greatly influenced by both.<sup>11</sup> The entire direction of his thinking is concerned with the quest for complete apprehension "of the universe and one's self within that universe," of the balance between unity and difference. Such a goal leads, almost inevitably, to the quincunx, for, as Jung observes,

unity and quaternity appears united in the quincunx . . . , the four forming, as it were, a frame for the one, accentuated as the centre. In the history of symbols, quaternity is the unfolding of unity. The one universal Being cannot be known, because it is not differentiated from anything and cannot be compared with anything. By unfolding into four it acquires distinct

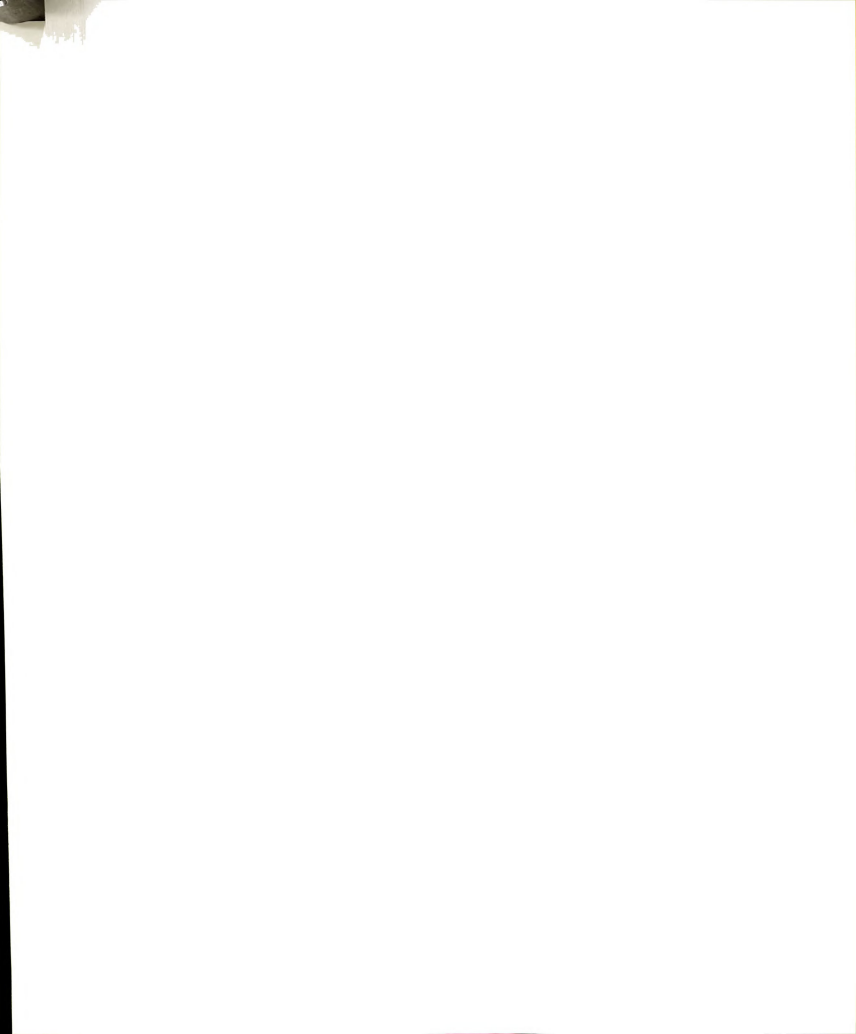


characteristics and can therefore be known.  
(Civilization in Transition 407)

The quincunx, then, symbolizes both the ineffable for which there are no words, and its conscious comprehension by means of the intellect. It squares the circle.

It is a reconciling symbol in still another sense, however, for it also unites all the subjects in which Durrell has expressed an interest. Within the parameters of Gnosticism and the hermetic philosophy underlying alchemy, the quincunx possesses a religious significance as the symbol of the differentiated deity. But Jung's studies have shown that it is equally to be understood as a symbol of psychic wholeness. In psychological terms, that is, the quincunx represents the realization, and hence fulfillment, of the individual self. Finally, in its numerical dimension, the quincunx participates in what Durrell has called the "dialect" of physics, where the cosmology of the space-time continuum has led scientists such as Alexander to suggest an identity between space-time and "the primordial reality out of which things have evolved" (Key 32). These ideas will be discussed in much greater depth in the remaining chapters, but it is important to recognize that, for Durrell, the quincunx provides a symbolic foundation which is common to the various systems of knowledge. It does so by reflecting "a metaphysical reality about ourselves and the world," by teaching us that

the opposition between the human world and the higher world is not absolute; the two are only relatively incommensurable, for the bridge between



them is not entirely lacking. Between them stands the great mediator, Number, whose reality is valid in both worlds, as an archetype in its very essence. (Jung, Civilization in Transition 409)





## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Shrimpton, for example, comments in his review of Sebastian: "He overwrites. He sentimentalises. He has a weakness for theories (particularly about sex) of an almost Lawrentian looniness. As if this weren't bad enough, he works in a form--the roman fleuve--which is supposedly outmoded. The awkward fact remains that Lawrence Durrell now seems to be four fifths of the way through one of the great novels of our time" ("The Whodunnit Gnostic-style" 41). Shrimpton's ambivalence seems to be typical of many casual readers of Durrell's work.

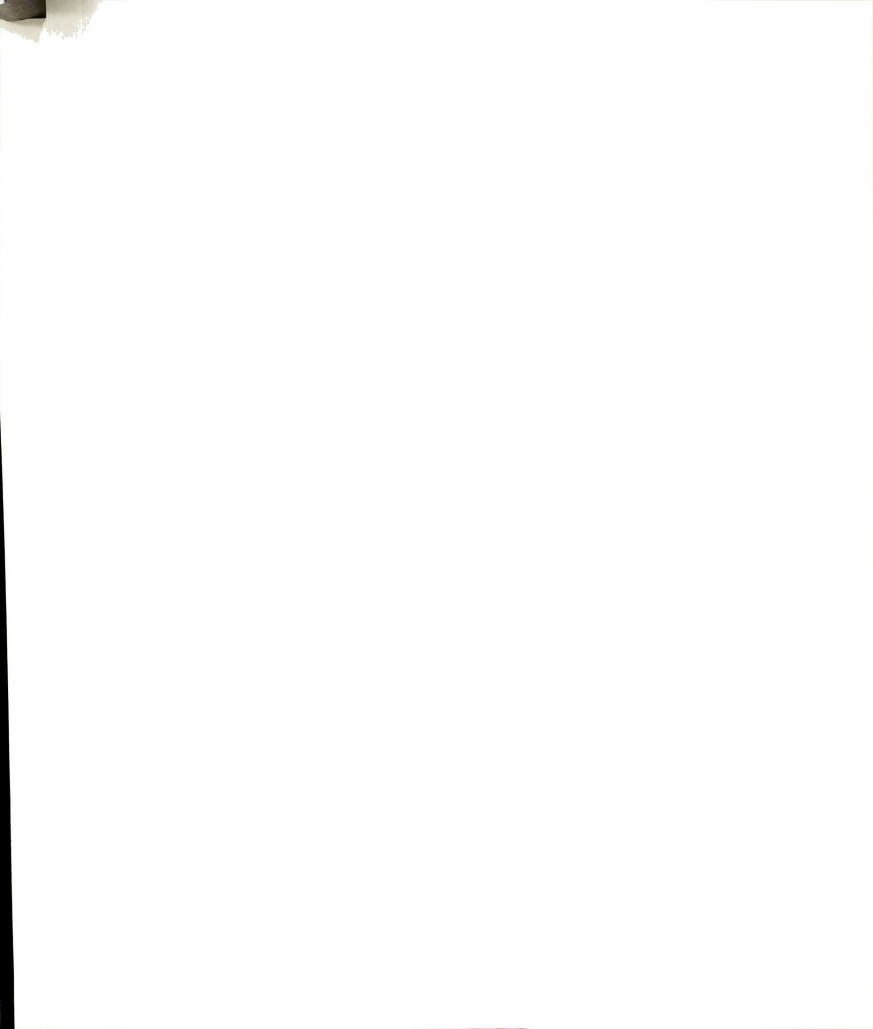
<sup>2</sup> de Montremy, Jean Maurice. "Lawrence Durrell et Variations: Avignon, troisième mouvement." La Croix (Paris), 1 December 1984, 2. Qtd. in MacNiven, "The Quincunx Quiddified" 1.

<sup>3</sup> Durrell explains the term as "those clusters of tables, you open one and it opens another and you open a third and so on and so forth." He adds a specific disclaimer of any intention to write a roman fleuve and reiterates his own emphasis upon form: "gradually the thing should become on the one hand more flou, that is to say more dispersed apparently, and much tighter in its inner organization and lie anchored on Avignon and a very small group of people. But it would open not in the Quartet sense but in a telescopic sense, knuckle by knuckle so to speak" (Carley, "An Interview with Lawrence Durrell on the Background to Monsieur and its Sequels" 46).

<sup>4</sup> A Key to Modern British Poetry 3. All subsequent references to this work will be included within the text under the abbreviated form Key.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Alfred Bork's remarks in "Durrell and Relativity" 191-203. Bork examines Durrell's exposition of relativity theory in A Key to Modern British Poetry and concludes that his understanding of it is derived entirely from popular interpretations.

<sup>6</sup> In the same article, Burns convincingly argues that Durrell's various states, through which one must pass in order to experience the "cosmic consciousness" of the heraldic universe, have been influenced, at least indirectly, by the philosophy of Plotinus. It is worth



observing that the system advocated by Plotinus bears a close correspondence to the Gnostic cosmology. There is a primordial unity from which everything else emanates in differentiated form. The last of these emanations is matter, which implicates man. The individual is thus trapped within a space-time world but impelled by his own longing for the eternity of the one.

7 Jung's argument that the Trinity is entirely masculine in character rests on the identification of the fourth element with the Virgin Mary. In pre-Christian symbol systems this element usually signified the feminine principle and, therefore, he concludes, its relocation in Mary continues that custom. However, the result of its exclusion from the Trinity is that the Christian formulation of God becomes solely male. It is worth noting that Jung's views conflict with a significant tradition in Christian theology, according to which Sapientia, as the second person of the Trinity, is partly female. A different version of this idea finds expression in the androgynous quality with which Christ is sometimes endowed.

8 This symbol of totality is common to a number of myths and religions. In the West, for example, the Cosmic Man is often identified with Christ, and in Jewish mysticism reappears as Adam Kadmon. It is interesting to observe that Leonardo da Vinci's drawing of a man with arms and legs extended to touch the rim of a circle expresses the same idea.

9 "Rosarium Philosophorum" (in Art. Aurif (1593), II: 261), alleged to have been written by Petrus Toletanus, and qtd. in Jung, Psychology and Religion 67-68.

10 W. Marshall Adams, The Book of the Master, or The Egyptian Doctrine of the Light born of the Virgin Mother (London 1898). The information concerning his argument is derived from Mead's discussion in Thrice-Greatest Hermes I: 68-69.

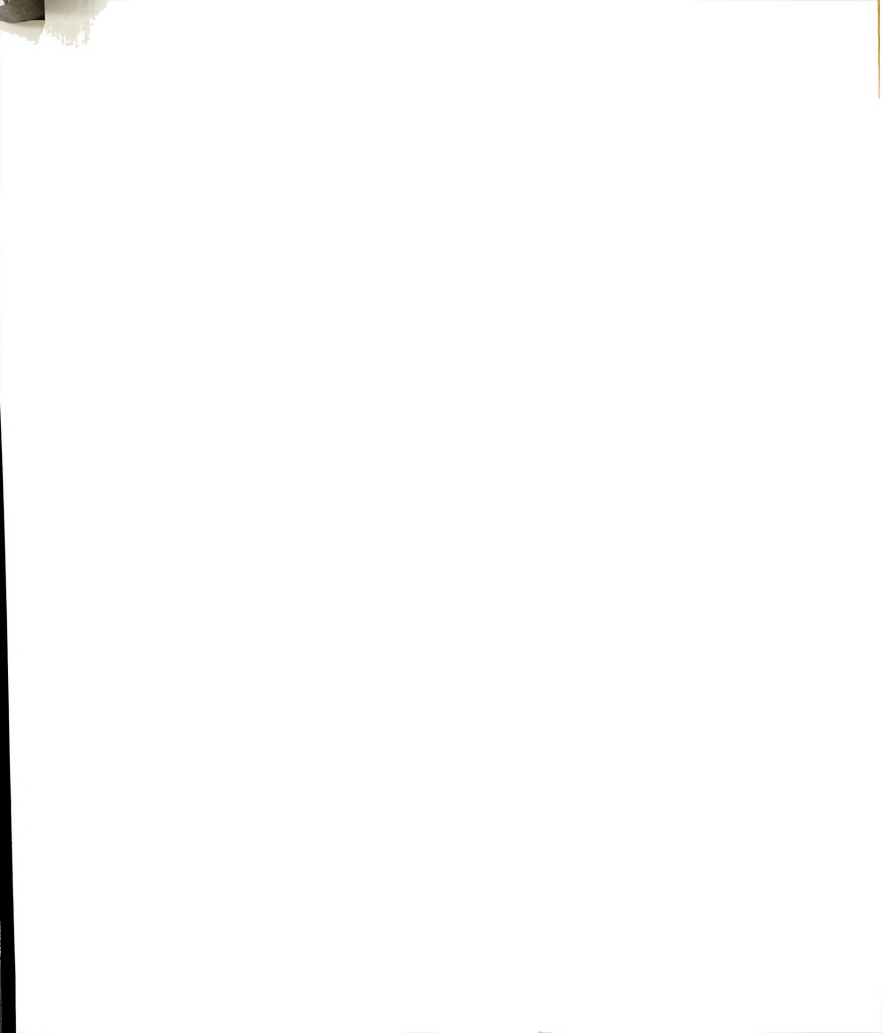
11 In his interview with James Carley, Durrell criticized the Gnostics for their extremism, and suggested that the heresy was "a disease caused by the Christian context" ("An Interview with Lawrence Durrell on the Background to Monsieur and its Sequels" 45). Carley also remarks in a footnote to his subsequent article on Monsieur, "Durrell has assured me that he is in no way a disciple of Jung. The parallels between their ideas suggest similar ways of treating the same material" ("Lawrence Durrell's Avignon Quincunx and Gnostic Heresy" 166 n. 27).



## Chapter Two

### Gnosticism: the "grammar of dissent."

In deciding "to give the devil his due, so to speak, and to call [his novel] Le Monsieur," Aubrey Blanford acknowledges the importance of Gnosticism within The Avignon Quintet (Monsieur 275).<sup>1</sup> Its principles supply that "fateful grammar of dissent" in which the characters engage (Monsieur 194), opposing the five Ms of their Judeo-Christian inheritance--Monotheism, Messianism, Monogamy, Materialism and merde (Monsieur 141)--with a "theology of revelation" that denies the reality of the material world (Lyons & Antrim 49). This conflict in values is epitomized by Alexandria and Avignon, the two great cities in which much of the narrative action occurs, for they were the one time centers of Gnosticism and of Catholicism respectively. Alexandria, with a heterogenous populace including Egyptians, Greeks, Jews and Babylonians, became the great meeting point between East and West. Its library housed the most ancient expressions of Hellenistic thought, while its museum, or university, provided a further forum for intellectual activity. But this predominantly Greek inheritance was gradually modified by the accretions of



Jewish philosophy, Babylonian astrology and different Oriental mystery cults, thereby producing "the incipient terminology of a new mysticism" (Jonas, The Gnostic Religion 25). In the work of men such as Philo Judaeus (a contemporary of Christ) that language is already present, together with a structure of thought which has obvious similarities to Gnosticism. From such mixed origins, then, the Gnostic systems emerged during the first and second centuries A.D. as the most complete synthesis of occidental philosophy with oriental spiritualism, and the foremost threat to Christianity. Something of this syncretistic history is actually supplied by Sebastian Affad, when he muses upon the

successive waves of esoteric knowledge which, like a tropical fruit, were the harvest of Indian thought, of Chinese thought, of Tibetan thought . . . pouring into Persia, into Iran, and into Egypt, where they were churned and manipulated into linguistic forms which made them comprehensible to the inhabitants of the Middle Eastern lands. (Sebastian 43)

Just as the birth of Gnosticism can be credited, partly at least, to Alexandria, so can its death throes be traced to Avignon. Suppressed by the Church Fathers in the third and fourth centuries A.D., the Manichaeian belief in dualism survived, however vestigially, in various aberrant sects like the Bogomils, only to resurface in southern France in the guise of the Albigensian heresy. Despite papal opposition the movement flourished until Innocent III declared the Albigensian Crusade in 1208, and throughout the





succeeding century it was slowly eradicated. Medieval Avignon was thus, paradoxically, both a stronghold of perhaps the greatest European challenge to Christianity and a focal point for the Catholic Church. As the papal residence from 1309 to 1378 and the home of the anti-popes during the Schism, the city incarnated all that was worst in Christianity--its materialism, decadence and spiritual decay. The resurgence of Gnosticism was therefore hardly surprising. Nor was its eventual elimination, for the subsequent geographical proximity of the popes ensured their alignment with the interests of the French monarchy, and hence any menace to the ascendancy of the Catholic Church was also, ultimately, a menace to the supremacy of the king. For reasons as much political as they were religious, then, it was in Avignon, "cathedral to Mammon," that "our Judeo-Christian culture finally wiped out the rich paganism of the Mediterranean! Here the great god Pan was sent to the gas-chambers of the Popes" (Livia 48).

Alexandria and Avignon represent the two poles of experience between which the characters gravitate. Thus the protagonists of Blanford's novel reside at Verfeuille, the crumbling chateau in Provence, but their spiritual life begins only at Macabru where, in Gnostic terminology, they are awakened from the slumbers of the soul within matter to the consciousness of evil as the presiding cosmic reality. Severed from their past by a "sense of inner estrangement and alienation from the so-called real world which [is] the



mark of the religious nature when once it awakes from its sleep in the world" (Monsieur 136), they renounce the comforting fiction of Christianity and its concomitant affirmation of the Old Testament God. Piers, indeed, carries what Durrell himself calls the "Gnostic refusal of the lie" to its logical conclusion ("Foreword," The Gnostics 8), in dying, apparently, according to the beliefs of his sect.

He, Sylvie and Bruce function not simply as initiates, however, for their love, we are told, "forms a sort of disembodied illustration of the precepts of the gnostic incarnation" (Monsieur 139). There are, in fact, many versions of this cosmogony, since the formulations of Gnosticism are nearly as numerous as its followers, but the specific variant to which Akkad refers, in his role as psychopomp throughout Monsieur, is derived from the refutations of Hippolytus and, more particularly, his account of the writings of Justinus. Akkad describes

three unbegotten principles of the universe, two male and one female. One male principle is called Good, who takes forethought for the course of things; the other male is called Father of the Begotten, but he is without foreknowledge and invisible. The female is without foreknowledge, wrathful, double-minded, double-bodied, a virgin above and a viper below. She is called Eden, she is called Israel. (Monsieur 139)

Likewise, in the lost Book of Baruch (an early text on the gnosis), Justinus articulates the

three principles of the Universe: (i.) The Good, or all-wise Deity; (ii.) the Father, or Spirit, the creative power, called Elohim; and (iii.) the World-Soul, symbolized as a woman above the middle and a serpent below, called Eden. (Mead, Fragments of a Faith Forgotten 194)



This concept of a triune godhead preceding the creation of the material world is a common feature of the Gnostic literature, although the names and relationships of the three principles differ to some degree.

Within the version of the myth framed by Justinus, the whole of creation comes into existence through the twenty-four angels of the Father-Spirit (Elohim), twelve of whom follow his will and twelve that of the World-Soul (Eden). She, in turn, produces animals from her lower part and men from her upper part, deputing to man the soul, as does Elohim the spirit. Subsequently, Elohim discovers that he has a superior and, abandoning Eden, enters into the Light-realm of the Good Deity. From jealousy, then, Eden torments what remains of the Spirit in man and incites him to sexual passion. Worst offender amongst the World-Soul's angels is Naas, the serpent and symbol of animal passion. But Elohim sends one of his own angels to prohibit man from consuming the fruit of the Tree (which is also called Naas), for the serpent has "given rise to adultery and unnatural intercourse" (Mead, Fragments of a Faith Forgotten 196). Elements of the personal history in which Piers, Sylvie and Bruce have been caught up clearly echo this myth, since Piers certainly pursues a higher plane of spiritual existence, while all three characters have engaged in unnatural intercourse. However, their history also suggests that the female principle is responsible for the creation of matter in conjunction with her spouse, rather than by a



mistaken act of parthenogenesis.

The more typical systems of the Egyptian-Syrian Gnosis, such as that formulated by Valentinus, present a somewhat different narrative. Here, the highest principle, who is a pre-existent power for good, creates from itself a female principle called Thought. Prior to this self-division, it is androgynous, containing a potential for gender differentiation that is realized only when the one principle has become two. Their union results in the Mind (Nous), also called Father, Logos, and Beginning of all beings, together with the feminine Truth. This syzygy produces a further pair who, in turn, create yet another couple, and so on, in a descending order of perfection, until the last female Aeon, or power, who is the Sophia, completes the Pleroma--that is, "the fully explicated manifold of divine characteristics" (Jonas, The Gnostic Religion 181). But disaffections arise in the Pleroma, for only the Mind is privileged to commune with the highest Good. Eventually, the Sophia, youngest and most impetuous of the Aeons, leaps from the embrace of her spouse towards this highest principle and, in so doing, becomes insane. She falls "not like Lucifer by rebelling against God, but by desiring too ardently to be united with him" (The Alexandria Quartet 39).

A similar fate awaits the hapless Sylvie, although unlike Semele (a mythological variant upon the Sophia figure), she is not destroyed by the incandescence of the divinity. Like the Sophia, however, her loyalties are in





conflict, for she loves both Bruce, her spouse, and Piers, her brother. It is this very conflict to which Blanford attributes her mental collapse:

The division of objectives in loving is something woman finds impossible to face; it threatens the fragile sense of her identity, the unity of her vision of things seen through the unique lens of human love. Once this sense of uniqueness is put in doubt or dispersed the self breaks up (itself the most fragile of illusions) and all the subsidiary larval selves, demons and angels, come to the surface to splinter and confuse the central ego. (Monsieur 282)

Of course, Sylvie's history is echoed by that of Pia, one of the many "larval selves"--both fictive and "real"--from which her character is composed. In this second trio equal distress prevails, for Rob Sutcliffe has "formed (without knowing it) the third in a trinity just as ill-starred, with Pia and pretty Trash as the other partners" (Monsieur 174). Torn by her inverted passion for Trash and her genuine, if sexually unsatisfactory, love for her husband Rob, Pia gradually disintegrates under the strain. The anguish of her "fragmented love" cannot be resolved by Freudian psychotherapy (Monsieur 212), since all this achieves is the recognition of a like inversion in Rob.

The problem lies not in the characters themselves, however, so much as it does in the world they are condemned to inhabit, for, by inverting the real spiritual order of things, the Judeo-Christian God has thrown nature out of true. To his malign influence Sutcliffe attributes the

sharp differentiation of the sexes in our culture [which] was shaped most probably by monogamy and monosexuality and their tabus. It was an abuse of



nature. Thus the typological couple which has come to dominate our style of psyche was the baby-founding duo, husband and wife, city founders. (Monsieur 215)

Yet the emancipation of woman from the sexual bondage of undesired conception has restored to her the self-respect she enjoyed in the pre-Adamic state of wholeness for which the Gnostic yearns. This, Sutcliffe concludes,

is why the sharp distinction between the sexes has begun to blur, with man becoming more feminine and vice versa. In this context [his] trio of lovers must present the prototype of a new biological relationship, foreshadowing a different sort of society based on a free woman. (Monsieur 215)

Paradoxically, then, although both Sylvie and Pia are fragmented by their experience, the trio itself is an image of reconciliation; it admits the possibility of a principle that transcends the division between body and spirit, between man and woman. Indeed, even the concept of an identity with clear delineations must be qualified, for the accompanying perception "of the individual in this world is not of an individual at all, but of an organ or part of the great organism" (Campbell, Occidental Mythology 398). Thus what seems at first to Sutcliffe an "unholy trinity" of lovers suddenly reveals its "underlying unity . . . as a total self, or the symbol of such an abstraction." He recognizes in it the Gnostic formulation of the godhead as "a triune self, composed of two male and one female partner [sic]" (Monsieur 214), and hence the degree of man's participation in divinity.

The story of the Sophia has other implications for



humanity, however, since her actions directly result in the creation of the material world and, with it, man. From her folly a formless passion is parthenogenetically conceived, imperfect in its nature because she has thereby arrogated to herself a power possessed only by the highest good. The Pleroma must be restored to its former purity, and so the Sophia is separated from both the passion to which she has thus given birth and the Intention with which she conceived it. The latter are banished beyond the Light-realm, where the Intention is hypostatized to become the lower Sophia, a quite separate entity from the upper Sophia as the original Sophia is now called. But the suffering of this lower Sophia, and her ignorance concerning the Father, eventually elicit the compassion of the Aeons. They send Jesus to be her consort and he in turn externalizes her passions, providing them with a substantive existence of their own. Thus is formed

earth according to the stiffening of terror; then water, according to the movement of fear; air, according to the flight of grief; the fire, however, is inherent in all of them as death and corruption, just as ignorance is hidden in the three passions.<sup>2</sup>

Subsequently, Jesus informs the lower Sophia of the Father's presence, illuminating her ignorance with knowledge, and imparting to her a portion of the Spirit. She finally takes matter (passion) and the psychical substance (soul) which she has earlier received from turning back to the light source, and fashions from them the Demiurge, or father of



all material things.

But the manufacture of the hylic world is one long history of pride and error, for the Demiurge creates everything in ignorance of his forefather. Believing himself supreme, he claims that he is the One God, and, even when initiated by his mother into the mysteries of the Light-realm, chooses to suppress that knowledge from his prophets. Jahweh, for such he is, deceives man as to his true temperament and status within the hierarchy of cosmic powers, introducing a reign of darkness that inverts the natural order. He "is the spirit of matter, and he springs fully armed from the head of classical Judaism of which all European religions are tributaries. The Prince [of Darkness] is usury, the spirit of gain, the enigmatic power of capital value embodied in the poetry of gold" (Monsieur 140).

This radical version of the world's genesis is a vital feature of Gnosticism. Clearly, it denies "the fundamental Christian doctrine of Original Sin," and instead blames the "parlous state of the universe on the act of creation itself" (Campbell, Creative Mythology 149). Indeed, far from being intrinsically evil, and hence needing a transmundane Savior, man actually possesses a pneuma, or spirit, which partakes of the same essence as that comprising the unknown God. The Christian tradition of the Word made Flesh is turned inside out, and man is invited to mine his own spiritual resources. If "you do not make yourself equal to God, you cannot apprehend God; for like is known by like."<sup>3</sup>





The human race is thus opposed to the terrestrial sphere in a dichotomy directly analogous to that between the deity and matter. As Hans Jonas observes, in "this three-term configuration--man, world, God--man and God belong together in contraposition to the world, but are, in spite of this essential belonging-together, in fact separated precisely by the world" (The Gnostic Religion 326).

The unmistakable existence of evil must, then, be attributed to a different source, and lies, so Durrell suggests, "in the extraordinary death drift . . . inherent in the Christian way of looking at things from the very beginning."<sup>4</sup> In contrast, Gnosticism, as articulated by Akkad, claims that the "realisation of one's own death is the point at which one becomes adult" (Monsieur 42). For Piers, and later for Sebastian Affad, this realisation assumes a literal dimension through their belief that only in the repudiation of life on earth can the true spiritual life be affirmed. To face death with the knowledge of its imminence is to outface Monsieur, while, without such knowledge, they "are just ordinary people, dispossessed, taken unawares; the original sin!" (Sebastian 87). Ignorance, therefore, and not evil, is the root of man's disinheritance. His salvation lies only in the diametrically opposite condition of gnosis, whereby he is informed of his true circumstances within the material universe. But the acquisition of knowledge is not a result of logic, despite the overwhelming evidence of evil. It is, rather, a



suprarational experience akin more to belief than to reason, for "the findings of direct intuition" are not subject to proof, or "a slavish belief in causality and determinism" (Monsieur 197).

The revelation of the usurping God to which the protagonists of Blanford's novel are brought is just such an instance of mystical illumination. Overcoming the preliminary hardships of their journey through the desert, they are ferried across the river in a "Stygian situation and mood" (Monsieur 100), to enter into the underworld of Macabru. They wander through the Arab bazaar, where an atmosphere of festivity prevails, but the true carnival--a carni vale, or valediction to the flesh--is to be celebrated only by the chosen few. The ritual begins, as Durrell takes care to explain, with readings from the Pistis Sophia, an Ophitic text dating probably from the first half of the third century.<sup>5</sup> During this part of the ceremony the candles are extinguished and relit at regular intervals "as if to mark a distinct pause in the proceedings" (Monsieur 119). The gesture is reminiscent of the three bells rung at the consecration of the Eucharist in the Roman Catholic mass, but what follows is, of course, an inversion of the mass. The details have been adapted from a denunciatory account supplied by St. Epiphanius (c. 315-402), of a Christian Ophitic ceremony which he once mistakenly attended:

They have a snake, which they keep in a certain chest--the cista mystica--and which at the hour of their mysteries they bring forth from its cave. They heap loaves upon the table and summon the



serpent . . . .[I]t crawls up on the table and rolls in the loaves; this, they say, is the perfect sacrifice. Wherefore, as I have been told, they not only break the bread in which the snake has rolled and administer it to those present, but each one kisses the snake on the mouth, for the snake has been tamed by a spell, or has been made gentle for their fraud by some other diabolical method. And they fall down before it and call this the Eucharist, consummated by the beast rolling in the loaves. And through it, as they say, they send forth a hymn to the Father on high, thus concluding their mysteries.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, in the rites at which Piers, Toby, Sylvie and Bruce are present, Sabine embraces Ophis, although the four untried novices show an understandable reluctance to follow suit. Subsequently, in their parody of the doctrine of transubstantiation, all "partake of the holy mummia" and consume drugged wine (Monsieur 122). What each then sees, during the altered state of consciousness that naturally ensues from this, is evil incarnate in the form to which his perception best lends itself. Thus Toby, as a historian, visualizes something rather like the tomb of the Black Prince, while Bruce sees "a kind of huge [black] dung-beetle with the head of a dog" (Monsieur 124). This insect, which feeds on animal waste, clearly suggests the world of organic matter, a world contaminated by excrement and increment alike.<sup>7</sup> Yet such ritual inversions merely echo the more profound theological inversion whereby the serpent, traditional harbinger of damnation, becomes instead the means of illumination. The reversal of associations fits coherently within the Gnostic scheme, for, if Jahweh is evil, it is the snake sent by the Sophia who first alerts



Eve to her true state in the Garden of Eden, and induces her to eat the fruit of knowledge. In violating the command of the Demiurge she thus begins the work of redemption. Hers is indeed a fortunate fall.

In fact, a wealth of symbolic associations attach to the serpent, as Akkad indicates in a "confirmation breakfast" which follows upon the initiation and baptism of his new converts (Monsieur 131). A "symbol of the caduceus of Aesculapius, of the spinal column, of the kundalini-serpent of the Indians, . . . [i]t is also the sacred phallus of Greece and Egypt and India, as well as the coiled intestines from which one can perform divination by entrails as our ancestors did" (Monsieur 133). In its sexual dimension, it represents the generative powers of the universe; as man was conceived in the womb from a "serpent" and an "egg," so was the cosmos. Thus the snake ultimately signifies the supreme deity, and the egg his female spouse, the Great Mother from whom everything else emanates. Coiled around the nucleus of the universe, it illustrates "the continual cycle that goes from the One to the All and comes back from the All to the One" (Lacarriere, The Gnostics 81). Similarly, as the caduceus of Hermes and the thyrsus of Dionysus, it heralds the passage from life to death and hence to life again. It is an image of process, of renewal. Within kundalini yoga, too, it symbolizes the "serpentine force in man, which when following animal impulse is the force of generation, but when applied to spiritual things





makes of man a god" (Mead, Fragments of a Faith Forgotten 204). Paradoxically, therefore, the snake is both the indirect instrument of man's death in punishment for his violation of Jahweh's law, and an image that unites the sexual with the spiritual realm in affirmation of life.

This very paradox informs Akkad's distinction between the principles of Christianity and those of his own Gnosticism. Death, he claims, is the dominant value in a Judeo-Christian tradition which elevates possession above freedom; possession of the loved one dictating monogamy, possession of goods materialism, and possession of the one true God a monotheism steeped in blood. Within "this death-desiring culture," the "new sacrament was to spill blood, not to spill sperm and impregnate the universe. To hoard gold and to spill blood were now the imperative, and this is the order against which our small communion of gnostics are opposed" (Monsieur 217). In their stead he places the life-affirming value of sperm,

for our world is a world not of repression and original sin but of creation and relaxation, of love and not doubt. This is what sets us apart from the others who today rule everything in the name of death. (Monsieur 141)

Freedom, "which is simply the power of spending," finds its prototype in the orgasm, while hoarding leads to the foundation of "cultures based on key repressions" (Monsieur 217). Akkad, then, urges expression rather than repression, and thus the inversion of an already inverted cosmic order to restore its former harmony. Moreover, since the "act of



sexual congress as the spirit-developer, the idea hatcher is the source of all science, all art, all information which the spirit needs as its aliment" (Monsieur 262), the most logical means of redressing the death drift is an opposing sexual licence.

This association of carnal with spiritual knowledge has, of course, a long history. We have only to recall the impassioned medieval celebrations of the Virgin Mary to appreciate how basic is the similarity between the two experiences of the sublime. Yet the kinship is a primarily anti-Christian one, and implicit within the signification of the serpent. As Joseph Campbell remarks,

Wherever nature is revered as self-moving, and so inherently divine, the serpent is revered as symbolic of its divine life. And accordingly, in the Book of Genesis, where the serpent is cursed, all nature is devaluated and its power of life regarded as nothing in itself. (Creative Mythology 154)

Thus any attempt to dethrone the God of the Old Testament implies a corresponding exaltation of nature. But for the Gnostic this is a Platonic ideal, and not to be confused with the biological reality of "l'être mangeant l'être et mangé par l'être." The latter can only be the work of the Demiurge, who is "une intelligence sans coeur" (Monsieur 138).

The sexual act is similarly idealized, not as an expression of human love but rather as the path to God. Woman is both the chosen vessel of the light, from whom all creation thereafter stems, and the source of that salvatory



revelation which exposes the Demiurge. She is not, therefore, simply an object of male gratification, but has importance in her own right. Her significance lies, however, in her sex and not her individuality, for she is a type of the original Sophia. Thus man unites not with "a woman but the incarnation of Woman" (The Alexandria Quartet 61), in a syzygy that emulates the first coupling. This distinction is, as Jacques Lacarriere points out, a vital one, since,

if the Gnostics were able to magnify sex and at the same time reject love as a sentiment, if they achieved a total and radical dissociation between these two domains, it was because all the force of their love, their sense of fusion and identification, was turned towards the true God, the distant kingdom which they could reach only with the help of woman, through her and with her. (The Gnostics 94-95)

Akkad's insistence upon the spiritual nature of sexual union ultimately, then, implies the abnegation of its human character.

It exists, of course, in conjunction with a complete disengagement from the presiding system of values which is equally characteristic of the Gnostic faith. When the moral structure of the whole universe is believed to be inverted, it is clearly unproductive to conform to its laws, whether natural or ethical. Accordingly, Gnosticism invokes disobedience to the existing moral order, in renunciation of "the empty world" (Monsieur 13). Historically, this took the form either of an extreme ascetism intended to diminish corporeal existence without actually inducing death, or of an extreme licence in which the violation of every



prohibition somehow used up its evil. Akkad's physical appearance hints at both courses, "for he sometimes looked heavy and fat, and sometimes thin and ascetic" (Monsieur 105). But the nature of the dissent he advocates is clearly a radical libertinism:

All those emblems of a hunger which engenders self-destruction, which pushes things to the very limit of the sensibility, those belong to us; and they must be strictly differentiated from the privations and prohibitions which spring from the tenets of any branch of Judaeo-Christianity. Their laws are different and based on violent repressions; ours are absolute but personal. (Monsieur 139-140)

It is important to understand that his remarks are not a simple invitation to profligacy of every kind, however. The deliberate and ritual pursuit of what is deemed immoral by a structure evil in itself is finally a moral act; and regeneration, not degeneration, is its goal.

In fact, the readiness of Akkad's inner circle to die for their belief is a clear indication of its essentially religious nature. They are willing to carry their refusal to cooperate with the world to its logical conclusion, despite the relative insignificance of this gesture when all "individual deaths [have] been resumed by the death of God!" (Monsieur 10). Suicide in the literal sense is, of course, prohibited, for, as Bruce remarks (in a pun which is typical of Durrell), the Gnostics are "dead against self-destruction" (Monsieur 81).<sup>8</sup> In the same way that sexual union is invested with ritual status, so is dying; and it must therefore be conducted in the right way:





Everything lies in the act of acceptance, to join finally the spiritual trust of the mature who have tasted the world to the full and wish to be purged of the physical envelope. They join the inner circle and make an act of acceptance--that is what constitutes the gnostic suicide. They accept, then, their own execution, but it is not their own hand that is raised against them. (Monsieur 144-145)

This distinction between self-inflicted death and complicity in a suicide pact, which seems at first mere sophistry, has an ulterior significance. It embraces the element of chance, in the selection of an executioner by lot, and so emulates process, that "self-perpetuating act of insight on the part of the universe as a whole" (Alyn, The Big Supposer 144). In this way the original rhythm of nature is restored and man's redemption begun, for in "the theology of process, . . . coincidence and contingency rule, but never fortuitously" (Monsieur 145).

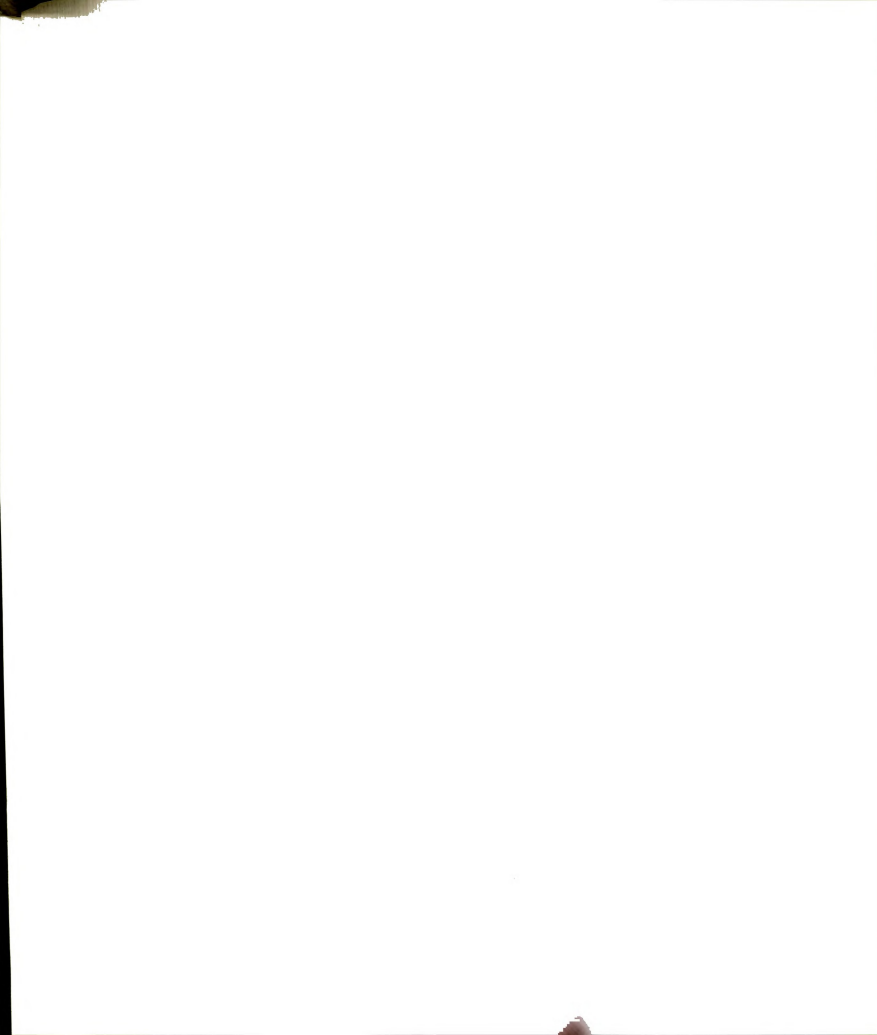
Indeed, Gnosticism is just such a "theology of process," since its entire structure is founded upon a belief in contingency. Contrary to the Christian drama, in which man is placed center-stage and his fate considered an integral part of the divine scheme, the Gnostic cosmogony establishes the tragedy as having preceded man's existence. He is therefore an accidental by-product of creation, and not its cause as, in his egoism, he chooses to believe. The same is true of his environment, since the whole material world results from the fall of the Sophia, and hence "the stability of the gnostic universe is quite inadvertent; the conformity of matter to models or modes is very precarious



and not subject to causality." With this recognition of contingency, then, "the notion of death is born and gathers force so that you start, not to live according to a prearranged plan or model, but to improvise" (Monsieur 167). Moreover, precisely because this world of matter is not a part of some divine plan, but controlled instead by the machinations of the Demiurge, death itself ceases to hold terror. It signifies the welcome release of the pneuma from its bondage to the flesh, and its reunion with the eternity of the Light-realm.

For Piers, therefore, death is the joyful culmination of a spiritual quest begun at Macabru and symbolically enacted in his voyage down the Nile. Just as "the Hindus had a Heavenly Ganges...and an earthly Ganges, so had the heavens a Celestial Nile, and Egypt a physical Nile, the life-giver of the land" (Mead, Thrice-Greatest Hermes 1: 110-111). His "timeless journey into ancient Egypt" is a pilgrimage through the territory of Osiris and Isis (Monsieur 158), from whose religion his own derives, and the simulacrum of that final journey into the timeless region of the heavens. It is this same voyage from life to death, and hence to the eternal, the real life, that Blanford contemplates as, in the conclusion to Monsieur, he awaits the "letter with an Egyptian postmark" which will place his name too on "the death-map of the stars" (Monsieur 295).

The tenets of Gnosticism appear most fully explicated in this first text, but they continue, of course, to inform



the remaining volumes of the Quintet. Like Piers, Bruce and Sylvie, the protagonists act out the roles of the Gnostic trinity in its different aspects. Livia, for example, is repeatedly identified with the serpentine part of the feminine principle; she is variously described as "like a lizard, like a snake" (Constance 6), and a "snake with a trigger in its tongue" (Livia 116). Similarly, her incestuous relationship with her brother Hilary, suggested in the second book and confirmed by Smirgel's account of "this unlucky passion which neither could renounce" (Quinx 119), recalls the marriage of Osiris and Isis, who were united in the womb. Even her physical details correspond with those of the goddess. She has "black soft hair [which] seemed to fly out of the crown of her head and flow down the sides in ringlets reminiscent of Medusa" (Livia 39), just as Isis is depicted with "a plain circlet in fashion of a mirror, . . . borne up on either side by serpents that seemed to rise from the furrows of the earth . . . 9 The susceptible Blanford perceives this kinship with "some ancient Greek goddess" (Livia 111), and certainly, in her dealings with men, Livia is as capricious as any female deity.

It is she, in fact, who openly espouses the Orphic tradition, telling Blanford,

before that bunch of thugs who ruled Olympus there were others like Uranus who ruled the earth and was castrated by Chronos. Those severed genitals were thrown still frothing and writhing into the sea, and the foam they generated gave birth to Aphrodite. (Livia 110)



The dismemberment of Osiris, Uranus, Dionysus--each is a necessary sacrifice to ensure the "fruitful" world of passion. Blanford, who has observed the emasculation of Thrush's husband and fears "that this same gloomy fate of Zagreus" will be his (Livia 70), is naturally rather alarmed by the role in which he sees himself cast. His apprehensions are confirmed when he does indeed undergo a symbolic castration; for Livia inflicts a psychic wound to his sex in her peremptory dismissal of his adolescent infatuation for her, which foreshadows the physical injury he later sustains to his spine. Both wounds are, of course, essential for Blanford's spiritual growth, since a new self cannot emerge until the old has died. His sexual initiation with Livia "literally scorched him awake, precipitated him from raw youth into adulthood" (Livia 104), and the first faint glimmerings of "reality prime" (Livia 176), while subsequently, with Theodora, he rises "from the dead" (Constance 99), after a "rape" that effects his resurrection. However, his lack of passion, "a power-cut now so markedly symbolised by the physical disability under which he labour[s]" (Constance 341), cannot be so easily healed, and it is only in Constance, who ministers to both body and soul, that he finally finds salvation.

The terms in which these experiences are depicted reveal their debt to Gnosticism. Woman introduces anguish and death into the world, but she is also the agent of





instruction and redemption. The episode with Livia, although painful, "awakens" Blanford from the spiritual sleep which has characterized his stunted youth. A "viper below," it is she who first arouses his sexual energy, and hence the latent serpentine power which, with Constance, he learns to harness for the fulfillment of his own godhead. As a result of this coupling, then, Blanford is at last able to complete the novel he has long struggled in writing, to realize his own role as author and Logos. His dream of "a book which, though multiple, embodie[s] an organic unity" (Livia 38), is a fitting tribute to Osiris, from whose limbs, rent by Typhon and restored by Isis, comes the promise of the future.

Yet, if Blanford emerges as a type of Horus from the ashes of his own past self, there is also a sense in which he owes his spiritual paternity to Affad. Like Akkad, for whom he supplies the prototype, Affad is explicitly Gnostic in his affiliations. Known to the fellow members of his sect as Ptah, one of many designations for the cosmic God, he embodies the androgynous features of the eternal essence. Indeed, he is actually called Sebastiyanne--a name clearly intended to convey the double-sexed and double-visioned role of Tiresias.<sup>10</sup> It is hardly surprising, therefore, to find him articulating a theory of gender differentiation that implies cross-sexual characteristics:

when the couple was created out of the original man unit, clumsily divided into male and female parts, the affective distribution did not correspond at all with the biological. The sex of



the man is really the woman's property, while the breasts of the woman belong to the man . . . .The male and female commerce centres around sperm and milk--they trade these elements in their love-making. (Constance 284)

In fact, Affad's remarks appear to be an adaptation of the sexual philosophy attributed to Simon Magus, earliest and most colorful of the Gnostic prophets. Essentially, Simon argued that within man there are two forms of divine fire--a psychic form manifested in the desire to beget, and a physical form, which is blood. From this latter come two complementary fires, which take the form of semen in the male and milk in the female. Thus sexual fusion liberates the divine fire in man and facilitates a union of souls in accordance with the primary order of the cosmos. Simon evidently acted upon the logical consequences of his own doctrine, and propagated it to others, traveling with a companion whom he identified as the fallen Sophia--although his Christian opponents believed her a fallen woman of a rather more prosaic sort! But one of the implications of his philosophy has direct bearing on the role of woman. As Jacques Lacarriere observes,

In opposition to the Bible's truncated image of the couple, where the woman is made out of the man and not coexistent with him, Simon offers us the image of a primordial couple with the woman existing at the same time as the man whose destiny Jehovah foiled and who therefore could not come into being. (The Gnostics 50)

Simon's position is consistent with the general trend in Gnosticism to elevate woman from her subjugation to the male, and Affad merely extrapolates from its implicitly



Platonic features. He replaces the conventional metaphors for sexual love as a battle or mercantile proposition with the idea that it is an "exchange rather than investment" (Constance 285), an equal and reciprocal emulation of the divine syzygy.

If sexual union is thus seen as a microcosmic reflection of, and contribution to, the unity of the macrocosm, then its apotheosis is the shared orgasm, which "admits you to the realm beyond death and rebirth" through its participation in the timeless eternity of the pleroma (Quinx 15). The Metaphysical conceit in which death is a synonym for sexual ecstasy now bears new meaning, since "each orgasm is a dress rehearsal for something deeper, namely death, which becomes more and more explicit until it happens and revives the whole universe" (Quinx 16). But that instant achieved outside the chronological domain of Jahweh is also important for the purpose of procreation. Death is life in the Gnostic equation, and hence the momentary death of the orgasm is a prerequisite for further life on spiritual as much as biological grounds. The fusion of cells in conception symbolizes that greater fusion through which the fragmented spirit is released from its individual constraints.<sup>11</sup> When, therefore, Constance invites Blanford to deal in his projected novel with "human love which is a yogic thought form, the rudder of the human ship of fools" (Quinx 16), it is appropriate that he should describe the task in images of pregnancy. Only after he has fully



understood the knowledge imparted by Affad to Constance and so, in turn, to himself, can he be "brought to term" of a book conceived from that experience (Quinx 165).

Ironically, however, the very love which Affad is able to create by virtue of his Gnosticism is also the source of his own apostasy. In caring for Constance, rather than for what she represents, Affad is seduced from the immediate goals of his faith. He begins to suspect "that there are spirits of love sent into the world who, if recognised, cannot be resisted, should not be resisted at the risk of betraying nature herself." Accused of jeopardizing the Gnostic attempt "to face the primal trauma of man, namely death, and all for the sake of a woman" (Sebastian 39), he is reminded with horror that he has succumbed to transitory passion as an end in itself. Indeed, so far has he departed from his earlier repugnance for the material world that he actually desires to "engender a child" (Sebastian 41). In view of the spiritual importance attached to procreation this may not seem so heinous a wish, but in practice it perpetuates the kingdom of Jehovah on earth. Thus Affad is guilty of taking literally what is meant symbolically; as Philo observes in his work, On the Contemplative Life, the true Gnostic "longing is not for mortal children, but for a deathless progeny which the soul that is in love with God can alone bring forth . . . ." <sup>12</sup>

Of course, Affad's defection is only temporary, but it is enough nonetheless to suggest the ultimate failure of all





Gnosticism. Just as Constance has something to learn from him, so does Affad learn from her, and what he learns is the fundamental power of love. Denying, as he does, the Christian burden of guilt for man's fall, Constance instead asserts the possibility of joy in that domain which the Gnostics dismiss as a living death:

birth is no trauma but an apotheosis: here I part company with my Viennese colleagues for they were born into sin. But in reality one is born into bliss--it is we who cause the trauma with these mad doctrines based on guilt and fear. (Quinx 17)

Her affirmation of life reaches its highest expression when she symbolically bears Affad's child, by restoring to him the son he has earlier fathered. But this act of redemption conforms only to the Gnostic idea of woman as an instrument of salvation and not to the extremity of its solution. The young Affad's autism has resulted in a mental disengagement from the world which parallels that of his father, and the answer Constance proffers is the same for both. Recognizing that the boy "was not asleep, he was breathing. He was just not fully alive, that was all" (Sebastian 71), she provides him with the love his mother has been unable to sustain, and so eventually returns him to the realm of feeling. Her subversion of Gnosticism is complete: in its method, which derives from a quite different structure of knowledge; and in its achievement, which insists on the significance of this world in all its complexity.

Affad's response to the reintegration Constance has thus effected is equally revealing. He admits that, having



seen what "you had done for the child--with your science which I found so limited--I could not do otherwise than come and thank you for the tremendous gift" (Sebastian 147). In a corresponding act of love, he revokes his decision to leave her, and resumes the relationship, although the terms on which he does so make clear his intention of remaining loyal to his own persuasion. Yet, given the purport of the drubbing he has so recently earned from his fellow Gnostics, it is difficult to see how that very reunion with Constance does not, in fact, implicate his religious beliefs. As James Nicholls concludes, she appears to have at last "overcome the inversions of Affad's Gnosticism and brought him to a commitment to life and fecundity" before his death ("The Risen Angels in Durrell's Fallen Women" 9).

How appropriate, then, that he should die in a manner as ambiguous as the way in which he has lived! Deprived of the letter Mnemidis has concealed, Affad is destined "without that knowledge . . . [to pass] on a feeble signal. Like a dirty spark plug!" (Sebastian 150). And yet, ironically, Mnemidis is (albeit unintentionally) the perfect agent for his execution. A "mystic of crime" (Sebastian 160), he "feels the fact of being a sort of cosmic mishap" (Sebastian 13), and seems even to have been involved in the Alexandrian sect of which Affad is a member. His choice of weapons is similarly apt; those same "two flashing, sabre-like" knives with which the nuns have earlier performed "their absorbed Christian sacrifice, cutting up the body of



Christ into eatable-sized slices" (Sebastian 104). Seeing this manifestation of the Word made flesh, Mnemidis takes it upon himself, as "the incarnation of Primal Man . . . . perfected in [his] sainthood" (Sebastian 107), to complete the Communion. But he does so in a fashion that inverts its symbolic function and thus, incidentally, recalls the Gnostic inversion of the Eucharist depicted in Monsieur.

A like inversion underlies his escape from the asylum in which he has formerly been incarcerated, for, exploiting his impenetrable disguise as a nun, Mnemidis promptly seduces the youthful driver of the baker's van. The anti-Christian implications of this highly comic scene are clear: the clerical vow of chastity is itself a "hideous inversion of man and woman, a rejection of humanhood in fellow sympathy and love, and a denial of man's Godhead as a fecund and creative being" (Nicholls, "The Risen Angels in Durrell's *Fallen Women*" 6). However, the homosexual nature of the encounter renders it physically just as sterile, and so, in this respect at least, analogous to the deliberately childless unions of the Gnostics. Mnemidis has been sufficiently identified with Gnosticism to suggest the more invidious conclusion that it too is ultimately barren; and complicity in its radical solution indeed an act of lunacy.

Affad's death at the hand of Mnemidis is, then, an equivocal denouement. Even as it concludes the "grammar of dissent" he has articulated, so does it complete the argument against Gnosticism.<sup>13</sup> But to assume therefore that



nothing can be learned from its tenets would be an error of extremism as grave as that of which the Gnostics stand accused. Clearly, Durrell is very much in sympathy with their rejection of a mechanistic perspective, and corresponding insistence upon the life of the spirit. He is equally "convinced that there is a profound link between sexual and psychic energies" such as Affad claims (Alyn 33). What he cannot advocate is a fanaticism that excludes the entire province of material reality and seeks fulfillment only in extinction. It is possibly this apparent prevarication over death which elicited criticism from John Arthos for a failure of courage in The Alexandria Quartet:

it is one thing to let one's imagination explore a system of thought, and another to square it with one's commitments. The Gnostic saints and martyrs, those whose memory is recorded in the Catacombs, evidently recognized the responsibility of thought, the obligation to follow through, and their lives paid for their intuitions--death, it appears, was a price they were ready to pay. But for Durrell's characters, one after another, death is the most horrible of eventualities, more to be feared than the evil that is life. ("Lawrence Durrell's Gnosticism" 372-373)

Events in the Quintet confirm that Durrell's protagonists do indeed let their "imagination explore a system of thought," and the ones who profess it pay the price for their intuitions. But the author's commitments are not to be confused with those of his characters, for Durrell himself is engaged in the evaluation of Gnosticism and not in being its exponent. Perhaps, then, it is appropriate to conclude with his own conviction (rather than the words of his





creations) that

the refusal [to cooperate with the Christian vision] can be operated without actually taking it so far as to die. It's a good deal saner way of dealing with this problem of dissent than the gnostic way which is so extreme. (Carley, "An Interview with Lawrence Durrell" 45)



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> It is possible to identify some, at least, of the works Durrell has actually consulted in his study of the Gnostics. G.R.S. Mead is explicitly mentioned in Monsieur, while parts of his major work, Fragments of a Faith Forgotten, are fictively attributed to Akkad, one of several who give voice to their Gnosticism in the Quintet. Durrell is probably also familiar with Mead's three volume opus, Thrice-Greatest Hermes, although there is no specific quotation to confirm this. Other sources include The Gnostics, a less scholarly work by Jacques Lacarriere, which contains a "Foreword" by Durrell himself, as well as supplying further passages of Akkad's exposition, and possibly Joseph Campbell's Occidental Mythology, the third volume in his four part sequence, The Masks of God. Campbell's contrast of the mosque with the church (III: 397-98) is similar to that of Constance in her remarks to Schwarz (Constance 292). However, this may be alternatively explained by a common earlier source in Spengler's Decline of the West (I: 200), to which Durrell refers on many occasions.

Readers who wish for additional information on Gnosticism should consult the work of Hans Jonas, in particular, The Gnostic Religion, his superb study of its philosophical implications. Other materials are listed in the general bibliography, but Pheme Perkins' The Gnostic Dialogue is also worth noting here, both for its usefulness and for its remarks on Durrell's version of Gnosticism as depicted in Monsieur. She comments: "Durrell paints pictures of pseudo-intellectual decadence that is drawn to the mysterious Gnostic shaman Akkad. Perhaps not surprisingly, the gnosis they encounter is equally decadent, that of the magic formulae and mystic interpretations of the Pistis Sophia which are chanted and commented upon in a strange Ophite ritual. One suspects that Durrell's imagination has painted as good a picture as any of the esoteric ritual of such a form of gnosis" (209).

<sup>2</sup> Irenaeus, Adressus Haereses I. 5, 4. Quoted in Jonas, The Gnostic Religion 189.

<sup>3</sup> Corpus Hermeticum XI 20b. Quoted in Campbell, Occidental Mythology 366.

<sup>4</sup> Carley, "An Interview with Lawrence Durrell on the



4 Carley, "An Interview with Lawrence Durrell on the Background to Monsieur and its Sequels" 42. All subsequent references to this article will be identified within the text as "An Interview with Lawrence Durrell."

5 The first quotation, depicting the resurrection of a Jesus very different from his Christian counterpart, is taken from the opening paragraph of the Pistis Sophia: "It came to pass, when Jesus had risen from the dead, that he passed eleven years discoursing with his disciples, and instructing them only up to the regions of the First Commandment and up to the regions of the First Mystery, that within the Veil, within the First Commandment, which is the four-and-twentieth mystery without and below--those [four-and-twenty] which are in the second space of the First Mystery which is before all mysteries,--the Father in the form of a dove."

The second, appropriately enough, describes the fate of the good man who has not yet been initiated, but will, in a succeeding birth, be given the Cup of Wisdom: "there cometh a receiver of the little Sabaoth, the Good, him of the Midst; he bringeth a cup full of intuition and wisdom, and also prudence, and giveth it to the soul, and casteth the soul into a body which will not be able to fall asleep and forget, because of the cup of prudence which hath been given unto it, but will be ever pure in heart and seeking after the mysteries of light, until it hath found them, by order of the Virgin of Light, in order [that that soul] may inherit the Light for ever" (Mead, Pistis Sophia: A Gnostic Gospel 1 & 323).

6 Panarion Haeresium 1. 37, 5. Quoted in Campbell, Creative Mythology 151-152.

7 As Jolande Jacobi remarks, "In mythology, scarab beetles often appear golden; in Egypt they were sacred animals symbolizing the sun. But if they are black, they symbolize the opposite side of the sun--something devilish" (Man and his Symbols 365).

8 In this context it is interesting to note Durrell's own attitude to self-destruction, especially as it has been such a recurring preoccupation. In an interview with Marc Alyn he observes that "Action is the only way out, but it's also the most difficult. Basically most people are in despair. I can only say again, either I kill myself or I create something" (The Big Supposer 98).

9 This passage is taken from the translation by William of Adlington (1566), quoted by Robert Graves in The White Goddess 63, and subsequently by Carol Peirce in an excellent paper discussing the roles of Pursewarden and his sister Liza, themselves variants upon the Osiris and Isis



myth, "That 'one book there, a Plutarch': Of Isis and Osiris in The Alexandria Quartet" 9.

10 Affad is also depicted with a thread around his neck, the "umbilical cord which united him with the buried world [the Gnostics] were trying to bring to light" (Constance 298). This is almost certainly a reference to the "Noose of Ptah," an Ankh-tie and symbol of life, "of which the older form is a twisted rope, probably representing the binding of male and female life in generation" (Mead, Thrice-Greatest Hermes 1: 61).

11 In his discussion with Jolan Chang, author of The Tao of Love and Sex, Durrell repeats many of these ideas. They are neither exclusively nor entirely Gnostic in origin, but formed quite frequently from an amalgam of Taoist, Hindu and Buddhist thought. While his remarks to Chang do not add greatly to what he has already said in the Quintet, they are easier to grasp in this much less complex work and for that reason useful. See A Smile in the Mind's Eye 23-29.

12 Trans. by G.R.S. Mead and quoted in Fragments of a Faith Forgotten 75.

13 James Carley remarks that, "like the gnostics, . . . Durrell shows a metaphysical interest in the structure of the word. The gnostic systems all visualize a hierarchical universe whose workings are understood only through a complex arcane verbal knowledge. Both The Alexandria Quartet and The Avignon Quintet take physical models of the universe and explore their linguistic ramifications: in each series, the form is a logical--or at least psychological and philosophical--manifestation of contemporary theories of knowledge" ("The Avignon Quintet and Gnostic Heresy" 229). This may well be the reason why Durrell has chosen "grammar" as the metaphor for Gnosticism. However, it is worth adding that some formulations of Gnosticism (for example, those of Monoimus and Marcus) show an equal interest in number systems, which is hardly surprising in view of their Pythagorean associations.





### Chapter Three

#### **From Gnostics and Knights Templar to Nazis: the "rotting palimpsests of the past."**

Just as the religious principles of Gnosticism inform the content of the novels which comprise The Avignon Quintet, so do its temporal concepts inform their structure. Time is not, as the Greeks envisaged it, an indefinite succession of cycles which, by their recurrence, assure the permanence of things within the visible world, and hence emulate the perfect immobility of the divine; nor is it the finite, linear and, above all, purposeful, progression from genesis to judgement urged by Christianity. For both these formulations assume a relationship between the temporal universe of matter and the atemporal essence of the heavens which the Gnostic cosmogony denies. It operates, indeed, on the quite contrary premise that, precisely because the phenomenal world is the product of a lie, it cannot partake, in any respect, of the order which characterizes the Light-realm. Thus time, since it results from the imperfect productions of the Demiurge, is a degradation of the spirit--neither the image of, nor the means to, its



redemption. Salvation is correspondingly seen as a condition exterior to time, achieved momentarily through the individual apprehension of immanence, and ultimately in the redemption which follows from that illumination. This latter notion is, of course, explicit in the sexual philosophy articulated by Sebastian Affad, for congress is significant to the degree that it liberates man and woman from their temporal prison. Clearly, however, the more prolonged state in which they reside is one of abhorrent servitude to time and matter. It is important to examine the terms of this experience more closely, in order to establish its impact on the structure of The Avignon Quintet.

For the Gnostic, as Henri-Charles Puech remarks,

time, whose instants engender and destroy one another, in which each moment arises only to be engulfed in the next moment, in which all things appear, disappear, and reappear in a twinkling, without order, without aim or cessation or end--time contains within it a rhythm of death beneath an appearance of life.

In its radical disjunction from the eternity of the Light-realm time is itself a lie--one, moreover, designed to deceive man into procreation, and hence perpetuation of its thrall. As if this were not enough, those to whom gnosis is denied in one existence are condemned to yet others, through a series of reincarnations in which they must work out their destiny before they can resume their place in the pleroma. To this extent time participates in the Hellenic conception of a cycle, but, far from being beautiful in its fidelity to the motion of the celestial spheres, it is now an



interminable revolution that, by its very remorselessness, reveals the hand of Jehovah. Nor is it redeemed, as in Christianity, by the advent of a Saviour who intervenes in time and thus achieves a historic existence, for the Jesus who figures in Gnostic soteriology is never made flesh. He is instead, according to this doctrine of "docetism," a phantom whose efficacy is not concrete but symbolic.<sup>2</sup> As Akkad informs Toby, he "is simply a cipher for us. He has no connection with what you call Our Saviour" (Monsieur 130). This view is obviously consistent with the Gnostic conviction that no sustained contact exists between the worlds of darkness and light; a Christ who is not incarnate can never be subject to temporality. But it also demonstrates a characteristic tendency to mythopoesis. Events in the pleroma, being antecedent to time, are myth, while events in the material universe occur within time and are therefore history. Both time and history, as constructs of the Demiurge, refute the possibility of a progressive tradition; they supply only those "rotting palimpsests of the past" in which man's recurring misery is confirmed (Monsieur 249).

Two aspects of this Gnostic perspective are particularly relevant to our understanding of time in the Quintet. On a microcosmic scale, the protagonists shift from one persona to another, one life to another, and often, indeed, endure quite contradictory fates. Rob Sutcliffe, for example, is made to die in Monsieur, to exist only as a



figment of Aubrey Blanford's imagination in Livia, and to achieve concrete reality in Constance, although he is once again consigned to the frustrating role of alter ego in Quinx. Similarly, Pia is a conflation of the two sisters, Livia and Constance, while the Le Nogres, condemned to death and insanity respectively in the first volume, reappear in Constance surprisingly healthy for their past tribulations. But the explanation for this somewhat unusual conduct lies in Blanford's avowed intention to write "a series of books through which the same characters move for all the world as if to illustrate the notion of reincarnation" (Livia 41). And so they do, materializing in discontinuous form to work out a different destiny in which, it is to be hoped, they will more nearly approach redemption.

Yet, if the individual histories of the protagonists exemplify this tendency to reincarnation, so too does the universal history in which they are participants. For the microcosm is a faithful replica of the macrocosm, and events prove just as susceptible to permutation as the people to whom they occur. Thus the Nazi crusade for "a new order of things which would be more in keeping with the order of nature" eventually collapses into the Templar "tradition of chivalry" (Constance 42 & 237), which, in its turn, collapses into the Gnostic quest for illumination. Equally, the inquisition to which Affad must answer for his lapse from Gnosticism recalls those other inquisitions conducted under the aegis of the cross and swastika. A common retreat





into myth, prompted by fanatical and often totally misguided aspirations, results in actions that alike reveal their "heart of darkness." Various characters claim that their respective movements have actually been inspired by each other. Smirgel, for example, insists that Hitler's real aim is to create an inversion of the Templar Order, while both Toby and Quatrefages believe the Knights Templar to have been secret Gnostics. But the principle that unites these disparate moments in time is one of repetition rather than succession. Humanity does not progress through its errors--a lesson made painfully clear by the very immediacy of the Nazi regime--so much as it reenacts past follies in different form. History "repeats itself eternally . . . . In the history books it will always be a Friday the thirteenth" (Constance 363).<sup>3</sup>

On both a personal and a universal level, then, the idea of recurrence pervades the structure of The Avignon Quintet. Ironically, however, what the characters strive most to emulate is frequently the very opposite of what they actually become. They duplicate the past in precisely the roles against which they have defined themselves, and thus perpetuate the same values they seek to overthrow. In particular is this true of the Nazis, who claim as their inheritance a version of Gnosticism, only to demonstrate, in their real allegiance to National Socialism, the antithesis of every Gnostic ideal. The connections which Durrell weaves between the Gnostics and Nazis are two-fold in nature; they



may loosely be distinguished as mythological and psychological. Working in the dimensions of myth, he suggests that the Gnostics were the spiritual precursors of the Knights Templar. Hence, the Germans, having determined to replace the Templar Order with their own, invoke an inversion of the existing moral and political structure. But the practical consequences of the Nazi movement indicate that they have inverted Gnosticism itself, and have thereby imitated the Judaism which they so despise. In short, the Aryan myth merely prolongs "this materialist funeral of living man" (Livia 162).

The psychological reasons for the German defection are rooted in a similar ancestry. Durrell depicts the influence of the Gnostics as a continuous tradition from the time of the troubadours, although it has been subjected during the course of its history to several bizarre revisions. Specifically, he portrays the response to Gnosticism as a complex dialectic between idealism and cynicism, which results in a perversion of the original ideal. In this latter thesis, he has clearly been swayed by the arguments of Denis de Rougemont, who sees in the Nazi regime a resurrection and corruption of the Gnostic desire for death. It is here that Durrell's perspective primarily departs from that adopted by de Rougemont, for Durrell represents the subversion of the Germans as so complete that they correspond, rather, to those who have butchered their opponents in the name of Judeo-Christianity. The two



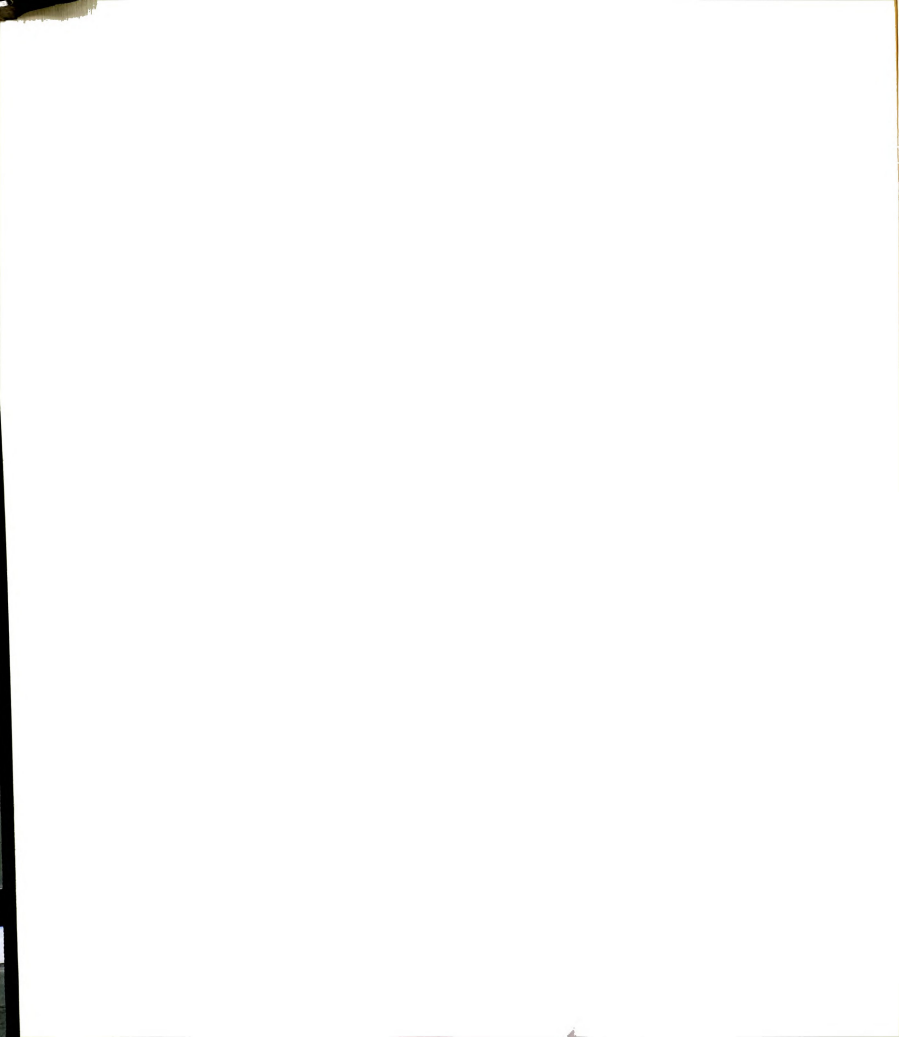
dimensions on which the narrative functions are obviously related, but it is helpful to consider them separately. The first part of this chapter accordingly addresses the mythology which underlies the history of the Knights Templar and National Socialism. The second part traces Durrell's application of de Rougemont's ideas, and hence the psychology which culminates in the Nazi war machine. Both perspectives ultimately confirm the malefic recurrence of the past.

#### **From Knights Templar to National Socialists: A Mythology**

The heavy hand of the Demiurge is especially apparent in the story of the Knights Templar, for, as Toby Goddard explains, on

Friday the thirteenth in [October] 1307, in conformity with the lettres de cachet sent out by King Philippe le Bel to all the seneschals of France . . . the 5,000 field officers of the Templar order . . . were arrested at the instigation of the Chancellor of France, Guillaume de Nogaret. (Monsieur 237)

Accused of heresy and homosexuality, the knights were tortured with a brutality that appalled even their contemporaries, and by 1312 the destruction of the Order was complete. There seems actually to have been little concrete evidence in support of those allegations, and it is therefore more probable that, as the bankers for much of western Europe, they were the victims of a "put up" case to acquire their wealth. This was, at any rate, the prevailing view amongst those who were not Philip's henchmen. It is



also the opinion expressed by Lord Galen, when he remarks with an irony of which he is sublimely unaware, that "the burning question for the investigators who tortured them was financial rather than ecclesiastical" (Livia 129). But the primary argument informing the Quintet is clearly based upon a subsequent accommodation of history to concur with Philip II's official version of the Templars' guilt and even, indeed, to exaggerate it with claims of a secret Gnostic conspiracy.<sup>4</sup> This is the perspective urged by Toby,

that there was in fact a Templar heresy, contracted perhaps in the Orient . . . . While they were outramer in the service of the Cross they became contaminated with the secret gnostic beliefs which coloured their notions of good and evil and which qualified their allegiance to the Pope and Christendom. (Monsieur 240)

Toby's assertion that the Knights Templar "were a degenerated valentinian order," and that the idols they allegedly worshipped "represented the eons" (Monsieur 245), closely resembles the claims made by Joseph Hammer, an eighteenth century orientalist whose imagination exceeded his scholarship. In the Mystery of Baphomet Revealed, Hammer resurrects the idea formerly propounded by a German Masonic bookseller, Friedrich Nicolai, that the "Templar Masons, through the medieval Templars, were the eventual heirs of an heretical doctrine which originated with the early Gnostics" (Partner, The Murdered Magicians 129). Nicolai, no less prone to fantasy than Hammer, argued that the etymology of Baphomet, chief amongst the Templar idols, was a compound of two Greek words meaning "baptism" and





"spirit"; not, as it is in fact, a corruption of the Middle French for Mohammed. Toby, of course, entertains this possibility that the name comes "from bàphe metéós, the baptism of wisdom" (Monsieur 245). But it is to Hammer's more extensive mythopoeisis that he owes the remaining ideas for his proposed dissertation. Hammer suggests a connection between the Persian Order of Assassins and the Knights Templar, finding the latter "convicted by their own monuments as guilty of apostasy, idolatry and impurity, and of being Gnostics or even Ophites" (Partner 139). He interprets the accusations of sodomy made during the trial of the Templars with similar licence, and supplies evidence of a sexual depravity corresponding in nature to the equally fictitious orgies imputed by Epiphanius to the original Gnostics.

Toby is obviously faithful to this romantic vision--or, rather, revision--of the Templar story, both in reading to Bruce from his notes, and in concluding that the knights "had gone too far, clear beyond the Orphics, beyond the double sex, the gnostic two, Tiresias and all that bedlam." From his perspective, however, the Templars have been lured into evil. Losing their balance, they "plunged into this new and terrifying darkness where they could realise all flesh as excrement only, decay as the only truth, death as the great Motive of the usurping godhead" (Monsieur 295). Quatrefages expresses the opposite point of view. A Faustian figure with good reason to fear that midnight visitor "come



to propose some sort of compact with the Devil" (Livia 156), he also believes that the Templars were Gnostics.<sup>5</sup> But, in his opinion,

The knights were systematically destroyed by the hooded anonymous butchers of the Inquisition in order to secure the . . . pre-eminence of matter and will in the world . . . . They were accused of every kind of sorcery, whereas the only conjuring they indulged in was the flat refusal to continue living the great lie. (Livia 161-162)

Quatrefages has been employed by Lord Galen to find the Templar treasure, which was allegedly buried beneath a quincunx of olive trees to prevent its annexation by Philip II. Beginning "in good economic faith," he subsequently realises that Galen and his business associates, in hunting for substantive wealth, "have reduced the whole thing to a vulgar matter of fric, of booty. They have missed the whole point of this tremendous apostasy" (Livia 161). As he explains to the dubious Blanford, "our search for the quincunx of trees concerns another sort of treasure" (Livia 163).

In fact, buried treasure is a prominent and recurring feature of the Templar myth. So too is the diversity of opinion about its form. As Peter Partner observes, the "more high-minded . . . may have interpreted the hidden gold as a symbol of heavenly wisdom, but thousands of greedier and more literal-minded persons took the allusions to point to real gold and real treasure" (The Murdered Magicians 111-112). It is to Joseph Hammer's inventive brain that Quatrefages owes his particular conception of the Templar



wealth. For Hammer, in a departure from the existing stories entirely his own, claimed that the medieval Grail legend was actually Gnostic in origin. Basing his argument on Wolfram of Eschenbach's Parzifal, in which the knights who seek the Holy Grail are called Templeisen, he concludes that the legend describes the Knights Templar, and that the Grail itself symbolizes Gnostic illumination. With the assistance of Nicolai's linguistic fictions about Baphomet, he even manages to incorporate King Arthur and the Round Table in his theory of a continuous Gnostic tradition (Partner 141-142). Despite the obscurity of his publication, Hammer's ideas were successfully transmitted to early twentieth century anthropologists like Sir James Frazer and Jessie Weston. Through the work of the latter, these ideas found a new, and more literary, application. One such instance is, of course, T. S. Eliot's poem, The Waste Land, which was partly inspired by Weston's From Ritual to Romance.<sup>6</sup> But clearly Quatrefages also comes from this syncretistic pattern of thinking. As Smirgel later explains to Constance, he is

deeply steeped in the lore of the gnostics and the Templars. All this apparent rubbish had great symbolic importance for him--he felt himself to be on the track of the Grail, the Arthurian grail, nothing less. The treasure might have been a simple wooden cup or a priceless chalice or a loving cup buried by the knights; it could have been the cup out of which Jesus drank at the Last Supper. (Constance 236)

The unlucky clerk, tortured by the Nazis to reveal secrets he has never possessed, interprets his experience in



terms of the persecution to which the Knights Templar were subjected: "Now he had fallen into the hands of the new Inquisition, though the priests of the day wore field-grey and bore swastikas as badges and amulets" (Constance 2). Confined eventually in the sanatorium at Montfavet, after a mental collapse he perhaps feigns to escape further torture, Quatrefages is again disturbed by

the projections of troubled memory, once full of armoured knights riding down infidels in a gorgeous array of plumes and helms--like great fowls on horseback; now the same space peopled with the dark-robed exemplars of the new Inquisition, thirsty for booty, not for knowledge. (Constance 365)

But Smirgel, whose work as a double agent also brings him to Montfavet, expresses a view no less romantic in its opposition. Selling information to the Egyptians, he nonetheless subscribes to the orthodox Nazi position. Indeed, he tells Constance, with all the conviction of a genuine convert, that Hitler's real interest is "a lost tradition of chivalry which he wishes to re-endow and make a base for a new European model of knighthood. But of a black order, not white" (Constance 236).

What seems to Quatrefages an inquisition is thus, for Smirgel, a quest to replace the Knights Templar with a Nazi "order of black chivalry." Ironically, though, the very method he outlines to Constance, in explaining the purpose of the Nazi regime, is drawn from the same Gnosticism for which the Templars were condemned as "a heretical sect convicted of religious malpractice" (Constance 272). Arguing





that the inversion of contemporary values will lead to the recovery of an older mythical order, Smirgel predicates the exhaustion of evil through its actual commission, in a manner analogous to that urged by some of the early Gnostics:

You cannot belittle the enormity of the evil we have unleashed in order to outface it; we Germans are a metaphysical race par excellence--beyond good and evil stands the new type of man the Fuhrer has beckoned up. But so that he perfects himself we must first go back and start from the wolf so to speak. We must become specialists in evil until the very distinctions are effaced. Then he will come, the new man whom Nietzsche and Wagner divined. (Constance 236)

Just as Gnosticism inverts the existing moral structure in its denial of the material world, so does Smirgel's articulation of the Nazi philosophy claim inversion as the means to an illumination which is heterodox in origin. Exhorting Constance to understand the beauty of the New Order, he explains,

We are not washed in the blood of the Christian lamb, but in the blood of inferior races out of which we shall fashion the slaves which are necessary to fulfil our designs. It is not cupidity or rapacity which drives the Führer but the desire for once to let the dark side of man have his full sway, stand to his full height. Seen in this way Evil is Good, don't you see? (Constance 237)

Quite naturally, Constance does not see anything of the kind. Appalled by his vision of destruction, she perceives Smirgel as "a praying mantis, with all the mechanical fury of such a thing in love" (Constance 237). Her words recall Akkad's conviction that this insect, which "devours its male



even while it is fecundating her" (Monsieur 137), is but one more instance of the evil that the demiurge has introduced. Thus, despite the fact that Smirgel advocates a fanatical transgression of the moral norms which has its basis in Gnosticism, he and his fellow Nazis are actually the faithful, if unwitting, servants of Jehovah.

Smirgel's inversion of the Templar Order to justify the New Order of the Nazi regime results, therefore, in a perversion of Gnosticism. It is typical of the ironies which abound, however, that if the Germans least resemble what they think to emulate, they are indeed implicated by a similarity with the tradition they oppose. For the history of National Socialism depends as much upon an act of mythopoesis as that to which the story of the Knights Templar was subjected during the so called Age of Reason. Moreover, both National Socialism and the "Templarism" which then abounded owe a good part of their vitality to that master of fabrication, the Abbé Augustin de Barruel, a French Jesuit whose work spawned the Protocols of Zion. Barruel's massive five-volume text, Mémoire pour servir à l'histoire du Jacobinisme, which he published between the years 1797 and 1798, was a diatribe against the Knights Templar, Freemasons and Bavarian Illuminati. In his fevered imagination, the Templars had survived as a secret society, pledged to the destruction of monarchies, the papacy, and all other institutions in which power was vested. Its pernicious influence had culminated, indeed, in the French



Revolution. Barruel made no mention of the Jews in this work, but in 1806 he enthusiastically decided to redress the omission, after receiving a letter which claimed that the Revolution was really part of a Jewish conspiracy. By 1820, shortly before his death, Barruel was convinced that the Jews had designs upon not just France but the whole of Europe, and that in the Freemasons they had access to a network of communications which crossed national boundaries.

Barruel's letter was destined, after emendations that made it still more virulent, to form the basis for the Protocols. The history of their fabrication and dissemination is relevant to the Quintet only insofar as it informs Durrell's depiction of the Nazis. But their importance is indicated by his express desire to include them in an appendix to Constance ("Author's Note"). For the Protocols, "which outlined the Jewish plot to conquer the world, and the extraordinary Will of Peter the Great, equally a plot to redeem it through Pan-Slavism" (Constance 42-43), confirmed the existence, in Judaism and Communism, of a historically recognizable enemy against whom the Nazis could define their position. In particular, the evils of industrialization and technology, together with the poverty which often accompanied them, could all be laid at the door of the Jews, since the few who were visible tended to be successful in the more innovative areas of politics and commerce. Appealing, then, to romantic visions of a previous era when the Teutonic race was supreme, the Nazis found a



fertile climate in which to propagate the New Order. As Norman Cohn observes of their supporters,

When these people looked to the past, to the ideal state which they supposed to have preceded the modern age, they looked a very long way back. They looked far beyond throne and altar, back to an infinitely remote and almost entirely mythical world. For them "the Jew" was not only, or mainly, the destroyer of kings and the enemy of the Church--he was above all the age-old antagonist of the German peasant, he was the force which for two thousand years had been undermining the true, original German way of life. Historical Christianity itself was a Jewish creation which had helped to destroy the archaic German world; and now capitalism, liberalism, democracy, socialism, and the urban way of life were continuing this process.<sup>7</sup>

The same romantic retreat into a cloud cuckoo land of mythical origin explains Livia's rhetoric. In her recently discovered enthusiasm for the Nazi cause, she tells Blanford,

With the death of Goethe the new world was born, and under the aegis of Judeo-Christian materialism it transformed itself into the great labour camp that it is. In every field--art, politics, economics--the Jew came to the forefront and dominated the scene. Only Germany wants to replace this ethos with a new one, an Aryan one, which will offer renewed scope for the old values as exemplified by Goethe's world. (Livia 109)

Dismissing "all the Jewish brokers of psychoanalysis" as part of a "barren mechanism [which] betrays its origins in logical positivism" (Livia 110), she, like Smirgel, equates the Nazi movement with the Orphic tradition, in which Uranus must be castrated before Aphrodite can triumphantly emerge from the waves. Yet the sterility of their mutual vision is obvious, for the only value which the Nazi war machine





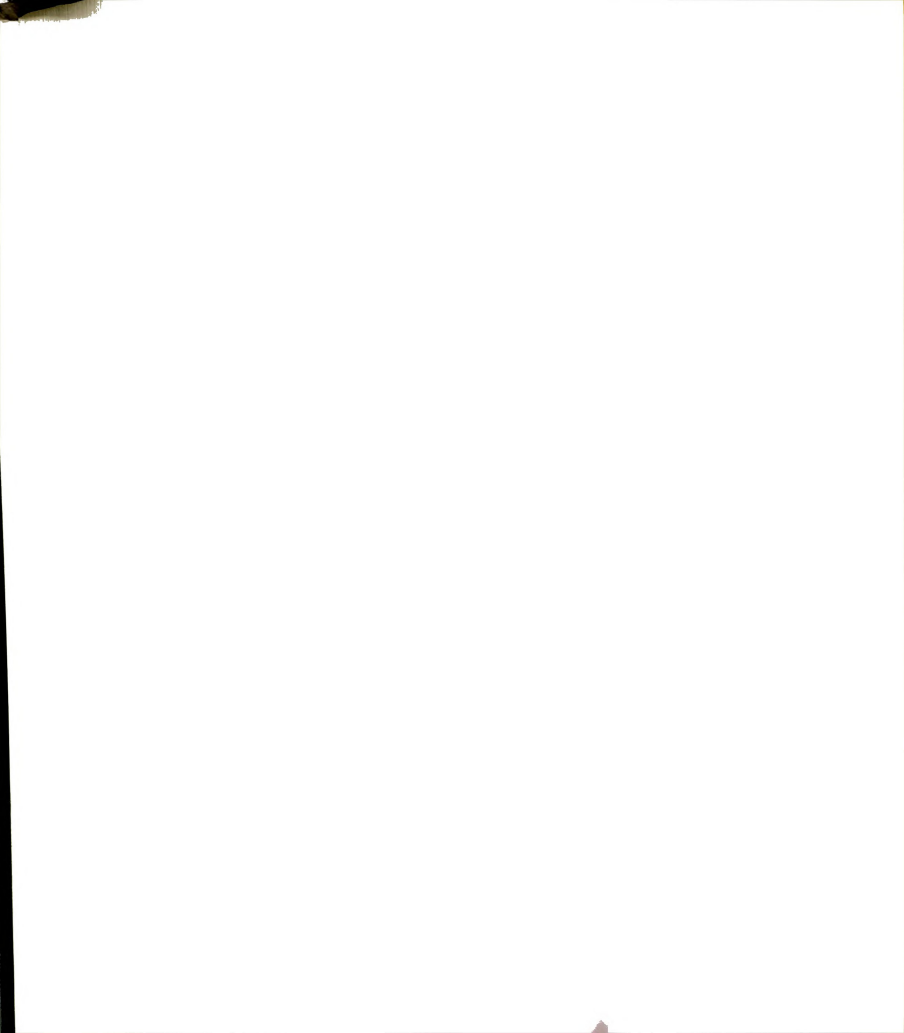
upholds is death, and Livia, at least, is one of its casualties.

Perhaps the supreme irony of the regime she espouses, however, is its hidden desire to become what it professes to hate most of all. The Nazis replace the "great labour camp" of Judeo-Christianity not with that "old world of humanism and liberalism and faith" to which Livia aspires (Livia 109), but with the concentration camps of Auschwitz, Dachau and Belsen. As Toby perceives with an acuity greater than Livia has shown, what the Germans really intend is to establish themselves as the new elite:

They want to be the Chosen People--they have announced the fact. They want to do away with the Jews so that they can take their place . . . . The Chosen Race! Whose blood is thicker than whose? Washed in the blood of whose lamb if I may ask? This is where Luther's great worm bag has led them. (Constance 319)

The accuracy of his remarks is in fact substantiated by no less a person than Hitler, whose conversations with Hermann Rauschning were published by the latter in his book Hitler Speaks. There Hitler comments, "I have read the Protocols of the Elders of Zion and it simply appalled me. The stealthiness of the enemy, and his ubiquity. I saw at once that we must copy it--in our own way of course" (Cohn, "Introduction" xxiv).

But what results from this Nazi paranoia is a copy only in the sense that it replicates the "barren mechanism" for which Livia has blamed the Jews, and thus indeed betrays its origins in myth. Moreover, the technological dreams of Lord



Galen, for all that he conforms to the German stereotype of the Jew, are exceedingly benign when compared with the Nazi machine for destruction. Vulgar and materialistic though he may be, Galen visualizes a world founded on childhood readings like The Romance of Steam, in which he has learned that the "steam-engine is a mighty power for Good" (Livia 118). In contrast, General Von Esslin gains a "schoolboyish pleasure" from the sight of his amassed tanks:

for him the thought of them and of their crews was one of joy unredeemed by any reservation. The 10th Brigade, the 7th Panzers--this vast grouping of steel was breath-taking in its battle-power, its beetle-power. The slither of mesh as the caterpillars cackled across the asphalt of major highways, the roar and slither of the engines--all this was a Wagnerian paeon of malevolent power which would soon be unlocked. (Constance 34)

Yet, in succumbing, like his fellow Nazis, to a relish for the technology of death, Von Esslin actually reneges upon the originally romantic impulse of the Aryan myth. The full extent of that betrayal is revealed by the role in which humanity is now recast. Man is no longer conceived as part of an organic whole, or an incarnate fragment of the divine spirit. On the contrary, he is reduced to a mere cog in the machine, for "the mighty rhythm engendered by the Grand Army in movement is irresistible, is all-engulfing. They were all diminished as individuals, shorn of their personal responsibility by the power of its motion." Caught up in the "coils and meshes" of this great apparatus for war, the Germans are swept along "as if on the breast of some great river . . . . But a river of chain-mail, a river of meshed



steel" (Constance 44), the antithesis of those "great rivers of the human sensibility threading the jungles and swamps and forests of lost continents. The big rivers like Nile or Mississippi ferrying their human freight from one world to another" (Livia 37).

The Nazi quest for a Teutonic ideal uncompromised by the Luciferian elevation of matter to which history testifies is doomed, then, to repeat history rather than to break with precedent. Its inversion of the moral order which rules the modern world results only in perversion and death; not in the recovery of a pre-Lapsarian realm in which man fulfills his own divinity. Indeed, the reverse is true, since the New Order proves instead an awesome illustration of man's capacity for diabolism. Under the auspices of National Socialism quest becomes inquisition. The affinity between the two experiences is actually apparent in their etymological kinship, for both are cognates of the Old French queste, deriving from the Latin quaestio, or question. Their juxtaposition reveals that the vocabulary we choose to delineate people and things is determined by our ideological vantage point. In other words, something may be either quest or inquisition, depending upon the referential framework of the observer.

Durrell invites us to learn from the example of the Nazis how essential it is to question our own ideological assumptions, to ensure that the rhetoric of redemption does not, in fact, become the instrument of our damnation. But



his underlying pessimism about humanity is obvious from his depiction of what replaces the Germans. Quatrefages, incarcerated at Montfavet under a regime he perceives as the "new Inquisition," unthinkingly perpetuates its values when he leads the inhabitants of the Dangerous Ward on yet another quest to Avignon. Criminals and lunatics, "each with his personal vocabulary, the triumph of his destiny over reason," these are the "crusaders of the new reality!" (Constance 374). Dubbed, moreover, as Michael Begnal observes, "with the names of some of the original Templars--Baudoin St.-Just, Tortville, Jean Taillefer, Raynier de Larchant, Pairaud, and Molay" ("The Mystery of the Templars in The Avignon Quintet" 5), they suggest that history is inescapable; that it will always describe "the victory of divine entropy over the aspirations of the majority--the hope for a quiet life this side of the grave" (Constance 363).

#### **From Manichaeans to Nazis: A Psychology of Passion**

If the mythological level of Durrell's narrative suggests that National Socialism is simultaneously an imitation and inversion of Gnosticism, so too does his depiction of its psychology. A self-proclaimed "burglar" of ideas (Lyons & Antrim 45), he is indebted for some of his notions on romance to Denis de Rougemont's Love in the Western World, a provocative work published in 1940, and substantially revised for a second edition in 1956.





Distinguishing "pagan" Eros from Christian Agape, de Rougemont claims that the myth of Tristan and Iseult glorifies self-destructive passion in a consciously encoded transmission of Manichaeism by the troubadours; and that its gradual secularization has resulted in the failure of Christian love within the institution of marriage. In particular, he sees the lure of the East, which "pursues understanding in the progressive abolition of diversity," as responsible for the rise in recent years of the totalitarian regime.<sup>8</sup> A desire to obliterate the individual self is, he argues, the fundamental impulse of such movements. In effect, they have translated the erotic passion for death which the Tristan myth disguises into the realm of politics.

It is interesting to note that Durrell first read Love in the Western World in 1957, and appears even then to have been considering its potential use for his own fiction. In a characteristically ebullient telegram to Richard Aldington, he remarks that de Rougemont's text contains

A LOT ABOUT LANGUAGE D'OC AND A NEW THEORY OF  
PROVENCAL LOVE POETRY, CATHARS' BELIEFS AND  
HERESIES ETC. DO YOU KNOW ANY GOOD BOOK ALONG  
THESE LINES? THAT THE LOVE-CONVENTIONS OF THE  
POETRY DISGUISED A KIND OF METAPHYSIC OF MYSTICAL  
ILLUMINATION SHARED BETWEEN LOVERS? AND THAT  
CONTINENCE NOT LICENCE WAS THE TIP? IT SOUNDS VERY  
ODD . . . . (Literary Lifelines 26)

The more cautious Aldington, obviously unimpressed by Durrell's terse summary of its content, responds doubtfully in a letter dated 24 August 1957,

I don't know the De Rougemont book, but should say the thesis is questionable. If you read the poems of the troubadours, and not merely theories about



them, it is obvious that in the pre-Albigensian Crusade period they are pour le bon motif, i.e. the poets think it would be a good idea to have their mistresses naked in bed. But after the atrocious crime of the Albigensian Crusade and under the influence of R.C. shifts the metaphysical-mystical was developed, as you have doubtless read in Dante's Vita Nuova. The original Provençal amour courtois was certainly taken from the Arabs of Spain, who were far indeed from mysticism, though I believe they started that too. (Literary Lifelines 28)

Aldington's reservations are quite legitimate, if somewhat reductively expressed, but Durrell seems to have forgotten the warning.<sup>9</sup> Writing again, some three years later, in a letter of 20 July 1961, he remarks,

On Saturday we are being visited by Denis de Rougemont, a writer I much admire. I think you would be quite emballed if not actually degringled [toppled over] by his Love in the Western World--philosophic work. (Literary Lifelines 180)

In fact, it is productive to consider the content of Love in the Western World in some depth, since its thesis informs several of the more important connections in the Quintet, especially that between the Gnostics and the Nazis. Durrell has actually indicated the measure of his debt by dedicating Livia to its author. Beginning with the Tristan story, de Rougemont ends up encompassing the major part of western literature and military history in his argument, with a vision which is impressive for its sheer ambition alone! He suggests that Tristan and Iseult are not in love with each other, but rather with an ideal of love that is abetted by its very frustration. Indeed, neither is even capable of seeing the other as he or she actually is, for



both experience that other only in terms of the self. What they share is not love but narcissism. To fuel this passion, then, they must seek ever greater obstructions to its physical fulfillment. In overcoming externally imposed perils they affirm life. However, in subsequently creating self induced restrictions, they display a repressed desire for death. Hence Tristan marries the wrong Iseult, and by his celibacy subverts the institution of marriage, together with its life-affirming values. Erroneously believing that to die for love will somehow transfigure them, he and the true Iseult equate suffering with knowledge in a manner analogous to that of the mystics.

Thus analysed, the myth seems to de Rougemont to share certain correspondences with Gnosticism; specifically, in its essentially lyrical expression of a faith which cannot be objectively described, and a death-wish in conflict with the desire for sexual communion. But the similarity, he argues, is no accident, for the rhetoric of courtly love reached the Provencal poets at the same time that Manichaeism was spreading to fruition in the Albigensian heresy, and by the same routes. Moreover, the troubadours who composed and transmitted this poetry often sought patrons who were known for their Catharist sympathies. Both poets and patrons could safely communicate religious convictions disruptive to the predominant power structure by encoding them within a formal mode which disguised their true import. In short, he concludes,

the passionate love which the myth celebrates actually became in the twelfth century--the moment when it first began to be cultivated--a religion in the full sense of the word, and in particular a Christian heresy historically determined. (LWW 137)

References to this alleged link between the troubadours and the Gnostics occur throughout the whole of the Quintet.<sup>10</sup> Piers dresses for Christmas dinner at Verfeuille in "the narrow bootlace tie and the ribbon of the felibre" (Monsieur 59), a costume clearly intended by its association with the Provençal poets to undermine an overtly Christian celebration. Subsequently, he makes the connection more explicit, observing in his conversation with Bruce that

the cathars have always been self-elected and self-created gnostics. But what about the Courts of Love and their gradual extinction? The love the troubadours extolled made orthodoxy very thoughtful--in particular because it posited a new freedom for the woman, and a new role as Muse and refiner of the coarser male spirit. This was not to be relished by people who felt happier within the iron truss of the Inquisition . . . .  
(Monsieur 160)

Blanford too hints of a Gnostic heresy buried deep in the Provençal tradition of poetry. Encountering a genuine member of the Felibre on his first journey to Avignon, he is initially puzzled by the mysterious announcement of death with which Brunel is met. He adds only that he later "read a modern history of the Felibre . . . and discovered the names of that sad little group waiting under the ramparts of the city" (Livia 48).

Apparently, Blanford also realizes that narcissism supplies the foundation for his relationship with Livia,

since "what he saw was not Livia but his own transfigured version of her--the reflection of his love" (Livia 164). Like Rob Sutcliffe, whose passion for the unfortunate Pia is equally frustrated, he is at last compelled to admit that "the projection of one's own feelings upon the image of a beloved [is] in the long run an act of self-mutilation" (Monsieur 111). Nor are the two men alone in idealizing their sexual partners. When Constance, in the ecstasy of her infatuation with Sam, compares him to Donatello's David, Blanford immediately diagnoses her problem, observing from bitter experience that

Everyone sees himself or herself as somebody quite different. Hence the confusion because everyone is acting a part. He sees you as Iseult, whereas you are really Catherine of Russia. You see him as David, but I see only the eternal British schoolboy in love, elated because he is undressing his mother. (Constance 14)

Erotic love, as all the protagonists discover for themselves, is not knowledge of another so much as it is a reflection of the self. And the suffering it elicits is productive only upon reflection, being at best the means to self-knowledge.

Durrell's depiction of passion conforms thus far to the Tristan story as de Rougemont suggests it should be read, but he is indebted still more extensively to his source in the argument that ensues. De Rougemont's study of the various convolutions by which Manichaeism results in National Socialism appears to operate on the principle "Only connect," and Durrell, seeing rich fodder for his own work,

follows suit. Tracing successive "profanations" of the Tristan myth in western literature, de Rougemont identifies two related trends. Both, he argues, are present in the Roman de la Rose. The first part idealizes a distant lady in the manner established by the troubadours, while the second reacts against this excessive refinement with a cynical emphasis upon sensual pleasure. The "two Roses," as he calls them, in turn begot two distinct traditions. Dante and Petrarch, in whom the "language of Love had at length become the rhetoric of the human heart" (LWW 181), were descendants of Guillaume de Lorris. But the inversion of their extreme idealism produced an antithetical tradition in the salacious fabliaux. This conflict between material and spiritual values is exemplified by the Débat de l'âme et du corps, in which a

soul just parted from its body assails its erstwhile companion with bitter reproaches, alleging that if it is condemned to damnation the body is to blame. But the body retorts with a tu quoque (which has some justification!) So, keeping up their belated recriminations, the two go forward together into everlasting torment. (LWW 185)

Progressing through Shakespeare and Milton, in whose work he sees the vestiges of Arthurian romance, de Rougemont claims that by the seventeenth century its "mystical element was degraded into pure psychology" (LWW 193). Social order took precedence over the implicitly nihilistic features of romance, and the happy conclusions of comedy prevailed. A few writers, he argues, remained



faithful to the original implications of the myth in continuing to depict the suicidal aspect of passion, but by the eighteenth century its eclipse was complete. When the distinction between mind and body replaced that of body and soul, "the result was to divide a human being into intelligence and sex" (LWW 208), with a corresponding diminution in the importance of passion.

De Rougemont contends, however, that the desire for courtly love, and its concomitant experience of the transcendent, could not be so easily suppressed. It reappears in the shape of Don Juan, who discards his successive conquests in search of that one elusive woman with whom he can finally slake his passion. Deceived by his conviction that in the realm of the senses he can find the immanence he really seeks, Don Juan deliberately violates the rules of amour courtois through rape and infidelity, to end not in heaven but hell. De Rougemont sees him as the converse of Tristan and, in the contradiction between the two, an explanation for the peculiar moral philosophy advanced by the Marquis de Sade, whose ancestor, Hugues de Sade, married Petrarch's Laura. Caught between the anachronistic desire for ideal love and the cynicism of his age, de Sade tried to exorcise the tyranny of the senses through a debauchery intended to exhaust evil and ultimately redeem the purity of love. This analysis of de Sade recalls the version of Gnosticism articulated by Smirgel in his description of the Nazi position.

De Rougemont argues, in effect, that there is a three-fold movement, in which the inversion of idealism leads to a cynicism that is itself inverted to produce a perversion of the original ideal. His analysis illuminates the dilemma in which Durrell's characters find themselves, once they fall in love; and that they should do so in Avignon is particularly appropriate, since there "one is reminded that the Middle Ages are not so very far behind us--as a reality rather than an abstraction" (Monsieur 226). Medieval Avignon, with its conflict between Catharist Pure and degenerate Catholics, reveals just such a tension between idealism and cynicism in the history of religious love as exists in the erotic love experienced by the protagonists of the Quintet. Moreover, its past inhabitants were responsible for first expressing both romanticism and the sadism which is its perverted offspring. As Blanford remarks to Felix Chatto in their nocturnal wanderings,

It has one thing, this town, for me. The huge span of human aspiration and human weakness are [sic] symbolised by two figures from its bestiary, so to speak. I mean Petrarch's Laura who invented the perfect romantic love and the Marquis de Sade who carried it right back into its despairing infancy with the whip. What a couple of guardian angels! (Livia 88)

The juxtaposition is reinforced more poignantly for Blanford when Livia, in whom he mistakenly perceives a second Laura, takes him on a tour of the museum. There he sees some

medieval documents which mentioned the marriage of Petrarch's sweetheart, and hard by, some pages of handwriting torn from the letters of the Marquis



de Sade . . . . He had forgotten that both the libertine and the Muse were from the same family. (Livia 108)

Of course, Blanford actually marries his Laura and learns the error he has made. For Livia is in truth a female Don Juan, able only to be the recipient of love, and never its donor: "Yes, she gave herself, but it was only a smear of a woman who responded to the kiss. Affectively she was anaesthetic, her soul was rubberised" (Livia 20). Livia's promiscuity is motivated by a hunger for passion which, precisely because she cannot satisfy it sexually, she eventually transposes onto politics. This perversion of both her sexual preferences and her political alignments expresses an inversion of the idealism which characterizes Blanford. He acknowledges the kinship in admitting to Sutcliffe that

There are only two ways out of Avignon, the way up and the way down, and they are both the same. The two roses belong to the same family and grow on the same stalk--Sade and Laura, the point where extremes meet. (Constance 353)

In fact, all the protagonists must choose either the way up or the way down; whether, that is, to apply the serpentine force of passion to fulfillment of their own divinity or merely to sensual gratification. This renewal of the medieval debate "de l'âme et du corps" is specifically articulated by Blanford and Sutcliffe, in the roles of body and soul respectively. Originally conceived as "an imaginary author called S" (Livia 115), Sutcliffe suggests by his very name the serpentine power to which he gives voice.



Similarly, in claiming "like Tiresias [to have] breasts which see all, and a forked tail in the shape of a lightning conductor" (Livia 25), he expresses its potential either for salvation or for damnation. Indeed, he even illustrates the two alternatives in his own lives, the one culminating in infantile regression and death, the other in that final moment with its promise of "reality prime" (Quinx 201). Displaying a somewhat more independent and fractious turn of mind than his creator welcomes, then, Sutcliffe is the soul who retorts to Blanford's recriminations with his own Tu Quoque (Livia 25 & 53). He explicitly acknowledges this function as, together, they venture on their last book before "body and soul must end their association" (Quinx 21).

The dialogue continues in the example supplied by the other characters. Thus Sam, who reneges upon his commitment to Constance, is condemned to a death which, by its very futility, indicates the measure of his betrayal. Seduced by the excitements of war, he asserts that, beside combat, "love-making is a charming adventure, nothing more" (Constance 73). The belief he professes is clearly reiterated by his actual choice of profession. In deciding to stay a soldier, he directly opposes Constance, whose energy is devoted to the preservation of life, instead of its annihilation. It is no surprise that he should "feel a complete traitor to Constance, to all she believes in" (Constance 72), since he has indeed chosen the course of

immediate gratification. Killed by his own side in target practice, rather than dying with a "certificate for glory" (Constance 75), Sam illustrates the emptiness of his values through an equally meaningless death. He leaves Constance with the recognition that she too has deceived herself, for

they had been acting a part, the part of two golden immortals from some romantic opera. Now here they were, under the wheels of the Juggernaut--or rather, she was; in a sense he had escaped and left her to gather up the remains of the thought "death." (Constance 118)

This allusion to "some romantic opera" which culminates in the revelation of death and a corresponding revulsion on the part of Constance, is clearly derived from Love in the Western World, where de Rougemont concludes his survey of European literature with Wagner's Tristan und Isolde. He argues that if de Sade illustrates the myth in its most profane form, Rousseau was to reverse the trend by resuscitating its spiritual values. The German romantics followed his example and, in Tristan und Isolde, the religious content of the story reached its most complete articulation. But precisely because Wagner had "transgressed the taboo" to reveal its secret meaning (LWW 228), the myth now lost its true function, and hence its potency. All that survives, so de Rougemont suggests, is the degenerate middle class fiction of the "eternal triangle," in which cuckold, gigolo and bored housewife parody their counterparts in the original drama.

Though the myth may be "dead" in literature, however,





it has enjoyed a secondary existence in the analogous arena of war. Pointing out that in the rule of chivalry there existed a code of conduct applicable to the arts of both love and war, de Rougemont remarks on its social purpose in confining the lawless force of passion within a limiting framework. He analyses the history of war in Europe as a series of oscillations between idealism and cynicism, corresponding to the dialectical movement he sees in literature. But with the military developments of World War I, fighting ceased to be contained by the accepted formal modes for its control. In substituting total devastation for its earlier, symbolic role, war thus turned upon the instinct to which it owed its origin and, like erotic love, ceased to remain the theatre for passion.

Yet passion itself is indestructible, and has instead, de Rougemont argues, been displaced onto politics. In particular is this true of totalitarian regimes, where the personified Nation subsumes individual passions. Moreover, the existence of several totalitarian states supplies each with an obstruction to its fulfillment, so that the "real, tacit, and inevitable aim of the totalitarian elevation [is] therefore war, and war means death" (LWW 268). Citing the instance of Hitler, to whom the German masses responded as a woman to her suitor, de Rougemont recalls the prophetic words he wrote for his first edition of Love in the Western World: "It will need a superhuman Wagner to orchestrate the stupendous catastrophe of passion become totalitarian"



(270). Clearly, he sees in World War II the confirmation of his worst fears.

Durrell's depiction of the war is, of course, informed by this perspective. A profane version of Gnosticism supplies the metaphysical foundation for National Socialism in the Quintet, while Von Esslin reveals how the projection of personal passion onto the collective body of the state results in the abnegation of individuality. Nor is this merely a feature of the Nazi movement, since Sam, in fighting for the Allies, revels in the same "individual lack of responsibility [which] is so wonderful--it enables the whole race to act from its functional roots, in complete obedience" (Constance 73). But the danger of such a total abdication from personal accountability is obvious, for, as Durrell observes in an interview with Marc Alyn, "our political systems are structures that can be manipulated this way or that" (The Big Supposer 41). In the hands of a dictator, power redefines morality to serve its own needs and the individual conscience is suppressed. Hence, for the Nazis, Hitler becomes

the man-god of the future who was delineating for them the spiritual frontiers of the new estate. The prospects of the freedom these ideas offered made them feel buoyant and shriven; for all that they were going to do now the Führer offered them an absolution in advance. Belief--that was all that was necessary for them; the rest followed automatically. (Constance 40)

The abeyance of normal ethical considerations is traditionally an aspect of war, but it is equally



characteristic of love, as Blanford ironically recalls when, in the narration of Constance, he quotes that old adage, "All's fair in love and war!" (101). The Nazis express both forms of passion; "madly in love with the Leader" (Constance 100), they carry out his instructions with a fervor that exposes its erotic origins. Indeed, the vision of Hitler's triumphant procession through Paris is almost enough to evoke tears in the normally stiff-lipped Von Esslin. Similarly, Hitler appeals to Wagner's celebration of a romantic love in which the desire for union with the beloved extends to the willing sacrifice of the self in death:

He had consecrated a whole day to the convulsions of Wagner's music . . . . apparently wish[ing] it to be clear that the intellectual and emotional foundations of the present German postures and actions were to be traced to the artist. The spiritual justifications of the new faith were there. (Constance 33)

At the core of the Nazi experience there thus exists that desire for death which proves so abhorrent to Constance, and Hitler is the "superhuman Wagner" who orchestrates its fulfillment.

The fusion of eroticism and politics in war is illustrated on a smaller scale by General Von Esslin, who treats sexual intercourse as an extension of his military activities for the Nazi cause. His relationship with the Polish maidservant at his mother's home is based on a "silent combat" in which "she submitted, and the thought excited his cupidity; he overwhelmed her as his army would soon overwhelm her country and people, raping it, wading in



its blood" (Constance 37 & 38). Attracted by her "death-mask" face and hair that resembles the "sort of tresses which grow on Eastern corpses after death" (Constance 37), Von Esslin reveals the necrophilic quality of his lust. Moreover, in choosing the same sexual object as his father, he betrays a displaced desire for incest with his mother. It is no coincidence that, like Oedipus, he loses his sight; nor that this retribution should be exacted by Krov, the Polish slave whose action unwittingly avenges the servant's suicide.

Though Von Esslin inverts the chivalric code on which he was raised, and so becomes perverted in his sexual practices, he is relatively harmless in comparison with Fischer. As an officer in the Waffen S.S., Fischer has ample opportunity to indulge the "capacity for cruelty and mischief which [gives] him an almost sexual radiance" (Constance 182). A modern de Sade, he literally purchases Nancy Quiminal's body with the lives of his potential victims, and subjects her to humiliation for his own pleasure: "He could deprave, this man, simply by smiling" (Constance 180). Both Fischer and Von Esslin illustrate in their personal lives the pattern of conduct which the Nazis exemplify as a whole. The political and sexual deviations of which they are guilty reflect the extent to which they have subverted the true function of passion, by subduing it to sensual gratification at the expense of spiritual development. Idolizing Eros, they end by embracing Thanatos,

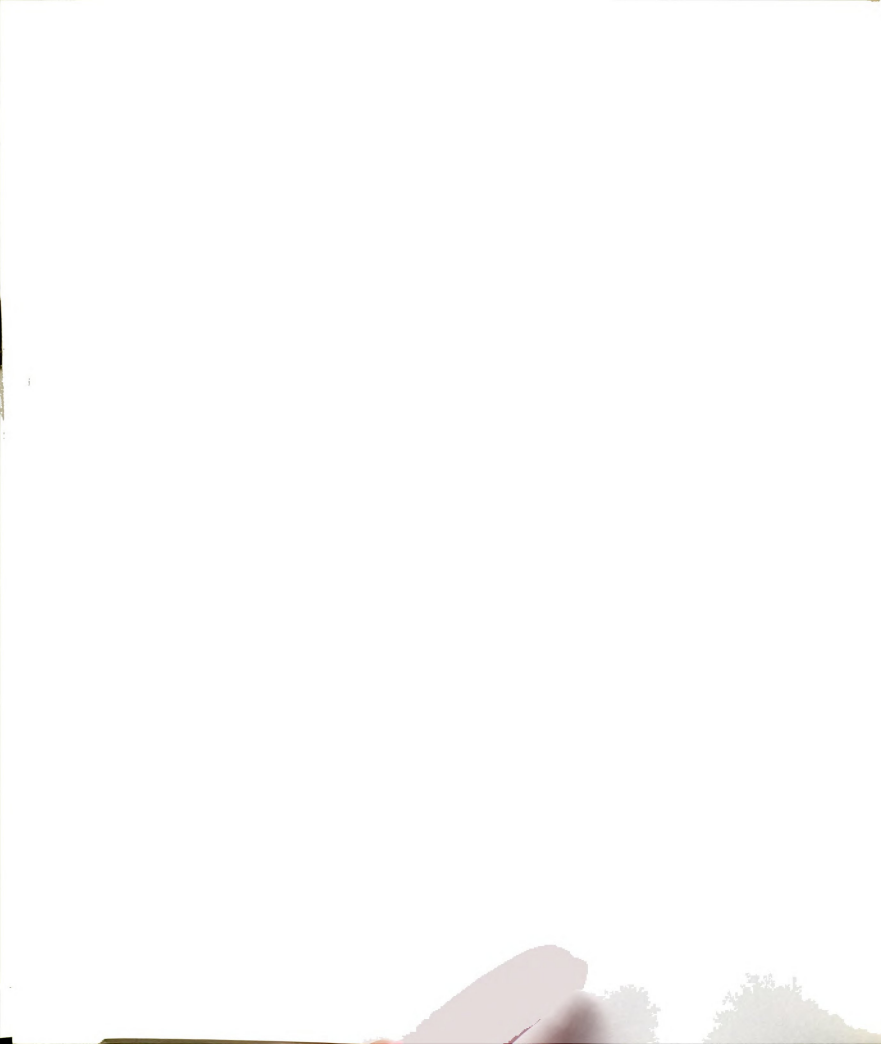




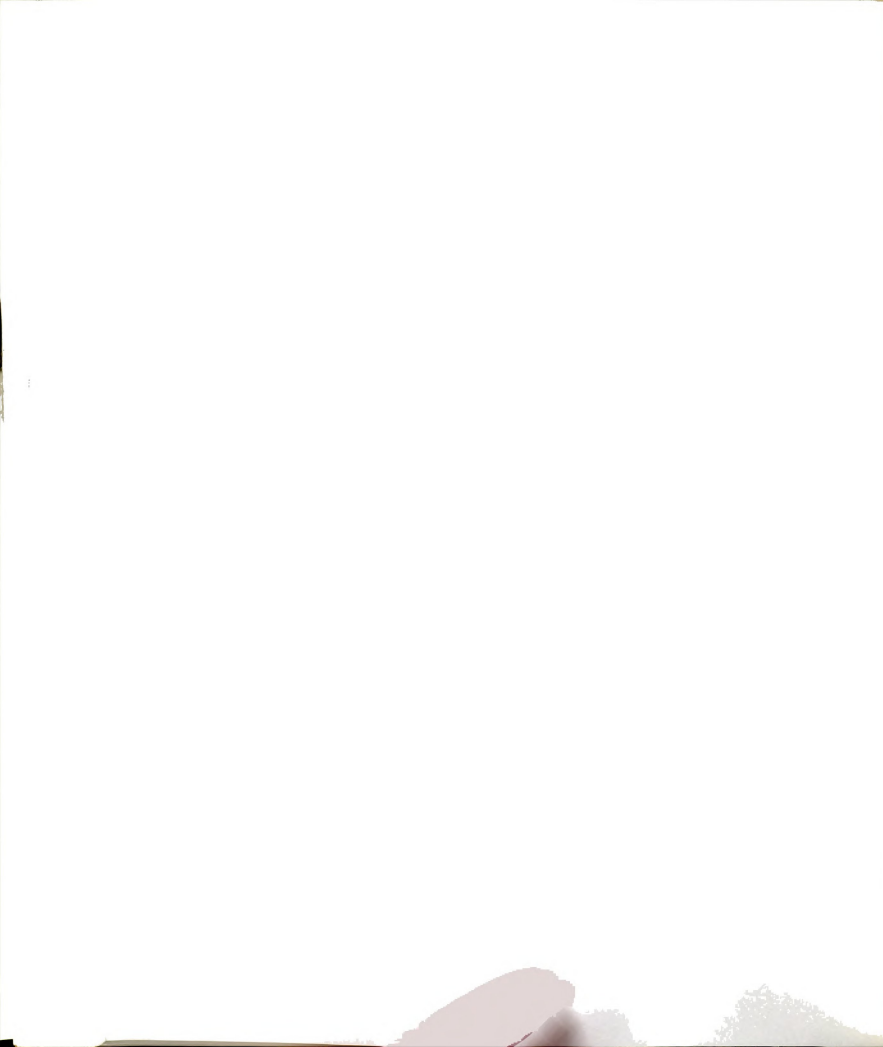
but theirs is the path to hell.

The grim spectacle of National Socialism which Durrell thus evokes is unquestionably colored by de Rougemont's Freudian synthesis of mythology and psychology. It is hardly surprising that Durrell's imagination should have been fired by such ideas, since his own inclination is likewise to seek a relation between events that results in a larger vision of reality. However, Durrell's conclusions about the Nazi regime ultimately differ from those of his source in one vital respect. Whereas de Rougemont sees in the Nazi phenomenon a resurgence of Gnosticism, admittedly perverted in form, Durrell insists that this perversion finally effects a reversion to all that implicates Judeo-Christianity. In their persecution of others, the Germans have merely replicated the persecution to which the Gnostics and Knights Templar were subjected under the banner of a Christian God. They have accordingly betrayed the myth which inspired them, to become the agents of evil. This is truly to repeat the past.

De Rougemont's answer to passion is, then, for Durrell, no answer whatsoever. Seeing Eros and Agape as mutually exclusive alternatives, de Rougemont turns to the very tradition which repels Durrell, concluding that "charitable love, Christian love" will save mankind from its romantic folly (LWW 311). Durrell is also profoundly suspicious of "crude antithetical thinking," which he perceives as "the



mark of the second-rate mind" (Quinx 41). Realizing, like de Rougemont, that "the target [is] not between the thighs," he insists upon the transfiguring quality of love, for the real target is "between the eyes--the pineal gland of the white vision" (Constance 136). Rejecting de Rougemont's solution, therefore, he searches for a third, transcendent principle of love, and finds it not in Agape but in alchemy.<sup>11</sup>



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Henri-Charles Puech, "Gnosis and Time" 65-66. This article is a particularly clear and helpful exposition of the highly complex Gnostic conception of time.

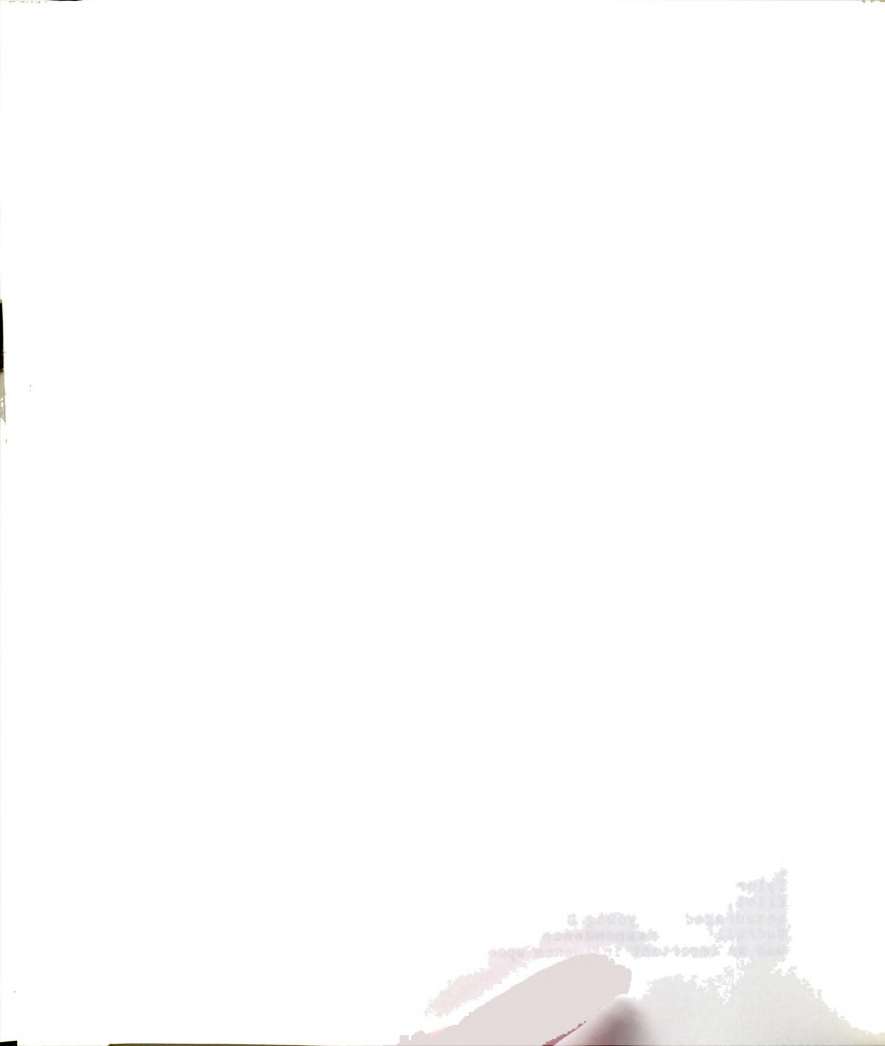
<sup>2</sup> The content of the Pistis Sophia underlines this difference between the Christian and the Gnostic perspective, since it alleges to report the teachings of Jesus over an eleven year period succeeding his resurrection.

<sup>3</sup> Oswald Spengler, whom Durrell has long admired, argues for a similar view, in claiming that "the expression-forms of world-history are limited in number, and that eras, epochs, situations, persons are ever repeating themselves true to type" (The Decline of the West II: 4).

<sup>4</sup> Introduction, The Murdered Magicians: The Templars and their Myth xxi. This is one of the best accounts available of both the limited historical evidence and the evolution of the myth surrounding the Knights Templar. Partner point out the complexity of the reasons for the downfall of the Templars, and emphasizes that the Order had incurred many enemies by its mingling of martial with religious values.

<sup>5</sup> In this context it is interesting to note that the legend of Simon Magus is generally regarded as one of the forerunners of the sixteenth century Faust tradition. According to various Christian commentators, his magic powers stemmed from a diabolical compact in which he had enslaved the spirit of a boy, "unsullied and violently slain, and invoked by unutterable adjurations," to assist him in his evil. For a discussion of Simon as the prototype for Faust, see the work of Philip Mason Palmer and Robert Pattison More in The Sources of the Faust Tradition: From Simon Magus to Lessing 9-41.

<sup>6</sup> In his "Preface" to A Key to Modern British Poetry Durrell remarks that "the main bias for [his] own thinking . . . has developed out of a study of anthropologists like Tylor, Frazer, Rivers, etc . . . ." (xii). In addition, T.S. Eliot, in his capacity as a director of Faber and Faber, encouraged the young Durrell in publishing The Black Book. Durrell's correspondence with Miller indicates that Eliot was an important influence upon him, and it is probable that



his first exposure to the work of such writers stems from this period in his life.

7 Cohn's "Introduction" to Herman Bernstein's book, The Truth about "The Protocols of Zion" xix. This is a brief but illuminating analysis of the conditions resulting in the Jewish Holocaust, and the part which the Protocols of Zion played in its history.

8 Love in the Western World 318. All subsequent references to this work will be included in the text in the abbreviated form LWW.

9 In fact, Aldington's reservations about Love in the Western World are as forcefully articulated by Joseph Campbell, who points out that, "whereas according to the Gnostic-Manichaeic view nature is corrupt and the lure of the sense to be repudiated, in the poetry of the troubadours, in the Tristan story, and in Gottfried's work above all, nature in its noblest moment--the realization of love is an end and glory in itself; and the senses, ennobled and refined by courtesy and art, temperance, loyalty and courage, are the guides to this realization" (Creative Mythology 176).

10 It is probable that Durrell has actually named the oasis to which the protagonists of Monsieur travel for the Gnostic rite of initiation after Marcabru, the Troubadour poet whose verse de Rougemont quotes: "Wise beyond doubt I hold him who divines what each word in my song means" (Love in the Western World 96). It is also possible that Durrell chose to alter the name to Macabru in order to suggest the macabre element of Gnosticism, but there is no evidence to confirm this speculation.

11 In his refusal to accept de Rougemont's binary structure Durrell actually comes close to the position articulated by Joseph Campbell in his criticism of Love in the Western World: "our theologians still are writing of agape and eros and their radical opposition, as though these two were the final terms of the principle of 'love': the former, 'charity,' godly and spiritual, being 'of men toward each other in a community,' and the latter, 'lust,' natural and fleshly, being 'the urge, desire and delight of sex.' Nobody in a pulpit seems ever to have heard of amor as a third, selective, discriminating principle in contrast to the other two. For amor is neither of the right-hand path (the sublimating spirit, the mind and the community of man), nor of the indiscriminate left (the spontaneity of nature, the mutual incitement of the phallus and womb), but is the path directly before one, of the eyes and their message to the heart" (Creative Mythology 177).





## Chapter Four

### **Alchemy and Individuation:**

**"what that bastard Jung is up to."**

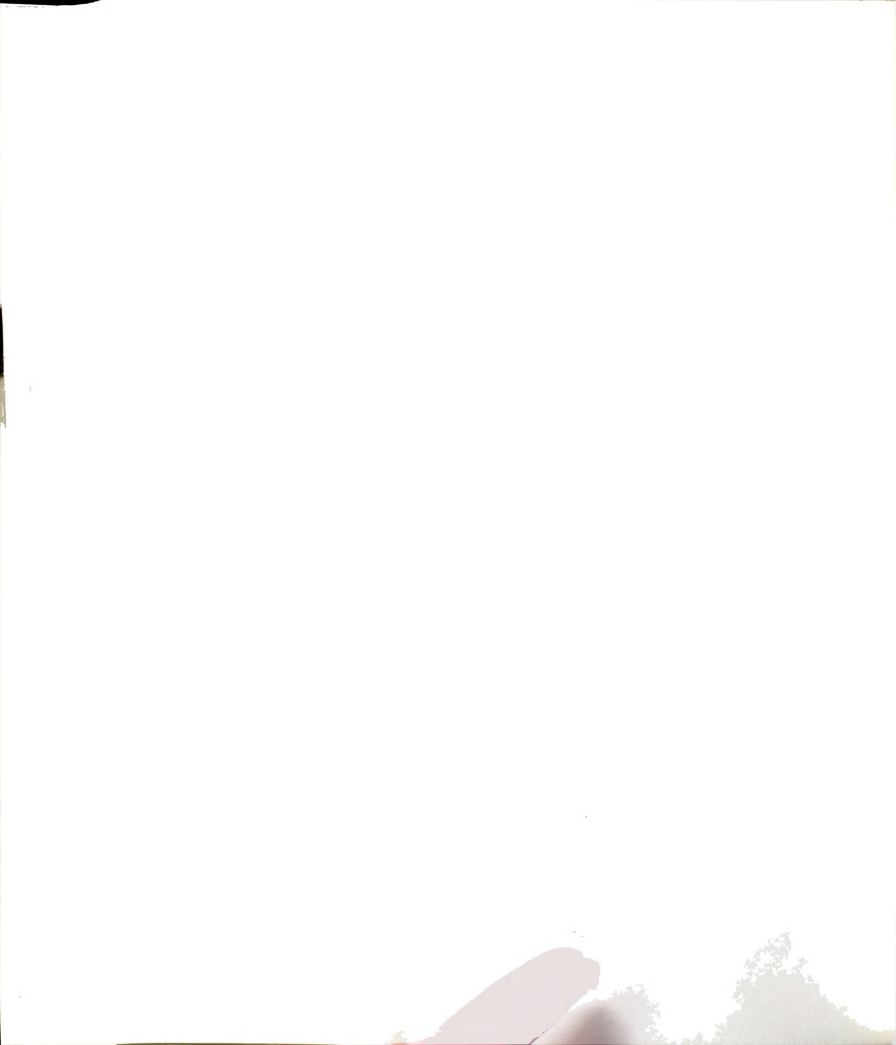
When Constance discusses with her fellow psychoanalyst Schwarz, "what that bastard Jung is up to," she implicitly admits the convergence between two apparently unrelated systems of knowledge. Remarking that the "alchemical work is in distillation or decoction--the personal ego decants itself in thoughts which are really acts and slowly, drop by amazing drop, virtue, which is voidness, precipitates" (Sebastian 22), Schwarz specifically recalls Jung's discovery of the relationship between alchemy and psychology. It is significant, moreover, that hermetic alchemy, in which Jung has identified the archetypes of the individuation process, owes its ancestry to the Gnosticism Constance has resisted in Affad. As Jung himself observes, "when we come to the original basic ideas of alchemy we find elements that derive from pagan, and more particularly from Gnostic, sources" (Psychology and Alchemy 357).

Both systems attribute salvation to knowledge--that is,



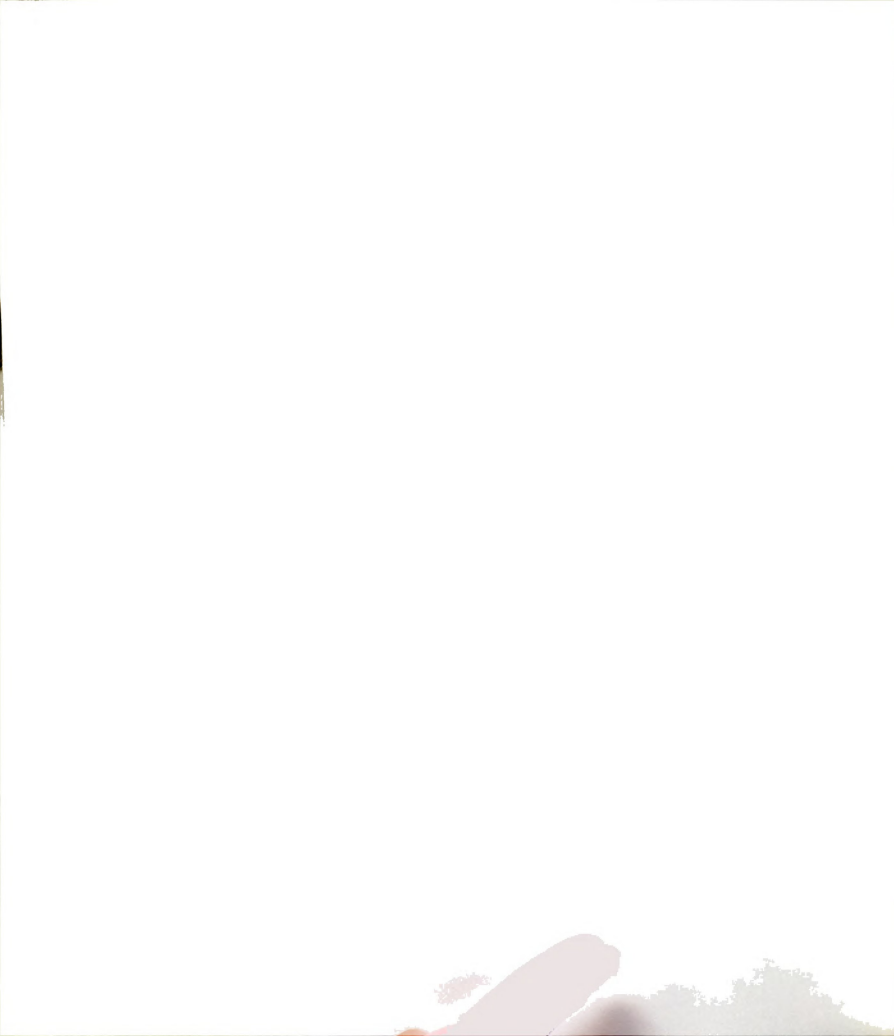
to gnosis of the ineffable rather than to knowledge attained as the result of logic or reason. The articulation of this knowledge is characterized by a rich symbolism which illustrates the genuine difficulty in describing a numinous experience, and at the same time ensures its preservation from the uninitiated. Moreover, despite superficial differences in these symbolic formulations, Gnosticism and alchemy alike espouse as their transcendent aim the recovery of the quintessence from its imprisonment in matter. For the Gnostic this entailed the liberation of the pneuma from its bondage to the flesh and hence its reintegration with the divine principle of the pleroma. For the alchemist it was a chemical operation, by means of which the elements could be distilled from the primordial chaotic mass and synthesized once more in the "corpus subtile, a transfigured and resurrected body" which formed the counterpart to the divine unity (Psychology and Alchemy 427). While the solitary labors of the alchemist therefore assumed a distinctly concrete dimension in the laboratory, it is obvious from the tenor of the extant literature that they were primarily spiritual in purpose. Adepts like Paracelsus and Gerhard Dorn clearly envisaged their experiments as both physical and metaphysical, recognizing too that production of the elusive essence depended as much upon their own mental condition as it did upon any chemical reaction. Thus the

physical goal of alchemy was gold, the panacea, the elixir of life; the spiritual one was the rebirth of the (spiritual) light from the darkness



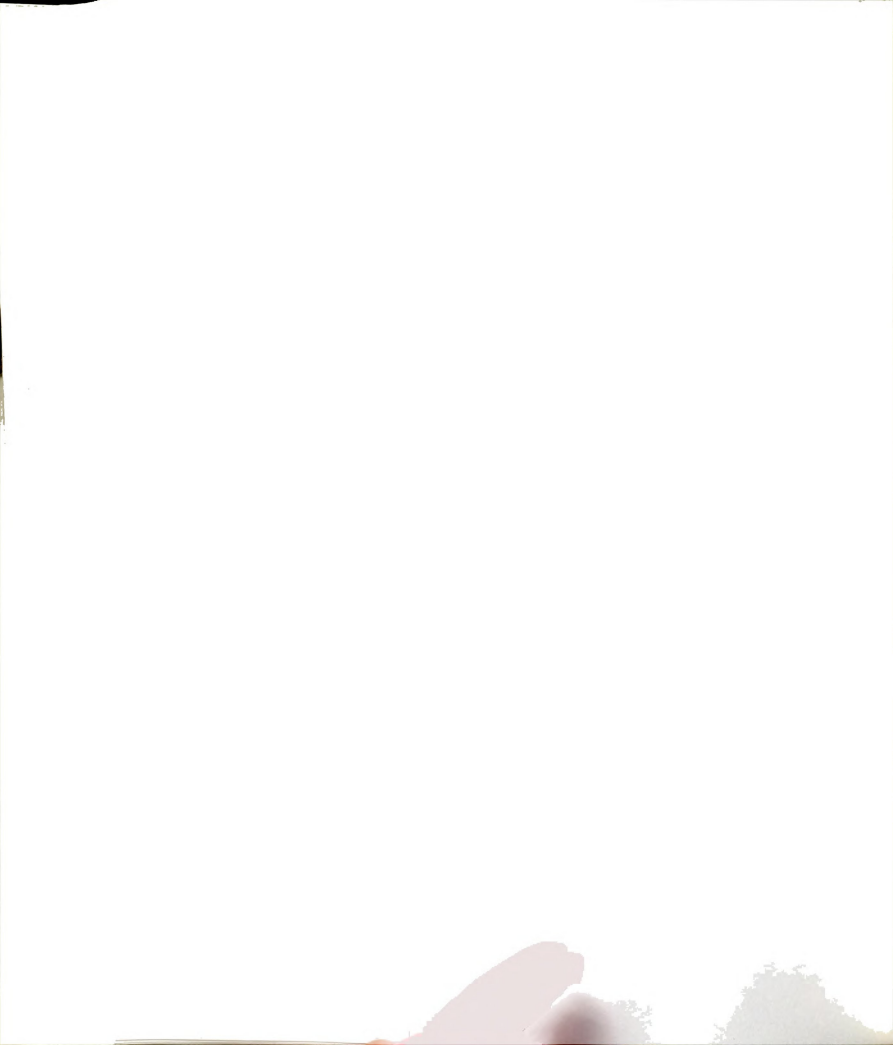
of Physis: healing self-knowledge and the deliverance of the pneumatic body from the corruption of the flesh. (Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis 90)

The actual procedure for achieving this goal is equally redolent of Gnosticism. As we have already seen, according to the Gnostic cosmogony matter originated from the seduction of the lowest aeon, whose externalized passions resulted in the creation of the four elements, earth and air, fire and water. The alchemist emulated this division of the primordial chaos into its four parts when he sought to distill the four elements or their qualities, moist, dry, warm and cold, from the prima materia over which he toiled. The work itself was conceived as a four-fold process, during which the quicksilver, or whatever other substance was used to represent the massa confusa, underwent changes in color reflecting the stages of nigredo, albedo, rubedo, and citrintas respectively. As its name suggests, the nigredo signified the blackness and corruption of the original material, either present from the beginning as one of its qualities, or else produced by the separation of the elements. If the prima materia was assumed to be divided in its initial condition, the alchemist had then to effect a union of opposites metaphorically analogous to the union of male and female. When the product of this first conjunction died, the nigredo followed. Subsequently, with repeated distillations, the nigredo was sufficiently purified for its transformation to the albedo, which, being white, contained



all colors. This change in states was alternatively likened to the reunion of the body which had earlier "died," with the soul released at its death, and so took on the properties of a resurrection. For many alchemists the albedo could only be secured at such cost that it was prized as though it were the ultimate goal. But not until the albedo had been heated by the most intense fire did it turn into the rubedo, and finally the citrinitas, or gold, which heralded the completion of the alchemical process. By the sixteenth century, however, the citrinitas had ceased to be considered significant, and the procedure more commonly ended with the manufacture of the rubedo. Symbolically described as Sol or King, the rubedo joined with the albedo, as Luna or Queen, in a second conjunction which celebrated the "chymical wedding" of the elements in a higher unity.

Now a number of people in the Quintet profess to be alchemists. Affad, indeed, appears to symbolize the synthesis produced by the chemical wedding. Admitting that, as a child, he "preferred to lock [him]self up and indulge in abstruse studies like alchemy and mathematics," Affad tells Constance that he "stood between [his] father and mother, each held a hand, as if between a great king and queen, two gods" (Constance 293 & 325). Similarly, Constance herself, despite the scepticism which results from her scientific training, claims to have "hunted not an ethos but the curve of a perfect licence charged with truth," so that





she "was an alchemist without knowing it" (Livia 249). Quatrefages too has turned "towards symbolic mathematics, enigmas, emblems and the shadowy reaches of alchemy and astrology" (Livia 91). Engaged in tracking down the Templar treasure, he insists that its real value is spiritual rather than material, and Blanford, who has also dabbled in the occult, recognizes that he is referring to the Philosopher's Stone. The "least mercuric" of men, Blanford in fact uses an image which "one would have had to be an alchemist to understand," in describing his feelings for Livia: "What he loved in her was her 'water'--as of a precious stone. It is after all what is really loved in a woman--not the sheath of matter which covers her--but her 'signature'" (Livia 28 & 153). Yet the most important illustrations of alchemy in the Quintet do not occur as a consequence of the arcane interests expressed by some of the characters. It is in what happens to the protagonists, and not in the vocations they pursue, that the alchemical process is clearly revealed; for the characters actually undergo a sequence of changes in the course of their spiritual development which parallels the transformation of the prima materia into the quintessence. In short, they become alchemists who are simultaneously the substance of their own experiments.

In this respect, they conform to Jung's discovery that alchemy is really an attempt to explore the hidden provinces of the human mind; a truth unrecognized or, at best, only

incompletely realized by the medieval and renaissance adepts who sought evidence of their success in external reality. Indeed, the unanimous failure to secure their goal indicates that the elusive quintessence which the alchemists struggled either to create or to extract from matter did not exist outside the realm of their imagination. Jung points out that it was always conceived as

a celestial substance, i.e., something transcendental, which, in contrast to the perishability of all known matter, was incorruptible, inert as a metal or stone, and yet alive, like an organic being, and at the same time a universal medicament. Such a "body" was quite obviously not to be met with in experience. (Mysterium Coniunctionis 525)

From observations formed during an extensive number of psychoanalyses, in which the dreams of his patients appeared quite frequently to employ alchemical symbols whose production could not be explained by any conscious knowledge of their history or meaning, Jung concluded that alchemy was a spontaneous expression of the unconscious mind. The adept, in other words, "experienced his projection as a property of matter; but what he was in reality experiencing was his own unconscious" (Psychology and Alchemy 245).

A brief digression may be helpful here to clarify Jung's understanding and use of alchemical symbols. Both their generation and the conscious apprehension of their particular significance are features of the psychic development which he has called "individuation." Jung uses



this term "to denote the process by which a person becomes a psychological 'in-dividual,' that is, a separate, indivisible unity or 'whole'" (The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious 275). In fact, the process is intrinsic to man in the sense that it originates from the repertoire of latent images, or archetypes, which Jung believes to have been imprinted on the brain during its organic evolution. Jung has identified four archetypes of especially widespread importance--the self, persona, shadow and animus or anima--but it is specifically the archetype of the self which facilitates individuation. Responding to its powerful stimulus, the undifferentiated, yet nonetheless complete, psyche with which every human being is born gradually matures into a fully differentiated personality. Such, at least, is the ideal result, although in practice the process varies both as to its extent and its expression. For the level of individuation actually attained by any one person depends upon the degree to which the conscious ego is able to assimilate the contents of the unconscious.

However, the integration of unconscious phenomena is no easy feat, because they generally "manifest themselves in fairly chaotic and unsystematic form" (The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious 276). In contrast with the conscious mind, which is characterized by its awareness of distinctions and subject to a certain amount of individual control, the unconscious is an entirely autonomous whole,



whose hidden contents may irrupt at any time. Naturally, therefore, the revelations of the unconscious are frequently associated with mental discomfort, since they occur involuntarily and, often, in order to compensate for the deviations of the ego from its instinctual foundations. But to deny such unwelcome intrusions into the arena of consciousness would be injurious to the psyche, which is a synthesis of these two antithetical functions. Only through assimilation of the unconscious does the virtual image of the self become actual, then; and in that universal human process, Jung suggests, lies the source of the myths with which man has attempted to account for his existence:

The essence of the conscious mind is discrimination; it must, if it is to be aware of things, separate the opposites, and it does this contra naturam. In nature the opposites seek one another--les extrêmes se touchent--and so it is in the unconscious, and particularly in the archetype of unity, the self. Here, as in the deity, the opposites cancel out. But as soon as the unconscious begins to manifest itself they split asunder, as at the Creation; for every act of dawning consciousness is a creative act, and it is from this psychological experience that all our cosmogonic symbols are derived. (Psychology and Alchemy 25)

Thus the prima materia over which the alchemists labored is, like the Gnostic primordial chaos, an expression of the inherited unconscious. Equally, the division of matter into its four constituents corresponds with the differentiation that results from dawning consciousness. In other words, all human beings possess four aspects of psychological orientation, since

we must have a function which ascertains that something is there (sensation); a second function which establishes what it is (thinking); a third function which states whether it suits us or not, whether we wish to accept it or not (feeling); and a fourth function which indicates where it came from and where it is going (intuition). (Jung, Psychology and Religion 167)

Informed by the four functions of consciousness, then, the various archetypes individuate, as each must, for the development of a balanced personality. Apart from the archetype of the self, which initiates this process, there are the three spontaneously personified archetypes which Jung identified as being of particular frequency and importance: that is, the persona, shadow and anima (in a man) or animus (in a woman). Of course, they manifest themselves differently in every human being, precisely because it is the environment and experience of the individual which activate their potential. However, the function of each archetype remains the same, regardless of the specific shape it takes in any one man or woman. The persona, for example, has a primarily social function, as the exterior facade with which an individual conducts himself in public. It enables him to cooperate with his community, and hence to profit from the collective strength of the social group to which he belongs. In this fashion the preservation of both the individual and the race is ensured, for the persona promotes the necessary quality of conformity.

Just as the archetype of the persona is responsible for





the production of our social skills, so is there a complementary archetype whose function it is to remind us of our animal and instinctual foundations. This immediate antagonist is the shadow, a figure of the same sex as the subject who is undergoing individuation. Containing the unknown or little-known attributes of the ego, the shadow is an

"inferior" personality . . . made up of everything that will not fit in with, and adapt to the laws and regulations of conscious life. It is compounded of "disobedience" and is therefore rejected not on moral grounds only, but also for reasons of expediency. (Psychology and Religion 198)

Clearly, the shadow is antisocial in its tendencies and for this reason, as well as for the depth of its roots in our historical evolution, carries an enormous potential for destruction. Yet, because it is also a source of great vitality, and often, in fact, expresses values which are needed by consciousness, the shadow cannot simply be repressed as a rather undesirable aspect of human nature which would be best kept hidden. Indeed, Jung argues that the results of such a course can be seen in the carnage of the twentieth century; for, he suggests, it was an abnormally widespread irruption of the shadow, in reaction to its earlier repression, which precipitated World War II.<sup>1</sup>

If the archetype of the shadow is an endowment arising from the earliest period of the evolutionary process, then the archetype of the anima or animus is our more immediate



biological inheritance. Derived, so Jung believes, from the minority of chromosomes opposite in gender to those which have determined an individual's sex, the anima is an unconscious feminine personality present in the male psyche, and the animus conversely an unconscious masculine image existing in the female psyche.<sup>2</sup> Actually, both genders have acquired these cross-sexual characteristics culturally as well as biologically, through their continuous interaction over many generations. However, the "blueprint" of the opposite sex which is thereby created takes specific form in an individual only when it has been activated by projection onto the appropriate parent--that is, by the child's unconscious identification of this inner personality with its opposite-sex parent. All subsequent relationships with members of the opposite gender are directly influenced by this unconscious image, and the degree to which a particular person conforms to its shape. The archetype of the anima or animus is thus a mediating factor in that it facilitates comprehension of each sex by the other, and so promotes their perpetuation.

It is also a principle of mediation in a second sense. Much as the persona negotiates between the ego and the environment to modulate an individual's relations with the exterior world, so the anima negotiates between the ego and the unconscious to modulate his interior psychic relations. Hence the archetype of the anima or animus performs a



crucial role in the individuation process; for, in providing access to a man or woman's unconscious phenomena, it supplies the preliminary conditions for their transition to the conscious mind. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the anima elicits something of the ambivalence which characterizes our attitude towards unconscious contents, a fact illustrated by the symbolic expression it receives as both psychopomp and siren. Yet union of the anima with the ego is the supreme goal of individuation, and the difficulty in attaining this point is addressed by the alchemists through their symbolic formulations of the process.

Their first task was, of course, the production of the nigredo; in psychological terms, the recognition of the shadow. This alone is no easy achievement, as Jung indicates in his description of the accompanying mental state:

Confrontation with the shadow produces at first a dead balance, a standstill that hampers moral decisions and makes convictions ineffective or even impossible. Everything becomes doubtful, which is why the alchemists called this stage nigredo. (Mysterium Coniunctionis 497)

Obviously, the adept conceived his experience of the darkness within himself in terms of matter, and so was merely sustaining that paradigm when he articulated the purpose of his labor as the liberation of the tainted soul (or shadow) from the body by means of the separatio. But the descriptions of his prolonged and troublesome endeavour afterwards to distill the soul of its impurities reveal that what the alchemist was actually engaged in was the attempt



to rid himself of his own projections. As Marie-Louise von Franz explains, in commenting upon the psychological significance of the albedo,

Whiteness suggests purification, no longer being contaminated with matter, which would mean what we call technically, and so lightly, taking back our projections . . . . It needs a long process of inner development and realization for a projection to come back. (Alchemy: An Introduction to the Symbolism and Psychology 222)

In effect, then, the transition from the nigredo to albedo describes the painful process of inspecting the shadow, in order to recover the psychic contents which have been transferred to external objects but are rightly the features of the subject. With the restoration of these contents the soul returns to the body, a resurrection clearly equivalent to the recovery of the psychic energy which was earlier projected elsewhere. Thus the albedo corresponds with spiritual development through knowledge of oneself, and its elusiveness is in this context entirely understandable.

Having once extracted the pure spirit from substance, or, in other words, identified the contents of his own unconscious, the adept had next to assimilate his illumination. He had, that is, to reconcile the insights supplied by his unconscious with the warring impulses of his conscious mind. At first this process of integration is a "fiery" conflict between the two antithetical functions, but eventually it leads to the "melting" or synthesis of opposites which the alchemists called rubedo. The image of





the hierosgamos with which they depicted this final phase is not merely a convenient analogy; for the conjunction of Sol and Luna, or Logos and Eros, signifies that harmony between reason and emotion which is achieved only through union of the (male) ego with the (female) anima. Similarly, the gold, Philosopher's Stone and whatever other forms of higher unity were said to result from the alchemical procedure prove ultimately to be symbols of the fully individuated self, which, like the hard won treasures of the crucible, "is absolutely paradoxical in that it represents in every respect thesis and antithesis, and at the same time synthesis" (Psychology and Alchemy 19).

Though all the archetypes participate in the development of the self, therefore, the alchemical procedure specifically addresses the integration of the ego with the shadow and anima, both of which reside in the deeper layers of the unconscious. It describes the course by which unconscious phenomena (the prima materia) surface into consciousness. Perception of the shadow (the nigredo) precedes its eventual "cleansing" through the recognition that the characteristics contained in the shadow actually belong to the self (the albedo). In the ensuing struggle to accommodate this new understanding the individual experiences a psychological conflict which is finally resolved by the integration of his originally unconscious contents with consciousness (the rubedo). From the



"marriage" of the anima with the ego comes his discovery of the gold which has been hidden all the while inside him, and is now fully realized as the individual self (the citrinitas).

This correlation between psychology and alchemy informs the movement of The Avignon Quintet. The protagonists--those at least who do not succumb to the darkness within themselves, or to the war which is its external and universal manifestation--mature from their youthful posturings to that more complete apprehension of themselves which is a pre-condition for self-fulfillment. In particular is this true of Aubrey Blanford, whose successful individuation permits him to write the fictive account of that experience in Monsieur and the "autobiography" which comprises his subsequent novels. The form he employs in creating the text is, moreover, an apt response to the lessons which supply its content, being equally a synthesis of parts. From the prima materia of Monsieur come the four differentiated elements of Livia, Constance, Sebastian and Quinx, which culminate, when read together, in the totality of the Quintet. Hence the work owes both its substance and its structure to the literature in which the alchemists struggled to express their lonely vision.

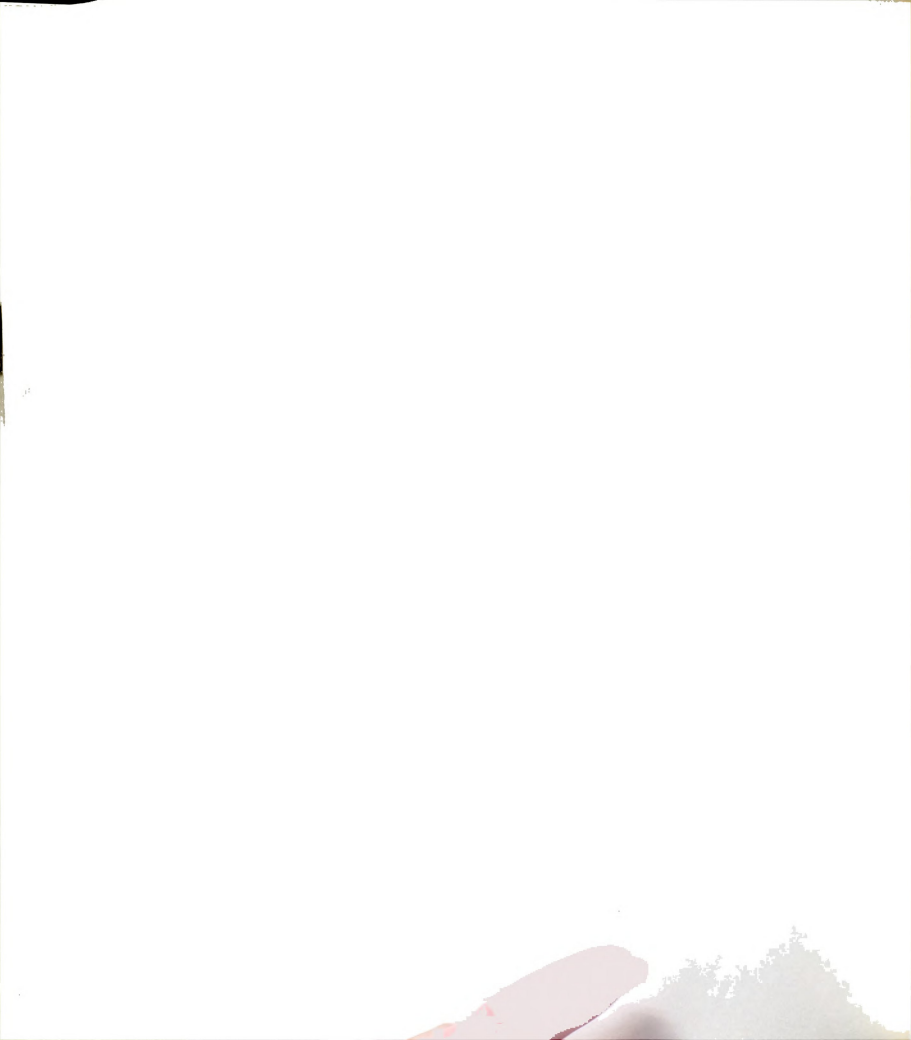
It is helpful to consider the two aspects--substance and structure--separately, although the division is



obviously an artificial one in the sense that each is an interrelated feature of the whole text. Nonetheless, its complexity justifies such an approach for purposes of clarification. The ensuing discussion, then, is comprised of two parts. The first addresses the substance of Blanford's personal narrative, specifically its alchemical and psychological significance for Constance and himself. The second has a wider focus; it examines the structure of that narrative, including the relation of Monsieur to the remaining novels, and the larger symbol system of the quest, which concludes with the collective anticipation of "reality prime."

### **The Substance of Blanford's Narrative**

Blanford's inauguration as both man and artist results, of course, from his relationship with Livia. He readily acknowledges that "without her and the frightful jolt she gave him he might never have entered the immortality stakes" (Livia 66); for it is she who, having read his notebooks, first calls him a poet, and so gives meaning to his scarcely formulated ambitions, "as if she had suddenly invented him anew, invented his career and the whole future shape of his inner life by the magic of such a phrase" (Constance 6). Equally, it is "the lovely and pliant Livia's destiny to initiate" Blanford sexually and, indeed, to marry him (Livia 68). In view of Livia's proclivities,



the liaison is clearly doomed from its inception. Yet, when she subsequently departs for Germany to espouse the fascist cause, their separation plunges Blanford into a depression he describes as "omega grey." During his troubled dreams the whole world appears to partake of this color, "the deepest grey before complete blackness; . . . the almost black of death" (Livia 196).

Stripped of its elaborate explication, the pattern to which Blanford's experience conforms is thus obvious. In his union with Livia he undergoes a preliminary conjunction symbolically analogous to the unio mentalis of the alchemists. This initial syzygy represents the synthesis of the spirit and the soul, after the latter has been drawn away from its servitude to the body. But because the soul is tainted still by its association with matter, it must be totally separated from the body for the extraction of the nigredo. Similarly, his relationship with Livia produces in Blanford a new sense of his own spiritual potential, and thereby precipitates that "dark night of the soul" which always accompanies confrontation with the chthonic unconscious.

Subsequent events confirm the extent to which Blanford's development parallels the alchemical procedure. The separation of soul from body, which is a feature of the nigredo, naturally results in the death of the body. Indeed, as Jung observes, the philosophers "therefore called this





state the grave, corruption, mortification, and so on, and the problem then arose of reanimation, that is, of reuniting the soul with the 'inanimate' body" (Mysterium Coniunctionis 521). While Blanford does not actually die, he nonetheless experiences a fate which is symbolically equivalent, when he receives the spinal injury that leaves him paralysed. Reflecting upon the implications of this wound, he feels that his "future ha[s] vanished as inexorably as the past" (Constance 95). Significantly, Blanford's illness also coincides with the defection of Rob Sutcliffe. Originally his imaginary alter ego, Sutcliffe now enacts the part of Blanford's incarnate soul.<sup>3</sup> His fictive status has already incurred suspicion with the mysterious appearance of Freud's sofa, wrapped in paper which bears his name (Constance 19). But the fact that he has sent the sofa to Constance, rather than to Bruce, as Pia has requested, indicates that he remains subject to Blanford's authority. This is no longer the case when Sutcliffe materialises in Geneva, where he encounters Constance and displays a lively insubordination. Unwilling to forego his recently acquired independence, Sutcliffe even refuses to welcome the convalescent Blanford on his return from Egypt. Angered by this flagrant disobedience of his wishes, Blanford complains, "because my power is not absolute over him--he is after all my creation; but he can sometimes break loose and show traces of free will" (Constance 331). At this point, then, the division



between Blanford and Sutcliffe is complete, signifying a like separation of body from soul.

However, Sutcliffe's importance is by no means exclusively alchemical in its depiction, since he is equally a portrait of Blanford's shadow--that is, the psychological aspect of the same phenomenon which, in alchemy, is depicted as the impure soul. Typically, acknowledgement of the shadow first occurs in response to the infliction of a psychic wound. Rob Sutcliffe owes not only his freedom, but his very existence, to the injuries which Blanford sustains; for, in much the same way that he has been enfranchised by the events of Aby Fahym, so does he earlier originate from Blanford's humiliation over the theft of his diary. To "guard against a repetition of such torture Blanford ha[s] attributed his thoughts and ideas to an imaginary author called S" (Livia 115). When Livia subsequently violates his privacy a second time, Blanford hastily pretends that it is Schopenhauer to whom he thus refers, but already he envisages "a large fleshy man with pink knees pressed together, penis en trompe-l'oeil as he might say, whirling dumb-bells before an open window" (Livia 116). This curious alter ego represents the antithesis of everything his inventor seems to be. In contrast with the somewhat priggish Blanford, Sutcliffe is indisciplined, flamboyant and frequently crude. He accordingly embodies both the animal spirits of man's primitive nature and that latent creativity



to which the shadow generally gives voice.

Sutcliffe's portrayal is consistent with the properties of this archetype in yet another sense. In being an image of the same gender, the shadow signifies an individual's own sexual characteristics. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Sutcliffe's sexual history corresponds in many of its details with the *mésalliance* between Blanford and Livia. Falling deeply in love with the frail Pia, he insists upon marrying her, only to discover that she is actually a lesbian. Then, like Blanford, he is forced to suffer the anguish of losing his wife to a female rival. Clearly, Trash, the beautiful negress who seduces Pia, is a fictive counterpart to Thrush, the "little Martinique" with whom Livia is unfaithful. The two men even proffer identical explanations for their choice of sexual partners. Sutcliffe learns from the psychological texts which he so earnestly peruses in hope of illumination about his wife's collapse that "the reasons behind his own choice of an investment in Pia [include] the shadow of another incomparable inversion" (*Monsieur* 180). Similarly, Blanford has to confront the "unconscious springs of inversion" in himself, a condition he ascribes to his "mother fixation" (*Monsieur* 292). In short, Sutcliffe describes the problems of his creator, which Blanford can only express once he has become aware of them. Ironically, the act of depicting Sutcliffe testifies to Blanford's increased consciousness of who he really is,



at the same time that the depiction itself reveals the extent to which he was earlier unconscious.

The full import of Blanford's first adult experiences should, by now, be apparent. Ignorant and unsure of himself, he promptly falls prey to the dubious charms of Livia, but is sufficiently perceptive to detect "the presence of a shadow which st[ands] forever between them" (Livia 170). There is indeed such a shadow, and the inevitable failure of the relationship provides a catalyst for that process of inner reflection through which he learns to locate the shadow in himself. Blanford's subsequent hardships, in particular his paralysis and long convalescence, supply the occasion for further introspection. This period of unhappiness equates with the alchemical production of the nigredo from the unio mentalis, and its laborious transformation to the purified state of the albedo.

The next stage in Blanford's development is thus the reanimation which attainment of the albedo actually effects. It occurs when Theodora, the Greek nurse whom Prince Hassad has secured to take care of Blanford, awakens in him the capacity for sexual response. Her immediate ministrations include an erotic massage to "check if it work[s]," and the grateful Blanford acknowledges that with "this bold stroke she restored me to life" (Constance 98). However, his transition to the albedo is not complete until he has also recovered control over the still rebellious Sutcliffe, and





hence the custodianship of his own soul. It is significant that before the reunion takes place Rob Sutcliffe undergoes an almost identical experience. Just as Blanford becomes the involuntary object of Theodora's sexual pleasure, in a fashion that amounts to "rape, the infantile dream of being tied down and raped forcibly by someone who smel[ls] like your mother," so is Sutcliffe later "raped by Trash--very enjoyably but against [his] will" (Constance 99 & 340). This duplication of events suggests that body and soul are converging once more, in readiness for their eventual reconciliation. It is soon followed by the telephone call in which Sutcliffe renews contact with his creator, and the two men agree that they "must meet one day in order to exchange versions" (Constance 342). They even decide to collaborate with each other in writing their respective novels, and shortly afterwards Sutcliffe visits the recumbent Blanford to discuss this joint project. To their mutual surprise they discover that they "see eye-to-eye" and so (Constance 352), with the harmony of soul and body at last established, Blanford's attainment of the albedo is secure.

All that now remains for him is the supreme union of opposites which heralds the completion of the alchemical process. Indeed, Blanford actually remarks that, together, he and Sutcliffe are "moving towards [their] apotheosis," but with characteristic pessimism he is dubious about its outcome, perceiving his alter ego "as a fat, sad oracle,

[himself] as a post-war crook with designs upon the Underworld only" (Sebastian 144). His fears are, of course, unjustified, for what he learns is that his life so far has been a long, if unwitting, preparation for that second and final conjunction by means of which "male and female.., are melted into a unity purified of all opposition and therefore incorruptible" (Psychology and Alchemy 37). This most formidable of tasks is naturally attended by difficulties--not least the temporary deviation from her normally heterosexual preferences to which Constance succumbs with Sylvie. Yet all those obstacles which have previously seemed to Blanford quite insurmountable are finally dissolved, when he and Constance undergo the submersion that produces their release from the constraints of the past.

Significantly, Constance has undertaken Blanford's physical therapy, although, unlike her predecessor Theodora, she preserves the distinction between medical and sexual proximity. Nonetheless, their sustained contact creates a new intimacy, and Blanford observes that she "spoke to him now quite wordlessly, while she was working on his back. 'How strange that you should be my first love, my worst love,' she told him. 'The only one with whom I could make no progress whatsoever. And of course I yours'" (Quinx 150). When Blanford actually articulates his feelings, Constance insists that their love is unredeemable, they cannot undo "the whole blessed attrition of time" (Quinx 151). But



circumstances prove otherwise, for shortly afterwards their habit of taking a nocturnal swim nearly results in the death of both. Blanford is able to avert the danger only by drawing upon a strength which he has never before realized that he possesses, in order to save Constance and himself from drowning. Clearly, the immersion has a number of symbolic implications. The fact that it occurs at night suggests the darkness which accompanies our dealings with the world of the unconscious. Moreover, water is a universal symbol of the feminine principle, and thus connotes, for Blanford at least, the confrontation with his anima figure which constitutes the real, psychological difficulty in achieving the chemical wedding. To be overwhelmed by the contents of the anima would indeed approximate to drowning. Yet Blanford survives the experience and emerges from his ordeal a renewed man.

A second set of associations explains this rehabilitation, for water also has the life-giving and purifying properties which originally resulted in its use during the rite of baptism. As Jung observes of the Catholic sacrament, the "ordinary water . . . acquires the divine quality of transforming and giving spiritual rebirth to man. This is exactly the alchemical idea . . . ." (Psychology and Religion 101). But the spiritual renaissance signified by baptism involves no corresponding abnegation of the body. On the contrary, the water itself is an express recognition of



man's hylic nature. The connection is not surprising when we recall that, in the Gnostic cosmology, matter is explicitly identified with the female Sophia. Whether water is one of the the four elements produced from her passion, or merely implicit in the Narcissus motif with which several versions account for the seduction of the Light, it is always a feature of the Gnostic genesis. Hence Blanford's immersion ultimately symbolizes the synthesis of his spirit and soul with a body cleansed of its impurities, and so imperishable.

The hierosgamos which he thereby celebrates through the reconciliation of his own warring aspects in a higher unity concludes with the sexual conjunction that is its literal enactment. Blanford finally discovers the confidence to claim Constance as his partner, for "something radical ha[s] changed--the whole cloud of inhibitions which had paralysed him in his dealings with her suddenly seemed to have lifted" (Quinx 155). With the removal of this affective disorder, he can overcome his physical disability, to "generate the power and the glory of the complete sexual encounter" (Quinx 156). Constance, in the fullness of her womanhood, restores to Blanford the forfeited powers of his own body and, as the quotation from the Pater Noster implies, it is truly a religious experience.

Yet Blanford is not alone in undergoing a spiritual and psychological preparation analogous to the alchemical procedure. Before Constance can participate in the



hierosgamos which is equally her achievement, she too contends with the darkness of the nigredo and endures the suffering it entails. Her relationship with Sam is the unio mentalis with which that process begins, for though it may be a happier liaison than Blanford's with Livia, it is no less ill-fated. Impulsively deciding to marry Sam when the war is declared, Constance is sufficiently uncertain of her choice to seek corroboration from Blanford. But the very question "meant that, in fact, she was doing the wrong thing, and that somewhere in her inner consciousness she knew it" (Livia 180). For all her lately discovered knowledge of Freudian psychology, Constance actually makes the same romantic error that Blanford has committed, in mistaking the true temperament of her lover. Indeed, she privately conceives a programme to effect his education, according to which Sam "would realise through her all that she divined in him now . . . ; she would pierce through the crust of his flippancy, the friendly footlings of his idols . . . and strike sparks off his inmost soul!" (Constance 8). Her ambition is misplaced, however, since Constance has not "divined" Sam's real potential so much as she has projected onto his image the man she wants him to be. Constance is still far from attaining the knowledge of herself and others that is a necessary condition for her own fulfillment.

Sam's demise signals the end of this first stage in her development, but Constance must deal with a second and



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related loss, in the baby she has aborted because she "did not wish to risk that [Sam] might stay with [her] against his will" (Constance 127). When the product of their union dies, then, the result is a perfect simulacrum of the alchemical mortificatio. Constance, that is, has suffered a uniquely female death of the body, equivalent in meaning to the paralysis which cripples Blanford. Naturally distressed by this double blow, she considers returning to Britain, where she believes that she can better contribute to the war effort. But Prince Hassad correctly diagnoses her reaction as a sense of guilt, telling Constance that she "want[s] to be punished," and therefore seeks "action, fear, discomfort" (Constance 151). The solution he advances involves an even greater danger, for he suggests that she return, in the capacity of Red Cross aide, to Avignon. However, his proposal is more appropriate than the Prince appears to realize, since the "city has been from time immemorial a vast sanatorium as well as a political cross-roads" (Constance 152). There, Constance is forced to work under the restrictions of the Vichy regime, and witness the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis. Thrown entirely upon her own resources, she lives in the isolated Tu Duc with ample opportunity for reflection. Her circumstances thus accord in every detail with the nigredo, which, as Jung remarks, "not only brought decay, suffering, death, and the torments of hell visibly before the eyes of the alchemist,



it also cast the shadow of its melancholy over his own solitary soul" (Mysterium Coniunctionis 350).

Of course, in psychological terms, it is exactly the shadow with which Constance now grapples, and everywhere around her is evidence of the catastrophe that occurs when man succumbs completely to its dark appeal. In the collective example supplied by the Germans, she observes "nothing less than the first outbreak of epidemic insanity, an irruption of the unconscious into what seemed to be a tolerably well-ordered world" (Jung, Civilization in Transition 212). The more immediate and painful example is provided by her sister. Livia advocates a Dionysian vision of "impassioned dissolution, where all human distinctions are merged in the animal divinity of the primordial psyche" (Psychology and Alchemy 90). She actually conforms to this vision in two respects. The more obvious is her choice of National Socialism as a substitute for any personal philosophy. But her incestuous relationship with Hilary further reveals the degree to which Livia has lost herself in the depths of the unconscious. Significantly, Hilary is blond, while Livia is dark in coloring, a description which suggests their roles as Sol and Luna respectively. Yet the hierogamos, when it occurs in the form of a brother-sister pairing, is no longer an expression of mature consciousness. In fact, Jung explains that

incest is the aberrant natural form of the union of opposites, a union which has either never been made conscious at all as a psychic task, or if it

was conscious, has once more disappeared from view. (Mysterium Coniunctionis 92)

There is thus a peculiar logic to the retribution which is eventually exacted from both. With Hilary's execution for espionage and Livia's "apotheosis" from suicide case to war hero (Constance 257), the greater shadow of the Nazis extinguishes those who have lived according to the dictates of the shadow.

In the terrible fate of her siblings, Constance has warning of the dangers to which she too is exposed.<sup>4</sup> But her opposition to the Germans is indicative of the inner strength with which she confronts the nigredo. By the end of her sojourn in Avignon she is able to admit Sam's death to Livia, and hence to herself. The words bring their own consolation, for Constance is finally rid of his phantom, "the figment she had been carrying around inside her like an unaborted child" (Constance 241). Clearly, however, the terms in which she depicts that sense of release recall the profound wound to her womanhood which Constance has earlier sustained. Moreover, in the same way that Blanford's injury is a symbolic castration which reveals his artistic impotence, so is the mutilation of her sexuality evidence that Constance cannot fulfil her own creative energies. It is particularly important therefore that her first sexual contact with Affad conveys a forcible reminder of her power to conceive. Affad is "overwhelmed with gratitude for he realised that it was for him, this dark menstrual flow"

(Constance 265). During the passionate affair which follows, he shows Constance how the true achievement of love exists in mutual submission, and not the attempt to dominate one's partner that converts every sexual act into an assault. The lesson is especially valuable, since she has actually been guilty of just this fault in her relationship with Sam. And the fruits of her knowledge are commensurate; in surrendering control, Constance discovers that she has paradoxically "assumed herself, her full femininity-- something which had remained always a sort of figment, a symbol which gave off no current" (Constance 273).

The union through which her maimed sexuality is thus healed signifies a corresponding revivification of the body. Indeed, the specific circumstances of its initial consummation demonstrate that Constance has successfully attained the albedo. As Jung points out, "blood is a primitive symbol for the soul" (Alchemical Studies 143). Hence the menstruation which so excites Affad is also a sign of the reanimation that occurs when the soul resumes its place in the body. Constance is intuitively aware of this change, recognizing that the "embrace of Affad had in some singular way acted upon her as the drop of scalding oil had done upon the cheek of sleeping Eros" (Constance 292). Awakened, like the divinity, from the dream world of the unconscious, she too is free to realize the god within. Moreover, the mark of her new consciousness is the

generosity which she can now display towards Affad, disagree though she may with the death pact he has undertaken for the sake of his religion. In a manner consistent with the myth of Cupid and Psyche, she is forced to endure the pains and tribulations of separation, although it is actually Affad who leaves her. Nonetheless, Constance is able to see her lover as he really is, and not through the distorted lens of her own projections. In the seeing lies her acceptance, and hence the psychic maturity which leads to godhead.

Her brief interlude with Sylvie, which precedes the final conjunction with Blanford, seems after this to suggest a temporary regression. As Constance explains to Jourdain, the psychoanalyst at Montfavet, "the base must have been some slumbering and neglected homosexual predisposition, but the motor which set it off was, inexplicably enough, the death of Schwarz" (Quinx 45). Certainly, the suicide of her longtime friend and colleague is a severe loss. It throws her off balance, so that "from some depths of inner numbness [she] ha[s] lost all power of evaluation" (Sebastian 196). Yet it would be wrong to dismiss the incident as a mere error of judgment, for it also expresses an androgynous quality in Constance, similar to that which Affad has revealed. Since bisexuality is, furthermore, an aspect of the highest principle in the Gnostic pleroma, before the division which produces male and female, it clearly symbolizes a unity that transcends





distinctions. The alchemists likewise emphasized the hermaphroditic nature of the Philosopher's Stone. Thus the androgyny which Constance perceives in herself may prove disturbing to Blanford, but it is ultimately a symbol of her totality. She has at last achieved that harmony between body, soul and spirit which is the supreme task of self-realization.

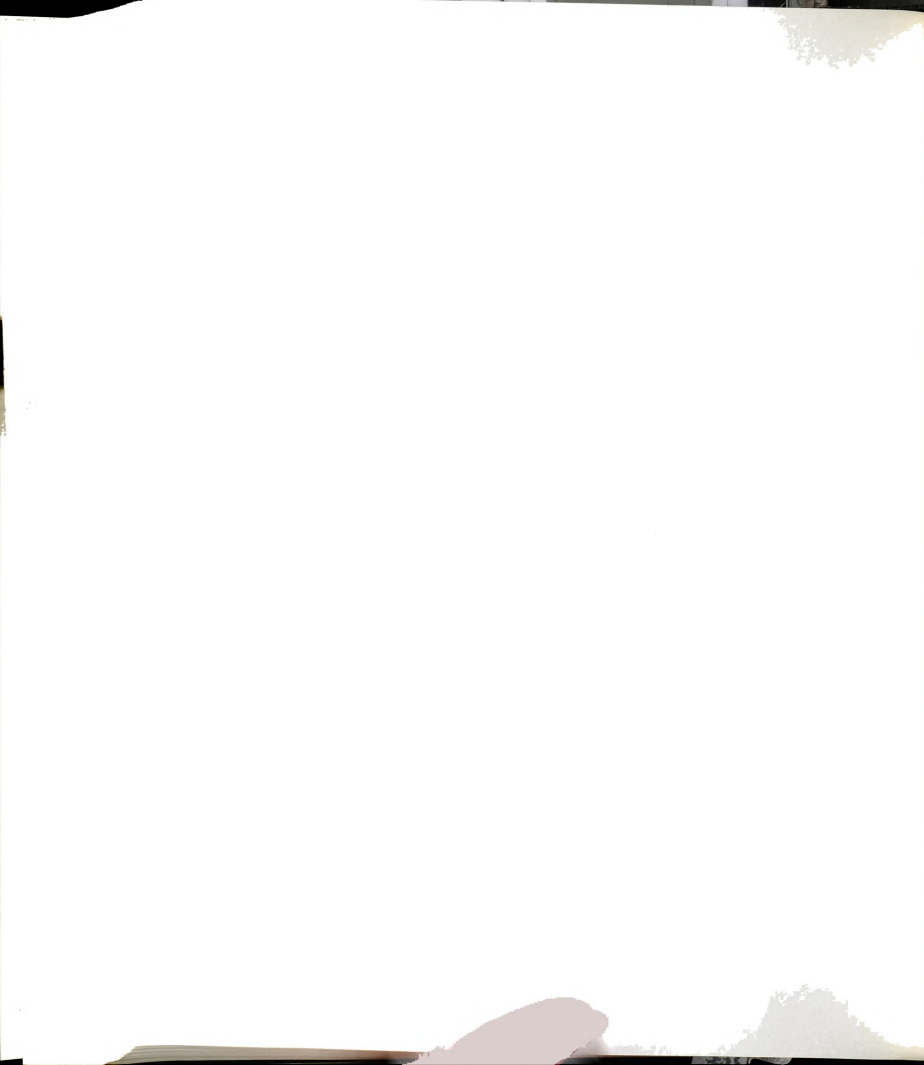
With the recognition and integration of her opposing attributes, Constance completes the process of individuation that culminates in the chemical wedding. Nonetheless, she is irretrievably a "man's woman" (Quinx 45), and so must turn to Blanford for its consummation. In this final union of man and woman, she communicates her gnosis to him, thereby translating into the exterior world of their love the synthesis which she has already accomplished as an interior condition. Sabine, who claims of course to have foreseen the conjunction, explains its significance to Blanford. Constance has "realised that if she staked her claim and risked everything [he] might get reborn, re-created" (Quinx 169). In redeeming Blanford as a man, she also redeems him as an artist, freeing him to complete the sequence of novels over which he has labored for so long. It is a joint enterprise, however, since Constance knows that "the whole oeuvre for which he was going to try was as much her work, her responsibility, as his" (Quinx 198). Hence the book itself is the product of their union, a synthesis of



opposites that occurs in some "third thing, which represents not a compromise but something new" (Mysterium Coniunctionis 536). Affirming the mystical marriage by its very existence, the Quintet which Blanford "writes" is equally a celebration in its substance. It indeed "exemplif[ies] in the flesh the royal cobra couple, the king and queen of the affect, of the spiritual world. 'My spinal I with her final she.'" (Quinx 198).

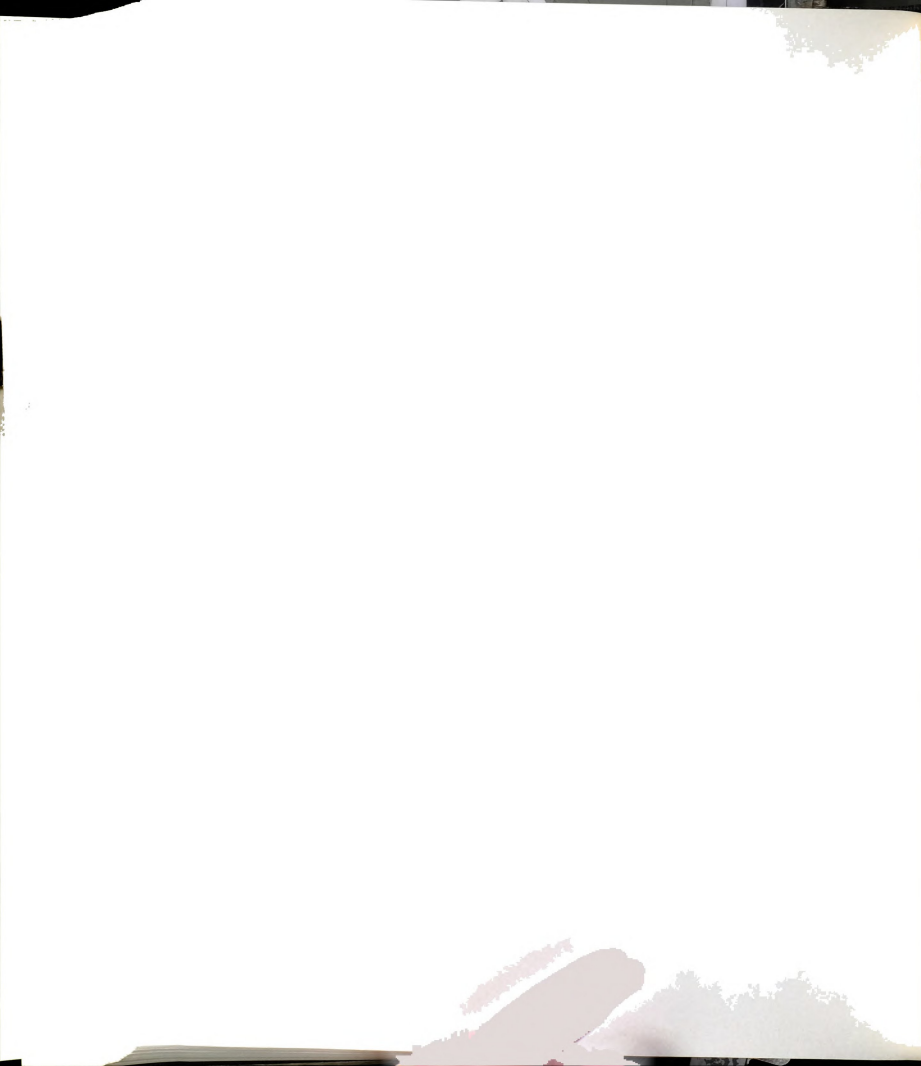
### **The Structure of Blanford's Narrative**

The text which thus results from Blanford's conjunction with Constance reflects the properties of the Philosopher's Stone in its structure. As Jung observes, the "place or medium of realization is neither mind nor matter, but that intermediate realm of subtle reality which can be adequately expressed only by the symbol" (Psychology and Alchemy 283). The Quintet itself is such a symbol, for, if its content depicts the process of the alchemical opus, its structure describes the product. Monsieur supplies the raw material for the remaining novels, and is therefore analogous to the massa confusa. In fact, Durrell explicitly states that this first volume "is a terrible muddle because it's got all the themes in it, it's an old suitcase full of all the themes I intend to develop" (Carley, "An Interview with Lawrence Durrell" 46). Monsieur introduces everything: the tenets of Gnosticism; the various sexual inversions, which echo this



theological inversion; the dichotomy between quest and inquisition; instability of the discrete ego; and so on.<sup>5</sup> Yet Blanford is dissatisfied with the execution of his ideas, regretting the "many corners he ha[s] left unexplored, so many potentialities undeveloped simply because he ha[s] firmly decided not to write 'the ordinary sort of novel'" (Monsieur 275).

Disappointed, then, by the inadequacies of his text, he resolves to try again, wondering whether "in the next book about these people he could not cut down a layer or two to reveal the invisible larval forms, the root forms which had given him these projections?" (Monsieur 282) Blanford's scheme for a second volume clearly demonstrates his intention to identify the fundamental features of his characters. He wants, that is, to differentiate the elements which comprise his subject matter. In order to achieve this task Blanford adopts a new tactic. He puts aside the evasive fictions with which he has earlier attempted to record events, and chooses instead to write the facts. Letting "his memory draw him back to the very beginning of the story" (Livia 26), he starts the narrative afresh, with an account of his "real" experiences in Avignon, and the "real" people whose lives have influenced his. Obviously, Blanford does not simply exchange art for autobiography, since, in describing incidents of which he cannot possibly have first hand knowledge, he is still constructing a fiction. But the



explanation he offers Constance, when she reads the incomplete manuscript of Monsieur, illuminates his conception of the other books. This initial work is "only a novel, the bare bones of a draft of a story"; yet it is also a story "based on true findings" (Constance 345).

With Livia, therefore, Blanford begins the process of separating his material into its respective parts. He recalls the "Summer Sunlight" of his youth, to depict the love affair which initiates him in the mysteries of alchemy. The substance of his narrative thus resembles its position with respect to the entire Quintet. In being the preliminary extract from the prima materia of Monsieur, Livia is equivalent to the nigredo. In fact, the very title provides a clear indication of this, for Livia's name suggests an association with the word "livid," which signifies both blackness and, through its derivation from the Latin verb livere, the color of lead. (Black lead was, of course, one of the most common chemicals from which the adepts sought to manufacture gold and, in view of the symptoms it induced as a poison, proved a particularly appropriate symbol for the nigredo.) Similarly, the subtitle of the novel acknowledges its psychological dimension. As Toby actually explains, in the middle ages homosexuality "was punishable by being burned alive or buried alive" (Monsieur 242), and the femoral incision with which Constance later ensures Livia's death reiterates this motif. However, Blanford has also to





distinguish the homosexual component in himself, something he is unable to do until he has assimilated the contents of his own unconscious. He is indeed "buried alive," buried by the weight of his ignorance.

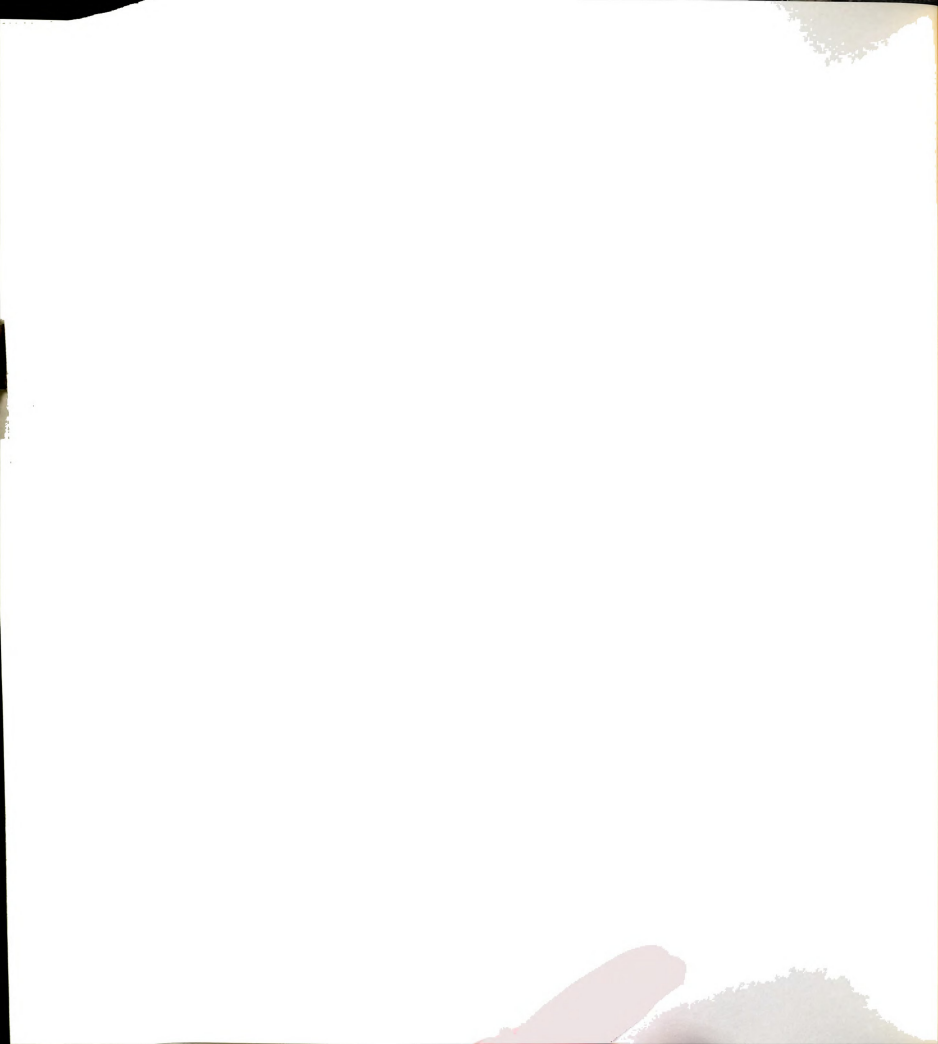
Constance records Blanford's ensuing struggle to unearth these phenomena through the "solitary practices" of meditation and reflection. The difficulty of his task is mimicked by the structure of the text; for it is here that the reader first has to contend with what William Godshalk calls "the shocking interpenetration of primary and secondary [realities]" ("Durrell's Game in The Avignon Quintet" 4). In other words, Monsieur is a secondary reality, being Blanford's fiction, while Livia supplies the primary reality on which that fiction is based. But the distinction between the two dimensions immediately collapses, once Sutcliffe and Toby associate with Constance. Obviously, in the introductory pages of Livia, Blanford talks with his alter ego. Yet it is easy to attribute their conversation to the eccentricities of age and illness, or the delusions of an author who has lived too much in the realm of the imagination. Since Blanford has already displayed somewhat aberrant behavior in the closing lines of Monsieur, when he apparently believes himself to be dining with the long dead Constance, mental instability seems a probable explanation.

With the refutation of this theory, the reader is left



totally bewildered by the interweaving of realities instead of their more conventional juxtaposition. However, the dissolution of the boundaries between worlds which have previously appeared quite separate is essentially what happens when the ego is invaded by the unconscious. Furthermore, it is specifically through the presence of Rob Sutcliffe, in his capacity as the personification of Blanford's shadow, that most of the violations occur. Thus Sutcliffe's irruption from the ostensibly contained world of Monsieur into the reality which Blanford regards as exclusively his emulates the autonomous irruptions of the unconscious. Clearly, acknowledgement of the shadow and the accompanying work of purification are analogous to the alchemical task of converting the nigredo to the albedo. Hence the internal structure of Constance actually demonstrates that transition in process. The confusion of realities which results from the manifestation of Sutcliffe equates with the problems of the adept as he struggled to transform the nigredo. Similarly, the completion of the novel indicates a successful conclusion to Blanford's labors. In Constance he at last produces the albedo.

If Constance is the second extract to be distilled from the chaos of Monsieur, Sebastian is obviously the third, and therefore corresponds with the rubedo. Once again, the subtitle of the novel supplies a clue as to its classification within the various stages of the alchemical



procedure. The rubedo describes that "fiery" war between the two halves of the personality--conscious and unconscious--which precedes their final reconciliation. In like fashion, Sebastian depicts the "ruling passions" of the protagonists, who, torn by their conflicting impulses, struggle painfully to negotiate a middle ground. Sebastian Affad is caught between his loyalty to Gnosticism and his love for Constance. She, in turn, is faced with the dilemma which Mnemidis precipitates when he steals the letter intended for Affad. This material difficulty aptly expresses her own divided inclinations in loving Affad and yet maintaining a professional commitment to the preservation of life. Blanford also has his share of emotional troubles. Discovering his true feelings for Constance, he then has to contend with the jealousy which qualifies his affection for Affad, and later with the hostility he dare not express to Sylvie. But the central conflict, which effectively subsumes every other instance of ambivalence, is clearly that between Blanford and Sutcliffe, in their symbolic capacities as body and soul, or ego and shadow. It is this universal problem which Sebastian specifically addresses through its structure.

The running dialogue in which the two men have engaged is characterized by their humorous quips at each other's expense, and an underlying gravity of purpose. Thus, when Sutcliffe mocks Blanford's preoccupation with the form of



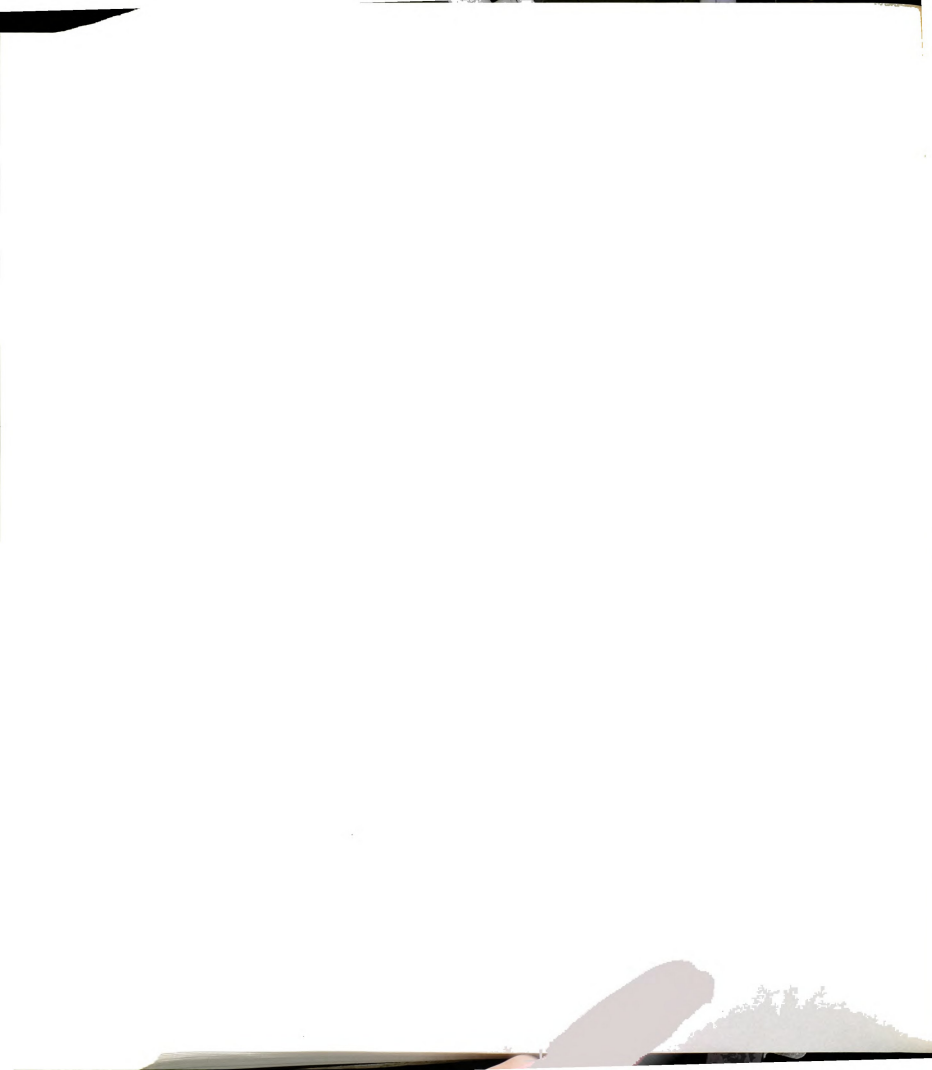
their "double concerto," he does so in a jocular response that is nonetheless seriously meant. Spelling words and sentences backwards, he suggests that they should employ the principle of "enanteiodromion." In this way, "everything would be seen to be turning into its opposite, even our book which would take on a mighty shifty strangeness, become an enticement for sterile linguists to parse in their sleep" (Sebastian 123). Now, as Jung explains, "enantiodromia or conversion into the opposite . . . makes possible the reunion of the warring halves of the personality and thereby brings the civil war to an end" (Psychology and Religion 342). Hence the significance of Sutcliffe's remarks lies in his tacit recognition of the rubedo and the proposal that their text should accordingly reflect its properties. Aubrey Blanford agrees; in fact, he says that he is "deliberately turning the novel inside out like a sleeve" and "then back" (Sebastian 124).<sup>6</sup> Ironically, however, in their very discussion of enantiodromia as a structural principle, both men are demonstrating that principle in operation.

With Sutcliffe's persistent refusal to remain a mere fictive construct, the distinction between reality and illusion has already disintegrated. But, if the transition from fiction to reality is possible, then so, presumably, is its reverse, the transformation from reality to fiction. Certainly, this is what Sutcliffe implies, in reminding Blanford, "you have admitted to yourself that I exist--or





rather that you only exist in function to me" (Sebastian 133). Later (within the chronology of the novels, although earlier in their order of production), when Blanford insists that he invented Sutcliffe, his alter ego replies, "Or I you, which? The chicken or the egg?" (Livia 10). His question is not as frivolous as it might seem. Sutcliffe is suggesting that, since all realities are relative, and therefore mental constructs, there is little except the investment of belief to separate them from fictions. Indeed, he even offers to write "a book to prove that the great Blanford is simply the fiction of one of his fictions" (Livia 53). Not only has the barrier between their two worlds totally collapsed, then, but each man is starting to partake of the other's dimension. Just as Sutcliffe has become increasingly real, so is Blanford's reality increasingly suspect.<sup>7</sup> This exchange of roles is effectively an instance of enantiodromia. Both Blanford and Sutcliffe are slowly undergoing a transfiguration into the opposite, and thus converging in their paths. By the end of Sebastian, they are sufficiently in harmony to leave Geneva, "capital of human dissent" (Sebastian 173), and begin the long trip back to Provence. There, in "Avignon, rose of all the world" (Constance 354), every difference will at last be reconciled, through that final synthesis of male and female, spirit and matter, the "Noumenon and the Phenomenon--reality turned inside out like a sleeve" (Sebastian 199).



The process of differentiation which the earlier novels have described culminates, in Quinx, with the complete integration of the conscious and the unconscious; and hence the production of the citrinitas. Rob Sutcliffe, who before has expressed the desire to "change hearses in midstream" and become "Jack the Stripper or someone more colourful" (Constance 323), is now accepted as an active participant in the construction of the text. Indeed, the fact that it is as much the "Ripper's Tale" as it is Blanford's "quinx" (Constance 351) is clear from the title they choose for their book. Sutcliffe's pseudonym is especially appropriate. In being the epitome of Blanford's unconscious, he rips aside the veil of illusion which has originally obscured his creator's vision. As Durrell puts it, Blanford's "powers are somewhat diminished, he can't see very far, whereas SUT is the third eye, so to speak. His belly-button pierces the future, the all-seeing eye of time" (Quinx 28).

The transcendent nature of this experience is reflected in the fragmentation of the narrative. Approximately the first forty pages of Quinx are written in a style that intimates, through its disjunctions, internal dialogues and "jump-cutting as with cinema film" (Quinx 99), how inadequate language really is to express the ineffable: "Either one twigged or not; there was nothing to say about so private an inkling of truth" (Quinx 61). As co-author and critic, Sutcliffe actually complains to Blanford about "this



weird prose barbecue," which characterizes all the works. However, Blanford explains that the "apparent disorder is only superficial." What he intends by the technique is

the admission that reincarnation is a fact. The old stable outlines of the dear old linear novel have been sidestepped in favour of soft focus palimpsest which enables the actors to turn into each other, to melt into each other's inner lifespaces if they wish. Everything and everyone comes closer and closer together, moving towards the one. (Quinx 99)

The content of Quinx indicates that progression towards unity through the gradual convergence of all the characters, from all dimensions of space and time, fiction and reality, as they gather outside the caves which allegedly hold the Templar treasure. Yet, in the same way that the caves have been constructed as a quincunx, a "sort of housing for the divine power" (Quinx 131), so is the Quintet organized on principles that lead to the apprehension of "reality prime."

With the achievement of the citrinitas, which is implicit in the conclusion of Quinx, the individual novels reveal their relationship to each other as a quaternality. From the undifferentiated unity of Monsieur come the four books which epitomize the four elements, the four stages of the alchemical procedure. The opposition of earth and air is expressed by the darkness of Livia and the corresponding illumination of Quinx. Between the beginning and end of this narrative stand Constance and Sebastian, which depict the cleansing water of the albedo and the melting fire of the rubedo respectively. Each of the novels therefore represents



a single element of the massa confusa from which it has originated. But, just as the protagonists complete their story with the recognition of a higher unity which resolves every opposition, so does the reader complete the perusal of that story with a like recognition. In the larger entity of the Quintet the four return to the One. Jung notes that the "pairs of opposites are arranged in a quaternio when they represent a totality. The totality appears in quaternary form only when it is not just an unconscious fact but a conscious and differentiated totality" (Mysterium Coniunctionis 203). Thus the Quintet itself is simultaneously an account of the alchemical procedure and, in its totality, an expression of the unity which is alchemy's ultimate goal.

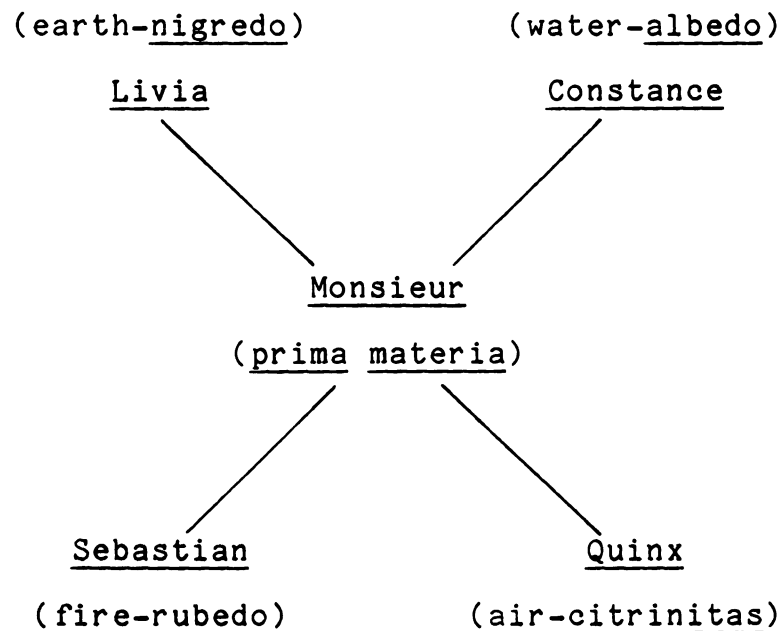


Figure 1: The Quincunxial Structure of the Novels





### The Final Vision of Reality Prime

The collective character of the sublime experience which the Quintet anticipates in its closing lines suggests that this unity is both personal and universal. Such proves indeed to be the case, for the superficially material pursuit of wealth which Lord Galen and Prince Hassad have initiated discloses an underlying hermetic significance. The sign which is said to designate the burial place of the gold is a quincunx of trees. But, as Jung remarks, the "tree appears frequently in the medieval alchemical texts and in general represents the growth of the arcane substance and its transformation into the philosophical tree" (Alchemical Studies 274).<sup>8</sup> Obviously, the biblical account of the world's creation associates the tree of knowledge with the serpent, which is a symbol for the chthonic Mercury. It is he who tells Eve that, if Adam and she consume the fruit, they "shall be as Gods, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3.5.). In the Christian tradition, then, precisely because man and God are conceived as essentially separate, man's hubris is the original sin for which he is cast out from Paradise. But, in the hermetic philosophy of Gnosticism and alchemy, the identity of God and the ego is assumed to be self-evident. Man is "both the one to be redeemed and the redeemer." Instead of leaving the,

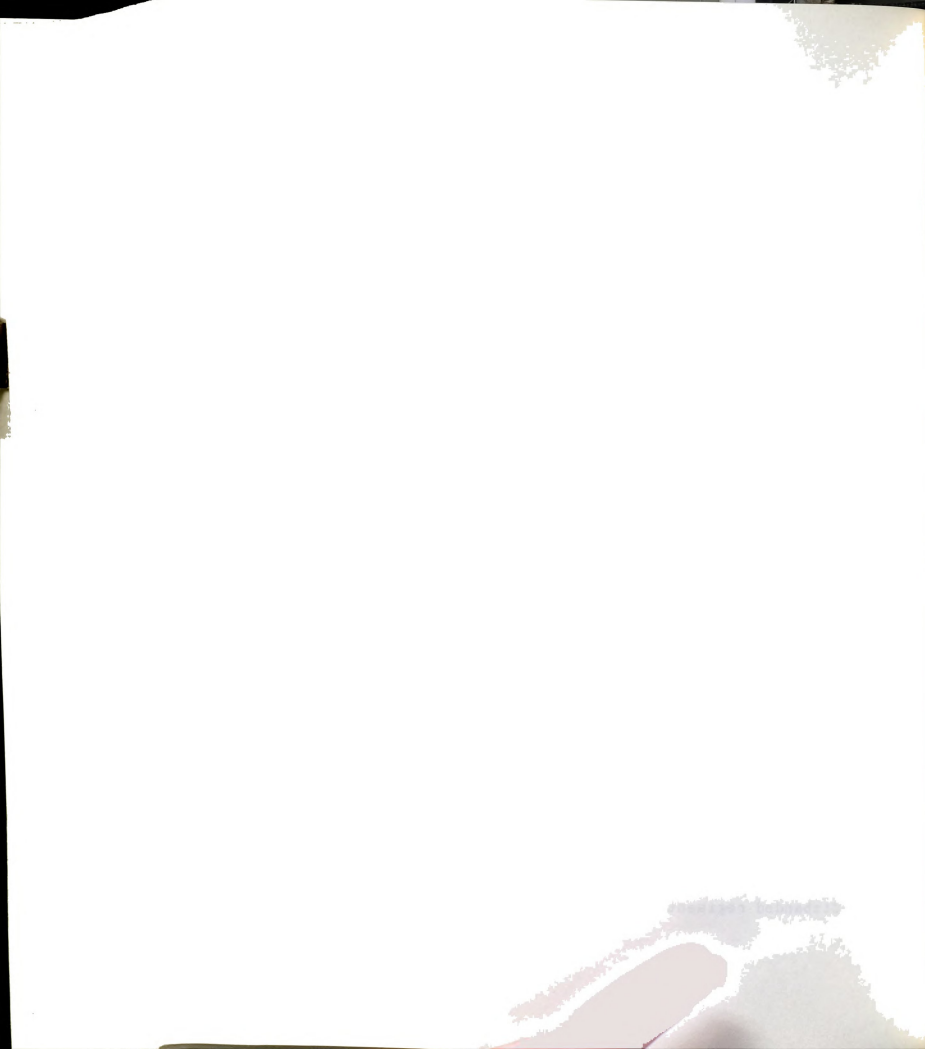
work of redemption . . . to the autonomous divine figure . . . [he] takes upon himself the duty of carrying out the redeeming opus, and attributes



the state of suffering and consequent need of redemption to the anima mundi imprisoned in matter. (Psychology and Alchemy 306)

Hence the tree is a figurative expression of the gnosis which is necessary for man's metamorphosis. With the knowledge it signifies, man can realize his own divinity and, accordingly, become "as God."

Before he can do so, however, he must first extract the world-creating spirit, for which the serpent is a symbol, from its concealment in matter. In other words, man must look into his own unconscious and contend with the darkness he finds there, if he is also to obtain its illumination. Now the characters engaged in the quest for the Templar wealth are faced with dangers of a similar sort. Lord Galen and the Prince are warned by the gipsy soothsayer to whom Sabine introduces them of the hazards entailed by their search. The "treasure is a real and very great one, but it is locked in a mountain and guarded by dragons who are really men" (Quinx 88). The prophecy comes true in a surprising fashion. General Von Esslin, who is recuperating from his injuries at the Eye-Clinic in Nîmes, tells Constance of a rumour that the treasure has already been discovered by a regiment of Austrian sappers. Shortly after mining the area to preserve it from others, they had been executed by the Nazis for refusing to destroy Avignon. Curiously enough, the "sappers had been formed from a disbanded regiment of Imperial dragoons and were entitled to



wear a dragon on their shoulder-flash in memory of their origins" (Quinx 111).

Literally, then, it is "dragons who are really men" from which the danger to Lord Galen's venture arises. Yet the dragon is also "a symbol combining the chthonic principle of the serpent and the aerial principle of the bird. It is . . . a variant of the Mercurius" (Psychology and Alchemy 292). Indeed the uroboros depicts the entire alchemical process, for the dragon which devours itself describes that circular movement from one unity to a second and higher unity, which is signified by the transformation of the prima materia into the Philosopher's Stone. Thus the dragons are also a symbol of the unconscious phenomena which all the protagonists engaged in the quest for the Templar treasure must acknowledge and assimilate, if they are ever to secure the gold. As Jung explains,

only one who has risked the fight with the dragon and is not overcome by it wins the hoard, the "treasure hard to attain." He alone has a genuine claim to self-confidence, for he has faced the dark ground of his self and thereby has gained himself. This experience gives him faith and trust, the pistis in the ability of the self to sustain him, for everything that has menaced him from inside he has made his own. (Mysterium Coniunctionis 531)

By implication, at least, all who are present at the opening of the caves have "risked the fight with the dragon." Furthermore, the fact that the treasure they seek is actually hidden in a series of caves is confirmation of its psychological dimension. As Sutcliffe tells Blanford, in his



account of Felix Chatto's exposure to Zen Buddhism, "Plato's cave [is] the unpurged cave of human consciousness" (Quinx 63).<sup>9</sup> It is "the dark ground" of the self.

With the realization of the self comes the concomitant recognition of its relation to the universal spirit, which is to be found not only in man but in every aspect of matter. Durrell attributes to Affad the articulation of this idea that the "ego . . . is only a sort of negative for the superlative esoteric state--tiny glimpses of wholeness; as if light passed through them, printing out a different reality" (Quinx 137).<sup>10</sup> That reality, which Durrell has called "reality prime," is the equivalent of Jung's unus mundus, the one world which existed prior to the phenomenal actuality that resulted from its division into heaven and earth. For it is a feature of material reality, as it is of consciousness, that everything be differentiated, and hence two or more in number. But the original condition of the universe was unity and not multiplicity. In the words of Gerhard Dorn, "as there is only one God and not many, so he willed in his mind to create from nothing one world, and then to bring it about that all things which he created should be contained in it, that God in all things might be one."<sup>11</sup> It is with this vision of wholeness that Durrell concludes the Quintet, as "reality prime rushed to the aid of fiction and the totally unpredictable began to take place!" (Quinx 201). He invokes, not the fragmented world of





human experience, but "a potential world, the eternal Ground of all empirical being" (Mysterium Coniunctionis 534).



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In his essay "The Fight with the Shadow," Jung remarks that the "Germans wanted order, but they made the fatal mistake of choosing the principal victim of disorder and unchecked greed for their leader . . . . He represented the shadow, the inferior part of everybody's personality, in an overwhelming degree, and this was another reason why they fell for him" (Civilization in Transition 223). This volume contains all of Jung's "Essays on Contemporary Events," in which he discusses the conditions which resulted in World War II. Naturally, Jung does not dismiss the economic and social factors which contributed to the outbreak of another world war, but he is primarily concerned in his own analysis with the psychological reasons for its occurrence.

<sup>2</sup> Jung's explanation of cross-sexual characteristics which are acquired biologically is actually inaccurate. To be precise, twenty two of the chromosome pairs have no role in the determination of gender. It is only the X and Y chromosomes (the twenty third pair) which are relevant. Specifically, the presence of a Y chromosome results in a male, while its absence results in a female, but the chromosomes themselves have no gender. However, since men and women secrete both male and female sex hormones, there is indeed a biological explanation for the cross-sexual characteristics which manifest themselves psychologically.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter Three (106-107) above for a discussion of Sutcliffe in his symbolic capacity as Blanford's soul.

<sup>4</sup> Obviously, Constance does not know the history which explains the deaths of Hilary and Livia until Smirgel confesses his own part in their fate. But she is aware of the fact that both have died; for it is she who discovers Livia, and later, during her conversation with Smirgel, indicates her belief that Hilary "had been killed on active service with the Intelligence Corps" (Quinx 118).

<sup>5</sup> Ian Macniven makes a similar observation about the manner in which Monsieur generates all the themes for the subsequent novels, although he does not address its alchemical significance ("The Quincunx Quiddified" 6).

<sup>6</sup> Candace Fertile comments upon the similarity between Blanford's observation and the view expressed by Darley in The Alexandria Quartet that Pursewarden's irony is "really tenderness turned inside out like a glove." She adds that,



whereas Pursewarden seeks "the whole pointless joke," for Durrell the "merger of illusion and reality . . . is a joke with a point" ("Lawrence Durrell: Devil or Deity?" 4).

7 Many of the other characters undergo a like metamorphosis from fiction to reality. Piers and Sylvie return in Constance as Piers and Sylvaine LeNogre, friends of Affad; Bruce Drexel reappears as the doctor who takes care of Blanford when he is injured in Alexandria, and also perhaps as the Bruce who ministers to Blanford after his drunken attempts to forget Livia; while Akkad is transformed from mystic to criminal in Livia. As Ian MacNiven remarks, the reader "is invited to play the game of deriving the characters and actions, in retrospect, of Monsieur from the other books, in a parody of the way critics search for sources in an author's life" ("The Quincunx Quiddified" 6).

8 In fact, Durrell probably got the idea for a quincunx of trees from Mead's commentary on the Book of the Great Logos According to the Mystery. There, the "master-mysteries of the Light-treasure are those of the Five Trees and of the Seven Voices and of the Great Name" (Fragments of a Faith Forgotten 523).

9 Yet another reference to the unconscious exists in the dedication of a grotto in the caves to the patron saint of the gipsies, who is known as Saint Sara, "the tenebrous one" (Quinx 162).

10 To be precise, the "self is not only the centre, but also the whole circumference which embraces both consciousness and the unconscious; it is the centre of this totality, just as the ego is the centre of consciousness" (Psychology and Alchemy 41). Thus realization of the self archetype is a necessary condition for intuition of the unus mundus, but the ego is the medium through which man becomes aware of his essential unity with the rest of the world.

11 Theatrum chemicum I, 415. Quoted in Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis 462, n. 39.



## Chapter Five

### **Conclusion: The "moral geography of the mystic."**

The reconciliation of body, soul and spirit in "a separate indivisible unity or 'whole'" completes that process of individuation which is exemplified most fully by Constance and Blanford (Jung, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious 275). Paradoxically, however, their very attainment of psychological individuality culminates in the perception of a supraphysical reality that subsumes all such distinctions. Within this potential world which Durrell has designated by the name "reality prime," the dualities that characterize man's empirical knowledge of his environment reveal their underlying unity. Thus "self" and "other" lose their meaning entirely in the larger context of a reality which transcends the most fundamental of schisms in mundane experience, that between spirit and matter.

In the preceding chapters we have seen how this rift results in the equal and opposite reactions of Gnosticism and National Socialism. If the Gnostics elevate the spiritual realm at the expense of matter, the Nazis,





inspired by a similar nostalgia for some mythical past miraculously untainted by materialism, are seduced by the very structure which they seek to overthrow. The god they serve is a god of evil, the same god whom the Gnostics take to be Jehovah, the recalcitrant son of the Sophia. Hence the New Order of the Germans, far from restoring the divine order it invokes, actually perpetuates the dominion of matter. Durrell's depiction of Gnosticism and National Socialism illustrates, then, the two extremes which arise from the dichotomy between spirit and matter.

A like polarity is true of the protagonists themselves. Just as they participate in the external conflicts which characterize their political and religious environment, so do they also grapple with the internal conflicts which the individuation process requires them to address. Both alchemically and psychologically, the task which confronts them amounts ultimately to the integration of matter and spirit. The difficulties which attend this challenge have already been discussed, but for Blanford and Constance at least, they lead to the discovery of a transcendent principle of unity.

In fact, the notion of a universal Self which resolves every pair of opposites into a harmonious whole is primarily eastern. It finds expression in the Buddhist "Wisdom of the Yonder Shore" and in the Gnostic postulation of a pre-temporal pleroma which can be recovered only through the



cultivation of spiritual gnosis. In contrast to this vision of an ancient and noumenal unity, so Durrell suggests, is the egocentric orientation which distinguishes western thinking, with the result that only what is available to the conscious mind is accorded any value, this being the province of the ego. Reason supersedes intuition, phenomenon supplants noumenon, and reality is accordingly conceived in exclusively rational terms. A second product of this solipsism is the occidental attitude to death; as James Carley remarks, the "formulation of a theory of an individual ego . . . entails the concept of death on a personal level as an unspeakable but inevitable calamity" ("The Avignon Quintet and Gnostic Heresy" 231). Clearly, aggrandizement of the ego and the concomitant fear of its expunction in death are antithetical to the belief in a superior spiritual world where neither individual identity nor mortality has any place. For the Gnostic, then, both are the tricks of Jehovah, intended only to perpetuate his manipulation of humanity. Indeed, Sebastian Affad observes that the "real seed of the [western] neurosis is the belief in the discrete ego; as fast as you cure 'em the contemporary metaphysic which is Judeo-Christianity manufactures more I's to become sick Me's" (Constance 304).

Durrell's sympathy with the eastern perspective is obvious. Traces of his preoccupation with hermetic philosophy exist in works as early as The Black Book. But,



in a letter to his friend Ian MacNiven, in which Durrell discusses his plans for the Quintet, he explicitly acknowledges his intention to address the conceptual differences between eastern and western thought. More particularly, it is his ambition to reconcile the two through his art:

[Man] fitted into our behavioristic notion of individual psychology as consisting of two parts, conscious and unconscious, male and female--materially making up a cube anatomically; a four-power animal with the possible existence of a fourth dimension! This was our religion. But in oriental terms this isn't true for the human personality is far from discrete, it is five-powered and five-sided. It ain't stable but a "congeries" of elements. Seen in this way my five-power novel should give a much more "flou" effect for its personas are not wholes but collections of spare parts. They could be each other by a simple slip of contingency. As for death which, like matter, rules the western novel, that doesn't exist either. Oriental thinking regards it as simply changing your violin case for another! Nor does reality itself have outlines, borders, because it is provisional and not fixed and demarcated. The multiplicity of possible lives in each of us is quite overwhelming--how to reduce it to an artistic formula is the problem? I have tried to do so while still remaining a European.<sup>1</sup>

Durrell's attempt to fuse the eastern "thought-forms" he has studied with the western views he has inherited supplies the focus for this chapter. Seeking to modify the materialistic impulse of the Occident through the spiritual insights of the Orient, he explores the crucial relationship between spirit and matter. With the resolution of this polarity, in "that secret field or realm which constitutes the moral geography of the mystic" (Sebastian 1-2), Durrell completes



the quincunx, and so concludes the task of The Avignon Quintet.

The debate has its roots in the different theories of value to which the various characters subscribe. Moreover, the significance they attribute to gold, in particular, is symptomatic of the social and political alignments they each display. Thus the issue is neither academic nor arcane; it is as vital to the protagonists of the Quintet as it was to the medieval alchemists, whether they were genuine adepts for whom gold was a symbol of spiritual riches or impostors who saw in alchemy a means to material gain. Naturally, as the precursor of the alchemical tradition, it is Gnosticism which advances the spiritual perspective most overtly. Akkad, for example, decries that "radical shift of emphasis . . . which pushed the balance over from the domain of spirit into matter." When this fall from grace occurred,

The whole axis of the human sensibility was altered . . . . The ancient vegetation gave place to our new steel vegetation, flowering in bronze, then iron, then steel . . . . The table of the essences gave place to the table of the elements. The Philosopher's Stone, the Holy Grail of the ancient consciousness gave place to the usurping values of the gold bar. (Monsieur 217)

In support of his argument against the materialism evinced by those who reduce gold to the status of bullion, Akkad refers to "Marx's great analysis of our culture or the Freudian analysis of value as based upon infantile attitudes to excrement," concluding that the "cornerstone of the culture then is another M--merde. The golden bar is the





apotheosis of the human turd" (Monsieur 141).

Affad too articulates this view and, like Akkad, imputes the presence of such pervasive materialism to the malign influence of Judeo-Christianity. Indeed, he even suggests that the war has arisen as a result of the German revulsion against its tenets; the philosophical implications of Judeo-Christianity being exemplified by that "triad of great Jews who have dominated thought--Marx, Freud, Einstein." All are

adventurers in the realm of matter. Marx equated human happiness with money--matter; Freud found that the notion of value came from faeces, and for him love was called investment; Einstein, the most Luciferian, is releasing the forces sleeping in matter . . . . (Constance 320)

Obviously, for both Akkad and Affad, the preeminence of material thought, however brilliant, is merely confirmation of Jehovah's supremacy, and hence the tragedy which has befallen man. But other characters, who are not affiliated with Gnosticism, or not directly at any rate, express similar opinions. Blanford, for instance, observes that "Europe was fast reaching the end of the genito-urinary stage in literature--and he recognised the approaching impotence it signalled" (Livia 174). In other words, he parallels the relationship which Freud has established between excrement and increment with a second equation between cupidity and sterility. As Carole Mablekos points out, corruption provides our means for gauging material production, which is then inverted to indicate a lack of



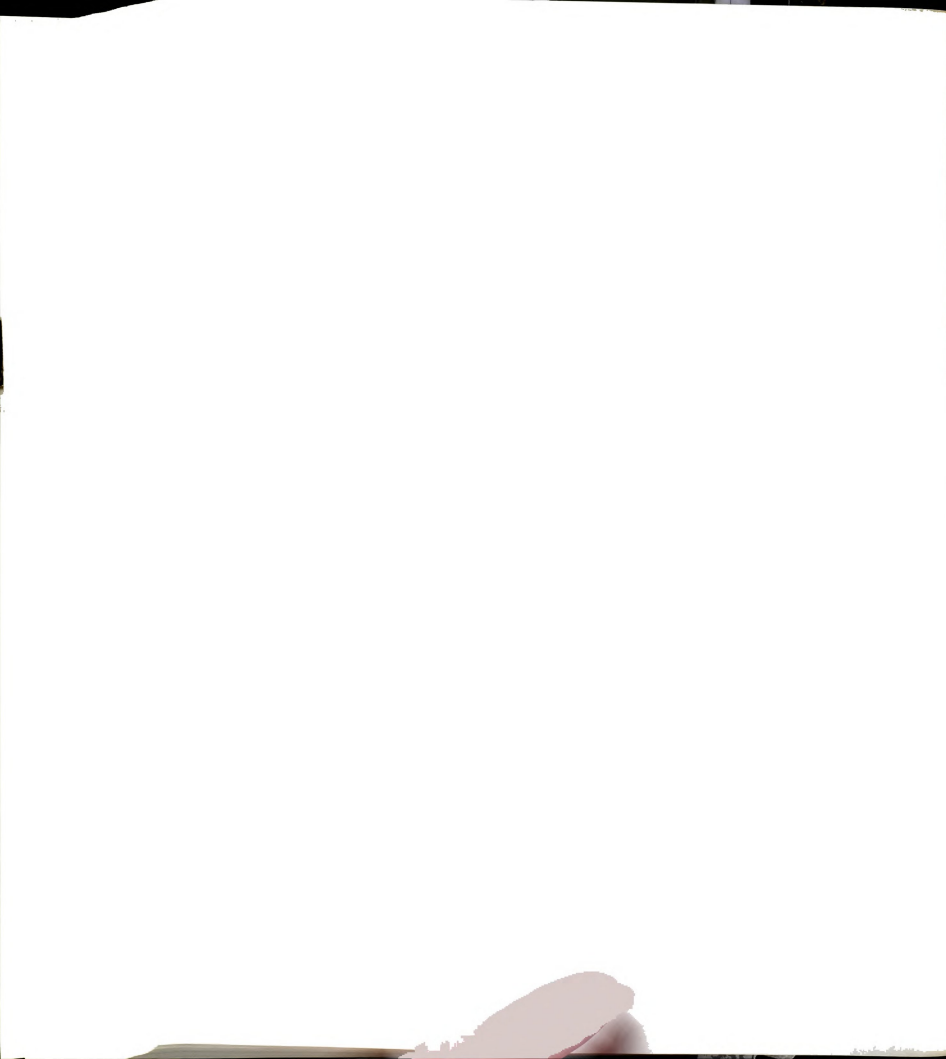
reproduction, artistic and otherwise.<sup>2</sup> Condemning this "audio-judeo-visual age" which he believes to be emerging, Blanford also considers that it explains the "jealousy of the Germans" (Livia 174).

Given the virulence of the criticism to which Judaism is thus subjected, it is not difficult to see why Durrell might be suspected of anti-semitism. The problem is compounded by the fact that, in the Quintet, he is addressing a period which has gone down in history as being perhaps the worst occasion of man's brutality to the Jews. Durrell is aware of, and sensitive to, such charges, but insists that his argument should not be misconstrued. In the transcription of "The Kneller Tape," which was actually recorded in Hamburg, he implies that his position is philosophically grounded, and not an expression of prejudice against a particular people.<sup>3</sup> More specifically, he contends that the "imaginative link with Plato and Heraclitus was snapped forever" by the teachings of Judaism, thereby denying "the religious continuity of things." Alexandria, with its tradition of syncretism, supplies the connection between the orphic mysteries and Rome; yet it is precisely this inheritance which the Old and New Testaments repudiate. Durrell argues, then, that in the refusal to acknowledge "Hermes [as] the chap Jesus took over from" (through the continuous transmission of a wisdom which originated in India), Judaism severed the "vital link with a primordial



world which really knew itself." He emphasizes that he is "not talking racial nonsense" (Moore, The World of Lawrence Durrell 168), and appeals to the precedent established by Philo Judaeus in asserting a congruence between Platonic philosophy and the Jewish creed.

Of course, history also demonstrates the manner in which a philosophical argument can be perverted to justify a policy for which it was never meant. We have only to recall that, in the hands of the Nazis, Nietzsche became an instrument of anti-semitic propaganda, to appreciate the potential for abuse. Durrell is alive to the dangers of the position he advocates, and introduces a note of caution in the character of Affad. Believing the Germans to be motivated by a repugnance for the materialism which he too despises, Affad is nonetheless an active opponent of the Nazis. In his opinion, the true problem is "the refusal to see that the Jewish faith is not a confession but that the Jews are really a nation bereft of a homeland and forced to become the world's cuckoo" (Constance 321). For this reason he engages in surreptitious manoeuvres against the British, seeking to further the formation of a Jewish state. In short, there is no necessary causal relation between the religious myths and the political views of the Nazis. On the contrary, Affad is proof that an alternative, and considerably more humane, deduction is both possible and preferable.



If Durrell depicts the underlying philosophy of Judaism as stacked in favor of matter, his Quintet is clearly no less critical of Christianity. Indeed, Sutcliffe observes that "Europe's behaviour was appropriate for those who drank symbolic Sunday blood and munched the anatomy of their Saviour" (Constance 25). Durrell's typically parodic forays against Christianity have already incurred the wrath of some readers. Edward Kopper, for example, writing on the Quartet, remarks that in "his use of religious imagery in general Durrell reveals almost embarrassingly his own patronizing and half comprehending view of theology" ("A Note on the Religious Imagery in The Alexandria Quartet" 119). The accusation is, in one respect at least, unjust; Durrell may be offensive, even patronizing perhaps, but he is certainly not ignorant.

The substance of his antipathy to the Christian Church is equally rooted in the dialectic between spirit and matter. A number of passing references accrue to suggest that the chain of associations by which Blanford identifies corruption with materialism also applies to Christianity. Abandoned by Livia, he visits a prostitute, only to be confronted by the sight of "a crucifix over the bidet" (Livia 192). Shortly afterwards, he discovers that she has stolen his wallet, thus confirming the connection between money, monotheism and merde. Similar connotations characterize the story of Imhof, whose "massive investment"





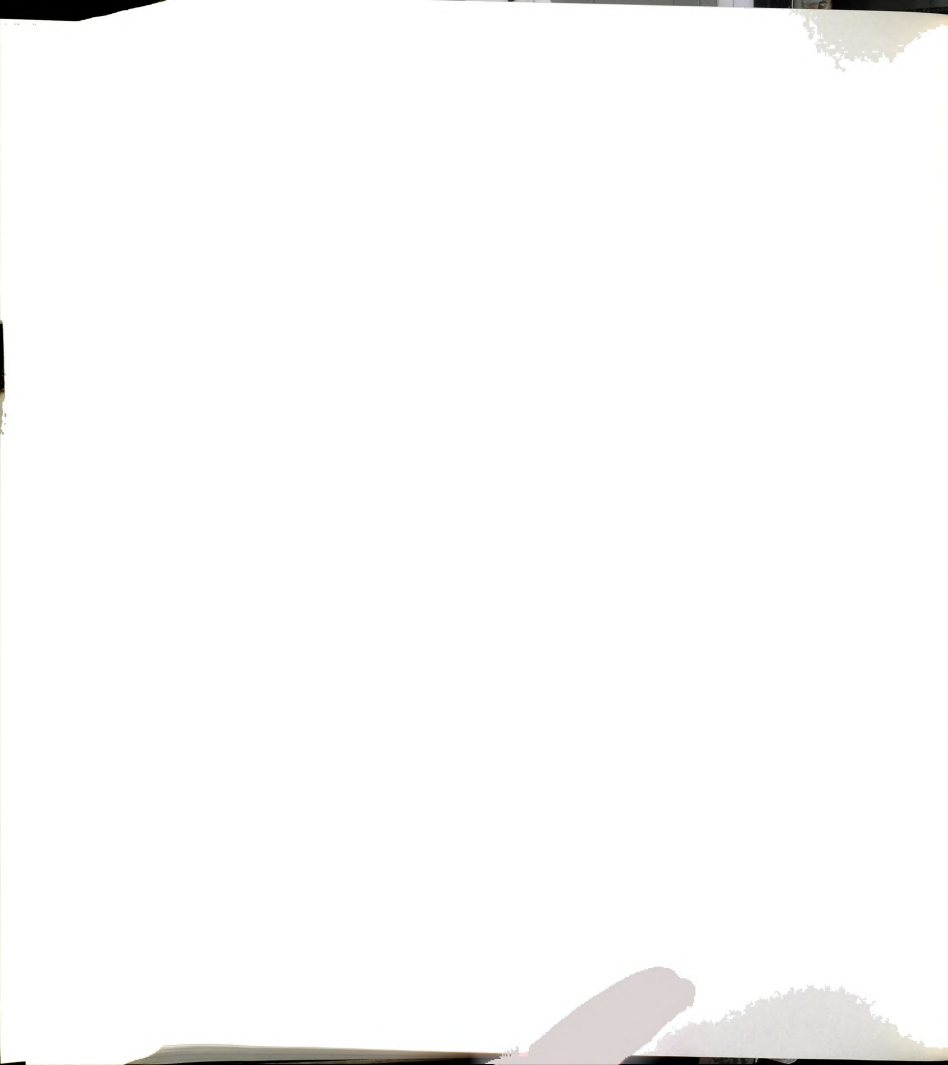
in bidets precipitates a fall from reason that echoes the fate of the Sophia (Livia 240). Lord Galen, who subsequently inherits the thousands of bidets in which his one time business partner had speculated, is troubled by no such sensitivity. On the contrary, he is able to sell the bidets for a "nice little sum." They are purchased by none other than the Society of Jesus, which has "found a way of printing 'Jesus Saves' on them in several languages" (Sebastian 180), and proposes to export them to the Far East as part of a modern day religious crusade. Finally, in hot pursuit of the culture which it is his new task as Minister for Culture and Information to define, Galen goes on a prolonged debauch that concludes with his symbolic crucifixion at the house of pleasure run by the infamous, but aptly named, Mrs. Gilchrist. Invited to relinquish his "ghastly monotheism which has led to man's separation from nature and released the primal devastator in him," Galen is then plastered with lipstick graffiti in a "veritable fertility rite" that asserts the Dionysian aspects of the Christian drama (Sebastian 139 & 140). Eventually, he is taken from the brothel by his indignant nephew Felix, in a manner which resembles the removal of a corpse, and cheerfully resurrected at Blanford's feet.

The individual episodes in which the Freudian equation of faeces with wealth is a recurring theme culminate in a vision of Avignon as the center of this obsession with



matter. In fact, Durrell explains that he "wanted the city to convey some of the unease, some of the despair, and some of the disgust [he] feel[s] about Christianity" (Carley, "An Interview with Lawrence Durrell" 43). It is Blanford who makes the association explicit. Observing the pompe à merde on its nightly round of the different quartiers, he perceives that it "is sucking out the intellectual excrement of the twentieth century in a town which was once Rome." The quotation from St. Augustine occurs to him: Inter faeces [sic] et urinam nascimur. Somberly, Blanford meditates upon the ironic appropriateness of the words, recalling that Avignon "had been, after all, Augustine's 'City of God,' transplanted once upon a time to this green and innocent country" (Livia 262-263).<sup>4</sup> The city epitomizes everything he abhors about Christianity. Containing within its precincts both the Palace of the Popes and the Monument des Morts--a proximity which suggests their innate kinship--Avignon indeed becomes "a realized symbol for the development of the 'signature' contained in Judeo-Christian thought" (Carley, "Lawrence Durrell's Avignon Quincunx and Gnostic Heresy" 163).

The antagonism which Durrell feels for Christianity is reinforced by his reading of Jung. Briefly, Jung argues that "the orthodox Christian formula is not quite complete, because the dogmatic aspect of the evil principle is absent from the Trinity and leads a more or less awkward existence



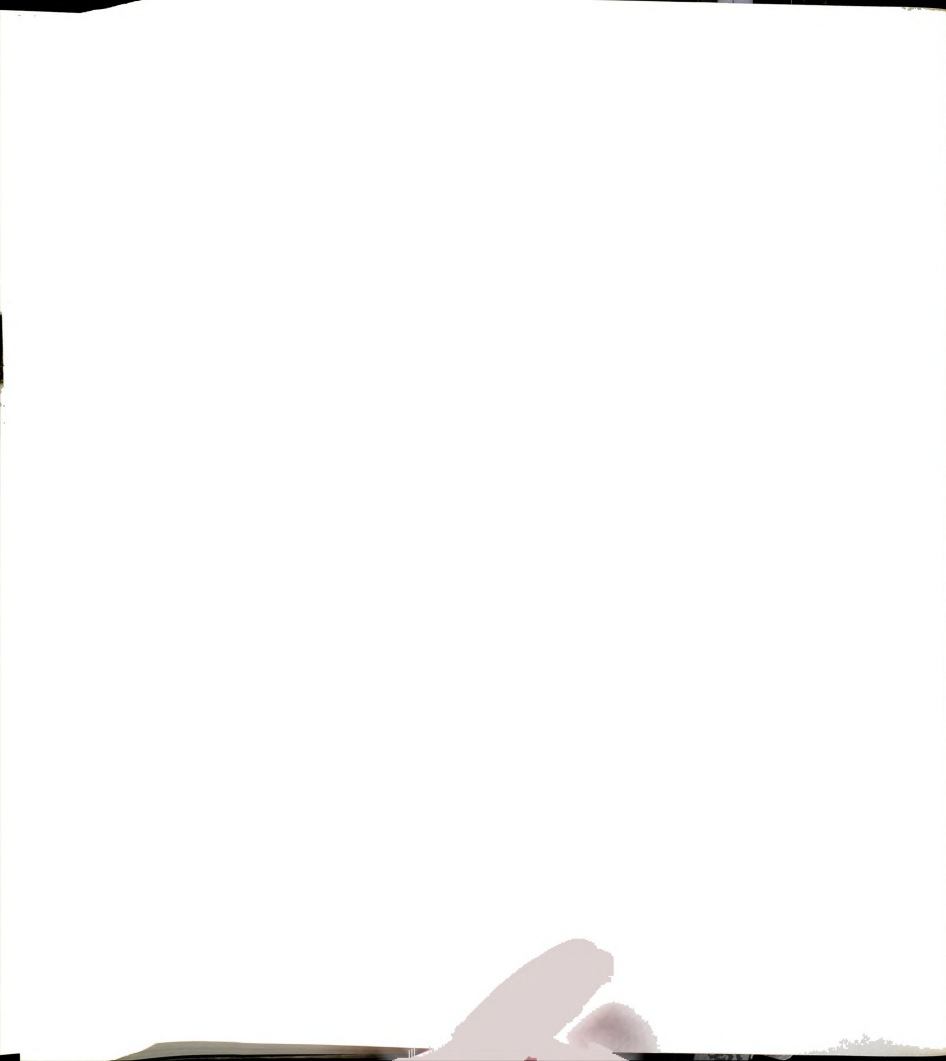
on its own as the devil" (Psychology and Religion 59). Examining the various ways in which Christianity has attempted to account for the origin of evil, he concludes that there are only two alternatives: either evil is a privatio boni (as St. Augustine claimed) or it has substance and shape in the autonomous figure of the devil. Jung believes the negative definition of evil to be unsatisfactory in a number of respects. Most obviously, it "robs evil of absolute existence and makes it a shadow that has only a relative existence dependent on light." Yet the power to corrupt creation, thus necessitating God's incarnation in Christ and his whole work of redemption, is hardly to be credited to a figure whose potency derives merely from the privation of good. Jung reasons, therefore, that the "devil as an autonomous and eternal personality is much more in keeping with his role as the adversary of Christ and with the psychological reality of evil" (Psychology and Religion 168 & 169).

If this is actually the case, a still more vexed question immediately arises, since in "a monotheistic religion everything that goes against God can only be traced back to God himself" (Psychology and Religion 169). In other words, an omnipotent God who is solely responsible for the creation of the universe, and all that lies within it, must be the ultimate source of evil, as well as of good. The inference is clearly disturbing, and Jung suggests that it



illuminates the traditional theological insistence upon God's formulation as a Trinity. The spontaneous symbol of the quaternity represents good and evil as the moral aspects of a natural polarity; yet it is exactly this idea which Christianity finds so uncomfortable. Thus the indisputably quaternary Cross, "set midway between heaven and hell as a symbol of Christ's struggle with the devil" (Psychology and Religion 170), depicts, not the divinity itself, but the Passion which God endured in his encounter with the world of matter. It is the refusal to locate evil within the sphere of the divinity, and hence to accord it an identity independent of its relation to good, which Durrell finds objectionable. He argues that we have "overweighed the frail bark of Christianity by denying totally the reality of evil" (Carley, "An Interview with Lawrence Durrell" 43). The result, as with any repression, is an uncontrollable resurgence of what has been denied, either in a direct manifestation of evil or in the displaced form of an obsession with matter.

Though Durrell condemns both Christianity and Judaism for their materialistic bias, it is actually in his analysis of National Socialism that he comes to grips with "the reality of evil." As Sutcliffe flippantly warns Blanford, "if you go mucking about with the discrete ego you must be careful not to make a mistake and release a whole lot of indiscreet ids" (Sebastian 136). This is precisely the





disaster which overtakes the Germans, when they succumb en masse to the impulses of the shadow. Aspiring to free the world of the tyranny which matter exercises in the shape of the prevailing western religions, they are themselves implicated by the very god they wish to dethrone. Significantly, the German enterprise begins with an outrageous success, "as if all they touched turned to gold" (Constance 100). Soon, however, the occupation of Avignon exposes the real affiliation of the Nazis. Constance notices how the town, which "had always been somewhat dirty and dilapidated," changes character: "the smell of rotting garbage became pronounced, . . . mountains of it, overflowing from dustbins and packages everywhere." The contamination resulting from the presence of the Nazis is appropriately summarized in her ensuing discovery that the only public phone booth has been used as "a sort of urinal by persons unknown" (Constance 184).

In the same vein, she later learns from Nancy Quiminal that Fischer, who embodies all the worst traits of the Germans, is tormented by a sense of inadequacy which is "based on shame--for he wet his bed" (Constance 199). Similarly, it is in the lavatory that Lansdorf chooses to commit suicide, when it becomes evident that the Allies are succeeding in their counter offensive. The particular nature of his retreat recalls that of the departing troops, who "had expressed themselves in a manner which had become for



them conventional in war. Everywhere there was excrement, on tables, on chairs, in doorways, on stairs" (Constance 370). Far from being aligned with the spiritual values to which they originally lay claim, the Nazis only prove the supremacy of matter. In their attitude to race and religion, everything, that is, "to do with monotheism, monolithic organisation, everything mono, which leads to this self-induced paranoia called Western Civilisation . . . . The Germans are simply following out the whole pattern in their usual gross fashion" (Constance 276).

In fact, the "death-desiring culture" which the Nazis thus exemplify is a logical result of the Judeo-Christian transition from gold to faeces (Monsieur 217). The inversion of values which it signifies leads from material corruption to the corruption of matter. Ironically, Smirgel appeals to alchemy as a justification for the genocide which the Germans have planned, when he explains to Constance that "the Jew is the slave of gold. Spiritually we are on the gold standard of Jewish values." The New Order he envisages "will be based no more on gold, but on blood--the document of the race-might" (Constance 236).<sup>5</sup> In alchemical terms, of course, blood is a symbol for the soul, and hence suggests the initial purpose of the Nazis; to redeem it from imprisonment in the Judeo-Christian world of matter. Yet their actual practice is inspired not by alchemy but by the swastika, with its "dark red of bull's blood, upon which



the crooked cross had been overstamped" (Constance 185). Now the swastika is a quaternity, but the Nazi version is usually considered to rotate in a counter-clockwise direction. As Jung observes, "in general, a leftward movement indicates movement towards the unconscious, while a rightward (clockwise) movement goes towards consciousness. The one is 'sinister,' the other 'right'" (The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious 320). The swastika itself, then, reveals that the Germans have inverted the alchemical process. For the self-development which is its underlying aim, they have substituted the "crooked" goal of regression. Descending into the abyss of the unconscious, they thereby illustrate the warning of Eliphas Levi: "If you embark on the course to sainthood and fail to achieve your goal you are condemned to become a demon" (Livia 184).

In celebrating "the central horror of death; being sucked down the great sink like an insect, into the cloaca maxima of death," the Nazis exhibit their true alignment with "the anus mundi" (Livia 5). Their orientation is thus the very opposite of the Gnostic attitude to death as a cumulative restoration of the anima mundi. This distinction is apparent in Affad's reaction to the death-bed vigil which he shares with Constance. Watching their mutual friend Dolores, as she finally relinquishes her hold on life, he observes that "one breath is hooked into another . . . . In between the breaths is the space where we live, between the



beforebreath and the afterbreath is a field or realm where time exists and then ceases to exist" (Sebastian 88). Affad's explanation is rooted in the etymological affinity between "breath" and "soul." Their relationship is most obvious in the derivation of the Latin spiritus, or spirit, from the verb spirare, meaning to breathe. However, both the Greek pneuma and the Latin anima (cognate to the Greek anemos, wind) also have this dual connotation. Hence it is between the inhalation and exhalation which comprise the rhythm of material existence that Affad seeks the great breath of the universal soul.

The same sense of contact with the anima mundi informs his conception of wealth. For Affad, it is neither excrement nor blood, but sperm that "is really riches, money in its physical aspect" (Constance 268). Criticizing the devaluation of sexual passion, he tells Constance that contemporary love is "mostly debased currency, the timid investments of undischarged bankrupts with nothing to offer but undocumented sperm, trivial aggressive lusts" (Constance 299). In their stead, he asserts the importance of a sexual connection which partakes of the transcendental connection with the divine spirit. It is in the "little space, between the breaths," he claims, "that we have started to expand the power of the orgasm, as a united synchronised experience, making it more and more conscious, mobilising its power and fecundity with every kiss" (Sebastian 88-89). Affad's words





suggest that he sees in the universe a process of development analogous to individuation. Just as the union of the ego with the anima effects the supreme goal of self-realization, so does the union of the ego with the anima mundi, through sexual conjunction, achieve the realization of the universal Self.

Eros and Thanatos are therefore directly linked, "like a single centaur joined at the waist" (Constance 350). Sexual intercourse, "that supreme fiction of joining" (Constance 336), anticipates the real fusion with the eternal spirit, which occurs only after death. Motivated, then, by an idealism which the Nazis have inverted, Affad makes the same association between erotic love and the desire for death. Yet there is one significant difference in the practical consequences of their common equation, a difference which reveals the antithetical extremes that Gnosticism and National Socialism represent. Whereas the perverted sexual exploits of General Von Esslin and Fischer demonstrate a relish for destruction that is aimed at others, the object of Affad's death-wish is himself.

Not unnaturally, Constance balks at this conclusion, which is in her opinion an equally unacceptable elevation of death over life. As a Freudian psychoanalyst, she is well aware that Eros and Thanatos are the primary instincts, directed during the intermediate phase of the autoerotic stage in infancy at the self. But the desire to regress to



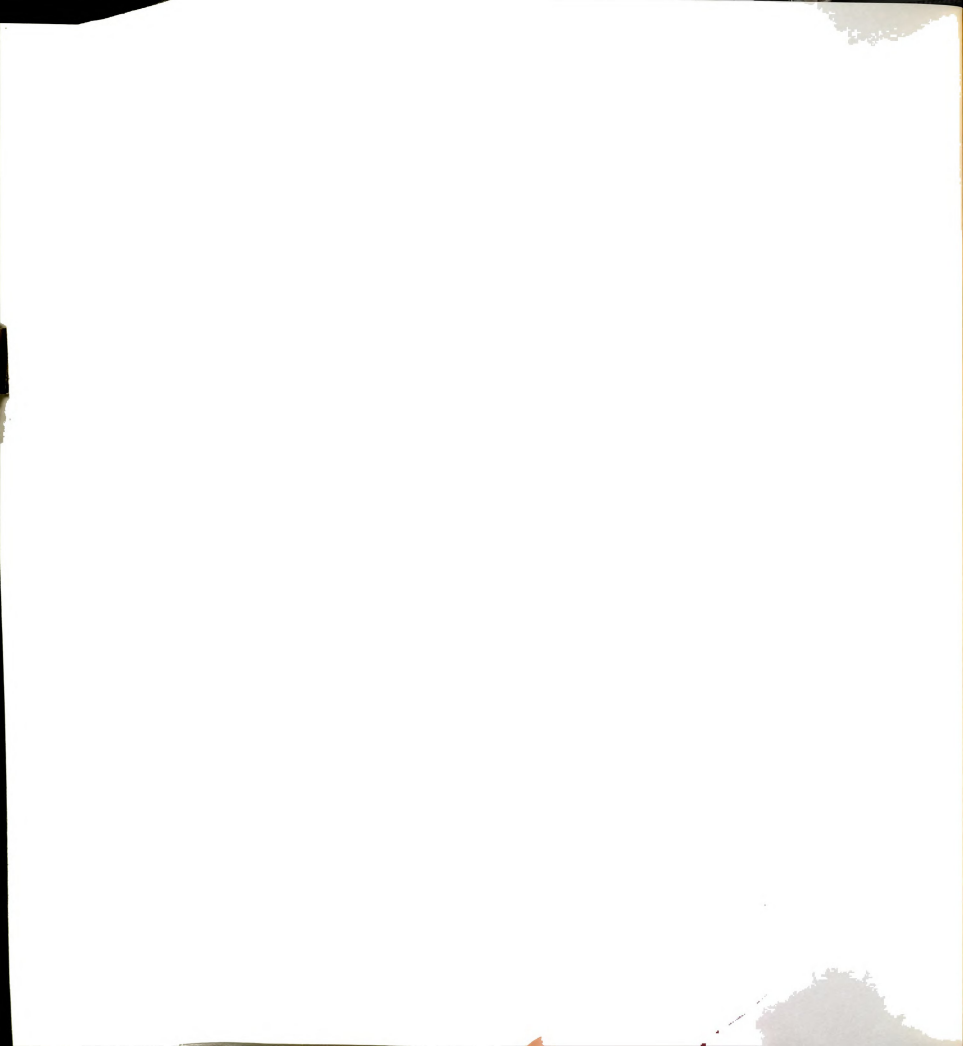
the original condition of inorganic matter, which Freud speculated was the source of this instinct, is in normal development averted from its primary object by displacement. In other words, an instinct for self-preservation emerges, with the result that the death-wish is projected against others in the altered form of an instinct for destruction. So, for Constance, Affad's active pursuit of death is not an indication of his spiritual maturity, but evidence of its very lack. Remarking on her error in thinking the Mediterranean races wiser than the Germans, she curses "that collection of dismal death-worshippers projecting their infantile death-wish out of a ruined Egypt!" (Sebastian 65).

The conflict between the lovers reveals a clash of values as powerful as that which characterizes the opposition between the Gnostics and Nazis. Moreover, it too is based upon the dichotomy between spirit and matter. Adopting the logical positivist view expounded by Freud, Constance sees death as a regression to the state of total inanimacy, an end of individual consciousness and hence reduction to matter. In contrast, Affad subscribes to an organic view of the world, according to which death is a progression and extension of consciousness through liberation of the spirit contained in matter. The difference between the two perspectives is obvious; logical positivism emphasizes the ultimate importance of death, as distinct from the optimistic stance of Gnosticism, in which death is



merely a transition from one state of being to another. The disagreement between Affad and Constance provides a second arena, then, for discussion of the relationship between spirit and matter. More specifically, the opposing pairs, male/female and Gnosticism/National Socialism (as a subset of Judeo-Christianity) present different aspects of that central split, spirit/matter.

The reconciliation of opposites which evolves from these conflicts is likewise carried out on several levels: psychic, sexual and universal. Constance supplies a particularly clear example of how the synthesis is achieved, for she embraces all three dimensions of experience and, in this respect, is indeed "a key" (Constance 353). Clinging to her western prejudice that death signifies extinction, she is, of course, initially appalled by Affad's commitment to the Gnostic sect which Rob Sutcliffe has earlier called a "grubby little suicide academy" (Monsieur 244). Yet her education is at odds with her intuitive conviction that "trying to want only what happened, and to part with things without regret . . . . made [her] sort of on equal terms with death" (Livia 248).<sup>6</sup> Emotionally, therefore, Constance is already equipped to understand something of the Gnostic position; that it is wiser "to co-operate with the inevitable and learn to profit by this unhappy state of things--by realising and accommodating death," than to resist "the flow of the ineluctable force which, like a



river, bears us down to the ocean of everything's unknowing" (Constance 343). She instinctively senses the natural and intrinsic relation of life to death, but has no formal system of belief to support her intuitions. What Affad offers her is a rich "schema of which [she] had a profound need," so that she can at last "rest [her] intellect upon something which seems solid" (Constance 288). Through the expression of his sexual ardor, Affad is able to communicate a spiritual awareness which he has himself derived from Gnosticism. Although he never succeeds in converting Constance entirely to his way of thinking, that knowledge does qualify her original adherence to logical positivism.

With Affad's help, then, Constance finally begins to resolve the polarity between intuition and intellection. Her psychic development continues and she, in turn, transmits what she has learned from Affad to Aubrey Blanford. In this final union both find their completion. However, the significance of their achievement (as we have seen) lies in its reconciliation of opposites. On a psychological level, the union represents fulfillment of the individuation process--a reconciliation of the schism between consciousness and the unconscious. In its alchemical function, the relationship describes the reconciliation of male with female, and the emergence of some new thing which combines spirit and matter. Thus the alchemical coniunctio effects a synthesis of psychic and sexual antitheses.





But the dimension on which it operates has implications beyond the exclusively personal realm of the protagonists, for the inner world of the emotions is not divorced from the outer world of their social and political obligations. On the contrary, they are interpenetrating and mutually informing realities. Just as Affad's Gnosticism profoundly influences the love he shares with Constance, so does that same love influence his commitment to Gnosticism. Constance, who is no less concerned with the quest for spiritual illumination (as her interest in yoga actually indicates), recognizes the inherent limitations in Affad's religion. Indeed, she reflects that "the true yogi knew the hour of his death, and did not need artificial reminders in order to render it a conscious act." Understanding, then, how impertinent is the attempt "to pre-empt reality when destiny may well be preparing to make an end of us in the next five minutes" (Sebastian 151), Constance actively subverts Affad's loyalty to the suicidal tenets of Gnosticism. In the expression of her love for him, she affirms the value of life; and her triumphant restoration of Affad's son to the world of feeling from which he has been estranged by his autism results in a like recovery of Affad himself.<sup>7</sup> The degree to which she succeeds in her endeavour is apparent from the implications of Affad's death. When he dies as a substitute for Constance, what he achieves is not the perfect Gnostic act of self-sacrifice, designed to redeem



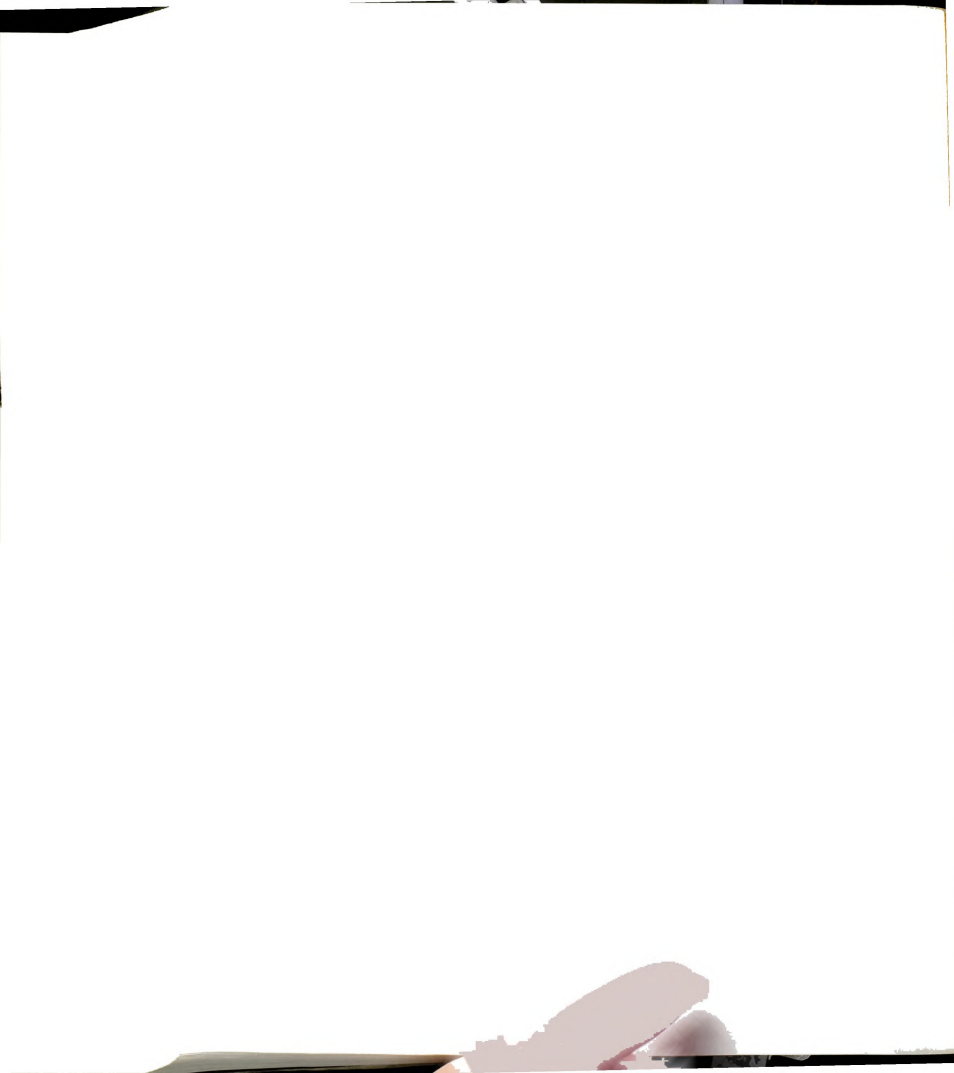
death, but a redemption of life instead.

As Affad's Gnosticism is mediated by his love for Constance, so an equivalent process of disenchantment qualifies Smirgel's allegiance to National Socialism. It is their mutual adherence to the Nazi party which originally unites Smirgel and Livia. Eventually they become lovers, but then he, like Blanford, his predecessor in Livia's affections, detects that "profound reserve which prevented her from really giving herself in love" (Quinx 116). Accidentally discovering the details of Livia's incestuous relationship with Hilary, Smirgel correctly recognizes that she will never "be cured, so long as the magnet of Hilary's presence existed somewhere in the world." This knowledge has "poisoned his waking life" (Quinx 119), and he therefore resolves upon vengeance. Ironically, the opportunity presents itself through the increasing frustration of his political ideals, a disappointment which parallels the tribulations of his emotional life. As Smirgel later explains to Constance, "at long last I too grew disillusioned with the Nazis and ashamed of my own passivity in the face of Nazi doctrines and acts" (Quinx 120). However, he is still sufficiently imbued with the Nazi bloodlust to exploit the German military resources as an instrument of revenge. Thus, after arranging for Hilary to join the French Resistance, Smirgel promptly betrays him to the Germans.



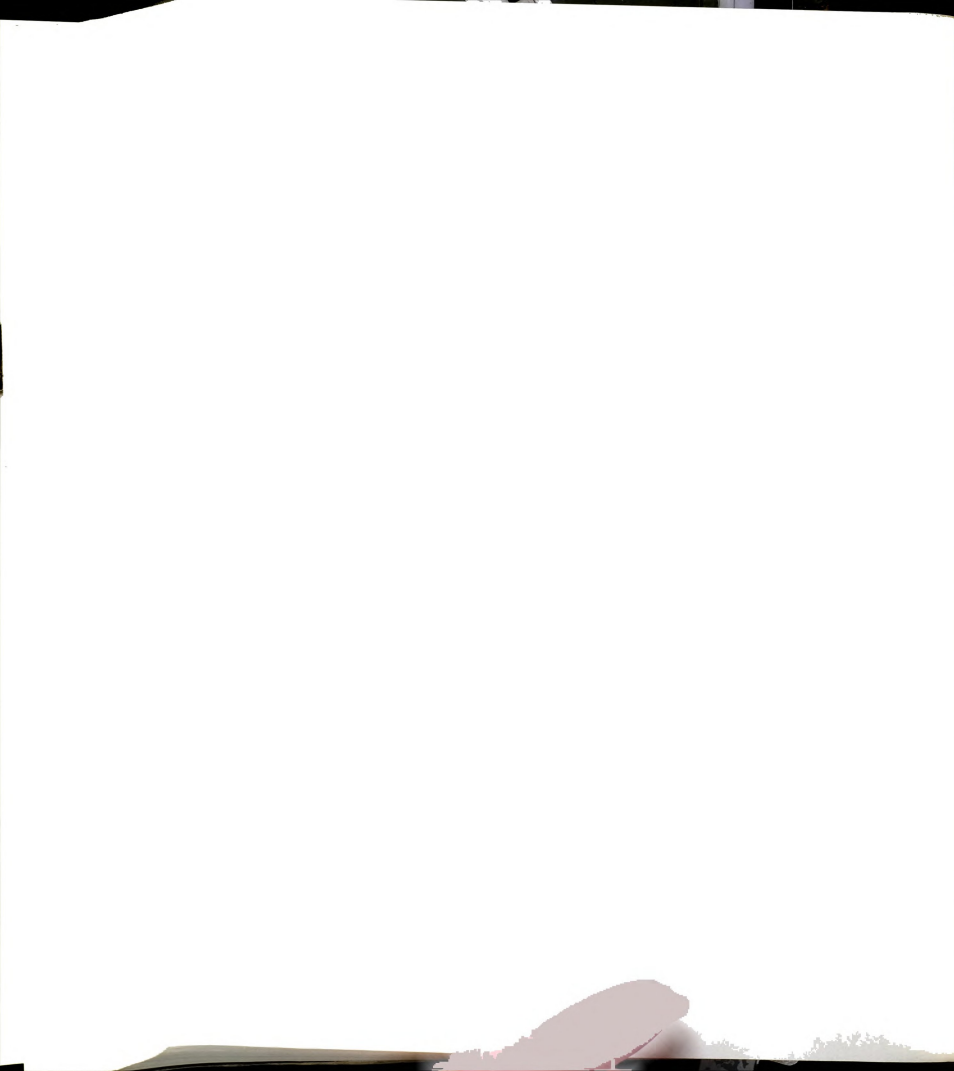
The ramifications of Smirgel's treachery are far greater than he has anticipated. Compelled to watch Hilary's execution, Livia atones for her earlier lack of vision by blinding herself. Her subsequent suicide precludes the reconciliation for which Smirgel has hoped, and thereby defeats his whole purpose. Though Smirgel himself survives, the loss of the woman he loves completes his disengagement from the political structure which brought them together. At the same time, then, that the incident reveals a change of heart analogous in some respects to the experience of Affad in his relationship with Constance, the different conclusions to each intimacy emphasize the polarity of the beliefs which have sustained them. Whereas Affad saves Constance from death, albeit unwittingly, Smirgel is actually the cause of Livia's demise. He exhibits in his personal relations precisely that destructiveness which distinguishes both National Socialism and the Judeo-Christianity to which it has reacted, only to become its imitation.

Yet, despite this opposition of values, the movement of the entire narrative clearly heralds a rapprochement. In the same way that the sexual liaisons of the various characters lead them steadily towards personal assimilation, so does the modification of their convictions, through those liaisons, lead to the assimilation of the external world. Significantly, Durrell depicts the achievement of this final



state, in which all the factors are ultimately reconciled, as a collaborative effort. The protagonists abandon their previous hostilities to cooperate in the recovery of the Templar treasure. Lord Galen and Prince Hassad provide financial backing, as well as the political immunity for which Smirgel, in return, contributes the map of the quincunxial caves made by the Austrian sappers. Similarly, Quatrefages shares what he has learned, and the gipsies appoint a delegate to safeguard their interest in the caves, where they have long worshipped the patron saint of their tribe. In this assorted range of people, every past alignment is thus represented, whether it be Gnostic, Nazi or Judeo-Christian.

In like fashion, the participation of Blanford and Constance is required, for their recently consummated union invests them with a new figurative importance. Joined together in a conjunction which corresponds to the hierosgamos of the alchemists, they have assumed a symbolic dimension as the universal principles of male and female respectively. When, therefore, they too appear at the ceremony which is a ritual preliminary to the opening of the caves, the conditions for production of the quincunx are at last complete. More specifically, in the common purpose which restores harmony amongst his protagonists, Durrell resolves the thematic oppositions between male and female, Gnosticism and the Judeo-Christianity of which National





Socialism is an extreme example. The quaternal structure of the Quintet is thus reinforced by the quaternity of its themes.

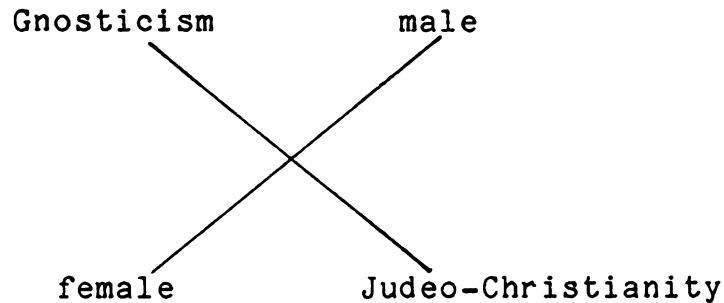


Figure 2: Durrell's Quincunx of Themes

Now one of the properties of this structure is, as Jung observes, that "the middle term of the second pair of opposites would coincide with the middle term of the first pair. The resultant figure is a quincunx, since the two pairs of opposites have a common mean or 'third form'" (Psychology and Religion 125). In this way the figure depicts the paradox which comprises the "One born of Four" (Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis 316); it acknowledges the dualities upon which it is founded but simultaneously describes their synthesis in a totality. The mutual aim which unites the protagonists of the Quintet clearly provides such a mean. Yet the particular significance of the quaternity is its reconciliation of the most basic polarity in human experience, that between spirit and matter. Whereas



the Christian Trinity emphasizes their eternal bifurcation, the quincunx symbolizes that transcendent reality in which the binary opposition of spirit and matter is resolved.<sup>8</sup>

The constituents of Durrell's quincunx have already revealed an underlying relevance as aspects of this very dichotomy. In the antithetical relation of Gnosticism to Judeo-Christianity, the real issue is the allegiance of the characters to the values of spirit and matter respectively. A like meaning informs the sexual antithesis, for it is the male Logos who inhabits the pneumatic realm and the female Sophia who conceives concrete reality. Hence the union of dualities which comprises the Avignon quincunx is finally a symbol of the indestructible world which results from the fusion of spirit with matter. Appropriately enough, then, it is only when the protagonists have been liberated from the constraints of their original condition, that they are at last empowered to enter the place "where the Grail lies hid" (Quinx 134). For the "moral geography" of mysticism charts the paths to a gold which can neither decay nor corrupt, that imperishable gold in which the attributes of spirit and matter are wedded.

The more immediate implication of Durrell's quincunx is its assertion of a congruence between eastern and western thought. In reconciling the oriental wisdom which suffuses Gnosticism with the clearly occidental traditions of the



Judeo-Christian world, Durrell argues that they are complementary, rather than contradictory, visions of the same reality. "Inner is Western and Outer Eastern" (Sebastian 199), but only in their union can we encompass the complexity of the human condition. Only, therefore, when intellection combines with intuition, and empiricism with mysticism, can we begin to apprehend man's place in the universe. This, indeed, is the attitude which Schwarz articulates,

hoping that something like the Principle of Indeterminacy as posited by our physicists for reality will find its way into the religious values of the new state; . . . . hoping for a materialism which is profoundly qualified by mysticism--a link between Epicurus and Pythagoras, so to speak. (Sebastian 174)<sup>9</sup>

Durrell's belief in the correspondence between science and religion is illuminated by the studies of Marie-Louise Von Franz. In her investigation of the conceptual models which supplied the foundation for classical physics, Von Franz demonstrates how the archetypal image of the sphere "formed the basis of scientific ideas about time and about space as three-dimensionally conceived." It was likewise from the image of the sphere that atomic theory originated; in the mythical formulations of Leucippus and Democritus, the smallest indivisible particle was envisaged as a kind of "soul-atom," which, together with other such particles, provided the totality of the universal soul.<sup>10</sup> Von Franz concludes, then, that a projection of the same archetypes is



responsible for the concepts of both classical physics and religion: "all these fundamental scientific hypotheses are, in the end, derived from a mandala-formed God image" (Projection and Re-Collection in Jungian Psychology 61).

A similar relationship to its archetypal origins is true of contemporary physics, she argues, although the precise form of the God image has altered to accommodate new ideas about physical reality. Einstein's theory of relativity, for example, posits a four-dimensional world which is not, in itself, subject to time. In other words, time supplies one of the coordinates for its description, but man's "consciousness merely moves along the world-lines of his body and his immediate surroundings and thus subjectively experiences the world as a temporal factor" (Number and Time 190). Now the determinism which is predicated by the timeless world of general relativity theory is antithetical to the findings of quantum theory. Heisenberg's uncertainty principle converts the laws of physics into statements about relative, instead of absolute, certainties. Various attempts to reconcile the two theories have entered into the realm of metaphysical speculation. One such instance, of particular interest to Von Franz, is the suggestion first put forward by Aloys Wenzl, a German philosopher of science who is somewhat dubiously regarded by mainstream physicists. Wenzl proposes that the four-dimensional continuum of the Einsteinian world-model





possesses only a potential existence.<sup>11</sup> When space-time reality is conceived in this way, it is not difficult to see a resemblance to Jung's unus mundus. In psychological terms, that is, the continuum can be understood as an essentially quaternary representation of the one world which exists in potentia, prior to its actualization in matter.

An identical view is expressed by Affad, in claiming that "Einstein's non-discrete field, Groddeck's 'It', and Pursewarden's 'heraldic universe' [are] all one and the same concept and would easily answer to the formulations of Patanjali" (Sebastian 28).<sup>12</sup> As he explains to Prince Hassad, the movements of yoga become mental acts, and "the basic realisation which meditation really brings is n-dimensional" (Sebastian 32). For Affad, as for many of the characters in the Quintet, physics and psychology lead ultimately to the religious experience of "reality prime."

Affad's assertion of a convergence between physics and theology requires both amplification and qualification. Some of the ideas which inform contemporary physics do indeed share a resemblance to concepts existing in other, and earlier, structures of thought. But, with the transition from visual representations of reality to mathematical equation systems of increasing complexity, an accurate translation of those ideas into the medium of language has long been impossible. It is therefore only the philosophy of physics, and not physics itself, which can be the subject of



any comparison. Nonetheless, a number of physicists have addressed the issue, amongst them no less an authority than Werner Heisenberg. In the modern conception of energy as the basic substrate of all matter, Heisenberg sees a correspondence with the Heraclitean world-fire. Believing fire to be the underlying substance of the universe, from which everything else was derived, Heraclitus surmised that it was thus the source of both spirit and matter. However, as Von Franz points out, this idea is actually a refinement of the Greek Logos, that "all-directing world mind" which is, equally, an aspect of Gnosticism (Projection and Re-Collection in Jungian Psychology 67).<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, in the fact that mathematical forms alone can describe micro- and macro-cosmic reality, Heisenberg sees a reactivation of the Pythagorean belief that physical matter was ultimately geometrical in nature. According to Pythagoras, the five regular solids could explain, or even comprised the essence of, the entire material world.<sup>14</sup> Number was sacred, then, for it was the principle of order by which God regulated creation. What prompted Pythagoras to reach this conclusion was the discovery of the relationship between arithmetical ratios and musical notes, an observation which led to the idea that the harmony of the spheres was both mathematical and musical. In this context, it is worth remarking Rob Sutcliffe's desire to produce a "book arranged in diminished fifths from the point of view



of orchestration" (Constance 123). His words suggest that the structure of the Quintet is likewise inspired by the "divine" function of number.

An analogous sense of number as the expression of the divine will characterizes the complicated number-system which was formulated by Marcus, one of the earliest Gnostics to emerge from the school of Valentinus. Indeed, Hippolytus actually claimed that "the whole of Valentinianism was based on the numbers and geometry of Pythagoras and Plato" (Mead, Fragments of a Faith Forgotten 315).<sup>15</sup> It is thus possible to see, in the recurrence of ideas which bear a resemblance to certain philosophical concepts found in Gnosticism, what Durrell means by the convergence of contemporary physics and religion. He argues that the ontological principles which inform them are the same, although they have resulted in very different theories of knowledge. In this respect, he clearly agrees with Jung, who has observed that "the physicist's models ultimately rest on the same archetypal foundations that also underlie the speculations of the theologian. Both are psychology, and it too has no other foundations" (Psychology and Religion 187).

Number itself, Jung concludes, is the mediating factor between psychic and physical reality. It is "something on the one hand mathematically abstract and on the other hand fabulous and mythological" (Civilization in Transition 409). Concurrently, therefore, numbers possess a quantitative



aspect, in the sense that they provide a system of measurement for objects in the tangible world, and a qualitative aspect as the instrument for creating or perceiving order. The two aspects of number coalesce in the experience of acausally synchronistic phenomena; that is, "the simultaneous occurrence of a certain psychic state with one or more external events which appear as meaningful parallels to the momentary subjective state," although there is no causal connection (The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche 441). But the significance of acausal synchronicity is the fact that it implies the existence of "two essentially heterogeneous world-systems, whose sporadic interlocking causes certain aspects of wholeness to manifest themselves" (Number and Time 247). Hence the unitary representation of number in acausally synchronistic phenomena suggests to Jung that number is actually the principle which reconciles matter with spirit in the intermediate realm of the unus mundus.

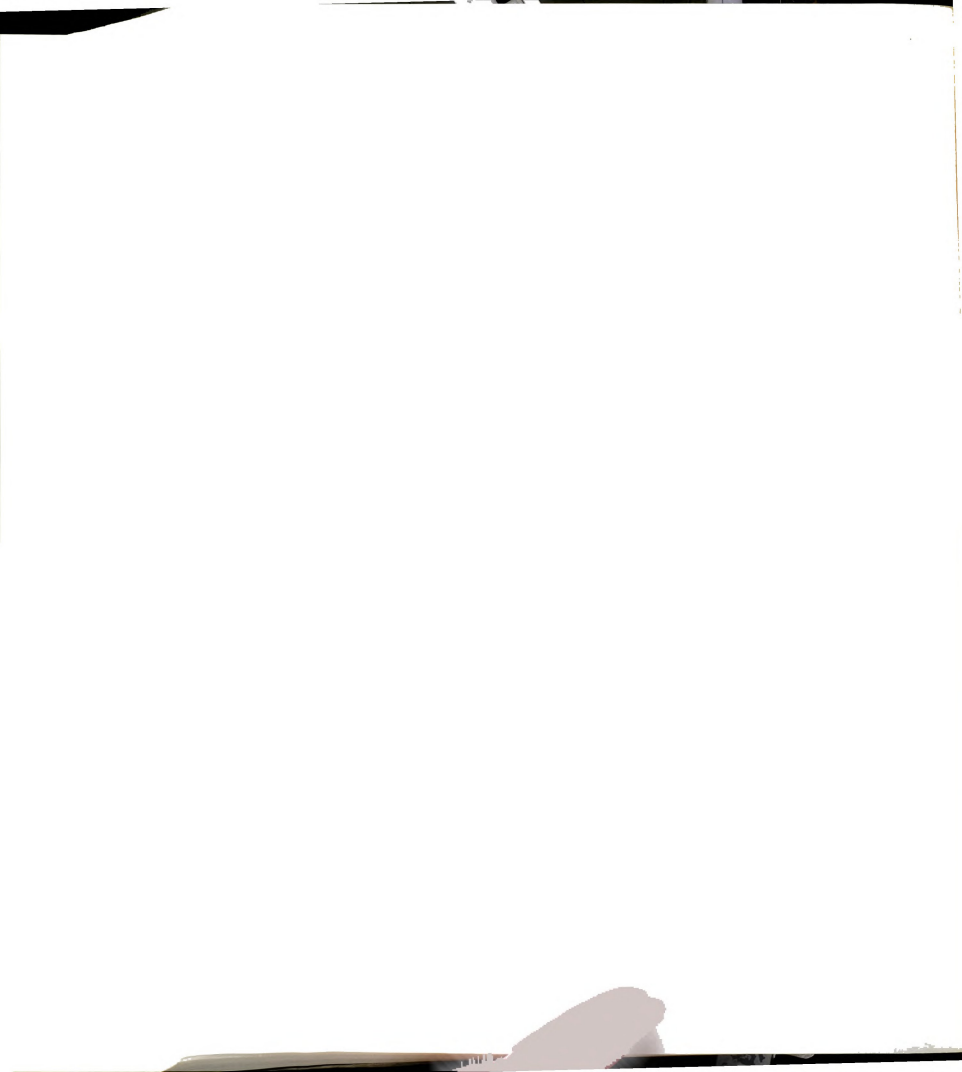
Jung's belief that the mathematical and mythological functions of number are thus the two facets of one, transcendent reality seems very similar to Durrell's conception of number in the Quintet. Its symbolic application is obvious: in the numerous pairings which express the binary oppositions of conscious/unconscious, matter/spirit, and so forth, as well as being models of the divine syzygy; similarly, in the triadic relationship





between Piers, Bruce and Sylvie, which signifies the synthesis of those oppositions "as a total self, or the symbol of such an abstraction" (Monsieur 214). From this triadic formulation of wholeness, which is solely spiritual, the Quintet progresses to the fourness of the quaternary: the four-dimensional world of space-time reality, the four stages of the alchemical procedure, the four which expresses the integration of body and spirit. In this way, it arrives at the four-in-one of the quincunx, supplanting the five Ms for which Affad condemns the occident with that self-realization which culminates in the vision of "reality prime."<sup>16</sup>

Number thus resonates throughout the entire Quintet, as the common ordering principle of Gnosticism and alchemy, as the clue to the very essence of the Templar treasure. It supplies the patterns from which the protagonists must seek, and decipher, the meaning of their own lives. This, Durrell implies, is the function of number which the western world has forgotten. In the desire to quantify reality, man has succeeded only in divesting that reality of a qualitative dimension which is equally vital, if we are ever to understand its significance. The responsibility Durrell assumes as his task in The Avignon Quintet is, then, to recover the balance. Believing that salvation lies in the meeting of East and West, in the fusion of ancient wisdom with modern science, he struggles to "free the novel from



the shackles of causality with a narrative apparently dislocated and disjointed yet informed by mutually contradictory insights" (Quinx 165-166). The recognition of that realm wherein they unite has resulted in his final artistic accomplishment, the long-projected "Book of Miracles." What Durrell has thereby achieved is most aptly expressed in his own words: "When the mathematical and the poetical co-exist as they were always meant to; a collision of worlds takes place and you write a hymn to Process" (Quinx 141).



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter to Ian MacNiven, 15 December 1984. Quoted by MacNiven in "The Quincunx Quiddified" 5.

<sup>2</sup> Carole Mablekos addresses this theme in her excellent article on Tunc and Nunquam, but her comments are equally applicable to the Quintet, in which Durrell is dealing with similar views ("Lawrence Durrell's Tunc and Nunquam: Rebirth Now or Never" 52).

<sup>3</sup> Certainly Durrell's personal life is no evidence of anti-semitism, since his second wife was actually Jewish.

<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to note that Augustine was a Manichaeon for nine years before converting to the Christian faith, which his mother, Saint Monica, had adopted. Joseph Campbell remarks that "Every bit of his enormously influential theology is shot through with a Gnostic-Manichaeon revulsion from the flesh" (Creative Mythology 148). His analysis of Augustine is somewhat reductive, however, and ignores the extent to which Augustine revolted, in turn, from the anti-materialistic stance of Gnosticism. It was Augustine who stamped the Western tradition with the affirmation that matter, being created by God, is good.

<sup>5</sup> Ironically, Smirgel's articulation of the German rationale bears a close resemblance to the plans allegedly produced by the Jewish Wise Men in the Protocols of Zion. See, for example, Protocol No. 3, which proposes to "create by all the secret subterranean methods open to us and with the aid of gold, which is all in our hands, a universal economic crisis whereby we shall throw upon the streets whole mobs of workers simultaneously in all the countries of Europe. These mobs will rush delightedly to shed the blood of those whom, in the simplicity of their ignorance, they have envied from their cradles, and whose property they will then be able to loot." It is also worth noting that, in the same Protocol, the snake is used as a symbol of Jewish power: "The whole long path we have trodden is ready now to close its cycle of the Symbolic Snake, by which we symbolise our people. When this ring closes, all the States of Europe will be locked in its coils as in a powerful vice" (Quoted from Bernstein's work, The Truth about "The Protocols of Zion" 302 & 305). Significantly, in Durrell's depiction of



World War II, it is the Germans themselves who invoke the serpentine powers of the Dionysian tradition, only to abuse those powers in a fashion which is every bit as destructive as the intentions they attribute to the Jews.

6 In an interview with Joan Goulianos, Durrell appears to be discussing the same idea that Constance expresses, when he observes that oriental philosophies are not passive, but operate on the basis of "the willpower of desirelessness. It's a technique of not interfering but influencing. It's not ascetism either. It's what Tran Tzu calls the fasting of the heart" ("A Conversation with Lawrence Durrell about Art, Analysis and Politics" 164).

7 For a fuller discussion of the way in which Constance qualifies Affad's adherence to Gnosticism, see Chapter Two.

8 Jung argues that the "union of one pair of opposites only produces a two dimensional triad . . . . This, being a plane figure, is not a reality but a thought. Hence two pairs of opposites, making a quaternio . . . are needed to represent physical reality" (Psychology and Religion 121).

9 A rather more flamboyant version of this idea is propounded by Rob Sutcliffe, when he writes in lipstick, "E=mc<sup>2</sup> with the legend ERECTION EQUALS MEDITATION PLUS CONNIVANCE SQUARED." To this parody of Einstein he adds, "MEDITATION OVER FORNICATION LIKE MASS OVER FORCE YIELDS REINCARNATION" (Constance 323).

10 It is only, of course, in the development of high energy physics that the discovery of subatomic particles has been made.

11 Wenzl speculates that the Einsteinian world-model is a "pattern of space-time reality, insofar as this can be determined, and strictly the potential scope of possibilities, insofar as a free actualization can take place in them" (Metaphysics of Contemporary Physics 128-129. Quoted from Von Franz, Number and Time 190). His interpretation of the model which results from relativity theory is clearly similar to that of Alexander, whose work Space, Time and Deity Durrell certainly knows. Wenzl also writes that this "world, if we are to make a statement about its essence, is a world of elementary spirits" (quoted from Frank, Philosophy of Science: The Link Between Science and Philosophy 235). Clearly, this is not the traditional language of physics. Frank's book provides a good counter balance to such views; it is a cautious and thorough study of the problems inherent in classifying contemporary physics according to philosophical concepts.

12 Patanjali was a second century B.C. Indian philosopher and the founder of Yoga.

13 In fact, Durrell picks up on this idea when he depicts the metaphysical challenge of Gnosticism as the need "to turn back the tide of spiritual entropy" (Sebastian 81). If energy is the substance from which both hyle and pneuma are created, then entropy can be seen not just as a loss of energy in the material world, but also as a diminution of the pleroma.

14 The five regular solids of Pythagoras are the tetrahedron, cube, octahedron, dodecahedron and icosahedron. His view of the world as a geometrical expression of God's will was refined by Plato in the Timaeus. It was from Plato's cosmology, of course, that Jung deduced the universal significance of the quaternity.

15 The idea is not as preposterous as it might initially seem, for the Pythagorean schools were part of the orphic communities, from which Gnosticism is descended. Mead discusses the possible validity of Hippolytus' assertion, and the implications of number as a cosmological symbol. It is interesting to note that Mead concludes his discussion by remarking that it suggests a union of the past and present: "It is at this point that the intuitions of antiquity and the most recent discoveries of modern science should meet face to face" (Fragments of a Faith Forgotten 332).

16 Von Franz remarks that, in China, "the number five possesses the same significance as four does with us, because it is taken to represent the centered four. This concept is also found in the West, in the alchemical idea of the quinta essentia. The quinta essentia is not additively joined onto the first four as a fifth element, but represents the most refined, spiritually imaginable unity of the four elements" (Number and Time 120-121). Clearly, Durrell's quincunx is to be understood in the same sense.



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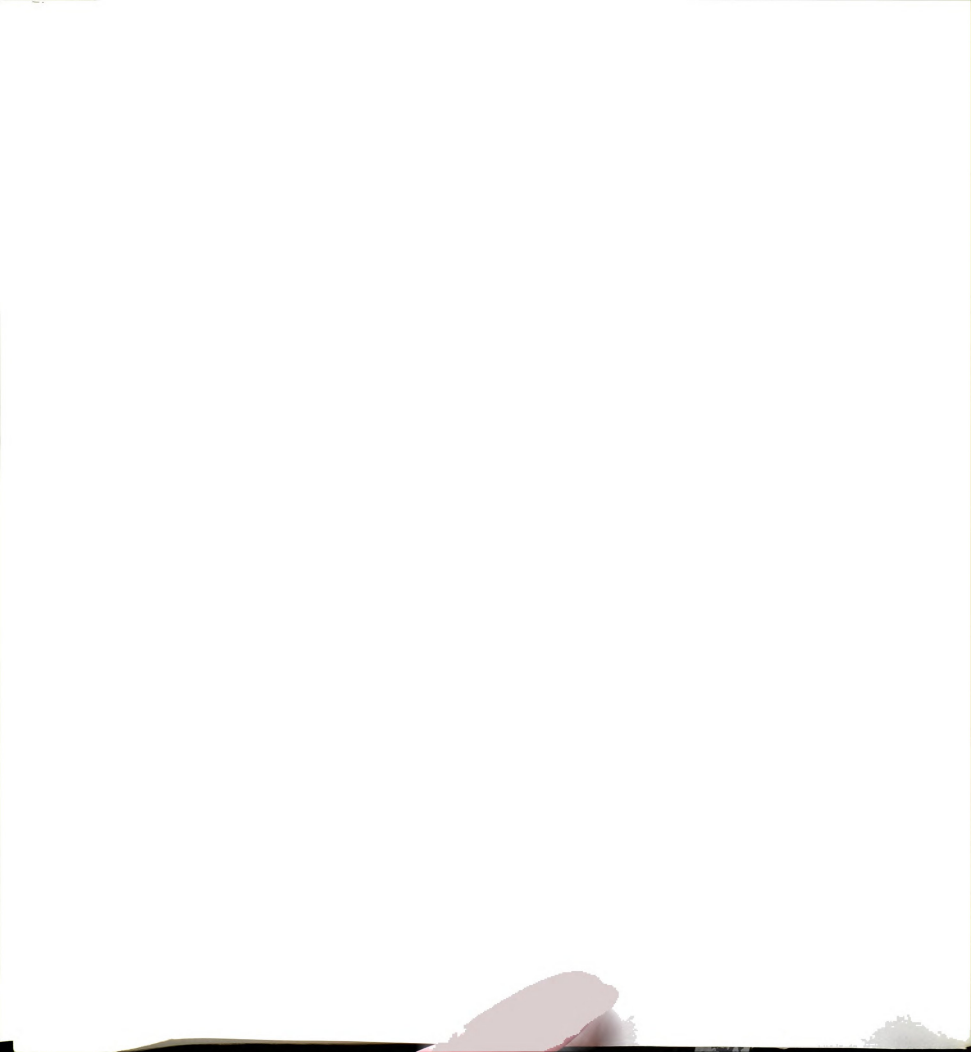


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