

To Test an Idea:
Menippean Satire in Lawrence Durrell's *Avignon Quintet*

Senior Paper

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For a Degree Bachelor of Arts with
A Major in Literature at
The University of North Carolina at Asheville
Fall 2009

By *JACOB RILEY*

Thesis Director
Dr. Blake Hobby

Thesis Advisor
Dr. Michael Gillum

Philosophical ideas animate Durrell's writing, yet Durrell does not aspire to philosophy. He admits in a *Key to Modern British Poetry* that he is “[d]eficient in true scholarship” and has “only been able to bring to the job only a wide haphazard reading” (x). Durrell proclaims: “The materials we use for thinking are so unstable that it is unlikely we shall ever reach a final definition [. . .] Yet we are forced to use them. There is no final truth to be found—there is only provisional truth within a given context” (3). Durrell's works deal with relationships and the ability we have—both as beings living in the world and as readers encountering a text—to negotiate relative meaning, see life's general deficiencies, and arrive at pragmatic truths. Durrell depicts his characters intellectual systematizations as necessary charades in order to test an idea. Durrell's works lead characters to weigh options, see reality as perspectival, and arrive at concrete decisions. Such a malleability of thought and language can not only be found in Durrell's writing but also in works of literature broadly categorized as Menippean satire, a link not yet explored in Durrell criticism. Arguing that Durrell's works function in a Menippean mode, I will explore the porous nature of thought and identity in *The Avignon Quintet*.

Menippean satire has been a fluid category since its ancient beginnings. According to Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism*, Menippean satire is “a prose form” with a recurrent feature of “incidental verse” (309). However, Frye attempts to pin down other aspects of Menippean Satire:

The Menippean satire deals less with people as such than with mental attitudes [. . .]
 The Menippean satire thus resembles the confession in its ability to handle abstract ideas and theories and differs from the novel in its characterization, which is stylized rather than naturalistic, and presents people as mouthpieces of the ideas they represent. (310)

Though none of the works of Menippus survive, many works continued the tradition he established. Frye considers works such as *Gulliver's Travels*, *Candide*, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, and even *Brave New World* as works of fiction, but not novels (308). Likewise, it is difficult to call Durrell's *Avignon Quintet* a novel.

Northrop Frye laments that certain works of fiction have been misunderstood because they are not recognized as Menippean Satire: "a clearer understanding of the form and traditions of the anatomy would make a good many elements in the history of literature come to focus [. . .] there are many [. . .] anatomies that are neglected only because the categories to which they belong are unrecognized" (Frye 312). For instance, in Menippean Satire, "[t]he intellectual structure built up from the story makes for violent dislocations in the customary logic of narrative, though the appearance of carelessness that results reflects on the carelessness of the reader or his tendency to judge by a novel-centered conception of fiction" (310). Critics have often struggled with the structure of the *Quintet*. Melody L. Enscoe in "Systematic Imagery in Durrell's *Avignon Quintet*" suggests that the *Quintet's* images compose the complex structure that gives the work a coherent meaning: "the destruction and reconstruction of established groups of characters, narrative perspectives, ideologies, and images are essential patterns that can lead one [. . .] to a coherent understanding of Durrell's most challenging work" (152). In contrast, Ann Gibaldi in "Entropy in Lawrence Durrell's *Avignon Quintet*: Theme and Structure in *Sebastian* and *Quinx*," argues that Durrell's conscious lack of structure reflects his stance on the reversal of chaos through submission to entropy: "[Durrell] refuses to impose a highly formalized and recognizable structure on the *Quintet*. Instead he chooses a structure that is chaotic, submitting to entropy with the faith that through this submission an underlying pattern or structure will reveal itself" (104). Another critic, Susan Van der Closter argues that the *Quintet* is structured like a Medieval polyptych,

demonstrating “the timeless relevance of medieval symbolism, renewing and humanizing it by bringing it into the twentieth century” (44). While structural analyses can give us clues to the meaning of the *Quintet*, one might also benefit from approaching it from the perspective of genre.

Widening the scope of Menippean satire to what he calls the Menippean genres, Mikhail Bakhtin in *Problems in Dostoevsky's Poetics* claims that the primary goal of a Menippean satire is to test an idea or truth:

The most unrestrained and fantastic adventures are present here in organic and indissoluble artistic unity with the philosophical idea. And it is essential to emphasize once again that the issue is not the testing of a particular human character, whether an individual or social type [. . .] in this sense one can say that the content of the menippea is the adventures of an *idea* or *truth* in the world. (115)

At first, it seems difficult to pin down what particular idea or truth Durrell is testing because of Durrell's belief in the fluidity of ideas. Durrell writes, “[i]deas from various departments of thought cross-fertilize each other, and it is sometimes a good idea to discuss one kind of thought in terms of another” (2). Furthermore, Durrell's characters do not always represent and expound one particular idea; because all of the *Quintet's* characters are not delineated autonomous beings but members of one another, connected by shared ideas.

Though Durrell's highly self-reflexive narrative differs from his ancient and even modern Menippean predecessors, a key Menippean theme is the relationships between aspects of the self and between the self and others. Complicating Northrop Frye's claim that characters are mere mouthpieces for ideas they represent, Bakhtin claims that characters in the menippea do not even coincide with themselves: “This destruction of the wholeness and finalized quality of a man is facilitated by the appearance, in the menippea, of a dialogic relationship to one's own self (fraught

with the possibility of split personality)” (117). The relationship between Blanford and Sutcliffe most clearly illustrates this kind of dialogic treatment of selfhood.

Durrell’s conflation of fiction and reality complicates the relationship between Sutcliffe and Blanford. The text suggests that Sutcliffe is the fictional creation of the author Blanford. However, in *Constance*, Sutcliffe breaks through his fictional position and enters Blanford’s realm, causing us to question the ground of fictional “reality.” Throughout the work, they engage in humorous self-conscious discussions about the nature of art, their own literary projects, and other issues, as *separate entities*. As Bakhtin writes, “this unfinalizability of a man [. . .] [is] still rather elementary and embryonic in the menippea, but are openly there and permit us to look at a person in a new way” (117). Bakhtin means that, unlike characters in the novel, the other personality is represented as another entity rather than a part of the psyche. Julius Rowan Raper recognizes Sutcliffe and Blanford’s bond in “The Philosopher’s Stone and Durrell’s Psychological Vision.” He calls Sutcliffe “a fictional mirror of the cynical, skeptical, self-critical, yet earthy side of Blanford himself” (142). According to Raper, even though Sutcliffe is represented as a separate body, he is symbolically the other half of Blanford’s psyche.

Taken together as one self, we can understand Sutcliffe and Blanford as representing what Frye calls the *philosophus gloriosus*: “The novelist sees evil and folly as social diseases, but the Menippean satirist sees them as diseases of the intellect, as a kind of maddened pedantry which the *philosophus gloriosus* at once symbolizes and defines” (309). Following Frye’s definition, Millowicki and Wilson in “A Measure for Menippean Discourse: The Example of Shakespeare” elaborate upon the function of the *philosophus gloriosus*: “Menippean discourse asserts then denies; holds up high, then tears down. This is nowhere more apparent than in [. . .] the *philosophus gloriosus*, who undercuts in reflexive second thoughts and meta-commentary, his own intellectual achievements” (302). The

meta-commentary on Blanford's thoughts presents itself through his dialogues with Sutcliffe. For instance, in *Livia*, Sutcliffe accuses Blanford of using art to express theories. He groans and says "The old danger is there—a work weighed down with theoretical considerations" (*Livia* 11). But Blanford sees the danger and denies that his project is a theoretical treatise. For all of the philosophical and religious ideas explored in the *Quintet*, the work does not primarily question ideas' independent truth. Instead, Durrell primarily questions the construction of the self through such ideas. As Sutcliffe says to Blanford,

What always bothered me was the question of a stable ego—did such a thing exist?

The old notion of such an animal was rather primitive, particularly for novelists with an itch to explain this action or that. Myself, I could hardly write down the name of a character without suddenly being swamped by an ocean of possible attributes, each as valid and as truthful as any other. (*Livia* 37)

Durrell's commitment to the question of the self refutes the claim that Durrell's project exists in the abstract realm of philosophical ideas.

Such is the problem with postmodern critiques such as the one found in Stefan Herbrechter's *Lawrence Durrell, Postmodernity, and the Ethics of Alterity*. Using dense philosophical texts, Herbrechter critiques one of the systems laid on in the *Quintet*, Gnosticism, for its aspiration to the One over the Other: "Since this system of thought always starts from the One and—after a playful detour—returns to the One, the plural remains a purely intermediary step. It is thus not autonomously plural but plural towards or 'for' the One" (116). In a similar philosophical analysis, Ramón P. Alastrué's "Chaos and Cosmos in The Avignon Quintet" claims that the *Avignon Quintet* resolves its several dualisms (East/West, Male/Female, Creator/Created) through its quest for a Center able to harmonize chaos and cosmos. For instance, Alastrué reads the final journey

into the cave at the end of *Quinx* as “a way both into the inescapable labyrinth of a closed fictional system and out of the labyrinth, onto a superior ontological plane: what the external narrator calls the realm of unpredictability [. . .] the external world” (Alastrué 124). However, Durrell’s *Avignon Quintet* critiques such clear distinctions between reality and fiction. Thus, it is difficult to agree with Alastrué that the *Quintet* offers “a possibility of transcending the fictional nature of fiction and the historical nature of history” (124). Rather, it forces the reader to recognize reality’s dependence on fictions.

While Alastrué finds harmony on a superior ontological plane, Paul Lorenz suggests an inner transformation as a mode of transcendence in “Angkor Wat, the Kundalini, and the *Quinx*: The Human Architecture of Divine Renewal in the *Quincunx*.” He claims that we must

tap the power of the cosmos and achieve a metamorphosis of consciousness that will ensure the continuation of human life is a disengagement from the linearity and hierarchal structures of the Indo-European worldview. In this way, we, as human beings, can achieve the power of the Buddha. (167)

While it is true that Durrell tended toward Eastern thought, within the *Avignon Quintet*, Eastern thought is not presented as a panacea for all human problems. As William Godshalk points out in “Lawrence Durrell’s Game in *The Avignon Quintet*,” eastern practices like yoga are first presented in a positive light, but then playfully put into question. In *Quinx*, the narrator writes that “Sutcliffe was right to reproach [Blanford] with all the brain wearying lumber he had taken aboard--all this soul-porridge, all this brain-mash of Hindu soul-fuck” (*Quinx* 166 qtd. in Godshalk 196).

Though such ideas in themselves as Gnosticism and Eastern Wisdom are meaningless, as interpreted by characters, these systems of thought become part of a character’s self-construction. Durrell’s characters are not primarily composed of actions, but by their unique adoption of ideas.

Jim Nichols in “Ah the Wonder of My Body: The Wandering of My Mind: Classicism and Lawrence Durrell’s Literary Tradition,” claims that for Durrell “all knowledge is a well from which individuals draw, and such knowledge is neither inherently evil nor good but specific to the situation, the persons, and their demands” (Nichols 452). Therefore, the reader must take into account the effects of the knowledge characters receive.

If Durrell’s ideas were divorced from the characters that affirm them, these ideas would form stable systems, making the *Avignon Quintet* a work of diluted philosophy. However, Durrell is first and foremost a fiction writer. To illustrate the contrast between philosophy and Menippean satire, Bakhtin argues that, unlike Plato’s dialogues, in Menippean satire “complex and extensive modes of argumentation [. . .] fell away, and there remained essentially only naked ‘ultimate questions’ with an ethical and practical bias” (*Problems* 117). Thus, Menippean satire often ridicules stable, systematic accounts of reality.

Menippean Satire questions any abstract system’s claim to truth because ideas about truth change within different contexts. Durrell writes, “So it is with ideas, and with the words we use to express them. Existing singly, they also have the power to modify, and form greater wholes in other contexts” (*Key* 3). Durrell goes on to write “The relations we see, or think we see, between ideas, are only useful if we use them as spring-boards from which to jump into reality ourselves” (*Key* 39). If those ideas are adhered to dogmatically as an eternal Truth, they hinder rather than help the characters construction of the self and surrounding reality. In *Monsieur*, Sylvie senses this danger when she warns Akkad about Piers’ temperament: “Akkad, don’t encourage Piers to take all this too seriously [. . .] He is far too quixotic, far too extreme. It would be very dangerous for somebody with his type of temperament” (*Monsieur* 150). Piers refutation is that he would “go to the stake for this,” which illustrates Sylvie’s point.

Piers has an intellectual temperament that leads him to intense theoretical study of Gnosticism, a major ideology questioned by the text. But though Piers devotes himself to the theoretical study, he does not adhere to core principles of Gnosticism. The Gnostics supposedly shun the world of matter for a more poetic existence. Akkad labels all Judeo-Christian religions as a form of slavery to matter: “The presiding demon 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 is usury, the spirit of gain, the enigmatic power of capital value embodies in the poetry of gold” (*Monsieur* 144-45). However, shortly after his studying, Piers goes on a pleasure cruise with three of his friends. Bruce is shocked by the abundance of Piers supplies: “you would have thought we were mounting an expedition to Polynesia to judge by the quantity of the stores which he ordered” (*Monsieur* 154). Despite all of Akkad’s theoretical expositions, Akkad is not an ascetic hermit but a successful businessman who accepts and thrives in a world he claims is evil. His blatant participation in the world of matter undermines his discourse on the spirit. First described as a “merchant-banker,” Akkad is “equally at home in four capitals and four languages” (107). Sometimes he looks like “a fattish sluggish pasha, wallowing in riches like a Turk,” other times “[b]eautifully dressed by London with a buttonhole and a silk handkerchief” (107). Akkad’s chameleon like existence may suggest that the theoretical underpinnings of Gnosticism, particularly the binary between Judaism and Gnosticism, may only be a helpful myth rather than a dogmatic truth. Indeed, after his theoretical exposition of Gnosticism, the nature of truth is entirely put into question. Akkad tests Piers’ faith by inserting a fake article about how the entire sect was created by criminals in order to take advantage of gullible tourists. Piers is relieved to find that Akkad planted the article, but seems to miss the greater point Akkad tries to make. Akkad fully admits that there are aspects of the article that could be considered true: “you could question

many things about our group and we would be unable to provide convincing explanations to rebut you” (*Monsieur* 174). Indeed, his own actions reflect that he does not take his theoretical explication as an essential doctrine for life. In another attempt to explain his beliefs, he tells Piers “not to live according to a prearranged plan or model, but to *improvise*” (*Monsieur* 173). Akkad’s two different formulations of belief show the inherent instability of the Gnostic system.

Furthermore, Akkad’s alternate exposition of Gnosticism suggests that Gnosticism transcends its systematic explanation. Reed Way Dasenbrock in “The Counterlife of Heresy” reads Akkad’s fake article as a serious warning to Piers that “the acceptance of any ordering or system of explanation, even a heretical one, produces the fatal quiescence of orthodoxy” (228). Unquestioned acceptance of all Gnostic doctrine is antithetical to the very spirit of Gnosticism. Before Akkad’s hoax, Piers did not really understand the Gnostic attitude; he still thought that it could be understood through books. He says to Bruce, “I’ve hit bedrock with this system, and I feel I shall go to the end of it, I feel it” (166). Dasenbrock argues “Akkad’s disturbance of Piers’ easy acceptance of his initiation into Gnosticism is, therefore, Piers’ real initiation into Gnosticism” (228). Dasenbrock concludes his analysis with a comparison between Durrell’s and Akkad’s improvisational methods: “Durrell plays with our belief in the reality of what is being narrated just as Akkad plays with Piers’ belief in his own initiation. And this constitutes our initiation into the counterlife of art, a creative improvisation which refuses the world even as it redeems it” (228). Thus, in one version of Akkad’s thought, the Gnostic should continually question aspects of Gnosticism.

Taking his cue from Akkad, James Gifford questions the sources of Akkad’s Gnosticism. Most critics have assumed that Durrell pulled his ideas from Lacarriere’s *The Gnostics*. However, in “Gnosticism in Lawrence Durrell’s *Monsieur*: New Textual Evidence for Source Materials,”

Gifford points out an important difference between Durrell's representation and Lacarriere's. In Durrell's Gnosticism, a strange ritualistic suicide is the culmination of the Gnostic's primary alienation from the world: "to the pure [G]nostic soul the open gesture of refusal is necessary, is the only poetic act" (144). In contrast, for Lacarriere, suicide "is the absolute antithesis of the Gnostic attitude. Not one of them, at any time, preached suicide" (Lacarriere qtd. in Gifford 2). Gifford argues this difference is accounted for by one of Durrell's notebooks with a newspaper clipping of an article:

The article describes the suicides of six young people, which occurred in quick succession in the Slovenian capital of Ljubljana in 1968. The suicides, because of their rapidity and the proximity of all those involved, were quickly rumored to be the result of a "suicide club" and this notion was well publicized in the international press at the time [. . .] the article itself contains no mention or even suggestion that the suicides were in any way connected to Gnosticism." (Gifford 3)

It appears as though Durrell combined this suicide club event with the Gnostic refusal of the world. Gifford thinks that this undermines some scholars' readings that Gnostic suicide is a real option ; rather it "is quite plausibly a satiric element in the work" (Gifford 6).

Supporting his position that suicide is an untenable option for Durrell, Gifford argues in "The Phenomenology of Death: Considering Otto Rank, Ernest Becker and Herbert Marcuse in Lawrence Durrell's *Avignon Quintet*," that Gnostic suicide 'colonizes' (controls) death by accepting the death of the body in exchange for a resolution to our anxiety about death: "The death of the self (the primary anxiety) is projected onto the unreal exterior body (death of the body), hence resolving the anxiety over mortality, but creating the life-limiting disdain for physicality" (Gifford). In this way, the Gnostic seeks to 'know' death instead of believing there is, as Akkad puts it, "a very

narrow path between reality and illusion” (*Monsieur* 172). Against Gifford, C.W. Spinks contrasts Gnostic despair with romantic despair, implying that Gnostic despair does not provide comfort: “Akkad is not offering just romantic despair, and the despair here offered is repeatedly described as [G]nostic despair—something that would deny all the comfort of such existential despair” (130). But Gifford’s philosophical analysis undermines Spinks’ unsupported position. Furthermore, if Gnostic suicide is really an *Aufhebung* of the discrete ego rather than its annihilation, we cannot seriously consider it to be an option for Durrell, who continually fought against this conception of the self. Both of Gifford’s articles strongly suggest the possibility that Gnostic suicide is a part of the *Quintet’s* satirical vision.

Gifford’s genetic criticism and his thorough research into philosophical psychology gives more credence to Toby’s declaration that Akkad’s cult is “nothing but a grubby little suicide academy [. . .] a sort of ungraduated colourless hopelessness about the very fabric and structure of our thought, our universe” (*Monsieur* 255). Gifford’s analysis also helps to support the many critics who have already pointed out the insufficiency of Gnosticism. James P. Carley in “The *Avignon Quintet* and the Gnostic Heresy” writes,

Although the Gnostic systems are replete with symbols of reconciliation, [G]nosticism itself cannot be taken as a panacea for the problems of western society [. . .] [G]nosticism is a reaction, not an absolute [. . .] Beyond its own world of mirrors and antitypes [G]nosticism must be evaluated by means of the reflections of yet another looking glass. (235)

In an interview of James P. Carley, Durrell said that Gnosticism was “a disease caused by the Christian context”; as “the opposite extreme, [[G]nosticism] is a renunciation which makes sense only in the context of a reaction” (Durrell qtd. in Herbrechter 64). Thus, if Gnosticism is a system

that reacts against Christianity, then, when dogmatically adhered to in all its aspects, it is as destructive as Christianity.

This mocking of the seriousness of religion is another characteristic of Menippean satire. Millowicki and Wilson write, “The reductive objectives of Menippean discourse extend, strikingly, to the treatment of the gods and myths as the cherished principles of human civilization are ironized and mocked” (Millowicki & Wilson 302). Though Gnosticism mocks Christianity, Durrell mocks Gnosticism’s own systematization. Candace Fertile in “The Role of the Writer in Lawrence Durrell’s fiction,” cites James R. Nichols in order to explain Durrell’s mocking attitude: “For Durrell, all religions and, I suspect, all ‘systems’ fail because they eventually grow old, rigidify, and come to substitute abstract thought for vital energy, dogmatism for experience, rules for human contact” (Fertile 71). Both over-explained systems fall victim to the Menippean satirist. Frye writes, “The Menippean satirist, dealing with intellectual themes and attitudes, shows his exuberance in intellectual ways by piling up an enormous mass of erudition about his theme or in overwhelming his pedantic targets with an avalanche of their own jargon” (311). Durrell’s targets appear to primarily be psychoanalysis and Christianity, but upon closer inspection Gnosticism is also an important target: even the characters, at times, realize the ridiculousness of Gnostic theories.

Furthermore, Durrell also invites the reader to see how too much theory can undermine its own premises and frequently may align one theory with its opposite. Against the philosophical maxim of making distinctions, Durrell shows how too many distinctions and explanations threaten the joy of an idea. For instance, though Akkad’s theories about the Prince of Darkness are essentially correct, the reader may notice a dissonance between a world ruled by a Dark Prince and the carefree atmosphere of the fictional city, Macabru. In addition, Julius Rowan Raper addresses

this inconsistency in another location. Raper points out the Gnostic's dark conception of the world and "the pastoral life Constance offers her young friends at Tu Duc [. . .] [This demonstrates] the Gnostic principle as a partial truth at best, if not an illusion" (147). However, even if it is only a partial truth or illusion, some of the pieces of Gnosticism reveal an affinity with a darker force.

When a character attempts to explain the reasons for certain practices in Gnosticism, Gnosticism seems to resemble Nazism. Some critics have still tried to distinctly oppose Nazism with Gnosticism. In "The Human Architecture of Divine Renewal in the *Quincunx*," Paul Lorenz writes, "The Nazis are simply the heirs of Indo-European religious fervor [. . .] They are insisting that Western civilization embark on a mad, lust-driven quest for self-destruction that is intended to bring on the promised millennia of monotheism" (164). Furthermore, Affad, at times, supports this view: "everything to do with monotheism [. . .] everything mono, which leads to this self-induced paranoia called Western Civilization [. . .] The Germans are simply following out the whole pattern in their usual gross fashion" (*Constance* 276). While the spirit of Nazism may be directly opposed to Gnosticism, the theory of Nazism and Gnosticism share common themes. Looking closer, Affad not only critiques Jewish monotheism, but he also blames the Jews for the Nazi's actions against the Jews: "The little I know about racial discrimination I've learnt from [the Jews]" (*Constance* 276). Stefan Herbrechter expands on the relationship between Gnosticism and Nazism's attitudes towards the Jews. "German fanaticism is 'justified' by Jewish elitism, and on a global scale it is the 'self elected metaphysical condition' of the Jewish people which engendered anti-Semitism in the first place" (299). In addition to Gnosticism's negative perception of the Jews, its premises may lead to fascist thought. Herbrechter writes,

It is by turning away from the reality of the world and falling back onto mythological thinking that the radical search for otherworldly salvation through a

higher form of knowledge [. . .] almost necessarily gives rise to even more domination and violence and ultimately fascism. (298)

The Gnostics' metaphysical explanations and their strange practice of ritual suicide relinquish individual responsibility for their actions. Herbrechter argues that this relinquishment is part of Durrell's project of universal Hellenism, going back to the thought of Philo of Alexandria: "Durrell's writings attempt to incline the cultural 'balance' once more towards Hellenism, by a combination of [G]nosticism and Taoism" (292). However, if we read Durrell as a Menippean satirist, where it is not ideas themselves that are being questioned, but rather the relationship between ideas and the self, then Herbrechter attempts to read Durrell as an inadequate philosopher rather than a writer of fiction.

Whereas philosophical systems are meant to be consistent and stable, Gnosticism takes on new significance in *Livia* and *Constance* not present in *Monsieur*. Subtly criticizing Carly, Raper writes, "Framed by *Livia*, the desperate Gnosticism of *Monsieur* takes on new significance, one more psychological and less theological and philosophical than it possesses in the first novel read in isolation" (147). Blanford would agree with Raper about the necessity of context in determining meaning, claiming that he is creating a "*roman-gigone*," which can be roughly translated as novels nesting within one another (*Livia* 11). In *Livia*, Raper comments on Constance's positive presence as opposed to her Nazi sister, Livia: "Constance's presence appears to be an absolutely essential balance to the joined horrors of Livia's defection, World War II, and the Gnostics' dark vision" (148). Raper opposes Constance to the Gnostics, but fails to emphasize that in *Constance* and *Sebastian*, Constance has appropriated a part of Gnostic beliefs. The elaborate myths that Affad uses to explain to Constance the Gnostic sexual theory destabilizes the binary between Judeo-Christian materialism and Gnostic spiritualism: "Sperm needs to be cultivated, it is really riches,

money in its physical aspect, the girl should all the time be making more and more, manipulating the scrotum, caressing it, counting her change” (*Constance* 268). Sperm ceases to be a life giving force as it is metaphorically understood as money—the root of the material spirit. Furthermore, like the Nazis, Affad’s theory also makes claims concerning the power of race:

the more they render the orgasm conscious the deeper in phase they will be, thus the purer the child and the more harmonious the race [. . .] When a culture starts going downhill the first victim is the quality of the fucking and the defective documentation of the sperm—by documentation I mean oxygen, just lack of oxygen, which is race-knowledge, genetic nous. (*Constance* 268)

While she fully accepts the positive effects of the theory on her life, Constance takes a playfully critical attitude towards it. Re-iterating the theory to Schwarz, Constance verbally announces her skepticism: “I know it sounds crazy” and “It sounds like rubbish doesn’t it?” (*Constance* 284, 289). She also anticipates Schwarz’s misgivings: “You are right to shoot me down—I must seem unbearably prosy about all this” (*Constance* 289). Despite her urge to rationalize it, she recognizes that she “[is] a fool to try and attribute universal laws to what might be a solitary experience” (287). Schwarz thinks that Constance is overreacting: “And here she was getting enthusiastic about contrapuntal fucking” (*Constance* 291). James Nichols echoes Schwarz’s sentiment by reminding us that “in Durrell’s fictive world as in the actual one, a good fuck is still a good fuck [. . .] his note of the need for a ‘joint’ approach for love is a banality unless we also recognize its undercutting humor” (Nichols 460). Agreeing with Nichols, in “Sex and Comedy in Lawrence Durrell’s *Avignon Quintet*,” Danel Olson maintains that Constance’s mockery frees the concept from orthodoxy: “But all the mockery keeps the concept ironic and playful, free from dull absolutes [. . .] it is wild and laughable, but still it demands that both partners be satisfied; affirms the need for both to trust

completely, become passive in the other's strength" (Olsen 100). Thus, Constance mockery may be a useful approach to Gnosticism, rejecting certain dogmas of the cult.

However, her words to Schwarz also echo Piers' enthusiasm for Gnosticism in *Monsieur*. After finding the article that supposedly exposed Akkad's cult as a hoax, Piers says "But how I needed it [. . .] How it seemed to fulfill my sentiments, my ideas" (*Monsieur* 169). Similarly, Constance tells Schwarz that, "he showed me this schema of which I had a *profound* need. At last I can rest my intellect upon something which seems solid" (*Constance* 288). It is at first unclear if Constance's critical stance toward Affad's sexual theory makes her appropriation of Gnosticism radically different from Piers. But, because in Menippean Satire conflict often stems from intellectual pedantry, here conflict arises when she attempts to rationalize a system that ultimately defies rationalization: "And it doesn't come from a man, it comes from an attitude. Why shouldn't I try to catch a hold on it and rationalise [sic] it. It might serve others like me, like I *was* before Affad arrived" (*Constance* 290). Schwarz claims that she shouldn't do it because it will "*bore*" Affad (*Constance* 290). But Schwarz only tells her she shouldn't rationalize Affad's sexual theory rather than explain the impossibility of doing so.

The real reason that she cannot rationalize the Gnostic theory is because in order to systematize something, one must seriously believe as much as Affad. Constance's inability to have a serious commitment to Gnosticism is why she claims she cannot adequately express it as Akkad does. Affad sees their love as embodying other Gnostic beliefs: "I am only a link in a long bicycle chain. I believe you understand his, as it is also expressed in sexual terms in our love for each other" (*Sebastian* 87). Thinking Constance may not understand his reasoning, he doubts their love: "has it forever vanished? Are you cured of me?" (*Sebastian* 87). The dissonance between Affad's and Constance's belief can be illustrated by their diverging perspectives on the knowledge of death.

According to Affad, the knowledge of the time of death is “essential information [. . .] without it we are just ordinary people, dispossessed, taken unawares: the original sin” (*Sebastian* 87). But Constance questions this part of the theory: “she was furious to think that all this fuss should be made over this petty question of a letter. . . . To know the hour of one’s death—was it really so important?” (*Sebastian* 76). Thus, just when Constance thought she could rest her intellect in something solid, Affad’s serious commitment to his ritual suicide tests and ultimately destroys their love.

The death of Constance’s psychoanalyst mentor, Schwarz, allows for the critique of another major belief system, psychoanalysis. Shortly before his death, Schwarz is disturbed by Sutcliffe and Toby’s irreverent attitude—particularly, by the implications for psychoanalysis: “If Sutcliffe was to be believed, what hopes could one hold out for the future of psychoanalysis? Moreover, they were *joking* about such a situation—joking about tragedy” (*Sebastian* 182). Bakhtin points out that within Menippean Satire “scandals and eccentricities destroy the epic and tragic wholeness of the world. . . . they free human behavior from the norms and motivations that predetermine it” (117). Unlike Schwarz, who attempts to hold onto a tragic aesthetic, Sutcliffe’s Menippean attitude allows him to accept and live in the world as it is. Though he agrees with Sutcliffe’s diagnosis of the world’s future direction, Schwarz is unable to accept this new condition calmly: “at least, he, Schwarz, refused to be flippant about the matter. He *cared*, he was *concerned*” (*Sebastian* 182). Combined with the inability to deal with the guilt caused by an event in his past, his tragic attitude leads him to kill himself. Constance is devastated by his death: “she knew that reality had all but overwhelmed her, had shaken the basis of her inner being” (193). In this tumultuous time, Constance does not hold onto an abstract system of thought like psychoanalysis, but rather the figure of Sylvie from *Monsieur* “So for a brief period of time these two defeated and exhausted

women would band themselves together through love and unite their strength to face an unfeeling world. In their febrile ecstasy they were become deaf to the counsels of science and reason” (196). Like ideas, characters also develop new meanings in each novel. Meanings change as beliefs change. William Godshalk points out that “no character can maintain a complete distance from all belief, that these characters ultimately need something in which they can have at least a modicum of faith” (196). Still, the half faith in the system is only a means for the unpredictable to occur rather than the cure itself.

Like Gnosticism, Psychoanalysis, is another significant belief system for Durrell’s characters. However, as Ann Gibaldi writes, psychoanalysis itself is rarely the cause of rejuvenation. She writes, “Durrell’s approach to systems that resist entropy are very complex. He sees such systems as admirable in their efforts, but ultimately flawed and insufficient” (Gibaldi 102). In the case of Affad’s son’s autism, she writes,

Durrell suggests that Constance’s science may not be totally responsible for the boy’s recovery. She learns that she wears the same perfume, *Jamais de la Vie*, as the boy’s defected mother. She suspects that the scent has provoked what she calls, “an affective pattern of association-responses” (86). It is significant to note that this pattern was discovered by the child rather than imposed by the doctor. (103)

Before Constance is introduced, Sutcliffe recognizes the limits of psychoanalysis as a science, as well as its fruitfulness. Sutcliffe writes about his initial positive impression of psychoanalysis: “The writer rejoiced for the old doctor treated all human behavior as a symptom—the intellectual daring of this feat changed his whole life” (*Monsieur* 189). Indeed, Sutcliffe the *writer* rejoices in a new understanding of his lesbian wife, Pia and of himself: “Reading up a bit of this extraordinary lore he began to see some of the reason behind his own choice of an investment in Pia” (189). But, for

Sutcliffe the man, psychoanalysis is insufficient: “It wasn’t sufficiently enracinated, sufficiently powerful, the strain; not as powerful as the corresponding strain in Pia. Meanwhile the great attachment had clarified itself as the genuine article [. . .] as Love” (189). In a similar way, psychoanalytic treatment sets up a new understanding of Constance’s connection with Sylvie. Like death, love is another random force that cannot be systematized or controlled: “[. . .] man cannot do without calamity, nor can he ever circumscribe in language the inexpressible bitterness of death and separation. And love, if you wish. Love” (*Sebastian* 199). Psychoanalysis brought them initially together, Schwarz drove them apart, and the death of Schwarz has once again brought them together. Melodie Ensore recognizes the paradoxical way that the same elements function in opposite ways: “Like the characters themselves, the elements that join and separate them are essentially the same. Convergence occurs in chasm” (157). Even though psychoanalysis may not provide the ultimate scientific answer, it has indirectly made possible a strong bond that helps Sylvie and Constance deal with the reality of death. Michael H. Begnal elaborates on the power of this bond in “The Mystery of the Templars in *The Avignon Quintet*”: “Assuming the mantle of a mother, Constance is able to put the boy back in touch with his own emotions, and, at Sebastian’s [Affad’s] death, both son and surrogate mother make the giant leap of being able to face the reality of death together” (163).

Even though all the characters have different attitudes towards the ideologies in the *Quintet*, they are all simultaneously brought closer to together and driven apart by these systems. Various systems of thought are different ways for the characters to connect to each other. When a certain intellectual trope is used to make characters connect, it serves a purpose, but when dogmatically adhered to, it is a destructive force. Psychoanalysis connects Sylvie and Constance, but also restrains Constance from attaining the Gnostic attitude; Gnosticism breaks Constance and Affad

apart only to unify Constance and Blanford in *Quinx*. As a poet, Durrell sees systems of thought as useful metaphors with which we can understand others and ourselves. Rather than offer us a truth independent of human connections, ideas facilitate the relations between people. Most importantly, Durrell shows that, like ideas, the self changes as we interact with other human beings, frequently becoming more human by our interaction with the Other.

This interaction explains why Durrell's presentations of systems seem simplified: he often reduces both Eastern and Western thought to a pithy phrase or a humorous line in verse. Instead of combining ideas toward an encompassing abstract philosophical system, ideas provide different ways of relating to one another and to ourselves, increasing our possibilities and providing for a richer life. We can then understand Blanford's final statement in *Quinx* as Durrell's intertwining of reality and fiction: "It was at this precise moment that reality prime rushed to the aid of fiction and the totally unpredictable began to take place" (201). In this way, the reader of the *Avignon Quintet* comes to see the fictive relationships--between other beings as well as philosophical systems--that comprise the self: "relations we see, or think we see, between ideas, are only useful if we use them as spring-boards from which to jump into reality ourselves" (*Key* 39).

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