

# 'Monsieur' for trotting

*Monsieur*, by Lawrence Durrell, Viking Press, New York, \$7.95.

By Bill Roberts

*Monsieur*, by Lawrence Durrell, is a book that should be read at a trot. To gallop through this novel would be to miss what it has to offer. The stimulating ideas and characters and the richly detailed descriptions of Avignon, Alexandria and Venice might be blurred.

But the reader who walks too slowly through the book is likely to be disappointed. The ideas and characters stimulate, not satisfy. They never get up and breathe, and the effect of *Monsieur* is finally of a travelog, a nicely done tour through the country of Durrell's imagination.

Bruce, a cynical middle-aged doctor, is the main character, and his life sets a standard of world-weariness for the others. He has his memories of a triangular love affair with Sylvie, now mad, and her brother, Piers, now dead. Bruce hasn't got much going for him now, but he gives the rest of the cast somebody to talk to.

### Blasted idealist

Piers is a suicide. His part in the novel, more symbolic than believable, seems to stand for blasted idealism. When Bruce tries to look into Piers's coffin at the funeral, he is turned away to spare him the shock of seeing the decapitated body.

Rob Sutcliffe, a horny, burnt-out novelist, wanders through Venice in an unfruitful search for something new to do and write about. In his notebooks are things such as: "There is mystery in the fact that if you repeat something meaningless long enough it begins slowly to gather significance and meaning as a needle on the disc gathers fluff. It becomes a *mantram*."

Toby is a hard-drinking scholar who is completing his life's work, a reinterpretation of the history of the knights of Templar. But it looks as if it will turn out badly. As in *Monsieur* itself, the trick is not to take theories, in this case about a religious sect suddenly and violently abolished in the 14th century, too seriously.

And there is Akkad, an Egyptian gnostic. Akkad is the well-spring of the ideas that come bubbling up in the novel. Akkad tells us "the bitter central truth of the gnostics: the horrifying realization that the world of the Good God was a dead one, and that He had been replaced by a usurper—a God of Evil." This conqueror is the unseen Monsieur.

In a flashback, Akkad takes Bruce, Sylvie, Piers and Toby to a tent in the Sahara, drugs them, and introduces them to gnosticism while a huge cobra keeps watch from a wicker basket. The snake seems to become Monsieur, and the effect of this scene on each character is the burden of the novel.

### Playing cards

Gnosticism, homosexuality, medieval history and theology—Durrell plays with these and other ideas as if they were cards in a deck. But his best sleight of hand comes near the end, when the reader realizes that every character is the product of some other character's imagination.

It's an elaborate trick, maybe a mean trick. But it accounts for the half-developed state of the characters and puts responsibility for the novel where it lies—in the author's imagination.

Durrell is 63, and his most acclaimed work, *The Alexandrian Quartet*, was finished in 1960. Like his novelist Rob Sutcliffe, Durrell's best work may be behind him. *Monsieur* is a pretty good novel, nothing more.

# entertainment

By Eli Rhodes

For Sept. 29 through Oct. 4.

**Aries.** You have strong creative energy this week, but you must be practical to use it. Try to remain calm and avoid being headstrong with others.

**Taurus.** A little pampering—of yourself and others—can go a long way this week. Try to look busy and attentive at work or class. Let loose in the evening hours.  
**Gemini.** Sidestepping issues may seem more comfortable to you now, but there are problems to be solved in your relationships. Others will respect your opinions if you listen to theirs.

**Cancer.** Your tendency to overindulge in moodiness could waste the whole week. No one seems to want to play your way. Compromise wins more than sulkiness will.

**Leo.** Certain relationships could be confusing this week. You'll have to dig deep to know where you stand. Don't be too afraid of hurting another's feelings.

**Virgo.** You'd better keep to yourself for the next few days. Anger or jealousy will be strong until next weekend—then you can start a pleasant new relationship or deepen an old one.

**Libra.** Be skeptical of offers or requests from others this week. Your position isn't as stable as it seems. Try to maintain poise.

**Scorpio.** Stick to tried-and-true methods this week. New acquaintances and situations may appear deceptively pleasant. Entertain at home with close friends.

**Sagittarius.** Material gain will be yours this week—probably in the form of gifts. Be patient when negotiating with coworkers. Worthwhile projects take time.

**Capricorn.** You may have to struggle to get a word in edgewise—make sure those few words count. Don't forget earlier promises, but don't make any new ones this week.

**Aquarius.** Your mood may be critical and brooding this week. Don't let your tongue damage valuable relationships. Work at an easy pace to avoid mistakes.

**Pisces.** Try to express your true feelings this week—little affectionate insults could be taken seriously by others. Alertness in the home may prevent an accident.

**Astrological Outcast** is intended for amusement purposes only.

### ON CAMPUS

#### Art

Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery- 11th and R- photographs by Vincent Vallarino through Oct. 5; English Satirical Prints through Oct. 5; Ceramic Sculpture and Pottery by Eric Abraham through Oct. 5; Prints by William Hogarth through Oct. 12.

#### Film

Sheldon Film Theater- 11th and R- *The Shadow Catcher* and *The Exiles*- Tues., Wed. and Thurs.- 7 p.m.; *Thief of Baghdad*- Fri. and Sat.- 3, 7, 9 p.m.; *Claes Oldenburg*- Sun.- 3 p.m.

#### Concert

Nebraska Union- 14th and R- Big Walter Horton and Luther Allison- Fri.- 8 p.m.

Kimball Recital Hall- 11th and R- Wind Ensemble Recital- Sun. 4 p.m.

### Off Campus

#### Art

Haymarket Art Gallery- 119 S. 9th- Midwest Melting Pot Exhibit through Oct. 12.

#### Theater

Lincoln Community Playhouse- 2500 S. 56th- *Godspell*- Fri. and Sat.- 8 p.m.

#### Music

Pershing Auditorium- 15th and N- Jefferson Starship- Fri.- 8 p.m.  
Cathedral of the Risen Christ- 3500 Sheridan Blvd. Organ recital by Quentin Faulkner- 4 p.m.

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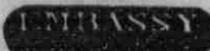
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