

= Pure ( Miller novel ) =

Pure is a 2011 novel by English author Andrew Miller . The book is the sixth novel by Miller and was released on 9 June 2011 in the United Kingdom through Sceptre , an imprint of Hodder & Stoughton . The novel is set in pre -@-@ revolutionary France and the upcoming turmoil is a consistent theme throughout . It follows an engineer named Jean @-@ Baptiste Baratte and chronicles his efforts in clearing an overfilled graveyard which is polluting the surrounding area . Baratte makes friends and enemies as the cemetery is both loved and hated by the people of the district .

Miller was inspired to write about the Les Innocents Cemetery after reading historian Philippe Ariès 's brief description of its clearing and imagining the theatrics that must have been involved . The novel received positive reviews , particularly noting the quality of writing . The novel was awarded the Costa Book Award 2011 for " Best Novel " and " Book of the Year " , and was nominated for the Walter Scott Prize and South Bank award .

= = Plot = =

The novel centres around a young engineer named Jean @-@ Baptiste Baratte , who is tasked with the removal of the Les Innocents cemetery from Les Halles , Paris in 1786 ( the Place Joachim @-@ du @-@ Bellay now occupies the area ) and the removal of its church . Baratte is an engineer with a single decorative bridge , built in his small home @-@ town , comprising his entire career and , as such , is somewhat surprised by his appointment ; he does , however , endeavour to complete his task .

The cemetery has been in use for many years but , given the number of people buried in such a small area , the bodies are no longer decomposing properly . They have begun to overflow and fall into the neighbouring houses as greater excavations take place and basement walls are weakened . The entire area is also permeated with a foul smell , turning fresh produce rotten in far shorter times than natural and tainting the breath of those who live there . Baratte finds that he has both friends and enemies in the area ? the cemetery is both loved and hated by the people of the district . He finds resistance from all sides , notably Ziguette who strikes Baratte during his sleep in opposition to his work . He befriends the church 's flamboyant organist named Armand , recruits his old colleague Lecoeur to assist with the excavation , is monitored by the infamous Guillotin and falls in love with Heloïse , widely known in the area as a whore .

= = = Characters = = =

Jean @-@ Baptiste Baratte ? the protagonist of the novel ; engineering graduate of the École des Ponts et Chaussées and overseer of the project ; originally from Normandy . The name is a reference to the biblical John the Baptist . Barattes nickname is " Bêche " , which is French for " Spade " , a reference to his career .

Armand ? the church 's flamboyant and alcoholic organist ; and close friend to Baratte ; with links to " the party of the future " .

Héloïse Goddard ? a prostitute , also known as " The Austrian " because of her resemblance to Queen Marie Antoinette , who specialises in indulging the peculiar perversions of her clients ; also Baratte 's love interest .

Lecoeur ? Baratte 's old friend brought in as the foreman to the miners undertaking the excavation . English translation of the name is " The Heart " .

Ziguette Monnard ? Barrate 's landlord 's daughter who attacks Baratte in the middle of the night , in opposition to his work .

Marie ? maid to the Monnards who spies on Baratte sleeping during the night .

Jeanne ? 14 @-@ year @-@ old granddaughter to the church 's sexton .

Dr Guillotin ? a doctor who is observing the progress of the excavation for research purposes .

Père Colbert ? the church 's mad priest .

= = Themes = =

The novel takes place immediately before the French Revolution and , while not discussed in the novel , a number of sights and incidents foreshadow the impending events . Clare Clark , in The Guardian , stated " as Baratte 's story unfolds , the impending revolution hangs over the narrative like the blade of the guillotine to come " , identifying a number of auguries of the future turmoil ; including " an organist play [ ing ] to an empty church " , the local theatre putting on a production of Beaumarchais ' The Marriage of Figaro ; and a cart displaying the phrase " M Hulot et Fils : Déménageurs à la Noblesse " on its side ( English : M Hulot and Son : Movers to the Nobility ) . In The Week , Michael Bywater stated he felt that the novel has " a sense in the air that something decisive is going to happen , and happen soon " .

Thomas Quinn for The Big Issue opined that the removal of the cemetery as a whole could be construed as Miller asking " whether we should sweep away the past in the name of progress " or if we should be " confronting set ideas about what makes us human in the first place " .

Miller also aimed to imbue the novel with a sense of anxiety , especially concerning the decisions Jean @-@ Baptiste must take . Commenting on fiction in general in an interview with Lorna Bradbury for The Daily Telegraph , Miller stated that " a novel is a collection of anxieties held together , more or less well , more or less interestingly , by the chicken wire of plot " . Bradbury goes on to state " that is absolutely the case with Pure , which details multiple counts of insanity as the panic @-@ inducing business of razing the cemetery takes hold " . Of Pure specifically , Miller stated that " I 'm interested in what anxiety does to people " , " in what happens when they can 't respond the way the world expects them to . What happens when our sense of ourselves falls away under the pressure of circumstances ? What 's left ? That 's a very interesting place to be . "

Another theme prevalent in the novel is death , influenced in part by the death of Miller 's father , to whom the book is dedicated . Miller stated that " after the age of fortysomething , death is a taste in your mouth , and never goes away again " . The reviewer for The Australian called the novel " a meditation on death and the frailty of the body and spirit " .

= = Development = =

Miller first heard about the clearing of the Les Innocents cemetery ten years before writing the novel , when reading a book by French medievalist and historian , Philippe Ariès ; specifically his 1977 work entitled L 'Homme devant la mort , or The Hour of Our Death . Ariès ' book did not go into a great deal of detail concerning this actual event , however Miller was " taken by the theatricality " of it and decided to write a novel based around the exhumation . In an interview with Kira Cochrane he stated the novel " appealed to [ him ] as being interesting , visually interesting " , stating " it was when it all happened that made it stand out . It 's the 1780s , a few years before the French revolution " . Miller further stated that his father 's occupation as a doctor also had some bearing in his interest in the human body , stating " I grew up looking at these things ? my Beano and Dandy were the BMJ and The Lancet " . Miller decided not to include any French dialogue in the novel as " it is so pretentious " in an English @-@ language novel , stating " I was afraid that my editor would strike it out " .

= = = Publication history = = =

2011 , UK , Sceptre ISBN 978 @-@ 1 @-@ 4447 @-@ 2425 @-@ 7 , pub date 9 Jun 2011 , Hardback

2012 , UK , Sceptre ISBN 978 @-@ 1 @-@ 4447 @-@ 2428 @-@ 8 , pub date 5 Jan 2012 , Paperback

2012 , UK , Dreamscape Media , pub date 29 May 2012 , Audiobook

2012 , USA , Europa Editions ISBN 978 @-@ 1 @-@ 60945 @-@ 067 @-@ 0 , pub date 29 May 2012 , Paperback

### == = Novel 's title == =

The novel 's title can be attributed to a number of aspects of the work . The purification of the cemetery and the recent change in social mores ( in relation to dirt and decay ) being the most immediately apparent . James Kidd , writing for The Independent , stated " if this suggests one definition of purity , others are suggested by political undercurrents . Namely , the ideals that helped shape the French Revolution : Voltaire 's call to reason , Rousseau 's call to equality , and Robespierre 's call to arms . "

### == = Cover == =

The cover , created by Royston Knipe , was based on Francisco Goya 's etching The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters . It features Baratte in his pistachio green silk Charvet suit replacing the recumbent Goya in his self @-@ portrait . Instead of the owls and bats which assail Goya in The Sleep of Reason , Knipe used ravens . The cover was noted by The Guardian writer John Dugdale , in an article about the marketing aspect of book cover design , as being unique in the current market . He stated that ; along with the covers for The Sense of an Ending and The Tiger 's Wife ; " None of the three looks like anything else in bookshops " .

### == = Audio adaptations == =

A Sweet Talk production of Pure was broadcast on BBC Radio 4 as part of the Book at Bedtime programme from 20 ? 31 August 2012 ; it was read by John Sessions , abridged by Jeremy Osborne and produced by Rosalynd Ward .

The novel was also the inspiration for two songs written by Bath based musicians , The Bookshop Band , namely " The downfall of Les Innocents " and " The Engineer 's Paris " from their album Into The Farthest Reaches .

### == = Reception == =

The novel received almost universal praise , with reviewers praising Miller 's approach to the subject , his vividly rendered characters and setting and his eloquent prose .

In a review for The Independent , James Urquhart found the novel to be " richly textured " and that it had " energetic , acutely observed characters " ; stating " Miller populates Baratte 's quest for equanimity with these lush and tart characters , seductively fleshed out , who collectively help to deliver the bittersweet resolution of Baratte 's professional and personal travails . " Clare Clark , writing for The Guardian , found that " Miller is a writer of subtlety and skill " and stated that she found the novel to be much like a parable , stating that " Unlike many parables , however , Pure is neither laboured nor leaden . Miller writes like a poet , with a deceptive simplicity ? his sentences and images are intense distillations , conjuring the fleeting details of existence with clarity . " Clark goes on to say that " Pure defies the ordinary conventions of storytelling , slipping dream @-@ like between lucidity and a kind of abstracted elusiveness . The characters are often opaque . The narrative lacks dramatic structure , unfolding in the present tense much as life does , without clear shape or climax " and found that " The result is a book that is unsettling and , ultimately , optimistic . " The Australian 's Jennifer Levasseur found Pure to be " Well @-@ executed and inventive " , stating that she found the plot " Historically convincing , immediately engaging and intellectually stimulating " . She went on to state , of Miller himself : " Miller is the calibre of writer who deserves to be followed regardless of topic , time period or setting because of his astonishing dexterity with language , his piercing observations and his ability to combine rollicking storytelling with depth of character . "

Novelist Brian Lynch , writing for the Irish Independent found " The story in Pure is simple , almost dreamlike , a realistic fantasy , a violent fairy tale for adults " , stating " At its best Pure shimmers " . The novel received two reviews from The Daily Telegraph . Freya Johnston found that " Miller

lingers up close on details : sour breath , decaying objects , pretty clothes , flames , smells , eyelashes . He is a close observer of cats " and stated , of Baratte 's project as a whole , " Miller intimately imagines how it might have felt to witness it . " Holly Kyte found *Pure* to be " irresistibly compelling " and " Exquisite inside and out " . She stated that " Every so often a historical novel comes along that is so natural , so far from pastiche , so modern , that it thrills and expands the mind " and that she found that " *Pure* is a near @-@ faultless thing : detailed , symbolic and richly evocative of a time , place and man in dangerous flux . It is brilliance distilled , with very few impurities . " Suzi Feay , for the Financial Times , stated " Quietly powerful , consistently surprising , *Pure* is a fine addition to a substantial body of work " and also noted that " Miller 's portraits of women and the poor are thoughtful and subtle . " Writing for the Daily Express Vanessa Berridge found the novel to be " very atmospheric , if not to say positively creepy at times " and stated that " Miller 's eloquent novel overflows with vitality and colour . It is packed with personal and physical details that evoke 18th @-@ century Paris with startling immediacy . " Reviewing for the Daily Mail Clare Colvin stated that the novel " draws you in with hallucinatory power " and that she found that " Miller evokes the underside of Parisian society with assured , vivid detail so that images remain in your mind long after you reach the last page . This is historical fiction with imaginative style . "

In a review for The Observer , Leo Robson found the novel to be somewhat underwhelming , stating that " It is disappointing , given the vitality of the novel 's setting and set @-@ up , that Miller fails to achieve corresponding dynamism in the development of plot and character " , adding that " as a prose writer , Miller appears averse to taking risks , which means no pratfalls ? but no glory either " . He found the " engineer 's progress and his setbacks are narrated in a patient , tight @-@ lipped present tense , and just as the novel rarely concerns itself with anything that doesn 't impinge on the destruction of Les Innocents , so it rarely deviates from its obsessive regime of description and dialogue " . He did somewhat temper this , however , stating that " It is one of the historical novel 's advantages over the topical or journalistic novel that the benchmark is plausibility rather than verifiable authenticity . Success in this effort requires a capacity for immersion and a degree of imagination , and whatever his shortcomings as a prose writer and a storyteller , Andrew Miller is endowed with both . "

= = Awards and nominations = =

The novel was not longlisted for the Man Booker Prize , to the surprise of a number of reviewers . The novel did , however , win the Costa Book Award in 2011 for the " Best Novel " and " Book of the Year " .

Novelist Rose Tremain , writing for The Guardian , identified the novel as one of her two " Books of the year 2011 " . In 2012 , The Observer named it as one of " The 10 best historical novels " . It was shortlisted for the 2012 Walter Scott Prize for historical fiction , with judges praising the novel as " a wholly unexpected story , richly imagined and beautifully structured " ; and the South Bank Award in the " Literature " category . The novel was also short @-@ listed for the " Independent Booksellers ' Week " Book Awards , which are voted for by the public through independent book @-@ shops . The marketing campaign for the novel was short @-@ listed in the " Best Overall Package " award by the Book Marketing Society in their Best Marketing Campaign of the Year awards .

*Pure* was identified as an " Editors ' Choice " by The New York Times in June 2012 . The novel was also listed on the Belfast Telegraph " Your Top Choice " listing for the best book of the week . *Pure* has , as of 5 September 2012 , been listed twelve times ; with the first seven being in position 1 . NPR listed it as one of their " Critics ' Lists " for summer 2012 in the " Rich Reads : Historical Fiction Fit For A Queen " section , nominated by historical fiction author Madeline Miller who stated that " this is historical fiction at its best . "

= = = Costa " Book of the Year " = = =

Speaking about the novel at the awards ceremony in Piccadilly , London , Miller stated that he " had no special sense of this one being the one " and mentioned that " it 's a strange journey , you spend

three years in a room on your own and then this : a little unsettling but deeply pleasurable " ; " It 's a very happy occasion " . Chair of the judging , editor of the Evening Standard newspaper Geordie Greig , said that the panel were basing their decision partially on the durability and memorability of the work , stating " we were looking for quality " . Speaking of the novel itself , Greig called it " a rich and evocative historical novel which engrosses with its vivid portrait of pre @-@ revolutionary France " , stating " The qualities of Pure stood out for its memorable gothic tale of morality and mortality . "

The judges were undecided over whether the prize should have gone to Matthew Hollis ' biography Now All Roads Lead to France instead . The judging panel was locked in a " fierce debate and quite bitter dissent " and eventually used a vote to decide on the winner . Geordie Greig said " it was not unpleasant , it was forthright " , stating " it 's not like comparing apples and oranges ? it 's like comparing bananas and curry . " Chair for the selection in 2010 , web editor for Foyles bookshops Jonathan Ruppin , supported the decision , stating " Like Hilary Mantel , who finally became a major name when she won the Man Booker , Miller should now gain the commercial success his stylish and absorbing novels have long deserved . " He goes on to say " Pure perfectly captures the mood of a downtrodden and angry nation , on the verge of overthrowing a self @-@ serving and out @-@ of @-@ touch ruling class ? it 's very much a book for our time . "

The 2011 awards were subject to some attention from bookmakers , who offered odds of 2 / 1 for favourite Matthew Hollis ' biography Now All Roads Lead To France and odds of 3 / 1 for Miller 's Pure .