

Iris Murdoch

The Black Prince

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Penguin Books

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Contents

Editor's Foreword 9

Bradley Pearson's Foreword 11

Bradley Pearson's Story

Part One 21

Part Two 205

Part Three 305

Postscript by Bradley Pearson 381

Four Postscripts by *Dramatis Personae* 393

Editor's Postscript 412

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Irish Murdoch was born in Dublin of Anglo-Irish parents. She went to Badminton School, Bristol, and read classics at Somerville College, Oxford. During the war she was an Assistant Principal at the Treasury, and then worked with U.N.R.R.A. in London, Belgium and Austria. She held a studentship in philosophy at Newnham Collège, Cambridge, for a year, and in 1948 returned to Oxford where she became a Fellow of St Anne's College. In 1956 she married John Bayley, teacher and critic. She was made an Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1975 and was awarded the C.B.E. in 1976.

Her novels are *Under the Net* (1954), *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1955), *The Sandcastle* (1957), *The Bell* (1958), *A Severed Head* (1961), *An Unofficial Rose* (1962), *The Unicorn* (1963), *The Italian Girl* (1964), *The Red and the Green* (1965), *The Time of the Angels* (1966), *The Nice and the Good* (1968), *Bruno's Dream* (1969), *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970), *An Accidental Man* (1971), *The Black Prince* (1973), winner of the James Tait Black Memorial Prize, *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* (1974), winner of the Whitbread Prize, *A World Child* (1975), *Henry and Cato* (1976), *The Sea, the Sea* (1978), for which she won the Booker Prize, *Nuns and Soldiers* (1980), *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983) and *The Good Apprentice* (1985). She has also written *The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artist* (1977), based on her 1976 Romanes lectures, and *A Year of Birds* (1978), a volume of poetry.

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Part Three 305

Postscript by Bradley Pearson 381

Four Postscripts by *Dramatis Personae* 393

Editor's Postscript 412

Contents

Page

Part One 1

Part Two 205

Part Three 305

Part Four 405

Part Five 505

Part Six 605

Editor's Foreword

I am in more than one way responsible for the work that follows. The author of it, my friend Bradley Pearson, has placed the arrangements for publication in my hands. In this humble mechanical sense it is through my agency that these pages now reach the public. I am also the 'dear friend' (and such) who is referred to and at times addressed in the book. I am not however an actor in the drama which Pearson recounts. My friendship with Bradley Pearson dates from a time in our lives posterior to the events here narrated. This has been a time of tribulation when we needed and happily found in each other the blessings of friendship. I can say indeed with confidence that were it not for the encouragement and sympathy which I was able to give to Bradley, this story would probably have remained untold. Those who cry out the truth to an indifferent world too often weary, fall silent, or come to doubt their own wit. Without my help this could have been so with Bradley Pearson. He needed someone to believe him and someone to believe in him. He found me, his *alter ego*, at the time needful.

What follows is in its essence as well as in its contour a love story. I mean that it is deeply as well as superficially so. Man's creative struggle, his search for wisdom and truth, is a love story. What follows is ambiguous and sometimes tortuously told. Man's searchings and his strugglings are ambiguous and vowed to hidden ways. Those who live by that dark light will understand. And yet: what can be simpler than a tale of love and more charming? That art gives charm to terrible things is perhaps its glory, perhaps its curse. Art is a doom. It has been the doom of Bradley Pearson. And in a quite different way it is my own.

My task as editor has been a simple one. Perhaps I should

more justly describe myself as – what? A sort of impresario? A clown or harlequin figure who parades before the curtain, then draws it solemnly back? I have reserved for myself the last word of all, the final assessment or summing up. Yet I would with better grace appear as Bradley's fool than as his judge. It may be that in some sense I am both. Why this tale had to be written will appear, in more senses than one, within the tale. But there is after all no mystery. Every artist is an unhappy lover. And unhappy lovers want to tell their story.

P. Loxias

Editor

Bradley Pearson's Foreword

Although several years have now passed since the events recorded in this fable, I shall in telling it adopt the modern technique of narration, allowing the narrating consciousness to pass like a light along its series of present moments, aware of the past, unaware of what is to come. I shall, that is, inhabit my past self and, for the ordinary purposes of story-telling, speak only with the apprehensions of that time, a time in many ways so different from the present. So for example I shall say, 'I am fifty-eight years old', as I then was. And I shall judge people, inadequately, perhaps even unjustly, as I then judged them, and not in the light of any later wisdom. That wisdom however, as I trust that I truly think it to be, will not be absent from the story. It will to some extent, in fact it must, 'irradiate' it. A work of art is as good as its creator. It cannot be more so. Nor, such as he in this case is, can it be less. The virtues have secret names: they are, so difficult of access, secret things. Everything that is worthy is secret. I will not attempt to describe or name that which I have learnt within the disciplined simplicity of my life as it has latterly been lived. I hope that I am a wiser and more charitable man now than I was then - I am certainly a happier man - and that the light of wisdom falling upon a fool can reveal, together with folly, the austere outline of truth. I have already by implication described this 'reportage' as a work of art. I do not of course by this mean a work of fantasy. All art deals with the absurd and aims at the simple. Good art speaks truth, indeed *is* truth, perhaps the only truth. I have endeavoured in what follows to be wisely artful and artfully wise, and to tell truth as I understand it, not only concerning the superficial and 'exciting' aspects of this drama, but also concerning what lies deeper.

I am aware that people often have completely distorted general

ideas of what they are like. Men truly manifest themselves in the long patterns of their acts, and not in any nutshell of self-theory. This is supremely true of the artist, who appears, however much he may imagine that he hides, in the revealed extension of his work. And so am I too here exhibited, whose pitiful instinct is alas still for a concealment quite at odds with my trade. Under this cautionary rubric I shall however now attempt a general description of myself. And now I am speaking, as I explained, in the *persona* of the self of several years ago, the often inglorious 'hero' of the tale that follows. I am fifty-eight years old. I am a writer. 'A writer' is indeed the simplest and also the most accurate general description of me. In so far as I am also a psychologist, an amateur philosopher, a student of human affairs, I am so because these things are a part of being the kind of writer that I am. I have always been a seeker. And my seeking has taken the form of that attempt to tell truth of which I have just spoken. I have, I hope and I believe, kept my gift pure. This means, among other things, that I have never been a successful writer. I have never tried to please at the expense of truth. I have known, for long periods, the torture of life without self-expression. The most potent and sacred command which can be laid upon any artist is the command: wait. Art has its martyrs, not least those who have preserved their silence. There are, I hazard, saints of art who have simply waited mutely all their lives rather than profane the purity of a single page with anything less than what is perfectly appropriate and beautiful, that is to say, with anything less than what is true.

As is well known, I have published very little. I say 'as is well known', relying here for my fame upon publicity deriving from my adventures outside the purlieus of art. My name is not unknown, but this alas is not because I am a writer. As a writer I have reached and doubtless will reach only a perceptive few. The paradox perhaps of my whole life, and it is an absurdity upon which I do not cease to meditate, is that the dramatic story which follows, so unlike the rest of my work, may well prove to be my only 'best seller'. There are undoubtedly here the elements of crude drama, the 'fabulous' events which simple people love to hear of. And indeed I have had, in this connection, my own good share of being 'front page news'.

I will not attempt to describe my publications. They were, in the context to which I alluded above, much talked of, though not I fear read. I published a precocious novel at the age of twenty-five. I published another novel, or quasi-novel, at the age of forty. I have also emitted a small book of 'texts' or 'studies', I would not exactly call it a work of philosophy. (*Pensées* perhaps.) Time has not been given me in which to become a philosopher, and this I but in part regret. Only stories and magic really endure. How tiny one's area of understanding is art teaches one perhaps better than philosophy. There is a kind of despair involved in creation which I am sure any artist knows all about. In art, as in morality, great things go by the board because at the crucial moment we blink our eyes. When is the crucial moment? Greatness is to recognize it and be able to hold it and to extend it. But for most of us the space between 'dreaming on things to come' and 'it is too late, it is all over' is too tiny to enter. And so we let each thing go, thinking vaguely that it will always be given to us to try again. Thus works of art, and thus whole lives of men, are spoilt by blinking and moving quickly on. I often found that I had ideas for stories, but by the time I had thought them out in detail they seemed to me hardly worth writing, as if I had already 'done' them: not because they were bad, but because they already belonged to the past and I had lost interest. My thoughts were soon stale to me. Some things I ruined by starting them too soon. Others by thinking them so intensely in my head that they were over before they began. Projects would change in a second from hazy uncommitted dreams into unsalvageable ancient history. Whole novels existed only in their titles. The three slim volumes which have emerged from this wrack may seem a meagre foundation upon which to rest the sacred claim of being 'a writer'. But in fact (I feel inclined to say 'of course') my faith in myself in this respect, my sense of the absoluteness of this destiny, this even doom, has never weakened or wavered. I have 'waited', not always with patience, but, in recent years at least, with an increasing confidence. I have felt ever behind the veil of the future that a great achievement was hidden still. Let those smile who have endured as long. And if it should turn out that this small story about myself is all that my destiny is for, is the crown after all of my expectation, shall I feel myself cheated?