

**The Techniques of First-Person Narrative in Iris Murdoch's
*The Black Prince***

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Abstract

Many critics find Iris Murdoch's first-person novels, narrated by a more or less egotistical and unperceptive male who is also the protagonist of the novel *The Black Prince*, which is full of veiled meanings, ironies and mixed messages. Irish Murdoch made her protagonist in this time, complex and brilliant exploration of the relationship between the author and her male narrator. This study explores the techniques of first person narration. In fact, the narrator can be relied upon to the same extent as a third-person narrator, whether omniscient or not. This technique was suggested by the third-person narrator within the first-person narrative in Doris Lessing's significant novel *The Golden Notebook*. Erotic love and blinds both illuminates *The Black Prince* is one of her most insightful novel about love, Iris Murdoch shows us both facets of erotic love in operation. On the one hand, Bradley's love and the anxiety are closely associated to it blind him too many features of the people around him, as the ego so often, in Murdoch's view, obscures reality.

Keywords: Iris Murdoch, *The Black Prince*, Erotic, First- person narration, Irony, Love, and Omniscient.

Introduction

Iris Murdoch was born in Dublin in 1919 that brought up in London, and received her University education at Oxford, later at Cambridge. In 1948, she became a fellow of St. Anne's college, Oxford where she taught philosophy for many years. Iris Murdoch was appointed Dame Commander and order of the British Empire in 1987. Irish Murdoch wrote twenty-six novels including *The Black Prince* also. She received several literary awards and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for *The Black Prince* in (1973). Her works of philosophy include Sartre. She also wrote several plays and a volume of poetry and who died on February 8, 1997.

The Black Prince is a closed novel and choosing to write it in the first person narrator does not diminish this quality, but it is also one in which she has come to achieving a synthesis between powerful plot and fully rounded characters. One of the most important characters in Murdoch's choice of her fiction is the first person for this novelist the epic situation which is created thereby. It is in the form of a confession, and it would be a very different novel indeed without that aspect. The story could have been related in the third person, it is true, but the reflections on the nature of reality and art would sit peculiarly in a novel told by an omniscient third person. These events are so closely related to the perceptions and experiences of the main character that they spend themselves more readily to the subjective narration – in fact, they are really inseparable from it.

The Black Prince is the paradigm of metafiction among Iris Murdoch's works obsessed by the question of art-truth relationship. Iris Murdoch's novels argue mainly with terms of her philosophical ideas and *The Black Prince* is no exception. The criticism it has aroused takes it widely as the epitome of Murdoch's thematic concern over the capability of erotic love to purvey man with a glance of eternal truth and the efficiency of art to express that truth; in short, for its emphasis on the interconnection of love, beauty and truth. Nussbaum (2004) sees the novel a reflection on the double nature of love; a depiction of the tension that exists between selfish and selfless love: the former depriving man of the full access to reality, the latter granting him with moral vision. Making her discussion profoundly on Northrop Frye's theory of modes, Hague argues that it is structurally comic hence a credit to Murdoch's "conviction that the comic mode is the most proper vehicle for the novel" (145).

Constructing its major stylistic features in the literary movements, it shows that *The Black Prince* has a parodic artistic that helps Murdoch draw on the established literary conventions to suggest the ethics of narrative. The inclusion of the four postscripts by the dramatic personae provides the novel with enough leverage to undermine the validity of the story of Bradley, the first-person narrator, and interrupt the form it seems to advocate as truthful; this study challenging the possibility of a single logical reality and the objective representation, the novel places metafiction over conventional fiction for its ethical value. Critics, however renowned an ontological difference between this traditional practice and the contemporary one: the former self-reflexivity was to strengthen the suspension of the disbelief, while the new version is to detain the complexity of truth.

Bradley Pearson is the narrator of *The Black Prince*, who is the unsuccessful author. At the age of fifty-eight, after he is living alone for several years. Bradley suddenly falls himself in love with Julian Baffin, the teenage daughter of his literary rival, Arnold Baffin, who has a prolific popular novelist. His works Bradley contempt not altogether unmixed with envy, and pities. Meanwhile, Arnold's miserable wife, Rachel, has newly taken a sexual pleasure with

Bradley, and he keeps extent relationship with her. Bradley's sudden recognition that he is passionately in love with Julian thus sets the stage for the novel's comic and tragic intricacies. It also presents the reader with one of Murdoch's most vivid and moving accounts of erotic love.

Recalling his meeting with Julian at the restaurant on top of the Post Office Tower, Bradley invites it a moment of "blinding joy." "It was as if stars were exploding in front of my eyes so that I literally could not see." His breathing was fast; "a quiet and perhaps outwardly imperceptible shuddering possessed my whole frame" (230). His legs "ached and throbbed," his knees were weak, and a feeling of happiness filled his body, locating itself mostly in the genitals. Those, he recalls, were some of the physical symptoms:

They can readily be sketched in words. But how to convey the rapture of the mind, as it mingles with the body, draws apart into itself, and mingles again, in a wild and yet graceful dance? The sense of being absolutely in the right and longed-for place is fixed and guaranteed by every ray in the universe.... Consciousness half swoons with its sense of humble delighted privilege while keen sight, in between the explosions of the stars, devours every detail of the real presence. I am here now, you are here now, we are here now. To see her among others, straying like a divine form among mortals, is to become faint with secret knowledge. (231)

In this artful conservative portrayal of the blinding force of new erotic love, Bradley alludes, as many times elsewhere in his narrative, to the description of falls in love with Plato's Phaedrus. He depicts his passion as a moment of blinding light and sudden vision, which is a form of goodness and beauty from mortal eyes are characteristically cut off. Bradley suggests that his love gifts a kind of insight into the truth of the world that we can hardly achieve otherwise.

Bradley's erotic vision is a kind of self-centred illusion that does not really suggest any insight into any real thing or person outside the ego itself. Consider, first of all, the complete literariness of his description. If the experience is really so like the experience described in Plato, it does not inspire our confidence that it really gives true vision of Julian Baffin, or any goodness or beauty residing in her. A person who poses their experiences on works that they admire is all too likely to be egocentric lovers, seeking to cast the beloved into a situation dreamed up inside their own fantasy.

Bradley considers the fact himself too expresses doubts about the quality of his insight. Only a few days before, he believes that he fell in love with Julian's mother Rachel, and he asks himself: is this really love, or is it "just nothing ... the transient embarrassment of an elderly puritan who had for a very long time had no adventures at all?" (134) particularly in his view of

rapid connection from mother to daughter, one might well ask the same question of his following attachment. When we do so, we need to consider the fact that Bradley has been pathetically impotent with the mother, and has constantly become successfully aroused in the presence of the daughter. Sexual performance about Anxiety is a major motif in the story he tells, and one that undermines to some extent our confidence in the other-specified of his vision.

Julian herself believes the fact that Bradley does not really care to know anything about her. Though she loves to him, she frequently accuses him of egoism of vision:

“You talk as if there was nobody here but you....
You don’t seem to know me at all.
Are you sure it’s me you love?” (256, 257)

Really, the Bradley portrayed in those scenes is so deeply focused on his own inner states that it seems quite true that the sufferings and experiences of Julian are not quite real to him something that even his description of his vision suggests, with its mention of a joy that is blinding. Consider, finally, the form of the novel as a whole. Most of the novel is Bradley’s narrative of his love and its tragicomic end. In that view, the novel is strange in Murdoch’s oeuvre: rarely does she illustrate so much confidence in a single character, give so much of the world of the novel to that character’s eyes. The story told by Bradley is allowed in many respects by the mysterious way.

Murdoch simply claims that this change is of some moral significance. Following the behaviour right is one good thing; but getting the thoughts and emotions are another, and in some ways a deeper, more essential, good thing. She challenges moral philosophy to attend more to these long-term tasks in vision and self-cultivation, to focus on patterns of character that enlarge over a life rather than simply on isolated moments of choice. Although Bradley rejects redemptive suffering as a false idea, ironically it is his suffering which has enabled him to reach the state of mind wherein he is able to make this judgment.

Conclusion

The Black Prince is the first person narrative fiction of Irish Murdoch’s. It reveals the story of the blinding force of new erotic love, Bradley alludes, as many times elsewhere in his narrative, to the description of falls in love with Plato’s Phaedrus. The first person narrator does not diminish this quality, which she has come to achieving a synthesis between powerful plot and fully rounded characters. One of the most important characters in Murdoch’s choice of her fiction is the first person for this novel is the epic situation which is created thereby. It is in the form of a confession, and it would be a very different novel indeed without that aspect. This novel is highly influenced on Shakespeare’s play *Hamlet* which is openly referenced and

discussed throughout, especially by Bradley. The final treatment of two characters Bradley has achieved sexual intimacy with Julian and Christian.

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