



# The Black Prince

*Iris Murdoch , Martha C. Nussbaum (Introduction)*

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Bradley Pearson, an unsuccessful novelist in his late fifties, has finally left his dull office job as an Inspector of Taxes. Bradley hopes to retire to the country, but predatory friends and relations dash his hopes of a peaceful retirement. He is tormented by his melancholic sister, who has decided to come live with him; his ex-wife, who has infuriating hopes of redeeming the past; her delinquent brother, who wants money and emotional confrontations; and Bradley's friend and rival, Arnold Baffin, a younger, deplorably more successful author of commercial fiction. The ever-mounting action includes marital cross-purposes, seduction, suicide, abduction, romantic idylls, murder, and due process of law. Bradley tries to escape from it all but fails, leading to a violent climax and a coda that casts shifting perspectives on all that has preceded.

## The Black Prince Details

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Author : Iris Murdoch , Martha C. Nussbaum (Introduction)

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# From Reader Review The Black Prince for online ebook

## Catie says

Real Readers Book Club (Liz) - April 2018

Recommendation from Triin (@wordchild) - 10/6/2017

Last night was our monthly meet up for our #RealReadersBookClub. I've been so anxious to discuss this literary gem. This time we all were pretty much in agreement with our ratings. But, I loved that each of us got something different out of the novel. I appreciated all the philosophical musings about art and the creation of art. Murdoch applies this theme throughout many of her novels, this one in particular seemed to be especially full of creative references, since it revolves around a writer.

I especially love that we each came to a different conclusion of the narrator. Was he unreliable, telling the truth, guilty, innocent? It led to a fabulous discussion, in which we decided that at the very least, Murdoch enjoys messing with her readers emotions as well as creating a very clever and unexpected trick with Shakespeare's Hamlet and the Greek God, Apollo (she even admitted in interviews that she got quite a kick out of this).

For a memorable read with careful plotting, fully realised characters and attention to details, look no further. I highly recommend this literary masterpiece.

My rating: 4.5 Stars

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## Jamie says

very engaging and has the quality of making you see your life as being a little more sinister than before:

The natural tendency of the human soul is towards the protection of the ego. The Niagara-force of this tendency can be readily recognized by introspection, and its results are everywhere on public show. We desire to be richer, handsomer, cleverer, stronger, more adored and more apparently good than anyone else. I say 'apparently' because the average man while he covets real wealth, normally covets only apparent good. The burden of genuine goodness is instinctively appreciated as intolerable, and a desire for it would put out of focus the other and ordinary wishes by which one lives. Of course very occasionally and for an instant even the worst of men may wish for goodness. Anyone who is an artist can feel its magnetism. I use the word 'good' here as a veil. What it veils can be known, but not further named. Most of us are saved from finding self-destruction in a chaos of brutal childish egoism, not by the magnetism of that mystery, but by what is called grandly 'duty' and more accurately 'habit'. Happy is the civilization which can breed men accustomed from infancy to regard certain at least of the ego's natural activities as unthinkable. This training, which in happy circumstances can be of life-long efficacy, is however seen to be superficial when horror breaks in: in war, in concentration camps, in the awful privacy of family and marriage.

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## Brad says

Assuming that *The Black Prince* is a fair representation of Iris Murdoch's work, I think it's unlikely I'll read any more of her books.

That's not to say she's a poor author, nor is it to suggest I didn't like *The Black Prince*. She is a fine author, and I liked *The Black Prince* well enough. But my experience with this book and what that means to my future engagement with Murdoch's novels is a bit like my experience with swimming laps in the local pool without a loftier purpose: neither is worth the effort.

I love swimming. I really do. And I like how I feel after I've gotten back into the routine of swimming. But I have to make time, get ready, get to the pool, put in the effort to swim those laps, stress out my lungs, feel the ache in my muscles the next day, and work on staying motivated despite my enjoyment. Yet I get just as much enjoyment out of sitting on my sofa watching a rerun of *Match Game*, which takes no effort at all, and much more enjoyment out of swimming, biking and running with a sprint triathlon as the end goal -- more effort, but it's effort well spent.

If *Match Game* is the literary equivalent of a fun Terry Pratchett novel and triathlon training is the equivalent of Ulysses, I'll always avoid the middle ground that *The Black Prince* fills. It's good, but the effort really isn't worth the payoff.

If I am wrong, however, and Murdoch's other books are worth the effort, I would love to hear a convincing argument and some recommendations because, if nothing else, this book shows that she is a good author.

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## **Michael says**

Hilarious, stylish, and profound--what more do you want out of a novel? A master class in unreliable narration.

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## **Tamara says**

In my opinion this is Murdoch's finest novel – I read many of her novels in my 20s, but none has made me contemplate love and morality in any sort of deep level as much as this book has. I could rave on about this book for hours, but I would rather rave on about how angry the introduction by Martha C. Nussbaum made me! I cannot fathom how Nussbaum can have left out so many literary allusions made in the book.

First, while she does speak of Plato's *Phaedrus* – and yes, it deserves mention – more apt would have been a discussion of Plato's *Symposium*. How can one talk about Plato's views on erotic love without mentioning the text where Diotima's ladder is introduced? The ladder represents man's steps or route toward the divine (the Good) – it is the approach to understanding truth by the appreciation of "beauty." The first rung on the ladder is physical desire – or lust for a beautiful individual – while it may be base, it is the first step in moving towards the divine and as such we participate in the divine when we step onto the rung. In the book, Bradley states "How right Plato was to think that, embracing a lovely boy, he was on the road to the Good." (p. 202) This novel presents one man's journey towards the divine by starting at that bottom rung.

Another missing classical allusion is to that of the work of the classical Greek poet, Sappho – Sappho is alluded to, but never mentioned by name several times in the text. In particular to her poem about her desire for a particular pupil (the main character in the book briefly tutors his love) Sappho 31, a poem which is better known through Catullus' translation in Latin (Catullus 51). In the poem Sappho describes the physical

sensation of being in love, here is Bradley's take on it: "A quiet and perhaps outwardly imperceptible shuddering possessed my whole frame. My hands vibrated, my legs ached and throbbed, my knees were in the condition described by the Greek poetess." (p. 230).

I am also surprised that Nussbaum made nothing out of the fact the opera the lovers, Bradley and Julian, attend is Der Rosenkavalier – a well-known "trouser opera" in which a woman plays a male lover. Or Bradley first falls in love with Julian while she is talking about having played Hamlet in trousers as a schoolgirl. Nussbaum needed to discuss more fully the gender-blurring throughout the novel. Murdoch has always had gay or bisexual characters in her novels, but this book is by far "the gayest" of them all. This is not to say the lead character is gay, but that the book itself is written with a tone of high camp. How could she not discuss that?

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## Nickolas the Kid says

ΕΔΙΤ 1

Ο Σ'νδεσμος στην Λεσχη του Βιβλ'ου:

<http://www.λ?σχη.gr/forum/showthread....>

Ο Μπρ?ντλι Π?αρσον ε?ναι ?νας συνταξιο?χος εφοριακ?ς, ο οπο?ος ονειρε?εται να γρ?ψει ?να δυνατ? λογοτεχνικ? μυθιστ?ρημα σχετικ? με την αλ?θεια. ?να πραγματικ? λογοτεχνικ? αριστο?ρημα. Γ?ρω του δι?φοροι χαρακτ?ρες... Φθαρμ?νοι κυρ?ως απ? τον συζυγικ? β?ο... Η ψυχολογικ? διαταραγμ?νη αδελφ? του, η πρ?ην γοητευτικ? συζυγ?ς του, ο κολλητ?ς του φ?λος ο συγγραφ?ας, ο κ?πως ιδι?μορφος κουνι?δος του, ο κ?ριος Λοξ?ας... Και μ?σα σε ?λες αυτ?ς τις καρικατο?ρες, και το σκοτειν? αντικε?μενο του π?θου, η ?φθαρτη εικ?να της μικρ?ς Τζο?λιαν. Θα καταφ?ρει μ?ως να απαλλαγε? απ? την παρουσ?α των τοξικ?ν ανθρ?πων, να γρ?ψει το μυθιστ?ρημα του και να ανακαλ?ψει την μοναδικ? αλ?θεια που φανερ?νει ο ?ρωτας;

Η ?ιρις Μ?ρντοχ πι?νεται κυρ?ως με 3 θ?ματα.. Τι ε?ναι τ?χνη και πως πρ?πει να εκφρ?ζεται, τι ε?ναι ο γ?μος και πως μπορε? να φθε?ρει τους ανθρ?πους μ?σα απ? την δικ? του φθορ? και τ?λος τι σημα?νει αλ?θεια και π?σο μπορε? κανε?ς να την αντιληφτε?... Η Μ?ρντοχ αφηγε?ται την ιστορ?α του Μπρ?ντλι Π?αρσον με ?ναν αρκετ? πρωτ?τυπο τρ?πο (το καταλαβα?νουμε αμ?σως απ? τον πιο ευφ?νταστο πρ?λογο επιμελητ?!! ). Την ιστορ?α ουσιαστικ? την μεταφ?ρει στον αναγν?στη ο επιμελητ?ς του βιβλ'ου κος Λοξ?ας.

Η αγ?πη της συγγραφ?ως για τον Σα?ξπηρ και την Αρχα?α Ελληνικ? τ?χνη ε?ναι κ?τι παραπ?νω απ? εμφαν?ς. Ο Μπρ?ντλι μιλ?ει σε ?να φ?λο του ?πως ο ?μλετ μιλ?ει στο φ?ντασμα αναζητ?ντας την δικα?ωση των πρ?ξε?ν του ακ?μα και μ?σα απ? ?ναν φανταστικ? (;;; ) φ?λο. Ο εκδ?της και φ?λος του Μπρ?ντλι ε?ναι ο κος Λοξ?ας, ?να ?νομα δι?λου τυχα?ο μιας και ?ταν ?να απ? τα παρων?μια του Θεο? της Τ?χνης Απ?λλωνα. ?τσι μοιρα?α οι χαρακτ?ρες του βιβλ'ου φ?ρουν το αρχα?ο δρ?μα αλλ? και την Σαιξπηρικ? λιτ?τητα κ?νοντας την αν?γνωστ? του απολαυστικ?.

Σε αρκετ? σημει?α του βιβλ'ου υπ?ρχουν αναφορ?ς για κρυμμ?νες ομοφυλοφιλικ?ς τ?σεις και Συμπλ?γματα της Ηλ?κτρας. Ο κ?θε χαρακτ?ρας του βιβλ'ου ε?ναι και μια διαφορετικ? ερμηνει?α της Μ?ρντοχ για τις διαφορετικ?ς πτυχ?ς του ανθρ?πινου χαρακτ?ρα.

Ο Μαρ?ος πρ?γκιπας ε?ναι ο δι?βολος ? ο ?ρωτας; Η αλ?θεια ?ρχεται μ?σα του ?ρωτα ?πως ?λεγε ο Πλ?τωνας ? τελικ? ?λα ε?ναι μ?ταια;

5/5...

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°°°.°..°-°. \_· ????? Ροζουλ? Εωσφ?ρος ·\_·°-°.° ·°°° ★·.·^·.·★ ?????? ???????  
??????? Ταμετο?ρο Αμ says

«Ο Μά?ρος Πρ?γκιπας» ε?ναι μια γιορτ?, μια αρχα?α τελετ?, μια θε?κ? επιρρο? αναφορικ? με τα σκοτειν?, διαφορο?μενα και υπ?ροχα συναισθ?ματα της ανθρ?πινης ψυχ?ς.

Η συναισθηματικ? ανταπ?κριση ε?ναι αδιαμφισβ?τητα η αρχ? και το μεγαλε?ο της λογοτεχνικ?ς κριτικ?ς.

Η συγγραφ?ας σε αυτ? το βιβλ?ο κ?νει τις φαντασι?σεις της τ?χνη, δημιουργε? χαρακτ?ρες πλ?ρως δομημ?νους και ?θλιους, τ?σο ?θλιους και τ?σο ανθρ?πινους που φθ?νουν στην ?κσταση και θριαμβε?ουν ως απ?λυτα αποτυχημ?νοι.

Η Μ?ρντοχ γνωρ?ζει πολ? καλ? την κ?λαση.

Σχεδ?ν ?λοι οι χαρακτ?ρες του βιβλ?ου ζουν εκε?. Απεικον?ζει αριστουργηματικ? την απελπιστικ? ανθρ?πινη κατ?σταση σε κ?θε ?κφανση της, μα κυρ?ως εισβ?λει στην ψυχ? του αναγν?στη ?χοντας ως δο?ρειο ?ππο τον Μά?ρο Πρ?γκιπα.

Μά?ρος, ?πως τα σκοτειν? αβυσσαλ?α ψυχικ? β?θη, Πρ?γκιπας, ?πως το τιμητικ? και θριαμβευτικ? αξ?ωμα, ?πως ?νας μεγαλει?δης τ?τλος τιμ?ς και εξουσ?ας που καθορ?ζει την ολοκλ?ρωση μ?σα απο την αισθητικ? την αλ?θεια και τον Μά?ρο ?ρωτα.

Ε?ναι ?να μυθιστ?ρημα προκλητικ?, υπ?ροχο, ζοφερ? και ιδιοφυ?ς.

Σε περν?ει σε ?να επ?πεδο τα?τισης και αυτοσυνειδητ?τητας ακριβ?ς ?πως πρ?πει η τ?χνη να σε περν?ει σε ?λλες σφ?ρες παρηγορι?ς, λ?τρωσης και «διαλογισμο?».

Οι αι?νιες αλ?θειες διαχ?ονται μ?σα στη γραφ? της και φ?ρνουν πολυ?ριθμες επιρρο?ς στους ?ρωες του βιβλ?ου και στον αναγν?στη.

Η αγ?πη, ως δ?ναμη ενοπο?ησης, η ομορφι? σε επ?πεδο θε?τητας, η αλ?θεια που οδηγε? στον παρ?δεισο μ?νο αν θελ?σουμε να την ακολουθ?σουμε, η επιθυμ?α, ο π?νος, η ευδαιμον?α, ο εξευτελισμ?ς, η δικαιοσ?νη, ?ρχονται στον αναγν?στη τ?σο οικε?α και αδ?στακτα ?πως η ανελ?ητη β?α.

Ο ?ρωτας, οι διαφορο?μενες αλ?θειες, η τ?χνη, το δρ?μα, το πνε?μα, η πολυπλοκ?τητα, το μ?σος, η αποτυχ?α και η ?κσταση της φαντασ?ας δαγκ?νουν τον αναγν?στη θριαμβευτικ? και υπ?ρλαμπρα.

Μ?σα σε ?να μπερδεμ?νο πλ?γμα ανθρ?πινων αναξι?πιστων χαρακτ?ρων τοποθετε?ται ο ?ρωας μας.

Ο αξιαγ?πητος (προσωπικ? ?ποψη) και ασυμβ?βαστος Μπρ?ντλι ε?ναι ο κεντρικ?ς ?ρωας της ιστορ?ας.

?νας ?ριμος ?νδρας που αρρωστα?νει απο ?ρωτα και εμμον? για ?να νεαρ? κορ?τσι.

Απο κει και μετ? ξεκιν?ει ?να επ?τευγμα κλασικ?ς λογοτεχν?ας.

?νας καταγισμ?ς τ?χνης, ζω?ς και θαν?του που αρχικ? μας παραπ?μπει στο Πλατωνικ? Συμπ?σιο και κατ?πιν στο μαρτ?ριο του ?μλετ πιστοποι?ντας ?μπρακτα μ?σω της εξ?λιξης ?λα τα αι?νια συμπλ?γματα της ερωτικ?ς και σεξουαλικ?ς ανθρ?πινης υπ?στασης.

Ταυτ'στηκα με τον Μα?ρο Πρ?γκιπα...?πως ταυτ?ζεται ο το μαρτ?ριο του ?ρωτα με το θ?νατο και την λ?τρωση.

Αφαιρετικ?ς, απαγορευμ?νος, καταστροφικ?ς και εξεχ?ντως απολαυστικ?ς σαν την ουσ?α της ζω?ς.

Ουσιαστικ? κ?τι π?ρα και π?νω απο την αγ?πη ε?ναι η ουσ?α αυτο? του βιβλ?ου.

Στο τ?λος της ιστορ?ας μας βλ?πουμε τα γεγον?τα που μας αφηγε?ται ο Μπρ?ντλι απο την ?ποψη των ?λλων κ?ριων χαρακτ?ρων της ιστορ?ας.

Αυτ? απλ? μπορε? να χαρακτηριστε? ως μια συστροφ? παραλυτικ?ς ?κπληξης για τον αναγν?στη και σ?γουρα χαρακτηρ?ζεται ως εγκεφαλικ? επεισ?διο ιδιοφυ?ας.

Προφαν?ς,το λ?τρεψα αυτ? το βιβλ?ο.

Διαβ?στε το

και θα καταλ?βετε, ? μ?λλον ?πως ε?πε ο Μπρ?ντλι σε κ?ποια στιγμή της αφ?γησης του :

•?ποιος ?χει αγαπ?σει θα με καταλ?βει ...•

????????????

Καλ? αν?γνωση.

Πολλο?ς ασπασμο?ς.

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## Manny says

As usual, I just can't remember a thing that happened, at least to the extent of assigning it to this rather than some other Iris Murdoch novel. Probably an insane billionaire has a scheme to destroy the world and 007 needs to infiltrate his shadowy organisation, having sex with several hot women en route and finally defusing the atomic weapon when there are only seconds left on the clock.

Wait. That was the other series, wasn't it? In that case, pretty much the same, but take out the atomic weapon and the billionaire and add some Wittgenstein.

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## Aubrey says

3.5/5

The term "unreliable narrator" is a popular one in literature. As are "creativity", "art", and "great", words whose definitions are thrown around so quickly that the mind can hardly fix on one before another, more "truthful" one is sailing past. As if truth had anything to do with it.

Let's start with the "unreliable" part of the first term. Unreliable how? What standard of reliability do we actually have at our disposal? The simplest answer is the book itself, an answer that quickly devolves into an inescapable paradox from the purely objective point of view. As a result, one must step back from the lenses of objectivity, and trust in the states of transience that meaning undergoes for each and every occasion.

This book has an unreliable narrator. In fact, it has many, and one would go mad in the attempt to discover the "real" story based on the accounts of all of these different and differing voices. Pardon my usage of concrete ideals that belie their inherent complexity, but the story is not of real importance here. There is a story, that is true, but this story is something that was viewed through the perspectives of many human beings, each with prejudices and motives and other mental biases that warp and twist whatever observations they manage to capture from reality. It is these disconnections between whatever constituted these observations and their final rendition on paper that are of interest. Or, more accurately, just how much havoc these disconnections wreak when one comes in contact with another through that vague film of "reality".

The real chaos provoked by the clashing of abstract interpretations is even more pronounced here, in a book wholly consumed with the idea of "art". What is art? How does one define its many aspects, and more importantly, how does one come to create their own? Should one be prolific in their attempts at this most beautiful of substances, or should one wait until one has enough experience/the right state of mind/the most fruitful life opportunity close at hand?

I do not have an answer for that. But many of the characters in this book do, each as varied and conflicting as their inherent characteristics. One thing they all hold in common, though, is their ability to "clean up" the story in their recounting, shape it to a single theme that guides their individual story to their own satisfactory ends. Seemingly well-constructed interpretations are prolific here, all the more striking when contrasted with the glimpses of the most banal of realities that each writer lets slip in their own fashion.

In my mind the former interpretations, while admittedly much more impressive in terms of thematic power and linguistic expression, would not be nearly so impressive without the latter banalities. Why? Because it is this pervasive contrast between high-flown words of interpretation and the mundane "facts" of what "really happened" that is so fascinating. Especially when each narrator wishes to tell the truth, and many of them wish to do it in a way that they consider "art". Words and reality (physical, mental, sociocultural, political, rational, so many multitudes of -al's swirling about and shifting the story at hand) have equal amounts of power over each other. It only requires a small change in either of them to drastically change the results of their constant war.

One event. Two people see it. Each pens down their own version of what they believe happened. One person reads the writings of the other, and responds with a more "correct" version of the others. One reader reads all of these linguistic exercises and theoretical meanderings. One reader wonders at the discrepancies, the accusations, the drama. One reader wonders.

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## **Paul Bryant says**

I read this years ago and thought it was hilarious, especially when the old prissy geezer was taking the young lovely student he was hopelessly in love with to the Opera and was so excited and overwhelmed by the whole inebriating ineffable scrotum-bedevilling love thing that he vomited all over the row in front. Which quite curtailed the passion for that evening.



I actually re-read this not that long ago and it wasn't quite so side-splitting but the vomit scene still brought forth a few chortles.

All the characters in Iris Murdoch's novels are little upper middle class clockwork figurines, she winds them up and they rush here and shag, and rush there and existentialise, and rush there and divorce. It's funny and exhausting and you often need a chart.

But one Iris Murdoch novel is a must.

So it should be this one.

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### **Fiona says**

Haven't read this in years either. Irish Murdoch was shortlisted for the Booker for this wonderful novel written in the 1970s. Hasn't dated at all. She has characters and plot on a string. Brilliant realisation of first person narrative, and a story within a story. The narrator is typically grey, British, mediocre and of the pre Thatcher era, completely out of sorts with his own and everyone's feelings and emotions, sexual or otherwise. At times bleak, mostly ironic, hugely amusing, nearly a sitcom riddled with pathos and bathos, and generally awesome writing. Through the 1st person narrative, so much of the protagonists frailties and societal prejudices are revealed, including an intolerance of human dirt and stains, and middle class shiboleths are demolished unforgivingly; very Patrick White. A stylistic triumph to make Martin Amis proud. Comparisons with the later, similarly themed *The Information* (writer's block and literary/sexual jealousy) are unavoidable. Clearly Amis is a tour de force when at his best, but Murdoch's style and control is probably superior, and that's saying something for me to come to that conclusion. I am tempted to re-read most of her work as it's been over 10 yrs since I first read her. Again, a joy to read ~ fantastic writing.

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### **Jim Fonseca says**

For fans of the author's *The Sea*, *The Sea*, here's a great book that has a similar tone and structure. The similarities with *The Sea*: we have a just-retired divorced man who has rented an ocean-front cottage. He has always 'used' women and treated them callously; old flames return making theatrical appearances at his door at inopportune times. These include his ex- and he assumes she wants to get back with him, which may or may not be true. And just like *The Sea*, we have a murder, an attempted murder and a suicide.

I'd say there are three main themes: love – the experience of falling in love and being in love; the pros and cons of marriage, and art.

On love: Iris Murdoch made this famous quote: "Every artist is an unhappy lover. And unhappy lovers want to tell their story." It's about falling in love with the emphasis on "falling." It happens to this 58-year-old man instantaneously over dinner one night with a woman barely 20 years old; a daughter of long-time friends of his. He is smitten as if he had heart attack. The author tells us in an aside that few authors write about the experience of being in love and that is mainly what the story is about. "The absolute yearning of one human body for another particular one and its indifference to substitutes is one of life's major mysteries."

On marriage: “But there is a natural hostility between the married and the unmarried. I cannot stand the shows so often quite instinctively put on by married people to insinuate that they are more moral than you are. Moreover to help their case the unmarried person often naively assumes that all marriages are happy unless shown to be otherwise.” And “People who boast of happy marriages are, I submit, usually self-deceivers, if not actually liars...There is nothing like the bootless solitude of those who are caged together.”

On art: our main character worked in a tax office but his real love was literary things – he wrote book reviews and one critically-acclaimed book. He’s in a rivalry with another male author. He wrote one great book (his opinion) but his friend bangs one out every year. He believes he ‘discovered’ the other writer so we have this complicated mentor/protégée relationship. It revolves around the theme: is art supposed to be ‘difficult’ or ‘fun’?

Other passages I liked:

“One can see many men who live happily, possessed and run (indeed manned, the way a ship is manned) by women of tremendous will.”

“Of course men play roles, but women play roles too, blanker ones. They have in the play of life, fewer good lines.” (written in 1973)

Do we keep secrets from friends to make ourselves feel superior? Is it because “To see someone as not ‘in the know’ is to see them as diminished.”

“Those who occasion loss of dignity are hard to forgive.”

“One must constantly meditate upon the absurdities of chance, a subject even more edifying than the subject of death.”

“Her eyes were red and swollen with crying, and her mouth was rectangular with complaint, like the mouth of a letter box.”

“...you don’t know what it’s like waking every morning and finding the whole horror of being yourself still there.”

And our lover? It ends badly for him, of course. So badly that at the end someone collects his memoirs and has each of the major characters react to them. So we are treated to new twists and turns about what really happened.

Like *The Sea, The Sea*, a great read that I added to my favorites.

top image from [thewordtravels.com](http://thewordtravels.com)

lower of London apartments from [orchardsoflondon.com](http://orchardsoflondon.com)

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## Maureen says

once again iris murdoch makes my head explode. each time i think i'm in the wrong place when i start: everything seems so conventional and normal, even boring: so british, and calling, and tea cups and all, and then, oh then, it just sort of explodes into sparks of clarity dancing around sordidness combined with philosophy -- its meditations primarily on art, and love. i found several lengthy sections to type out, after the quote below, but cannot now bring myself to do so as the book has exhausted me. it has rung me out but i will not forget it. i do not say i like it, and yet, i cannot say i don't love it. with this, and the unicorn, murdoch has taught me much about suffering, and madness.

a quote from the narrator, which perhaps gives credence to those that align bradley pearson with humbert humbert in their minds.

"I felt that I was, at every instant, creating Julian and supporting her being with my own. At the same time I saw her too in every way as I had seen her before. I saw her simplicity, her ignorance, her childish unkindness, her unpretty anxious little face. She was not beautiful or brilliantly clever. How false it is to say love is blind. I could even judge her, I could even condemn her, I could even, in some possible galactic loop of thought, make her suffer. But this was still the stuff of paradise because I was a god and I was involved with her in some eternal activity of making to be which was of sole and absolute value. and with her the world was made, nothing was lost, not a grain of sand nor a speck of dust since she was the world and I touched her everywhere."

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## Kirsten says

Whew! I finally finished it. I wanted to score this book higher. It was an excellent book, but I wouldn't say I "really liked it" as the GR ratings go. The prose was just too dense for me to really enjoy it.

The characters, however, and the story are engaging and absorbing. At no point did I not want to finish the book. The characters were engaging though not very likable. Still, I am glad I read it.

This is going to sound odd. But it is a very wet and windy sort of book. It made me feel as I do on a cold and rainy and blustery fall day. But in a good way.

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## Teresa Proença says

"A arte não é confortável nem falsificável. A arte conta a única verdade que em definitivo interessa. É a luz através da qual os seres humanos podem ser corrigidos. E para além da arte, permitam que vos diga, não existe nada."

— Iris Murdoch, *O Príncipe Negro - Uma Celebração do Amor*

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## Christin says

Granted, I did not pick this book, but I did blindly and eagerly consent based on the fact that I had heard of Murdoch's work and as a result of my experience with other British/Irish women novelists being so rich and rewarding, assumed I would love it. Oh, folly! Iris Murdoch is a philosopher (and a lover of Sartre, worst offender of all, if you ask me), and I generally make it a rule never to read the novels of philosophers because they know shit about character development and even less about plot. Now, mind, as a lover of Joyce and Woolf, I can worship and venerate a plotless novel like it's my job (which it kind of is) as long as there is some lyricism and some wordplay. Not so *The Black Prince*. Now, all the faux editorial prefaces and postscripts would suggest that I am supposed to hate Bradley and feel that the narrative has no centre. But I hated everyone from the vacillating, talentless Baffins to whining homosexual stereotype Francis Marloe. It's 1973: take a Valium, see a therapist. As such, I resented the hell out of this novel: its endless pontificating on art and existentialism, its mangling of Shakespeare and Dante, its endless reliance on Freudian paradigms only to ridicule them ex-post-facto. I don't see how creating a cast of miserable, despondent, self-obsessed people merits a Booker Prize. I learned nothing from this book and will never read her again. It could've done with a lot more preface/postscripts and a lot less novel. Bottom line: lame.

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## Robert says

A strange and convoluted tale of love... or at least, such is the way it describes itself. But it seems Iris Murdoch's real purpose with the text is to offer the reader the disorienting experience of traveling across a highly nuanced emotional terrain with a Prufrockian narrator who is attempting to be "set the record straight", and in the process creates more questions, doubts, and uncertainty.

It is a book within a book, told in the first person by the "author" of the text... and even goes a step further by having four postscripts in which other characters get a chance to speak their own view of the events. But the majority of the text is a journey thru a single mind that is undeniably deceiving itself at some fundamental level while loudly proclaiming that his only goal in writing this book is to reveal the truth. What does this say about Subjectivity? Relativity? Text? Love? Truth? etc etc

The writing is superb, with loads of beautiful lines. Some of them hewn down to aphoristic brilliance... "Perfection is instant despair." ... "The work of art laughs last." ... and many of the ideas raised within the text and by the text itself are wonderfully explored.

But I must end this review with a caveat. Though I do speak highly of it and think it is a book I am very glad to have read, I nonetheless feel hesitant to recommend it to many people. This is because the main character constantly annoyed the hell out of me... and keep in mind, I am generally well-disposed to those who are caught in a web of over-analysis, but his priggish tone made me want to punch him on several occasions. Did Iris Murdoch create this irritation as another exploration of form and textual interaction? Questions, questions, questions...

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## Adam Dalva says

This is, somehow, my fourth Iris Murdoch novel in as many months, and some of her tendencies have

become apparent. Here too we have a foppish, marginally asexual middle aged man who experiences a not-so-good awakening; we have a third act tragedy involving a supporting character; we have a bit character who scarcely ever appears but is mentioned frequently to give the illusion of time passing; we have philosophic departures into the nature of love; we have a queer supporting man who willingly becomes a butler-figure for sadomasochistic reasons; we have a love pentagram.

Fortunately, I love all these things, and so I love Iris Murdoch. *THE BLACK PRINCE* deviates from the form in a few ways - the narrative is a bit more nasty and sad (cruel depictions of middle-aged women abound, the philosophic sections are more separated), and there is immediate doubt given as to the reliability of the protagonist. Bradley Pearson, a failed author with a rival/best friend named Arnold. Bradley "writes the book" from an indeterminate location in space and time, and a sequence of letters at the end call into doubt swaths of the narrative.

The action starts with delay. Bradley keeps trying to get out of London to write his long delayed novel and keeps getting held back. Murdoch novels work like stages - the primary locations are always heavily permeable, with frequent, comedic entrances that add complications. There are numerous candidates for Bradley's love: his ex-wife is back in town and single; Arnold's wife likes him; Arnold likes Bradley's ex-wife; Bradley's ex-wife's brother likes him; Arnold's daughter likes him; his sister likes no one but is mucking everything up; everyone thinks Bradley and Arnold secretly like each other. Complexity stacks. Oh, she writes this kind of thing so well! And with Murdoch, there is always a hook. This one happens very late, almost exactly halfway through the novel, and from there on it catches fire, a thrilling novella that I won't spoil. Look at the writing when Bradley does fall in love, the prose is so pyrotechnic but simultaneously makes fun of him:

"But nothing really had prepared me for this blow. And it was a BLOW, I was felled by it physically. I felt as if my stomach had been shot away, leaving a gaping hole. My knees dissolved, I could not stand up, I shuddered and trembled all over, my teeth chattered. My face felt as if it had become waxen and some huge strange weirdly smiling mask had been imprinted upon it, I had become some sort of god. I lay there with my nose stuck into the black wool of the rug and the toes of my shoes making little ellipses on the carpet as I shook with possession. Of course I was sexually excited, but what I felt transcended mere lust to such a degree that although I could vividly sense my afflicted body I also felt totally alienated and changed and practically disincarnate."

Wow! There is a sequence of vomiting in the opera shortly after this that is one of the funnier things I can remember reading. I like *BLACK PRINCE* better than *THE BELL* and not as much as *SEVERED HEAD* or *THE SEA*, *THE SEA*. One needs to trust that Murdoch is both hilarious and wicked to stick with this one (which is why I think *SEVERED HEAD* makes the best gateway drug). I read it slowly and quickly at once; high praise.

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## Marija Simi? says

3,5 stars.

I just really enjoyed this book at the beginning. It's indeed an unusual one. I both, like and dislike the main character, Bradley, and overall, all characters in this book. And I am that type of a reader, who is perfectly

aware of character's age, but still always picture it as a young(er), and often, I create his physical appearance, although author clearly describe it (as opposite). I don't know why I do this. And, also, I wonder, do I picture characters in books like young ones, because I am young now and will that change when I am old..?

Okay, back to the book itself. I most definitely will re-read this book! I found that it has interesting psychological background, although I am not much impressed by 'developments' in story. This, shall I call it peeve of mine especially manifest in Part 2 of the book. And, the end itself pretty much gave me a feeling of irritation. It's sort of unfinished, but not in the 'good' way. But, once again, I so must read this book again, I sense that I will appreciate it much more. I kinda don't fully 'get it'.

However, I see that not many of my friends read it, which is sad. I would recommend you to read it's description, and hopefully you will find the story interesting, and again hopefully you give it a try.

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## **Ben Loory says**

i loved this the same way i love every iris murdoch book. and it doesn't surprise me that this is probably her most famous book-- it's long and complex and full of great characters and all perfectly set out and cut like a diamond and overflowing with wonderful sentences and thoughts about art and life and love and all the rest. for me though it was just a little too normal. it's a book about people and the way they interact. it doesn't quite have the shimmering fantastical intensity of, say, *The Italian Girl*, or *The Flight from the Enchanter*, or *The Sandcastle*. the strangeness and beauty of the world itself, of existence pure and simple, is not as forefront. (except, i guess, in that moment with the balloon, where he chases and loses it in the street. (it is not by mistake that they chose that image for the cover of this version. it's the moment that stands out by being different.))

but still, i'd rather read anything by iris murdoch than pretty much anything by anyone else. and i can't just give ALL her books five stars. though really i probably should.

*Of course, as you have so often pointed out, we may attempt to attain truth through irony. (An angel might make of this a concise definition of the limits of human understanding.) Almost any tale of our doings is comic. We are bottomlessly comic to each other. Even the most adored and beloved person is comic to his lover. The novel is a comic form. Language is a comic form, and makes jokes in its sleep. God, if He existed, would laugh at His creation. Yet it is also the case that life is horrible, without metaphysical sense, wrecked by chance, pain and the close prospect of death. Out of this is born irony, our dangerous and necessary tool.*

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