

A LOVE THAT POINTS:  
THE TELEOLOGIES OF EVELYN WAUGH AND IRIS MURDOCH

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**SUPERVISORY AND EXAMINING COMMITTEE**

Harrison Charles Otis, candidate for the degree of Master of Arts in English, has presented a thesis titled, ***A Love That Points: The Teleologies of Evelyn Waugh and Iris Murdoch***, in an oral examination held on April 10, 2018. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

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### Abstract

Both Evelyn Waugh and Iris Murdoch use their novels to work out the ways in which metaphysical ends undergird and direct the world of lived experience. In other words, both authors are consistently teleological, though they disagree wildly on what (or who) the ultimate teleological good actually is. I have chosen to examine Waugh's and Murdoch's teleologies in light of the nature of love, which functions for both authors as a virtue and as a teleological engine. In my first chapter I treat the relationship between love and sex in Murdoch's *The Black Prince* and Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, considering Murdoch and Waugh as exemplars of Platonic and Dantean eroticism, respectively. In my second chapter I treat the relationship between love and art in Waugh's *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold* and Murdoch's *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, where Murdoch reflects a Platonic conception of creation and Waugh an Augustinian one. In my final chapter I treat the relationship between love and service in Murdoch's *Bruno's Dream* and Waugh's *Sword of Honour*, arguing that Murdoch exemplifies Simone Weil's understanding of the human self and will, whereas Waugh exemplifies Augustine's understanding of the same. For Murdoch, I argue, sex and art are teleologically split: that is, they are each by nature at least partially inimical to virtue, and thus must remain imperfect if they are to direct the soul toward the Good. Likewise, the efficacy of service depends on a recognition of the imperfection of the self and its subsequent destruction. For Waugh, on the other hand, sex and art are each by nature good; though that goodness becomes demonic when wrenched from its proper context, it nonetheless continues to point toward God, a lesser and distorted reflection of a greater light. Similarly, service requires not the destruction of the self but rather an affirmation of

the self and its particular vocation toward God and others. In all this, Murdoch's Good gives her a teleology that is markedly impersonal and distrustful of the self, whereas Waugh's God gives him a teleology that is markedly personal and affirmative of the self.

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I must also thank the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research and the Department of English for the many teaching assistantships and scholarships that have enabled me to pursue my degree. Specifically, I am grateful for the FGSR Graduate Scholarship, the Dr. Morris Shumiatcher Scholarship in English, the John Spencer Middleton & Jack Spencer Gordon Middleton Scholarship, the Saskatchewan Innovation and Opportunity Graduate Scholarship, the Dorothy & Leon Goldman Award in English, and the Department of English Line Faculty Scholarship.

### **Dedication**

As a stranger to Regina, I would have been greatly at a loss without the many communities that have sprung up around me. My thesis would have been, if not impossible, at least much more difficult to complete without the hospitality of Dr. Marcel DeCoste and Dr. Susan Johnston; the camaraderie of my fellow English graduate and honours students; the mutual encouragement of my church family at Hillsdale Baptist; and particularly the fellowship and friendship of my brothers at Casa de Bro.

If I trace the winding path back far enough, this thesis would not exist without Dr. Cory Grewell and Dr. Steven Hake of Patrick Henry College, under whose guidance I first learned how to study literature as an academic, nor without Erin Brown Conroy, Aubrey Heki, and Daryl Madore, who taught me to write. And it would certainly not exist without my parents, who have never ceased to love me, support me, teach me, and pray for me.

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**List of Abbreviations**

*BD* Iris Murdoch, *Bruno's Dream*

*EAR* Evelyn Waugh, *The Essays, Articles, and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*

*FHD* Iris Murdoch, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*

*FS* Iris Murdoch, *The Fire and the Sun*

*SG* Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*

## Introduction

“Murdoch is a fraud,” wrote Evelyn Waugh in 1961: the eponymous instrument of her novel *The Bell* “could not have been rung as she described it” (qtd. in Stannard, *No Abiding* 446n13).<sup>1</sup> Though Murdoch does not seem to have returned the sentiment—in an interview with S. B. Sagare she commends the staying power of Waugh’s work (702)<sup>2</sup>—Waugh’s characteristically acerbic putdown emphasizes the difficulty of finding common ground between the two authors. They may share a genre (the novel), a homeland (Britain), and a century (the twentieth), but initially they seem to have little else in common. Murdoch’s philosophical and descriptive style, replete with articulated interior reflection, is far from Waugh’s satiric barbs, chiseled prose, and implied interiority. Murdoch’s plots often revolve around the romantic permutations of her characters, with an emphasis on their personal moral lives; Waugh’s plots tend to put a generally hapless protagonist in conflict with the social institutions of his day, resulting in a critique of society rather than of the individual. What Lorna Sage has called Murdoch’s “aesthetic of imperfection” (68) contrasts strongly with Waugh’s aesthetic of craftsmanship (*EAR* 73). Murdoch’s work is often comic, but seriously so; Waugh excels at being funny, in ways that can seem not very serious at all.<sup>3</sup> Ideologically, Murdoch’s spiritually-inflected atheism gives her books a markedly different flavor than Waugh’s early satiric atheism and later devout Catholicism. At first glance, Murdoch and Waugh write about different subjects in different styles and with different themes: to my knowledge, only one scholar

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<sup>1</sup> According to Martin Stannard, Waugh wrote this sentiment in the dedication to Tom Driberg’s copy of *Unconditional Surrender* in October 1961.

<sup>2</sup> “Evelyn Waugh survives and Charles Morgan doesn’t” (702). In context, this is a commentary on how difficult it is to predict the future canon, rather than a discussion of the quality of Waugh’s work.

<sup>3</sup> According to Philip Hensher, “all of Murdoch’s novels after the first two, blissfully funny books” are “formally [comedies], but one[s] evidently written by someone without any sense of humour” (xi); this criticism is unfair, in my opinion, but does helpfully illustrate that Murdoch rarely succeeds at being funny in the way that Waugh routinely does.

has found a relationship between these two authors worth giving more than a passing mention.<sup>4</sup>

That scholar is T.R. Wright. In his 1988 *Theology and Literature*, Wright argues that Murdoch is the twentieth-century exemplar of “the abandonment of metaphysics by the great realist [novel] tradition,” an abandonment “[r]esisted by defenders of Catholic orthodoxy such as Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene and Flannery O’Connor” (11).

Murdoch “seems to regard religious language in a naïve realist or positivist manner as a mistaken attempt to name metaphysical entities which do not exist rather than a symbolic expression of realities beyond human comprehension” (120); Waugh, by contrast, challenges readers “to abandon the secular assumptions of their age, to admit the depth of evil in themselves and in the world, to acknowledge their need of redemption” (121). To Wright, “the only reality Murdoch seems prepared to affirm” is “human virtue,” whereas Waugh “presents the supernatural as the only real world, the only reality worthy of serious consideration” (121). This contrast, I would argue, importantly mischaracterizes both authors. It is true that Murdoch doesn’t “believe in a personal God or a paradise elsewhere or anything outside humanity. It’s all here in our human existence” (Robson 86). Religious language can thus be problematic: “To present the idea of God at all, even as myth, is a consolation,” and therefore a vicious denial of reality (*FS* 88). Nonetheless,

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<sup>4</sup> A. S. Byatt situates Murdoch’s *An Accidental Man* “somewhere between Waugh, Shakespeare and Dickens” for its “passion, tragedy, comedy” (88) and Peter J. Conradi jests that whatever social snobbishness Murdoch may have displayed is no worse than Proust’s or Waugh’s (*Iris* 443-44). Suguna Ramanathan contrasts Catholic converts Waugh and Graham Greene with Murdoch, who also “took theology seriously” but from outside the fold of faith (“Deconstructive Theology” 36); similarly, Christopher Sykes suggests that Waugh’s sympathetic portrayal of religion in *Brideshead Revisited* paved the way for later unironic treatments of religion in works like Murdoch’s *The Bell* (249). On the theme of religion, Bran Nicol wonders at “the sheer number of guilt-ridden characters in the pages of Murdoch’s novels,” an unexpected preoccupation for a novelist outside the Catholic tradition of Waugh, Greene, and others (42). Nicol also characterizes Waugh’s *Brideshead* and *Sword of Honour* (30, 73) as members of the “late-modernist retrospective tradition” that Murdoch puts to “deconstructive use” (73), foregrounding the personal rather than the historical (36) and ironizing her narrators’ sense of progress (73-74). Nicol spends a good deal of time elaborating Murdoch’s strategies in this regard but only mentions Waugh in passing.

religious language does, for Murdoch, attempt to express something real, calling “human attention to the remote, external other” (Dipple 101). “Prayer is properly not petition, but simply an attention to God which is a form of love” and thus of virtue, she writes; “God was (or is) a *single perfect transcendent non-representable and necessarily real object of attention,*” and “moral philosophy should attempt to retain a central concept which has all these characteristics” (SG 53-54, emphasis original). It is this God-like concept, the Good, which underlies all, or almost all, our attempts to be virtuous (68). Murdoch’s religious language is indeed “a symbolic expression of realities beyond human comprehension” (Wright 120).

In this way, although Wright is correct to affirm that Murdoch sees no reality beyond the human, he is incorrect to characterize her as retreating from metaphysics. Her philosophy and novels are in fact permeated by the idea of a neo-Platonic Good functioning “as a transcendent magnetic centre” (SG 73). This Good is “indefinable...because of the infinite difficulty of the task of apprehending a magnetic but inexhaustible reality” (41): as James Clements notes, then, “the *telos* of her philosophy is unimaginable and undepictable” (63). But Clements is right to use the word *telos*: though the Good may be indefinable and ontologically uncertain, Murdoch’s frequent description of it as “magnetic” (SG 41, 61, 73, 100) ascribes to it the power of directing and shaping reality. A “magnetic centre” implies a teleology, a final end “towards which love naturally moves” (100). “A live force moves through the created world towards Good,” she writes (FS 52). And yet Murdoch also explicitly denies teleology:

That human life has no external point or *τέλος* is a view as difficult to argue as its opposite, and I shall simply assert it. I can see no evidence to suggest that human life is not something self-contained. There are properly many patterns and purposes within life, but there is no general and as it were externally guaranteed pattern or purpose of the kind for which philosophers and theologians used to search. (SG 77)

How, then, does Murdoch's evocation of a neo-Platonic teleology comport with her insistence that no such teleology exists?

Murdoch's teleology, I suggest, is quasi-Kantian. To Kant, teleology—the understanding of the world as designed and therefore following particular ends—is a maxim of reflective judgment, a useful heuristic for our understanding that does not make any claims to objective truth about reality. The human understanding cannot but see the world teleologically (284); as a result, without commanding certainty or objectivity, teleology is nevertheless “as necessarily valid for our *human judgment* as if it were an objective principle” (232). Similarly, Murdoch argues that moral order is something we recognize intuitively: “I believe in good as something which arises in the soul....In this sense I believe the reality of good is connected with the reality of all our strivings—it's something we come across every day in all the things that we do” (Robson 85). Murdoch is not always willing to treat the Good as a subjective concept, however, attempting in fact to differentiate her position from “a sort of pragmatism or a philosophy of ‘as if’” like Kant's (SG 72-73). Certainly, she argues, the Good is not defined by the human mind but rather discovered by it (28-29). Nonetheless, when Murdoch attempts to define the Good, she often does so in terms of subjective vision: “Good is the focus of attention

when an intent to be virtuous coexists...with some unclarity of vision” (68). Murdoch concludes,

There is...something in the serious attempt to look compassionately at human things which automatically suggests that ‘there is more than this’. The ‘there is more than this’, if it is not to be corrupted by some sort of quasi-theological finality, must remain a very tiny spark of insight, something with, as it were, a metaphysical position but not metaphysical form. But it seems to me that the spark is real.... (71)

Even here, Murdoch does not definitely say that the spark is real, but only that it is suggested by our attempts at compassionate vision and that it *seems* real to her.

In this, she does go farther than Kant by attempting to ascribe some sort of metaphysical reality to the Good, vague and uncertain though that ascription may be. But her consistent association of the Good with subjective vision, as well as her refusal to assign to it any content, any “metaphysical form,” indicates that she ascribes no metaphysical reality to the teleology that follows from the Good. Her teleology is, then, for practical purposes, Kantian: though it may have solid metaphysical grounding, it operates as though it had none. Kant understood morality to be “an end apart from any condition,” compelling simply by its existence (278), but since morality is nowhere consistently upheld in experience, he argued that one must “assume the existence of a *moral* author of the world, that is, of a God” in order not to abandon the pursuit of morality “as impossible” (281). Murdoch’s Good is not a similarly consoling assumption, for it requires the subject to confront “the absolute pointlessness of virtue” (SG 84). Morality *is* impossible, the world *does* manifest itself as undesigned, but the Good calls

nonetheless: “The only genuine way to be good is to be good ‘for nothing’ in the midst of a scene where every ‘natural’ thing, including one’s own mind, is subject to chance, that is, to necessity. That ‘for nothing’ is indeed the experienced correlate of the invisibility or non-representable blankness of the idea of Good itself” (69-70).<sup>5</sup> When Murdoch denies teleology, she refers to this pointlessness of virtue. The Good is neither omnipotent nor providential. Reality is not ordered toward it. Nevertheless it exists universally in our experience, and we are called to pursue it. This is a practical teleology, with a Kantian metaphysical caginess, but a teleology nonetheless.

Contrary to Wright’s assertion, then, Murdoch does not abandon metaphysics: on the contrary, metaphysics is at the center of her intellectual project. The same is true for Waugh, whose teleology follows Augustine rather than Kant. To Kant, the appearance of objects in the world provokes in us a teleological response: for instance, “[i]f, amid beautiful natural surroundings, [one] is in calm and serene enjoyment of his existence, he feels within him a need—a need of being grateful for it to someone” (274). To Waugh, what is important is not merely the response provoked in us by our surroundings but also the very natures of the surroundings themselves. As Augustine puts it,

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<sup>5</sup> Murdoch’s ethics importantly differ from Kant’s in the relative emphasis they give to the will. To Kant, “a good will is that whereby man’s existence can alone possess an absolute worth, and in relation to which the existence of the world can have a *final end*” (272). Morality is simply “the formal rational condition of the employment of our freedom” (278), and moral fulfillment “consists in the form of the earnest will” (280). Murdoch critiques this understanding of virtue as resulting in “the notion of the will as the creator of value,” such that “[t]he idea of the good remains indefinable and empty so that human choice may fill it” (SG 78-79). By contrast, Murdoch emphasizes not the faculty of willed choice but rather the faculty of attention to external reality, which “imperceptibly... builds up structures of value round about us” so that “at crucial moments of choice most of the business of choosing is already over” (36). Indeed, “most of what is often called ‘will’ or ‘willing’ belongs to” vicious fantasy rather than to virtuous reality. “Freedom is not strictly the exercise of the will, but rather the experience of accurate vision which, when this becomes appropriate, occasions action. It is what lies behind and in between actions and prompts them that is important, and it is this area which should be purified” (65). I discuss Murdoch’s understanding of the will in more detail in my third chapter.

[T]he world itself in all its ordered change and movement and in all the beauty it presents to our sight...bears a kind of silent testimony to the fact of its creation, and proclaims that its maker could have been none other than God, the ineffably and invisibly great, the ineffably and invisibly beautiful. (*City* XI.4)

Creation itself is good, and its goodness points backward to the goodness of its Creator. Thus Waugh can tell John Freeman that “everything in the world that’s good depends on [God]” (“Face to Face”); and novels like *Brideshead Revisited*, which I discuss in my first chapter, demonstrate that the many facets of created experience, such as food and sex, are, by virtue of God’s creation, good in themselves. As a result, when Wright argues that Waugh “presents the supernatural as...the only reality worthy of serious consideration” (121), he is only partially correct. Waugh certainly believes the supernatural to be the reality worthiest of serious consideration, and his novels are filled with warnings against investing the temporal with the significance due the spiritual. Like Murdoch, he recognizes the chaos of lived experience, and he further recommends the spiritual as the only lasting source of value. In his novels, however, his characters are also constantly led to consider the supernatural by means of the natural: the movement from temporal to spiritual is not a stepladder, leaving the bottom rungs behind, but rather a rope ladder, where the whole thing is drawn up after you.<sup>6</sup> Thus, as I discuss in my second chapter, after the eponymous tribulation of *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold*, novelist Pinfold does not turn from his past trials to exalted spiritual platitudes; rather, he rounds back on his experience and rewrites it, demonstrating not a rejection of the particular but an incorporation of it into a mature, spiritual perspective. This is a teleology of both practical utility and metaphysical confidence.

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<sup>6</sup> I am indebted to Dr. Marcel DeCoste for this image.

In Murdoch's world, things point to the Good by virtue of our interaction with them. In Waugh's world, things point to God by virtue of their created natures. But in both worlds, things point: and this is the fundamental contention of my thesis. Beneath their stylistic, narrative, and religious differences, both authors are consistently teleological. Though his contrast is misleading, then, Wright is correct to perceive that the point of contact between Murdoch and Waugh is metaphysics. In the midst of an increasingly materialist century, Murdoch and Waugh foreground the metaphysical; and though they do so in different ways and with different intent, they both use their novels to work out the ways in which metaphysical ends undergird and direct the world of lived experience. Wright, quoting Mauriac, summarizes Waugh's novelistic project as "[t]he hidden presence of God in an atheistic world" (123)<sup>7</sup>; Ramanathan, responding to Wright, defines Murdoch's theme as "[t]he hidden presence of good in a world which tilts away from it" (*Figures of Good* 3). In other words, Waugh and Murdoch share a common focus on the ways in which life's supreme good manifests itself in an apparently chaotic and subversive reality, while disagreeing wildly on what (or who) that good actually is. As a result, in this thesis I compare the authors' depictions of teleology in their novels, paying special attention to the ways in which their divergent understandings of teleology result in contrasting moral and spiritual visions.

I must pause here to answer an important objection about my methodology: how can I justify reading Murdoch's philosophy as a clue to her novels? The three Waugh novels I analyze are all from the second half of his career, when his teleological project was abundantly clear: upon the publication of *Brideshead*, he wrote that his future books

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<sup>7</sup> Wright is quoting Mauriac as quoted on page 44 of Georg M. A. Gaston's *The Pursuit of Salvation: A Critical Guide to the Novels of Graham Greene* (Troy, 1984).

would be preoccupied with “the attempt to represent man more fully, which, to me, means only one thing, man in his relation to God” (*EAR* 302). Murdoch, on the other hand, has frequently attempted to dissociate her philosophy from her writing: “I suppose I have certain philosophical ideas about human life and character, and these must somehow find expression in my novels: but for the most part I am not conscious of this process and I think it would be destructive if I were” (qtd. in Leeson 10). In 1978 she admitted that her “views about human nature, about good and evil, about repentance, about spirituality, about religion, about what religion is for people without God, and so on...may add up to a world outlook, which comes to be expressed, directly or indirectly, in the novels”—yet she terms this outlook “a kind of moral psychology...rather than philosophy” (“Closing Debate” 90).<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, each of the elements Murdoch lists in her description of moral psychology is patently metaphysical and thus philosophical. If anything, the term “moral psychology” emphasizes a practical rather than theoretical concern with metaphysics, and this is indeed consonant with Murdoch’s own understanding of the relationship between literature and philosophy. “Philosophy aims to clarify and to explain, it states and attempts to solve very difficult highly technical problems,” she said to Bryan Magee in 1977. “Literature...is full of tricks and magic and deliberate mystification. Literature entertains, it does many things, and philosophy does one thing” (“Literature and Philosophy” 4). Philosophy is a narrowly-focused discipline, whereas literature is more wide-ranging and dialogic; indeed, in my second and third chapters I specially note that Murdoch has deliberately inserted her own philosophy into the mouths of two rather morally dubious characters. If Murdoch has attempted to repudiate the connection

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<sup>8</sup> This terminological distinction is the basis for a small but serious debate in Murdoch criticism between those who would label her a philosophical novelist (e.g. Guy Backus, Miles Leeson) and those who would call her a moral psychologist (e.g. Peter Conradi, John Bayley).

between her philosophy and her novels, I suggest that she is in fact attempting to foreground literature's fundamental ambiguity as contrasted with the technical precision of philosophical analysis. "Ideas in art must suffer a sea change," she says (21). When in the following chapters I analyze Murdoch's novels in light of her philosophy, then, I intend not to reify a philosophical system but rather to examine how her moral philosophy is sea-changed into the structure and characterization of her fiction. Although I will draw general conclusions about the world-picture the novels present, I aim to do so by respecting, rather than rejecting, the particular literariness of their "truth-seeking activity" (11).

I have chosen to examine Waugh's and Murdoch's teleologies in light of the nature of love, which functions for both authors as a virtue and as a teleological engine. "Love," writes Murdoch, "...when it is even partially refined...is the energy and passion of the soul in its search for Good, the force that joins us to Good and joins us to the world through Good. Its existence is the unmistakable sign that we are spiritual creatures, attracted by excellence and made for the Good" (*SG* 100). As I elaborate in my first chapter, Murdoch understands love to be synonymous with attention, a dedicated outward focus that necessarily destroys that seat of vice and delusion, the ego. In this way, one cannot be good, nor see the Good, without love. In Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, Charles Ryder muses, "Perhaps...all our loves are merely hints and symbols...and this sadness which sometimes falls between us springs from disappointment in our search, each straining through and beyond the other, snatching a glimpse now and then of the shadow which turns the corner always a pace or two ahead of us" (303).<sup>9</sup> By the end of

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<sup>9</sup> Here and throughout my study I quote from the 1945 edition of *Brideshead*, rather than Waugh's later 1960 revision, unless otherwise noted.

the novel, Ryder has come to find the fulfillment of his search in conversion to the Roman Catholic Church; indeed, in all three of Waugh's novels that I discuss in this thesis, a loveless protagonist is awakened to his proper role in divine providence by the influence of human love. For both Waugh and Murdoch, love is fundamentally dirigent, moving characters and people toward the ultimate metaphysical end.

Each of my chapters, then, emphasizes a particular facet of love. In my first chapter I treat the relationship between love and sex in Murdoch's *The Black Prince* (1973) and Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), considering Murdoch and Waugh as exemplars of Platonic and Dantean eroticism, respectively. In my second chapter I treat the relationship between love and art in Waugh's *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold* (1957) and Murdoch's *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970), where Murdoch reflects a Platonic conception of creation and Waugh an Augustinian one. In my final chapter I treat the relationship between love and service in Murdoch's *Bruno's Dream* (1969) and Waugh's *Sword of Honour* (1965), arguing that Murdoch exemplifies Simone Weil's understanding of the human self and will, whereas Waugh exemplifies Augustine's understanding of the same. For Murdoch, I argue, sex and art are teleologically split: that is, they are each by nature at least partially inimical to virtue, and thus must remain (to some degree) imperfect if they are to direct the soul toward the Good. Service, as I define it in my chapter, is necessarily an act of virtue and thus not split in the same way, but its efficacy likewise depends on a recognition of the imperfection of the self and its subsequent destruction. For Waugh, on the other hand, sex and art are each by nature good; though that goodness quickly becomes demonic when wrenched from its proper context, it nonetheless continues to point toward God, a lesser and distorted reflection of

a greater light. Similarly, service relies for its efficacy not on the destruction of the self but rather on an affirmation of the self and its particular vocation toward God and others. In all this, Murdoch's Good gives her a teleology that is markedly impersonal and distrustful of the self, whereas Waugh's God gives him a teleology that is markedly personal and affirmative of the self.

Murdoch's metaphysical ambivalence results in a world that is axiologically ambivalent: all value, except the transcendent (and really existent?) Good, is provisional, fleeting, and unstable. By contrast, Waugh's metaphysical confidence results in a world that is axiologically confident: human recognition of value may be uncertain, but value itself inheres in the creation of a transcendent, personal Creator. This I hope to make clear in the pages that follow. But I also hope to make clear that these two authors, who disagree on almost all relevant details about the world and its meaning, have delineated markedly similar views of its general structure. To describe life as a vector quantity in the midst of a society that believes itself scalar is a bold and fascinating move; the relationship between Waugh's and Murdoch's fiction illustrates both the uniqueness of that stand and the great diversity of opinion possible within it.

## Chapter One: Love and Sex

“It seems—or it seemed to us till lately—a natural thing that love (under certain conditions) should be regarded as a noble and ennobling passion,” writes C.S. Lewis: “it is only if we imagine ourselves trying to explain this doctrine to Aristotle, Virgil, St. Paul, or the author of *Beowulf*, that we become aware how far from natural it is” (*Allegory* 4). According to Socrates in Plato’s *Symposium*, for instance, erotic love may start the nascent philosopher toward the Good, but by the time he has attained the Idea of Beauty he is “no longer...slavishly attached to the beauty...of any particular person at all,” regarding such attraction as “low and small-minded slavery” (210d). For the medievals, “passionate love itself was wicked, and did not cease to be wicked if the object of it were your wife” (Lewis, *Allegory* 17). Thus, the courtly love tradition, which gave medieval and Western culture an “idealization of sexual love,” presented it as “an idealization of adultery” (16). Even in Dante, whose *Divine Comedy* is able to “produce a noble fusion of sexual and religious experience” (25), tensions show through. Unlike Socrates’ speech in the *Symposium*, Dante’s ascent to the Beatific Vision does not involve a renunciation of particular attraction—on the contrary, it is Beatrice’s particular love for him, and his particular love for Beatrice, both spiritual and sexual, that leads him from the Inferno to Paradise.<sup>10</sup> Yet even in the purity of the Earthly Paradise, Dante can be rebuked for excessive attention to Beatrice’s beauty: “You stare too fixedly!” the nymphs chastise (*Purgatory* XXXII.9). Each in their different ways, Plato and Dante are

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<sup>10</sup> Martha Nussbaum argues that after being cleansed of lust in the final cornice of Purgatory, Dante’s love for Beatrice is “purified of bodily desire” (“Love and Vision” 34). However, she fails to make a distinction between lust and sexual desire; although Dante may no longer lust, and the “ancient flame” that revives in him on first catching sight of Beatrice is therefore cleansed of sin (*Purgatory* XXX.48), there is no reason to believe that the flame is different in *character* than it had been on earth. Dante is still capable of feeling “[a] thousand yearnings hotter fired than flame” to see her (XXXI.118).

responding to the same tension: how do the earthy, particular sexual passions integrate into an understanding of love as teleologically oriented toward the heavens?

Iris Murdoch and Evelyn Waugh also respond to this dilemma in their novels—and in fact, the Plato-Dante distinction is relevant here: I suggest that Murdoch’s response is Socratic whereas Waugh’s is Dantean.<sup>11</sup> To demonstrate this claim, I will consider Murdoch’s *The Black Prince* and Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited*, two novels often considered among their authors’ finest.<sup>12</sup> Beyond critical acclaim, however, these novels contain a number of thematic and structural similarities that make a comparison of them especially fruitful. Both are *künstlerromans* in which a retrospective first-person male narrator (Bradley Pearson, for Murdoch; Charles Ryder, for Waugh) retells his growth into maturity in art and in love. Both Pearson and Ryder have a series of intense relationships with members of the same family: Ryder with Sebastian and Julia Flyte, Pearson with Rachel and Julian Baffin. Ryder’s love for Sebastian serves as the “forerunner” of his love for Julia (Waugh, *Brideshead* 303), much as Pearson’s liaison with Rachel “prefigures” and enables his love for Julian (Murdoch, *Black Prince* 136). For both protagonists, these relationships are sexual and, in their day, arguably illegitimate or forbidden, involving homosexuality and adultery for Ryder, adultery and a severe age mismatch for Pearson.<sup>13</sup> And although both Pearson and Ryder must ultimately abandon these relationships, through them they attain a degree of spiritual

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<sup>11</sup> I use the term “Socratic” here rather than “Platonic” since, although most critics agree that Plato endorses Socrates’ speech in the *Symposium*, Martha Nussbaum has argued that Plato’s stance is in fact more ambivalent (“Speech of Alcibiades”).

<sup>12</sup> For *Black Prince*, see Bove 74, Heusel 6, Martin and Rowe 100, and Johnson 2. *Brideshead*’s reception has been significantly more mixed (see DeCoste 13-18; Davis, *Brideshead* 11-19), but acknowledgements of the novel’s craft are nonetheless abundant (see Patey xvii; Delasanta and D’Avanzo 140; Hynes, “Two Affairs” 234). Certainly Waugh, while writing *Brideshead*, considered it his “magnum opus” (qtd. in Patey 223).

<sup>13</sup> Pearson is fifty-eight; Julian is twenty.

wisdom with which they close their respective novels.<sup>14</sup> These troubled and fallible loves ultimately lead both protagonists toward maturity; their loves move teleologically to, for Ryder, God, and for Pearson, the Good. Yet in both narratives, sex has a troubled relationship to teleology. For neither Murdoch nor Waugh is sex a mystical gateway to the transcendent; sex in fact points Pearson and Ryder alternately toward and away from their respective ends. Teleologically speaking, sex is ambivalent in the work of both authors. But for Murdoch (as for Socrates), sex is ambivalent because it is inherently dualistic, split between good and evil, love and selfishness; for Waugh (as for Dante), sex is ambivalent because it is fundamentally good yet also fundamentally secondary.

“A Sufficiently Diffused Eroticism”: *The Black Prince*

In a perceptive article on love and vision in Murdoch’s fiction, Martha Nussbaum explores a central tension in Murdoch’s writing between what Nussbaum terms the Dantean view—“that sexual desire and the bodily component in love are...sources of egoistic self-delusion”—and the Platonic view—that “sexual ferment...is a valuable part of the search for truth,” even “a necessary part” (37).<sup>15</sup> *The Black Prince* could, without

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<sup>14</sup> In both novels there is an evident difference in perspective between the more mature narrator of events and the callow character who is the narrator’s younger self. Pearson makes this explicit in *The Black Prince*: although for purposes of narration he “inhabit[s] his past self,” he notes that his “later wisdom...will not be absent from,” and will indeed “irradiate,” the account (3). The Pearson who begins the story as a self-described “ageing Don Juan,...the majority of [whose] conquests belonged to the world of fantasy” (7-8), is a clear contrast to the Pearson telling the story, whose final words to Priscilla and Julian demonstrate a true concern for and attention to reality. In *Brideshead Revisited*, the distinction between old and young narrator is more subtle, leading Jeffrey Heath to argue in 1975 that critics had generally failed to notice it (“*Brideshead*” 225). Nevertheless, scenes such as Ryder’s Grand Remonstrance from his cousin Jasper, in which the narrator Ryder identifies his younger self’s inchoate state of mind, provides a number of possible justifications for that state of mind, then dismisses them all as “sophistries” (Waugh, *Brideshead* 45), demonstrate the narrator’s ability and willingness to analyze and editorialize his prior behavior. Indeed, the shift in tone between Prologue and Epilogue, from acedia to unusual cheerfulness (351), reveals that the narrator Ryder himself has matured while recounting his own story. In DeCoste’s view, Ryder’s overall progression through the novel is thus his awakening to art and to the Church in the main narrative, the retelling of which enables him to understand the appropriate synthesis of these two callings (43).

<sup>15</sup> Nussbaum’s terminology here is somewhat idiosyncratic and, I would argue, at least partially inaccurate. As I have already argued, *The Divine Comedy* does not view sexual desire as a source of

much trouble, be read as supporting either position. As Priscilla Martin and Anne Rowe put it, faced with the dichotomy “between the love that cracks the ego, triggering the absolute loss of self that in turn generates goodness, and...[a] sadomasochistic self-indulgence that generates evil,” the novel “illustrates, paradoxically, that any deep-rooted love comprises both” (100). This oxymoronic insistence that “we must simultaneously understand antithetical views as equally true” (105) is appropriate for a novel whose content and form rely so heavily on irony (Lamarque 211). Nothing in *The Black Prince* is straightforward, not even the plot—the novel’s concluding postscripts by “dramatis personae” call into question almost all points of Pearson’s narrative—and its portrayal of eroticism is appropriately ambivalent.<sup>16</sup> As Conradi explains, in the novel Pearson’s love is equal parts “totally compelling and real” and “illusory”: “Eros is thus a sophist, teaching a vital truth but a partial one” (*Saint* 257).

The vital truth sexual intimacy teaches is one of attention and identification. “We care absolutely about that with which we can identify ourselves,” writes Pearson. “A saint would identify himself with everything” (Murdoch, *Black Prince* 101). Pearson’s contention that goodness means identification with everything, or more specifically care for and attention to everything, is clearly Murdoch’s own:

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“egoistic self-delusion” but rather as one of Dante’s most valuable guides to salvation. Nussbaum bases her characterization of the *Comedy* on the fact that Dante must pass through “the purifying flame of the Angel of Chastity” to reach Beatrice (33); however, by making no distinction between lust (purified by the flame) and sexual desire, Nussbaum assumes her conclusion: that for Dante sexual desire itself is morally wrong. As I will argue in more depth later in this chapter, this is not an assumption Dante makes: rather, as John Freccero puts it, in the *Comedy* “Eros is...redeemed rather than condemned” (167).

<sup>16</sup> To Bran Nicol, the structure of the novel “[deconstructs] almost every ‘truth’ Bradley presents,” leaving the reader “incapable of [summing up] because of the indeterminacy of the text” (100, 103). Whereas Nicol uses this indeterminacy to argue that the novel questions “the very notion of truth itself” (97)—not even Pearson’s “later wisdom” is reliable (Murdoch, *Black Prince* 3)—James Clements argues more persuasively, in my view, that Murdoch’s stylistic deconstructionism “arise[s] less out of an affinity with post-structuralism than from an apophatic mysticism that draws directly from Plato, and, more ambivalently, from Wittgenstein” (27). To Clements, Murdoch’s tendency to leave contradictions unresolved is intended “primarily to reveal” the unrevealable (that is, the Good) via the arational signification of apophasis, “rather than to undermine” (22).

It is in the capacity to love, that is to *see*, that the liberation of the soul from fantasy consists....What I have called fantasy [is] the proliferation of blinding self-centred aims and images....What counteracts the system [of fantasy] is attention to reality inspired by, consisting of, love. (SG 65).

By the end of the novel, Pearson has learned, through his relationships and his suffering, what this attention means. And sex, he learns, is one crucial pathway of such attention. Though at the beginning of the novel, Pearson is a loveless, self-obsessed man “generally indifferent to bodies,” his liaison with Rachel Baffin awakens him to physical beauty: “I was interested to find that I wanted to kiss Rachel, that I wanted, after a considerable interval, to kiss a particular woman” (*Black Prince* 177). Pearson does not yet see Rachel, in Murdoch’s sense—he is not attending to her as a person—but he does see her body. He has at least learned that there is outside of himself a physical object of sight,<sup>17</sup> and with Julian this newfound appreciation of bodies explodes into a firework of spiritual physicality.

On first falling in love with Julian, he writes, “When sexual desire is also love it connects us with the whole world and becomes a new mode of experience. Sex then reveals itself as the great connective principle whereby we overcome duality, the force which made separateness as an aspect of oneness at some moment of bliss in the mind of God” (203). Sex—when it is also love, that is, attention—resolves the problem of self and Other by mystically making the separation between persons an ingredient in their oneness, thereby allowing the individual to overcome the “separation from and lack of knowledge of the world” that is for Murdoch the source of evil (Clements 40). As Julian

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<sup>17</sup> As he puts it, through his relationship with Rachel “I also put myself into a totally different ‘life-mood’ which had extensive and surprising results” (117).

puts it after making love with Pearson, “Now I feel as if I were alone—and yet I’m not—I’m—I’m you—I’m both of us” (Murdoch, *Black Prince* 323).<sup>18</sup> As a result, sexual unity, though preserving the lovers’ physical separateness, results ideally in total personal identification with the beloved, an identification that replaces “self-centred aims and images” with the beloved’s aims and images (*SG* 65). It leads one “to *will* another rather than oneself” (*Black Prince* 202). Thus Pearson constantly identifies himself as Julian’s slave, reinforcing the replacement of his self with her own (227, 311): “[I]t was more her will than mine which had so completely transformed our lives,” he says (304).<sup>19</sup> At its best, then, sex is a physical enactment of the spiritual unity brought on by voluntary, attentive submission to the will and being of another. Through sex the lover can enact a diminuendo in the face of the beloved’s alterity, a self-dimming that, for Murdoch, means goodness.<sup>20</sup>

In his manuscript, Pearson takes pains to emphasize that the unifying power of sex depends on its physicality. Recalling the experience of first falling in love with Julian, the short time when his love made him “simply a saint” (236), he writes,

Physical desire had of course been with me from the first, but earlier it had been, though perceptually localized, metaphysically diffused into a general glory. Sex is our great connection with the world, and at its most felicitous and spiritual it is no servitude since it informs everything and enables us to inhabit and enjoy all that we touch and look upon. (237).

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<sup>18</sup> Notably, Julian says this after a lovemaking that is, on Pearson’s part, permeated by egoistic delusion (as I will discuss later). If even a selfish degeneration of sex works toward unity and identification with the other, how much more powerfully virtuous must a truly “spiritualised sexuality” be (Conradi, *Saint* 107)?

<sup>19</sup> There is an important caution here, in that the ideas of “identification” and “slavery” are just as easily (and for Murdoch, much more commonly) markers of egoism—of mastery or masochism—as of the selfless attention I am arguing for here. I will discuss these issues momentarily.

<sup>20</sup> The implications of this statement will be discussed at greater length in my third chapter.

Sex here becomes a means of experiencing the world generally: it is an intimate attention to physical reality and thus itself a form of virtue (since for Murdoch, virtue is clear vision).<sup>21</sup> And in the context of the beloved, this delight in the physical becomes patently erotic: Pearson lies in bed, thinking about “Julian’s legs, now bare and egg-shell brown, now encased in tights, pink, mauve, black,” about “her mane of dry shining greeny-golden hair and the way it grew down the back of her neck,” about her “strokable nose and pouting mouth,” about her eyes and her breasts—and, he says, “I felt completely happy and I felt good. (I mean virtuous.)” (*Black Prince* 203). At first this imaginative ogling seems like nothing more than animal lust, and it is difficult to understand how Pearson can link this to virtue. Yet Pearson would have us read this as lust, certainly, but as more than lust: as a delight in the physical being of the beloved that represents dedicated attention and thus a type of goodness. What Pearson does here is simply the solitary counterpart to his and Julian’s actions before lovemaking at Patara: “Looking into each other’s eyes we caressed each other without any haste at all, with a sort of tender curious astonishment....I worshipped my darling from head to foot...” (309-10). This is not consummation, but it is quintessentially erotic: worshipping the metaphysical glory found in the body of the beloved.<sup>22</sup>

The danger here, of course, is that by describing sex as shedding a “general glory” on “all that we touch and look upon,” Pearson makes all physical experience erotic

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<sup>21</sup> “[T]he realism (ability to perceive reality) required for goodness is a kind of intellectual ability to perceive what is true, which is automatically at the same time a suppression of self,” she writes in *The Sovereignty of Good*. “*The necessity of the good is then an aspect of the kind of necessity involved in any technique for exhibiting fact*” (64, emphasis hers).

<sup>22</sup> Importantly, this glory is created by the lover’s love itself, not inherent in the beloved. Metaphysical glory is a corollary to the metaphysical certainty that, as I will discuss later, Murdoch describes as love’s inevitable effluence. When Pearson tells Rachel, “Love is a sort of certainty, perhaps the only sort,” and Rachel responds by saying, “all that ‘certainty’ you were talking about is an *illusion*,” they are both right (348, 351).

experience. This effectively shears sex of its eroticism: if everything is erotic, then nothing is. Compare Pearson's description of himself under the influence of this "general glory": "I wanted to go around touching people, blessing them, communicating my great happiness, the good news, the *secret* of how the whole universe was a place of joy and freedom filled and running over with selfless rapture" (236). Pearson sees the world in radiant hues and wants to "go around touching people," but though his rapture is ecstatically physical, it is not particularly sexual. Indeed, the phrase "metaphysically diffused into a general glory" parallels a phrase Murdoch used in private correspondence to indicate a non-physical relationship. Writing to her friend Brigid Brophy, Murdoch argued "that a 'sufficiently diffused eroticism' might last forever. Brophy[, however,] decided that biology was not to be cheated in this way" (Conradi, *Iris* 490).<sup>23</sup> The glory of a "sufficiently diffused eroticism," then, seems to be the glory of an intentionally non-sexual physicality—or, more generously, of a more-than-sexual physicality. Though the widest extent of this glory is apparently non-sexual, its genesis is Pearson's sexually-charged physical reverence for Julian's particular body. For Socrates, love of one particular person is the first step toward loving beautiful bodies generally; so here Pearson's physical love for the world is the flower of his physical love for Julian.

However, for Socrates, the ladder from particular sexual love to perfected, ideal love "is a ladder in the strictest sense; you reach the higher rungs by leaving the lower ones behind" (Lewis, *Allegory* 6). *The Black Prince* seems to indicate that the same holds true for Pearson: Pearson's ascent to virtuous love requires him to leave behind the

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<sup>23</sup> Throughout her lifetime, Murdoch conducted a number of emotionally intense friendships that, while not always physically consummated, nevertheless blurred the line between "friend" and "lover" (see, for instance, Conradi's description of her relationship with Donald MacKinnon, a non-sexual relationship intimate enough to upset MacKinnon's wife [*Iris* 255-58]). Her relationship with Brophy was, it seems, one of these.

specificity (and, thus, the sexuality) of his sexual love for Julian.<sup>24</sup> Sex, it appears, not only reveals and motivates virtue, but also distorts and obscures it, and *The Black Prince* portrays two related facets of this one central flaw: first, and most glaringly, sex is not only a means of giving attention but also a means of wielding power. This is certainly the case for Rachel Baffin, whose own erotic awakening in the novel is a foil for Pearson's. The liaison that awakens Pearson from solipsistic lovelessness also awakens Rachel from grinding middle-aged tedium. She, however, defines her epiphany in terms of possession rather than of reverent attention, speaking of her desire to be free from slavery to her husband and of a commensurate desire to see him enslaved to her (Murdoch, *Black Prince* 33, 131). Her goal in making love with Pearson is not to attend to him but rather to carve out for herself "a little privacy, a little secrecy, a few things of my own which aren't absolutely dyed and saturated with Arnold" (171)—and thus she forces Pearson into bed, claiming the need "to perform an act of will" lest she "die of humiliation or something" (148). In a cruel irony, although Pearson's attitude to Julian is generally (though by no means consistently) less possessive and more attentive than Rachel's attitude to him, his actual consummation with Julian falls into the same trap. Motivated by self-centered fears and anxieties ("Would I ever make love to her? Ought I to? Would I be able to?" [304]), he forces himself on her with rough rage. Having torn off her clothes, "[f]or a moment, still fully dressed, I surveyed her naked" (320): Pearson here takes the position of a master inspecting his slave, or worse, a landowner surveying his

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<sup>24</sup> I should mention here that in a 1968 interview, Murdoch explicitly denied this view: "Love obviously in its genesis belongs with sex, but it's able to transcend sex—I don't mean in any sense of moving away from carnal expressions of sex but simply that sex is a very great mystifier, it's a very great dark force" (Rose 16). However, as I will argue in the following paragraphs, the narrative of *The Black Prince* does in fact demonstrate a willingness to move away from "carnal expressions of sex," in part because, as discussed above, Pearson defines sex so expansively as to make it non-sexual.

property, no longer worshipping her body but rather exploiting her vulnerability. For both Rachel and Pearson, the unifying power of sex becomes a means of forcing the beloved to identify with the lover, of molding the other rather than of attenuating oneself.

Second, and more subtly, sex is also a means of seeking the self through masochism. At first glance, masochism, though still operating within the discourse of mastery, seems to subvert the egoism of domination by debasing the self. Debasement is not the same as destruction, though, argues Murdoch, and masochism is, as a result, a peculiar form of selfishness concentrated on the significance of one's own suffering (see *SG* 66-67). If it is an exercise of power to make another play your slave, it is equally an exercise of power to make another play your master (see *Rose* 15-16). Pearson's love for Julian—qualified, as mentioned earlier, in terms of slavery—initially avoids this vice. As long as he purposes to conceal his love rather than “puzzle, burden, and bedevil her young life with [its] faintest hint or glimpse” (Murdoch, *Black Prince* 201), he demonstrates that he is willing to see his own desires wither for Julian's benefit; he is attending to the beloved, not to himself.<sup>25</sup> Eventually, though, he confesses his love to Julian. He speaks as harshly as possible, ostensibly attempting to convince her to leave him alone, then muses: “In protesting that I would not talk love I had talked love and nothing but love....If I could *die* of this talk I would be most happy” (259). Now Pearson is playing at submissive suffering, effectively (and half-consciously) manipulating Julian into declaring her love for him. Throughout the remainder of their relationship, Pearson obsesses about Julian leaving him—“whatever miracle made us will automatically also break us” (300); “I'm too old”; “I'm no good” (310)—in terms reinforcing his sense of

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<sup>25</sup> “To the pure lover in his moments of purity the idea of suffering is vulgar, it portends the return of self,” he writes. “What I rather felt [on this first day of love] was a dazzled gratitude” (201).

“unworthiness” related to fears over his virility (268). Despite (or, perhaps, because of) his constant language of submission, Pearson’s true focus rests on himself and his performance, rather than on the hard reality of Julian’s being. His violent forcing of Julian stems from the same motivation, a desire to prove his virility and “make me worthy to keep her forever” (319); the fact that masochism slides so easily into domination only emphasizes the self-obsession that is their common animating factor.

“[S]exual energy,” according to Murdoch, “. . . is connected with . . . worshipping and extension of power, with the way in which we make other people play roles in our lives—dominating roles or slave roles. So this sort of drama is a fundamental expression of sex” (Rose 15-16). Drama, in this sense, is a manipulation of others in ways that gratify the self, whether painfully or pleurably, consciously or unconsciously—“sex is a very great mystifier, it’s a very great dark force” (16). Gratification is the key, the idea that the self is seeking some sort of reward, or, in Murdoch’s terminology, consolation.<sup>26</sup> By contrast, in morality “the idea of a reward is out of place” (Murdoch, *SG* 65).<sup>27</sup> The “absolute for-nothingness” of the Good means that “true morality” consists in “an austere and unconsolated love of the Good” (90): “Almost anything that consoles us is a fake” (58). Sex, however, as a source of intense self-centered pleasure (as well as of intense self-centered anxiety), is almost inevitably seen as the reward of love—this is implicit in the very word “consummation”—and is thus inherently, if not antithetical to virtue (“there are sometimes rewards” in morality, Murdoch admits [65]), at the least very dangerous. Its inherent

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<sup>26</sup> As I discuss in my third chapter, in Murdoch’s thought attention to reality means death. By avoiding reality, even through unpleasant or painful means, and typically through unconscious survival mechanisms, the ego keeps itself alive—the greatest perceived benefit, and the greatest consolation, of all.

<sup>27</sup> “In the case of art and nature such attention is immediately rewarded by the enjoyment of beauty. In the case of morality, although there are sometimes rewards, the idea of a reward is out of place” (*SG* 65).

tendency is to twist love away from attention to the other and toward the thrills of mastery or of masochism. And even when sex manages to avoid these two pitfalls, as in the one occasion when Pearson's love made him "simply a saint"<sup>28</sup>—the first day after falling in love—it remains deceptive simply because it is inherently particular (*Black Prince* 236). Pearson may at this moment be a saint in regard to Julian: "until that moment I could not see her....Now I could see" (199). But he can see no one else, as his subsequent glib treatment of Rachel and Priscilla reveals. The intensity of his particular, sexual love "provokes tunnel vision and makes the rest of the world invisible" (Conradi, *Saint* 257). The inherent consolation of sex limits his vision to that which *he* desires, returning him to himself, rather than expanding it to the world independent of his desire. As a result, despite hymning the benefits of "a spiritualised sexuality," *The Black Prince* nowhere shows this fully achieved (Conradi, *Saint* 107).<sup>29</sup> Instead, Pearson's truest acquisition of wisdom and best practice of love, at the end of the novel, come when sexual intimacy is no longer possible.<sup>30</sup>

From the moment he falls in love with Julian, Pearson envisions a love that, although suffused by sexual desire, is nonetheless impossible to consummate: "I could

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<sup>28</sup> That this pronouncement comes from the mature narrator Pearson rather than the immature character Pearson strengthens the weight of this characterization.

<sup>29</sup> Aside from Bradley's loveless tryst with Rachel, and his even more dismal congress with Julian, Roger and Marigold's blissful union results in their complete disregard for Priscilla, who commits suicide "at the only time in the book that the lonely Francis [her caretaker] is shown seeking erotic consolation, with the louche Ribgy upstairs" (Conradi, *Saint* 261). There is not a happy marriage in the novel: "*The Black Prince* reads at times as though written as a meditation on *Hamlet* III, i, 156: 'I say, let there be no more marriages'" (253).

<sup>30</sup> Simon and Axel, in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, may provide a counterexample to this point: they end that novel happy, relatively virtuous, and sexually active. Nevertheless, as I will argue in my second chapter, Simon and Axel importantly fall short of full virtue. Perhaps more to the point are the examples of Tallis in that same novel, whose sainthood persists despite permanent separation from his wife Morgan, and Diana in *Bruno's Dream*, whose path to virtue opens at the same moment her husband falls out of love with her. These characters, whose stories do not have the programmatic force of Pearson's Platonic arc, nonetheless demonstrate Murdoch's tendency to associate virtue with erotic distance. Of course, Diana's thoroughly selfish husband Miles, himself mourning the loss of his love interest Lisa, also illustrates that erotic separation is not itself a guarantee of virtue.

never never never tell my love....It was enough happiness to love her. The extra piece which would be telling her about it was like a pinpoint compared with the heavenly joy of simply apprehending her” (Murdoch, *Black Prince* 201). On that first, saintly day of love, “I did not even want to see Julian....I did not even need her. It was enough to know that she existed. I could *almost* have forgotten her...” (236).<sup>31</sup> When dining with her in the Post Office Tower, Pearson exclaims that in the mere sight of the beloved “straying like a divine form among mortals,...one realizes that these passing seconds are the fullest and most perfect, not even excluding sexual union, which can be allotted to human beings” (231). Julian at this moment still does not know of his love for her; the “fullest and most perfect” experience of love, then, is independent of reciprocation, whether emotional or sexual. Thus at the end of the novel, faced with Julian’s absence at his trial, Pearson writes, “Those who know will understand how in a curious way I was almost relieved to think how she had now been made perfect by being removed into the sphere of the impossible” (379). And in his final apostrophe to Julian, Pearson affirms both, “[my] love [for you] remains...not diminished though changing, a love with a very clear and a very faithful memory” and, “I do not now know, or want to know, anything about your life. For me, you have gone into the dark” (384).

The significance of these remarks depends on *The Black Prince*’s larger metaphysical argument about love. On first falling in love, Pearson “gazed out with wide peaceful eyes at a world devoid of evil” (205); he enthuses about “how the whole

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<sup>31</sup> What marks his fall from virtue on the second day of love is that “I began to need her,” the fatal symptom that “[s]elf was reviving” (236). On the third day, even further from virtue, the fact that Julian might be “anywhere in anybody’s arms...began suddenly to concern me so much that it felt like a red-hot knitting needle thrust into the liver” (239). The more personal and physical his desire, it seems, the less virtuous it is.

universe was a place of joy and freedom filled and running over with selfless rapture” (236). After Julian’s abandonment and Priscilla’s funeral, Pearson decides instead that

[t]he world is perhaps ultimately to be defined as a place of suffering.... This is the planet where cancer reigns, where people regularly and automatically and almost without comment die like flies from floods and famine and disease, where people fight each other with hideous weapons to whose effects even nightmares cannot do justice, where men terrify and torture each other and spend whole lifetimes telling lies out of fear. This is where we live. (340-41)

Pearson’s final wisdom is his ability to hold both of these truths in the same hand. Love is valuable because it generates its own metaphysical certainty, a certainty that the Conradesque horror of the world nowhere supports, and true vision is that which can see goodness and horror together. “Happy love undoes the self and makes the world visible,” Pearson concludes. “Unhappy love is, or can be, a revelation of pure suffering” (341). In other words, happy love—with all the rewards of sex and the joy of mutual self-giving—reveals the value of the Good, and unhappy love—suffering, unconsolated—reveals how illusory our apprehension of the Good truly is. Happy is he who can see both simultaneously: who recognizes, as Murdoch writes in *The Sovereignty of Good*, “the absolute pointlessness of virtue” along with “its supreme importance” (84). By learning to love Julian in suffering and separation, without the consolations of sexual intimacy or even of reciprocal love, Pearson learns to reverence the existence of a real other “pointlessly,” even religiously. Julian, described in religious language throughout his obsession with her,<sup>32</sup> becomes in the end for him a distant god, an image of the Good:

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<sup>32</sup> “With her the world was made,” Pearson says (Murdoch, *Black Prince* 200), echoing John 1:10, speaking of Christ: “He was in the world, and the world was made through Him” (NKJV). He goes to his

single, perfect (recall that “she had now been made perfect by being removed into the sphere of the impossible” [*Black Prince* 379]), transcendent, non-representable (after all, he no longer knows anything about her), and necessarily real.<sup>33</sup> By learning to attend to her and love her in austerity, Pearson is thus learning to attend to reality without the self-interest of reward: he is becoming virtuous.

Ultimately, then, Murdoch’s understanding of the role of sex in love is, like Socrates’, fundamentally ambivalent. On the one hand, through his involvement with Rachel, Pearson is awakened to the beauty of bodies, and through his involvement with Julian, that love of beauty germinates into a sprout of virtue. It is only through an erotic sort of love that Pearson learns the value of attending to another; it is only through eroticism that he receives the motivation to pursue the Good at all. Nevertheless, for his love to truly blossom, Pearson must treat Julian as an icon rather than an idol, recognizing that the sexual passion he feels for her is ultimately deceptive. The Good is transcendent but not immanent; it is non-representable and thus non-embodied. As a result, it can never be attained through sex, which draws us inherently to selfishness and, by generating its own consoling metaphysical certainty, to worshipping the physical *as* the Good rather than as an *image* of the Good. It is not that sex is most perfect when unconsummated; it is that sex must remain *imperfect* lest we believe its insistence that it itself is the Good. As a result, sex is good in that it teaches us to value and attend to the physical alterity of the Other, but it is evil in that it inherently drives us to treat the

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flat to meditate on Julian, thinking, “[s]o holy men return to temples and crusading knights feed upon the blessed sacrament” (210-11). He describes love as “exclusive worshipping attention” (236) and feels that Julian’s love is as precious as “the bloody grail” (274).

<sup>33</sup> In *The Sovereignty of Good*, Murdoch defines God as “a *single perfect transcendent non-representable and necessarily real object of attention*” and argues that the Good “has all these characteristics” (54).

physical (at best) or the self (at worst) as ends in themselves. It is fundamentally morally ambiguous and thus an unstable foundation for love. For Pearson, and for Murdoch, sexual love is an effective teacher, a powerful stimulant—but to be truly mature, love must learn to operate without these defective training wheels.

### *A Happy Golf Life: Brideshead Revisited*

At first glance, *Brideshead Revisited* seems to echo Murdoch's portrayal of sex. Charles' relationship with Sebastian, latently sexual, is presented as one that both grow out of (Pugh 69).<sup>34</sup> And, as Pearson's love for Julian leads him to accept their separation, so Charles' love for Julia leads, at Lord Marchmain's deathbed, to her separation from him: "Ryder's love for Julia has led him to lose her" (Hynes, "Two Affairs" 241). Additionally, the novel's two explicit sex acts—Charles with Celia and with Julia—are described in less than enthusiastic detail.<sup>35</sup> Celia, we read, "had neat, hygienic ways for that too" (Waugh, *Brideshead* 215); with Julia, Charles speaks of observing a formality, "as though a deed of conveyance of her narrow loins had been drawn and sealed" (243).<sup>36</sup> At the novel's climax, Julia renounces her adulterous relationship with Charles in order to

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<sup>34</sup>Pugh persuasively characterizes Charles and Sebastian's relationship as a "romantic friendship" not uncommon in that era, marked by great emotional and often sexual intimacy between two persons of the same sex (65). Although the sexual nature of Charles and Sebastian's friendship is not universally accepted (see Christensen 138-41), Tison Pugh (69), D. Marcel DeCoste (29n14), and Douglas Lane Patey (226-27) have ably demonstrated significant textual support for this position. Perhaps most notably, Charles speaks of a "naughtiness high in the catalogue of grave sins" in his relationship with Sebastian (Waugh, *Brideshead* 45); this "could of course not be said of mere friendship" (Patey 226). Additionally, Sebastian's namesake—Saint Sebastian—had become by the early twentieth century unofficially "known as the patron saint of homosexuality" (Byrne 310).

<sup>35</sup>Critics have not been slow to criticize Waugh's sex scenes on aesthetic grounds. Selina Hastings characterizes Waugh's "two attempts at describing their [Charles and Julia's] first love-making"—in the first and revised editions of the novel—as "neither of them impressive" (486); Martin Stannard calls them "embarrassingly coy" (*No Abiding* 106). Christopher Hitchens opines that "there is no conceivable excuse" for Waugh's "lamentable" and "writhe-making" "inability to write about sex" (255-56).

<sup>36</sup>I have here quoted from the revised 1960 edition of *Brideshead*, in which Waugh makes his descriptions of the sex acts even more dispassionate than in the original. In the 1945 edition, Charles' lovemaking with Celia is not even alluded to, and his intercourse with Julia is described as an act of "formal possession" and "a symbol, a rite of ancient origin and solemn meaning" (261)—somewhat more humane than the 1960 edition's implication that Julia is to Charles a piece of real estate, but still some distance from the poetry of passion.

pursue God more closely; at novel's end, Charles, Julia, Sebastian, and (for good measure) Cordelia are all celibate, with little prospect of future activity. As a result, the novel easily reads as a story about renouncing human sexuality for divine love: as Tison Pugh contends, the story “stresses the failings of the sexual in the face of the divine,” as “[t]he sexual component of [Charles'] relationships” only “prove[s] meaningless...as he finds himself without a sexual partner but with God” (70).

Yet *Brideshead*, narrated by a retrospective Charles Ryder, is not the work of a man whose interior progress has led him to despise his former sexual passions and regard them as petty, as Socrates would have it (Plato, *Symposium* 210c). As Valerie Kennedy puts it, “Charles's early love for Sebastian...is sensuously, comically, and fondly evoked” (25), and the novel's treatment of Julia, though frequently criticized,<sup>37</sup> nonetheless makes clear that her adulterous relationship with Charles provides him with a realer and more substantial life, both personally and artistically, than did his marriage with Celia. And if Waugh's letters and diaries while writing *Brideshead* reveal his fear that the novel was becoming “rather smutty” (*Letters* 184), they also demonstrate his fear of treating sex too dismissively. From his diary on 9 May 1944: “I feel very much the futility of describing sexual emotions without describing the sexual act; I should like to give as much detail as I have of the meals, to the two coitions—with his [Charles'] wife and Julia” (564). The great difficulty Waugh had in composing these scenes, as attested by letters, diary entries, and the textual history of the novel, demonstrates the importance

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<sup>37</sup> Henry Reed remarked on the novel's publication that “Julia is only a theme and not a person” (Stannard, *Critical* 240); more recently, Paula Byrne admits that Julia's characterization lacks “dramatic and emotional potency” (302) and Selina Hastings writes that “the character of Julia is cardboard, remaining from first to last, in Christopher Sykes's memorable phrase, ‘dead as mutton’” (487). This criticism is, to my mind, unjust. More accurate, I believe, is V.C. Clinton-Baddeley's assessment that Julia's “swift determination to rebel and her slow determination to recant are both equally and inevitably right” (Stannard, *Critical* 238)—or, as D. Marcel DeCoste has put it, that Julia's “development from restless debutante to wounded penitent” represents “a psychologically compelling narrative arc” (23n10).

of the explicitly sexual scenes to the novel as a whole: Waugh clearly found them (at least, the latter of the two) crucial enough to avoid the simple expedient of polite euphemism or coy innuendo.<sup>38</sup>

The journal entry quoted above gives one reason for this: Waugh seems to class gustatory and sexual experience as twin sources of sensual pleasure, implying that good food and good sex serve similar purposes in the working of the novel. Indeed, considering *Brideshead's* "meals" provides an important entry into Waugh's understanding of *Brideshead's* sex. Yet despite the prevalence of sensual delights in *Brideshead*, there are surprisingly few descriptions of meals as such (as opposed to dinners, which occur frequently but often without description of or comment on the food).<sup>39</sup> The novel, in fact, contains only two prominent descriptions of its characters' meals: the succession of bland repasts at the Ryder household and Charles' dinner with Rex Mottram. At home, Charles' father dines regularly on such delicacies as "a white, tasteless soup, over-fried fillets of sole with a pink sauce, lamb cutlets propped against a cone of mashed potato, stewed pears in jelly standing on a kind of sponge cake" (67). The insipidity of the meal—and of the later banquet, whose "dishes...regularly alternated in colour between red and white" while remaining "equally tasteless"—parallels the insipidity of Charles' relationship with his father (71). Mr. Ryder, it seems, loves his son as much as he loves his food, and just as he turns the father-son relationship into armed

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<sup>38</sup> In his diary entry for 4 May 1944, Waugh writes, "I painfully picked up the threads of a very difficult chapter of love-making on a liner"; on 5 May, "Lay in bed this morning sadly realizing that I must rewrite all I did yesterday." On 9 May, the episode finally finished, he called it "the most difficult part of the book so far, and in spite of some passages of beauty I am not sure of my success" (564). Waugh continued to be uneasy about his handling of the scenes: he completely deleted any reference to Charles and Celia's congress in the 1945 edition of the novel, only reinstating it in the 1960 edition. That he did not similarly elide Charles and Julia's tryst reinforces the scene's significance.

<sup>39</sup> Waugh seems to prefer to describe the milieu in which the meal takes place, whether the splendors of *Brideshead* or the decrepitude of the Blue Grotto Club, rather than the food itself.

combat,<sup>40</sup> so he (and his ironically-named cook Mrs. Abel) also turn a rightful source of gustatory pleasure into sop.

The physical hunger Charles experiences at his father's house is thus a symbol of the spiritual hunger that sends him, "in search of love," to Sebastian (31)—a character whose first appearance in the novel is associated with gourmet delights: "I've got a motor-car and a basket of strawberries and a bottle of Château Peyraguey—which isn't a wine you've ever tasted, so don't pretend" (23). Charles and Sebastian eat together in scenes of elegance and rapture that sharply contrast with the tedium of Mrs. Abel's cooking:

On a sheep-cropped knoll under a clump of elms we ate the strawberries and drank the wine—as Sebastian promised, they were delicious together—and we lit fat, Turkish cigarettes and lay on our backs, Sebastian's eyes on the leaves above him, mine on his profile, while the blue-grey smoke rose, untroubled by any wind, to the blue-green shadows of foliage, and the sweet scent of the tobacco merged with the sweet summer scents around us and the fumes of the sweet, golden wine seemed to lift us a finger's breadth above the turf and hold us suspended. (24)

This scene, the perfect combination of gustatory, olfactory, natural, and human beauty, illustrates the inverse of Charles' experience with his father: here, good food is the handmaid of love. In a sense, the food itself acts as a forerunner of Charles' love for Sebastian, whose love becomes a forerunner of Julia's and then of God's (303). As Douglas Patey puts it, "The beauty to which Charles responds even in food is invested from the start with implicit eschatological significance, as a sign of (and call to) what in

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<sup>40</sup> Speaking to Charles of his sister Philippa, who came to live with him after his wife's death, Mr. Ryder muses, "It was in *her* mind to make a home with me, you know....But it didn't do. I got her out in the end." Charles notes: "There was an unmistakable note of menace in his voice as he said this" (67-68).

the sonnet ‘To what serves Mortal Beauty?’ Hopkins calls ‘God’s better beauty, grace’” (235).

As a result, the fact that Rex Mottram, at his dinner with Charles, demonstrates himself unable to “appreciate a first-rate French meal” or “distinguish between a port wine that satisfies the vulgar and one that only a connoisseur can cherish” (Hynes, “Two Affairs” 248) is just one more stroke in Waugh’s portrait of him as “a tiny bit of [a human being], unnaturally developed” (*Brideshead* 200). By contrast, Charles intersperses the account of their conversation with comments on the “hot, thin, bitter, frothy” soup (173), the “simple and unobtrusive” sole (174), and the other courses, culminating in his praise of the Burgundy wine: “This Burgundy seemed to me, then, serene and triumphant, a reminder that the world was an older and better place than Rex knew, that mankind in its long passion had learned another wisdom than his” (175). The sensual beauty of the food becomes, for Charles, a window out of Rex’s “harsh, acquisitive world”—a world just as loveless and distorted as that of Charles’ father (175-76). Simultaneously, however, as DeCoste notes, Charles’ sneering interior monologue during the conversation reveals “a Ryder whose callow snobbery and measurement of all worth on a scale of worldly pleasures betrays a deformed character” (36). Indeed, the “other wisdom” Charles here lauds is a wisdom he has just renounced, proclaiming less than ten pages earlier, “I have left behind illusion” for “a world of three dimensions—with the aid of my five senses” (Waugh, *Brideshead* 169). At the dinner with Rex, however, those five senses direct Charles back to spiritual and emotional “illusions,” pointing him in a direction he is not yet prepared to follow. He leaves dinner with Rex

and, after a few more meetings with the Flytes, plunges into ten years of artistic and spiritual stagnation.

Food, then, is not itself sufficient to work good in Charles' life; it can even provide material for an additional carapace of egoism. Despite the teleological function Charles recognizes through half-closed eyelids at his dinner with Rex, culinary sensitivity does not even seem to be a necessary condition of spiritual progression. Bridey, for instance, dislikes wine: "At Magdalen I tried to get drunk more than once, but I did not enjoy it. Beer and whiskey I find even less appetising" (91). That this is the first topic of conversation at Bridey and Charles' first meeting emphasizes the difference between Charles and Sebastian, epicurean aesthetes, and Bridey, whose indifference to such sensual pleasures does not prevent his being, if more aesthetically immature than these two, a good deal more spiritually mature. Nevertheless, it seems significant that Cordelia "ate voraciously" at dinner with Charles (220), "Bridey was a slow and copious eater" (283), and Father Mackay "made a hearty breakfast" before endeavoring to give Lord Marchmain last rites (326). This is not the exalted aestheticism of Charles' mealtime reflections but rather a simple appreciation of culinary goodness—an attitude that, with Rex, Charles' own selfishness blinds him to. Early in the novel Charles remarks "the expression I have seen...in the religious, of innocent wonder that those who expose themselves to the dangers of the world should avail themselves so little of its varied solace" (85). It is a religious attitude to counter one's experience of earthly danger with enjoyment of earthly good, as Cordelia, Bridey, and Father Mackay here seem to do with their food. This emphasis on the spiritual power of enjoyment—of "solace," or consolation—is a clear contrast with Murdoch, who also identifies religion with

consolation and argues that thereby “il ramène toujours inévitablement à soi” (Morin 55).<sup>41</sup> For Waugh, however, the enjoyment of food is properly not a means of self-satisfaction—though he agrees with Murdoch that this is a common perversion—but rather a means of enjoying the thing itself and the “eschatological beauty” it contains. For Murdoch, the lover gives metaphysical glory to the person or thing loved, and thus any delight in that glory is ultimately a delight in self; for Waugh, that glory is already resident in the person or thing, thanks to its creation by a God on whom “everything in the world that’s good depends” (“Face to Face”), and thus any delight in that glory is ultimately a delight in both its Creator and in the person or thing itself. This is the moral teleology that underpins *Brideshead*’s treatment of food—and of sex.

For Waugh, then, food is a good thing that inherently gestures toward the goodness of God; yet, as Charles’ dinner with Rex reveals, its goodness in a person’s life depends on that person’s good use of it: is one attuned to eschatological goodness and beauty, or is one attuned only to oneself? I suggest that the same applies to Waugh’s attitude toward sex. Thus, in Charles’ first tryst with Julia, Charles reveals his own spiritual poverty by remaining oblivious to the goodness of sex and of the person with whom he is in love. Their intercourse is “a symbol, a rite of ancient origin and solemn meaning” (Waugh, *Brideshead* 261)—language that sounds oddly sacramental, reminiscent of the “eschatological significance” implicit in the sensuality of food (Patey 235). Yet Charles is speaking in terms not of theology but of retail: “So at sunset I took formal possession of her as her lover” in order to “cast a burden which I had borne all my

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<sup>41</sup> “It always returns inevitably to the self” (my translation). In *The Sovereignty of Good*, Murdoch writes that one’s sense of “‘there is more than this’, if it is not to be corrupted by some sort of quasi-theological finality, must remain a very tiny spark of insight, something with, as it were, a metaphysical position but no metaphysical form” (71). To attribute metaphysical form to the transcendent is to corrupt the idea itself, to seek the theological consolation of finality, to slip into selfishness.

life” (Waugh, *Brideshead* 261). As at his dinner with Rex, Charles uses sensual pleasure as a means of affirming his own perceived spiritual progress, while remaining blind to the true spiritual meaning of that pleasure. This becomes even more pronounced in Waugh’s 1960 revision, which omits all sacramental language: “Now on the rough water there was a formality to be observed, no more” (243). Marcel DeCoste argues that the revision “underscore[s] that this love...is still limited by its strictly erotic character” (37n18); however, I would argue that by deleting all language that could even imaginatively be characterized as erotic, Waugh characterizes Charles and Julia’s fault here as not being erotic enough. More accurately, Charles’ inability to understand the teleological direction of sexual love, to interpret it only in reference to his own perceived superiority,<sup>42</sup> keeps him from true eroticism—as his stilted language in both the 1945 and 1960 versions reveals. When Charles uses sex as a calculated attempt to *possess* the beauty that has so moved him in these relationships, he pictures himself as the master of the teleological progression rather than its subject. He seeks to use, to manipulate, rather than to receive and rejoice. It is this that results in the non-eroticism of his congress with Julia.

By contrast, in Charles’ relationship with Sebastian, sexual intimacy—one of the “naughtiness[es] high in the catalogue of grave sins”—is pursued with “something of nursery freshness about us that fell little short of the joy of innocence” (Waugh, *Brideshead* 45). Their relationship is marked by a sheer joy in love and in each other, by “an excess of high spirits, in the love of the moment, and the wish to prolong and

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<sup>42</sup> At one point, Charles explicitly reveals his perception that the teleological end of Julia’s life was *himself*: after she tells him her story aboard the liner, he remarks, “I learned it as one does learn the former—as it seems at the time, the preparatory—life of a woman one loves, so that one thinks of oneself as part of it, directing it by devious ways, towards oneself”(Waugh, *Brideshead* 183). The key words “as it seems at the time” indicate that the mature narrator Charles has come to realize this perception for the delusion it is.

enhance it,” as Charles writes of his drinking habits (129). The sexuality of Charles and Sebastian’s relationship is thus an integral part of Charles’ introduction to the theological valences of pleasure, as he here learns to pursue pleasure theologically—for its own sake, for the goodness it embodies, which in turn points back to a greater goodness beyond itself. Charles describes his relationship with Julia in similar terms, emphasizing its organic “for-itselfness”: in earlier courtships “I would plan my evening and think, At such and such a time, at such and such an opportunity, I shall cross the start-line and open my attack for better or worse....With Julia there were no phases, no start-line, no tactics at all” (256).<sup>43</sup>

The non-acquisitive innocence displayed in Charles’ relationships with both Sebastian and Julia reflects a self-engaging interest in the beloved, rather than a Murdochian self-destructive interest in the beloved: for Charles, love for Julia and for Sebastian finds expression in mutual enjoyment, relational and sexual, rather than in mutual separation and distant, iconic observation. This is not to say that love *requires* sex, but rather that sex plays a significant, and beneficial, role in the economy of love. In this Waugh follows Dante, whose *Divine Comedy* makes lust and gluttony the first two circles of Hell and the final two cornices of Purgatory: the farthest away from extreme torment and the closest to Earthly Paradise, respectively. As Virgil explains, this is because the lustful and gluttonous do not commit the sin of malice—the deliberate pursuit of injustice—but rather of incontinence (*Inferno* XI.22-23, 79-90): “the

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<sup>43</sup> In the paragraph immediately following this observation, Charles recounts his first attempt to seduce Julia, who bars him from her bedroom, saying, “I don’t know if I want love.” Charles responds, “Love? I’m not asking for love,” and Julia answers, “Oh yes, Charles, you are” (256). Evidently Charles is asking for love, in the crude physical sense of the term, and his desire for physical consummation seems to flow naturally from the organic “courtship” he had just described. What he clumsily denies to Julia and to himself is that the love he seeks from Julia, and of which his sexual desire is a part, is more than physical. He senses, but cannot (and will not) articulate, the theological overtones of the goodness that inchoately draws him on.

immoderate use of things that are good by nature” (450n[p. 113, l. 80]). It is not because food and sex are not worth enjoying, but rather because they *are* worth enjoying, that enjoying them incorrectly, out of step with their created order, merits judgment.<sup>44</sup> To Waugh, Charles’ homosexual relationship with Sebastian and adulterous relationship with Julia are both wrong by religious and moral standards—but they are wrong in the best possible way, because of an over-delight in a good thing created to be delighted in.

This understanding of created goodness relies heavily on Augustine’s understanding of the goodness and order of creation. In his *City of God*, Augustine argues that nothing God created is evil: “God in his goodness created good things” (XI.23), and only by a willed rejection of his goodness does corruption occur, the wrenching of some good thing from its “position in the splendour of the providential order” (XI.22). That natural order, the hierarchy of greater and lesser goods, dictates how good things ought to be used:

Now the knowledge of the creature is a kind of twilight, compared with the knowledge of the Creator; and then comes the daylight and the morning, when that knowledge is linked with the praise and love of the Creator; and it never declines into night, so long as the Creator is not deprived of his creature’s love.

(XI.7)

Things considered solely in themselves have a dim sort of glow, since they retain the goodness of their creation, but only when considered in “praise and love of the Creator”

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<sup>44</sup> Augustine makes a similar point in *The City of God*: “Therefore it is not by nature but by a perversion that the rebellious creation differs from the good, which adheres to God; yet even this perversion shows how great and honourable is the nature itself. For if we are right to condemn the perversion, that shows without doubt that the nature is honourable, since what justifies the condemnation of the perversion is that the perversion disgraces a nature which deserves honour” (XII.1).

do they break into their full glory. Waugh echoes this reasoning in an eloquent passage from *Brideshead* on the nature of love:

Perhaps...all our loves are merely hints and symbols; a hill of many invisible crests; doors that open as in a dream to reveal only a further stretch of carpet and another door; perhaps you and I are types and this sadness which sometimes falls between us springs from disappointment in our search, each straining through and beyond the other, snatching a glimpse now and then of the shadow which turns the corner always a pace or two ahead of us. (303)

As twilight leads to dawn, so here Charles pictures love as leading—well, he knows not where, but he knows that it leads.

At this point in the novel, deep in his relationship with Julia, Charles is still enthralled by Julia herself, without regard for her Creator; as a result, he is not yet able to imagine dawn. All he senses is that in itself his love is incomplete. He calls love a set of “hints and symbols,” or, in the revised 1960 edition, “vagabond-language scrawled on gate-posts and paving-stones along the weary road that others have tramped before us” (284). The idea is that of a message which Charles is not yet able to understand. In Augustinian terms, created goods—of which, for Waugh and Dante, sex and food are two<sup>45</sup>—have a particular content (the goodness of God) written in a language that becomes illegible when those goods are improperly enjoyed. What Waugh emphasizes in *Brideshead* is how even the improper enjoyment of those goods can awaken the lover to the existence of the language itself and eventually drive him to learn to read. In fact, the

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<sup>45</sup> Augustine seems to regard food as a created good (XI.22) but is less sure about sex. In a marriage, he writes in *The Excellence of Marriage*, “the better persons they [husband and wife] are, the earlier they begin by mutual consent to abstain from carnal union” (35). Augustine might agree with Nussbaum that the purgatorial fire does indeed cleanse the soul from sexual desire.

entire narrative of *Brideshead Revisited* can be seen as Charles' attempt literally to read his past correctly, in all its eroticism and in the light of divine providence, in order to fully recuperate the good therein contained (see DeCoste 41-43).

The Dantean and Augustinian emphasis on providential order implies that each created thing is importantly subordinate to its Creator; perhaps counterintuitively, Waugh frequently interprets this subordination in terms of relative unimportance—or, more precisely, of ordinariness. Since, for example, the goodness of sex comes from and depends on divine goodness, sex is, *sub specie aeternitatis*, much less important than God himself and the individual's relation to him. As Waugh writes in a 1930 article, "Tell the Truth about Marriage,"<sup>46</sup>

Responsible people—doctors, psychologists, novelists—write in the papers and say, "You cannot lead a happy life unless your sex life is happy." That seems to me just about as sensible as saying, "You cannot live a happy life unless your golf life is happy." It is not only nonsense, it is mischievous nonsense. (*EAR* 94-95)

The simple truth, he writes, is "that man's sex life is only a part of his general activity," and no more or less important than that (96). In 1956, Waugh echoed the same theme, speaking about homosexuality: "It is in many ways a great inconvenience (though there are manifest compensations) to have 'unnatural' sexual appetites" (512). One's sexual desires, however "unnatural," are merely an inconvenience from one angle and a convenience from another. "[E]very moral and immoral act is an act of will," and one's

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<sup>46</sup> Published on 23 August, this article appeared only half a year after Waugh's traumatic divorce of 17 January. That his wife was unfaithful to him, then ran off with her lover despite Waugh's attempts to recover the marriage, may explain why Waugh here denounces so forcefully the idea that sexual satisfaction is necessary to marital bliss (see Hastings 193-99).

will is not determined by one's appetites (512).<sup>47</sup> Sex and sexuality are simply raw materials for the working of morality: "human beings, especially men and women in their sexual relationship, are ceaselessly working on one another, reforming or corrupting," he wrote in 1951 (404). That this should be true of all human relationships, but *especially* sexual ones, indicates that sex indeed has a powerful pedagogic function. Sexual union is, after all, one of the most powerful instances of interpersonal intimacy in the human experience, and the opportunities it provides for mutual influence are commensurately great. In *Brideshead* we see the positive effects of this power in Charles and Julia; we see its negative effects in Celia, whom Charles admits he married for "[p]hysical attraction" mixed with "[a]mbition" and "[l]oneliness" (257), and whose sexual appeal, thus diluted with self-focused abstractions, is an essential contributor to Charles' ten dead years. Yet for all of Waugh's characters, sex remains "only a part of [their] general activity," one additional arena for the sharpening of their character and for "the operation of divine

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<sup>47</sup> In the same article, Waugh writes that that in terms of sexuality "'[n]ormality' is certainly an almost meaningless expression....Moral theologians postulate a Natural Law and from it deduce a code of the licit and illicit that corresponds very slightly with the common observation of human behaviour. Much that seems 'normal' is forbidden, much that seems repugnant or absurd is allowed" (511-12). Christensen uses these statements to argue that Waugh promotes "a more generous and *catholic* spirit" of Catholicism that sympathizes with rather than condemns homosexuality (138). If nothing else, Waugh's portraits of Sebastian and Charles in *Brideshead* and of Ambrose Silk in *Put Out More Flags* certainly demonstrate sympathy toward rather than hamfisted condemnation of homosexual relationships. However, Christensen's veiled implication that Waugh saw no moral problem with homosexuality at all is inconsistent with Waugh's description in the same article of a homosexual lifestyle as a "vice" (*EAR* 512). Waugh does still seem to regard homosexual activity, as distinct from the fact of experiencing homosexual desires, as morally wrong: he disapproves of the popular conception "that temptation and sin [are] one and the same thing" (512). As I suggest in the above paragraph, underlying this entire discussion is Waugh's contention that sexuality is merely one of the various parts of a human life; homosexual activity, for him, is wrong but not more so than other vices—and, like other vices, it is an instance of perverted good and thus has good in it waiting to be redeemed. The position Christensen attributes to Waugh is actually closer to that of Murdoch, who in 1964 echoes Waugh's comments on natural law: "Many 'natural', in the sense of easy, instinctive human activities are immoral, and traditional morality frequently pictures the good life as the defeat of nature....If, on the other hand, the label ['unnatural'] is offered as a description meaning 'very unusual', it would seem to be a false description since homosexuality is very usual" ("Moral Decision" 3-4). For Murdoch, however, as opposed to Waugh, the understanding of homosexuality as "an ordinary human condition" (4) implies that homosexual and heterosexual behavior, or even celibacy, are morally equivalent: "responsibility for others and service to the community can be found on all these paths" (6).

grace” (Stannard, *Critical* 271). Sex is good, as are food and golf; and like food and golf, it is inessential compared to the God who stands behind it. It is both deeply consequential and spectacularly unimportant.

This unimportance is reflected at the novel’s end. Ironically, Bridey, arguably the least sensual character in the book, is rewarded with a happy marriage,<sup>48</sup> whereas the novel’s sexually active characters are consigned to singleness and celibacy. For Julia, Sebastian, and Charles, however, celibacy is a byproduct of increased spiritual maturity rather than its object. Writing to Hollywood bigwigs in 1947, Waugh famously explained that “I regard it as essential that, after having led a life of sin Julia should not be immediately rewarded with conventional happiness. She has a great debt to pay and we are left with her paying it” (qtd. in Heath, “*Brideshead*” 229). As Robert Murray Davis notes, since “under church law, Julia has never been married”<sup>49</sup> and since Charles’ union with Celia is a probable candidate for an annulment, a Julia-Charles wedding remains theoretically permissible: “Julia apparently refuses to marry Charles not merely because she cannot do so validly, but because she renounces marriage to him under any circumstances” (Davis, *Brideshead* 31). The key is not that Julia renounces *marriage* under any circumstances but that she renounces marriage *to Charles*. That is, Charles and Julia are celibate at the end of *Brideshead* not because they must renounce sex, but because they must renounce each other: they are to each other “rival goods” competing with God, and in order to pursue God they must each dethrone the other’s idol (see Waugh, *Brideshead* 340). For Sebastian, Cordelia’s suspicion that he “had [a vocation]

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<sup>48</sup> Appropriately for Bridey, Waugh downplays the sensuality of the marriage: before publication, Waugh edited “what had been [Bridey’s] ‘sexual stupour’ over [his fiancé]” to “the more general and for Bridey more believable ‘amorous stupour’” (Davis, *Writer* 172).

<sup>49</sup> “[W]hile Julia’s marriage to Rex is civilly valid, under church law it did not exist,” since Rex, being already married, “cannot marry Julia in any kind of Catholic ceremony” (Davis, *Brideshead* 31).

and hated it” (222) seems borne out by his later desire to become a novice; though he is refused full membership in the monastery, he remains “a sort of under-porter,” one of the “few odd hangers-on in a religious house...people who can’t quite fit in either to the world or the monastic rule” (307-08). It is Sebastian’s alcoholism, not his sexuality, that disqualifies him from becoming a full brother, but insofar as he is able he discharges the vocation it seems God has given him: he is, as much as it is possible for him to be, a monk. And by doing so he demonstrates marked spiritual progress; it is a long way from the Sebastian who, likened to an idyllic Polynesian, resists “the grim invasion of trader, administrator, missionary and tourist”—that is, of “his own conscience and all claims of human affection” (127)—to the Sebastian who learns to hold himself responsible for Kurt, then cheerfully admits to the Superior that he “need[s] a missionary for [himself]” (305).

For each of these characters, then, celibacy is not Socrates’ categorical rejection of bodily pleasure as ultimately unspiritual: sex is disallowed *for them* for reasons specific to their circumstances and spiritual trajectories. By contrast, in Waugh’s other magnum opus, the WWII epic *Sword of Honour*, the protagonist Guy Crouchback suffers from “a habit of dry and negative chastity which even the priests felt to be unedifying” (8); part of his spiritual journey, then, involves a reawakening to sexual intimacy with, first, his ex-wife Virginia (whom he remarries), then (after Virginia’s death) his second wife Domenica. Different characters take different paths. Waugh put the point most memorably in 1952: “There is only one saint that Bridget Hogan can actually become, St Bridget Hogan, and that saint she *must* become, here or in the fires of purgatory, if she is to enter heaven. She cannot slip through in fancy-dress, made up as Joan of Arc” (*EAR*

407). Joan of Arc was celibate; perhaps Bridget Hogan will not be. God will grow each saint in love through the means appropriate to each. Sex is universally good but not universally essential.

For both Waugh and Murdoch, then, sex is teleologically inessential: one can achieve the Good, or follow God, without it. Where Waugh and Murdoch primarily differ is in their understanding of how goodness (or Goodness) interacts with the physical world. Murdoch's Good is unutterably transcendent, far above the physical; Waugh's God is transcendent but immanent, sacramentally present in the physical world. Thus P. A. Loxias, in his final editorial comment on Pearson's manuscript, can opine that "after art"—like erotic love, a generator of metaphysical certainty—"there is, let me assure you all, nothing" (*Black Prince* 408); *Brideshead* ends with a meditation on the "small red flame...before the beaten-copper doors of a tabernacle" containing the Blessed Sacrament (351). To pursue a transcendent Good means to ultimately abandon the physical and thus the sexual; to pursue a sacramental God means to pursue him through the physical and thus the sexual. It is not that for Murdoch the sexual is evil—as we have seen, the goodness it reveals can be a powerful stimulant and pedagogue—but rather that its physical embodiment is, from the perspective of the Good, inherently distortive. For Waugh, on the other hand, the sexual is certainly a lesser copy of the goodness of God, and consequently of secondary importance, but a true copy nonetheless. For the one author, sex is inherently useful, and for the other, it is inherently valuable. Sex tends upward, in both the Murdochian and the Waughian universes, but for Murdoch, it ultimately evaporates in the light of the Sun; for Waugh, it becomes a filament.

## Chapter Two: Love and Art

In the *Timaeus*, Plato affirms that the universe is imbued with a rational order, “by nature the fairest and the best possible” (30b). Yet among the various causes of this good order he includes the “wandering cause” (48b), a force of physical creation not always subject to reason. Matter itself is fundamentally unstable—at the time of creation, “no part of it was in equilibrium, but it swayed unevenly in every direction as it was shaken by the forces” (52e)—so it can never be completely ordered. Its origins are outside rationality, so the rational Demiurge cannot simply command this material; he creates by persuading it (48a). By contrast, in *The City of God* Augustine argues that nothing can “escape the laws of God who orders all things well” (XI.23). Lucifer himself remains subject to his Creator: “[i]n the very creation of the Devil...God had already, in virtue of his foreknowledge, laid plans for making good use of him even in his evil state” (XI.17). For Augustine, there is no such thing as a “wandering cause”; nothing—not even evil—exists outside the goodness of God, since existence itself is a good and evil is only good’s distortion. God in his goodness constrains and orders all his creation, even employing “evil choices in his design, so that whereas such evil choices make a wrong use of good natures, God turns evil choices to good use” (XI.17).

In her treatise *The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists*, Iris Murdoch notes of the *Timaeus* that “[t]he Demiurge’s satisfactions and his relation to his material are those of an artist” (53). Similarly, Augustine writes that God’s work of creation was “done with the true artist’s skill, which here is the Wisdom of God” (XI.21). Although neither Plato nor Augustine elaborate an aesthetics from their creation accounts, these differing visions of the divine artist result in two different views of the

human artist, a divide that is on clear display in the works of Evelyn Waugh and Iris Murdoch. Murdoch directly affirms the Platonic view that the artist faces “in part fundamentally a jumble of which nothing can be made” (*FS* 53). As a result, Murdoch argues that it is at least partially inappropriate to conceive of reality as ordered, and since the essence of love is the right conception of reality, artistic order can be not only inaccurate but also spiritually dangerous. Waugh, by contrast, does not explicitly discuss Augustine’s doctrine of creation, but his emphasis on the spiritual order of good art seems far from an acknowledgement of “wandering causes.” In seeking to portray “man in his relation to God” (*EAR* 302), he believes, the artist must be careful to avoid the creation of false order, but she should be equally diligent to avoid disorder, since the divine order of Providence indulges in neither.

Ultimately, both Waugh and Murdoch understand a proper conception of order as central to the artist’s role, and their novels *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold* and *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, respectively, circle incessantly around the problem of true and false artistic order. Waugh and Murdoch agree that the role of the artist is to reveal the order of the real world, but Waugh valorizes the artist’s careful crafting of that order, whereas for Murdoch craftsmanship is precisely the most morally suspect component of art. And since Waugh and Murdoch agree that order is inherently linked to love, the artist is ultimately playing not just with words or paintbrushes but also with her own pursuit of life’s most important ends.

Polished, Ordered, and Arranged: *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold*

*The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold* (1957) is among the most enigmatic and challenging of Waugh’s works. Based on Waugh’s own brief hallucinogenic episode, the

novel is extremely autobiographical: Waugh trumpeted this fact to friends and on the dust jacket of the first edition (DeCoste 110).<sup>50</sup> Yet as Robert Murray Davis notes, “close examination of Waugh’s letters and diaries and of the manuscript itself undermines Waugh’s [implied] claim...that he simply sat down and transcribed his experience” (*Writer* 282). The novel’s status—as autobiography? as fiction? as some combination of the two?—is thus difficult to pin down. The novel has been read as “an accurate and complete self-portrait” (Heath, *Picturesque* 259) and as “a deceptive autobiographical document” Waugh uses to suppress his inner demons (Stannard, *No Abiding* 348); as a “mock-novel” and extended practical joke on the (often personal) attacks of Waugh’s critics (Patey 339)<sup>51</sup> and as “a perfect psychological extension of the conflicts that troubled Evelyn Waugh from his childhood onward” (Kloss 109-10); as a demonstration that Waugh considered himself “a writer first and a Catholic second” (Brien 462) and as “a perfect extension of the religious vision which permeates Waugh’s later works” (Phillips 149). To Katharyn Crabbe, at novel’s end, “no one would argue that Gilbert has come back the same man he was when he left” (165); Stephen Post finds it obvious that Pinfold “is not much changed” (173). In other words, there is very little scholarly consensus on what this novel actually is and on what its protagonist actually accomplishes. I suggest, however, that the novel is centrally about two separate, yet related themes: Pinfold’s art and faith. Indeed, the novel demonstrates that Pinfold’s art is menaced by the same virus that cankers his faith: a denial of value, and thus of love, that leads to an embrace of false order.

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<sup>50</sup> For a discussion of the biography behind the plot, see Stannard, *No Abiding* 341-47; for an extended discussion of the differences between the biography and the novel, see Davis, *Writer* 283-84.

<sup>51</sup> Alan Brien offered this memorable assessment: “He [Waugh] rounded on his pursuers, battled with them, subdued them, swallowed them, and regurgitated them, harmless and picturesque as fossils in marble, embalmed in an autobiographical novel” (462).

At its most obvious, *Pinfold* is a *künstlerroman* detailing its protagonist's fall from and recovery of artistic maturity. Pinfold opens the novel as a moderately successful Catholic novelist, author of several works popular at home and internationally (3). He is a literary craftsman, whose concern for his works is that they be "well made" and whose concern for himself is that he continually clarify and enrich the themes at his disposal (4).<sup>52</sup> At the time our story begins, however, Pinfold has, through idleness, abandoned his novel-in-progress (19). To resume work on the manuscript and to recover from habitual drug and alcohol abuse, Pinfold takes a cruise to Ceylon on the SS *Caliban*. Once on board, however, he is constantly distracted by an array of hostile, taunting voices: mastermind Angel, sneering Goneril, sympathetic Margaret, and others, none of whom is he ever able to see. Under these conditions, Pinfold does no work on his novel. But not only does he fail to create any good art; worse, his voices overwhelm him with bad art. Pinfold hallucinates (among other things) an impassioned preacher exhorting a wayward congregant against sexual impurity, "an old sea-dog" lashing his lascars in the face of mutiny (51), a sadistic captain torturing and murdering one of his crew, a complex episode of international brinkmanship and espionage, and a scandalous seduction scene: "the staples...of religious melodramas, lurid potboilers, spy thrillers, dewy love stories, and whodunit detective novels" (DeCoste 116). By the end of the novel, however, Pinfold finally frees himself from his pulp fiction hallucinations and sits down to write *The*

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<sup>52</sup> Pinfold considers his own books "as objects which he had made, things quite external to himself to be used and judged by others"; when asked for comment on their significance, "Mr. Pinfold gave nothing away" (4). This is not, as DeCoste has argued, a denial of "the literary work as a bridge between self and other" (111), but rather an insistence that the work of art be allowed to speak for itself. Pinfold "had nothing to give [the inquiring] students" not because his novels have no communicative value, but because, in a very straightforward sense, he claims no esoteric or mystical insight into the significance of his works (Waugh, *Ordeal* 4). They are pieces of craftsmanship meant to be judged on their own merits. As Waugh himself stated in an interview, "I think any work of art is something exterior to oneself: it's the making of something, whether it's a bed table or a book" ("Frankly Speaking").

*Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold*, the novel we have just read—presumably, a novel Waugh published on the assumption that it constituted good art. Thanks to his battle with the voices, Pinfold has escaped his lethargy and returned to genuine artistic production. One of the central arcs of the *Ordeal*, then, is Pinfold’s movement from artistic incompetence to artistic competence by means of a hallucinatory artistic ordeal.

Pinfold’s religious development is trickier to pin down: his spiritual growth over the course of the novel is markedly ambiguous. Hynes even contends that for Pinfold, “his religion enters neither into the nature of his aberrations nor into his cure” (“Death Wish” 69). Yet this conclusion seems strained in light of the spiritual overtones of Pinfold’s ordeal, suggested from the very table of contents by the Miltonic echoes of the final chapter, “Pinfold Regained” (DeCoste 122). Even more pointedly, Waugh gave the name “Angel” to the chief of Pinfold’s tormentors (a marked change from “Stephen Black,” the character’s real-life inspiration [Stannard, *No Abiding* 334]). Heath characterizes the *Caliban* as “a place of barbaric faith” (*Picturesque* 262); as Davis notes, Pinfold’s “ability to pray is an important issue throughout the novel” (*Writer* 290), with his success or failure at doing so keyed to important episodes with the voices. If Pinfold’s voices represent an artistic perversion Pinfold must struggle against, then, both his voices and his ship seem also to represent a spiritual perversion against which he must prayerfully defend himself. Additionally, it is significant that, as DeCoste notes, Pinfold’s voices only cease at the words of a priest (123). In real life, Waugh met with both a priest and a psychiatrist and even then it was some time before the voices entirely ceased (Patey 326); in the novel, however, Pinfold pointedly declines a psychologist—“I’ve had enough of psychology” (190)—and his voices stop almost immediately after he hears that Father

Westmacott has declared them illusory (189).<sup>53</sup> Pinfold's final victory over his voices is thus portrayed as a sort of exorcism, a gesture entirely in line with Waugh's analysis of his own illness: "I do not absolutely exclude the possibility of diabolic possession as the source of [the voices]" (*Letters* 494). Here, as with his naming of Angel, Waugh purposefully departs from strict autobiography in order to emphasize the spiritual dimension of Pinfold's ordeal.

I have suggested that, despite this emphasis, Pinfold's overall spiritual trajectory is unclear. This uncertainty arises over Pinfold's state at the end of the novel, which I will discuss later; it is much more evident, however, that Pinfold begins the novel trapped by the mortal sin of sloth. In a 1962 essay on that vice, Waugh defines sloth in Thomistic terms as

*tristitia de bono spirituali*, sadness in the face of spiritual good. Man is made for joy in the love of God, a love which he expresses in service. If he deliberately turns away from that joy, he is denying the purpose of his existence....[Sloth] is allied to despair. (*EAR* 573)

As Waugh puts it, sloth is quintessentially a refusal to acknowledge and delight in proper sources of value, whether in God himself, one's neighbor (through service), or, by extension, any other created thing God has declared good: thus Daniel McInerney

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<sup>53</sup> Just before Mrs. Pinfold mentions Father Westmacott, she mentions Pinfold's friend Arthur, who explains (as an employee of the BBC) that Angel had been in England all along. Yet even when this cornerstone of his mental narrative is disproved, Pinfold remains, though "dumbfounded," deluded: "They must be working the whole thing from a studio in England" (188). His hallucinations can find a way around the destruction of his most fundamental fantasies; there is no reason to imagine that Pinfold could not similarly explain away any other facts put to him. As a result, Father Westmacott, whose words unequivocally quash the delusion, demonstrates an efficacy and authority not shared by the other figures in the novel, an authority which implies Pinfold's sufferings are particularly within his purview—that is, essentially spiritual. Incidentally, Hastings' claim that "[a]t the end [of the novel], just as in life, Mr Pinfold is cured quickly and simply by the intervention of Mrs Pinfold, and by his doctor changing his prescription" (566-67) is thus misleadingly imprecise.

describes sloth as a “forgetfulness of the goodness of creation” (48), in the Augustinian sense of created goods discussed in the last chapter. Waugh’s “joy in the love of God” includes—indeed, requires—appropriate joy in the things God has imbued with value for us to enjoy and appreciate. At the beginning of the novel, however, Pinfold seems to accept no sources of value at all. His art does not quicken him: restarting his novel would require effort, “and he was disinclined to effort” (19). But he has not abandoned art for some other, more alluring mistress; rather, he seeks no enjoyment at all. “In youth his long periods of leisure had been devoted to amusement,” Waugh tells us. “Now he had abandoned that quest” (19-20). Nothing is truly worth his enjoyment or attention: “He wished no one ill, but he looked at the world *sub specie aeternitatis* and he found it flat as a map” (10). Pinfold sees with the eyes of Qohelet and despairs. Or, more accurately, he yawns: “The tiny kindling of charity which came to him through his religion sufficed only to temper his disgust and change it to boredom” (10). He longs for sleep, not as a rest from worthwhile effort, but as a sort of simulated death, “six or seven hours of insensibility” (14) to shield him from the knowledge of “how little of his life was past, how much there was still ahead of him” (10). He retreats from the world, from his work, from other people, “into a solitary den compounded of claret and syntax” (DeCoste 113). Sloth in its full strength, Waugh believes, is “an outrage against the divine order committed with full knowledge and consent which, if unrepented before death, consigns the doer to eternal loss of salvation” (*EAR* 572). Pinfold has not, at the beginning of the novel, succumbed to this undiluted vice; he is, after all, still a practicing Catholic and thus at least intellectually aware of the value of the Church and the Godhead. But the

intellect does not seem to be enough. The “calm acceptance of the propositions of his faith” (*Ordeal* 8) is increasingly an ineffective antidote against Pinfold’s creeping *acedia*.

Here Pinfold’s spiritual and artistic battles merge, for sloth is Pinfold’s scourge both artistically and spiritually: it is, after all, sloth that keeps Pinfold from progressing on his novel. More radically, by denying value, sloth denies teleology. Teleology implies an end worth moving toward, but if nothing has value *sub specie aeternitatis*, nothing is worth moving for at all. This is clearly problematic theologically, and, to Waugh, it is equally destructive to artistic practice. In 1946, Waugh describes storytelling as “the attempt to reduce to order the anarchic raw materials of life” (*EAR* 303). Good literary art, in other words, means organizing apparently chaotic reality into a coherent architecture. As he put it in 1930,

One has for one’s raw material every single thing one has ever seen or heard or felt, and one has to go over that vast, smouldering rubbish-heap of experience, half-stifled by the fumes and dust, scraping and delving until one finds a few discarded valuables.

Then one has to assemble these tarnished and dented fragments, polish them, set them in order, and try to make a coherent and significant arrangement of them. (*EAR* 73)

This emphasis on structure and organization—in a word, craftsmanship—is not accidental. In its fullest instantiation it is theological: the organization of a work of art is an analogue for the organizing hand of Providence, that which in reality creates “a coherent and significant arrangement” out of what appears the “smouldering rubbish-

heap of experience.”<sup>54</sup> This relationship is foregrounded in *Brideshead Revisited*. As Heath puts it, “What may appear merely chaotic from man’s perspective is orderly from God’s, and so Waugh presents Ryder’s ‘profane’ memories in a ‘sacred’ frame which reveals the pattern inherent in disorder and the good latent in evil” (*Picturesque* 161). By writing and ordering his experience, Charles Ryder is able to see how the morally and spiritually dubious episodes of his life coalesce into a sacred pattern directed by and toward God. By contrast, sloth impairs the artist’s ability to recognize pattern or order, since sloth denies the value that order implies. Thus, for Pinfold, the sloth that dogs him throughout the novel is at once his source of spiritual and artistic failure.

As a result, the solution to sloth ought to be an antidote both spiritual and artistic, and Waugh identifies this solution as love. To Waugh, McInerney writes, “the remedy for sloth...is joy in the love of God, a love that is expressed in service to others. At the core of this love is a *yes* to the goodness of creation” (55). Sloth denies value; joy rejoices in a world made valuable by love, the love of God—and also human love, as Waugh writes in his next book after *Pinfold*, a biography of Ronald Knox. At one point, Waugh describes Knox in terms Pinfoldesque: “The vision of himself *sub specie aeternitatis* threatened, and but for his reserves of spiritual strength might have overwhelmed him, with the sense of futility in all his occupations” (214). The solution to this bleak vision? “He needed human love” (215). Love—whether human or divine—is fundamentally a recognition of value, and as such joy is impossible without it. Thus at the end of the novel it is both

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<sup>54</sup> The description of reality as a “smouldering rubbish-heap” is hardly in line with an understanding of the world as providentially ordered—it sounds, in fact, more Murdochian than Augustinian. This article (“People Who Want to Sue Me”), however, was published early in his career (31 May 1930) and before his official entrance into the Church on 29 September 1930 (Hastings 225). Waugh’s understanding of the artist as craftsman remains constant throughout his career; his understanding of the craftsmanship of reality itself changed with the development of his religious faith.

human and divine love that rescue Pinfold from his hallucinations: the words of his priest reported by his wife (*Ordeal* 189). Crabbe neglects Mrs. Pinfold's indirect discourse, choosing to attribute Pinfold's recovery to her words alone (165), but she is nonetheless justified in associating Mrs. Pinfold with "[Pinfold's] greatest spiritual strength," that which is "ultimately responsible for recalling him to life" (163).<sup>55</sup> If, at the beginning of the novel, "the tiny kindling of charity which came to him through his religion sufficed only to temper his disgust and change it to boredom" (Waugh, *Ordeal* 10), then, at the end of the novel, the ray of religion which comes to him through human charity tempers his boredom and changes it to joy. Divine love is the efficient cause; human love the instrumental cause; but both causes are active and necessary. The spiritual change they work in Pinfold has profound artistic implications: like Charles Ryder writing *Brideshead*, Pinfold writes *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold*. He becomes able to rejoice in his ordeal, to see the order by which the artistic pabulum that tempted him ultimately pointed him toward love.

This it does primarily by contrast: his voices convict Pinfold of his sloth by dramatizing it. The voices seek to drain all value from Pinfold's world, whether by convincing him that his neighbors are contemptible louts or, failing that, by causing him to withdraw from them completely.<sup>56</sup> They also attempt to persuade him that his own work is garbage and that he himself is a contemptible lout. To Waugh, "the individual soul...is the preconception of Christendom," "the basic assumption of all traditional Christian art and philosophy" (*EAR* 206, "Strange Rites" 171); as a result, the self-hatred

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<sup>55</sup> To be precise, Crabbe argues that it is Pinfold's own confidence in his wife's love that is "his greatest spiritual strength" (163).

<sup>56</sup> This latter end they temporarily achieve: "Living and moving and eating now quite alone, barely nodding to Glover or Mrs. Scarfield, Mr. Pinfold listened and spoke only to his enemies" (155-56).

with which Pinfold's voices tempt him is a vicious denial of the value of the self, at least as bad as denying the value of his neighbors. Goneril's frequent encouragements to suicide are nothing more than the logical end of such despair, which is itself the logical end of Pinfold's *acedia*. Yet when confronted with these demands, "Mr. Pinfold did not feel the smallest temptation to obey" (*Ordeal* 163). Pinfold's hallucinations, then, perform a *reductio ad absurdum*. They force Pinfold to confront his own sloth and its consequences and, by doing so, cause him to see the repugnance of his own attitude. In Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Regan and Goneril (after whom Pinfold names the unkindest of his voices) justify their cruelty to the king as a pedagogical tool: "O sir, to willful men, / The injuries that they themselves procure / Must be their schoolmasters" (2.4.302-04). For Shakespeare's Regan, this is sophistry; for Pinfold's Goneril, it is effective pedagogy.<sup>57</sup>

The hallucinations also mirror Pinfold's sloth through not only their content, but also their very form. At one point Pinfold believes he hears his novels scathingly denounced by BBC personality Algernon Clutton-Cornforth:

The basic qualities of a Pinfold novel seldom vary and may be enumerated thus: conventionality of plot, falseness of characterization, morbid sentimentality, gross and hackneyed farce alternating with grosser and more hackneyed melodrama; cloying religiosity, which will be found tedious or blasphemous according as the reader shares or repudiates his doctrinal preconceptions; an adventitious and

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<sup>57</sup> Despite this pedagogical effect, Pinfold's auditory visions are still bad art, for the reason that they impose a false order on reality. The *reductio ad absurdum* is only visible when standing outside the artwork; the art itself does not finally point beyond itself. Put another way, Pinfold's hallucinations only reveal their pedagogical value when treated not as works of art themselves but as raw material to be *turned into* art by Pinfold's novelization of his experience: when Pinfold is no longer trapped within the delusions but evaluating and ordering them.

offensive sensuality that is clearly introduced for commercial motives. All this is presented in a style which, when it varies from the trite, lapses into positive illiteracy. (Waugh, *Ordeal* 72)

Pinfold, at the opening of the novel, is described as a literary craftsman, and we are given no indication that he is a poor artist; Clutton-Cornforth's critique in fact applies more accurately to the dramas that Pinfold constantly overhears. The basic criticism is of "morbid sentimentality," that emotional hyperdrive in which everything is over-dramatized, over-emoted, and over-explained. Pinfold, the man who sees no value, is thus overwhelmed by art in which everything is aesthetically overvalued, as though the only alternative to sloth were fanaticism. Initially this seems like a step in the right direction, as the audio dramas Pinfold hears do evoke excitement, the diametrical opposite of the boredom of his sloth. Thus during the International Incident "Mr. Pinfold wished he could stand beside [the captain] on the bridge, exhort him to defiance, run the ship under the Spanish guns into the wide, free inland sea where all the antique heroes of history and legend had sailed to glory" (105). At the end of this escapade Pinfold "was struck with real fear, . . . something he had quite often read about and dismissed as over-writing" (117). Fear, too, is a sort of negative excitement, as far removed from boredom as exuberance: you cannot fear for what you do not value. As his hallucinations progress, Pinfold pictures himself at war with his voices, "caught unawares, with unfamiliar barbarous weapons, treacherously ambushed when, as it were, he was under the cover of the Red Cross"; thus, when he has left the ship, having apparently "rallied and routed the enemy" (168), he is ecstatic, "one with hashish-eaters and Corybantes and Californian gurus, high on the back-stairs of mysticism" (173). By virtue of their exaggerated emotional and

artistic content, these moments of melodrama push Pinfold toward joy and thus a recognition of value. Unfortunately, however, these recognitions are all too temporary, for the exaggeration that makes these incidents melodramatic makes them also false. The episodes are paragons of narrative order, but they are, after all, hallucinations: instances of false order, and thus ultimately empty. While in the grip of these fantasies, Pinfold may defeat his perceived enemies, but he fails to perceive that his true enemies are the fantasies themselves. His victories are sham victories; always Pinfold collapses back into boredom.

The bad art of Pinfold's hallucinations thus reflects Pinfold's sloth on two interlocking levels: the invective of his persecutors dramatizes the lethargy of sloth and the melodrama of his episodes dramatizes the "ersatz, indeed *antifestive*, festivity" that McInerney identifies as sloth's unexpected apparition. A recognition of the good order of reality results in festivity, "a joy-filled *yes* to the goodness of creation" (47); as a result, sloth not only denies order by lethargy but also parodies it by a frenetic bustle, the "electric activity" that "cannot utterly extinguish the cry of a sadness edging toward despair" (52-53). And it is this frenetic sloth that is most dangerous to Pinfold, for it approximates closely enough the true excitement of joy that it can be easily mistaken for the real thing. As DeCoste argues, "the most dangerous of the popular fictions in which his journey dabbles is that detective story by which he attempts to construct a rational account for all these implausible scenes" (117). Pinfold's constant scramble to explain his situation is dangerous precisely because he mistakes melodrama—weaponized telepathy with ties to Nazi Germany, a BBC plot to forcibly psychoanalyze recalcitrant authors (Waugh, *Ordeal* 165-66)—for reality, and by doing so confuses the false joy of cheap

excitement with the true joy of rightly-ordered love. Having, through sloth, denied value for so long, he is unable to distinguish between true and false order and thus risks spending his entire life in fantasy.<sup>58</sup>

The seductive allure of false order is most clearly illustrated by the complex character of Margaret, the kindest of Pinfold's persecutors. Pinfold is ultimately freed from his voices by the love of his wife and the words of his priest; Margaret is constantly associated with both love and Catholicism, in a deadly, yet sympathetic, parody of the ends to which Pinfold must aspire. She and "her galloping declaration[s] of love" (135) are invariably a source of comfort and compliment to Pinfold, the bringer of "moments of unction which [compensate] for much of the ignorant abuse" of his other voices (136). She leads an injured seaman in the rosary (53-54), accompanies Pinfold to church, recites the Mass, and urges him to pray for Angel and Goneril (183). In an early episode, Margaret and a friend sing a bawdy music hall ditty, but "on the passionless, true voices of the girls, [the lyrics] were purged and sweetened; they floated over the sea in perfect innocence" (81). Here Margaret performs the same sort of artistic feat that Pinfold will later perform: she purifies the morally dubious by incorporating it into a new, morally superior context (in this case, that of her innocent voice). In this sense, Margaret seems the perfect antidote to Pinfold's *acedia*, appealing through love to his sense of value and demonstrating, if obliquely, the way that love can make sense of his disordered experiences. Yet Margaret yearns erotically for Pinfold, attempts to seduce him into the

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<sup>58</sup> At the end of the novel, Angel proposes that his entire team of voices will leave Pinfold alone if only he refuses to tell anyone that they have been afflicting him. As Pinfold later realizes, "Supposing I had [accepted the offer]...[a]ll my life I should have lived in the fear that at any moment the whole thing might start up again. Or for all I knew they might just have been listening all the time and not saying anything. It would have been an awful situation" (191). The threat of living the remainder of his life in a world of fantasy is thus a real one.

mortal sin of adultery, and is jealous of his wife: “she is not good enough for you,” she tells him (187). Her seduction scene also comes immediately after Pinfold, “for the first time for three days...., said his prayers” (136), as though she is trying to distract him from the divine love with her own. The next time Pinfold mentions prayers it is to report that he has stopped saying them again (162). Ultimately, Margaret’s appeal is the consolation of love and religion without the strain of reality, whether real human love or real religious practice; more covertly than Angel or Goneril, she works to strip all value from Pinfold’s world and imprison him within his own mind. As the best-disguised incarnation of Pinfold’s sloth, she is only Catholic “in a way” (183); she is only “a sort of Cordelia” (69). Like the melodramas Pinfold hears, she points him toward the loves that ought to sustain him in reality, but in a way that encourages him to seek them only in fantasy.

It is only when Pinfold’s voices finally cease, after the intervention of his wife and his priest, that he becomes able to see bad art for what it is: both meretricious and dirigent. The word “exciting” has new resonance by the end of the novel: “Was it boring?” his neighbors ask of his trip. “No,” he replies, “not the least boring. It was most exciting....It was the most exciting thing, really, that ever happened to me” (190). He now sees the larger context—the struggle to recognize and escape *acedia*—in which the spiritually and aesthetically dubious episodes of his voyage receive their proper value. To Pinfold, and to Waugh, this is a true order, a true drama, generating true excitement. Faced with the memories of his shipboard annoyances, Pinfold’s mind no longer “[trucks] furiously forward to confront the offending object close-up with glaring lens” (10). Rather, Pinfold rejoices in his experiences, both by relating “every detail of his long ordeal” (190) and by writing a novel about them. He does not so much reject the bad art

of his voyage as he demonstrates an appreciation for the way those episodes, if duplicitously, pointed him toward love by pointing him toward value. By using the melodramatic word “ordeal” in the title of his novel, Pinfold has converted the ersatz hype of his hallucinations into an aesthetic excitement, an excitement that is really a form of rejoicing in the love of God and the love of neighbor. His novel has organized his experience into its proper teleological order. Bad art has become good art.

But how much does Pinfold really demonstrate the love of God and of neighbor at the close of the novel? He is unable to pray for Angel and Goneril (183) and he declines their offer of silence out of vindictiveness (“You have been extremely offensive to me and I intend to make you suffer for it” [186]) and “sheer bad temper” (191). Angel and Goneril are, of course, not real persons, but Pinfold believes they are, and as a result his bitterness toward them demonstrates a real spiritual failing. In his manuscript of the novel, Waugh originally attributed Pinfold’s rejection of Angel’s offer to courage (Davis, *Writer* 293); that the published novel speaks instead of “sheer bad temper” can only emphasize that “Pinfold regained” is no pillar of virtue (Waugh, *Ordeal* 177). Additionally, the novel ends so shortly after his recovery that we have almost no chance to see if Pinfold has changed personally instead of just artistically. His reflection “that he had endured a great ordeal, and unaided, had emerged the victor” (193) seems disingenuous in light of the fact that he was, in fact, greatly aided by both his wife and his priest; this self-focus does not reflect kindly on New Pinfold’s morality. DeCoste is right to point out that Pinfold’s recovery is made possible by a “return to faithful communion” (123), but Pinfold had been a faithful Catholic even in the depths of *acedia*, and we are not given enough information to know if his ordeal has finally led him “to regard worship

as a corporate rather than a private act” (Waugh, *Ordeal* 9). He has conversations with his neighbors on the train ride home, but there is nothing to suggest he relishes a more than usually exuberant sense of community (190). In his last appearance in the novel, he is hiding from a neighbor to work on his novel (193-94).

It is this ambivalence that makes Pinfold’s spiritual conflict difficult to track. It is clear that he has won some sort of victory over sloth by the end of the novel, but in many ways he seems just as crotchety as before—with the addition of increased pride, the companion vice to the renewed self-love he experiences as a result of his ordeal. It’s important to recognize, then, that Pinfold’s artistic victory does not come with unlimited moral benefits. Waugh is explicit in a 1961 article:

Humility is not a virtue propitious to the artist. It is often pride, emulation, avarice, malice—all the odious qualities—which drive a man to complete, elaborate, refine, destroy, renew, his work until he has made something that gratifies his pride and envy and greed. And in doing so he enriches the world more than the generous and good, though he may lose his own soul in the process.

That is the paradox of artistic achievement. (*EAR* 560)

Pinfold has not descended to the spiritual nadir Waugh evokes here, but the ambivalence of his spiritual position at the end of the novel reinforces the moral ambiguity Waugh understood to accompany even good art. “The Christian writer knows that five minutes after his death it will not matter to him in the least whether his books are a success or not,” Waugh made clear in 1958. “So he is naturally lazy” (“Art of Literature”). From the perspective of eternity, Waugh believed, there is a sense in which the time spent on artistic excellence is a waste: a novel is, after all, only a novel, not a human soul. Writing

is no different “at all from gardening or needlework or any other activity,” Waugh wrote to Lord David Cecil in 1949: “a harmless way for fellow[?] men to occupy their leisure and earn their livings” (*Letters* 305; brackets original). To Waugh, investing the massive amount of time and effort necessary to perfect something that is essentially trivial—“harmless”—borders on venial sin, perhaps even mortal sin.<sup>59</sup> As a result, good art, for all its ordered glory, is—like sex—teleologically inessential. It is by no means a mystic gateway to the transcendent; it is an imperfect and relatively unimportant means to (perhaps fitfully, perhaps effectively) serve a greater end.

When Waugh speaks of Pinfold’s “dangerous trade,” then, he is perhaps not speaking wholly ironically (*Ordeal* 18). The literary artist stands precariously balanced between the melodramatic sloth of bad art and the avaricious pride of good art. But for some, Waugh argues, this is the craft they have been given to practice, warts and all, for the glory of God. Pinfold is one of these artists. His temptations are those of an artist, and his victories are those of an artist. As a result, his artistic awakening is truly a spiritual victory (if a limited one). He regains the ability to write because he regains the ability to love: to rejoice in the work of God in and around him. The story of his ordeal thus reveals that art has no less importance for being limited. Just as the Magi arrived “twelve days late, after St Joseph and the angels and the shepherds and even the ox and the ass”; just as the Magi brought gifts that were “travel-worn and not nearly as splendid as they looked when they were being packed up at Babylon”; just as the Magi “made the most disastrous

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<sup>59</sup> Waugh reiterates his view of art as trivial in a 1949 essay: “The Church and the world need monks and nuns more than they need writers. These merely decorate” (*EAR* 387). Yet in his 1939 *Robbery Under Law*, Waugh defends the adornment of Mexican churches by arguing, “For the impulse to adorn is a part of love, and those who see in the glories of Mexican decoration only the self-advertisement of a clerical caste and the oppression of a people, do not know love” (238). Ideally, then, good art is motivated by love rather than by pride, but without ever losing its fundamental character as decorative: that is, secondary.

mistakes,” even “provok[ing] the Massacre of the Innocents”—even so the artist’s path is circuitous, dubious, and uncertain. Yet even the Magi “get to Bethlehem in the end and their gifts are accepted, prophetic gifts that find a way into the language of the Church in a number of places”; even the artist is permitted to use his gifts in the service of God. “It is a very complete allegory,” Waugh reflected in his diary (606). Art is one path among many to Bethlehem, a dangerous path, but not an evil one. It is, as Pinfold comes to demonstrate, simply another created thing pointing with all the rest of creation toward the love of God, in both senses: the love of God for man and the love of man for God. Aesthetic order that inspires the latter by taking the former as its end is, in its small way, good.

*Partly Fundamentally Jumbled: A Fairly Honourable Defeat*

“Art transcends selfish and obsessive limitations of personality and can enlarge the sensibility of its consumer. It is a kind of goodness by proxy,” writes Iris Murdoch in *The Sovereignty of Good*. Good art “is the most educational of all human activities” (85). It “invigorates our best faculties and, to use Platonic language, inspires love in the highest part of the soul” (83). When writing these words in 1967, Murdoch clearly held an enthusiastic view of the moral power of art.<sup>60</sup> By contrast, Murdoch ends her *Fire and the Sun* (1977) on a more ambivalent note: “art, like writing and like Eros, goes on existing for better and for worse” (89). Between these two non-fiction works was published *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970), a novel whose attitude toward art favors that of *The Fire and the Sun*. Yet Murdoch never abandoned her robust view of art’s moral significance, and in fact, *Fairly Honourable* demonstrates how both Murdoch’s

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<sup>60</sup> *The Sovereignty of Good* was first published in 1970, but the essay from which these quotations are taken, “The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts,” was first delivered as a lecture in 1967.

enthusiasm for and ambivalence toward art are compatible with each other. Whereas bad art is selfish, making false order from fantasy, good art inculcates love by apprehending real order in particular reality—but the aesthetic order even of good art contains an inherent selfishness that makes it morally suspect.

The villain of *Fairly Honourable* is Julius King, cynic and artist. Indeed, the book's most prominent example of art—notably, of bad art—is not a discrete art object at all, but rather the drama that Julius orchestrates among the other characters: the “play-within-a-play” contained inside the novel's dramatic structure (Swinden 250).<sup>61</sup> Following a bet that “I could divide anybody from anybody” (Murdoch, *FHD* 225), Julius sets out to manipulate the entire cast of characters into behaving as he wants them to. His neighbors become actors in a life-size play of his own direction. Thus by a series of well-placed letters he convinces Rupert Foster and Morgan Browne that each is in love with the other; by a series of well-placed innuendoes he convinces Axel Nilsson that Simon Foster is cheating on him and Simon that Axel will never forgive him. With more innuendoes he erodes Hilda Foster's trust in her husband Rupert and Peter Foster's trust in his aunt Morgan. As Julius' puppets one by one demonstrate “the frailty of human attachments” (395) they also demonstrate, in his opinion, the unreality of goodness: “But human life *is* tawdry, my dear Rupert....There is no glittering summit” (373-74). Significantly, the script of this drama is generated more by Julius' actors than by himself:

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<sup>61</sup> Similarly, Valerie Burling notes of the novel as a whole that “le lecteur se trouve devant une grande mise en scène, une grande pièce de théâtre (déguisée en roman!) à l'intérieur de laquelle se joue une petite pièce, la pièce montée par Julius : une structure de mise en abîme, *a play within a play*, ce qui nous ramène à *A Midsummer Night's Dream*” (43). (“The reader finds himself before a large production, a grand play (disguised as a novel!) inside which is performed a smaller play, directed by Julius: a *mise en abyme*, a play within a play, which reminds us of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*”; my translation.)

Julius plants an idea or two, but his subjects deceive themselves.<sup>62</sup> He provides his characters with the material they need to assemble a persuasive narrative out of their own desires and neuroses: “There’s hardly any deception, if you choose it carefully enough, with which people will not co-operate. Egoism moves them, fear moves them, and off they go” (396). Julius causes all his actors to become like Pinfold, amateur private eyes searching madly for the ur-theory that will finally explain it all. As a result, Julius’ art both manipulates his neighbors according to his private philosophical convictions and facilitates his characters’ individual desires to pay more attention to themselves than to the world around them. If, as Murdoch has said elsewhere, “[m]orality has to do with not imposing form, except appropriately and cautiously and carefully and with attention to appropriate detail” (Bellamy 135), then this is a profoundly immoral art: an art immoral because it embodies false order, an order false because it merely embodies what scriptwriter and actor want for themselves.

Rupert, for example, believes he has ordered his life by the lodestar of goodness, and he is the book’s most eloquent expositor of transcendent moral order. Twice—once with Peter, once with Julius—he appeals to art as evidence that goodness really exists. We know that Shakespeare is better than Swinburne and Tintoretto than Puvis de Chavannes; ergo, there must be some really existing scale of values against which we are measuring them (Murdoch, *FHD* 122, 213). Yet when Peter angrily retorts, “When did you ever really compare Shakespeare with Swinburne? When did you last read a play by

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<sup>62</sup> In fact it was Morgan, says Julius, who began by “cast[ing] me in some sort of role as a liberating force” to whom she turned for approval (395); he reciprocated by “mystify[ing] people and mak[ing] them act parts” (387). (Morgan had earlier declared her love for Peter by saying, “Well, for me, you’re perfect too, you just fit you see, you fit the rôle, you’re exactly what I need” [183].) This vocabulary of “parts” and “roles” emphasizes that the people in question are not truly *seeing* the people around them; they see only the part they want them to play. Murdoch has said elsewhere that “[p]eople are often looking for a god or ready to cast somebody in the role of a demon” (Rose 14). Our egoistic fantasies eagerly await the ones who can help us realize them.

Shakespeare, if it comes to that?" Rupert is forced to acknowledge that it has been some time. Nonetheless, he argues, "it's been absorbed" (122-23). In fact, his entire life is based on an ethic of absorption which he chooses to describe as "exercises in loving attention: loving people, loving art, loving work, loving paving stones and leaves on trees" (350). As Peter's interrogation reveals, however, Rupert's focus is not in fact on his surroundings and neighbors themselves but rather on their absorption into "his happiness" (350) and his "scale of values" (122). He attends to things only long enough to incorporate them into his capacious philosophy: ultimately, then, he attends only to his own philosophy, which is to say, only to himself.<sup>63</sup> Thus when he thinks Morgan is in love with him, he purposes "to enclose this thing, . . . to contain it" (244), and though he characterizes this containment in terms of concern for Morgan's welfare, he is so concerned with being "*deliciously* high-minded" (in Julius' phrase) that he fails to ask her the necessary, obvious questions that would expose the illusion for what it is (256).<sup>64</sup>

When Hilda finally discovers his involvement with Morgan, he responds not with concern for his wife but for his own rectitude and their (read: his own) happiness: "Hilda,

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<sup>63</sup> Compare this ethic of absorption with the attitude of Tallis Browne, Morgan's husband: "He felt a bond at such moments not with anything personal but with the world, possibly the universe, which became a sort of extension of his being. Occasionally the extension was gentle and warm, like the feeling of a river reaching the sea. More often it was uncomfortable or even horrible as if he had immense dusty itching limbs which he could not scratch" (199-200). Rather than absorb the world into himself, Tallis extends himself into the world in a relationship of loving submission, even to the detriment of his own happiness and pleasure.

<sup>64</sup> Hensher critiques the novel's plot as "fantastically implausible," writing that "the engineered liaison between Rupert and Morgan would have collapsed if either of them had said at any point 'When you said in your letter . . . ' and it is impossible to believe their manipulator would have discounted the danger" (x). However, I would argue that the implausibility of the episode is intentional, as it reveals that neither Rupert nor Morgan are preeminently concerned with each other—a fact Julius is eminently aware of and that his deception is designed to illustrate. As Julius says, "[t]hey will never talk straight to each other, they haven't that kind of honesty. . . . Vanity not love conducts their feet" (Murdoch, *FHD* 257). By criticizing the episode's implausibility, then, Hensher in fact misses its entire point. Unfortunately, this is not the only instance of misreading in his treatment of the novel. Most egregiously, he faults Murdoch for "grotesque inconsistencies" like the fact that "Tallis's neighbours . . . abruptly become Sikhs after several references to them being 'Muslims', 'Pakistanis' and speaking 'Urdu'" (x). He has apparently not noticed that a new Sikh tenant moves into Tallis' house halfway through the novel (Murdoch, *FHD* 269).

we will be happy again, we will— You’ll understand how it was— I’ll explain....Nothing’s—hurt really—” (370-71). When Rupert’s world is shaken, he ignores the really existing people around him, taking comfort instead in thoughts of his world’s restoration. Julius’ art inflames rather than counteracts this tendency, driving Rupert ever deeper into his own self rather than outward into the world.

As a result, Julius’ art both imposes on Rupert the false order of Julius’ own imagination and encourages Rupert in the creation of his own false order. These sorts of pseudo-teleologies are the hallmark of bad art: manufactured networks of value, melodramas, not unlike those of Pinfold’s voices. Good art, by contrast, demonstrates “a pure delight in the independent existence of what is excellent” by virtue of “a perfection of form which invites unpossessive contemplation and resists absorption into the selfish dream life of the consciousness” (*SG* 83). The form of good art moves its audience to resist selfish imposition and to instead attend to the person or object represented. It does so not by imposing a foreign order on its subject (as much as possible) but rather by allowing the alterity of its subject to shine through with maximum clarity. As a result, whereas Waugh pictures the good artist as a sculptor who actively creates order from his raw material, Murdoch thinks more in terms of a photographer who arranges a scene of really existing independent objects. “The (good) human artist...is trying to portray the partially failed world as it is, and in doing so to produce something pleasing and beautiful,” she writes (*FS* 80). In portraying the world “as it is,” the artist does justice to that which is really other, even the difficult and terrifying and morbid. In making such a portrayal “pleasing and beautiful,” the artist does justice to the ultimate moral order, however remote this may seem to be from particular experience. The form of a great

work of art will express both truths at the same time, but Murdoch always emphasizes the former over the latter, refusing to quantify what the moral order is or might mean, and insisting that any minimization of contingency, tragedy, and horror automatically scuttles any attempt to see justly. Only when the artist—or the person, generally—accurately *sees* the world before her will she also see whatever moral order that world may possess.

We get a glimpse of this uneasy balance between beauty and disorder when Morgan attempts to convince Peter that there is goodness in the world, that not everything is “contaminated and muddled and nasty and slimed over and cracked” (*FHD* 180). Like Rupert, she demonstrates the existence of human goodness by appealing to art; unlike Rupert, she appears to actually attend to the art that moves her, as she quotes a stanza of Shakespeare’s *Tempest* from memory:

*Full fathom five thy father lies,  
Of his bones are coral made.  
Those are pearls that were his eyes,  
Nothing of him that doth fade,  
But doth suffer a sea change  
Into something rich and strange.* (180)

This extraordinarily complex allusion functions on at least four interlocking levels. Most fundamentally, the lyric beauty of Ariel’s song is itself a metaphysical pointer toward goodness.<sup>65</sup> Significantly, though, it is a beautiful song about death. This might seem an odd choice of poetic subjects with which to argue for the existence of goodness, but for Murdoch it is precisely this sort of art—art that can face death fairly and beautifully—

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<sup>65</sup> “Beauty gives us an immediate image of good desire, the desire for goodness and the desire for truth. We are attracted to the real in the guise of the beautiful and the response to this attraction brings joy” (*FS* 45).

that is closest to goodness. This is imaged even within the words of the poem, for Ariel sings not merely of death but of death transformed. The Duke's bones have become coral, his eyes pearls, his body sea-changed "into something rich and strange." The morbid image of a jeweled skeleton—all the more distressing, in the context of the play, for being the first announcement Ferdinand has had of his father's putative death—becomes somehow a thing of beauty in these verses, both lyrically and visually. In this way, the song is about what the song does, which in Murdoch's view is what all good art does: presenting even ugly reality in a way that somehow indicates its place in the moral order. Good art leads us to "understand the necessary for the sake of the intelligible, to see in a pure just light the hardness of the real properties of the world" (*FS* 80).

The best example of this point is *Fairly Honourable* itself, which is Murdoch's (good) novelization of Julius' (bad) drama. The novel's characters frequently praise Julius for being "exceptionally honest" (26), even "outrageously honest" (238), and despite his dishonest manipulation of them, there is a sense in which this is true.<sup>66</sup> "I detest the spectacle of self-deception of any kind," Julius says (136). His life-size human drama is designed to puncture the opaque bubbles of fantasy: "Better the real world, however shabby, than that condition of high-minded illusion" (374). Like Pinfold's voices, Julius' machinations are a *reductio ad absurdum* of the characters' selfishness, and as such they depend for their effectiveness on a clear and accurate portrait of the character's faults. Julius uses such a vision to manipulate and control. But Murdoch's

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<sup>66</sup> "Julius might read all your letters if you left him alone in your flat, but he'd be sure to tell you afterwards," Axel muses (26). Julius "never mixed into his behaviour that hazy little bit of falsehood which most people find necessary for the general easing of social intercourse," Rupert thinks (238). Julius himself makes clear that "I am no actor" (137). None of this, of course, is precisely true. Julius does in fact read all Hilda's letters while alone in her house, but only tells her when prompted by Tallis. As soon as it becomes necessary to his plan, Julius lies with facility and acts the part of a lonely older suitor (to Hilda) and a reconciled, flirtatious ex (to Morgan); his entire scheme rests on the creation of a false narrative surrounding his characters.

retelling of Julius' actions allows us, the audience of his play, to see the dance of his actors' fantasies and profit by the lessons they are too preoccupied to read. We see the characters' internal as well as external actions: we are thus given an accurate, attentive portrayal of their refusal to attend. Fantasy is a real part of real people, and anyone who wants to love his neighbor will have to attend to this as well. As Swinden puts it, all our fantasies are real, "in the sense that [they become] something that has to be taken account of by everyone else who has to do with us" (256). Murdoch's novel, then, affords us the opportunity to attend to the reality of unreality, and thereby to come to an increased moral awareness of the people around us. And by using Julius' own drama to point her readers toward moral maturity—in addition to the example of Tallis Browne, whom I will discuss in a moment—she demonstrates the falseness of Julius' moral cynicism. The novel's final words, "Life was good" (438), a description of "Julius's Paris excursion through a series of small, real pleasures" that include opera and art exhibitions (Conradi, *Saint* 205), reverberate against Julius' assertion that goodness is unreal and irrelevant. The novel's ending is a quiet *reductio ad absurdum* of Julius' own selfishness, both mocking him for his smugness and demonstrating that his own experience is incompatible with his professed beliefs. Indeed, someone who has "a passion for cleanliness and order," as he describes himself to Tallis (Murdoch, *FHD* 417), is certainly a poor spokesman for the "sensible acceptance of the second-rate" he counsels Rupert to adopt (373). In Murdoch's handling of it, then, even Julius' manipulation becomes "something rich and strange" for the benefit of the reader, an attentive depiction of evil that ultimately reveals the goodness beaming around and through it.

The final, and most subversive, valence of Morgan's quotation of Ariel's song is that the song is a lie. In *The Tempest*, the Duke is not really dead, and Ariel knows it. Or, as Murdoch puts it, even the greatest art "has essential elements of trickery and magic" (*FS* 78); even good art, Murdoch implies, is at heart morally problematic—it points to goodness even as it deceives. The lie of art haunts even the happiest and best example of art in the novel: "the tall slim long-nosed Greek *kouros* from the National Museum at Athens, the tutelary deity" of Axel and Simon's relationship (*FHD* 78). When he first sees the statue, Simon "fall[s] in love" (190), and by the way he reacts we know this is no mere private fantasy. When not with the statue, "[h]e walked round the Museum, looking with ostentatious seriousness and blind eyes at the other things" (190). When with the statue, he practices physical, erotic adoration:

He lightly stroked the feet, probing between the long separated toes, he reverently touched the penis. He looked up into the serene divine countenance, huge-eyed, long-nosed, so enigmatically smiling....He kissed the buttocks, the thighs, the hands, the penis, first hastily and then with slow adoration. (191)

The description of Simon's response to the *kouros* is strikingly similar to the description of Bradley Pearson's response to Julian Baffin: Pearson is initially unable to attend to anyone but Julian, and he "worship[s]" her (*Black Prince* 310) by physically and imaginatively caressing each part of her body (203). As discussed in the last chapter, in doing this Pearson is partially deluded, but nonetheless demonstrates a real love by virtue of his attention to Julian's particularity. Similarly, Simon's response to the *kouros* demonstrates a real and reverent submission to the alterity of his beloved. For him, art functions as it should: it trains him in attention and thereby drives him toward love—and

this literalizes itself when Simon's attention to the *kouros* becomes the catalyst of his attention to Axel. Their relationship takes on the characteristics of Simon's artistic attention: of all the pairings in the novel, theirs is the one most closely tied to reality. Their union is "not merely (finally) the stablest in the book, but the only one left standing at the end" (Conradi, *Saint* 391n21). Scholars generally ascribe the strength of their relationship to its truthful intimacy: they have "the only love in the novel based on knowledge and truth" (Rowe 3n5); they survive because they "are able to confide in each other ultimately" (Todd 80); Julius does not destroy them because "they know each other too well" (Byatt 89). In other words, they attend to each other.<sup>67</sup> Simon's habit of attending to good art has pointed him straight to the genuine love of another.

Simon and Axel, however, never get past the stage of Pearson's deluded infatuation with Julian—that is, they possess real love for each other, but the mutual reciprocation of their love produces a compelling fantasy, a false order of happiness, that ultimately sidetracks them from virtue. Axel acknowledges this explicitly, making clear that "[a]most all human love is bloody selfish.... To take refuge in love is an instinct and not a disreputable one" (Murdoch, *FHD* 426). Using love as a refuge—that is, twisting it into fantasy in order to avoid facing reality—may not be disreputable, but it can still be wrong. Thus, Axel and Simon, delighting in their love for each other, fail to tell Hilda that Rupert's supposed adultery is fabricated, a disclosure that could have averted Rupert's death: "Let it drift. It isn't anything to do with us really, is it?" (388). In their last scene together, Simon still chooses to prioritize the consolation of Axel's love over honestly facing the fact of Rupert's death; as he does so, his grief becomes "a little

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<sup>67</sup> Simon and Axel's relationship is, of course, also characterized by lies (mostly on Simon's part) and miscommunication. Ultimately, though, they resist Julius' machinations because truth-telling proves more fundamental to their relationship than deception.

vaguer, a little less dense” (428). His vision blurs.<sup>68</sup> And as the original attentiveness of Simon’s love was instigated by art, so too this dubious consolation is reinforced by art. Simon and Axel close the novel by sightseeing at a Romanesque church, above the doorway of which “a very battered Christ wearily opened long arms and huge hands, receiving, judging” (427). Julius has already made clear that “a sense of being justly judged” is “what consoles most of all, most of all, most of all” (216-17); that we last see Simon and Axel fleeing to the arms of such a judge reflects their inward flight from a true appreciation of reality. The hands of Christ are later contrasted with “[t]he serrated green leaves” extending “their motionless pattern of angelic hands”—not judging, not even commenting, but simply offering ambiguous witness (428). The Christ of art, though his consolation may be life-giving, nevertheless cannot, like the leaves of nature, attain a truly virtuous vision of reality in all its non-consoling jumble. Nature simply is, but art is shaped by an artist for a purpose, and that purpose—because formulated by a being of imperfection, fears, and fantasies—is almost always false, somewhere. And thus for all its benefits in Simon and Axel’s life, art seems unable to inculcate the most genuine expression of love. The essential duplicity of its speech finally undercuts the nature of loving attention.

Existing quietly alongside Julius’ drama is Tallis Browne, Morgan’s estranged husband, the one character Julius is unable to manipulate. Murdoch has called Tallis the “only...real saint” in her books (Bigsby 220) and “a Christ figure” to Julius’ Satan—not in the false consoling sense of Axel and Simon’s Christ but in the sense of true goodness (Bellamy 135). He is anything but artistic: indeed, Murdoch herself has identified him as

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<sup>68</sup> Tallis, on the other hand, “tried just to remember Rupert and keep the memory clear and feel the pain of it mindlessly” (434).

exemplifying the conflict between the artist (Julius) and the saint (Bellamy 134-35). Where the artist speaks, Tallis is silent. Both Rupert and Julius propose eloquent answers to the question, “Why is stealing wrong?” but Tallis, though he cannot articulate the answer, nonetheless knows it better than either of the other two (Murdoch, *FHD* 106-07, 173-74, 328). Rupert has been writing a philosophical *magnum opus*; Tallis began a book on Marx and de Tocqueville but abandoned it (14). The excerpts from his lectures Murdoch allows us to see are always unfinished: “*In my last lecture I*” (60); “*During these years Lloyd George played an ambiguous role, he*” (97); “*Previous to that date...*” (436, ellipse original). Similarly, where the artist is concerned with order, Tallis seems abandoned to chaos. His lecture notebooks “lying about on the table together with stained newspapers, jam-smearred plates, brown-rimmed tea cups and a milk bottle half full of solidified sour milk” (60) are far from the “neat order” of Rupert’s book, piled precisely in “fat yellow notebooks” (217, 212). Not only is Tallis’ house filthy (the above description of his table is, comparatively, rather tame) but he himself lives in a perpetual muddle, as Hilda puts it.<sup>69</sup> “You take on too many things and you don’t do any of them properly,” Morgan accuses him, and he agrees (201). Julius admits to being pained by Tallis’ life: “[a]fter all, I am an artist. This is just a mess” (422).<sup>70</sup>

To Suguna Ramanathan, “Tallis’s mess is indicative of his letting people go free; Tallis’s mess is a *moral state*; it has to do with proper loving” (*Figures* 38). At one point Julius cleans Tallis’ flat but by the end of the novel “the old squalor” has returned;

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<sup>69</sup> “Hilda thought, wherever Tallis is there’s always a muddle! Then she thought, this is unjust. Wherever there is a muddle, there Tallis is” (169).

<sup>70</sup> In an address, Murdoch tied together the characteristics of silence and muddle: “Tallis has got no particular mode of speech, he hasn’t got any voice really, he hasn’t got any kind of ringing voice which one hears in the book, it’s all a kind of jumble and muddle and this is important too” (“Closing Debate” 76).

Richard Todd argues that “the reader is invited to see this as a way of getting the feeling across that Tallis does not submit to the easy patterns that the artist would like to impose on him” (88-89). Peter Conradi, by contrast, emphasizes that “[b]oth Julius and Tallis seek order..., but of different kinds, at different speeds, and for wholly different ends” (*Saint* 221). All three positions are correct, for Tallis, although no artist, nonetheless sees with the ideal artist’s eyes. At end of the novel, Tallis reflects on Rupert’s death:

The accident was deeply the product of its circumstances. Tallis did not try to unravel these nor did he speculate about the guilt of any person, not even about his own. He grieved blankly over something which seemed, in its disastrous compound of human failure, muddle and sheer chance, so like what it was all like. It went wrong from the start, he said to himself. But these were not his words and this was not his thought, and he put it away from him as a temptation. Then he tried just to remember Rupert and keep the memory clear and feel the pain of it mindlessly. (Murdoch, *FHD* 434)

Tallis attends to the real tragedy of Rupert’s death as a simple blank fact. He does not absorb the tragedy into a drama of guilt, nor does he draw the obvious moral “it went wrong from the start,” which is his father’s motto and a sign of the false order of cynicism. Rupert’s death is just a real, painful thing. And yet Tallis’ wordless surrender to the quiddity of the event is not without an appreciation of form. The tragedy seemed “so like what it was all like.” Or, as Swinden puts it, Rupert died “because he was what he was” (256); that is, the order of events leading to his death “is not so much imposed from above...as created out of the combination of real actions with real results that such a

person has himself performed” (246).<sup>71</sup> Tallis does not impose order on reality but is able, instead, to see a real abstraction (it was “so like what it was all like”) actually present in the jumbled reality he experiences. He attends to the world so carefully that the world begins to reveal its own form, formless and tautological though that form may be. As a result, Tallis sees the world as the great artist ought: unadulterated jumble caught in its own ineffable form.<sup>72</sup>

By virtue of having had this vision, however, Tallis is unable to express his insight as art. “A work of art,” Murdoch says, “has got to have a form, it has got to have notation, it has got to have something which is fixed and authoritative, it must have authority over its victim, or client or whatever you can call the person who is meeting it” (Biggsby 214). Tallis’ goodness makes him unable to impose authority: he sees and submits but does not command.<sup>73</sup> That would require someone with a little more will, a little less abjection—and, consequently, a little foggier vision: someone like Rupert. His book of philosophy is rightly pilloried as “facile optimistic High Church Platonism” (Murdoch, *FHD* 221)—that is, as a deceptive and consoling false order—but not necessarily because Rupert’s philosophy is incorrect. As Swinden notes, the crux of this philosophy is ultimately validated in the book (251-52) and, I would add, in Murdoch’s

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<sup>71</sup> In context, this last quotation comes from a discussion of Jake Donaghue in *Under the Net*, but Swinden applies the same concepts to his discussion of *Fairly Honourable*.

<sup>72</sup> It is something like this, I believe, that Simone Weil means when she writes, “La seule beauté réelle, la seule beauté qui soit présence réelle de Dieu, c’est la beauté de l’univers. Rien de ce qui est plus petit que l’univers n’est beau” (170). (“The only real beauty, the only beauty which is the real presence of God, is the beauty of the universe. Nothing smaller than the universe is beautiful”; my translation.) Indeed, Weil argues that “[l]’univers est beau comme serait belle une œuvre d’art parfaite s’il pouvait y en avoir une qui méritât ce nom” (170). (“The universe is beautiful as a perfect work of art would be beautiful, if one could exist worthy of the name.”) In Murdoch’s view, it is precisely because the universe—with its perfect combination of unimpeded particularity and universal form—is the perfect work of art that man-made art both reveals the nature of the universe and, by abridging its particularity, distorts it. I discuss the relationship between Weil and Murdoch in more detail in my third chapter.

<sup>73</sup> When Rupert counsels him to use “[t]he authority of a husband” with Morgan, Tallis asks “in a reasoning and unemotional voice, ‘But suppose she loves Julius King?’” (Murdoch, *FHD* 173). He counters the suggestion of authority with an emphasis on the freedom of his neighbors.

own philosophy as seen in her earlier novel *The Bell*. In that book, protagonist Michael Meade avoids a relationship with ex-lover Nick Fawley rather than risk romantic entanglement. For this he is obliquely rebuked by the Abbess: “Remember that all our failures are ultimately failures in love. Imperfect love must not be condemned and rejected, but made perfect. The way is always forward, never back” (219). This counsel is strikingly similar to Rupert’s rationale for his involvement with Morgan: “As I see it, it’s not a matter of going *round* love, it’s a matter of going *through* love—through to a better love—much more sober, much more realistic” (*FHD* 255). Rupert here is being pretentious and foolish; in *The Bell*, however, the Abbess is “the voice of wise counsel itself” (Conradi, *Iris* 451), and Michael’s failure to heed her advice results in Nick’s suicide—exactly the result Rupert fears for Morgan if he ignores her (Murdoch, *FHD* 244). Rupert’s book is not foolish, then, because it is *false*, but because it is *ordered*. In articulating his true belief, he has fallen in love not with the world it describes but with the description itself. By ordering the world he has been turned towards himself, the ordering subject. Tallis, on the other hand, is too subject to the external reality of the world to assert his subjectivity. Because he sees and attends, he cannot create. He is so attuned to the real order of the world that he cannot fabricate his own imitation.

If Murdochian art is so inherently duplicitous, whence arises its power for good? From careful attention to its subject and an awareness of its essential trickery, such that art is not allowed to become an end in itself, “a full-stop barrier” (*FS* 70). When art is “thought of as symbolic force rather than statement,” it points beyond itself to the reality of which it is a flawed imitation (76). For Murdoch does, indeed, believe in a sort of “Salvation by art” (qtd. in Rowe 1), in which art can “educate and enlighten” her

characters and readers alike “by stunning them into an awareness of the existence of a reality outside themselves” (Rowe 9). Art is, after all, a lie that tells the truth, and if Murdoch is often effusive about the moral power of art it is because she believes the artist’s truths often outweigh her lies. In one interview Murdoch calls herself “an authoritarian” on the point that “the work of art should have a very strong internal structure”—yet inside this strict form should be “characters who are...strolling around in our minds as independent people” (Biggsby 214). The novel is not condemned, by virtue of its closed artistic form, to depict characters “entirely determined by [the author’s] cruel and ferocious prejudices”<sup>74</sup>; rather, if the novelist is a great one, she can create characters “which are not just part of one’s mind in a narrow sense; they are as if they were separate from one’s mind, they are different, they are not projections of me, they are entities on their own and they relate to each other in a free way” (215). Ideally, the novelist’s world is one in which the novelist acts not as Waugh’s Providence but rather Plato’s Demiurge, not commanding her creation but persuading characters of independent existence. The best art, then, gives us a picture of ultimate moral order (form) wedded to the indeterminacy of alterity (autonomous characters). By doing so, the best art mirrors reality, and attention to it can thereby drive the soul toward love.

Yet free characters are an illusion: no matter how independent they appear, they are always a creation of the artist’s mind. Good art veils this fact with a sort of literary magic, but even that magic is a sleight of hand, a form of deception. Unvarnished impartiality is impossible. For Murdoch, then, no matter how accurate the artist’s presentation of order, insofar as she *crafts* that presentation she necessarily deceives. “[T]he strongest motive to art,” she writes, is probably “the desire to become the

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<sup>74</sup> In context, Murdoch is describing the characters of D.H. Lawrence.

Demiurge and reorganize chaos in accordance with one's own excellent plan" (*FS* 69). Regardless of how much authority we might exercise over our artistic creations, however, in reality we are not the Platonic Demiurge; our excellent plans are dangerous, no matter how realistic, because they convince us that we are. For Waugh, too, art is about finding order in experience. But he sees craftsmanship as a literary good because, I suggest, the craftsman's role of *imitating* God does not (in his view) necessarily imply an attempt to *usurp* God ("to become the Demiurge"). As the Catholic catechism states, "God grants his creatures not only their existence, but also the dignity of acting on their own, of being causes and principles for each other, and thus of cooperating in the accomplishment of his plan" (stanza 306). There is an order and a goodness to the Wavian universe, including an order and goodness to the self, which means that self-assertion can be subject to—indeed, can participate in—the divine order without committing blasphemy.

The danger of false order is certainly real to Waugh and his characters, as Pinfold's hallucinations demonstrate. But Waugh would not claim, with Murdoch, that all man-made order is inherently false. Waugh lives in a universe more fundamentally ordered than Murdoch's, where certain—if not all—wellsprings of created order can be rightly apprehended and expressed. The goodness of reason and of creation means that truth is not so difficult to come by as Murdoch's fiction would suggest. When Pinfold concludes his ordeal, he sits down to order it almost immediately. Bradley Pearson also has "the privilege of an ordeal" (Murdoch, *Black Prince* 381). But he does not write about it until the end of his life, and even then the concluding postscripts question the accuracy of his work. Because Waugh's outlook is not epistemologically unstable, Wavian art, though it should never be false, need not be mimetic: "some of the best

[writers] in the world” have written stories about “characters [who are] pure abstractions” (Waugh, *EAR* 302). For Murdoch, by contrast, great novelists never stray far from realism of society and of character, “a real apprehension of persons other than the author as having a right to exist and to have a separate mode of being which is important and interesting to themselves” (“Sublime and Beautiful” 271): any other self-assertion would be a direct route to selfish fantasy.<sup>75</sup>

As a result, Murdochian art is, like Murdochian sex, teleologically split. In its ideal representation of contingent reality it points toward love, and in its embodiment of a self-assertive form it points toward selfishness. However, what Conradi said about Murdochian sex cannot quite be said of Murdochian art: ideally, art is not equal parts “totally compelling and real” and “illusory” (*Saint* 257). In good art, reality can—almost—neutralize the illusion. Art holds this particularly privileged position in Murdoch’s teleology, I suggest, because artistic enjoyment can be markedly impersonal. Julius himself points to this at the end of *Fairly Honourable*, when he reflects, “Painting may not be the greatest of the arts...but perhaps it gives the purest and most intense pleasure....My pleasure in painting is, as pleasure should be, absolutely cold” (437). When we honestly enjoy a work of art—attentive enjoyment, that is, not selfish absorption—“such attention is immediately rewarded by the enjoyment of beauty” (*SG* 65), and beauty is itself a spiritual concept that points beyond itself to the Good. “Beauty gives us an immediate image of good desire, the desire for goodness and the desire for truth,” Murdoch writes. “We are attracted to the real in the guise of the beautiful and the response to this attraction brings joy” (*FS* 45). By contrast, sexual delight is rarely a pure

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<sup>75</sup> In a 1959 essay, Murdoch identifies the greatest novelists as “of course Scott, Jane Austen, George Eliot, Tolstoy, especially Tolstoy—one could add other names” (“Sublime and Beautiful” 272). Each of these authors writes in the mode of social realism.

delight in beauty, but is mixed up with intense personal and physical concerns: the stuff of fantasy. For all its dangers, then, art is to Murdoch uniquely positioned to point us to goodness. One can certainly be good without art—“art is not essential”—but it is “at least more valuable to the moralist as an auxiliary than dangerous as an enemy” (*FS* 77).

Like Waugh, Murdoch associates good art with joy: “[i]n the shock of joy in response to good art, an essential ingredient is a sense of the revelation of reality, of...the world as we were never able so clearly to see it before” (*FS* 78). For both authors, then, good art breeds love by causing us to reflect on right and good order. Waugh’s art points toward the love of God and his creation; Murdoch’s art toward the love of a reality imperfectly morally ordered. In both cases, the result is joy at the revelation of truth. It is our access to truth, and the sort of truth we have access to, that is the main difference between them. In an Augustinian world, as “God created nothing in ignorance,” so neither should “any human craftsman” (*City* XI.10). In Murdoch’s Platonic world, however, uncertainty and ambiguity are precisely the qualities the artist should cultivate: “the good artist builds indeterminism into his determinism” (Biggsby 214). For Waugh, the artist actively crafts signposts to the divine order; for Murdoch, the artist builds telescopes to see reality signposting itself.

### Chapter Three: Love and Service

Augustine is not a man given to faint criticism. No one who reads *The City of God* can miss his scathing denunciations of pagan gods (“abominable evil spirits, eager to deceive mankind” [II.13]), pagans themselves (“infected by a gross mental disorder which makes them defend the irrational workings of their minds as if they were logic and truth itself” [II.1]), and the entire secular world-system (“which holds nations in enslavement, but is itself dominated by that very lust of domination” [I.Preface]). There is much in this world, Augustine will not hesitate to proclaim, that is broken, fallen, or simply perverted. Nevertheless, “even what is perverted must of necessity be in, or derived from, or associated with—that is, in a sense, at peace with—some part of the order of things among which it has its being or of which it consists. Otherwise it would not exist at all” (XIX.12). Indeed, “there cannot exist a nature in which there is no good” (XIX.13). To Augustine, all that exists does so by virtue of the residual goodness of its creation, and attains to greater or lesser goodness as it chooses to embrace or attempts to reject God, the source of that all-sustaining goodness. What God has created may, through its own fault, now be imperfect, but it has not as a result lost all its value.

By contrast, declares Simone Weil in *Attente de Dieu*, “[n]ous savons tous qu’il n’y a pas de bien ici-bas, que tout ce qui apparaît ici-bas comme bien est fini, limité, s’épuise, et une fois épuisé laisse apparaître à nu la nécessité” (208).<sup>76</sup> Where Augustine’s God creates in abundance of goodness, Weil’s God creates in separation: “[l]a Création est de la part de Dieu un acte non pas d’expansion de soi, mais de retrait,

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<sup>76</sup> “We all know that there is nothing good down here, that everything that here seems good is finite and limited; it exhausts itself and, once exhausted, reveals naked necessity.” This and all further translations from Weil are mine.

de renoncement. Dieu et toutes les créatures, cela est moins que Dieu seul” (137-38).<sup>77</sup> As a result, every human soul is largely mediocre (169) or, worse, evil, and we project this evil on the things around us (186): “Dieu [est] la seule chose qui mérite d’être aimée” (209).<sup>78</sup> The only true beauty is the beauty of the universe as a whole, since this is the infinitely complex divine oeuvre; its individual parts do not have beauty in themselves (170). Maturity demands the recognition that “il n’y a pas...de [différence] entre les choses, entre les événements,” at least not fundamentally, for “les choses et les événements, partout, toujours, sont la vibration de la même parole divine infiniment douce” (122-23).<sup>79</sup> To Weil, recognizing the goodness of God means denying the goodness of creation, except insofar as creation is neither individual nor particular but absorbed into a sort of divine mask.

With such different understandings of the goodness of creation, Augustine and Weil also disagree strongly over what it means for one to do good in the created world, and in particular what it means to do good to those especially pesky parts of creation: other people. What good ought we to seek as we relate to our neighbors? Iris Murdoch (who follows Weil) and Evelyn Waugh (who follows Augustine) consider this question in their respective novels *Bruno’s Dream* and *Sword of Honour*.<sup>80</sup> Both novels explore the paradox that selfishness often veils itself with solicitude: how is it that some acts of

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<sup>77</sup> “Creation is not an act by which God expands himself but rather one by which he retreats, renounces himself. God with all his creatures is less than God alone.”

<sup>78</sup> “God is the only thing that deserves to be loved.”

<sup>79</sup> “There are no...differences between things, between events”; “things and events, everywhere, always, are the vibration of the same infinitely sweet divine word.”

<sup>80</sup> *Sword of Honour* is in fact a 1965 recension of a trilogy Waugh had originally published in three separate volumes: *Men at Arms*, *Officers and Gentlemen*, and *Unconditional Surrender* (or, in the U.S., *The End of the Battle*). Despite Heath’s claim that “the trilogy loses far more than it gains through [Waugh’s] omissions” in the redaction (*Picturesque* 216), Davis points out that “[m]ost of these revisions affect plot and theme very little” (*Writer* 327) and that the revision’s streamlined organization “clarifie[s] the structure of the...volume” (331). In this thesis, I have chosen to cite from the recension.

ostensible selflessness and kindness are nothing more than disguised egotism, and what distinguishes these acts of benevolence (as I shall call them) from acts of true service? Their answers return to teleology, and in particular to the teleology of the self. To Murdoch, as for Weil, the self is suspect at best, so service seeks the independence of the other and is only possible when the will is absent; for Waugh, as for Augustine, the self is by nature good, so service seeks the good of the other and is fundamentally an active, particular vocation.

“Eating Their Mother’s Dead Body”: *Bruno’s Dream*

Murdoch was “[e]arly and deeply influenced by Simone Weil” (Gordon 120). In 1968 she recalled in her journal the intellectual “path which started many years ago when I first read Simone Weil and saw a far off light in the forest...” (qtd. in Conradi, *Iris* 501), and in 1983, when asked about her “evidently deep response to Simone Weil,” Murdoch responded, “Yes, I love her” (Haffenden 135). Murdoch’s emphasis on attention is distinctly Weilian; so is her suspicion of the human will. “What I have called fantasy, the proliferation of blinding self-centred aims and images, is itself a powerful system of energy,” writes Murdoch, “and most of what is often called ‘will’ or ‘willing’ belongs to this system” (*SG* 65). Weil speaks more strongly: attention is directly opposed to volition. She describes the attentive attitude in *Attente de Dieu*: “surtout la pensée doit être vide, en attente, ne rien chercher, mais être prête à recevoir dans sa vérité nue l’objet qui va y pénétrer” (102).<sup>81</sup> The definition of attention is precisely the suspension of one’s own will and thoughts in order to let another person manifest himself in his full alterity. Because of “l’absence de finalité, d’intention, de discrimination” in the world, the only

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<sup>81</sup> “Above all one’s thoughts should be empty, waiting, not searching for anything but ready to receive in its naked truth the object that will penetrate the mind.”

way we can be truly attentive to it is “l’absence d’intention en nous, ... la renonciation à la volonté propre” (173).<sup>82</sup> As a result, “[l]a volonté n’opère dans l’âme aucun bien” (190).<sup>83</sup> Unless carefully controlled, willpower can become one of the strongest chains barring us from true goodness.<sup>84</sup> Thus, to Weil, virtue always appears passive: “Dans le retournement qui constitue la condition humaine, la vertu authentique dans tous les domaines est chose négative, au moins en apparence” (193).<sup>85</sup> In Murdoch’s fiction, too, the most virtuous characters are generally the most passive (Gordon 118-19).

As a result, Weil defines the love of one’s neighbor in terms not of active service but rather of active acknowledgement. It is far too easy for benevolence to be a sign of selfishness rather than of love: “Il n’est pas étonnant qu’un homme qui a du pain en donne un morceau à un affamé. Ce qui est étonnant, c’est qu’il soit capable de le faire par un geste différent de celui par lequel on achète un objet” (140).<sup>86</sup> The only way for charity to be other than a commercial transaction is if, by stepping out of one’s own self, one temporarily steps out of the realm of action altogether:

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<sup>82</sup> “The absence of finality, intention, discrimination”; “the absence of intention in us, ... the renunciation of the will, properly speaking.”

<sup>83</sup> “The will works no good in the soul.” The will can, of course, be occasionally useful, but its usefulness is “lointaine, inférieure, très subordonnée, purement négative,” necessary only “pour l’accomplissement des obligations strictes” (190). (“Distant, inferior, very subordinate, purely negative”; “for the accomplishment of strict obligations.”) Indeed, “[l]e bon exercice de la volonté est une condition du salut nécessaire sans doute” (190). (“The good exercise of the will is without doubt a necessary condition of salvation.”) Weil’s emphasis is not that volition is good, but rather that the poor use of the will would be a clear roadblock to salvation. Murdoch, too, emphasizes that “good ‘efforts of will’ are [not] always useless or always fakes”; they “can play some part, *especially as an inhibiting factor*” (SG 65, my emphasis).

<sup>84</sup> Weil writes, “L’effort de volonté vers le bien est un des mensonges sécrétés par la partie médiocre de nous-mêmes dans sa peur d’être détruite” (190). (“That the will can work toward goodness is one of the lies fostered by the mediocre part of ourselves in its fear of being destroyed.”)

<sup>85</sup> “Amid the vicissitudes that make up the human condition, authentic virtue in every area is something negative, at least in appearance.”

<sup>86</sup> “It is not surprising that a man with bread should give a piece to someone starving. What is surprising is that he should be able to do so with a different gesture than that with which he buys an object.”

La plénitude de l'amour du prochain...[c]'est savoir que le malheureux existe, non pas comme unité dans une collection, non pas comme un exemplaire de la catégorie sociale étiquetée 'malheureux', mais en tant qu'homme, exactement semblable à nous, qui a été un jour frappé et marqué d'une marque inimitable par le malheur. (105-06)<sup>87</sup>

The greatest service one can render to one's neighbor is to see him in his full alterity, as a human being, not as an abstraction. What about food banks, clothing drives, care packages? Weil does not dispute the importance of taking action—but, she says, acts of service “ne sont que l'effet automatique de ce moment d'attention” (139).<sup>88</sup> Clear vision automatically results in action, or, in Murdoch's words, “true vision occasions right conduct” (*SG* 64). When one is completely concentrated on another, the various self-centered motivations for action are, by definition, absent—and as a result, the actions that immediately present themselves can be considered true service. This is not so much an active willing of the neighbor's good as it is an impulsion toward the neighbor's good by the vividness of the vision, an instance of what Weil would call “obedience.” Similarly, Murdoch notes that “[w]e act rightly ‘when the time comes’ not out of strength of will but out of the quality of our usual attachments and with the kind of energy and discernment which we have available.” Careful attention creates a “just mode of vision and...good quality of consciousness” that is “the background condition” of “good habit and dutiful action” (*SG* 89): one's actions bloom inevitably in the mental landscape that attention inculcates. For both Weil and Murdoch, then, only when one completely attends

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<sup>87</sup> “The fullness of the love of neighbor...is to know that the miserable person exists, not as a unit in a collection, not as an example of the social category labeled ‘miserable,’ but as a man, exactly like us, who was struck one day and marked with the inimitable mark of misery.”

<sup>88</sup> “Are only the automatic effect of this moment of attention.”

to another, only when one's will is completely suspended in favor of the infinitely unique existence of one's neighbor, can one be confident of acting in perfect love.

Conradi records that, at the time of writing *Bruno's Dream*, Murdoch wondered "whether [the novel] enacted the end of her subjection to Weil's puritanism" (*Iris* 502). Thus Conradi calls the novel "Janus-faced," noting "the sceptical wit and good humour it displays at the expense of its own vision" (*Saint* 122). "*Bruno's Dream* has troubled [Murdoch's] critics more than any of her other major novels," writes Donna Gerstenberger, "in part because their instinct to consider it a serious work appears to be countered by the novelist's playfulness in its conclusion" (45). Despite its own playfulness, however, at the core of the novel remains a Weilian distrust of human nature. When we exercise our will in an attempt to serve others, selfishness necessarily clouds our judgment and our acts of charity, as it does for Danby, Nigel, Diana, and almost every other character in the novel; true service, as Diana eventually learns, is the self-destruction that comes by attention, an inward attitude that enables right action.

An obvious example of misguided action in the novel is Danby Odell, who frames his relationships with his mistresses in terms of benevolence:

He felt that one ought not to cause pain, but a discreetly conducted affair caused no pain, and might produce a great deal of happiness, fresh, gratuitous, *extra* happiness. It was a sense of that extra, of having stolen a march on dull old life, that so much pleased him and made him feel himself, really, a benefactor. He had been a benefactor to Linda and to Adelaide. Why should he not be a benefactor to Diana, who showed every sign of being a rather bored middle-aged wife at a loose end? (104)

By going to bed with his women Danby makes them happy! Surely this is an unselfish act done for their benefit. Yet Danby's philanthropic self-image is nothing more than self-deception. He has already admitted that "[h]e had no idea whether [Adelaide] liked going to bed with him" (24). In context, his thoughts of "extra happiness" are called up *ad hoc* to justify beginning an affair with Diana while still conducting one with Adelaide. ("[H]e might find some way of accommodating them both, and anyway such thoughts were premature" [104].) Later, when Adelaide has discovered Danby's involvement not with Diana but with yet another woman—Diana's sister Lisa—Danby muses, "What had seemed so natural and simple and pleasant while it was going on nicely now seemed much more like a crime" (228). His choice of words—"natural," "simple," "pleasant," "nicely"—reveal that his attitude of benevolence was simply a disguise for his own comfort-seeking. Only when that comfort is gone does he realize that his ostensible charity was, in fact, vacuous.

When Danby tries to understand what exactly his crime toward Adelaide was, he concludes, tentatively, that it was "letting himself be loved so much more than he loved": "allowing someone to be committed, to be utterly bound, for the sake of a second rate kind of loving" (228). In other words, Danby's relationship with Adelaide constituted a power imbalance in which Adelaide was "utterly bound" to Danby, who was not similarly bound to her: and, as my first two chapters have shown, power is one of the great consolations of the ego.<sup>89</sup> By virtue of his power over Adelaide, Danby was able to

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<sup>89</sup> This sort of power imbalance is also evident in the relationship between Julius and Morgan in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, where Julius has quite got over Morgan but Morgan cannot seem to leave him alone. Similar dynamics occur in Simon and Axel's relationship in the same novel, as Simon is completely devoted to Axel but fears that Axel is not, and in Priscilla and Roger's relationship in *The Black Prince*, where Priscilla is unhealthily dependant on a Roger who couldn't be happier finally to excise her from his life. In each of these instances, interestingly, it is the woman (or, in Simon's case, the feminine partner) in the relationship who exhibits dependence and the man/masculine partner who possesses the power of

interact with her in a way that effectively avoided any real confrontation with her person. (Did she enjoy going to bed with him? Did it matter? Apparently not.) His power gave him the freedom to treat her as an object in service to the myth of his own benevolence. As Weil puts it, in the relationship between the strong and the weak, “[i]l n’y a qu’une volonté, celle du fort....Le faible est comme une chose.”<sup>90</sup> And yet it is precisely in such situations of power imbalance, Weil argues, that there is opportunity for “[l]a vertu surnaturelle de justice,” which she identifies with love:<sup>91</sup> “La vertu surnaturelle de justice consiste, si on est le supérieur dans le rapport inégal des forces, à se conduire exactement comme s’il y avait égalité” (135).<sup>92</sup> Such utterly just love is “supernatural” because it demands an attention that runs counter to the “nécessité mécanique” that, for all but the very good, inexorably leads the strong to oppress the weak, with or without realizing it (134).<sup>93</sup> Danby, however, necessarily refuses the opportunity to experience such supernatural love. Despite—or perhaps because of—Murdoch’s own characterization of him as her “one happy character” (qtd. in Conradi, *Iris* 439), Danby has not trained himself in the attention necessary to truly love any of his mistresses, and as a result wields his oppressive power unthinkingly.<sup>94</sup> His selfishness—indeed, his self—is too opaque to see through.

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emotional freedom. Danby’s own dependence on a cool, initially uninterested Lisa is a neat reversal of these dynamics.

<sup>90</sup> “There is only one will: that of the stronger....The weak person is like an object.” Weil continues: “Il n’y a aucune différence entre jeter une pierre pour éloigner un chien importun et dire à un esclave : ‘Chasse ce chien’” (135). (“There is absolutely no difference between throwing a rock to shoo an annoying dog and saying to a slave, ‘Chase this dog.’”)

<sup>91</sup> “The supernatural virtue of justice.”

<sup>92</sup> “For the superior member of a power imbalance, the supernatural virtue of justice consists in conducting oneself exactly as if the relationship were an equality.”

<sup>93</sup> “Mechanical necessity.”

<sup>94</sup> In his relationships with Gwen and Lisa the situation is different, as these constitute not simply the casual enjoyment of a middle-aged bachelor but a real and really vivid erotic love that necessarily takes Danby out of himself. Like Bradley Pearson’s relationship with Julian Baffin, they thus have the potential

The same opacity is ultimately what separates Nigel Boase from virtue, despite his strenuous efforts toward it. Nigel—nurse to the dying Bruno, clandestine admirer of Danby, Hindu mystic, masochist, voyeur—is an enigmatic figure. Many critics give him an exalted place in the novel’s moral pantheon: to Frank Baldanza he is “the major articulate saint of the book” (155); P.W. Thomson calls him “the most comprehending” among the novel’s characters (279). Similarly, Cheryl Bove finds in him the only unselfish love in the novel (186), and William Hall sees him as “a kind of *Bodhisattva* indicating the path that Lisa, Diana, and even Danby in his casual way, are to follow as the action develops” (438). These critics are right to notice that, as Gerstenberger puts it, Nigel is “a source of a good deal of the book’s wisdom” (47). In the mystic vision that makes up his first appearance, Nigel perceives the transcendent non-existence of the Good (“a single blinding point of light which absorbs all light into itself” [Murdoch, *BD* 32]) and can see clearly the coexistence of horror and order. (As I have noted in both previous chapters, few of Murdoch’s characters ever attain this latter vision.) In his next extended appearance, Nigel strides “[u]npersonned” through London, observing—that is, attending to—the varied realities of the people around him (84). His gentle touch and spiritual conversation make him Bruno’s favorite attendant (10, 99). And it is he who gives Diana the final wisdom that paves her path into sainthood: “Love them and let them walk on you” (224). As a result, it is not difficult to read Nigel as Simone Weil’s dream, the one character in the novel completely dedicated to both attending to and serving the people around him.

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either to spur him toward goodness or to become another false image on which he bases his own selfishness.

However, Conradi's more ambiguous description of Nigel as a would-be saint (*Saint* 124) and Frank Kermode's qualified assessment of him as "phoney" (24) ring a dissonant note. Zahra Ali pulls out the alarm bells: "Nigel's eroticism augments his moral failure, his pretension of being free from desire adds to his insincerities, and his erotic drives mock his religiosity" (269). These critics recognize that despite his wisdom, there is something fundamentally *off* about Nigel. That something is his exercise of power. "Of course violent men get put into cages and stretched on racks by men who are less violent but more clever," he tells his brother Will, while stretching him on an improvised rack. "It's the only way to make them listen" (Murdoch, *BD* 197). Similarly, in order to make Diana hear his words of wisdom he pinions and holds her against her will, "in a scene which has the language and notional force without the action of rape" (Thomson 278).<sup>95</sup> In his final letter to Danby, Nigel exults, "*How easy it proved to make you do exactly what I wanted! But I must not think about my godlike power...*" (Murdoch, *BD* 268). His midnight voyeuristic tours through London represent not a quiet attentiveness to the people around him, but rather a grasping desire for knowledge which he then uses to manipulate, much like Julius in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*.

Nigel, in fact, combines the character of Julius King with the philosophy of Rupert Foster.<sup>96</sup> Critics who valorize Nigel have been so taken by the wisdom he espouses that they have failed to recognize the fundamental duplicity that accompanies his artistry. For Nigel is a consummate artist:

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<sup>95</sup> Thomson chillingly completes the metaphor: "Chaste Diana, the least comprehending of all the characters, is [mentally] impregnated by Nigel, the most comprehending" (279).

<sup>96</sup> This is not to say that Nigel would express himself as Rupert does; Rupert's philosophical emphasis is on presence whereas Nigel's is on absence. But both characters espouse philosophies that closely mirror Murdoch's own.

In the dimness he is squatting huge and blocks the sky. Little hands vibrate like hairs but he squats huge and broods on self. His idly stirring foot may crush a million million while he scratches, fidgets, brushes away a myriad buzz of littlenesses whose millennia of shrieking are to him the momentary humming of a gnat which between two fingers he idly crushes as he squats still and broods on self. (32)

This passage from Nigel's first psychedelic vision recalls the apocalyptic imagery of William Blake in *The First Book of Urizen*: Urizen is portrayed as "a shadow of horror...risen / In Eternity! Unknown, unprolific, / Self-clos'd, all repelling" (44), a "self-contemplating shadow" (45) that is "unknown, abstracted, / Brooding secret" (44). Nigel's description as a huge shadow (dim, sky-blocking) that "squats still and broods on self" casts him as a type of Urizen, Blake's villain and creator-figure.<sup>97</sup> As Kay and Roger Easson explain, Urizen represents in Blake's mythology a force of "reason, organization, and order" who, not content to exist symbiotically with "protean and dynamic motion," sets out to reduce flux and change to order: "the Urizenic consciousness is the consciousness of the do-gooder who seeks to reform others rather than reforming himself" (Blake 68). Nigel is more tolerant of the contingent than is Urizen, but his life is nonetheless an effort to organize reality in accordance with his own will, his "master metaphor of self-identity" (Ali 267).<sup>98</sup> He creates a human drama as Urizen creates a world. The beliefs on which he stages the drama—as revealed in his conversations with Bruno and Diana—happen to be (from Murdoch's point of view)

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<sup>97</sup> Conradi notes in a different context that "Nigel's reference to new heaven and new earth [when speaking to Diana]...recalls Blake" (*Saint* 124-25).

<sup>98</sup> Specifically, Ali identifies Nigel's "master metaphor of self-identity" as the belief that "he is God, a strange coadunation of the Christian and Hindu deities" (267).

correct; but like Rupert, he believes them self-referentially rather than attentively.<sup>99</sup> He is thus the consummate artist: he speaks truth but in a fundamentally duplicitous way. In a sense, he serves his neighbors. Certainly his counsel benefits Diana and he does also save Danby from death—though, importantly, “from a danger he himself arranged” (Baldanza 155). But he is not quiet enough to be virtuous: the acts of benevolence he performs are for him also acts of selfishness, actively pushing him farther away from love.

Danby and Nigel fail, ultimately, because of the magnetism of power. The Good, however, eschews power. It is “not exactly powerless. For to be powerless, to be a complete victim, may be another source of power,” says one of Murdoch’s characters in *The Unicorn*. “But Good is non-powerful” (107). Both the pursuit of power and the strident renunciation of it are equally exercises of will: of *willpower*, in fact, and equally selfish as a result. The only way to avoid power, then, is not to will oneself at all, but to will another: to attend and, in doing so, to die. For Weil, this death to self is the prerequisite for divine possession: “Nous pouvons seulement consentir à perdre nos sentiments propres pour laisser passage en notre âme à [son] amour. C’est cela se nier soi-même” (126).<sup>100</sup> Murdoch references this view in the novel when Bruno tells Lisa, “If there were God one could leave it to God” (167); he repeats the same sentiment at the end of his life: “If God existed He would do it for me.” Yet for Bruno this idea is merely a platitude, a vain desire for consolation that masks his true moral responsibility. He finally

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<sup>99</sup> Thomson notes that Nigel “has no convincing psychological identity, and is intended to have none” (279), suggesting that Nigel’s “unsatisfactoriness” is what makes him able to affect “the attitudes and relationships of the major characters” (278). This vision of Nigel as a person so improbable as to be almost not a person, who goes around helping other characters mature, would seem to be a clear fulfillment of Weil’s vision. However, though Nigel may be psychologically and even physically improbable, never fully settled in characterization, he comes across almost as a disembodied will, relentlessly pursuing his own agenda. This self-possession is what I emphasize here, and what I argue ultimately keeps him from virtue.

<sup>100</sup> “All we can do is to consent to lose our own feelings in order to give passage in our hearts to [God’s] love. This is what it means to deny oneself.”

comes to realize this: “God would do it for me, but God doesn’t exist” (281). To Murdoch, then, to die to self is to live not to God but to the Other, to be filled with the Other rather than the Spirit. Ramanathan casts Murdoch’s vision in terms of the two greatest biblical commandments, to love God and love one’s neighbor: “the second commandment is the same now as the first, or the only meaningful manifestation of the first” (*Figures* 15). But for both Weil and Murdoch, being filled by the Other (transcendent or human) means dying: despite the biblical echoes, the self is not resurrected but occluded. “Dieu seul est capable à aimer Dieu,” Weil explains (126): we are not temporarily disabled by sin in our pursuit of the divine love but rather shut out completely by virtue of our humanity.<sup>101</sup> God and the human are incompatible; for one to increase, the other must decrease.<sup>102</sup> Similarly, Ramanathan summarizes Murdoch’s view of the ego as “a contrived, built, and blocking construct in the way of something intuitively grasped as both true and precious” (*Figures* 21): again, the Good and the ego cannot both be grasped at the same time. Self and selfishness are, effectively, synonymous. Thus to truly love one’s neighbor one must rid oneself also of one’s self.<sup>103</sup>

This death is what enables true service.

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<sup>101</sup> “Only God is able to love God.”

<sup>102</sup> Recall Weil’s doctrine of creation, quoted in my introduction: creation itself is a separation from God and is itself good only as it loses created individuality to become filled with God. By the same token, however, Weil indicates that “on peut être presque sûr que ceux chez qui l’amour de Dieu a fait disparaître les amours purs d’ici-bas sont de faux amis de Dieu” (212). (“One can be almost certain that those in whom the love of God has eclipsed the pure loves of the world are false friends of God.”) Additionally, “[l]e prochain, les amis, les cérémonies religieuses, la beauté du monde ne tombent pas au rang des choses irréelles après le contact direct entre l’âme et Dieu. Au contraire, c’est alors seulement que ces choses deviennent réelles” (212). (“Neighbors, friends, religious ceremonies, the beauty of the world do not become unreal after the soul has had direct contact with God. On the contrary, only then do these things become real.”) I would suggest, however, that the reality in which these objects of love participate is not so much a particular existence *qua* themselves but rather an existence *qua* “masks” of God, if you will.

<sup>103</sup> Practically, of course, this operation is only possible in a metaphorical sense: thus Murdoch comments that “one is almost irredeemably selfish” (Biggsby 220). As one can never actually lose one’s self, so it is almost impossible for one to become completely virtuous.

Importantly, this death is not synonymous with masochism. Neither Weil nor Murdoch preach a gospel of redemption through suffering; indeed, both explicitly preach against it. “[L]a partie médiocre de nous-mêmes”—that is, the part opposed to virtue—“ne craint pas la fatigue et la souffrance, elle craint d’être tuée,” Weil explains (191).<sup>104</sup> Renouncing the self may be painful, but if one remains fascinated by the pain, one will never finally finish renouncing. Similarly, as discussed in my first chapter, Murdoch believes masochism to be a particular form of selfishness, and in *Bruno’s Dream*, one of the primary indicators that Nigel is far from virtue is his pleasure in suffering: “[I love God because] He makes me suffer,” he says; “...I dig suffering” (99). With this confession, Nigel reveals that his focus is not truly on the people around him but rather on his own pleasure in painful situations. Murdoch concludes, “That moral improvement involves suffering is usually true; but the suffering is the byproduct of a new orientation and not in any sense an end in itself” (*SG* 67). Service may be associated with suffering, but suffering is not itself service. Pain is not redemptive; love is.<sup>105</sup>

Bruno himself provides an example of this when he tells Nigel about the spiders he used to watch as a child: “Do you know, Nigel, that there is a spider called *amaurobius*, which lives in a burrow and has its young in the late summer, and then it dies when the frosts begin, and the young spiders live through the cold by eating their mother’s dead body.” Young Bruno took this spider as an image of God, imagining that

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<sup>104</sup> “The mediocre part of ourselves is not afraid of fatigue and suffering. It is afraid of being killed.”

<sup>105</sup> To be more precise: unselfish love pursued attentively is redemptive. Other sorts of love in the novel marked by intense emotional and erotic attachment—Danby’s love for Gwen and then Lisa, Miles’ love for Pavarti and then Lisa—are, like Bradley Pearson’s love for Julian, more ambiguous. As I discussed in the first chapter, the eroticism of these loves may lead to unselfish attention and virtue but can just as easily lead back to selfishness. Miles’ love affairs seem to have led him to the latter, since each time after the death or removal of Pavarti and Lisa he retreats into a Pinfoldesque prison of solipsism. We are not given enough information about the future of Danby’s relationship with Lisa to know how his story will turn out, but given the abjectness of his devotion I would hazard a guess that his prognosis is hopeful.

“He *was* those spiders which I watched in the light of my electric torch on summer nights” (*BD* 98). At the end of the novel, Bruno has a dream that God appears to him in the form of an *eresus niger* (281), a spider he has always longed to find (14); though Murdoch does not mention it in the text, this spider is similarly matrophagal (“Ladybird”).<sup>106</sup> In both these images of God, the mother spider dies to feed her children: like Weil’s God, she renounces herself so that her creation might live. Only in her complete self-destruction is she able to serve. This picture of self-sacrificing love accords well with Weil’s argument that attention is redemptive. When we attend to another, we accord him a humanity he would not otherwise possess: before our attention, the Other “est seulement un peu de chair nue, inerte et sanglante au bord d’un fossé, sans nom, dont personne ne sait rien,” but our “attention est créatrice” (139), calling into being “ce qui n’existe pas” (141).<sup>107</sup> The death that love demands—the slow process by which one eliminates one’s own will in order to will another—is thus really efficacious for the other person. “On se donne en rançon pour l’autre,” Weil says. “C’est un acte rédempteur” (140).<sup>108</sup> What may appear a passive act of observation—especially compared to the

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<sup>106</sup> This is actually somewhat difficult to affirm, since Řezáč et al. note that there has been considerable taxonomic confusion regarding *Eresus* spiders; *Eresus niger* was formerly used as a catchall term “for all specimens from Spain to China, sometimes synonymizing even obviously different species,” and as a result is no longer a current biological term (264). However, the study performed by Řezáč et al. to clear up this confusion did not occur until 2007; since *Bruno’s Dream* was published in 1969, I think it is safe to affirm that the matrophagal habits of what is now called *Eresus sandaliatus* would have had resonance within Murdoch’s use of the *Eresus niger*.

<sup>107</sup> The Other “is only a bit of naked flesh, bloody and motionless at the side of a ditch, nameless, ignored by all” (in this quotation Weil refers to the parable of the Good Samaritan); but our “attention is creative,” calling into being “that which does not exist.” To Weil, this sort of power is only possible because all attention is an act of God himself: “Seul Dieu présent en nous peut réellement penser la qualité humaine chez les malheureux, les regarder vraiment d’un regard autre que celui qu’on accorde aux objets, écouter vraiment leur voix comme on écoute une parole” (142). (“Only God present in us can actually conceive of the humanity of the miserable, truly see them differently than one sees objects, really listen to their voice as one listens to a word.”)

<sup>108</sup> “One gives oneself as a ransom for the other. It is an act of redemption.”

efforts of characters like Nigel and Danby—or as a morbid act of masochism is in fact an intense, other-focused interior action that results in effective exterior service.

In the novel, Bruno is the test case for such service: he is *malheureux*, the “chair nue, inerte et sanglante au bord d’un fossé,” against the backdrop of which the other characters’ love (or lack thereof) shows clearly.<sup>109</sup> He is also, he complains, “a monster, animal-headed, bull-headed, a captive minotaur” (Murdoch, *BD* 13)—an interesting parallel to Weil’s description of God as the minotaur at the center of the world’s labyrinth, lying in wait to eat the soul who ventures to him. He who can respond in self-sacrificing love to Bruno’s miserable alterity, then, “ressortira, mais changé, devenu autre, ayant été mangé et digéré par Dieu” (157).<sup>110</sup> This is a sacrifice most of the characters in the novel are unwilling to make. When Diana first meets Bruno, she is “shocked and sickened,” noting that Bruno “seemed more like flesh, living flesh as one rarely sees it, *in extremis*, than like a person,” and backs quickly out of the room (Murdoch, *BD* 128). Miles, too, blushes with “shock and horror” (110), finding himself unprepared for this “awful naked demand of one human being upon another” (111); during their first interview, he consistently refuses to hear the confession Bruno wants to make (“I don’t want to listen!” [112]) and feels himself “utterly utterly defiled” (114). Later, when Miles is more used to his father, his visits are like “being in the cinema” rather than conversation: “Miles moved, spoke, performed and Bruno watched” (279).

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<sup>109</sup> In Weil’s thought, “le malheur” and “malheureux” are specialized terms referring to a particular kind of suffering with power to “enchaîner la pensée” (“to enchain the mind”): “Le malheur est un déracinement de la vie, un équivalent plus ou moins atténué de la mort, rendu irrésistiblement présent à l’âme par l’atteinte ou l’appréhension immédiate de la douleur physique” (108). (“Misery is an uprooting of one’s life, an equivalent, to varying degrees of strength, of death, made inescapably present to the soul by the imposition or immediate fear of physical pain.”) Bruno feels significant physical pain, particularly at the end of his life, in a way that leaves him unable to mentally escape the reality of death: *il est malheureux*.

<sup>110</sup> He “will reemerge, but changed: having become other, eaten and digested by God.”

Compared to “Miles’s complete, chilling neglect of his dying father,” writes Baldanza, Danby’s “loving but brusque nursing” comes off well (152); but even Danby does not succeed at truly paying attention to his father-in-law. “Danby was very kind but he was a thoroughly worldly man,” Bruno muses. “Danby must be wondering who would get the stamps” (Murdoch, *BD* 12). Bruno here intuits that Danby does not quite see him for who he is, that what appears kindness is always focused on another end just beyond the invalid’s sickbed. Though Danby, in his own mind, downplays any mercenary motives relating to the valuable stamp collection (27), in his recorded interactions with Bruno we see him opposing Bruno’s stated wishes based on a false impression of Bruno’s character (70-71); patronizing Bruno and attempting to curtail his visit with Lisa (118-21); snapping at Bruno and patronizing him again, while upset over his own relationship with Lisa (151-53); refusing to heed Bruno’s requests while upset over his relationships with Lisa and Adelaide (203-05); and, finally, ignoring Bruno completely by going on vacation with Lisa the weekend of Bruno’s death (285). As with Bradley Pearson and Priscilla in *The Black Prince*, Danby is (initially) too self-centeredly complacent and (eventually) too blinded by erotic love to attend to the real existence of his dying relative.

Nigel, too, fails to serve Bruno with true attention. Bruno loves Nigel because of his gentleness, the “angel fingers” (10) so talented at massaging and relieving physical pain (97). Nigel sits with Bruno, talks with him, listens to his ideas, treats him seriously. Yet Bruno sometimes gets the impression that Nigel is pushing his own timetable rather than waiting for Bruno’s: “He could still get to the lavatory quite easily. Yet why was Nigel always talking about bedpans now and saying how easy they were and suggesting that today he was surely too tired to go?” (11). When Bruno calls for Nigel in the middle

of the night, “Nigel did not always hear, did not always come,” even though the cries are sometimes so loud that he “must have heard” (21). Indeed, at the end of his first vision Nigel “hears the calling and the weeping,” but remains lying “prostrate upon the floor of the world” (32). And at the end he too has abandoned Bruno, fleeing to a job in India, despite professed sorrow at the necessity of the departure (267-68). As with the rest of Nigel’s behavior, his interactions with Bruno reveal a man who attends selectively, for the purposes of his own agenda. When confronted with the *malheureux* Bruno, Diana and Miles initially flee; Danby and Nigel respond with disguised self-aggrandizement. These characters perform acts of benevolence—Diana brings flowers, Miles visits, Danby and Nigel nurse—that are ultimately acts of selfishness, not of service.

It is Lisa who initially demonstrates the clearest example of service to Bruno. Unlike Diana, she is not repulsed by Bruno’s appearance. She holds his hand: “The intensity of the girl’s attention to him seemed to have stilled the room.” She assures him, “You are loved,” and treats him accordingly (120). She listens to the confession Miles refused to hear and wisely counsels Bruno to stop obsessing over his past actions, the “agitating puppet” of the self (167). Her interaction with Bruno, indeed, is a clear demonstration of Weil’s dictum that “[l]es malheureux n’ont pas besoin d’autre chose en ce monde que d’hommes capables de faire attention à eux” (105).<sup>111</sup> Lisa’s attention, and the counsel and confessional that follow automatically from that attention, are all Bruno needs. There is no greater service than to lay down one’s will for the clear vision of another.<sup>112</sup> By the end of the novel, once Lisa has abandoned herself to more selfish

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<sup>111</sup> “The miserable need nothing else in this world than people able to pay attention to them.”

<sup>112</sup> Lisa does not maintain this attitude, shedding her life of saintly attentiveness for a life of hedonism with Danby at the end of the novel. Baldanza argues that this denouement indicates that hers was a “pretended sainthood” animated by “drives...sexual rather than spiritual” (153). However, in light of

pleasures, Diana conquers her initial revulsion in order to love as Lisa did. “I have done the most foolish thing of all, in becoming so attached to someone who is dying,” she thinks. “Is this not the most pointless of all loves? Like loving death itself.” Yet it is this very pointlessness that ensures the virtue of her “blank unanxious hopeless love” (Murdoch, *BD* 288). She sees nothing but the person in front of her, for no other reason than that he exists. Whereas Bruno had abandoned his wife to a solitary death (22), Diana—Bruno’s new partner in the topsy-turvy finale of the novel (287)—is with him at the moment of his, sparing him the indignity of frantic, unanswered cries for company. She serves Miles, too, by outfitting the summer house to facilitate his poetry-writing (255), and Danby and Lisa, by persuading them to take a weekend together (285). Her service consists in enabling all those she loves to move farther away from her: Bruno to death, Miles to his Muse, Danby and Lisa to each other. She no longer matters; what matters is the free existence of those around her.<sup>113</sup> She is slowly replacing her self, her will, with those of her neighbors: “She lived the reality of death and felt herself made nothing by it and denuded of desire. Yet love still existed and it was the only thing that existed” (289). For Murdoch, this is true love; this is true service.

In *Bruno’s Dream*, we see primarily the negative side of this self-death, the side of quietness and waiting and (apparent) passivity. We get glimpses of love’s active side

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Bradley Pearson’s insistence in *The Black Prince* that “[o]ne’s capacity to forget absolutely is immense” (8), I think it is not implausible to argue that Lisa is simply a true saint who becomes changed “for the worse” by Miles’ unexpected reciprocation of her love (Murdoch, *BD* 275) and decides to forget the goodness she had learned. When Lisa tells Danby, “You imagine I’m good. But those self-denying years prove nothing,” she does not mean that the self-denying years were a sham, but merely that her past habits do not dictate her present attitudes (277).

<sup>113</sup> To Weil, “Dieu s’est nié en notre faveur pour nous donner la possibilité de nous nier pour Lui” (138). (“God denied himself for us to give us the possibility of denying ourselves for Him.”) As a result, “pour la même raison nous devons vouloir la conservation de l’autonomie chez nos semblables” (175). (“For the same reason we should desire to conserve the autonomy of those like us.”) To respect others’ autonomy is to accord them the same privilege and opportunity that God gives us: that is, the privilege and opportunity to freely surrender that autonomy.

in the description of Lisa's saintly phase—Communist activist, nun, and teacher at an impoverished, low-class school—but Tallis Browne, from *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, provides a clearer picture. Tallis illustrates the negative side of love in his willingness to let Morgan flit where she will despite his great desire for her. Yet he is also actively involved with his community, as he reveals when telling Morgan his schedule:

There's a meeting of student volunteers, they're going to paint houses. Then there's someone just out of jug I've got to see. Then there's a United Churchmen's Committee on prostitution. Then I've got a class. Then there's a probation officer's study group I promised to talk to. Then I've got to write a—  
(201)

When Morgan accuses him of “tak[ing] on too many things” and not doing “any of them properly” (201), she speaks truth: Tallis, in his greatly matured power of attention, is able not only to see but also to act well—yet because he has no self strong enough to rank one set of needs as more important than another (all Others are infinitely other, after all), he shuttles hurriedly from one to the next, doing what he can until the next need shows itself to him and leads him away.<sup>114</sup> And, as Ramanathan points out, “when promoting the interests of others unequivocally requires action, none shows himself quicker to act than Tallis”: when the Jamaican diplomat is threatened by thugs, Tallis is the only one to decisively beat the hoodlums away (*Figures* 17). Yet this was not part of a premeditated campaign of goodness, but rather an automatic response to the evil that confronted him. Tallis' actions count as service because his own will is so absent from them.

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<sup>114</sup> This may also explain the death of Danby's first wife Gwen, who died of a heart attack after “jump[ing] off Battersea bridge in March to save a child who could swim anyway” (*BD* 29-30). Confronted with a situation in which need was immediately evident, Gwen acts automatically, without the self-reflection that could have saved her life but at the cost of increased self-interest. By doing so, she illustrates in her death what Murdoch calls “the absolute pointlessness of virtue” (*SG* 84).

For Murdoch, as for Weil, what separates acts of benevolence from acts of service is the presence of the will. Whenever the will is involved in human action, that action always (Weil) or almost always (Murdoch) points back to the self. It participates in a false, self-referential teleology. When the will is not involved in action, however, that action points forward to the real world, and thereby toward the Good—and that action is therefore service. Murdochian service, then, is not teleologically split as are Murdochian sex and art. Acts of benevolence can very easily be vicious—particularly, perhaps, when they seem the most helpful. The service that results from attention may appear much more ambiguous, because it is not directed. It valorizes the free existence and choices of the external world—and as a result it points toward the Good, in fact, by refusing to point at all.<sup>115</sup> Its value is only truly visible to the one who loves, rather than the one who is loved. Unless the beloved eventually attains to attention himself, of course; but one does not attend in the expectation of reward, which is a manifestation of self-interest and thus of selfishness. True service allows the self to die so that the Other, whoever or however he or she should be, might live.

Commanded to Ask: *Sword of Honour*

With the publication of *Sword of Honour*, writes Alex Danchev, “[t]he Second World War was no longer sacrosanct. The bad Waugh threw the good war into confusion” (477-78). It is indeed striking that, for a trilogy about the war whose antagonist has become synonymous in contemporary parlance with ultimate depravity, *Sword of Honour* has no easy white hat/black hat characterization. Waugh’s war is more of a black hat/black hat affair, “a sordid social jamboree of smart and semi-smart sets,

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<sup>115</sup> This may be one reason why Murdoch values good art so highly: its reflection of the indeterminate order of the universe is perhaps the most effective possible service.

who are mainly engaged in self-inflation and in climbing up the ladder,” in V.S. Pritchett’s words (Stannard, *Critical* 425). Steven Trout characterizes the novel as “an anti-epic” that “not only attacks modern warfare (and midcentury English culture) with...pervasive irony..., but also lampoons war fiction itself” (126), to the extent that Christopher Derrick predicted the last third of the trilogy would be taken for a “pacifist tract” (Stannard, *Critical* 429). *Sword of Honour* is, in large part, a tale of disillusion: Waugh suggested the title *Quixote in Modern Dress* for the US edition of the final volume (*Letters* 565), and over the course of the trilogy the eager soldier Guy Crouchback learns that his ideals are just as ludicrous and his campaigns just as quixotic as those of Cervantes’ antihero.<sup>116</sup> Yet *Sword of Honour* is also a tale of re-illusion, as Guy moves not toward nihilism but toward a chastened understanding of the identity and operation of true virtue in a world of pervasive vice. As the injustice of the war destroys both his ideals and the pride that sustained them, Guy slowly learns to think in terms of his soul, to pursue his own particular vocation. By doing so he awakens to service: neither a transaction nor a posture but a personal, intentional action performed by and for individual souls.

Unlike the sycophantic journalist Ian Kilbannock, Guy Crouchback does not “want to be known as one of the soft-faced men who did well out of the war” (17). He is not interested in his own comfort; “all war,” he believes, “consist[s] in causing trouble without much hope of advantage” (439). Rather, Guy is moved to go to war when he sees “[t]he enemy...plain in view, huge and hateful, all disguise cast off” (4). His motive is moral:

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<sup>116</sup> In a brilliantly off-hand stab, Waugh also suggested that the American edition be titled *Uncle Tom’s Cabin and the Seven Dwarfs* (*Letters* 565).

“My dear fellow, [Guy’s compatriots said,] we’ve quite enough on our hands as it is. We can’t go to war with the whole world.”

“Then why go to war at all? If all we want is prosperity, the hardest bargain Hitler made would be preferable to victory. If we are concerned with justice the Russians are as guilty as the Germans.”

“Justice?” said the old soldiers. “Justice?” (16)

Following Augustine, Guy argues that war is to be waged for neither personal nor national convenience but for the punishment of wrongdoing (*City* XIX.7). This is a highly teleological position: Guy’s understanding of warfare fixes a particular moral order—that is, a just order—the attainment of which is war’s only legitimate end. And, according to Waugh’s own précis of the first two-thirds of the trilogy, Guy understands this pursuit of justice as “an opportunity to re-establish his interest in his fellow men and to serve them” (Waugh, *Sword* 664). By reestablishing true order, Guy believes, the just war will effectively serve not only his countrymen but also “his fellow men,” regardless of national affiliation: the restoration of moral order via punishment is salutary for both punished and punisher. The term “military service” echoes on multiple levels.

Over the course of the novel, however, Guy loses his faith in such service. “*Men at Arms* [begins] with its hero inspired by an illusion. *Officers and Gentlemen* ends with its deflation,” Waugh comments (Stopp 169): Guy Crouchback begins in “secret jubilation” at the prospect of honorable military service (Waugh, *Sword* 3), experiences “his honeymoon” with “the Royal Corps of Halberdiers” (67), then eventually begins “to dissociate himself from the army in matters of real concern” (326) and returns to “the old ambiguous world, where priests were spies and gallant friends proved traitors and his

country was led blundering into dishonour” (440). This disillusionment occurs amid the wreckage of prosaic futility and blatant injustice. Hardly any act of either charity or benevolence performed in the novel succeeds: Apthorpe dies from the whisky Guy gives him, Leonard is bombed after choosing to succor his wife on the home front, the dead soldier whose ID tags Guy sends to Headquarters for a memorial is forgotten when Julia Stitch drops them into a wastebasket, the Jews are evacuated from poor conditions in Yugoslavia to poor conditions in an Italian refugee camp (Patey 352). Even Guy’s attempt to bring Ritchie-Hook a coconut from a night raid on Dakar is thwarted when Ritchie-Hook comes back himself with the severed head of a sentry. “By all justice I ought now to be drafting a citation for your M.C.,” says Colonel Tickeridge after that raid (Waugh, *Sword* 200). Instead, Guy is sent back to England in disgrace, known as “the chap who blotted his copy-book at Dakar in ’40” (201). Trimmer, a cowardly and inept opportunist, is elevated into a national hero and “receives the medal Guy should have won at Dakar” (Patey 328-29). After the evacuation from Crete, Guy’s actions again merit an M.C., but he is sent home; it is Ivor Claire, the deserter, who ultimately ends up with a medal (Waugh, *Sword* 435, 660). Justice and military service turn out to have been long separated, perhaps even divorced.

The climax of Guy’s disillusionment comes as he considers instigating Ivor Claire’s court-martial for desertion, even though conviction could lead to Claire’s execution (436-37): “Why was he [Guy] here in Mrs Stitch’s basement, why were Eddie and Bertie in prison, why was the young soldier lying still unburied in the deserted village of Crete, if it was not for Justice?” (439). Ignoring Claire’s fault would counteract the *telos* of the entire war and render meaningless the prior sacrifices others had made. In

a purely Augustinian sense, this would be unjust not only to the nation but also to Claire himself, who would thereby be allowed to continue in the illicit attitudes that inspired his dereliction in the first place. “For just as it is not an act of kindness to help a man, when the effect of the help is to make him lose a greater good,” writes Augustine, “so it is not a blameless act to spare a man, when by so doing you let him fall into a greater sin” (*City* XIX.16). In other words, legitimate punishment may result in physical harm to the malefactor, but its goal is always spiritual restoration, a quality infinitely more valuable, to Augustine, than physical comfort or even physical life itself. In this sense, court-martialing Claire could be considered an act of service to him. Guy, however, chooses instead to destroy the only evidence against him, “a symbolic act...like the man at Sphakia who dismembered his Bren and threw its parts one by one out into the harbor, splash, splash, splash, into the scum” (Waugh, *Sword* 440). In this moment Guy is not attempting to “[r]ally round” an old friend (439); in fact, he is not thinking about Claire at all. There is no justice in the war, he has decided; therefore, service is futile.

The remainder of the novel, however, proceeds to argue that Guy’s conclusion does not follow from the premise. The error in his reasoning can be traced back to Santa Dulcina delle Rocce, the Italian village where he spent the eight years after his divorce. Nominally dedicated to Saint Dulcina, the town is in fact more devoted to Sir Roger of Waybroke, a medieval crusader canonized not by the church but by popular sentiment. Sir Roger set out on the second Crusade, was shipwrecked on the Italian coast, and “enlisted under the local Count, who promised to take him to the Holy Land but led him first against a neighbour, on the walls of whose castle he fell at the moment of victory” (5). That Sir Roger was part of the *second* Crusade is significant. The “first true

Crusader,” according to Waugh, was the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius: “Solemnly dedicating his arms he invaded Persia...and brought the relic [the True Cross] home in triumph” (*EAR* 416). What makes Heraclius a “true Crusader” seems to be a single-minded spiritual focus coupled with a lack of territorial ambition. By contrast, Eugenius III’s proclamation of the second Crusade “ushered in a new period for crusading, with ruling monarchs taking a significant role” (Lock 147). Racked by political intrigue, the second Crusade managed both to anger the Crusaders’ allies and to fail spectacularly at retaking lost territory: “[b]y any measure, it was a disaster” (Madden 63). In the second Crusade, then, failure to achieve the (allegedly) holy aims of war is associated with increased politicization, a diversion from causes of the soul to causes of ambition. This is, indeed, the way Sir Roger dies: co-opted from his crusade into a political squabble. More than “[t]he union of sacred and secular ideals” Frederick Stopp sees in him (172-73), he represents the domination and coercion of the sacred by the secular, the “poignancy and futility” (Wilson 88) of a just cause in an unjust world.

Put another way, Sir Roger specifically, and the second Crusade generally, illustrate the triumph of “public causes” over “private causes of the soul.” This ought to be a beneficial parable for Guy, given the way Waugh uses these terms to describe a central theme of the trilogy: “Crouchback’s realization that no good comes from public causes; only private causes of the soul” (Stopp 46). Yet when Guy adopts the knight as his own *de facto* patron (“‘Sir Roger, pray for me,’ he said, ‘and for our endangered kingdom’” [Waugh, *Sword* 5]) he sidesteps the issue entirely. It may seem a noble thing to attempt the placation of Sir Roger’s spirit (228), to turn Roger’s “great vow unfulfilled” into Guy’s great vow fulfilled (5). In making this his goal, however, Guy

betrays a greater fixation with the public than the private: he associates Roger's cause not with the true Crusader's ethic of Emperor Heraclius but with the cause of WWII Britain. Rather than recognize the futility of political battles, Guy embraces them, ignoring the spiritual battles that ought to have been the crusader's first concern. As a result, Guy's concern for justice is wholly public and external, a matter of consequences, of ensuring that guilty nations are punished. By pursuing this end so fixedly, Guy invests the public and political with spiritual significance. He confuses (in Augustinian terms) the City of Man with the City of God: he looks for final teleological satisfaction in a world that is neither final nor wholly satisfying. In this way Sir Roger's example functions as Guy's seduction rather than his inspiration, a "false idol" (Heath, *Picturesque* 220) around which Guy erects a religion of military-worship (DeCoste 132)—ultimately, a religion of pride in national honor. This is why Guy decides to destroy the evidence against Ivor Claire: having conflated the two cities, he can conceive no City of God to follow when the City of Man proves illusory.

Guy's devotion to wholly temporal ends is hinted when, as Guy contemplates the façade of the Halberdier's parish church, the narrator comments, "From such a doorway as that Roger de Waybroke had stepped out on his unaccomplished journey, leaving his madam padlocked" (Waugh, *Sword* 51). The narrator immediately notes that "the womenfolk of the Halberdiers" were "[l]ess constrained than the Lady of Waybroke," and in that same paragraph he introduces Mrs. Leonard, a soldier's wife who is anything but constrained (51). ("I own *this* one," she says of her husband when meeting then-Colonel Ritchie-Hook [56].) In fact, Mrs. Leonard's constant carping—she "wanted a man about the house" (186)—eventually drives Leonard to request a transfer to barrack

duties so that he can remain with his wife and newborn while the rest of his regiment goes to the front. Leonard's sacrifice for his wife and child foreshadows the sacrifice Guy will later make for his ex-wife Virginia and her child: distorted and parodic, yes, but nonetheless a glimpse of the willingness to endure "loss of 'face'" for the sake of another (453). Sir Roger's decision to padlock his madam, by contrast, reveals a failure to even risk the possibility of losing face, and Guy appears to side with him when he agrees that Leonard is "behaving pretty poorly" (187). He does not yet realize that Sir Roger's death is the supreme example of losing face, and that even his posthumous recuperation is not as a glorious warrior but as a beribboned effigy, "tied in bows of coloured wool" (5), with an "odd title" (147). Rather, Guy's association of Roger with a jingoistic militarism prevents him from appreciating a virtue that courts vulnerability, a charity that can endure disaster.

Guy attempts to flee vulnerability by treating both his neighbors and his own soul as superficially as possible. When he confesses himself before leaving for England, "[t]here was no risk of going deeper than the denunciation of his few infractions of law, of his habitual weaknesses. Into that wasteland where his soul languished he need not, could not, enter" (6). Similarly, when he confesses before the invasion of Crete, Guy notes that the priest "seemed to shrug off the triviality of what he had heard" (327). And Guy consistently interacts with others as categories rather than as people. He attempts to make love to his ex-wife Virginia because, as she says, "I was the only woman in the whole world your priests would let you go to bed with" (117): not because he loves her as a person but because, technically, she is still *wife* and he *husband*. When he discovers that a steward on board his troop ship is a fellow Catholic, he considers approaching him in

friendship but gives him a few coins instead. “[T]he Goanese turned and went on his way rejoicing a little, but not as a fellow man at peace; merely as a servant unexpectedly over-tipped” (190): Guy refuses to establish any connection beyond the transactional categories of *passenger* and *servant*. Finally, when Apthorpe dies from the bottle of whisky Guy smuggled to him in the hospital, Guy is “aghast rather than ashamed,” “shaken” but ultimately “not concerned” (211, 212). The death is not his responsibility because the whisky had been suggested, almost commanded, by his brigade major; Guy, obeying “like a sleepwalker” (Munton 85), acts not as a friend giving a gift but as an *order-follower* depositing goods with a *human receptacle*. Ironically, Guy’s attitude in pursuit of justice is thus the same as the attitude of his unjust society. The British military bureaucracy, too, is concerned only with the superficial and external; Trimmer, for instance, is feted not for his true heroism but for his proletarian origin and “sex appeal” (Waugh, *Sword* 309, 359). And just as this attitude ultimately led the Allies to defeat Hitler, so this attitude of Guy’s motivates several acts which could be interpreted as service—giving Apthorpe whisky and giving the servant money, for example. Yet these are more properly examples of benevolence rather than charity, automatic and soulless rather than truly concerned.

Murdoch would accuse Guy of failure of attention, and it is true that Guy at these moments sees his neighbors as categories rather than as fully human beings. However, Waugh’s criticism of Guy is on slightly different grounds. This shows very clearly in the case of Mr. Crouchback, whom Guy describes without irony as “the best man, the only entirely good man, he had ever known” (499) and who, by Murdochian standards, is occasionally as attentively obtuse as Guy. “After all your father was very credulous,”

Arthur Box-Bender tells his wife, Mr. Crouchback's daughter—and he is undeniably correct (506). When his landlords begin intriguing to evict him, Mr. Crouchback remains oblivious: “The Cuthberts would never do a thing like that. Never. After all these years” (231). When Trimmer is catapulted to fame, Mr. Crouchback is jubilant: “We've got no junker class in this country, thank God. When the country needs them, the right men come to the fore” (356). When the government prevents him from sending a personalized package to his POW grandson, Mr. Crouchback is indignant: “As you say, the boy may be really hungry. If he wants ‘Glucose D’ why can't I send it to him?...It's all *wrong*” (235-36). Wrong it may be, but the example of the Yugoslavian Jews at the end of the novel—when they receive personalized donations and their neighbors do not, the Jews are persecuted and relocated—undercuts his point. In all this, Mr. Crouchback demonstrates a selective inability to see accurately, whether the mercenariness of the Cuthberts or the vindictiveness of the charitably neglected. As Miss Vavasour tells him, “You treat everyone as if he were a gentleman” (231). This is not Murdochian attention; or, rather, it is a twist on Murdochian attention. Mr. Crouchback sees people not necessarily as they are but as they could be. As Augustine puts it, “Now we love even our neighbor by faith; for we who are ourselves mortal know not the hearts of mortal men. But in the future life,...every man shall love and praise in his neighbor the virtue which, that it may not be hid, the Lord Himself shall bring to light” (*Enchiridion* CXXI). To Augustine, we love our neighbors for the virtue we may not yet be able to recognize in them; this is not a straightforward assessment of their alterity but rather an active faith in the work of Providence in their lives. In his optimistic assessments of his neighbors, Mr. Crouchback demonstrates this kind of faith. By contrast, he sees himself with strict

accuracy, recognizing, despite his many evident virtues, “the difference in kind between the goodness of the most innocent of humans and the blinding, ineffable goodness of God” (Waugh, *Sword* 499).<sup>117</sup> In other words, Mr. Crouchback sees himself justly and others charitably; but whether looking at himself or at others, he regards not the external appearance but the soul.

By reifying Sir Roger’s example into the pursuit of national rather than spiritual justice, however, Guy shuns the soul in favor of an external, public crusade: this, rather than a failure of Murdochian attention, is Waugh’s primary critique of him. Yet the first two-thirds of the novel relentlessly attack the feasibility of such a crusade; thoroughly disillusioned after the debacle on Crete and Ivor Claire’s desertion (Stopp 169), it remains to Guy to learn how the virtue of the soul survives public injustice. At the end of the novel the Kanyis, a Jewish couple who had worked to bring humanitarian relief to their community, are arrested on trumped-up charges and “tried by a People’s Court. You may be sure justice was done,” fellow-officer Gilpin sneers to Guy (Waugh, *Sword* 659). At this final desecration of his foundational ideal, Guy is tempted to strike Gilpin as he had once threatened Trimmer. At that time, under the baleful eye of Sir Roger, he had repented the injustice of the act after the fact.<sup>118</sup> With Gilpin, “the sense of futility intervened” and he dropped his fist (659). Guy has not learned that justice itself is futile. Rather, he has learned not to expect justice in an unjust world. Whereas Guy’s teleological confusion of the City of God with the City of Man resulted in an expectation of external, visible victory, his acknowledgement of futility represents not a canceling of

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<sup>117</sup> “As a reasoning man Mr Crouchback had known that he was honourable, charitable and faithful; a man who by all the formularies of his faith should be confident of salvation; as a man of prayer he saw himself as totally unworthy of divine notice” (499).

<sup>118</sup> “Was this the triumph for which Roger de Waybroke took the cross; that he [Guy] should exult in putting down Trimmer?” (91).

all value but rather a reduction in scope and a redirection of effort. It is not enough simply to be “on the right side.” One must *be* right in one’s soul.

For Waugh, as for Augustine, being right in one’s soul means attending to one’s vocation. This is what Guy’s father, Mr. Crouchback, indicates when he rebukes Guy for gloating over “the end of the Piedmontese usurpation” yet concedes, “Of course it’s reasonable for a soldier to rejoice in victory” (451). To boast about the loss or acquisition of temporal power is wrong; to take pride in the prosecution of one’s vocation is reasonable. Guy ripostes that he is no longer interested in victory: “When we declared war on Finland...,” he begins, referencing the unholy invasion that had first shaken his confidence in martial justice (451). “That sort of question isn’t for soldiers,” Mr. Crouchback replies (452). Again, Mr. Crouchback turns Guy’s attention from questions of national intrigue to questions of personal vocation. The soldier’s task is not to make alliances or shape national policy. What, then, is the soldier’s task? What sort of questions *are* for soldiers?—or, more specifically, what sort of questions are for this soldier, for Guy? Only at his father’s funeral does Guy learn to ask these questions. Before that point, Guy’s interactions with God had been mere “act[s] of respect, like the signing of the Visitors’ Book at an Embassy or Government House” (500). He treats God with the same impersonal, transactional ethic that animates all his dealings with others:

He reported for duty saying to God: “I don’t ask anything from you. I am here if you want me. I don’t suppose I can be any use, but if there is anything I can do, let me know,” and left it at that.

“I don’t ask anything from you”; that was the deadly core of his apathy; his father had tried to tell him, was now telling him. That emptiness had been with

him for years now even in his days of enthusiasm and activity in the Halberdiers. Enthusiasm and activity were not enough. God required more than that. He had commanded all men to *ask*. (500)

Guy's refusal to ask anything of God is an attempt to maintain a Christian faith on the level of abstract concepts and ideals (like justice, say) without risking a personal encounter. It is soulless dedication: religion without vocation. When Guy asks God, "Show me what to do and help me to do it," then, he is for the first time thinking in terms of the virtue of the soul rather than the virtue of the nation (500). It is at this moment that Guy begins to replace his ethic of justice with an ethic of charity, for this is how Guy understands the call to vocation: "the chance to do some small service which only he could perform, for which he had been created" (500).

Thus when Guy's ex-wife Virginia, pregnant by Trimmer, proposes remarriage, he consents. Importantly, Guy realizes that remarrying Virginia is "not the normal behaviour of an officer and a gentleman; [it is] something they'll laugh about in Bellamy's" (580). In choosing to follow what he perceives as his vocation regardless of popular opinion, Guy heeds the advice of his father: "*Quantitative judgements don't apply. If only one soul was saved, that is full compensation for any amount of 'loss of face'*" (581). As always, Mr. Crouchback's words direct Guy to the virtue of the soul rather than the fashionable virtues of utilitarian analysis and public approval. The soul outweighs all other perceived goods one might weigh against it. When defending to Kerstie Kilbannock his decision to remarry Virginia, Guy says, "'But you see there's another—' he was going to say 'soul'; then realized that this word would mean little to Kerstie for all her granite propriety—'there's another life to consider'" (580). Kerstie,

who would not understand the word “soul,” thinks in terms of the biological and mechanical. To her, a person is just another tally mark: “What is one child more or less in all [the] misery [of the world]?” (580). Guy, on the other hand, thinks in terms of the spiritual. A life is valuable because it possesses a unique eternal soul, and the call on Guy’s own soul now enables him to recognize and nourish the value of another.

Where Weil saw only God as the proper object of love, Augustine sees three objects: “God, [oneself], and [one’s] neighbour...” When one properly loves these three objects, “he will be at peace, as far as lies in him, with all men, in that peace among men, that ordered harmony” (*City* XIX.14). One loves one’s neighbor, then, for the dual purpose of attaining this triple peace oneself and aiding one’s neighbor in his own pursuit. The goal is the restoration and maintenance of the moral order: like Guy’s initial conception of the war, it is highly teleological, but with the spiritual rather than the political as its highest goal. Thus Guy, in his service to Virginia and her child, seeks to benefit them more than temporally. Virginia converts to Catholicism after the marriage and, in the words of Eloise Plessington, “was killed at the one time in her life when she could be sure of heaven—eventually” (Waugh, *Sword* 627). Gervase, the child, will be brought up in the Catholic faith: “Swallowing personal and family pride to pass on the Crouchback name and legacy to ‘little Trimmer’, Guy enacts... Waugh’s hard-won understanding of the Church’s function: not to fortify the walls against barbarism, but to bring the Hoopers and the Trimmers in” (Patey 353). Service means not just caring for physical needs but also for spiritual ones, based on a robust imagination—à la Mr. Crouchback—of what one’s neighbor’s spiritual good could be. To Waugh, as opposed to Murdoch, autonomy is not the goal. Rather, true service both enacts and reinforces the

network of interpersonal relationships that, ideally, leads to peace with God and with others.

Guy's particular calling to serve Virginia is not one of predisposition (the proposal was "most unwelcome") nor of superiority ("I don't think I've ever in my life done a single, positively unselfish action") nor even of indispensability (Virginia "would have survived somehow"). Rather, as he puts it, "[i]t was made my business by being offered." That is, in the providential order of things, Guy has found himself with opportunity, ability, and motive to aid Virginia and, more importantly, her unborn child: "This is just one case where I can help. And only I, really. I was Virginia's last resort. So I couldn't do anything else" (Waugh, *Sword* 580). To Guy, this constellation of opportunity is a clear answer to his prayer, "Show me what to do and help me to do it," and as a result constitutes a divine call on his life (500). The opportunity was handed to him without any premeditation or research on his part: Guy is importantly passive here. But this is not the same as Murdoch's and Weil's conception of an unwilled, almost automatic service. For them, both the opportunity to serve and the actual action of service must arise with as little willpower as possible; for Guy, the opportunity to serve was provided with no willpower at all, but he still enjoys the fundamental *choice* to accept or to ignore. This is a corollary of the idea of service as vocation: that is, a calling, not a coercion. "[E]very moral and immoral act is an act of will," Waugh writes elsewhere (*EAR* 512). Guy's apathy was a sustained choice to ignore his soul; he awakens by making the choice to ask God for a call, by explicitly asking for a way to assert his self

and his willpower. And because, to Waugh, the self and the will are by nature good, God's calling works through rather than against them.<sup>119</sup>

When Guy is confronted with the distressed conditions of the displaced Jews in Yugoslavia, he feels "a similar sense that here again, in a world of hate and waste, he was being offered the chance of doing a single small act to redeem the times," and he begins advocating their humanitarian relief (*Sword* 617). Unfortunately, in quantitative terms he finally redeems nothing. Not only do "[t]hose Jews who escape find themselves behind barbed wire in an Italian refugee camp," but also "as a direct result of Guy's intervention, Mme Kanyi and her husband are executed by the Partisans as traitors" (Patey 352). It is even difficult to say in qualitative terms, perhaps, that he has aided a single soul. Guy's own self-perception—"he was playing an ancient, historic role....He was Moses leading a people out of captivity" (Waugh, *Sword* 650)—reveals a persistent concern with roles and categories (this time, spiritual rather than national) rather than with the souls around him. And Mme Kanyi herself reminds him that the evacuation he so stridently advocates is not the exodus he imagines: "There was a time when I thought that all I needed for happiness was to leave," she says; but "[i]s there any place that is free from evil?" (655). She rightly questions the value of the temporal relief Guy offers, since such relief cannot touch the soul. Indeed, Guy's actions may be less effective in this instance because he forgets the relative priority of the spiritual over the temporal.<sup>120</sup> Despite all this, as Heath

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<sup>119</sup> If service is an act of will, what prevents it from devolving into the power games that Weil and Murdoch decry? Augustine provides an answer: those who live in the triple peace of love for God, self, and neighbor, can exercise power "[not] because of a lust for domination but from a dutiful concern for the interests of others, not with pride in taking precedence over others, but with compassion in taking care of others" (*City* XIX.14). Counterintuitively—neither Waugh nor Augustine are known for their sunny views of human nature—both are comparatively much more sanguine about the human person's ability to achieve this kind of charity than are Weil and Murdoch.

<sup>120</sup> Joseph Heller in fact damns Guy for his actions: "it is stupidity...that leads to the execution by the Communists of a Jewish refugee he has attempted to aid while on assignment to Yugoslavia" (Stannard,

puts it, “we may be confident that...Guy has profited from his compassionate action” (*Picturesque* 252). In his final conversation with Mme Kanyi, Guy is again pointed toward the City of God. “Even good men thought their private honour would be satisfied by war,” Mme Kanyi tells him. “They could assert their manhood by killing and being killed. They would accept hardships in recompense for having been selfish and lazy.” Guy responds: “God forgive me...I was one of them” (Waugh, *Sword* 655-56). This confession is purgative, definitively revealing the folly of attempting to mend his soul with external appearances. And the final defeat of Guy’s plans for justice throws him back even more firmly on “private causes of the soul” (Stopp 46).

It is thus at this moment that Guy “come[s] to the end of the crusade to which he had devoted himself on the tomb of Sir Roger”: Guy’s “frustrated act of mercy” is the “consummation” of this crusade (Waugh, *Sword* 656). Like Sir Roger, Guy has pursued temporal rather than spiritual ends, and like Sir Roger, Guy meets with crushing failure. Yet, like Sir Roger, Guy will also achieve a measure of recuperation. At an earlier moment when Guy is passed over for a command, “[h]e merely felt a deep sinking of spirit; Sir Roger, maybe, had felt thus when he drew his dedicated sword in a local brawl, not foreseeing that one day he would acquire the odd title of ‘Il Santo Inglese’” (147). Waugh’s phrasing here encourages us to think in terms of present discomfort and future reward; just as Guy (we later learn) was passed over strategically, to qualify him for a better promotion, so Sir Roger’s death has allowed him to become a source of encouragement to the citizens of Santa Dulcina della Rocce. Notably, Sir Roger becomes

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*Critical* 444). I see his point, but I would argue that it is not stupidity, *per se*, but rather overconfidence, the vestiges of his pride, that leads Guy to put Mme Kanyi in a compromising situation (by helping carry firewood and entering her house): the partisans “can’t make any trouble,” he tells her. “Not for you, perhaps. You are leaving,” she replies (Waugh, *Sword* 655). Guy is still caught up in the image of himself as a new Moses, enthralled by “human idols external to himself” (DeCoste 156).

a figure of spiritual rather than temporal significance, thereby reflecting the priorities that ought to have initially motivated Guy's crusade. There is certainly irony in comparing a violent death to a missed promotion; like Leonard's parodic sacrifice for his wife, however, Sir Roger's ambiguous death and quasi-resurrection stand as a distorted mirror for Guy's own trajectory. Both Guy and Sir Roger, writes David Heinemann, "[fail] to engage in the greater struggle and yet succeed...in [their] own way[s]": both demonstrate a movement from the futility of the temporal to the permanence of the spiritual. As a result, Sir Roger functions for Guy much as Margaret functions for Pinfold: a sympathetic, yet potentially fatal parody of Guy's proper ends, a parody that becomes constructive when Guy considers not false public order but rather the true order of the soul. At the end of his time in Yugoslavia, then, Guy does reject the false, public vocation he had earlier tied to Sir Roger's example, but he does not reject Sir Roger himself, for the lesson Sir Roger's death teaches points to the lesson Guy learns through the Kanyis' death: even the utter failure of his imperfectly charitable intentions does not empty them of value.

If, as Ramanathan has argued, in Murdoch's novels the first biblical commandment, "Love the Lord your God," is ultimately collapsed into the second (*Figures 29*), *Sword of Honour* portrays the opposite scenario: the first commandment stands when the second seems to fail. Judged solely on the horizontal axis, Guy's actions toward the Kanyis are worthless or worse. Judged on the vertical axis, as the (somewhat botched) expression of a particular personal divine call, they retain their value whatever their horizontal consequences. In *The City of God*, Augustine argues that evil is wrong because it contravenes nature, which (by virtue of God's creation) is good (XI.17). By

casting service in terms of vocation, Waugh adapts this idea: it is right that Guy should serve, and by extension wrong that he should not, not because of a Kantian categorical imperative or a utilitarian general calculus but because God has particularly called him to action. Whatever acts of service he may perform are as much for his benefit as for the benefit of those he serves. Thus Guy's remarriage has the unexpected result of healing "the deep old wound in Guy's heart and pride" (Waugh, *Sword* 621), and his attention to the Kanyis provokes a moment of confession and repentance that prepares him for life after the war. This is not a justified solipsism, defining good solely in terms of the self: rather, it is a view of service that avoids the problem of bias by defining good according to a third party—in this case, God, the good Creator of both servant and served. In Waugh's view, service extends from one immortal soul to another, for the mutual good of both. And in cases where the injustice of a barbaric world renders charity apparently fruitless, the work of Providence ensures that no act of service is wasted.<sup>121</sup>

In *Sword of Honour*, the call to charity and service is unintelligible without twin affirmations of the vocation of the self and the activity of Providence. God values individual souls enough to give them particular ways to serve the other individual souls around them; and even when these actions do not go as planned, he ensures that goodness remains. To Waugh, service does involve renouncing oneself for the good of another: it may require loss of face, and it certainly requires the recognition of other sources of value, even eternal value, outside of oneself. When one serves, then, one renounces oneself; but one does not renounce one's self. For Waugh and his characters, true service

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<sup>121</sup> In Waugh's short story "Compassion," published before *Sword of Honour* and eventually adapted into that novel's Yugoslavian sequence, a priest tells the Guy-figure, "You mustn't judge actions by their apparent success. Everything you did was good in itself....No suffering need ever be wasted. It is just as much part of Charity to receive cheerfully as to give" (440).

is a *vocation*, and thus to serve another is not only to do good to that person but also, by fulfilling one's vocation, to do good to one's own soul. All service, then, points toward the God who gives the vocation and who brings good even out of its apparent failure. To Murdoch, acts of service point toward a disembodied Good by being as disembodied as possible, selfless, will-less, seeking nothing more definite than another's autonomy. To Waugh, service points toward a personal God by actively responding to a personal call, seeking not another's autonomy but his edification. Murdochian service is a window for the Other to look through, unimpeded; Wavian service is a pair of virtual reality goggles, both enabling and enhancing the Other's vision.

## Conclusion

A BBC radio personality once opened an interview with Waugh by calling him “perhaps the most interesting, amusing, and at the same time depressing person now writing. Can you tell me: do you really feel that there’s any future for mankind at all?” Despite protesting that the inquiry “smacks of the ‘have you stopped beating your wife’ question,” Waugh concluded that “if you mean future...in the sense of a prosperous and happy time to come, I’m afraid I don’t” (“Frankly Speaking”). Murdoch herself was asked a similar question (“Why is your view of the world not very optimistic?”) and responded, “I am pessimistic about human nature...in the sense that I think it is very difficult to stop being selfish” (Sagare 698).<sup>122</sup> Waugh and Murdoch share a common pessimism about human nature—a pessimism that permeates both their novels, whether through the “decline and fall” *leitmotiv* of Waugh’s universe or the constant moral failures of Murdoch’s characters. And throughout their novels, Murdoch and Waugh respond to their pessimism by turning to the particular and individual.

“There is no such thing as a man in the street,” said Waugh in 1953. “There is no ordinary run of mankind. There are only individuals who are totally different” (“Frankly Speaking”). Murdoch, when asked about the difference between men and women, responded similarly: “Women should realize that they are ordinary individuals just as men are, and that they must do what they can, develop their talents and make themselves into whole people and this is something that any human being must try to do, and the fact that you are man or woman doesn’t make it a different task” (Sagare 707). “One’s just a

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<sup>122</sup> Nonetheless, “[h]uman arrangements have improved enormously...[T]here is a great deal of goodwill which has been injected into our societies. Things do still get better...” (Sagare 698). In other words, Murdoch sees cause for optimism in public but not in private causes; as *Sword of Honour* reveals, what optimism Waugh has faces entirely the other way.

human being,” she concludes (Bellamy 133). Both Waugh and Murdoch, in other words, emphasize not universal abstractions but individual particulars. It is the private, not the public, that matters, learn both Guy Crouchback and Rupert Foster, for it is in the private realm that teleology most clearly manifests itself. Gilbert Pinfold is not led out of sloth by the political machinations he thinks he hears, nor is Charles Ryder led to God by his artistic success; rather, both are salvaged by the particular, private loves that tug on both of them. Bradley Pearson and Diana Greensleave find goodness by attending to one particular, inaccessible person. For both authors, it is above all the particular, the individual, that points.

Put another way, both Waugh and Murdoch see humans as fundamentally metaphysical: the individual’s response to transcendent order is the fulcrum of temporal value. That which is truly important under the sun is the human heart, or the human soul, in its relation to the sun itself. As a result, for both authors, human experience is dirigent. Whether one considers sex, art, or the needs of others, one is confronted by evidence (for Waugh) of God’s goodness or (for Murdoch) of alterity; these things call one to look past oneself to one’s ultimate good. Life is, in a word, teleological. Yet in Waugh and Murdoch’s worlds, particulars point for different reasons. “[T]here’s good in a decadent world,” Waugh argues (“Face to Face”), but this goodness can only be recovered by attention to the particular, for it is with the particular soul that God is most intimately concerned. By contrast, Murdoch urges a focus on the particular for reasons of definition rather than of intimacy. Since “goodness...is a form of realism” (*SG* 57), goodness is impossible without attention to particulars—but the Good is in no way actively concerned with them. The Good is impersonal; so is realism. Thus, in Murdoch’s novels, sex and art

appear as teleologically split, pointing both towards and away from goodness: with no personal Creator to ground their natures, sex and art indeed appear to have no natures at all. By contrast, Waugh's understanding of a created and ordered world means that creation is *by nature* good, if by will distorted, and when it points upward it does so naturally, not merely practically.

C.S. Lewis helpfully summarizes the distinction between Murdochian and Wavian teleology:

If you asked twenty good men today what they thought the highest of the virtues, nineteen of them would reply, Unselfishness. But if you had asked almost any of the great Christians of old, he would have replied, Love. You see what has happened? A negative term has been substituted for a positive, and this is of more than philological importance. The negative idea of Unselfishness carries with it the suggestion not primarily of securing good things for others, but of going without them ourselves, as if our abstinence and not their happiness was the important point. ("Weight" 25)

To Murdoch, the self is so naturally selfish that attempting to get past the self is, as it were, a full-time job. In sex, in art, and in service, Murdochian virtue is the abstention, or the destruction, of the self because in our limited and compromised existence no more than this can be done. In this way, Murdoch's ethics seem to enclose a curious kind of selfishness, one in which the Good is defined more by an unwillingness to consider *oneself* than by any positive content about *others*. The Kantian bent of her ethics comes into play here: one is moral for morality's own sake; only when one is unconcerned with

reward, consolation, or any productive relationship between morality and reality can one be truly virtuous.

I am attempting to thread a difficult needle here, and am not altogether sure that Murdoch would be happy with my characterization of her in the previous paragraph. Certainly, Murdoch's primary ethical thrust is realism and attention to the Other; her entire philosophical and novelistic program is built on the problem of "purif[ying] and reorient[ing]...an energy which is naturally selfish" (*SG* 53). But she is unwilling to posit any positive metaphysical alternative to selfishness. The Good has "no metaphysical form" (71); one can never reach beyond "the invisibility or non-representable blankness of the idea of Good itself" (70). If one is not to be selfish, one is to be good—this is the correlate of Murdoch's teleology—but since Good is blank and invisible, to be good is not to be *something* but rather to *not* be something. In this way, the Good does not call the self outside itself to something else; the self need only break down its walls from within. This is the curious sort of selfishness I describe as associated with Murdoch's moral project. And yet the Good clearly does call us outside ourselves, or there would be no teleology at all. It calls us to itself and to the real world around us. It has, after all, "metaphysical position" (71). There is a strange double motion here; the Good seems to lead both inside and outside the self. Murdoch's teleology itself is teleologically split.

Waugh, on the other hand, unreservedly speaks of God in terms of metaphysical form. His religion is "a coherent philosophic system" coupled with "intransigent historical claims," as Charles Ryder puts it (*Brideshead* 86), in particular the claim of "an actual crucifixion on a piece of wood" ("Face to Face"). If one is not to be wicked, one is to be good—and since the Author of goodness is worshipped by the Church, revealed in

Scripture, taught in the catechism, documented in history, and reflected by creation, to be good is to become like the Being these sources describe. God calls the soul not out of itself but to himself, and as a result Waugh's teleology can be more unreservedly unselfish than Murdoch's: the soul is not called to destroy *itself* but rather to be itself for the good of *another* (as well as its own good). In Lewis' terms, if Murdoch champions unselfishness, Waugh champions love.<sup>123</sup>

As a result, although Waugh and Murdoch use the same word to denominate their novels' teleological engines, they are in effect speaking of two different qualities. And as the engines are different, so are the courses: a Waugh character's journey to God looks quite different from a Murdoch character's journey to the Good. Yet it is noteworthy that either author should describe a journey as worth making at all. Waugh lived through the First World War and fought in the Second; Murdoch experienced the latter and saw the rise of postmodernism; both lived during the Holocaust: their work has bathed in the great metaphysical acids of the twentieth century. Out of these political and intellectual corrosives Waugh and Murdoch have stubbornly fished the old-fashioned notions of *telos* and virtue. Unlikely comrades, but partners in this nonetheless, they cried to their neighbors and cry to us still: look outward, look up! The Sun calls you on.

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<sup>123</sup> This may seem a bold claim, especially since I have just spent upwards of one hundred pages discussing both Waugh and Murdoch's understanding of love, and I must emphasize that these are Lewis' terms, not mine. Nonetheless, Lewis raises an important point. Murdoch's philosophy balances a "thoroughly pessimistic view of human nature" (*SG* 50) against an uncertainly real *telos*; with the top of the structure luminous, yet empty (see *FHD* 215), the weight falls back on humanity's inescapable selfishness. Virtue—and in particular, love—is primarily defensive, negative. In Waugh's understanding, however, an equally strong conception of human frailty is ultimately outweighed by a vision of a strong, active, and personal God, both luminous and weighty. In this sense, Wavian love is proactive and positive. The two concepts are in fact significantly different, and Lewis' terminology helps emphasize this.

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