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## **Hail The Bright Puppets: A Fairly Honourable Defeat**

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The style is simplicity made flesh. Mr. Langguth makes a sentence spin compositionally. Not only does his way of saying things reduce person, place and/or situation to the unforgettable but his manner of communicating New Testament wisdom, facile. This book is well recommended to teachers and students of both freshman composition and creative writing.

This is a modern-day Christ, put together not so much by reverence or orthodoxy as by wit or perhaps by a wilful desire to startle. Langguth will have no part of monuments or their perpetuation. He is not cowed by tradition; neither will he contribute to a growing list of boring reading. The facets or aspects we know are served here on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. We realize and accept Langguth's insistence that Christ lived and died like us, and the introduction of streetcars, nuns, motorcars, gunfire, hospitals and sessions with cashew nuts makes this novel terribly and beautifully universal.

VALDEMAR O. OLAGUER

## HAIL THE BRIGHT PUPPETS

A FAIRLY HONOURABLE DEFEAT. By Iris Murdoch. New York: The Viking Press, 1970. 426 pp.

An inexhaustible mine in the pyrotechnics, lusts and infinite variations of love, Iris Murdoch has created still another world of physical and mental desire. It is a world of her own making; one that is perhaps quite unique to her. Like all universes privately endowed and just as individually arranged, this one sticks to, and submits to laws legislated and defended by their creator. And it is a closed private world in England, chilling and bizarre.

Bright sexual (and intellectual?) unions project their permanence at curtain-rise: Rupert and Hilda heterosexual, Tallis and Morgan, heterosexual, but divorced. Into this farce wanders Julius King willy-nilly, a sane but devious device of his own manipulation, content only to breed chaos and confusion where benignity and order once reigned. There is a devilry in Julius which Iris Murdoch condones and wills to be sovereign. He is the instrument of bliss and torment, the implacable god who thinks, wills and executes, always to his own glee and honor.

What King knows and perhaps cherishes is an affair culminating in wilfull abortion, with Morgan in America, where she has found sanctuary in a South Carolina college. She fled from Tallis whose

rounded inadequacies stifled and strangled her. One complication sets in. Hilda is Morgan's sister and their obviously satisfying childhood, marked by mutually acknowledged loyalties, is no deterrent to Morgan's passion and self-seeking. Morgan comes back to England to Priory Grove which is Rupert's and Hilda's retreat. She takes stock of the situation and fomenters her strange penchant for Rupert into a romance. Rupert gives her a green malachite paperweight which once belonged to Peter. In his turn Peter, Rupert's offspring, does not live at Priory Grove, but rather, obeying his instincts, is holed up in Tallis' house and in one scene, fearful of encroaching ghosts, sleeps in the latter's arms. Peter discovers his mounting passion for Morgan and submits to it. There is no end to the incest. But at its heights, Peter discovers the paperweight in Morgan's safekeeping. Of course, Morgan's sexuality is only hinted to Hilda, but she eventually discovers it. She flees from Priory Grove, gets into a series of contretemps, enjoys a kind of remorse and returns to Rupert; only it is now too late. She telephones Priory Grove and speaks to Morgan who has found Rupert floating in the pool, dead, overdosed with alcohol and sleeping pills. Hilda and Morgan, with the restored Peter, go to America and become confidently, typically fulfilled, replete with shoplifting, visits to the official psychiatrist, returns to society and college job. Whatever pangs of conscience harrow the two sisters are soft-pedalled: Rupert truly recedes into the background; there was no rift between the spouses, it seems; and Morgan sees the good and bad of two worlds, with moral expertise. Morgan does not suffer, or apparently she does not.

The deviate portion of the novel, with Axel and Simon as protagonists, is cleverly managed by Julius, who wheedles Simon first into coming up to his flat without telling Axel, then into covert placement of Simon and himself in a museum that both might witness and hear Rupert's and Morgan's quaint love scene, and their vows for a rendezvous. Later Julius serenely appears at Axel's birthday party, trundling an enormous pink-fuzzed teddy bear, which the latter disposes of with comic difficulty. But the homosexual rifts are patched (previously Simon tells Morgan how Axel and he significantly meet in an Athens museum).

The special use of letters in the novel, indicates narrative skill and the ability to characterize. For one, Tallis sends Morgan eager overtures towards reconciliation; for another, Rupert writes Hilda a long passionate avowal of faith. The addressees tear these up respectively, and by a mystery of coincidence the fragments find themselves in one wastebasket. Morgan later rakes these up, and reads a broken continuity into the pieces. These lives are never the same again. Similarly Tallis, feeling blandly heterosexual, bangs out a note to Morgan, who dismisses this as rubbish.

A damaging striptease by Morgan before Simon, the amenities of normal and perverted love whose vocabulary and syntax become the reader's, sundry scenes of faith and treachery parade through these gay pages. Always the reader happily responds.

Julius King's role in the management and disposal of these desires exhibits a certain moral infallibility which baffles and endlessly stimulates the reader. We shall grant that one individual, for all his plotting and ability at horror, can fix the lives of others; this does not prepare us to admit that malice and an apparently senseless or unfeeling view of the world can, by its own energies, direct one to destroy. But this novel proves this, in principle and in intention, to be true. Though masterly, Julius falls short of most canons of charity drawn up by people, unless the Murdochian universe, obeying its own specific densities is filled with enormities. *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* is Julius King's book: it properly begins and concludes with him; his dominance thereof paves the way for destruction, and negates the claim that the meek inherit the earth. At this point, a large scale study of the fiction — and heroes of Iris Murdoch is in order, perhaps to signify not only that the Julius King type is here to beguile us and to stay, not only that the obsessive marionettes the author parades before us and wilfully destroys are realities, but that Iris Murdoch is certainly a representative artist.

VALDEMAR O. OLAGUER