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Athanasios Dimakis, “‘In a Greek Light’: Hellenic Moral Vision in The Philosophy & Fiction of Iris Murdoch”

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ABSTRACT

Adopting a synthetic approach, while highlighting the uninterrupted continuum and flow of ideas between Murdoch’s moral philosophy and her fiction, this study explores the processes through which Greek visualism infiltrates Murdoch’s spiritual, mystical, and quasi-mythological conception of moral vision. This dissertation investigates the visualist preoccupations of Murdoch’s philoso-fiction with the contention that it remains consistently and persistently heliocentric, ocularcentric, and Apollonian. Deriving from the tenets of Greek visualism, Murdoch counters what she perceives as the de-moralization and demystification of vision and the uprooting of its ethical extensions in post/modernity, which overemphasizes its optical dimensions, addressing the vicissitudes and pathologies of physiological vision while challenging the primacy of vision in classical metaphysics. The exploration of the indissoluble relationship of masculinity and liquidity, two of Murdoch’s constant authorial obsessions, which reaches culmination in/through the abundant male-related liquid ordeals that populate her fiction, affiliates the ethical extensions of mortality with the sharpening of (moral) vision that Murdoch seems to set forth in her visualist metaphysics. Rupturing the aesthetic structure of the sublime, Murdoch directs attention to the dead body that lies at the heart of her fiction. The sublime experience of sea-change connects her philosophical novels with morality, depicting *enlightenment* as a movement towards goodness and ethical reorientation. This dissertation aspires to reinstate the tenacious visualism of the influential author/philosopher to the Hellenic context where, I submit, it rightfully belongs in

spite of its recurrent restrictive associations with either Plato or Aristotle. The ocular intensity of Murdoch's heliotropic fiction, the largely unexamined quasi-literal presence of the sun-God Apollo in the *dénouement* of the novels discussed, along with the striking sequence of *enlightenments* and the existence of a surplus of Hellenic visual *insignia* and metaphors facilitate the designation of Murdoch as a visualist philosopher and novelist that "live[s] in a Greek light" (*Metaphysics* 159). This is the literal and metaphorical light that illuminates Iris Murdoch's moral vision.