In at the Kill

The Memoirs of General Grivas. Edited by Charles Foley. (Longmans, 30s.)

General Grivas is a very brave man—and he is not afraid of telling us so on nearly every page. That, however, did not destroy the excitement, spirit of adventure and high sense of dedication with which animated Grivas. Were it not for the sense of dedication the reader would find this account distasteful in the extreme. Cold-blooded murder by 'execution squads' is inevitable in a revolution in a small island. The terrorism of General Grivas was no worse than that of President de Valera. We have all come to like de Valera and those who, like myself, know him cannot resist his charm. I suppose if Grivas lives long enough he, too, will be forgiven.

Politically, the importance of this book resides in the complete incrimination in the policy of indiscriminate murder and terrorism of that holy man, Archbishop Makarios. A section of Grivas's diary (up to April 1, 1955) which was found buried in a jam jar in August 1956, at the outset of the insurrection, and parts of which were published at the time, had already raised the question of the Archbishop's duplicity. The evidence produced by General Grivas is altogether as the holy prophet is concerned. Though Makarios frequently counselled prudence and usually argued for sabotage rather than indiscriminate murder he was privé to the plot from the earliest days.

As early as July 2, 1952, the first meeting of a 'Secret Liberation Committee' was held in Athens in the kitchen of the Archbishop Makarios. Others more highly placed in the Etnarchy were also committed from the start. Thus we are told by Bishop Spilides of Athens, Primate of All Greece, 'promised us his full support and agreed that I should go again to Cyprus.' Grivas tells us that on his first visit to Cyprus in connection with his plot in November 1952 he met Andreas Azinas, 'a young protege of the Archbishop Makarios... With him I chose the landing site for our first gun-running cassette... He became liaison between Makarios and myself.' Grivas also tells us that Makarios financed his first shipments of arms from Greece.

I have emphasised that, to begin with, Makarios deprecated murder. Later he was to become more bloodthirsty. On March 3, 1958, Makarios, after saying that 'although we should not provoke the Turks, we should show weakness,' went on: 'My opinion is that we should throw a grenade or two from some balcony and give them a sharp lesson, so that they will not dare to face us.' A few weeks later Makarios wrote to Grivas: '... only EOKA can deliver the blows needed to teach the Turks a lesson. I appreciate that there are difficulties but the thing is possible. There were clashes at Limassol the other day between Greeks and Turks after a Greek was murdered. A Turk was fired on during the clash. I think it would have been possible to throw a hand-grenade or two at the Turkish mob. The same should be done in other towns.' These are the words of the Bishopdom of whom Dr. Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury, recently asserted (I do not know with what authority) that he was a 'Christian.' The possibility of being an Archbishops' Club. No doubt it is a move of modern churchmen towards 'great Christian responsibility.'

We are indebted to General Grivas for giving us a fuller account than was available earlier of the abortive plot to blow up Government House in his bed and how, through miscalculation about changes of temperature, he slept all night on the bed, and discovered the next morning and safely detonated in the gardens of Government House. Lady Harding has long cherished a grievance that none of the newspapers has mentioned that the fact she was sharing her husband's bed. Grivas does not mention this point; so I am glad to have this opportunity of putting the matter on record.

This is a fascinating story of underground adventure. It will surely become a textbook of small-scale guerrilla warfare. Grivas will probably be remembered twenty years from now with de Valera and Tito as one of the most successful guerrilla leaders of the twentieth century.

R.A.M.O.P.H.C. S. CHURCHILL.

Murdoch's Eighth

The Italian Girl. By Iris Murdoch. (Chatto and Windus, 21s.)

The Eve of Saint Venus. By Anthony Burgess. Illustrated by Edward Pagram. (Sidgwick and Jackson, 15s.)

The Prince's Person. By Roger Peyrefitte. Translated by Peter Fryer. (Secker and Warburg, 18s.)

A Moment in Time. By H. E. Bates. (Michael Joseph, 21s.)

God Came on Friday. By Patrick O'Hara. (Spectator, 213:7107 (1964:Sept. 11) p.346

The Spectator, September 11, 1964

The Italian Girl is Miss Iris Murdoch's eighth novel, and is as impeccably written as one would expect from a writer so happily immediately recognisable by its jaunty elegance, garrulous detail and accented metaphor. Clearly the prose, treatment and conception of climax and statement are uniquely Miss Murdoch's. It is simply no good considering any one of her books in a dissociated manner as one might perhaps do with the work of a less idiosyncratic author.

In her literary persona Miss Murdoch is as uncommercial as Miss Compton-Burnett, of whom there are traces in this present book, although Miss Murdoch's idiom is more evidently modern. The similarity between these two novelists is traditional in their points of resemblance, especially striking in the juxtaposition of melodramatic violence (exemplified in deed and characterisation) and the ironic yet compassionate probing of cause and motive, quite apart from the compulsive author's personality that distinguishes the work of both. Miss Murdoch has risen more quickly in general terms of fame than did Miss Compton-Burnett, but this is a subject that is entirely different. It is described as the post-world-war-two intellectual climate: Miss Compton-Burnett's great literary reputation was only fully accepted after the Second World War. If Miss Murdoch's development is not yet on the same parallel, there is no reason to be mean about her future merely because she has to date enjoyed such praise. I mention this because Miss Murdoch may have suffered from her popularity; there is a tendency in certain literary corridors of power (to borrow from Sir Charles Snow) to be ambivalent about her work, and this is plain stupid, because to praise Miss Murdoch is not to deny equal power and position to other outstanding women novelists.

What matters now is to admit that a new novel from Miss Murdoch demands more attention than most fiction published today. Her standard is high even if certain aspects may not satisfy as much as her earlier work. In some ways The Italian Girl, which at first appears to follow her last three novels, actually returns to the earlier The Bell. The Bell alone stands by itself, although every novel has its clear connection to this author's general thesis. In spite of much exhilarating action and emotional excess there is a basic simplicity, which was not lost in the behaviour complexity of her last three novels, which created an impression of repetition. 'How does evil begin in a life?' asks Otto, one of the most damaged of this small cast of characters. The spectator and analyst of this is the concern of wood-engraver narrator Edmund, intent on dissociation, yet sucked into a chronic set of domestic problems when he returns home to attend his mother's funeral. Reluctant to assess or to acknowledge facts, disgusted by his brother Otto's impurity and self-destructiveness, repelled by his sister-in-law Isobel's greed and sexual honesty, Edmund is compelled to witness and participate, simply because of his own misguided idealism which conceives innocence in his niece Flora, and moral austerity in Maggie, the Italian girl, by whom eventually he is seduced (and this is where Miss Murdoch makes her point) when he realises that Maggie is as vulnerable to weakness as he is obstinately resolved against recognition of it in himself.

This insipient inconstant situation isajar into inaction by two outsiders who the plot and his sister Elsa, whose shock tactics and directness ultimately purifies. In all this shared madness there is no knowledge of the three girl, and Miss Murdoch superbly controls the moment of clarity, when exhaustion by conflict reveals another layer of self-knowledge to those who have walked through Danie's Purgatory. The question is not what life is but what life can best live,' reflects Edmund, and herein to Miss Murdoch's art, and her illustration of it is no small triumph.

Two short entertainments from two highly skilled professionals make a delightful exercise in contrasts. Mr. Burgess shoots off his glibstering joke with great finesse. The Eve of Saint Venus is a very dashing plea for the lady's inclusion in the calendar of saints, and the pre-wedding antics which take place in a very U.County-boumiante are exracrificatory and grotesque. Equally short and frolicsome is Mr. Peyrefitte's last ride at the Vatican, which recounts in his own sly implausible fashion the confusions (moral as well as spiritual) of cardinals obsessed by a Cinquecento Mantuan Prince's genital organs and performance. Nothing rouses Mr. Peyrefitte as much with pleasure as true soundal which he can gossip so splendidly about. Actually, of the two, Mr. Burgess, to my mind, wins in this battle of wis.

A Moment in Time is no doubt Mr. Bates's offering to the commemoration of that fatal battle of Britain summer, and as such this slight story of the sentimental (love, youth and acclimatisation to war), narrated by a young very English girl, has merit; if only to remind us of the jargon used by those dedicated pilots. Somehow one wishes that Mr. Bates had left his own admirable Flying Officer X books to stand undulyed by this latterday reflection.

Mr. O'Hara has a splendid basic talent and his racy novel about the crookedness of small-time boxing, God Came on Friday, is exciting. There is fine material here for a novel about Sharp characterisation and power to make the dull Frankie hero interesting suggest that with some discipline and more emphasis, it might one day equal Mr. David Storey, although this, comparatively, is a very long-term guess.

KAY DICK.