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The Iris Murdoch Society

The Iris Murdoch Review is the publication of the Iris Murdoch Society, which was formed at the Modern Language Association Convention in New York City in 1986. It offers a forum for short articles and reviews and keeps members of the society informed of new publications, symposia and other information that has a bearing on the life and work of Iris Murdoch.

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Appeal on behalf of the Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies by the Society

The Iris Murdoch Society actively supports the Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies at Kingston University in its acquisition of new material for the Murdoch archives. It has contributed financially towards the purchase of Iris Murdoch's heavily annotated library from her study at her Oxford home, the library from her London flat, the Conradi archives, a number of substantial letter runs and other individual items. More detailed information on the collections can be found on the website for the Centre:

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The Centre is regularly offered documents, individual letters and letter-runs that are carefully evaluated and considered for funding. We would welcome any donations that would enable the Iris Murdoch Society to contribute to the purchase of important items that may come up for sale in the future. We would also welcome reminiscences of Iris Murdoch, letters from her, or the donation of any other material that would enrich the scholarly value of the archives. The Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies is establishing itself as an internationally significant source of information for researchers on Iris Murdoch's work. The Iris Murdoch Society would greatly appreciate your help to continue this level of support for the Centre.

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Foreword: An ‘International’ Edition of the *Iris Murdoch Review*

2009 marked the 90th anniversary of Murdoch’s birth and the 10th anniversary of her death. This second *Iris Murdoch Review* is a celebratory ‘International’ edition that reflects both the breadth of Murdoch’s interest in other cultures and the global nature of research on her work at this time. Her international significance has been clearly evidenced by two factors. First, by conferences dedicated to Iris Murdoch held in 2009 in Turkey and Portugal, and an exhibition on her work held at the University of Barcelona in 2008. Second, by the rapid growth in the international range of the enquiries to the Centre of Iris Murdoch Studies – from America, Brazil, China, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, India, Iran, Ireland, Japan, Macedonia, Poland, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Taiwan and Turkey. Also the critical attention given in this issue to marginal aspects of Murdoch’s novels involves them in fresh international cultural and political debates. This attention offers innovative insights into her characters and suggests new cultural significances for the detail of the novels.

Frances White’s prize-winning essay¹ on Diaspora is a politicized reading of *The Flight from the Enchanter* that suggests concern on Murdoch’s part about the treatment of refugees in Britain in the 1950s, and Murdoch’s anxieties here remain relevant to the twenty-first century. Maria Smolenska Greenwood’s close focus on the character of Wojciech Szczepanski, a second generation Polish refugee in *Nuns and Soldiers*, suggests that by constructing characters of ‘difference’, Murdoch explores issues of national loyalty and honour that identify something of the essence of Polishness and, by implication, Britishness. Following her review of ‘The Response of Italian Critics to the Work of Iris Murdoch’, in the *Iris Murdoch News Letter* no.14, Professor Madeline Merlini reflects on Murdoch’s experience of Italy and references to the country and its culture in her fiction. Her essay invites further observations on Murdoch’s links with a country to whose art and literature she was perpetually drawn. Japan, of course, is home to its own Iris Murdoch Society, and Chiho Omichi, writing on Murdoch’s use of netsuke in her novels, reveals ways in which superficially insignificant detail often provides rich psychological clues to character. Nick Turner’s innovative comparison between Murdoch and Jane Austen draws Murdoch back to her English realist roots, reminding of her commitment to moral improvement, her self-consciousness about the artificiality of form, her striving for impersonality and her concern for that which is universal as well as particular. Turner’s discussion not only illustrates Murdoch’s debt to Austen but also transforms Austen’s work in the light of its association with Murdoch’s. Anne Sebba’s short essay on the H.G. Adler library, which has now been housed on permanent loan at King’s College London, is of interest because Adler was a childhood friend of Franz Baerman Steiner and Steiner’s parents were with Adler in Theresienstadt from July to October, 1942.² Murdoch told Canetti of how Adler had secured his own safety in the concentration camps by writing love poems for the Nazis, and Conradi suggests that Murdoch ‘came to see that the Jewish expatriates whom she loved, who fought as expatriates will, who had undergone the worst their century had to offer, carried within themselves, as it were, an understanding that she and other British people lacked’.³ This library has huge value for future researchers into Murdoch’s representation of Holocaust victims and survivors in her novels. The six book reviews and the record of the unusually large range of recent publications worldwide bear testament to the eclectic international nature of Murdoch scholarship. It is heartening to note that material from the Murdoch archives has enriched a number of essays in this edition, fruitfully extending analyses of Murdoch’s life and work.

Anne Rowe, January, 2010.

¹ This essay won a prestigious prize for a postgraduate paper awarded by CWWN (Contemporary Women’s Writing Network at the University of Leicester).

² See Peter Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), p. 341, p. 339.

³ *Ibid.* p. 371.

“The world is just a transit camp”: Diaspora in the Fiction of Iris Murdoch

Diaspora is dispersion, scattering, diffraction. It links with words like adrift, astray, straggling, travelling, and it resonates with losing coherence, throwing into confusion, going off on one's own, wandering, drifting apart, and – further down the scale of dissolution – with disintegrating, dissolving, decaying, decomposing, disembodying, disordering, defeating.¹ This is a catalogue of disconnection and destruction. Such diaspora begins as an external, structural, social occurrence – the diaspora of the Jews or the Irish. But when the links which attach people to their societies are weakened or even snapped completely, diaspora reveals itself as an internal, individual, personal occurrence – the break down of the individual, of the self. Elements in Iris Murdoch's writings reflect both aspects of diaspora.

Murdoch was well-known and well-connected, securely part of the English academic and literary world, a Dame of the British Empire. Yet she identifies strongly with exiles, refugees, displaced persons. One reason for this is biographical: born in Dublin to Irish parents but moved to England as a baby, Murdoch spent the rest of her life in exile from her native country:

We settled down in London – where we knew nobody – and I grew up as a Londoner, and it's only lately that I've realised how strange that was. I never had any family apart from this perfect trinity, and I scarcely know my Irish relations. I feel as I grow older that we were kind of wanderers, and I've only recently realised that I'm a kind of exile, a displaced person. I identify with exiles.²

Her school, Badminton, took German-Jewish refugees as pupils in the 1930s; and Murdoch spent two years, 1944-46, as a Relief worker with UNRRA in camps for displaced persons in Austria and Belgium, which she described as 'absolutely front-line stuff' (*TCHF*, p. 130). Her denial that this influenced her fiction, 'except for a strong feeling about refugees' (*TCHF*, p. 231), perhaps under-rates the effect on her imagination of this identification with the condition of exile. As late as 1989 she wrote in her journal a memory from 1946 of a 'fear that I would get nowhere, would hang around and ultimately become a displaced person myself' (Journal, 19 November 1989).³ Inside the apparent security of her social position, Murdoch felt a deep lack of belonging which gave her empathy with others who more obviously share that state of being.

Before analyzing diaspora in Murdoch's fiction, it is important to note that her understanding of this human experience must be rooted in her philosophy. Murdoch's philosophy, having appeared old-fashioned during her lifetime, is actually visionary and prophetic in her pioneering work, and her renown as a philosopher is rapidly increasing. She is in the vanguard of the new 'ethical turn' in moral philosophy and literary theory and criticism.⁴ Murdoch's central *credo*, the heart of her ethical and aesthetic manifesto is:

¹ See *The Original Roget's Thesaurus*, ed. by Betty Kirkpatrick (London: Longman, 1987).

² Gillian Dooley, *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction: Conversations with Iris Murdoch* (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), p. 130. Hereafter *TCHF*.

³ Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), p. 247. Hereafter *IMAL*.

⁴ See *Renegotiating Ethics in Literature, Philosophy and Theory* ed. by Jane Adamson, Richard Freadman, & David Parker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) for Murdoch's innovatory and influential place in this new movement.

Art and morals are, with certain provisos [...] one. Their essence is the same. The essence of both of them is love. Love is the perception of individuals. Love is the extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real. Love, and so art and morals, is the discovery of reality.⁵

She returns the concept of the unique and precious individual to centre stage in ethics, and sees art as an important means of learning this central lesson of attention to the reality of the other.⁶ Her own art bears out her philosophical tenets, which are derived jointly from her experience of life and from her reading of other philosophers. Peter Conradi observes that

Her period with UNRRA seems to have been important for two reasons. In Brussels she encountered existentialism [...] she also saw a ‘total breakdown of human society’ which she has said it was instructive to witness. These two encounters now seem less apart than might appear. This breakdown of society produced the refugees and homeless persons who figure in Murdoch’s novels, as in history, and Sartrean existentialism was a philosophy that privileged the cultureless outsider hero.⁷

But this existentialist influence which romanticized unbelonging (think of Camus’ *L’Etranger*) was tempered both by the absolute human wretchedness Murdoch had witnessed, and by her reading Simone Weil,⁸ who, as a Jew in occupied France, became a refugee herself. To quote Conradi again:

It is Weil’s strength that she does not, unlike Sartre, sentimentalize the position of being radically denuded and outside society. Murdoch has called Weil’s *Need for Roots* ‘one of the very few profound and original political treatises of our times’. It argues that the most terrible deprivation possible is the destruction of one’s past and one’s culture [...] Sudden or violent deracination can mean complete or demonic demoralization. (*SA*, p. 16)

⁵ Iris Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. by Peter Conradi (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), p. 215.

⁶ In their stress on the primacy of the ethical, and on the all importance of the other, Murdoch and Levinas have a considerable amount in common, but the crucial difference is that Murdoch’s ‘other’ has a face which must be *seen*, whereas Levinas’s other is more conceptual than personal and is significantly ‘faceless’. See C. F. Alford, ‘Emmanuel Levinas and Iris Murdoch: Ethics as Exit?’, *Philosophy and Literature* Vol. 26, Part 1 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 24-42: ‘Levinas was never interested in the concrete reality of the other person, whose fleshy reality can only get in the way of transcendence. Murdoch, who does not seek transcendence, is interested in the reality of the other as it may known through what she calls “love: the non-violent apprehension of difference”’ (p. 37).

⁷ Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: The Saint and the Artist*, 2nd edn. (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 13. Hereafter *SA*. Conradi’s quotation is taken from Murdoch’s interview with Haffenden, which can be found in *TCHF*, pp. 124-38.

⁸ See Sissela Bok, ‘Simone Weil and Iris Murdoch: The Possibility of Dialogue’, *Gender Issues* (Fall 2005), 71-8: Murdoch ‘found Weil’s books [...] invaluable as she struggled with her own sense of displacement and rootlessness’ (p. 75).

Murdoch, like Weil, perceives the devastating effects of diaspora, which can either destroy individuals or cause them to become demonic and pass on to others the suffering they themselves received. Her novels contain characters of both kinds.

Outsider figures are present from the beginning of Murdoch's fictional *oeuvre*. The chief characters in her first novel, *Under the Net* (1954), are the Irish expatriate (like herself) Jake Donaghue and Hugo Belfounder, whose parents are German refugees, and all her novels are peopled by refugees, exiles, displaced persons. Also by characters who, belonging themselves in the centre of their society, worry about those who are marginalized. Amongst the displaced are the Levkings, Russian Jewish refugees in *The Italian Girl* (1964); Willy Kost, a German-Jewish refugee and concentration camp survivor, in *The Nice and the Good* (1968), chief among 'the cast of displaced persons' in that novel (SA, p.181); and the 'Count', Wojciech Szczepanski, a second generation Polish refugee in *Nuns and Soldiers* (1980). Amongst the concerned are Tallis Browne in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970), saddened by the misery of his ostracized Sikh lodger; Gertrude Openshaw, who teaches English to Asian women in *Nuns and Soldiers*; and Gabriel McCaffrey, who worries about the loneliness of an Indian man sitting unbefriended at a café in *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983). Awareness of marginalization is always uncomfortably present in the middle-class world Murdoch's characters inhabit.

Exiled characters divide into two groups. There is a subset of those who have become demonized by their experience, chief amongst whom is the anti-hero of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, Julius King, a manipulator and destroyer of others, whose actions are cast in a new light at the end of the novel when it is revealed that he survived Belsen. Violence has bred violence in such characters. Others are undone by their deracination. Violence has broken them. The Ur-text for this theme of exile and dispossession in Murdoch's work is her second novel, *The Flight from the Enchanter* of 1956, which is at the heart of her conception and portrayal of the evil and suffering which diaspora causes in individual human lives. *The Flight from the Enchanter* is essentially about refugeeism. Conradi relates that 'an early draft [...] makes it clear that originally all the major characters were to have been refugees' and in the final version the English characters are also 'subject to various displacements' (SA, p. 65) although the figures who are defined by their refugee status are fewer. The action of the plot turns upon a question's being asked in parliament, which is orchestrated by Mischa Fox, the Enchanter figure. He is a displaced person himself, so displaced indeed that Conradi describes him as a 'fantastic deracination ("Where was he born? What blood is in his veins? No one knows." [935])' (SA, p. 67). He prefigures Julius King in his destructive manipulation of those around him, his 'creatures' who fall under his sway. He has set up in a business a dressmaker called Nina, who is patronized by an Englishwoman, Rosa, whom Mischa loves. Rosa has befriended two Polish refugees, Jan & Stefan Lusiewicz, at the factory where they all work, but as the brothers learn English and gain confidence they become hostile and violent to Rosa and her family and she appeals to Mischa for help to get rid of them. Setting up the asking of a question in parliament is his response to her plea, but the repercussions of this affect innocent others as much as the bullying, stealing Lusiewicz brothers.

The situation is this: there is an organization called SELIB (standing for Special European Labour Immigration Board), an agency which regulates immigrant permits, and holds all the immigrants' identity documents (p. 99). John Rainborough, who works there, explains the position of such immigrant workers:

[U]nless there's some special reason to chuck them out, they can stay for good. For the first five years they hold a special SELIB permit. After that they can

apply for an ordinary Ministry of Labour permit, or else ask for naturalization. [...] [They are on probation] [o]nly in the sense that their permission to be here at all depends on their work permit. But in fact once they're here no one is going to bother their heads about them, and provided they behave normally there's nothing to stop them being here forever. Technically speaking, half these workers oughtn't to be here at all. (p. 97)

This is because of the 'FPE' (the 'Farthest Point East'), an arbitrarily placed demarcation line: immigrants born east of this line are not entitled to work in England under the SELIB program. John Rainborough describes it as a 'crazy and arbitrary [...] rough and ready distinction' (p. 98), but justifies it. When his questioner, Rosa's brother, Hunter Keepe comments,

It would be a sad thing for a man [...] to have his fate decided by where he was born. He didn't choose where he was born.

John answers,

Yes, it's not a pleasant way to have to discriminate between human beings [...] but you have to deal with the situation that you have, and we didn't make this one. Anyhow, life is full of that sort of injustice. (p. 99)

This slick passage contains some major and unexamined assumptions: that 'once they're here no one is going to bother their heads about them' is a harmless state of affairs; that the situation is somehow just a given, not a man-made construction which could be altered; and that it counts as a kind of natural injustice. It is Hunter who voices the essence of the tragedy of refugees – to have their fate decided by the unchosen accident of birth place.

Nina, the dressmaker, who uniquely among Murdoch's characters is given no surname – a mark of her lack of identity – is an unspecified East European, but importantly she was 'born east of the line' (p. 263). She is 'what Annette [Cockayne] classified as "some sort of refugee" [...] [who] spoke with a charming and quite undiagnosable foreign accent' (p. 75). Annette, another of Nina's patrons, is the spoilt daughter of rich parents, and from her perspective Nina just orbits her own rightly more central existence. She does not really *see* Nina, valuing only the skill which will make her beautiful clothes. Murdoch's philosophical vocabulary is full of metaphors of vision: to give attention is really to see the other person. No one really sees Nina. To Mischa she is prey. Vulnerable, poor and alone, she was 'ready from the first to be his slave' (p. 140). Nina has 'the refugee's horror of the power and hostility of all authorities and of their mysterious interconnection with each other' (p. 145). When she hears of the question asked in parliament concerning SELIB workers she is terrified. She asks Rosa for help:

'Miss Keepe, [...] might I speak to you? Have you a moment?'
I'm going somewhere just now [...] but do walk along with me if you like.'
Without thinking what she was doing, she began to run. Nina ran behind her.
'I'm so sorry', said Rosa, 'I just forgot for a moment.'
'How are you getting on, Nina?'

'I have some problems.'

'Life is a series of problems!' said Rosa merrily.

'How are you getting on, Nina?' asked Rosa. 'Oh yes, I asked you that, didn't I. I do hope these problems aren't really bad ones. If ever I can be of any assistance -'

'Ah yes!' said Nina breathlessly from behind Rosa's elbow. 'I would like to ask your advice!'

'Never be afraid to ask advice,' said Rosa. 'People try to be far too independent of each other.' [*It becomes apparent that she is calling on Mischa Fox.*]

'Some other time - ' said Nina, 'I'll call again.' She turned about and bolted away down the street.

Rosa looked after her in surprise. Then she turned [...] She forgot Nina completely. (pp. 236-9)

Rosa does not *see* Nina either. Self-preoccupied with her own dramas she fails to respond to the desperate though quiet appeal for help. This scene is heavily ironic as Rosa 'merrily' puts Nina's problems on a scale with her own, twice asks her how she is getting on without listening to the answer, meaninglessly offers assistance even as she is withholding it, says platitudinously that 'people try to be far too independent of each other' without realizing that Nina is attempting to depend on her, forgets her presence even while she is there, and forgets her totally the moment she is absent. John Rainborough's phrase takes on resonance in this context: 'no one is going to bother their heads about them'. Neither Rosa nor Annette bother their heads about Nina.

All Nina's efforts to be seen and heard are set at nought by others. Murdoch presents the consequences of this failure of attention, this failure to perceive the reality of the other, this failure of love, in the outcome of Nina's story, a passage which must be told in full as it portrays of the essence of what it means to be a displaced person:

Three days ago Nina had received a communication from the Home Office asking her to present herself at a certain department in Westminster, and adding that failure to do so would render her liable to prosecution. [...] She had not obeyed the summons. Now in a fever of haste she was packing to be gone, at every moment expecting to hear upon the stairs the tread of the police who would come to take her away [...] she had no doubt that if she fell now into the hands of the state she would be deported back to her own country. And I would rather die, thought Nina, I would rather die.

[...]

She stared at her passport, and it seemed to her suddenly like a death warrant. It filled her with shame and horror. She took it in her hand and it fell open at the picture of herself. [...] Here was her very soul upon record, stamped and filed, a soul without a nationality, a soul without a home. [...] It remained like the Book of Judgement, the record of her sins, the final and irrevocable sentence of society upon her. She was without identity in a world where to be without identity is the first and most punishable of crimes, the crime which, whatever else it may overlook, every state punishes. She had no official existence.

[*She thinks of escaping to Eire but*]

[...] suddenly it seemed impossible to her that she should be allowed to leave the country. Every port would be watched. She pictured once again the sort of scene in which she had so often taken part, the scene at the frontier where she

had watched and waited while uniformed men examined her papers; the long time of waiting while the man who had taken her passport away should return with a surly look, as if she had wasted his time to tell her that her papers were not in order and she could not pass. I couldn't stand it again, said Nina to herself, not again. [...] It now seemed to her quite useless to try to fly. She would only be arrested as she boarded the boat. There was no escape. [...] Only one frontier remained, the frontier where no papers are asked for, which can be crossed without an identity into the land which remains for the persecuted, always open. (pp. 263-5)

There is only one way out for Nina and, with tragic inevitability, the history of this nameless, stateless, friendless individual concludes, 'She gathered her feet under her and pitched head first from the window' (p. 266).

Murdoch's fictional analysis of Nina's powerless position is close to the political philosophy of Hannah Arendt,⁹ which articulates how empty ideas of the rights of man are for stateless persons and how dependent such rights are, 'not on "the abstract nakedness of being human" but on political communities strong enough to reinforce them'.¹⁰ Murdoch's novel suggests that political communities need not only to be strong but also to be caring, to be bothered. Just as Hunter earlier noted the unfairness of birthplace, so Nina's lack of official existence is here described as a 'sin', a 'crime': 'to be without identity is the first and most punishable of crimes, the crime which whatever else it may overlook, every state punishes'. This cameo of the life and death of one particular refugee focuses on the suffering individual and the ways in which those around her have failed her. But *The Flight from the Enchanter* is an indictment, not only of individual failures of attention, but also of the failure of English society as a whole to attend to the plight of the displaced. English society is politically strong; Whitehall and Parliament are always present in the background of the novel. But it is not caring. Callous, unthinking, accidental, blind indifference holds sway. The 'obscure Conservative M.P.' who asked the crucial question about SELIB, 'having performed his task, sank again into the tranquility of the back benches' (p. 237). This quiet but savage irony is reinforced when Rosa learns of Nina's suicide:

The newspaper attributed Nina's death to the publicity given recently to the position of a certain category of aliens, of whom, it appeared, Nina was one. [...]

'But', said Rosa, [...] 'surely they wouldn't have done anything to Nina?'

'That's the sad thing [...] of course they wouldn't. After all, it's England. It's like the Duchess in *Alice*. No one really gets beheaded. Someone writes to *The Times* or to their M.P. long before that happens. None of these people will be deported. [...] Nothing would have happened to Nina, except that she would have had to fill in a few more forms. Someone ought to have explained this to her.' (p. 279)

⁹ Arendt, like Weil, was forced by Hitler to flee her home country and was naturalized as an American citizen in 1951. For further points of comparison between Murdoch and Arendt see Frances C. P. White, 'Iris Murdoch and Hannah Arendt: Two Women in Dark Times' in *Iris Murdoch and Moral Imaginations*, ed. by Simone Roberts and Alison Scott-Baumann (North Carolina: McFarland Press, forthcoming, 2010).

¹⁰ Peter Baehr, ed., *The Portable Hannah Arendt* (London & New York: Penguin, 2000), p. xiv.

The last words about Nina are that '[s]he was peculiarly isolated and very near to despair [...] she was just an incidental casualty –' (p. 279).

No one may get beheaded, but Nina *is* defenestrated. Acidic words from Arendt again come to mind: refugees are compelled to 'go home and turn on the gas tap or make use of a skyscraper in quite an unexpected way'.¹¹ Murdoch's tone at such points, in this often funny and surrealist novel,¹² is as acerbic as Arendt's: 'After all, it's England [...] Someone writes to *The Times* or to their M.P.', is self-evidently both complacent and inadequate. 'Someone ought to have explained' to Nina. No one did. Rosa accepts her own guilt in the matter, but it is not Rosa's alone – it is the whole of English society's attitude towards refugees which is at fault. In a destructive way as well as a tolerant way, 'no one is going to bother their heads about them'. But indicating that the problem is not England's alone, the novel contains a powerful image of the world-scale of the trauma of diaspora. Before desperation drives her to suicide, Nina has a nightmare of being chased through a dark wood by the snapping jaws of her sewing-machine, from which she endlessly has to pull a roll of material which 'whirl[s] round her limbs like a winding-sheet. Before it enveloped her she saw its pattern clearly at last; it was a map of all the countries of the world' (p. 139). This is a global matter.

In *The Flight from the Enchanter* another aspect of Murdoch's thought on displacement is first evident. Annette Cockayne, secure and privileged though she is, feels; 'I have no home. I'm a refugee!' (p. 249). Her faux-suicide (she overdoses on milk of magnesia and gin) parallels and highlights Nina's real despair and, although this is a comic scene, there is an underlying sense of unbelonging which is truthful. This radical sense of outsidership and displacement haunts many characters throughout Murdoch's oeuvre. In *The Time of the Angels* (1966), Eugene Peshkov, a Russian refugee who spent nine years in a camp in Austria, tells Pattie O'Driscoll, an orphaned illegitimate half-Irish half-Jamaican woman, who is as alone and exploited as Nina: 'All the world's a camp. Pattie [...] There are good corners and bad corners, but it's just a transit camp in the end' (p. 54).

This image of the world as transit camp, and of all individuals as in some ways refugees or displaced persons in the world, reaches its apotheosis in Murdoch's last novel, *Jackson's Dilemma* (1995), in which Jackson, who has been variously interpreted as Everyman ('Jack's son'),¹³ the Alzheimer's from which Murdoch was suffering as she wrote her final work,¹⁴ an angel,¹⁵ or even the Holy Spirit,¹⁶ is the most fantastically deracinated of all her characters. He is found among the homeless by the river in London, and no one, including himself,¹⁷ knows where he has come from – it seems as if he may even come from another world than this one;

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² 'The published book distances this theme of displacement and achieves a deliberate alienation of the treatment, which is lightly comic, Lewis Carroll-like and fantastic, from the matter, which is sombre' (*SA*, p. 65). In this juxtaposition of comedy with serious moral themes, Murdoch is the literary ancestress of such contemporary writing as Marina Lewycka's novel about immigrant workers, *Two Caravans* (London: Penguin, 2008).

¹³ See article on *Jackson's Dilemma* in Literature Encyclopaedia Online, www.litencyc.com/php/sworks by Frances C. P. White, September 2006.

¹⁴ John Bayley says, 'It seems obvious today [...] that in one sense he was what was coming. The dark foreshadow of her present disease', *Iris and the Friends: A Year of Memories* (London: Duckworth, 1999), p. 52.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Dipple suggests that 'Jackson's greatest affiliation is with the long vagaries of Rabbinical and Christian angelology'. See 'Fragments of Murdoch's Vision: *Jackson's Dilemma* as Interlude', *Iris Murdoch News Letter*, 9 (1995), 4-8 (p. 7).

¹⁶ Mark Patrick Hederman suggests that 'Jackson in the novel is the Holy Spirit', *The Haunted Inkwell* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2001), p. 95.

¹⁷ And indeed including his creator – see Murdoch's comments to John Bayley as she was writing her final novel: "It's this man Jackson," she had said to me one day with a sort of worried detachment. "I can't make out who he is or what he is doing." [...] "I don't think he's even been born yet," she said'. John Bayley, *Iris: A Memoir of Iris Murdoch* (London: Duckworth, 1998), p. 147.

'Of Jackson's past nothing was said, "A strange kind of human being," Owen had called him' (p. 245). Displacement in the world has become an ontological and metaphysical state in Murdoch's imagination: marginalization has taken centre place. Conradi comments,

Refugees play a significant role in Iris's imaginative universe and fiction alike, displacement hereafter a spiritual as well as a political condition. [...] On being criticized in 1957 for portraying characters in her first two published novels who are misfits, oddities, exiles or displaced, all with something of the refugee about them, Iris replied that 'we are not so comfortable in society as our grandfathers were. Society itself has become problematic and unreliable. So it is that the person who is literally an exile, the refugee, seems an appropriate symbol for the man of the present time. Modern man is not at home, in his society, in his world'. (*IMAL*, p. 239)

And:

In 1982 Iris remarked [...] about refugees in her novels: 'Those are images of suffering, kinds of people that one has met. Such persons are windows through which one looks into terrible worlds'. (*IMAL*, p. 239)

The Flight from the Enchanter was written over half a century ago, but Murdoch's insights into the evils created by diaspora remain contemporary. In the face of the Morecambe Bay cocklepickers, English society seems no more to bother its head about the plight of immigrant workers now than it did then, and in view of the numbers of refugees, exiles and displaced persons in every part of the world in the twenty-first century, Murdoch's critique of political attitudes, and analysis of the attention to the individual which is the chief moral imperative, remain relevant and compelling.¹⁸ There is now a vast literature both about and by the displaced, the exile, the immigrant. But Murdoch's work, both philosophical and fictional, is a forerunner on the subject of diaspora as in many other areas.

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¹⁸ On Thursday 5 February 2004, eighteen cockle pickers died after becoming trapped by rising tides in Morecambe Bay, Lancashire. They were illegal Chinese immigrants, forced into this dangerous work.

Dilemmas of Difference: The Polish Figure and the Moral World in Iris Murdoch's *Nuns and Soldiers*

Dilemmas of difference are central to Iris Murdoch's work and, in *Nuns and Soldiers*,¹ the very title carries the point. How do nuns and soldiers differ from other people, from each other, from the rest of us? Regarding Kant's 'moral imperative,' is their moral world like ours? After presenting the characters and main themes, I examine the figure of the foreigner of Polish origin, known as 'the Count', for whom dilemmas of difference are crucial and who is possibly (critics differ) *the* soldier of the title.²

The moral world of the novel centres on three concepts: loyalty, sacrifice, integration. They are dramatized by characters' actions and interactions, but in such a way that moral assessments can vary from strongly positive to strongly negative, with many nuances in between. Exemplified loyalty, sacrifice and integration appear as positively moral (unselfish, disinterested, other-orientated), or as questionably moral (selfish, self-interested, self-orientated): immoral or amoral. The three concepts structure the plot as in a syllogism: loyalty is tested and proved by sacrifice; sacrifice if admirable is rewarded by integration; in parallel, shirking sacrifice reveals disloyalty and can incur punishing exclusion.

The six main characters are, first, Guy Openshaw, a wealthy, socially prominent civil servant; second, the Count, (Wojciech Szczepański [p. 11]) an anglicized Pole befriended by Guy, also at the Home Office; third, Gertrude, Guy's wife, a Cambridge graduate who renounced a teaching career on marriage; fourth, Anne Cavidge, a college friend of Gertrude's and a former nun who, having just left her convent, is staying with Gertrude. Then comes the fifth main character, Tim Reede, whom (as a distant relation) Guy financed through art college and who (being an unsuccessful artist) continues to live on Guy's allowance. Finally, the sixth character, Daisy Barrett (whose inner life is not explored), Tim's mistress, is an impecunious artist turned novel-writer.

These characters are all experiencing crisis. Guy Openshaw, cancer-ridden, thinks of imminent death and his intimates' bereavement. The Count, the Pole, foresees losing his only friend; Gertrude faces traumatic widowhood, and Anne, the former nun, is entering the lay world without guidance. As for Tim and Daisy, their only steady income ceases with Guy's demise. The first four face emotional and moral readjustment, the last two face drastic practical problems, destitution, even hunger. The two groups contrast not only by their existential choices, but also by wealth, social class, age, and even (the Count especially) nationality. All will be tested as to their loyalties, their sacrifices and their integration, since all six are to some extent 'outsiders' in English society. Guy is of Jewish descent; the Count is the son of émigré Poles; Gertrude (née McCluskie) is half Scots; Anne is, or was, a Roman Catholic; Tim is half Irish - half Cornish (with Celtic red hair); Daisy is half French-Canadian. Of them all, the Count is the most foreign.³

¹ All references are to the first edition of *Nuns and Soldiers* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1980).

² A. S. Byatt sees the title as a metaphor referring mainly to the Count and Tim Reede, but in moral terms, all the characters. See *New Statesman*, 5 September 1980, 21-2; Graham Hough states, 'the Count, a Polish refugee (sic) [...] is the only possible candidate for the soldier of the title'. *London Review of Books*, 18 September 1980, p. 12. Other reviews were by Angela Carter, 'The Nun's Story', *Guardian*, 4 September 1980; Victoria Glendinning, 'Vice is Natural and Virtue is Not', *Listener*, 4 September 1980, pp. 308-9; Marghanita Laski, 'Profane and Sacred Love', *Country Life*, 23 October 1980, p. 1513.

³ Foreignness interests non-English academics. Maria Jędrzejkiwicz, in her critical work *Perspektywa Etyczna w Powieści Iris Murdoch* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1990) – (*The Ethical Perspective in the Novels of Iris Murdoch* [Warsaw: University of Warsaw Publications, 1990]) comments, 'the author identifies with refugees' and refers to the English-language article by a French colleague, C. M. Charpentier,

Having met the four main characters in the sickroom in the ominously named Ebury Street,⁴ readers may pass with relief to the two bohemians in the relaxed, raffish setting of a London pub, *The Prince of Denmark*. And while evoking tragedy, *Hamlet* and themes of traditional (aristocratic) loyalties to the *paterfamilias*, Murdoch also suggests, by associating pub/tavern to low-life, the comedy of *The Rake's Progress*⁵ and the themes of material inheritance. This blend of tragi-comedy introduces a third set of characters, minor actors such as Manfred North and Veronica Mount, while others are 'contingent', functioning as chorus and comic relief through their gossipy, witty, sometimes catty, commentary. They are recognizable, educated, middle-class Londoners of the late twentieth century, sufficiently ordinary to serve as a foil to the four main characters, and especially to the two most unusual ones – Anne, the erstwhile nun, and the Count, the virtual soldier.

Loyalty, the main theme at the novel's start, appears as the prime virtue of friends on the death of one of them.⁶ The dying man himself distinguishes between true friends sincerely grieving and those more conventionally solicitous. To acquaintances and relatives 'dropping in with kind enquiries', he bars his door, calls them *les cousins et les tantes*, implies their loyalty to be (discreetly) self-interested, expecting an inheritance (Guy is childless). And although a widow named Gertrude in an English novel inevitably recalls Hamlet's mother, the epitome of disloyal wives, readers can, initially, believe in Gertrude's sincere grief and loyalty to her dying husband.⁷ Anne is loyal to her old college friend by undertaking to share her bereavement, while the Count proves his loyalty in both speech and silence at his dying friend's side.

Through Guy's death-bed conversations on metaphysics and philosophy with Anne and the Count, and the mentions of Aristotle's⁸ and Cicero's⁹ views on friendship (p. 5), Murdoch links loyalty to ideas of liberty and equality, since true friendship exists only between equals, above all, moral equals. Concerning the Count, two questions arise: first, is he truly Guy's equal and, second, will he maintain this social status which will allow integration into British society? Will the Ebury Street 'set' continue as friends after Guy's death?

For the Count, son of an isolated Polish *émigré*, is without Polish connections or family of his own. His loneliness extends even to an uncertainty about Guy's feelings for him. Socially, he differs greatly from Guy, 'the patriarch', in having little power or influence, or even social presence. In other peoples' eyes he is a foreigner and hardly 'counts' (we guess the author's punning). During their last conversations the Count asks himself if he is really Guy's friend, or simply a dependent, a hanger-on: 'He was in the dying man's room as his dog might be. The Count brooded on this. Sometimes he read it as contempt, sometimes as a vast compliment' (p. 19). Standing to gain by Guy's death, the Count too can be tempted to disloyalty: Gertrude, whom he has long loved, would be free to marry again. Yet moral fastidiousness forbids his thinking along these lines, despite overhearing Guy tell Gertrude that a marriage between herself and the Count would be welcome in his eyes.

'Alienness in some of Iris Murdoch's novels: *An Accidental Man*, 1971, *A Word Child*, 1975, *Nuns and Soldiers*, 1980', *Neophilological Quarterly* XXXV, 2 (1988), 153-61.

⁴ A punning on 'bury' and 'burial' is sensed.

⁵ *The Rake's Progress* (1734); plate II of Hogarth's 'Modern Moral Subjects'.

⁶ Murdoch examines bereavement extensively, for example in *Bruno's Dream* (1969) and *Henry and Cato* (1976).

⁷ Peter Conradi thinks Murdoch's portrayal of widowhood surpasses that of Virginia Woolf or E.M. Forster. See *The Saint and The Artist*, 2nd edn (London: HarperCollins, 1989), pp. 58 & 324.

⁸ In *Nichomachean Ethics*.

⁹ In *De Amicitia*.

The central moral dilemma of the novel is of course the judgement that characters and readers alike make as regards the loyalty or disloyalty of the widow, Gertrude, who re-marries within six months of bereavement. But she does not marry the man her husband has suggested, the Count, who has deferred the courtship he has so ardently desired. The Count's refusal to think about his own advantage at moments inappropriate to his sense of loyalty distinguishes him from the other characters. His sense of honour and loyalty to the nth degree appears, indeed, as his own peculiar virtue, not just particular to himself, but peculiar also in the sense that at times (after Guy's death) it can appear odd, out-dated, quixotic, extravagant and un-English.

From the start the Count's foreignness is underlined by much factual information (pp. 6-18): his unpronounceable name; his inherited nationality (Polish); his puzzling background (son of a pre-World War II Polish exile-émigré to London); his appearance (tall, bony, pale, with pale hair and pale-blue eyes frequently alluded to as 'snake-like' – a cliché-marker of foreign malignancy [p. 17]) and his nickname, 'the Count', acquired at college (the London School of Economics) through typical student raillery, since he is not, we learn, a real Count. To his intimates, the Count is Peter, the English version of his other 'harmless' (in other words pronounceable) first name of Piotr (p. 11). The Count feels anguish over loyalty to his Polish roots and above all to his father, who brought him up on talk of the Second World War and Polish heroism in order to turn him, albeit unwillingly, into a Polish patriot, eternal exile and émigré, with undying, if necessarily divided and despairing, loyalties.

By contrast, Tim Reede, without university attainments or cultivated tastes, could never aspire to equality with Guy. His moral world contrasts with that of the 'superior' characters: the Count, Guy, Gertrude and Anne. Instead of scruples and principles, he lives by lucky or unlucky chance, and is shown thinking of himself as a 'soldier of fortune', but, as A. S. Byatt suggests, he is but a '*parodic* soldier of fortune',¹⁰ not above helping himself from the contents of others' fridges. Appearing at first as a conscienceless scrounger, unlike the scrupulous Count, Tim arouses more sympathy later when readers learn that he and Daisy are fatherless and see Guy and Gertrude as figures of parental largesse. If the Count's loyalty to Guy and to Gertrude consists in foregoing self-interest, Tim's lies in admitting it bluntly. He asks Gertrude for money (p. 135) not out of heartless extortion, but out of a compassionate instinct to refuse pretence. By a similar instinct, Gertrude employs Tim as care-taker of her house in Provence, and later it is Tim who initiates their falling in love. His spontaneity makes Tim honest in a way unknown to the Count who, however deep his feelings, has the habit of controlling them and thinking things through.

The second part of the novel centres on sacrifice. Intellect and self-control allow the Count to sacrifice himself and his own desires out of consideration for others, while Tim, although true to himself in a spontaneous way, hardly considers other-orientated duty. He sacrifices/abandons his mistress, Daisy, almost without qualms. Admittedly, Tim and Daisy's loyalty to each other is but tenuous, a '*faute de mieux*' habit, hardly an emotional or moral commitment. Gertrude's sacrifice of her reputation as a loyal wife by her remarriage is shown in similar terms as part of her instinct for happiness; her truthfulness to her own spontaneous nature coincides with Tim's, but differs from that of the Count. Anne Cavidge, on the contrary, is the Count's sister spirit. She too sacrifices personal happiness to her spiritual intuitions which, to her, are as binding as moral duties. Anne's sacrifices of herself – joining then quitting the convent; loving and then leaving the Count to Gertrude – can be seen as stages in her search for authentic spiritual freedom.

¹⁰ A. S. Byatt uses the term in her review. See footnote 2.

The Count's sacrifices and his 'unselfing' (which engenders spiritual progress) are on a similar moral if not spiritual level: his deferring his courtship of Gertrude for a year out of respect for her mourning; his hiding his disappointment on her remarriage; his despair at losing her; his decision to exile himself to Ireland and even his welcoming of assassination by the IRA in a final self-sacrifice for love. Throughout, self-interest is sacrificed to principles of honourable, predictable conduct and loyal duty. The last part of the novel centres on integration (into society, a group, a married couple), whether into the material and social level or alternatively into an ideological consensus (political, religious or spiritual). Tim and Daisy are both reintegrated into the real world of money and means, renouncing their hand-to-mouth existence. Gertrude is re-integrated into the happily married state. Anne, on realizing the Count's continuing love for Gertrude, decides to emigrate to America, join a community and, through a drastic 'unselfing', aim for union with her own personal Christ.

The Count, the most un-integrated socially of the characters who, in his forties, realizes that his Polish identity is ineradicable, longs most for integration and acceptance. But if, in the end, the Count achieves closer integration into the group of English friends, this is because Gertrude generously (according to some critics), or selfishly (according to others),¹¹ insists that he stays in London, close to her and her new husband, on terms of intimate, if platonic, friendship. The Count agrees to continue as devoted courtier and counsellor. He will at least matter to Gertrude and her husband, who both need his moral support. The Count is finally seen to be satisfied with the mild half-happiness of a secondary role, and perhaps becomes at last a more significant and even sympathetic figure, if not a fully empowered one. Nor is he one of the more convincingly realized of the characters in Murdoch's fiction.

For, on a factual level, many details about the Count lack accuracy, and to those, like this writer, who know anything about Poland or Polish émigrés to England during and after World War II, some are plainly wrong. The Count's antecedents are so unusual as to be improbable, while some assertions describing him verge on the impossible. Is Murdoch using artistic license and, mischievously po-faced, choosing such improbabilities on purpose to play on her own and her readers' ignorance of things Polish? Or has she, dare I suggest, failed in her home-work? Or does she *want*, as she puts it (p. 6), for the figure of the foreigner to be a 'conceptual muddle'? One point she makes does accurately strike home: the Count's suffering from the general ignorance of his acquaintance as regards his fatherland, his feeling invisible and shorn of identity, his disappointment when, after a visit to Poland (in the post-Stalinist era), no-one of his acquaintance shows interest in his trip (pp. 12-13). Nonetheless, I will point out the improbabilities, inaccuracies and mistakes about Poland and the Poles which mar, without entirely spoiling, the figure of the Count.

For instance, with a name like Wojciech Szczepański, his being a British civil servant in the Home Office seems unlikely. For years after the War, even British subjects were barred from becoming civil servants unless both parents, even grand-parents, were British-born. The Count's father is a Polish *émigré*, a Marxist who fled Stalin's purges of the Polish Communist Party *before the war*. Said to have been born in England in about 1938 (p. 8), the Count grows up rejecting the Polishness of his parents by refusing to learn his native language (p. 10). After his father's death in 1969 and the earlier, and even more traumatic, death of his brother, the Count tries to learn Polish, but his efforts are so inept that they are laughed at by his mother (p. 12). This detail can shock a Polish reader who knows how seriously the *émigré* Poles took their

¹¹ Graham Hough finds Gertrude 'charming', her charm 'compact of ambiguities', while A. S. Byatt thinks Gertrude 'enslaves' her admirers. See footnote 2.

language and how they, in some cases, forced their children to speak it once it had been learnt in infancy.¹²

Nevertheless, when we meet the Count in his bachelor flat in 1978 (marked by the election of the Polish Pope), listening to the radio as a distraction from pining for Gertrude, he is not at all English-thinking (we ignore his schooling) but spends much time aching over the plight of Poland and the Poles, not so much as *émigrés* but as defeated soldiers, who lost the war, their country and even their capital, Warsaw, in the abortive, heroic attempt of the Warsaw Rising. The most damning error the author makes or editors let pass (p. 9) is about the Warsaw Rising, stated to have begun on the 1st September 1944 instead of the real date of 1st August 1944, and to have lasted five weeks and not the two full months of its actual continuance.¹³ The other historical error is about the Count's father, at the War's start, joining the Polish Air Force under Polish command (p. 10), whereas the Polish Air Force was, in fact, under *British* command, enabling Polish pilots to fight in the Battle of Britain and win renown, if not complete recognition.¹⁴

Furthermore, Murdoch makes her Polish *émigré* almost impossibly patriotic: if he was born in England and rejected Polishness, why so much anguish? How could his father evoke his country's fate if he knew little English and the son little Polish? More plausibly, the Count might, as did other real-life *émigré* Poles of his generation, have tried to escape his tragic heritage by changing his name, getting a well-paid job in a practical profession like engineering, and determinedly marrying an English wife, possibly a nursing lady (like the Irish immigrant, Bernard Shaw) or a lady helpfully typing his manuscripts (like the anglicized Pole, Josef Conrad).

Certain reasons for Murdoch's fictional choices could be suggested. As a member of the Communist Party in her youth, she would have found a more typical *émigré* Pole of right wing political persuasion unsympathetic, and therefore made her Polish figure descend from idealistic Marxists (not, significantly, Communists) rather than from idealistic Nationalists. However, the sort of knightly Polish gentleman that she portrays, so obviously upper-class that he accepts without demur the silly nickname of 'the Count', would perhaps not, for reasons of ideology, have been brought up by committed Marxists in the purest traditions of Polish aristocrats: even down to the minutiae of courtesy and panache (hand-kissing, heel-clicking) to say nothing of the grand ideals of honour and Polish patriotism. And even the son of a maverick pre-war Polish Marxist would probably be less cut off from fellow *émigré* Poles than the Count, when one reflects on the presence in London during World War II not only of the Polish Government in Exile, but also of much of the Polish Armed Forces and General Staff, as well as sizable numbers of dependents. Organizers of Polish clubs and churches in London and the provinces combed local telephone books for Polish names to root out potential members. Murdoch has the post-Stalinist era government of Poland, with its more liberal Communism, 'wooing' the exiles by doing exactly that (p. 13), but seems to ignore the degree of identification and organization by the Polish authorities of the vast Polish community in Britain. During the war, getting a hold on Poles was a way to continue the fight against Hitler; after the war, a way to continue the fight against Stalin. Polish traditions of uniting to resist the enemy, dating from the tenth century, were honed by the recurrent risings, repressions and

¹² Throughout the 19th century, Poles fiercely resisted the partitioning powers' efforts to stamp out their national language.

¹³ Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland*, 2 vols (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 37, V2, 466, 474-9 and 576.

¹⁴ See Lynne Olson & Stanley Cloud: *For Your Freedom and Ours: the Kościuszko Squadron: Forgotten Heroes of World War II* (London: Heinemann, 2003).

political emigrations of the nineteenth century. Yet the Count's relations with Poland and fellow Poles are sparse, neglected in favour of his role as courtly lover.

Murdoch's links to Poles and the Polish were possibly neither close nor wide. No Polish names appear in Peter Conradi's index to his biography of Iris Murdoch.¹⁵ Leszek Kolakowski, the Polish intellectual well-known in Oxford,¹⁶ is not there, neither is her Polish critic and friend, Maria Jędrzejkiewicz, nor is there mention of the latter's articles, in English, about Murdoch's work.¹⁷ Murdoch's experience of Poles would have been of those she met through her work for UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Association) in 1944-5, but her real-life attitude to Poles seems sketchy, with little attempt at the modest virtue claimed for Guy Openshaw, accuracy (p. 68).

Yet however misinformed about Poland, however easily caricatured her reported enthusiasm for a Polish Pope (by A. N. Wilson),¹⁸ it must be admitted that Murdoch has understood something essential about her Polish character. One can forgive factual errors in a novelist who comes to grips with the inner experience of her characters so convincingly and movingly. When the Count listens to Gertrude's plea that they should continue an exclusive friendship of platonic love, he agrees to her proposition:

He stared at her, then he said almost helplessly, 'You have made a move which I cannot counter.'

Gertrude's eyes had already begun to laugh at him. She got up and came to him and he rose and took her hand and kissed it. (p. 458)

Here, the hand-kissing no longer seems some quaint and foreign ritual, but a moment of deep emotion, a reward for the Count's high-minded devotion. Readers can see him as upholding the chivalric ideals of medieval legend and the honourable courtesy that went with them, and can recall not so much the absurdity as the pathos of Don Quixote, and even catch, perhaps, distant echoes of the earlier poets of transcendent loves, Dante and Beatrice, Petrarch and Laura and the whole romantic tradition of ideal courtly love.

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¹⁵ Murdoch's biographer, Peter Conradi, stresses the impossibility of including six thousand-plus names of friends and contacts.

¹⁶ See Peter Hebblethwaite, 'Feuerbach's Ladder: Leszek Kolakowski and Iris Murdoch', *Heythrop Journal* (Oxford: April, 1972), 132 & 143-61.

¹⁷ See: Maria Jędrzejkiewicz, 'Fantasy and Reality: the Uses of Art in Iris Murdoch's works', and 'Escape from Freedom: Enchanters in Iris Murdoch's Fiction'; Box 9, No 7, in the Murdoch archives, acquired by the Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies, Kingston University, London.

¹⁸ A. N. Wilson, in *Iris Murdoch As I Knew Her* (London: Hutchinson, 2003). Wilson reports Murdoch's reactions to a Polish Pope at a party on 16 October, 1978: 'marvellous news' and 'I love Poland, I love Poles' (pp. 212-3). Her predictions, however – Catholics ordaining women priests before Anglicans – are shown as laughably wrong.

Italian Influences in the Novels of Iris Murdoch

Iris Murdoch's interest in Italy and things Italian was probably kindled by her friendship with the eminent Italian scholar Arnaldo Momigliano, who became professor of Ancient History at University College, London in 1951, and who instigated Murdoch's lifelong love for the Italian language and for the Florentine poet, Dante.¹ Together they read the *Divine Comedy* in Italian and together they travelled to Italy in 1952, 1953 and 1955.² She subsequently travelled to Italy with John Bayley on lecture tours and on one occasion read a paper in Italian.³ A variety of Italian settings and references to Italian language, literature and art infiltrate Murdoch's novels, and these details add colour and texture not only to their environments, expressing their individual tone, but also help to illustrate the emotional conditions of their characters and subtly reinforce each novel's themes.

Murdoch was always very modest about her linguistic skills, but in *The Nice and the Good* (1968), a novel which explores different forms of love, she draws on her knowledge of Italian and Latin to indicate the force of sexual desire experienced by John Ducane, a civil servant who studies Roman law. He quotes a couplet from the poetry of Propertius, '*Quare, dum licet, inter nos laetemur amantes: / non satis est ullo tempore longus amor*' and comments on the strength of the Latin *amor* as opposed to 'the lilting Italian *amore*, a comparison that allows him to intensify his erotic thoughts about the wife of a colleague with whom he is engaging in an inappropriate dalliance.⁴ Knowledge of Italian can be an important feature in the education of her characters and their reactions to it speaks volumes about their strengths and failings as individuals. In *The Flight from the Enchanter*,⁵ Annette Cockayne, who knows four languages including Italian, is bored by the affected voice of her Italian tutor, and decides to escape from her finishing school into the 'School of Life'. Many other characters speak the language: in *The Unicorn*,⁶ Marian Taylor, the 'governess' at Gaze Castle, is required to know French and Italian. Others are fluent in Italian, from the two brothers, Edmund and Otto Narraway in *The Italian Girl*⁷ (who speak Italian because an Italian maid had always been part of their household) to the two sisters Marian and Rosalind Berran in *Jackson's Dilemma*, who have studied Italian; indeed, even the child in this last novel, Bran Dunarven, is fluent in Italian.⁸ But mere knowledge of the Italian language is not enough in itself to achieve integration into a country's culture, as Hilary Burde in *A Word Child* discovers. His gift for languages included teaching himself Italian, but he found when he travelled to Italy that his 'linguistic abilities never made [him] feel at home'.⁹ 'Having' a foreign language is not only used as a device to illustrate how characters are integrated into an environment or are comfortable with their lives, but also how they are perpetually alienated from it.

Knowledge of Italian culture, both literature and art, also features prominently in Murdoch's novels, and her personal study of Dante is reflected throughout her fictional *oeuvre*. The works by Dante to which Murdoch refers most frequently are the *Inferno* and *Rime*. In *The Flight from the Enchanter*, Annette's tutor is reading aloud from the fifth canto of the *Inferno* when she wearies of school; a certain degree of maturity is necessary for those who read Dante, and Annette's madcap pranks indicate her immaturity. Similarly, in *The Black Prince*, Julian

¹ Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), *Divina Commedia* and *Rime Petrose*.

² Peter Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), p. 314.

³ Madeline Merlini, *Iris Murdoch News Letter*, no. 14 (2000), p. 10.

⁴ Murdoch, *The Nice and the Good* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1968), p. 51.

⁵ Murdoch, *The Flight from the Enchanter* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1956).

⁶ Murdoch, *The Unicorn* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1963).

⁷ Murdoch, *The Italian Girl* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964).

⁸ Murdoch, *Jackson's Dilemma* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995), p. 95.

⁹ Murdoch, *A Word Child* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975), p. 24.

Baffin's immaturity is underlined by the fact that Bradley Pearson considers her too young to read Dante. He warns her particularly against reading the *Comedy* with the justification that it requires a commentary, adding, 'if not read in Italian, this great work seems not only incomprehensible but repulsive'.¹⁰ *The Bell* is full of references to Dante. Italy is evoked by the train journey with which the novel commences, which in turn mirrors a former train journey through Italy made by the estranged couple, Dora and Paul Greenfield. Dora had been too unhappy then to appreciate the Italian scenery, perceiving Italy as 'full of barren lands made invisible by the sun, and poor starving cats driven away from expensive restaurants by waiters with flapping napkins'.¹¹ Dora is now travelling to rejoin Paul at Imber Court, an English Palladian house set beside an Abbey in spacious parkland with a lake and rivers. The structure of this setting consists of a series of concentric circles, similar to that of Dante's *Inferno* and the name Imber appears to be derived from the Latin *umbra* and the Italian *ombra* indicating that the inmates are merely shades ferried to and fro by Michael Meade or Toby Gashe. Dora, who will undergo trial by water, perceives even the poppies as 'ghostly'. At the close of the story, after the suicide of Nick Fawley, Michael 'did not want for a single moment to forget what had happened' (p. 308). He finally recognizes himself as a sinner and feels it right that he should suffer, remembering 'the souls in Dante who deliberately remained within the purifying fire' (p. 308).

A Severed Head, a novel much concerned with the corruptive power of aesthetics, is also inundated with references to Italy and Italian artefacts, and again to Dante. Martin Lynch-Gibbon compares the beauty of his wife Antonia to 'the water-haunted sunlight on an old pavement in Venice'.¹² He buys Italian prints for his mistress, Georgie Hands, in an effort to improve her taste. Antonia, whose taste is impeccable, puts on a dress of Italian wool that Martin had bought her in Rome in an effort to impress the younger woman. Antonia's beautiful home contains, among other things, an Italian silver cup and copies of Italian books, including Dante. Martin, who met Georgie when he was giving a lecture on Italian military history, reads Dante with Palmer Anderson. Palmer is Antonia's psychiatrist and her lover, and the reading of Dante together by these two men suggests that suffering will ensue from these entangled relationships. Palmer's sister and incestuous lover, Honor Klein, is Martin's final partner in this sexual comedy. When he first meets her in the fog at Liverpool Street Station which smells of sulphur and brimstone, Martin compares their meeting place to the *Inferno* (p. 68) and whereas Martin had imagined himself to be the controlling partner in his relationships with Georgie and Antonia, with Honor he has no such illusion. He quotes the line by Dante describing the power of love: '*El m'ha percosso in terra e stammi sopra*' (p. 156).¹³ Dante remains influential in Murdoch's imagination to the end of her writing career: in her final novel, *Jackson's Dilemma*, Benet Barnell anticipates Edward Lannion's becoming happily married to Marian Berran, and he compares their situation to Dante's *Paradiso* (p. 24). Dante's imagination perpetually infuses Murdoch's own.

The Italian Girl has the distinction of being the only novel by Murdoch in which nationality appears in the title. The most interesting aspect of the novel is the fact that Maria Magistretti is Murdoch's version of the Great Mother as described by Bachofen and Neumann, thus linking Italian femininity with beneficence, creativity and power.¹⁴ Like Aphrodite she is a goddess of love within and without marriage. Like Athena she is a goddess of handicraft and as

¹⁰ Murdoch, *The Black Prince* (1973; London: Vintage Classics, 1999), p. 64.

¹¹ Murdoch, *The Bell* (1958; London: Vintage Classics, 1999), p. 21.

¹² Murdoch, *A Severed Head* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), p. 21.

¹³ Dante: 'Love struck me to the ground and stands above me', *Così nel mio parlar voglio esser aspro* (I Want to Charge My Words with So Much Harshness), *Le Rime Petrose* 4, line 35.

<www.italianstudies.org/poetry/st4.htm> [accessed 11 December 2009].

¹⁴ J. J. Bachofen (1815-1887) and Erich Neumann (1905-1969), theorists of matriarchy.

such is represented spinning and weaving, or rather, since she is part of a twentieth-century household, mending and darning. Gloria Feman Orenstein in her book *The Reflowering of the Goddess* claims that, according to all recent archaeological evidence, the cosmic Creator was a female and ‘the Mother of all living things’.¹⁵ In *The Italian Girl*, the narrator, Edmund Narraway, recognizes that Maria was as much his mother as his biological mother, Lydia. She is an indispensable part of Lydia’s household but also performs acts of charity for all the various members of the Italian community. Edmund, like other male narrators in Murdoch’s fiction, seems to suffer from a metaphorical blindness, particularly with regard to women. He cannot distinguish Maria from her predecessors and sees her more as an animal than a woman. Her patience and unprotesting acceptance of the most disgusting tasks cause Edmund to compare her to a little donkey and, when he becomes interested enough in her to follow her to the kitchen, he becomes troubled by her ‘damp strange animal look’ (p. 141). Maria becomes transformed when her hair is cut off by Edmund’s niece, Flora, and, by casting off her black clothes in favour of red ones, she becomes visible to him. Edmund says, ‘she was no longer invisible. And as I stared at her in amazement at her metamorphosis I recalled suddenly, poignantly, from some much younger age a figure seen in the radiance of my childhood, a dark, slight tutelary goddess’ (p. 166). Maria plans to return to Italy but her old room is already full of dazzling Italian sunshine. Edmund’s new awareness of her makes him ill at ease: ‘it was an old face, a new face, a boy by Titian, the maid of my childhood’ (p. 207). He sees her first as a temptress (p. 212) but successively her countenance becomes the face of happiness. She was ‘as strange as Eve to the dazed awakening Adam’ (p. 213). She has brought Italian weather to the gloomy midlands of England and together they will travel to Rome.

That her love for Italian paintings infuses Murdoch’s imagination is suggested by a plethora of detail in the novels, such as the comparison in *The Nice and the Good* of a girl riding a pony in Dorset to ‘a figure in the background of a painting by Uccello’ (p. 119) and the description of furnishings in a London flat as ‘Bellini green’ in *A Severed Head* (p. 27). Dora, in *The Bell*, is moved by Italian painting, and finds ‘the great light spaces of Italian pictures more vast and southern than any real South’ (p. 190).¹⁶ A picture of Imber Abbey dated 1400 seems to her more like Italy than England (p. 67) and her unhappy memories of travelling in Italy with Paul are tempered by her appreciative memory of Italian art: the sight of Toby standing naked in a woodland stream reminds her of ‘the young David of Donatello, casual, powerful, superbly naked and charmingly immature’ (p. 77). Murdoch’s novels are often centrally linked to a great Italian painting. In the early novel *An Unofficial Rose*, Hugh Peronett feels an almost sensual love for his ‘honey-coloured’ fictional sketch of Susannah from Tintoretto’s *Susannah Bathing*.¹⁷ Hugh believes that the painting has the power to inspire a crime or to enslave a man. It is his golden dream of another world, which he renounces by selling it, thereby enabling his son, Randall, to make his own attempt to reach this other world.

In *The Nice and the Good* Paula Biranne visits the National Gallery and enjoys ‘the golden company of the Italian primitives’: she ‘knew a good deal about pictures and they brought to her an intense and completely pure and absorbing pleasure which she received from no other art, although, in fact, her knowledge of literature was much greater’ (p. 140). One wonders whether Paula is speaking for the writer herself. *The Nice and the Good* is, among other things, a literary representation of Bronzino’s picture of *Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time*. The figures in the painting are significantly linked to the various couples whose love affairs are the subject of the novel, but the painting is particularly relevant to the marriage of Paula and

¹⁵ Gloria Feman Orenstein, *The Reflowering of the Goddess* (New York: The Athene Series, Pergamon Press, 1990), p. 7.

¹⁶ For a more detailed discussion of Murdoch’s use of paintings in her novels see Anne Rowe, *The Visual Arts and the Novels of Iris Murdoch* (Lampeter: Mellen Press, 2002).

¹⁷ Murdoch, *An Unofficial Rose* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962), p. 102.

Richard Biranne which had been wrecked by Richard's lecherous nature. Paula calls the Bronzino which her husband had defined as 'a real piece of pornography', 'Richard's special picture' (p. 141). She had been deeply in love with her husband but he had divorced her when, for once, she had been unfaithful to him. Returning time and again to gaze at the painting, Paula reflects 'how like Richard it all is [...] so intellectual, so sensual' (p. 323). When she meets him again in front of the painting, she feels overcome by desire and, knowing that he will always be unfaithful to her, takes him back. The painting is used here to illustrate a love that attempts to look beyond surfaces to the reality beneath.

The title of Iris Murdoch's novel *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* refers to Titian's painting which hangs in the Borghese Gallery in Rome.¹⁸ The painting was formerly known as *Beltà disornata e beltà ornata*. It is now referred to as *Sacred and Profane Love*, a title which lends itself to a description of Blaise Gavender's sexual life, divided as it is between his love for his virtuous wife, Harriet, and the animal sensuality he feels for his mistress, Emily McHugh. In Titian's painting the two main figures are separated from each other by a child playing in a fountain. In the novel the child becomes Luca, who both links and divides the two women. In a novel full of dualities, Harriet's attention dwells also on Giorgione's *Il Tramonto*, a painting of Saint Anthony and Saint George, which is to be found in the National Gallery in London. The composition of Giorgione's painting is similar to that of Titian in that it represents two figures, divided in Giorgione's painting not by a child but by a tree. Herself a heroic and saintly figure, Harriet dies a martyr's death throwing herself in front of the child Luca during a mysterious terrorist attack. Her apparently casual death forms a parallel to Blaise's near death when attacked by Harriet's dogs. This scene, which can be interpreted as a modern representation of the myth of Actaeon, appears more explicitly in the novel *Henry and Cato* in which Henry Marshalon seeks consolation from life in art by contemplating Titian's *Death of Actaeon*.¹⁹ Happiness is rarely bestowed on Murdoch's characters but they have a great capacity for suffering and seem to enjoy looking at representations of suffering. In *The Sea, The Sea*, the first-person male narrator Charles Arrowby, always in search of '*le temps perdu*', goes to the Wallace Collection in London which he used to visit with his father.²⁰ With uncharacteristic modesty, Charles admits that, like his father, he knows little about art but he quickly abandons *The Laughing Cavalier* in favour of Titian's *Perseus and Andromeda*. He finds that the mouth of the sea-dragon ready to claim Andromeda is similar to that of a sea-monster that he is convinced he has seen rising from the waters of a calm sea. Charles himself is a monster of egoism as he candidly reveals in the book he is writing. Mary Hartley Fitch, who has known him since they were children together, describes him as an eel (p. 300) and, after he has lost her for ever, he admits, 'I let loose my own demons, not least the sea-serpent of jealousy' (p. 492). Gazing at Titian's painting he sees himself not as a monster but as Perseus, who will rescue Andromeda/Hartley, whom he persists in seeing as a maiden to be carried away from a situation fraught with danger. Titian was Murdoch's favourite painter and a significant section of his painting representing the flaying of Marysas by Apollo appears in the background of Tom Phillips's official portrait of Iris Murdoch. In *Jackson's Dilemma* the painter Owen Silbery refers to the artist's sense of remorse as felt by Shakespeare in his tragedies and expressed by Titian in *The Flaying of Marysas* (p. 64).

Many of Murdoch's characters visit, or desire to visit Italy, which bears a weight of implied significance for them. Murdoch herself loved Italy as a holiday land of sunshine, and being given or denied a visit there may be an indicator of happiness for characters in her novels. When, in *A Severed Head*, Antonia falls in love with Palmer, she urges Martin to take a trip to Rome or Venice in the hope that Martin will find a new happiness (p. 99); but a stay in

¹⁸ Murdoch, *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1974).

¹⁹ Murdoch, *Henry and Cato* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1976).

²⁰ Murdoch, *The Sea, The Sea* (1978; London: Vintage Classics, 1999).

Italy is Murdoch's reward to happy lovers and Martin will not find happiness with Honor Klein, who warns him that their love has nothing to do with happiness (p. 252). In *An Unofficial Rose*, Randall Peronett tries enjoying 'la dolce vita' in Rome with his mistress, Lindsay Rimmer, but the fact that she is less familiar than he would have wished with the works of the great Italian painters is possibly a sign that she will disappoint him in other ways.

The Italian cities which particularly interest Murdoch, Rome, Venice and Florence, are situated in 'a world elsewhere' in the words of Muriel Fisher in *The Time of the Angels* (p. 230). The novel takes place in London, where thick fog renders the atmosphere more sinister and mysterious. Muriel would have liked to escape to San Remo, where, even in winter, she hopes to see the sun, but, like the other characters in this gloomy novel, she remains confined to her own sunless world. Similarly, one of Hilary's many abortive plans in *A Word Child* is to 'educate Crystal and take her to Venice and make her laugh with happiness' (p. 233). In *The Book and the Brotherhood*, Jean Cambus expresses the desire to travel to Italy with her lover, David Crimond, not knowing that he has in mind a suicide pact; it is Gideon and Patricia Fairfax, two of the few characters in the book whose destiny will not be tragic, who visit Venice from time to time. In Murdoch's last novel, *Jackson's Dilemma*, Marian and Rosalind, after studying Italian at school, also make frequent trips to Italy. When Marian sees her lover, Cantor Ravnevik, in London he reminds her of a 'Doge of Venice' (p. 114) but Venice in *Jackson's Dilemma* presents danger for the unwary English traveller. Benet has a strange vision while he is staying in Venice and is uncertain whether he can blame it only on walking in the sun without a hat. Jackson's dilemma is that of the homeless. He has nowhere to go and Benet decides that Italy would be just the place for him, although Benet often comes to the wrong conclusion, and both Jackson and Italy are uneasily haunting and haunted presences in this novel. When Iris Murdoch concluded *Jackson's Dilemma* she herself was entering the inferno of Alzheimer's which would lead to her death, and Italy has lost its assurance of happiness in her fiction. But it is clear from this brief account of some of the Italian references and influences in Murdoch's novels how much Italy, Dante, and Italian painters resonated in her mind and enriched her own artistic vision.

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Netsuke in Iris Murdoch's Novels

Iris Murdoch paid three visits to Japan during her lifetime (in 1969, 1975 and 1993), which indicates both her popularity among the Japanese reading public and her personal interest in this country. ¹ Peter Conradi confirms that Murdoch's attachment to *The Tale of Genji* led her to visit an Abbot at Ishiyamadera in Shiga prefecture during her 1975 visit.² Murdoch's love for this tale is mentioned also by John Bayley: '[Tolkien and] Lady Murasaki had been inhabitants of her mind',³ and it is well-known that Murdoch borrowed some scenes from this tale in the creation of a few of her own works.⁴

The Tale of Genji, however, is by no means Murdoch's only source of fascination with Japan. When Kingston University acquired Murdoch's Oxford library and opened the Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies in 2004, a surprising number of books about Japanese history and culture were to be found there. These include five books by Yukio Mishima, two books on netsuke, two books on Japanese folklore, a book on Zen Buddhism, a book on haiku, a book by Musashi Miyamoto, and a book on Japanese sociology. These books suggest a serious interest in this country and offer Japan as a fruitful avenue of enquiry in Murdoch's work.

Of all Japanese arts and crafts, netsuke makes the most persistent appearance in the novels, appearing in five: *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956), *A Severed Head* (1961), *The Black Prince* (1973),⁵ *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983), and *Jackson's Dilemma* (1995). The two books on netsuke in her Oxford library (F. M. Jonas's *Netsuké* and Egerton Ryerson's *The Netsuke of Japan: Legends, History, Folklore, and Customs*) are classic works on the subject. The purchase of these books is in itself insufficient to explain what kind of interest in netsuke Murdoch had,⁶ but, at the very least, it indicates serious interest in this special type of Japanese handcraft, which is particularly evident in the novels discussed in this essay: *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956) and *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1987).⁷

The first mention of netsuke in *The Flight from the Enchanter* occurs when Annette, who has recently left her finishing school in order to 'go out into the School of Life' (p. 12),

¹ This paper is a revised and shortened version of 'Netsuke in Iris Murdoch's Novels' in *Thought Currents in English Literature*, 80 (2007): 93-115. I would like to express my deep appreciation to Frances White for giving me the initial inspiration for this topic. I am also greatly indebted to the members of the Iris Murdoch Society in Japan who offered invaluable comments and suggestions. Finally, my gratitude will go to the staff of Sagemonoya, in particular Ms. Yukari Yoshida of the International and Japan Netsuke Study Society, for expanding my knowledge on netsuke and providing me with numerous invaluable books on this subject.

² Peter Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (London, HarperCollins, 2001), p. 545. *Ishiyamadera* is a venue associated with the tale.

³ John Bayley, *Iris: A Memoir of Iris Murdoch* (London: Duckworth, 1998), p. 50.

⁴ See for instance, Yushiro Inouchi, *Iris Murdoch no Sekai* (translated as *The World of Iris Murdoch*), (Tokyo: Obunsha, 2003), pp. 113-28. Inouchi is one of a few critics to point out the significance of Japan in Murdoch's novels. Without this excellent work I would not have been able to bring my discussion this far.

⁵ Although the word 'netsuke' is used in all other novels listed here, there is no direct mention of this word in *The Black Prince*. In this novel a netsuke-like object is expressed as 'the little Chinese bronzes' in the shape of 'a water buffalo with lowered head and exquisitely wrinkled neck bear[ing] upon his back an aristocratic lady of delicate loveliness with many-folded dress and high elaborate hair' (*The Black Prince*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975, pp. 78-9). This novel is mentioned here because John Bayley wrote in a letter to the author that Murdoch's favourite netsuke, the only one she had bought by herself, appears in *The Black Prince*. It must be added, however, that his description of Murdoch's favourite netsuke is not a perfect description of the one that appears in the novel: according to Bayley, Murdoch's netsuke was 'a buffalo & a man with a rat on his shoulder'.

⁶ John Bayley has confirmed in a letter to the author that Murdoch had not been given, but rather bought the books on netsuke herself.

⁷ Editions used are *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975); *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984). All citations will hereafter appear parenthetically in the text.

visits Mischa Fox at his mysterious labyrinth-like mansion:

‘What these [*sic*]?’ said Annette, pointing to the ivory figures [...]
‘They’re called *netsuke*’, said Mischa. ‘They were made in Japan in the eighteenth century. People used to wear them on their clothes.’
‘Was it magic?’ asked Annette.
‘No’, said Mischa, ‘or only in the way in which magic can be part of ordinary life’. (p. 192; italics in text)

Why or how Mischa collects netsuke is never explained, but his short explanation implies his interest is more than mere superficial curiosity.⁸ Mischa’s netsuke collection is described in detail by the narrator:

Annette lifted one of them. It was an old man seated and leaning against a sleeping buffalo. She turned it upside down. It was carved underneath too, the man’s naked foot turned back, his figured robe, the fur of the animal. She put it down. Next to it was a girl seated on a clam-shell, then a boy with his arm round the neck of a goat, an old man with a rat on his shoulder, a woman holding a fish. Each one she saw, represented a human being with an animal. (p. 193)

Taking its subject matter from everyday life is a feature of eighteenth-century netsuke. ‘Since the Edo period saw the rise of a thriving urban culture centred on Edo, Kyoto and Osaka’, writes Julia Hutt, ‘scenes connected with city life were of widespread appeal. It was, moreover, the *chōnin* [merchants and industrial workers in urban areas] who bought netsuke and *sagemono* in the greatest numbers’.⁹ Mischa’s collection of elaborate carvings portraying the everyday lives of ordinary citizens is thus undoubtedly eighteenth-century work. However, they have another feature in common: every piece ‘represented a human being with an animal’ (p. 193). Why did Mischa collect this type of netsuke in particular? Clues are found in the fact that *The Flight from the Enchanter* is a novel studded with animals, both real and metaphorical. Characters’ names, such as Mischa Fox, Hunter Keepe, and Camilla Wingfield, create a pervasive network of animal imagery in the novel, and the descriptions of tropical fish in Mischa’s house create a vivid and suggestive picture. Further, ways in which characters move and act are often compared to animals. Mischa says ‘women are like fish’, and ‘[t]he female equivalent of Pan is the sleek mermaid’ (p. 134). This connection is emphasized through repeated comparisons of Annette with fish and mermaids (pp. 64 & 199), and her youthful light movements are often associated with animals: she tries to ‘kick up her heels behind her like a horse’ (p. 14); she runs into Hunter’s room and seems to ‘fly in one bound from the door to perch on Hunter’s desk’ (p. 18) like a cat; and when she is on the verge of being raped by Rainborough, she tries to escape his tight hold so fiercely that he ‘felt her twisting and turning in his grip like a powerful fish’ (p. 128–29). Likewise, Mischa has ‘wise and serene’ eyes ‘like those of a happy animal’ and extraordinarily flexible feet and ankles like ‘the smoothly bending limbs of an animal’ (p. 190); while Mischa ‘[sips] his sherry like a cat’ (p. 131), Rosa, his ex-lover, ‘[shakes] herself like a dog’ (p. 197). Even an unnamed minor character, ‘the little typist’, is described in association with an animal, being referred to as ‘a dowdy, fluffy girl, off

⁸ It is not entirely correct for Mischa to say netsuke was an eighteenth-century product. Its origin can be traced back as far as the late sixteenth century, though it was in the eighteenth century that netsuke became ‘art’. For the further history of netsuke, see *Netsuke: Gyōshuku sareta Edo Bunka (Netsuke: Condensed Culture of Edo)*, (Tokyo: Bijyutsu Shuppansha, 2005).

⁹ Julia Hutt, *Japanese Netsuke* (London: V&A, 2003), p. 55.

whom pieces continually fell as off a moulting bird' (p. 93).

These ubiquitous animal images are strengthened by frequent mention of animals in conversation. The references in Mischa's speech have particular significance because they emerge in an abrupt and uncanny way:

'I saw a sad thing as I was coming along', said Mischa.

'What was that?' asked Rainborough.

'A bird with only one foot', said Mischa. 'How would it manage with only one foot to hold on to a branch in a storm?'

Rainborough neither knew nor cared. He was beginning already to have that uncanny feeling which he remembered having had so often in the past during conversations with Mischa. He never knew how to take Mischa's remarks. (p. 131)

At another time Mischa starts unexpectedly to confide a childhood memory while looking through pictures of the place where he grew up. He speaks of the extremely short lives of newborn chickens given to the children as prizes in the fair every year. His eyes fill with tears as he recalls his sadness as a small child when the little chicken died only a day or two later. In the same tone of love and pity, however, he abruptly confesses the next moment that it was after this experience that he started to kill small animals:

'I was so sorry for them,' said Mischa. 'They were so defenceless. Anything could hurt them. I couldn't – stand it'. Mischa's voice became almost inaudible. 'Someone gave me a little kitten once,' he said, 'and I killed it.' [...] 'So poor and defenceless', Mischa murmured. 'That was the only way to help it, to save it. So it is. If the gods kill us, it is not for their sport but because we fill them with such an intolerable compassion, a sort of nausea. Do you ever feel [...] as if everything in the world needed your – protection? It is a terrible feeling. [...]' (pp. 208-9)

Self-styled as 'god', Mischa justifies his drive to kill as love. Indeed, as Peter Seward observes, 'the springs of cruelty and of pity' lay 'strangely close to each other' in Mischa (p. 208). Just as he has 'a brown profile and a blue profile' because of his – one blue and one brown – eyes (p. 79), Mischa is simultaneously god and devil. His complex double character of saintly benevolence and devilish cruelty is shown most clearly in his relationship with animals. The same logic of 'to love is to kill' is applied also to women, who Mischa compares with fish. Just as the beautiful tropical fish are killed in the middle of the lively party, all Mischa's lovers are betrayed or discarded by the end of the novel. Whether it is animals or women, the enchanted who became slaves to his allure are a cause of nausea for Mischa, the enchanter.

Mischa's netsuke lends power to the impression of demonic energy around him. Netsuke, which is both beautiful and uncanny simultaneously, is itself very much like Mischa. Peter Seward says Mischa 'seemed [. . .] to be the very spirit of the Orient, that Orient which lay beyond the Greeks, barbarous and feral, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon' (p. 209). Mischa's mysterious Oriental figure seems close to the often expressionless mysterious figure represented in netsuke. The character and his collection thus together create this uncanny atmosphere, this demonic energy. Most of his netsuke pieces represent animals under the control of human beings, such as a cow, a goat, and a fish in a woman's hand. Thus his

collection serves as an indicator that he is the ‘god’ of animals and thus, by extension, women. His netsuke collection is Mischa’s world in miniature.

Finally and most importantly, there is a magical power in netsuke itself, which works to reinforce the energy already surrounding Mischa. When Annette asks Mischa, ‘Was it magic?’ the answer is, ‘No, or only in the way in which magic can be part of ordinary life’ (p. 192). Mischa apparently knows that netsuke was both a utilitarian tool and a talisman for Japanese people.¹⁰ Murdoch believed that the renewal and continuation of Christian religion could only be realized by releasing God and Christ from supernatural myths that many contemporary people have difficulty in believing.¹¹ In this sense, the Japanese, who prayed for everyday luck, not to the transcendental God beyond their reach but rather to the netsuke under their sleeves, were people who understood a demythologized God from the very beginning.¹² Netsuke, as a small tool necessary to hold their medicine case and tobacco, are also holy and magical for their owners. Netsuke thus is evidence for the way in which religion and everyday life were never considered separate by the Japanese.

How, then, can we read the fact that such a mysterious godly/demonic character as Mischa treasures a netsuke collection? *The Flight from the Enchanter* ends rather pessimistically compared with many of Murdoch’s later novels because no one is ultimately ‘saved’. Mischa tries to become netsuke, a form of demythologized god, and readers are reminded that there can be such small ‘gods’ like netsuke in everyday life. Although concern over the future of religion does not surface overtly, *The Flight from the Enchanter* might be read as a story of a failed demythologization. It is a commonplace to say that Murdoch’s interests in the Orient and Buddhism gradually emerged in her novels in the 1960s and became more apparent in the 1970s.¹³ However, looking at her use of netsuke in *The Flight from the Enchanter*, published in the mid 1950s, her concern over the diminishing influence of Christianity in the West, and her hopes for the Oriental religion as its salvation are already evident.

The strongest presence of netsuke in Murdoch’s fiction occurs in *The Philosopher’s Pupil* (1983). As Murdoch herself says, this novel is ‘about the nature of power in human relations’.¹⁴ Power struggles within various human relationships – teacher and pupil, priest and philosopher, husband and wife, grandfather and granddaughter, and so on – weave the complex plot of this novel. Yet a close examination of netsuke in the novel reveals another important power figure, the narrator, N. His struggle to gain the status of ‘god’ in the story can be illuminated by paying attention to the role of netsuke.

Netsuke first enters the story soon after George McCaffrey hears about the return of his ex-teacher, the renowned philosopher, John Robert Rozanov, to the town of Ennistone. John Robert’s earlier abandonment of George and his advice to stop studying philosophy have left

¹⁰ To give a few examples from Mischa’s collection: a netsuke forming the shape of cattle was a talisman to wish for agricultural plenty because the cattle is considered to be a draught animal. Consequently, this subject came to embody all wishes for prosperity and thus was loved by merchants (See Edwin C. Symmes Jr., *Netsuke: Japanese Life and Legend in Miniature* [1991; Rutland: Tuttle, 1996], p. 110). For another example, netsuke representing a rat (‘ne’ in Japanese) escaping (*nukeru*) from the rat-catching cage was held by people who wished for good health. This was because an old Japanese proverb, ‘ne ga nukeru’, meant ‘to recover completely from illness’. (See Wilhelm Gabor and Yukari Yoshida, *The Netsuke Dancers* [p.16]).

¹¹ Murdoch discusses this issue in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992).

¹² Murdoch uses the term ‘demythologize’ and ‘demythologization’ very often in her later works, particularly in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*.

¹³ See for instance, Masao Kimura, *Iris Murdoch to Zen* [Iris Murdoch and Zen] (Tokyo: Shōhakusha, 1995)

¹⁴ ‘John Haffenden Talks to Iris Murdoch’ (1983), in Gillian Dooley, ed., *From a Tiny corner in the House of Fiction: Conversations with Iris Murdoch* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), pp. 124–38 (p. 125). Hereafter *TCHF*.

such a deep scar in George's heart that he has since led a destructive life. It is Stella McCaffrey, George's intelligent Jewish wife, who owns the netsuke in *The Philosopher's Pupil*. Shortly after being almost killed by George in the opening scene of the novel, Stella disappears. The presence and significance of netsuke are paradoxically conveyed by their absence:

Stella had, some time ago, moved into her own room the little collection of Japanese netsuke, gifts from her father, which had once stood upon the sitting-room mantelpiece. She had ranged them upon the white window-sill facing the end of her bed. George burst in with this hammer, eagerly anticipating the work of destruction. But the window-sill was bare. He looked about the room, opened the drawers: gone. The little gaggle of ivory men and animals had disappeared. Stella must have come, foreseeing his rage, and taken them away. [...] George felt a pang of jealous misery and frustration. (pp. 139-40)

It is clear Stella has already withdrawn her netsuke from the couple's communal sitting-room to her private bedroom for safety and the above passage suggests that she came back to her house again to secure the safety of netsuke, which seems to be of the utmost importance to her. When she finally returns to George later in the story, the first thing she does is set out her netsuke on top of the hallstand. She does not wait for George to find them but says, 'See, I brought the netsuke back' (p. 490). Stella's attention to these small ornaments might be considered almost obsessive. But George pays similarly obsessive attention to the netsuke, although in a very different way. While Stella 'treasure[s] them as tokens of her father's love' (p. 140), George treats them with anger and hatred. His temptation to destroy the netsuke grows irresistible whenever he feels a strong surge of distressing emotion. He cannot bear either their presence or absence – as if, ambivalently, the more he hates, the more he comes to love them. Hence, when he finally destroys one of them by stamping on it, he is filled with feelings of guilt and regret instead of satisfaction. He immediately runs to Father Jacoby in misery and confesses his action:

'I have done something terrible' [...]
'George, you haven't hurt Stella, have you?' [...] 'Stella? No.' He turned round and put his hand in his pocket and brought out something, two small white fragments which he held in the palm of his hand. He said, 'I broke it, I got angry, but it can be mended. See, the little Japanese thing, ivory, a man holding a fish, a fisherman with his basket, see underneath his foot and the pattern of his dress folded-his head is broken off, but it can be mended. It's all to do, it's to do. Oh, if you only knew how unhappy I am, how my heart hurts in my breast. It's all so black. Oh what a burden it is – '. (pp. 495-6)

His immediate reaction to his own act of breaking the netsuke is to feel a desperate desire to repair. George is in love with the netsuke as much as Stella.

As with Mischa, Stella can be identified with her netsuke. Such attributes as her 'handsome Jewish face' and 'strong dark hair which grew up like a crown or turban above her brow' (p. 106), her extreme cleverness and strength revealed in her intelligent vocabulary and calm attitudes ('She was the cleverest strongest woman that [George] had ever met' [p.79]), and her extraordinary benevolence and generosity to George, an angry man no one in the town can control – all contribute to the making of a very powerful image. Even though she is a mere

housewife, many Ennistonians openly admire her, often speaking of her 'power', comparing her handsome head with a 'royal Egyptian head' (p. 350), and its black hair with that of 'an Egyptian queen' (p. 355). George is constantly threatened by her 'terrible strength' that would '[eat] up the reality all round her to increase her own' (p. 350). He reflects that 'he was never in love with Stella, only obsessed and hypnotized', but N, the narrator, insists nonetheless that 'there is no doubt that he was in love' (p. 79). Stella is another figure who has the demonic energy to attract and enslave other human beings. In this novel again, netsuke lends its own demonic energy to one of Murdoch's characters: Stella wants her netsuke close to hand because it is part of her, part of her power.

George's urge to destroy the netsuke can therefore be read as his own urge to free himself from his wife's demonic power. Yet neither the attempt to kill Stella nor to destroy the netsuke is successful. It is his willpower that ultimately repairs the netsuke. Unbinding the spell of the enchanter is indeed difficult. When he is released from his original anguish by the death of John Robert, George at last becomes able to see Stella for the first time, not as the demon that might eat him up but simply a wife. Netsuke is not even mentioned in the last pages of the novel, after the attempted murder of John Robert. The netsuke has lost its significance, and Stella is no longer identified with it. The narrator, N, observes towards the end of the novel that 'She [Stella] was always possessively watchful, but now seems to me, when I see them together, to be more tender and "sentimental"' (p. 548). Certainly, Stella cannot have lost her exotic appearance, and probably still possesses her demonic power; yet George finally comes to see her as 'a real woman' (p. 490) as opposed to a stern alien Egyptian queen. Netsuke, last seen in the couple's communal dining room in a 'jumbled bunch' (p. 512), has its power reduced to a little magic merged into everyday life.

The third and most important character attracted to netsuke is the narrator, N. Since the novel takes the form of the mysterious N (taken from the Latin '*Nemo*', meaning 'nobody') narrating the whole story (p. 23),¹⁵ it should be stressed that it is neither George nor Stella but N who makes the numerous references to Stella's netsuke in the narrative. Significantly, the only scene in the novel where N talks directly with other characters starts with his reference to netsuke:

'I see you've set out the netsuke, my old friends'.
'Yes – ' I especially like that demon hatching out of his egg'.
'You would. You were the only person who really *looked at* them.' (p. 357;
italics original, underlining added)

Considering that N's stance during the rest of the novel is to narrate in the manner of a nineteenth-century omniscient narrator, the sudden revelation of his voice in this scene surprises. N is indeed 'there but not there. He is like a ghost'.¹⁶ Yet suddenly here N emerges in the forefront of the novel as a person with a voice. The reader now knows that N not only exists but is so close to Stella's netsuke as to call them his 'old friends'. However, because N immediately recedes into the background of the story and never speaks again, the reader is never informed of why Stella's netsuke are old friends to N. Therefore, it may be suggested that this scene in which N makes his only appearance is the scene where a ghost acquires a mysterious and magical body. The demon that hatched out of the egg is, in fact, N himself.

¹⁵ Murdoch herself says in a few interviews that N's identity is made fairly clear in the novel ('[i]t is quite possible that N is the psychiatrist, Sir Ivor Sefton'). See *TCHF*, pp. 167–93 (p. 171). However, it seems to be difficult for most readers, including Murdoch's critics, to realize this in their first reading.

¹⁶ Jack Turner, *Murdoch vs. Freud: A Freudian Look at an Anti-Freudian* (New York: Lang, 1993), p. 129.

The *Karasu Tengu* (half-bird and half-human mountain deity) emerging from an egg was a popular subject throughout netsuke history.¹⁷ The oldest sample of this type of netsuke can be found in the form of an illustration in the seventh volume of *Sōken Kishō* [*Appreciation of Superior Sword Furnishings*] (1781),¹⁸ the oldest record of netsuke carvers in Japan. The Chinese characters written beside this illustration suggest that this subject embodied the meaning, ‘to seize a very rare chance’. This comes from the literal meaning of the combination of these Chinese characters which is: ‘a baby bird could be born only if the mother bird realized the exact time that the baby wanted to come out of the egg’ – the egg is so hard for the baby bird that the mother and the baby have to crack the egg together at the same time, one from outside and the other from inside.¹⁹

N, in narrating the story, has seized a rare chance. Naming the whole town ‘N’s town’ (Ennistone), he plays the role of ‘god’, watching over and penetrating into every person’s (even the dog’s) actions and thoughts to tell the story. As he declares in the beginning that he ‘will allow [him]self here and there the discreet luxury of moralizing’ (p. 23), he makes judgments for his fellow beings. A superficial reading might consider the power figure in the story to be John Robert or Stella, who are both admired and feared by the people in the town. Yet the real power figure in the story is undoubtedly N, who controls the whole story. More than anyone else, it is N who borrows magical power from netsuke.

The Philosopher’s Pupil is not the last of Murdoch’s novels in which netsuke makes its presence felt. Even in her last novel, *Jackson’s Dilemma*, netsuke is displayed on the mantelpiece in Benet’s house.²⁰ The narrative leaves the reader with no strong impressions about netsuke; because no information is given about what kind of netsuke it is, or what kind of material it is made from, the reader cannot visualize the netsuke, and it does not seem to cast any significant influence on the story as a whole. Benet once ‘meander[s] to the mantelpiece and play[s] with the netsuke’, but neither Benet nor the netsuke seem to have any magical power (p. 70). It is just a small pretty ornament on the mantelpiece.

Murdoch once said that as a novelist she should not write about what she did not know: ‘One could bring in little funny details and oddities, bits of background, quirks, little vistas and so on, but I could obviously not set a novel in India or Japan because I don’t know’.²¹ How does the repeated appearance of netsuke fit into what she says here? Were netsuke merely ‘little funny details and oddities’ all the time? It does not seem so. Murdoch, who continued to seek a new religion incorporated into people’s ordinary life, apparently found great hope in Japanese netsuke in her early career. In her later fiction, however, Murdoch includes netsuke without attributing symbolic meaning to it. She became more concerned with ordinary things than with extraordinary ones. She says,

Young writers are often afraid of writing about ordinary things because they

¹⁷ I confirmed through email correspondence with Ms. Yukari Yoshida on 4 September 2007 that the most probable, if not only, subject Murdoch was referring to by the description, ‘demon hatching out of his egg’, was *Karasu Tengu*.

¹⁸ Shinemon Inaba, *Sōken Kishō* (7 volumes). The 6th and 7th volumes are reproduced in Kiichi Inagaki, *Netsuke Sanka* (*Love Song to Netsuke: The Wonderful World of the Miniature Craftwork*), pp. 124–59.

¹⁹ See Akira Ichikawa, *Netsuke no Miryoku* (*The Attraction of Netsuke*) (Osaka, Shinpū Shobo, 2003), p. 108; *Netsuke: Gyōshuku sareta Edo Bunka*, p. , p. 92. For other explanations about this netsuke, see for instance Barbara Teri Okada and Mary Gardner Neill, *Real and Imaginary Beings: The Netsuke Collection of Joseph and Edith Kurstin* (Yale: Yale University Art gallery, 2003), pp. 62–3.

²⁰ Murdoch, *Jackson’s Dilemma* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995), p. 12.

²¹ Murdoch, interview with Glover (1977) in *TCHF*, pp. 33–43 (p. 41).

think that this would be rather dull and of course they are anxious to startle their friends by writing something rather odd, and also they imagine that it's more original to write about something rather odd. I think the artist that has worked for a long time in his craft is less concerned with any desire to shock or any desire to search for oddities. He can find plenty of oddities without looking for them.²²

As her writing career matured, monstrous figures such as blue-eyed and brown-eyed men and supernatural labyrinth-like houses disappeared from her novels. Probably netsuke, a little oriental magic merged in everyday life, appealed to Murdoch earlier as an effective symbol for certain themes. But it is also a positive sign of how everyday objects can be religious, and a negative sign of how people are vulnerable to the power of false gods.

John Bayley wrote in a letter to the author that '[Murdoch] was interested, but not greatly' in netsuke, and he informed me that 'she had given all [her netsuke] away to friends (each as a gift gesture) by the time she became seriously ill, & before she died'.²³ I think these words are proof of her great love and interest in netsuke. Netsuke were treasured by Stella because they were 'tokens of her father's love', and Benet never forgot that his netsuke had been given to him by a friend, long ago (p. 140). An act of netsuke giving was special for Murdoch, because it was a token of her love. Netsuke, a small oriental magic, always meant something special to her and she gives it as gift to her readers.

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²² Iris Murdoch, interview with Jean-Louis Chevalier (1978), in *TCHF*, pp. 70–96 (p. 91).

²³ John Bayley, letter to the author.

‘It was badly done, indeed, Bradley’: Iris Murdoch, Jane Austen and the Novelist as Moralist

Literary analysis is, amongst other things, a matter of comparison. How great is a writer? What are they doing? Are they reactionary or revolutionary? These are questions that can be answered in part by placing an author alongside their contemporaries, and measuring them against their literary ancestors. Iris Murdoch has been seen variously as the heir of Shakespeare, Dickens, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Proust and James. She has been called our most intelligent novelist since George Eliot, a philosopher-novelist like Sartre and Camus; the links have ranged from brief comments to fully fledged articles.¹ This idea of forming part of a tradition may be unfashionable, but Murdoch was happy with it and always suggested that she wanted to write like the Russians, like Shakespeare.² While critics have explored her work in terms of the nineteenth-century realist novel, and Shakespearean comedy, I think such studies do not encompass the possible comparisons that might be made. In particular, Olga Kenyon’s suggestion, some years ago, that Murdoch is the ‘moralist for our time’, and that ‘she can be considered in the tradition of female creators of the novel in the eighteenth century, such as Fanny Burney and Jane Austen’ demands further consideration.³ Murdoch’s concern with the novel as a place to investigate morality unites her with Jane Austen. Moreover, an awareness of this shared moral vision, with the recent return of ethics in academic discourses, is the most helpful way to unite the two novelists. In doing so, one may appreciate not only Austen’s potential influence on Murdoch, but also the transformation of Austen’s fiction in the light of Murdoch’s writing.

The eighteenth-century novel is often a world of moral fables, of character types, a place where, no matter how alienated various picaro appear, they will find their place in a divinely structured society by the end. These fictions grew from the chapbooks, from Bunyan, in a time when the world was becoming secular but fiction tended to leave God in place. At the end of this period, straddling the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, came the great early mistress of the English realist novel, Jane Austen. Austen’s novels are highly ‘patterned’ – moral works, exploring moral problems. Thus, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth and Darcy embark on a moral journey, although they are never reduced to mere chessboard pieces in the cause of Austen’s interest in the moral world: they are absolutely and triumphantly *alive*. Theirs is an empirical journey, where they learn how not to read the world in terms of abstract concepts, but to value an individual for what he or she is; it is a triumph of the particular. Jane Austen is not didactic, but in her arrangement of character and plot we feel her coaching and persuading. This is the archetypal work of novelist as moralist: *Pride, Prejudice, Nice, Good*, perhaps? Malcolm Bradbury’s words on Austen in fact seem like a description of Murdoch, too:

The whole structure of her inventions is recurrently that of a kind of moral assault course, an extended interview in which candidates give their

¹ See, for example, Peter Conradi, ‘Iris Murdoch and Dostoevskii’, in *Dostoevskii and Britain*, ed. by W.J. Leatherbarrow (Oxford: Berg, 1995), pp. 277-91; Priscilla Martin, ‘Houses of Fiction: Iris Murdoch and Henry James’, in *Iris Murdoch: A Reassessment*, ed. by Anne Rowe (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 124-35; and Richard Todd, *Iris Murdoch: The Shakespearean Interest* (London: Vision Press, 1979).

² Iris Murdoch, ‘Literature and Philosophy: A Conversation with Bryan Magee’, in *Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. by Peter J. Conradi (London: Penguin, 1997), pp. 3-30. Hereafter *EM*.

³ Olga Kenyon, *Women Novelists Today* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1988), pp. 16-17. Note also Valentine Cunningham’s remark that *The Sea, The Sea* is ‘a kind of throwback to eighteenth-century metatextualities’. ‘Shaping Modern English Fiction: The Forms of the Content and the Contents of the Form’, *On Modern British Fiction*, ed. by Zachary Leader (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 149-80 (p. 157). Hereafter *SMBF*.

qualifications, undergo a succession of tests, and are finally rewarded ...⁴

There is, of course, a great deal that is different about Austen and Murdoch. Murdoch is a very twentieth-century novelist: her work is European, influenced by existentialism, blackly comic, inherently sexual. Richly various, it embraces gothic and surreal incident and plot; postmodern and metafictional devices, operatic, and even soap-operatic, effects. Austen, on the other hand, although publishing much of her work in the second decade of the nineteenth century, is a very eighteenth-century writer: her style is often Johnsonian, her subject matter apparently small and tightly controlled: for Janeites these are novels of the parlour, romantic comedies. There is an argument for Murdoch's novels occupying the 'masculine' side of literature through their engagement with the traditionally masculine discourse of philosophy, their closeness to the 'thriller', and their first-person male narrators. By contrast, on the surface at least, Austen's fiction can be read as romance, the stereotypically female domain, and as having given birth to an industry of escapist Regency entertainment.

The strength of Austen's work, however, is its ability successfully to marry psychological realism and romance within a closely observed economic and material context. In Murdoch's *The Nice and the Good*, the large cast, the depiction of consciousness, and the comic ending, create what is, in formal terms, an 'Austenian' as well as a Shakespearean novel. As Peter Conradi has noted, Murdoch wrote within the same tradition as Austen: both novelists focus on an apparently limited world and its manners, where the arrival of an outsider can disrupt a 'court'.⁵ By the end, Murdoch's joyously over-formal ending – where the dog goes off with the cat – highlights her awareness of the close she is obliged to make. Austen speaks similarly at the end of *Northanger Abbey*:

The anxiety [...] can hardly extend, I fear, to the bosom of my readers, who will see in the tell-tale compression of the pages before them, that we are all hastening together to perfect felicity.⁶

Austen and Murdoch thus ironically remark on the gap between unordered reality and the ordered realist novel they are crafting.

Like Shakespeare, both Austen and Murdoch strive for impersonality. Austen learns it by the time she gets to the magisterial later works; Murdoch manages it throughout. They are both dramatists, novelist-dramatists, often advancing action through dialogue. Austen learnt from her eighteenth-century predecessors to give us the family history of a character: *Mansfield Park*'s opening is a prime example of this, as we learn the history of the three Ward sisters and their offspring. Likewise, the first chapter of the underrated *An Unofficial Rose* lays out the complex cast, like a game of happy families, as Valentine Cunningham observes.⁷ Austen shows us here that, to be great, fiction needs patterning and symbols – the cross and chain, the fire in the east room, the big country house and the squalid city house, the lifeless aunt and the meddling aunt. Perhaps, most of all, the strange world of Sotherton: its wilderness and its haha, its empty chapel. The symbolic landscapes of *The Bell* and *The Good Apprentice*

⁴ Malcolm Bradbury, 'Jane Austen's *Emma*' (1962), in *Jane Austen: Emma*, ed. by David Lodge, Casebook Series (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 156- 69 (p. 157).

⁵ Conradi, Peter J., *Iris Murdoch: The Saint and the Artist*, 3rd edn. (London: HarperCollins, 2001), p. 15.

⁶ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 246.

⁷ *SMBF*, p. 165.

owe much to Austen, as well as to the Gothic tradition, and, it might be argued, Murdoch could not have written them if *Mansfield Park* had not been written.

Both writers also believed that fiction was important and were unashamed in their claims for its worth. Both use their novels to self-referentially comment on the status of the form. Here is Austen, famously, in *Northanger Abbey*:

‘Oh! It is only a novel!’ replies the young lady, while she lays down her book with affected indifference, or momentary shame. ‘It is only *Cecilia*, or *Camilla*, or *Belinda*’; or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best-chosen language. (p. 58)

While here we have Anne Cavidge in *Nuns and Soldiers*:

Anne had been reading *Little Dorrit*, it was amazing, it was so crammed and chaotic, and yet so touching, a kind of miracle, a strangely naked display of feeling, and full of profound ideas, yet one felt it was all so true!⁸

The uniting idea here is that of *truth*: the novel for both Jane Austen and Iris Murdoch is a place for humour, for entertainment, but also for enlightenment as to human nature.

What emerges through such comparisons is the underpinning of a shared moral framework which unites these two seemingly very different authors. Although by no means a philosopher, in her fiction Austen mirrors and contributes to intellectual change in Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. She followed Locke and the empiricists and, in doing so, wrote in the wake of the decline of absolutisms and metaphysical certainties. Kant’s questioning of rationalism destabilised the ability to rely upon previously assumed truths beyond the realm of experience. In the wake of the rise of individualism and the beginnings of libertarian thinking it seemed that each individual must make their way, through education and discovery, to be fit to take up a place as wife, mother, or patriarch. There was no question of abolishing the old systems, but that is not to say that there did not need to be *improvement*. The novels propound an ethic of kindness and charity, of duty to one’s kin, no matter how irritating they may be. A model of goodness might be Mr Knightley, with his gifts of apples and pork to the Bates. Yet Austen is willing to admit that living like this, and obeying the rules, as Elinor does in *Sense and Sensibility*, can be exhausting: Marianne’s life can seem a much more attractive alternative. Once again, of the two sisters, is one nice, and one good? Which is the most appropriate virtue? *Sense and Sensibility* is thus a moral investigation, in the same way that the quietness of Harriet is contrasted with the allure of Emily in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*, and the self-dramatization of Edward is set against the apparent passivity of white, formless Stuart in *The Good Apprentice*. Who really is the good apprentice? Murdoch wants us to ponder this, but plants a firm clue. At the end of the novel, Stuart, a kind of modern Fanny Price, is reading Austen’s *Mansfield Park*. Both Murdoch and Austen are aware that virtue and goodness, while necessary, are not always very interesting, and that dynamism and energy can have understandable allure.

⁸ Iris Murdoch, *Nuns and Soldiers* (1980; London: Vintage, 2001), p. 55.

An Unofficial Rose, like *The Nice and the Good*, is a book with debts to Austen. A.S. Byatt has suggested that it springs from Lionel Trilling's essay on *Mansfield Park* which sees Fanny Price as part of a tradition of suffering heroines.⁹ This is a novel where young Miranda is given a set of Austen novels and, significantly, fails to engage with them, just as Gertrude does not get on very well with her reading of Austen in *Nuns and Soldiers*. It contrasts the virtue of Ann Peronett with the wit and sparkle of characters like Emma Sands and Lindsay Rimmer. *Mansfield Park* has the house disturbed by the Crawfords and the theatricals; *An Unofficial Rose* has the calm of Grayhallock disrupted by the arrival of Emma Sands, eating everything up, summoning everyone for interview:

Ann was silent, and it seemed afterwards that she had passed a vast time in reflection. What she said and did now was crucial, not so much for Mildred as for herself. Mildred had led her up to her moment of theatre, but she must be cheated of it and sent away empty. There must be no drama here, no possible foothold for the imagination. What Mildred was trying to conjure up must be made nonsense of, must be made somehow not to exist. The thing must be laughed off briskly. Mildred must be clapped on the shoulder and taken to her coffee. There must be no admission of knowledge or interest, no confused looks, nothing. Again it was no and nothing.¹⁰

In the manner of Austen, here Murdoch takes us into the thoughts of Ann through free indirect speech. It is notable that theatre is the symbol of what Ann is trying to reject, just as Fanny Price refuses to act, and is the only one to stand firm against all that the theatricals stand for in *Mansfield Park*. What both authors are trying to do is not preach either for or against, but *show* quietness, duty and virtue against energy and the ego, weighing each, while leaving the verdict to the reader. 'No and nothing' is the mantra of Ann, and of Fanny; both live often in a state of denial which is, according to their creators, both right *and* wrong.

Theatre may be suspect, but art can be good in Austen – Elizabeth Bennet and Catherine Morland, like their creator, defend reading novels, even if they might be the romances of Ann Radcliffe. And it is a portrait of Mr Darcy, a piece of art that is *true*, according to the housekeeper who shows it off to Elizabeth Bennet, that helps alert the latter to his moral worth. The *moral* point is highlighted when we remember that Austen and her family loved theatricals: the danger is acting, falseness and insincerity. The shadows are dancing on the wall of the Platonic cave, and false passions are highlighted and played out. It is not so far from here to Tim and Gertrude dancing naked in the grass in *Nuns and Soldiers*, Edward flirting with Ilona in *The Good Apprentice*, Charles Arrowby re-discovering his bearded lady in *The Sea, The Sea*, and Hilary Burde finding coincidence as he plays with Kitty in *A Word Child*. There may be infatuation, and real feeling, but it is only temporary. Matters of the heart, for both authors, demand tough consideration and weighing up, until we can discover what is *true*.

Austen gives us, in fact, a detailed study of an artist whose powers are really dangerous, whose immersion in her own dangerous imagination can have really upsetting results on the lives of other people. That person is, of course, Emma Woodhouse. Through Emma, Austen expresses, perhaps, her own anxieties about her own artistry; she also subscribes to the

⁹ A. S. Byatt and Ighes Sôdré, *Imagining Characters* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995), p. 154.

¹⁰ Iris Murdoch, *An Unofficial Rose* (1962; London: Vintage Classics, 2000), p. 114.

eighteenth-century distrust of the imagination, expressed by her beloved Samuel Johnson in the story of the astronomer in *Rasselas*.¹¹

It is possible to see both Austen and Murdoch as novelists influenced by both Plato and Aristotle. For Austen, high Eros in *Persuasion* is a noble goal, yet the delights of living on Earth are right to the fore: parties, walks, conversation, flirtation. Murdoch is similarly open to both the metaphysics of Plato and the fun of sex, food, drinking and silliness. They are both united by the suspicion of bad fantasy, and supply moral investigations into what can happen. But whereas Austen is constantly suspicious of anything involving imagination and fantasy over the exercise of reason, for Murdoch there is a clear divide between fantasy (which is bad) and imagination (which is good).¹²

The title of this essay unites perhaps the two most remarkable character creations of each author, Emma Woodhouse and Bradley Pearson. When, in 'Against Dryness', Murdoch writes that we are 'benighted creatures sunk in a reality whose nature we are constantly and overwhelmingly tempted to deform by fantasy', she might have been talking of the actions of Emma in trying to manipulate love affairs.¹³ Emma is the ultimate proud ego-driven product of Romanticism, and has to learn humility.¹⁴ The journey that Emma makes, from bad fantasy and power play – how much does this idea of hero-worship link her with Murdoch too? – to humble recognition of the moral worth of Miss Bates as a separate entity, is remarkably similar to the journeys made by Jake Donaghue, Hilary Burde, Charles Arrowby and Bradley Pearson, all would-be artists and creators trying to impose order on the contingent muddle of the Murdochean world. This essay is thus an attempt to link the ethics of these two writers: despite the fact that Austen never theorized about fiction or wrote about ethics, the morality expressed in her novels unites them.

The quotation in my title comes, of course, from *Emma*, and the words are those of Mr Knightley, the kind, wise and yet rather dull patriarch whose voice is close in style to Austen's narrator. (He was Murdoch's favourite Austen character.)¹⁵ His reprimand to Emma about her cruelty comes from the author, too. We feel a similar implied reprimand from Murdoch to her creations, which accompanies her love for them: Bradley Pearson's desire to write his story, to find a muse, has resulted in his being tricked, in his false image of himself; he can only make love under the guise of theatre and disguise. Similarly, Hilary Burde's willingness to see coincidence, to see himself as a victim of the gods, results in the death of others. Charles Arrowby should clearly *not* be seeing himself as Prospero. Let us remember too, in Austen, Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*, whose love of books distorts her vision, and who has to come to a point where 'the visions of romance were over' (p. 201). At the end of the fictions of these novelists, the isolated consciousness dissolves into that of the 'dialogue' of marriage, of clear perception of reality, or, perhaps, of postmodern, multiple points of view, which are favoured over the solitary self which can never truly *see*.

Quite well-known things that have been said, then, about both Austen's and Murdoch's fiction – that the former is about improvement, the latter about learning to see, learning to 'unself', learning to understand the otherness of our fellow creatures – can be drawn together. Both novelists expect their readers to participate intensely in moral considerations, to judge;

¹¹ The idea of Emma as avatar for Austen the artist was suggested by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 158-9.

¹² See 'Literature and Philosophy: A Conversation with Bryan Magee', *EM*, p. 11.

¹³ Murdoch, 'Against Dryness', *EM*, p. 293.

¹⁴ Interesting, perhaps, that Murdoch calls her novelist and 'magician' in *An Unofficial Rose*, Emma.

¹⁵ See *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction: Conversations with Iris Murdoch* ed. by Gillian Dooley (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), pp. 150 & 224. My thanks to Gillian Dooley for alerting me to this fact.

they both want the world to be a better place. This indirectly practical intention for their novels brings us to the ethical turn in fiction, a now well-established reaction against the loss of the human in philosophy and literary criticism. One of its chief purveyors, Martha Nussbaum, has written on Murdoch and, without directly exploring Austen, has focussed on the nineteenth-century realist novel in her work. There is not space here to quote Nussbaum at length, but two examples are illustrative: in ‘Exactly and Responsibly: A Defence of Ethical Criticism’, Nussbaum supports Henry James’s assertion in the Preface to *The Golden Bowl* that the novelist’s duty is partly an ethical one; in *Poetic Justice*, she states that

Novels [...] present persistent forms of human need and desire realized in specific social situations [...] Novels [...] in general construct and speak to an implicit reader who shares with the characters certain hopes, fears and general human concerns, and who for that reason is able to form bonds of identification and sympathy with them.¹⁶

Clearly, from what we have seen in this essay, the fiction of both Austen and Murdoch would fit Nussbaum’s criteria for novels, and so the authors find a meeting point, both in James, and in current ethical criticism.¹⁷

Murdoch and Austen, then, shared a great deal: both aimed to produce great art which was freely inhabited by characters and incident. They wrote fiction which, by *not* striving to be topical and political, has greater universal value. Both were entertainers and storytellers, popular with a wide public and writing close to popular genres, yet both saw the novel as more than that. They were aware that virtue is hard and goodness can be dull, that love can both set us free and make us the slave to delusion and fantasy. For both, as for Leavis and Lawrence, the novel can explain our morality; but for both the novel is also a comic form, and moralising can be a dangerous activity: think of Mary Bennett’s constant Johnsonian moralising, and the array of philosophers and psychotherapists who are all reluctant to see the particular, in Murdoch.

One consequence of allying Murdoch with a neo-Kantian view of the self and nineteenth-century models is that such a reading may seem outdated. Yet, with the ethical turn, Murdoch’s own once unfashionable moral philosophy has moved much nearer the centre of academic discourses. A postmodern ethics of unknowability has a definite place; so too does Murdoch’s assertion of value and meaning. And where does that value lie? For Murdoch, it lies in the great tradition. It is no accident but a conscious irony on her part, that, in *The Book and the Brotherhood*, the book which Matthew Hernshaw is reading before he dies is *Sense and Sensibility*.¹⁸ Matthew does not learn from the failure of Mr Dashwood; he too fails to provide for his offspring.¹⁹ It was badly done by Matthew, Emma and Bradley – but, next time, if we pay attention, it can be ‘goodly’ done by us.

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¹⁶ Martha Nussbaum, ‘Exactly and Responsibly: A Defence of Ethical Criticism’, *Philosophy and Literature* Vol. 22.2 (1998), pp. 343-365 and *Poetic Justice* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), p. 7.

¹⁷ See also Patricia Waugh’s re-reading of Murdoch’s work in ‘Visceral Perturbations and Human Judgement: Ethics and the Novel’ in *On the Turn: The Ethics of Fiction in Contemporary Narrative in English* ed. by Barbara Arizti and Silvia Martinez-Falquina (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007).

¹⁸ Iris Murdoch, *The Book and the Brotherhood* (1987; London: Penguin, 1988), p. 53. My thanks to Frances White for identifying the connection between Austen and Murdoch here, for reminding me of Stuart Cuno’s reading of Austen in *The Good Apprentice*, and for her encouragement in the writing of this paper.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 108-9

I Shall Bear Witness: H.G. Adler and the Holocaust - Kings College Library Bequest

‘One of the great intellectual scandals of our time,’ wrote the Czech-born Professor of German at Yale, Peter Demetz, ‘is that the important books of novelist, poet and Holocaust survivor H.G. Adler, both the personal ones and those in search of historical truth, have yet to be translated into English [...] I see Adler in the Shoah as a companion to Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel’.¹ This scandal – highlighted by Demetz but uncomfortably familiar to many others – is about to be corrected.

Adler died in 1988 in relative obscurity in England, but is now increasingly recognized as a founder of Holocaust scholarship.² Twenty years after his death, his monumental work, *Theresienstadt 1941-45: Das Antlitz einer Zwangsgemeinschaft*,³ the first fully documented account of a single camp, published in German in 1955, will finally be available to an English audience. At the same time, one of his most significant novels, *Eine Reise*,⁴ will be published in English for the first time. In addition – and arguably most important of all – Adler’s personal reference library, a unique and important collection of printed material about the Holocaust and the history of European Jewry, some of it extremely rare, has been housed on permanent loan with King’s College, London in the Foyle Special Collections Library. Although some of the most physically vulnerable items are still in need of conservation, it has all been catalogued and can now be viewed on line.⁵

Adler’s son, Emeritus Professor of German at King’s, Jeremy Adler, described the loan as ‘a thank you to this country which gave my father safe haven and where I grew up happily’.⁶ Hans Günter Adler (he used the initials H.G. to avoid association with the senior SS officer, Hans Guenther, who was Eichmann’s representative in the so-called Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia responsible for deportation of Jews) was born in Prague in 1910, into a family of assimilated Jews who believed more in continuous human progress than in the traditional Judaic faith. His mother was a dancer, his father a bookbinder. His cultural and linguistic roots were Austrian and German rather than Czech. The worlds of Rilke, Werfel and Kafka overlapped with his. H.G. studied musicology, literature and philosophy at the city’s Charles University and gained his doctorate there in 1935 for a dissertation on Klopstock and Music but was prevented from pursuing an academic career by the rise of the Nazis. He made unsuccessful attempts to emigrate, first to Brazil, and then to Great Britain, but letters to friends already in England, including the later Nobel prize winner Elias Canetti, went unanswered and he failed to get an entry permit. Trapped in Czechoslovakia, he was sent in 1941 to a labour camp in Bohemia where he was made to work on the railways. On February 8, 1942 he was deported to Theresienstadt together with his new wife, Gertrud Klepetar, and her parents.

Almost as soon as he entered Theresienstadt, Adler’s existence was defined by poetry, both reading and writing it. He wrote over a hundred poems there and had a pocket book of

¹ Robert Fine and Charles Turner eds., *Social Theory After the Holocaust* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press).

² *Editor’s note*: H.G. Adler was a childhood friend of Franz Steiner. Adler comforted Murdoch in November 1952 after Steiner’s death. He told her ‘you loved him and one day of love tells you more than years of friendship’.
(Peter Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* [London: HarperCollins, 2001], p. 339.)

³ *The Face of an Involuntary Community : History, Sociology and Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁴ H.G. Adler, *The Journey*, trans. by Peter Filkins (London: Random House, 2008).

⁵ The H.G. Adler Collection at King’s College, London can be consulted at:
<<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/iss/library/spec/collections/indiv/>>

⁶ All quotations from Jeremy Adler are taken from a conversation with the author.

Homer with him. This ability to give artistic expression to his experiences was a key factor in his survival. He said later that, although at first he had not expected to survive, he decided that, if he did, he wanted ‘to represent it in two different ways. I wanted to explore it in a scholarly manner and so separate it from myself completely, and I wanted to portray it in a literary manner. I have done both and the fact that I have done so is no great achievement but it does provide a small justification for having survived’.⁷ But he had other survival strategies too. He often recounted how, when he was about to be beaten by a camp guard, he asked first for permission to take off his glasses. It was granted and in that moment the man was put off his stroke so that although the beating went ahead it was less harsh than it might otherwise have been. Later the glasses were broken anyway, but, significantly, still kept.⁸

He consistently refused to play any part in the administration of the camps, recognizing that to do so could easily lead to compromise. He needed to remain detached – an outsider. This decision to live as an outsider was to help him later in surviving the harsh realities of post-war London, where émigré artists and writers had a hard time establishing a foothold, and also explains why he was not prepared to bend the knee to the literary establishment when it held out scraps to him. He was not afraid to have differences of opinion with other writers, including Hannah Arendt. Arendt had relied heavily on *Theresienstadt*, which she had read in manuscript, for her own influential book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. But Adler felt she had used his research selectively, rejected Arendt’s depiction of the SS Officer as an ordinary bureaucrat and felt that her belief in ‘the banality of evil’ had misinterpreted his central theme.

Veza Canetti, wife of Elias Canetti, once reproached Adler for having survived, for being ‘the one who got away’: ‘Her own guilt at having survived was extreme and killed her in the end,’ explained Jeremy Adler, ‘so when my father was there it acted as a living and constant reproach to her and others. The knowledge that they had survived and avoided the camps where others had died was difficult, if not impossible, to live with’.⁹

H.G. himself recognized how much he owed his survival for two and a half years in Theresienstadt to his first wife, Gertrud. As a camp doctor she was able to acquire morsels of food and medicine; but the intellectual and emotional sustenance they gave each other was equally vital. She was also working on understanding the nature of many strange diseases in the camps where psychological and psychosomatic factors, combined with poor diet and lack of hygiene, made diagnosis all but impossible. Much of what H.G. subsequently wrote in the medical sections of *Theresienstadt* was gleaned from her studies.

Her medical status could have ensured her own survival. But on October 12, 1944, the Adlers were transferred to Auschwitz. H.G. handed over all the material, now squashed into an old leather briefcase, with which he had been entrusted in the Ghetto, to fellow inmate Rabbi Leo Baeck. Upon arrival at Auschwitz, Gertrud chose not to desert her mother, accompanying her along the ramp to the gas chamber so that she should not die alone. This act, demonstrating her moral superiority, remained central to H.G.’s understanding of humanity for the rest of his life. H.G. was kept in Auschwitz for two weeks before being sent on to Buchenwald, from where he was liberated on April 13, 1945. He returned to Prague and collected the briefcase, from now on adding to the collection. One important addition was the Theresienstadt opera,

⁷ H.G. Adler, in an interview on German television in 1986, quoted in *Social Theory After the Holocaust* ed. by Fine and Turner.

⁸ H.G. Adler deposited his Theresienstadt Archive at the Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie, Amsterdam. His literary estate is at the Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach am Neckar. The Beinecke Library owns his letters to Herman Broch.

⁹ H.G. Adler, in an interview on German television in 1986, quoted in *Social Theory After the Holocaust*, ed. by Fine and Turner.

Der Kaiser Von Atlantis, written by his friend Viktor Ullman, which was given to him after Ullman's death in the camps. But in 1947, with the onset of communism, Adler fled to London and there resumed contact with former friends including the sculptress Bettina Gross, whose mother he had seen shortly before her death in Auschwitz. Bettina Gross became Adler's second wife.

One of the most poignant personal pieces to have survived, on show recently at King's but part of a private collection, is a much folded pencilled note on a scrap of paper from Gertrud, offering him food. The rest of the archive comprises 1,100 books, pamphlets and journals – a wide range of material including one exceptional rarity, *Bilder Aus Theresienstadt*, a picture book containing eighteen hand coloured lithographs by the Dutch artist and fellow prisoner, Jo Spier. This book, grimly reminiscent of a holiday souvenir album, was produced in an edition of ten copies, probably as a propaganda exercise for the Red Cross inspection visit to the camp in 1944. Only two other examples are known to survive, neither of them in the UK. It is not hard to imagine the pain involved in producing such a bogusly beautiful work of art which depicted life in Theresienstadt with its camp orchestra, sham shop facades, its own money and coffee shop. Yet after the war Spier faced opprobrium for having produced this.

Another key document is *Der Anti-Nazi*, a booklet containing summaries of Nazi policies and ideology along with counter-arguments to be used against them. This was published on fragile pre-war paper as a collection of loose leaves in a cardboard portfolio intended for ease of access during public meetings where a whole book such as this was banned and anyone found with such an item risked serious punishment. Restoration of this one extraordinary item, finally inserting each sheet in a Melanex pocket, cost £300.

Jeremy Adler recalled that he was 4 or 5 when he first saw some of the items in his father's library. 'I remember pulling down a book and looking at these ghastly photographs. It was part of my earliest consciousness. My parents never attempted to suppress or deny anything,' he tells me. 'With my father writing seventeen or eighteen hours a day the camps were a constant presence in my life. My father referred to them as '*die Boese Zeit*' (evil times)'.

Although the Adlers had little money, Jeremy insists that his parents shielded him from an awareness of material poverty. His father never behaved in the way expected of a poor refugee, which meant he never had the allure of a victim, or an exile, and was considered arrogant or difficult by some. In pre-war Prague Adler was a dandyish, poetic type. In post-war London, his nerves destroyed, he often appeared not to be listening. 'But he never lost his dignity nor his pride and never looked like a refugee. He was tall, stood upright and always wore well-cut suits'. He was for many years Honorary President of the PEN Centre of German Writers in Exile group based in London.

Jeremy believes that his father's natural facility as a teacher, both in the camps helping some of the children through their traumas and after liberation when he worked as a tutor to child survivors in Prague while helping to set up the Jewish Museum, meant he was tragically well equipped to be a father himself. But the son always understood that eventually this unique collection of documents, which has framed his own life so darkly, must be removed from the shelves of a private scholar. 'I recognised that they were better off in a public library with rules. I wanted them not to be in a collection which specialised only in Holocaust studies but in a general academic environment where students from all disciplines could consult them'. Not every library understood their significance but King's, where Jeremy himself taught, and with its magnificent new space in the former Public Record Office in Chancery Lane, is an ideal home. Somewhat ironically, Adler senior did acquire a reputation as a major literary figure in

post-war Germany, where he was often invited to lecture, or appear on television. Having taken seven years to find a publisher even in German, *Theresienstadt*, once launched, was an immediate success there. It was accepted as legal evidence of the Final Solution by the German Constitutional Court when passing Germany's Restitution laws.

There is no simple explanation for the sudden renaissance of interest in this noble intellectual, a survivor not just of the camps but of a pre-war East European culture that has done so much to shape British intellectual thought. At the root of the complex reasons why Adler failed to find an English publisher is his then unfashionable view, ultimately grounded in his Jewish faith, that a system of beliefs, ethical values and the basic political concepts of human rights and democracy do make sense, and that their abuse by the Nazis and others, however terrible, did not destroy them. 'If they failed us,' explained Jeremy Adler, 'he believed that they required examination historically and conceptually not condemnation whether naïve, reflected or dialectical'. H.G.'s belief in the power of goodness, as opposed to what has been called the fallacy of negativism, to achieve even a modicum of change is a view shared by Adler's close friend Franz Baermann Steiner, the doomed lover of Iris Murdoch, and was at the core of her own philosophy and bestselling novels.

H.G. Adler owed his deeper understanding of Judaism to two encounters in the camps. In Theresienstadt he spent hours with the leader of the reform community, Rabbi Leo Baeck, and his subsequent views are so close to Baeck's that it is inconceivable he was not deeply influenced by him. Later, when he was transferred to Auschwitz, his friendship with an orthodox Slovak Jew, Max Schiff, with whom he studied the Talmud, was a deeply revelatory experience.

In the second half of the twentieth century, as the academic discipline of 'Holocaust Studies' grew, Adler provided a contrary voice. He opposed the nihilistic views of those such as Theodor Adorno, who famously declared that there could be no more literature after Auschwitz, their pessimism broadly stating that human beings forced to choose survival did so at the expense of their humanity. Canetti maintained that *Eine Reise* marked a literary turning point as it re-introduced hope into modern literature.

And in this argument lie the seeds of a major reason for his failure to be taken up by British publishers. It was a question of timing as well as mutual incomprehension; the inability of the English to comprehend the experiences of a survivor. With his cultural roots remaining firmly in European soil, his work appeared less than commercial. Yet, just as he had refused to compromise with the Germans, so he refused to compromise in his writing, a refusal clearly seen in his novels, where he deliberately de-sexualised anything that could possibly be titillating, even for example going so far as to transform a wife into a sister. Because of his determination to bear witness, objectively, to what he had seen, his fiction carries the hallmarks of historical documentation, is never less than scholarly and contains few personal details. He made no concessions to readers who expected stereotypes: all Germans evil, angry monsters and all Jews brave, heroic resistance fighters. He sometimes referred to the latter as 'the lost ones' and their oppressors as 'the conspirators'. Nor did he shy away from condemnation of Jewish failures.

In rejecting his novel *Eine Reise* an editor at the well-known publishing house, Secker, advised him that he would have more success if he wrote a book on the death camps in the style of Norman Mailer's *The Naked and The Dead*. Similarly, the respected Jewish historian Cecil Roth opposed the idea of a whole book on Theresienstadt given its 'minuscule' significance in the history of the Jews. In spite of reactions such as these, the message in the thousand-page, carefully argued *Theresienstadt*, not a book for the fainthearted, was never

sentimentalised. The cultural gap was, for the English at this time, impossible to bridge. Perhaps it is hardly surprising that others used his carefully researched material – and in those pre-Google days that involved many hours of searching – in a more accessible way. For example W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* (2001) freely plundered the more difficult, older volume.

The same determination to document was echoed by H.G. Adler's second wife's mother, who packed up the family possessions and sent them to England in advance of her own transportation to and death in the camps. Jeremy, an only child currently writing a long novel himself, now has the weight of guardianship of these items too on his shoulders. 'It's a question of preserving the heritage of a whole group of people and the memory of those people,' says Jeremy. 'My father gave a name, a soul and a spirit to what would otherwise remain a number'. How did Adler senior avoid bitterness? I am not, of course, the first to ask but Jeremy Adler takes his time to answer the question on his father's behalf. 'He believed in the teachings of Maimonides that bearing a grudge harms most the person who bears it'.

Anne Sebba, author of Jennie Churchill, Winston's American Mother (John Murray, 2007)

**Priscilla Martin: Review of *An Iris Murdoch Chronology* by
Valerie Purton (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) pp.ix+256 £55**

Until Palgrave launched their series of Chronologies I had supposed the term to mean a skeletal list of events and publications at the beginning of a biography or critical work. Valerie Purton, who has also published a Coleridge chronology, offers much more in her volume on Iris Murdoch. She provides all the factual information yet available to her for each year, month and day of Murdoch's life. Sometimes this information is apparently trivial. One entry for January 1959 records, 'IM stays overnight in Oxford after teaching', rather than returning home to Steeple Aston. (Perhaps I am missing a sub-text.) The daily programme for the Bayleys' 1975 British Council visit to Japan is given in full, including, twice, '(Sun) Rest day.' Sometimes, since Purton includes political events such as war, elections, strikes, demonstrations and terrorist attacks, the information is of major importance.

As Norman Page, General Editor of the series, points out in his Preface, 'most biographies are ill-adapted to serve as works of reference [...] since the biographer is likely to regard his function as the devising of a continuous and readable narrative [...] rather than a bald recital of facts' (p. viii). It will often be quicker and more convenient to dip into this detailed kind of chronology simply to find out what was happening when. One might add that the biographer ideally organizes his or her account as much by theme as by chronology but that this patterning can have its own kaleidoscopic limitation, forming or eliding the contingent and quotidian to create a significant configuration. The Chronology, with its odd juxtapositions and incongruities – the major work, the driving preoccupations, the great contemporary events and the small happenings that just happened to be recorded – does suggest the experiential texture of lived life, what T.S. Eliot summarized as 'Spinoza and the smell of cooking'. As Purton points out in her introduction, the format of the Chronology 'serendipitously engages with one of Murdoch's major themes' in focussing on the contingent. However, the introduction usefully provides a complementary overview of the fiction, classifying it in decades from the anti-existentialism of the novels in the fifties to the 'increasing mysticism and animism' of the 'elegiac novels' of the nineties.

Purton's Chronology is far more than a 'bald recital of facts'. Sometimes she adds brief but incisive comments. Sometimes the nature and wealth of the material speaks for itself. The number of Murdoch's correspondents and the quantity of extant letters (though some cannot yet be consulted), for example, testify to the importance she placed on friendship and the time and attention she devoted to it. Letters to different recipients can suggest fluctuating or concealed feelings: on successive days she writes to David Hicks (expressing pleasure at the photograph of his new fiancée and discussing her philosophical reading), and to Queneau (confiding that this is a 'difficult and desolate time for her'). She wrote for many years to close friends such as Philippa Foot, Marjorie Boulton and Norah Smallwood, her editor at Chatto and Windus. She also tirelessly read and recommended the work of friends to Smallwood. She was extremely generous about entering into correspondence with strangers, undertaking epistolary conversations which sometimes led to meetings and friendship. This was the case with the Indian scholar, Suguna Ramanathan, who has written a book on Murdoch, and with the American academic and writer, Roly Cochrane. These relationships became important to her: she valued Ramanathan's understanding of eastern and western religions and in her final illness John Bayley sent Cochrane a pile of letters which Murdoch had forgotten to post. Not all approaches proved as rewarding to her. In a letter to Cochrane, now clearly in a different category, she mentions the 'endless correspondents asking her to give a lecture, take out a subscription, write a review, give advice on novel-writing or on how to get into Oxford'. More

correspondence was involved in her work for the Tyndale Society, the Jan Hus Fellowship and the Dickens Fellowship and she was also conscientious about writing to politicians on issues that concerned her. She was not willing to have a secretary and by 1992 was spending up to four hours a day on answering letters. Her steady output of novels, plays, poems and philosophy looks the more amazing in this context.

Her work also flourished despite the competing demands of love affairs, social life, travel and wide reading. After her marriage, her resignation from her fellowship at St Anne's and the end of her part-time teaching at the Royal College of Art, Murdoch settled into a routine of writing in the morning and part of the afternoon. However, the Chronology records plenty of lunches, dinners and parties in Oxford and London and she would drop everything to rush to help or listen to a friend in trouble. Although the Bayleys preferred home to 'abroad', they had holidays in Europe, often visiting Stephen and Natasha Spender's farmhouse in Provence (on which *Les Grands Saules* in *Nuns and Soldiers* was based), John and Patsy Grigg's house in Spain, and Borys and Audi Villers in the Canary Islands. From 1963 they were on the British Council list of speakers and travelled widely to lecture. Murdoch felt a particular affinity with India, Russia and Japan but they did not look forward to a trip to Australia. She also read avidly. Her favourite authors included Homer, Plato, Jane Austen, Dickens, Dostoevsky, George Eliot and she said that Henry James was the major influence on her own novels. In 1965 she decided to read the whole of Shakespeare and spent four years in the project. She read poetry in at least half a dozen languages.

The novels, the main work of Murdoch's life, do not figure as largely in the Chronology as one might expect. She gave few interviews and rarely spoke of the current novel during its composition. Purton's bald entries on the progress of *A Severed Head* in 1960 are typical: in January, having written eighty pages of notes, Murdoch begins the first draft, which fills six notebooks; it is finished in April and she embarks on the final draft the next day; in July she finishes the 308 handwritten pages of this version; in December she sends the blurb, partly written by John Bayley, to Norah Smallwood. The reader of the Chronology learns only, but interestingly, that she felt *A Severed Head* and *The Unicorn* to be very private novels that others would not like. Similarly laconic are the notes on her resistance over the years to all attempts to edit or correct her manuscripts. Perhaps she confided her thoughts about work in progress to her journal. She was inclined to express a sense of distance from her earlier work. In 1985 she tells Cochrane that *The Time of the Angels* seems extremely remote and strangely remarks in a letter to Ramanathan that she cannot see any specific links between *Hamlet* and *Nuns and Soldiers*, a 1980 novel with a character named Gertrude, who makes an 'o'er-hasty' and questionable second marriage, and a favourite pub called The Prince of Denmark.

The chronological account reveals both consistency and changes of opinion. Murdoch had a tendency to rework her past. For example, she was still defending communism in 1950, though she later, as her views moved towards the right, tended to minimize the time she had been a party member or fellow-traveller. In 1988 she said that she was no longer a Marxist after the age of twenty. But in 1943 she wrote 'almost evangelically' three letters to Marjorie Boulton, hoping that Marjorie would 'soon share her own deep and permanent certainty about the truths of Communism.' Purton notes 'an ironical counterpoint' between the Murdoch of 1981 and the undergraduate. She welcomed the new centrist SDP party but when she and Roy Jenkins, one of its founders, held office in the Oxford University Labour Club she differed sharply from him in her sympathy for communism. Surprisingly, Purton has no comments to record on the Suez crisis, which shook Oxford like the rest of the country in 1956. Perhaps Murdoch kept silent in dismay at the Soviet invasion and suppression of the Hungarian uprising, which shocked some British communists into leaving the party. Murdoch's move to the right led her to vote Conservative in the general elections of 1983, 1987 and 1992, partly in

reaction to Labour's policies on education, defence, Europe, Ireland and the trade unions. She even tried to make A.N. Wilson and his wife promise to vote Conservative in 1992. In 1984 she startlingly remarked that the striking miners should be put up against a wall and shot. She was similarly intemperate about Irish republicans. In 1990 she told A.N. Wilson that she was ashamed of *The Red and the Green*, an admirably even-handed account of the Easter Rising of 1916, because of its sympathetic treatment of the insurgents.

Her religious views also changed over time. I was surprised that she wrote to Frank Thompson in 1943 'about her rejection of most Eastern philosophies which seem to her to depend on the suppression of the individual, saying that she prefers almost any Western philosophy', a striking contrast with her later convictions. After the War she was attracted to Anglo-Catholicism and her visits to Malling Abbey provided material for *The Bell*. She later suggested that she gave up belief in God under the influence of John Bayley. However, religion was a lifelong preoccupation, even if it had to be religionless religion. In the eighties, after reading Don Cupitt, she felt she might be able to go to church again, still revered Christ but was increasingly interested in Buddhism. In the nineties she regrets 'the waning of traditional Christian iconography in the West', saying that people no longer have adequate pictures of good and evil.

I noticed a few minor errors: Stephen Metcalf (for Medcalf), Lanzerote (for Lanzarote), Bran Nichol (for Nicol), Christchurch College (for Christ Church), University of Berkeley, California (for the University of California at Berkeley), Bernano's for Bernanos', Les Grandes Saules for Les Grands Saules. Purton mentions a family holiday for the Bayleys, including John's two brothers and their wives, when Michael was not married. In the Introduction Murdoch is said to have met Wittgenstein 'only twice at Oxford' but in 1947 'meets Wittgenstein [...] in Cambridge [...] and is to meet him on only one further occasion.' Jennifer Searle, whose name may have suggested that of a minor character in *A Word Child*, was supervised by John Bayley, not Iris Murdoch. The index is not completely reliable.

This Chronology contains a wealth of material but, informative though it is, Purton honestly describes her work as an 'interim measure.' She has consulted a great range of material but a great deal more was not available to her. She was able to read only Conradi's extracts and notes on the Journal. It was not possible to see all the surviving correspondence and Purton decided not to paraphrase or quote from some intimate letters which might hurt or embarrass people who are still alive. Other material is bound to come to light and eventually there will be a volume of the Collected Letters. But in the meantime this is a rich and fascinating book, which will be invaluable to other researchers.

Robert J. Baker: Cheryl Bove and Anne Rowe, *Sacred Space, Beloved City: Iris Murdoch's London* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008)

The city has no center other than ourselves.

Orhan Pamuk

Many of Iris Murdoch's readers have sensed that her depictions of London say much about her characters, and Cheryl Bove and Anne Rowe now demonstrate that London was an intricate register of her characters' moral states under Murdoch's abundant, loving regard. Bove and Rowe contend, 'For her, the city has the power to speak to the soul – her own, her characters' and her readers' alike' (p. 1). In Murdoch's hands, London became the locus of her moral and metaphysical interests as well as the setting in all but two of her twenty-six novels. In the end, Murdoch's delight in the city was a delight in the Good.

In announcing their aim, Bove and Rowe write, 'Her novels detail and celebrate London with an acuity which matches that of more celebrated "London writers", such as William Blake, Charles Dickens and Virginia Woolf. This book attempts to redress the balance and establish Murdoch amongst their ranks, because her plots thrive equally on the city: its buildings, icons, pubs, river and most of all, its people' (p. 1). While Blake and Dickens often focus on the alienation and corruptions that were among the byproducts of urbanization and industrialization, Murdoch concentrates largely on groups of friends in middle-class settings. Murdoch does know something of the underside of urban life, as she demonstrates in *Henry and Cato* and in her own life. Bove and Rowe observe, 'In London she intensified her experience of life, fostering morally dubious relationships so as to understand the darker side of humanity, her own as well as others', which informs her novels' (p. 6). Unlike Blake and Dickens – or even Maugham, who sets his first novel in the slums of Lambeth and whose characters find relief only in the idyll of an excursion into the country – Murdoch tends to rejoice in the city and to take deep pleasure in the streets, buildings, the River, and even the furnishings of the city's houses.

Bove and Rowe also offer an array of astonishing insights and glimpses into the world that Murdoch knew and delighted in. They show along the way that London, like art, was a vertex by which one could come to the moral awareness that Murdoch championed in her philosophy and her fiction. In this, London became not only Murdoch's beloved city but also a sacred space, one in which her characters and her readers could learn to be attentive to the otherness of reality and, so, undertake the unending pilgrimage toward the Good. As Bove and Rowe point out, 'Her London settings influence her characters subconsciously and serve as spiritual resting places, and landmarks, if they are given proper attention, can alert characters to an understanding of what lies within themselves' (p. 2). They go on to argue that readers' absorption into the beloved spaces Murdoch selects as her settings allows them, like the characters, to enter into the sacredness of the city – and of reading.

Sacred Space, Beloved City begins with a preface by Murdoch's biographer, Peter Conradi, and an introduction by the authors. The six chapters, each of which begins with a quotation from Murdoch's novels, take up in turn the City of London, a series of buildings, the Post Office Tower, Frampton's Peter Pan statue, and the River Thames. The chapters are each divided into two parts – a critical essay that traces Murdoch's sense of a particular area or feature of London followed by a guided walk through that area of the city. The chapters are splendidly illustrated with line drawings by Paul Laseau, which frame and evoke the monuments, buildings, and bridges of London. Several chapters pursue the special interests of Bove and Rowe – the roles that architecture and painting play in Murdoch's imagination. The

walks surely are the result of the walking tours that Bove led for her students and for many Murdochians after the biennial conference. The book is completed with an extensive gazetteer that indexes the London places mentioned in Murdoch's fiction.

The first chapter, 'Architecture and the Built Environment in *Under the Net*,' draws attention to the meticulousness with which Murdoch traces Jake Donaghue's pub crawl, swim in the Thames, and riverside picnic. In his progress, Jake is cognizant of Wren's churches as he moves from pub to pub. Bove and Rowe explain that 'Murdoch equates the secular spaces of the pubs with the sacred spaces of the churches that hover over them' (p. 15); the association, they argue, indicates that the pubs have taken on an ecclesiastical function, providing a space for fellowship and confession. They might go further, as both public house and church deal in spirits, intoxication, and movement outside of oneself; people attend both for fortification, consolation, and recreation, though in the case of church it is recreation in a more fundamental sense. Bove and Rowe demonstrate that Jake's awareness of and connection to the particular features of the London he passes through with his friends induce in him an affectionate mindfulness of the city's past and attentiveness to the particulars he perceives. They show that Jake's 'passive' engagement with perception is Murdoch's refutation of the Existentialist claim that 'behavioral changes take place in isolated awareness "against an apocalyptic background"' (p. 23). Thus, Jake's journey becomes his spiritual pilgrimage.

The second chapter, 'A Secular Iconography: Art Galleries and Museums,' lays out with precision Murdoch's deployment of galleries and museums as sacred spaces in a secular age. In Bove and Rowe's terms, they are 'spiritual resting places in a hectic world that rarely participates in religious practice' (p. 35). This chapter provides a précis of Rowe's *The Visual Arts and the Novels of Iris Murdoch* in suggesting that Murdoch uses paintings as icons that draw characters out of themselves and toward the Good. The chapter traces the effect of Gainsborough's *Painter's Daughters Chasing a Butterfly* on Dora Greenfield, Titian's *Death of Actaeon* on Henry Marshalon, Hals's *Laughing Cavalier* on Jake Donaghue, and Titian's *Perseus and Andromeda* on Charles Arrowby. To this analysis, Bove and Rowe add the insight that Murdoch extends Burke's notion of the sublime, arguing, 'Such an experience of self-forgetfulness can be generated by the symmetry, order and visual balance of the interiors of London buildings' (p. 38). Indeed, this experience of the built space and architectural order of London offers another vertex by which one can let go of egoistic self-concern and move toward a compassion for alterity.

In the next two chapters, Bove and Rowe turn their attention to two familiar landmarks – the Post Office Tower in Soho and the Peter Pan Statue in Kensington Gardens. They observe that these familiar sights function as gauges of characters' consciousness as well as connecting life and art. They also shrewdly note that the Post Office Tower is Murdoch's own quiet insistence, *pace* Derrida, on the common-sense referentiality of language. In *The Black Prince*, the Post Office Tower symbolizes Bradley's sexual desire and his neurotic refusal of it. But the Tower is not only a phallic symbol; it is also an image of human aspiration toward truth and wisdom, of the fate overhanging all the characters, of 'the magnetic pull of the Platonic Good' (p. 66), and of guilt. Bove and Rowe's analysis shows how dense and supple Murdoch's symbolism can be; it also reveals their loving appreciation of *The Black Prince*.

In the fourth chapter, Bove and Rowe continue to explore the complexity of Murdoch's craft by looking at her preoccupation with Peter Pan.

Her continual meditation on the character [of Peter Pan] and her persisting uncertainties about him may well have been fuelled by Frampton's statue, for

she continued to be drawn to it during her years as a mature writer and thinker. She and her husband often walked to Peter Pan's statue from their nearby Cornwall Gardens flat, and he has said that she was 'very fond' of it. (p. 84)

Using *An Unofficial Rose*, *Word Child*, and *The Good Apprentice*, Bove and Rowe demonstrate that the innocence of Peter Pan constitutes a kind of perversity, particularly when it is found in adults who refuse responsibility or the real world in favour of moral immaturity or self-absorbed fantasies. Murdoch, as Bove and Rowe note, complicates her thinking about Peter Pan. She has considerable sympathy for the Peter Pans in her narratives, seeing them as wounded by loneliness in childhood, the absence of parents, the difficulties of the transition between childhood and adulthood, and the perversion of family relationships.

The penultimate chapter explores Murdoch's use of civil servants and Whitehall. Murdoch's father, of course, worked at Whitehall and may have served as at least one model for Murdoch's civil servants. Her own work in the Treasury afforded her plenty of first-hand observations of civil servants, their privileges, and their frustrations. Bove and Rowe note the constant dissatisfactions suffered by the civil servants in Murdoch's novels and contend that the privileged education and social codes of the civil servants left them unprepared, perhaps unable, to deal with people from different backgrounds. Like other buildings and landmarks in London, Whitehall itself receives Murdoch's appreciative gaze. A vehicle for Murdoch's satirization of bureaucracy, it images the corruptions of power, neurosis, and convention, particularly in the male psyche.

The final chapter, 'The Thames,' may be the best in this study, for Bove and Rowe take up the ubiquity of the River Thames in Murdoch's novels and its complex function as the trope of tropes in Murdoch's fiction. The River is not only an index of the characters' moral states; it is also a device that draws readers themselves toward goodness. Bove and Rowe point out, 'The desire to be near the water in Murdoch's novels is an enduring symbol of the desire for goodness, and was her own as much as it was her characters' (p. 129). They also suggest that what the characters see, hear, and smell along the River is the source – and perhaps catalyst – of their actions; these riparian sights, sounds, smells, and movement constitute 'an aesthetic moral apparatus,' drawing readers into empathy with the characters and enlarging the readers' own moral stature (p. 133). To this, according to Bove and Rowe, Murdoch adds another use of the Thames. With its tidal ebb and flow, the River depicts Murdoch's vision of the human soul, drawn alternately to the Good and to neurotic desire. Bridges function as passageways to increased or decreased awareness; and the embankment serves as a metaphor for the containment of the surge of desire and obsession: 'The controlling embankments and bridges that contest with the tidal pressures that threaten to destroy them allow Murdoch to use the Thames as a comment on the eternal debate between life and art' (p. 140).

The book suffers from the poor quality of its reproductions, which are often, as with the one of Titian's *Death of Actaeon*, too small and dark to underscore Bove and Rowe's insights (p. 43). The sketch of No.5 Seaforth Place also disappoints with a perspective that makes the building look like a large plywood box with windows. No. 5 Seaforth Place is an odd building, to be sure, but this drawing does not do it justice. The text, however, more than compensates for these deficiencies, even for readers who have never seen London.

Sacred Space, Beloved City will deepen appreciation of the role that the city plays in Murdoch's fiction; it will also provide biographical connections such as Murdoch's love of the Peter Pan statue and the Christmas tradition she and John Bayley established of walking to it. Above all, the book demonstrates that London designates her novels themselves as sacred

spaces which enshrine the possibility, as well as the difficulty, of becoming good. Bove and Rowe have done an additional service, for they will donate proceeds from the sale of this volume to the Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies at Kingston University to support acquisitions. Their book, then, will instruct and delight scholars and amateurs alike; it will also support the collection of additional materials to ensure that the Centre will preserve the work of a novelist who continues to instruct and delight us now ten years after her death.

Sabina Lovibond: Review of *Iris Murdoch's Ethics: A Consideration of her Romantic Vision*, by Megan Lavery (London and New York: Continuum, 2007)

Megan Lavery undertakes to establish a positive connection between the philosophy of Iris Murdoch and the tradition described in this monograph as 'philosophical romanticism', following a collection edited under that title by Nikolas Kompridis (2006). The task is a challenging one, because Murdoch – as Lavery recognizes (p. 75) – is naturally understood as a critic of the romantic tradition, whose damaging after-effects she sees reflected in the fixation of twentieth-century ethical theory on heroic individual will as the (supposed) source of value. Thus in *The Sovereignty of Good (SG)* 'to be romantic is to take refuge in the exaltation of [...] suffering freedom' (Lavery, p. 77), rather than to confront the more genuinely instructive realities of death and chance; while in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals (MGM)* (p. 40, quoted by Lavery, p. 80), Murdoch is still anxious to distance us from 'the drama of the Romantic Movement, as involving the liberation of the individual into an open space wherein to *construct* his morality'; she seeks to respond to 'the Western philosophical tradition's *romantic break* with Plato's theory of truth' (Lavery, *ibid.*).

Lavery is on the track of an interesting, and probably correct, insight in attempting to see past Murdoch's official anti-romantic stance and to connect her thinking with 'romanticism' in the historical sense, meaning a cluster of ideological tendencies that flourished around 1800. Internal to this ideological formation, for example (according to Seamus Perry in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776-1832*, OUP 1999, under 'Romanticism'), was a tension eminently recognizable from some of Murdoch's own reflections on the novel: 'If an idealist emphasis upon the mind is predisposed to value the unity that the mind is able to create from the given plurality of sense experience that it receives, then a countering realism is likely to stress the opposite: the worth and respectability of nature's ordinary, independent diversity.' This sounds like an anticipation of the issue addressed by Murdoch in her celebrated 1961 essay 'Against Dryness', which tries to chart a course for contemporary fiction between the 'crystalline' and the 'journalistic', arguing that despite the second of these dangers, what would currently be most beneficial to imaginative literature is an injection of 'contingency' and a return to 'the now so unfashionable naturalistic idea of character' (*Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. Peter Conradi, Penguin 1999, p. 294). And we can credit Murdoch herself with some awareness of the internal complexity posited by Perry, since she states in the same essay that 'the pure, clean, self-contained [literary] "symbol" [...] is the analogue of the lonely self-contained individual. It is what is left of the other-worldliness of Romanticism when the "messy" humanitarian and revolutionary elements have spent their force' (p. 292).

So there is much to recommend Lavery's grounding assumption that just as German romanticism (in the words of Frederick Beiser) is the 'greatest revival of Platonism since the Renaissance', Murdoch's later revival of Plato 'places her within the romantic tradition and makes early German romantic scholarship an appropriate hermeneutical context for her writings' (p. 60). We have to wait until about half-way through the book (Chapter 3) for anything like a systematic exposition of romantic ideology or of Murdoch's indebtedness to it, but the latter is said to revolve around three main ideas: (1) that 'individuals are always and inevitably becoming; they are constantly destroying old selves and creating new selves', (2) that 'love is the privileged expression of reason in its relationship to the infinite', and (3) the idea of 'irony or, in Murdoch's case, humility [...]. To be ironical is to be intelligently detached from our critical and creative powers in an acknowledgement of their limits and a vigilant

responsiveness to their excess [...] Humility is formally similar to irony but without drawing attention to the self' (pp. 61, 62, 63).

It is unfortunate that a claim repeated several times in the course of the book (pp. 7, 37, 57, 66, 74, 88) – indicating, presumably, that Lavery attaches some importance to it – appears to rest on a misunderstanding of the passage in *SG* which is cited in its support. The claim in question is that Murdoch designates Plato and/or Kant as 'the great romantics'. The sole supporting evidence is from *SG* p. 85, where Murdoch writes:

I do not think that any of the great Romantics really believed that we receive but what we give and in our life alone does nature live, although the lesser ones tended to follow Kant's lead and use nature as an occasion for exalted self-feeling. The great Romantics, including the one I have just quoted, transcended 'Romanticism'. A self-directed enjoyment of nature seems to me to be something forced [...]

It is true that the preceding few pages of *SG* are concerned with the evolution of romanticism from certain themes in Kantian philosophy, and that Plato's *Phaedrus* has been mentioned at the beginning of the relevant paragraph in connection with the spiritual value of beauty. However, the 'great [romantic] [...] just quoted' is neither Kant nor Plato but Coleridge, the author (in 'Dejection: An Ode') of the words 'we receive but what we give / And in our life alone does nature live', though Murdoch (characteristically) does not name him, or display her quotation in verse form. While both Kant and Plato have been *mentioned* within the paragraph, neither has been *quoted*, and nothing in Murdoch's text licenses the suggestion that she means the term 'great romantics' to apply to either of them – an idea that would be at variance with any normal understanding of the history of philosophy.

Lavery begins Chapter 3 with the disclaimer that 'although philosophical romanticism informs [her] analysis of Murdoch's philosophy, it is not [her] principal research focus' (p. 58). The main object of attention, apart from Iris Murdoch's own non-fictional writings, is a body of Murdoch commentary and of contemporary or recent secondary literature on romanticism. Plato and Kant (in keeping with their importance to Murdoch) are named frequently in this book, but there is no direct, text-based discussion of any of their works; the Bibliography includes one work by Kant (the *Critique of Judgement*), but none by Plato. Some historical representatives of romanticism are mentioned in passing and listed in the first endnote to Chapter 3, but none of the writers named is allowed to speak in his own voice, and the consideration of past philosophy and theory seems in general to take place in an atmosphere of respectful hearsay. The disadvantage of relying on a reading of Murdoch for instruction in these matters, without independent reference to the sources she is discussing, is apparent, for example, in the bizarre statement that 'Classical Greek thinking [...] remains focused on a transcendent reality and not the self' (p. 73: if this had been so, Plato need not have wasted his time attacking sophistic anti-moralism!), or in the uncritical acceptance of Murdoch's equation of post-structuralism with determinism (p. 74), or the brisk dismissal of existentialism as '[failing] to recognize [...] that the individual is both determined and determining' (p. 81). In fact, the treatment of texts by Murdoch – which Lavery does study directly – is not very reliable either: it is not the case, for instance, that Murdoch at p.43 of *MGM* says anything about Kant '[alluding] to the inherently pictorial and magical nature of [his] theorizing' (Lavery, p. 51); nor is Derrida mentioned in her reflections on extreme existentialism at p.36 of *SG*, or indeed, I believe, anywhere else in that book (Lavery, pp. 80-81). (But as regards small-scale inaccuracies, the publishers are also open to criticism: they must surely accept

some responsibility for the numerous garbled versions of personal names, especially non-English names, appearing in the Index – e.g. Michelle [*sic*] Le Doeuff, Casper [*sic*] David Friedrich, Kierkegaard [*sic*], McTaggart [*sic*]; and it's *Alison* or *A. E.* Denham, not Ann [*sic*] as in the Index and at p.18, and not D. E. [*sic*] Denham as in the Bibliography.)

To conclude with another worry about the substance of the book, Lavery's affirmation of Murdoch as an implicitly feminist thinker (p. 7) poses some pressing questions about the nature of feminism. She is right to point out (p. 43) that Murdoch has done much to enrich analytical moral philosophy with examples taken from everyday, often female-centred, experience; also right, I dare say, to discern some sexual politics in Murdoch's championship of unassuming, 'invisible' virtue or sainthood in opposition to the 'masculinist, romantic paradigm' (p. 86). Still, feminism can hardly rest content with the observation – however incontrovertible in itself – that the social contribution of women and other 'humble' individuals is undervalued. How, if at all, is the idea of 'using our freedom to become more obedient' (p. 6: again, not a radically misleading summary of Murdoch's line in *SG*) to be taken up by a movement whose aim is to *end women's subordination to men*? No doubt there is more to be said on this point, but Lavery does not say it.

Nick Turner: Review of Afaf (Effat) Jamil Khogeer, *The Integration of the Self: Women in the Fiction of Iris Murdoch and Margaret Drabble* (University Press of America, 2006)

In spite of the hugely successful conferences on Iris Murdoch, and the opening of the Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies at Kingston University, there are still those who claim that Murdoch is critically unfashionable. Palgrave Macmillan's suggestion that they would still publish a monograph solely on Murdoch refutes this; clearly, they are leading the way, for here is a new book that sees Murdoch placed alongside another 'unfashionable' literary sibling, Margaret Drabble. What is more, the subject of study is the women the novelists portray; this is then doubly fascinating, for both novelists (Murdoch in particular) have been accused of a reluctance to engage with modern gender politics. The book fills a welcome gap.

Khogeer, in a nicely personal Preface, explains that, in spite of the plethora of published criticism on the two authors, there was not yet a work examining 'the progressive integration of self of the women characters' (p. x). She is anxious to point out that her study will 'dispel the notions that both novelists advance reconcilable trends, support ideas consistent with contemporary mores first and foremost those conducive to the welfare of society' (pp. x-xi). Khogeer thus sets her stall out as being an unfashionable one, which is commendable in the light of so much critical uniformity.

What follows is a lively discussion of a selection of works by the two novelists, written by someone who knows and loves their material, in an accessible and idiosyncratic style. Writing on *The Good Apprentice*, Khogeer asserts that 'when the reader sees that the title of the novel's first section is "The Prodigal Son", he expects to hear the familiar story [...] how surprised the reader must be to encounter a completely remodelled prodigal son' (p. 125). Some might question this unproblematic conception of the reader (and their gender); it certainly goes against the tide and for that it is to be admired. These touches mean that Khogeer is always readable, a factor which too many critics and publishers forget; the book will serve as an excellent introduction to the work of Murdoch and Drabble in Saudi Arabia, where Khogeer is based, and where the reception of Murdoch's work is likely to be problematic at the very least. In addition, Khogeer makes a number of rather intriguing suggestions. One of these is that the title of *The Good Apprentice* is a reference to Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre* (p. 123): clearly, both works are 'bildungsromans'. But I am not sure that there is a strong enough case made for this; Khogeer even points out the many dissimilarities and weakens her own argument. The same is the case with the amusing idea that the same novel's Ursula Brightwalton resembles her creator. It's worth quoting Khogeer at length, here:

Above all there is Midge's confidant Dr. Ursula Brightwalton who manages to combine her career as a busy physician with her household chores. Not given to female shilly-shallying and superficial sentimentalities, Dr. Brightwalton is a woman after Murdoch's own heart. In fact, if there is a female character with a carbon copy resemblance to the novelist, it is Dr. Brightwalton, the competent family doctor and efficient housewife (p. 131).

Now this, as before, is engaging and direct in terms of style. It does, however, rest on rather specious assumptions and needs much more evidence and thinking through. Does Murdoch, despite her protests, ever put herself into her work? Perhaps she does; but more discussion is needed. I would also take issue with the notion of 'female shilly-shallying', and the possibility

that the 'superficial sentimentalities' are related to the female; and to the idealisation of the efficient housewife. Then again, we should remember that women in Saudi Arabia *are* leading much more restricted lives than Western women, and that leading an intellectual life would often only be possible by the parallel assumption of roles we in the West have come to think of as outdated. It's very much a question of who the book is marketed for, and being read by.

This does take us to the nub of the issue, and my only other complaint, which is that perhaps the book doesn't quite deliver what it promises; I began to feel that Khogeer's heartening enthusiasm was carrying her away, and there was rather too much storytelling and commenting on character, with a great part of the discussion of *The Sea, The Sea* focusing on Charles Arrowby, before we got to the women. The central thesis seemed to disappear. It might have been better, perhaps, to lose the subtitle and its reference to women, for the only conclusion Khogeer can really come to based on that is that 'women are the best judges of their own problems' (p. 179), and that Drabble and Murdoch are doing very different things. Rightly, Khogeer points out that Murdoch 'is more concerned with human beings in general without making a distinction between men and women. She believes that individuals are unique and valuable regardless of gender' (p. 181). Now Drabble's novels, particularly the first five, clearly foreground contemporary women's lives in terms of marriage, work and motherhood, so the juxtaposition with Murdoch is a tricky one and needs careful management.

What might have helped the argument is (although it does rather pain me to say it) a strong theoretical line on which to hang the points about gender, and perhaps some use of the wonderfully dubious remarks Murdoch herself made (e.g. 'What's all this about women's studies? Why can't we just have studies?'). Although Khogeer discusses Deborah Johnson's useful monograph, there is recent work on Murdoch and gender that would have made for useful comparison. (Good examples of this are articles by Katherine Weese, and Tammy Grimshaw, although Grimshaw's work may not have been available in time.) I would question, too, the choice of material: Emily and Harriet in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* would fit in well here, as of course Harriet ends up not being integrated, but quite the opposite; the image of her keepsakes being burned is a particularly painful one. Similarly, there is much to say about Anne in *Nuns and Soldiers*, or those later young women trailing after power figures: Hattie in *The Philosopher's Pupil* and Irina in *The Message to the Planet*. How about the modern Fanny Price, Ann Peronett, in *An Unofficial Rose*? Of course, there is only a limited amount that can be done, but maybe different choices could have been made – or can be made next time. If I did feel that, by the end, I had been on an enjoyable journey without necessarily arriving anywhere definite, that isn't to say that the journey wasn't a useful one.

And I think another journey is needed. It is really important to remember that Murdoch and Drabble were both bestselling writers; thus, they have to some extent been part of moulding discourses. Murdoch may not *obviously* write about gender, but that doesn't mean she isn't saying anything about it, by her silence. There is a great deal still to say about women in the fiction of Iris Murdoch (and Margaret Drabble) – but if it were all said the business of academia would be over. Khogeer has produced a quirky, idiosyncratic book that is most welcome in its rejection of the worst excesses of theory; I hope there are more like this to come.

Edith Brugmans: Review of Mariëtte Willemsen, ‘Impersonal Love. Iris Murdoch and the Concept of Compassion’ in *Mitleid*, edited by Ingolf U. Dalferth a.o., *Religion in Philosophy and Theology*, vol. 28, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2007, pp. 181-196.

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Mariëtte Willemsen, assistant professor of philosophy at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, occasionally speaks and writes on Iris Murdoch’s philosophy. She cooperated with Marije Altorf on a Dutch translation of *The Sovereignty of Good*, published in 2003.

The present article on Murdoch’s concept of compassion is based on papers presented at a conference at Abo University, Turku, Finland in August 2005, and at the third Iris Murdoch Conference held at Kingston University in September 2006. Willemsen argues that Murdoch’s moral concept of love refers to a particular type of love, the type that could best be named ‘compassion’. Willemsen argues further that Murdoch’s concept of compassion might clarify and perhaps even settle a longstanding philosophical debate on the negative or positive value of compassion.

Having introduced the aim of the article, Willemsen then offers, in section two, a very short history of philosophical evaluations of compassion. She places Plato, Kant and Nietzsche as opponents to compassion since these philosophers hold compassion to be a disgraceful emotion. Plato’s banishing the poets from the ideal state is, according to Willemsen, a case in point since Plato justifies the banishment by arguing that pity has a degrading effect on the public. More telling, of course, is Nietzsche’s opposition to compassion. Willemsen explains Nietzsche’s view in some detail, making use of Martha Nussbaum’s analysis of Nietzsche’s arguments against pity.

On the positive side, as advocates of compassion, Willemsen places Aristotle, Rousseau and Schopenhauer. She considers Schopenhauer to be the best advocate for compassion, as he argues that through feeling compassion the ultimate bond of identity between human beings is realized.

After this short exposition of the philosophical debate on the value of compassion, Willemsen explores the concrete meaning of compassion by discussing the TV film *Wit* as an exemplary picture of compassionate feeling and behaviour. A brief summary of the plot is followed by lively descriptions of three scenes and telling quotations from the dialogue. Willemsen concludes that neither the negative, degrading conception of compassion, nor the positive, unifying conception of compassion is applicable in the situation pictured. ‘Wit’ shows a particular type of compassion, a type that according to Willemsen is covered by Murdoch’s concept of compassion.

What, then, is Murdoch’s concept? In the fourth and final section of her paper, Willemsen explains Murdoch’s view. Contrary to Nietzsche, who considers pity to be a selfish feeling resulting from fantasy-based fears for one’s own life and comfort, Murdoch argues that compassion is true respect for the other, a kind of respect that requires imaginative attention. Murdoch’s philosophy thus warrants a notion of compassion that, according to Willemsen, transcends the classic debate in two respects. First, Murdoch’s theory of imaginative attention implies a kind of impersonal love, thereby transcending the debate on disgrace versus solidarity, the personal emotions connected with the negative and positive conceptions of pity. Second, Murdoch’s theory of imaginative attention implies a non-exclusive concept of the other, thereby widening the sphere of compassion so as to include non-human beings.

A few comments on Willemsen's paper. The section on Murdoch's concept of compassion is very short, too short maybe. The discussion of Murdoch's view actually amounts to less than three pages. The philosophical importance and originality of Murdoch's view could have been explained better if Willemsen had chosen to discuss one of Murdoch's novels instead of the film 'Wit'. *Bruno's Dream* and *The Good Apprentice*, indeed every novel Murdoch wrote, could have served as exemplary tales of compassion, offering impressive pictures of fantasy-ridden self-pity and imaginative, compassionate love.

Perhaps the scholarly reader will also feel disappointed in Willemsen's representation of the views of the other philosophers mentioned. The few statements signalling their positive or negative evaluation of compassion leave many questions unanswered. Yet, precisely because Willemsen sets up the scene of the classic debate on the value of compassion in such bold lines, she succeeds in convincing the reader that Murdoch's concept of compassion surpasses the limits of that debate and opens a new ethical perspective.

There is extra reason for welcoming Willemsen's article. The publication of the article in the volume 'Mitleid' in the German Series *Religion in Philosophy and Theology* guarantees that the philosophy of Iris Murdoch will become better known to members of the German-speaking community of philosophers and theologians.

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Daphne Turner: Review of *Memories of an S.O.E Historian* by M.R.D. Foot (Pen and Sword, 2008)

M.R.D. Foot appears in Peter Conradi's biography of Iris Murdoch as someone who knew her at Oxford, had a brief affair with her during the war, and eventually married her flat-mate at Seaforth Place, Philippa Bosanquet. Those who read his *Memories of an S.O.E Historian* will find a lot of interest. It gives an account of his upbringing in an army family: he was taught to shoot and ride; his main father-figures were his grandfather and his grandfather's butler. He was excellently taught at Winchester, served in the army for all six years of the war, ended as an intelligence officer in the SAS, was captured in France and exchanged for a German 'E-boat ace'. He went back to Oxford, taught there and at Manchester, and became an internationally-known historian, specializing in clandestine warfare.

As he tells this, he builds up a picture of the intricately inter-related world of the British Establishment. Even in his account of his ancestry there are spider-webs of association. For example, his great-great-grandmother's sister married Sir Leslie Stephen's brother James, whose daughter married a nephew of Florence Nightingale ... He knows what happened to all his contemporaries at Winchester and follows them into church, politics, the armed services. He knows everyone, and has a fund of anecdotes about many of them. It is a world of rich and poor, a fixed class system, educational privilege, who-you-know, conviction of British superiority - and male. I can think of only one woman in the book who belongs to his public rather than his private life. This is Judith Brown, a Cambridge historian who later held a chair at Oxford and whom Manchester did not want to appoint to a lectureship because she was a woman. M.R.D. Foot saw she 'had to be appointed', and fought for her, and she was.

Would one want such a world back (assuming it has in fact gone)? Perhaps - if one were born both male and privileged. It certainly produced men of admirable qualities, such as M.R.D. Foot, people with courage, conscience, integrity, responsibility, aesthetic sensibility and wide information. At twenty, he was commanding men in war-time and doing it sensitively. He is also aware of the privilege gap and prepared to bridge it. He brought a retired railway porter to dinner at Keble. In Bonn (1948) he gave up a room and generous food in a hotel for an uncomfortable bunker and 900 calories a day with the German students he was about to teach. A less admirable product of the same system was heard to comment, 'Bad business ... Gone native'.

He says specifically that it was not his intention to sketch his private life. But it is not totally ignored. He was sexually bullied at school; his father deserted his mother; he had a brief, unsuccessful affair with Iris Murdoch; he has had three wives and two children; he lost his Oxford job and much prosperity because of divorce; his relationship with his son is not good. Over and over again, what must have been long misery or intense sadness is related in one flat, factual statement: 'I felt savaged' is such a moment. One can read sympathetically between the lines, but this is a book by a man who is too much of a gentleman to gossip about others or himself. The one moment of passion in his account of Iris Murdoch is directed against Canetti for ungentlemanly indiscretion, an indiscretion which he unfortunately endorses himself by mentioning it.

Foot is less interested in his own story than in the many 'people of like mind' he has met, and in the oddities and ironies of life behind the scenes. This is not a book which casts new light on Iris Murdoch, who is mentioned only briefly, but it provides an interesting, if tangential, insight into a man to whom she was once close.

Editorial

It is with great pleasure that the Iris Murdoch Society presents this second issue of the newly re-named and re-designed series of *The Iris Murdoch Review* (formerly *Iris Murdoch Newsletter*). It continues to be published by Kingston University Press Ltd. The *News Letter* began in July 1987, and the first four issues were edited by Christine Ann Evans, who was at Harvard and at Lesley College, Cambridge, Massachusetts. John Burke from the University of Alabama edited issues 5-8, which were published between 1991 and 1994, and Cheryl Bove took over as Editor for issue 9 in 1995. Peter Conradi joined the editorial team in 1996 as European Editor and Anne Rowe joined as Assistant Editor. In 1998 Peter Conradi became Consultant to the *News Letter* and Anne Rowe took over as European Editor with Cheryl Bove remaining as American Editor. At the time of the first edition of *The Iris Murdoch Review*, Cheryl Bove retired as American Editor but remains on the Editorial Board. Peter Conradi and Avril Horner continue in their roles as Consultants, with Anne Rowe as Editor and Frances White as Assistant Editor. All past editions of the *Iris Murdoch News Letter* and *The Iris Murdoch Review* are available on the website for the Centre of Iris Murdoch Studies.

Thanks are due for the efforts of all those involved in the editing and production of all the past issues of the *News Letter* and the previous edition of *The Iris Murdoch Review*.

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