

# The Iris Murdoch Review

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## ***The Iris Murdoch Review***

The *Iris Murdoch Review* ISSN 1756-7572 (Kingston University Press) publishes articles on the life and work of Iris Murdoch and her milieu. The *Review* aims to represent the breadth and eclecticism of contemporary critical approaches to Murdoch, and particularly welcomes new perspectives and contexts of inquiry. Articles discussing relations between Murdoch and other novelists and philosophers are also welcome.

Articles are sent for review anonymously to a member of the editorial board and at least one other reader. Manuscripts should not be under consideration elsewhere or have been previously published. It is strongly advised that those submitting work to the publication be familiar with the content of the *Review*.

Articles are normally approx. 3000 words long, and book reviews between 1000 - 1500 words long. Among criteria on which evaluation of submissions depends are whether an article/book review demonstrates familiarity with scholarship already published in the field, whether the article/book review is written effectively, and whether it makes a genuine contribution to Murdoch studies. The editorial board reserves the right to refuse submissions that fail to meet these criteria, including articles and book reviews which have been requested.

All submissions should be formatted according to MHRA, and the style-guide can be found on the MHRA website: <http://www.mhra.org.uk/Publications/Books/StyleGuide/download.shtml>

Submissions can be sent to the Assistant Editor, Dr Frances White: **frances.white@kingston.ac.uk** and/or the Editor, Dr Anne Rowe: **a.rowe@kingston.ac.uk**

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## Editorial Preface

This Special Edition of the *Iris Murdoch Review* marks both the tenth anniversary of the Iris Murdoch Archive Project and the occasion of the Seventh International Conference on Iris Murdoch to be organised by Kingston University. The eclectic mix of material within spans the years from the 1950s to the 1990s and moves beyond, to include Murdoch's 'afterlife' – the fifteen years since her death. Unpublished primary source material, fresh biographical information, comprehensive literary criticism and moving personal responses to Iris Murdoch collectively provide unique insights into her life and work.

A small group of poems written by Iris Murdoch for her one-time fiancé, Wallace Robson, along with an Introduction by Frances White and a short preface written by his son Hugh, opens this issue. These poems are published here for the first time. They represent a heartfelt reaction to the emotional turmoil that characterized her pre-marriage years when, in her early thirties and eager to settle, she was unsure of how to reconcile competing desires for emotional security and sexual freedom. The poems are followed by a further new addition to biographical sources: a transcription and accompanying notes to a talk on Murdoch's sixty-year friendship with fellow philosopher, Philippa Foot, given by Peter J. Conradi at Kingston University in 2013. This lecture was part of the community project *Iris Murdoch and Philippa Foot: An Arc of Friendship*, supported by the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund, and run by the Iris Murdoch Archive Project between May 2012 and July 2013. Professor Conradi intends this work to act as an *Omnium Gatherum*, a compendium or quarry for future scholars of serendipitous points that are not recorded elsewhere. His collection of diverse footnotes forms a rich repository of thoughts and memories which ensures that the particularity of this remarkable friendship will not be lost.

Students from local Sixth Forms were also involved in the Community Project, attending workshops in the Murdoch Archives, visiting Seaforth Place where Murdoch and Foot shared a home, the National Gallery and the National Portrait Gallery. They subsequently created art works in response to Murdoch's letters to Philippa Foot which featured in the exhibition in Kingston Museum in May 2013.<sup>1</sup> The engagement of the students was so intense that a competition was devised, in which they were invited to write a letter from the future to Iris Murdoch, which would record their responses to the project. The two winners were Susannah Rees and Sukaina Kadhum, then in year 12 at The Tiffin Girls' School in Kingston.<sup>2</sup> In very different styles, these letters indicate with great maturity the pleasure and benefit these students received from engaging with an active archive. Susannah's letter sums up the value of the archive project and the lessons she has learned from it. Sukaina's letter describes how, when sitting on a crowded train, the pages of her Murdoch novel, *The Sandcastle*, were blown away down the carriage and the effect this very Murdochian occurrence had on the passengers around her. The Tiffin Girls' School is very proud of these students'

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<sup>1</sup> See the *Iris Murdoch Review*, No.4, 2013, p.66.

<sup>2</sup> Prizes were presented at the school by Anne Rowe, and the students will speak at a panel on the project at the Seventh International Conference on Iris Murdoch Conference at Kingston University in September 2014.

understanding of the friendship and the historical contexts that frame the letters from Iris Murdoch to Philippa Foot. We are delighted to publish the winning entries here.

Sabina Lovibond's discussion of Iris Murdoch's 'Baggy Monsters' is rooted in the 1980s, and investigates Murdoch's avowed realism. She measures how far the group of novels written in this decade – *Nuns and Soldiers* (1980), *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983), *The Good Apprentice* (1985), *The Book and The Brotherhood* (1987) and *The Message to the Planet* (1989) – match up to Henry James's yardstick that the novel should provide a 'personal and direct impression of life'. Having suggested that the novels do indeed 'touch on' a wide range of social and political issues, she acknowledges that they do so only incidentally, because Murdoch's realism is perpetually in competition with her myth-making. In particular Lovibond explores how the *The Book and the Brotherhood* distinguishes itself in presenting a world-view that is essential to the plot, but is nonetheless reluctant to be charged with historical particularity. Despite such constraints however, Lovibond credits these 'baggy monsters' with a remarkable degree of social realism and as such this discussion forms an important contribution to the relatively scant body of criticism on Murdoch's still somewhat neglected late novels.

The 1990s are represented by a short introduction to Murdoch's penultimate novel *The Green Knight* written by her friend and literary agent, Ed Victor. Here he brings to life his first meeting with Iris Murdoch, his subsequent friendship with her and his admiration for this particular novel, which she dedicated to him. This short reminiscence acts as a fascinating prelude to Pamela Osborn's study of Iris Murdoch's literary afterlife which suggests that Murdoch's fiction demonstrates an apprehension of the ways in which she would be mourned after her own death, and a perceptive awareness of the tendency of the biographer or memoirist to 'feed upon' the dead. Osborn's discussion ranges over the life writing on Iris Murdoch by John Bayley, Peter Conradi, A.N. Wilson and David Morgan, juxtaposed with theories on mourning by Freud, Derrida and contemporary theorists. Her essay not only adds complex, fresh ways of understanding the function of this body of life writing on Iris Murdoch but also of the process of mourning itself.

Five reviews of recent publications on Iris Murdoch are included, two of which evaluate books that contribute to the growing body of publications of Murdoch's letters, *Remembering Iris Murdoch: Letters and Interviews* by Jeffrey Meyers and *Never Mind about the Bourgeoisie: The Correspondence between Iris Murdoch and Brian Medlin 1976-1995*, edited by Gillian Dooley and Graham Nerlich. The mounting number of available letters means that a third substantial body of writing by Iris Murdoch will stand alongside her philosophy and fiction, increasing the available Murdochian 'voices' from a duet to a trio. Murdoch's letters will now invite equal critical attention from future researchers.

The past year has also witnessed the publication of two other significant books: an overdue reassessment of the relationship between Iris Murdoch and Elias Canetti written by Elaine Morley and reviewed here by Miles Leeson, and Frances White's prize-winning biographical study,<sup>3</sup> *Becoming Iris Murdoch*, reviewed by Priscilla Martin. White's book evokes one of the most eventful periods in Iris Murdoch's life – the crucial years between 1945 and 1956, when the political, intellectual and spiritual aspects of her character were being shaped.

The cover of this special edition of the *Iris Murdoch Review* displays just a handful of the hundreds of annotations Murdoch made to books in her personal library at her Oxford home. The library is currently held in the Murdoch Archives in Kingston University's Special Collections, and Katie Gile's subsequent report indicates the Archives' continuing growth. The burgeoning internationalism of Murdoch studies

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<sup>3</sup> *Becoming Iris Murdoch* was joint winner of the Kingston University Press Short Biography Competition in 2012 alongside *My Brother and I* by C.J. Driver.

is also witnessed in this issue, by the publication of Margarita Mauri's collection of essays in Spanish from the Iris Murdoch Seminar at Barcelona University, reviewed here by Sofia de Melo Araújo, and by Tony Milligan's conference report from the first international conference on Iris Murdoch at Roma Tre University held in February 2014. This issue and its affiliated conference also celebrates the global friendships between individuals and institutions that have been forged over the past ten years, and that have strengthened and invigorated Iris Murdoch scholarship worldwide.

Anne Rowe, May 2014

## Raid on the Inarticulate: Poems for Wallace Robson

In Iris Murdoch's 1975 novel, *A Word Child*, Arthur Fisch says to Hilary Burde, 'Poetry is best of all. Who wouldn't rather be a poet than anything else? Poetry is where words end', and Hilary retorts, 'Poetry is where words begin'.<sup>1</sup> Throughout her life Murdoch made 'raids on the inarticulate,' as T.S. Eliot describes the act of poetry writing. In 2013, with help from a donation from the Friends of the National Libraries,<sup>2</sup> the Iris Murdoch Archives acquired the Wallace Robson collection.<sup>3</sup> The growth of a young literary archive brings strange new things to light. Just as letters reveal different aspects of Iris Murdoch's life, relationships and personality, so her unpublished writings demonstrate her struggling with the medium of words as she refined her craft of writing. The eleven poems included in this new collection are published here for the first time. Written during the 1950s, they were sent by Murdoch to Wallace Robson, an English Fellow at Lincoln College, Oxford, with whom she had a turbulent romance from February 1950 to April 1952, culminating in a broken engagement which caused much pain on both sides.

These may not be amongst Murdoch's finest efforts at poetry: they do not perhaps compare well with some of the best poems published in *Poems by Iris Murdoch*,<sup>4</sup> or *A Year of Birds*,<sup>5</sup> but they nonetheless hold significant interest in the context of this relationship and the letters to Robson written concurrently. The poems are visceral, dashed rapidly down in raw emotional states; rough drafts, unpolished. Obvious weaknesses are apparent in the lack of an original poetic vision, a faltering sense of metre, and a frequently clichéd use of imagery. However, it is important to maintain awareness that the poems were not written for publication, but to help Murdoch discover her true feelings and to communicate those feelings to the lover with whom she perpetually quarrelled, despite her affection for him. Anxious to marry, Murdoch hoped that Robson might be the one who would rescue her from her lonely single state. In her letters to him she attempts to envisage and plan a future for them both together. The poems manifest the tortuous dichotomy between her conscious hopes and her subconscious fears. Although she twice says in letters to Robson, 'I shall never get used to you', it is in the poems that the full extent of her inner knowledge of their incompatibility surfaces from the depths. These poems are about shipwreck and car crashes, about darkness and cold, about violence and sin. They reveal Murdoch's discernment that marriage to Robson would be destructive to them both – a 'mortal rendezvous' as poem number eight envisages.

Furthermore, Murdoch confesses that communication with Robson is fraught with difficulty: poem number three opens, 'Instead of a letter it eases/The heart more to write thus'. The ambivalence of her feelings vacillates between an open acknowledgement of her 'hatred' for him in the blatantly titled 'Tu es mon mal', and a great tenderness

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1 Iris Murdoch, *A Word Child* (1975); (London: Vintage Classics, 2002), p.88.

2 See Anne Rowe, 'Recent Acquisitions: Letters to Rachel Fenner; Poems and Letters to Wallace Robson', the *Iris Murdoch Review*, 4, 2013, 64-5.

3 KUAS121

4 *Poems by Iris Murdoch*, eds. Yozo Muroya and Paul Hullah, (Japan: Education Press, 1997).

5 Iris Murdoch, *A Year of Birds* with wood engravings by Reynolds Stone (1984); (London: Chatto & Windus, 1991).



expressed in poem five, to acute feeling of guilt for the pain she causes him which she expresses in poem nine. Three of the poems (six, seven and eight) are composed on a single day, 3 March 1954, and read as if written after a bitter quarrel: 'when all was wrenched / and set ashivering / Tinkling and broken – / the torn tongue quivering, The sad word spoken' (poem six). These poems have a passionate energy born of pain. In poem eight Murdoch achieves the considerable self-insight, that, for her, 'honesty is a hard thing'; 'dappled deception [...] natural and sweet'. Such occasional felicities of vocabulary as well as the poignancy of a failed love story told through poems, makes this small collection of greater weight than its apparent slightness.

Frances White

W.W.Robson (1923-1993)

William Wallace Robson was part of a lively and influential generation of dons and writers who were associated in various ways with Oxford University in the mid-twentieth century. Robson had been a scholar at New College in the early 1940s where he was a pupil of Lord David Cecil; and it was either during this period, or, more likely, in the late 1940s and early 1950s when he was Fellow and Tutor in English at Lincoln College, that he came to know Iris Murdoch and to begin the relationship that ultimately led to their brief engagement.

Robson was a brilliant but eccentric young man. He read widely and voraciously and possessed an extremely powerful memory. These qualities, together with a sharp wit and great personal charm, must have made him attractive to many people. But in spite of his intellectual gifts, or perhaps partly because of them, he was anxious and emotionally vulnerable. There are hints in the letters of tensions of various kinds, which may have contributed to the breakdown of the relationship. We cannot know the full picture, but it seems likely that there was something in this combination of powerful, independent personalities which was not well suited to marriage; at any rate the affair ended, and Robson married Anne Moses in 1962, to whom he remained devoted until his death thirty years later.

The letters give a glimpse of what might have been an interesting literary partnership. Both Murdoch and Robson were writers as well as dons. Robson's only non-academic publication, however, was a volume of poems, *The Signs Among Us*, which received little attention. Although the letters hint at Robson's literary ambitions, in the end it was Murdoch who became famous as a writer. How far he influenced her in her own work will perhaps never be known; but any clever, bookish, intense young men who appear among the pages of her novels are well worth the attention of future scholars who may be interested in their relationship.

Hugh Robson, May 2014

## Poem One (undated)

*Tu es mon mal*

You have searched my heart; and far down  
The dark nets in the dark waters move.  
This is but a sad image of love;  
Unless from depth itself a strength can come.

Dazzling and electrical, a tension of the nerves,  
Fear, and even hatred, turn to steel.  
Is this the true tenderness I hoped to feel?  
Or is violence itself a power that saves?

I can see no hope in your sex branded eyes.  
Our extreme union is a lack of hope.  
Is this the future's flesh, its innocent shape,  
Kernel of lightning in collapsing skies?

You are the troubled and dark power counter  
To which setting foot and knee I strain  
Until I define myself in a rending pain  
And see in shock my soul's fragments founder.

Shot through the head into a diamond glory.  
Promised not present – there is only a shiver  
Along the nerves. The notion of never  
Is an unformulated part of the story.

Crying with fear compelled from your embrace  
You are the steep way that I slowly tread –  
The gazing skull that entering my head  
Aches with mortality upon my face.

You are the iron man with whom I dance  
Where each step is original with life –  
While truth is at our wrist like a blunt knife.  
You are the wakening as you are the trance.

My hatred for you pierces you like love –  
My secret moods come blooded from your heart.  
My starry thoughts that burn to fly apart,  
Scattering worlds, in your cold orbit move.

There is no escaping the dimensions of space,  
All other spaces are contained therein.  
You are my necessity; although I run  
My thinking feet imagine no new place.

Only the truth can hold our reeling galaxy –  
To truth your power must bend its unkind laws.

The Power that holds us both upon our course  
Is our unsteady love's only identity.

The darkness in me of untruth to you,  
Your jealous force that weighs upon my neck,  
Must in our new heaven and earth break  
Into the singing of planets the night through.

Our poor love lifts a soiled and bleeding face,  
And all the air is black with our offence.  
My hand in the darkness touches yours once  
And the tenderness I prayed for comes as a grace.

*Tu es mon mal oh toi mon guérison,  
Tu es la froide terre que reveillaient mes pleurs,  
La mort qui me venait comblé de fleurs  
Dont le parfum est enfin un bénison.*

### **Poem Two (undated)**

This open sea of monsters is my home  
Covered with gentle ships all bearing west  
The spices and the garments of the east  
We are the kings who sit upon the prow  
And look upon the mountains of the east  
Here where the great waves bear us to our doom  
Come take my hand and look upon the whale  
The crystal eyes of great Leviathan  
And every island swimming in the west.

Where are the sweet suns now  
Dear doves that come into the dark  
Into the dark dark room  
Here we are sundered oh  
My dear under the sea  
Where the gold galleons lie  
Among the fish. Not all  
Not all the languages of weeping men  
Are adequate to speak the word  
That now breaks through.  
This word that opens darkly in my heart  
Its gaping mouth of seaweed  
Poor sweet word –  
How tenderly this dark mouth opens here  
Child of a southern civilising speech

*[The poem is clearly unfinished – the remainder lost]*

### Poem Three (undated)

Instead of a letter it eases  
The heart more to write thus.  
The great thing is to avoid fuss.  
The deep impulse is to do what pleases,  
Tho' perhaps the final result only teases.

Nervous and beady in the black cage,  
(Words are described as winged),  
Their crooked feet are ringed,  
Tense for flight is their plumage,  
And high for the storm their courage.

They are braver than I –  
They can reach a greater height,  
They know their course in the night.  
Some of them may die,  
But others will find the way.

Though my tongue is still  
And I am weak,  
Perhaps they will know how to speak  
When the grey wings and the red bill  
Are come quietly to your windowsill.

And the Spring wind stirs the breast  
That had climbed so far aloft,  
Ruffles from smoothness that infinitely soft  
Contour, as they stop their crest  
Humbly, & come to rest.  
They are better than I.  
Their unpretentious wings  
Speak of innocent things.  
My poor messages may lie,  
But not they.

I think they belong to you,  
These gentle birds that so  
They struggle in my heart to go.  
Let that prison not have made them untrue  
Or tarnished what they know.

Open your window & your door  
To their crooked & humble feet.  
Give them a little corn to eat.  
Forgive them for being poor.  
Let them rest upon the floor.

Over the barricaded hours  
And the electric storm of time  
Only these wings can climb.  
I think they have these gracious powers  
Because they are yours.

**Poem Four (dated 1952)**

The trailing stars tell of dooms  
In a universe next door to ours.  
I have seen the fall of the world  
Poised at the intricate centre of flowers.  
Pretty one, pretty one, I say  
To the timid suspense of a cat –  
Profound in her enormous eye  
A powdery lamp is lit.  
Day comes like a settling bird  
That I coax to my windowsill –  
Reality waits the word  
That shall shatter it once for all.  
What a tremulous structure it is,  
Focussed, suspended in place  
By the random *congeries*  
The atomic form of the face.

Let the personality list  
A fraction out of its sense  
And the shadows of particles  
Will fall with a difference.  
Will fall to create new things,  
And the colour structure broken  
A new born planet sings  
That the word has at last been spoken.

**Poem Five (undated)**

I would rather write a poem  
Calling down the old leaves  
Such old crackling leaves from the gentle  
Branches of trees which lean nearer  
Nearer, asking of us only  
The silence of bodies laid at the root  
Heads deep the uplifted  
Roots, amid the moss & primroses.  
Somewhere high up, very high,  
A robin or some spring bird is saying  
A word which we cannot quite hear –  
The leaves which fall are speaking

Indifferently of autumn or spring –  
I wish, as I look into your eyes.  
Which are deep as the brook swollen  
With springtime floods & tears  
That we could understand the bird –  
The hours pass, the roots  
Of the primrose are as strong as a tree –  
The insects of summer crawl

Upon us – your tears fall –  
But listen. The bird sings –  
Here is one one

*[The poem appears to have been abandoned at this point]*

### **Poem Six (March 3 1952)**

Crystalline scattering  
Powdering meaning  
Into no mattering –  
All is seeming  
And faint of heartness.  
The endless roadway  
Flies in the darkness  
A far ahead way,  
The catseyes blinded,  
The headlights quenched,  
And no one minded  
When all was wrenched  
And set a shivering  
Tinkling and broken –  
The torn tongue quivering,  
The sad word spoken.

### **Poem Seven (March 3 1952)**

To receive relief I write,  
Not looking at all  
At the obvious places  
Where nailed upon the wall  
There are tortured faces.  
Simply the courage to wait  
And quietly to look  
I lack. There is someone  
Whose grief I make,  
Who is for me cast down:  
But this I will not know.  
The earth of elsewhere

Is my wild garden –  
Yet though I search there  
One flower of pardon  
Will never grow.

**Poem Eight (March 3 1952)**

I find that honesty is a hard thing;  
But dappled deception is natural and sweet,  
Simple, seductive & most discreet  
In the weary grace of its surrendering.  
When the sun shines the little birds sing,  
And pointed flowers prick my feet,  
And I become frisky and fleet  
And fly all tedious remembering.  
But I hope that nevertheless  
I may be most strongly chained and penned  
So that although I run with wildness  
The tugged at tether will cast me to the ground  
Until I have learnt mildness,  
Being truth's prisoner in the end.

**Poem Nine (March 9 1954)**

The tired wanderer in careful heaven  
Oppressed by the perfume of hyacinths & Balkan Sobranie  
Has on his head a cloud of very many  
Memories, if he pauses even  
For a moment, standing still  
And looking at the attentive landscape  
Assembling quickly into colour & shape,  
To pin him between a river & a green hill.  
These things like birds now twitter in my ears  
And all their language is a sweet disdain;  
What childhood knew I cannot understand.  
The trees beneath our thundercloud of tears  
Are tall & leafy with continual rain;  
Eloquent in the silence of the land.

**Poem Ten (March 12 1952)**

You ask a hundred sonnets of me – you  
That put pain not poetry upon my soul.  
The icebergs know the pathway from the pole  
That leads them to a mortal rendezvous.  
The little ship is crushed & all its crew  
Are black & tiny on the sculptured white,

And the finality of freezing night  
Touches with treasuring that which is true.  
Now the mast totters & the hulls crack  
And a cold world enters forever in,  
A universe of white that knows no black,  
The nightmare strength of ice, the crushing din,  
That moves with snowy silence on its track  
And softly will obliterate our sin.

**Poem Eleven (March 12 1954)**

There is no flower on the asking tree  
And no foliage at the bottom of the sea.  
Only a single bird in the air flying  
Is the consolation of our dying.  
You are the question that escaped from me,  
Finding no answer in our unity.  
The cry went out a pilgrim through the earth,  
But missed the habitation of the birth.  
My heart went straying and returned a deer,  
With horns of horror & with eyes of fear.  
You, vulnerable to the hunters' darts,  
Lay in the dangerous world my other parts.  
Where the stars like fireflies are burning in your hair,  
And your brow is cut so deep with care  
That the bone is reached that has left no blood,

Your eyes contain that minimum of good  
That buys back all our paper with its gold;  
Unless this story is better left untold,  
Or laid by both of us before that Censor  
Who may or may not be there,  
May or may not answer.



## 'The Guises of Love': The Friendship of Professor Philippa Foot and Dame Iris Murdoch

*What follows is the transcript and notes for a talk given at Kingston University on Wednesday 15 May 2013 as part of the community project, Iris Murdoch and Philippa Foot: An Arc of Friendship, run by the Iris Murdoch Archive Project at Kingston University and funded by the National Lottery, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund.*

This talk places on public record some background to the correspondence between Philippa Foot and Iris Murdoch, recently acquired by the Iris Murdoch Archive Project at Kingston University, and from sources such as Iris Murdoch's journals, and my own, and Philippa Foot's letters to me. One interest of these letters is that they are written from one distinguished philosopher to another. Another is the ways that the letters can return us to, and illuminate, Murdoch's novels. I want to trace some echoes between life and fiction while trying to respect the essential mystery of each.

I want to start by sketching Foot's influence on my biography of Murdoch. I dedicated this to Philippa Foot as well as to John Bayley for two reasons: she had been Iris's closest woman friend for over 60 years;<sup>1</sup> and she helped and mentored me with unstinting generosity. I first met Philippa – I use first-names for brevity's sake – at a lunch party at Iris and John's,<sup>2</sup> and she early on said: 'I'm so glad it's you'. Another biographer whom she named was someone she could never have cooperated with: he 'would have made us all feel dirty'. We rapidly became friends. Her mother was born in the White House, her grand-father was President Grover Cleveland. Philippa came to stay with us each year in Wales, together with Iris and John at first, and after Iris's death by herself.<sup>3</sup> She stayed with us in London; we met in Oxford regularly and travelled memorably to Bulgaria together in 1998 in Frank Thompson's footsteps.<sup>4</sup>

How Iris was represented mattered to Philippa. On being asked on *Woman's Hour* what she felt about John Bayley's memoirs, which foreground her last illness, she remarked wryly: 'I could have lived without them'. She advised that I must find a way to include some account of Iris's confused and confusing early love-life – 'because if you don't someone else will ... and yours must be the definitive biography'. She appreciated that this would be challenging. When I felt burdened

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1 Foot never publicised her closeness to Murdoch. Of a well-known novelist who regularly broadcast her friendship with Murdoch and was Murdoch's best-known literary disciple, Foot remarked in 1998, 'Iris had the knack of making each of her women friends feel unique and "as if they were the only one": only the very egocentric believed this'.

2 Possibly early summer 1997.

3 During her first visits she arrived each time carrying a large free-range chicken and porcini as her gift. She overlapped on two occasions with Joanna Kilmartin, who had translated vol. IV of Proust's letters: a happy friendship flowered between them. Murdoch introduced Foot to Proust's work, possibly in 1943-4.

4 Foot had been invited by Professor Maria Stoicheva of Sofia University's Philosophy Department and Foot suggested that I might come with her to research Frank Thompson's last months.

by these responsibilities she suggested wisely and wittily: 'Write the biography *without curiosity*'. She also said: 'Leave the philosophy to us: we can deal with that'.<sup>5</sup>

On 16 December 2000 I delivered the complete typescript of *Iris Murdoch: A Life to Philippa*. Alarmed about her possible response, I was greatly relieved when she rang me twice in Wales to enthuse about it: my journal shows that she said – gratifyingly – it was 'comical. Sad, gripping ... you don't know what you've done – don't understand how good it is – it's *marvellous*'. But she also had objections and concerns. Some of these appear within a letter to me now archived at Kingston University. But not all. Some she refused to commit to writing and would discuss only face-to-face. When I asked her what was missing, she mentioned John Bayley's importance, and Iris's goodness, topics Philippa herself addressed eloquently in her Somerville eulogy. (As it happened, John Bayley had encouraged me to cut some passages concerning Iris's love for him which I suspect he thought saccharine. In a similar spirit I had decided that if I *asserted* her goodness I risked hagiography: I had instead to *evoke* it and let the reader draw conclusions.)

Philippa had more serious anxieties. One was Elias Canetti's contention that Iris had laid out Franz Steiner's body, with the scandalous implication that love-making with her had killed him. My partner Jim O'Neill argued that it was important to show Iris as something more and other than a mere blue-stocking: that sentence stayed. But her greatest anxiety concerned Iris's Communist connections. In the summer of 1983 Iris's ex-colleague at St Anne's, Jennifer Hart, had been hounded by police and journalists after being named in print as a Soviet spy: Iris too had spied during the war for the Communist Party, copying Treasury papers then leaving these copies in a tree that was a dead-letter drop in Kensington Gardens. Philippa was alarmed at the possibility of a repeat scandal. To compound her fears about Iris as a Communist, Philippa's sister Marion, who moved into the Seaforth flat and stayed for more than sixty years, commented that graffiti on the walls in August 1945 strongly suggested that the flat continued in use as a place for Communist Party cell meetings, perhaps as late as 1945: she believed Iris herself to have absented herself during these meetings.<sup>6</sup> Since the scribblings were low on the wall, the Comrades evidently sat on the floor. I did not remove all mention of her spying. But – feeling misgivings – I did omit the dead-letter drops and the graffiti.

Then, in October 2001, the *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer of the biography, John Jones, took me to task for down-playing Murdoch's espionage.<sup>7</sup> I had written that Iris probably copied only 'information of little moment about colleagues and Treasury doings', adding that she would probably not have hesitated to pass on information of greater moment too. But I had no entitlement to make such assumptions.<sup>8</sup> Jones recalled, with much circumstantial detail, Murdoch telling him in a pub in the late 1940s of her war-time spying, mentioning a Captain who was her Communist Party 'minder'. This review, in-and-of-itself, licensed me in the paperback edition to re-insert the dead-letter drops. The graffiti, however, I did not re-insert, and have never mentioned before. (It may in this connection be recalled that Canetti in *Party in the Blitz* alleges that Iris was involved in spying for the Communist Party abroad post-war.) In the event, what

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5 For this reason, publication of *Iris Murdoch: Philosopher*, ed. by Justin Broackes's (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) is greatly to be welcomed. Typical of Foot's generosity that, invited to give a plenary lecture herself at the Brown University conference on Murdoch's work, she commended me to go in her stead, which I indeed did; my talk on discipleship duly appeared in Broackes's volume.

6 Murdoch was thought to have been required by the Communist Party to leave the party on taking up her war-work at the Treasury in 1942, while staying on as a clandestine member.

7 John Jones, 'She loved and sung', *TLS*, 5 October 2001.

8 There might – conceivably – still be papers in Moscow that would throw light on this.

obsessed the media and wholly overshadowed the news that she had once spied for the Communist Party were tales of Iris's Alzheimer's and of her love life.

I wonder whether there were elements of displacement – in the Freudian sense – in Philippa's fears. There is a parallel between the life of a spy and that of someone engaged in multiple love affairs: both risk being seen by others as cold-blooded, cruel, or traitorous. Both practise deceit or double-dealing. Soon after Philippa joined Iris in the Seaforth flat in 1943, Iris stole Philippa's part-time lover Thomas Balogh, wounding Iris's other lover, M.R.D. Foot, whom Philippa in turn rescued and married.<sup>9</sup> If there is one parallel between the spy and the unfaithful lover, another obtains between the spy and the novelist: both observe human conduct, collect and steal stories, reconfiguring these to a wider audience.

Researching her biography did not change my view of the shape of Iris's career. I still think her best work to be found in those magical and extraordinary novels *Under the Net*, *The Bell*, *A Severed Head*, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, *The Black Prince* and *The Sea, the Sea*. But biographizing sometimes suggested reasons for success, when, for example, the work put down a deep tap-root into her own experience, as well as a radiation outwards from it. Her life started to seem quite as extraordinary as her fiction – and to render 'realistic' much that I had hitherto mistaken for fantasy.

I was astonished and disturbed by the immediacy and intensity of her journals and letters, as by the confusion of her early love life. (With hindsight I can now see that my first academic article in 1981 – called 'The Metaphysical Hostess' – had touched on this; it concerned an archetypical heroine who 'conducts a number of emotional intimacies simultaneously and thus might be thought emotionally promiscuous'.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps I understood more than I thought.) Iris created over thirty years a long series of vamp-figures – starting with Anna Quentin in *Under the Net*, moving through Antonia Lynch-Gibbon in *A Severed Head*, Hannah Crean-Smith in *The Unicorn* and Lady Millie Kinnard in *The Red and the Green* – who are often dealt with comic severity. Despite decades of feminism, a double-standard still obtains: men are forgiven their wild oats while women who sow the same are rebuked or punished. Lara Feigel in her recent *The Love-Charm of Bombs: Restless Lives in the Second World War* shows how tolerant war-time sexual morality was.<sup>11</sup> Graham Greene at one point ran three women as well as visiting prostitutes, but stays un-rebuked by critics.<sup>12</sup> The same charity is not extended to Iris Murdoch whom there is a fashion to diminish as Kali, goddess of destruction.

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9 Establishing dates depended upon timing of the appointment of US war-time Ambassador to London, John Winant, known to Foot's parents; Foot had moved to Seaforth that same October and it seemed likely that Murdoch's theft of Balogh happened very soon after. Foot would admit only to one single night's sleeplessness and gave many reasons why this might have been the case; and she purported to mind Murdoch's treachery for M.R.D. Foot's sake, more than for her own. But it would be strange if jealousy had been restricted to one sleepless night: Balogh, Foot told me, fell in love with Murdoch as he had not been with her. And then, as she also told me, everyone fell for Iris. Foot's and Murdoch's reactions to these events both involved Donald MacKinnon but differed. For both women, his counsel counted immeasurably and it was McKinnon who introduced Murdoch seriously to the figure of Christ, who started to figure in her private scheme of redemption. At the same time Foot later saw that McKinnon's idiosyncrasies – for all that Foot revered McKinnon as a model – made her hate Christianity and put her off religion for life as it were. 'Iris has a *spiritual* life', Foot once remarked to me, while she herself had a *moral* life. Religion for Foot was a closed book.

10 *English Literary History*, Vol.48, No.2, Summer 1981; it covered Forster, Woolf, Murdoch and Henry James.

11 Lara Feigel, *The Love-Charm of Bombs: Restless Lives in the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2013).

12 Graham Greene lied to his wife (Vivien) and long-term mistress (Dorothy, with whom his brother Hugh sometimes slept in his absence), about the great love of his life, Catherine Walston, who also had a husband. Catherine's other lovers included a Labour MP, an American general and an IRA chieftain.

A meditation from a later novel, *Bruno's Dream*, belongs here: 'How selective guilt is, thought Bruno. It is the sins that link significantly with our life which we remember and regret. People whom we just knocked down in passing are soon lost to memory. Yet their wounds may be as great. We regret only the frailty which the form of our life has made us own to'.<sup>13</sup> The form of Iris's life – and in particular Philippa's proximity – provided her with reminders that she had wounded others.

Murdoch's and Foot's careers mirrored each other: in 1942 both were Bohemian leftist students. (Although never in the Communist Party, Foot once startled her pre-war country-house hosts by reading the *Daily Worker*.) Even during the cold war between them (1944-59), Murdoch lodged with the Foots at 16, Park Town for more than a year, starting July 1948, though this arrangement struck all of them as odd. *Bruno's Dream* echoes this episode when Lisa Watkins, the 'bird with a broken wing' – as Murdoch's was broken by Balogh and Hicks – is taken in as a lodger by Miles and Diana Green-sleave.<sup>14</sup> Circumstances kept throwing them together. In Philippa's front room she, Iris, Elizabeth Anscombe, Mary Midgley (and others – but mainly women) campaigned against Oxford's sternly and restrictively linguistic regime in moral philosophy. This regime separated philosophy from any problems in real life, which were categorised as crude non-professional business – better left to amateurs like parsons.<sup>15</sup> Philippa and Iris were rebels, reading heterodox thinkers such as Nikolai Berdyaev, and penning articles differently objecting to what was wrong. Happily scholars are at work on these articles and books.

Philippa and her only sister Marion, older than her by one year, loved and yet exasperated one another; the stimulation Marion provided was never intellectual. Iris, even though their philosophical views differed increasingly, seems more like Philippa's soul-sister. In November 1952, Iris was due to baby-sit at the Dummetts soon after Franz Steiner died. She asked Philippa to come with her; Philippa recalled Iris's grief. During Trinity Term 1954 on Tuesdays at 5.30, Iris co-taught with Philippa the graduate course, 'Analysis in Moral Philosophy', in Keble College, where Basil Mitchell was also involved. Philippa was a distant observer when Iris married John Bayley in 1956. When I spoke to her of the Bayley family's concerns about this marriage, she commented, 'I think I know why: she was seen as *ungovernable*', that is, as someone refusing to play by the rules, but making up her own rules instead (including same-sex liaisons).<sup>16</sup> This observation tallies with John Bayley's own recollection of the politics of his marriage, which helped rescue Iris from unhappiness and confusion. When I enquired about one bout of pre-marriage falling, he intimated that she might for a while have over-done her drinking. He saw Iris's 1956 visit to Bowenscourt, in Ireland, as a crucial factor in her decision to press ahead with marrying him, a parallel that commentators have been slow to understand or extrapolate from. Elizabeth Bowen's happy but celibate

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13 Iris Murdoch, *Bruno's Dream* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), p.19.

14 Ibid., p. 67. Murdoch noted in January 1949, while lodging with the Foots, 'Thought later: what marks one out as a confined person, with no dimension of greatness? Some lack of sweep, some surreptitious idolatry. In my case, I feel there must be some will to please which is on my face like a birthmark. Who lacks this smallness? Donald MacKinnon, and Pippa, unconfined people, and Elizabeth Anscombe too'.

15 Mary Midgley mentioned this to me in an email. This regime occupied itself instead with defining general words such as 'good', 'right' and 'duty' in tidy and wholly objective ways. (R.M. Hare's book *The Language of Morals* was the bible of this campaign and the chief text supposed to occupy students.)

16 Another witness recalls a further aspect of Murdoch's 'ungovernability': her bisexuality and willingness to have affairs with women-friends. This impression Murdoch gave may have been reinforced by the visit both girls paid to Philippa's home in Kirkleatham, where Iris's informality irritated Philippa's mother. Kitchen staff were now absent in war. Iris, strong-willed and without a by-your-leave, went to make sandwiches; on another occasion she pushed her plate away and put her head on the table.

marriage to Alan Cameron (who had died four years before, in 1952), provided Bowen with a secure base from which to make forays into the world, and, in doing so, have love affairs with Humphrey House, Sean O'Faolain, May Sarton, and Charles Ritchie.

Both Iris and Philippa were in later life Oxford-based grandees. Murdoch became Dame of the British Empire in 1987; Foot turned down a comparable honour when offered one. After Philippa's retirement from UCLA in 1991 they invented the tradition of Friday lunch together at 15, Walton Street. That continued into Iris's last illness; and when we were all five together in Wales Murdoch would refer to Foot as 'my friend'. John Bayley memorably and accurately evokes Philippa's 'quizzically precise, polite attention' on such occasions.<sup>17</sup> I don't know exactly when Murdoch asked Foot (and John Simopoulos) to be her executors (but not literary executors), and they agreed. It indicates trust in their loyalty. Murdoch also gave Foot a signed copy of each of her novels: these are held in Somerville College Archives.

A well-known joke Foot liked to tell about Seaforth: they decided to tell each other of the men who had asked to marry them. Philippa's 'list' was soon done. As Iris's list went on and on, Philippa asked crossly whether it might not save time if Iris listed only those men who had *not* yet asked her to marry them. This joke shows them – however playfully – in competition. Both Balogh and MacKinnon, for example, fell in love with Murdoch, and neither with Foot. Foot tasked me early with conveying that, 'everyone was in love with Iris, was fascinated by her, and couldn't get enough of her company'. She compared Murdoch's popularity – charisma, or glamour – in this regard, with that of Isaiah Berlin. Foot also once remarked to me that Murdoch's early promiscuity was not really or primarily about sex, but about power, and she would, on occasion, compare the younger Iris with Lou-Andreas Salome, whose name was linked to that of a succession of great men: Nietzsche, Freud, Rilke. That so many loved Murdoch is, of course, also a testimony to positive qualities of character: her strange empathetic ability to enter deeply into the lives of others.

When in Spring 2001 I was invited to the Queneau family flat in the 16<sup>ième</sup> to read Iris's letters to Raymond Queneau, I was dismayed by one of these.<sup>18</sup> By August 1952 Momigliano and Franz Steiner were both in love with her and jealous of one another. There were other flirtations. Yet here on 24 August she was visiting Paris and penning a 14-page declaration of love to Queneau. I telephoned my editor at HarperCollins in London who advised me to place it in the narrative exactly when it happened. I had a sentence that originally ran: 'It may cheer the hostile or puzzle admirers that she claimed what some men assume as a birthright, the right to run close friendships concurrently'. Foot suggested I add the three words, '*and even love-affairs*', to read 'the right to run close friendships and even love-affairs concurrently'.<sup>19</sup> Yet when Hilary Burde pronounces early on in *A Word Child*, 'There is nothing like early promiscuous sex for dispelling life's bright, mysterious expectations', his author seems to stand behind this judgement.<sup>20</sup> I do not believe that the word 'promiscuous' describes what Murdoch considered herself.<sup>21</sup> She, who destroyed and edited much, allowed many references in her journals to early flirtations and dalliances to remain. By 1990 they evidently seemed remote to her. There are three alternative reasons why this might be so.

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17 John Bayley, *Iris: A Memoir of Iris Murdoch* (London: Duckworth, 1998), p.174, hereafter *Iris*.

18 Murdoch's letters to Queneau are held in the Iris Murdoch Archives in Kingston University's Special Collections.

19 Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), p.201, hereafter *IMAL*.

20 Iris Murdoch, *A Word Child* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975), p.3.

21 See *IMAL* p.580, when in 1985 she denounced promiscuity in interview with Adam Mars-Jones.

First, John Bayley has argued, ‘this desire that each of her relationships should be special and separate, as innocent as in the garden of Eden, was of great significance with Iris [...] what she felt about each of them was totally genuine and without guile’.<sup>22</sup> We will re-visit this topic of innocence. When things were going well it seems she did believe that what she felt about each lover was indeed genuine: and perhaps that she had merely arrogated to herself a privilege always claimed exclusively by men. Secondly, there is the specialised hindsight of the fiction-writer: since their life-experience has been put to use – intensely burnt up, consumed and transmuted within the process of creating fiction – many novelists find it hard to recall their lives accurately.<sup>23</sup> So it may also be that the act of writing itself enabled Murdoch to distance herself, shed and hence disown this persona in later life. Thirdly, there is the role of her Platonism: the Platonic tenet of the Gifford lectures that ‘Chaste love teaches’ stems from the two erotic dialogues, *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, and proposes that the path to wisdom lies through purifying, sublimating or refining unchaste love.<sup>24</sup> This is a wisdom a ‘vamp’ might seem ideally placed to discover. This Platonic sublimation is illustrated by her last vamp or ex-vamp – Anne Cavidge in *Nuns and Soldiers* – who does not later judge her youthful sins too harshly. Indulging no morbid sense of guilt, (‘everything was provisional and moved so fast and other people were behaving quite as wildly as she was’), Anne Cavidge, attracted by ‘the idea [...] of becoming good in some more positive sense’, feels that her early life had been in itself ‘a teaching, something laid down from the very start’.<sup>25</sup>

Other accounts are possible. Iris, around 1956, declared herself to John Bayley a ‘Proteus’ figure who needed to be hung onto before she could turn into her real self. (She gives to Mischa Fox in *The Flight from the Enchanter* the same observation about the Protean nature of all women and the need to struggle with them.) To be Protean is to have different aspects or faces, to see that we consist of what Bradley Pearson in *The Black Prince* calls ‘tissues and tissues of different personae’ – and thus to be potentially conflicted.<sup>26</sup> We might say that one of her many different youthful aspects was a pagan free spirit, another was meticulous and conscience-driven.

Her 1948 journal entry – ‘One of my fundamental assumptions is that I have the power to seduce anyone’<sup>27</sup> – or her 1953 entry, ‘the impossibility of marriage, of having only one man’<sup>28</sup> belong naturally to the pagan free spirit. Her choice of the morally radical Simone Weil as mentor around the same time, and her famous 1972 declaration in favour of the mystical (as opposed to the existentialist) hero<sup>29</sup> come from a radically different source: the mystical hero, she tells us, is marked by the proper sense of guilt: and guilt in this essay – ‘Existentialists and Mystics’ – is one necessary precondition of good faith. In *A Severed Head*, Martin Lynch-Gibbon early invents a striking and

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22 John Bayley, *Iris*, p.24.

23 The novelist Angus Wilson makes this point in *The Wild Garden: or Speaking of Writing* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1963), a point attested to by other observers.

24 Murdoch’s 1982 Gifford lectures – re-worked as *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992) – were much concerned with this theme.

25 Iris Murdoch, *Nuns and Soldiers* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1980), pp.57, 58, 57.

26 Iris Murdoch, *The Black Prince* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), p.200.

27 Journal: 12 December 1948.

28 Journal: 6 October 1953.

29 In the original essay ‘Existentialists and Mystics’ she refers to the mystic as guilty. The existentialist hero by contrast ‘does not suffer from guilt’ (*Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. by Peter J. Conradi [London: Chatto & Windus, 1997], p.225). ‘The mystical hero is a new version of the man of faith, believing in goodness without religious guarantees, guilty, muddled, yet not without hope’ (Ibid., p.227).

wonderful phrase to describe the 'idle thoughtless happiness which was never to come [...] in my life again' while he is two-timing his wife Antonia with his mistress Georgie Hands: 'I was happy [...] with that particular quality of a degenerate innocence'.<sup>30</sup> The wonderfully paradoxical phrase 'degenerate innocence' bears contemplation: it proposes that innocence in and of itself can be guilty.

In a standard Romantic trope, Murdoch's novels often show how false innocence must be lost or gone beyond in order to be recuperated as understanding or wisdom. Thus Otto Narraway in *The Italian Girl* says, 'Sin is a sort of unconsciousness, a not knowing', and he instances the 'dreaming, swimming, dazed Eve of Ghislebertus at Autun' as an iconic depiction of this unconsciousness.<sup>31</sup> This theme of degenerate innocence flowers memorably in *The Black Prince* where wickedness is often 'the product of a semi-deliberate inattention, a sort of swooning relationship to time [...] We ignore what we are doing until it is too late to alter it'.<sup>32</sup> Like Martin, Otto and Bradley – and, if I may put it thus, like all who count ourselves moral seekers – Murdoch wanted to discover what lay beyond 'degenerate innocence'. From this standpoint, the myth of the Fall belongs critically within the spiritual quest; and the dramas of 1943-4 were seminal in her journey as a seeker and as a novelist. This is surely one reason that she compulsively re-invents and re-imagines new emotional and sexual imbroglios in one novel after another. Imbroglios reflect a new morality: but they are also fertile ground for the spiritual quest, moving from the compulsive and blind life of the cave towards life in the sun. In the cave, Julius King tells us in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, 'Human beings are essentially finders of substitutes' and 'Anyone will do to play the roles'.<sup>33</sup> In the sun, by contrast, we might at last be properly and freely apprehensible to one another.

There seem to be three significant phases in Iris and Philippa's friendship: the first starts with the quadrilateral tale in 1943/4; the second with M.R.D Foot's desertion of Philippa in April 1959; the third follows Iris's and Philippa's brief affair in 1968. This first period coincided, until Iris's marriage in 1956, with maximum storm and stress in her private life, with the loss of Frank Thompson in 1944 and Franz Steiner in 1952, and a rapid sequence of so-called 'a-symmetrical' or uneven relationships. Philippa, evoking this period to me, wrote to me of Iris's bizarre 'tendency to fall in love with absolutely everybody'. Oxford is a small place, and Philippa observed much.

Iris paid many tributes to Philippa's remarkable strength of character. In April 1959 she recorded that she trusted Philippa's mind, knew herself safe in it, even when she thought she would never speak frankly to her again. She trusted Philippa never to traduce or diminish her. And on 1 February 1964 she noted that there was in her life 'eternally Philippa', who represented 'a great reserve of good' on which Iris had 'never really called'. Two years after that entry she was drafting *The Nice and the Good*. John Bayley was unsure whether Iris ever drew 'portraits from life'. When I 'recognised' Paula in *The Nice and the Good* as a portrait of Philippa – which happened unexpectedly but with an instant sense of conviction – this changed both our views of the novel. Paula has the same letters at the beginning and end of her name – P and A – as Philippa. 'Foxy-faced' is a good description of Philippa's appearance, both her long aristocratic face and also her air of high intelligence verging on shrewdness or craftiness. Paula's pronouncement, 'Everyone invites a divorced woman', is a recognisable echo of Philippa's own brave wit.<sup>34</sup> The account of her relationship to 'Mary' who has

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

31 Iris Murdoch, *The Italian Girl* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964), pp.41 and 45.

32 Iris Murdoch, *The Black Prince*, p.189.

33 Iris Murdoch, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), p.224.

34 Iris Murdoch, *The Nice and the Good* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1968), p.20.

some character traits and also physical traits of Iris, recalls Philippa's and Iris's friendship. The fictional characters Paula and Mary, have, like Philippa and Iris, been friends since college. Moreover Paula is said to be an uncompromising person whom Mary experiences at times as an unconscious prig, while at the same time Paula's coolness, her detachment and peculiar virtue nevertheless soothe Mary's nerves. That recalls in a very direct and literal manner the way Iris often experienced Philippa.<sup>35</sup>

Two 1967 journal entries suggest that, eight years after M.R.D. Foot left, it was Philippa who instigated the conversation about how to resuscitate their old close friendship: 'Saw Philippa for a drink on Thursday [2 November].<sup>36</sup> Good. As I was going she said, "Why do you have to go? Why don't you live here?" I said, "We have been here before." In 1943 Philippa living in Fitzroy Street and I at Seaforth. We were always together either at Fitzroy or Seaforth, till the obvious idea occurred to us that we must live in the same place'.<sup>37</sup>

One month later: 'Dec 9 [1967] Saw Philippa. We talked about love. She came nearer than ever before to admitting that our relationship was the most important thing. I was very moved. We talked of the far past [...] Later, trying to write a letter I found my usual difficulty in doing so. Why? I can write to everyone else. Why is it hard to write to her? Trying to interpret, I spoke of the sado-masochism in our relationship. (On my side, that is.) Am I a bit afraid of her? I have always seen her as a judge'.

There were, Murdoch would note rather later, 'people who, though much loved, remain[ed] sinister witnesses from the past'.<sup>38</sup> No name is given: or rather one single name has been so vigorously crossed out as to render it illegible. Their brief affair in 1968 was an attempt to neutralize or get beyond the barrier left behind by the 'quadrilateral tale'. 'Most friendships', Arnold Baffin strikingly proposes in *The Black Prince*, 'are a sort of frozen and undeveloping semi-hostility'.<sup>39</sup> The remark shines with its own clear light of truth. Perhaps Philippa's moral toughness did its work both in sustaining the friendship, and also in keeping its temperature cool.

Here are some of Iris Murdoch's journal entries from that crucial period:

29 April [1968] 'Philippa writes about finding the link between emotion and expression: No expression is ever quite suitable. I feel this with her too. How awkward we are with each other, after nearly 30 years of friendship'.<sup>40</sup> Murdoch's scattered journal references the next month suggest that the affair with Foot only partly resolved the awkwardness they felt with one another.<sup>41</sup> In *The Black Prince* Rachel's flirtation with Bradley is designed in part to neutralise him as a potentially hostile witness, a manoeuvre not wholly successful: Rachel and Bradley remain locked into a strange paradoxical history of closeness and distance.<sup>42</sup> In an analogous manner the barriers that Iris wanted removed with Philippa did not permanently come down either.

3 May [1968] 'Philippa re recent events: "The world had a before and after look". And, "I

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35 Foot, when I explained my reasons for thinking that Paula might be a portrait of her, agreed.

36 Probably at 72 High Street, Foot's flat from 1962-72.

37 4 November 1967.

38 28 August 1975.

39 *The Black Prince*, p.173.

40 She expressed the identical sentiment in an undated letter: 'How awkward we are with each other after all these years' (KUAS 100/3/58).

41 May 1968 was the month that Murdoch had drinks with Brigid Brophy and her new partner Maureen Duffy, signalling to all concerned that Murdoch's intimate relationship with Brophy was now definitively over.

42 Bradley's having observed Rachel and Arnold's murderous marital fight makes Rachel feel compromised. Her flirtation with Bradley is power-play designed to exclude and so pay back Arnold while neutralising Bradley as a potentially hostile witness.



have a neurotic compulsion to act the tyrannical princess child where you are concerned.” In a certain way, she curiously misunderstands my reactions. Fails for instance to see my rather specialized love for the tyrant’.

[Saturday] 18 May [1968]: ‘Saw Philippa Thursday [16 May] and stayed night. Time and space problems. I am still a bit afraid of P, I think. She is numinous, taboo ..’.

20 May [1968] [After comparing Philippa to her other women-loves]: ‘I think the quality of my admiration for her has altered too. Perhaps I admire her a little less & value her more’.<sup>43</sup> That might suggest that her desire to demythologise their relations had some limited success.

On 20 February 1969 there was dinner during a snow-storm with Philippa who was ‘very gay, with prospects of liberation & lots of money’. This was the time Foot retired from Somerville with the title of Senior Research Fellow, and Berkeley was bidding for her from January the following year.<sup>44</sup> Meanwhile Murdoch’s fame – and public demands on her time and energy – were constantly growing. The disparity between their lives must on occasion have struck Philippa forcibly. Philippa was far too ‘morally tough’ and high-minded to have given in to envy, but would have been inhuman never to have experienced that emotion. She had, all her adult life, the experience of discovering that someone had befriended her in hope that an introduction to Iris Murdoch might at some point follow. The following spring she wrote to Iris, who also noted in her journal on 5 May 1969, ‘P complains about not seeing me. I wrote to her: only what happens easily should happen at all. But of course long and austere disciplines are necessary before things can happen easily. I’m not sure how the analogy works. In fact the analogy is Zen’. This reads as casuistical, dressing up her busy-ness and hence emotional distance as somehow spiritual; yet soon Iris tried to make amends. 16 May 1969: ‘In Oxford this week stayed with Philippa’. By September of that year, with Philippa’s departure for the University of Berkeley looming, their relations reverted to an older pattern. In 1969 the old twin themes of Philippa’s constancy and the estrangement or ‘oddness’ endemic to their relations, become dominant notes again. On 29 September 1969, a letter from Honor [Tracy], ‘gave me a feeling of having a vacancy for a close woman friend. Of course there is eternally Philippa. But my relation with her is so odd. Why “but” – ?’<sup>45</sup> They met that October when Iris said to Philippa, ‘that I had decided a week ago that I was a philosophical poet. In fact I only decided it as I spoke the words to her’ (27 October 1969). A gnomic entry on 15 December 1969 reads simply: ‘Pip. I throw a ball. She won’t play’. No context is given: this seems to refer not to a single meeting, but to be triggered by thinking about a pattern. And after Foot’s return from Berkeley that summer, they lunched in September: ‘Sept 11 [probably 1970] Went into Oxford. Lunch with Philippa ... Good to see P. tho’ a sense, although talk easy and various, of non-communication’.

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43 Full quotations: ‘Superiority of Philippa to M[argaret Hubbard], [and] to B[rigid] B[rophy]’. 20 May. The last entry is rather pointless, a gesture. ‘P[hilippa] cd not write *Finishing Touch*, nor beautiful Ciceronian Latin as easily as English. I think the quality of my admiration for her has altered too. Perhaps I admire her a little less & value her more. That isn’t quite it. She certainly still brings out the Dr Masoch in me. (Whereas young S[cott] D[unbar] brings out the de Sade!)’ Brophy described her *Finishing Touch* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1963); (repr. 1987), a ‘waspish *jeu d’esprit*’ set in a girls’ school as a ‘lesbian fantasy’. ‘Ciceronian Latin’: Hubbard was a classicist who wrote a study of Propertius.

44 Foot’s mother, Esther Cleveland, did not die until June 1980, so the money spoken of here was not from that source.

45 Full quotation: 29 September 1969 ‘Very nice letter from Honor [Tracy]. Why do I see so little of that girl? Her letter gave me a feeling of having vacancy for a close woman friend. Of course there is eternally Philippa. But my relation with her is so odd. Why “but” – ? I cd certainly do with Honor. Only time and space come stupidly between’.

Murdoch often found communication with loved and trusted friends vexed or stilted – by no means only with Philippa.<sup>46</sup> This frustration is gradually accompanied by a growing understanding and acceptance that her destiny, like that of all mortals, is a solitary one. Philippa, in her turn, joked about talking with her ex-husband that it resembled ‘attempting to speak Urdu’. Both women puzzled at the conundrum that they were close and yet distant. One last journal entry from May 1975: ‘My adventures in other people’s dreams: Philippa writes:<sup>47</sup> You had been giving a lecture or talk and when it was over drew a kind of shawl or blanket over your head to say that you had disappeared. I was disturbed and jealous because at the same time, or later, you were talking to some young girl. I said, “You’re not going away for a month?!” and woke up’.

I want to end by saying more about the life-long affinity between these brilliant and remarkably independent women. They shared a remarkable self-sufficiency. About Murdoch’s secretiveness much has been recorded. In my own friendship with her I accepted without much thought the convention that, while she could catechize me about my life, I was not granted the same privilege in return. Murdoch could unburden herself in letters, but – after her marriage<sup>48</sup> – to very few friends in person.<sup>49</sup> The painter Harry Weinberger made a pact with her: he would disclose details of episodes of his private life on the understanding that she did the same, in equal exchange, and to this she agreed. Similarly Andrew Harvey, to elicit confidences, got her well-oiled beforehand. While both women loved to be the questioner, something MacKinnon might have taught them, Foot also had a secretiveness entirely of her own. Heinz Cassirer (son of the Enlightenment historian Ernst Cassirer) with whom she lodged around 1942, and who was probably in love with her, once called her ‘pathologically discreet’, a phrase Murdoch borrowed for Mrs Tinckham in *Under the Net*. Foot believed that her spidery hand-writing was symptomatic of a love of concealment and privacy. ‘Order of legibility 1 out of 10’ Murdoch used to joke.

Murdoch noted (17 October 1970) that Foot ‘never needs cheering up’, which is another way of saying that she was self-sufficient. This had one origin in the period when, as a child, she was diagnosed with abdominal tuberculosis and suffered the then ‘cure’ of sleeping for a year, winter months included, on an out-of-doors balcony in North Yorkshire. Self-sufficiency was reinforced by her long interest – of which she made no

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46 And perhaps for that reason she learnt somewhat to blur the line between chaste friendship and love: the phrase ‘*amitie amoureuse*’ recurs in her fiction.

47 Probably from the USA – either NYC or Cornell.

48 Among those friends she introduced to Canetti were (from memory) John Simopoulos, Pierre Riches and Julian Chrysostomides.

49 Not everyone enjoyed having to relate with Murdoch on her own terms. Canetti comes to mind here. Nothing touched her deeply, he claims. He thought her coated in ice, or – as Stuart Hampshire put it more charitably – ‘utterly unwounded’. Canetti excelled at what has been called ‘listener’s rape’, where the person doing the confiding is in some sense – whether aware of this or not – having his/her privacy violated, and inner being ‘robbed’. Canetti himself gloats over the confidences and dependency on him alike of Carol Stewart (translator of *Crowds and Power*) and the poet Kathleen Raine. In *Party in the Blitz* (London: Harvill Press, 2005) Canetti reveals that he resented Murdoch’s success, and also resented the way she out-Canetti’s Canetti, listening to him so ‘greedily’ (p.223) while staying hidden herself. He secretly liked talking better than listening and she elicited his Mr Toad-like boastfulness. He says of her: ‘[t]his was the only time in my life that I was with a woman who didn’t seek to hold me to her’ (p.223). ‘I told her everything’, he laments bitterly (p.226). And he saw that she made use of what she stole in her fiction, where three male egomaniacs in successive novels are in some sense inspired by him: mysterious power-broking Mischa Fox in *The Flight from the Enchanter*, the demonic puppet-master Julius King in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, and the rapacious woman-hating tyrant Charles Arrowby in her Booker-winning *The Sea, The Sea*.

secret – in psychotherapy; reinforced too, perhaps, when her marriage failed after 14 years, and she learnt – for the following half-century – to fend for herself. Philippa of course had lovers and could discuss these relationships in a relaxed way. Although she had an upper-class upbringing, riding to hounds, and a Nannie who meant more than her distant mother, it is wrong to see her just as a ‘lady’: her disclosures could be as striking as her reticences and she was always interesting and unexpected. It had been Philippa who in 1944 brought Iris the news of Frank Thompson’s death, and she astonished me at Frank’s grave in Bulgaria in 1998 by opening a bag she was carrying and handing me a single red carnation to place there, as if from Iris.<sup>50</sup> She enjoyed taking centre-stage. She destroyed most of her correspondence and yet prized Murdoch’s letters, keeping them safe and allowing me to make use of them. Having destroyed a suit-case full of Donald MacKinnon’s letters, she found a handful remaining and handed these to me on the day Murdoch died.<sup>51</sup> While she was ready for the fact that she and Murdoch had briefly been lovers to appear in print, she carefully absented herself from the book launch at the National Portrait Gallery in case, I suspect, she were to be cornered or quizzed by the inquisitive.

Philippa liked to perform; Iris only in her writing. Foot was amazed on reading *Under the Net* in 1954 by the sheer wit her friend had hidden from the world and revealed only in writing. She had never, in 12 years of friendship, intuited this side of Iris. (At a Somerville memorial evening for Iris Murdoch with Hermione Lee and me around 1999, Foot herself gave a very funny performance reading from *Under the Net* about Dave Gellman’s extramural classes. Each found the other mysterious and unaccountable.) I recently came across my notes of a memorable evocation she made to me in February 1998: ‘Iris is [like] a cat, head-strong, self-willed, passionate and totally her own woman – [there is] silence at the centre – she didn’t care what you thought or felt about her. People who are so reserved, yet so much there for others, affectionate, generous, a fascinating mix. Yet [there was] somehow something untouchable about her. One never got to the centre. Most people live in the sight of others. Iris, despite her intense involvement with others, did not. She is totally there yet totally for-herself’. Philippa had no sense of knowing Iris. And if Philippa saw Iris as sphinx-like, the compliment was returned. In 1968 she had noted in her journal: 5 October 1968: ‘Writing to Philippa. She is of course the Sphinx. The Sphinx knew every man’s secret, but did not always know that she knew. Hence P’s surprise at the kind of fear she inspires. She knows the answer to a question which no one else can answer for me. But what is the question?’

They resembled one another. Anna in *Under the Net* has ‘a calculated avoidance of self-surrender’ (p.33). Perhaps both had an element of this. It is no accident that Murdoch twice explored their real-life relationship by re-inventing them as sisters: Lisa and Diana in *Bruno’s Dream*, Hilda and Morgan in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. They were in some sense like sisters. Her first published novel has sisters too: Anna Quentin and her film-star sister Sadie. The narrator, Jake, is fascinated and baffled by Anna’s emotional promiscuity which parodies its author’s. Yet at the end of the book Jake surrenders to a form of agnosticism that reminds me vividly – and movingly – of the struggles of Iris Murdoch and Philippa Foot over nearly 60 years to understand one another, and to

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50 I hope to lodge a CD in the Iris Murdoch Archives at Kingston University, of what would have been Frank Thompson’s eightieth birthday celebration that took place in the Bulgarian Embassy in London in the summer of 2000.

51 That day Philippa and I were together taking tea in the state room of Magdalen College (where I was Visiting Fellow). Philippa had visited the previous week, when Iris had kissed her hands; I visited that afternoon when she was unconscious and yellow. I went up to my rooms and rang John Bayley who told me Iris had died. Philippa remarked, distraught, that with each death you lose the voice that says your name in one particular manner. She added, ‘She was the light of my life [...] A good number of people will feel that’.

express their love for each other: 'When does one ever know a human being? Perhaps only after one has realised the impossibility of knowledge and renounced the desire for it and finally ceased to feel even the need for it. But then what one achieves is no longer knowledge, it is simply a kind of co-existence; and this too is one of the guises of love'.<sup>52</sup>

I last visited Philippa in August 2010 when she was bed-ridden and had little time left.<sup>53</sup> She seemed at peace, enquiring repeatedly, 'How are you really?' She minded about the well-being of friends and was not to be fobbed off with shallow or polite replies. She also asked – referring to my *Life of Frank Thompson* – 'How is Frank really?' And then she started to speak, again and again and yet again, of the extraordinariness of Iris. She changed the topic for one brief moment to Iris's St Anne's lover, who nearly destroyed her marriage: how unfathomable that Iris Murdoch should have fallen for someone so (from memory) 'raucous'.<sup>54</sup> But then she moved back to Iris Murdoch herself. Almost her last words to me – and thus mine today – were: 'What an astonishing person Iris was ... Astonishing'.

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52 Iris Murdoch, *Under the Net* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1954), p.238.

53 She asked me what tree I planned to plant in Wales in her memory, and when I said 'a cherry tree' she looked owlish and joked, 'Only one?!'

54 Margaret Hubbard, who died 28 April 2011.



Prize-winning entries to the 'Letter to Iris Murdoch' Competition for Sixth Form Students who participated in the Community Project, *Iris Murdoch and Philippa Foot: An Arc of Friendship* run by the Iris Murdoch Archive Project between May 2012 and July 2013

Teddington  
24 August 2013

Dear Iris Murdoch,

We've never met before. I suppose it's rather difficult to have met considering the expanse of time between us, but I feel as if I know you. I've been part of a project you see, we've been reading the letters you sent to your friend Philippa and visiting all your old haunts: St James's Park, Seaforth Place and Somerville College to name a few. I was trying to figure out how to introduce myself – as you don't really know me – and I thought it might interest you to know that my eyes are blue. They told us when we were looking at the portraits of you that you had a code about eyes. They said that if a character of yours has brown eyes then he is a practical sort and a reliable, salt of the earth type of person that everyone needs in their life, but if he has blue eyes then he is a thinker, a fickle creator and an artist. I always wondered if that was what made Mischa Fox (you remember him don't you – he's from your book *The Flight from the Enchanter*?) so enigmatic and disarming to the victims of his charm; no one could quite decipher his identity with his one practical brown eye and his one thoughtful blue eye.

Anyway, as I was saying, my eyes are blue; I want to be a philosopher you see. I've read some of your philosophy books and my favourite is *The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists*. I think that people with blue eyes are just the kind of people that your beloved Plato spurned; they are exactly the kind of people who create things intended to deceive the onlooker. Although Plato claims it's sacrilegious and immoral to indulge in imitation, I think both you and I share a love of it. After I learnt all about you through the project, I pored over the thirty three portraits of you on the National Portrait Gallery website and I sat and stared at you and imagined what I'd tell you about the twenty-first century.

You must feel as though I'm a terrible peeping-tom; peering through the chink in the curtains of your public persona, at your letters to Philippa. That's how I know that you find it odd that a person, such as me, can obsess over you and think about you and write to you without you ever knowing. It's also how I know that you're a bit afraid of the twenty-first century and what the endless march of progress will bring. It's nothing to be afraid of though Iris, honestly it's not. We still read all the greats and Wittgenstein and Heidegger and all their chums continue to prove a bit of a head sore for philosophy students. You're one of the greats too now, although whether you were born great, achieved greatness or had it simply thrust upon you is not entirely clear. I think you snatched it by rushing in to fill the intellectual vacuum that the men's absence created during the war and once you made it there you wouldn't move for anybody.

That's one thing our endless march of progress hasn't resolved. War. It's so easy to forget now though; a distant thing that happens to other people. I bet you'd have had something to say about that and quite a bit to say about modern ethics and religion. I never really understood what you meant by having a religion without a God until I saw Somerville's chapel. We went as a big group, all the girls that had been involved in the project; all the nosey parkers that had been reading your letters. I can understand why you loved it there, the food for one thing was marvellous but what sticks out most in my mind was that great white blank chapel. It was a nice, useful space with a piano for the music students to practise and was very well lit. I knew the minute I saw it that you'd have loved it.

But for all the things that haven't changed, there are just as many things that are starkly different to your world. For a start, and I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad news, Iris, there is the internet. It's like a drug that people can't bear to be without, but as drugs go it is quite a useful one. Think of it a bit like penicillin if it helps. It has rather been the death of the Royal Mail I'm afraid, though why use snail mail when at the slightest twitch of a finger you can send a message to a friend immediately? I can hear your disapproval at my having typed this rather than write it and I am sorry but Iris, times do change. It does save such a great amount of time to keep up to date with such things and I feel sure that you of all people would understand that. They told us that you would spend hours and hours attending to your correspondence and just think of the extra time you could save with a little help from social networking!

On the subject of keeping up to date, I feel as if I ought to give you a quick run-down of the current affairs. We are currently under a coalition government and the current economic climate is not so very different from the one you recall in your letters – although we are yet to suffer widespread power cuts. Although you'll be disappointed to hear that Communism has not yet taken seed in Britain, it does appear to be flourishing in China, which appears to be just about the only world power that is not suffering this Global Depression.

A little closer to home still, St James's Park is flourishing although after our recent spell of tropical weather the poor park keepers seem to be losing their on-going battle to keep the grass green. By contrast, the squirrel population seems to be thriving; not least of all due to the huge number of peanuts they have been fed in your name by the people who have taken part in the project.

Iris, I shall close by asking your forgiveness for prying into your life and also by extending a hand of friendship, as you did to Philippa all those years ago. Of all the things that have changed and all the things I will see change in my lifetime, the one thing that will always be constant is friendship. That's possibly the most important lesson I've learnt through the project; although you wrote your letters to your friend in an inky fountain pen and I chat to mine over Facebook (it's a website on the internet that enjoys considerable popularity particularly amongst people of my generation) the phenomenon of friendship itself is unchanging, just as true friends are immovable in their love for one another.

Gosh that's quite an aphorism – take that, Heraclitus!

Your blue-eyed friend,

Susy

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Dear Iris Murdoch,

After taking part in the *Iris Murdoch and Philippa Foot: An Arc of Friendship* project I feel like I know almost everything there is to know about you, yet as you do not know anything about me, it seems logical to begin by telling you a little about myself. I could tell you that I am in sixth form at the moment, that I was born in Slough and that my father is from Iraq. But does that really tell you anything about my *identity*? A word that translates to most, as basic information, sometimes etched into a card; simple and tedious.

Chuck Palahniuk, author of *Choke* provides a clear description of the way the word *identity* is manipulated: 'We can spend our lives letting the world tell us who we are. Sane or insane. Saints or sex addicts. Heroes or victims. Letting history tell us how good or bad we are. Letting our past decide our future. Or we can decide for ourselves. And maybe it's our job to invent something better'.<sup>1</sup> So to really enlighten you as to my *identity* would be impossible; as my identity is shaped by a compilation of personal experiences, beliefs and opinions; a description of my identity would be ruined by the company of the necessary pigeonholing. Yet perhaps over the course of this letter, by sharing some of the issues I care about most with you (and which I understand to be important to you too), you will feel like you have captured an understanding of the kind of person I am, without labels attached. Likewise, in an article I wrote earlier this year, I chose to describe you using a visual image to illustrate your personality, rather than an endless list of adjectives; 'a mysterious, brooding, strong woman; brow furrowed looking straight at the camera'. The reason being that a visual image is more universal; it is something everyone can picture in the same way without attaching prior assumptions as we do with words, and to me, this image provides an encapsulating representation of *Iris Murdoch*. Despite identity being unique to every individual, an aspect of society is involved too. To quote Palahniuk again, 'I am a combined effort of everyone I've ever known'.<sup>2</sup> These shared aspects of identity link people and places together. Your connection with Oxford for instance is partly a result of a connection with the people there; a connection so rooted in your identity that you were even cremated in that city.

The attachment you have for London correlates with your love for detail in both people and objects. Detail being something that London thrives on, as one of the busiest and most diverse capitals in the world, a city that lives and breathes. A fascinating example of your use of detail is in *The Sandcastle* in the case of Miss Carter's car: 'the Riley lurched over madly towards the river. Mor saw it rise above him like a rearing animal'.<sup>3</sup> The suspense in this moment is assisted by the built up image the reader has of the Riley. The amount of detailed description devoted to this material object has led to the car almost becoming a living character in the novel. It is this recreation of the world around us; the objects, people and feelings it contains, that has kept people reading books for so long. Novels can put into words an emotion that you have never been able to describe, reconstruct a place that you never thought you would see again or just save you from feeling like you are alone in experiencing something new.

The other day, while traveling through one of London's largest arteries on a Central Line train, I had an experience that demonstrated the magic books can weave into life. It is common knowledge that during the London Underground rush-hour, no matter how densely packed your carriage is and how close you end up to another

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1 Chuck Palahniuk, *Choke* (London: W.W.Norton, 1996), Kindle Edition.

2 Chuck Palahniuk, *Invisible Monsters* (London: W.W.Norton, 1999), Kindle Edition.

3 Iris Murdoch, *The Sandcastle* (1957); (London: Vintage, 2003), p.98.

Londoner, no one will say a word to another. What made my stuffy, silent carriage that afternoon different to any other on a normal day was the simple presence of a scruffy Penguin edition of your novel *The Sandcastle*. As I was quietly reading a gust of fortunate, suffocating wind found its way through the carriage window. The next thing I knew, the first few pages of my book were flying around the carriage, and my fellow passengers who were, only moments ago, faceless, detached machines, were now crawling around the carriage all united in their mission to save my lost pages. All of them ignored my embarrassed muttering of 'Oh don't worry, I've read those pages..' but what else do you say in a situation like that?

The magic the book had worked came to light when everyone had handed back the pages and sat back down; the empty vacuum between the seats had disappeared and Londoners had now taken on a new posture; relaxed and open. The hint of a smile was on most of their faces from the experience we'd all just shared. The book had managed to change the whole atmosphere of the carriage in a matter of seconds. What struck me most was the common value all these people had shared; that books are something to be treasured. It is a value that has kept writers such as Tolstoy, Woolf and Austen alive for centuries.

Today, in the post-modern era, the power of the novel is something that is being more scrutinised than ever. There is a new focus on form, previously only appreciated in poetry. With novels being written backwards, written as sonnets, screenplay novels and alternative ending novels, twenty-first century writers are on the search for something reinvented. The timeless question that inevitably crops up now is whether it is actually possible to create a story that is completely fresh and new. Or do writers simply recycle the novels of the past?

In my opinion the best novels are those which reflect human nature as accurately as possible and it is clear that human nature has not changed much over the centuries, meaning that neither has this element of novels. This is what makes your novels so special; that you are able to describe meticulous details of human nature with a manner of great importance. One of my favourite moments in *The Sandcastle* is when Mor questions himself about why he does not tell his wife the whole truth about where he is one evening: 'he hadn't even reflected about it, he had told the lie immediately, without even thinking. Why?'<sup>4</sup> The expression of guilt here is so effective because of the simple and honest way this most complex of emotions has been captured.

The combination of authentic human emotions and unusual situations produce the best kind of novel, containing the perfect composition of old and new. This balance can be traced all the way back to ancient Rome with texts like *The Odyssey* which also maintain this equilibrium using a balance of touching, overtly human moments and exciting new adventure.

Another aspect of culture today that is both more prominent and debated is art. Although modern art appears to be less immaculate than the work of those from the past such as Rossetti or Degas, it still captures just the same emotions or experiences. A condemnation being applied to both art and literature is that we lost the last slither of higher culture somewhere in the late twentieth century. But similarly to art, novels still carry the same essential messages they did in the past. The resemblance between Katniss Everdeen of the modern series *The Hunger Games* and *Jane Eyre* for example is incredible, as the independent, determined character makes just as much impact today as she did more than one hundred years ago, illustrating the timelessness of novels.

There are endless examples of works of literature, art and theories being revived from the past, given new life and being slotted into the modern day. Something which is catalysing this change is the movement back towards theology, caused partly, by social networking sites and the media overwhelming us with information about the rapidly

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<sup>4</sup> Iris Murdoch, *The Sandcastle*, p.85.



changing position of the world. This move back to theology has opened up people's minds to new ideas, particularly concerning ethics and politics. It seems as though people are looking at ethics in a new light, which you, Iris, were evidently concerned with a long time ago, as your books have such a strong focus on philosophy. You manage to capture the heart of so many issues such as goodness, moral improvement and the concept of 'the self' while always maintaining a non-judgemental and objective tone.

As for a discussion of the weather, a superior and essential part of any letter, the rain in London is as unpredictable as ever and seems even more determined to interrupt the summer sunshine than usual. But at least the snowdrops in St James's Park will be happy.

Yours Sincerely,

Sukaina Kadhum

## Baggy Monsters Digest the 1980s: The Realism of the Later Iris Murdoch

I am going to assume that Iris Murdoch would on the whole have been pleased rather than vexed by the association of her work with the term ‘baggy monsters’ – Henry James’s memorable coinage in connection with Tolstoy.<sup>1</sup> For one thing, it invites us to link Murdoch with what she herself would regard as the golden age of the novel; at any rate, she thinks ‘the most obvious difference between nineteenth-century and twentieth-century novels is that the nineteenth-century ones are better’.<sup>2</sup> And for another it seems to license a rather exciting feast of literary misrule – a celebration of the kind of creativity for which, again, Murdoch speaks out when she says in a review of (the English text of) Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*: ‘It is doubtless the case that writers of brief and meticulous articles will always look askance at writers of large, unrigorous, emotional volumes; but the latter, for better or worse, have the last word’.<sup>3</sup>

That was in 1957. Fast forward a quarter of a century, and having put the constraints of professional (analytical) philosophy well behind her, Murdoch is at the height of her powers as a creator of baggy, super-sized fiction. She is also, of course, freshly launched upon the decade-long project of converting her 1982 Gifford lectures into the philosophical ‘baggy monster’ that is *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, though I cannot hope to take the measure of that work in the present discussion. Instead I will confine myself to the handful of massive novels she published in the 1980s, from *Nuns and Soldiers* to *The Message to the Planet*, and will ask: in what way can we think of this body of writing as paying homage to Murdoch’s heroic nineteenth-century predecessors, and how effectively does it do so?

An obvious preliminary task is to clarify what that admiration entails – what sort of standard or ideal it sets before the practising writer. Some orientation is provided here, appropriately enough given Murdoch’s reverence for Plato, by the idea of *realism*. The interviews in Gillian Dooley’s collection drive home the authority of this idea for Murdoch not just as a philosopher but as a novelist also: ‘I aim at being an ordinary writer’, she says, ‘a realistic writer in the tradition of the English novel’; ‘a realistic novelist writing in the English tradition and the Russian tradition and the tradition of Proust’.<sup>4</sup> Even where there is an element of fantasy, this should be organically connected with the realist quality of the work, not a distinct, detachable extra; indeed, even where the label ‘realistic’ seems scarcely to apply at all, there must still be a certain *truthfulness* at work, ‘an intelligent just judgement in the portrayal of the story’.<sup>5</sup>

This is instructive so far as it goes. But then it is not obvious, either, what constitutes a ‘realistic’ mode of story-telling. As Bran Nicol reminds us in his contribution to *Iris*

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1 See *Leo Tolstoy: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Henry Gifford (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p.104.

2 Iris Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. by Peter J. Conradi (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997), p.221, hereafter *EM*.

3 *Ibid.*, p.150.

4 *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction: Conversations with Iris Murdoch*, ed. by Gillian Dooley (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), pp.54, 81; compare also p.72.

5 *Ibid.*, pp.7, 175.

*Murdoch and Morality*, different styles of writing can seem to have what it takes to capture the truth of individual experience at this or that historical moment.<sup>6</sup> So is there anything like a timeless, or classic, programme of fictional realism in relation to which we can consider the achievement of Murdoch's 'baggy monsters'?

For some light on this question, I turned to Pam Morris's overview of the topic for literature students, and was struck in particular by her statement that the artistic impulse to (literary) realism lies in an 'absorbed, unfastidious connoisseurship towards the materiality of existence [...] a complex, ambivalent responsiveness towards, rather than repulsion from, the tangible stuff of reality'.<sup>7</sup> While these formulations perhaps home in rather too precisely (for our purposes) on the 'material' and 'tangible', the idea of 'absorbed, unfastidious connoisseurship' with regard to the human scene *in general* – which of course contains enough and to spare of 'material' moments – seems highly suggestive in relation to Murdoch, even though she is not mentioned in Morris's book. Certainly these words evoke the high value Murdoch herself sets upon imaginative *inclusiveness* and *capaciousness* (the noble face of the 'baggy', so to speak). They recall, for example, her suggested amendment to Kant's doctrine of the sublime (also dating from the 1950s, the period when her 'writerly' ideology seems to crystallize) – namely that that particular mode of consciousness is best located in the encounter, not with wild nature, but with the unsurveyable *human* 'other', which itself constitutes a 'vast and varied reality outside ourselves'.<sup>8</sup> Sheer size, plus the resulting complexity, seems to be necessary to the fully-fledged artistic record of this encounter. Thus what Murdoch finds in the great nineteenth-century novels is 'a plurality of persons more or less naturalistically presented in a *large* social scene, and representing mutually independent centres of significance which are those of real individuals'.<sup>9</sup> The demands of a narrative unfolding against a 'large social scene', and incorporating characters who may figure as neither admirable nor congenial but who are to be accepted in a spirit of 'unfastidious' respect for their separate, self-moving life – these are the imperatives to which we can picture Murdoch's long novels of the 1980s as responding.

And turning to the word 'absorbed' – there is something appealingly Murdochian in this part of Morris's formula too: the realistic writer is one who *effaces* himself or herself through the presentation of a fictional world; someone caught up in the spectacle of their own evolving creation, but also someone 'absorbed' *into* it in proportion to the success of their artistic effort, so that their own personality recedes into invisibility. Thus Shakespeare is 'the most invisible of writers'; George Eliot, like Tolstoy, displays 'that *godlike* capacity for so respecting and loving [her] characters as to make them exist as free and separate beings', not mere thinly disguised replicas of their author; for 'art is not an expression of personality, it is a question rather of continually expelling oneself from the matter in hand'.<sup>10</sup>

Remarks like these convey something of the ascetic side of Murdoch's thought, as applied to artistic, or in particular literary, endeavour; they capture the way in which

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6 See Bran Nicol, 'Murdoch's Mannered Realism: Metafiction, Morality and the Post-War Novel' in Anne Rowe and Avril Horner (eds.), *Iris Murdoch and Morality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). Murdoch makes the point herself at *EM*, p.244. And for some analogous reflections on painting and sculpture, see Linda Nochlin, *Realism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), ch.1; thus at p.14: 'Realism [meaning the historically specific, nineteenth-century movement of that name in the figurative arts, as compared with what preceded it] was no more a mere mirror of reality than any other style and its relation *qua* style to phenomenal data [...] is as complex and difficult as that of Romanticism, the baroque or Mannerism'.

7 Pam Morris, *Realism* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.23.

8 *EM*, p.282.

9 *Ibid.*, p.271 (emphasis added).

10 *Ibid.*, pp.275, 276, 283 (emphasis added).

art, like religion, is ‘about the destruction of the personality’.<sup>11</sup> However, as we know, the artist as pictured by Murdoch is not just another ‘saint’: he or she is also a maker or form-giver, and to this end material is needed, and the material will ideally be supplied by a broad, ‘unfastidious’ embrace of social experience. So novelists cannot simply devote themselves to a practice of ascetic self-discipline, but should also relish the buoyancy and density of the life they undertake to mirror. The discipline proper to the artwork is not at variance with a robust human curiosity: what it calls for is the channelling of that curiosity into an exercise of ‘imagination’ as distinct from (self-indulgent) ‘fantasy’.<sup>12</sup>

Let us retrace our steps and focus once again on the general question: what does it take for a work of fiction to qualify as ‘realistic’? Is it a matter of content, of style, or somehow of both? The answer supplied by Henry James – one of the classic novelists whom Murdoch singles out for praise<sup>13</sup> – is that it is neither of these things, but rather a measure of artistic *success*, irrespective of method. He argues in his 1888 essay ‘The Art of Fiction’ that realism is not a strategic choice or an expression of individual taste, but a goal internal to the novel form as such. In fact, the *only reason for the existence* of a novel is the attempt to ‘represent life’. ‘A novel’, James continues, ‘is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life: that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression [...] the air of reality (solidity of specification) seems to me to be the supreme virtue of a novel – the merit on which all its other merits [...] helplessly and submissively depend. If it be not there they are all as nothing, and if these be there, they owe their effect to the success with which the author has produced the illusion of life’.<sup>14</sup> It would follow from this view that to call a novel ‘realistic’ is not to assign it to any determinate stylistic category but to commend it for having ‘life’, a quality that can supervene on any number of distinct modes of narrative.

In view of her declared admiration, we might reasonably ask how Murdoch’s ‘baggy monsters’ fare when measured by James’s yardstick. ‘Solidity of specification’ is a natural term to apply to what Murdoch is after, say, with her astonishingly detailed account of the public baths at Ennistone (in *The Philosopher’s Pupil*), or of the layout and regime of ‘Bellmain’ (in *The Message to the Planet*), or the sprawling extended family of Guy Openshaw (in *Nuns and Soldiers*) – or, of course, of the various coast-lines, cliffs, rocks and shingly beaches so dear to her inward eye. (Jill Paton Walsh gives an excellent example from middle-period Murdoch in her lecture, reprinted in the *Iris Murdoch Review*, where she quotes the euphoric scene-setting description of Rupert and Hilda Foster’s back garden at the beginning of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*.)<sup>15</sup> How effectively, then, do Murdoch’s late novels ‘produce the illusion of life’? This is a question to which I find it surprisingly hard to return a straight answer – though I suppose it is that very difficulty which makes the topic an attractive one for enquiry.

To anticipate my conclusion in rough-and-ready terms: it seems to me that the novels in question are much more resolutely mimetic, more ‘solidly specified’, in some respects than others. The areas of maximum ‘solidity’, I believe, are those of personal appearance or physiognomy, and of physical setting in general: the natural environment (sea-coasts, river-banks, meadows, overgrown places) and its flora and fauna; and the human, or social, environment in so far as this falls under the heading of ‘real estate’ – houses, gardens, large institutions. I don’t mean to suggest that the market value of

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11 Compare *Nuns and Soldiers* (1980); (London: Vintage, 2001), p.467.

12 *EM*, p.255.

13 See Dooley, *op. cit.*, especially pp.80, 94, 226.

14 Henry James, *The Art of Fiction and Other Essays* (1884); (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), pp.5, 8, 12.

15 The *Iris Murdoch Review*, Vol.1, no.3. (2011), pp.16-28.

such locations is of any special interest to Murdoch. It is rather that the action of her novels, early or late, often seems to draw vitality from the evocation of a very precisely visualized material space in which it unfolds, especially – though not only – where her characters are pitted directly against hostile natural forces or inanimate objects: the freezing Thames mud that kills Kitty Jopling in *A Word Child*, or the school tower climbed by teenager Donald Mor in *The Sandcastle*. Murdoch's account of such settings naturally covers matters with a direct bearing on the experience of the relevant characters; but they are rich, too, in what John McDowell has called 'pointless knowable detail'<sup>16</sup> – where 'pointless' is not a pejorative term, but rather indicates that the detail is of a kind that one would register in a spirit of disinterested curiosity, not because anything turned upon it. Nothing turns, for example, on the particular type of roses the Fosters have in their back garden ('Albertine', 'Little White Pet'), but the presence of these names tells us something significant about the company in which we find ourselves<sup>17</sup> – namely, that of a narrator who is not content just to say 'roses' but cares more precisely about the appearance of her imaginary garden walls. These, after all, are real strains of rose which we can look up in a reference book if we choose.

All dedicated readers of Murdoch will be aware by now of the *ethics of attention* that informs her writing: an approach captured in the statement that 'what we require is a renewed sense of the difficulty and complexity of the moral life and the opacity of persons [...] We need a new vocabulary of attention'.<sup>18</sup> And there is no reason why attention to the varieties of climbing rose in a fictional garden should not serve as an exemplar or promissory note with respect to the treatment of the moral life. However, though the species in our gardens are (as Marx pointed out<sup>19</sup>) not untouched by historical processes, the way we ourselves – that is, human beings generally – are inserted into history presents the novelist with a more complicated array of decisions. To what extent, and how, will any given work of fiction undertake to represent its characters as occupying a specific moment in the unfolding of a common social world? This question arises with some force for writers in the 'historical novel' genre, and one can sometimes feel that such writers are working a little too hard to be helpful. But even in the case of fiction set in its own present day, like nearly all of Murdoch's, there are important choices to be made as to how a present-day 'feel' will be communicated to the narrative. And of course this can be done in quite a spare and economical fashion. In James's *The Golden Bowl*, for example, we know we are in a world of steamships and telegrams, a world in which young women can breeze unaccompanied from land to land in a neat little hat and a pair of tan shoes,<sup>20</sup> and where an Italian 'prince' is no longer exempt from money troubles; yet there is nothing about burning issues of the day, social movements, or the like. Those topics occur in other novels which undertake to convey an 'impression of life' specifically in the vicinity of a social movement (like *The Bostonians* or *The Princess Casamassima*), but they are not indispensable to the

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16 John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), p.119.

17 I am thinking here of Wayne C. Booth's conception of reading as the imaginative entertainment of 'company', with the opening this creates for an 'ethical' mode of criticism: 'Each work of art or artifice, even the simplest wordless melody, determines to some degree how at least this moment will be lived. The quality of our life in the moment of our "listening" is not what it would have been if we had not listened' (*The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988], p.17.

18 'Against Dryness', in *EM*, p.293.

19 The cherry tree is not simply part of nature, he says in *The German Ideology* in the course of criticizing Feuerbach, but was imported commercially a few hundred years ago.

20 Henry James, *The Golden Bowl* (1904); (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p.71 (description of Charlotte Stant).

representation of present-day life as such. Attentiveness to the detail of current social reality, and openness to an intense personal perception of that reality, do not necessarily – though they *may* – find expression in writing that ticks the ‘current events’ box.

Murdoch’s 1980s novels follow the precedent set by James’s own ‘baggy monsters’ in that they make a variety of different choices on this score. Taken as a group, they touch on a wide range of issues of an unsettling or challenging nature: Marxism and militant socialist politics, the future of democracy and of religion, the fate of the world, terrorism, women’s liberation, abortion, the sex industry, women priests, ethnic diversity, illegal drugs, and even the nitty-gritty of unsatisfactory levels of foreign-language teaching in the state school system. But the operative words here are ‘touch on’; and the touch is in the main a very light one. Thus, the life-crisis of Edward Baltram in *The Good Apprentice*, which motivates the main action of the novel, is brought on by the accidental death of Edward’s friend Mark Wilsden in the course (presumably) of a bad LSD trip (the ‘magisterial drug which transports its initiates to heaven or to hell’),<sup>21</sup> and drugs for legal psychotherapeutic use, as well as of the snake-oil variety, also occur as a topic of discussion;<sup>22</sup> but the book belongs principally to the domain of ‘myth’, for which the indeterminate, lonely setting of ‘Seegard’ provides an appropriate backdrop: the action is not located with any firmness in present-day London (despite the mention of ‘Camden Town’, ‘Fulham’, ‘Fitzroy Square’<sup>23</sup>), or in any other part of Britain. Broadly the same account can, I think, be given of *The Message to the Planet*, where again we have a quasi-photographic realism in the description of ‘Bellmain’<sup>24</sup> and other physical settings, supported at one point by a generous helping of imaginary antiquarian detail<sup>25</sup> – but where the centre of interest is a certain relatively timeless structure of human relationships, and the micro-environment of Britain in the 1980s is of very minor relevance.

The baggiest of all Murdochian monsters is undoubtedly *The Philosopher’s Pupil*, where, as already noted, we have amazing ‘solidity of specification’ with regard to local history, topography and prosopography. But here, too, it is the narrative archetypes brought into play – the doomed devotion of pupil to ‘master’, the mad but fortuitously successful match-making project of John Robert Rozanov – that sweep one along, not the evocation of a recognizable present-day setting; and this despite the painstaking inclusion of topical references to such matters as women’s liberation, Eurocommunism, and an Asian community centre.

Still limiting ourselves to her 1980s output, Murdoch’s most sustained attempts to function as a ‘realistic writer in the tradition of the English novel’ therefore seem to me to be *Nuns and Soldiers* and – above all – *The Book and the Brotherhood*. The latter stands out as the only one of her novels (apart from *The Red and the Green*, which is set in a fairly remote past, beyond living memory for most readers) to engage at all closely with politics; the only one to offer an imaginative reconstruction of life as a highly educated and politically engaged UK citizen in Murdoch’s own time (or, more exactly, the time of someone about half a generation younger). One might argue that the loudly oppositional presence of Daisy Barrett in *Nuns and Soldiers* offers a kind of external perspective – however crude and abstract – on the bourgeois, metropolitan world of that novel, thus impeding any tendency to spin off into out-and-out ‘myth’,

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21 Iris Murdoch, *The Good Apprentice* (1985); (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p.1.

22 Ibid., pp.35, 187.

23 Ibid., pp.1, 18, 56.

24 Iris Murdoch, *The Message to the Planet* (1989); (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p.216.

25 Ibid., pp.240-1.

and helping to maintain the novel as a 'house fit for free characters to live in'.<sup>26</sup> But in *The Book and the Brotherhood* we have the much more ambitious construction of an entire cast of half a dozen central figures who are introduced to us in terms of their once common, though eventually divergent, political worldview. They are far from being reducible to that youthful political moment, but it is in varying degrees formative for all of them, and it is essential to the plot.

And we also have a show of determination by Murdoch to make these central characters engage in strenuous political debate, exchanging amongst themselves what their author clearly takes to be the ideas that would force themselves upon a reflective person living through the 1980s (since they correspond at many points to lines of thought she herself pursues in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*), but ideas which are nevertheless convincingly represented as those of 'real individuals' within the world of the novel: that is, we are not being subjected here to a *mere* bit of didactic writing with some proper names attached as flags of convenience. The most striking episodes of this kind occur at a moment of crisis in relations between the 'brotherhood' of the title – a group of old friends who were at Oxford together in the 1950s – and the author of the putative 'book', another former Oxford contemporary by the name of Crimond, whom they have decided some time ago to support financially while he writes a grand work of Marxist, or quasi-Marxist, theory. The crisis has been long in preparation:

Years passed during which Crimond continued to receive a salary which set him free to indulge in political activity which his 'supporters' increasingly disapproved of, and to write, or pretend to write, a book which, if it ever appeared, must exert a dangerous and pernicious influence. It became more difficult to feel that this was simply a matter of keeping a promise, and began to be thought of as a ridiculous, irrational, intolerable situation about which *something must be done*.<sup>27</sup>

However, it flares up and provokes some collective will to action after Crimond reactivates an old affair with Jean, the wife of one of the 'brothers'. Murdoch gives us a detailed account of the conversations in which another member of the group, Gerard, is deputed to meet Crimond and demand a progress report, and to clarify the content of his work; and again of the actual meeting, where Gerard tries to establish whether Crimond is indeed writing something that will be anathema to the 'supporters', as the middle-aged political centrists they now are.

These conversations contain some of Murdoch's best efforts to show us 'free characters' in action. That the characters' contrasting attitudes emerge partly through what they each have to say about the absent Crimond is true to life and takes nothing away from the artfulness with which these scenes are composed. Is Crimond a believer in violence, someone who regards morality as a 'disease to be got over', an advocate of terrorism? What is a 'terrorist', anyway? (p.220) Is their old friend a sinister conspirator, or on the other hand a lone scholar and a romantic or utopian thinker? If he is a utopian thinker, is that a mitigating circumstance or just the opposite? Alternatively, is he something 'new and awful' (p.225), the forerunner of a post-democratic, post-individualist society congenial to his own underlying puritanism? Pages like these bring an impressive 'solidity of specification' to the portrayal of a group of people who have lived and suffered and grown apart, and yet who still care intensely about abstract ideas and about each other.

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<sup>26</sup> See *EM*, p.286.

<sup>27</sup> Iris Murdoch, *The Book and the Brotherhood* (1987); (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988), p.101; emphasis in original, hereafter *BB*.

Does Crimond deserve a hearing, or should the group be trying to engineer a decisive break? One member, Jenkin, is open to the idea of Crimond as a genuine radical thinker capable of salvaging something of value from the Marxist tradition, and wants to re-establish 'communication' with him (p.242); Gerard is sceptical, and reacts badly to the charge that he is withdrawing into a social cocoon and disclaiming responsibility for the future ('Jenkin, you make me sick!' [p.244]). But we cannot dismiss Jenkin as a mere sentimental dreamer, since he is singled out for us early on as a classic 'good' character in Murdochian terms – one who 'doesn't need to get anywhere', who 'walks the path' and 'exists where he is' (p.22). If such a person is interested in the 'battle front [...] where religion and Marxism touch' (p.13), then perhaps we should be too.

And the meeting between Gerard and Crimond, when it duly takes place (pp.286-300), is a still more remarkable 'flaying of Marsyas' from the point of view of Murdoch the creator. Certainly it is Crimond who is able to speak with dignity and poise, while the sympathetic liberal-humanist Gerard flounders awkwardly through a series or more or less foolish queries about the book; Crimond occasionally declines to answer, but his performance overall is succinct and lucid, and he continues to insist on the originality and encyclopaedic ambition of his work in progress. 'You've felt superior all your life', Murdoch allows Crimond to tell Gerard, who has just declared an interest in the neo-Platonist philosopher Plotinus: 'You think you're saved by the Idea of the Good just because you know about it. The planet goes down in flames but you and your friends feel secure' (p.294). Crimond also wrong-foots Gerard by demonstrating an eerily sharp memory of some of their long-past conversations. Gradually, though, the two men begin to square up to one another over the proper way for humanity to face the future. Crimond says various apocalyptic things ('I am not a utopian [...] It's the wasteland next [...] Even if we don't blow ourselves up, the future will be, by your nice standards, terrible. There will be a crisis of authority, of sovereignty, technology will rule because it will have to rule [...] The bourgeois individual won't survive this tornado' [pp.276-7].) Gerard nevertheless draws him into positing 'a new consciousness, a new capacity for happiness, a kind of happiness the human race hasn't yet dreamt of', and into claiming that '[t]he utopian impulse is essential, one must keep faith with the idea that a good society is possible'; whereupon he (Gerard) replies with what we now know to be the view of Murdoch herself, influenced by Simone Weil, that '[t]here is no good society [...] society can't be perfected, the best we can hope for is what we've achieved now' – meaning western parliamentary democracy, human rights, and a little 'economic tinkering' (pp.298-9) (as Crimond scornfully comments). The discussion stutters to an inconclusive halt, Crimond departs unbowed, and a door is thus held open for Gerard's eventual verdict that the finished book (which is in his hands by the end of the novel) is 'wonderful', 'brilliant', 'all we hoped' – though also 'all we feared, later on' (pp.556, 558). Gerard still disagrees with Crimond's ideas, but is now fired by the prospect of devoting his life to writing a refutation.

We must respect the imaginative self-discipline, the refusal of 'consolation', that enables Murdoch to say of Crimond's *magnum opus* through her ideological kinsman Gerard: 'of course ... I'm right, and he's wrong – but my rightness – needs to be changed – shaken, uprooted, replanted, enlightened' (p.560). The courage displayed in this Socratic attitude is brought into sharp focus by contrast with the brusquely dismissive words of another supporter, Rose, who is Gerard's interlocutor in this discussion: 'You keep praising this book, but you say it's all wrong! If it's Marxism it must be [...] I'm not going to read it! I think it's a detestable book, I wish it didn't exist' (p.564) – echoing the dogmatism of a character such as Anytus in Plato's *Meno*, who tells Socrates he is sure the sophists are a bunch of scoundrels, even though he has had no contact with



them.<sup>28</sup> Rose's view is admittedly not a straightforward instance of political commentary, since her judgement is skewed by unrequited love for Gerard and resentment of his new-found intellectual enthusiasm; this is Murdoch implicitly falling into line with the Beauvoirian conviction that (for historic and structural reasons), 'yes, women today are inferior'. But still, to build a 'happy ending' on the advent of an imaginary work of cultural critique which is at once obnoxious and too brilliant to ignore – this surely represents a brave attempt to communicate a 'personal, direct impression of life' in (what may well prove to be) the turbulent latter days of liberal democracy. Brave, and even (arguably) 'unfastidious', since Crimond serves as a mouthpiece for some chillingly prophetic remarks which Murdoch is under no compulsion to include; presumably she does so because she herself takes them seriously and thinks Crimond, not Gerard, is the kind of person who could entertain them. 'Perhaps you don't mind the idea of a world without books?' 'It's inevitable, it must be understood, it must be embraced, even loved [...] [My book] will perish with the rest. Plato, Shakespeare, Hegel, they'll all burn, and I shall burn too'.<sup>29</sup> Compare the *Guardian*, 5 December 2011: 'Almost 4 million children in Britain – one in three – do not own a book, a poll has found ... the proportion had risen from one in 10 in 2005'.

And yet ... these characters do not inhabit a world of specific historical events. They read newspapers (notably *The Times*),<sup>30</sup> but they do not react in the familiar, breakfast-table conversational mode to what they find there – no one says 'Margaret Thatcher makes me sick' or 'Neil Kinnock makes me sick'. Well, no doubt we can dispense with that particular mode of social realism, but what about the key political moments in the life of Crimond and his generation? If we can relevantly be told about the changing views and party affiliations of the 'brotherhood' members (communism, Trotskyism, pacifism, the Labour Party, 'William Morris Merry England socialism' [p.97]), we might also expect to hear them reminiscing or shuddering or challenging one another over some of the more obvious talking-points of their common civic experience. Gerard, Crimond and the rest – what did they make of 1956 (the Soviet invasion of Hungary)? Of the Cuba crisis and of first-wave, or indeed second-wave, CND? Of the Vietnam war and of 1968 (the May events in Paris, the invasion of Czechoslovakia)? Of 1979 (the election of Thatcher)? The poll tax, the Falklands, the miners' strike?<sup>31</sup> Are some of them now Conservative voters, and if so, since when?

These questions may appear impertinent, and may remind us of James's wise warning against issuing any positive prescription about *how* to be 'interesting', how to convey an 'impression of life', what to include. Why shouldn't there be fiction without 'adventure', asks James, dissenting from the view of another critic – 'why without adventure, more than without matrimony, or celibacy, or parturition, or hydropathy, or Jansenism?'<sup>32</sup> Similarly, a novel about Britain in the 1980s does not have to include the miners' strike:

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28 *Meno* 92bc.

29 *BB*, p.294. There may conceivably be an echo here of Jacques Derrida's idea of the 'end of the book' in *Of Grammatology* (first published in French 1967), though we had better not make too much of this, since as Tony Milligan points out 'Derrida uses the "book" in a [theoretically loaded] way that contrasts with the "text" [...] [He] was *not* announcing the end of inscription, printing or binding in handy portable volumes' ('Murdoch and Derrida: Holding Hands under the Table', in Anne Rowe and Avril Horner [eds.], *Iris Murdoch: Texts and Contexts* [Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012], pp.81-2; emphasis in original).

30 I was wrong to say in my *Iris Murdoch, Gender and Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2011) that no paper other than *The Times* is mentioned in *BB*: Jenkin and a colleague confer at one point over a letter to the *Guardian*.

31 Jenkin asks Crimond at the eventual round-table discussion for his thoughts on 'trade union reform I mean making them more democratic' (*BB*, p.333), but that is as close as we get.

32 'The Art of Fiction', p.19.

'art is essentially selection', as James also says.<sup>33</sup> But then he goes on to add that 'it is a selection whose main care is to be typical, to be inclusive'. Murdoch evidently shares this ideal – hence the evolution of the baggy monster – yet alongside the wish to capture a social reality that includes political debate and conflict, we see an impulse to distance that reality by purging it of contingent, datable historical items (even though these are what politically minded people constantly talk about) and quarrying it for abstraction and generality, as if for the purposes of a philosophical seminar. In this respect, then, 'solidity of specification' is just what we do *not* have in a novel like *The Book and the Brotherhood*: we have an impression of 1980s life in the perspective of some individuals who at least know what it is to picture oneself as 'living the history of one's time',<sup>34</sup> yet the impression is distanced or 'mythified' by a smoothing away of anything too charged with historical particularity, so that the resulting argumentative episodes – while compelling enough in themselves – are half-way to attaining the condition of a Platonic dialogue.<sup>35</sup> We are at a long remove here from such novels as Simone de Beauvoir's *The Mandarins* (1954) or Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962), with their respective chronicles of the ordeal of 'de-Stalinization' in the 1940s and '50s: in fact, so precise are these two texts in their blow-by-blow treatment of life on the left that one can even imagine Murdoch *qua* critic pointing to them as object lessons in 'journalistic' – as opposed to 'crystalline' – writing.

If I am not mistaken, there is just one exception in Murdoch's fiction to her habit of reticence about specific current events, and it occurs in a scene near the end of *Nuns and Soldiers* where several of the central characters share a moment of excitement over the news that a Polish Pope has been elected: this must refer to the accession of Karol Wojtyla as Pope John Paul II in October 1978, and is of interest to the persons concerned because one of their number, the so-called 'Count', is of Polish extraction.<sup>36</sup> So in this case the interest is more sentimental than political (or, come to that, religious); the event has charm, but no practical implications; it belongs, rather, to the category of eye-catching phenomena that tend to feature in the closing stages of a Murdoch novel, like litters of kittens or flying saucers.

Murdoch modestly describes herself in a 1976 interview as not knowing much about the world of politics.<sup>37</sup> This is misleading in that she is clearly very well equipped to represent the exchange of political ideas, whether crude or sophisticated; but we may see some justice in it if we compare the enormous 'solidity of specification' of her physical settings, as noted earlier, with the thinness of what she has to say in *The Book and the Brotherhood* about the highly interesting process of ceasing to be left-wing as one advances into middle age. Here Murdoch seems content to operate almost entirely at the level of 'telling' rather than 'showing'.<sup>38</sup> The reader of *The Book and the Brotherhood* will quickly recognize that Crimond is in a sense an outlier to the narrative, since no attempt is made to occupy his viewpoint; but what of Crimond's lover Jean, who certainly does take her turn as the novel's centre of consciousness? How has it been for her all these years as the superfluously gifted wife of Duncan, a

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33 'The Art of Fiction', p.17.

34 Ibid., p.295: Crimond says 'I'm doing what has to be done *now*, I'm *living* the history of our time' (emphasis in original).

35 Murdoch, of course, also wrote two of these in the 1980s ('Art and Eros' and 'Above the Gods', both in *EM*) – though they are not as lively, to my mind, as the ideological debates in *The Book and the Brotherhood*.

36 *NS*, p.470. Richard Todd (*Iris Murdoch* [London: Methuen, 1984], p.94) confirms that up to that point, 'With the exception of *The Red and the Green*, there is nowhere else in Murdoch's fiction such reference to historical dates'.

37 Dooley, op. cit., p.48.

38 See A. S. Byatt, *Degrees of Freedom: The Early Novels of Iris Murdoch* (London: Vintage, 1994), p.141.

decent but slightly boring career diplomat? Alternatively, what does it mean *to her* to have '[written] a pamphlet for [Crimond] on the position of women in the Trade Unions', working '(unpaid of course) as his research assistant', or to have served as 'secretary to his agent' when he contested a parliamentary seat, or to have 'written a book on feminism'?<sup>39</sup> We learn a great deal about the quality of Jean's experience of 'being in love' with Crimond, but next to nothing about the way her emotion draws upon this distinctive intellectual and practical background. Why not, for instance, an episode where Jean – some years later – recalls waiting to find out what Crimond thought of her book on feminism, actually hearing what he thought, trying not to care too much, possibly feeling disappointed and resentful but somehow suppressing it all in a spirit of 'if you love him you'll forgive him'? This kind of material might have been more rewarding than, say, the information that Gerard's dining room wall is 'covered by nineteenth-century Japanese paintings [...] representing birds, dogs, insects, trees, frogs, tortoises, monkeys, frail girls, casual men, mountains, rivers, the moon'; or that Violet Hershaw (a peripheral character) appears at a party in 'a fairly simple well-cut light-blue cocktail dress with some glittering decoration round the neck'.<sup>40</sup>

Again, to quote passages like these at random and out of context may seem rather a cheap trick, and it would not be impossible to produce some case-by-case artistic justification for them. Murdoch's minute (imaginary) attention to people's appearance and clothing is in any case full of the fascination of a kind of bitchy girl-talk for which some of us are too proud to make much room in real life. The point remains, though, that as an exercise in 'realistic writing in the tradition of the English novel', *The Book and the Brotherhood* – and to a greater or lesser extent, the rest of the 'baggy monsters' – offer something of a switchback ride: at certain moments an almost suffocating profusion of 'pointless knowable detail', at others a neglect that seems indicative of some strange areas of frigidity in Murdoch's treatment of her characters.

We can agree, anyway (or so I would suggest), that realism in fiction is an artistic *achievement* – the outcome not just of an attitude of faithful receptivity or even of active direction of the 'gaze', but of complex technical effects. A writer as prolific as Murdoch offers us the chance to study such effects over a wide range of subject-matter and to note the inevitable favouritism shown to one kind of descriptive repletteness over another (inevitable because, to repeat, 'art is essentially selection'). We know Murdoch works under an ethics of writerly invisibility, of silencing the self and looking outward – but this in itself can hardly dictate the choice of where to look, or explain (for example) why we have to look so hard at clothing, interior decoration, plants and stones, when so much else is passed over. Are we being invited to engage, with Murdoch, in a kind of obsessive *practising* for the moment of attention to human beings in their social space? Of course the human adventure never ceases to be the main thing, but should one suspect some impulse of postponement, some recourse to displacement activity, in the almost hallucinatory realism of circumstantial detail that goes to make a Murdochian baggy monster? (I am still haunted by Peter Conradi's revelation that she saw no more films after 1972.<sup>41</sup> That seems somehow in keeping with the level of intensity she can bring to Gerard's Japanese paintings or Violet's cocktail dress. These items – including, I think, the dress – owe nothing to the historical moment of composition of the novel, and it is as if the *screening out* of the present day actually enhances the work of imaginative visualization.)

<sup>39</sup> *BB*, pp.78, 99, 76.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.193, 196. A still more extreme example is the description of what they all wore to go skating while staying at Rose's house in Yorkshire (p.250).

<sup>41</sup> See Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), p.449.

Pam Morris comes to mind again here with the suggestion that realism is defined by a ‘humanist contract with the reader based on the consensual belief that shared communication about material and subjective realities is possible [...] the belief that there is a shared material world external to textuality’.<sup>42</sup> If there is such a contract, Murdoch strongly endorses it, being a fierce critic of ‘structuralist’ efforts to reduce existence to the status of text, or mental life to ‘language speaking through us’; she writes much of the time as if insisting to herself ‘Not I, not even *we*, but the world around us’. Less obvious, though, is what we should say about Murdoch’s relation to the realist tradition affirmed by Morris when she praises Stendhal as ‘the first writer to consistently *understand and represent character as the shifting location of multiple social forces*’.<sup>43</sup> For the urgency with which, as a moralist, Murdoch seeks to warn us against deterministic thinking (the seductive feeling that one can make no difference, that choice is an illusion) cannot easily coexist with a relaxed, enquiring attitude to the action of ‘multiple social forces’ on characters who are, so to speak, her closest imaginary friends – the ones in whom she makes the biggest emotional investment. (This is why she deserves particular credit for allowing Crimond to attack Gerard and his friends as instances of a certain social *type* – even if it is hinted that these confrontations owe something to the pleasures of intellectual masochism.<sup>44</sup>)

It would not have occurred to me to describe Iris Murdoch, quite generally or in the abstract, as a writer who takes character to be the ‘shifting location of multiple social forces’.<sup>45</sup> That is, her practice as a story-teller does not seem to involve the even-handed depiction of an entire cast of characters in these terms: some (like Lily Boyne or the comical feminists of *The Philosopher’s Pupil*) are ideological fashion victims, others labour under the self-evident constraints of marriage or family, whereas in the case of more serious or estimable characters (like Jenkin, perhaps, or Tallis Browne in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*) the issue of social determination typically recedes towards the point of invisibility. Of course, any attempt at an explicit division of humanity along these lines – the superior, free individuals versus the mediocre, determined majority – is highly offensive to her, and the implication of such a division is one of her chief complaints against ‘structuralism’. She wants to place all of us in the same metaphysical boat; yet she cannot consent to say with Tolstoy (in his philosophical epilogue to *War and Peace*) that ‘it is necessary to renounce a freedom that does not exist, and to recognize a dependence of which we are not conscious’.<sup>46</sup> Her concern is, rather, with the *unstable* grip of human beings upon self-determination, the tendency to slip back willy-nilly into ‘immanence’ or passivity; and it so happens that her most powerful studies of this theme invoke the workings of nature (especially in the guise of water or mud) rather than those of a complex, historically specific society.

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42 *Realism*, pp.44, 155.

43 *Ibid*, p.56, emphasis added.

44 ‘Gerard felt full of energy. Was it possible he had actually enjoyed being denounced by Crimond?’ (*BB*, p. 341).

45 Martha Nussbaum observes in her review of Conradi’s *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (‘When She Was Good’, *The New Republic*, 31 December 2001) that Murdoch ‘seems almost entirely to lack interest in the political and social determinants of a moral vision, and in the larger social criticism that ought, one feels, to be a major element in the struggle against one’s own defective tendencies’. The point seems to have struck home: this section of Nussbaum’s review is cited, at least as worthy of comment, by no fewer than three of the contributors to Justin Broackes’s edited collection *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) (Maria Antonaccio; Lawrence Blum; Bridget Clarke).

46 Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, trans. Louise and Aylmer Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), Vol. III, p.537.

One may feel from time to time that her fiction bears the mark of some repression, some insurmountable 'fastidiousness', under this latter heading. Still, we must credit the baggy monsters with a remarkable degree of success – given the unevenness of their grounding in social reality (the areas of suffocating profusion versus those of indifference or neglect) – in communicating that enduring desideratum of the novel: a 'personal, direct impression of life'.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> This paper is a lightly revised version of the lecture I gave at the Sixth International Iris Murdoch Conference at Kingston University in September 2012. Thanks to all who took part in discussion of it on that occasion, and to the organizers.

## Introduction to *The Green Knight*

*This Introduction to the Bedford Square Books edition of The Green Knight by Iris Murdoch's literary agent and friend, to whom she dedicated this novel, is reproduced here by kind permission of the Ed Victor Literary Agency.*

I became Iris Murdoch's literary agent in 1984 ... against her will. When she began her writing career (her first novel, *Under the Net*, was published in 1954), literary agents were few and far between and most definitely 'below the salt' in the snobbish publishing world of those times. As was so often the case back then, her publisher, the legendary Norah Smallwood at Chatto & Windus, also acted as her agent, selling not just US and translation rights to her novels, but also film, television, and dramatic rights. That arrangement went on for many years, but when Norah decided to retire, she advised Iris that I should represent her literary interests for the future. Iris was not best pleased.

Like many authors, Iris deplored all change, and was worried about putting her literary affairs – which had for so long been in what she regarded as the safe hands of her publishers – into mine, those of an upstart American literary agent. Norah hosted a lunch to introduce us to each other. I had been reading her novels since I was a high school student, and was, of course, awed in her presence. She was polite to me, but icy cold. She said she wondered why I would be interested in representing her work, and indeed warned me she might never write another novel again. Try as she might, however, she could not discourage me. And, over time (and over many more lunches, some of them quite bibulous), she not only came to trust me as the guardian of her copyrights, we also became the closest of friends. Over the many years I represented Iris, she would never talk about her works in progress. Every couple of years, my phone would ring and she would say simply, 'Ed, I've written a novel'. The following day, like clockwork, she would come down from Oxford to my office in London to deliver the manuscript to me. The book would have been handwritten in a series of about a dozen identical lined notebooks. She invariably stuffed them into a large and unfashionable blue plastic bag, the kind one found in laundrettes in those days. Despite my frequent Cassandra-like warnings that she should make copies of her manuscripts, Iris never did. So the contents of the blue plastic laundry bag were unique. Once delivered to my office, they would be immediately whisked to a copy shop, before the originals were sent to the typist. Her instructions to the typist, as well as to her publishers, were simple: Do not change a comma, let alone a word, of her work.

Iris worked constantly and tirelessly. When she wasn't writing novels, plays, or her great philosophical works, she was busy answering – in her distinctive longhand – every letter sent to her by readers, friends, and fellow academics. In an age in which everybody was phoning and/or faxing, she sent letters and postcards. One day I received a postcard with this simple message:

Dear Ed

Would you mind if I dedicate my new novel to you?

Love

Iris

This was not a rhetorical question. Iris came from a generation for whom politeness was ingrained, and she was genuinely seeking my consent. Would I mind? I was, of course, overwhelmed with gratitude and considered it an honour to have *The Green Knight* dedicated to me.

*The Green Knight*, published in September 1993, was Iris's twenty-fifth – and penultimate – novel. Like most of her earlier books, it was reviewed widely and, mostly, very positively. The first paragraph of the review in the *New York Times* gives an excellent summary of the questions Iris sought to answer in *The Green Knight* – and indeed in all of her earlier works: 'What is the connection between art and morality? How are we to reinvent a system of ethics for our time? How can we wrest ourselves from our dependence on science to provide solutions for our problems? How are we to regenerate our engagement with the world?'

Iris never, ever wanted to see any reviews of her books, even the most laudatory of them. As far as she was concerned, when she finished writing a book that was the end of her interest in it. All she then wanted to do was move on to the next. As it happened, her next novel, *Jackson's Dilemma* (1995), was to be her last.

Iris and I had a tradition of lunching just before Christmas at the wonderful, but now sadly defunct, White Tower restaurant in Charlotte Street. She was almost invariably late, and always arrived clutching an array of carrier bags stuffed full of books, papers, shopping, whatever. George, the excellent sommelier, would light up when he saw her, because he knew we would be ordering a fine claret from his first-rate list. The last time we had this lunch, something very disconcerting occurred. Iris looked at me with those amazing blue eyes of hers and asked, 'Ed, dear, did I ever write a book called *The Black Prince*?'; 'Yes, of course, Iris,' I replied, my mind reeling at the implausibility of this question. It was, of course, my first inkling of the onset of her Alzheimer's disease.

Iris died in 1999, four years after that lunch. Her husband, John Bayley, described brilliantly and so very sadly her descent into the depths of Alzheimer's in his book *Iris: A Memoir*. It is still painful for me to imagine a woman with a mind as fruitful and inventive as Iris's spending hours and hours watching *Teletubbies* on her TV screen. Rereading *The Green Knight* once again made me aware of what a singular genius Iris was. I am confident her body of work – which to my mind ought to have earned her a Nobel Prize – will be regarded as one of the pinnacles of twentieth-century British fiction.

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## ‘How Can One Describe Real People?’: Iris Murdoch’s Literary Afterlife.

Iris Murdoch’s fiction not only reveals an acute consciousness of how life writing acts out the complexities of mourning, but also an apprehension of the ways in which she would be so problematically mourned after her own death. Several novels represent a sustained attempt to wrest her literary survival away from those who would seek posthumously to appropriate it. *The Black Prince* (1973), *The Sea, The Sea* (1978) and *Jackson’s Dilemma* (1995) in particular exhibit perceptive awareness of the tendency of the biographer or memoirist, wittingly or unwittingly, to ‘feed upon’ the dead for his own egotistical gain, which can connect with a tendency to self-aggrandizement. Murdoch thus contends with her own death and afterlife in her fiction before anyone else has the opportunity to do so. Close analysis of life writing on Iris Murdoch by John Bayley, Peter Conradi, A.N. Wilson and David Morgan, juxtaposed with theories on mourning put forward by Freud, Derrida and contemporary theorists, adds complex, fresh ways of understanding the process of mourning. Bayley’s trilogy of memoirs, *Iris: A Memoir of Iris Murdoch* (1998), *Iris and the Friends* (1999) and *Widower’s House* (2001) contain his personal response, partly in diary form, to Murdoch’s decline and death due to Alzheimer’s; Conradi’s *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (2001) takes a detailed, scholarly approach to Murdoch’s life and times; A.N. Wilson’s *Iris Murdoch As I Knew Her* (2003) is a somewhat scurrilous personal account of his relationship with Murdoch which contests Bayley’s, and Morgan’s *With Love and Rage: A Friendship with Iris Murdoch* (2010) combines fragments of her letters and remembered conversations, alongside intimate reflections on both, in an attempt to bring her back to life.<sup>1</sup> While all these texts can be related to various theories of mourning to support, contest or expand them, each text also demonstrates how any individual experience of mourning is unique, and will inevitably escape any theory that attempts exhaustively to describe or account for it.

*Jackson’s Dilemma*, written as Alzheimer’s disease began to interfere with her writing, has been identified as ‘Murdoch’s own farewell to her powers’.<sup>2</sup> When she attributes to the enigmatic Jackson ‘forgetfulness’, failing ‘powers’ and an end to ‘assignments’, the resemblance to her own deterioration is too close to ignore.<sup>3</sup> The novel ends as Jackson perceives ‘death, its closeness’ and realises that ‘at the end of what is necessary, I have come to a place where there is no road’ (*JD*, p.249). The text both enacts and engenders mourning by means of its tear-soaked imagery and the absences of many dead characters, while Murdoch herself is more present in this last novel than perhaps any other. Her identification with the suffering Jackson connects her strongly to this Christ figure whose function is to heal grief and help others avoid a damaging inability to mourn. Jackson

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1 John Bayley, *Iris: A Memoir* (London: Duckworth, 1998), hereafter *Iris*; John Bayley, *Iris and the Friends* (London: Duckworth, 1999) p.244; John Bayley, *Widower’s House* (London: Duckworth, 2001); Peter Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (New York: Norton, 2001), hereafter *IMAL*; A.N Wilson, *Iris Murdoch As I Knew Her* (London: Arrow, 2003), hereafter Wilson; David Morgan, *With Love and Rage: A Friendship with Iris Murdoch* (Kingston: Kingston University Press, 2010), hereafter Morgan.

2 Peter J. Conradi, *The Saint and the Artist*, 3rd edition (London: HarperCollins, 2001), p.361.

3 Iris Murdoch, *Jackson’s Dilemma* (London: Penguin, 1996), p.248, hereafter *JD*.



guides various characters away from remorse and grief and reconnects them with each other. As the grieving Tuan considers suicide, his doorbell rings and the scene ends with the reassuring words, 'Jackson came in' (*JD*, p.198). Jackson is able, though readers are never made aware how, to free Tuan from his crippling grief so that he may marry the woman he loves. As two marriages brought about by Jackson take place at the end of the novel, he is described, finally, as a 'mender of things' (*JD*, p.245).

In presenting Jackson as a romanticised self-portrait Murdoch counterbalances the ways in which she would be assessed and re-assessed after her death. Yet Jackson is also variously perceived as a 'dark angel' (*JD*, p.63), 'the Fisher King in disguise' (*JD*, p.64), 'a captive, like a ringed bird' (*JD*, pp.64-5), terms that foreshadow the myriad negative representations of Murdoch that appeared after her own death. Priscilla Martin and Anne Rowe observe how 'two posthumous portraits have superimposed themselves over the image of the almost beatific "Saint Iris", whose dignified and austere presence had generated such reverence in her life. The first that was to dominate her old age was of the "Alzheimer's Poster Girl", while the second, which was to reconfigure her past, was of the *Femme Fatale*'.<sup>4</sup> Journalist Chris Hastings describes Murdoch as a flirtatious woman who 'doled out heartbreak' to her 'victims' and as a 'sexual predator'.<sup>5</sup> Wilson analyses Donald MacKinnon's assertion in 1992 that 'there was real evil' in Murdoch as a denunciation with which Wilson himself partly agrees (Wilson, p.175). Carol Sarler writing in the *Observer* conversely describes her as a victim of Bayley's 'emotional incontinence'.<sup>6</sup>

Murdoch realised that, as her own writing life came to an end, public mourning would constitute a process of fictionalizing in which she would be transformed into a work of art. In the second volume of his trilogy, Bayley suggests that 'there is a surreal sense in which Alzheimer's has turned Iris into art. She is my Iris no longer, but a person in the public domain'.<sup>7</sup> Ironically, it was Bayley's decision to publish *Iris*, his initial memoir, *before* her death, which initiated this process of fictionalization, rather than the Alzheimer's itself.<sup>8</sup> Bayley's decision to provide graphic detail about his wife's illness has been interpreted variously as a benign taboo-breaking attempt to 'destigmatize' Alzheimer's disease and vindictive 'common assault' (Sarler, p.27).

The closeness to their subject of the biographers and memoirists discussed in this essay, and the proximity of their books' publication to Murdoch's death, mean that the mourning they exemplify is still raw. While Bayley's memoirs conform to the genre of 'grief memoir' as autobiographical accounts of grief, Conradi's biography, and Wilson's and Morgan's memoirs, do not. All these works contend, however, with the writers' experience of Murdoch's mental disintegration due to Alzheimer's disease and her inevitable death, and thus manifest symptoms of mourning. The writers' lack of biographical distance from the subject itself implies personal mourning. The 'distanceless biographer' is defined by Rena Tekcan as being 'historically placed at such a privileged moment that they are

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4 Priscilla Martin and Anne Rowe, *Iris Murdoch: A Literary Life* (London: Palgrave, 2010), p.168, hereafter *IMLL*.

5 Chris Hastings, 'Her Lovestruck Victims', the *Telegraph*, 1 September 2001, p.36 and 'Murdoch Lust stayed Strong Despite Alzheimer's', the *Telegraph*, 1 July 2007, p.31.

6 Carol Sarler, 'In the Name of Love, Shut Up', the *Observer*, 28 February 1999, p.27, hereafter Sarler.

7 John Bayley, *Iris and the Friends*, p.244.

8 Anne Rowe's essay, 'Critical Reception in England of *Iris: A Memoir* by John Bayley', *Iris Murdoch News Letter*, 13 (1999), 9-10, summarises critical responses to the book and concludes that 'Bayley demonstrates how love still thrives in such uncompromising familiarity, and read in this light, this book reveals itself as simply one brave enough to face such ambivalence as well as the horror of dementia' (p.10).

able to see their subjects with their own eyes'.<sup>9</sup> Such proximity, Tekcan argues, can not only be advantageous but also problematic because biographers may be too close to be reliable: 'The intention of writing the biography of someone one knows is never pure, unambiguous or wholly altruistic' (Tekcan, p.11). D.J. Taylor argues that both Bayley's and Wilson's memoirs are damaged by intimacy, and that, in Wilson's case, 'you wonder whether water samples of this kind wouldn't be better taken a mile or two further on from the river's source'.<sup>10</sup>

Conradi confronts the unique paradox of his situation: 'Closeness to one's subject is simultaneously a strength and a liability, and I wanted to [. . .] start the job of setting her work in the context of the cultural/intellectual life of the mid-twentieth century, of the generation who struggled to come to terms philosophically and emotionally and artistically with Hitler, with existentialism, and with the slow collapse of organised religion' (*IMAL*, p.xxv). While his narrative is framed by their friendship, he implies distance by summoning up the detail of the society in which Murdoch lived, particularly the 1940s and 1950s. Conradi confesses, 'as she gradually forgot her past, I rediscovered it. It sometimes felt as if I were becoming her memory' (*IMAL*, p.xxi). When Conradi raised the matter of writing her biography with Murdoch at the end of 1996, he did so because 'it did not seem right that the life of so remarkable a person should go unrecorded' (*IMAL*, p.xix); her mental state was already worsening. The biography itself was written predominantly after Murdoch was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease in 1997; thus she was alive during the first two years of its composition and dead during the final year of its completion. While it is clearly a celebration of her life it also endeavours to preserve that life both in Conradi's personal memory and in the public consciousness, so that her loss is not absolute for either. Conradi's justification for particular interest in the period between 1919 and 1956 is that he is covering the era 'least discussed in John Bayley's memoirs of Iris' and 'soonest likely to disappear from view' (*IMAL*, p.xxiii).<sup>11</sup> The final line of *Iris Murdoch: A Life*, 'we are lucky to have shared an appalling century with her' (*IMAL*, p.597) demonstrates the 'double-focus' of life writing of this kind: the preservation of the dead and the invocation of the world in which they lived.

Conradi's respectful biography provides a contrast with other works of life writing in which Murdoch is the subject. The belittling evident in Bayley's and Wilson's works can be understood as an aspect of writing about the dead which, Derrida contends, always contains a degree of 'violence' and 'retaliation'.<sup>12</sup> Derrida asserts that revenge is the political exploitation of the dead, an attempt 'to manoeuvre, to speculate, to try to profit or derive some benefit, whether subtle or sublime [...] to denounce or insult them more or less directly'.<sup>13</sup> Wilson accuses Bayley of such offenses which include allowing 'resentments, envy, poisonously strong misogyny and outright hatred of his wife' to infiltrate his memoirs (Wilson, p.9). Certainly Bayley's narrative is more focused on presenting Murdoch as an Alzheimer's sufferer than a great writer. This diminishment

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9 Rana Tekcan, *The Biographer and the Subject: A Study on Biographical Distance* (Stuttgart: Verlag, 2010), p.11, hereafter Tekcan.

10 D.J. Taylor, 'They Knew Her too Well', the *Guardian*, 26 August 2003, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2003/aug/26/biography.irismurdoch>> [accessed 2 May 2014].

11 Roland Barthes described the urge to preserve a dead subject in memoir as the need to 'oppose the laceration of forgetting *as it reveals its absolute nature*. The-soon-to-be "no trace remaining", anywhere, in anyone. Necessity of the "Monument"' (*Mourning Diary* [London: Notting Hill Editions, 2011], p.113; Barthes's emphasis).

12 Jacques Derrida, 'Circumfession', in *Jacques Derrida (Religion and Postmodernism)* ed. by Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

13 Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, eds. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), hereafter *WM*.

is carried through into Richard Eyre's dramatization of Bayley's first memoir in the film *Iris* (2001).<sup>14</sup> Alex Ramon notes that 'the younger Murdoch is never shown lecturing and is only shown in the act of writing once. Rather, she is presented throughout in terms of more obviously "dynamic" activity: swimming, bicycling, dancing, falling down stairs, singing, having sex and, more rarely, involved in intellectual argument'.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, Ramon contends, 'considerable attention is given to the details of [Murdoch and Bayley's] domestic life' which 'locates *Iris* within a tradition of British cinematic realism' (*IMTC*, p.233). This low-key realist approach has been criticised for allowing the film to 'feel conventional, shackled to a restrictive realist framework' (*IMTC*, p.234) which demeans its subject.

Despite his criticism of Bayley's perspective, Wilson too seems intent on locating Murdoch in domestic and social spheres. He also seems more intent on destroying the image of Bayley as a selfless carer than he is on redeeming Murdoch from the effects of Bayley's memoirs, which he believes had obscured Murdoch's 'sort-of-greatness' (Wilson, p.37). No attempt is made to assess Murdoch as a thinker and judgments of her work are equivocal. While he claims that 'her novels, more than any other inspired me to want to be a novelist' (Wilson, p.262), he nonetheless catalogues his early negative responses and questions her credentials as a philosopher: 'as well as being brilliant, her novels are also, surely, pretty good tosh? Ditto the "philosophy" which isn't really philosophy at all, just secular sermonising based on Plato and Simone Weil, etc? Or am I being unfair?' (Wilson, p.28). Thus, Wilson fails to reclaim Murdoch from the 'bitterness' of Bayley's portraits.<sup>16</sup>

Such retaliatory responses to her death would not have surprised Murdoch who explored the use of biography as revenge in *The Good Apprentice*. After the death of the artist Jesse Baltram, his wife, 'Mother' May, publishes her memoirs. In a strange and coincidental foreshadowing of Murdoch's future, Jesse also seems to have been suffering from a form of dementia. Murdoch includes a fictional two-page newspaper review of extracts of May's memoirs which bear striking resemblance to criticism of both Bayley's and Wilson's books. The reviewer refers to the memoirs as 'an orgy of indiscretion and revenge' (*GA*, p.448) in which 'every page glows with malice. Mrs Baltram is an expert in the art, practised it must be admitted by almost every biographer, of seeming to utter warm assessments and even adulation while quietly and ruthlessly diminishing the object of attention. Perhaps we all want to diminish those whose stature accuses us of being small' (*GA*, pp.448-9).<sup>17</sup> Murdoch's recognition that biography can become a vehicle for revenge provides a possible rationale for her reluctance to authorise life writing about her in her lifetime. That she would be powerless in death to prevent it was probably a fact of which she was fully aware.

All the memoirs and biographies I discuss here contain the kind of self-aggrandizement which Frances Stonor Saunders connects with the cannibalistic consumption of the subject inherent in grief memoir. Derrida also recognises the dangers of writing about the dead, contending that 'an homage in the form of personal testimony [...]

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<sup>14</sup> *Iris*, dir. by Richard Eyre (Miramax, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> Alex Ramon, 'Murdoch on Film: "Re-seeing Reality in Richard Eyre's *Iris*"', in *Iris Murdoch: Texts and Contexts*, eds. Anne Rowe and Avril Horner (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p.231, hereafter *IMTC*.

<sup>16</sup> A.N. Wilson, "I'm Mr Evil" <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/sep/03/biography.features11>> [accessed 2 May 2014].

<sup>17</sup> Jesse's disappearance and probable death before the publication of this article is unknown to the press, thus the reviewer believes him to be alive, if 'a sick and senile recluse who gave up working years ago' (*The Good Apprentice*, p.448). That the reviewer believes the memoirs will be published during Jesse's lifetime and is critical of this, again foreshadows the reaction to Bayley's decision to publish *Iris* while she was still alive.

always tends toward reappropriation and always risks giving in to an indecent way of saying “we”, or worse, “me” (*WM*, p.225). This appropriation of the subject as ‘grief-meat’ is also inherent in elegy, the genre which seems most contiguous to grief memoir.<sup>18</sup> Gerhard Joseph recognises elegy as ‘feeding upon the memory of the dead friend’, a process of ‘cannibalisation’ for the purposes of ‘aesthetic self-aggrandizement’.<sup>19</sup> Bayley, while outwardly deferential to his wife’s superior achievements, makes allusions to his influence on her work.<sup>20</sup> Conradi, while attempting to efface himself from his biography, utilises Murdoch’s death as an intrinsic component of his own spiritual journey. Wilson’s book has been recognised as ‘self-serving’ and it makes much of his reported claim that Murdoch originally asked him to write her official biography, before later authorising Conradi’s version (Wilson, p.30).<sup>21</sup> Wilson acknowledges flaws in his personality which include ‘competitiveness to the point of aggression’ (Wilson, p.217) and confesses to a ‘vulgar excitement at [Murdoch’s] fame’ (Wilson, p.264), but he is unable to restrain these faults in his assessments of her. One chapter, ‘We Authors’ (Wilson, pp.216-27), contains numerous positive reviews of his own novel, *The Sweets of Pimlico*, and indeed the entire book is an intentional showcase for Wilson’s literary and critical skills. Likewise, while Morgan recognises the egotism inherent in his early, mildly combative, relationship with Murdoch, he is also unable to avoid romanticising his own delinquent behaviour in the process of writing about her.

In *The Sea, The Sea* Murdoch has her first-person narrator Charles Arrowby realise that his biographical portraits of those he has lost are motivated by a need to nourish his own ego, and Charles confesses to his reader that, ‘I know that quietly I belittle [Hartley], as almost every human being intentionally belittles every other one. Even the few whom we genuinely adore we have to belittle secretly now and then [...] just to feed our wondrously necessary egos’.<sup>22</sup> As Martha Nussbaum suggests, ‘Murdoch, more than any other contemporary ethical thinker, has made us vividly aware of the many stratagems by which the ego wraps itself in a cosy self-serving fog that prevents egress to the reality of the other’.<sup>23</sup> Both Murdoch’s own novels and, inadvertently, the biographical works inspired by her death, illustrate this central philosophical principle.

While writing about the dead is often self-serving, it can also constitute the attempt to return the subject to life. Derrida draws parallels between the impulse to write about the dead and the negation of death, claiming that memorialisation in the form of biography is a mode of ‘trying to forget, repress, deny, or conjure away death’ (*WM*, p.176). His suspicions that life-writing can be a denying of death or resurrecting of the subject are borne out by most of the texts I discuss here. Each of the biographers and memoirists who responded to Murdoch’s death by writing about her, with the exception of Bayley, confess to doing so in order to return her to life. Conradi acknowledges that his book is a ‘quest for the living flesh-and-blood creature’ (*IMAL*, p.xxii), and Wilson concludes by claiming that it has been an ‘exercise’ which has ‘brought her

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18 Frances Stonor Saunders, ‘Too Much Grief’, the *Guardian*, 11 August 2011, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/aug/19/grief-memoir-oates-didion-orourke>> [accessed 2 May 2014].

19 Gerhard Joseph, *Tennyson and the Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.18.

20 Bayley states that he wrote ‘a small section’ of *The Bell* (*Iris*, p.46) and that he reviewed the work of others ‘under her name’ (*Iris*, p.128).

21 Alex Clark, Review: ‘Iris Murdoch by A.N. Wilson’, *The Sunday Times*, 31 August 2003, <<http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/culture/books/article243574.ece>> [accessed 20 May 2014].

22 Iris Murdoch, *The Sea, The Sea* (1978); (London: Vintage, 1999), pp. 292-3.

23 Martha Nussbaum, ‘Love and Vision: Iris Murdoch on Eros and the Individual’ in *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*, eds. Maria Antonaccio and William Schweiker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.36.

into focus again. Her? The Iris Murdoch I knew. At last, as far as I am concerned, she has come back to life' (Wilson, p.265). Morgan is absolutely aware of his need to 'stop her fading from me personally', and his ultimate failure to 'invoke her for myself – to see her staggering affectionately towards me again' (Morgan, p.28). Morgan's collection of memories also takes on the responsibility of alleviating Conradi's still raw grief by returning the living Murdoch to him. He tells Conradi in his 'opening letter' that he has exaggerated Murdoch's role in his life as a 'reformer' (Morgan, p.2) because 'I thought an account of Iris as a saviour-figure would be what you wanted to hear' (Morgan, pp.2-3).

Freud refers to the desire to believe that words can resurrect the dead, as 'magical thinking' which relates to a primitive or infantile 'confidence in the possibility of controlling the world'.<sup>24</sup> Mourning theorist Jeffrey Berman suggests that 'nowhere is magical thinking more evident than in the belief that we can will ourselves into saving another person from death. Magical thinking can take many forms, including the denial that death has occurred and the belief in the possibility of "undoing" or reversing death'.<sup>25</sup> Freud connects 'magical thinking' and art when he argues that the 'omnipotence of thoughts' associated with magical thinking has been retained only in the arts: 'Only in art does it still happen that a man who is consumed by desires performs something resembling the accomplishment of those desires and that what he does in play produces emotional effects – thanks to artistic illusion – just as though it were something real'.<sup>26</sup> Morgan's literary portrayal succeeds in evoking, and invoking, Murdoch's voice by means of excerpts from letters and remembered conversations, drawing attention to the absence of Murdoch's voice in the books by Bayley and Wilson, either in the form of remembered speech or by reference to her own work. Even Jeffrey Berman, who is a devotee of Bayley's memoirs, notes that Murdoch's voice disappears almost completely in passages where Bayley records Murdoch's reaction to her diagnosis: 'Did she express sadness that their lives would never be the same? Was she angry at him for being healthy? Did she feel guilty that he was wearing himself out in caring for her? Did she express gratitude that he was so devoted to her? Bayley never raises any of these questions' (Berman, pp.81-2).

Instead Bayley presents her as a silent and saintly sufferer. Carol Sarler therefore argues that Bayley's Murdoch is not an individual but a generic Alzheimer's sufferer, claiming that 'each of us, stripped to our bare intimacies is stripped of those things that make us different from others, reduced from what we have that is special to that which is commonplace' (Sarler, p.27). Morgan's Murdoch, depicted largely in her own words, is more distinctive. He claims that writing about her has returned her voice to him 'as clear[ly] as if I was listening to a recording. It is only now, coinciding with a new period of uncertainty in my life, that I feel the hole she has left' (Morgan, p.28). This allusion to uncertainty in his own life is strongly connected to the intensity of his attempts to resurrect her. Anne Rowe suggests in her introduction to *With Love and Rage* that Morgan 'relives rather than recounts the past, allows us to encounter Murdoch in ways that more conventional accounts cannot. We hear her stammering voice; smell her face powder or the moist tweed of her coat in the rain, and feel our own *frisson* at being in that august presence. Morgan's narrative technique unwittingly emulates Murdoch's own in its evoking of another human presence so vividly that she is not merely observed, but re-experienced by readers' (Morgan, p.xv). His synaesthetic conjuring of her presence reveals Morgan's need for Murdoch to continue in her role as teacher, mentor, even

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24 Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo and Other Works*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001), p.89.

25 Jeffrey Berman, *Companionship in Grief* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010), p.205, hereafter Berman.

26 Ibid., p.90.

mother, as he faces ‘uncertainty’ (Morgan, p.28). His magical thinking illuminates a need to understand her as not absent, but an enduring and benevolent presence.

While Conradi and Wilson each attempt to re-encounter Murdoch, Morgan’s memoir in particular illustrates new models of grief which emphasise the purpose of mourning as the maintenance of a relationship with the dead. New Wave mourning theorist William Worden suggests that ‘we now know that people do not decathect from the dead but find ways to develop *continuing bonds* with the deceased’.<sup>27</sup> Thus, one of the main tasks of mourning is to ‘find an enduring connection with the deceased in the midst of embarking on a new life’ (Worden, p.50). This recent approach compels us to take a critical look at the Freudian model, which Margaret Stroebe suggests ‘could be called a medical model of bereavement’ and which is associated with ‘a disease process’.<sup>28</sup> Morgan begins the task of maintaining a relationship with the dead Murdoch by reliving conversations in which he often plays an antagonistic role to which Murdoch remains impervious:

DM: I may do things that will shock you.

IM: *You could surprise me but not shock me.* (Morgan, p.43)

DM: I don’t agree with your use of the word ‘descry’, it’s archaic.

IM: *It’s a perfectly good word.* (Morgan, p.47)

Morgan’s protraction of their relationship includes imagined responses to the publication of his book (‘if a shade can protest she will by calling me an ass for writing about her at all’).<sup>29</sup> His acknowledgements establish his memoir firmly as an attempt to ‘keep her alive in our mind’s eye because we loved her or realised we were loved by her’ as opposed to ‘reverence for a dead writer, or some imaginary whispery contact with her, or a wish to add to Murdoch scholarship’.<sup>30</sup>

These authors form a community of survivors into which Iris Murdoch is incorporated. While the biographical attempts to capture Murdoch after her death have been described as ‘the battle for her memory’, they are an inevitable part of a re-positioning of Murdoch in the lives of her survivors, which includes her reading public.<sup>31</sup> Tony Walter’s ‘New Model of Grief’ makes a claim for the role of biography in mourning, suggesting that the bereaved ‘typically want to talk about the deceased and to talk with others who knew him or her. Together they construct a story that places the dead within their lives, a story capable of enduring through time’.<sup>32</sup>

While the disagreements and different accounts that characterise life-writing undermine the veracity of individual accounts, they also support the mourning process. If the purpose of mourning, according to the ‘New Model of Grief’, is to integrate the dead into the lives of the living, Stroebe suggests that comparing of accounts of the dead person helps the survivors to ‘find a secure place for the one who had died’ (Stroebe, pp.255-6). Conflicting accounts of Murdoch’s life therefore contribute to the construction of a more

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27 J. William Worden, *Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.50, hereafter Worden.

28 Margaret Stroebe, ‘From Mourning and Melancholia to Bereavement and Biography: An Assessment of Walter’s New Model of Grief’, *Mortality*, 2 (1997), 255-62, p.257, hereafter Stroebe.

29 David Morgan, *With Love and Rage: A Friendship with Iris Murdoch*, Acknowledgements.

30 Morgan, Acknowledgements.

31 Rosemary Hill, ‘I Will Tell You Everything’, *London Review of Books*, 32 (2010), 41-42, p.41.

32 Tony Walter, ‘A new model of grief: bereavement and biography’, *Mortality*, 1 (1996), 7-25, p.7.

fully substantiated portrait that can be incorporated into the lives of her survivors, and thus mourned. There are certainly varying accounts of Murdoch's physical presence: in Bayley's memoirs the demented Murdoch is uppermost, and often sleeping beside him as he writes. Conradi recognises the 'discontinuity between the serene and Buddha-like stillness others increasingly saw in Iris, and the questing spirit within; reminding the reader that the young Murdoch 'was renowned at Oxford for her acting ability' (*IMAL*, p.530). His older Murdoch, however, is defined by the 'simplicity of the mystic' (*IMAL*, p.588). Wilson emphasises Murdoch's promiscuity, humble work ethic and 'her mystery – what was going on behind that face?' which, at the end of the book, still 'remains a mystery' (Wilson, p.265). Morgan's Murdoch is a scolding, authoritative but benevolent presence that continues to work on him 'as a constant voice of correction – a series of affectionate tickings-off – *Come on David; Come off it David* – which I half listen to and, now and again, half act on' (Morgan, p.119). Each work of life writing nourishes or engenders another, which contributes to a more complex and realistic picture of Murdoch. Rather than destroying any sense of a 'complete' portrait, these conflicting accounts create a more realistic one. Conradi provides a deliberate antidote to Bayley's 'beautiful and terrible' Murdoch (*IMAL*, p.591), while Wilson attacks Bayley's focus on 'the twilight years, when IM was still alive but out of things' (Wilson, p.260). Morgan's memoir was inspired by conversations with Conradi, and is addressed to Conradi in the form of a letter. His narrative is aware that it is participating in a dialogue, often speaking to Conradi directly and commenting that remembered discussions with Murdoch 'go against the idea of "Saint Iris" as remembered in John Bayley's book and others' (Morgan, p.69). Each biography or memoir of Murdoch relates to previous ones in an on-going relocation of the dead subject as a continuing, even living, presence.

Life writing in the decade after Murdoch's death thus resembles the collective eulogising inherent in the funeral ceremony, the purpose of which in previous centuries was to entrust 'the memory of the dead person to the care of the *community* of others through the medium of *biographical narration*'.<sup>33</sup> Murdoch wanted no ritual associated with her death, 'at her own request, none attended her cremation; nor the scattering of her ashes "North of J8 flower-bed" [...] at Oxford Crematorium; and no memorial service followed' (*IMAL*, p.592). In the increasingly secularised and de-ritualized late twentieth and twenty-first century, life writing entrusts Murdoch's memory to a community of survivors of biographers and readers. At the beginning of *Iris Murdoch As I Knew Her*, Wilson writes, '[o]n this side of the grave, and beneath the visiting moon, there isn't a Last Word. What follows is certainly not an attempt to write it' (Wilson, p.11). The continuing repositioning of Murdoch by life writers ensures that the collective mourning of Murdoch is an endless and productive memorial.

However, more recently, literary mourning of Murdoch has rejected the personal and allowed her to survive through her work. A crucial aspect of this reassessment is Martin and Rowe's *Iris Murdoch: A Literary Life* which meets the challenge set to Murdoch scholarship in their final chapter, 'Afterword', 'to assimilate this information [about Murdoch's private life] so that it can contribute towards the synthesizing of life and art in a way that will not only help scholars to distinguish what identifies Murdoch's art as uniquely her own, but will also help to illuminate the nature of the creative process itself' (*IMLL*, p.171). Significant in this process is the fact that increasingly few writers will be able to write a distanceless biography of Murdoch, so the mantle will pass to who did not 'eat and drink' with her, but are near contemporaries. Eventually all writing about Murdoch will be by the 'distinctly removed' (Tekcan, p.9)

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33 Vivasvan Soni, *Mourning Happiness* (New York: Cornell University, 2010), p.83, emphasis in original.

or 'historically distanced' (Tekcan, p.113). Murdoch's own writing, particularly her letters and working library acquired by the Iris Murdoch Archive Project at Kingston University, will form the most important contact that these future biographers have with her. These thousands of letters to many different recipients also constitute the only place where Murdoch can *survive* in her own terms and comprise the closest possible material to autobiography. Murdoch appears to have been aware of the dependence of her literary survival on her personal correspondence, particularly in her wartime letters. Conradi refers to the Second World War as 'a great age of letter-writing, providing a virtual chat-room for a generation'.<sup>34</sup> These letters trace the genesis of Murdoch as an author and as a character. As Conradi notes, she could be 'shy and inhibited', but on paper 'experienced freedom' (*A Writer at War*, p.87). Murdoch is clearly aware of this freedom, writing to Philippa Foot, 'I can live in letters'.<sup>35</sup>

Murdoch's 1973 novel, *The Black Prince*, is her most consciously self-revelatory, and closest to autobiography in her *oeuvre*. The novel thus challenges attempts to define her after her death.<sup>36</sup> Her awareness that the writer's life, expressed through his or her work, is of paramount interest to certain critics and readers is one of its themes. *The Black Prince* is Murdoch's strongest bid for literary survival and also represents a conscious attempt to provide an autobiography that undermines future attempts to interpret her life. Rowe suggests that this novel blurs 'the distinction between narrator and author' who uses the novel as 'confessional', a place to 'acknowledge the inevitable presence of [her] own obsessions and defy those limitations by constructing a work of dazzling imaginative virtuosity'.<sup>37</sup>

Murdoch's own ethics of biography emphasize the unknowability of the other, which is encountered by all of Murdoch's biographers. 'Human lives,' she suggests, 'are essentially not to be summed up, but to be known, as they are lived, in many curious partial and inarticulate ways'.<sup>38</sup> Wilson contends that in *The Black Prince* Murdoch is 'quite shamelessly writing about herself' (Wilson, p.97), and yet he is fundamentally unable to capture the self he suggests Murdoch is revealing: 'Her mystery – what was going on behind that face – remains a mystery to me. If in this book I had hoped to come up with some simple "explanation" – how this woman came to write those books – then I have failed [...] Contemplating her, it occurs to me that it does not really matter that I have not prised out her secret. Perhaps, like the sphinx, she did not have one' (Wilson, p.265). Bayley's memoirs expose Murdoch's unknowability too through his reiteration of the idea that he 'cannot remember the [Murdoch] that must once have been'

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34 *Iris Murdoch: A Writer at War, Letters & Diaries 1939-45*, edited and introduced by Peter J. Conradi (London: short Books, 2010), p.86, hereafter *A Writer at War*.

35 Letters from Iris Murdoch to Philippa Foot in the Iris Murdoch Archives in Kingston University's Special Collections, KUAS100/2/7.

36 Peter Conradi suggests that the 'punnings about the self-referring quality of *Hamlet* are partly to be applied to *The Black Prince*', and claims that 'we [...] feel the authorial presence to be closer to Bradley than it is to other of her narrators' (SA, p.252). See also Bran Nicol, 'Iris Murdoch's Aesthetics of Masochism', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 29 (2006), 148-67, in which he suggests that Murdoch is aware that, in her fiction, she is presenting a piece of writing as objective or impersonal when it is, in fact, driven by her desire'; Mark Luprecht has argued that the novel's narrator is 'doubtlessly represents a part of his creator's personality' ('Sado-Masochism in *The Black Prince*' in *IMTC*, p.141); A.N. Wilson suggests that 'the novel is hard to put down and its readability must partly be explained by the fact that it is all coming from IM herself' (Wilson, pp.95-6).

37 Anne Rowe, "Policemen in a Search Team": Iris Murdoch's *The Black Prince* and Ian McEwan's *Atonement* in *Iris Murdoch: A Reassessment*, ed. Anne Rowe (London: Palgrave, 2007), p.154.

38 Peter Conradi, ed. *Iris Murdoch: A Writer at War, Letters and Diaries 1938-46* (London: Short Books, 2010), p.200. Letter to David Hicks dated 20 January 1943.



before Alzheimer's took hold (*Iris*, p.157), and Conradi asks 'how does one write about someone who thought she had "no memory, no continuity, no identity?"' (*IMAL*, p.xxiv). He is especially anxious to connect Murdoch's enigmatic personality to her goodness, suggesting that she was not concerned with 'the quest for an authentic identity' (*IMAL*, p.597). Ramon declares that the failure of the film *Iris* at 'summing Murdoch up', is in fact a form of preservation which keeps 'the most private, enigmatic and mysterious aspects of her personality intact' (*IMTC*, p.136).

*The Black Prince* and *The Sea, The Sea* are both essentially meditations on the impossibility of knowing the biographical subject and thus the artificial illumination that the biography form provides. Bradley admits to inability to capture his former lover, Julian, in his work. He addresses her directly at the end of his postscript, acknowledging that 'eternally you escape my embrace. Art cannot assimilate you nor thought digest you' (*BP*, p.392). Julian, given her right to reply in her own postscript, notes that she is 'not a very convincing "character"' (*BP*, p.408). Charles Arrowby provides a running commentary on the veracity of his biographical sketches of others in *The Sea, The Sea*, noting that his description of his cousin, James, is 'quite stylish. Is it true however? Well, it is not totally misleading, but it is far too short and "smart." How can one describe real people?' (*SS*, p.68). This consideration leads to a lengthy meditation on the reader's perception of biography as fact:

I re-read my pieces about James and Peregrine and was quite moved by them. Of course they are just sketches and need to be written in more detail before they become really truthful and 'lifelike'. It has only just now occurred to me that really I could write all sorts of fantastic nonsense about my life in these memoirs and everybody would believe it! Such is human credulity, the power of the printed word, and of any well-known 'name' or 'show-business personality'. Even if readers claim that they 'take it all with a grain of salt', they do not really. They yearn to believe, because believing is easier than disbelieving, and because anything which is written down is likely to be 'true in a way'. I trust this passing reflection will not lead anyone to doubt the truth of any part of this story! (*SS*, p.76)

This contemplation both warns readers of Charles's narrative of his unreliability, and is a surreptitious defiance of the biographical writing that Murdoch knew would emerge after her death.

Murdoch's dramatization of bereavement, grief and mourning in her novels extends to reflection upon her own death and the inevitable response to it by biographers and memoirists. *The Black Prince*, *The Sea, The Sea* and *Jackson's Dilemma* prepare the ground for the inevitable failure of biographical responses to her death to capture her essence. The desire to do so, however, is unquenchable and forms an important element of public and private mourning for her. Biographies and memoirs about Murdoch embody many of the diverse and complex responses to death examined by twentieth and twenty-first century mourning theory. In an age in which mourning is no longer as widely ritualised as it once was, it has found an outlet in life writing and Murdoch's survival will depend, at least in part, on this process. All writing produced about Murdoch since her death inevitably responds to her loss. Memoirs and biographies of which she is the subject thus reflect and contribute to the changing perception of mourning in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. They engage with and challenge Freudian mourning theory and expand the scope of contemporary New Wave mourning theory. The 'Murdoch

biography industry' (*IMTC*, p.235) that has flourished since the revelation that she was suffering from Alzheimer's disease and her subsequent death exemplifies the theory that the purpose of mourning is to create and maintain an enduring relationship with the dead person. Each additional work of life writing about Murdoch thus contributes to a fuller and more realised picture of her, which enables a community of survivors, including her readers, to be sustained. Murdoch's own analyses of writing about the dead in her novels, however, reveal the impossibility of presenting the subject accurately and convey an acute awareness of the, often self-serving, motives for doing so. Murdoch's novels therefore provide a challenge to the attempts of life-writers to capture and exploit her after her death.

Review of *Iris Murdoch and Elias Canetti: Intellectual Allies* by  
Elaine Morley (London: Legenda, 2013)

An infrequent occurrence now, in the swiftly expanding world of Murdoch criticism, is to find oneself in entirely virgin territory. True, there have been numerous studies during the past fifteen years or so that have discussed Iris Murdoch's relationship with Elias Canetti, but too often, as Elaine Morley notes, these have focused heavily on Canetti as the enchanter, the 'monster of Hampstead', with Murdoch cast as one of his numerous spellbound apprentices. Morley is right to flag this up early, as her own work attempts something entirely new, interdisciplinary, and, for those deeply engaged with Murdoch's work, highly illuminating.

In her introduction Morley sets out her stall by bringing together major secondary commentators: John Bayley, Peter J. Conradi, A.N. Wilson, and Canetti's biographer, Sven Hantschek, not only to give an overview of their respective lives, but also to contend that Murdoch and Canetti are not as far apart as early secondary work on these writers implies. Morley's claim is that Murdoch and Canetti are intellectually close on a range of issues including, surprisingly, their vision of power, even if they are separated by literary tradition. Morley's intention is to demonstrate that 'in the end [they] offer similar solutions to the problem of power, in spite of [Murdoch's] criticism that [Canetti] ignores the human capacity for good' (p.6). Morley draws on their respective fiction and critical writings, and also makes thoughtful use of the Iris Murdoch Archives in Kingston University's Special Collections to create a personal tone that draws the reader deeply into her discussion. She employs close-readings structured into three lengthy chapters – 'Blindness and Vision', 'Isolation and Communication', 'Possession and Non-Possession' – to exhibit her original and pointed critique of this intellectual relationship, drawing out the minutiae of both their narrative techniques and their shared fascination with human suffering. Of specific interest to Murdoch scholars is the shared heritage of Murdoch and Canetti, and Morley's re-readings of Murdoch's most frequently discussed novels; her work on *The Sea, The Sea*, for example, is particularly clear and original.

The danger with producing a comparative study, especially across a national and linguistic divide, is that both reader, and indeed writer, can become preoccupied with one side of the discussion. If Morley does have a bias it is toward Murdoch, but this is not a major stumbling point, as the synergy – and indeed disagreement – between both writers in their work is made apparent throughout the book. In the chapter that discusses 'Possession and Non-Possession', Morley details literary representations of the inherent nature of the power-hungry. Charles Arrowby is at the centre of this debate, but we are also reminded of Mischa Fox and Julius King, all, as Morley states, originally thought of as exemplars of Canetti's monstrous personality. Morley's contention is that the characterisation of Arrowby is more influenced by power figures in the work of Canetti, rather than by Canetti himself, and she supports this argument, in part, through the marginalia found in Murdoch's copy of *Crowds and Power* in the Murdoch Archives at Kingston University. This is just one small example of the close reading and attention to fine detail that Morley exhibits throughout her work: clearly the focus is on Murdoch, but readers of Canetti's work will find much to engage them.

As may be expected from a first monograph based on doctoral work, there is some awkward phrasing that could have been smoothed a little. Morley makes her argument a little too pointedly at times so that it may come across as unnecessary authorial interruption: however, some less well-versed readers may appreciate this directive quality. The necessity for long quotations in German from Canetti's works, especially from *Die Blendung*, is also doubtful. This book is aimed at the British market and I would have been happy to take Morley's translations, or those of others, on trust. Whilst these translations can help close reading, they feel redundant in the transposition from research to a fully-fledged book. The chief fault of this book is the formatting, but this issue is of course out of the author's hands: a larger font and footnotes would have been helpful for the reading experience.

These are, however, minor points. This monograph is rich in new avenues of discussion and Morley's attention to the detail of both shared biography and intellectual heritage creates a work that is not just for those interested in Canetti's influence but for any scholar seeking to gain new insight into Murdoch's most revered novels.

Review of *Remembering Iris Murdoch: Letters and Interviews* by  
Jeffrey Meyers (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)

In this volume Jeffrey Meyers presents a biographical sketch of Iris Murdoch, his personal collection of letters from her written between 1970 and 1995, the *Denver Quarterly* and *Paris Review* interviews he did with her, and a brief response to John Bayley's and A.N. Wilson's memoirs. Meyers met Murdoch at a seminar she gave at the University of Denver in 1978 after they had become correspondents. He contends that he and Murdoch had 'an Elective Affinity: we liked each other and got on well'.<sup>1</sup> His description of their relationship reinforces Murdoch's chameleon-like ability, vividly exposed by David Morgan in *With Love and Rage*, to divine what her friends and correspondents needed her to project at any one time.<sup>2</sup> Meyers states that 'our relations were at once like mother and son, respected teacher and favourite pupil, older and younger colleague, but we were also buddies, confidantes and friends' (p.12).

Meyers' personal relations with Murdoch are of considerably more interest than his biographical outline, which contains redundant information on Murdoch's earnings and winnings and makes the uncalled-for insinuation that Murdoch won the (£10,000) Booker prize for *The Sea, The Sea* in 1978 because her friend, Freddie Ayer, was on the panel. The detail in this section adds little to Peter Conradi's thorough *Iris Murdoch: A Life*, and is rather less respectful of the subject and her contemporaries, referring to Murdoch's female lovers, amongst whom Philippa Foot is named, as 'various butch types' (p.4). Given the brevity of this section (26 pages), there is also disproportionate attention paid to Murdoch's childlessness, a fact that seems to preoccupy many of her biographers and memoirists.

Anyone who has visited the Iris Murdoch Archives at Kingston University will recognise Meyers' description of reading Murdoch's handwritten letters as 'rather like breaking a code' (p.13) which serves to enhance the experience of deciphering their meaning. Meyers asserts that the ninety-three letters from Murdoch (and three from Bayley) in this collection 'will deepen our understanding of her bohemian life and complex work' (p.2). He is right that the letters confirm traits and preoccupations evident in other letter runs and reveal previously unknown aspects of the writer. Murdoch's genuine delight and excitement at becoming the co-dedicattee, with Bayley, of Meyers' biography of Hemingway (1985) is as surprising to the reader as it was to Meyers himself ('We shall be delighted to see ourselves in real print inside your book, which we shall be so pleased to read!') (p.33). In her letters to Meyers Murdoch is endlessly encouraging and supportive of his work and typically tactful when dismissing theories about her own. In response to an article sent (but not written) by Meyers which attributes to Murdoch a theory of fiction, she declares '[the writer] has ingeniously put together those 2 old papers to credit me with a theory of fiction! In fact (of course) I have none – except that I think people should write well!' (p.39). Meyers's footnotes are largely useful in explaining

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1 Jeffrey Meyers, *Remembering Iris Murdoch: Letters and Interviews* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.11.

2 David Morgan, *With Love and Rage: A Friendship with Iris Murdoch* (Kingston: Kingston University Press, 2010).

his side of the conversation since we only have Murdoch's letters, but there are some exasperating omissions. It would have been useful to know, for instance, which character in Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* was rumoured to have been based on Murdoch (a theory she dismisses).

Meyers admits to being a fan of A.N Wilson's *Iris Murdoch As I Knew Her*, and the self-aggrandisement that distinguishes that memoir is also a consistent feature of Meyers' book. Perhaps this tone is justified since Murdoch was clearly an admirer of Meyers' biographies. There is, however, markedly little discussion of Murdoch's work and thought in the book, with the exception of the two interviews, and Meyers's own work is heavily referenced. The inclusion of a reference letter written for Meyers by Murdoch seems unnecessary and disturbs the sequence of letters referring to the *Paris Review* interview which are the most interesting in the collection. As Meyers suggests, Murdoch took this interview particularly seriously and was insistent in her attempts to exercise some editorial control over the content. Her mistrust of the 'absolutely first-class muddlers' (p.51) at the *Paris Review* is amusing, but also revealing of a real concern about misrepresentation in the press. One letter seems to contain real panic about the prospect of the interview being published before she has made a final edit: 'About the interview – I *must* see a copy for correction – there was so much to change, and doing it on your original script looks rather confused, and I must see the typescript therefore in time, *before* it begins to be set up by the Review! I would *also* like to see the proofs. *Must get it right*. I haven't yet discovered a suitable "revised MS" page, but could quickly do so' (p.51). A further letter demonstrates uncharacteristic petulance after the *Paris Review* submits supplementary questions: 'I am amazed. Who do these *Paris Review* people think they are? Are they French or Americans? Why do they think they're so grand? I thought they'd commissioned the thing? I'm not at all sure I want to answer their questions. It depends on what the questions are. You may say that I will consider their questions' (p.53). Fortunately Murdoch was pleased with the interview when it eventually came to be published (two years after it had taken place). It stands as one of the more revealing interviews with Murdoch and it is fascinating to see the mechanics behind the piece exposed here.

Evidence of quite a sudden decline in Murdoch's ability to communicate is another significant aspect of Meyers's collection of letters. While there is a vagueness in many of her letters, those written from spring 1990 onwards are markedly absentminded and often far shorter in length. These letters are as valuable as the earlier ones in tracking Murdoch's mounting struggle to continue working and her unrelenting need to do so. One particularly poignant letter contains the plaintive parenthetical insertion: 'Perhaps it is time to stop juggling and fall off the high wire' (p.77). If Murdoch is contemplating the end of her writing career, she is also increasingly keen to support and praise the industry of her recipient ('you are a great power house' [p.75]). She also maintains a keen interest in the shifting seasons and in Meyers's frequently changing location. His proximity to the sea in Maine is a source of envy for Murdoch, who repeatedly reaffirms her love of swimming and her desire for an indoor swimming pool which she believes could help her relax as she labours on her final novel, *Jackson's Dilemma*. The letter run ends, as many sadly do, with letters written by John Bayley after Murdoch becomes unable to reply. Bayley affirms that she 'remains as *sweet* as ever [...] tho' nothing remains of her great creative mind, nothing' (p.83).

An appendix to the letters contains both the *Paris Review* and *Denver Quarterly* interviews which have been published elsewhere, but are useful accompaniments to the letters that outline the interview and editing process. The inclusion of some deleted passages from the *Paris Review* interview is also illuminating. Murdoch's meditation

on the work of civil servants is potentially enlightening in connection with her civil servant characters and her comments on Ireland reveal her huge distress about the effect of terrorism: 'how will they get out of this condition of hatred and acceptance of continually murderous activity? [...] I think terrorism is a great problem for civilized societies' (p.111). A further appendix consisting of a brief review of John Bayley's first memoir of Murdoch and A.N. Wilson's *Iris Murdoch As I Knew Her* seems superfluous and could perhaps have been incorporated into the initial biographical section. There is no doubt, however, that the letters in this collection will be of interest to Murdoch's readers and of use to scholars as noteworthy additions to the material which is already available.

Review of *Becoming Iris Murdoch* by Frances White  
(Kingston-upon Thames: Kingston University Press, 2014)

This biography, which won the Kingston University Press Short Biography Prize, is unusual in several ways. The biographical genre is now much discussed, theorized and problematized. Frances White acknowledges her debt to Catherine Neale Parke's *Biography: Writing Lives*. There are courses on biography and life writing in British universities. Oxford, to give only one example, offers under the aegis of Hermione Lee, a regular series of guest lectures by distinguished biographers. But the reader's angle, though inevitable, is not often admitted. Here it is foregrounded. The subtitle to the Introduction is 'How do I write a biography of Iris Murdoch as I know her?' White shares her own experience of Iris Murdoch from the point in her early teens when her father gave her a copy of *The Unicorn* to their only meeting, when, after learning that Iris had Alzheimer's, she impulsively hurried to Murdoch's North Oxford house and thrust a bunch of irises into the hands of the smiling but confused novelist. Throughout, White moves from her own response to the work, her sense of Murdoch as a teacher and her 'Tristram Shandy-esque' dilemmas of presentation (p.29). She offers 'a passionate book, not a dry detached assessment' (p.19), hopes 'to hand on to others the passion one feels for one's subject and her achievements' (p.107) and offers a notably fresh and responsive account of Iris Murdoch.

However, this is also a short scholarly book. White knows the secondary material and has made fruitful use of the Iris Murdoch Archives at Kingston University, which celebrates its tenth anniversary this year. In particular, her quotations from letters are immediate and illuminating. She 'wanted to let so much of the story be told by Iris Murdoch and John Bayley in their own words' (p.107), although recognizing that their words are open to the same questions and scepticism as the biographer's. However, these records do open windows into how the writers felt – or wanted to present themselves – *at the time* and White warns against the hindsight of the biographer and reader, who are aware of a future invisible to the author. Murdoch did not know during the period covered by White's book that she was going to be a very successful novelist. Indeed, she feared for some years that she might have no talent either as a novelist or a philosopher. It was a time 'of uncertainty, loneliness, and fear of failure in both work and relationships' (p.30).

White concentrates on just over a decade of Murdoch's life: from 1945, when the war ended and she was sent to Belgium and Austria to work for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration on behalf of refugees and displaced persons, to 1957, when her third published novel, *The Sandcastle*, came out. The first years of this period, very eventful but often unhappy, are of course less discussed in critical works on the novels, while the much calmer and productive years after her marriage in 1956 provide less of interest to the biographer. Murdoch was 79 when she died and only about a third of Peter J. Conradi's biography deals with the last 43 years of her life. White focuses on a very important and formative time in Murdoch's development as a person, thinker and writer.

The book is organized by themes rather than chronology. The chapters are headed 'The World', 'The Flesh', 'The Spirit', 'The Mind', 'The Heart'. In the first chapter Iris is indeed introduced into another world with the excitement of arrival in a Europe from



which English civilians had been cut off for six years. In Brussels she is excited by existentialism, briefly encounters Sartre, on whom she will write a book, and meets Queneau, whom she admires, loves and translates. In Austria she is hurled into the aftermath of war and works with young people whose lives have been totally disrupted, who are on starvation rations and who are facing an unknown future with impressive courage and commitment. The plight of refugees will be a recurring topic in her fiction.

'The Flesh' deals with a dizzying number of relationships, some carnal, some loosely platonic, most heterosexual, some lesbian, their quantity supporting Iris's belief that she could seduce anybody. White comments that 'characters in Iris Murdoch's novels are woven into webs of desire so complex as to be farcical. She has been criticized for this but would strenuously deny that it is untrue to life. It was certainly not untrue to her own life' (p.25). (Or to many others. An Oxford student told me that her Oxford graduate mother had thought this aspect of Murdoch's novels far-fetched until she herself went up to the university.) And in real life it was not so farcical. Two relationships ended tragically with Frank Thompson's execution in Bulgaria and Franz Steiner's fatal heart attack, and David Hicks broke off his engagement to Iris. The chapter concludes with Murdoch's marriage to John Bayley, though the sexual complications did not.

White quotes an entry in Murdoch's journal three times: 'I think nothing is really worth anything except (a) being happily married (b) being a saint (c) writing a good novel' (pp.30, 60 and 92). She thought (b) 'far too difficult' and her valorization of it may seem at odds with her promiscuity. But in 'The Spirit' White charts her continuous interest in Christianity and theology, discusses the powerful influence on Simone Weil on her thought and fiction and emphasises the supreme importance for Murdoch of *attention*, to others, to the natural world and to art. Something should have been said here about her respect for Buddhism.

'The Mind' discusses Murdoch's reading, teaching and writing on philosophy. After her return to England and a depressed but industrious year of private study in her parents' house, she was awarded a research position at Cambridge. Unfortunately, Wittgenstein, one of her main interests, left for Ireland soon after she arrived. She found Cambridge intellectually uncongenial because of its concentration on linguistic philosophy and was relieved to be appointed to a position at Oxford, though I think the philosophical climate was similar there. She was, as Philippa Foot told me, concerned with moral life, while her Oxford colleagues were interested in moral language. Murdoch pursued her own interests, taught a wide range of philosophy and refused to be confined to the syllabus. She preferred contemporary European philosophy to English for its attention to the whole person. Her book on Sartre was a readable introduction to existentialism and made the connections, which she often later denied of her own novels, between philosophy and literature in her own novels. Surprisingly, she expressed the wish that she could move from teaching philosophy to English literature, her choice of subject when she first applied to Oxford as a sixth-former. Also surprisingly, she became disaffected with Oxford and for the rest of her life made frequent escapes to London: 'The society gets me down in the long run [...]. The donnishness of people, the cleverness – all the bleeding *intellectuals* [...]. What a relief to board the London train and see those damn spires disappearing' (p.86). This comment explains why, although she spent most of her life in or near Oxford, London is the main, and Oxford a very minor, setting for her novels.

'The Heart' celebrates Murdoch's marriage and her personal and creative development during it. White claims that during these decades, in contrast to her self-absorbed and self-analysing youth, Murdoch practised and achieved her spiritual ideal of 'unselfing' and is, like Shakespeare, invisible in her fictions. I should like to believe this but see no evidence for it in the biographical records or the novels and wish White had provided

it. Perhaps Murdoch's less obviously eventful life suggests contemplation rather than action but most people's middle and later years are less eventful, even if they are not sitting at their desks writing novels. In his biography Conradi solves the problem of how to address this period of Murdoch's life by writing about friendships. White surmises, interestingly, that John Bayley's creativity was inhibited by his wife's. He wrote novels before his marriage and after Murdoch's death. However, he did produce an impressive body of literary criticism in the meantime and helped himself cope with the grief and demands of Iris's illness by writing about it.

White's doubts about the genre of biography recur in her concluding section. Can one trust even the testimony of the subject about herself? This is a question that indeed haunts Murdoch's fiction. What White can trust is the authenticity of her own response to the work and she conveys that candidly and vividly. This is an engaged and engaging account of a beloved novelist.

Review of *Never Mind about the Bourgeoisie: The Correspondence between Iris Murdoch and Brian Medlin 1976-1995*, edited by Gillian Dooley and Graham Nerlich (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014)

This rich and informative correspondence merits two reviews: one focused on the Australian moral philosopher and eco-activist Brian Medlin (1927-2005) from an Australian perspective, one focused on Iris Murdoch (1919-1999) from a British perspective. For the readership of the *Iris Murdoch Review* the latter is appropriate, but 'Iris Murdoch and Brian Medlin' by Jane Sullivan, is a perceptive review which appears in *Australia Book Review*.<sup>1</sup>

Murdoch's 40 (mostly short) letters take only 51 pages: Medlin's 23 (often very long) letters take 145 pages. Yet this collection is a major addition to the published letters of Iris Murdoch because of several unusual characteristics: first, it is the only existing symmetrical letter-run, thanks to Medlin's copying of his letters to Murdoch as well as keeping hers to him. Second, this is a very unusual relationship in Murdoch's life. She had small personal acquaintance with Medlin (he visited England and she visited Australia only once) apart from as a correspondent, and she had no romantic attachment to him, nor any role as either pupil or mentor, as is the case in many other letter-runs. They meet as equals, with great respect for each other's minds and work, and warm affection for each other's characters. Third, Murdoch writes to Medlin about herself and admits to him how rare this is.

Theirs was a deep if unlikely friendship. Their wide-ranging correspondence discusses each other's books and multiple interests, most particularly, a passion for philosophy to relate to everyday life. Murdoch tells him, 'I like your: "philosophy is about the texture of human life. Philosophy is about getting life right and making life right"' (p.161), and he shares with her his conviction that 'if I can't do philosophy in heaven, *I* can't go there. *The person I am* can't go there, if I can't do philosophy badly, then I can't do it at all' (p.156). Murdoch often urges correspondents to *write more*: Medlin's loquacity satisfies her craving to know more about him, his family, his thoughts, his outdoor bush-life of gardening, hikes and bird-watching, bush ballads and cricket ('a noble game – it has a mystical magic' [p.111], Murdoch tells him). They met through John Bayley when Medlin briefly studied at Oxford. Medlin is Australian to the core. To him, England is 'the country of the Oxford don and Maggie Thatcher!' (p.51) and he tells Murdoch, 'If it hadn't been for the rare human being like [John Bayley] at New College, I'd have gone bonkers' (p.12).

Medlin is vivacious, surging with passion despite major health problems. His letters fascinate, offering joy and stimulating provocation. Small wonder that Murdoch tells him, 'I enjoy your letters and reading them is a treat' (p.111). He lives life to the full and pays the kind of attention to the world that Murdoch advocates in her philosophy and embodies in her novels: 'The whole area was thronged with a frenzy of feeding birds. Willy-wagtails, crested pigeons, peaceful doves, singing honey-eaters, crows, probably ravens, falcons, nankeen kestrels, fork-tailed kites, black-shouldered kites, letter-winged

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<sup>1</sup> This review can be found at this link: <<https://www.australianbookreview.com.au/abr-online/current-issue/116-may-2014-no-361/1959-iris-and-brian>> [accessed 14 May 2014].

kites. All hassling for a nest, a living, a place in the sun' (p.57). He tells Murdoch much about his beloved country, which she appreciates: 'Australia needs you to tell about her. Telling about Australia (by Australians) is really *quite different* [...] There is an *Australian style*' (p.68). Murdoch amusingly (and unsuccessfully) tries to learn Australian slang from him: '(I note that it should be "flat as a lizard *drinking*" but I have forgotten what it actually means – is it good or bad?)' (p.111). He brings out Murdoch's often-submerged wit: 'People don't *sing* much in Oxford now. Except for the Warden of New College who is a talented pianist, and sings a lot of Cole Porter etc. if encouraged – and even if not' (p.144).

Furthermore, Murdoch offers Medlin a degree of intimacy rare to her usually reticent character: 'You ask about my parents. My father was born in New Zealand [...] I was born in Dublin, but my father, following the tradition, removed me at the age of one to London [...] He was a clever gentle bookish man, a *good* man. My darling mother, who had a wonderful soprano voice, was merry & witty & sweet. I was an only child. What luck. I had this wonderful pair all to myself. I miss them very much' (p.67). Murdoch seems taken aback by her own confidences: 'Enough about me. I don't usually write about myself, but you did ask' (p.67). His Australian directness startles *her* into confidentiality: 'I was struck by your reply when asked why you married John. "Love," you said – I believe somewhat surprised' (p.90).

Murdoch and Medlin argue, but never with anger, more with intrigued, respectful searching into their differing views. A case in point is the vexed word/concept *bourgeois*, pertinently chosen by Dooley and Nerlich as the title for this volume. They 'bandy the word backwards and forwards' until 1992 when Murdoch says, 'my heart is with you – never mind about the bourgeoisie' (p.xi) and Medlin responds in kind. She rises to his challenge: 'So you think my views on art are "bourgeois." I wonder what you mean by that?' (p.143). But it is in Murdoch's review of Medlin's book, *Human Nature, Human Survival* (1992) (also included in this volume), that she interrogates the word most closely: 'Here we must pause to consider the important concept of 'the bourgeois': the bourgeoisie, bourgeois values, bourgeois philosophers, the bourgeois way of human life. Medlin points out various senses of the word: a mode of production, a social class, a kind of society, a historical era, a system of ideas, an ideology' (pp.203-4). She then comments judiciously, 'I would think that the word "bourgeois" is not helpful here, it is too ambiguous and over-loaded' (p.205).

The prelude to the writing of the review engenders some of the most insightful letters in the collection. Medlin diffidently asks this favour of her, acknowledging 'I think I have some idea of how you cherish your time' (p.163), and indeed Murdoch's willingness to accede to his request is also the 'most striking proof of her regard for Medlin' (p.xii) that Dooley finds in the 'thoughtful, sympathetic but by no means uncritical' (p.xiii) review. They discuss both his monograph and *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, which she sends him in exchange: 'I am reading *H. Nature H. Survival* with greatest interest and pleasure. [...] If you receive a longish Book with a pretty cover from me don't feel you have to read it – it is (being based on lectures) all bits & pieces, there are some jokes, some lit. criticism etc'. (p.172). Murdoch calls Medlin's book 'your fine spirited text', though 'I disagree with some of your main tenets – the root of which is your sort of Marxism-Leninism and your anti-bourgeois arguments' (p.177). Of her book Medlin writes: 'With respect to *MGM* [...] Your book isn't "difficult," but I'm finding it hard to handle [...] It is a very complex book, at any rate in detail: so far I'm still seeing mainly trees' (p.182). He later says 'I'm finding *MGM* a marvellously exciting book' (p.183), and 'I think you may be provoking me to write a book called *Morality as the basis of Metaphysics*' (p.184). Medlin was afraid that by cutting her over-long review he had 'lost the Iris Murdoch flavour' (p.187), but, certainly for this reader, Murdoch's distinctive voice is clearly heard.

Medlin loved Murdoch's novels and he loved her. This epistolary friendship reveals new aspects of Murdoch's personality. Dooley and Nerlich have edited impeccably and the volume is beautifully produced, with the inclusion of facsimiles of letters and photographs of the *dramatis personae*. Dooley's scholarly 'Introduction' contextualises the correspondence, and this, alongside the meticulous endnotes, is particularly helpful for the non-Australian reader. The only drawback is the high price of this volume, but the treasure within its covers makes it well worth paying.

Review of *Ética y Literatura Cinco Novelas de Iris Murdoch* edited by Margarita Maurí (Barcelona: Kit-book, 2014)

Margarita Maurí, one of the leading experts on Iris Murdoch's work in Southern Europe, is responsible for much of the attention given in Spain to this British writer, not only through her own scholarly production, but also by organizing a seminar/research group on Iris Murdoch at the University of Barcelona since 2006. The Iris Murdoch Seminar focuses primarily on Murdoch's philosophical essays and on the ethical aspects of her literary endeavours. This new publication, edited by Maurí, is a direct result of the research group established through past seminars. In *Ética y Literatura Cinco Novelas de Iris Murdoch* five novels by Murdoch are read as philosophical texts, with particular attention being given to ethical aspects: *Under the Net*, *The Bell*, *A Severed Head*, *The Black Prince* and *The Book and the Brotherhood*.

Stemming from Maurí's introduction and her emphasis on the role of Art, all five contributions share an explicit structure: plot summary, presentation of characters, and focus on a list of topics deemed pertinent at a philosophical, as well as narrative, level. The novels chosen range from 1954 to 1987. Ignasi Llobera reads *Under the Net* (1954), paying particular attention to the convention of *bildungsroman* in which Jake Donaghue evolves from character to narrator. Llobera presents a fascinating point concerning the links between Murdoch and Wittgenstein, in which he highlights ways in which Murdoch goes beyond the acknowledgment of the unspeakable, attempting to show through Art that which cannot be verbal and thus reaching for the purest form of Art. Margarita Maurí presents a study of *The Bell* (1958) in which religion, innocence, love, and the bell itself as a symbol, are analyzed in depth. Maurí provides an interesting contrast between the sermons of Michael Meade and James Tayper Pace, and also between the absolute opposites of the Bishop and Noel Spens. According to Maurí, *The Bell* is also a study of isolation – the isolation of the Self, which creates artificial boundaries against reality. Martina Marcet's reading of *A Severed Head* (1961) is centred on the relevance of Eros as desire and violence. The power struggles depicted in the novel provide the perfect ground for the study of the link between Plato's notion of Eros and Freud's interpretation of sexuality and erotic drive. Marcet's detailed reading of plot and symbols such as Medusa's head, lays the ground for a pertinent pondering on Iris Murdoch's ethical perspective on the human mind and the quest for inner knowledge. Laura Cortés studies *The Black Prince* (1973) and focuses on the confrontation between writers and concepts of Art. Cortés also develops an appealing perspective on the transformation of a middle-aged protagonist set in motion by love as an enactment of Murdoch's theory of moral evolution. Finally, in her analysis of *The Book and the Brotherhood* (1987), Montse Figuerola emphasizes the importance given to character over plot, and provides an interesting interpretation of the enchanter fantasy, particularly of Jean Cambus's role as a sort of voluntary slave. Her study also focuses on religion as an aid to vanquishing the ego and on Gerard's recognition that someone who thinks differently from the author of a provocative book must prove his position through the effort of writing a new book, and not merely by being dismissive.

*Ética y Literatura Cinco Novelas de Iris Murdoch* is one of the first scholarly works on Iris Murdoch published in Spanish that is accessible to the general public outside academia. It will provide new readers of Murdoch's fiction with a solid guide to the main philosophical aspects of five fundamental novels and of Murdoch's approach to Art and Life. Together with the ongoing effort to translate Murdoch's novels into Spanish, Portuguese and Italian, this new book will prove an extremely valuable contribution to the reading of Iris Murdoch in Southern Europe enhancing the already significant impact of the Iris Murdoch Seminar itself.

### **Editorial Note**

A review by Maria Antonaccio of *Language Lost and Found: On Iris Murdoch and the Limits of Philosophical Discourse* by Niklas Fosberg (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) will appear in due course on the Iris Murdoch Archive Project website. We apologize for being unable to include the review in this edition, which is being published ahead of schedule to coincide with the Seventh International Conference on Iris Murdoch at Kingston University. On the book's cover, Stephen Mulhall acknowledges it as 'one of the most philosophically sophisticated contributions to these interlinked issues that I have come across in the past decade; the care, clarity and ease with which Fosberg contests and dismantles one of the most influential current readings of Murdoch (that advanced by Nussbaum) is enough on its own to make it clear that standards in this area have just been raised'.

## Report on the Iris Murdoch Archives in Kingston University's Special Collections 2013-14

Since the last report in the Summer of 2013, the Archives have once again been incredibly busy. The community project, 'Iris Murdoch and Philippa Foot: An Arc of Friendship', based on the letters from Iris Murdoch to Philippa Foot and supported by the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund, finished at the end of July 2013. This project was a tremendous success and we hope to build upon the relationships formed with local community groups and schools in the future.

The period has also seen a number of additions to our collections. These are:

- Letters from Iris Murdoch to Brigid Brophy: Approximately 1000 letters from Iris Murdoch to her friend and fellow author Brigid Brophy, dating from the 1950s to the 1990s. Work is currently underway on organising and cataloguing the letters. Purchased with the assistance of the Iris Murdoch Archive Project (Kingston University), the Iris Murdoch Society, Kingston University Alumni Fund (Opportunities Fund), V&A Purchase Grant Fund, the Breslauer Foundation, and Friends of the National Libraries.
- A Copy of *The Lover's Manual of Ovid* by E. Phillips Barker owned by Iris Murdoch – a note by Iris Murdoch in the front reads 'Iris Murdoch Oxford Jan 1942'. Kindly donated by Anne Rowe.
- A set of 16 books formerly owned by Iris Murdoch – many of them have handwritten dedications from the authors to her, or Murdoch has written her name in the front. One text is partially annotated. Purchased by the Iris Murdoch Archive Project.
- Letters from Iris Murdoch to Stephen Gardiner. Gardiner was an architect and a friend of Iris Murdoch. Kindly donated by Joan Scotson.
- Copy of the publication *Black Paper 1975: The Fight for Education* which contains an article by Iris Murdoch. Kindly donated by an anonymous donor.
- Scripts for the Radio play adaptation of *The Sea, The Sea* from 1994. Kindly donated by Richard Crane.
- Letters from Iris Murdoch to her friend Leo Pliatzky: 50 letters in total, with the earliest dating from 1943. Purchased by the Iris Murdoch Archive Project.
- Letter and postcard from Iris Murdoch to Ludmilla Lasku. Kindly donated by Ludmilla Pineiro (nee Lasku).
- Thirteen books relating to Frank Thompson and his family. Kindly donated by Peter J. Conradi.
- Two letters from John Bayley and one postcard from Iris Murdoch to Michael Howard, to be added to the earlier donation of letters from John Bayley to Michael Howard. Kindly donated by Michael Howard.
- Two items relating to Iris Murdoch and theatre: a programme for *A Severed Head* at the Donovan Maule Theatre in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1968, and a copy of the magazine for Greenwich Theatre *Cue* from Sep 1970 with a piece by Iris Murdoch, 'A Note on Drama'. Donated by an anonymous donor.



- A Copy of *The Living Novel* by V.S. Pritchett owned by Iris Murdoch. Murdoch has written her name and the year in the front of the book, underlined passages in the text and added some annotations in the back cover. Kindly donated by Anne Rowe and Frances White, and partially funded by the proceeds of the Book Launch of *Becoming Iris Murdoch* by Frances White, on 18th June in the Winn Hall, Dunsfold, Surrey, at which Anne Rowe gave a talk, *The Importance of Being Iris*.

We are very grateful to all our donors. We have recently been sent a number of items including books on Iris Murdoch and her work, as well as the *Black Paper* and theatre items mentioned above, by an anonymous donor. Should the donor be reading this edition of the *Iris Murdoch Review* we would like to take this opportunity to say thank you for your generosity – it is very much appreciated.

The number of visitors using the Iris Murdoch Collections here has been very high. Since the beginning of June 2013 we have had 166 visitors and 7 group visits looking at 569 items from the Collections.

For those planning to visit us in the future please note that there have recently been some changes to our opening hours. We are now closed all day on Wednesdays to allow us to fulfil a number of professional commitments and activities, including hosting group visits to the archive. However, we no longer close for lunch on the remaining days of the week so appointments can take place at any point between 9 a.m. and 4.30 p.m. on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursday and Fridays; and our researchers are welcome to work through the lunch time period should they wish to. What we do ask is that you do not try to eat your lunch in the Archive as you work! We are based very close to a café for those wishing to step out to grab a bite to eat or drink, and there is seating near to the Archive too. As always, if you would like to make an appointment or have any queries please do not hesitate to ask, you can contact us at [archives@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:archives@kingston.ac.uk). Please remember we do ask for at least 24 hours notice of appointments.

We have been hard at work recently improving our Archives Catalogue, which can be searched online at <http://adlib.kingston.ac.uk>. There is now a record on the catalogue for every single collection the Archives hold, so you can search and see descriptions of all our holdings. Some collections are only documented at the top level, i.e. there are not descriptions of individual documents. However we are working hard at this and new cataloguing records go live all the time, so do please check the site regularly for updates. Please remember that the book collections are catalogued and appear on the University's library catalogue at <http://icat.kingston.ac.uk>.

We have also recently added details of more of our Iris Murdoch Collections to the AIM25 site at [www.aim25.ac.uk](http://www.aim25.ac.uk). AIM25 aims to draw together collection level descriptions from higher education and specialist archives across the London area, and having our records on the site means that researchers can search our holdings as well as those of over 100 other Archives. We have also submitted details of our holdings to the National Register of Archives managed by the National Archives and records should be added to their online database soon – please see <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/nra/default.asp> for more information or to search. Having details of our Collections on these sites will enable potential researchers to find us more easily, and will help promote our Collections. Another innovation is a survey which we are sending out to our researchers after their first visit (or first repeat visit since February 2014) to the Archive. This is to collect information to inform future planning for the Archive and to help improve our service. Please note that participation in the survey is voluntary and

all answers are anonymous. We hope that many of you will help us by filling in the survey after your visit.

Looking ahead, the Archive will be undergoing an exciting change in the future. Kingston University recently announced plans to construct a new building at the Penrhyn Road Campus and, amongst other things, the building will contain a new home for the Archives and Special Collections. Planning is currently in the very early stages, but you can find out more about the proposed building at <http://www.kingston.ac.uk/campus-planning/new-town-house/>

Finally, just a reminder that we will share any news on the Archives and Special Collections (including details of new collections, exhibitions, and cataloguing updates) on our Archives Blog, which can be found at <http://blogs.kingston.ac.uk/asc>

Report: Italy's first international conference on Iris Murdoch, *Iris Murdoch and Virtue Ethics: Philosophy and the Novel*, organized by Dr Ester Monteleone, was held at Roma Tre University from Thursday 20 February to Saturday 22 February 2014.

A full programme of plenary and parallel sessions focussed on issues connected with the virtues. The international spread of Murdoch scholarship was evident, with speakers from Italy, Spain, the US and the UK. The strong cluster of plenary speakers included Luisa Muraro (University of Verona), who delivered a paper in Italian (with simultaneous translation) on Murdoch's only short story, 'Something Special'; Maria Antonaccio (Bucknell University), who extended her account of asceticism in Murdoch's philosophy; Anne Rowe (Kingston University), who outlined the moral challenges to Murdoch scholarship arising from thousands of Murdoch's letters now available for study; while Sabina Lovibond (Worcester College Oxford), and Alison Scott-Baumann (University of Derby), explored Murdoch's uneasy connection with rival traditions of existentialism, structuralism and phenomenology. Response from postgraduate students to a polished and strongly analytic paper, entitled 'Loving Gaze and Accurate Knowledge', by Margarita Mauri (University of Barcelona), indicated the impact of her work, which comprised a patient teasing out of problems associated with interpreting the case of 'M and D', in particular why a loving gaze is an intrinsic element of virtue rather than something to be thought of independently from virtue.

The conference marked three areas of development in terms of current responses to Murdoch's philosophy: first, work on Murdoch and the virtues, which now appears less insular and more *connected* to ongoing debates within the theory of virtue ethics. Symptomatic of this change was a range of papers examining Murdoch's latent neo-Aristotelian connection. This is a timely development. Attempts were made a decade ago to provide an account of Murdoch's governing approach to virtue, none of which was particularly successful, perhaps because all were written prior to the current more detailed examination of Murdoch's attitude towards particular virtues. There have, however, been several useful analyses of individual Murdochian virtues over the past few years and Murdoch scholarship at this conference furthered the identification of how her philosophy integrates with theories of virtue ethics.

Second, Murdoch's engagement with Heidegger and continental philosophy is receiving more detailed attention. Sabina Lovibond's plenary lecture, which examined the strengths and limitations in Murdoch's engagement with structuralism, was complemented by Gary Browning's informal address on Murdoch's Heidegger manuscript, *Heidegger: The Pursuit of Being*, held in the Iris Murdoch Archives at Kingston University. Murdoch's abandonment of the manuscript has always cast a question mark over its quality. However, Browning claims that there are pertinent insights in the latter manuscript and that the 'Introduction' (published in *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher*, edited by Justin Brookes, OUP, 2011), is not entirely representative of the text as a whole. These insights shed considerable light on Murdoch's distinctive conception of what it is to engage in philosophy.

Third, Murdoch's concept of love (which is far from transparent in all respects) is also receiving systematic attention. This theme is due to be explored further at the Seventh International Iris Murdoch Conference at Kingston University in September. The intention is that the Proceedings of the Rome Conference will be published in two volumes, edited by Ester Monteleone. Such a publication will make a welcome and significant contribution to Murdoch scholarship, and it is to be hoped that this innovative conference will be the first of many in Italy.

## Iris Murdoch Online

Evidence of Murdoch's growing and evolving readership is increasingly manifest in her presence on social media sites. Several classic Murdoch quotations are widely retweeted (and sometimes corrupted) on Twitter every day ('we can only learn to love by loving', 'love is the extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real' and 'one of the secrets of a happy life is continuous small treats' are among the most-retweeted). The official Twitter account for the Iris Murdoch Archive Project has over 2,500 followers and, along with the smaller but equally lively Facebook appreciation group, has come to be a place where fans and scholars from all over the world gather to discuss Murdoch's work and to disseminate information. As I write, the comedian and actor Russell Kane (who recently stated in an online interview that Murdoch was his ideal dinner guest) is sharing his love of *The Bell* and *The Sea, The Sea* with followers of @IrisMurdoch and with his own 576k followers, many of whom are intrigued by the first line of *The Bell*. Murdoch's fiction and philosophy regularly capture the imaginations of bloggers and recent subjects to be explored in this form include bicycling in Murdoch's fiction, Murdoch as a woman writer, meditations on the virtue of the scholar in Murdoch's work, shoes in her fiction, and Murdochian opening lines. A blog entry about fantasy literature entitled 'Chapter Eight Changes Everything' contends that the introduction of Felicity's perspective in Chapter Eight of *The Sandcastle* adds a 'new and stunning', but often overlooked, dimension to the novel.<sup>1</sup>

Murdoch is invoked with similar frequency by journalists writing for online publications. Her name is no longer merely shorthand for the cruelty of Alzheimer's disease; rather her relevance to contemporary life is being discovered, reassessed and rejoiced in. She regularly appears in lists of important novels, most recently a *Guardian* inventory of '50 Great books' and a controversial *Telegraph* list of the '20 Best British and Irish Novels of all Time'.<sup>2</sup> In April 2014, *The Black Prince* was sixth in an online newspaper's list of the 'Top 10 novels inspired by Shakespeare'.<sup>3</sup> But the perspective of the journalist is frequently eclipsed by the ardour of those who comment on the article, provoking discussions of Murdoch's work from every angle from scholarship to nostalgia. To have access to the instantaneous responses of new readers is perhaps the most rewarding outcome of Murdoch's presence on social media sites. A young Twitter user, upon discovering *Under the Net*, tweeted 'my little joys are multiplied. How did I live without Iris Murdoch?' He is one of many captivated new readers who will ensure her literary survival for a long time to come.

1 Matthew David SurrIDGE, <<http://www.blackgate.com/2013/09/01/chapter-eight-changes-everything-iris-murdochs-the-sandcastle/>> [accessed 2 May 2014].

2 Andy Miller, <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/may/09/year-reading-dangerously-books-saved-life-review>; <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/10629373/20-best-British-novels-of-all-time.html>> [accessed 2 May 2014].

3 Sally O'Reilly, <[http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/apr/30/top-10-novels-inspired-shakespeare-herman-melville-patricia-highsmith?utm\\_content=bufferae9b5&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=twitter.com&utm\\_campaign=buffer](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/apr/30/top-10-novels-inspired-shakespeare-herman-melville-patricia-highsmith?utm_content=bufferae9b5&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer)> [accessed 2 May 2014].

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## Recent and Forthcoming Publications

In the International *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, ed., Hugh LaFollette (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), these entries are of interest: 'Murdoch, Iris' by Brad Cokelet, and 'Attention, Moral' by Bridget Clarke, which concerns Iris Murdoch and Simone Weil.

*Would You Kill the Fat Man?: The Trolley Problem and What Your Answer Tells Us about Right and Wrong* by David Edmonds (Princeton University Press, 2013), contains an account of Iris Murdoch's friendship with Philippa Foot.

*Iris Murdoch Connected*, ed., Mark Luprecht (University of Tennessee Press, Tennessee Studies in Literature Series Volume 47, 2014)

*Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1945-1995*, eds., Anne Rowe and Avril Horner (London: Chatto & Windus, forthcoming 2015)

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## Notes on Contributors

**Peter J. Conradi** is Emeritus Professor of English at Kingston University and Honorary Research Fellow at University College London. His publications include: *Iris Murdoch: The Saint and the Artist* (1983: third edition 2001), *Iris Murdoch Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature* (ed. 1997), *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (2001) and *Iris Murdoch: A Writer at War: Letters & Diaries 1938-46* (ed. 2010). He is advisor to the *Iris Murdoch Review* to which he contributes articles and reviews. His *A Very English Hero: The Making of Frank Thompson* was published in 2012. He was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 2011.

**Katie Giles** is the Archivist for Kingston University Archives and Special Collections, where she works with the Iris Murdoch Collections amongst many others. Work in the Archive includes cataloguing, preserving, promoting and giving access to the documents they hold.

**Sukaina Kadhum** has just completed her A-Levels at the Tiffin Girls' School and hopes to study English at university. As well as literature, she also has a keen interest in photography.

**Miles Leeson** is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Chichester. His book *Iris Murdoch: Philosophical Novelist* was published in 2010 and his co-edited collection *Writing the Last Taboo: Incest in Contemporary Literature* will be published shortly.

**Sabina Lovibond** is an Emeritus Fellow of Worcester College, Oxford, where she taught philosophy from 1982 to 2011. Her recent publications include *Iris Murdoch, Gender and Philosophy* (Routledge, 2011), and 'Nietzsche on Distance, Beauty, and Truth' in *Nietzsche on Art and Life*, ed. Daniel Came (Oxford University Press, 2014). A selection of her articles on ethics and feminism, with a new introduction, is forthcoming from OUP - all being well - in 2015.

**Priscilla Martin** teaches English and Classics at the University of Oxford. She has published on Chaucer, Piers Plowman, the Gawain-poet, Tyndale, Shakespeare, Virginia Woolf, Iris Murdoch and other modern novelists. Her novel, *The Idler*, is available on Kindle.

**Sofia de Melo Araújo** is a researcher at the Centre for English Translation and Anglo-Portuguese Studies, the Interdisciplinary Research Centre – Culture, Space and Memory, and at the Institute of Philosophy at the University of Porto. Her PhD is on 'Ethics and Literature: a Reading of Iris Murdoch's Novels (1958-70)'. She co-edited, with Fátima Vieira, *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher Meets Novelist* (CSP, 2011).

**Tony Milligan** lectures in philosophy at the University of Hertfordshire and is the author of *Civil Disobedience: Protest, Justification and the Law* (Bloomsbury, 2013); *Love* (Acumen, 2011); *Beyond Animal Rights* (Continuum, 2010) and co-editor, along with Christian Maurer and Kamila Pacovska, of *Love and its Objects* (Palgrave, 2014). His most recent article on Iris Murdoch appeared in the March 2014 issue of *Religious Studies*.

**Pamela Osborn** is a Researcher with the Iris Murdoch Archive Project and Part-Time Lecturer at Kingston University. She achieved her PhD, 'Another Country: Bereavement, Mourning and Survival in the Novels of Iris Murdoch' in 2013. Most recently she has published 'Minding the Gap: Mourning in the Work of Murdoch and Derrida', in *Iris Murdoch: Texts and Contexts*, ed. by Anne Rowe and Avril Horner (Palgrave, 2012). An essay, 'The Myth of Hyacinth and Apollo in The Bell' will be published in *Iris Murdoch, Connected*, ed. by Mark Luprecht (forthcoming, University of Tennessee Press, 2014). She is currently researching references to Murdoch in the work of contemporary novelists.

**Susannah Rees** is a full-time A-level student at the Tiffin Girls' School and hopes to study Theology at University.

**Anne Rowe** is Lead Editor of the *Iris Murdoch Review*, Director of the Iris Murdoch Archive Project and Associate Professor in English Literature at Kingston University. She has published widely on Iris Murdoch and is currently co-editing, with Avril Horner, *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1935-1995*, which will be published by Chatto & Windus in 2015.

**Ed Victor** is Chairman of the Ed Victor Ltd Literary Agency and represents, among other clients, Edna O'Brien, John Banville and the Estates of Raymond Chandler, Douglas Adams and Josephine Hart.

**Frances White** is Writer in Residence at Kingston University Writing School and is Assistant Director of the Iris Murdoch Archive Project and Assistant Editor of the *Iris Murdoch Review*. She has published widely on Iris Murdoch and her recently published book, *Becoming Iris Murdoch*, won the Kingston University Press Short Biography Competition.





