

The Iris Murdoch Review

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The Iris Murdoch Review

The *Iris Murdoch Review* (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 lines of inquiry.

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Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 25th January 1977. Photograph by Sophie Bassouls.

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Lucy Bolton: Introduction

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3. Iris Murdoch's signature, reproduced from letter to Frances White, 8 November 1981.
4. Still from credits of *Iris*, dir. Richard Eyre, 2001.

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Lucy Bolton

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Editorial Preface

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this guest-edited issue of the *Iris Murdoch Review* dedicated to Iris Murdoch and Visual Culture. The wealth of academic material published in this issue not only broadens our understanding of Murdoch's own views on artistic practice but also, and more importantly, displays the impact her own theoretical and fictional work can have on a diverse range of fields. Our guest editor, Lucy Bolton, analyses the detail of the fine essays she has commissioned in her own introduction but there are three elements that need mentioning here. First, that the state of Murdoch studies is in such good health; two of the essays are by emerging Murdoch scholars, Daniel Read and Rebecca Moden, undertaking doctoral work at Kingston University, and two by Lucy herself and her colleague Anat Pick, both experts in film studies. Second, it is a delight to read Lucy's interview with Anne Rowe who reflects on her own continuing work on Murdoch's engagement with art since the publication of *The Visual Arts and the Novels of Iris Murdoch* fifteen years ago. Lucy is to be commended for drawing together such exemplary work and this, along with co-ordinating (with Anat Pick) the valuable symposium on 'The concept of attention in Simone Weil and Iris Murdoch' at Queen Mary University of London in February (reported by James Riley), demonstrates her dedication to Murdoch studies: we are delighted that she has agreed to join the editorial board for the *Review*. Finally, the undoubted highlight for many readers will be the publication of a hitherto unknown essay by Murdoch on Simone Weil.

This talk by Murdoch was written for broadcast on the BBC's Third Programme in 1951. Justin Broackes, editor of *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher*, discovered it in the BBC Written Archives' Centre, Caversham Park, Reading, following up on a brief mention in Bove and Fletcher's bibliographical work from 1994. As Broackes remarks in his essay, 'Iris Murdoch's first encounters with Simone Weil', this is a major find for Murdoch scholarship, not only shedding light on Murdoch's later work on Weil but also confirming her early engagement with Weil's work, perhaps earlier than we had thought. It is clear that new biographical and critical work will have much to draw on in the future and Murdoch scholarship is indebted to Justin Broackes for his diligent detective work, careful transcription and scholarly analysis.

The reviews section of this issue has some unusual features. Carol Sommer's *Cartography for Girls: A-Z of Orientations identified within the Novels of Iris Murdoch* 'attempts to identify and map, without hierarchy, all of the experiences of female consciousness depicted in all of Iris Murdoch's 26 novels': this is a major undertaking, and a work of art in its own right.¹ We invited three Murdoch scholars from different disciplines, Frances White, Gillian Dooley, and Rivka Isaacson, to reflect on their personal engagement with this startling work. Also, a range of philosophical essays has been published in edited collections which the Murdochian philosophers Nora Hämäläinen and Niklas Forsberg have jointly reviewed as a group. Finally, Scott Moore's work on Murdoch's engagement with Tolkien is assessed by Margaret Guise, a theologian who has herself recently written on Murdoch as Pamela Osborn notes in her survey of recent journal articles. Together, this survey and these reviews testify to the continuing and widening impact of Murdoch's thought on twenty-first century art and philosophy.

¹ See <http://www.informationasmaterial.org/portfolio/cartography-for-girls/> [accessed 19-6-16].

As Katie Giles mentions in her detailed summary of archival activity we now have Murdoch's journals, along with a wealth of other new material from the estate, available for researchers. This is exciting news as their existence has been known since the publication of Peter Conradi's *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (2001) and we are delighted that Audi Bayley has bequeathed them and other items: we are indebted to Mrs Bayley's kind generosity toward the continuation of Murdoch studies. We are also grateful for Katie Giles's expertise and ongoing support for the Iris Murdoch Archive Project at Kingston University.

The past year has been a particular highlight for the University of Chichester as we inaugurated the Iris Murdoch Research Centre in October 2016. The launch of the Centre, reported by Shauna Pitt, was preceded by a one-day symposium with reflections on the history of Murdoch scholarship across the world presented by Frances White and Gillian Dooley, and a discussion of the reception of Murdoch's letters published in *Living on Paper* by the co-editors Avril Horner and Anne Rowe. The Centre was formally opened by the Vice-Chancellor Clive Behagg, and I then spoke on recent developments in Murdoch studies. This has been followed by a variety of events across the UK: the impressive symposium at Queen Mary University of London noted above, an inspiring workshop on female philosophers at Durham University inaugurated by the 'In-Parenthesis group' which is reviewed by Hannah Marije Altorf, and a recent one-day conference at the University of Chichester on British Women Writers from 1930-1960, which included some superb papers on Murdoch's work and is reported by Grace Pearson. Further afield, Paul Hullah has contributed an account of the most recent conference of the Iris Murdoch Society of Japan, and Chris Boddington of the Murdoch panel at this year's Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900 at the University of Louisville, USA.

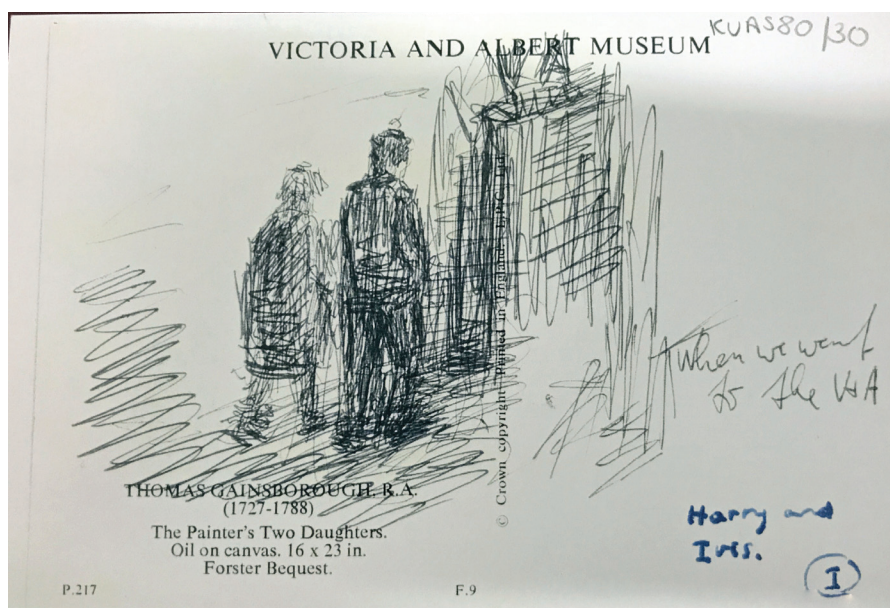
This issue of the *Iris Murdoch Review* will be launched at the eighth International Iris Murdoch Conference in September 2017 at the University of Chichester. The next year sees the publication of major works by Anne Rowe and Gary Browning, along with a regular series of events focused around the Iris Murdoch Society and Iris Murdoch Research Centre. Details of these events will follow in the Iris Murdoch Quarterly Newsletter, distributed to all Society members via email. Exciting plans for events and publications are also being developed for celebrating Iris Murdoch's centenary in 2019 so there is much to look forward to in the near future.

Miles Leeson
University of Chichester
July 2017

Introduction

The aim of this special issue of the *Iris Murdoch Review* is to highlight the work that has already been undertaken on Murdoch in relation to the visual arts, to showcase research that is currently being done on this relationship, and to demonstrate the potential that exists for an even broader and richer encounter between Murdoch's work and contemporary visual culture. The essays on this theme explore some areas of Murdoch's work that are clearly already in the frame, such as Anne Rowe's reflections on the significance of paintings in the novels, and Daniel Read's analysis of the influence of Paul Nash. Essays by Rebecca Moden, Anat Pick and myself, however, extend thinking about Murdoch and visual culture into more metaphorical and philosophical realms.

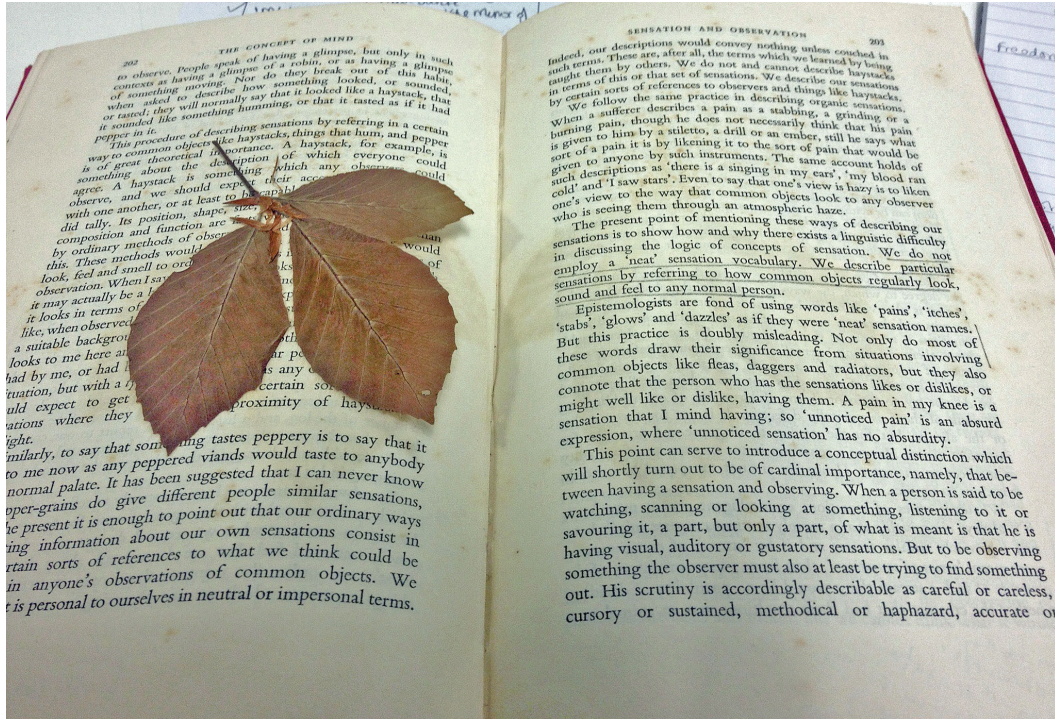
Engaging with the visual arts is a natural continuation of reading Murdoch. As our cover photograph by Sophie Bassouls playfully evokes, Murdoch was very interested in the act of looking at, or paying attention to, art. Painting is clearly a strong and persistent presence in the novels, laden with implications for personal moral training and growth. Murdoch herself enjoyed painting, and the archives at the University of Kingston hold three of her works.¹ Her admiration of the painter Paul Nash, and abiding friendship with Harry Weinberger, are enduring elements which influence her writing in visual and conceptual ways. In September 2014, the Kingston Museum Art Gallery staged an exhibition called 'Iris Murdoch and Harry Weinberger: Writer meets Painter', curated by Anne Rowe and Frances White, in collaboration with Weinberger's daughter, Joanna Garber, and his grandsons, Jake and Matthew Garber. This exhibition showed various artefacts such as photographs of Murdoch at the opening of a Weinberger show, doodles and postcards demonstrating their affectionate friendship, as well as paintings by Weinberger and letters from Murdoch.



Postcard of Harry and Iris, drawn by Harry Weinberger, KU Archive Folio KUA580/30.

¹ The painting of an unknown village or town is KUAS202/12/1, and the painting of a building in snow is KUAS202/12/2. There is a third painting, a still life, which is KUAS191/2/2.

Giving visual, affective form to their mutual admiration, the exhibition drew on the tactility of items such as a Mont Blanc fountain pen, and the sight of their exchanged objects as part of a creative relationship. This exhibition showed how something as metaphysical as a meeting of minds can be given figuration and form, and can be shared by those who witness and experience this. In a similar way, the discovery of a dried leaf, pressed between the pages of one of Murdoch's books now held in the archive at Kingston University, is a tactile and visual evocation of her consciousness: this page struck her as something worth marking, this leaf as something worth preserving.

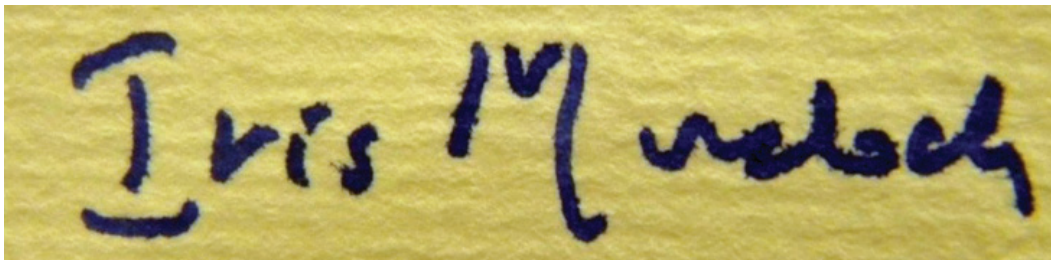


A leaf pressed in the pages of Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind*, KU archives, IML 1028.

There is, of course, a vast wealth of material in Murdoch's novels which invites analysis in terms of visual culture. Anne Rowe's book *The Visual Arts and the Novels of Iris Murdoch* was published in 2002, and it is a great pleasure to be able to include an interview with Rowe in this issue, where she reflects on many of the issues raised in her book and the surprising lack of other work done in the area over the last fifteen years. In a unique and detailed interview, Rowe describes how Murdoch's use of paintings in her novels is designed to elicit and enable a sensory, affective encounter with the moral dilemmas and journeys of her characters. Rowe invites us to consider more fully how paintings function in Murdoch's fiction, whilst also offering insights into how paintings themselves, and the process of painting, sit alongside Murdoch's philosophical, conceptual concerns.

The essays by Daniel Read and Rebecca Moden demonstrate the integral roles that visuality plays in Murdoch's novels, and how complex these roles can be. Read explores the influence of the painter Paul Nash on Murdoch's own painting, as well as on her writing and thinking, drawing attention to the depth of the relationship and shared concerns with moral transformation. Moden focuses on *The Green Knight* in order to analyse the motif of the mask and the device of the *passeggiata*: both strikingly visual elements of the novel, which Murdoch uses to represent and evoke issues of morality and knowledge. Moden demonstrates Simone Weil's influence on Murdoch in these fields, highlighting the centrality of vision and seeing to Murdoch's moral thinking.

There are elements of Murdoch's life and work that are visually iconic outside of the novels. The broad planes of her face, with her steady stare and distinctive haircut, have been often captured by painters such as Tom Phillips and Marie-Louise von Motesiczky, and photographers such as Sophie Bassouls and Ida Kar. Even when caricatured or stylised, Murdoch's portraits display a consistently serious demeanour and set of features, rendering her appearance easily recognisable from a variety of artistic impressions: from the line drawings of Jim Naylor and David Levine to the colour portraits of Kate Pugsley and Renee Bolinger. The image of her signature is also familiar from the copious correspondence and her name signings in all her books.



Murdoch's signature, reproduced from letter to Frances White, 8 November 1981.

The large capital letter 'I', with its horizontal top and bottom strokes detached from the vertical dash, is an imprint of her self – a stamping of her 'I' – and is used to evoke her creative, writerly self as the image for the title shot of Richard Eyre's 2001 film.



Still from credits of *Iris*, dir. Richard Eyre, 2001.

This context is paradoxical, however, as the film tells the story of Murdoch's descent in Alzheimer's disease as recounted by John Bayley in his memoirs, and as interpreted for the screen by Richard Eyre, who based some of the scenes and lines of dialogue on his own experiences with his mother who had suffered from the same disease.² It is therefore a cinematic depiction of Iris Murdoch

² 'What Sir Richard did intend was to weave his mother's experience of dementia into *Iris*, the film he directed and co-wrote about Iris Murdoch's descent into Alzheimer's [...]' "It was when I opened a door for her and she looked at the doorway and she looked at the wall and she looked at the door and said, 'Which side do I go?'" Judi Dench, he says, acted it exquisitely.' Matthew Stadlen, *The Telegraph*, 19 May 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/10839530/Richard-Eyre-Ive-stopped-blaming-my-parents.html>, [accessed 10-6-17].

which is several interpretations removed from the stamp of authorship suggested by the depiction of her signature being written as the film's title. Also, as the name appears, the image it overlays is that of the naked, swimming Kate Winslet playing the young Iris. In yet another way, then, the title shot undercuts Murdoch by signalling the film's preoccupation with her youthful abandon, which it depicts in sharp contradistinction with the ageing, ailing woman (played by Judi Dench) about whom Bayley writes.³ Indeed, it is the faces of Kate Winslet and Judi Dench that adorn the front covers of the 2002 editions of Bayley's memoirs, and so in some ways the film has succeeded in erasing the image of the real Murdoch in this context.

The relationship between Iris Murdoch and cinema is a totally different beast, then, than an encounter with the *Eyre* film. As the essays in this special issue demonstrate, Murdoch's work on attention and moral vision opens out possibilities for approaching film as a potentially transformative ethical experience. Anat Pick looks carefully at how scenes from some of the earliest films by the Lumière brothers can be re-seen in a way that enables us to focus on less prominent elements, and how Murdoch develops Weil's concept of attention in ways that make it a suitable addition to cinematic modes of looking. In my own essay, I develop elements of Murdoch's philosophical writing in *The Sovereignty of Good* and 'Vision and Choice in Morality' in the context of viewing and experiencing contemporary film; in particular the way in which a film might be seen as a valuable moral fable, and not simply a decorative one. These film essays take familiar elements of Murdoch's writing, the kestrel and the parable of M and D, and re-cast them in the context of cinematic contemplation. This is in line with the approach of film philosophers who see films as philosophical texts, much as a poem or a play might be, and examine the film in the light of its philosophical content and potential.

As well as a detailed focus on the links between Weil's concept of attention and Murdoch's development of it, this issue features the transcript of the talk on Simone Weil, recently discovered by Justin Broackes, that Murdoch gave on the BBC Radio in 1951. In his essay, Broackes indicates the profound influence Weil had on Murdoch. It is a fitting coincidence that this talk should have emerged just in time to be included in this special issue as it is precisely this fundamental aspect of Murdoch's moral thinking, that of attention and moral vision, that lends itself so readily to exploration in and through visual culture. The strength of visual thinking in Murdoch's work lies not just in imagery or narrative in her novels, but also in the breadth of visual analogy and allegory in the stories and examples in her philosophical work, such as the colour red or the woman with the alabaster box in 'Vision and Choice', or the kestrel in *The Sovereignty of Good*.

Also in this issue is a triple review of Carol Sommer's work *Cartography for Girls: A-Z of Orientations identified within the novels of Iris Murdoch*. This strongly visual mapping of Murdoch's female-focused statements is a highly original encounter with the patterns and rhythms in her writing, and is a further way in which Murdoch's work can be explored in visual culture. Sommer runs an Instagram account for this project, and indeed, Murdoch has a lively online presence, in forums that celebrate the visual potential of her work in many ways. There are the Facebook and Twitter accounts run by Frances White and Pamela Osborn. There are several interviews and short films available on YouTube, which enable the viewer to experience Murdoch's sonorous voice and meticulous argumentation in a more direct way that feels almost first-hand, albeit mediated by time and medium. There are also innumerable Pinterest boards that collect images of Murdoch. These include book covers, photographs, portraits, artwork, and quotes turned into catchy lessons for our time: 'Falling out of love is chiefly a matter of forgetting how charming someone is'

³ I have discussed this in detail in 'Winslet, Dench, Murdoch and Alzheimer's Disease: Intertextual Stardom in *Iris*', in *Feminisms*, Laura Mulvey and Anna Backman Rogers (eds.), (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, March), pp.65-77.

(*A Severed Head*), and 'One of the secrets to a happy life is continuous small treats' (*The Sea, the Sea*). These pithy quotes, accompanied by graphics or images of Murdoch, go some way to ensure that her wit and creative output reaches a contemporary global audience, but in no more than barely bite-sized chunks.

This special issue demonstrates the richness of the relationship between Murdoch's work and visual culture, and calls for greater attention to this field of enquiry. The issues raised by Rowe in terms of the sensory experience of paintings in the novels demand that these be understood as the phenomenological encounters that Murdoch intended them to be. Murdoch's affinity with the art of painting and the influence of painters on her work is clearly an area that has the potential to offer bold insights into her thinking and writing. And the ways in which Murdoch conceives of looking, attention and vision invite consideration alongside scholarship on film spectatorship, offering a radical, new ethics of looking at film. I hope that the potential for engaging with Murdoch's thinking in the context of contemporary visual culture will be realised in more sustained and rigorous ways, and that this special issue will inspire others to investigate further possibilities for how this might be developed.

‘Waiting on God’: A Radio Talk on Simone Weil (1951)

Prefatory note on the text by Justin Broackes

The original typescript of this radio talk is in the BBC Written Archives’ Centre, Caversham Park, Reading. It consists of 13 pages (with another page of announcements to introduce and follow the talk), typed up by a BBC typist, no doubt from an earlier manuscript by Murdoch. The talk was broadcast on Thursday 18th October 1951, at 7.40 p.m. on the Third Programme; and it was repeated on Saturday 8th December, at 6.00 p.m. (It had been prerecorded on the Monday before, 15th October.) The producer was Leonie Cohn. The programme log records the talk as taking 30½ minutes, which probably means it overran.

I have inserted accents, corrected a couple of typing errors and non-standard spellings (e.g. ‘theif’ for ‘thief’, ‘Beldyaef’ for ‘Berdyayev’), and standardized the book titles. (The typescript has *L’Attente de Dieu* for *Attente de Dieu*.) There are some deletions and changes that have been inserted into the typescript, some (I think) in Murdoch’s hand, others by the producer or another member of staff. In the copy-editing for the *Review*, the punctuation (some of which, I suspect, is due to the BBC typist, rather than to Murdoch herself) has been slightly tidied up in the first paragraph and a couple of other places. With two small exceptions, my policy has been to print the original typewritten text, which is usually fuller than the modified version – the deletions were very likely prompted by the need to cut the talk to fit the time slot – and to mention changes and deletions in footnotes. (The two exceptions are in paragraph 1, where I drop a phrase from the typescript, and in paragraph 4, where I follow the handwritten insertions: the latter seem to correct what shows up as a factual mistake in the former.) All footnotes are my own: I have given sources of quotations and some other brief explanations. I am grateful to Marisa Smeraldi for help with the early stages of transcription, and particularly to Charles Miller at the BBC, and to Trish Hayes at the Written Archives’ Centre, who helped generously with queries about the hard-to-read copy of the typescript. Above all, thanks are due to Audi Bayley for permission to publish the text.

§

The text of Murdoch's radio talk

Who was Simone Weil? The facts of her life are simple. She was a Jewish teacher of philosophy who left France in 1942 and died in England of tuberculosis in the following year at the age of 34. She is known to us through four posthumously published books:¹ *La Pesanteur et la grâce*, which is a collection of notes and aphorisms on religious themes; *Attente de Dieu*, a series of letters and papers, partly about her relation to the Catholic Church; *L'Enracinement*,² a sort of social treatise concerned with the regeneration of France, which was written for the French authorities in London; and finally, *La Connaissance surnaturelle*, which consists of extracts from notebooks which Simone kept in 1942 and 43.

What she writes is striking. She expresses herself vividly, sometimes violently; and her work has that unmistakable fresh tang. She is, that rare thing, an original thinker. One gets too the impression of an exceptional degree of seriousness. We are not surprised to learn that she impressed people she met as a truly spiritual person.

There are various stories told about her asceticism and those ascetic tendencies possibly hastened her death.

Her parents were Jewish but she says of herself: 'I was born, I grew up, and I always remained within the Christian inspiration.'³ Yet she was never baptized. She explains her reasons for this in a series of letters to a priest whom she knew, called Father Perrin. This forms the beginning of *Attente de Dieu*, *Waiting on God*, which is the first of her works to appear in English. In this book the writer says,⁴ "The love of those things which are outside visible Christianity keeps me outside the Church."⁵ These were in part intellectual things: Eastern religion, Greek philosophy and certain Christian heresies. She could not bring herself to draw the boundary of truth so as to exclude what she had found there. But also she says this: 'nothing gives me more pain than the idea of separating myself from the immense and unfortunate multitude of unbelievers.'⁶ She felt that she had a vocation to remain *outside* with the riff-raff of spiritual displaced persons. She feared the Church as a social

¹ Simone Weil, (1) *La Pesanteur et la grâce* (Paris: Plon, 1947, limited edition; 1948), (2) *Attente de Dieu: Lettres et réflexions* (Paris: La Colombe, 1950), (3) *L'Enracinement: Prélude à une déclaration des devoirs envers l'être humain* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), and (4) *La Connaissance surnaturelle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1950). The first English translation to appear was of (2): *Waiting on God*, trans. Emma Craufurd (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951); issued in the USA as *Waiting for God* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1951; reissued in paperback: Harper Colophon, 1973; Perennial Classics, 2001). [Editorial note: this translator's surname appears spelt as Crawford, Craufurd and Crauford in different publications. Here, as also in other articles in the present issue of the *Review*, references are given preserving the variant spellings of the name as it appeared in the various publications.] Murdoch's radio talk marked the appearance of the English translation, and the quotations are taken from it. (I give page references in the footnotes, to *Attente de Dieu* in the French edition of 1950 and to *Waiting on God* in the first edition of 1951.) Translations of the other works followed later: (1) *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Arthur Wills (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1952); (3) *First and Last Notebooks*, trans. Richard Rees (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); (4) *The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties toward Mankind*, trans. Arthur Wills, with an Introduction by T. S. Eliot (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1952). Further posthumous publications followed, including: *Intuitions pré-chrétiennes* (Paris: La Colombe, 1951), *La Condition ouvrière* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), *Lettre à un religieux* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), and *Cahiers* (Paris: Plon, 3 vols, 1951, 1953, 1956), translated as *Notebooks* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956).

² At this point the typescript, curiously, includes the phrase: '(This one is the first of her works to appear in English)'. The phrase – as attached to *L'Enracinement* – is surely false. (*The Need for Roots* is dated 1952 and *Waiting on God* dated 1951.) The phrase is also contradicted by what Murdoch says, just below, in the fourth sentence of paragraph 4 (handwritten into the typescript). What I suspect is that the phrase here may have been meant to come earlier (e.g. following 'Catholic Church'), attaching to *Attente de Dieu*: perhaps it was written into the margin of Murdoch's original manuscript, without a clear indication of where it was to go and the person typing up the BBC script may have inserted it in the wrong place. It remains puzzling that there is no correction visible in the typescript: but the phrase seems best deleted.

³ Weil, *Attente de Dieu* (1950), p.71; *Waiting on God* (1951), p.16 (Letter IV).

⁴ I here follow (from the beginning of the previous sentence: 'This forms...') the handwritten corrections inserted into the typescript. The typescript originally read: 'This forms the beginning of *L'Attente de Dieu*. She says'.

⁵ 1950, p.101; 1951, p.42 (Letter VI).

⁶ 1950, p.52; 1951, p.5 (Letter I).

structure; she feared both its authoritarian character, and what one might call its 'cosiness.' She charges even Father Perrin with attaching himself to the Church as to an earthly country. She says to him accusingly: 'You live there in an atmosphere of human warmth.'⁷

For Simone Weil the main fact of human life, and the fact which we must not flinch from if we are to find out any truth about it,⁸ is the fact of affliction. *Le Malheur*. For her the centre of Christianity is the passion and the central moment of the passion is the cry of dereliction. The greatness of Christianity, Simone Weil says, lies in its seeking not a supernatural remedy for suffering but a supernatural *use* for the suffering. Let us see how she conceives this use. Her thought, although we have it in this scattered aphoristic form, is curiously systematic.

Two things strike one immediately about her 'system'. That it is very austere dualistic, and that it enunciates with a strange sort of confidence a view of the physical and of the spiritual universe which one might call 'mechanical.' The dualism is between *La Pesanteur* and *La Grâce* – gravity, this is gravitational force, and grace. All natural phenomena, including psychological phenomena, are subject to 'gravity', by which she means that they are subject to 'natural law' in the scientific sense. This realm of natural necessity is purposeless; things have causes but not ends. The only sort of finality which we can detect in it is the purposeless finality of the total ordering of natural things.

When the necessity of the world cuts across our path, when we experience both its violence and its utter lack of purpose, then we are afflicted. This puts us in a privileged situation. In *La Pesanteur et la grâce* she says 'Contradiction alone proves to us that we are not all...'⁹ The experience of suffering is the experience of reality. For our suffering is not something which we invent. It is true. That is why it must be cherished. All the rest is imaginary.'¹⁰ It is the sharp touch of necessity that releases us from the life of imagination – the unreal life of soothing expectation, in which are to be included the so called 'consolations of religion.' What is required of us at this point is to accept the reign of necessity obediently, as being itself a manifestation of obedience to God, and attempt to love God even here. This movement will extend our apprehension of the order of the world as something which is in itself beautiful. Kant said of Beauty that it is the experience of a purposeless finality. And it was after Job's steadfastly truthful experience of affliction that God revealed himself to him as the God of Leviathan and the warhorse. If we stand fast, quietly enduring the violence of necessity and refusing the balms of imagination, we are in a high degree experiencing something real. And in the very act of our loving acceptance of the realm of gravity, we have left it for the realm of grace.

To open ourselves to the operation of grace requires an exercise of *attention*. This image of *waiting* is a favourite one of Simone Weil's. In academic studies, for instance, one has to learn a certain way of not being too active, a way of concentrating which consists, not of pushing and straining, but of waiting upon the truth. She says 'there is something in our souls which has a far more violent repugnance for attention than the flesh has for bodily fatigue. This something is much more closely connected with evil than is the flesh. That is why every time we really concentrate our attention we destroy the evil in ourselves.'¹¹ This destruction is not brought about by any violence of the will. The lower parts of the soul do not fear the fatigue of wrestling with the will. This is usually a fake battle. Simone praises the chaste woman who does not argue with the seducer but who pretends not to

⁷ 1950, p.103; 1951, p.43 (Letter VI): there are faint crosses covering the last sentence of this paragraph that may indicate it was to be deleted in the broadcast.

⁸ The last 19 words (from 'and the fact') are crossed out.

⁹ I.e. 'We are *not everything*' (*pas tout*). The last 10 words (from 'Contradiction alone') and the ellipsis marks are crossed out in the typescript.

¹⁰ *La Pesanteur et la grâce* (1948), p.112 (Murdoch's translation); corresponds to (but differs in wording from) Wills's later-published translation, *Gravity and Grace* (1952) at p.148.

¹¹ 1950, p.119; 1951, p.56 ('Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies').

hear him. God has always been rightly imagined as *seeking* for the human soul. *Quaerens me sedisti lassus*.¹² The soul must not strain and seek for itself, but fix its attention and wait.¹³ This waiting receives its reward, as it were, automatically. If we are able to open our eyes indifferently upon good and ill, to suffer the pain of the evil desire, while keeping our eyes upon what is pure, then the good will draw us *par un phénomène automatique*. Religion, Simone says, is essentially a matter of looking. This also is why good, like the object of artistic inspiration, always surprises us. We are not able to imagine it beforehand. We only experience good in doing it; evil we only experience in abstaining from it or in repenting of it. In doing it we do not experience it, for it is wrapped up in imagination.

This conception of grace as the unimaginable reward of a sensitive attention, imposes a view of the impersonal nature of our approach to God. The laws of intellect, Simone Weil says, are the same as the laws of love. When we are thinking we efface ourselves before the object. Creative attention is a renunciation of itself. The work of great artists and great saints is in a certain sense anonymous. God, in creating the world, renounced himself; he withdrew so that something less perfect might exist. So God is impersonal in so far as he is the model of that which passes beyond the self by renunciation. The soul that approaches God must similarly renounce itself so that something more perfect may exist. Simone says 'My desire is to lose not only all personal will but all personal being'.¹⁴ The human soul must resemble Christ who judges not, but in whose light all things, as they draw near, judge themselves: it must resemble pure water in which all things will weigh themselves. The soul must be itself indifferent, and then the truth of the world will inevitably be shewn in it.¹⁵ Christ told us that we should be like the lilies of the field and that our God is he who makes the rain fall upon the just and the unjust. To understand this is to apprehend the beauty of the world and to lay ourselves open to the power of grace.¹⁶

This is the meaning of obedience. It was this very strict notion of obedience, her sense of the 'automatic' operation of truth that kept Simone out of the Church. She felt that if God wished her to enter she would feel the need to enter imposed on her as a necessity.

Our ordinary life is three quarters fiction: imagination veils from us the sharp independence of real things. Knowledge lies in the acceptance of this independence; that is why experience of suffering is experience of reality.¹⁷

Distance, Simone Weil tells us, is the soul of beauty; it is the soul, too, of all other true apprehension. It is essential to friendship. Essential too to that objective recognition of others of which the image is the good Samaritan. To *know* the world is to recognize the independence of its order and the independence in it of other centres of will beside oneself. This independence is also what makes the past peculiarly precious to us, makes it able to be for us an object of contemplation, to be an image of eternity; whereas we are immersed in the present, and the future is the natural victim of the imagination.

There is something immediately commanding about the austerity of Simone Weil's thought. Much of it, of course, calls up familiar echoes. Her central image has affinities with the key images

¹² *Quaerens me, sedisti lassus: Redemisti Crucem passus*, 'Seeking me, you sat down tired; suffering the Cross, you redeemed me': words addressed to Jesus in the *Dies Irae*, a mediaeval prayer forming (until the Second Vatican Council, 1962-65) part of the Latin mass.

¹³ This sentence and the next two are (rather indistinctly) crossed out in the typescript.

¹⁴ Quoted, slightly freely, from Letter III: 'My greatest desire is to lose not only all will but all personal being': 1950, p.65; 1951, p.13.

¹⁵ This sentence is crossed out in the typescript. I have substituted 'inevitably' for 'inevitable' in the typescript, which looks to be a typing error.

¹⁶ In the typescript, a handwritten wavy line connects this paragraph with the next, indicating they were to be run together; and the subsequent paragraph (beginning 'Our ordinary life') is lightly crossed out.

¹⁷ There are crosses covering this whole paragraph, suggesting it was to be deleted.

of contemporary thinkers such as Berdyaev¹⁸ and Sartre and recalls what is perhaps a common ancestor, the metaphysic of Kant. She escapes, however that dash of romanticism which marks so many of the latter-day followers of Kant: she seems as untouched by Kierkegaard as she is by Hegel. She praises the Greeks because they sought purity of thought, not intensity of thought. No existentialist could excel her in picturing the pointlessness of the natural world – and yet, how she has transformed this idea! She makes of it a picture of obedience, a form of beauty, something which can command our love. She accuses Christian tradition of neglecting the beauty of the natural world. This coolness, this note of balance in her work one may¹⁹ be tempted to connect with her understanding of the Greeks – or, more profoundly perhaps with her reading of Eastern mystical books. She mentions, for instance, a debt to the Bhagavat Gita.²⁰

It is just here perhaps that one feels most uneasy. Here, where Simone²¹ seems to be attaching a supreme degree of reality to an order which is so completely independent of the particular mind. She connects incarnation not with action or the thoughts which direct action, but with contemplation. She connects it with beauty. She says that the existence of beauty is what proves it possible; and experience of beauty is a contemplation which is untouched by imagination. She writes: 'Man must perform the movement of incarnating himself, for he is disincarnated by imagination.'²² We are most truly incarnate when, pure of fantasy, we obediently accept the order of necessity in which we are placed, and keep our gaze upon God. In a way, the only real actor here is God. In a striking image she says how she wishes to efface herself so that God may communicate freely with his creation. Her presence is like that of the troublesome third party who disturbs the tête-à-tête of two fiancés.²³ The higher part of the soul seems to be impersonal; it is God. And the best condition of the creature is when he has by self-effacement restored to this part its perfect purity.

All this must be considered when we estimate her rejection of social institutions, her rejection, for instance, of the Church, so considered. It cannot but seem²⁴ that the world of purposes and actions, of human planning, of that dangerous but necessary systematising of the spirit which is called ideology, is by her way of thinking all committed to the realm of imagination – or if it is accepted as real, is seen simply as a manifestation among others of the order of necessity. And this order, if it is properly understood, is to be loved indiscriminately. The gaze of Simone Weil seems to pass rather readily beyond the world where value is attached to our immediate preferences, expedients, and adventures. It is characteristic of her that she praises those works of art which present the purest and most naked picture of human affliction: the Greek plays, *King Lear*. No novel is ever mentioned among the things she loved. She admired the Iliad but never mentions the *Odyssey*.

Her view of history, is curious too. She says, very finely, in *L'Enracinement* that the greatest crime of our age is the systematic destruction of the past. But what is the past? She says that it is one of the fundamental needs of the human soul. This may be to say just that it is important for people to be rooted in a tradition. Yes. But she has said too that the past is the image of eternity, the image of inaccessible reality; it is to be contemplated. Will any past do for this purpose? The answer ought

¹⁸ Nikolai Berdyaev (1874-1948), Professor of Philosophy, University of Moscow, from 1920; expelled from the country, September 1922; settled in Paris from 1923.

¹⁹ Crossed out in the typescript and changed, in handwriting, to 'might'.

²⁰ Which Weil read in Spring 1940, and refers to at 1950, p.77; 1951, p.22 (Letter IV); and elsewhere. The spelling *Bhagavat* in the typescript corresponds to the first printed French and English editions (1950, p.77; 1951, p.22): later English printings, more standardly, have *Bhagavad* (e.g. at 2001, p.28). Following the word 'Gita', 7 words are inserted, in handwriting: ', and we are not surprised at this'.

²¹ With 'Weil' also inserted, in handwriting, into the typescript.

²² *La Pesanteur et la grâce* (1948), p.62, presumably in Murdoch's translation; corresponds to (but again differs in wording from) Wills's translation, *Gravity and Grace* (1952), p.103 (section on 'Illusions').

²³ This sentence crossed out.

²⁴ 'It cannot but seem' is crossed out in the typescript, and replaced by 'we feel'.

to be yes. Yet Simone Weil seems oddly inconsistent here. She insists that history is in the realm of accident, which ought to be accepted as such, that there are no patterns in history. Yet she herself is very ready with historical patterns, or perhaps one should rather call them historical prejudices. Chiefly, she sees the power of Rome as a regrettable accident which ensured the transmission into Christian thought of Hebrew ideas of sovereignty. She idealizes peoples who *went under* – not only the Gauls and the Albigensians, about whom we know something, but also the Trojans and the Druids. Her historical views are expressed in a paper, at the end of *Attente de Dieu* called *Three Sons of Noah and the History of the Mediterranean*,²⁵ which appears to be a sort of race theory, which claims the peoples she approves of as the progeny of Ham. Here we no longer seem to have to do with a fine critical mind, but with some sort of crank. In *L'Enracinement* her historical sketches are at times brilliant. But we cannot help feeling that she is a little too ready to commit the opposite fault from those who hold that everything that has happened is right and to hold that everything that has happened is an unfortunate accident. She casts history from her. This is of a piece too with her treatment of political ideology; in *L'Enracinement* she recommends the abolition of all political parties. As a political thinker she has been characterized as Utopian, rather than eschatological. And one feels that her refusal to subject her thoughts in such matters to the hard yoke of practice is to be connected with her stiffly dualistic view of reality – and with her notion of what incarnation involves.

If we turn from the region of social action to that of individual action we may feel similarly uneasy. One simply cannot say that the realm of imagination is the realm of delusion. To cut through human nature so harshly is to leave the pure portion of it so unrecognizably inhuman that in the end we have learnt nothing. It is salutary to suggest that all struggling of the will has something bogus²⁶ about it – but then one may find that there is nothing left which is recognizable at all as being the occurrence of a choice. The real choice, it seems, is made elsewhere and one might almost say by someone else. (Simone is of course not the only thinker to have got into just this dilemma). She says – and again this is a fine thing to say – that certitude is not a state of soul, certitude is in security. That love is not a state of soul, love is a direction. But nevertheless there are states of the soul – and the task of being a human being would seem to lie at the intersection of these states with whatever we take to lie beyond them. It does not lie beyond them. Simone Weil seems to offer a picture which is austere to the point of deleting the particular person altogether. Her rejection of history is not made, like that of Kierkegaard, in favour of the idea of particularity, since she seems to discard that too. Her model for the spiritual life is not the particular human bond, it is the life of the intellect.

In a way it is this very thing which is both repellent and attractive about her: her utopianism, her notion of the hardness of truth and its automatic operation upon the mind, her dislike of social institutions, her carelessness of history. In many regions of thought our age has made a discovery which is like the discovery which the Impressionists made when they started to paint exactly what they saw instead of painting what they might think they ought to be seeing. The Impressionists, you may remember, were followed by the *Fauves* and other post-impressionist groups who came upon this atomized universe whose objects had been dissolved into a haze of lights and colours, and put it together again, not by reinstating the old idea of the object, but by projecting upon it the light of a personal fantasy. Simone Weil is, if you like, a witness against the dangers of this move

²⁵ 'Les trois fils de Noé et l'histoire de la civilisation méditerranéenne', in the French edition (1950, pp.222-236): it appears in the UK edition of the English translation (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951, pp.155-169), but not in the US edition (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1951). The UK reissues that I have seen continue to include it (e.g. Routledge, 2009), while the US reissues continue to exclude it (e.g. HarperCollins, 2001).

²⁶ The word 'bogus' is crossed out in the typescript and replaced by 'sham'.

– the dangers of doing what Marcel²⁷ lately expressed as substituting the tragic categories for the traditional ones organized round the notion of truth.

But her protest is too harsh and her idea of the operation of truth too simple. It may be that at an advanced stage of the spiritual life, the power of truth is felt as an unambiguous necessity and God and the universe experienced as a sort of pure mechanism. The writings of certain mystics do seem to suggest something of the sort. But Simone Weil would I am sure be ready to admit that her own utterances do not in fact carry this kind of authority. Nor is it clear to me what sort of truths about the ordinary world can ever be brought back from such a region. That it is a source of truth for us is certain. What is uncertain is how this truth works in the details of our lives – the details of work and love and politics. Of these difficulties Simone seems to me to be negligent. My objection is not so much that she is wrong in thinking that the laws of intellect are the laws of love – though I feel that perhaps this is wrong. But rather that she has after all misrepresented the laws of the intellect. She says, in *La Pesanteur et la grâce*: ‘The mind is not forced to believe in the existence of anything.’²⁸ And then she quotes sceptical and idealistic philosophy and Eastern philosophy – The mind is not *forced* to believe in the existence of anything.²⁹ ‘That is why the only organ of contact with existence is acceptance, love. That is why beauty and reality are identical. That is why joy and the sense of reality are identical.’³⁰ Her picture of the intellect as waiting upon truth in order to *accept* it is in a way exact. But intellectual work is not only attention – it is also setting the stage for attention. And where most human matters are concerned we are never able to finish for long with the task of setting the stage. This is why institutions and ideologies are important.

Someone said of Simone Weil that she understood the crucifixion but not the incarnation. The person in the New Testament that she envies most is not St. Paul but the good thief.³¹ It is not a sovereign but a suffering God that she desires. She says carefully of Christ that his death was not like the death of the martyrs – it was nearer to that of a common criminal. It had its moment of complete blackness. After her experiences in the Renault factory in Paris where she once worked for a year, Simone said that she felt as if she had been branded upon the forehead. ‘Since then I have always regarded myself as a slave.’³² And elsewhere she says: ‘Christianity is a slave’s religion.’³³ This is the heart of her thought – the sense of affliction. The best that religion can do for a man in these days, she says, is to prepare him for affliction. The church which should embrace such a view would be a church careless of temporal sovereignty and prepared to be dismembered. That, as a worldly institution, we have not got such a church is clear. Whether it might not be proper to desire one is the question which Simone Weil puts to us.

²⁷ Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973), in *Les Hommes contre l’humain* (Paris: La Colombe, 1951), p.55: ‘And here it seems to me after all, that a grave and most serious warning is essential for all who – in the name of prejudices of class or race – have repudiated the universal, or even, more profoundly, on those who claim to substitute, as I may have done at certain points in my life, tragic categories, like those of engagement, betting, and risk, for traditional categories organized around the concept of truth’ (my translation).

²⁸ *La Pesanteur et la grâce* (1948), p.73, presumably in Murdoch’s translation; corresponds to (and here coincides word for word with) Wills’s translation, *Gravity and Grace* (1952), p.113 (in section on ‘Love’).

²⁹ ‘of anything. “That is why”: this is my emendation of the Typescript, which reads: ‘anything’. That is why’. Even with the emendation, the text presents problems: the repetition of the phrase ‘The mind is not forced to believe in the existence of anything’ (with a capital letter on ‘The’) is puzzling: and it doesn’t seem quite to fit the context. But, with the emphasis on ‘forced’ just the second time round, the repetition also doesn’t look simply to be a typist’s error. Perhaps (as I also suggested for the passage marked with footnote 2) the words were written in the margin of Murdoch’s original handwritten script, without a clear indication of where they were to be inserted: the text certainly makes smoother sense if the second appearance is deleted, but the repetition was surely intended, even if not perfectly integrated with the rest of the text.

³⁰ *La Pesanteur et la grâce* (1948), p.73; corresponds to (and again agrees verbatim with) *Gravity and Grace* (1952), p.113.

³¹ 1950, p.66; 1951, p.14 (Letter III).

³² 1950, p.75; 1951, p.20 (Letter IV).

³³ 1950, p.75; 1951, p.20 (Letter IV).

It may be said, rather wearily, about her: after all, there are no new heresies. And indeed it is easy enough to find old labels for Simone Weil's heresies. But she moves us precisely because of the way she has taken the impact upon herself of the particular extremities of the present time: the age of the factory worker, the D.P.,³⁴ the concentration camp. She says to Perrin that 'to-day it is not nearly enough merely to be a saint, but one must have the saintliness demanded by the present moment'.³⁵ What this saintliness is we have yet to discover. But Simone Weil is a pioneer whose experience, whatever we may finally think of it, should not be neglected. I have suggested that she was too impatient with what one might call the intellectual state of soul. If we place truth only at the far point beyond us where love burns in the heart of affliction then all our systems and theories seem by contrast equally lost in the darkness of error. But this very austerity lends her a freshness in her approach to theory. So that on the one hand she can condemn social enthusiasms and testify against them by her isolation; and on the other tell us that the task of this age is the construction of a civilization based on the spirituality of work and quote Marx in her support.³⁶ It is this quality of independence which makes of *L'Enracinement*, for all its irritating characteristics, a really thrilling piece of political thinking.

It is an increasingly rare spectacle nowadays to see someone attempting to stand intellectually upright outside the bounds of an ideological allegiance. It is rather like seeing someone trying to stand on the wing of a moving aeroplane – a very little increase in tempo and the thing becomes completely impossible. Simone says herself that the attempt to make a fundamental criticism of our civilization is an impossible one – because of the shortness of life and the impossibility of a joint effort. But, she says, this is not a reason for not undertaking it. We are all in the situation of Socrates, who, while he was in prison waiting for death, began to learn to play the lyre.

I read *La Pesanteur et la grâce* in a library copy – and after some particularly stern passages a previous reader had written in the margin – *Elle est bien dur*. The impression, for me, is not so much one of hardness. There is a strain of tenderness here too. She loved the English metaphysical poets – she liked particularly George Herbert's poem called *Love*.³⁷ But there is a certain air of confidence – one might call it 'authority' – which may well lay her open to the charge of pride. She claims much for herself. She claims implicitly a special power of intellectual detachment – and, explicitly, to have a vocation to be an exception. It was, it is true, an anonymous exception which she claimed to be³⁸ – 'ever ready', as she puts it, 'to be mixed into the paste of common humanity'.³⁹ How much of pride there was in her decision to stand alone it is impossible to say – nor, in a way, does it matter. She was a very brave thinker.

³⁴ i.e. Displaced Person.

³⁵ 1950, p.105; 1951, p.45 (Letter VI).

³⁶ Last 6 words struck out.

³⁷ In Letter IV (1950, pp.75-76; 1951, pp.20-21), Weil describes spending ten days at the Benedictine Abbey of Solesmes in 1938, and a young English Catholic who told her of the poetry of George Herbert. Reading, learning and repeatedly reciting 'Love' (the third poem of that title in Herbert's collection *The Temple*, 1633), Weil found it had the virtue of a prayer. And at a certain moment, she says, she found that Christ himself came down and took possession of her. The language of Herbert's poem stayed with Weil, and provided the imagery near the end of 'Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies': the master who – after the slave has long awaited his return – arrives and makes the slave sit, to be served with meat by the master himself.

³⁸ There are handwritten changes inserted in the typescript, which yield, as a revised version: 'It is true, that she claimed to be an anonymous exception'.

³⁹ 1950, p.53; 1951, p.5 (Letter I).

Iris Murdoch's first encounters with Simone Weil

The influence of Simone Weil on the philosophy of Iris Murdoch was huge: prior and perhaps even greater in some ways than the influence of Plato. I suspect it was through Weil that Murdoch discovered that there was such a thing as a progressive version of Plato, and came to see the attractions of a whole cluster of views that Murdoch developed with Weil – and then found had all along been there to be found also in Plato.¹

But when and how did Murdoch first discover Weil? The publication of *Existentialists and Mystics* (1997) made available again Murdoch's wonderful review of the English translation of Weil's *Notebooks for the Spectator* (2 November 1956). There had, however, been an earlier review of Weil's *Waiting on God*, given on the Third Programme of the BBC (the ancestor of BBC Radio 3) in October 1951, which is now published here for the first time in print. It shows Iris Murdoch in a first encounter with a book that was to be exceptionally important to her in later decades. *Waiting on God* become one of a tiny handful of philosophical works (together with Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* and Plato's *Symposium*) that Murdoch acknowledged as formative influences and recurring reference points: but I suspect no one could have told that from the radio talk, so the question arises, what did Murdoch see in Weil, and when did she come to see it?

Murdoch's own comments in later life seem to date her discovery of Simone Weil only to the late 1950s. To a student writing about her work in 1968, she wrote: 'About Simone Weil: I don't myself think that *The Bell* – published in 1958 – 'is deeply influenced by her and I'm not even quite sure that I had read her at that time. I had certainly not studied her, as I did later.'² To Peter Conradi, yet later, Murdoch said much the same: 'Yes, Simone Weil helped me very much. I can't recall just when I discovered her – probably in the late 1950s. My copy of *La source grecque* is dated by me January 1961.'³

These statements may seem oddly forgetful, if set against the reviews from 1956 and 1951; properly understood, however, I suspect, they are actually quite accurate. By the time of the first draft of *The Bell* (in mid-1957), Murdoch had reviewed close on a thousand pages of Weil: the two volumes of *Notebooks*, along with *Waiting for God*, which, even for the 1951 radio talk, Murdoch had discussed in connection with three other publications of Weil's that at that time were only available in French. Murdoch read these works with perceptiveness, admiration, and attention, and surely no little labour. ('To read her is to be reminded of a standard,' Murdoch had said.)⁴

¹ Peter Conradi discusses the influence that Simone Weil had on Murdoch's reading of Plato: 'In the 1950s [Murdoch] found a valuable ally in [the] battle [against Existentialism] in the work of Simone Weil, whose thought helped deepen her moral address, and also enabled her the better to understand Plato, whom she had been routinely taught at Oxford, and was herself teaching. At Oxford "there was no wide consideration of [Plato], he was simply misunderstood. I learnt nothing of value about him as an undergraduate (he was regarded as 'literature') [...] Simone Weil helped me very much". See Peter J. Conradi, 'Platonism in Iris Murdoch', in *Platonism and the English Imagination*, Anne Baldwin and Sarah Hutton (eds.), (Cambridge: University Press, 1994), pp. 330-42 (p. 333).

² Iris Murdoch, *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995*, ed. Avril Horner and Anne Rowe (2015), p.372 (letter to David Beams dated 17 Sept. 1968).

³ Ibid, p. 572 (letter to Peter Conradi dated 13 Jan. 1992). This letter is quoted in Conradi's 'Platonism in Iris Murdoch'.

⁴ Iris Murdoch, 'Knowing the Void', in *Existentialists and Mystics* (1997), Peter J. Conradi (ed.), (New York: Penguin, 1999), pp.157-60 (p.157), hereafter *EM*.

And she was getting others to study them as well as herself: she was using *Waiting for God* already in her teaching at Oxford. ('Simone Weil's *Waiting on God* [...] fascinated Iris, who read it in French', as we hear from Jennifer Dawson's Political Theory tutorials, which started in 1951.)⁵ It may seem odd, therefore, that Murdoch had so little recollection later of her first, surely rather non-negligible, encounters with a writer so impressive and important to her.

And yet the truth is, I believe, with Murdoch. She may perhaps have half-forgotten the 1951 radio talk, and may have felt unsure about the exact order of events in 1956 and soon after. But the crucial statement is this: 'I had [when writing *The Bell*] certainly not studied her, as I did later.' *As I did later*, I think, is key. And when she talks of the time 'when I *discovered* her', we might say, Murdoch was right, if she thought her first *discovery* of Simone Weil was much later than her first, even careful, readings of her. The reading of Weil in the early 1950s sowed a seed that grew to maturity in Murdoch's own thought only a decade or more later. In the philosophy of the mid-1950s, in essays such as 'Metaphysics and Ethics' (1955; publ. 1957) and 'Vision and Choice in Morality' (1956), Murdoch writes as an independent voice, challenging R. M. Hare and much else in modern moral philosophy of British post-war academia, but she brings in almost nothing of the form or content of Weil's writing. Murdoch had not found a way to *use* the influence and power of Weil's work, and perhaps had not even seen that she might come to do so. From the end of the 1950s and into the 1960s, however, a real change appears. Weil becomes visible in the 1959 articles 'The Sublime and the Good' and 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited' (e.g. at *EM*, p.215, though Weil's name isn't explicitly mentioned, and at *EM*, p.270, where it is). And the three articles that came to constitute *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970) show a progressive and great outpouring of ideas derived, reworked, and transformed, from Weil: first in 'The Idea of Perfection' (1962; publ. 1964), then in 'On "God" and "Good"' (1966; publ. 1969) and 'The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts' (1967).

From the late 1950s Murdoch was studying Weil in ways she had not done before. Murdoch had many undergraduates, and a small number of graduate students, but the graduates who we hear about were almost always from faculties other than philosophy. (Conradi mentions Charles Taylor, A. D. Nuttall and Stephen Medcalf [*IMAL*, pp.303, 300]: Taylor was in the Faculty of Social Studies, and the other two in the English Faculty.) The one graduate student of hers that I know of who was in the Sub-Faculty of Philosophy (although I am hoping there must be others) is Miklós Vetö, and he has hardly been mentioned by writers on Murdoch. He had escaped from Hungary in 1957, and arrived with a letter of recommendation addressed to Isaiah Berlin, while finishing a D.E.S. (the ancestor of a *maîtrise*) at the Sorbonne. Berlin managed to arrange a scholarship for him; so he stayed, and worked with Murdoch on a D. Phil. thesis on 'The Ethics of Simone Weil' (1964), which became a very well-received book.⁶ Vetö describes Murdoch as having been 'very delicious, very nice', and talks of three years of philosophical discussion between them, traces of which, he says, he later discovered in *The Unicorn* (1963),⁷ surely Murdoch's most Weilian novel.

That makes all the more remarkable the early review from 1951, which was to be so little remembered later by its author, or indeed by anyone else (though it did get a mention in the magnificent *Iris Murdoch: A Descriptive and Annotated Secondary Bibliography* [1994], by John

⁵ Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (2001), p.299, hereafter *IMAL*.

⁶ Miklós Vetö, 'The Ethics of Simone Weil' (D. Phil. thesis, Oxford, 1964), which developed into the book *La Métaphysique religieuse de Simone Weil* (Paris, 1971; 1997; 2017), translated as *The Religious Metaphysics of Simone Weil* (Albany, NY, 1994).

⁷ There is a short profile of Vetö in Ellen Ficklen, 'A Scholar Deepens His Understanding of Faith', *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Vol. 53, Issue 11 (Nov. 3, 2006). And Vetö has written a short and fascinating autobiographical sketch, though only two pages cover this early period: Miklos Vetö, 'Jalons et moments', *Iris: Annales de philosophie* (Université Saint-Joseph, Faculté des lettres et des sciences humaines, Beyrouth, Liban) 27 (2006), pp.1-10 (pp. 4-5).

Fletcher and Cheryl Bove). This first public engagement of Murdoch with Weil's work shows, I think, no sign of being mere apprentice-work, or just a first attempt to get to grips with a new kind of material. On the contrary, Murdoch's talk is a work of exceptional accuracy and penetration, setting out central lines of thought in Weil, and raising challenges to them. The more I read it, the more I am struck by the concentration and clarity of thought. (It is best read slowly.) Murdoch had given two radio talks the year before, on 'The Novelist as Metaphysician' and 'The Existentialist Hero' (both reprinted in *EM*), and she clearly knew her craft. But the task, I suspect, was harder in this case: existentialism has an aspect of wide appeal, while Weil's thoughts were more likely to be seen as esoteric, although impressive. And yet I think we can see that Murdoch's early reception of Weil was very different from what it became in *The Sovereignty of Good*: not in her understanding of Weil, but in what she could *do* with that understanding.

Those who know *The Sovereignty of Good* will find in the Simone Weil of Murdoch's early radio talk many of the characteristic notions that will resonate a decade later in Murdoch's own work. To take just one central cluster of ideas: our task is to recognize how the *imagination* (or *fantasy*, in the more Freudian version of the idea that Murdoch will later develop) cuts us off from reality; we must learn to apply *attention* to the *real*; if we succeed, then actions that are *required* of us can be *automatically* performed, with a kind of *renunciation of the self or ego*.

But there is a big difference between Weil's version of these ideas and Murdoch's a decade or more later. In Weil, the renunciation of self leaves, quite literally, *God* operating in us; in Murdoch, it will become *Good* that operates in us. 'In true love it is not *we* who love the afflicted in God, it is *God in us* who loves them. When we are in affliction, it is *God in us* who loves those who wish us well. Compassion and gratitude come down *from God*' (*Attente de Dieu* [1950], p.156; *Waiting on God* [1951], p.92, my emphasis).⁸ And that is a view that Iris Murdoch can in this early review report with sympathy, but not with acceptance. What remained to be done if this material was to be affirmable, for Murdoch and her later philosophical audience, was to find a version of Weil's moral psychology that could survive when separated from the requirement of a God, and combined with a new affirmation of the independence (and, if properly understood, freedom) of human persons. But I suspect it was hard in 1951 even to see that as a task to be attempted, let alone as a task that Murdoch herself would later achieve. By contrast, however, in the work of the 1960s, we see that Murdoch has achieved it: she has transposed much of Weil's thought into a new key, and made it her own. Where Weil had talked of God and the methods and training for coming to a love of God, Murdoch will talk of Good and the methods and training for coming to a love of the Good. A great achievement of Murdoch's is to see how the methods can be fundamentally the same in the domain of morality as Weil had sketched for the domain of religion, and to make *mysticism*, as before, a name for those methods. Morality emerges therefore, in Murdoch as a kind of *mysticism*, even in a world where 'there is no God' (as Murdoch supposes, in 'On "God" and "Good"': *EM*, p.361). 'Morality has always been connected with religion and religion with mysticism. The disappearance of the middle term' – the disappearance of religion – 'leaves morality in a situation which is certainly more difficult but *essentially the same*' (*EM*, p.360, my emphasis). The task that Murdoch undertook was to link morality with mysticism, but without religion, by transforming the psychology of that supremely *religious* thinker Simone Weil.

The magnitude and novelty of the task – that is, of the modulation of many of Simone Weil's ideas into a new, more metaphysically modest key – was perhaps so great that it presented itself hardly, if at all, to Murdoch in 1951 as a task doable or to be done. And that perhaps gives us an

⁸ For full references of these texts see footnote 1 to Iris Murdoch, 'Waiting on God: A Radio Talk on Simone Weil', the *Iris Murdoch Review* no.8 (2017), p.10.

explanation of why, in retrospect, Murdoch took her *discovery* of Weil only really to have begun from the late 1950s. It was only from that later time that she began to realize that there was a task; to discover, with Weil, views she could literally affirm. In making that transformation, Murdoch turned out also to be recreating a version of much of Plato's own thought. And she recreated it somewhat as if she was recollecting something seen obscurely at an earlier time, both remembered and not quite remembered: a very suitable way to bring a form of Platonism to light and to mind.

Anne Rowe, author of *The Visual Arts and the Novels of Iris Murdoch* (2002),
in interview with Lucy Bolton

LB Why do you think the elements of the visual arts are not discussed more in relation to Murdoch's work?

AR It seems odd that her use of the visual arts hasn't been commented on more frequently by critics, especially as she so openly admired the Jamesian practice of the 'sister arts' – creating a mutual correspondence between painting and literature. And of course, there's also biographical evidence that testifies to this interest: she was schooled in the visual arts from her Badminton days which instilled a passion for painters and painting; she taught philosophy to art students at the Royal College of Art and sought out the company of painters throughout her life, and this level of interest found its way into her fiction. Yet her painterly interests have been sidelined, like many others, in favour of finding equations between her fiction and philosophy, so the sophisticated knowledge of art and art theory that infiltrates the novels still begs investigation. My own work, which came out of an inquisitive research interest wisely suggested by Peter Conradi, has barely scratched the surface of the dialogue with the visual arts in the novels. In fairness, the lack of critical curiosity was also exacerbated by Murdoch herself, who purposefully deflected critics from finding too many 'significances' in her work. She told an American researcher in the 1970s that the relationship between her books and works of art was 'not close', stating specifically that Bronzino's *Allegory of Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time* that features in *The Nice and The Good* enters only as an afterthought.¹ This puzzled me greatly, because I had concluded that the Bronzino is *not* an afterthought: I have argued, in fact, that the plot, the characters, and the philosophical and aesthetic foundations of that book are directly generated by that painting. John Bayley has since mentioned in his memoirs that she frequently went to art galleries when she was looking for inspiration for a novel, and that a painting would often 'set her off'.

LB Why do you think IM deliberately sent critics on the wrong track, and do you think that has affected reception of the novels?

AR I came to understand during the course of my research that it is a *sensual* response that she solicits from her readers, at least equally, and perhaps over and above, an intellectual one. She intends a great deal of meaning to be absorbed subliminally. The complex aesthetic devices that she uses to communicate meaning are borrowed from various art theories and paintings that she loved, but to encourage an intellectualization of those methods would deflect from the sensual engagement she sought. I'm convinced that there are more veiled allusions to actual paintings in the novels than have yet been identified, as well as more complex formal links to various styles and movements in art theory, all still hidden within the texts and implying additional layers of meaning.

¹ Betty Mitchell Foley, *Iris Murdoch's Use of Art as Analogies of Moral Themes* (PhD Dissertation, Wayne State University, 1979), p.10.

Analysing these allusions would enlarge understanding of both Murdoch's view of human nature and the ways in which she experimented with the novel form. In fact I was speaking recently with Pamela Osborn, who has also written on Murdoch's use of paintings, after we had both been re-reading *The Italian Girl*. I suggested that this novel had been under-rated and misunderstood because its picture of humanity belongs less to the twentieth century and more the twenty-first, where troubling sexual proclivities have been forced more into the open. Pamela agreed, and added that she thought the novel generated the experience of walking through an art gallery, where some scenes are sinister and full of dark figures while others are almost too picturesque, for example when Edmund frames Flora within a Pre-Raphaelite painting or recasts her as a simple country girl painted at the turn of the century. The book appears to hint at the troubled mindset of a certain type of paedophilic inclination, invisible to society and readers at the time the book was written.

LB Murdoch is perhaps perceived as a wordy, intellectual writer – is this unfair? Is there a jarring of perspectives between her intellectual and her sensory depictions of art in the novels?

AR Well, it's right to say that she is perceived as a 'wordy, intellectual' writer, quite justifiably so, but what needs to be understood is that her philosophical standpoints and her sensory depictions of art do not jar against each other at all, but are two complementary aspects of the same enterprise. Murdoch understood the way that great painters look at the world, recording the truths of human existence unclouded by their own fantasies or prejudices, to stand as a paradigm for the moral demand to *see* clearly that she champions in her own philosophy. To be able to look at the world and see that world and humanity as it really is, not as we want it to be in order to fulfil our own desires – this is how great painters, like Titian and Rembrandt, trained themselves to see, and their paintings serve as moral examples of that kind of truthful perception. So, I would say there is not – or rather should not be – any 'jarring' between her intellectual pursuits and the aesthetics and sensory depictions of art in the novels. They are all part of the aligning of art and morals that is at the centre of her philosophy.

LB Murdoch uses real paintings in her novels, but what about the process of painting itself? The creation of the work of art? How does this figure in her metaphysical thinking?

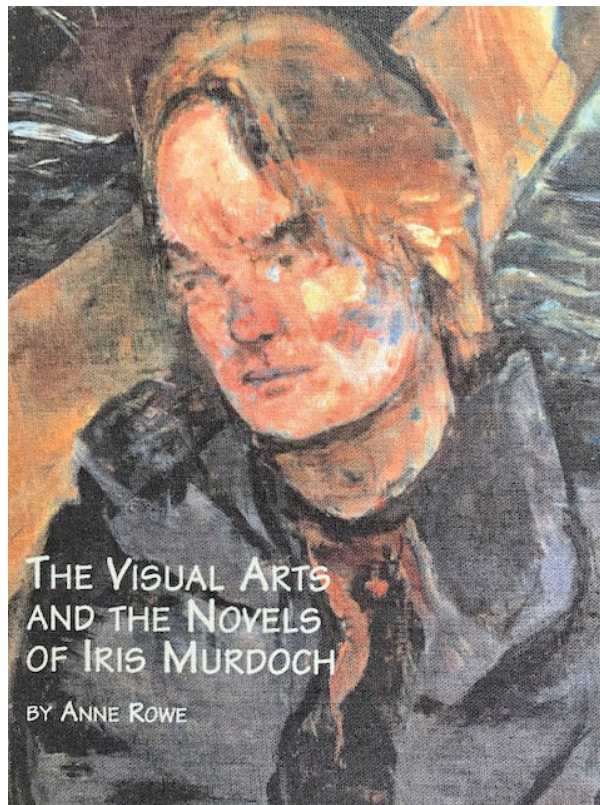
AR If, in the construction of a painting, a painter attends to an object or a subject so intently, and concentrates on it so deeply, that self-identity is lost, he becomes nothing in himself, then a psychical and intellectual space emerges that something *other* than oneself can fill. Murdoch understands this as a religious exercise and she illustrates the point in her philosophy by quoting Rilke, who said of Cézanne that he did not paint 'I like it' but 'there it is'.² When a painter can achieve this feat of concentration in the process of creation, the resulting work has great power, which can create a moment of ascesis in the viewer of the painting, and at that moment, what Murdoch calls a 'revelation' can take place. This is what happens to Dora in *The Bell* when she visits Gainsborough's *The Painter's Daughters Chasing a Butterfly* at the National Gallery, and what happened to Murdoch herself when she saw Titian's last great painting, *The Flaying of Marsyas*, when it came from Czechoslovakia to London in the 1980s. It was this experience she strove to replicate in the construction and reception of her own narratives. The demand that she made on herself was to be able to see, to tell the truth about humanity, and then find an appropriate way to

² *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970), (Ark Paperbacks, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), p.59.

translate that truth into an artistic form so vivid that her readers become momentarily absorbed – or ‘unselfed’ – just like the viewer of a painting, and perhaps experience a similar kind of revelation. Such an experience can, as it did for Dora, produce moral clarity, but what’s also significant is that Dora is unaware of what has happened: enlightenment takes place below surface consciousness. But she does know instinctively what she has to do to begin to put her life on the right track. Murdoch attempted to emulate the process of painting in her writing, by creating a completely synaesthetic art form that uses shape, colour, form, sound, visual imagery and symbolism to facilitate the representation of that truth. I would say again that the wealth and complexity of the ways that she executes this vision is stunning and still not fully appreciated. I would, in fact, go as far as to suggest that she experimented with constructing a fully synaesthetic literary form more innovatively than any other mid to late twentieth-century writer.

LB Do you consider good and bad art to be understandable in relation to the ability of the artwork to console or to perpetuate self-delusion, versus the ability to enlighten as Gainsborough’s painting did for Dora and *The Flaying of Marsyas* did for Murdoch?

AR Yes. She was always aware of the danger of the consolatory power of art, suspicious that some art too easily provides readily available consolation that disables moral engagement. Examples might be the quick aesthetic fix that comes from the cats Tim Reede paints in *Nuns and Soldiers* or the morally draining comfort that Eugene Peshkov receives from his beloved icon in *The Time of the Angels*. Lesser art, or even a distorted perception of good art, can intensify solipsism and allow us an easy path to self-delusion that moves us away from confronting the more unpalatable truths of the human condition that great art attempts to reveal. Gainsborough’s unashamed, perhaps even sentimental, portrayal of fatherly love also illustrates, honestly and prophetically in this case, his understanding that he cannot save his beloved daughters from the dangers that the future will inevitably hold for them. The ghostly smile on the face of Titian’s Marsyas as he endures his skin being torn from his body implies his understanding that while extreme suffering has no redemptive power it may not be a punishment by the gods, but an act of love. These are difficult truths, not only to face but to find ways of expressing in art, and they are miles away from the cheap consolation of mediocre art or the sinister self-delusion and perversity exhibited, for example, in Jesse Baltram’s surrealist, erotically charged portrayals of women with animals in *The Good Apprentice*. Mediocre art, she has suggested, exhibits much more clearly than mediocre conduct the intrusion of fantasy and the self into the art form and is a diminishing of any reflection of the real world. There is, I think, an attempt at soliciting readerly discernment between good and bad art in her inclusion of both actual paintings and ‘made-up’, fictional works of art, which are mediocre by comparison. I should add though, that I think she came to understand that there can be a more benign aspect to the consolatory emotions that certain art can produce, and that in her life she grew more tolerant of them as she grew older. This tolerance is evident in her letters, where she reveals that she was often consoled by art in times of emotional turmoil, especially music. She never allowed her own art to participate in that purely consolatory function though. To the end of her career the novels force readers to face the anguish of sin, remorse, grief and mortality. Gerard’s meditation on death as he sits beside the corpse of his beloved father in *The Book and the Brotherhood* is about as far away from consolation as art can get. Only the presence of deep and loving friendships in the novel partially turns the book’s face away from the blank face of truth, but never eradicates it.



Cover of *The Visual Arts and the Novels of Iris Murdoch* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 2002).

LB You suggest in your book that ‘readers achieve salvation by proxy’ – this is a fascinating phrase! Can you explain it?

AR Well, the first thing I should clarify here is that when Murdoch speaks of salvation she does not mean salvation in any conventional religious sense. She simply means that art can take its observer or reader a small step nearer to the truth and becoming good; to seeing reality as it is and responding justly to it. Yet at the same time she makes clear that truth lies beyond all images and is ultimately inaccessible. A great painting, or a great novel, can only point towards those truths, and only in this limited way do readers achieve salvation by proxy. James Arrowby in the *The Sea, The Sea*, attempts to explain this point to Charles when he speaks of the way that images *explain* things but that ‘the truth lies beyond’. A number of characters achieve a degree of ‘salvation’ when they look at paintings, and this happens quite frequently; Dora in *The Bell* is the only character I can think of who has a completely positive revelation which is uniquely explained in that book in some detail. Murdoch was never to spell out a reaction so openly to her readers again. ‘Salvation’ takes place in the space Murdoch creates between authorial intent and readerly response. Readers have to be themselves engaged in the creation of meaning, she is not a didactic writer in the conventional sense.

LB Are you saying salvation comes to the reader via the character’s salvation, or the readers’ own evocation of the images?

AR The effect of art on characters and its vicarious effect on readers is dealt with in complex ways. For example, Harriet in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* and Henry in *Henry and Cato* are affected but also baffled by the paintings they see, and it’s clear that it is the moral responsibility of the character to take their intuitions further by confronting their problems, by concentrating on

the other, and allowing moral understanding of others, and themselves, to surface. Harriet fails to respond properly, so does Henry, but *readers* perhaps achieve salvation 'by proxy' because in both these novels the omniscient narrative gives them access to information that the characters don't have, so the task is easier. The paintings in these books, by the way, are Giorgione's *Il Tramonto* in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* and Titian's *The Death of Actaeon* in *Henry and Cato*. Achieving this end with first-person narratives is more challenging for a writer though. In a quite obvious way, for example, Titian's *Perseus and Andromeda*, which Charles Arrowby ponders over at the Wallace Collection in *The Sea, The Sea*, holds meaning *only* for the reader, and certainly *not* for the character. The painting has a psychological relevance that could lead Charles to understand some damaging buried psychological forces if his attention could only be paid to it, but he's just too self-obsessed. His juvenile appropriation of the painting for a cheap sexual thrill is one of the funniest passages in the novel, but, hopefully, the psychological implications within the painting give a penetrating insight into Charles's inner life. These insights are indicated to the reader not only by the obvious similarities between the narratives of the painting and the novel but also, more subtly, by the numerous evocations of images throughout the book that link them: for example the appearances of the sea demon, the descriptions of the wet open mouths of a number of the female characters, and the evocative descriptions of the sea itself. While the nature of his psychological problem bypasses Charles, the attentive reader assimilates much that helps them understand something about his fear of women and his repressed feelings of jealousy, shame and inadequacies. This knowledge enables them to view him with justice and tolerance. Murdoch believed passionately that the truth contained in great art has the power to penetrate into the deep unconscious mind and trigger unknown sources of power, but both her characters and her readers need to be alert to that potential.

LB Could you say something about symbolism and surrendering art to contingency and rigidity of form? I am thinking here about IM's ideas about art in relation to Derrida's account of language.

AR The tension Murdoch grappled with between the artificiality and rigidity of form and the truth-telling demand of art defines Murdoch as a writer. While form necessarily distorts reality, the challenge was always to use it to take readers closer to truth and not further away from it. She understood Derrida's account of language to be a form of technological determinism that weakened faith in morality and the ability to discern truth in art. In particular she disliked his removal of the referential qualities from language; and her references to actual paintings that exist outside the literary text are part of her denial of the validity of his claims. Paintings form an inter-textual, cross-referential system of meaning which accrues validity from a solid *experiential* reality that is independent of the text. Her use of symbolism is also part of this attempt to extend the boundaries of language by suggesting multiple levels of meaning for the same object. Murdoch's understanding of Derrida has been questioned of course, and critics have noted that deconstruction values certain things, including contingency, as much as she does. While this may be true, I think she disliked the radical extremes of deconstructionist theory that emerged out of its origins. The construction of multifaceted, complex symbols in the novels participates in this ongoing debate, and the novels are saturated with symbols, often immediately evident in the titles: a severed head, a bell, the sea, a rose, a sandcastle, the list could go on. But her symbols are never unitary; they can represent various and often opposing qualities. For example, the old bell, buried deep in the lake at Imber Court in *The Bell*, symbolizes both Michael Meade's genuine spiritual aspirations at the same time as it symbolizes the deep unconscious forces that make those aspirations unattainable.

But this does not destroy stable meaning, it just makes that meaning more complex. Her symbols help to release art from the rigidity of language and allow for ambiguity and ambivalence that take us closer to meaning not further away. *The Black Prince* is a masterpiece in this sense, where the tension between the constraints of language and its multifarious possibilities are confronted in the story itself. The postscripts clearly undercut the truth of Bradley's account of events but assessing the veracity of language only through the intellect will get you nowhere in this novel. It is to the emotions and sensory perceptions that she appeals to lead us to understanding, for even in the fictional world she argued, again contentiously, there is a truth to the artist's intent, even while acknowledging the presence of the author's unconscious mind in its creation. Only through the aesthetics and the poetic lyricism of her prose can one access the truths the novel attempts to tell, even if they turn out to be paradoxical. I feel sure that she wants to hang on to the old-fashioned and ordinary certainties of a literary text, both experiential and moral, and I can't see *The Black Prince* as subscribing to the idea that art is merely 'play': as Bradley reminds us, 'all art lies, but great art lies its way to the truth'. Art for Murdoch is one of the most serious and valuable sources of human understanding.

LB Do you consider the way Murdoch writes about art in her non-fiction to be philosophy or merely 'idea-play'?

AR Well, what we have just spoken about in relation to *The Black Prince* is as good an illustration as any of her 'idea-play' at work in the novels. She differentiates this 'idea-play' from her philosophy though, which has a considered point of view to which she can be held to account. When she speaks about the truth-telling power of art and its importance to humanity in her philosophy, we must take her at her word. But the gap between the philosophy and fiction has driven many a student to distraction; she forces readers to participate in the novels' meaning and never allows them to merely absorb one unequivocal point of view, especially in relation to her own philosophy. She became increasingly nervous about being seen as any kind of sage or seer with a specific set of prescribed values. As I've said, meaning in the novels is generated in the mind of the reader, in the gaps within the narrative that readers have to fill. Murdoch's use of paintings brilliantly illustrates this 'idea-play' and its relation to her philosophy, the way the novels test and often equivocate her philosophy. I'll try to explain this point with reference to Giorgione's *Il Tramonto* which appears in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*. In her philosophy Murdoch identifies the Good man as humble, with an absence of the anxious, avaricious tentacles of the self, as one who renounces the self in favour of attention to the other. This kind of goodness is evident in the Giorgione painting in the figure of Saint Anthony, who is lovingly tending to the sick. But there is another hero in the painting too, Saint George, who displays a more conventional type of heroism as he attempts to bravely slaughter what looks like a rather inoffensive baby dragon. Likewise, two competing types of heroism contest each other in the novel, but no unquestioning assumption is made about the superiority of humble selfless goodness: in fact, the novel illustrates how selflessness can turn into masochism, self-denial into dangerous repression, and renunciation of power into an abnegation of moral responsibility. The Giorgione painting crystallizes the complexities of her philosophical thinking and functions as a symbol of a kind of self-delusion that Murdoch perceives to be one of the most insidious and pervasive barriers to goodness: the inability to truthfully perceive one's own motives. This understanding does not negate her philosophical position on the nature of the good, but it does illustrate the difficulty, perhaps the impossibility, of achieving it. And she certainly does not absolve her readers from the moral demand to attempt the impossible, to come as close to goodness as one can.

LB What is the role of the eye, the intellect, the soul, the body, in relation to art?

AR The role of the eye is to see reality accurately without the intrusion of fantasy, obsession or desire; the role of the intellect is to see reality justly, stripped of ideology, issues of personal gain and with tolerance and respect for the *difference* between ourselves and others; the role of the body is an ambivalent one, we should allow its instincts a place in our understanding of how we assimilate meaning, but always be aware of its power to distract us. In *The Nice and the Good* the narrative voice observes that ‘we think with our body with its yearnings and its shrinkings and its ghostly walkings’.³ We ignore our ‘gut’ reactions at our peril, they are often as good, or even a better, guide to reality than relying merely on the intellect itself, but they are also powerful deceivers. The only way I can think of her concept of the soul is in terms of her idea of the Platonic *eros*, the energy force within all human beings that embodies both the desire for goodness, God, and love, and also its opposing desires, sexual obsession and the desire for power and domination over others. The challenge for her characters is a discriminatory one – there is an ongoing attempt to identify which aspect of *eros* is driving human actions. *Eros* is a great charlatan and leads us into all sorts of trouble, which is just as well for a writer: most of Murdoch’s plots hinge on the human cost and tragedies that emerge out of losing control over such potentially dangerous and destructive psychological forces.

LB How is the meditative element of attention to art translatable to our everyday lives? Is art unique, compared to say the natural world?

AR Not at all. Paintings are useful as points of meditation, but in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* Murdoch makes clear that that on the lifelong journey between illusion and reality that we are all undertaking, there are many wayside shrines and sacraments as she calls them, or places for meditation, that provide spiritual and moral refreshment. She suspects that most of us have our own personal icons, stored away safely in our minds, and that they are ‘untainted and vital’.⁴ If we can learn to understand the significance of icons or images when we see them, we can store them, and call on them in times of need; they can serve as sources of energy, as pure and inspiring things that attract love and veneration. But they can serve as warnings of evil too, such as the macabre image – and smell – of dead birds that John Ducane in *The Nice and the Good* encounters in Radeechy’s dungeon, and then calls to mind when he has to ward off immoral temptation. Art is an obvious source of such practical moral aids, but many other images from the real world – a kestrel, a statue, a rose, a sunset, a landscape or a human face – can all serve us spiritually and morally in this way.

LB Is the sublime stripped of iconography or imagery and turned into a state of moral consciousness? Do we have to have images – our own or others’ – to conceive of the sublime and/or to experience it?

AR Icons and images are an excellent starting point. I daresay that great sages or seers can reach a state of the sublime by thought alone but the rest of us probably need a trigger. Murdoch defined the sublime as an extraordinary deep reservoir of imagery which is dark and which holds within it the terrors of the mind. A force comes from this region, she suggests, that occasions vision

³ *The Nice and the Good* (1968), (London: Triad/Panther Books, 1985), p.334.

⁴ Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), p.496.

and enlightenment. For Kant nature was the trigger that enabled experience of the sublime but Murdoch transposes this reaction to include those emotions that we can receive from great art. Her novels would come into this realm I think. She attempts to evoke the sublime, not only by creating a surge of love for her characters but through the beauty of their form, which, working together can induce a feeling of the sublime. Her aesthetic experiments are among the tools she uses to induce this emotion, creating a fully synaesthetic enterprise that uses sound, sight, smell, touch, taste, all working together. In this way her art can be described as 'sacred' or 'religious' – aesthetics and morals form the prism that shapes the novels and vicariously provides the opportunity for her readers to experience what she calls 'salvation by art'.

‘Evolving a Style’: Iris Murdoch and the Surrealist Moral Vision of Paul Nash

Iris Murdoch’s engagement with the visual art of the British Surrealist painter Paul Nash (1889-1946) has hitherto been unexamined by critics despite the fact that her novels both implicitly and explicitly engage with his paintings. Best known for his depictions of the scarred landscapes of World War One and World War Two, Nash is frequently described as one of the most influential British artists of the twentieth century.¹ While Nash’s pre-war paintings explored more idyllic rural settings, his later artworks often explore the impact of archaic, primitive or mythological objects on their landscape. For Nash ‘inanimate objects’ like ‘stone and leaf, bark and shell’ all have a ‘personal beauty’ that can be endowed with ‘active powers’.² Ranking highly among these objects are megaliths or monoliths, large prehistoric stones or stone monuments.³ These subjects, as well as Nash’s interest in the English landscape and his late exploration of the relationship between the sun and the moon, contribute to what Andrew Causey terms a unique ‘sequence of personal imagery’.⁴ Murdoch’s allusions and references to Nash’s paintings highlight not only the influence he had on her creative output but also the compatibility of their pictures of morality; Murdoch is to a large extent, as this essay will argue, an advocate of Paul Nash’s Surrealist vision.

Among the increasing collection of resources in the Iris Murdoch Archives at Kingston University are paintings from the late-1930s and early-1940s that – when considered alongside Murdoch’s correspondence from the same time – highlight the significance of Nash’s influence on Murdoch’s creative development.⁵ Murdoch’s novels and moral philosophy are greatly influenced by the visual arts.⁶ However, her well-documented passion for the visual arts pre-dates both her novels and philosophy. In a 1983 interview with John Haffenden she notably admits that,

I always wanted to be a novelist, but there was a time when I thought I wanted to be an archaeologist and art historian [...] I would very much like to have been a Renaissance art historian, and at one time I wanted to be a painter. I think I would have been a moderate painter if I had given my life to it, but that is an absolute hypothesis, without any basis to it!⁷

¹ See Alex Farquharson, ‘Foreword’, in *Paul Nash*, Emma Chambers (ed.), (London: Tate Publishing, 2017), pp.6-7.

² Andrew Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects* (Surrey: Lund Humphries, 2013), p.125.

³ See entries for ‘monoliths’ and ‘megaliths’ in *Paperback Oxford English Dictionary*, 7th edn., Maurice Waite (ed.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.450, 467.

⁴ Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects*, p.130.

⁵ Hereafter, references to the Iris Murdoch Archives at Kingston University will be abbreviated to ‘the Archives’.

⁶ In *The Visual Arts and the Novels of Iris Murdoch* (2002), for example, Anne Rowe argues that Murdoch alludes to specific paintings in her novels – from Bronzino’s *Allegory of Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time* to Titian’s *The Flaying of Marsyas* – to expand and improve the reader’s moral perception by more accurately depicting the complex reality of human consciousness. Anne Rowe, *The Visual Arts and the Novels of Iris Murdoch* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), p.234.

⁷ Iris Murdoch, ‘John Haffenden Talks to Iris Murdoch’ (1983), in *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction: Conversations with Iris Murdoch*, Gillian Dooley (ed.), (South Carolina: University Press, 2003), pp.124-138, (p.128).

Murdoch's declaration that she could have been 'a moderate painter' is made all the more pertinent by the growing collection of materials in the Archive, which offer tangible examples of her early predilection for art. Crucially, among these resources are three paintings from the late-1930s and early-1940s that exhibit Murdoch's engagement with Nash. During the late-1930s, Peter Conradi explains, Murdoch 'was painting a lot': he notes the existence of a still life depicting 'a copy of Joyce's *Ulysses* [...] lying by a blue pottery jar of coltsfoot' and suggests that this was Murdoch's only 'surviv[ing]' painting.⁸ A further two, however, have recently been acquired by the Archives: a landscape depicting a rural hilltop town and a landscape depicting a more suburban setting.⁹ On first inspection neither of these paintings directly reference Nash's 'sequence of personal imagery'; yet Murdoch worried about the influence that Nash had on her early paintings. In a letter to David Hicks, she admits that 'I never write anything these days – I paint a lot instead, and am evolving a style which I hope does not owe too much to Paul Nash – grey stony inorganic'.¹⁰ While Murdoch's paintings which are currently in existence do not directly reference Nash's paintings, they nevertheless draw upon the muted, 'grey stony inorganic' colour palette that Murdoch ascribes to him.¹¹ Murdoch's continuing artistic development and her early experiments with painting are thus, as she herself acknowledged, indebted to Nash.¹²

Murdoch's paintings evidence an engagement with Nash that flourishes in her fiction. Many of her novels allude to Nash's 'sequence of personal imagery' – no fewer than seven, for example, contain significant stones or monoliths. Additionally, in two late novels, Murdoch overtly references Nash. In *The Good Apprentice* (1985) Clive Warriston – the maternal grandfather of the protagonist, Edward Baltram – is briefly described as 'a minor painter and follower of Paul Nash' and the fictional environment of Seegard, echoing Nash's predilection for monoliths, contains a 'large' 'striking' 'mysterious' stone structure.¹³ *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983) similarly includes a unique stone structure, 'The Ennistone Ring', a circle of nine stone megaliths whose 'mysterious', uncanny presence is respected by the townspeople of Ennistone.¹⁴ This novel exemplifies Murdoch's engagement with Nash by including a further two references to him: the local artist 'Ned Larkin' is 'an Ennistonian follower of Paul Nash' (PP, p.26) and George McCaffrey's mental breakdown at the end of the novel alludes to Nash's late paintings, including *Sunflower and Sun* (1942), *Solstice of the Sunflower* (1945) and *Eclipse of the Sunflower* (1945). In *The Philosopher's Pupil* Murdoch juxtaposes the moral dangers inherent in the traditional artistic vision of Surrealism with the more accurate, albeit ambivalent, picture of morality presented in Nash's late Abstract, Surrealist, Symbolic paintings. On the one hand, Ned Larkin's corrupt fantasy art in the Slipper House – a large 1920s

⁸ Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), p.112.

⁹ The archive catalogue numbers for the paintings are KUAS191/2/2, KUAS202/12/1 and KUAS202/12/2.

¹⁰ Iris Murdoch, *Iris Murdoch: A Writer at War; Letters & Diaries 1939-45*, Peter J. Conradi (ed.) (London: Short Books, 2010), pp.185-90, (p.189) (21 March 1941).

¹¹ Conceivably, there were (or are), as Murdoch's letter to Hicks indicates, more paintings that directly alluded to Nashian subjects. Conradi, for example, suggests that 'many of [Murdoch's] paintings of the time had ladders in them' (Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life*, p.112). None of those surviving to date contain ladders. Nevertheless, among the more prevalent objects within Nash's paintings are ladders. For example, Nash depicts trench ladders in *After the Battle* (1918) and a wooden apple ladder behind a superimposed picture frame in *Month of March* (1929).

¹² The Archives also recently acquired a large collection of hitherto unseen poems, two of which exhibit Murdoch's early poetic engagement with Nash. She notes that one of her untitled poems 'should be a picture, not a poem. Mixture of Arthur Wragg and Paul Nash' (Iris Murdoch, Untitled Handwritten Poem [beginning 'This I can create everlasting'], in *Poems January 1938 to July 1940 [Red Notebook]*, held in Iris Murdoch Archives, Kingston University, KUAS202/3/4). Finally, in a later poem titled 'Thoughts around Nash's wild stones' Murdoch responds to the terror being unleashed upon the English landscape during World War Two, and includes a reference to 'Nash's wild stones [...] crying for their flint-eyed young' (Iris Murdoch, 'Thoughts around Nash's wild stones' [11.10.40], in *Poems 1940-1945 [Black Notebook]*, held in Iris Murdoch Archives, Kingston University, KUAS202/3/5).

¹³ Iris Murdoch, *The Good Apprentice* (1985), (London: Vintage, 2000), pp.20, 128.

¹⁴ Iris Murdoch, *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983), (London: Vintage, 2000), p.195, hereafter PP.

'art déco' [sic] 'folly' constructed by Alex McCaffrey's 'eccentric' father, Geoffrey Stillowen (PP, p.62) – exhibits a Surrealist vision that offers a moral warning about the superimposition of fantasy over reality. On the other hand, George McCaffrey's mental breakdown highlights the extent to which the complex Surrealist vision of Nash's late paintings accurately portrays the ambivalent nature of the moral life along with the need for redemption. This question of redemption is important considering that at the end of the novel the dangerous and unpredictable George attempts to murder his ex-teacher, the eponymous philosopher John Robert Rozanov, by drowning him. George believes he has succeeded but unbeknownst to him Rozanov had committed suicide, and was already dead. After what George believes to be a successful attempt to murder Rozanov, he runs to the Ennistone Ring and undergoes a veridical vision of the eclipse of the sun that alludes to Nash's late explorations of mortality and moral renewal. After this ambiguous denouement, George's transformation into a 'gentle, polite, quietly humorous' (PP, pp.547-8) character illustrates the 'complex' 'mysterious' nature of the moral life (PP, p.556) and highlights the delicacy required when judging a character's actions. Murdoch's consolidated allusions to Nash in *The Philosopher's Pupil* render it her most Nashian novel.

Murdoch's explicit references to Nash in *The Philosopher's Pupil* partly serve to highlight the moral danger inherent in the traditional vision presented by Surrealist artists, whose works exhibit a solipsistic moral vision and are, as Anne Rowe argues, 'deeply opposed' to Murdoch's 'aesthetic'.¹⁵ In the first 'Manifesto of Surrealism', the French poet André Breton explained that the aim of the literary and artistic movement of Surrealism was 'to resolve the previously contradictory conditions of dream and reality into an absolute reality, a super-reality'.¹⁶ This conflation of reality and the fantasy world of dreams is damaging to Murdoch's vision of art and morality. For Murdoch, 'the enemy of art' and 'of true imagination' is fantasy: one of the reasons 'we may fail to see the individual', Murdoch warns, is 'because we are completely enclosed in a fantasy world of our own into which we draw things from the outside, not grasping their reality and independence, making them into dream objects of our own'.¹⁷ In *The Philosopher's Pupil*, Ned Larkin's paintings exhibit a Surrealist 'private fantasy world' (PP, p.206) that isolates and restricts Alex McCaffrey's moral vision.

Alex's affinity with the fantasy worlds of Larkin's paintings offer an example of the dangerous moral solipsism that arises from the Surrealist conflation of fantasy and reality. Adorning the window shutters of the Slipper House, Larkin's paintings partly echo the wartime subjects of Nash's paintings and the 'grey stony' colour palette he favoured.¹⁸ Larkin's subjects include 'an aeroplane among clouds' (PP, p.62), 'powdery garden scenes in pastel shades' (PP, p.64), 'a black-and-white terrier' (PP, p.206), 'a blue sky traversed by a silver airship' (PP, p.206) and various scenes of the McCaffrey family (PP, p.206), including a 'picture of [Alex's] childish self holding a little bouquet of flowers' (PP, p.207). These paintings offer the viewer idyllic scenes of British family life and wartime aircraft. However, as the narrator warns, they also exhibit a 'window into the private fantasy world of Mr. Larkin' (PP, p.206). As Alex walks around the Slipper House looking at these paintings she feels 'a kind of pleasure of aloneness' (PP, p.63). Influenced by the 'artistic impulses with which she had [in the past] so irresolutely played', and by Larkin's paintings, Alex's 'neurotic and corrupted' (PP, p.63) vision of the world ignores reality in favour of an intoxication and enchantment with the

¹⁵ Rowe, *The Visual Arts and the Novels of Iris Murdoch*, p.55.

¹⁶ André Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism' (1924), <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/ernst-pieta-or-revolution-by-night-t03252> [accessed 29-3-17].

¹⁷ Iris Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Good' (1959), *Existentialists and Mystics*, Peter J. Conradi (ed.) (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), pp.205-20, (p.216), hereafter EM.

¹⁸ Murdoch, *Iris Murdoch: A Writer at War; Letters & Diaries 1939-45*, p.189 (21 March 1941).

inner self.¹⁹ In Murdoch's fiction this engagement with Surrealist techniques, Rowe warns, 'bears a distinct moral caveat for her readers'.²⁰ Murdoch's connection of Alex's isolated, neurotic way of life with the 'private fantas[ies]' of Ned Larkin's paintings illustrates the limited moral vision afforded by traditional forms of Surrealism.

The primary obstacle to naming Nash as an influence on Murdoch's fiction is his own Abstract, Modernist and Surrealist tendencies. For Murdoch, the Surrealist world-view can, as Rowe argues, hinder true moral vision by superimposing 'a subjective reality on the real world'.²¹ However, while Nash is labelled a Surrealist painter – and certainly played a large part in the development of British Surrealism – Causey explains that, by the 1940s, Nash had 'freed himself from the shackles of pure abstraction and Surrealism' and moved 'towards something deeper, more mythic'.²² This unorthodox Surrealism is compatible with Murdoch's philosophical moral vision. Murdoch's passion for art transfers to her moral philosophy where she connects the 'truth-seeking' activity of the good artist with love and an attention to reality:²³

Art and morals are [...] one [...] The essence of both of them is love. Love is the perception of individuals. Love is the extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real. Love, and so art and morals, is the discovery of reality. What stuns us into a realisation of our supersensible destiny is [...] [nature's] unutterable particularity; and most particular and individual of all natural things is the mind of man.²⁴

In Murdoch's moral philosophy the positive moral vision that art represents is partly connected with a concept she 'borrowed' from Simone Weil; good art exhibits *attention*, 'a just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality'.²⁵ Murdoch's combined vision of art and morals with its crucial imperative of attention echoes Nash's unique and imaginative attention to the world. He suggests that his own artworks – like *Marsh Personage* (1934), a black and white photograph depicting a piece of driftwood, a natural, 'found object' – illustrate 'what anyone with an observant, searching eye might collect'.²⁶ Like Murdoch, he stresses the importance of the right kind of attention: in order 'to find' the 'personal beauty' of such objects, Nash asserts, 'you must be able to perceive'.²⁷ Here, with his celebration of an imaginative attention to the particular, Nash's unorthodox Surrealist vision is compatible with Murdoch's picture of art, moral vision and reality.

Nash's late paintings portray allegories that, like Murdoch's fiction and philosophy, highlight the importance of moral transformation. Causey notes that Nash's late works were consciously 'designed

¹⁹ Anne Rowe similarly discusses Murdoch's engagement with the problem of the Surrealist 'intoxication and enchantment with the inner self' within *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956). See Rowe, *The Visual Arts and the Novels of Iris Murdoch*, p.60.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., p.53.

²² Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects*, p.151.

²³ Murdoch uses the phrase 'truth-seeking' to describe the role of creative imagination in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*. See Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992), (London: Vintage, 2003), p.321 and passim, hereafter MGM.

²⁴ Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Good' (1959), *EM*, p.215.

²⁵ Iris Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', in *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970), (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2009), pp.1-44, (p.33).

²⁶ Emma Chambers (ed.), 'The Life of the Inanimate Object', *Paul Nash* (London: Tate Publishing, 2016), pp.35-48, (p.41).

²⁷ Ibid.

as final paintings' because, by the 1940s, he knew that 'he would not be long-lived'.²⁸ Thus, the self-declared 'last phase' of Nash's paintings – which focus on 'the theme of the sunflower' and on the 'great luminaries', the sun and the moon – engage with questions of mortality and redemption.²⁹ Nash himself described the thematic background to one of these paintings, the *Solstice of the Sunflower* (1945):

During the solstice the spent sun shines from its zenith encouraging the Sunflower in the dual role of the sun and firewheel to perform its mythological purpose. The Sun appears to be whipping the Sunflower like a top. The Sunflower Wheel tears over the hill cutting a path through the standing corn and bounding into the air as it gathers momentum. This is the blessing of the Midsummer Fire.³⁰

This painting, and the others from this period, are partly informed by Blake's poem 'Ah! Sun-Flower' and James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. In the latter, Frazer describes how cultures would enact fertility celebrations during the summer solstice, cartwheeling large burning wheels of straw and resin downhill to promote a prosperous harvest.³¹ Such 'fertility cults', Tom Overton explains, are in *The Golden Bough* shown to 'underpin the Christian promise of renewal through death'.³² Nash connects such rituals with Blake's figure of the sunflower, who ineffectually 'seek[s] after that sweet golden clime' of heaven, tragically alluding to Jacob's Ladder (Genesis 28:12).³³ Like Nash's other late paintings, the symbolism of *Solstice of the Sunflower* highlights the importance of spiritual redemption and the need to accept one's own mortality.³⁴ Such a transformative vision of death also appears within Murdoch's fiction and philosophy. There is, as Thomas McCaskerville in *The Good Apprentice* attests, a psychological 'need for death': 'the death of the ego' is a morally beneficial experience capable of leading to 'the liberation of the soul', after which the individual can more accurately attend to reality.³⁵ Thomas's picture of moral development as well as Nash's allusions to Frazer and Blake echo Murdoch's concept of unselfing, a form of 'meditation wherein the mind is alert but emptied of self' (MGM, p.245) that Murdoch aligns with Weil's concept of *décréation*.³⁶ For Weil, the perception of reality requires that the individual 'decreates' themselves: to 'love truth', Weil argues, 'means to accept death. Truth is on the side of death'.³⁷ Influenced by Weil, Murdoch's concept of unselfing, of a morally beneficial form of death, aligns with Nash's picture of morality in his late paintings. Causey notably argues that these paintings illustrate how 'sadness becomes

²⁸ Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects*, p.141. Nash's long-term asthma – which caused the heart attack that led to his death – made him continuously aware of his death. In an earlier article, Causey even goes as far to suggest that Nash's late paintings offer 'premonition[s] of death'. Andrew Causey, 'The Art of Paul Nash', in *Paul Nash: Paintings and Watercolours* (London: Tate Gallery 1975), pp.11-35, (p.34).

²⁹ Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects*, pp.141, 147.

³⁰ Paul Nash, quoted by Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects*, p.151.

³¹ See Sir James George Frazer, 'Chapter 3: Balder's Fires', in *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, Book IV, Robert Frazer (ed.) (Oxford: University Press, 2009), pp.722-30.

³² Tom Overton, 'Eclipse of the Sunflower' (2010), <http://visualarts.britishcouncil.org/exhibitions/exhibition/masters-of-british-painting-1800-1950-1956/object/eclipse-of-the-sunflower-nash-1945-p114> [accessed 23-3-17].

³³ William Blake, *The Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1789-94), in *Blake's Poetry and Designs*, Norton Critical Edition, 2nd edn, Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant (eds.), (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), pp.8-47, (p.39), (Plate 43, Line 3).

³⁴ Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects*, p.148.

³⁵ Murdoch, *The Good Apprentice*, pp.85, 277.

³⁶ For definitions of Weil's *décréation* see Simone Weil, 'Decreation', in *Gravity and Grace*, Gustav Thibon (ed.), Emma Craufurd (trans.), (London: ARK Paperbacks, 1987), pp.28-34.

³⁷ Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p.11.

exultation and death itself a celebration'.³⁸ By alluding to Blake's and Frazer's writings, Nash's late paintings highlight – like Murdoch's fiction and philosophy – the morally redemptive potential of a true attention to one's own mortality.

The compatibility of Murdoch's and Nash's moral vision is further proven by her allusions to his late paintings in *The Philosopher's Pupil*, where George's mental breakdown portrays a similar allegory on the importance of moral transformation and the death of the ego. George first witnesses the 'electrical vibration of the blue zenith beyond the stones' (*PP*, p.539), which recalls the stark blue sky of Nash's *Solstice of the Sunflower* (1945) with its own symbolic references to seasonal renewal and spiritual redemption. Murdoch expands George's vision with imagery rich in allusions to Nash:

[T]he sun [...] was no longer round but becoming shaped like a star with long jagged mobile points which kept flowing in and out, and each time they flowed they became of a dazzling burning intensity [...]. And as it burnt with dazzling pointed rays a dark circle began to grow in its centre, making the star look like a sunflower [...]. As [George] watched, the dark part was growing so that now it almost covered the central orb of the sun, leaving only the long burning petals of flame which were darting out on every side. The dark part was black, black, and the petals were a painful shimmering electric gold [...]. It's killing me, thought George, it is a death thing [...]. He turned, wrenching his head round. He caught a glimpse of the Ennistone Ring, quite close and bathed in an odd vivid crepuscular light. Then from beyond the Ring and coming toward him, there appeared a brilliant silver saucer-shaped space-ship, flying low down over the Common. It came toward George flying quite slowly, and as it came it emitted a ray which entered into his eyes, and a black utter darkness came upon him and he fell to his knees and lay stretched out senseless in the long grass. (*PP*, pp.539-40)

George's vision offers a palimpsest of Nash's *Eclipse of the Sunflower* (1945) where the 'black, black' eclipse is similarly juxtaposed by the 'painful shimmering electric gold' of the sunflower's petals. Moreover, the 'crepuscular' rays of sunlight and the ambiguous 'brilliant silver saucer-shaped space-ship' alludes to Nash's *Sunflower and Sun* (1942), where a similarly ambiguous space-ship-like object (possibly the sun or moon) shines a ray of light onto a recoiling sunflower. Aided by allusions to Nash's late paintings, George's veridical vision is an experience of the death of the ego, a form of unselfing after which he is able to appreciate reality. Like Nash's late paintings, *The Philosopher's Pupil* illustrates how an appreciation of mortality allows the individual to see the ambivalent nature of the moral life and acknowledge the concomitant importance of moral transformation.

³⁸ Causey, 'The Art of Paul Nash', p.34.



Paul Nash, *Sunflower and Sun*, [oil on canvas, 51.1 x 76.5cm]. Art Gallery of New South Wales, Australia. (1942). Gift of the Contemporary Art Society, London 1944.³⁹



Paul Nash, *Eclipse of the Sunflower*, [oil on canvas, 71.1 x 91.4cm]. British Council Collection. (1945).

³⁹ I am grateful to the Humanities Research Fund at Kingston University for funding the permission to reproduce this painting.

Murdoch further illustrates the equivocal nature of the moral life and the importance of moral transformation in the narrator's response to the ambiguous change engendered by George's vision. The narrator asserts that George is, after his veridical vision, 'a changed, and still changing man' (PP, p.547). For the reader, after witnessing George's attempted murder, such an act of forgiveness, grace or redemption might seem unjustified. A resistant reader might even be tempted to ask if George, as a would-be murderer, deserves such change. However, George's transformation from a dangerous, 'restless' (PP, p.302) character to a 'gentle, polite, quietly humorous' (PP, pp.547-8) character represents a crucial moral concern for Murdoch. The individual's 'life-problem', she argues, 'is one of the transformation of energy' (MGM, p.24). While such transformations may be difficult, the individual nevertheless 'live[s]' with 'the real possibility of improvement' (MGM, p.506) and positive moral change. The narrator of *The Philosopher's Pupil* highlights the importance of acknowledging this 'complex' aspect of the moral life:

The motivation of terrible deeds tends to be extremely complex, full of apparent contradictions, and often in fact bottomlessly mysterious, although for legal, scientific and moral reasons we 'have to' theorize about it [...] [Nevertheless] the chance 'triggers' [that] determine our most fateful actions [...] [must] remain opaque particulars with which science can do little. (PP, p.556)

Like the narrator, Murdoch does not support a strict scientific picture of moral theorizing. Instead, for her, art is 'a great hall of reflection' in which the true complexity of the moral life can be more accurately and more freely 'examined and considered'.⁴⁰ George's transformation thus highlights that, however dangerous some characters may be, they are always capable of moral improvement. George's unselfing – his moral transformation or redemption – is a form of death that, as Causey attests when discussing Nash's paintings, deserves 'exultation' and praise.⁴¹ Murdoch's picture of morality in *The Philosopher's Pupil* does not tally with strict scientific theorizing about morality, but instead, like Nash's late paintings, highlights the importance of redemption and moral transformation.

In Paul Nash, Murdoch finds an advocate for her moral vision: his unique 'attenuated Surrealism' is not only compatible with her picture of art and morality, but is also, like Murdoch, opposed to the traditional world-view of Surrealism.⁴² The critical silence surrounding the influence of Nash's paintings and writings on Murdoch means that there are many fruitful discussions still to be had about these two influential British artists. The growing resources in the Archive are highlighting the need to redress this silence. Not only are Murdoch's early experimentations with art indebted to Nash, but her novels also continued to draw on Nash's 'sequence of personal imagery' and, as in *The Philosopher's Pupil*, his thematic explorations of mortality and moral transformation. Causey concludes his study of Nash's works by asserting that the 'links in Nash's art are between the legacies of Symbolism in his early subject pictures, his evolution of a personal Surrealist art, and the background of both in the English Romantic movement'.⁴³ Blake is a prime example of one

⁴⁰ Iris Murdoch, *The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists*: Based upon the Romanes Lecture 1976 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p.86.

⁴¹ Causey, 'The Art of Paul Nash', p.34.

⁴² Herbert Read, 'Paul Nash', in *The Philosophy of Modern Art* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952), p.190.

⁴³ Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects*, p.152.

the Romantic poets who not only influenced Nash but also Murdoch.⁴⁴ All three of these artists assert the importance of acknowledging the complexity of the moral life and attending to the reality of the 'minute particular'.⁴⁵ William Blake, Iris Murdoch, and Paul Nash all conform to the moral paradigm Murdoch outlines in *The Fire and The Sun* (1977): they accurately portray the true ambivalence, complexity and particularity of the moral life of the human individual; they 'lend to the elusive particular a local habitation and a name'.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ There are very few discussions of the influence of Blake on Murdoch. Daniel Majdiak offers concise but detailed criticisms of Murdoch's quotations of Blake in *The Time of the Angels*: of his sixteen-page article, ten pages concern Murdoch's aesthetic similarities to the Romantics in general, seven pages concern Murdoch's allusions to Blake: see Daniel Majdiak, 'Romanticism in the Aesthetics of Iris Murdoch', *Texas Studies in Language and Literature*, XIV.2 (Summer 1972), pp.359-75. An examination of the fundamental influence of Blake on Murdoch is one of the avenues of research that I explore within my PhD thesis.

⁴⁵ In the epic poem *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion* (1804; c. 1821), William Blake writes, 'Labour well the Minute Particular, attend to the Little-ones!' (Chapter 3, Plate 54, line 54). George Steiner has connected this moral imperative to Murdoch's praise of 'love' and 'art' as 'the discovery of reality', in 'The Sublime and the Good', *EM*, p.215. Steiner argues that Murdoch exhibits '[l]uminous shades of Blake's "holiness of the minute particular"', in 'Foreword', *EM*, p.xv.

⁴⁶ Murdoch, *The Fire and the Sun*, p.86.

Breaching the Barrier of the Mask: Iris Murdoch, Simone Weil and the Construction of Visual Metaphor

Iris Murdoch's late novel *The Green Knight* can be understood as a response to Simone Weil's ideas about the concept of attention, which was fundamental to Murdoch's neo-theology. In this novel, the visual metaphor of the mask becomes part of the 'new vocabulary of attention' which Murdoch calls for in 'Against Dryness', inspired by Weil's observation that morality is 'a matter of attention, not of will'.¹ The creation of this new vocabulary in order to perceive and work at the nature of human existence is, Murdoch claims in this landmark essay, the vital duty of literature. 'It is here that literature is so important, especially since it has taken over some of the tasks formerly performed by philosophy', she states. 'Through literature we can re-discover a sense of the density of our lives. Literature can arm us against consolation and fantasy and can help us to recover from the ailments of Romanticism. If it can be said to have a task, that surely is its task'.² This conviction led her to generate, in her novels, a proliferation of visual metaphors which provide new ways of conceptualising the individual's mutable, volatile relationship with the transcendent external world, and which are illuminated when studied in the context of her engagement with Weil's thought.

Murdoch's turn to visual metaphor was an aspect of her struggle to overcome the limitations of linguistic form to communicate truth more directly and viscerally. In 'Thinking and Language' she contends that '[l]anguage itself, if we think of it as it occurs "in" our thoughts, is hardly to be distinguished from imagery of a variety of kinds [...] And the metaphors which we encounter, and which illuminate us, in conversation and in poetry, are offered and are found illuminating because language also occurs in thinking in the way that it does'.³ Conceiving of consciousness as pictorial, she recognises that images, if correctly perceived, are imbued with power to communicate truth. Her views were often reiterated in Weilian terms, for example in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*: 'at the borderlines of thought and language we can often "see" what we cannot say and have to wait and attempt to formulate for ourselves and to convey to others our experience of what is initially beyond and hidden'.⁴ She strives to create visual metaphors which are sufficiently complex and dynamic to depict this experience of a reality lying beyond our grasp.

Echoing and cross-referencing through Murdoch's novels, the visual metaphor of the mask can be understood as a *metaxu*, to use Weil's term: a fluid, multi-faceted, protean symbol, simultaneously separating and connecting inner and outer reality, as they constantly interact, shift and refocus. Murdoch recognised that an intrinsic aspect of human existence is the continual invention and imposition of forms – in other words artificial shapes, structures or patterns – on reality, although reality ceaselessly resists our attempts to so confine it. The mask, emblematic of form, is part of a 'new vocabulary of attention' because it provides a new way of trying to comprehend and depict the perpetual interaction of external reality and individual experience, positioned on a continually

¹ Iris Murdoch, 'Against Dryness' (1961); *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, Peter Conradi (ed.), (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997), pp.287-296 (p.293), hereafter *EM*.

² *Ibid.*, p.294.

³ Iris Murdoch, 'Thinking and Language' (1951); *EM*, pp.33-42 (pp.39-40).

⁴ Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992), (London: Penguin, 1993), p.283, hereafter *MGM*.

transforming borderline. It can act as a mediator between inner and outer consciousness, and the endless process of unselfing which takes place as masks are created, refined and discarded enables the gradual honing and purifying of attention which leads to a more accurate vision of the individual's relationship to the world. The construction of masks may, conversely, obscure or dangerously distort perceptions of this relationship. 'Morality has to do with not imposing form except appropriately and cautiously and carefully and with attention to appropriate detail, and I think that truth is very fundamental here', Murdoch observed; sustained moral effort is essential to the attempt to ensure that form is 'pulled at by the value of truth'.⁵ Murdoch was conscious of Weil's observations regarding the soul's innate resistance to such moral effort. In *Waiting on God*, Weil claims that '[t]here is something in our soul which has a far more violent repugnance for true attention than the flesh has for bodily fatigue. This something is much more closely connected with evil than is the flesh'.⁶ Murdoch echoes Weil's remarks, for example in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* in which she states that we have 'a natural impulse to derealise our world and surround ourselves with fantasy'.⁷ *The Green Knight* contains a profusion of literal and metaphorical masks which reveals how easily imagination can yield to the mechanical force of fantasy. The novel shows how inattention can cause the mask to crystallise into a barrier, its seductive magic inducing a dreamlike, morally dangerous state of mind. The individual must struggle with the forces of good and evil within him or herself in order to try to develop the capacity for true attention which can illuminate reality.

Murdoch's concerns about the evils of inattention intensified in the later stages of her career, exacerbated by her view that structuralism's inattention to the relationship of the individual to external reality had dangerously distorted it. Structuralism, which she defines in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* as "linguistic idealism" or "linguistic monism", in which 'truism, half-truth, and shameless metaphysics join to deceive us',⁸ seemed to Murdoch to present language as an all-powerful form dominating the individuals submerged within it. The concept of reality outside language appeared to have been eradicated, which incited Murdoch to denounce structuralism as false and immoral: '[t]he fundamental value which is lost, obscured, made not to be, by structuralist theory, is truth, language as truthful, where 'truthful' means faithful to, engaging intelligently and responsibly with, a reality which is beyond us'.⁹ Murdoch's deep-seated, only partially-acknowledged anxieties that the structuralist picture could actually be valid, that there might be nothing real beneath or beyond form, or that, if there is, it may not be possible to hone the purified vision required to access it, are also apparent in certain scenes in *The Green Knight* in which the attempt to attend to the particularity of others seems to have been all but relinquished; characters are experienced only as masks, sunk in totalising form.

Murdoch's continual sense of failure and ruthless scrutiny of what she perceives as her own shortcomings are part of her ceaseless struggle towards her own unselfing. Her journal entries frequently contain expressions of self-doubt: in 1968, at a particularly low ebb, she described her thoughts as 'fearfully *limited* and partial' and asked herself 'Have I come to the end of the path which started many years ago when I first read Simone Weil and saw a far off light in the forest?

⁵ Iris Murdoch, interview with Michael O. Bellamy (1976); *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction: Conversations with Iris Murdoch*, Gillian Dooley (ed.), (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), pp. 44-55 (p.50), hereafter TCHF.

⁶ Simone Weil, 'Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God', *Waiting on God* (1950), Emma Craufurd (trans.), (London: Routledge, 2010), pp.49-60 (p.56), hereafter WG].

⁷ Iris Murdoch, *MGM*, p.503.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.197, 188.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.214-5.

The woodcutter's house! Hardly an arrival'.¹⁰ She uses her fiction as a testing ground for her beliefs, pitting arguments against each other, in a continual debate with herself which reaches a crisis point in *The Green Knight*. But ultimately she retains her faith in the value of striving for a refined state of receptivity by means of the practice of attention, and she provides an illustration of this Platonic pilgrimage towards reality in her novel through the gradual, painful unselfing of her character Bellamy James, who learns to shed false masks and to begin to find a more truthful way of perceiving himself and his relationship to the world.

Before turning to the presentation of Bellamy, two scenes in *The Green Knight* will be considered, both of which seem to present the evils of inattention by means of the visual metaphor of the mask. *The Green Knight* is structurally balanced by the repetition, near its beginning and its end, of a scene which depicts a *passeggiata*: a circular walk taken on a summer's evening by a crowd of people in an Italian square. Murdoch is known to have participated in the *passeggiata*, five years prior to the publication of the novel.¹¹ It seems to have seeped into her consciousness and become, for her, an externalisation of her fears of the consequences of inattention.



Ascoli Piceno (Piazza del Popolo), by Roberto Taddeo
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The two representations of the *passeggiata* are strikingly similar, above all in their descriptions of innumerable faces, wearing fixed mask-like expressions, materialising then disappearing from view. The continual rotation of the *passeggiata* implies that no progress is made; it offers a visual representation of mechanical repetition and substitution, an illustration of Murdoch's Weilian observation that 'until we become good we are at the mercy of mechanical forces'.¹²

¹⁰ Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), p.501, hereafter *IMAL*.

¹¹ 'Two episodes in *The Green Knight* stemmed from a holiday with Borys and Audi Villers, friends of the Bayleys for thirty years and travelling companions in the 1980s: the evening parade through the piazza, which they experienced together at the little town of Ascoli Piceno, where they went to look at the Crivellis in September 1988; and the tense bridge scenes, which were inspired in Spoleto. The bridge so frightened Iris that she refused to cross. Her fear informs the novel as the ordeal Harvey twice has to suffer.' Peter J. Conradi, *IMAL*, p.567.

¹² Iris Murdoch, 'Knowing the Void' (1956); *EM*, pp.157-160 (p.158).

The first *passeggiata* takes place during a visit by Harvey Blacket, a student, and his two older travelling companions Bellamy and Clement Graffe, to a small town 'somewhere in the Apennines'.¹³ Harvey feels a compulsion to participate, while Clement and Bellamy both take the role of onlooker.

Harvey had been taking part in the evening *passeggiata* in the square of the little town. The square, in warm waning light, was crammed with people walking, mostly young or youngish, mostly walking in a clockwise direction, though there were many older people too and many who chose to stumble into confrontations by walking anti-clockwise. In fact with so many people in the small square, it was impossible to avoid stumbling and confrontations. Harvey, who had experienced this phenomenon elsewhere in Italy, had never seen such a lively crush. It was like being inside a shoal of fishes who were confined by a net into a huge compact ball. His bare arms, since he had rolled up his shirt-sleeves, were being liberally caressed by the bare arms of passing girls. Faces, smiling faces, sad faces, young faces, ancient faces, grotesque faces, appeared close to his and vanished. People hastening diagonally through the throng thrust him gently or brusquely aside. Good temper reigned, even a luxurious sensual surrender to some benign herd instinct. Girls walked arm-in-arm, boys walked arm-in-arm, less often girls linked with boys, frequent married couples, including elderly ones, walked smiling, now at least in harmony with the swarming adolescents. Predatory solitaires pushed past, surveying the other sex, or their own, but well under the control of the general decorum. Eccentrics with unseeing eyes glided through, savouring amid so much society their own particular loneliness and private sins and sorrows. Clement and Bellamy, briefly amused by the show, had soon retired to sit in the big open-air café whence they viewed the intermittent appearance of Harvey, who with parted lips and shining eyes, in a trance of happiness, was blundering round and round the square. (GK, pp.21-22)

This description of the *passeggiata* seems to embody Murdoch's comment that, 'ordinary life is a kind of dreamy drifting, defending yourself all the time, pushing other people out of the way'.¹⁴ At a first reading, the portrayal of so many people bathed in light and mingling in continuous rhythmic movement may appear to be joyful, even utopian; however, the narrative voice subtly emphasises that all of these individuals are in fact detached, disconnected, and focused solely on their own paths, forming at most a pair bond, but failing to relate to each other or to their surroundings in any more meaningful way. Various kinds of false perception of external reality are depicted: the rapacious 'surveying' of 'predatory solitaires' who assess the surface exteriors of passers-by; the 'unseeing eyes' of lonely 'eccentrics' who cannot perceive other people because they are immersed in their own troubles; the 'shining eyes' of Harvey who, although apparently happy, is 'blundering' in a 'trance', his elation rendering him oblivious to the particularity of those around him. In every case, the individual has accepted appearances, and has failed in this moment to give sufficient attention to the reality of others. Inattention to the particularity of others has caused the form of the mask to harden into a barrier between inner and outer, meaning that other people are experienced only as disembodied faces, performing immobile, artificial expressions.

The *passeggiata* is depicted again towards the close of the novel, when Harvey and his lover Sefton Anderson have returned to Italy.

¹³ Iris Murdoch, *The Green Knight* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), p.21, hereafter GK.

¹⁴ Iris Murdoch, interview with John Haffenden (1983); *TCHF*, pp.124-138 (p.135).

The people of the little town were walking together, round and round the square. Quickly, his arm round Sefton's waist, he pulled her into the slow crowd. They moved slowly, as in a march, as if in a great demonstration or religious procession, carried along by the flow of people, by their physical pressure, pushed, brushed, gently jostled. There was a soft murmur of voices, like distant birds, like the sound of silence. Some resolute stalwarts walking in the opposite direction stared, smiled, sleeves brushed sleeves, hands brushed hands. Beautiful faces appeared, joyful faces, inquisitive faces, friendly faces, dejected bitter faces, faces like masks with round empty mouths and eyes. Harvey held Sefton closely to him [...] They felt that they resembled each other, they were twins as, crushed together, they turned and gazed into each other's faces, their lips parted in a dazed smile of joy. (GK, p.460).

In the second representation of the *passeggiata*, too, references to vision are significant: participants stare but then pass on, failing to sustain their attention; faces are 'like masks with round empty mouths and eyes', the adjective 'empty' suggesting that inner reality has been suppressed, sealed off behind the masks which have become the only reality. Harvey and Sefton gaze, but only at each other. Their mutual love means that they are learning to see each other more clearly, and thus making some gradual moral progress, but their intense focus on each other narrows their vision so that they are at present insensible to those around them, and therefore in a sense complicit in the falsity of the scene.

The simile in the description of the first *passeggiata*, 'it was like being inside a shoal of fishes who were confined by a net into a huge compact ball' implicitly connects the experience of the cramped, continually circling *passeggiata* which sweeps its participants along to Murdoch's unease about the reductive, distorted structuralist picture which, as she saw it, presents humanity as trapped within all-encompassing linguistic form, structuralists in her view having failed to attend to the complexity of the relationship between transcendent external reality and the inner consciousness of the individual, who progresses by degrees towards a clearer perception of it. The *passeggiata* of human beings enclosed in masks of fantasy can be taken as a troubling image of the *impoverished* quality of consciousness in the late twentieth century, which fails to turn attention outwards to the formless particularity of others.¹⁵

Murdoch's depictions of the *passeggiata* echo Weil's conviction that this lack of attention to one's neighbours lies at the core of the world's problems. In *Waiting on God* Weil states that,

[t]hose who are unhappy have no need of anything in this world but people capable of giving them their attention. The capacity to give one's attention to a sufferer is a very rare and difficult thing; it is almost a miracle; it is a miracle [...] It is a recognition that the sufferer exists, not only as a unit in a collection, or a specimen from the social category labelled 'unfortunate', but as a man, exactly like us, who was one day stamped with a special mark by affliction. For this reason it is enough, but it is indispensable, to know how to look at him in a certain way.

¹⁵ A more violent image of a 'shoal of fishes [...] confined by a net' is present in *The Book and the Brotherhood*, in Gerard Hernshaw's story of South Sea island fishing. A captured 'mass of huge fish and "sea monsters" [...] as they found themselves confined and being removed from their element, began a ferocious and fantastic threshing about, a maelstrom of terror and force, a flailing of great tails, a flashing of great eyes and jaws. They also began to attack each other, making the sea red with their blood.' When Gerard told Jenkin Riderhood this story he 'spontaneously used it as an image of the unconscious mind'. This memory resurfaces as Gerard walks abstractedly through foggy London streets, 'wrapped in the great dark cloak of his thoughts'. The image of the netted, struggling fish serves, perhaps, as an implicit commentary on Gerard's failure to direct his attention outwards beyond his own mental turmoil in order to perceive Jenkin's troubled state of mind. Iris Murdoch, *The Book and the Brotherhood* (1987), (London: Penguin, 1988), pp.134-135.

This way of looking is first of all attentive. The soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at, just as he is, in all his truth.

Only he who is capable of attention can do this.¹⁶

It is not until refined attention diminishes the self that the mask of illusion can be pierced and the individual reality of others becomes visible. In these scenes, Murdoch seems deeply pessimistic about whether this vision of reality can ever be attained. However, the imperfect moral progress of her character Bellamy, who does eventually learn to give attention to his neighbour, and to discard a false mask, implies that the struggle to perceive reality must not be abandoned, although even the most refined attention may only reveal reality indirectly and fleetingly, by means of *metaxu*.

Bellamy is a seeker of enlightenment who decides that he wants to renounce the world by becoming a monk in an enclosed order. He adopts an ascetic lifestyle, prays ardently and desperately, and experiences visions of angels. Bellamy's fantasy of romanticised religious experience becomes a barrier which prevents him from confronting the moral complexity of reality. His construction of a Christian mask is part of his effort to achieve an accurate vision, but the mask is too hastily and inattentively created and assumed, resulting in an artificial renunciation.

Parallels can be drawn between the lives of Bellamy and of Weil, who both turn to Christianity in their search for truth, but whereas Weil's moral progress is engendered by her inherently religious attention to and empathy for the suffering of others, Bellamy isolates himself and becomes increasingly introspective, derealising the external world. Bellamy sees fervent, protracted prayer as essential to his efforts to will his moral improvement. Conversely Weil, who states in *Gravity and Grace* that '[w]e have to try to cure our faults by attention and not by will',¹⁷ believes that '[a]ttention, taken to its highest degree, is the same thing as prayer. It presupposes faith and love. Absolute unmixed attention is prayer'.¹⁸ Ironically, Bellamy's prayers cause him to sink further into self-deception, as the quality of his attention deteriorates. He desires to be stripped, annihilated, to experience the 'void'. His mentor Father Damien tells him that 'the blank space you speak of is God, is Christ. This could be a theme for prayer and meditation' (GK, p.95). However, when Bellamy tries to confront the void's absolute emptiness, 'sitting quiet for a while with his hands folded in a usual pose of meditation', his imagination fills it with consolatory fantasies: 'there might come what he took to be the opposite sensation, the silent breeding of an enormous space, a chasm faintly lit, silently fermenting' (GK, p.97). His generation of illusions gathers momentum, and they come to dominate his consciousness so vividly that he starts to fear the onset of insanity. He remains dimly aware that his visions are 'part of the *vast lie* which surrounds me and wherein I move from one fantasy to another' (GK, p.153). In his final letter to Damien, Bellamy states, 'I have had a curious sensation as if my prayers were becoming *fat*' (GK, p.265); this is a sign, perhaps, that his prayers, rather than orientating his attention outward towards external reality, have been contaminated by the 'fat relentless ego'.¹⁹

Weil's awareness that an individual's attempt to progress too quickly beyond his or her moral capacity can be corrupting is reflected in Murdoch's statement in 'Knowing the Void' that '[i]t is of no avail to act above one's natural level',²⁰ and Bellamy epitomises this shared view. Eventually, deprived of the consolation of contact with his mentors, Damien and Peter Mir, Bellamy comes

¹⁶ Simone Weil, 'Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God', WG, p.58.

¹⁷ Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (1947), Emma Craufurd (trans.), (London: Routledge, 2002), p.116, hereafter GG.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.117.

¹⁹ Iris Murdoch, 'On "God" and "Good"' (1969); EM, pp.337-362, (p.342).

²⁰ Iris Murdoch, 'Knowing the Void' (1956); EM, pp.157-160, (p.158).

to realise that 'I have been, as it were, in retreat – or in eclipse, or in never-never land' and that 'I helped no one and just made myself miserable!' (GK, pp.375, 425). The process of constructing and discarding the romantic illusion of a religious retreat from the world, although painful and dangerous, has in fact been of some assistance to Bellamy's moral development, as he has become more aware of the dangers of attempting to shape reality by the imposition of a mythical form, and has learned to accept his limitations. He eventually tells himself '[d]on't be miserable thinking you can't be perfect' (GK, p.471). When Bellamy starts to turn his attention outwards to his neighbours the mask of illusion is pierced, the real becomes more visible, and his clearer vision prompts him to take action by caring for his friend Moy Anderson.

Murdoch states in 'Knowing the Void' that to read Weil 'is to be reminded of a standard'.²¹ This standard gave her hope and courage to scrutinise her moral demands, to recognise the impossibility of fulfilling them, but ultimately to insist nevertheless that the attempt must be made. Although the multitude of masks in *The Green Knight* reveals Murdoch's anguished contemplation of the possibility that perhaps external reality beneath or beyond form may not exist, or that if it does, it cannot be accessed, it also illustrates her resolve to continue sharing Weil's conviction that while reality may be 'beyond the reach of any human faculties, man has the power of turning his attention and love towards it'.²²

²¹ Ibid., p.157.

²² Simone Weil, *Selected Essays 1934-43*, Richard Rees (trans.), (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p.219.

‘Nothing now but kestrel’: Simone Weil, Iris Murdoch and the Cinema of Letting Be

One of Iris Murdoch’s clearest illustrations of the function of attention lends itself to the cinematic. The scene is domestic, and Murdoch is visibly agitated:

I am looking out of my window in an anxious and resentful state of mind, oblivious of my surroundings, brooding perhaps on some damage done to my prestige. Then suddenly I observe a hovering kestrel. In a moment everything is altered. The brooding self with its hurt vanity has disappeared. There is nothing now but kestrel.¹

The scene moves from the interiority of self to the exteriority of world. Were this a film, there would be no need for the camera to return to Murdoch’s face to register the transformation that the sudden ‘attention to nature’ (SG, p.82) brought about. ‘There is nothing now but kestrel’ is an instance of what Murdoch calls “‘unselfing,” and that is what is popularly called beauty’ (SG, p.82). The suspension of self does not rely on the beauty of the kestrel’s particular attributes as a common but powerful predator. A Romantic of the kind Murdoch dislikes would interpret the scene as one of identification: Murdoch draws on the kestrel’s beauty and fierceness to bolster her own. But Murdoch rejects this possibility: a ‘self-directed enjoyment of nature seems to me to be something forced’ (SG, p.83). Beauty is pleasurable because it transcends without effort the self’s gravitational pull and frees the world to simply be: ‘we take a self-forgetful pleasure in the sheer alien pointless independent existence of animals, birds, stones and trees’ (SG, p.83). The experience of beauty is therefore a selfless attention to ‘what is’, which Murdoch contrast with degraded forms of Romanticism that ‘use nature as an occasion for exalted self-feeling’ (SG, p.83).

The relationship between attention, reality, beauty and the good is central to Murdoch’s critique of conceptions of moral agency that assume a proactive, self-sustaining subject, making decisions in the world. Recognition that the world exists independently from oneself sounds obvious, but the wilful, wishful self often gets in the way and occludes vision. ‘As moral agents’, says Murdoch, ‘we have to try to see justly, to overcome prejudice, to avoid temptation, to control and curb imagination, to direct reflection’ (SG, p.39). The practice of attention cultivates such an overcoming of prejudice through an appreciation of the ‘independent existence of animals, birds, stones and trees’. Though markedly different in style and temperament, Murdoch’s terminology and moral sensibility are a translation, or adaptation, of the thought of Simone Weil.

¹ Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970), (London: Routledge, 2014), p.82, hereafter SG.



Simone Weil (1909-1943).

Attention, for Murdoch and Weil, links life and art, if only because both face a common enemy: the imagination. 'Virtue is *au fond* the same in the artist as in the good man in that it is a selfless attention to nature' (SG, p.40). As with the 'real' encounter with the kestrel (arguably art by the time we read about it in *The Sovereignty of Good*), artworks are judged by the degree of their 'obedience to reality' (SG, p.41). Though rare, 'great art exists and is sometimes properly experienced and even a shallow experience of what is great can have its effect. Art, and by "art" from now I mean good art, not fantasy art, affords us a pure delight in the independent existence of what is excellent' (SG, p.83). Excellence here implies, on the part of the viewer of the artwork or nature, an 'unpossessive contemplation' that 'resists absorption into the selfish dream life of the consciousness' (SG, p.83). Early cinema offers rich examples of such attentive observation.

Cinematic mythology has it that the very first film audiences jumped in fright at the sight of the incoming train in the Lumière brothers short *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat/Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (1895). A second, less known tale, accompanies another Lumière actuality, *Le Repas de bébé/Baby's Lunch* (1895). In the film, Auguste Lumière feeds his baby daughter Andrée in the garden of their Lyon home. His wife Marguerite pours a drink into a small china cup, stirs it and sips, while at the back of the frame the wind blows in the trees. At the film's screening on December 28th, 1895 at the Grand Café in Paris, audiences reportedly delighted not in the culinary drama at the centre of the frame, but in the motion of leaves in the background. What should we make of this peculiar re-direction of viewers' attention at the moment of cinema's inauguration?



Le Repas de bébé (1895). Baby at the centre, the moving leaves in the background.

It is no coincidence, I think, that one of cinema's pioneering examples places the act of eating centre-frame. The bourgeois dining ritual at the heart of *Repas de bébé* stands in for other domestic pursuits that film would reflect back at its growing middle-class audience, and more decisively, for the ways in which cinema itself would become an object of mass consumption, with eating and drinking integral to the commercial movie-going experience. But the role of eating in film is more fundamental still. The activity of eating mimics the ways in which cinema appropriates – captures, frames, and projects – its objects of sight. It is no coincidence either that *Repas de bébé* foregrounds an image of (food) consumption while occasioning a form of (image) consumption that eschews the devouring we see in the film. In placing side by side the central image of the feeding baby and the peripheral image of the moving leaves, the film intimates two ways of looking: the hungry gaze as the mainstay of filmic appropriation, and its non-voracious alternative that attends to objects at a distance, and *lets them be*.

In what follows, I wish to think through Weil and Murdoch's notion of attention as the cinematic impulse of 'letting be': a conservationist impulse that honours the existence of beings and things by looking-without-devouring. The opposite tendency in cinema is often rightly criticized when, for example, feminist or postcolonial critics highlight the medium's predatory stance towards its vulnerable subjects: women, ethnic minorities, and animals. The cinema famously consumes what it renders exotic, and we consume with it. To view cinema in this way, as a modern feeding machine, is to ignore the medium's potential to preserve and protect the objects of sight by distinguishing the activities of looking and eating, keeping us at a distance, like Murdoch behind her windowsill, enhancing the reality of what we see as that autonomous thing that cannot be consumed.

Since its inception, I argue, cinema has encoded these two contradictory attitudes: looking-as-eating, and looking-as-attention. Cinema can offer the world as an ingestible array of edibles, or as made up of what is not easily assimilable: objects we look at without devouring, present to our gaze without being consumed. Looking-without-devouring preserves the fundamental integrity of beings and things as existing beyond us, unintended for us, and exceeding our desiring grasp. *Repas de bébé* illustrates a basic division in cinema between looking and eating as two modes of engagement and approach that signal different economies of desire with regard to the objects of sight.

Attention in the sense Weil used it, and Murdoch later developed, is not guaranteed. It can be cultivated and practiced but it retains the passivity and uncertainty of a waiting. Today, audiences seeing the film for the first time may not notice the leaves blowing in the wind. To notice the leaves implies a particular mode of attention, a forgetting or suspension of narrative, character-driven visual habits that have dominated cinema for nearly a century.²

By some lovely coincidence, the pairing of looking and eating in Lumière anticipates Weil's own analogy between looking and eating, which recurs throughout her work. 'The great sorrow of human life', Weil writes in *Waiting for God*, 'is knowing that to look and to eat are two different operations. Only on the other side of heaven, where God lives, are they one and the same [...] Maybe the vices, depravities and crimes are nearly always or even always in their essence attempts to eat beauty, to eat what one can only look at'.³ When eating, we ingest and assimilate the object into the self, and destroy it. Analogously, to look at something as if eating it is to adjust what we see to suit our own ideas and preconceptions. Once the objects of the world have been thoroughly incorporated, they are lost to the world and to the observer. Looking and eating are thus implicated in the power dynamics between the self and the other. Each activity invigorates the consuming self by, as it were, gobbling up difference and assimilating exteriority.

In Weil's looking/eating analogy, the beautiful resists assimilation and destruction by the devouring I/eye. The beautiful (like food) is 'a carnal attraction' that (unlike food) 'keeps us at a distance and implies a renunciation'. And: 'We want to eat all the other objects of desire. The beautiful is that which we desire without wishing to eat it. *We desire that it should be*' (my emphasis).⁴ As with Murdoch's kestrel, the beauty of the thing 'let be' makes possible another gaze, cast by the camera, or the viewer. To gaze while letting be is to deploy attention.

What was it about the peripheral movement of the leaves that so charmed viewers over and above the principal human drama of *Repas de bébé*? In an essay on the Lumières' early films, Dai Vaughan has suggested that 'what most impressed the early audiences were what would now be considered the *incidentals of scenes*: smoke from a forge, steam from a locomotive, brick dust from a demolished wall [...] the rustling of leaves in the background of *Le Déjeuner de bébé*'.⁵ Incidentals for Vaughan demonstrate cinema's aptitude at capturing, not any kind of movement, but spontaneous, contingent movement (p.65). The Lumières' 'harnessing of spontaneity' (p.66) was revolutionary because it captured the impersonal mechanisms of life in a new way. The beauty of the fluttering leaves made visible the operation of natural forces, undirected by human hands (or egos), to which the cinema is witness.

In two other films by Lumière, *La mer/The Sea*, and *Barque sortant du port/Boat Leaving the Harbour*, both from 1895, natural law is revealed through the motion of the waves. The latter features three men in a medium-sized rowing boat, making their way out to sea on choppy waters. A pair of women and children stand at the end of a jetty. Vaughan writes: '[l]ight shimmers on the water, though the sky seems leaden. The swell is not heavy; but as the boat passes beyond the jetty, leaving the protection of the harbour mouth, it is slewed around and caught broadside-on by the waves.

² When I recently screened *Repas de bébé* to a group of unsuspecting students, people responded by calling out 'how cute!' The sight of babies can indeed be delightful, but I suspect that much of the 'ooing and aahing' in this case was prompted by the conventional wisdom of the inalienable cuteness of babies, the long tradition of babies on screen, and the societal expectation of having them.

³ Simone Weil, *Waiting for God* (1951); Emma Craufurd (trans.), (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), p.105, hereafter WG.

⁴ Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (1947, 1952); Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr (trans.), (London: Routledge, 2002), p.149, hereafter GG.

⁵ Dai Vaughan, 'Let There be Lumière', in *For Documentary: Twelve Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp.63-67, (pp.64-65). Vaughan is referring to *Repas de bébé* by a slightly different title.

The men are in difficulties; and one woman turns her attention from the children to look at them' (p.64). There are two orders of attention here. The first is the woman who turns and looks on as the men strive against the waves. She can see the boat, the men, the surrounding water. Our attention, and Vaughan's, is of a different kind, determined by the positioning of the stationary camera, capturing the tip of the jetty, the watery expanse behind it, and the open water ahead towards which the boat is thrown.



Barque sortant du port (1895). The men struggle against the waves.

Like the moving leaves in *Repas de bébé*, the moving waves in *Barque sortant du port* reveal something about the potential of cinematic attention:

What is different about *A Boat Leaving the Harbour* is that, when the boat is threatened by the waves, the men must apply their efforts to controlling it; and, by responding to the challenge of the spontaneous moment, they become integrated into its spontaneity. The unpredictable has not only emerged from the background to occupy the greater portion of the frame; it has also taken sway over the principals. Man, no longer the mountebank self-presenter, has become equal with the leaves and the brick-dust. (p.65)

The operation of natural law on waves, leaves, and people alike reveals the mechanism of the world as radically egalitarian. The woman who looks on intriguingly, perhaps anxiously, may or may not have discerned this earthly truth. For us, she, too, is incorporated into the natural scheme that the film shows. Cinema, in this second order of attention, makes this reality clear.

Art's capacity to capture what Weil calls 'necessity', the mechanism that governs all worldly phenomena, is synonymous with aesthetic appreciation. Necessity is beautiful precisely because it is contingent and impersonal: it confirms the world as autonomous of the self, and the cinema repeats this validation by making necessity manifest. '[B]eauty touches us all the more keenly', writes Weil in *Intimations of Christianity*, 'where necessity appears in a most manifest manner, for example in the folds that gravity has impressed upon the mountains, on the waves of the sea, or

on the course of the stars'.⁶ The image of the moving leaves, like that of the rippling waves (or the circling kestrel) illustrates cinema's function as an imprinter of the reality of natural processes.

Necessity can be cruel or kind, painful or joyous, and the experience of beauty cuts across both pain and joy, asserting their ultimate equivalence. Beauty is the effect of our consent to necessity, experienced as non-preferential, thus just, and recognized as that which all things, from leaves to human beings, obey. 'Necessity and obedience', explains Lissa McCullough, 'are inverse sides or views of the same phenomenon. *Necessity* is the name for determinate limits when they are viewed as imposed from outside [...] *obedience* is the name for the very same limits when viewed as consented to by everything limited.'⁷ This, claims McCullough, is a 'liberating insight' that enables a Stoic kind of joy and freedom (p.127), even in the midst of hardship. The leaves in the wind offer precisely such an instance of freedom and joy at the sight of necessity.

Of course, cinema offers countless instances where the workings of necessity are far from benign. Indeed, cinema thrives on images and stories of pain and suffering. Following Weil, we might say that one of cinema's key aesthetic and ethical conundrums is the *adequate representation of necessity*: the rendering of necessity as an arbitrary limit, an impartial force whose affects, in either pain or joy, are essentially purposeless, subject to chance and non-directional, and whose meaning, on the receiving end concerns consent and obedience. Obedience, or the acceptance of necessity as an impartial force, is always attentive. Its reward is grace. In her BBC radio talk 'Waiting on God: A Radio Talk on Simone Weil', published for the very first time in this issue, Murdoch explains that attention for Weil is the antithesis of imagination. 'If we stand fast', Murdoch writes, 'quietly enduring the violence of necessity and refusing the balms of imagination, we are in a high degree experiencing something real. And in the very act of our loving acceptance of the realm of gravity, we have left it for the realm of grace.'⁸ This is the proper and highest achievement of art according to Weil.

The most rewarding films, or moments in films, belong to what, after Weil, I am calling the 'cinema of necessity', films that show the unfolding of necessity and its impact on living creatures. The trick, as it were, is to capture necessity without ascribing it an end (a teleology) that distorts its essential qualities (that 'sheer alien pointless independent existence'), without, as Murdoch explained, infusing it with consolations of the imagination. In the language of film theory, necessity means realism, championed by theorists like André Bazin (1918-1958), for whom the cinema was uniquely equipped to capture physical reality, not as a mere copy but as a kind of trace of the real.⁹

If, as Weil and Murdoch suggest, reality is the proper object of art, attention is the technique best suited to perceive it. And though cinema features only sporadically in her writings, Weil repeatedly returns to the act of looking, perspective, and even the role of the screen. In obvious ways, attention lends itself to the visual. Alone, however, attention can seem a little touchy-feely, a platitude suggesting we get over ourselves and notice what is around us. A comprehensive visual

⁶ Simone Weil, 'The Pythagorean Doctrine', in *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks* (1957), Elizabeth Chase Geissbuhler (trans.), (London: Routledge, 1987), pp.155-201, (p.191).

⁷ Lissa McCullough, *The Religious Philosophy of Simone Weil: An Introduction* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014), p.128.

⁸ Iris Murdoch, 'Waiting on God: A Radio Talk on Simone Weil', the *Iris Murdoch Review* no.8 (2017), p.11.

⁹ Although she is not a film theorist, and cannot be claimed as one, Weil brushes shoulders with Bazin. During the Vichy era, both moved in left-leaning Christian circles. After arriving in Marseille in September 1940, Weil took up distributing the Resistance leaflets of *Les Cahiers de Témoignage Chrétien*, the clandestine offshoot of *Témoignage Chrétien*, with which Bazin too was (loosely) associated. Earlier, in 1937, Weil published 'Letter to Dermenghem' (reprinted in *Simone Weil on Colonialism*) in the influential review *Esprit* that had attracted Bazin among other French Catholic leftists. Thus, though they did not meet, Weil and Bazin inhabit the same historical moment, though Weil would not live to see the end of the war.

theory grounded in Weil's philosophy requires that we think of attention and necessity in tandem, along with *affliction* and *decreation* (Murdoch's unselfing), which complete Weil's realist theory of art.¹⁰

Weil calls attention an 'effort without desire' (GG, p.117). The etymology of attention comprises both a passive waiting for (from the twelfth century Modern French *attendre*, 'to expect, wait for, pay attention') and an active stretching towards (from the Latin *attendere*, 'give heed to', literally 'stretch toward').¹¹ As a disposition and a technique, attention entails a relaxing of personal will and the cultivation of detachment, which allow the object to emerge more clearly. Paying attention in film suggests being lost in the undertaking, at a certain remove from a personal or societal 'investment' in the object. Attention in film is, then, a 'letting be' of the objects of sight, a way of acknowledging the autonomous being of things, a technique of realist observation.

By letting beings and things be, the cinema is committed to an ambivalent stance of approach and retreat: it seizes upon its objects in order to display them yet, in doing so, it also honours and preserves their existence. This, for Weil, mimics God's creative act that entailed a renunciation: to bring the world into being, to let it be, God retreated from the world. In a similar gesture, cinema does not simply 'capture', 'frame', 'record' and 'project' – terms that reflect the medium's more forthright compulsions – but attends, steps back from, and endures necessity alongside the objects of sight.

Attention, endurance, and retreat correspond to familiar cinematic positions. Attention has something to do with the notions of point-of-view, the long shot, or the close-up, but not strictly in the sense of the availability or withholding of detail. Enduring with the object is related to cinematic duration, albeit not in the strict sense of the long-take. By holding the shot long enough for necessity to become manifest, the time of the film approaches the time of the object. Thus, both attention and endurance signal film giving time and space to its objects, an approach that is also a kind of retreat. Weil makes this point strikingly in her *Notebooks*: 'To draw back before the object we are pursuing. *Only what is indirect is effective*. We do not accomplish anything if we have not first drawn back' (emphasis in the original).¹² Attention is a drawing back in pursuit. It can be added to the existing repertoire of cinematic modes of looking, and I take it in particular as a corrective to voyeurism, which intervenes desirously, and devours what it sees. Seeing in this way means seeing realistically and, significantly, seeing *justly*: 'in the enjoyment of art and nature', claims Murdoch, 'we discover value in our ability to forget self, to be realistic, to perceive justly' (SG, p.88). In this manner, for Weil and for Murdoch, questions of perception and art are integrally and seamlessly also moral questions.

Attention, oriented towards necessity, allowed the early cinema audiences to appreciate the motion of leaves in the wind. Seeing nature animated on film was more surprising and pleasing than seeing human actors move for the camera. The humble sight was humbling without preaching humility. But if we look closely, we can find the same contingent, spontaneous elements at work in the midst of human action too. Towards the end of the film, at approximately its thirtieth second, the one-year old Andrée breaks the fourth wall and hands a biscuit to someone off-screen, most probably her uncle Louis. It is only a moment, and easily missed, but it shows unplanned movement that asserts the flesh and blood reality of the people who are filmed.

¹⁰ It is beyond the scope of this short piece to discuss the other terms in this system: affliction (a consequence of necessity), and decreation (an extension of both affliction and attention). What is significant is that these terms interlock and complete one another.

¹¹ See the etymology of 'attention' and 'attend' at: http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=attend&allowed_in_frame=0, [accessed 13-6-17].

¹² Simone Weil, *The Notebooks of Simone Weil* (1956), Arthur Wills (trans.), (London: Routledge, 2004), p.169.



Andrée offering her biscuit, and breaking the fourth wall.

Andrée Lumière appeared in a number of other Lumière films, including *Pêche aux poissons rouge/ Fishing for Goldfish* (1895) and *Querelle enfantine/Children's Quarrel* (1896).¹³ She also featured in a series of colour photographs produced using the Lumière Autochrome system patented in 1903. Andrée's untimely death in 1918 from influenza, aged only twenty-four, is a reminder that necessity acts upon humans and nonhumans in an identical manner. Attention, strictly applied, does not distinguish between humans and leaves from the point of view of necessity. With this knowledge, the wind in the trees of *Repas de bébé* assumes a portentous and prescient role, a literal manifestation of John 3 verse 8: 'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.' Wind as spirit, as breath, as necessity, captured on film by the mode of attention.

Murdoch explains that '[o]ur ordinary life is three quarters fiction: imagination veils from us the sharp independence of real things. Knowledge lies in the acceptance of this independence; that is why experience of suffering is experience of reality.'¹⁴ The function of attention is to perceive necessity, 'what is', in all its beauty or cruelty. Quoting Weil, Murdoch writes:

'The experience of suffering is the experience of reality. For our suffering is not something which we invent. It is true. That is why it must be cherished. All the rest is imaginary.' It is the sharp touch of necessity that releases us from the life of imagination – the unreal life of soothing expectation, in which are to be included the so called 'consolations of religion.'¹⁵

The dramatized action in *Repas de bébé* is what is least interesting about it. What matters, received through attention, is the subjection of the living, whether babies or leaves, to the anonymous mechanism of the world, a mechanism stronger than the orderly rituals staged for the camera to signal the good life of the French bourgeoisie at the turn of the century. The 'soothing expectation'

¹³ See *Who's Who in Victorian Cinema*, <http://www.victorian-cinema.net/andreelumiere>, [accessed 11-4-17].

¹⁴ Iris Murdoch, 'Waiting on God: A Radio Talk on Simone Weil', the *Iris Murdoch Review* no.8 (2017), p.12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.11.

of safety and good health that would undoubtedly see Andrée to old age was an illusion. In the ostensibly cosy family scene is already nascent the undoing of life by the force of necessity, a fact that renders this little film, in spite of itself, an example of the art of necessity and affliction.

To conclude, I turn to another Lumière favourite, *La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon/Workers Leaving the Factory* (1895).¹⁶ Shot onsite of the Lumière factory in Lyon, the film has been described by Catherine Zimmer as an early example of 'workplace surveillance'.¹⁷ As Thomas Levin puts it, 'one could argue that employee surveillance plays a key role in the very birth of the medium since, no matter what else it is, Louis Lumière's 1895 *La Sortie des usines Lumière* is also the gaze of the boss/owner observing his workers as they leave the factory'.¹⁸ But here, too, spontaneity, contingency and necessity disrupt the instrumental framing of the workforce, most joyously, in the convivial figure of a dog, mingling excitedly, welcoming workers with a wag and a bark, oblivious to the camera's disciplining intent. Like the leaves in the Lumières' garden trees, the dog is both inside and outside the staged event. This vital surplus reminds us that, in spite of itself, cinema attends to the world, in defiance of deliberate orchestrations of the visual field. Visual pleasure, to borrow Laura Mulvey's well-worn phrase, is not the reward of the bearer of the look, but springs forth from the anonymous lives of objects, recognized by attention.

¹⁶ There are, in fact, three versions of this film, each slightly different. The dog (seemingly the same one) appears in all of them.

¹⁷ Catherine Zimmer, *Surveillance Cinema* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), p.6.

¹⁸ Thomas Y. Levin, 'Rhetoric of the Temporal Index: Surveillant Narration and the Cinema of "Real Time,"' in *CTRL [Space]: Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother*, Thomas Y. Levin, Ursula Frohne and Peter Weibels (eds.), (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT University Press, 2002), pp.578-593, (p.581).

Attention to the details of film and form:
Blue Jasmine as a Murdochian Moral Vision

In this essay I bring Murdoch's moral philosophy into dialogue with film through a consideration of *Blue Jasmine* (Woody Allen, 2013). As Lawrence Blum and others have observed, Murdoch's philosophy is full of visual metaphors: 'perceiving, looking, seeing, vision, and attention'.¹ These elements of Murdoch's moral philosophy point to the significance of the visual: of what can be seen, as well as how to look. Murdoch is uniquely placed in terms of philosophical traditions, and offers a new perspective in the burgeoning sub-discipline of film and philosophy. Arising out of Oxford analytic philosophy, but rejecting the linguistic, behaviourist, tradition, Murdoch looked to continental thinkers, particularly Simone Weil, as inspiration for formulating her own moral philosophy.² Film philosophy has been dominated by the perceived split between the continental philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze and Emmanuel Levinas, and the cognitive analytic philosophers such as Noel Carroll and David Bordwell.³ Murdoch, then, offers a fresh voice in this area, from one who has surveyed both fields and proposed a different approach, that of moral realism. Justin Broackes describes how this consists of

Allowing the world to contain such things as the courage of an individual person or the meanness of some petty act – something like 'moral facts' (VCM 54/95), conceived of as *what meets the eye of a just and loving moral perceiver*.⁴ (Emphasis in original)

Broackes explains how Murdoch's moral realism allows 'such moral properties as humility, generosity, and courage',⁵ and notes that Murdoch combined this moral philosophy with moral psychology and the idea of moral training. For Murdoch, rather than abstract or artificial choices, moral philosophy is concerned with the question of how I can become a better person.⁶

Murdoch pays special attention to the idea of moral perception, and this is where many of her visual metaphors come into play. Her concern is with how the 'particular perceptual or conceptual scheme' of an individual 'will influence what kinds of things we are equipped to pick out and talk about'.⁷ As she explains in 'The Idea of Perfection', 'I can only choose within the world I can see, in the moral sense of "see" which implies that clear vision is a result of moral imagination and moral

¹ Lawrence Blum, 'Visual Metaphors in Murdoch's Moral Philosophy', in *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher*, Justin Broackes (ed.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.307-323, (p.307).

² At the end of 'Vision and Choice in Morality', Murdoch looks towards 'contemporary continental philosophers' as an alternative to her analytic peers, Iris Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, Peter Conradi (ed.), (London: Penguin, 1997), pp.76-98, (p.97), hereafter *EM*.

³ For an account of the progress of film philosophy so far, see David Sorfa's editorial, 'What is Film-Philosophy?', in *Film-Philosophy*, volume 20, no.1, pp.1-5.

⁴ Justin Broackes, *Introduction*, *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher*, p.1.

⁵ Broackes, p.8.

⁶ Broackes explains the influence of Plato and Kant in this respect of training in the virtues (p.2).

⁷ Broackes, p.10.

effort.⁸ (Emphasis in original). This clearly offers transformative potential for self-knowledge but also for one's perception of others through thoughtful attention to details. As Broackes observes, Murdoch's 'radically distinctive' model of morality is about 'perception of particulars':⁹

It offered the prospect of freeing moral thinking at once from assimilation to mere feeling or passion, to intellectual intuition, to ordinary 'descriptive' judgment, and even to the issuing of prescriptions.¹⁰

Importantly, moral difference for Murdoch is not based on choice, it is based on vision. Moral disagreement therefore is not about what to do in a given situation, given shared concepts, but rather in 'the repertoire of concepts that different people understand and employ'.¹¹ It is in the deepening reflection, the process of change, that the moral work is done. Murdoch explains in 'The Idea of Perfection',

I have used the word 'attention', which I borrow from Simone Weil, to express the idea of a just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality. I believe this to be the characteristic and proper mark of the active moral agent.¹²

In a phrase that demands an appreciation of all the senses involved in attention, Murdoch suggests 'where virtue is concerned we often apprehend more than we clearly understand and *grow by looking*'.¹³ (Emphasis in original). Murdoch argues that moral facts are decided upon within the framework of the individual consciousness of the moral being. So, Maria Antonaccio notes how, according to Murdoch, 'morality is bound up with our deepest conceptual attitudes and sensibilities about the world, which determine the facts from the very beginning'.¹⁴ According to Murdoch, 'We differ not only because we select different objects out of the same world but because we see different worlds'.¹⁵ The idea of seeing different worlds, and the way in which Murdoch describes the selection of objects within them, offers a link to the way in which films can offer visions of worlds in which moral journeys take place. This is not simply a matter of narrative arcs, or the solution of an apparent moral conundrum, but rather is concerned with the idea of film as a transformative moral experience: for the characters within the diegesis, possibly, but also for us as we experience the film. Drawing upon Murdoch's moral philosophy in an analysis of film, and extending this to the relationship that we have with the film world, and then perhaps to the real world around us, offers a way of seeing film as Murdochian moral philosophy in action.

What might be the objections to such a position? That film is a mainstream form of entertainment, which could only possibly produce banal philosophy? That philosophical content is a rarefied discourse, perhaps evident in concepts contained within fine art, but excluded from the realm of such a populist art form? Murdoch would surely not agree. For Murdoch, moral philosophy can be seen as 'a more systematic and reflective extension of what ordinary moral agents are continually

⁸ Iris Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', in *EM*, pp.299-336, (p.329).

⁹ Broackes, p.11.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Broackes, p.12.

¹² Murdoch, *EM*, p.327.

¹³ Ibid. p.324.

¹⁴ Maria Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human: The Moral Thought of Iris Murdoch* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.38.

¹⁵ Murdoch, *EM*, p.82.

doing':¹⁶ universal rules and models are not suited to the complexity of everyday life and the inner lives of individuals. Moral philosophy is not the preserve of the elite or the arcane. In her 1956 essay on the cinema for *Vogue* magazine, she considers the specific power of the art form, noting its weaknesses (travel films are 'so depressing'), and concludes:

There is, however, one natural object with which the cinema is supremely concerned, and that is the human body, and more especially that 'most interesting surface', the human face. Here we can find tragedy and comedy made minutely concrete in the movement of a muscle, and human character on display at the point where spirit and matter are most intensely fused. If cinema could do nothing but present faces it would have enough material to be a major art.¹⁷

This personal and precise account of what Murdoch likes and dislikes about the abilities of film as a medium is strong support for thinking through film in line with her views on art as a suitable vehicle for moral training. As she claims in *The Sovereignty of Good*, 'Good art reveals what we are usually too selfish and too timid to recognise, the minute and absolutely random detail of the world, and reveals it together with a sense of unity and form'.¹⁸ Film worlds present human lives in extreme formal detail, as faces and gestures are expanded to fill an entire screen and command our attention, and they are usually within a film world that is telling us a story. In 'Vision and Choice in Morality' Murdoch talks about the idea of moral fables. She asks, does a morally important fable always imply universal rules? And how do we decide whether a fable is morally important? Here Murdoch talks about two types of moral fable: the one that is morally relevant, the other that is purely decorative. This idea seems to exist at the heart of the question of the significance of the film and its status as film philosophy: might a film concerned with a moral issue simply be a decorative tale? It may be that films such as *Indecent Proposal*, *Good People* or *The Box*, which ostensibly stage a moral dilemma but end in consolation and comfort, are what Murdoch would consider to be bad art, or purely decorative.¹⁹ However, a film that does not console, but rather which challenges, unsettles, and transforms the viewer, seems a suitable vehicle for us to grow by looking.

Rather than coming up with a set of universal rules or codes, what interests Murdoch is the background to the moral thinking we undertake and the judgements we make: why should we blot out the backgrounds – or deliberation – to these choices, which may be made confidently or tentatively? Attending to the details and inexhaustibility of them may well induce humility rather than induce paralysis. And, she argues, this attention to the details needs to be done in ways other than in language. She considers the limitations of language when it comes to serving us creatively, and says that 'the task of moral philosophers has been to extend, as poets may extend, the limits of the language, and enable it to illuminate regions of reality which were formerly dark'.²⁰ Calling for 'a fresh vision which may be derived from a story' and which 'represents a mode of understanding', Murdoch suggests that moral freedom 'looks like a mode of reflection which we may have to achieve and less like a capacity to vary our choices which we have by definition'.²¹

¹⁶ Murdoch, *EM*, p.83.

¹⁷ Iris Murdoch, 'Vogue 100: Iris Murdoch on the cinema', *Vogue*, August 1956; available at <http://www.vogue.co.uk/article/vogue-archive-article-iris-murdoch>, [accessed 12-6-17].

¹⁸ Murdoch, *EM*, p.371.

¹⁹ *Indecent Proposal* (dir. Adrian Lyne, 1993); *Good People* (dir. Henrik Ruben Genz, 2014); *The Box* (dir. Richard Kelly, 2009).

²⁰ Murdoch, *EM*, p.90.

²¹ *Ibid.* p.95.

This mode of reflection is perhaps akin to engaged spectatorship founded on loving attention. In her essay on cinema, Murdoch discusses the difference between experiencing film and looking at other art forms:

From a painting we can stand back, with a novel we can pause and ponder, but a film is as near to us as our own self-awareness, and comes over us with the inevitability of time itself.²²

This proximity to self-awareness enables the transformative ethical experience of a morally relevant film to be both affective and cognitive: we experience the character's story at a sensory, bodily affective level, but the film also may effect a change in our thinking and judgement. How precisely we are implicated in a film's morality is a mixture of identification, sympathy, empathy, physical affect, and judgement; a full consideration of this complex field is beyond the scope of this essay. It is the element of judgement that I want to explore here in relation to the film *Blue Jasmine*, in particular the question of how we judge Jasmine (played by Cate Blanchett). Does attention to the detail of film form, in particular Jasmine's face, alter how we judge her? And can the process we go through be thought of as akin to the development of a Murdochian moral vision?

Blue Jasmine is about a woman who lived a very affluent life married to a property broker who turned out to be crooked. They lost all their money, her husband hanged himself in prison, and her stepson does not speak to her. Without a home or a job, she turns to her working-class sister Ginger (played by Sally Hawkins). Jasmine and Ginger are sisters but not related by blood: they were both adopted. They state this a few times, and their differences are very marked, not only in terms of aspiration and education, but also passions and desires.



Jasmine and Ginger: sisters, but from different parents.

Ginger always says that Jasmine had the good genes. Ginger works in a supermarket, loves her home, and has a steady boyfriend. Jasmine is a shocking snob and bore, who drinks too much and despises her sister's entire life: her man, her children, her home. Jasmine makes it clear that she despised Ginger's ex-husband as well, and thinks her life and home are beneath contempt. Ginger is tolerant and caring, and receives her sister's acerbic criticism with indulgent good humour. She defends Jasmine to others and does her best for her.

Through a process of flashback and dialogue between the sisters it emerges that Jasmine's husband lost the lottery winnings of Ginger and her ex-husband by persuading them to invest in a dodgy deal. We also see Jasmine talking derisively about her sister and dreading her visit.

²² Murdoch, *Vogue* 1956. This shows an early appreciation of the phenomenology of film as physically affective, now a major area of film philosophy.

She describes Ginger to her friends as not very smart, and makes excuses not to have to see them or have them stay at her house. In the present day, Jasmine is trying to improve her prospects by taking a course in computing, and getting a job as a dentist's receptionist: a job she considers terribly demeaning and for which she lacks the skills. She and Ginger go to a party, where they both meet men: Ginger meets a seemingly middle-class man who pays her lots of ardent attention; Jasmine meets a smooth operator with political ambitions who believes Jasmine when she tells him she is an interior designer (which is what she is actually hoping to become). Their relationship proceeds on this deceit, and gets more serious, leading to a proposal of marriage. Both relationships founder. Ginger discovers that her new lover is in fact a married man, and when Jasmine is spotted on the street by Ginger's still furious ex-husband, Augie, her duplicity is revealed to her staggered fiancé. Once again Jasmine's world is in ruins, and now she has lost the support of her sister due to her derision of the sensitive working-class boyfriend who is now back on the scene.

Several factors determine the way in which we might judge Jasmine. First, in a flashback, we see that it was news of her husband's infidelity that prompted Jasmine to make the telephone call to the FBI to report his illegal trading. This suggests that she must have known of, or been wilfully blind to, the illegality of his business whilst enjoying the riches he produced and depriving her sister of her savings and winnings. Second, we see Jasmine come across her estranged stepson, David, working in a second-hand musical instrument store. He has got his life together, come off drugs, has a girlfriend, loves his job, and hates Jasmine. He tells her he never wants to see her again. Within the parameters of the snobbery, deceit, self-centredness and avarice in which we have seen Jasmine operating, these final revelations confirm her as a person perceived by many as beyond the pale. The film ends with her sitting on a bench muttering to herself, with nowhere to go.



Jasmine ends the film alone on the bench with nowhere to go.

Some of the film's moral messages are clear, if not over-determined: relationships based on deceit will founder; financial irregularities will catch up with you; a simple honest life is the key to happiness. The character of Jasmine is not entirely unsympathetic, however, and this is where attention to nuances of film form, with a 'patient, loving regard', can perhaps reveal a different understanding.²³ There are some more obvious reasons why we might have sympathy with Jasmine. First, there is the matter of the star turn: she is played by Cate Blanchett, who gives a sensitive performance, laced with humour (verging on slapstick in the dentist's office), desperation, and tenderness.²⁴ Second, there is the resonance with Blanche Dubois in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.²⁵ Disturbed, vulnerable and desperate, living in a fantasy world of halcyon days that were in fact founded on deceit, she cuts an almost mythic tragic figure.²⁶ Woody Allen describes Jasmine as 'having a tantrum' when she makes the telephone call to the FBI. The view of Allen, and Catherine Shoard, the journalist interviewing him, is that Jasmine brought it all on herself. Shoard considers that *Blue Jasmine* 'is a bruiser of a movie, a Greek tragedy that dispatches a Park Avenue princess with a massive slap'.²⁷ Allen says, 'she could have gotten a divorce, forgiven him, had a talk with him, moved out of the house. But she just hit the ceiling blindly and went on a rampage that brought destruction upon her whole household. She never stopped to think about the consequences of her raging moment.'²⁸

This negative judgement of Jasmine by the filmmaker and the journalist is arguable. Another view is that Jasmine gave up her degree to marry Hal (she was in her second year of an anthropology degree), she has supported his career through her wifely devotion, she loved him, and he has not only repeatedly slept with many women of their acquaintance to the knowledge of everyone except her, but now proposes to leave her for the teenage French *au pair*. Jasmine has a panic attack, she cannot breathe, and is facing the prospect of her marriage to the man she loves being in ruins in a desperately painful and humiliating way. The telephone call to the FBI is followed by his arrest, their financial ruin, his suicide, and her desperate state. However, her phone call did not cause his criminal conviction: that was his illegal business affairs. And despite Jasmine displaying offensive snobbery and callous self-centredness, I suggest that it is possible to see her in a more compassionate light.

This is where Murdoch's metaphor for generous thinking comes to mind. In M and D, Murdoch's most famous philosophical parable about the mother and daughter-in-law, M reflects deliberately about D, until gradually her vision of D alters. The change is not in D's behaviour, but it is in M's mind. For Murdoch, M's motives are irrelevant. What matters is that M has been active: what Murdoch calls 'morally active'.²⁹ M is attempting 'not just to see D accurately, but to see her justly or lovingly'.³⁰

Here Murdoch uses the concept of attention – which she says she is borrowing from Simone Weil – 'to express the idea of a just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality'. Murdoch writes, 'I believe this to be the characteristic and proper mark of the active moral agent'.³¹ She says that

²³ Murdoch, *EM*, p.331.

²⁴ Blanchett received the award for Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role at the 2014 Academy Awards.

²⁵ Tennessee Williams's play features the delicate and delusional protagonist Blanche Dubois, played by Vivien Leigh in the 1951 film, and directed by Elia Kazan. Leigh won her second Academy Award for her performance.

²⁶ Steve Chagollan is indicative of many critics when writing about the parallels between Blanche and Jasmine. <http://variety.com/2014/film/features/cate-blanchett-blue-jasmine-santa-barbara-film-festival-1201073028/>

²⁷ Catherine Shoard, 'Woody Allen on *Blue Jasmine*: 'You see tantrums in adults all the time'', *The Guardian* 26 September 2013, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/sep/26/woody-allen-blue-jasmine-tantrums> [accessed 12-6-17].

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Murdoch, *EM*, p.314.

³⁰ Ibid, p.317.

³¹ Ibid., p.327.

this 'sketch' that she has offered must be judged by its power to connect, to illuminate, to explain, and to make new and fruitful places for reflection'.³² I suggest that the realm of the film viewer is such a new and fruitful place, even if not necessarily the realm of the characters onscreen. Sadly, the parable of M and D does not apply to Jasmine, who fails to make any effort to improve her own moral vision, and indeed the reverse happens to Ginger: she comes to see Jasmine in a worse light than she did before. But what about us as viewers? Jasmine cannot change: she is committed to celluloid, or more likely to digital files. But we do assess Jasmine from a moral perspective. The film is a culturally relevant morality tale, especially post-Bernie Madoff and other high profile white-collar criminality over the last few years, but it is also far more than this as a work of art.³³ It challenges us to make judgements about the characters, and there are five scenes in particular that call for our attention and which will develop our view of Jasmine.

It has been strongly suggested in the film that Jasmine either knew of Hal's illegal business or was wilfully blind. Similarly, she seems laughably blind to his organising of his infidelities. Ginger says of her sister, 'when Jasmine doesn't want to know something she has a habit of looking the other way'. Her delusional state is shattered by Hal's death in his cell, which Jasmine describes in frank and brutal detail, shocking Ginger and her boyfriend by telling them about what happens when a person hangs themselves. This scene shows that Jasmine's self-deception is not complete and that what happened to Hal has forced her to confront something tragic that she may consider to be the consequence of her actions. This burden is the unbearable one, shown in the 'tragedy made minutely concrete' on Jasmine's face, suggesting the true trauma that Jasmine experiences, rather than simply the loss of her jewellery and fine lifestyle. It also conveys the extent of her artificial bravura performance, and hints that this may be more a result of effort than delusion.

Jasmine has been trying to work in the dentist's office and not doing very well, but is learning. The dentist scolds her for reading her college work on the job, forcing her to apologise and promise not to do it again. He declares his lust for her, he says he finds her clothes arousing and congratulates her that she should be happy she has made a conquest. This shows some of the problems that a woman in her position might encounter; she is not used to the power imbalance in this situation, or the assaulting arrogance of the dentist, and as a result of rejecting him, she loses her job.

In the scene where Jasmine receives a telephone call from the man she met at the party, the importance of the call to her is heartbreakingly evident. We can see how Jasmine is obsessed with receiving Dwight's phone call through her desperate panic to keep the line free, the level of artifice that goes in to the conversation and the making of arrangements, as she pretends to have other commitments to juggle, and then her vulnerability and relief once she puts the phone down. The camera stays on Jasmine a moment longer than is necessary, enabling us to see this private moment of overwhelming emotion, and to appreciate the magnitude of her need to be rescued.

When babysitting Ginger's sons, and having drunk a few martinis, Jasmine describes her history of psychiatric treatment including electric shock therapy and drugs. This shows her as a person with vulnerabilities, dating back over many years, and sheds light on her earlier reaction when told about Hal's infidelities, her need to self-medicate with martinis and Xanax, and the toll that her experiences have taken on her. As she says, 'After all, there's only so many traumas a person can withstand until they take to the streets and start screaming'.

³² Ibid., p.336.

³³ Madoff, the infamous Wall Street fraudster, was convicted of one of the biggest financial frauds of all time in 2009, and sentenced to 150 years in prison. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2011/feb/28/bernard-madoff-remorse-not-a-sociopath> [accessed 10-7-17].



Jasmine in the street, screaming.

Finally, the conversation between Jasmine and her stepson Danny does several things: it shows how she has received more vitriol than Hal, and this is interesting in the light of how offending women are often in this position of receiving extra or misdirected intensity of fury.³⁴ It also shows how Jasmine's values have not changed: she sees money and position as the desirable outcomes and any other source of satisfaction is inconceivable to her. Ultimately it shows how she has nobody and nothing now: no child of her own, and Hal's son blames her for the devastation of the family.

There are many more moments that can be seized upon for closer attention, such as the relationship with her parents, or her old so-called friends. Like her cinematic predecessor, Blanche Dubois, Jasmine's exchanges with the men to whom her sister introduces her show her to be capable of toughness when warranted. This suggests either that it is only now that these qualities are being called upon, or that she is transforming, developing harder layers, becoming more removed from the social butterfly she once was, or pretended to be.

In theoretical terms, it is clearly possible to conduct an economic, feminist, cultural or socio-political analysis of Jasmine's fate, but I want to propose that we think of her in Murdochian terms. By paying attention to Jasmine, with a patient, loving regard, we may form an opinion of her that is more forgiving, and we might even grow by looking at Jasmine in the scenes where she is crippled with shame and horror, not just at her economic and social situation, but at her role as the bearer of all the blame. Indeed she assumes this guilt: after the confrontation with Augie in the street, when Dwight is raging at her lies, seeing his political prospects tumbling around him, she says 'I brought it on myself again'. Here is a woman who talks to herself in the street, saying the things she wishes she had been able to say, but could not for various reasons. She ends the film sitting on the bench, talking to herself, berating her dead husband for sleeping with the *au pair*, conceding that even the lyrics to the song that was playing when they met – *Blue Moon* – are now 'all a jumble'.

If I am M, and Jasmine is D, my time with D is over once the film is over, and I can choose to condemn her as the prevailing opinion of many will do, or I can look again. I can pay attention to all that is there, not just the cut-and-dried legal or normative moral framework of the film. I can try to think about the options that Jasmine has available to her, the specific realities of her mental and emotional life, her vulnerabilities and her choices, and pay what Murdoch might call 'patient attention' to lead me to a view of 'just discernment'. The attention that a patient and non-judgemental spectator can pay to the protagonist of the cinematic art work is surely an endeavour

³⁴ See Lisa Downing on the extra criticism and hysterical reaction meted out to violent or criminal women, *The Subject of Murder: Gender, Exceptionality and the Modern Killer* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p.58.

that is in line with Murdoch's notion of art as 'a place in which the nature of morality can be *seen*'.³⁵ (Emphasis in original). We might come to a view that need not be accurate, and it need not be complete, but it may come close to what Murdoch might consider 'goodness by proxy'.³⁶ Murdoch writes that, in good art, 'we are presented with a truthful image of the human condition in a form which can be steadily contemplated; and indeed this is the only context in which many of us are capable of contemplating it at all'.³⁷ Steady contemplation of human character in a form where Murdoch herself writes that spirit and matter are most intensely fused: film as good art is Murdochian moral philosophy in action.

³⁵ Murdoch, *EM*, p.372.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p.371.

³⁷ *Ibid*.

Triple review of *Cartography for Girls: A-Z of Orientations identified within the Novels of Iris Murdoch* by Carol Sommer (York: Creative Commons, 2016)

Frances White

I have to begin by simply describing this book and I shall conclude with two responses from other Murdoch scholars as this is a unique work which cannot be reviewed in the usual terms and which will strike each reader differently. Carol Sommer has created her text by taking sentences from Iris Murdoch's twenty-six novels and ordering them alphabetically. Thus, it begins:

A black ring was closing upon her field of vision. A black wall rose up in front of her. A blackness surrounded her. A blind stupid idea of consolation, dying but refusing to perish, was her chief torment: the idea of being consoled by Ludwig for all this suffering. A certainty of his absolute truthfulness with her had been a steady consolation. A cloud of tiredness and depression came down and covered her like a bell. A cold dark shadow fell across Paula. A completely new sensation of jealousy shook her whole body in successive shudders of pain. A confusion of feelings silenced her. A dark confusion covered her. A darkness entered into her like a swarm of bees. A desire to get quickly out of the room took her as far as the door. A destructive demon of despair seemed to leap out of her own mouth. A different suffering waiting its hour would surely follow. A dull stale sadness came over her. A familiar feeling of depression, fear and thrill came to her from her father like an odour. A feeling of extreme tiredness came over her, and with it the nausea was renewed.

And it concludes:

Yet with a sudden dreadful loneliness, a sudden nostalgia for the old affectionate vanished world, she felt how desperately she would want to be needed and to be loved by the people at Gaze. Yet with daylight, and recalling again the cries, the howls, which she had heard on the evening of the music, she told herself that it was leaving her here, not taking her away, which would be the end of Hannah. Yet, as she reflected, this question seemed less important, consumed, dimmed by a sort of realism, which she still hesitated to dignify with the name of truth. Yet, between them, things were changing. Yet with a pain which had not yet fully claimed her, she knew that there had been an act and that it belonged to her. Yielding to what seemed almost like a vicious temptation, Gertrude had looked up the ballad which Guy had quoted. You cannot show your suffering for fear that worse befall. You said that we should meet again. Your disclosure took me by surprise.

The sheer volume of *work* that has gone into compiling these 456 (unnumbered) pages of sentences is breath-taking. (And incidentally the work is meticulous, proof-reading a text which lacks a narrative

is difficult in the extreme, and I spotted only a couple of tiny errors). I want to voice a small initial disappointment here as I felt dissatisfied that an A-Z stopped at Y. Could some sentences from *The Philosopher's Pupil* about the Papillon dog, Zed, not have rounded off the alphabet? The fact that Sommer did not choose to do so, in fact contributes to my ultimate understanding of her objective. So, what is the point of the technical exercise Sommer has set herself, and who does it benefit?

There are two potential audiences for *Cartography for Girls*, serious readers of Murdoch's work, and people working in or interested in the genre of text as artwork, to which this book makes an original and major contribution. For Murdoch readers, this is a tantalising game of novel recognition: many sentences that do not include proper names elude instant identification and can seem interchangeable. The impact of reading this distillation of the quintessence of Murdochian fiction had, on this reader at least, two main effects. First, it offers insight into how Murdoch creates the momentum, impetus and rhythm, of her novels, also into central themes, concepts, images and phrases in her work, highlighting the stylistic features of her writing. Second, the somewhat hypnotic experience of reading sentence after sentence, with no narrative thread to carry the mind forward, began to make me too think in taxonomical ways. I made lists from Sommer's lists. One of the lists I made was of the names of Murdoch characters selected, of which I found 67 female and 45 male (the female are italicised):

Adam, *Adelaide*, Adrian, Alex, Alice, Alison, Ann, Anna, Anne, Annette, Anthea, Blaise, Carel, *Charlotte*, Clare, Clement, Colette, Crimond, Danby, Daniel, David, Dennis, *Diana*, Diane, *Dora*, *Dorina*, Ducane, Edgar, Edward, Elizabeth, Emily, Eric, Felicity, Felix, Franca, Gabriel, George, Gerald, Gerda, Gertrude, Gracie, Guy, Hannah, Harriet, Harry, Hattie, Henry, *Hilda*, Jack, Jean, Jenkin, Jesse, Jessica, Joan, John, Kate, Kiki, Leonie, Lily, Lisa, Louise, Luca, Maisie, Marian, Mary, Matthew, Mavis, Meredith, Michael, Midge, Mildred, Miles, Miranda, Miss Casement, Miss Dunbury, Miss Evercreech, Miss Landon, Miss Tether, Mitzi, Monty, Morgan, Moy, Nan, Nesta, Nina, Noel, Octavian, Pattie, Paul, Paula, Pearl, Peter, Randall, Richard, Rosa, Rosalind, Rose, Ruby, Rupert, Sandy, Sefton, Stella, Stephanie, Stuart, Tallis, Tamar, Thomas, Tim, Tuan, Valerie, Will, Willy.

Further lists comprised sentences that are questions: Am I? Are? Can? Could? Did? Do? Does? Don't? Had? Have I? How? Is it? Shall? Should? Was? What? When? Where? Who? Why? Would? and sentences suggestive of an ethical imperative: I could, I must, I ought, I've got to, She should, Should she, which together create the atmosphere of moral anxiety that pervades Murdoch's novels. Sentences beginning with link words: And, But, Even, Of course, Oh, Or, Perhaps, and sentences beginning with a temporal aspect: Eventually, Ever since, For a moment, For a second, Gradually, In a second, Lately, Later, Meanwhile, Next, Now, Only later, Only now, She began, She still, Since, Sometimes, Soon, Then, Today, Tonight, When, Yesterday, reveal the dynamics which impel her fast-moving narratives.

Sommer's apparently indirect and subtle approach allows Murdoch's words to speak for themselves without commentary from her. This demonstration of a distinctive thread that runs through Murdoch's novels forms a silently powerful analysis of a strongly feminist aspect which comes through the interstices of the text. Murdoch was ardently anti-feminist, regarding feminism as unnecessary special pleading ('We want to join the [presumably male] human race, not invent a new separatism'), although strongly in favour of education for girls. Like George Eliot who created Rosamund Vincy and Gwendolen Harleth but no strong independent female character like herself, Murdoch creates wives, mothers, daughters and mistresses whose lives are defined and

circumscribed by the men who surround them. Yet this volume of sentences makes it crystal clear that Murdoch knew what this experience of being female is like, and it is not a happy one. In a very rare moment of self-revelation she wrote to Frank Thompson on 24th November 1942, 'Sometimes I think it's quite bloody being a woman'.

If we return to the passages of quotations the vocabulary employed is remarkable. From the opening pages of *Cartography*, again in list form:

black, closing, black, wall, blackness, surrounded, blind, stupid, dying, perish, torment, suffering, consolation, cloud, tiredness, depression, down, covered, bell, cold, dark, shadow, fell, jealousy, shook, body, shudders, pain, confusion, feelings, silenced, dark, confusion, covered, darkness, entered, swarm, bees, desire, room, door, destructive, demon, despair, mouth, suffering, waiting, dull, stale, sadness, familiar, feeling, depression, fear, thrill, her, odour, feeling, extreme, tiredness, nausea.

And from the closing pages:

Sudden, loneliness, sudden, nostalgia, old, affectionate, vanished, desperately, want, needed, loved, recalling, cries, howls, end, reflected, consumed, dimmed, realism, between, changing, pain, claimed, knew, act, belonged, yielding, vicious, temptation, ballad, cannot, suffering, fear, worse, befall, meet, disclosure, surprise.

What an onslaught of negative and direful emotions and images: what claustrophobia, passivity and lack of agency strike us instantly. The lexicon has a distinctly Gothic note and comes close to that which one would expect to find in overtly feminist novelists. Distress and dismay, regret and remorse, tears and weeping recur constantly through these pages. They evidence how much *suffering* her characters cause each other; particularly how much suffering men cause women. Murdoch herself fiercely sought (and achieved) agency and she escaped submersion in such a bleak experience of life by refusing full participation in what she adversely projects as womanhood: bisexual herself, she increasingly identified as 'a sadomasochistic male homosexual'.

I cannot begin to guess what proportion of the total numbers of words employed in Murdoch's fictional oeuvre these 456 pages represent. Certainly only a very small one. Sommer's choice of sentences is clearly very consciously made, and I found myself speculating on whether the text could be inverted, or at least very different, with a different choice of sentences from the novels. Suppose it were random – every thousandth sentence? Or all the abstract sentences, or all the sentences describing nature? How different an impression and book would that make? Sommer does not feature solely female characters (the proportion is about 60:40) so what makes her text feel positively feminist? I find the answer in analysing specific areas of *Cartography for Girls*: and it has to do with the agency or lack thereof of male and female characters and with the active or passive nature of their actions. Entries under 'Did' are a case in point:

Did she still wish as she often had wished that she had met Harry first, never married Thomas, that it had all been different? Did she want David to go into the army? Did she want Henry to pursue her, and would it not be terrible if he did not? Did she want her choice to have long or short hair? Did she want to believe that Gerard would calm down and lose interest and all that ardour, that great intent would come to nothing after all?

Women swayed by the men around them, husbands, lovers, sons, and lacking a sense of independent self-identity. But the most powerfully telling sections of the text are the entries for 'He' and 'She'. The pages of sentences starting 'He' begin thus:

He alone of all her vague friends had held an important place in her heart. He always uses such bad language when he's been with Marcus, she thought. He and she remained, Stella thought, above and apart from anything which George might do with a whore. He asked for time and I gave him time. He belonged to her and in her, this was loving him, for better or worse she *was* Randall. He bulked beside them, impenetrable and ineluctably present. He can be bad to me and it makes no difference, he knows that. He can save me.

The lexicon of these disconnected statements makes the point: important, bad, asked, gave, belonged, bulked, impenetrable, ineluctably present, bad, save. Strongest of all is [Ann's] self-identification with Randall: she has no being of her own. But these six pages are swamped by the 115 pages of sentences beginning with 'She', by far the most substantial single section of *Cartography for Girls*. It is here that we find the fluidly interchangeable Murdochian female character, needy, driven by emotion and largely defining herself in terms of the men in her life and the impact men have on her. The verbs which follow 'She' give a dynamic picture of the emotional life of Murdoch's women. To read the section in full is like being swept off one's feet in an irresistible flood, but a few examples will give the flavour. 'She'

accepted, admired, allowed, began to cry, began to feel frightened, believed, bit her hands, bit her lip, bowed her head, breathed deeply, buried her face, buried her mouth, burst into tears, checked her tears, clenched her fists, closed her eyes, clung, clutched, comforted, composed her face, concealed, coveted, craved, crawled, cried, desired, detested, did not know, dreamt, feared, fell, felt, fled, flushed, forbade herself tears, forced, fought, found, frowned, gasped, gave, gazed, gripped, groaned, hated, held onto, hid, hoped, hung, hurried, imagined, intuited, kicked, knelt, knew, laughed, lay, leaned, lifted, liked, listened, lived, longed, looked, loved, managed, married, moaned, mopped, mourned, mumbled, murmured, needed, paced, packed, pictured, pined, planned, played, plumped, prayed, realised, recalled, reflected, regretted, rehearsed, remained, remembered, responded, rocked herself, rolled her head about, sat, saw, shed tears, shivered, shrank, shrieked, shuddered, sighed, smelt, smiled, snuggled, sobbed, stared, stood, struggled, submitted, surrendered, suspected, swallowed, swayed, thought, told herself, tore, touched, treasured, trembled, tried, turned away, twisted, underwent, uttered, wailed, waited, wanted, was afraid, was frightened, wept, wished, wondered, yearned.

The single most penetrating sentence is perhaps: 'She walked to and fro like an animal upon a short string.'

These reflections answer my question of why Sommer could not, with integrity, include Zed, formally satisfying though it would be to complete the alphabet. This is an anatomisation of *female* human consciousness. *Cartography and for girls*: it's all in the title. The message of this book is how Murdoch maps female gender-based expectation and experience in her novels.

The importance of a novelist's achievement is assessed by her impact and the legacy she

bequeaths. Something unique and extraordinary about Iris Murdoch's voice, world, oeuvre, makes an impact at a tangent as well as directly. She inspires readers to think new thoughts and to make fresh and surprising connections. Sommer, a Fine Artist, is an eccentric Murdoch scholar, eccentric being used here to denote an approach at an oblique angle. Her artistic approach is radically different. She uses text as material, reworking it in playful, humorous, provocative and insightful ways. *Cartography for Girls* is a piece of performance art in book form, necessarily static because of the physical format unlike Sommer's moving installations 'On Saints and Artists' and 'Cartography for Girls in Fifteen Minutes'. You *experience* this book rather than *read* it which makes me wonder if the printed book is perhaps not the *best* format for an art installation? But the experience of reading it makes you *think*. I welcome this innovative slant on Murdoch's work which has taught me new things and opened up her novels afresh to me. I commend both the experimental concept and the painstaking research that Sommer has put into her sensitive and astute selection and arrangement of textual material. This is a work of scholarship as well as a piece of fine art. And now: to the responses offered by two other readers.

Gillian Dooley

A book of sentences in alphabetical order. A book that consists of a single paragraph and yet is 3.2 centimetres thick. A book that reveals the extent to which Iris Murdoch's novels are passionate love stories. A book that shows that despite Iris Murdoch never having written a book in a female first-person voice, her novels are full of women's inner voices. A book with no page numbers. Especially delightful juxtapositions: 'Of course they had always been very frank with each other and had lived their marriage as a mutual transference. Of course this was nonsense.' Every sentence in this book expresses a female consciousness. I kept wondering how she did it: a spreadsheet, perhaps? 'I must have been assuming that without me there it would be all cobwebs and desolation.' I would have used a spreadsheet. 'If only I could care just a little less.' 'If only only only ...' 'If she awoke in black misery, as she always did, she had the inductive powers to know that when she had got up she would probably enjoy a cup of tea.' 'It had been too long and too much and she had made a stone of her heart and she would never be able to justify herself, and never be able to explain.' 'Let him suffer.' Luckily imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. My home town seems destined to suffer: 'More tears came to Adelaide.' 'No book could serve her now.' 'No.' 'No.' 'No.' 'No.' 'No.' 'No.' 'No.' 'No.' 'Now she knew how it was possible to sing in the presence of death.' Rueful sentences that start with 'If only'. Sentences beginning with 'It had' inherently express regret, even despair. Sentences beginning with 'Later' show the uncanny time-warps novelists are so good at, Murdoch among the best. Sentences that start wryly with 'I must'. So many sentences starting with 'I'. This book is brilliant and *sui generis* and can never be imitated (except perhaps in this review). Ways of reading this book: try to track down every sentence to its source, or let mini-narratives form as you read, or let the passion and humour and intensity of Murdoch's prose course through directly to your heart; or some of each. 'Yes.' 'Yes.' 'Yes.' 'Yes.'

Rivka Isaacson

Twice I have had the good fortune to share a platform with artist Carol Sommer in conference panels devoted to 'oblique approaches to the study of Iris Murdoch'. I have hence been sonographer to the gestation of *Cartography for Girls* which, among many descriptions, must surely be called a 'labour of love'. Sommer has painstakingly and manually identified every sentence in every Iris Murdoch novel that represents a 'female orientation' which means an example of a woman thinking, doing or changing something. She has then ordered these alphabetically in a paperback book and also compiled compelling films of diversely accented women from all over the world, reading out the sentences in their living rooms over Skype. These films were shown on a loop as installations at the International Iris Murdoch conference in Kingston in 2014 and they are endlessly fascinating to watch; for the words, the women, the voices and the settings which range from student digs to someone's well-stocked alcohol cabinet.



Image 1 - Caramelised onion and goats cheese tart with salad by Carol Sommer.

In November 2015, there was an exhibition of *Cartography for Girls* in the Crown Street Gallery in Sommer's hometown of Darlington. Unable to attend the opening, since it clashed with the London launch of *Living on Paper*, I was privileged to experience my own private view/artist's tour when I visited later in the month. This included a delicious photogenic homemade meal (Image 1). Sommer's home is exactly what you might expect from such a creative person. It is a terraced house built in the late 19th century whose interior is a vibrant display of wonderful art made by Sommer and her friends, documenting her trajectory as an artist.

One particular piece caught my eye as it bore striking resemblance to a type of experiment (called HSQC for heteronuclear single quantum coherence) that we run almost daily in our lab (see comparison in Image 2). Carol explained that it comes from a project by Nick Kennedy in which numerous participants were each instructed to roll a dice a thousand times, attempting to hit a central mark, and record the landing spot each time with a sharp pencil.

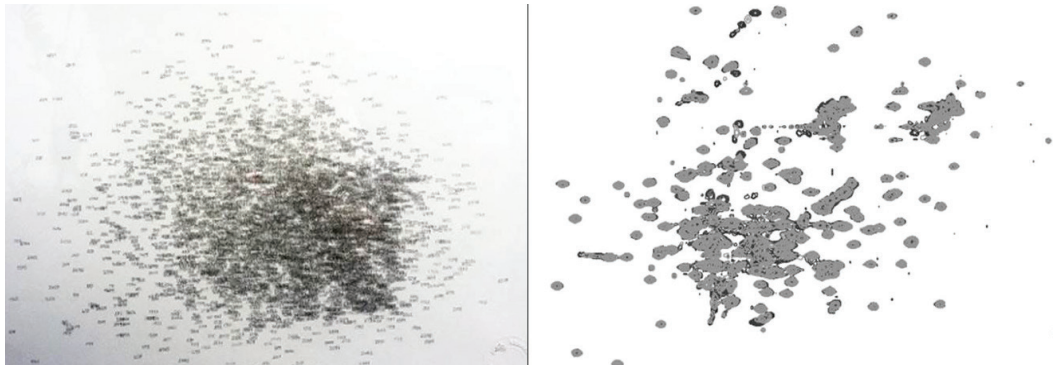


Image 2 - Left: Sommer's contribution to The Choral Drawing Project; Right: HSQC spectrum from the Isaacson laboratory.

This exercise in surveying chance and contingency in art is pertinent to Sommer's own work which explores Murdoch's philosophical view, explained in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, that accepting chance is an ethical stance. In *Cartography for Girls*, Sommer plays with ideas of form and formlessness, taking female orientations out of their earlier context and imposing the new order of the alphabet. This offers the reader a fresh textual encounter with some joyful juxtapositions. There are far too many to choose just one to quote here. Each time I try I end up sucked into the trance of the book for at least an hour. I think it would be just as distracting for someone unfamiliar with Murdoch's work and I'd recommend it as a procrastination mechanism for anyone who loves words. It's enlightening to discover how often Murdoch starts a sentence in the same way. A personal favourite example of this are the 'It was as if...' pages. It was as if she were attending to him ardently but blankly. It was as if she were being, as she lay, lifted off the ground, surrounded by a vibrating chord of atoms. I chose that for the tenuous science and I could go on, at length.

Sommer and her PhD supervisor, Simon Morris, belong to the school of 'uncreative writing' also sometimes categorised as 'conceptual writing' or 'appropriation literature'. They take existing written works and provide novel ways of interpreting them. Morris's publishing company called 'Information as Material' is devoted to disseminating such outputs, including the current *Cartography* paperback, although they are by no means confined to the written word. At a recent exhibition in Bury, entitled 'Reading as Art', Sommer presented her work to a backdrop of the French artist Jeremique Bennequin literally rubbing out Proust with a pencil eraser. He has now completed this lengthy task and his shows mostly comprise piles of 'rubbing out' detritus on plinths, including one empty plinth since the French Arts Council has bought one of the dust heaps!

So, where next for *Cartography for Girls*? Sommer's PhD is due to run until 2019 and her remaining efforts are tripartite. She will be presenting her work at conferences such as Gender and Trauma in Chichester in September at which we may yet share the stage again. Further exhibitions of *Cartography*'s latest incarnation will be shown. Sommer has started an Instagram account called cartography for girls and, each day, she posts a snapshot of a page from the book with relevant hashtags and then monitors online responses and other images with related hashtags. As such, we can expect Sommer's final thesis to be a meta multimedia epic and I for one look forward to future exposure.

Review of three chapters on Iris Murdoch

- Benjamin J.B. Lipscomb, “Slipping out over the wall”: Midgley, Anscombe, Foot and Murdoch’, Chapter 14 of *Science and the Self: Animals, Evolution, and Ethics: Essays in Honour of Mary Midgley* edited by Ian James Kidd and Liz McKinnell (London: Routledge, 2015)
- Konrad Banicki, ‘Iris Murdoch and the Varieties of Virtue Ethics’, Chapter 6 of *Varieties of Virtue Ethics* edited by David Carr, James Arthur and Kristján Kristjánsson (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2016)
- Sabina Lovibond, *Essays on Ethics and Feminism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2015), Chapter 14: ‘Iris Murdoch and the Ambiguity of Freedom’

Perhaps it will not be long until texts that discuss Murdoch’s philosophy, or review commentaries on her work, do not begin by stating that ‘recently, there has been an increase in the interest in Murdoch’s philosophy’. It is true, of course, that interest has increased. But perhaps Murdoch has now gained a fair enough recognition as a philosopher, so as to render such prefatory comments unnecessary. What appears to be in focus now are questions about how to relate Murdoch’s philosophy to contemporary philosophical discussions.

In this review, we discuss three recent book chapters: Benjamin J. B. Lipscomb’s ‘Slipping Out Over the Wall’, Konrad Banicki’s ‘Iris Murdoch and the Varieties of Virtue Ethics’ and Sabina Lovibond’s ‘Iris Murdoch and the Ambiguity of Freedom’, with an eye on the question of how Murdoch should most helpfully be ‘placed’ in contemporary debates.

Lipscomb’s paper, “Slipping Out Over the Wall”: Midgley, Anscombe, Foot and Murdoch’, is a contribution to an anthology in honour of Mary Midgley and its central aim is to discuss Midgley’s philosophical development. Describing the Second World War generation of exceptional female philosophers at Oxford, Lipscomb, somewhat paradoxically, manages to make Murdoch more present in this text than she is in the other two, that are explicitly about her work.

Readers of Murdoch will recognize the four young philosophers’ discomfort with the contemporary philosophy of their time, and the corrective moves for moral philosophy that they all more or less agreed upon: the critique of the fact/value dichotomy, a retrieval of the ancient tradition of the virtues, and the need to formulate a ‘naturalist’ moral philosophy, based on a realistic account of the human being. But as Lipscomb notes, ‘Foot and Anscombe wrote chiefly for the guild, in its venues, and more-or-less following its conventions’ (p.208). The other two, less adjustable to the current conditions of academic philosophy, drifted away, Murdoch to literary authorship and Midgley to motherhood, to writing as a public intellectual, to studies in biology, and finally back to academic philosophy, with work that is empirically curious and distinctively concerned with what is happening in the world around us.

At first glance, Midgley’s interest in our relationship to animals and the environment may lack obvious resonance with Murdoch’s work. What they share, however, is an outlook where the role of the public intellectual and the role of the philosopher are complexly intertwined. Moral philosophy

for both is concerned with our practical, contingent, historically specific but also natural world where we share moral concerns and seek to address them. Lipscomb emphasizes that for Midgley 'the fundamental tasks of moral inquiry and of the moral life are, in each case, *integrative*. The task of inquiry is to understand our nature in its full complexity, drawing on all necessary resources' (p.212). This could equally serve as a description of Murdoch's work, where the tools and topics of professional philosophy are continuously found insufficient for making sense of moral phenomena. But an omnivorous and integrative philosophy places specific demands on the philosopher. As Midgley has noted: 'Because so many disciplines border [my] topic, it must necessarily be discussed in plain language' (p.208). We can recognize the same plainness and the same distrust of theoretical language, for similar reasons, in Murdoch's texts. This feature has, however, not always made Murdoch easy to understand for *philosophers*, who tend to project their own expectations of a more technical use of language onto her texts.

A charming detail in the text is Midgley's claim that human thinking 'has two moments. There is abstracting, critical process, which has always been recognized as thinking: and there is another process of imaginative comprehension, of comparing and balancing' (p.211). Or as Murdoch puts it there is 'a two-way movement in philosophy, a movement towards the building of theories, and a move back again towards the consideration of simple and obvious facts. McTaggart says that time is unreal, Moore replies that he has just eaten his breakfast'.¹ Simple and obvious facts are of course something quite different from imaginative comprehension, but both philosophers express here an identical concern for a necessary counterweight to the abstraction of philosophical theory (and it can be argued that 'the consideration of simple and obvious facts' that Murdoch calls for may at times require 'imaginative comprehension' to become discernable as philosophically relevant).

The second chapter is Konrad Banicki's essay on Murdoch as a virtue ethicist. Published in the volume *Varieties of Virtue Ethics*, this text has the specific task of communicating the essentials of Murdoch's moral philosophy to an audience of readers who take an interest in virtue ethics but may be unfamiliar with Murdoch's thought. The book encompasses virtue in medieval thought, Confucius and Lao-tzu, and Durkheimian sociology, among other things. Thus, Murdoch should be far from the odd one out, and explaining how her work relates to forms of virtue ethics should be a relatively straightforward matter. Unfortunately, the text gives a somewhat disorderly impression and would have benefited from further work to better meet its purpose. As it stands, however, it is crowded with quotations from Murdoch and Murdoch scholars, which do not quite add up to a coherent and helpful account of Murdoch and virtue.

Apart from the issue of clarity, we wonder if the common emphasis on Murdoch the 'Platonist' as compared to mainstream Aristotelian virtue ethics is helpful for Banicki's purposes. The problem is that, while everyone seems to know what Aristotelianism stands for in contemporary ethics, the question of what Platonism could be easily gives rise to ideas quite foreign to Murdoch's work. Banicki chooses a relatively safe route, by focusing on Murdoch's use of the Platonic Cave as an image of human striving towards goodness and truthfulness, despite obstacles. A question that should be asked here, however, is whether or not a short account of this aspect of Murdoch's thought is likely to be found simply irrelevant by philosophers and students interested in matters of virtue. Especially when Banicki observes, without further explanation, 'the generally mystical flavour of her ethical development', and the 'seeming non-naturalism' of her conception of the good, many potentially sympathetic readers will be unnecessarily lost. Something more would need to be said about the down-to-earth interest in human nature and human affairs that is distinctive to Murdoch's thinking.

¹ Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970), (London: Vintage Classics, 2001), p.1.

Banicki wants to claim a place for Murdoch among the virtue ethicists but notes that 'her name is rarely mentioned in the usual accounts of the rise of modern virtue ethics' (p.90). This makes us wonder what the 'usual accounts' are, or should be. Murdoch was, as we saw above, close to Anscombe and Foot, both philosophically and personally. The formative 1997 anthology *Virtue Ethics*, edited by Roger Crisp and Michael Slote, contains Murdoch's essay 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts' alongside texts by Foot, MacIntyre, Anscombe and others.² Maybe it is time to overcome the habit of defending Murdoch by representing her as a philosophical outsider?

Lovibond's is the philosophically most demanding and exciting of the three chapters, largely because Murdoch provides an occasion for Lovibond to work through her own deep philosophical worries. The book in which this article appears is a collection of Lovibond's papers on ethics and feminism from the past three decades, and a structuring theme of the book is the emancipatory potential of a (post-Wittgensteinian) realist moral philosophy. Finding in Murdoch a philosopher who should be close to her own concerns, Lovibond struggles with what she sees as Murdoch's conservatism and resistance to structural social critique. The theme is familiar from Lovibond's 2011 book *Iris Murdoch, Gender and Philosophy*.³ The focal issue in this paper is Murdoch's conception of freedom, which Lovibond reads as very different from that of other 'secular defenders' of a realist moral philosophy.

In her account, Murdoch defends a radical conception of freedom, derived from Simone Weil, where freedom of choice is completely replaced by liberation through a self-chastising, self-denigrating attention to the world. 'This is a freedom which moves toward the ideal limit of perfect responsiveness to reality, and hence, paradoxically of "obedience" (to the objective requirements of one's situation)' (p.244). The crucial and problematic edge of this reading is the way it attributes a totalizing conception of freedom-as-obedience to Murdoch, which would rule out other aspects of freedom (e.g. freedom of choice), not only in the moral life but also in the realm of politics and social thought. Since this kind of totalizing theoretical thinking is quite foreign to Murdoch's multifaceted and conceptually mobile way of doing philosophy, the burden of proof here should be on Lovibond. The body of the text does not, however, work to consolidate the argument that this is in fact Murdoch's view. Instead, Lovibond focuses on the weaknesses of Murdoch's readings of existentialism (Sartre) and structuralism (Derrida), to prove that both have a richer conception of freedom than Murdoch suggests. Sartre (as Richard Moran has argued) is not a defender of a naïve, thin freedom of choice, and Derrida does not lock us into a structural cage of words.

From the fact that Murdoch did not recognize the potential of these thinkers for a broader and deeper conception of freedom, Lovibond derives the idea that Murdoch is in fact hostile to such a broader conception and wants to confine freedom to a one-sided religiously-tinted freedom of obedience. But can Murdoch's misrecognition of the potential of these philosophers prove anything of this kind? Her rejection of them is quite explicitly based on the way they seem for her to short circuit the important idea of the thinking, feeling, continuously active person in moral life. How could this add up to a totalizing ethics of obedience, which denigrates broader applications of the concept of freedom?

Thus, Lovibond ends by emphasizing the peculiarity of Murdoch's conception of freedom, without actually having fully argued her case. We are left with the impression of a deeply felt philosophical disquiet on Lovibond's part, which may not be unfounded, but which still seeks adequate expression. To figure out how this issue could be resolved, it may be helpful here to play the Murdochian game of asking what Lovibond is afraid of. This may be difficult to determine, if one looks merely at her

² Roger Crisp and Michael Slote (eds.), *Virtue Ethics* (Oxford Readings in Philosophy) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp.99-117.

³ Sabina Lovibond, *Iris Murdoch, Gender and Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge 2011).

paper on Murdoch. But her preface to the book is more helpful in this respect. Here she notes that 'I am concerned with the status and prospects of normativity, autonomy, purposive action, and other conceptual recourses for critical thinking; in fact, really with the whole inherited package of "progressive" ideology which trades on these resources, and which is at risk of looking antiquated by comparison with the anti-humanist or post-humanist discourses addressed in the opening phase of this book' (p.2). She further notes that '[e]verything in this book is located downstream from the judgment that the non-sceptical, or therapeutic, reading of Wittgenstein's texts is the right one and that maxims such as "Describe language-games", or "Don't think, but look" are meant to invoke' (p.4).

Strangely enough, we hear more of Murdoch's distinctive voice in these remarks by Lovibond, than we do in Lovibond's description of Murdoch. Exchange 'the inherited package of "progressive" ideology' to 'the human being' and you will see them giving expression to the same worry: that the current hip philosophies are crowding out our most valuable resource in moral and social thought – the truth-seeking human being, striving for the good.

Review of *Tolkien among the Moderns* edited by Ralph C. Wood
(Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015)

This excellent and thought-provoking collection of essays may be recommended not only to those who are already appreciative of Tolkien's oeuvre, but also to those who may be inclined to question whether the fictional world he created – replete with hobbits, elves and wizards – can have any bearing upon, or interrogate in any meaningful way, the greater philosophical and existential questions with which humankind is faced. The writers of each of these essays share the conviction that, far from being dismissed as charmingly arcane but ultimately irrelevant tales, Tolkien's major texts, most notably *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*, may be placed 'among the moderns', and can be brought into fruitful dialogue with the work of some of the most significant philosophical and literary exponents of our time. This generic contention is cogently articulated throughout, although each essay is distinctive in its choice of interlocutor and in the exploration of particular themes. Just a few will be highlighted here, before proceeding to consider in greater depth the chapter by Scott Moore, 'The Consolations of Fantasy: J. R. R. Tolkien and Iris Murdoch', which is likely to prove of especial interest to readers of this journal.

Germaine Paulo Walsh's essay, 'Philosophic Poet. J. R. R. Tolkien's Modern Response to an Ancient Quarrel', revisits the dispute between poetry and philosophy as reported in Book 10 of Plato's *The Republic*, investigating two Socratic charges: first, that poetry, construed as *mimesis*, offers lies masquerading as truth (rather than seeking truth *in se*, which is understood as the task of philosophy); second, that poetry undermines morality through its appeal to desire rather than reason. With regard to the first charge, Walsh suggests that, paradoxically, it is the very vastness and complexity of Tolkien's poetic legendarium which undermines any totalizing claim to truth. It is made clear, for example, that the sagas which constitute the early history of the elves have been subject to alteration and corruption as they were handed down from one generation to the next, and Tolkien, particularly in *The Silmarillion*, provides variant redactions of the same narrative in order to highlight that no single version can provide a definitive account of the events described. In this way Tolkien not only calls into question the possibility of interpretation-free history, but also points insistently to the limitations of language itself, and of the human mind of which it is the product. The discerning reader of Tolkien's works is thus encouraged to understand that poetry such as this is not 'masquerading' as truth, but rather has a significant role in exposing the finitude of language, and thereby in calling into question the nature of truth itself.

With regard to the second charge, that poetry should be regarded as morally suspect due to its capacity to present vice in a desirable or attractive guise, Walsh posits that Tolkien takes pains to present his fictional world as a moral universe in which characters who repeatedly choose evil become not only inwardly, but also outwardly, repellent. Characters, on the other hand, who consistently choose the good are shown as growing in wisdom, compassion, prudential reasoning and, above all, in an increasing capacity for contemplative awareness of the beauty of creation, and of their part as created beings within it. Tolkien's vision in this respect, clearly inspired as it is by a Christianized adaptation of the Platonist developmental schema of *theoria*, avoids overtly theistic

references, whilst remaining firmly committed to theological and ethical imperatives.

The question which then arises is whether this ostensibly 'orthodox' theological commitment renders Tolkien's work incapable of articulation with approaches taken by the major philosophers and ethicists of our times. Tolkien himself is reputed to have 'read very little from his own century',¹ yet it is the contention of other writers within this collection that his fiction may be interpreted as both resonating with, and also challenging, the assumptions of apparently more radical thinkers.

Peter Candler's chapter on 'Tolkien or Nietzsche; Philology and Nihilism' is an indicative example, as is Ralph Wood's essay on 'Tolkien and Postmodernism'. Of particular interest, perhaps, is Joseph Tadie's essay ('"That the World Not be Usurped": Emmanuel Levinas and J. R. R. Tolkien on Serving the Other as Release from Bondage') on the links which may be established between Tolkien and Emmanuel Levinas in relation to an attentive response to 'the Other', and the inherent role which this plays in self-transcendence. Tadie points to Levinas's description of the unreflective 'usurpation' of the world through self-satisfied concupiscence, and the 'natural' wish to remain contentedly *chez soi* by rejecting alterity through the absorption of the Other into the Same. Levinas's insistence upon the illimitability of the ethical demand to embrace transcendence through engagement with the holiness of the face-to-face continues to exercise a prophetic challenge, not only with regard to Nietzschean construals of the will-to-power, but also to those (which is perhaps to say the majority?) who are tempted to set aside or ignore alterity, and thereby remain in bondage to misconstrued concepts of self-interest. Tadie perceptively indicates that both Tolkien and Levinas are inheritors, through their respective Catholic and Jewish communities, of the biblical prophetic tradition, and it is therefore not, perhaps, surprising that the themes of attention to, and care for, the Other as the route towards release from such bondage may be traced as much within Tolkienian narratives as within Levinasian discourse. Tadie suggests, for example, that Gandalf's unexpected eruption into Bilbo's comfortable and contented life within the Shire, and his 'annunciation' of the hobbit's future mission, are accompanied precisely by the sense of shock, yet also of recognition, which characterizes the call of the Other to the Self. Initial demurral is followed by obedient response, as Bilbo responds to the call to abandon his familiar life *chez soi* and embarks, unprepared, upon 'the Quest' – a hazardous adventure, which will lead, *inter alia*, to the development of personal qualities and a self-transcendence of which he could not have imagined himself capable. Such moral growth is not confined to Bilbo. In the concluding section of this essay, Tadie highlights the Levinasian resonances which may be discerned in Gandalf's thoughtful reply to Gimli the dwarf in relation to the part which he, Gandalf, had played in instigating the Quest:

I do not know the answer. For I have changed since those days [...] In those days I should have answered you with words like those I used with Frodo [...] [that] Bilbo was meant to find the Ring [...] And I was *meant* to guide you both [i.e. Frodo and Bilbo].²

More humble now with regard to his own role in the Quest, Gandalf, like Bilbo, has needed to be released from a complacent and over-confident 'usurpation' of the world. In Levinasian terms, he has been challenged by the epiphany of the face-to-face as experienced through his deeper encounters with the 'otherness' of others, including hobbits and dwarves, and has grown as a result. Levinas has been criticized by some for the anthropocentrism (and, indeed, androcentrism) of his

¹ See P.M. Candler, Jr, 'Tolkien or Nietzsche; Philology and Nihilism', Ralph C. Wood (ed.), *Tolkien among the Moderns* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), p.95.

² J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Annotated Hobbit*, adapted by D.A. Anderson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002), p.369, cited in J. Tadie, '"That the World Not be Usurped"', p.238.

discourse;³ this 'dialogue' between his thought and that of Tolkien therefore yields particularly illuminating insights, since the concept of 'otherness' is extended, in Tolkien, to non-human, albeit fictional, beings.

Tadie's essay also sheds light upon the dialectic between what Iris Murdoch would have termed 'the Nice' and 'the Good' – that is, the ethical imperative to abandon, if required, the broader and apparently safer path of comfort and familiarity in order to pass through the 'strait gate' of true virtue. It is therefore to the essay by Moore that we must now turn since this piece, in investigating the various categories and meanings of fantasy, also touches upon precisely the distinction between 'niceness' and 'goodness', which is inherent in much of Murdoch's fiction, as well as her philosophy.

As Moore indicates, Murdoch was an admirer of Tolkien's work, and the two writers were friends, although Murdoch and John Bayley were closer contemporaries of Tolkien's son, Christopher. Murdoch is known particularly for her objection to certain types of fantasy which in her view offered a 'false consolation', and her novels are replete with characters whose egotistical, self-deceiving fantasizing (that of Charles Arrowby in *The Sea, The Sea* being a prime example) must be 'punished' or, to a greater or lesser extent, overcome. Her admiration for Tolkien's 'faerie' universe could, therefore, seem surprising, until one begins, as Moore so cogently points out, to distinguish between the various forms and purposes of fantasy. Against Tolkien's own insistence to the contrary, Murdoch suggested that his works should be categorized as exemplars of 'imagination' rather than 'fantasy', since it was the former, rather than the latter, which constituted 'a kind of freedom, a renewed ability to perceive and express the truth'.⁴

Whether one agrees or not with such a hard and fast distinction between imagination and fantasy, it is clear that this enabled Murdoch to acknowledge, within the Tolkienian narratives, the serious moral endeavour which forms the background to the Quest undertaken by his range of fictional creatures. Hobbits such as Bilbo and Frodo are consistently presented with hard choices and learn through these to distinguish between pleasant and comforting 'niceness', and the demands of true virtue or 'goodness'. Murdoch's own novels (not least that which she entitled *The Nice and the Good*) contain many similar examples, in which certain characters are enabled to glimpse the vacuity of a merely peaceful, self-pleasing existence and, in some cases, decide to pursue a more virtuous and ultimately more fulfilling path. The latter eschew, in other words, the 'false consolation' which arises from egotistical day-dreaming and are rewarded with what Moore terms the 'austere' or more authentic consolation which finds its fulfilment in non-possessive love and the capacity to 'see' the truth: 'It is in the capacity to love, that is to see, that the liberation of the soul from fantasy consists.'⁵

Whereas, within the Tolkienian world, such liberation tends to be constitutive of, and integral to, eucatastrophe (the 'happy ending' which is expected within the genre of faerie story-telling), the outcomes for Murdochian characters are often less clear. Her vision, which is less overtly theological than that of Tolkien, is perhaps commensurately more austere in this respect – the Good must be embraced for its own sake, without hope of extrinsic reward – although there may be unexpected moments of grace in which characters find themselves 'surprised by joy'.⁶ A telling instance occurs in *The Sea, The Sea*, when Charles Arrowby, who is preparing to abandon his self-imposed retreat at

³ See J. Llewelyn, 'Am I Obsessed by Bobby? (Humanism of the Other Animal)' in R. Bernasconi and S. Critchley (eds.), *Re-reading Levinas* (London: Athlone, 1991), pp.234-245.

⁴ Iris Murdoch, 'Art is the Imitation of Nature' in *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, Peter Conradi (ed.), (New York: Penguin, 1999), p.255, cited in Moore, 'The Consolations of Fantasy', p.203.

⁵ Iris Murdoch, 'On "God" and "Good"' in *The Sovereignty of Good*, (London: Routledge, 1970), p.65, cited in Moore, 'The Consolations of Fantasy', p.213.

⁶ William Wordsworth, 'Surprised by Joy' (1815), Miscellaneous Sonnets, Sonnet XXVII, *Wordsworth Poetical Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), p.204: see also, C.S Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (San Diego, New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1955).

Shruff End, spends a night by the sea-shore and is able at last to 'see' the 'otherness' and beauty of the created order:

I woke up and it was dawn. The billion billion stars had gone and the sky was a bland misty very light blue, a huge uniform over-arching cool yet muted brightness, the sun not yet risen [...] Then I saw below me, their wet doggy faces looking curiously upward, four seals, swimming so close to the rock that I could almost have touched them [...] And as I watched their play I could not doubt that they were beneficent beings come to visit me and bless me.⁷

In conclusion, then, this fine collection of essays contains much to enjoy, as well as to ponder. It will be appreciated by those who are already cognisant of the theological, philosophical and ethical depths inherent within Tolkien's fictional world, but may also help persuade those who have been less certain of its merit to strike up, or renew, an acquaintance with Bilbo, Frodo, Gandalf and their companions. Readers of this journal will doubtless find the piece by Moore of especial interest, but will, perhaps, be intrigued, in addition, to see the way in which several typically Murdochian themes are embedded within the Tolkienian narratives. Above all, however, this is an important book, not only because it so persuasively sets Tolkien 'among the moderns' (and, indeed, to a certain extent among the postmoderns) and their concerns, but also because it invites us to engage once more in those challenges – the call to respond to the ethical imperative; the recognition of the demands of 'the Good' over 'the Nice'; the need for attention to the Other, including the non-human Other – with which Tolkien himself, as well as Murdoch and each of the interlocutors included within this volume, so profoundly grappled.

⁷ Iris Murdoch, *The Sea, The Sea* (1978), (London: Vintage Classics, 1999), pp.475-476.

On Being President of the Iris Murdoch Society of Japan, With a Report of the 2016 Conference

It is with some quiet pride that I introduce myself these days as President incumbent of the Iris Murdoch Society of Japan (currently in its 19th year, with this my second year at its helm). What follows is a brief outline of how I came to know Murdoch's work, along with a report of the most recent conference held here in Japan.

Poetry (an oeuvre for which Murdoch, though she dabbled elegantly in it, is *least* well known), and not the novel, has long been my chosen lamp and lantern. In 1984, at Edinburgh University, in my final undergraduate year, I took a course in 'Twentieth Century Literature' (mainly because I wished to read Eliot and Larkin more closely) of which a single Murdoch novel (*Under the Net*) was an 'optional' item on a depressingly long reading list. I did not read it. A fellow student (it might well have been my good friend Ian Rankin, who, years later, would become an award-winning crime writer) told me Murdoch was 'middle class people sitting around dinner tables talking about Plato'. This opinion was seconded by others I knew, including a quiet man who sporadically turned up and slept on the couch in an apartment I shared with five other students. His name was Irvine Welsh. Irvine also remains my friend, and I have just about convinced him (and Ian) to revise their views of Murdoch.

Having completed my PhD, I arrived in Japan in 1992 to work as Foreign Professor in the Faculty of Letters at Okayama University, and found myself immediately under the caring, protective wing of my great mentor-friend and our society's figurehead and mainstay, Professor Yozo Muroya, Japan's rightly most-respected Murdochian. He set to work on me immediately: less than 6 months after arrival I had fallen in love not only with Japan, but also with Murdoch's beautifully written, moving, sharply-observed fictions and her agile philosophy. In the autumn of that same year, Murdoch and her husband John Bayley came to Japan on a British Council visit. It was to be her last trip to Japan, a country she clearly adored. Muroya and I chaperoned the couple in Okayama and Kyoto. They were absolutely charming, much more interested in quizzing me about my own writing than answering my inane garbled questions about theirs.

Yozo Muroya and I went on to edit and publish, with her gracious approval, the only available international collection of Murdoch's own (rather good) *Poems*, and a companion selection of her *Occasional Essays*. I subsequently met Iris and John on a couple of occasions in Oxford, and I would like to think that we built a rapport and even became friends. They were special people: inimitable originals, unique.

Our 18th annual one-day conference was held on 22 October 2016 in the picturesque surroundings of Shikoku Gakuin University. Not specifically themed beyond a broad-church Murdochian focus, it nonetheless soon became clear that this year's event was going to assume a philosophical focus. Committee business briskly completed, academic proceedings proper were opened by Kyoto Bunkyo University's Yasushi Nakakubo, who gave us 'Reading *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*: Murdoch's Melodrama', an inventive, sensitive analysis of Murdoch's approach to characterisation,

with emphasis on psychoanalytic implications of ‘melodrama’ from a theoretical perspective.¹ Keiko Tawa’s eclectic paper on ‘Murdoch’s Concept of Goodness and Japanese Philosophy’ revealed the crucial impact of Kitaro Nishida’s revolutionary synthesis of Zen and western thought on Murdoch’s work, an aspect artfully emblemized and attractively embodied by Dora in *The Bell*.

Fiona Tomkinson joined us from Yeditepe University in Turkey to share her original and perceptive take on ‘*Bruno’s Dream: Murdoch’s Intertextual Web*’. This was an ambitious, revealing, and well-researched paper that took in Bennett’s *Clayhanger* and the work of Italian philosopher Giordano Bruno, as well as making fruitful reference to Blake’s ‘The Fly’.

Junko Ono, who formerly taught at Okayama University, recently audited some of Anne Rowe’s classes at Kingston University. Her presentation, ‘The Power of Love in *The Black Prince*’, was both enlightening and entertaining, a stimulating mixture of original critical insight upon ‘a tale of tragic love which paints the death of ego’, mixed with some charming personal reflection. Ono’s memorable presentation provoked lively discussion of one of Murdoch’s most popular works here in Japan.

It is for others to declare any merits of my own paper, ‘Kestrels and Storks: A Defense of Murdoch’s “Self-Deluding” Faith in the Sovereignty of Good’, in which, refuting specific criticisms of Murdoch made by John Carey, I examined the ‘sovereignty of good’ as a Murdochian concept, as well as discussing her important book of the same name. Responding to Kieran Setiya’s suggestion that ‘her ideas must be reframed as interventions in existing disputes [...] and her conclusions made clear’, I argued for a critical reappraisal of Murdoch’s unpretentious, Zen-inspired, humanistic philosophical writings.

Closing the conference, our Invited Speaker was Kenzo Hamano of Kwansei Gakuin University, an eminent respected thinker in moral and political philosophy. His inspiring paper was a highlight. ‘Murdoch’s Moral Realism: Reminding the Canary of Its Forgotten Song’ was his title. Saijo Yaso’s beautiful ballad, ‘The Canary That Forgot Its Song’, is often interpreted in Japan as a Christian rally to perseverance (or latterly a call for reclamation of national pride): Hamano used its broader thematic suggestion of spiritual rejuvenation deftly to emphasize the real substance of Murdoch’s philosophy as well as its pluralistic abstract implications.

At the post-conference dinner, I found myself content and concluding that, however life’s roads may have brought me to this place, I do not feel myself to be an impostor here. I am still a ‘poetry person’, but that doesn’t prevent me enjoying Murdoch, for (among so many other elements of note) there is a breathtaking undertow of poeticism in all Murdoch’s prose: in the maxims, aphorisms, wit, rhythms, and images that uplift her narratives and make her sentences bristle and ripple and flow with a compelling energy and a beautiful ease. And Murdoch knew it. A long time ago, at a garden party at the home of a mutual friend and Brontë scholar Professor Christopher Heywood, I told her that I found her novel *The Sea, The Sea* heavily symbolic. She replied with a dissembling charm as cutting as it was graceful that, ‘Well, of course it is. All my writing is symbolic!’ So I *do* feel at home here. I have loved being a member of this worthy and convivial society since its inception in 1999.

Our warmest thanks to Professor Wendy Jones-Nakanishi of Shikoku Gakuin University, who allowed us to hold the conference on her institution’s campus, and worked tirelessly to ensure that the conference day was a smooth success from start to finish.

¹ The original Japanese paper titles are rendered (loosely, by myself, with apologies to speakers) in English throughout.

Symposium and Launch of the Iris Murdoch Research Centre at the University of Chichester, 10 October 2016

On the 10th of October last year, seventy Murdoch enthusiasts walked beneath the gaze of St. Hilda. The stained-glass depiction of this seventh century abbess, famed for her wisdom and her teaching, stands together with other 'academic' female saints along the corridor towards Cloisters, one of the oldest parts of the University of Chichester. Anyone familiar with the fiction of Iris Murdoch may feel that this was an apt way to begin the launch of the new Iris Murdoch Research Centre at the University of Chichester. Opened with a warm welcome from the Head of the Department of English and Creative Writing, Simon Barker, a half-day symposium of varied and engaging papers marked this exciting new stage of Murdoch studies.

Frances White, newly appointed as Visiting Research Fellow at Chichester and Deputy Director of the Centre, 'took stock' of the current situation in Murdoch studies, reflecting proudly on all that has been achieved so far, and speculating with excitement about the bright future of the new centre. Gillian Dooley (Flinders University, Australia) gave a paper entitled 'Iris Murdoch, Australia and me: on being the only Murdochian in the village' which emphasised this sense of the burgeoning international community as she reflected on her own journey, being the only Murdochian scholar of note in Australia. This was followed by Avril Horner and Anne Rowe (Kingston University) who discussed their recently published *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995*. They built on Frances's sense of progression and infused the event with an air not so much of 'passing the baton' but of a joining of forces, a growth in relations and enthusiasm. Staff and students of the University who attended the event were joined by many other delegates and the audience was as colourful and varied as any collection of Murdochian characters.

The symposium was followed by the launch event itself. Clive Behagg, the Vice-Chancellor, spoke proudly of the department, its new developments, and his colleagues. He then passed over to Miles Leeson, Director of the new Centre, who spoke of what Murdoch studies and the Iris Murdoch Society can look forward to in future. His short talk focused on his recent visit to Murdoch's former home in North Oxford. Audi Bayley invited Miles and Anne Rowe to Charlbury Road for the purpose of gathering together any overlooked items that should be placed within the archive at Kingston. Katie Giles details these in her report in this issue but the highlights included manuscripts of *The Book and the Brotherhood* and the 'Gifford Lectures' along with a trunk full of Iris Murdoch's personal items, such as holiday photos and pieces of professional photography, letters from the 1950s written and sent by Iris but returned to her possession, and artworks by herself and Harry Weinberger. Miles's illustrated talk was very well received and the ensuing conversation during the wine reception was animated and vibrant.

The months since the launch of the Centre have seen a range of events taking place at Chichester, along with organised visits to the archive in Kingston for Chichester students. The centre now has two PhD students with others expressing interest in joining in the next academic year. It is clear that this new partnership between Kingston and Chichester will bear much fruit.

‘The concept of attention in Simone Weil and Iris Murdoch’,
Study Day at Queen Mary University of London, 18 February 2017

Simone Weil’s influence upon the work of Iris Murdoch, as well as Murdoch’s development of Weil’s concept of attention, was investigated at this Study Day, hosted by Queen Mary University of London (QMUL). Proving to be an informal and informative day, the well-organised event invited and provoked much discussion and healthy feedback amongst both speakers and delegates. Lucy Bolton (QMUL) set the tone for the day with an invigorating introduction outlining the themes explored within the wide selection of papers, and reiterated the impact both Murdoch and Weil had on 20th century thought.

Contributions ranged across cinema, literature, and philosophy, and the emphasis on multidisciplinary approaches provided a refreshing and well-constructed selection of papers. Sabina Lovibond (Worcester College, Oxford) delivered the keynote paper, ‘The Varieties of Attention’, in which she looked at the comparative themes of attention within the written works of both Murdoch and Weil. Lovibond examined the impersonal nature of true Weilian attention. She suggested that although attention/attentiveness to the other is an understanding shared by both Murdoch and Weil, in order to fully comprehend Weil’s theory and Murdoch’s subsequent writings one must reflect upon the pleasures and perils of working on both novels and prayers as texts of moral philosophical thinking.

Other papers and presentations included ‘Attention and Apophasis in the work of Simone Weil’ by Martha Cass (independent scholar), ‘Attention, Affirmation, Temporality’ by Stuart Jesson (York St John University), ‘From Moral Character to Loving Attention: Or Iris Murdoch and Simone Weil on Their Way Out of the Cave’ by Konrad Banicki (Jagiellonian University in Krakow), ‘A New Vocabulary of Attention: Visual Metaphors in Murdoch’s Neo-theology’ by Rebecca Moden (Kingston University), ‘Weil and the Visual’ by Anat Pick (QMUL), and ‘Attention as Moral Modelling in Iris Murdoch’s Visual Ethics’ by Becca Rothfield (Harvard University). The papers concerning Murdoch’s philosophy suggested that Murdoch was inspired by Weil in her view of morality as being a matter of attention and not of will, correlating with Murdoch’s critique of structuralism in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*.

The expansive range of papers helped to form a generous picture of the relevance of both thinkers and writers. Frances White (University of Chichester and Kingston University) enlightened the audience with an informative talk on the Weil-related materials in the Iris Murdoch Archive at Kingston University, and how they enhance our understanding of Murdoch’s own work. The day concluded with a wine reception providing a perfect opportunity to engage further with the topics raised.

Thanks are due to Lucy Bolton and Anat Pick of Queen Mary University of London for organising the event. The major success of the study day was to open new avenues for exploration and it is clear that we are only at the beginning of unpicking the intellectual relationship between Murdoch and Weil’s work.

Conference report on 'The Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture since 1900', University of Louisville, Kentucky, 23-25 February 2017

The 45th Annual Conference at the University of Louisville included 85 panels on a wide range of literary and cultural studies including American and English literature and poetry, African American and Caribbean poetry and fiction, Hispanic and Latin American studies, Jewish literature, literary lives, gender and race, film, music, television and media. The keynote address by Jack Halberstam, Professor of English and Gender Studies at Columbia University, 'Sex, Death and Falconry', discussed the need for a new term for the many varieties of gender and sexuality recognised in an age where the old dichotomy of 'homo' and 'hetero' no longer seemed adequate. There were panels and papers on English authors, including panels organised by the Lawrence Durrell Society, The T.S. Eliot Society and the Iris Murdoch Society.

The Iris Murdoch panel, which for many years had been chaired by Professor Barbara Stevens Heusel, was organised and chaired by Professor J. Robert Baker, Director of the Honors Program at Fairmont State University and secretary of the Iris Murdoch Society.

Christopher Boddington's opening paper, 'Memorialisation of "Precious Dead" in Iris Murdoch's novels' analysed the different ways in which Murdoch had commemorated particular friends in her novels. It distinguished the tributes paid to such friends as Erik Christiansen in *The Message to the Planet*, and Yorick Smythies in *Under the Net* where her friends could be seen providing a template for characters created in her novels, from the memorialisations of those most precious to her after their deaths. The latter included Smythies again in *The Philosopher's Pupil*, Franz Baermann Steiner in *Under the Net* and Steiner and Frank Thompson in *The Nice and the Good* and *The Sea, The Sea*, where the author's use of coded and concealed references was designed to create memorials which may have been intended to be recognisable by only her closest circle, or, indeed, by those who were themselves the subjects of the memorials.

Robert Baker's paper, "Incompetently Organised"; Iris Murdoch's Male Homosexual as metaphor', explored Murdoch's enigmatic identification with the male homosexual. He discussed how the gay men in her earlier novels struggled to express desires but experienced frustration when the objects of their desires were under age and unavailable, taking Michael Meade in *The Bell* and Cato Forbes in *Henry and Cato* as examples. He showed how Murdoch's later gay characters, such as Simon Foster in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* and Bellamy James in *The Green Knight*, experience the same physical anguish and moral confusion as the straight couple with whom they interact. He suggested that the confusions and clumsiness of her gay characters reflected her own complicated feelings and experiences with men and women, and that, just as Murdoch struggled to express feelings that had no sanction, her gay male characters wrestled with affections and desires that appeared, from several perspectives, to be incompetently organised.

‘Women in Parenthesis: Anscombe, Midgley, Murdoch and Foot’, Study Day,
St Aidan’s College, Durham University, 18 March 2017:
Musings from a participant

The *In Parenthesis* workshop held at Durham University brought together around thirty scholars to reflect on ‘the lives, work, and friendships’ of Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Mary Midgley and Iris Murdoch (and in discussion Mary Warnock was often added to these four). These female philosophers became friends when studying philosophy in Oxford during the Second World War and then went on to write and think and teach philosophy: Anscombe in Cambridge and Oxford, Foot in Oxford, Midgley in Newcastle, Murdoch in Oxford, retiring early, and Mary Warnock in Oxford and Cambridge.

In Parenthesis is an ambitious project initiated by Rachael Wiseman (Durham University), Clare MacCumhaill (Durham University), Luna Dolezal (University of Exeter) and Liza Thompson (Bloomsbury).¹ It aims to reconstruct the historical narrative that allowed the ‘wartime group’ to flourish as philosophers and to investigate whether their contribution to philosophy is in any sense distinctive in its method, interests or practice. The open and explorative nature of the project was evident at the workshop. Participants were asked for very short contributions, which allowed for ideas to be shared and explored in a way that reminded me of Murdoch’s famous ‘huge hall of reflection full of light and space and fresh air, in which ideas and intuitions can be unsystematically nurtured’.² In the spirit of this workshop I continue here in a more musing tone, rather than reporting who said what.

On reflection, it seems remarkable that it has taken so long for a project like *In Parenthesis* to develop. Of course, it did not help that these women were reluctant to consider gender in relation to their work. Midgley and Warnock take up the issue only later in life, in their respective biographies, *The Owl of Minerva* and *A Memoir: People and Places*.³ When Murdoch was once asked about gender in relation to her novels, she replied that ‘the subject bores me in a way [...] I have never felt picked out in an intellectual sense because I am a woman; these distinctions are not made at Oxford’.⁴ The fact that the project is overdue is perhaps indicative of the issue considered. The topic can be ‘boring’ or, as Simone de Beauvoir argued ‘irritating’.⁵

Yet, there was little of irritation or boredom in the workshop. On the contrary, the mood was distinctly celebratory. The participants in the workshop enjoyed the privilege of Mary Midgley’s presence – as well as that of her sons and other family. Midgley could not have been more generous in her contribution. She attended Friday’s screening of an hour-long film, featuring interviews with her and Warnock as well as (for me some new) interviews with Murdoch. She was also there for most of the workshop on Saturday, where she expressed her delight at the interest in the wartime group

¹ *In Parenthesis*: <https://womeninparenthesis.wordpress.com> [accessed 17-6-17].

² Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992), (London: Penguin, 1993), p.422.

³ Mary Midgley, *The Owl of Minerva* (London: Routledge, 2005); Mary Warnock, *A Memoir: People and Places* (London: Duckworth, 2000).

⁴ Gillian Dooley (ed.), *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction: Conversations with Iris Murdoch*, (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), p.32.

⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Vintage, 1997), p.13.

and presented the historical reality as well as sharp, insightful and often humorous commentary on philosophy and philosophers present and past.

Why then did these women succeed in a discipline that is still not overly welcoming to women or people from diverse backgrounds? In a column in *The Guardian* some years ago, Jonathan Wolff wondered why these women seemed to be the exception to the rule.⁶ In her characteristic witty style, Midgley responded a few days later:

As a survivor from the wartime group, I can only say: sorry, but the reason [why this was the golden age of female philosophy] was indeed that there were fewer men about. The trouble is not, of course, men as such – men have done good enough philosophy in the past – what is wrong is a particular style of philosophising that results from encouraging a lot of clever young men to compete in winning arguments [...] By contrast, in those wartime classes – which were small – men (conscientious objectors etc.) were present as well as women but they weren't keen on arguing. It is clear that we all were more interested in understanding this deeply puzzling world than in putting each other down.⁷

At first glance, Midgley's comments suggest that in a way nothing special needs to be done to allow women to succeed in philosophy. Opportunity alone suffices, even when, as in this case, brought about by extreme circumstances.

Yet, things may not be that easy. These women were exceptional. Other women did not succeed and it was important to hear one such story during the day. Women were not expected to go on working and they were not encouraged to do so. The workshop also made it clear that Anscombe, Foot, Midgley, Murdoch and later Warnock were supported by their close friendship. They discussed philosophy and joined forces in their attempt to offer an alternative to logical positivism. They shared, as one of the participants noted, a middle-class background and self-confidence that came with it. They had in Donald McKinnon a very supportive tutor, of whom it has been suggested that his contribution is found in the work of his students. The women were given the time to think in a way that, as Midgley wondered, may not be available for first year students now.

The women of course encountered the prejudices that persist until today. A very insightful example came from Anscombe's Newnham applications, which showed her described in some of the clichés still attributed to women ('hardworking' etc.). Yet, having been rejected for the scholarship the first time, Anscombe resubmitted a year later, ending with the frank 'As for conclusions, I do not know at all'. When Foot's mother was concerned that her daughter would never marry, she was reassured that her daughter did not *look* studious.

The day did not limit itself to these practical concerns. As the workshop proceeded diverse ways of doing philosophy were not just discussed, but also tried. I have already mentioned the open atmosphere in the discussions. I was also struck, when watching the various interviews with Murdoch on Friday, by her very personal engagement with thinkers and thoughts. Where her interviewers would pontificate in rather abstract manner (to which Murdoch attended politely), Murdoch felt no qualm in expressing her likes and dislikes.

This brings me back to Midgley's tongue-in-cheek suggestion that 'we all were more interested in understanding this deeply puzzling world' and it may be one indication of the distinctive

⁶ Jonathan Wolff, 'How can we end the male domination of philosophy?', *The Guardian* 26 November 2013 <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/nov/26/modern-philosophy-sexism-needs-more-women> [accessed 17-6-17].

⁷ Mary Midgley, 'The golden age of female philosophy'. *The Guardian* 28 November 2013 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/28/golden-age-female-philosophy-mary-midgley> [accessed 17-6-17].

contribution these philosophers made to the discipline. As outsiders and insiders at the same time, through friendship, support from teachers and time to think, as well as sheer brilliance and persistence, these women were able to stay with this initial desire to understand 'this deeply puzzling world'. This is not easy. As Anscombe taught one of the participants, philosophy is difficult in a way in which being clever does not help. The day provided ample evidence that this distinctive contribution is worth pursuing further. Thanks to the excellent organisation of the *In Parenthesis* researchers, these ideas did not remain abstract but became alive. It was very clear that *In Parenthesis* is an important project on which I hope to report again soon.

Undervalued British Women Writers 1930-1960: 'Influences and Connectivity' Conference, University of Chichester, 27 May 2017

The second Undervalued British Women Writers Conference, and first to be held at the University of Chichester, proved an informative, stimulating and much required assessment of female literature between the period of 1930-1960, verifying that interrogating and celebrating such a substantial yet partly forgotten body of work is of crucial academic value and interest.¹ The enthusiastic driving force of Chichester undergraduate Dave Clayton, under the guidance of Dr Miles Leeson, ensured not only that the day went ahead but also that a wide range of speakers from various locations were warmly welcomed to Chichester. Delegates from England, Scotland, Hungary, Ireland and Spain arrived for a day of discussion and examination of a rich selection of less commemorated British women authors, and, formally welcomed by Chichester's Deputy Vice Chancellor, Catherine Harper, were promised a powerful quality of conversation that did not fail to deliver.

The broad range of authors and topics on offer meant that delegates were spoilt for choice in selecting panels. Authors discussed covered a wide breadth including Brigid Brophy, Ivy Compton-Burnett, Barbara Comyns, E.M. Delafield, Monica Dickens, Vera Brittain, Eve Garnett, Winifred Holtby, Storm Jameson, Anna Kavan, Marghanita Laski, Penelope Mortimer, Iris Murdoch, Noel Streatfield, Muriel Spark, Jan Struther, and Elizabeth Taylor. The following report cannot therefore comment on all sessions, but will, however, provide a taste of what one individual delegate was able to attend and will evidence the wide range of topics available within the selected panels.

The morning sessions saw a first panel dedicated to Murdoch and Brophy. Miles Leeson called for a need to look beyond familiar influences on Brophy and cast attention towards Rabelais' fiction, Bakhtin's theory and the opulent use of carnivalesque and the grotesque within *The Snow Ball*, *Flesh* and *In Transit*, whilst Pamela Osborn's and Frances White's papers concentrated on the dialogues of jealousy, sexual freedom, non-monogamy and the crystallography of eroticism between Murdoch and Brophy within surviving letters from the former to the latter, items from the Iris Murdoch archive and selected works of Brophy's fiction. A second panel dedicated solely to Murdoch opened with Chichester undergraduate Shauna Pitt's highly original paper on Tennyson's influence on Murdoch, namely in *The Bell*, *The Unicorn* and *The Time of the Angels*. Parallels of liminality, reflection and water imagery were drawn to form a fascinating paper that Pitt asserted can only encourage further connections between Murdoch and other poets. Rebecca Moden provided delegates with an insightful investigation into Murdoch's use of colour in *The Green Knight* and *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* to express what is unable to be communicated in language, drawing analogies between Murdoch's work and her influences within the art world, whilst Dávid Sándor Szőke demonstrated how the search for identity in the post-war worlds of Murdoch's *Under the Net* and Monica Dickens's *The Happy Prisoner* represent a new form of masculinity, devoid of traditional ideals.

Kate Levey gave a warmly moving first keynote paper entitled 'Brigid Brophy, My Mother', in which family anecdotes such as childhood mishaps were shared as Brophy was remembered fondly, yet honestly, by her daughter, and after the lunch break Avril Horner enthralled delegates with her

¹ The first Undervalued British Women Writers Conference was held at the University of Hull, 24th June 2016.

keynote paper, 'Barbara Comyns', in which the author's personal and professional life was discussed with much stimulus and care.

The afternoon session included a panel devoted to Ivy Compton-Burnett, E.M. Delafield and Muriel Spark. Julia Courtney began with a paper assessing the connections between Compton-Burnett and Delafield with regard to their use of comedy as a means of endurance and survival for characters within the domestic realm, while Nick Turner's reassessment of Compton-Burnett asked the question of why her literary achievement has become neglected. Kym Bridle concluded the session with a review of Spark's use of the letter to subvert realist form using postmodern stylistics of temporal narrative disruption.

The day's final keynote event was dedicated to Maureen Duffy as the author, poet, dramatist and activist sat in conversation with her biographer Jill Longmate. Duffy discussed her childhood fascination with writing, her friendship with Brophy, their activism and issues of sexuality with a refreshing frankness, providing a delightful ending to a thought-provoking and enthusing day which brought fellow delegates together in celebration of an eclectic selection of unsung British women writers.

Murdoch as Touchstone: A survey of recent journal articles

‘And so back to the cosmos which claims our attention.’¹

Murdoch’s prescience is augmenting her reputation as a thinker ahead of her time. Her philosophical and fictional entreaties for attention to be directed away from the self and outwards at the contingent reality of the world are continuing to be taken up by people from all disciplines who are attempting to make sense of the twenty-first century. Several significant studies of Murdoch are due to be published in time for Murdoch’s centenary in 2019 and, perhaps as a result of this, she has not featured significantly in any book publications in the year since the last roundup. Engagements with her work in journal articles, however, have continued. Murdoch’s picture of inner life and the portrait of ‘M and D’ in *The Sovereignty of Good* is endorsed as an ‘exemplary thought experiment’ by Charles Taliaferro and Elliot Knuths in ‘Thought Experiments in the Philosophy of Religion: The Virtues of Phenomenological Realism and Values’.² Margaret Guise calls for a re-reading of Murdoch’s novels in conjunction with the group of fourth-century bishops known as the ‘Cappadocian Fathers’ to reveal a ‘complex articulation between passion and passionlessness’ in her work.³ Carla de Petris turns to Murdoch’s Irish identity to make a comparison with the celebrated Irish writer Jennifer Johnston.⁴ Finally, Andrew Davison draws on Murdoch’s conception of the difference between imagination and fantasy in his article “‘Not to escape the world but to join it’: responding to climate change with imagination not fantasy’, which contends that relating to the world through imaginative evaluation, rather than wish-fulfilling fantasy, is necessary in order to break the cycle of accelerating production and consumption.⁵

¹ Avril Horner and Anne Rowe (eds.), *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2015), p.77.

² Charles Taliaferro and Elliot Knuths, ‘Thought Experiments in the Philosophy of Religion: The Virtues of Phenomenological Realism and Values’, *Open Theology*, 2, no. 3 (Spring 2017), pp.167-274, (p.167).

³ Margaret Guise, “‘A Passion for Passionlessness’: the Cappadocian Fathers and Iris Murdoch on Apatheia as a Spiritual Ideal”, *Literature and Theology*, (Spring 2017), pp.1-12 (p.12).

⁴ Carla de Petris, “‘Who am I? Well I’m Irish anyway, that’s something.’ Iris Murdoch and Ireland”, *A Journal of Irish Studies*, 6, (2016), pp.259-27.

⁵ Andrew Davison, “‘Not to Escape the World but to Join It’: Responding to Climate Change with Imagination Not Fantasy”, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences*, 375 (2017), pp.1-13.

Update from the Archives 2017

It has been just under a year since our last update for the *Iris Murdoch Review*. This year has once again been a very busy one for us, with work taking place on additions to the Iris Murdoch Collections here.

The most exciting addition to the Archive was a body of material formerly owned by Iris Murdoch, including Murdoch's journals. These fourteen volumes, as well as serving as diaries, were also notebooks with Murdoch's thoughts on philosophy and ideas for novels and poems, and as such offer a wealth of material to Murdoch scholars interested in all aspects of Murdoch's life and work. Alongside these were: several notebooks and folders of original poems by Murdoch, the vast majority of which are previously unpublished; planning notebooks for *Jackson's Dilemma* and *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*; and a vast array of loose documents including letters Murdoch wrote to Patrick O'Regan, brief writings by Murdoch, and photographs. There are also artworks and objects from Murdoch's study at Charlbury Road. Altogether this is a body of material that should be of great interest to Murdoch scholars around the globe. We are immensely grateful to Audi Bayley for her generosity in presenting this material to the Archives. Catalogue entries for this material, and the majority of our other Iris Murdoch related Collections, can be found on the Archives Catalogue at <http://adlib.kingston.ac.uk>.

Other additions to the Murdoch Collections here since our last update include:

- A range of documents on Iris Murdoch, including material for a planned Festschrift of Murdoch's life. Kindly presented by Anne Rowe.
- Two books formerly owned by Iris Murdoch: Leon Bloy, *La Femme Pauvre* (Paris, 1937) and Alexander Gray, *The Socialist Tradition* (London, 1947). Murdoch has noted the dates she received the books inside the front cover. Kindly presented by Miles Leeson.
- Copy of R. Palme Dutt, *India Today* (London, 1940) previously owned by Iris Murdoch. Murdoch has written 'Iris Murdoch, Manchester, Sept 1940' inside the front cover and has underlined or marked several passages in the text. Kindly presented by Miles Leeson.
- 16 letters from Iris Murdoch to publisher Rolando Pieracinni, regarding his publication of the book *Something Special* featuring Murdoch's poems. Purchased with the kind assistance of the Iris Murdoch Society.
- Several items including: an uncorrected Proof Copy of Iris Murdoch's novel *The Book and the Brotherhood*; a booklet entitled *Theology in Scotland Occasional Paper No 1* Apr 1995; 'Iris Murdoch's Giffords': *A Study of the 1982 Gifford Lectures* edited by R.A. Gillies; an original copy of *The Cherwell* magazine Vol LVI No 6 dated Week Ending 03 Jun 1939, including Iris Murdoch's piece 'The Irish – Are they Human?', and 6 original letters from Iris Murdoch to a bookseller regarding selling first editions from the 1980s, with a letter from the *Paris Review* to Iris Murdoch regarding an interview dated 14 Mar 1977 and a photograph of a book shop. Kindly presented by Miles Leeson.

We are very grateful to all of our Collection donors. We would like to especially thank Miles Leeson who has kindly sourced and presented many items connected to Iris Murdoch to the Archives.

This previous year has also been a busy one for visitors. Since our last article we have had 255 researchers using the Iris Murdoch Collections in the Archive, and have hosted 13 group visits. For these we have issued 717 items from the Collections, and we have also answered 471 enquiries.

Our researcher numbers include visits by our loyal body of transcribers, who have continued to work transcribing annotations from Murdoch's Oxford Library books. This has temporarily taken a pause while they focus their energies on transcribing Murdoch's journals and notebooks that have arrived this year, a huge task to undertake. We are extremely grateful to them for all their hard work and the help this will give Murdoch scholars for years to come.

Some of our other visits, including some group visits, have been made up of students travelling from the University of Chichester to see the records here. While the Archives themselves are remaining here at Kingston University, we will be closely working with the Iris Murdoch Research Centre at Chichester on projects relating to the records in the future.

Promotion of the Iris Murdoch Collections continues, with documents from the collections included in numerous group visits and tours. Items from the Iris Murdoch Collections also formed a key part of our 25 Objects for 25 Years series of blog posts which highlighted select items from across our collections, as part of a celebration of the 25th anniversary of Kingston becoming a University. If you missed the blog posts, or would like to refresh your memory, you can find them on the Archives blog at <http://blogs.kingston.ac.uk/asc>. The Archives blog is also where we post up details of new Collections, material newly catalogued, and any changes to the Archive's opening hours, so do make sure you visit regularly. The 25 objects, including the Murdoch related items, will also be a key display as part of the University's Civic Reception, and will be placed on display in our Archives Gallery this summer.

Behind the scenes, the Archives staff have also been working hard. Many of the Iris Murdoch related collections have now been repackaged into more suitable Archive quality packaging- this will help preserve the documents for years to come. Cataloguing work has been focused on listing the material presented by Audi Bayley; this is item listed and indexed to enable our researchers to find the material we need. We have also been working towards applying for Archive Service Accreditation. This is a nationally recognised scheme recognising excellence in Archive services, and providing a benchmark for further improvements in the future. We have been working on our application for some time now, and are thrilled to announce that our application was successful and that we are now an accredited Archives service. We have also begun work to prepare for the Archive's move to a new flagship building. This building is currently under construction with a planned opening date of 2019- we will update you more on this as time goes on.

Finally, please remember if you would like to visit us to view any of the items in the Archive you need to make an appointment at least 24 hours notice in advance. We are currently offering appointments on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays between 9 a.m. and 4.30 p.m. Appointments requests and any other enquiries relating to our collections can be sent to us at archives@kingston.ac.uk.

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