The Iris Murdoch Review

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The Iris Murdoch Society

University of Chichester, College Lane, Chichester, West Sussex
PO19 6PE

President: Anne Rowe
Secretary: Miles Leeson
Administrator: Heather Robbins

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 enquiry.

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Miles Leeson

As readers would expect, this year in Murdoch studies has been the busiest and most productive yet, and this success is reflected in the range of essays and the wealth of events reported here. With so many activities taking place during the centenary year, I am indebted to the editorial team, particularly Frances White and Lucy Oulton, without whom this issue would have been much the poorer. The essays in this edition are diverse and international with a strong focus on Murdoch's links with other writers; I am pleased then that our first piece is a previously unpublished essay by Murdoch herself.

It was a pleasure to be invited to Badminton School late last year to view their archive, one of the few not to have been visited by a Murdoch scholar. The essay 'Millionaires and Megaliths' by a young Iris (aged 17) is reproduced here for the first time since it was published in the school magazine in 1938. This is no run-of-the-mill field trip report but one of her first pieces of fiction, which would later inspire elements of *The Message to the Planet*. We are also pleased to be able to reproduce a woodcut created by Murdoch at the school.

The range of contributions that follow begins with Cheryl Bove, a founder member of the Iris Murdoch Society, who has written the history of how the *Iris Murdoch Review* emerged out of the *Iris Murdoch Newsletter*; and she includes details of how Murdoch studies have developed since the 1980s. The academic essays here all perceive Murdoch as a writer with strong affinities to a lineage of writers that stretches back to Shakespeare and Murasaki Shikibu, through to Sue Townsend and beyond. Rob Hardy sees Murdoch as being a shaman in the same way that Ted Hughes proposed that Shakespeare and T.S. Eliot were shamans in his book *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*. This important essay lends new weight to Murdoch as a central figure in literary history. Pamela Osborn's essay, by contrast, highlights the influence of Murdoch on Sue Townsend, who humorously records the young Adrian Mole attempting to read *The Black Prince* as a mark of his intellectual capacity. Frances White's work on theatricality in *The Green Knight* reads this novel as being infused with the magic of late-Shakespearean plays.

The character of Clement, she proposes, offers a self-reflexive commentary on Murdoch's view of her own role as a novelist.

Janfarie Skinner's essay draws intriguing comparisons between George Eliot and Murdoch and suggests that Murdoch's interest in intention and guilt was sparked at Oxford by her friend Elizabeth Anscombe's work, *Intention*. Fiona Tomkinson details how Murdoch's interest in Japanese culture extends into her fiction through intertextual references to indigenous myth and culture, finding its most important expression in the later novels. Chris Boddington discusses Murdoch's homosexual characters and places her fictional work in tandem with contemporary political thought to offer a compelling reading of Murdoch's thinking beyond the confines of her own time.

With so much occurring this year it is impossible to draw attention to the individual reviews of events, but we were delighted when the Royal Institute of Philosophy decided to focus their winter London Lecture Series on the quartet of Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Mary Midgley and Iris Murdoch. These talks were well attended and each of the Murdoch lectures is reviewed here. The lectures are also available to view via YouTube. As usual, the Research Centre at Chichester organised a range of events, my personal highlight being 'Iris Murdoch Twenty Years On' where over 40 participants discussed her legacy 20 years since her death.

Along with reporting the large number of Murdoch events in the past year, we also review a wide range of Murdoch-related publications – many published to coincide with her centenary. The most accessible for general readers is Anne Rowe's excellent *Iris Murdoch* in the *Writers and Their Work* Series from Liverpool University Press which covers Murdoch's entire life and works. Bran Nicol's review is explicit in highlighting how timely this work is. Gary Browning's monograph *Why Iris Murdoch Matters* has had much coverage in the press across the world and, similarly to Rowe's, covers all areas of Murdoch's writing life to propose that we need her work now more than ever. His excellent edited collection *Murdoch on Truth and Love* 'prepares scholars to go where that honey is, with increased agility and deepened love' which is true of both Browning's volumes. Chris Boddington's remarkable *Iris Murdoch's People A to Z* is a labour of love that, as Dooley says, is 'a huge contribution to Murdoch scholarship' taking in her novels, plays, and so much more. I was pleased to publish *Iris Murdoch: A Centenary Celebration* which brings together many essays collected by Peter J. Conradi 20 years ago, along with new remembrances from friends and associates. As we go to press, Conradi's memoir *Family Business* (Bridgend: Seren, 2019) has just been published. A full review will appear in next year's edition.

The editorial team were delighted when Dayna Miller was appointed to take over from Katie Giles in the Archive at Kingston, and Dayna's report this year covers only a fraction of the contribution she has made to Murdoch-related activities to date.

We are all grateful to her for assisting Frances White with the exhibition 'Iris Murdoch in Oxford' which will run over the conference period at Somerville College, Oxford. The administration and cataloguing of this exhibition are testimony to the shared love of the Iris Murdoch Archive Project itself, and we will carry a full review with pictures in the next issue of both the exhibition and the Centenary Conference.

Regular readers of the *Review* will notice some major changes to the size and design of this issue. As we celebrate 100 years of Murdoch's life and work, and ten years of the *Review*, the editorial team have decided to make changes that reflect current literary scholarship; we hope you like our new design. To this end we have also decided to set a word limit of 7–8000 words for all new submissions; this will bring the *Review* into line with other academic journals and, we hope, make publishing with us more attractive to scholars who may wish to share their research more widely. The *Review* will, of course, retain all its usual features and general readers will still find it accessible and readable. In addition I am pleased to include a woodcut image by Murdoch created at Badminton School in 1938, along with a poem by Kate White, inspired by Murdoch's *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*.

I am delighted that next year's review (which will focus on new and emerging scholars) will be guest-edited by two of my PhD students here at the Research Centre, Lucy Oulton and Rebecca Moden. The call-for-papers can be found at the back of this issue. It will be the first to implement the change to the longer essays.

As I write, the inaugural Iris Murdoch Summer School is taking place at the University of Chichester, and the Centenary Conference at St Anne's College, Oxford starts in just a week's time. With scholars and readers coming from across the world, from every continent save Antarctica, and with over 20 countries represented, the next 100 years of Murdoch scholarship has a firm foundation to build upon.

University of Chichester, June 2019

Millionaires and Megaliths

Iris Murdoch

We do not number many millionaires among our personal acquaintance, so it was with some curiosity that we awaited Mr Keiller, of marmalade fame, who was coming to show us round the excavations at Avebury. Having made his money on marmalade he spends it on archaeology. Would that all millionaires had as much sense, even if their tastes were different.

These particular excavations were of an Avenue and Circle of megaliths built by the Druids about 1900 BC. Many of the stones have been destroyed, but Mr Keiller and his young colleague, Mr Piggott, have been engaged in erecting all the existing stones in their right places. However, our thoughts were not historically inclined as we stood with the March wind in the Avenue awaiting our host and watching the black-faced lambs racing round and round the grotesque megaliths and playing king of the castle on a green hillock.

Soon a large green car drew up on the road and a tall gentleman, also arrayed in green and brandishing a long folding ruler, got out and greeted us. He began by telling us the history of the monument, and how, despite Charles II's interest in it, farmers had destroyed many of the stones in the early eighteenth century. The position of the existing stones was ascertained by the presences of the 'stone-holes' which were filled with a certain kind of sediment. Another factor which assisted the excavator was the accurate survey of the place made a few centuries ago by one Stokely, of whom Mr Keiller spoke with the warmest affection. As we walked down the Avenue our host told us the history of each megalith as we passed it. Each one had its own character and often its own name. Standing by each in turn, Mr Keiller caressed it, called it, 'this old fellow' or 'she', and told how difficult this one had been to erect, or how that one had been cracked in two and mended with special iron bars. Clearly every one of them was his personal friend.

The stones, he told us, were not 'unhewn blocks of sarsen', as so many accounts inaccurately described them, but had been carefully cut into one of two shapes, called A and B. The A stones were considerably taller than they were broad and had certain characteristic curves. The Bs were smaller, more diamond-shaped, and their salient features were a point on one side and a curve on the other, the point being invariably

higher than the curve. Mr Keiller had a theory of his own that the As represented a male figure – headless as in all primitive sculpture – and the Bs the lower part of a female figure. But whatever their explanation the shapes were very beautiful. 'Much finer', as Mr Keiller said with glowing eyes, 'than the stylised and decadent art of Stonehenge.'

As it neared the circle the Avenue curved abruptly – possibly in order to prevent the spirits of men buried in the circle from following anyone down the Avenue. We crossed the road to see the circle itself – or what was left of it. Originally it had consisted of a circular bank with a ditch inside it and megaliths standing all round the inner side of the ditch. Within this were two smaller circles of stones, one with a huge obelisk in its centre, the other with a 'cove' of three stones. Of this strange temple a certain number of megaliths remain, and very forlorn they looked standing here and there among the barns and corrugated iron sheds of the farm. Mr Keiller felt their desolation very deeply and talked with satisfaction of pulling down this building and removing that and cutting down this clump of trees. Eventually he hopes to remove completely the part of the village which lies within the circle and to change the course of the road where it trespasses on the monument. Then he will be able to achieve his purpose – to make the whole temple as like as possible to what it was in the days of the druids. Then he took us beyond the Circle to a barn which was being used temporarily as an office and showed us the remains of burials which they had found beneath some of the stones. The most interesting of these was an almost perfect bowl decorated with groove-markings – the only specimen of its kind in the world.

Then Mr Keiller very kindly offered to show us over his house. We accepted with alacrity, not imagining what a treat was in store for us. A little way up the road he led us through an iron gate and into another world. It was a dream of a house – Tudor, beautifully proportioned, handsome in every way. Mr Keiller told us its history and what additions each successive owner had made. We walked round to the other side. The garden was worthy of the house – yew hedges and fantastic box-trees redolent of the past, velvet lawns on which it seemed sacrilege to set foot without a dress that swept the grass.

We entered the house, which has been furnished almost entirely in the period by Mr Keiller and his predecessor. The first room we saw was the library – a long dark room fragrant with the scent of old books, and skilfully lit with unobtrusive electric lamps. Here we discovered another of Mr Keiller's hobbies – the study of witchcraft and demonology, a subject on which there were many books. Then followed a beautiful dream of long corridors, low doorways, oak staircases, Tudor fireplaces, Dutch fireplaces, panelled rooms, four-poster beds, French tapestry and Elizabethan mousetraps. The Drawing Office and the business part of the house is separate from the rest, along the Working Corridor. These rooms present a strange

contrast to the rest of the house. They are absolutely modern, brightly lit, hung round with instruments and lined with neat cupboards and drawers, the Drawing Office being smartly furnished in dove grey.

At the end of the Corridor our host showed us into a room which was lined from floor to ceiling with shelves, and on each shelf stood rows and rows of china cows! Collecting cow milk-jugs is yet another hobby of the eccentric Mr Keiller. He regretted he could not have us to tea. He invited us to come again; told us to bring our friends; to remind him of this afternoon. He saw us to the gate. We walked in rather a dazed condition down the road – it had been a day very full of rich experiences.

This essay first appeared in the Badminton School Magazine in the Summer of 1938. This is the first time it has been reproduced, with the kind permission of Badminton School. Our thanks to the archivist, Natasha Bishop, for her assistance.

The Formation and Development of the Iris Murdoch Society

Cheryl Bove

The Iris Murdoch Society (IMS) was formed by a small group of academics attending the Modern Language Association Conference in New York City in December 1986. Their intention was to inaugurate a society for academics and lay readers alike which would offer, through the medium of an *Iris Murdoch Newsletter (IMNL)*, a forum 'for short articles and notices and keeping members of the Society informed of new publications, symposia, and other news that has a bearing on Iris Murdoch and her writings' (*IMNL* 1, 1987, 4). The Society members were immediately encouraged by the acceptance of a Murdoch session at the Modern Language Association (MLA) conference in San Francisco in 1987, entitled 'Iris Murdoch: New Readings'. This hard-earned accomplishment came at a time when feminist theory held sway in American academia and Murdoch was certainly not perceived as a feminist. This highly politicised environment was, in part, responsible for why Murdoch's writings were not popular in American universities in these years.[1] The IMS attempted in vain to acquire 'Affiliated-Society' status with the MLA, which would secure a forum for her work at their conferences and, in turn, attract new academics. An early *Newsletter* records that 'while [the MLA] supposedly has a moratorium on considering single-author societies, exceptions were made at the pleasure of the MLA board'. Yet no such exception was made for the IMS.

Undeterred, IMS members continued to meet in hotel rooms during MLA conferences although individual sessions were difficult to obtain. In eight years of submitting proposals, the Society was successful in securing only one. For this reason, in 1996 the Society sought a smaller conference venue as a permanent home. The Carolinas Symposium on British Studies, which rotated among American Universities in the Carolinas, agreed to accept IMS panels, offering 'at least one of their sixteen sessions on a regular basis' (*IMNL* 9, 1995, 14). The first call for papers assured that there would be up to three Murdoch sessions at the 1996 conference. Two years later, in 1998, the Twentieth Century Literature Conferences, held annually at the University of Louisville, became the home for IMS meetings and Murdoch sessions, offering opportunities to compare Murdoch with American and

European authors; former IMS President Barbara Stevens Heusel's connections with Louisville secured the IMS a permanent slot there, and continues to do so.

Meanwhile the *Newsletter* itself had begun modestly in July 1987 with only two articles comprising four pages of text (*IMNL* 1, 1987), but written by two serious Murdoch scholars, John Burke (University of Alabama) and John Fletcher (University of East Anglia). Burke reported on Murdoch's lectures at Tulane University (24–25 March 1987); Fletcher's contribution (part of a later primary and secondary bibliography) comprised an annotated version of Murdoch's juvenilia (before 1950), with reflections on her 'presumably lost' novels which preceded *Under the Net*. The original intent was to publish the *Newsletter* biannually, with Christine Evans (Harvard University) as editor (1987–89), but in effect it appeared annually. Fresh criticism on Murdoch was announced and reviewed, and editors after Evans were John Burke (University of Alabama, 1991–93) and Cheryl Bove (Ball State University, 1994–95). The *Newsletter* became international when Peter J. Conradi joined Bove as European editor for issues 10 and 11 (1996–97), after which Anne Rowe took Conradi's place for issue 12 (1998). She and Bove continued as editors until it became the *Iris Murdoch Review* in 2008, with Rowe as its lead editor. The original *Newsletter* was published at Ball State University until 2003, then at Kingston University. In 2008 the newly formed Kingston University Press took over and continues production. Throughout these years the Society grew to a membership of over a hundred, with members in France, Japan, Spain, England, and the United States. The *Review*, now in its tenth issue, is currently edited by Miles Leeson (University of Chichester), while the *Newsletter* appears in the form of an online forum, written quarterly by Leeson.

Global interest in Murdoch broadened when the IMS of Japan was inaugurated in 1998 'to facilitate research on Iris Murdoch's work and cultivate the exchange of ideas and information' (*IMNL* 13, 1999, 15). Its first conference in Okayama 1999 attracted 35 attendees. The IMS Japan is presided over by Yozo Muroya of Okayama University, who has published widely on Murdoch and co-edited (with Paul Hullah) short editions of Murdoch's poems and occasional essays.[2] IMS Japan holds annual conferences and publishes its own *Newsletter*. Miharu Otsuki, a frequent visitor to IMS UK conferences, reports that 'nineteen of Murdoch's novels, two plays, and three of her philosophical works have been translated into Japanese. Miles Leeson, Frances White and Anne Rowe have written for the Japanese *Newsletter*, and Cheryl Bove's *Understanding Iris Murdoch* (USC Press, 2011) has been translated into Japanese'.[3] Otsuki also notes that Murdoch lectured in Japan in 1969, 1977 and 1993 and suggests that while Murdoch's 'understanding of Japan was thought to be of little depth', recent analysis of references to Japan in Murdoch's novels 'has identified Japanese items in at least ten works, some [related to] Japanese historical events'. She also pointed out that at the IMS Conference in Japan in 2018, Fiona Tomkinson

identified similarities between the psychology of the protagonists in *The Tale of Genji* and Murdoch's characters.

The research opportunities resulting from the inauguration of the Iris Murdoch Archives and the Centre for Iris Murdoch studies (CIMS) at Kingston University in 2004 under the directorship of Anne Rowe were a major influence in expanding international interest in Murdoch's work and in the increasing success of the *Newsletter*. Rowe's fundraising efforts secured over 1,000 books from Murdoch's Oxford and London libraries, unpublished work by Murdoch and hundreds of other items of interest to researchers, including a series of letter runs that include Murdoch's letters to the French philosopher Raymond Queneau, the émigré painter Harry Weinberger, her friend and fellow philosopher Philippa Foot, and her fellow writer and political activist Brigid Brophy. Only just over 700 letters, from more than 3,500 now held in the Murdoch Archives, have been published in Avril Horner's and Anne Rowe's *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934–1995* (2015).

Anne Rowe became the public face of the IMS after taking on the role of European editor of the *IMNL*. Her dedication to the IMS sustained and grew the Society and furthered the research and publication of its members. Rowe's gifts to Murdoch scholarship were two-fold: first, her extensive fundraising for acquisitions to the Murdoch archives meant that the CIMS could provide a vast repository of new materials that would regenerate Murdoch research; second, her published research argued for Murdoch's importance both in terms of her centrality to the 'ethical turn' in literary criticism and her relevance to the lives of general readers. Rowe taught a Special Study course on Murdoch at Kingston University for 25 years, while speaking at international conferences and making media appearances that helped to secure funding of close to half a million pounds raised from established funding bodies, IMS members and public donations.[4] The CIMS also provided a valuable service to researchers and the media: Frances White handled the majority of queries while Penny Tribe, the IMS administrator, helped to organise CIMS events and kept IMS members informed. The first Annual IMS Conference at St Anne's College, Oxford, in September 2002, was the brainchild of Murdoch scholar Janfarie Skinner and organised by her, Rowe, Kingston student Jane Slaymaker and other mature students at Kingston University. The biennial conferences at Kingston University that followed attracted over 100 delegates from as many as 15 countries and increased critical interest in Murdoch, thus enabling the *Newsletter's* progress into a fully peer-reviewed journal in 2008.

In a series of articles, 'Update from the Archives', that appear in the *Review*, former Kingston archivist Katie Giles has listed recent additions to the Murdoch Archives; a tradition that will be continued by Kingston University's new archivist

Dayna Miller. Those wishing to review the Archive's holdings can access its catalogued listings online at: <http://adlib.kingston.ac.uk>. There are now online Murdoch resources that include James Jefferies's extensive database of characters, locations and objects from Murdoch's novels. He discusses his work in 'An Introduction to The Iris Murdoch Information Service' (*Iris Murdoch Review 9*, 2018, 50–61), and his website holds a wealth of materials associated with Murdoch's novels and life. and can be found at <https://irismurdoch.info>. The Iris Murdoch Research Centre continues the *IMNL* online, and the IMS can be found on Facebook and on Twitter @irismurdoch.

Taking Iris Murdoch studies into the 21st century is Miles Leeson who established (in 2016), and directs, the Iris Murdoch Research Centre (IMRC) at the University of Chichester and is Lead Editor of the *Iris Murdoch Review*, with Editors Frances White (University of Chichester) and Pamela Osborn (Kingston University), and Assistant Editor Lucy Oulton (University of Chichester). Leeson is supported at the IMRC by Deputy Director Frances White, Administrator Heather Robbins, and Visiting Professor Anne Rowe. They have taken up the challenge of providing a thriving environment for Murdoch researchers and a venue for development of an invigorated international Iris Murdoch Society. Leeson's quarterly online *Newsletter* is emailed to over 130 IMS members, keeping them informed about upcoming events and recent publications, and making available videos of Murdoch talks and panels. He and his team have worked diligently, planning and hosting the 2017 IMS conference at the University of Chichester which featured presenters from Japan, China, Hungary, USA, Norway, the Czech Republic, Spain, France, the Netherlands, Finland, Italy and Sweden, as well as the UK (*IMR* 9, 2018, 65).[5]

The IMRC team also planned many events to celebrate the Murdoch centenary year including a Centenary Conference, which was jointly held by Somerville College and St Anne's College, Oxford, on 13–15 July 2019. The future certainly looks bright for Murdoch scholarship and its success has been secured by the work of many academics, only some of whom are mentioned here, and enthusiasts who have been enthralled by Murdoch's novels. Her magnificent *oeuvre* came out of a brilliant mind; as one of my appreciative colleagues once said, 'Murdoch has written in depth about the human experience in just about every avenue one could want to research'. For those of us who were fortunate to have had the opportunity to meet her, Iris was a lovely person and a generous spirit.

1 While the American IMS worried about Murdoch not being able to take her well-deserved place in the literary canon in the light of her perceived lack of feminist attitudes, it is comforting to note that a decade later, important figures writing specifically on women writers include Murdoch in their work: *Women Philosophers*, edited by Mary Warnock (the Everyman Library, 1996), cited Murdoch as a prominent female philosopher, and Murdoch is represented in A.S. Byatt's and Ignês Sodré's *Imagining Character: Six Conversations about Women Writers* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995).

2 Yozo Moroya and Paul Hullah, eds., *Poems by Iris Murdoch* (Japan: University Education Press, 1997) and *Occasional Essays by Iris Murdoch* (Japan: University Education Press, 1998).

3 Personal correspondence, 13 February 2019.

4 These bodies include the V&A Purchase Grant Fund, the Friends of the National Libraries, the Breslau Foundation and the National Lottery Heritage Memorial Fund.

5 Special thanks to Miharu Otsuki, Miles Leeson and Anne Rowe for statistics included in this article.

Shakespeare, T.S. Eliot and Iris Murdoch: The Shaman and the Intertext

Rob Hardy

In this essay I suggest that Iris Murdoch was a shaman, in the sense that Ted Hughes said that both Shakespeare and T.S. Eliot were, and that her shamanism is deeply linked to the intertextuality of her fiction.

According to Ted Hughes in his psycho-history of the English Reformation, *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*, the events which began before Shakespeare's birth and culminated after his death precipitated a massive national psychological trauma.[1] Shakespeare lived at a time when the old religion of the English (the veneration of the Great Goddess) was being forcibly replaced by the Protestant national religion of the male Puritan God. Before Shakespeare was born, Protestant fanatics had decapitated statues in churches all over the country, whitewashed coloured frescoes and suppressed the great cycles of religious plays. Shakespeare might, as a boy, have seen one of the last of these performances but, according to Jonathan Bate, by the time he had become an adult the old religious drama had been destroyed for ever.[2]

According to Hughes, the battle which culminated in the English Civil War was one where every citizen 'went to right or left' although a third path was to 'create [...] an emergency self to deal with the crisis [...] who would somehow hang on to all the fragments as the newly enthroned god and the deposed goddess tore each other to pieces behind his face'.[3] Shakespeare elegiacally memorialised the battles where men, representatives of the usurper male God, fought and tragically defeated those women who sometimes seemed like the Great Goddess herself – beautiful, wise, compassionate, silent, infinitely gentle, infinitely suffering. But then Hughes goes further. He claims that the tribal disaster of the Great Goddess's defeat by the young male God was like those disasters in other societies which call forth great shamans when they are desperately needed: '[T]he great shaman [...] gathers up the whole tradition of the despairing group [...] with all the circumstances of their present sufferings, into a [...] vision on the spiritual plane'.[4] Hughes claims Shakespeare

himself is the great shaman, called to live as a martyr to the defeated cause of the Great Goddess, the divinity of Old England.[5] Hughes also makes another claim – that the creatively exceptional Shakespeare is also the great shaman summoned to register the suffering of the Great Goddess. He is the shaman of the revolutionary Puritan will, of the young male God dedicated to destroying the ancient Great Goddess, who in the eyes of the male God is not only pure, gentle, and silent, but also dark, demonic and lustful. Within his own suffering mind, Shakespeare holds these two archetypal figures, staging the battle time after time between them, until in his final work there are no more battles, no more victors, no more losers. It had become clear to Shakespeare over the course of his life that the male characters' destruction of women in his work, symbolising the Puritan God's destruction of the Great Goddess, was achieved at terrible cost – the destruction, by those men, of their own souls. In his final work Shakespeare did more than memorialise the fallen Goddess while simultaneously identifying with the young male God. In his last plays, Shakespeare attempts to rescue the Goddess. This he does in his role as the great shaman.

We can agree with Hughes that Shakespeare still speaks to us uncannily over the centuries, yet we are free to ask if he is still the great shaman for our time – the one who can rescue us from disaster. For surely the loss of both religions, of the Puritan God and the Great Goddess, the loss of belief in the whole machinery of the soul of the pre-Enlightenment world, is the great disaster of our age? Both God and Goddess have become disastrously degraded to metaphor. The young male God has become the man-god described by the devil in his conversation with Ivan Karamazov. He guards the gates of the laboratory of the world, protecting science and ejecting delusion – everything that is not science – and, to adapt Ivan Karamazov's words, permissible research is infinite. And the Great Goddess has become mortally sick, her poor planet turned to a wasteland, her religious world a distant memory, in Philip Larkin's words, a 'vast moth-eaten musical brocade'.[6] If there were a great shaman who could help us now, in our time, what would they be like? Hughes nominated T.S. Eliot, because Eliot knew 'that religious institutions and rituals had ceased to be real in the old sense and [...] continued to exist only as forms of "make believe"'.[7] From that ground zero, Hughes suggests in his centenary tribute that Eliot began his great shamanic journey with 'the traditional shaman's crucial initiatory experience of visionary dismemberment' in 'The Death of Saint Narcissus', leading to the 'adoration of the supernatural woman of *Ash Wednesday*', and finally to 'the dance before God in an English chapel' of *Four Quartets*.[8] This religious journey took place not in the old supernatural world but in a new world where 'what had been religious and centred on God [had become] psychological and centred on an idea of the self' of psychoanalysis.[9] According to Hughes, Eliot listened to the call from his inner world, and created for his own time, as

Shakespeare had for his, 'a ritual dramatic form which established that process [of travelling from dismemberment in the meaningless to spiritual wholeness] as a real possibility for others'.[10] It is a powerful account, and can perhaps still speak to some of us. For while Eliot's journey may have led him to 'genuine happiness', it also led him to 'the paternal authority of a high priest in a world religion'.[11] Those of us who are sick of paternal authority may say that Eliot can no longer speak to us in the way he once did. This leads to my claim that Iris Murdoch, in contrast, has come to speak to at least some of us with the authority of a great shaman. So, what is it about Murdoch, the woman and the writer, that justifies such status?

One descriptor with which we might characterise a shaman is spellbinding. There are several photographs of Eliot which merit the word, if you look at his eyes. There are obviously no photographs of Shakespeare, but his image in the Chandos portrait is still striking because of his eyes. We do, however, have many photographs of Murdoch throughout her life in which she seems spellbinding because of her gaze. A.N. Wilson, Murdoch's proposed biographer at the time, explains how she visited him one afternoon in London shortly after the break-up with his first wife. She put both her arms on his shoulders and 'stared dreamily, almost amorously' into his eyes:

> She quite often did this at the end of an evening, but as a gesture in the afternoon, it somehow carried a suggestion in it which was lacking when the words 'goodbye' had already been said. The flickering moment was the only one when I felt I had glimpsed what her life of a hundred emotional intimacies had been like. Settling, later, to an evening of silence, of the lamplight and the book, I thought of her with very great affection. Through the wistful features of a youthful almost-seventy-year-old I had seen the face of a playful, sexy girl. I can remember [...] thinking how much, much more I should prefer having an affair with IM to writing her biography.[12]

In an account of a visit to Murdoch, Martha Nussbaum foregrounds the mysterious, rather than the spellbinding:

> All the while, I felt that her very intense gaze went, as it were, straight through me, to something that was not me at all, but to which I was somehow related. More than once I [...] thought: 'You don't really see *me*' – especially when, being a great lover of food, I found myself offered only [...] a very fatty pate, which I hate, and a plateful of cherries, to which I have an allergy. [...] She fixed me with her eyes and went on, eating pate absent-mindedly with her fingers. Above all

> I cannot forget those eyes, and the way they attended to something of immense importance that was, as I say, not exactly outside of me, and that was perhaps more real than me, but that was not precisely me either. Nor can I ever forget the essential mysteriousness of her face, so much more alive than most people, so blazing with uncompromising passion, so intent upon things that were not exactly in the room.[13]

Such an interpretation would have been uncomfortable for Murdoch, because it reveals something that she knew and feared about herself all her life – her potential to be in the minds of others an enchanter with knowledge of what Shakespeare called the mystery of things and with a sense that she had indeed been called to be a messenger to reveal that mystery. This perhaps explains the late novel, dedicated ruthlessly to destroying the yearning hope that there might be, for this planet, a messenger or, at least, a message. And if for the words messenger, spellbinder or enchanter, we substitute the word shaman, we can imagine Murdoch's response to being called such a thing.

If a shaman has access to the divine then, for me, reading Murdoch is like being seen by God. In *A Word Child*, Hilary Burde says:

> We were young and gripped by the awful compelling force of physical love. I was in total love from the start. Anne became so. She was sorry for me. Pity changed imperceptibly into enslaving fascination. She felt the grains of violence in me and yearned over them. I talked about my past. I told her things I had not told even to Crystal. She talked about her past. I could communicate with her, miraculously, totally. She saw me, she attended to me more than anyone had ever done, even Mr Osmand. It was like being seen by God.[14]

In this passage, Murdoch makes me feel that the divine gaze, if it exists, would resemble the gaze with which a compassionate woman might look at a man – with the gaze that takes the male reader at least, represented here by Hilary, back to his earliest childhood. It is a gaze that yearns over the beginnings, the seeds of violence originating in his childhood. So, when the woman looks at the man here, she looks both at the man as he is now and at the little boy he once was (and which she knows, and understands that he needs her to know, that he still is). Anne's seeing Hilary expresses both the mystery and sexuality of Eros. She sees Hilary as God might see him, as his dead mother might have seen her small son and as his perfect lover might see him now. In this passage between Hilary and Anne we also hear the voice of Julian of Norwich:

> I am the Wisdom of the Mother, I am the Light and the Grace which is blessed love [...]. I am the One who makes you love, I am the One who makes you desire, I am the never-ending fulfilment of all true desires.[15]

Julian of Norwich dramatised in her writing the simultaneous relationship of God the mother to her adored child and of God the perfect lover to the adult inside whom the child's desolate crying can sometimes still be heard. I want to suggest that Murdoch uses this text by Julian of Norwich as a hint at how all her intertexts might function, not as superficial decoration but as if they were spirit guides to her writing. Adapting Nussbaum, it is as though, by using these texts, she 'attends to something of immense importance [...] not exactly outside of [her characters or her characters' situations] but that is not precisely [them] either'.[16] Each intertext seems to surface in her novels at moments of psychological battle between opposed forces. One of the most powerful examples happens to relate to Eliot. Near the end of *A Word Child* and trying to contemplate the wasteland he has made of his own and others' lives, Hilary is led 'by an imperative need' to enter a church in South Kensington (*WC* 378). That it is St Stephen's Church, Gloucester Road, where Eliot had once been churchwarden is not exactly an accident, given all the other London churches Murdoch could have led Hilary to. In the church, Hilary sees:

> At one end of the aisle under a tasselled canopy the Christ child was leaning from his mother's arms to bless the world. At the other end he hung dead, cut off in his young manhood for me and for my sins. There was also, I saw, a memorial tablet which asked me to pray for the repose of the soul of Thomas Stearns Eliot. How is it now with you, old friend, the intolerable wrestle with words and meanings being over? Alas, I could not pray for your soul any more than I could for Clifford's. You had both vanished from the catalogue of being. But I could feel a lively gratitude for words, even for words whose sense I could scarcely understand. If all time is eternally present all time is unredeemable. What might have been is an abstraction, remaining a perpetual possibility only in a world of speculation. (*WC* 383)

This moment expresses exactly the battle in the minds of Murdoch and her representative Hilary Burde, and the place of the intertext in the enactment of such a battle. For both Hilary and Murdoch, Christ's journey ends with crucifixion not resurrection, and Hilary can no more pray for Eliot than he could for his friend Clifford. However, it is as though in confronting Hilary with the memorial tablet that asks him to pray for Eliot's soul, Murdoch acknowledges that the place where her great predecessor came to rest is where all people need to rest if they are not to

wither to dry bones. Murdoch citing, at the end of the chapter with no quotation marks and rendered into prose, the fourth to eighth lines of the beginning of Eliot's Four Quartets does more (*WC* 384). It teaches that the words of the greatest ones who have come before us, are a part of us. They make us all word children. Thus, when Hilary says he could feel a lively gratitude for words he could scarcely understand he perhaps means two things – he cannot understand the literal meaning of the words, and he cannot understand how a man viewed the world who could write such words. That way of looking, too, has 'vanished from the catalogue of being', which is the world view that could believe that humans have souls which survive death and that, again quoting from Julian of Norwich, whose spirit infuses *Four Quartets* as much as it does the novels of Iris Murdoch, believed that all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well (*WC* 384).

Murdoch could not believe that all shall be well. I do not know if Julian really believed those words, nor if Eliot did – the four lines surfacing from the end of *Four Quartets* seems more like an eruption of hope than of belief. It is certain that they contrast with the words from the poem's beginning and which, comprehensible or not, revolve around one word, unredeemable, expressing hopelessness and thus entirely relevant to Hilary's situation. And yet Hilary's St Stephen's Church episode expresses more than just hopelessness. I have said that Murdoch's intertexts seem to surface in her novels at moments of psychological battle, but the pervasive reference to Eliot in the episode seems to function additionally as attempted reconciliation – not just of Hilary with himself but of the two views deriving from the battle between which Hilary as a sensitive contemporary post-Christian is strung out. The first view is that the absolute knowledge that this world is all there is and that prayer to a non-existent God is fruitless. The second is that others, great ones, have believed otherwise, that Christ born of the Virgin Mary died for our sins and that such a belief brings peace. When Hilary, looking at the image of the crucified young man, says that he had been cut off in in his young manhood for Hilary and his sins, he says these words not because he believes them. He says them ironically but also with a kind of quietness, a kind of piety as if, by contemplating the conclusion of Eliot's 'intolerable wrestle/ With words and meanings', another erupting intertext, he could be freed for a moment from his own struggle to face up to what he has done and from the struggle to find the right words.[17] This moment of Hilary's thinking and crying alone in St Stephen's Church is one of the great moments in Murdoch's fiction. She enacts the tension in the mind of a modern post-Christian, between their absolute knowledge of the fruitlessness of prayer to a non-existent God, and their aching yearning for this not to be true.

If Murdoch had only written novels from a Christian or post-Christian perspective, she would still be a very considerable writer. My assertion that Murdoch is a shaman rests on more extensive evidence. She also attempted to

speak for those with practices and beliefs quite outside Christianity that deeply resonated with her, such as those of the young new age magician Moy in *The Green Knight* (1994). Murdoch, like Shakespeare and Eliot, was increasingly entranced by magic. One of Murdoch's minor aims in *The Sea, The Sea* (1978) is to examine Christianity from the outside, not just with the eyes of one who sees it as 'creepy' as suggested by Charles Arrowby's cousin, the sympathetic outsider James, but to see in it what other outsiders might call its magical and insiders its sacred beliefs and practices as Charles Arrowby once did, as a young man. In doing so Murdoch laid the way for another aim: to dramatise non-Christian magical practices and beliefs and learn in humility what they reveal of the world and the soul, with the battle, as in *A Word Child*, between the metaphorised Puritan God, guardian at the gates of reason, and the Goddess, revealed here in her full glory, metaphorised but also extending beyond metaphor and intermittently erupting from mysterious sources – in both senses of the word source: as origin; as spring.

The magician in *The Sea, The Sea* is James, the good soldier and Buddhist, who visits Charles at Shruff End. James, who disappears forever, is 'an enlightened one' 'who [knows] many things'.[18] After the disappearance of this magician, Murdoch gives her narrator a vision:

> And far far away in that ocean of gold, stars were silently shooting and falling and finding their fates, among those billions and billions of merging golden lights. And curtain after curtain of gauze was quietly removed, and I saw stars behind stars behind stars, as in the magical Odeons of my youth. And I saw into the vast soft interior of the universe which was slowly and gently turning itself inside out. I went to sleep, and in my sleep I seemed to hear a sound of singing. (*TSTS* 511)

Charles undergoes the ordeal of near drowning, for which his vision of the machinery of the universe is also consolation. *The Sea, The Sea* ends with the ironic suggestion that Charles's tragi-comic journal is just one more consolatory form created by the artist Murdoch about a character who aspires to be an artist and who has spent his life creating consolatory forms in the novel's contingent world. Murdoch frequently uses two words, 'as if', which allow her to imagine 'certain kinds of experience where it is as if [...] the curtain blows in the wind (of spirit maybe), and we see more than we are supposed to'.[19] Reading *The Sea, The Sea* as if it contained 'certain kinds of experience' might be one way of seeing more in it than we are 'supposed to', seeing, perhaps, that its world, and therefore ours, is made up of more than the rubble or random stones which Charles daily and comically tries to put into some sort of order.

In *The Sea, The Sea* we hear of a visitor from another plane, the tulpa or mental emanation, seen by Charles and disparagingly dismissed by James, the great explorer of Tibet. If *The Sea, The Sea* were a novel full of clues to stop us reading it in the ways we are not supposed to, the tulpa might be one of them, its presence intended to reinforce the novel's overt message about the nature of our world. Whatever magical feats are possible in it are only tricks, as James keeps insisting. But suppose James's feats such as rescuing Charles were not the only kind of magic in the novel? What would it be like if *The Sea, The Sea* opened a curtain onto the work of a greater magician – one like the Great Goddess herself? And here, as Paulina says in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*: 'It is required/ You do awake your faith'.[20] In *Walkabout: Life as Holy Spirit*, Mark Patrick Hederman, Roman Catholic monk and one of Murdoch's most inspired readers, describes a world where people take coincidences as pointers to the work of the Holy Spirit and a community of monks reads Murdoch's novels as guides to their own lives in 'the way in which the Spirit moves within our world of perfect freedom without leaving footprints'.[21]

Accepting death is the lesson taught by *The Sea, The Sea*'s greatest magician and visitor from the unknown, called by Hederman, the Holy Spirit. As Charles's story develops it becomes clear that his aim of 'learning to be good' is an avoidance tactic to defend himself against what he most fears – his death. But death permeates the novel. Avoided by Charles during all the years he was making his own theatrical magic, it returns in his memory of his beautiful young aunt who died when he was a boy, of the father he still misses, of all 'the great ones' who 'have gone from me' (*TSTS* 16). And the greatest of all those who went from him, Clement, his mother-lover whom he cared for while she was dying, returns to his memory with increasing urgency, as if she had come from behind the curtain of death to ask him to tell their story faithfully. Preoccupied for most of the novel with Hartley, his 'first love', Charles only slowly comes to answer that request, although the reader retrospectively realises that Charles had heard it by choosing to come to just this place: 'After all, it is for Clement that I am here. This was her country, she grew up on this lonely coast' (*TSTS* 35). As Charles's memories of Clement slowly surface the purpose of his pursuit of Hartley becomes clearer. It was another defence against death, just as it slowly becomes apparent that Clement and he had defended themselves against 'the black blank horror' of her dying with 'a storm of [musical] noise', which had the same oblivion-inducing purpose as the noise of the theatre in which they had immersed themselves (*TSTS* 521). Not until the end of his memoir is Charles able to allow that memory to merge together with his open-eyed meditation on Clement's forgotten death:

> How different each death is, and yet it leads us into the self-same country, that country which we inhabit so rarely, where we see the

> worthlessness of what we have long pursued and will so soon return to pursuing. (*TSTS* 521)

This is a great admission for a man who has spent much of his own story inadvertently recording his own defences against death. It is these defences which the great magician, the Holy Spirit in Hederman's words, has destroyed by bringing Charles to the country of his dead mother-lover to remember her death, and it is this magician who uses the opportunity to bring Charles enlightenment – the opportunity offered by James's saving Charles through Tibetan Buddhist magic.

The Holy Spirit, according to Hederman, works in the world 'in every religion and wherever s/he wills' and is certainly not confined to Christianity.[22] Following this clue and changing her name to the Goddess we can see her presence in other places in the novel. There is the toad that Charles finds in his kitchen, the toad, according to Robert Graves, being the companion of the mythical hundred-headed serpent watching over the jewelled Garden of the Hesperides; and the sea cauldron Charles falls into that evokes the cauldron of Ceridwen, one of the Goddess's names.[23] And the major mystery of the novel, Charles's sea serpent, is also associated with the Goddess. In Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*, Lucius in great misery sees the Goddess emerge from the sea wearing, 'in the middle of her forehead [...] a plain circlet in fashion of a mirror, or rather resembling the moon by the light it gave forth; and this was borne up on either side by serpents'.[24] The Goddess, according to Robert Graves, was also death: 'the Syrian Moon-goddess was [...] represented [...] with a snake head-dress to remind the devotee that she was Death in disguise'.[25] It is as if the universe, much stranger than we know, approaches Charles through these symbols of toad, cauldron and serpent and as if the Goddess, unacknowledged beyond these brief signs in Murdoch's novel, has nonetheless inscribed a shadowy sketch of herself in it. Murdoch's novel is a psychological battle between the Puritan God of science, who wants to make sure Charles doesn't see more than he's supposed to, and the Great Goddess who wants to make sure he does.

Murdoch deserves the shaman distinction because, having travelled behind the curtain of death and seen more than she was supposed to, she returns to us to convey the definitive message that for us there can no longer be gods or goddesses, shamans, priests or priestesses. They belong to the world we have lost, because deep magic, as opposed to the superficial kind of magic practised by James, can never again be believed in our world. As Christ tells Anne in *Nuns and Soldiers*, we have to do it all ourselves.[26] The message to our planet can never again be conveyed by a great visionary or shaman like Leonardo or Jesus – both figures behind *The Message to the Planet* (1989) – or by intertextual religious eruptions, whether Christian as in *A Word Child* or pagan as in *The Sea, The Sea*. If there is a message it will be like that conveyed in the incomprehensible words Marcus utters in *The Message to*

the Planet, which invoke the memory of a little boy born in Auschwitz who learned to speak only one word, its meaning a mystery to everyone who heard him. If Murdoch does resemble any of the great ones of the past it is Shakespeare, who in *The Winter's Tale* looked behind the curtain of the future, foresaw the increasing desperation of the human need for both reason and magic, attempted to satisfy it and failed, because the only magic he could bring to the stage, like Charles Arrowby, was illusory.

Paulina's awakening our faith turned out to be only awaking our disbelief. Hermione did not rise from the dead. No one ever has. She had never been a statue. It was a magic trick. And however persuasive Hederman's mystical vision of the intervention of the Holy Spirit (or Goddess as I've called her) is in our lives, it crumbles to dust beside Murdoch's entirely unmystical visions of those in whose lives the Holy Spirit, God or Goddess fails to intervene – the child of Auschwitz, the girl left holding her dog on the railway platform in *Jackson's Dilemma* (1995). In this sense, most of Iris Murdoch's novels are failures because, no more than Shakespeare, could she exist that long in 'as if' land, the real Murdochland suspended between magic and reason. In some of her novels she never seriously enters 'as if' land, in *A Word Child* for example or, if she does, as in *A Message to the Planet*, it is with the knowledge she will soon be leaving it. In other novels, her yearning not to leave 'as if' land, to let magic co-exist with reason, is very great but always defeated. Despite her great desire that it should not, reason always wins. In even the most magical of her novels, *The Green Knight*, the Great Goddess is diminished to an infinitely gentle, infinitely suffering young woman, as Eliot would say, obsessed by reuniting a rock with a stone, and the novel's master magician, Father Damien, ending up breaking his staff.

Religious readers might reply that there is more to say about Murdoch's teaching about death and that the divine in her novels is not destroyed by it. Charles's vision of the heavens in *The Sea, The Sea* is real. *The Green Knight* shows that the divine, whether tenderly incarnated in the strange figure of Moy who weeps over the deaths of small animals or in Peter Mir who dies in a psychiatric hospital, is not diminished by death. A mystical reader might report that Murdoch shows that magic can exist even in this death-filled world. Describing another strange and vulnerable figure, Jackson, in Murdoch's last novel, Hederman wrote to Murdoch on 6 April 1996,

> thank you for giving me the opportunity to write again – not like poor Bellamy in *The Green Knight* who was forbidden so peremptorily!
>
> You see, for at least twenty years you have been something of a spiritual guide, not just to me but to a group of us here who are on a search together [...] Your books have an uncanny knack of saying

> what is needed at the time [...] From *The Sea, The Sea* onwards I have waited with eagerness the arrival of each novel and in every case it was amazing how it dealt with whatever was happening to us at the time.
>
> Anyway, *Jackson's Dilemma* is the last straw. It describes my life and present project (both as Benet and as Jackson by the way!) so accurately that I am left laughing and gasping. [...] It is such a beautiful book – even the dust jacket. And it is all about keys and doors and openings; how to enter and how you can be locked out. About bridges and meetings. The wonderful scene at the end with the boy and the horse, what matter if you are vulnerable, they say.
>
> But you know, dear Iris Murdoch, of course, that Jackson is, in fact, God. Godwithus, Emmanuel: 'Son of this Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood'. You don't need me to tell you that. But, in some way, you do need me to tell you that.[27]

To my suggestion that his account of the Holy Spirit's (or God's or Goddess's) method of intervention in our world was forever destroyed by Murdoch's vision of the children of the Holocaust, Hederman might reply that *Jackson's Dilemma* was Murdoch's last attempt to come to terms with the implications of that vision, as he puts it, 'to "do" the fearful possibility that this is what relationship with God must be like after the times we have been through'.[28]

I am glad that Murdoch has readers like Hederman. It is as if they can read in Murdoch's work what some of us cannot. As if the key sentence towards the end of *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*: 'We need a theology which can continue without God' will forever lead to the words from Psalm 139, describing being held by God, with which Murdoch ends that book, as if denial of God will always lead to affirmation of God (*MGM* 511). I said one can't live in 'as if' land that long, but perhaps that is deeply mistaken. Perhaps that is exactly what Murdoch did, because there is no alternative if one is to continue to be human. Is a sense of the magical, the sacred in its most intense meaning, not just permissible but utterly required if we are to remain human, but only if accompanied by a steely, clear-eyed Don Cupitt-like absence of hope? But in that case how can it still be sacred? When Moy, in a moment of complete absence of hope in *The Green Knight*, says of her stone and herself: 'It was nothing. She was nothing' (*GK* 463), how is that a more faithful rendering of her and the stone's reality than imagining herself reverencing all life in India and the stone reunited with the rock, both of which imaginings cannot but include hope?

To return for the last time to *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare must have created the resurrection scene in that play out of deep personal anguish. In his book about this play, one of Shakespeare's most humane readers, Wilbur Sanders, wrote that the magic, or the sense of the sacred of that scene, was inextricably linked to the human capacity to hope. For Sanders this was not an academic question. His own young daughter had died after a car accident and to his book's dedication to her he added as an epigraph with the force of Paulina's original command: 'Bequeath to death your numbness, for from him/ Dear life redeems you'.[29] About hope, Sanders says that it is 'born out of the heart of the experience of loss itself':

> It [the restoration of Hermione] remains a hypothesis, of course, but an extremely tender one [...] tender over anything that still retains the potentiality for emotional warmth and fulfilment. To deny that potentiality is to deny something in ourselves. The supreme fiction has triumphed, not by defying but by expressing the realities of the human psyche that demand such a fiction

and:

> It cannot happen, but if it could happen, it would feel like this. Since it does, so vividly, feel like this, perhaps it can happen.[30]

What is this state of mind? What on earth would it be like to live in it? How is it different from self-delusion? Sanders might have replied that it is not self-delusion, and only one who has experienced both states of mind can know the difference.

Murdoch, towering enemy of self-delusion, expressed the reality of the human psyche which demands the supreme fiction of meeting God, just as Shakespeare expressed the supreme fiction of meeting our dead loved ones again. We cannot meet God, because he does not exist but, if he did, meeting him would feel like this. Since it does so vividly feel like this, perhaps we can meet him. A version of the ontological proof. And, if this is failure, then this reader would rather experience it than nearly everyone else's success, because it helps him imagine a world where the great messenger Iris Murdoch might have lived. And her message of hope, not despair, might be revered.

This is an abridged version of a lecture given by Rob Hardy at the University of Chichester on 3 February 2018.

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3 Ted Hughes, *Winter Pollen: Occasional Prose* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), 110 and 111.
4 Hughes, *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*, 89.
5 Hughes, *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*, 90.
6 Philip Larkin, 'Aubade', <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/48422/aubade-56d229a6e2f07 > [accessed 4 April 2019]
7 Hughes, *Winter Pollen*, 269.
8 Hughes, *Winter Pollen*, 284 and 289.
9 Hughes, *Winter Pollen*, 274.
10 Hughes, *Winter Pollen*, 290.
11 Hughes, *Winter Pollen*, 291.
12 A.N. Wilson, *Iris Murdoch As I Knew Her* (London: Hutchinson, 2003), 59.
13 Martha Nussbaum, '"Faint with Secret Knowledge": Love and Vision in Murdoch's *The Black Prince*' in Justin Broackes, ed., *Iris Murdoch: Philosopher* (Oxford: OUP, 2003), 152.
14 Iris Murdoch, *A Word Child* (1975) (London: Vintage ebook, 2002), 122, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *WC*.
15 <http://www.vatican.va/spirit/documents/spirit_20010807_giuliana-norwich_en.html> [accessed 19 September 2018].
16 Nussbaum, "Faint with Secret Knowledge" 152.
17 T.S. Eliot, 'East Coker' in *Four Quartets* (London: Faber and Faber ebook, 2009), lines 249–50.
18 Iris Murdoch, *The Sea, The Sea* (1978) (London: Vintage, 1999), 508, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *TSTS*.
19 Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992) (London: Vintage ebook, 2003), 505, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *MGM*.
20 William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale,* V.3.114–15.
21 Mark Patrick Hederman, *Walkabout: Life as Holy Spirit* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2005), 24.
22 Hederman, *Walkabout*, 24.
23 Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (London: Faber and Faber ebook, 2010), 40; Hederman, *Walkabout,* 195.
24 Graves, *The White Goddess,* 66.
25 Graves, *The White Goddess*, 439.
26 Iris Murdoch, *Nuns and Soldiers* (1980) (London: Vintage, 2001), 297.
27 Hederman, *Walkabout*, 254.
28 Hederman, Walkabout, 254.
29 Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale,* V.3.124–5.
30 Wilbur Sanders, *The Winter's Tale* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987), 114 and 122.

‘Above the common herd’: Iris Murdoch and Sue Townsend

Pamela Osborn

Open any Sue Townsend novel, reprinted since 2012 by Penguin, and you will see Iris Murdoch’s name at least once, either in the text or in the appendix. In an interview, published to celebrate Townsend’s 30 years as a bestselling author, Murdoch is one of the 19 authors Townsend credits with having had the most influence on her work. The other names include Richmal Crompton, Charlotte Brontë, Dickens, Eliot, Chekhov, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Waugh, Orwell and Stella Gibbons. Townsend also chose *The Sea, The Sea* (1978) as one of her ‘six best books’ in a 2012 newspaper article, describing it in typically understated fashion as ‘a love story about obsession’ and ‘a great read’.[1] Murdoch and Townsend are very different writers, with different backgrounds and preoccupations: Townsend was openly political (left-wing) and wrote for and about the feminist cause; Murdoch believed that literature should be largely free of political agendas, although she did say, ‘in a quiet way, there is a lot of social criticism in my novels’.[2] This essay, however, focuses on their many similarities and on the importance of Murdoch’s influence on Townsend.

Sue Townsend was born in Leicester in 1946. She left school at 15 and by the age of 23 she was a single parent caring for three children. She wrote secretly for 20 years before showing her work to anybody. Encouraged by her second husband, she joined a creative writing group and very quickly became a published and prize-winning playwright, journalist and novelist, synonymous with the name of her most famous creation, Adrian Mole. *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole Aged 13¾* (1982) became the bestselling novel of the 1980s and was adapted for stage and screen. Adrian Mole books sold more than 10 million copies in the UK alone in the 1980s. They were published in more than 27 countries overall. Between 1982 and 2008 eight Adrian Mole diaries were published, taking the character from his early teens to the age of 39¼. When Townsend died, aged 68, in 2014, the full extent of her influence, particularly on satire and comedy writing, became evident. A BBC documentary about her life claimed that ‘a whole generation of comic writers [...] grew up with Adrian Mole and took their voice from him’.[3] Indeed, the comic novel as a genre and

television and radio comedy all owe a huge debt to Sue Townsend: Helen Fielding (author of the *Bridget Jones* series of novels); Steve Coogan and Armando Iannucci (the creators of the fictional television personality Alan Partridge); Jesse Armstrong (writer of the sitcom *Peep Show*); Caroline Aherne (writer of the sitcom *The Royle Family*); Mark Haddon (*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time*); Iain Morris and Damon Beesley (writers of the sitcom *The Inbetweeners)*; comedy writer and journalist Caitlin Moran; and the author of the *Harry Potter* series, J.K. Rowling, all credit Townsend with enormous influence on their writing and, in many cases, their politics. Townsend's own influences are equally impressive. She spent much of her early writing life in public libraries and her exceptional reading list informed her creation of Adrian Mole, a boy, later a man, who wants to be a great writer but fundamentally misunderstands and misinterprets everything he reads and everything he sees.

Like Murdoch, Townsend's first novel was published when she was in her mid-30s. She also shares with Murdoch an interest in obsessive love and the behaviour of the comically lovesick. Both writers animate even the most peripheral characters in their work, often giving them full names and histories. Their work is, to quote Murdoch's description of comedy in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 'chaotic and concerned with accidental details and unreflective absurdities'.[4] Like Murdoch, Townsend often chooses to write from a male perspective, but both are also interested in the frustrations of the middle-aged woman and how these can on occasion spill over into violence – Murdoch's *The Black Prince* (1973) and Townsend's *Rebuilding Coventry* (1988) both pivot on acts of aggression committed by older women who snap. Most markedly, both are unashamedly funny writers and the comedy in their novels comes from human interactions and the situations which arise from those interactions. Townsend's debt to Murdoch, which she openly acknowledged, is most tangible in the voices of her male protagonists, complicated situations full of eccentric characters, and the tragic dimension of her comic writing.

Townsend includes a direct reference to *The Sea, The Sea* in her final novel, the plot of which is also perhaps the most directly influenced by Murdoch. Eva, the female protagonist of *The Woman Who Went to Bed for a Year* (2012), uses books, she explains to a friend, as anaesthetic to the extent that she can remember nothing about the birth of her now teenage, twins except the book she was reading. 'It was *The Sea, The Sea*', she says, 'I was thrilled to have two babies in my arms, but – and you'll think this is awful – after twenty minutes or so I wanted to get back to my book'.[5] This is the last of several direct references to Murdoch's novels in Townsend's work. The first occurs in Adrian Mole's diary entry for 17 January 1982: 'I am reading *The Black Prince* by Iris Murdoch. I can understand one word in ten. It is now my ambition to actually enjoy one of her books. Then I will know I am above the common herd'.[6]

A week later he adds: 'My mother blames my bad nerves on Iris Murdoch. She says painful adolescence should not be read about when one is studying for O levels'.[7] This comment is slightly baffling since Murdoch does not write overtly about painful adolescence in *The Black Prince*, but Townsend's point might well be that all of Murdoch's male protagonists, and many other characters besides, have an air of adolescence about them. They exhibit the rage, melodrama and melancholy of youth and tend to fall deeply, intensely and suddenly in love well into adulthood. We never learn if Adrian succeeds in his ambition to enjoy a Murdoch novel, although he does appear to develop a sense of kinship with her. In 1989 he sends the manuscript of his novel without vowels, *Lo! The Flat Hills of my Homeland*, to Murdoch's literary agent, Ed Victor, believing that he will particularly appreciate it because 'me and Iris are both concerned with the metaphysical world'.[8] The fictional Ed Victor replies two months later with a rejection, berating Adrian for his pretentiousness and advising him to buy a typewriter. Murdoch is mentioned again in Adrian's final diary, *The Prostrate Years*, as a passing joke in a letter from the vicar about the interminable length of a play, entitled *Plague!*, which Adrian writes for the amateur dramatics society:

> Dear Adrian,
>
> A short note. I'm stunned. Congratulations on the first draft of Plague! It is quite an achievement to give over sixty cast members at least two lines each.
>
> I fear a prior commitment prevents me from accepting your kind offer to play Daft Dick.
>
> I have, as you requested, passed the script on to my wife. She says she will read it when she has finished working her way through the complete Iris Murdoch.
>
> Yours in God,
>
> Simon.[9]

These playful references to the complexity, perceived exclusiveness and sheer volume of Murdoch's work will find accord with some readers and also serve to draw attention to Adrian Mole's own shortcomings as an intellectual and writer. To those familiar with Murdoch's fiction, they may also underscore some distinct and remarkable parallels in the work of Murdoch and Townsend. Townsend is one of

very few novelists in the 20th century who fully embraced the diary as a novelistic form, but both of Murdoch's (arguably) most accomplished novels, *The Black Prince* and the Booker Prize-winning *The Sea, The Sea*, experiment with first-person diary or memoir form. Murdoch's *Under the Net* (1954), *The Black Prince* and *The Sea, The Sea*, and Townsend's Adrian Mole diaries have in common narrators who are failed, or failing, writers whose comic ineptitude and lack of self-awareness often mask acute mental disintegration. Like Adrian Mole, who initially lives with his parents in a poor suburb of Leicester, Bradley Pearson, Charles Arrowby and also Hilary Burde in *A Word Child*, come from working-class, or at least lower-middle-class families: Charles was raised in the Midlands, Hilary 'in a town up north' and Bradley in a shop in Croydon. For the sake of brevity, and because *The Sea, The Sea* is perhaps closest in form and subject to Townsend's Adrian Mole books, this essay will focus on Charles Arrowby, but much of the following applies to his counterparts in Murdoch's novels.

Murdoch has constructed Charles using elements of the traditional 'buffoon' or 'writer-as-buffoon', as identified by Angela Hague in her study of comedy in Murdoch's novels.[10] Much of the comic essence of the book comes from the discrepancy between Charles's perception of himself and his world and the way he is seen by others. He has pursued fame as an actor, theatre director and playwright as a route away from what he felt was a mildly downtrodden childhood, with a degree of success. Charles has not, however, escaped a sense of intellectual inferiority, which often manifests as pomposity and pretentiousness. Adrian Mole's desire that his diary records the 'torment of being a 13¾-year-old undiscovered intellectual' for posterity is perhaps a more truthful justification than Charles's stated intention to use his diary/memoir to record his 'philosophy' as he repents of egoism.[11]

Murdoch and Townsend both excel at what Bakhtin suggests is a primary function of the novel: the exposure of pretension within the dominant culture in their respective, overlapping, eras. That they often perform this exposure by way of male narrators is significant because both Murdoch and Townsend strongly identified with their male creations but could also stand far enough outside male experience to satirise it. The intellectual pretensions of Charles Arrowby and Adrian Mole are comically and deliberately undercut by their respective failures to read even the simplest of situations correctly, particularly if these situations involve women. Charles's assessments of the women around him, Rosina, Lizzie, Hartley, his mother, Aunt Estelle and Clement, are subtly destabilised by information about their lives that he has not picked up on. It becomes evident that all of the conclusions Charles makes about his relationships with women underestimate his own standing in their lives and his effect on them. His understanding of his tempestuous affair with Rosina, for instance, is that it blew over quickly and that neither participant was necessarily in love, but Rosina's picture of the relationship paints it as a catalyst for

the complete destruction of her life. She tells Charles, 'you wrecked my marriage, you prevented me from having children, for you I made a slaughter of all my friends. And when I'd left him, you abandoned me' (*TSTS* 108). Rosina recounts the trauma she experienced when Charles left her and she terminated a pregnancy: 'I cried for months – for years – about that – I've never stopped crying' (*TSTS* 316), she tells him, to his surprise. Charles is grateful to Lizzie for an affair which, he writes, 'never caused me suffering' (*TSTS* 52) and dismisses the letter in which she outlines the pain he has caused her ('I've been in hell') as 'a silly inconsistent woman's letter' (*TSTS* 47). He also thoroughly underestimates Lizzie's relationship with Gilbert, which he cannot comprehend as serious and fulfilling because Gilbert is homosexual. Lastly, and most dangerously, he mistakes Hartley's fear of him for intense love. His belief that his great first love ended due to interference from her parents, who moved the family away, and also because of the war, is clearly untrue. There are many indications within Charles's diary that he not only forgot about Hartley for most of his life, but that his memories of their golden, innocent relationship are mostly fantasy. His recollection of the child Hartley never hugging him, but 'sometimes, rigidly, she held my arms, leaving great bruises' (*TSTS* 86), is humorous because it reveals Charles's misreading of the situation as an indicator of the intensity of Hartley's love for him, and disturbing because it seems to reveal that Hartley was actually trying to restrain or repel him. His later abduction and imprisonment of the adult Hartley in the belief that he is rescuing her from an unhappy, even violent, marriage, is a continuation of this wilful misreading of their communication and leads to a deeply traumatic episode for Hartley, and, indirectly, her son Titus's death. Charles's infantilising of women, the belief that they are incapable of knowing their own minds with the result that they become imprisoned in inferior relationships from which he must free them, is a common behaviour in Murdoch's male protagonists. In this way she threads the truth about her complex, damaged and frustrated female characters throughout the ludicrous beliefs her male characters hold about them.

Adrian Mole is also characterised by his underestimation of the women in his life, particularly his mother. It is notable in this context that Townsend claimed her ideal reader was a 35-year-old woman, and Pauline Mole is a 35-year-old woman in the first book. Her journey of self-discovery, and Adrian's belittling of it, is a constant theme in the diaries. Pauline's reading list, which initially includes *The Second Sex* and *The Female Eunuch*, runs alongside Adrian's superficial reading of classic literature. The implication is that, while he claims to have read *War and Peace* in a day and is inspired by *Animal Farm* to think about becoming a vet, his mother is genuinely stimulated and intellectually improved by her reading. Both Murdoch and Townsend are adept at depicting the tragi-comic failure of the male gaze, the flawed thought processes involved in these failures and the consequences both for

the men who misread the women in their lives and for the women whose lives are limited because they are underestimated or misjudged.

Both Charles and Adrian seem to use their diaries as a defence against, rather than as a record of, a reality which they are mostly unable to contemplate. As Angela Hague notes, 'comedy, the most realistic of the literary vehicles, is the proper mode in which to present the most important reality, death'.[12] Charles's diary is both a record of, and a diversion from, his deep grief for his former lover Clement and several other more distant losses. His narrative orbits the death of Clement, never fleshing out her shadowy presence until close to the end of the novel. In the context of this recent bereavement, Charles's frenzied and buffoonish attempts to build a life in his new house (tellingly in the area in which Clement grew up) and to *direct* the actions of his visitors as if in a performance are all diversions from mourning. When he finally faces Clement's loss, as a direct result of James's death, the tone of the novel changes briefly and unequivocally, revealing the pain he has been grappling with. This is the section in which Charles appears to be most truthful about his condition:

> That time of attentive mourning for her death was quite unlike the black blank horror of the thing itself. We had mourned together, trying to soothe each other's pain. But that shared pain was so much less than the torment of her vanishing, the terrible lived time of her eternal absence. How different each death is, and yet it leads us into the self-same country, that country which we inhabit so rarely, where we see the worthlessness of what we have so long pursued and will so soon return to pursuing. (*TSTS* 485)

The narrative, which until this point has been, at least in part, an attempt to depict Charles as comically delusional and somewhat trivial now reveals him to have experienced real trauma. The imparting of wisdom, about food, love and the theatre which take up much of the 'Prehistory' section of the novel, and the lovesickness which forms much of the 'History' section, were building up to this catharsis. Charles's pomposity and buffoonery in the earlier sections serve to bring this candid recollection of Clement's dying into stark relief. As Murdoch notes, in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 'the comic is capable of the highest seriousness, in life and in art' (*MGM* 92).

As well as providing a bleak portrait of the Thatcher, Major and Blair years in the UK through a combination of satire and social realism, Townsend wrote the first Adrian Mole book, she claimed, about the subject of divorce which she believed to be 'the most terrible tragedy for children'.[13] Adrian Mole was created, she said, 'to remind people of that'.[14] Adrian's early diary entries expose his bewilderment about

what is happening to his family when his parents separate. The tone is always tragi-comic: for instance, the reader is encouraged to laugh at Adrian's easy acceptance of the lie that his mother is fixing a boiler with a neighbour with whom she is clearly having an affair, and his obliviousness to his father's girlfriend's advanced pregnancy. His peevish complaints about the poverty of the household when his mother leaves his father are funny, but there is real suffering there too. As with Murdoch's work it is perceptible when the tone of the Adrian Mole diaries shifts towards the tragic end of the tragi-comic spectrum, as when, in *Adrian Mole and the Weapons of Mass Destruction*, the adult Adrian, now a father, writes an 'in memoriam' notice for his son's friend who has been killed fighting the war in Iraq:

> Stainforth, Private Robert Patrick, died on July 21st 2003, in Iraq, while serving on active duty. He was sent there because vainglorious, arrogant men wanted war and he died a terrible death. He was eighteen years old.[15]

Moments of astute commentary about their own failures also punctuate both writers' diary entries, such as Charles Arrowby's admission that 'of course this chattering diary is a façade, the literary equivalent of the everyday smiling face which hides the inward ravages of jealousy, remorse, fear and the consciousness of irretrievable moral failure' (*TSTS* 483), and Adrian's realisation that 'ever since I was a little boy I have preferred to live in the world of fiction. I have found the real world to be a harsh place'.[16] These moments of self-awareness are short lived, but they sharpen the comedy by confirming that these characters are not merely buffoons, or that we are all buffoons. Townsend's legacy can be traced in the voices of comic characters, such as Alan Partridge, who work so hard to deny their own ridiculousness, while actually enhancing it, but experience moments in which they are fully aware of how they appear to others. These tragi-comic voices are only successful if they are finely balanced, and an aspect of Murdoch's legacy, via Townsend in many cases, is this fine balance of delusion and self-awareness in modern comic voices.

Townsend's final novel, *The Woman Who Went to Bed for a Year*, engages overtly with Murdoch's work throughout, suggesting, as do the interviews she gave at this time, that Murdoch's work was on her mind. As well as the direct reference to *The Sea, The Sea*, there is an indirect reference to *The Black Prince*, the novel which includes Murdoch's best description of falling in love, at the moment in which one of Townsend's characters falls in love:

> The possibility of love had softened her face and straightened her back. How could she have lived so long without knowing of his existence?

> All that love stuff that she had once despised: the hearts, the songs, moon/June, the flowers. She *wanted* him to give her a white teddy bear clutching a plastic rose. Before today she could take men or leave them, most of them were spoilt man-boys. But he – he was worthy of worship.
>
> He looked like a black prince.[17]

The clearest allusion to Murdoch, however, occurs in the central plot. A middle-aged housewife, Eva, takes to her bed the day her twins leave home, and stays there for a year. She believes her withdrawal from her everyday life, the tasks of which are outlined in detail, is a logical choice. Others believe it to be the result of laziness, psychosis, empty nest syndrome or some kind of political protest, and there is much discussion of her condition. During her time in bed she is visited against her will by a number of characters, all in need of her attention. After she talks a man out of suicide she very quickly, and unwittingly thanks to social media, gains a worldwide reputation as a holy woman and teacher and the nickname, the Saint of Suburbia. Hundreds of people camp outside her house waiting for a glimpse of the messiah. Conversely, Eva begins to see herself as a 'giant grub', an image which echoes Anne Cavidge's observation about Christ in *Nuns and Soldiers* (1980) and the perception of Stuart as a 'white grub' in *The Good Apprentice*.[18] Eva's grub-like persona seems to be a sign that she is emptying of self in readiness for a new phase. There are clear echoes here of Murdoch's *The Message to the Planet* (1989), which chronicles the elevation of Marcus Vallar to quasi-sainthood by his friend Patrick, who believes Marcus resurrected him, and later by a group of seekers who gather outside the psychiatric hospital into which he has booked himself. In both novels, the messiah figure, from whom some great work or manifestation is expected, is a disappointment to their followers. They are both revealed to be experiencing extreme suffering. Eva, we gather from brief references, grieves over the miscarriage she had as a very young woman and has begun to find the suffering of others oppressive: 'I can feel their misery clogging up my system, I can hardly breathe. How can I be a good woman?' she asks.[19] Marcus, who is Jewish, perceives himself as having been maimed by the Holocaust, which he calls 'the icon of all human suffering', although he personally escaped persecution.[20]

The depth of grief and sorrow for the world which causes Eva and Marcus to feel the need to withdraw from it ironically draws people to them and creates the complicated, often farcical, situations they intended to escape from. Both novels contend with the need, felt by many, for a messiah figure who can provide healing and bestow meaning upon their lives. In both cases the chosen ones are empathetic to the point of self-destruction and take on the grief and pain of others

until they can do so no more. An important message of both novels is a familiar one to Murdoch readers – that it is both impossible and inadvisable for most people to withdraw from the world and from the absurdity of our existence.

1 Sue Townsend, 'My Six Best Books' <https://www.express.co.uk/entertainment/books/338681/My-six-best-books-Sue-Townsend> [accessed 11 December 2018].
2 Michael O. Bellamy, 'An Interview with Iris Murdoch', in Gillian Dooley, ed., *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction: Conversations with Iris Murdoch* (Columbia, SA: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 48.
3 *Secret Life of Sue Townsend (Aged 68¾)* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b080391j> [accessed 22 October 2016].
4 Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992) (London: Vintage, 2003), 92.
5 Sue Townsend, *The Woman Who Went to Bed for a Year* (London: Penguin, 2012), 121.
6 Sue Townsend, *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole Aged 13¾* (London: Penguin, 2002), 231.
7 Townsend, *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole Aged 13¾*, 232.
8 Sue Townsend, *Adrian Mole: The Lost Years* (New York: Soho Press Inc., 1994), 89.
9 Sue Townsend, *Adrian Mole: The Prostrate Years* (London: Penguin, 2009), 20.
10 Angela Hague, *Iris Murdoch's Comic Vision* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1984), 37.
11 Townsend*, The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole Aged 13¾*, 21; Iris Murdoch, *The Sea, The Sea* (1978) (London: Vintage 1999), 2.
12 Hague, *Iris Murdoch's Comic Vision*, 48.
13 *Secret Life of Sue Townsend (Aged 68¾)*.
14 *Secret Life of Sue Townsend (Aged 68¾)*.
15 Sue Townsend, *Adrian Mole and the Weapons of Mass Destruction* (London: Penguin, 2004), 458–9.
16 Townsend*, Adrian Mole and the Weapons of Mass Destruction*, 299.
17 Townsend*, The Woman Who Went to Bed for a Year*, 138.
18 Townsend*, The Woman Who Went to Bed for a Year*, 287; Iris Murdoch, *The Good Apprentice* (1985) (London: Vintage, 2000), 28.
19 Townsend*, The Woman Who Went to Bed for a Year*, 378.
20 Iris Murdoch, *The Message to the Planet* (1989) (London: Penguin, 1990), 416.

‘This rough magic I here abjure’: Theatricality in *The Green Knight*

Frances White

Clement Graffe, a central character in Iris Murdoch’s penultimate novel, *The Green Knight* (1993), is described by her thus: ‘Clement loved the theatre, he loved the buildings, the actors, the sonorous voices, the echo in the empty shell, the clothes, the smell, the perpetual glittering artificiality and transformation scenes’.[1] By the time she wrote these words, Murdoch had considerable experience of the theatre herself. She had written two stage plays, *The Servants and the Snow* (1989) and *The Three Arrows* (1989), and a radio play, *The One Alone* (1995).[2] She had also collaborated on adapting three of her novels for the stage: *A Severed Head* (1961), *The Italian Girl* (1964), and *The Black Prince* (1973).

I want to suggest later on in this essay that Clement’s role in *The Green Knight* offers a self-reflexive commentary on Murdoch’s view of her own role as novelist. For the present it is enough to say that the author’s description of her character is apposite to herself. Murdoch loved the theatre, she loved the buildings, and so forth. As a student at Oxford, Murdoch enthusiastically took part in amateur dramatics, and spent the summer of 1939 touring the countryside with the Magpie Players.[3] Actors and theatre directors feature prominently in her novels, most notably Charles Arrowby in *The Sea, The Sea* (1978). From the beginning, theatres are significant spaces in Murdoch’s world. Jake Donaghue finds Anna Quentin in the little Riverside Miming Theatre on Hammersmith Mall in her début novel, *Under the Net* (1954). It is in a theatre that Clement Graffe first met Louise Anderson in *The Green Knight* and it is again in an empty theatre that they are reunited towards the end of that novel and realise that they must marry.

Among Murdoch scholars, Hilda Spear has been a particularly close observer of the theatrical aspects apparent throughout Murdoch’s fiction. She notes the strong sense of theatricality as early as *The Bell* (1958), and observes how ‘the reader is joined by’ an outsider character, Dora Greenfield, ‘as onlooker’.[4] Murdoch does not simply mention the theatre in her novels, she employs dramatically based techniques to present her fiction and to create her novelistic points of view. Thus Dora’s, and our, first view of Imber Court ‘is presented rather like a stage setting for

a Shakespearean performance as though from a darkened auditorium she waits for the play to begin'.[5] Spear analyses why this sense of theatre is artistically integral to Murdoch's work:

> For her, the novel is concerned not with introspection and angoisse but with interrelationships, person with person. It is partly for this reason that her novels have a tendency towards the dramatic; drama is essentially about characters interacting with each other and, in order perhaps to combat the Sartrean view of isolated man, she constantly describes scenes in which characters are of necessity responding to each other's actions.[6]

This point, which is closely related to Murdoch's moral philosophy, continues to be valid throughout her fictional oeuvre. However, another aspect of Murdoch's employment of the dramatic comes later strongly to the fore: the dramatist's conscious relationship with and manipulation of her audience. In the later novels, Murdoch is increasingly aware of the power and ambiguity of this dynamic, and it becomes predominant in *The Green Knight*.

With regard to *The Unicorn* (1963), Spear remarks, 'so often in Murdoch's novels, the vocabulary constantly draws attention to the theatrical elements of the story', and she notes the detail of the settings, interior or exterior, to be found in Murdoch's work, and the, as it were, 'stage directions' for the movements of characters which are given by the author.[7] This propensity to conceive the novels in highly dramatised terms continues to be evident throughout Murdoch's career. Spear observes that in *The Black Prince* 'we are presented with a play in three acts', and in *The Sea, The Sea* and *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983) 'there is considerable emphasis on [the novels] as dramatic works, with careful casting and elaborate scene setting'.[8] All of these features are exhibited to the highest degree in *The Green Knight*. But before turning to consider that novel in fine detail, comments from other Murdoch scholars may augment our understanding of the importance of the theatrical element in Murdoch's fiction. It is not a surface phenomenon, a bolt-on extra. Perhaps Jake and Anna, or Clement and Louise, could equally well have met in parks, churches or shops, but Murdoch's deliberate choice of theatres as meaningful sites for meeting derives from the intrinsic significance of the theatre for her interpretation of human relationships.

Bradley Pearson in *The Black Prince* wryly observes that 'being is acting' and this aspect of human interaction continues to occupy Murdoch's attention.[9] 'Yes, we are players, actors' (*GK* 38), Aleph Anderson says to Harvey Blackett, in *The Green Knight*. Our human ability to play-act, to choose roles, to direct the emotions and actions of others around us, is a vital aspect of Murdoch's apprehension of humanity

and of morality. That is one level of accounting for these enigmatic utterances by her characters. But a further layer of potential interpretation surfaces, when the fact is brought into conscious consideration that what is being read or discussed is a work of art, a created artificial world with an author behind it. At this point we become aware that Murdoch is making her characters to be, to act – and, in the late novel *The Green Knight*, she is drawing our attention to this point. Aleph and Harvey are 'players, actors', not merely in the sense that we are all such to each other in human life, but in the specific sense here highlighted, that they are Murdoch's 'players, actors', in this drama which she has created and of which we are the audience. This point lies at the heart of Murdoch's own understanding and presentation of the essentially theatrical nature of her enterprise. As art is in Murdoch's view a moral matter, the point requires close attention.

The moral aspect concerns Murdoch's sense of the power of deception and of magic exercised by theatre. Her fullest expression of this comes in *The Sea, The Sea*, when Charles Arrowby says, 'The theatre is an attack on mankind carried on by magic: to victimize an audience every night, to make them laugh and cry and miss their trains'.10 Discussing this passage, Peter Conradi notes that 'drama is described as the genre which must *stoop* to catch its audience's attention, partly preparing the way for the shameless manipulations of the plot itself', and he speaks of the way in which 'the action of the novel is imaged forth for us in theatrical terms'.[11] Detractors of Murdoch's work vilify her for shameless manipulation of her plots, but her novels continue to display this characteristic. Murdoch aims not at presenting a slice of life, but at offering, through heightened, self-consciously artificial, dramatic situations, underlying truths concerning goodness and human struggle. She cares as little about realism as Shakespeare: her reality, like his, is of another order. Conradi calls Shakespeare the 'tutelary deity' of many of Murdoch's novels: *The Black Prince* is suffused *by Hamlet*; *The Sea, The Sea* and *Jackson's Dilemma* (1995) by *The Tempest*; and *The Nice and the Good* (1968) by *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, to offer just a few examples.[12] Murdoch's later novels have, as Conradi expresses it, 'the bland unconcern with probability of the later [Shakespearean] romances', and many critics have noted Murdoch's growing tendency to close her novels with Shakespearean endings filled with felicitous reconciliations and multiple marriages.[13]

Murdoch relates herself as author to some of her key characters who direct the lives of other characters around them. Furthermore, she is herself keenly aware of this, and sees this dynamic in her own work as paralleling Shakespeare's relationship with the characters in his plays. As long ago as 1979 (just after *The Sea, The Sea* which won the Booker Prize, but before the last seven 'late' Murdoch novels), Richard Todd, who has written at length on the Shakespearean interest in Murdoch's fiction, noted perceptively, 'the existence, in both her own writing and in Shakespeare's, of an "enchanter" or "stage-managing" character in certain plots, who

can be seen as in some way figurative of what the creator does to the rest of his cast'.[14] Prospero, the Magician of The Tempest, is the archetypal Shakespearean figure here, of course, and Prospero's influence is strong in *The Sea, The Sea* and then again, poignantly, in *Jackson's Dilemma*, Murdoch's last lyrical novel, of which more later. Such figures abound in Murdoch's fiction, from Mischa Fox in her revealingly entitled second novel, *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956), through Julius King, the puppeteer of the cast of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970), to Charles Arrowby and Clement Graffe.

Spear's close attention to the development of the theatrical strand in Murdoch makes related and pertinent points. She remarks,

> interest in theatre is [...] in all the novels, a continuing one, but in the course of time it seems to me that it has become less spontaneous and more of a structural device [...] This looking-in on little theatrical scenes which is so much part of the actual writing of the earlier novels [...] has gradually given way to more deliberate dramatic structuring.[15]

She also comments,

> not only have actors such as Charles Arrowby or Clement Graffe become major characters in the novels but also discussion of the role of 'acting', the conscious or unconscious substitution of – or perhaps interplay between – imagination and reality have become dominant.[16]

In the ensuing close reading of *The Green Knight*, I want to take these observations by earlier critics further, and to contend that in this late mature work, Murdoch makes self-reflexive use of her theatrical tendencies, and draws her readers' attention to her own devices for the extra-textual purpose of putting the whole conjoint novelistic and readerly enterprise under examination. Theatre, by this stage, is integral to Murdoch's understanding of the art of the novel as she uniquely practises it. Failure to perceive this has led to baffled and hostile reception of her idiosyncratic works. Earlier in her writing life, Murdoch wished strongly to be able to create free characters, a gift she perceived in Tolstoy among others. She was as sharply aware as her critics that her plotting skills tend to deprive her characters of such freedom, but by the end of her career I think she had come to accept her own peculiar strengths and to build on them fearlessly, taking courage from her mentor, Shakespeare.

To see Murdoch thus embracing theatricality in *The Green Knight* requires some knowledge of this strange and enigmatic novel. Unusually for Murdoch, *The Green Knight*, as its title indicates, draws on Arthurian legend as much as on

Shakespearean echoes. It overtly draws parallels between itself and mystery plays and is patently and unashamedly unrealistic. A summary of the convoluted and multi-stranded plot would be arduous and confusing, but certain points can usefully be made. In the time shortly before the action of the novel opens, Lucas Graffe, the adopted elder brother of Clement, who has nursed a lifetime of hatred towards his favoured sibling, takes Clement to a deserted piece of ground in London and attempts to murder him by striking him with a baseball bat. A passer-by, Peter Mir, intervenes, and receives the blow instead of Clement. Of this blow he dies. Except that he does not die. With audacious imaginative fabrication, Murdoch has him recover, unbeknownst to any of the other characters, and reappear, to seek first retribution, and later reconciliation, after a re-enactment of the scene jolts memories which Peter had forgotten following the blow to the head. Nothing about the legal or medical aspects of this scenario rings true for a moment. We are required to suspend disbelief.

Also in *The Green Knight* there are three teenaged sisters of beauty, cleverness and purity of heart and life. Todd has alleged that Murdoch's earliest critic and former admirer, A.S. Byatt, lost patience with Murdoch's fictional outrageousness at this point, declaring that the creation of 20th-century teenage-girl characters with no access to telephones, pop music, interest in make-up, clothes or boys was an unreality too far for her to swallow.[17] But I feel this is to miss the mark by a long way. Aleph, Sefton and Moy exist on the same plane as Perdita, or Imogen. Similarly, we do not question the plausibility of events in *The Tempest* or in *A Winter's Tale*. Murdoch's last novels are Romances of this Shakespearean kind, in which everyday reality is subordinate, or even simply irrelevant, to the works of art she is creating. That said, we can turn to the text to see what it is that Murdoch is attempting in this work.

The description of Clement with which this essay began occurs very early on in *The Green Knight* and alerts us to the importance which the idea of theatre is to have within it. What Clement is said to love about theatre includes 'the perpetual glittering artificiality and transformation scenes' (*GK* 25). Here Murdoch signals to the attentive reader her intention to create another novel of such 'perpetual glittering artificiality' and blatantly to indulge herself in 'transformation scenes'. Transformation does not come any stronger than apparent resurrection after supposed death. Alongside the Arthurian strain in the novel are such Shakespearean transformation scenes as the reappearance of Hermione to Leontes. It seems to me that Murdoch is saying here, this is what I do, accept it, and interpret it, at the level of deliberate artifice which you would allow to the theatre. This is drama. This demand is underscored by Aleph's words, also already referred to, 'we are players, actors' (*GK* 38). Murdoch is indicating the nature of this novel, and accentuating her position as dramatist, that of her characters as actors in her drama, and that

of the reader as audience. The novel as a stage is plainly offered to us, when, after describing middle-aged Clement and Louise's earlier relationship, Murdoch states, 'The stage now belonged to the young people, there would be happenings' (*GK* 66), and Clement insists that loving Louise is his 'drama' (*GK* 67). Not only is this vocabulary of drama, scene, stage-set and so forth reiterated throughout the book, but *The Green Knight* is divided into five chapters, the five acts of a play. Clement, who describes the plot as 'the slow enactment of an awful pantomime' (*GK* 329), draws our attention to the deliberately dramatic structure of this text. 'What he had lately seen might be called the "third event", or Act Three [...] Perhaps [Peter's party] would turn out to be Act Four' (*GK* 329). Murdoch is purposefully blurring the genre of the novel.

Murdoch's fiction as well as her philosophy is centrally concerned with the experience of human consciousness and emotion, and with the struggle of human beings towards truthfulness, unselfishness and, ultimately – with inevitable failure – towards goodness. Earlier, more realistic, novels, attempted to manifest this in less 'glitteringly artificial' ways. Here, Murdoch is allowing the action of a drama set reverberations of spiritual struggle resounding through her text, for the reader to pick up and wrestle with for himself. In much the same way that the late Shakespearean romances are pivotally concerned with issues of remorse, repentance, reconciliation and renouncement, so Murdoch's last novels concern themselves with these ineffable areas of human spiritual experience. Neither Shakespeare nor Murdoch will do the work for the audience/reader: both simply present their drama, their mystery-plays as material for the human spirit to work upon. Another passage from Charles Arrowby's ruminations about the theatre in *The Sea, The Sea* suggests the subtle distinctions Murdoch is working with, between what can be done by a traditional novelist and what can be done by a dramatist:

> Emotions really exist at the bottom of the personality or at the top. In the middle they are acted. This is why all the world is a stage, and why the theatre is always popular and indeed why it exists: why it is like life, and it is like life even though it is the most vulgar and outrageously factitious of all the arts. Even a middling novelist can tell quite a lot of truth. His humble medium is on the side of truth. Whereas the theatre, even at its most 'realistic', is connected with the level at which, and the methods by which, we tell our everyday lies. This is the sense in which 'ordinary' theatre resembles life, and dramatists are disgraceful liars unless they are very good. (*TSTS* 33)

This complex meditation on the nature of the novel and of theatre is mediated through the muddled and mendacious consciousness of one of Murdoch's famously

self-deceiving first-person narrators, but it nonetheless holds nuggets of insight for understanding Murdoch's own stance and her subsequent development as an artist. The 'humble medium' of the novel through which truth can be told is enlarged, as Murdoch's vision and technique develops, into a more 'outrageously factitious' form of art, far closer to the theatre than to the traditional novel. By accepting the role of a 'disgraceful liar', and by using lies in a similar fashion to the late Shakespeare, Murdoch emerges into a closeness to truth, a truth which is unattainable by realistic methods. By turning herself from novelist pure and simple into a dramatist-in-prose, to coin an awkward phrase, Murdoch is able to lie her way to the truth. Like Shakespeare, by the end of her career, she is 'very good'. Which is why I want to claim that, pace the hostile criticism her later work has received from readers who fail to perceive the shifts in intention which Murdoch has made in these books, she gets away with it. Romance, not realism, is the lens through which a novel like *The Green Knight* must be focused.

Illuminating links may be drawn between Murdoch and her character Clement, who, in Todd's words, 'can be seen as in some way figurative of what [she] does to the rest of [her] cast'.[18] The provisionality and disposability of Murdoch's style of novel-writing has long commanded the attention of critics, notably Lorna Sage.[19] Clement says,

> You dedicate yourself passionately to something, to a project, to people, to a family, you think of nothing else for weeks and months, then suddenly it's over, it's perpetual destruction, perpetual divorce, perpetual adieu. It's like éternel retour, it's a koan. It's like falling in love and being smashed over and over again. (*GK* 63)

He is speaking of the theatre, but this could be an account of the experience of the novelist who dedicates herself to each new novel in turn, loving her characters and living with them in her head (as Murdoch did for such weeks and months). As each book is finished and published, there is this 'being smashed' sensation, then the new 'falling in love' – the perpetual cycle Clement eloquently describes. Later, musing on his current work in the theatre, Clement thinks, 'I'm a stage manager, it seems [...] not a director!' (*GK* 117), which may echo the sense Murdoch sometimes had of stage-managing her plots, which took on a life of their own, rather than directing them as she had initially wished.

Clement has also worked in circuses. He has been an acrobat (*GK* 25) and he juggles brilliantly (*GK* 34). This too parallels Murdoch's verbal acrobatics and her juggling skills with her characters and plots. It is Lucas rather than Clement who is spoken of as 'the ring-master' (*GK* 59), but this circus title confirms the sense that there is within the book a figure of power who desires to control the activities of the

other characters, mirrored by Murdoch herself, the author as 'ring-master' of her novels. However, the two most pertinent phrases which connect Clement and his creator contain an element of self-disclosure, even self-mockery. This is not new in Murdoch's fiction: in *The Black Prince* she includes reviews of books by an author-character, Arnold Baffin, which read as self-parodies of her own novels, exploiting (and perhaps drawing the sting from) criticisms of her own work. Clement 'was, in that great palace of true and false [the theatre], some said too versatile' (GK 25). This charge has likewise been levelled at Murdoch in the house of fiction. But the most powerful image of her own position, as well as Clement's, is drawn from the circus, that ancient, most popular, and apparently crude, form of theatre. Clement says to Louise, 'I've been on a high wire long enough' (*GK* 63), and this vertiginous metaphor is reiterated in a longer passage:

> he had played the ape and the jester too long, he supposed and expected to play the fool, he was essentially a self-dramatising entertainer, who turns over twice in the air and fears that next time he will break his neck. He had spent too long up on the high wire. (*GK* 67)

Is this Murdoch, writing her penultimate novel in her seventies, feeling the riskiness and danger of her own position, fearing her self-dramatising tendencies, knowing that her work is being received with increasing bafflement and disfavour? Did she anticipate a fall? Is it she who has spent too long for comfort 'up on the high wire' of her own brand of entertainment? Other aspects of her emphasis on the theatricality of this novel support the idea.

When Peter Mir insists that he return with Lucas, Clement and Bellamy James to the scene of his 'murder' to re-enact the disturbing occurrence, it is Clement who feels responsible for attempting to direct what will happen. Discussing it beforehand with Bellamy, Clement says, 'we'll have to *control* it, don't you see, give it some intelligible order, something to keep them going, a beginning, a middle and an end. There must be a termination— '. 'Like theatre?' Bellamy queries, and Clement concurs, 'Yes, like theatre' (*GK* 267). The novelist too has to control her own imagined happenings, to give them 'intelligible order', 'a beginning, a middle and an end', and this process of structuring her novels seems to have become increasingly an experience 'like theatre' for Murdoch. Clement wonders if there could be a 'dramatic moment' when he hands the baseball bat to Peter, and the text is emphatic: 'Had Clement not told Bellamy that the encounter would and *must* be theatre?' (*GK* 270). It is as if Murdoch is stressing that such strange and unrealistic encounters as she offers us in her novels can only work if they are successfully presented, and received, as theatre. These are not the scenes of a novel of realism. They are quite other.

We may recall here that Spear highlighted the sense in which the reader is paralleled by a character, Dora, in *The Bell*, written 35 years earlier than *The Green Knight*, such that both reader and character act as audience for the scenes which take place in the novel. This quality of doubling readers with characters as audiences is here taken to extremes; blatantly and emphatically exposed to view. As in earlier novels, the rooms are described as if giving directions for stage-settings, with every chair precisely positioned, every character (actor) sitting or standing in their prescribed place, and the lighting chosen and adjusted with almost obsessional attention. 'I haven't put the centre light on,' Louise says to Clement, 'I hope that's right' (*GK* 156). The occasion is the introduction of Peter Mir to the Graffe brothers' friends at Louise's house. He has demanded to know all these people who have been gathered there to meet him, and Lucas is expected to be present. Peter's private intention of making Lucas tell the truth about what occurred is thwarted by Lucas's truancy from the party, which leaves Clement, again, trying to direct and control the occasion. As Clement and Peter speak, the text perpetually and overtly forefronts the concept of the other characters as audience:

> The attentive audience listened respectfully to these exchanges. There was a tension, even a nervous excitement, but no glances were exchanged. [...] The audience, who had been silent since the bell rang, at once rose to their feet. [...] [Mir] sat down. The audience sat down. [After Clement has made a speech] There was a pause, then someone [...] out of nervousness and to end the silence or else [...] in mockery of his speech, began to clap. Everyone clapped. [...] The audience, slightly embarrassed [...] now shifted, looking anxiously at one another, then at Clement. (*GK* 157–63)

Clement has failed to direct and control the scene in Lucas's absence. But we too, the readers of *The Green Knight*, are an audience, Murdoch's audience. We read in expectant silence: later we exchange views. Are we convinced by her 'drama', by her 'actors'? Do we, metaphorically, clap? And if we do, is it out of nervous tension, or in mockery? Has the novelist convinced us or embarrassed us? In this episode of the novel Murdoch creates a direct experience of theatre, and of theatrical reaction within, and to, her novel. It is as close as the novel can come to being what I earlier termed drama-in-prose.

Theatre-director, ring-master, magician. All these roles are allotted within the text and played outside it by Murdoch herself as author. The last of these relates art to magic, 'an attack on mankind carried on by magic' (*TSTS* 33), as Charles Arrowby memorably had come to feel that novels were equally as culpable as theatre of being such 'magical attacks'. Shakespeare is often thought to have been speaking of his

own role as playwright-magician, when he has Prospero declare that he here abjures 'this rough magic' at the end of *The Tempest*.[20] That Murdoch accepts this view (and that *The Tempest* is his last play), is clear from her own last work, *Jackson's Dilemma*. In this strange, haunting, Alzheimer's-ridden novel, she reflects on Shakespeare and on Prospero in particular. As Conradi observes, it 'reads like Murdoch's own farewell to her artistic powers: "He thought, my power has left me, will it ever return, will the *indications* return? [...] Have I simply come to the end of my tasks?"'; and '"at the end of what is necessary I have come to a place where there is no road"' (*JD* 248–9).[21] But I want to argue that she was already suspicious of her own powers and ready to abjure them in her penultimate novel.

Murdoch seems to be questioning her own novelistic activity at times, as when Bellamy, who 'had spent the day sitting on his bed waiting for the time to go and see the show', wonders, 'What had he seen? Something terrible – a *conjuring trick*' (*GK* 170). This description of the scene which Murdoch herself has created is also italicised by her. Such questioning of the acceptability of her magical art is also found earlier, when Clement realises that if Lucas had wanted to kill him, he could have done it anywhere at any time, and wonders: 'Why that elaborate stage set?' (*GK* 87). Both directing our attention towards, and self-interrogating, her theatrical tendency, Murdoch simultaneously throws the whole project into stark relief and puts it under examination.

The repeated central scene of violence with the Graffe brothers and Peter Mir in the deserted place is one of the set pieces readers of Murdoch's fiction have come to expect from her. She uses London, which she knew so intimately and loved so well, as a stage setting for her spiritual dramas, making it her site of performance in this book as in so many earlier novels. Thinking of the first occasion and preparing to take charge of the second re-enactment of it, Clement resolves to himself: 'They wanted theatre and they would get theatre. It was *his* mystery play and *he* would direct it' (*GK* 279). Such vehemence and possessiveness sit uneasily with Clement's actual role in the proceedings, and I think that at this point, author and character have merged, such that in Clement's persona, Murdoch is stating her own position vis-à-vis her readership. People have come to expect Murdoch to be 'outrageously factitious' and dramatic – she will not disappoint them. But one senses that her self-belief in the rightness of using magic in art, art-as-magic, in this way, is waning. Afterwards, when 'his mystery play' has 'turned into something [...] *newly* awful', Clement feels that he

> should simply have let the whole thing alone. He had stupidly been unable to resist a little drama, 'an evening in the theatre'. He had taken up Peter's words, 'a mystery play', but really he had thought of it as a farce [...] Surely Lucas had treated it ironically, as if he were enjoying

> what he had called a 'charade'. Had Clement imagined that he could *cure* them all by creating something *absurd*? Salvation by the absurd. A conjuring trick by Clement Graffe. (*GK* 290)

In this crucial Chinese-box style passage of reflection on a scene from within her own novel, Murdoch offers the reader a wide selection of descriptive vocabulary with which to label her own work. It is a sliding scale from a harmless 'charade', to 'farce', to a deceptive 'conjuring trick'. With characteristic self-mockery, but with a new note of seriousness underlying it, Murdoch lays bare the 'tricks of her trade' and humbly invites us to assess their worth. She who has believed in salvation by art, and in the goodness of art for people, here seems to be doubting her own faith and her own practice. Had she imagined that she could cure her readers by her work, and is she now perceiving it as merely theatrical, something absurd? A conjuring trick by Iris Murdoch? It is my contention that something of this nature underlies her writing of this last of her long late novels, before the shorter, starker, simpler *Jackson's Dilemma*, which does not share the 'glittering artificiality' of its predecessors, and that it is in *The Green Knight* that Murdoch shows herself abjuring her own 'rough magic'.

1 Iris Murdoch, *The Green Knight* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), 25, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *GK*.
2 *The One Alone* was performed on BBC Radio 3 on 13 February 1987 and published in 1995.
3 See Peter J. Conradi, ed., *Iris Murdoch: A Writer at War: Letters and Diaries 1939–45* (London: Short Books, 2010).
4 Hilda D. Spear, *Iris Murdoch,* 2nd edn (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 29.
5 Spear, *Iris Murdoch*, 29.
6 Spear, *Iris Murdoch*, 32.
7 Spear, *Iris Murdoch*, 48.
8 Spear, *Iris Murdoch*, 79 and 94.
9 Iris Murdoch, *The Black Prince* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), 200.
10 Iris Murdoch, *The Sea, The Sea* (London, Chatto & Windus, 1978), 33, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *TSTS*.
11 Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: The Saint and the Artist*, 3rd edn (London: HarperCollins, 2001), 319–20.
12 Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: The Saint and the Artist*, 320.
13 Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: The Saint and the Artist*, 320.
14 Richard Todd, *Iris Murdoch: The Shakespearian Interest* (London: Vision Press, 1979), 46.
15 Spear, *Iris Murdoch*, 123.
16 Spear, *Iris Murdoch*, 124.
17 Richard Todd made this remark in the discussion following his plenary paper 'What is Jackson's Dilemma?' at the third International Iris Murdoch conference at Kingston University in September 2006.
18 Richard Todd, *Iris Murdoch: The Shakespearian Interest*, 46.
19 See Lorna Sage, 'The Pursuit of Imperfection', *Critical Quarterly*, XIX.2 (1977), 57–87.
20 William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, V.1.32.
21 Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: The Saint and the Artist*, 361

Murder She Wrote: Intention and Guilt in Novels by George Eliot and Iris Murdoch

Janfarie Skinner

George Eliot was born in 1819, exactly 100 years before Iris Murdoch. In his obituary of Murdoch in the *Guardian*, Peter J. Conradi wrote that she was 'not the heir – as she early and wrongly imagined – to George Eliot, but to Dostoevsky'.[1] Murdoch's links with Dostoevsky are indeed extensive and have been widely and persuasively argued not least by Conradi himself. In his critical work *The Saint and the Artist* he quotes Murdoch as telling him, in 1983, that she 'would undoubtedly consider Dostoevsky a greater writer than George Eliot', and he later emphasises that 'George Eliot is in no sense a model for Murdoch'.[2] Nonetheless, scholars and critics do tend to invoke the names of the two women together when discussing women novelists with intellectual status or scholarly achievements. For example, Marialuisa Bignami, in her 2011 essay 'Iris Murdoch and George Eliot: Two Women Writers of Ideas', has suggested interesting parallels in the ways in which the writers develop narrative strategies to underpin the crucial role intellectual ideas play in their fictions, providing 'depth and texture'.[3] George Steiner, in his foreword to *Existentialists and Mystics*, reminds us that 'Iris Murdoch often refers to her great predecessor' and certainly Murdoch often named George Eliot when asked which novelists she admired.[4] She may not have rated Eliot as highly as Dostoevsky or Tolstoy, Henry James or Proust, but she did acknowledge her greatness. In 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited' she compares Eliot to Tolstoy, saying, 'she, at a level at times almost equal to that of Tolstoy, displays that godlike capacity for so respecting and loving her characters as to make them exist as free and separate beings'.[5] There are of course important differences between the two women: Eliot has a social and political range in her fiction which Murdoch does not attempt – with the possible exception of *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983) – and Murdoch's dark comic register would, I suspect, have baffled Eliot. But, while I recognise that George Eliot is not a model for Murdoch, I do believe there is insight to be gained into Murdoch's work by reading her alongside her 19th-century predecessor, particularly in relation to issues of moral decision-making, intention and will.

There are a number of notable biographical parallels. Both had turbulent early love lives, often falling disastrously in love with the intellectual men who were their mentors or teachers. In later life they both settled into legendary supportive relationships with literary men, Murdoch with John Bayley and George Eliot with George Henry Lewes. Both women challenged the sexual prejudices of their day. Eliot lived openly with the married Lewes and for a long time suffered social ostracism as a result; Murdoch, who herself had a somewhat unconventional marriage, wrote sympathetically about homosexual relationships long before legal or moral constraints were lifted. Both excelled in the study of languages and read widely in European literature, philosophy and theology (both read German, French, Latin and Greek philosophers in the original). Both made their early careers in non-fiction writing and made lasting contributions to intellectual debate through critical and philosophical essays. Both women were brought up as Christians but rejected formal belief in adult life while retaining interest in spiritual issues; there are a surprising number of clergymen in their books. Both had a particular interest in Jewish experience and history.

In the field of moral thinking Murdoch must have been aware of how closely her own theories mirrored Eliot's. Their moral philosophies are compatible though differently expressed. Eliot, influenced by the Positivist philosophers towards a Religion of Humanity, sees the moral life as the path of overcoming egoism and acknowledging that 'equivalent centre of self, from which the lights and shadows must always fall with a certain difference', while Murdoch sees the search for the Good, and the task of unselfing in everyday life, as attending to reality; the concept of attention she borrows from Simone Weil.[6] Priscilla Martin notes the similarity of approach but is not without criticism of the tone each can sometimes adopt: 'For both', she says, 'the basis of morality is the strenuous attempt to surmount one's natural egotism and to believe in the equal and different being of others', but, she observes: 'One may [...] feel as irritated by some of Murdoch's moralizing characters as by Eliot's moralizing narrator'.[7] My understanding of Martin's argument is that, in a novel, it may be no more acceptable to the reader for an author to promote their own moral agenda through the words or actions of a character than through an omniscient narrator. And I do think she has a point here. I would say both writers are at their weakest when they appear to tell us what we should do, and at their best when they show us how others fare when faced with choice. It is in the skill with which they interweave compelling stories with the interrogation of moral issues that George Eliot and Iris Murdoch have their pre-eminent achievement, and this skill is what links them together. I see the skills they share as threefold: first, both have an acute theoretical awareness of how moral weakness and moral backsliding work; second, both have great psychological insight into how these operate in individual consciousness; third, both have the literary ability to delineate

these processes convincingly in fiction in the crises and reflective exercises their characters undergo.

There are scenes in Murdoch's novels where the representation of the process of weakness of will, and moral slippage evokes Eliot for me, through echoes in texture, rhythms and tone: Rain Carter persuading Mor to drive her green Riley in *The Sandcastle* (1957) recalls the dreamlike mood of seductive erotic enchantment in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), when Maggie Tulliver and Stephen Guest drift too far down the river in a chapter called 'The Great Temptation'. The unpleasant master/servant dynamic between Mischa Fox and Calvin Blick in *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956) has a forerunner in the sado-masochistic relationship of Henleigh Mallinger Grandcourt and Mr Lush in *Daniel Deronda* (1876). When Jake Donoghue in *Under the Net* (1954) persuades himself it is permissible to publish *The Silencer*, he is described as undergoing a very similar downward spiral of temptation to that experienced by the weak-willed Arthur Donnithorne in Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859), who persuades himself he can, in fact he should, see his beloved Hetty again.

The Eliot novel which seems to haunt Murdoch most powerfully is *Daniel Deronda*, a novel which concerns the interlinked fortunes of the eponymous Deronda, and his search for his Jewish heritage, and the beautiful but flawed heroine Gwendolen Harleth. It is the novel which Rose Curtland takes with her to the reading party in *The Book and the Brotherhood* (1987) and on two occasions in her non-fiction Murdoch cites examples from *Daniel Deronda* to illustrate her arguments. In *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* (1953) Murdoch, who loved Sartre's (incomplete) novel sequence *Roads to Freedom* (*Les chemins de la liberté*, 1945–49), nonetheless criticises his representation of the philosophical/psychological concept of bad faith in his character Mathieu. She argues that George Eliot does it better in *Daniel Deronda* when Gwendolen, believing she ought to refuse the marriage proposal of the cold and sadistic Grandcourt, sets out to refuse but ends up saying yes. A 'yes' which, says Murdoch, 'hits off' bad faith with 'beautiful accuracy'.[8] The second reference to *Daniel Deronda* occurs in the essay 'Thinking and Language,' where Murdoch argues that thinking about the past involves retrieving mental states and expressing them in language. She is interested in the status of interior monologues. 'We *do*,' she says, 'attempt to characterise particular events which occur in them'. This is the crucial point she makes:

> In *Daniel Deronda* when Gwendolen hesitates to throw the lifebelt to her detested husband, who subsequently drowns, it matters very much to her to know whether or not at that moment she intended his death. It is also remarkable that another person, Deronda, thinks that he too is able to come to a true conclusion about Gwendolen's intention.[9]

Internal monologue and how it is retrieved is key, therefore, to identifying intention and guilt. The example of Gwendolen Harleth appears to have intrigued Murdoch. Justin Broackes, commenting on Murdoch's early essays, sees it as an 'excellent example' in her philosophical arguments which seek to establish the important status of inner mental activities.[10] I want to look at the example in more detail and consider how it may have fuelled her own many imaginative explorations of the theme of 'murder or accidental death?'

Gwendolen has married Grandcourt despite knowing he has a mistress and children and despite having effectively given her word to the mistress that she will not marry him. Grandcourt has become increasingly bullying and abusive; Gwendolen has come to hate him and wish him dead – this much is clear. Now, towards the end of the long novel, during a trip to Italy, and just when Gwendolen believes support is at hand in the figure of the almost saintly Deronda, her husband forces her out on a boat trip against her will, during which the wind gets up, he falls into the sea, sinks, rises, calls her to throw him a rope, but she does not. He is drowned. She jumps in to save him when it is too late. We hear the story directly from her as she tells it to Deronda and asks for his judgement. George Eliot leaves open the question whether the rope could have saved Grandcourt: Deronda's judgement is that in Gwendolen the good will overcame the bad and anyway the rope would not have helped. No jury would convict, but some critics do. Did she intend that a consequence of her failing to throw the rope would be that he should die?

Obviously, in Murdoch's terms, knowing what will count as guaranteeing a reliable memory of the mental event is crucial. 'What, after all', asks Murdoch, 'satisfies me, objective corroboration apart, that I have remembered anything correctly? One might speak here (particularly in such a case as the *Deronda* example), of adequacy, richness, flexibility, which will depend upon the subject's inducing a truthful and imaginative state of mind in the present'.[11] These crucial criteria must of course include the issue of an agent's capacity for accurate recall. Recent critics have identified in *Daniel Deronda* coded references to Gwendolen as a victim of childhood trauma, of abuse at the hands of her hated stepfather. The text is rich in clues of her repressed fears and obsessions. The manner of her recall of Grandcourt's death may be read as evidence of psychic shock.[12] While these factors need not cast doubt on the truth of Gwendolen's report, they surely indicate reasons for not judging her intention as culpable. Any ambivalence is perhaps that of her creator. In the original manuscript Eliot wrote, 'I knew no way of murdering him there, but I did, I did murder him in my thoughts'. But she crossed out 'murdering' and 'murder' and wrote in the more neutral 'killing' and 'kill'.[13] Gwendolen, however, brands herself a murderer and her task of self-forgiveness will be her lifelong task.

The case of Gwendolen Harleth is rich, complex and intriguing. In Murdoch's

novels we find many variations of the theme. In *The Unicorn* (1963), for example, the good character Denis Nolan kills Hannah Crean-Smith's sadistic husband Peter when he drives the car in which they are travelling into the sea; Denis gets out but pushes Peter back in. This act is not ambiguous and a court would convict, but Murdoch is not interested in legal or criminal proceedings but rather the moral issue which, here, is: 'How do we feel about a good man taking the life of an evil one?' In *The Philosopher's Pupil* (a novel full of references to death, killing and murder) George McCaffrey has murderous feelings towards his wife whom he fails to kill and, in fact, helps to rescue (after pushing their car into a canal). The question of whether George intended to kill his wife circulates around the town and around the text with slippery and unstable opinions being offered and no clear answer. We have George's own changing and unreliable accounts and the difficulty of disentangling what appeared to happen (recorded by the omniscient narrator) from what may or may not have been going through the mind of the inebriated and enraged George. Desperate to engage John Robert Rozanov in philosophical debate, George poses him the question in the terms of Murdoch's 'Thinking and Language' essay: 'If I pushed the car', he says, 'does that mean I intended to kill her? What was I *thinking* at just that moment? Did I *intend* to drive the car into the canal?'[14] Rozanov refuses the bait. Later in the novel George believes he has murdered Rozanov, by tipping him, conveniently comatose, into a bath and submerging him; he is unaware that Rozanov has already taken a lethal dose of pills and has left a suicide note. Cato Forbes in *Henry and Cato* (1976) is understandably provoked into killing Beautiful Joe when he finds him assaulting his sister. In *An Accidental Man* (1971), Matthew Gibson Grey says his brother was incapable of murder when it is suggested he drowned his first wife, Betty. He covers up for him with the police when a drunken Austin drives too fast and kills a child and later nearly batters to death the child's blackmailing stepfather. Lucas Graffe in *The Green Knight* (1994) does appear in court, but for using undue force against Peter Mir, not for the attempted murder of his brother Clement. In *The Book and the Brotherhood*, Duncan Cambus, having shot Jenkin Riderhood by accident when aiming at David Crimond, later suspects he had been set up by Crimond to commit 'what would look like a highly motivated murder'.[15] Edward Baltram in *The Good Apprentice* (1985) is tortured by guilt after drugging his friend; he is called a murderer by his victim's mother but he escapes the law by lying at the inquest. The only character I can think of who goes to prison for murder in Murdoch's novels is Bradley Pearson in *The Black Prince* (1973) but the standard reading here is that Bradley is not guilty.

In *A Word Child* (1975) Murdoch takes her treatment of 'murder or accidental death?' to new heights when she kills off *both* wives of Gunnar Jopling at the hands of, or at least in the presence of, her first-person, flawed, narrator, Hilary Burde. Hilary's mother, a prostitute, died when he was seven. He lived briefly with his

beloved sister and cruel aunt and then in an orphanage. Saved by having a good intellect that was nurtured by a caring schoolmaster, he goes to Oxford and lives an idyllic year as a tutor before self-sabotaging his life, having an affair with Gunnar Jopling's wife Anne, kidnapping her in his car and driving in a state of extreme rage; they crash; she is killed. 'I never doubted that I had behaved wickedly,' he later tells the reader.[16] When Jopling reappears in his life Hilary is offered the chance to redeem the past, but he fails to do so. He repeats the past. He enters into an inappropriate relationship with Gunnar's second wife, Kitty, which leads to a meeting in which she falls into the Thames and dies from hypothermia, caught in the mud despite desperate efforts to save her. It is the first wife's death which is perhaps the more interesting. Twenty years after the event, confronted by Gunnar, and with the challenge as to whether he killed Anne deliberately, Hilary says, 'I didn't crash on purpose, but I drove dangerously on purpose' (*WC* 326). He reflects that he had never put it to himself so clearly before. Here, Murdoch is giving Hilary the capacity to retrieve a mental state, an intention, many years after he experienced it. We ask ourselves, is he a reliable narrator? How far are we invited to take his capacity for self-deception into account? And if he is truthful here how far are we invited to judge that his past experience of an abusive childhood and the rage he experienced throughout both childhood and adolescence (which is the predominant emotion in his car drive with Anne), ameliorate the moral guilt we might otherwise attribute to him? Rage, too, is the predominant emotion which Gwendolen recalls when she tells her story to Daniel. Hilary says that after Anne's death he expected he would carry a placard saying 'murderer' round his neck always, and he is surprised how his role in the drama gets airbrushed out of the public narrative. Like Gwendolen he identifies himself as a murderer. He is the only character I can think of in a Murdoch novel whose childhood history is woven so closely into his adult life and used to explain it. This is an author, however, who is skilled at signalling by ironic distancing when putting words and judgements into the mouths of her first-person narrators, and we have to ask does Hilary's account of how he felt in childhood and what he intended at the time of the crash meet Murdoch's required standards of adequacy, richness and flexibility? So much of Hilary's story is structured on self-deception that, whereas I want to let Gwendolen off the moral hook, I am inclined to say of Hilary: guilty as charged.

Murdoch's interest in intention and guilt was surely bound up with the debate enlivened in 1950s Oxford moral philosophy by her friend and rival Elizabeth Anscombe's brilliant monograph Intention.[17] Murdoch's novels contribute wisely and entertainingly to that debate – I have not exhausted the list. Austin, in *An Accidental Man,* presents the gloomy view, 'who knows how networks of causes can make one blameworthy. I expect that every time we do anything even slightly bad it sets up a sort of wave which ends with someone committing suicide or murder or

something'.[18] This of course is ironic. Both Eliot and Murdoch want to tell us, and do, I believe, show us, that the network of causes may explain but does not necessarily excuse and, as Murdoch says of Gwendolen, 'it matters very much to her to know whether at that moment she intended his death'.[19]

1 Peter J. Conradi, 'Iris Murdoch Obituary: A Witness to Good and Evil', *Guardian,* 9 February 1999 <https://www.theguardian.com/news/1999/feb/09/guardianobituaries.peterconrad> [accessed 26 July 2018].
2 Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: The Saint and the Artist* (HarperCollins, 2001), 28 and 364.
3 Marialuisa Bignami, 'Iris Murdoch and George Eliot: Two Women Writers of Ideas', in *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher Meets Novelist,* eds. Sofia de Melo Araújo and Fátima Vieira (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 23–30 (30).
4 George Steiner, foreword to *Existentialists and Mystics,* ed. Peter J. Conradi (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), ix–xviii (x), hereafter *EM*; see for example comments in interviews in *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction,* ed. Gillian Dooley (Columbia, SA: University of South Carolina Press, 2003) xxiii, 14, 197 and 249.
5 Iris Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited', *EM,* 261–286 (276).
6 George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 205.
7 Priscilla Martin, 'The Preacher's Tone: Murdoch's Mentors and Moralists', in *Iris Murdoch and Morality*, eds. Anne Rowe and Avril Horner (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 31–42 (35).
8 Iris Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* (London: Vintage, 1999), 86, note 1.
9 Iris Murdoch, 'Thinking and Language', *EM,* 33–42 (36).
10 Justin Broackes, ed., *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 22.
11 Iris Murdoch, 'Thinking and Language', *EM*, 41.
12 See, for example, Jill L. Matus, 'Historicizing Trauma: the genealogy of psychic shock in *Daniel Deronda*', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 36.1 (2008), 59–78.
13 George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 674. Graham Handley's editorial footnote, indicating authorial manuscript changes, reads: '3. <murdering> killing MS; 4. <murder> kill MS'. I consulted the original manuscript in the British Library and the change is clearly and confidently made.
14 Iris Murdoch, *The Philosopher's Pupil* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1983), 223.
15 Iris Murdoch, *The Book and the Brotherhood* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1987), 520.
16 Iris Murdoch, *A Word Child* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975), 125, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *WC*.
17 Elizabeth Anscombe, *Intention* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell*,* 1957).
18 Iris Murdoch, *An Accidental Man* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1971), 326.
19 Iris Murdoch, 'Thinking and Language', *EM,* 33–42 (36).

Murdoch's Japanese Foxes: Kitsunē Myth, Shintoism and Zen Buddhism

Fiona Tomkinson

Murdoch's fascination with Japanese culture is well known, as is her preoccupation with mythology, religion, and mysticism, and her tendency to interweave these themes into the fabric of her novels, often through the creation of a complex and delicate web of symbolism and intertextual allusion. However, a number of subtle intertextual references to Japanese myth, religion and literature have not as yet been discussed by Murdoch scholars. These include frequent allusions to Japanese myths and folktales concerning foxes, or *kitsunē*. In Shintoism, foxes are considered messengers of the god Inari and perhaps also manifestations of the supreme sun-goddess, Amaterasu.[1] Their sacred status has connections with fox deities in China and Central Asia, but they are also presented in folkloric beliefs rooted in Shintoism as mysterious shape-shifters, seductresses or tricksters, who may be mischievous, benevolent, self-sacrificing, sinister or even murderous. They also have a role to play in the unique synthesis of Shinto and esoteric Buddhist beliefs endemic to Japan, where they may assume the role of servants of the Buddha, and Inari himself is also seen as a protective deity of Buddhism.[2]

It is my contention that a chain of *kitsunē* symbolism taken from Shinto and Buddhist mythemes stretches through a large number of Murdoch's works – it is at its most prominent in *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983) and *The Message to the Planet* (1989), but it is also functions as an important subtext in *The Good Apprentice* (1985) and *The Book and the Brotherhood* (1987), and it can be detected in earlier novels such as *A Severed Head* (1961), *The Black Prince* (1973), *Henry and Cato* (1976) and *The Unicorn* (1963).

These allusions are to at least five Japanese fox mythemes or narratives: the legend of Kuzu-no-Ha, the lost fox-mother associated with the Shinto shrine in Shinoda forest; a twelfth-century folktale of mischievous foxes in danger translated by Royall Tyler as 'Enough is enough!'; the 'wild fox koan' from the Buddhist text called in its Japanese version *Mumonkan* (無門関) (often inaccurately translated as 'The Gateless Gate'); the legend of the femme fatale nine-tailed fox, Tamame-no-mae, told in the Tamamizu monogatari and elsewhere, which unites Shinto and

Buddhist elements; and, finally, the sinister 'fox in disguise' theme as it occurs in the Japanese classic novel, *The Tale of Genji*.

References to foxes and Japan often go together in Murdoch's novels, as when Honor Klein in *A Severed Head*, gripping a Samurai sword, is told, 'You sound rather like a fox saying it believes in geese'.[3] However, the clearest hints that Murdoch is deliberately connecting the two are to be found in *The Philosopher's Pupil* and, like a number of Murdoch's novels, this work makes numerous scattered and seemingly inconsequential references to Japan: Stella McCaffrey thinks of escaping the wreck of her marriage with George by going to her father in Tokyo, and the netsuke collection which her father has given her plays an important role in the story, functioning as her household gods, which she removes from the marital home to protect from George's violence, but then replaces to reaffirm her commitment to him; the eponymous philosopher, John Robert Rozanov, has a Japanese doctor; there is a Japanese vase in the Slipper House and a gingko tree (a tree indigenous to China, but common in Japan) in its garden. The novel is also haunted by foxes. Towards the beginning it is said of the night when George tries to kill Stella: 'George was as crazy as a fox last night'; Meynell, the surname of Rozanov's granddaughter, Hattie, recalls that of Hugo Meynell, Master of the Quorn Hunt from 1753 to 1800, who perfected the modern art of foxhunting.[4] Above all, foxes are a mysterious and sometimes sinister presence in Alex McCaffrey's garden at Belmont, sometimes denoted by a bark in the night heard from the Slipper House which prompts Hattie to shed tears as she says 'dear foxie' (*PP* 240), sometimes revealing itself through close encounters with human inhabitants – there is also an encounter between a fox and Adam's dog Zed, described in great detail from the point of view of the dog, who obscurely feels that he is asserting his doghood in all its connection with humanity against the absolute alterity of the wild creature. The ghostly quality of the foxes comes through most strongly when Alex has an almost-violent encounter with a fox preceded by some sort of vision or hallucination:

> There's a head up there in the gingko tree, thought Alex. A head with long golden hair perched high up in the branches. Alex looked at it with heart beating fast. It was twilight on Wednesday evening. She thought, it's something to do with them, those wicked ill-omened girls. It's some kind of vile, filthy, ghost thing. Adolescent girls attract ghosts. (*PP* 42)

We have here, then, a Japanese tree, with a ghostly young woman appearing in it, which already evokes the world of the *kitsunē* in their apparitions as beautiful maidens and seductresses. This passage is followed by a paragraph in which Alex remembers her disgust at the fact of her servant Ruby Doyle (who will later be caught

up in the fox narrative) having spent the night in the Rolls Royce and contaminating it with her fat sweaty body. We then turn immediately to an image of a female fox:

> Earlier Alex had again seen the pretty vixen reclining while four fluffy milk-chocolate brown cubs with light blue eyes and stubby tails played tig on the lawn. This sight now seemed uncanny too, an accidental slit into another world, weird, beautiful, dangerous, coming nearer. (*PP* 412)

She is then startled by the dog fox raiding the dustbins: he has a 'darkly lined, sorrowful, fierce face', does not flinch when she raises her hand, makes her frightened and angry by his 'indifference to her presence', he then ignores her beating on the dustbin lid and, when she overcomes the difficulty she feels in speaking to the fox and shouts at him to stop, he overturns a bin. Enraged, Alex pelts him with rubbish and he utters a 'deep resonant shrieking noise', before brushing past her into the garage where 'with almost superstitious terror' she catches sight of 'the fox sitting up in the front seat of the Rolls' (*PP* 413). When Ruby appears, she denies anything has happened and as she goes back to the house, '[t]he strange head up in the trees seemed to be glowing in the intense twilight' (*PP* 413). Can we remain in any doubt that what we see there is, on some level, a fox spirit or the emanation of a fox?

There is also a connection between this fox spirit and Tom McCaffrey's dream that same night of his dead mother, Fiona Gates, whose hair is described in a similar way:

> In the dream Fiona appeared as a ghost with long trailing hair, wearing a white shift or petticoat. She seemed to be unable to speak, but held out her hands to him in a piteous gesture as if begging for help. He thought, she's so young, so *young*. (*PP* 417)

Although there is no specific reference to fox characteristics here, feckless runaway Fiona is, I believe, appearing under the aspect of the runaway fox-mother of *kitsunē* myth; in particular, Tom's experience is quite similar to that of the narrator in Junichiro Tanizaki's *Yoshino Kuzu*, or *Arrowroot* who, having been orphaned very young, describes how he identifies his mother with the runaway fox-mother as presented in the song *Konkai* (*The Cry of the Fox*) and the play *Arrowroot* Leaves – so much so that he actually goes looking for her near the Arrowroot Leaf Shrine of Inari in Shinoda forest, where Kuzu-no-ha, the fox-mother of *Arrowroot Leaves*, says she can be found if she is missed even as she abandons her sleeping child. The figure evoked by these songs is, significantly, that of a mother and wife combined:

> the love for my mother was simply a vague yearning for the 'unknown woman', in other words it was connected with the first buddings of adolescent love. In my case, the woman of the past who was my mother, and the woman who will be my wife in the future, are both 'unknown women', and both are tied to me by an invisible thread of fate. This state of mind is probably latent in everyone to a certain extent [...] There is evidence of this in 'The Cry of the Fox'. Lines such as 'For whom do you come? I come for thee' and 'Are you leaving? Oh, the pain' suggest a child's longing for his mother, but also sound like the anguish of a lovers' parting [...]. The image of my mother that I held in my little breast was not that of a matron, but that of an eternally young and beautiful woman.[5]

This is a psychoanalytical perspective which would have fascinated Murdoch and it is likely that she read the passage quoted here, since the title of an edition of *Arrowroot* is inscribed inside the back cover of one of her journals preserved in the Iris Murdoch Collection in the Archives and Special Collections at Kingston University – *The Secret History of the Lord of Musashi and Arrowroot: Two Novels* by Junichiro Tanizaki, 1935.[6] Another clue to the fox-identity of Feckless Fiona is her surname Gates, since the Inari fox is associated with the concept of the gate 門 (*mon*). Murdoch would have been aware of the lines of *torii* gates and fox statues which lead to famous Inari shrines, such as that of Fushimi Inari near Kyoto. (There may even be a further reference to the 'Gateless Gate' text in which we find the text of the wild fox koan, which is discussed below.)

The entwining of the fox motif and the Japanese motif in the novel continues as Stella, after bringing back netsuke, provokes the wrath of George and, without any justification, he calls her a 'foul vixen' – the 'foul vixen' is of course the polar opposite of a 'pretty vixen' (*PP* 491) – thus evoking the sinister aspects of the fox which are to be found in both European folklore and Japanese myth. Before long, the vulpine haunting culminates in Alex falling down the stairs during a violent confrontation with Ruby. Ruby, adhering to her ancestral gipsy beliefs, is superstitious about foxes, considering them bringers of bad fortune (*PP* 180), which is doubtless why Alex concealed the incident with the dog fox from her; Ruby is also becoming impatient with her status as servant in the household and uses the foxes as an opportunity to exceed the limits of her authority by arranging for them to be gassed, against what she knows to be the wishes of her mistress. The condemned foxes are, however, reprieved. The reason behind this is very mundane:

> Our worthy municipal officers with what our citizens call their 'usual efficiency', certainly pumped the lethal gas, but took a long time doing

> so, and failed to block all the exits of the earth, so that the foxes were able to decamp in safety. (*PP* 554)

However, the foxes' reprieve is part and parcel of a wider transformation: Alex's personality is transformed after her fall down the stairs in a similar way to that in which George's is transformed after his experience of being struck blind. Although the narrator describes her as being a shadow of her former self, there are also positive aspects to her new state. She is reconciled to Ruby and seems to be meditating as she spends her time looking out of the drawing-room window: 'And what does she see when she does so? Foxes' (*PP* 554). The presence of foxes thus seems to set a seal and blessing on the, at least, partial salvation of the surviving characters related in the section 'What Happened Afterwards'.

This final fox incident again brings together the distinct threads of the fox theme and the Japanese theme in the novel through its similarity to another story of reprieved foxes in a twelfth-century Japanese folktale. In Tyler's translation, the tale is called 'Enough is enough!' and tells of the mischievous foxes who infested the grounds of Major Counselor Yasumichi's old mansion house.[7] Finally determined to eradicate them, Yasumichi orders a fox hunt for the morrow, but as dawn approaches, the fox patriarch appears to him in a dream as a white-haired old man and pleads for his family, promising that he will control the troublemaking of the young foxes if they are spared, and, moreover, that they will protect the household and let them know of the approach of any good fortune. Yasumichi awakes and sees a hairless old fox under a tangerine tree; he gives up the fox hunt and the old fox's promise is fulfilled. There is no more mischief and every happy event around the house is announced by a fox's sharp bark. Another nod to fox mythology is perhaps present in Adam's desire to be presented with a semi-precious stone or 'malachite egg' (*PP* 477), which is referred to just before the reference to a wig hanging in the gingko tree like mistletoe – itself an image which fuses a sacred plant of the East with one of the Druids. Foxes in Japanese myth are often presented as possessing jewels, and malachite is a sacred mineral in Taoism sometimes associated with fox worship.

The fox here as benevolent *kitsunē* and bringer of good fortune is playing the exact opposite of its function in Ruby's gipsy belief. The reprieved Belmont foxes take on a similar role as benevolent presences, and although we are not told that Ruby loses her gipsy superstitions, it is as if their reputation is rehabilitated. This parallels George's sudden enlightenment and his return to his loving wife Stella, the woman whom he had once called 'foul vixen' and blamed for the death of their son, but whose virtues he finally recognises. Another significant detail in this context is that Stella is Jewish and though she did not, like other Murdoch characters such as Willy Kost in *The Nice and the Good* (1968) or Julius King in *A Fairly Honourable*

Defeat (1970), spend time in a concentration camp, she is nonetheless, in a certain sense by virtue of her race, a Holocaust survivor. In other words, like the Belmont foxes with whom her husband identified her, she has escaped being gassed. This connection between poisonous gas and the fox will, as we shall see, re-emerge in *The Good Apprentice* and *The Message to the Planet*.

If the Belmont foxes are once perceived as benevolent *kitsunē*, they fit into a whole fabric of allusions in the novel to Christian, Celtic and classical traditions which evoke the idea of a messenger or intermediary between the worlds of the material and the spiritual and which culminate in the road-to-Damascus type blinding and conversion of George McCaffrey after his encounter with the flying saucer. However, the dark side of the *kitsunē* is not ignored by Murdoch and comes out most strongly in *The Message to the Planet*, where allusion is made to two Japanese legends about foxes, the first a story of death and spiritual enlightenment and the second that of a femme fatale. The stories in question are that of the wild fox koan (also known as 'Hyako and the Fox') and the Edo period legend of the nine-tailed fox seductress, Tamamo-no-mae.

Like *The Philosopher's Pupil*, *The Message to the Planet* has a number of references to things Japanese. Indeed, we are given strong early hints that a Japanese context is important: Marcus Vallar lived with a mysterious Japanese and was said to be learning Japanese and Sanskrit. In the conversation which opens the novel, Alfred Ludens says of him, '[h]e's probably got into Taoism in the Far East. Breathing exercises. Zen. [...] Koans would have suited Marcus down to the ground' – to which his friend Gildas replies: 'Marcus is a koan'.[8]

When Marcus is later established in the grounds of the luxurious and sinister mental hospital we find that its name, Bellmain, links it to the fox-haunted garden of Belmont. And sure enough, the foxes appear. Patrick Fenman, who has been previously described as 'a wild man, a fox, a seal, a sort of sprite' (*MP* 174), makes his entrance; Ludens enters the grounds of Bellmain through 'a convenient trench made perhaps by a fox' (*MP* 284) of which he muses that it was 'probably made by a fox or a badger, or, if by a human, a remarkably thin one. Possibly two species had collaborated' (*MP* 286). There is something rather sinister in the phrase 'a remarkably thin one'. Though on a realistic level, we are more likely to think of the two species here as being badger and fox, or of a human having made use of a badger or fox scrape, and is there not also a faint hint that the trench could have been made by a remarkably thin fox-human, a shape-shifting *kitsunē*? The reference to the badger also has Japanese connotations, since 'badger' was the word usually used by 20th-century translators of Japanese folklore to render the Japanese tanuki (狸), an animal now often referred to by the neologism 'racoon dog'. The *tanuki* is, like the *kitsunē*, a shape-shifting trickster, though usually more mischievous than sinister – the two creatures are collectively known as *kori* 狐狸.[9] Murdoch also references

badger/*tanuki* superstitions in *The Philosopher's Pupil*, when she has George stop in his tracks as abruptly 'as a Japanese might be stopped by a badger'(*PP* 89).

The fox-haunting continues as the novel moves towards its climax. On the night of the last long conversation between Marcus and Ludens before Marcus's death, the two discuss the presence of foxes and badgers, and in the background is heard 'the melancholy unearthly bark of a fox' (*MP* 440) – though whether it is heralding good or bad fortune is ultimately open to deep philosophical discussion. At all events, shortly afterwards, on midsummer morning, Vallar is found dead, having turned on the gas in his kitchen. Though since he does not exhibit the classic signs of carbon monoxide poisoning (*MP* 469), the real cause of his death, perhaps a stress-induced heart attack or a mysterious form of voluntary dying such as that attributed to James Arrowby in *The Sea, The Sea* (1978), is also open to question (*MP* 496, 519). Shortly afterwards, Patrick, musing on what he now sees as the meaningless contingency of the event, remarks that there is 'no difference in the end between his death and that of a fox' (*MP* 476). The presence of gas at the scene of his death, even though it was not responsible for killing him, reinforces this suggestion of a fox-death, especially when we recall the attempted gassing of the Belmont foxes. Paradoxically, but in a paradox not too far removed from the paradoxes of Zen teachings, this very assertion of meaninglessness leads us as readers to attribute a symbolic meaning. The fact that Marcus has both been described as 'a koan' and as someone who dies who dies the 'death of a fox' strongly suggests that Murdoch is referencing a Zen legend from the *Mumonkan* (無門関) (*The Gateless Barrier*) of the path to enlightenment: the wild fox koan or 'Hyakujō and a Fox'. A version of this tale is among the Japanese books from Murdoch's personal collection in the Kingston University Archive.[10]

To summarise briefly, according to Tanahashi's account, this is the story of a Zen master called Baizhang who is confronted with an old man claiming to be a fox; the old man says that as a teacher in the time of Kashyapa Buddha, he answered a student's question with a denial of the fact that the person who practises with great devotion still falls into cause and effect.[11] This causes him to be reborn as a wild fox for 500 lifetimes and he now begs for a 'turning word' so that he can be freed from the wild fox body. He then asks the question that he had been asked so many years ago: 'Does a person who practises with great devotion still fall into cause and effect?' Baizhang merely answers. 'Don't ignore cause and effect', and the man then has a great realisation and declares that he is now liberated from the body of the fox. He says he will stay in the mountain behind the monastery and requests that the services for a deceased monk should be performed for him. The body of a fox is found behind the monastery at the base of a great rock and is cremated with due ceremony.

A few more parallels can be detected between this story and that of Marcus Vallar – notably, there is an ambiguity about this fox's death (it is not clear whether

it committed suicide by jumping from the rock or merely died at its foot) and Vallar, like the fox-monk, specifically orders that he should be cremated, though this is contrary to Jewish custom and evokes disturbing images of the Holocaust. Vallar also insists that his papers should be burnt and Ludens sees that his wishes are respected. The philosophical aspect of the koan with regard to causality also ties in with the complicated issues of causation surrounding Vallar's death. Indeed, the hints that it may be outside the ordinary realm of causation entirely. Perhaps the extremes of thought that he is pursuing take him beyond the ordinary realm of cause and effect and this is what kills him.

The other Japanese fox legend referenced, the story of Tamome-no-mae, is a darker tale. Here, a nine-tailed fox takes possession of three royal concubines, destroying her first two lovers by making them tyrants and finally destroying the health of the Emperor before being chased away. Probably the most famous pictorial representation of her is the woodblock print by Yoshitoshi, showing her in a woman's form, looking longingly at some geese in flight. It is perhaps this work of art which inspired the reference to geese in the previously mentioned Samurai sword episode in *A Severed Head* – we are being given a hint that Honor Klein might well be a nine-tailed fox in disguise. According to legend, Tamone-no-mae as fox started devouring women and travellers before an army was sent to kill her. She then became a killing-stone (*sesshō-seki*, 殺生石) which continually released poisonous gas, killing everything that touched it until Gennō Shinshō caused the evil spirit to repent and find salvation – at this point the stone was destroyed and the pieces flew away to different parts of Japan. This story is connected to the myth of the fox of Shinoda forest, since Gennō Shinshō (源翁心昭) is the grown-up Seimei, the child abandoned by the fox-mother. Murdoch was perhaps aware of this as she composed *The Philosopher's Pupil* and we may ask ourselves whether Tom McCaffrey plays this double role of abandoned child and enlightened liberator.

The three elements of this myth, the fox, the standing stone and the poisonous gas, are found in both *The Philosopher's Pupil* (where the standing stone is represented by the Axel Stone) and The Message to the Planet where we have the Ennistone Stone Circle and indeed the town of Ennistone (any stone) itself. Given that Ludens crawls though what may be a foxhole to visit the Axel Stone and that the ceremony there on midsummer's day seems to precipitate Vallar's fox-like death in a gas-filled kitchen, we may now ask ourselves: is the obelisk at Bellmain known simply as the Axel Stone in fact a *sesshō-seki*, perhaps containing a fox spirit in disguise?

If we are tempted to answer in the affirmative, a new insight into *The Book and the Brotherhood* is also at hand. Here we also have an obelisk or 'a stone of some sort in the wood' which Lily Boyne suspects to be connected with ley lines and cosmic energy.[12] It is situated near a village called Foxpath (*BB* 235, 246) where the snow is

patterned 'by the straight or curving tracks of foxes' (*BB* 240) – near the Roman Road on which Jean Cambus, née Kowitz, another racial survivor of the gas chambers, is tempted into a car-crash suicide pact with David Crimond, though she avoids his car at the last minute – choosing to make a curving track rather than a straight one. She is then abandoned by Crimond and makes her way to her friend Rose Curtland at her country house, Boyars, where she explains the accident by saying that she swerved to avoid a fox (*BB* 387). Perhaps this is truer than she knew – perhaps the fox was the red-haired gamekeeper's son Crimond himself? A demon lover, a male incubus of a *kitsunē*, a sexual tempter who lures a loving spouse away from her family and friends to destruction and death. There is also perhaps a link between Murdoch's reference to the sesshō-seki and the abortion subplot of *The Book and the Brotherhood* – visitors to the real stone associated with this legend will discover that the path is lined with thousands of figurines of Jizu, protector of miscarried and aborted babies, to whom their mothers make offerings. Tamar Hernshaw finally recovers from the trauma and regret caused by her abortion through going through an invented quasi-Christian ceremony which serves a similar function.

Even more subtle is the collocation of references to Japan, foxes, standing stones and poisonous gas in *The Good Apprentice*. At Edward Baltram's first dinner at Seegard, his half-sister Ilona (a name similar to that of Fiona in *The Philosopher's Pupil*) 'laughed, or giggled [...] covering her mouth with her hand, as he had seen Japanese girls do at his college'.[13] After dinner, he is warned that he may hear noises in the night – 'owls and foxes and things' (*GA* 107); he hears nothing, but the next morning sees 'a golden weathercock in the form of a fox' (*GA* 114). He also encounters a line of willows (*GA* 116), a tree with many mythical associations, including one with female ghosts in Japanese folklore. These ghosts are traditionally presented without feet – he himself soon loses his own feet, in the sense of losing his footing, as he falls into the mud, in an episode reminiscent of the passage in *The Unicorn* where Effingham Cooper nearly drowns in the bog, though here Edward manages to extricate himself fairly quickly.

However, Murdoch's self-referentiality has by then evoked memories in the attentive reader of both an ecstatic near-death experience and of the will o' the wisp or fairy fire seen by Effingham shortly before this event. (Edward has recently seen his father Jesse Baltram's pictures of fairies which provides another link to this passage.) I think it is possible that Murdoch was aware that what the Irish call 'fairy fire' is in Japanese folklore *kitsunēbi* (狐火) or 'fox fire', a sign that foxes are holding a wedding, and also a sign which is likely to bring ill-luck on the unwary traveller. Stone statues of Inari foxes are often depicted with a ball of *kitsunēbi* on the tip of their tails, and there are numerous representations of the phenomenon in Japanese art, such as the rather sinister illustration of the *Bakemono Tsukushi Emaki*, which could be imagined as a Japanese-style depiction of ignis fatuus in an Irish bog.

Be that as it may, the Japanese reference and the fox reference in *The Good Apprentice* are followed in very short order by others – to the standing stone and poisonous gas. Edward comes to a clearing where he finds 'a large vertical stone rising from a base' (*GA* 118). He touches the pillar and sees a bunch of celandine deposited there – he has already picked a celandine and adds this to the offering. The Wordsworthian flower might alert us to the fact that he is about to encounter a significant 'spot of time' in his existence. Returning, he feels 'something like a physical change, as if a cloud of gas or pollen or some intense infusion were blowing into his face and enveloping his body' and now 'streaming into him through the top of his head, came the insight that here was no accident, and that he had come to Seegard as to a place of pilgrimage, carrying his woeful sin to a holy shrine and to a holy man' (*GA* 119). Immediately afterwards, he again sees 'the golden weathercock fox turning in the wind' (*GA* 120). Later he will return to the obelisk and find Ilona dancing there. She has previously been described as having certain fox-like characteristics: reddish-gold hair, sometimes tied into a tail which, like that of her mother and sister, 'had a very delicate feral smell' (*GA* 155). Later when he meets her in London, she has cropped her hair, but it is still 'red-golden' and 'like the shining fur of some delightful animal' (*GA* 456). Is Ilona also a fox-in-disguise?

There are also two instances in Murdoch's earlier fiction where characters are described in sinister situations with fox imagery and associated with stones. Neither of these contain the third element of poisonous gas, though spiritual toxicity is certainly released. The first is to be found in *Henry and Cato*, when the home-coming Henry Marshalson, full of hatred and negative emotions about his dead brother, encounters a fox as he approaches his ancestral home of Laxlinden (the last syllable of which, of course, is 'den' – the home of a fox). Laxlinden contains his mother Gerda's admirer, Lucius Lamb, composer of haiku and later of (pre-written) *jisei*, or Japanese death poems, and a netsuk*e* collection. We are told that: 'The darkness which was the fox seemed to be looking at the darkness which was Henry' – and to add emphasis to the similarity, he is then said to be moving in 'fox-like silence' and finally referred to as 'fox-like Henry'.[14] We should not be surprised to discover, just eleven pages later, that this country estate also contains a standing stone: an 'obelisk made of black granite' (*HC* 58). Lucius Lamb's invocation of death as 'great teacher' (*HC* 330) also evokes the Japanese figure of Kūkai, otherwise known as Kobo Daishi (Great Teacher), a figure who has a close though highly ambivalent relation to the Japanese fox – he allegedly drove foxes from Shikoku, but he is revered on Inari Mountain and he or his sect may be responsible for the initial association of the fox with Inari. Moreover, according to a legend of the Heian period, Kūkai and Inari were disciples of the Buddha in a previous life, who had vowed to be reborn in ninth-century Japan where Inari would become the protector of Kūkai's Buddhism.[15]

The second instance is to be found in *The Black Prince*, where we have another

fox-like character in Julian Baffin, who Bradley Pearson watches 'as one might watch a fox'.[16] When Bradley first falls in love with her, he thinks about 'the intense concentration of her strokeable nose and pouting mouth, pointing like an animal's muzzle' (*BP* 211). When he declares his love for the first time, he sees Julian's face as a 'fox-mask' (*BP* 263), a phrase which evokes the white and red fox masks 狐の面 (*kitsunē no men*) of Shintoism. In this novel, we also have a clear reference to Murdoch's favourite Japanese text, the eleventh-century classic *The Tale of Genji*, which John Bayley suggested shared a special place in her affections matched only by *The Lord of the Rings*.[17] It is perhaps in *Genji* that Murdoch first came across the myth of the shape-shifting fox who may assume human form to take a lover – sometimes, though not always, with evil intent.

In the Yugao chapter of *Genji*, Prince Genji carries his new lover, Yugao, away to a country retreat. She is frightened and reluctant to go with him and Genji answers teasingly: 'One or the other of us must be a fox-in-disguise. Here is a chance to find out which it is!'[18] On a symbolic level, perhaps both of the protagonists are foxes: Yugao will abandon Genji by her death as the typical female fox-in-disguise tended to abandon her lover, but Genji has already begun a career of multiple and often secret love affairs which might well be described as foxy. However, on this occasion, evil comes from outside of the couple. On their first night in their rural hideaway, they are haunted by a vengeful female spirit who turns out to be an emanation of another of Genji's lovers, the Lady Roku-jo. Genji sees a tall and majestic figure in what he first takes to be a dream or hallucination, reproaching him for beginning a relationship with a worthless common creature picked up at random on the streets. Yugao goes into a fit and appears to be losing consciousness. Shortly afterwards, she dies, and this is not the last death which the jealous spirit of the Lady Roku-jo will, against her conscious wishes, bring about. The destructive sequence of multiple love-triangles, so similar in many ways to the world of Murdoch's novels, begins under the insignia of the fox.

There are a number of obvious parallels between the interlude at Patara in *The Black Prince* and the fox-spirit episode in the Yugao chapter of *Genji*. Bradley's idyll and Genji's in the deserted mansion are both of extremely short duration: the former being interrupted by the vengeful spirit of the Lady Roku-jo and the latter by the equally vengeful emergence and revelations of Julian's father, Arnold Baffin, and eventually by the even more damaging revelations and revenge of Rachel Baffin. It is perhaps no coincidence that there is a certain similarity between the name of Rachel and that of Roku-jo, and that Rachel when she attempts to seduce Bradley is described as having a face with 'a grimace upon it which reminded me of certain Japanese pictures, a mingling of pain and joy, the eyes narrowed, the mouth squared' (*BP* 158). Bradley's sister Priscilla, who also plays a role in disturbing the idyll by her suicide, has also been previously described as wearing white powder and red lipstick

which makes her look 'grotesque, like an elderly geisha' (*BP* 222). That Murdoch is not only echoing but consciously referencing *Genji* in the Patara passage is suggested by the conversation between Bradley and Julian after their love-making:

> 'Let's draw the curtains. I feel bad spirits are looking in at us.'
> 'We are surrounded by spirits. Curtains won't keep them out.'
> [...] 'I know,' she said, 'swarms of them.' (*BP* 330)

This is exactly the atmosphere of the deserted mansion in the 'Yugao' chapter of *Genji* in which we have the first reference in *Genji* to the *kitsunē* mytheme. In *Genji*, as Yugao falls into a swoon and dies, Prince Genji desperately tries to rouse her with the words: 'Have you gone mad with fright? You have heard no doubt that in such lonely places as this fox spirits sometimes try to cast spells upon men'.[19] I will quote the passage describing Yugao's death in Waley's translation in order to demonstrate how closely Murdoch adopts it:

> He noticed that his mistress was trembling from head to foot [...] suddenly she burst out into a cold sweat. She seemed to be losing consciousness. [...] Her face was set in a dull, senseless stare.[20]

Bradley writes of Julian at Patara:

> Her flesh was cool, almost cold, and she shuddered, arching her neck. [...] She was wearing the blue dress with the white willow-spray pattern [...]. She was staring at me with big eyes and every now and then a spasm passed across her face. (*BP* 330)

The willow-spray pattern gives us another warning that Japan is being referenced. In one of Murdoch's most uncanny intertextual moments, it is as if Julian has become Yugao – she is possessed by a victim of possession.

However, Julian does not die, but abandons Bradley. He is left with a 'wall of many-coloured elliptical stones' (*BP* 342). The fox has again turned to stone. The piece of driftwood abandoned with them seems to be inscribed with 'Chinese writing' (*BP* 315) – but I think Murdoch is playing with us here in using the word 'Chinese' – as the same kanji is used for 'fox' in Chinese and Japanese (狐). The lines of this character do indeed seem as if they might have been impressed on a piece of driftwood by the action of the tide. A longer sequence of Chinese characters could also have spelled out the name of the Chinese goddess who took the animal form of the nine-tailed fox, 狐仙娘娘 (Húxiān Niángniáng, or Fox Immortal Lady). This would be fitting as Julian is, seen from different perspectives, both Húxiān and vixen.

Murdoch is also playing a game which entangles Eastern and Western myths. It has already been pointed out that the fox can be associated with Murdoch's preoccupation with Jewish themes – but foxes are also linked to the world of ancient Greece. Bradley Pearson's encounter with, and subsequent abandonment by, the *kitsunē* takes place at Patara, under the sign of Phoebus (or Loxius) Apollo, god of poetry, music and light, closely associated in this novel with *eros*, but also the Black Prince himself, the cruel executioner of the flayed Marsyas. Elsewhere, Bradley describes himself as receiving a kind of epiphany as he watched a fox playing with mice (sacred animals of Apollo):

> Once in an endless meadow, just able to peer through the tawny haze of the grass tops, the child who was myself had watched a young fox catching mice, an elegant newly minted fox, straight from the hand of God, brilliantly ruddy, with black stockings and a white-tipped brush. The fox heard and turned. I saw its intense vivid mask, its liquid amber eyes. Then it was gone. An image of such beauty and such mysterious sense. The child wept and knew himself an artist. (*BP* 115–16)

Here, the fox itself wears a fox-mask, identifying it with the mythical *kitsunē*, but the image is also fused with the image of Apollo Smintheus, Lord of the Mice – who is himself associated with the masks of the Greek theatre.[21] A similar fusion of *kitsunē* and Apollo occurs in *The Good Apprentice:* the sacred grove, where Edward Baltram watches the fox-like Ilona dance, had reminded him on his first visit there of the stadium at Delphi, another shrine of Apollo (*GA* 118). There are a number of reasons why the figure of Apollo and the figure of the *kitsunē* are intimately connected in Murdoch's imagination. Apollo is a cruel god in *The Black Prince*, but he is also associated with the ladder of love of Plato's *Symposium* – with what Bradley calls 'Plato's dream' of love as 'the road to the Good' (BP 210).[22] *Ἔρως*, like Apollo, is not, for Murdoch, a pure being, but rather what is referred to in *The Symposium* (202d13-e1) as a *μεταξύ*, or intermediary – an 'ambiguous spirit'.[23] Likewise, foxes in Japanese myth may seem impure in their roles as shape-shifting tricksters/bodies in which penance is enacted, but are also messengers of the divine, whether in Shintoism as messengers of Inari, and perhaps also manifestations of the supreme sun-goddess, Amaterasu, or in their later representations as the servants of the Buddha.[24] They retain this divine aura in Murdoch's fiction. They are figures of danger and darkness, but also of epiphany and illumination, messengers of a transcendent reality.

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1 See Karen Ann Smyers, *The Fox and the Jewel: a Study of Shared and Private Meanings in Japanese Inari Worship* (Manoa: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), 1–10. According to Smyers, more than one-third of Shinto shrines are dedicated to this *kami*, and he is also revered at Buddhist temples. At the Zen Buddhist temple of Toyokawa Inari he is worshipped under the name Dakiniten and at Saijō Inari in Okayama under the name Saijō-sama – both are presented as bodhisatvas riding flying white foxes. Shamanic influences are also strong in certain aspects of Inari worship. Though contemporary Shinto priests insist that Inari is not a fox, it is possible that the initial object of worship on Inari Mountain was a fox *kami*, see Smyers, *The Fox and the Jewel,* 85–6; Bernard Faure, *Protectors and Predators: Gods of Medieval Japan*, vol. 2 (Manoa: University of Hawaii Press, 2015). <doi:10.21313/hawaii/9780824839314.001.0001>

2 Karen Ann Smyers, *The Fox and the Jewel*, 17–18, 24–9, 79–80. Inari is a complex figure, initially an agricultural deity, probably originally a goddess, who has been worshipped in Japan since at least the early eighth century. They are now associated with rice and sake, with business success and the granting of wishes.

3 Iris Murdoch, *A Severed Head* (1961) (London: Vintage, 2001), 96.

4 Iris Murdoch, *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983) (London: Vintage, 2000), 19, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *PP*; Martin Wallen, *Fox* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006).

5 Junichiro Tanazaki, *Some Prefer Nettles, The Secret History of the Lord of Musashi, Arrowroot* (London: Picador, 1985), 269.

6 Iris Murdoch, Journal January 1981–August 1992 KUAS202/1/14, from the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives. I would like to thank Frances White for drawing my attention to this journal note.

7 Royall Tyler, trans. & ed., *Japanese Tales* (New York: Pantheon Books).

8 Iris Murdoch, *The Message to the Planet* (1989) (London: Vintage, 2000), 19, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *MP*.

9 For more on the *tanuki*, see <https://www.tofugu.com/japan/tanuki/> [accessed 20 June 2019].

10 Mumonkan and Hekiganroku, *Two Zen Classics*, trans. Katsuki Sekida (Tokyo: Weatherill, 1977), IML 806 from the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives.

11 Kazuaki Tanahashi, ed., *Enlightenment Unfolds: The Essential Teachings of Zen Master Dōgen* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1999).

12 Iris Murdoch, *The Book and the Brotherhood* (1987) (London: Vintage, 2003), 266, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *BB*.

13 Iris Murdoch, *The Good Apprentice* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 2001), 104, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *GA*.

14 Iris Murdoch, *Henry and Cato* (1976) (London: Vintage, 2002), 147, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *HC*.

15 Karen Ann Smyers, *The Fox and the Jewel,* 17–18, 79–80, 228.

16 Iris Murdoch, *The Black Prince* (1973) (London: Vintage, 2006), 60, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *BP*.

17 John Bayley, 'Iris on Safari: A Personal Record', in Justin Broackes, ed., *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), 117.

18 Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji*, trans. Arthur Waley (North Clarendon: Tuttle Publishing, 2010), 61.

19 Murasaki*, The Tale of Genji*, 66.

20 Murasaki*, The Tale of Genji*, 66.

21 Murdoch would almost certainly have been familiar with the title of Mary Renault's *The Mask of Apollo*, published seven years before *The Black Prince*, in 1966.

22 Iris Murdoch, Journal April 1975–May 1978, KUAS202/1/12 from the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives. It is significant that this journal, in which Murdoch describes her travels in Japan, also contains a great deal of discussion of Plato, references to the cruelty of Apollo, a reference to foxes seen in her garden, and references to the Japanese poet Basho.

23 Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (London: Vintage 2003), 24.

24 Faure, *Protectors and Predators* <doi:10.21313/hawaii/9780824839314.001.0001>

The Bell and the Brotherhood: from Wolfenden to Section 28

Christopher Boddington

At a literary conference in 2017, keynote speaker Jack Halberstam gave an address entitled 'Sex, Death and Falconry' in which he discussed the problem of nomenclature of different categories of sexual preference in an age when the old dichotomy of homo/hetero was no longer adequate.[1] Iris Murdoch would have sympathised. Her own life could be complicated. She wrote to Georg Kreisel:

> I am probably not at all normal sexually. I am not a lesbian, despite one or two unevents on that front. I am certainly strongly interested in men. But I don't think I really want normal heterosexual relations with them. [...] I think I am sexually rather odd, which is a male homosexual in female guise. [...] I am very incompetently organised sexually.[2]

Murdoch's novels contain many male homosexuals and a smaller number of women who are or may be in same-sex relationships. Her treatment of same-sex relationships in her novels always reflects the prevailing English legal status of homosexuality and its social context in which each novel was written and the consequent social and cultural problems.[3] Murdoch largely conceals female same-sex relationships under euphemism or metaphor and does not deal expressly with issues arising from bisexuality or transgender, although individual cases of bisexuality are included. Perhaps this concealment reflects her own privacy in such matters.[4] It follows that this paper relates predominantly to male homosexuality, although Murdoch's treatment of the more important relationships between two women is also analysed and contextualised. Asked by Jeffrey Meyers what the function was of the homosexual characters who appeared in her novels, Murdoch replied that it depended on context and the different parts they played in different novels. She also asserted that she was 'in favour of gay lib' and that this attitude is reflected in her novels.[5]

Murdoch's treatment of male homosexuals falls into three distinct phases: from 1954 to 1966, before the Sexual Offences Act 1967; during the years 1968–78; and from 1980 onwards. Before 1967, the principal factors for Murdoch were the illegality of male homosexual acts, and the movement for decriminalisation, formalised in

the Wolfenden Report published in 1957 and the Sexual Offences Act 1967.[6] On homosexual law reform Murdoch wrote: 'The law must be changed, that goes without saying', and, as pro-reform, she saw her homosexual men as the locus for analytical characterisation and plot-writing in the light of this illegality.[7] In some of her novels, particularly *The Bell* (1958), the homosexuality of certain characters (and its legal implications) is a major element of the plot. Murdoch's novels of the second period, from *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970) to *The Sea, The Sea* (1978), trace the development of the place in society of same-sex relationships after they became legal. These novels illustrate the progression from an, at first, reluctant admission of homosexual men into the heterosexual community to their later general acceptance, at least within Murdoch's sections of metropolitan society. Homosexuality is seen in this second phase as evolving from the distinguishing characteristic of an individual to a quality like any other, which helps to differentiate that individual from other characters but may not be crucial to the plot. The sense of polemic which is so apparent in *The Bell* has tended progressively to fade. In her late novels, although she has apparently normalised the homosexual into her cast of characters, she has also returned briefly to the polemic of the early novels, particularly *The Bell* and *A Severed Head* (1961).

In 1954, when *Under the Net* was published, sodomy and therefore by implication much homosexuality between men, had been illegal for most of the period since 1533 (when Henry VIII imposed the death penalty for acts of sodomy). Homosexuality between men was further restricted in 1885, when a wider range of activities (characterised as gross indecency) was criminalised.[8] In the 1950s, policemen acting as agents provocateurs would approach those suspected as being gay men in public lavatories and, if they responded positively, arrest them. Prominent public figures were involved in sensationally reported legal actions. Lord Montagu of Beaulieu together with his friends, Michael Pitt-Rivers and Peter Wildeblood, were convicted and jailed. This conviction was the direct cause of the establishment of a committee which created the Wolfenden Report.[9] Ten years after Wolfenden, sexual relations between consenting male adults were partly decriminalised by the Sexual Offences Act, the culmination of a long campaign. During this slow decade of reform, homosexuals appear only intermittently in Murdoch's novels, but their status is always significant in the context of the plotline and in relation to other characters. This significance is evident particularly in three novels of this period: *The Bell*, *An Unofficial Rose* (1962) and *The Unicorn* (1963).

In *The Bell*, at a lay religious community established by Michael Meade at Imber Court in Gloucestershire, his colleague James Tayper Pace, paraphrasing Lord Devlin, says, 'Truth is not glorious, it is just enjoined; sodomy is not disgusting it is just forbidden'.[10] It was this fact, that sodomy was forbidden, and more particularly that indecent behaviour was prohibited, that gave point to Michael's misconduct

as a schoolmaster. Michael's homosexuality combined with his attraction to the young lead to the tragic events with which *The Bell* ends. It is implicit that, as an undergraduate at Cambridge, Michael (who had himself been the victim of a homosexual seduction at school) had homosexual relationships within his circle, which Murdoch neither specifies nor criticises. It is less clear what physical relationship Michael had with the 15-year-old schoolboy, Nick Fawley, after Nick had made advances to him, but Nick, in an emotional reaction to an evangelical preacher, confesses everything (or much more than had in fact happened) to the headmaster (*TB* 107). In Chapter 7, in which these events are recorded, Michael has become in effect the retrospective first-person narrator; whether this narration is reliable is left by the author as an open question. What is clear is that, on the basis of Nick's version of the events, the school authorities had seen Michael's behaviour as unacceptable and terminated his employment immediately but without open scandal, which in that era would have been normal procedure. Michael subsequently reflects, 'the idea of the matter which the headmaster had received was not an unjust one. He had been guilty of that worst of offences, corrupting the young' (*TB* 107). The effect of Michael's behaviour had been traumatic for the boy and, in the destruction of Michael's career, devastating for him. A smaller incident with Toby, years later, again involving Michael with a much younger person (this time aged 18), was portrayed as less damaging to Toby. His reactions over the following few days pass through confusion, amazement, surprise, disgust, doubts about his sexuality, and a desire to protect Michael to being in a daze, but seemed to have dissipated entirely within a few days of his arrival at the new world of his rooms at Oxford (*TB* 305).[11] The effect of Michael's impetuous kissing of Toby upon Nick, who has been staying at Imber Court and is an accidental witness, is disastrous for Nick who dies by suicide, for Michael who loses his faith and for the community at Imber which is dissolved and its members scattered. Michael's future, planning another teaching job, remains ambiguous.

The dramatic tension in a modern reading of Murdoch's novel arises from contrasting factors. This tension is inherent in Murdoch's sympathetic portrayal of Michael as a homosexual who struggles to be good and achieve something of value in society, and his predilection for juveniles; also in Michael's position of moral responsibility towards pupils that is at odds with behaviour which he himself recognises as corrupting the young. His offences against Nick and Toby are abusive and would each have been illegal as an assault under the law then in force, and they would not, after law reform, have come within the exemption for consenting adults in what was to become the Sexual Offences Act 1967, nor would they have been acceptable in general to the reform movement. The age of consent is not technically an issue differentiating the cases of Nick and Toby as all homosexual acts were illegal. Murdoch contrasts Michael's pederasty with his consensual

homosexual relations with his contemporaries at Cambridge; these she does not criticise, despite the fact that they were likely to have involved men under 21. For heterosexual acts the age of consent was 16, so that the encounter between Dora and Toby would have fallen into a different legal category, further consideration of which is not relevant to this paper.

The second area of moral tension lies in the radical changes since the 1950s in social attitudes to sexual relations. Murdoch's novel reflects prevailing attitudes in 1958, when homosexual conduct was illegal (and its practice unacceptable in a boys' school) but the rights of children were at that time largely ignored. Modern society generally regards questions of sexual identity to be a matter for those directly concerned, but treats the protection of minors from abuse, particularly since the 1990s, as a major social and legal issue. Not merely is the law on paedophilia broader and more rigidly enforced, but there are now statutory requirements to report such conduct and those convicted are added to the Sex Offenders Register. In her 1964 essay, 'The Moral Decision about Homosexuality', Murdoch debated the difficulties in identifying moral considerations applicable to homosexuals which did not equally apply to heterosexual men or couples. In *The Bell* Murdoch demonstrates that sexual interference with children is simply not acceptable by whomsoever it is committed. Her view on Michael's behaviour is briefly revealed in a dialogue between James and Michael towards the end of *The Bell*:

> 'Toby has told me everything.'
> 'Very little happened.'
> 'That's a matter of opinion.' (*TB* 293)

In *An Unofficial Rose* (1962), also written after Wolfenden but before the Sexual Offences Act, Mildred Finch's husband and brother demonstrate the contrasting values society places on homosexual and heterosexual behaviour. The respectable Humphrey Finch, a diplomat whose career had come to an untimely end 'after an incident in Marrakesh which even the British Foreign Service, with its wide tolerance of eccentricity, could not overlook', lives with 'poor Mildred' as she was called by those who knew – and who did not? – her husband's sexual preferences, namely his homosexuality.[12] Mildred's brother Felix Meecham, in contrast, is a dashing bachelor, a colonel with an MC won at Anzio, the driver of a very dark blue Mercedes, the escort of society ladies at Ascot and the lover of a woman at the French Consulate in Singapore. Felix, who could not understand his brother-in-law because he could not really believe in homosexual love, is widely adored by women. Humphrey is the victim of the social attitudes of the time but is not criticised by Murdoch for his proclivity. His behaviour towards young Penn, a coltish teenager to whom he is clearly attracted, appears to have been impeccable. Humphrey ends up in the last

chapter in Rabat where Mildred is sure he had quickly consoled himself. Humphrey and his predicament are echoed in another Murdochian character, Uncle Theo in *The Nice and the Good* (1968), who 'left India under a cloud, although no one had ever been able to discover what sort of cloud it was that Theodore had left India under'.[13]

Emma Sands presents a more complex study in sexual identity than either Humphrey or Felix, and *An Unofficial Rose* is a subtler study of female sexuality. A successful professional woman who shares her house with a succession of younger companions, Emma and her latest companion are described by Conradi as 'the witch-like half lesbian Emma Sands and her lover Lindsay'.[14] Emma, the former lover of Hugh Peronnet, was abandoned by Hugh many years ago when he decided to stay with his wife, Fanny. Emma appeared to console herself, or sought to, with the tall, young, Felix Meecham, then 14 years old. A successful writer of detective fiction, she never married, is now elderly, walks with a stick, is largely chair-ridden but not immobilised, and is suffering from a serious heart condition. Lindsay Rimmer is her current companion and functions as something between secretary, housekeeper and carer. Their language, particularly in front of Hugh's son Randall, is sexually teasing, 'a fag, sweetie?'(*UR* 67), but their physical relationship is, despite Conradi's reading, left ambiguous. Emma does tell Randall that she has a prior claim on Lindsay which may be read as an admission of their personal relationship. '"No, no," she said. "I can't do without her, I can't do without my gaiety girl. And I saw her first, after all"' (*UR* 75). Lindsay is a self-serving opportunist who is happy to take up with Randall if he has the money to support her in the life-style to which she aspires. Randall and Lindsay share one of Murdoch's most explicit sex scenes in Lindsay's own bedroom in Emma's flat when Emma is away for the day. Emma's relationship with Lindsay can be seen as loving, but Lindsay's relationships with both Emma and Randall appear selfish and shallow. In Emma's final meeting with Hugh she opens her soul and tells him of her new companion, Jocelyn Gaster and of her will, in which she leaves everything to Randall's nephew, Penn, and she explains her reasons:

> I adored Felix [...] He didn't know of course, he lived in a world of knives and ropes and things. Ah, he was enchanting at fourteen. That particular faun-like grace which fades later. Penn has it now. And some girls have it. Lindsay has it. She's very boy like. And Jocelyn has it. Something slim and piratical. Yes, I think I'm really made to love boys of fourteen. It sounds awfully immoral doesn't it? But then I am immoral. (*UR* 325)

Emma, perhaps bisexual, perhaps tending towards paedophilia, is, in Murdoch's words in relation to herself, 'a male homosexual in female guise', an example of Murdoch's 'redefining of rigidly defined gender categories'.[15] This status is signalled

by the androgynous names of Lindsay and Jocelyn. *An Unofficial Rose* was written at a time when Murdoch's own life was complicated by her relationship with a female colleague at St Anne's.[16] The comparative depersonalisation in Murdoch's description of a similar ménage in the following decade in *Henry and Cato* (1976), which will be discussed later, shows how Murdoch's analysis and description of such relationships matures after law reform.

The homosexual men in *The Unicorn* are among Murdoch's few homosexual villains. After a marital dispute where each of the parties can bear a share of the responsibility, Peter Crean-Smith leaves his wife Hannah prisoner under the supervision of his former lover Gerald Scottow. Peter's passion for a young man, Sandy Shapiro, in New York provoked Gerald's jealousy, which in turn led to the crisis between Peter and Hannah. Peter spends the years of Hannah's incarceration at Gaze Castle, in New York. Gerald takes his holidays in Marrakesh, a city associated by Murdoch with Humphrey Finch and another of her gay characters, Simon Foster in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. We may note that Humphrey, Theo and Peter, all characters from novels written before reform, each finds his different consolations far away from the jurisdiction of the English courts. Murdoch's first overtly homosexual, domestically established male couple, Simon and Axel in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, does not appear in England until 1970.

The years around 1970 were a significant period in the development of gay rights. Following the partial decriminalisation in 1967, despite the profound social stigma which remained common in England, a number of significant developments took place. The Gay Liberation Front was established at the London School of Economics in 1970 and the first British Gay Pride rally followed in 1972. In America the Stonewall Riots in New York City occurred in June 1969; in October of that year *Time* magazine ran a cover story on 'The Homosexual in America'; and in 1971 *Life* magazine published a special feature on gay liberation. Over the next five years, laws decriminalising aspects of homosexuality were passed in jurisdictions as diverse as the State of Michigan, South Australia and the Province of Quebec. In 1977, Harvey Milk, a representative of the gay community of Castro Street in San Francisco, was elected to the Board of Supervisors of the city and was assassinated a year later by a city employee apparently outraged by those circumstances.[17]

It was in this context that Murdoch's first fully 'out' homosexual couple appeared in 1970. Significant elements in the plot of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* arise from the contrast between the gay and straight couples in those early years of decriminalisation, and turn on the ability of the satanic Julius King to take advantage of the fact that Simon is very definitely 'glad to be gay', but his partner Axel is protective of his personal life and resents any demonstration of his sexuality in public. Murdoch contrasts Simon's and Axel's perspectives. Before being with Axel, Simon took pleasure in frequenting gay bars, a world which Axel describes

as 'that goddam secret organisation'.[18] Axel, by contrast, sees homosexuality as a 'fundamental and completely ordinary way of being a human being' (*FHD* 29). It is Axel who makes Simon understand 'that it was perfectly *ordinary* to be homosexual' (*FHD* 29). This passage is key to understanding Murdoch's own attitude to male homosexuality. A curiosity of the novel is that the only couple who survive Julius's malicious interference is the homosexual couple. It is significant also that, only a few years after decriminalisation, it is Axel's need to protect himself from the censure of his colleagues at work and the general public that creates the vulnerability of his relationship with Simon, despite experiencing no such negativity from their own immediate circle of friends and family.

During the 1970s a cast of increasingly homosexual characters appears in the novels. By contrast with their intermittent presence in the earlier novels, Murdoch includes gay, or possibly gay, characters in all the novels of this decade, often minor characters or in an incidental context. In particular, *An Accidental Man* (1971) features a large cast centred on the Tisbourne family and their home in Kensington. The senior civil servants and their children and friends gossip at their cocktail parties and correspond, by means of strings of letters, in a series of Chinese whispers which wander away from the objective truth established by the author. Murdoch's inclusion in this crowd of a significant number of homosexuals, and her different treatment of the various groups and couples, makes this her most important gay novel. The absence of moral judgement by Murdoch on any character's sexuality contrasts with the expressed attitude of some of her characters and reflects her philosophy of allowing free characters to develop within their own space, independently of the author and of each other.[19]

Ludwig Leferrier, refugee from the Vietnam draft and fiancé of Gracie Tisbourne, harbours a residue of romantic feelings for Garth Gibson Grey and is invited by Andrew Hilton, a homosexual don, to join the common room of an Oxford college which, 'though not quite a small Athenian state, is a gay enough place'.[20] As Heusel observes, 'The backdrop or context, includes other men from the same background and men's schools, this same inbred stratum, who find homosexuality preferable to heterosexuality'.[21] The contrast between the upper common room at Oxford and the drawing room in Kensington illustrates the fundamental difference still dividing those who approved of legalisation from those who did not. Eventually Ludwig abandons his prospective marriage and fellowship to return to America and face the draft board. He is accompanied by Garth's uncle Matthew who, among his many motives for leaving London, has realised that his conversation with Ludwig in Oxford had been his most satisfying sexual experience 'since the boy in the Osaka airport bookshop' (*AM* 371). One of the more established 'society' characters, Oliver Sayce, a formidably efficient Old Etonian in the antique book trade, turns up at the Tisbournes' party in jeans and lace ruffles. Geoffrey Arbuthnot, respectable

and married, cannot stand him, a typical reaction of the time. Andrew Hilton, on the other hand, is delighted to meet Oliver and has been wondering who he is all evening. At the end of the novel Andrew writes a letter to Ludwig about his thoroughly Grecian time with Oliver in Athens, with a quotation from Sophocles to the effect that Aphrodite can have more than one name, inferring that love can come in more than one form.[22] Matthew and Oliver go into partnership in a protest bookshop in New York. As someone at Gracie's party says, in a book where a major theme is Ludwig's protest against the Vietnam war: 'There's big money in Protest' (*AM* 376). Patrick Tisbourne and Ralph Odmore are two schoolboys who explore their sexuality in a correspondence of long letters delivered to each other by a small boy whose description in the correspondence varies from Patrick's 'what an intelligent and attractive little boy he is' (*AM* 276) to Ralph's 'snotty dog-faced Williamson minor' (*AM* 280). At the final party, Patrick and Ralph disappear into the kitchen and do not reappear.

An Accidental Man also contains Murdoch's most explicit description of a female same-sex relationship. The word 'lesbian' is used in four of her novels, but only once as a serious description. In *A Severed Head* Martin Lynch-Gibbon had been worried that tall, fair Miss Hernshaw or his other secretary, short, dark Miss Seelhaft, might get married and leave, only realising 'through some imperceptible but cumulative gathering of impressions that they were a happy and well-suited lesbian couple'.[23] The term is not used in relation to Mitzi Ricardo and Charlotte Ledgard, two of the accidental women in *An Accidental Man*. Suicide is one of the underlying issues explored in the novel: Mitzi and Charlotte both attempt suicide and meet in the recovery ward of the hospital. They set up house together, much mocked by the cocktail party set. It is only when Charlotte decides that this arrangement is not for her that Murdoch takes the reader into the heart of their relationship and movingly relates how Charlotte comes to the decision that she cannot leave Mitzi.

The progressive normalisation of Murdoch's narration of homosexuality can be seen in *Henry and Cato* (1976), another novel which contrasts the treatment by the heteronormative community of homosexuality in men and women. Cato Forbes, the young Catholic priest, has developed a passion for a potentially violent young man, Beautiful Joe, a relationship which is perceived as unsuitable by Cato's friend and confessor, Brendan Craddock. When Cato resigns from the priesthood and makes plans to go away with Joe, he can see a normal life for the two of them together in Leeds. Joe, who is not homosexual and sees the relationship between them as between priest and disciple, is shocked and angry and his response leads directly to the violent events that follow: 'And I thought you would still be priest and that would make it all right. […] Now you're just a queer in a cord coat. You're the sort of person I spit on'.[24] Law reform has moved faster than public opinion and the result of this conflict is tragic, leading to the violent events which follow, culminating in

the death of Joe. *Henry and Cato* manifests here the continuation of the contrasting attitudes between the homosexual and heterosexual worlds seen in *An Accidental Man* written five years earlier.

The contrast with Murdoch's portrayal of female sexuality is stark. Cato's father John has, since the death of his wife Ruth, had a long-standing relationship with Dame Patricia Raven, a successful professional woman. Patricia, who had loved Ruth and is known to his children as Aunt Pat, has made love to John out of 'love and friendship' and then tells him she is terminating their relationship (*HC* 392). She will now retire and live with a new companion, a young woman called Miriam Shippel, and they will go into politics. This relationship between a successful older woman and a younger companion is superficially not so different to that between Emma Sands and Lindsay Rimmer in *An Unofficial Rose*, but Murdoch's portrayal has developed. No longer the two most exotic characters in a middle-class world, Patricia and Miriam are now the normal couple in a world of eccentrics formed around a failed priest and the unwilling heir to a stately home.

Certain conclusions can be drawn from Murdoch's treatment of heterosexual and homosexual characters in the novels of the 1970s. The first is the absence of judgemental comment on sexuality. Some gay men are unhappy, but there is no sense that their homosexuality is at fault. What is clear is that Murdoch is treating them with the same analysis as her straight characters, subject to the same desires and frustrations. With the exception of the formidably efficient Oliver Sayce, her male homosexuals often remain, as Robert Baker has said: 'Incompetently Organised'.[25] Second, it is clear that Murdoch preferred to keep the relationships she had with women and with lesbian circles in London private, and found it easier to contextualise her female characters in this more private way.[26] She wrote, 'people's sexual preferences are often very private and have an oddity unconnected with their public persona and talents'.[27] Like the American poet Elizabeth Bishop, Murdoch's women do not refer overtly to their sexuality and refer to their partners as 'a friend' or 'a secretary'.[28] Both Emma Sands, who lives with a series of younger secretary/companions, and Patricia Raven, who will support her younger companion as a political candidate, are further shielded by an element of ambiguity; each has had a long sexual relationship with a man, the fathers respectively of Randall Peronnet and Cato Forbes, protagonists in the novels. Where there is a serious discussion in Murdoch's novels of women with a companion who may well be involved romantically, the nature of the relationship is veiled, except in *An Accidental Man*, in the case of Mitzi and Charlotte, where it is painfully revealed.

The decade ends with *The Sea, The Sea* (1978) where California has become a metaphor for sexual experimentation for both Charles Arrowby and Rosina Vamburgh. In this context it is fair to wonder whether it is Charles's usual vanity and self-deception or his stereotypical view of Gilbert Opian's homosexuality which

prevents him from understanding that Gilbert has truly replaced him in Lizzie Scherer's affections. Murdoch said in a discussion of her choice of male narrators in an interview while she was writing this book that she felt her own characters were androgynous. One of her narrators, Charles, admits he has been bisexual. Lindsay and Jocelyn in *An Unofficial Rose*, and at least two other primary characters, Carel Fisher in *The Time of the Angels* (1966) and Hilary Burde in *A Word Child* (1975), have ambisexual names, though the latter two are heterosexual and patriarchal in their behaviour. One, Piglet in *Nuns and Soldiers* (1980), has no defined gender, a fact that was admitted by Murdoch and said to be 'not of the slightest importance'.[29] There is no identification of any character as transgender.[30]

In contrast to some modern fiction which addresses the issues of homosexuality and gay men in straight society, Murdoch's late novels treat homosexuality as a normal human quality, recorded but not necessarily explained or exploited in the plotline.[31] From Bernard Jacoby, a celibate priest in *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983) who lives chastely, and permanently under various small clouds, to Owen Silbery, a successful painter in *Jackson's Dilemma* (1995) whose sexuality is only characterised indirectly, gay men appear in the second rank of characters, and their sexuality may not have much significance in the plot. Murdoch's treatment of Jesse Baltram in *The Good Apprentice* (1985) is typical of the later novels: she makes no direct reference to his relationship with Max Point in her narrative, only permitting her characters to mention it indirectly. In a letter from Julia Carson Smith to Edward Baltram, Julia writes:

> You asked about [Jesse's] friends, but the only one I can remember being mentioned was a painter called Max Point whom my father spoke of as having been (if you understand me) a rather special friend of Jesse's. He told me not to repeat this, people were more secretive about such things in those days, but I expect it doesn't matter now![32]

Another character, Ilona Baltram, talks of Max as Jesse's lover and possibly her own father. Edward himself can wonder whether his father Jesse is in the South of France with a young and pretty mistress, even a quite other ménage, without either Edward or his author, Murdoch, feeling any compulsion to be more explicit.

In *The Book and the Brotherhood* (1987) she creates a truly integrated homosexual within heterosexual society. Gerard Hernshaw, his Oxford friends and lovers, in particular Sinclair Curtland and Robin Topglass, all fit into a crowd of other men and women and as part of their everyday set of close-knit friends and relations. In this novel Gerard's homosexuality is used as a dramatic device within the plot, but not as the principal element of the plot itself which relates to the 'book' being written by David Crimond. Murdoch uses Gerard's sexual orientation, even in the consensual,

decriminalised 1987 context of the novel, as one of the defining elements of his relationship with Sinclair's sister, Rose. The characterisation of Gerard is interesting. Not for him the secret coupling of Francis Marloe with Bradley's upstairs neighbour in *The Black Prince* (1973) or the camp antics of Simon Foster which so irritate the very private Axel. It is known, and accepted without comment, that Gerard had been in love with Sinclair Curtland. After leaving Oxford he and Sinclair lived together until Sinclair's death in an accident. One American friend, Joel Kowitz, was said not to mind Sinclair's evident homosexuality which he thought of as a natural, even necessary, phase in the development of upper-class Englishmen. This integration of the homosexual into society contrasts with the exclusiveness of the dons in *An Accidental Man* as described by Heusel. After Sinclair's death Gerard lived in Notting Hill with Robin Topglass in Robin's father's house. Some years later, at the time in which the novel takes place, Gerard is known as a man who has always had plenty of close men friends with whom he has no sexual relations, and in more recent years he seems to have settled to living alone. In this context he and Rose are perceived within their social circle as belonging to each other, in a relationship which cannot advance into anything closer.

Murdoch, whose novels sometimes contain codes and ciphers to conceal or reveal messages for her readers, has used in *The Book and the Brotherhood* a code to underline the story of homosexual law reform and its effect during her career as a novelist, and as a reminder of the ordinariness of homosexuality. The title recalls Ralph Odmore's rebuke to Patrick in *An Accidental Man* that he should not ignore him because he, Ralph, did not belong to 'the brotherhood', and was not, therefore, interested in a closer relationship (*AM* 209). In the novel Murdoch uses two names to draw the reader's mind, consciously or subconsciously, back in time. Robin Topglass draws the reader back to the sexual anguish of *The Bell*, written at the height of the campaign for law reform. Robin is the 'son of the birdman', which refers to Peter Topglass in *The Bell*, written one generation before, a naturalist who settles down at Imber with his paraphernalia of bird study.[33] Similarly Gerard's own name, Hernshaw, is found in only one other novel, *A Severed Head*, which recalls the same-sex, but legal, relationship between Martin Lynch-Gibbon's two female secretaries.

These coded signals contextualise *The Book and the Brotherhood* with the backlash against homosexuality which resulted in Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988. A number of disparate elements had come together in the 1980s: the onset of AIDS mainly among gay men; what was seen as excessive liberalisation by the Greater London Council under Ken Livingstone; and the politicisation of society under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, when a majority still thought homosexuality was wrong.[34] The combination of these and other factors led eventually to the passing by Parliament of what came to be popularly

known as Section 28, prohibiting what was seen as the promotion of homosexuality in schools.[35] It was in this historical context that Murdoch was to write *The Book and the Brotherhood*. As Murdoch said in her interview with Jack Biles in 1977, 'I am very careful about names and so on; thus the chances are, if there is something fairly telling in the book, then, that is something I intended'.[36] Murdoch's use of the names Topglass and Hernshaw in that novel is a reminder of the days before decriminalisation, when she had published *The Bell* in 1958 and *A Severed Head* in 1961, and a warning that the reforms which followed the Wolfenden Report could not be taken for granted.

The legal ambit of Section 28 was limited to education and for her own part Murdoch could ignore Section 28 in her later novels. In *The Green Knight* (1993) and *Jackson's Dilemma* (1995), she continues to include homosexual men as incidental individuals whose sexuality does not greatly impinge on the plot or the other characters. In *The Green Knight*, Clive and Emil, in turn, live together, separate and regroup with new partners, as do many heterosexual couples in Murdoch's novels. In *Jackson's Dilemma*, Owen Silbery's sexuality is characterised by contrasting him with Tuan who is deemed not to be gay, 'not to share Owen's inclinations'.[37] Conradi has claimed 'she pioneered writing about homosexuality as merely one part of human life', keeping 'debate about human difference alive'.[38] Section 2A of the Local Government Act, introduced into law by Section 28, was eventually repealed in 2003, too late for Murdoch to have celebrated this return to the progress of the previous 20 years in what could have been her 27th novel.

1 The 45th Annual Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900, University of Louisville, Kentucky, 24 February 2017

2 Iris Murdoch, letter to Georg Kreisel, tentatively dated 'late October 1967(?)' in Avril Horner and Anne Rowe, *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934–1995* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2015), 347.

3 This paper refers to the law in force from time to time in England or England and Wales. The law in Scotland and parts of Ireland has generally been different at any given date.

4 Murdoch's attitude to bisexuality and gender fluidity has recently become more widely publicised. See Horner and Rowe, *Living on Paper*, 238.

5 Jeffrey Meyers, *Remembering Iris Murdoch* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 107. This conversation had been previously published in 1991 and included in Gillian Dooley, ed., *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction: Conversations with Iris Murdoch* (Columbia: South Carolina UP, 2003), 218–34 (233).

6 *The Report of the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution* published in Britain by HMSO on 4 September 1957. It was not considered odd at that time to link these two categories of sexual behaviour, both of which could at that time involve criminal activities.

7 Iris Murdoch, 'The Moral Decision about Homosexuality' (*Men and Society*, 1964) collected in Yozo Muroya and Paul Hullah, eds., *Occasional Essays by Iris Murdoch* (Okoyama: University Education Press, 1998), 31–8 (38).

8 See in particular the Buggery Act 1533.

9 Adam Mars-Jones, 'The Wildeblood scandal: the trial that rocked 1950s Britain – and changed gay rights', *Guardian*, 14 July 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jul/14/against-the-law-the-wildeblood-scandal-the-case-that-rocked-

1950s-britain-and-changed-gay-rights> [accessed 18 May 2019].

10 Iris Murdoch, *The Bell* (1958) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 132, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *TB*.

11 Some commentators disagree. See Bran Nicol, *Iris Murdoch: The Retrospective Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 61, where Nicol states, as part of a longer analysis, that it is clear that Toby has been damaged by Michael's advances, but that this apparently traumatic event is really just an integral part of gaining maturity.

12 Iris Murdoch, *An Unofficial Rose* (1962) (London: Triad Panther, 1977), 15, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *UR*.

13 Iris Murdoch, *The Nice and the Good* (1968) (London: Triad Panther, 1977), 14.

14 Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), 443.

15 Priscilla Martin and Anne Rowe, *Iris Murdoch: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 165.

16 Priscilla Martin and Anne Rowe, *Iris Murdoch: A Literary Life*, 53.

17 The killer, Dan White, is associated with the so-called 'Twinkie defense', by which his lawyer mitigated the legal consequences of his offence by pleading that eating too many of those sugary confections had temporarily unbalanced his brain.

18 Iris Murdoch, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970) (London: Vintage, 2001), 29, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *FHD*.

19 'Literature and Philosophy: A Conversation with Brian Magee', collected in Peter J. Conradi, ed., *Existentialists and Mystics* 1950–1997 (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997) 3–30 (28).

20 Iris Murdoch, *An Accidental Man* (1971) (London: Vintage, 2003), 63, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *AM*.

21 Barbara Stevens Heusel, *Patterned Aimlessness: Iris Murdoch's Novels of the 1970s and 1980s* (Athens GA: Georgia UP, 1995), 111.

22 A fragment from *The Colchian Women*, a lost play by Sophocles, in which Aphrodite is referred to as the Cyprian goddess (*AM*, 341).

23 Iris Murdoch, *A Severed Head* (1961) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 61.

24 Iris Murdoch, *Henry & Cato* (1976) (London: Penguin, 1977), 227, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *HC*.

25 'Incompetently Organised: Iris Murdoch's Male Homosexual as Metaphor', J. Robert Baker, paper presented at the 45th Annual Conference on Literature and Culture since 1900, University of Louisville, Kentucky, 24 February 2017.

26 Murdoch knew the London lesbian milieu and corresponded on the subject. See, for example, undated letter to Rachel Fenner c. 1968, Horner and Rowe, *Living on Paper,* 358.

27 Letter to Georg Kreisel, 15 August 1974. Horner and Rowe, *Living on Paper*, 426.

28 Review of *Elizabeth Bishop: A Miracle for Breakfast, Economist* (18 March 2007), 75.

29 Dooley, *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction*, 104.

30 There is detailed discussion of these issues, which fall outside the scope of this paper, in Tammy Grimshaw, 'Plato, Foucault and Beyond: Ethics, Beauty and Bisexuality in *The Good Apprentice*' in Anne Rowe, ed., *Iris Murdoch: A Reassessment* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 163–74.

31 See, for example, E.M. Forster, *Maurice* (first written in 1913–4, but not published until 1971), James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room* (1956), Annie Proulx, 'Brokeback Mountain' (short story first published in *The New Yorker*, 13 October 1997), and Alan Hollinghurst, *Line of Beauty* (2004), all of which present a homosexual man as the main character in an essentially straight society.

32 Iris Murdoch, *The Good Apprentice* (1985) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001), 50.

33 Iris Murdoch, *The Book and the Brotherhood* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1987), 7.

34 Actions by GLC and ILEA included the funding by GLC of LGBT groups and the inclusion in a local authority school library of *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin*, a book portraying a young girl who lived with her father and his male partner.

35 The new section 2A was introduced into the Local Government Act 1986 by Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988.

36 Dooley, *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction*, 66.

37 Iris Murdoch, *Jackson's Dilemma* (1995) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996), 23.

38 Peter J. Conradi, 'A Witness to Good and Evil', *Guardian*, 9 February 1999, 18.

The Piper

BY IRIS MURDOCH

The Piper—a woodcut by Iris Murdoch in 1938; first published in the Badminton School magazine. This is the first time it has been reproduced. With grateful thanks to the school archivist, Natasha Bishop.

Review of Gillian Alban, *The Medusa Gaze in Contemporary Women's Fiction: Petrifying, Maternal, Redemptive* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017)

Fiona Tomkinson

Gillian Alban's study traces the way in which the image of Medusa has been used by a number of female writers in the latter half of the 20th century, taking the reader on a fascinating journey through examinations of psychoanalysis and literary theory which brings to light the multivalent nature of the Medusa gaze as it has been reinterpreted over the centuries from its classical origins, through Romantic re-evaluations, Freudian and Lacanian interpretations and feminist and postmodern re-readings.

Alban's initial re-evaluation of the monstrous Medusa from a feminist perspective emphasises her fate as symbolic of the situation of women blamed for their own victimisation within patriarchal cultures: in Ovid's account of the myth, Medusa is raped by Poseidon in the Parthenon, and Athena avenges the desecration of her temple by transforming her hair into snakes, causing her to turn to stone all who meet her gaze, and eventually aiding Perseus when he is sent to decapitate her. Athena then appropriates the qualities of Medusa by placing her head on her shield, and the sculptured image of Medusa was used as an apotropaic talisman to deflect evil throughout the classical period, so transforming her murderous gaze into a protective one.

Inspired by Hélène Cixous's concept of the laughing Medusa, Alban takes up this protective aspect as iconic, asserting that the Medusa gaze can be an instrument of female liberation. Medusa can represent female rage at an unjust patriarchal order, but also the gaze that reflects evil, the sister or the mother in both their positive and destructive aspects and the divine female as talisman. As such she appears in these

various aspects in the work of Angela Carter, Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood, Sylvia Plath, A.S. Byatt, Jean Rhys, Jeanette Winterson, Michèle Roberts – and Iris Murdoch.

Alban shows how the Medusa image is applied by Murdoch to two of her characters, Honor Klein in *A Severed Head*, and Elizabeth Fisher in *The Time of the Angels*. Honor is very much a Freudian Medusenhaupt in the eyes of Martin Lynch-Gibbon, inspiring fear, a sense of the divine and erotic attraction. Elizabeth is also seen as an enigmatic Medusa by her uncle Marcus, though he is at a loss to account for this feeling since he also believes her to be an innocent and sweet girl. Alban explicates the Medusa qualities of Elizabeth in terms of an apotropaic revenge which reverts the prying gaze of her sister Muriel, who peeps through a crack in the wall with the intention of showing her to a young man, only to catch her in the act of incest with Carel, her supposed uncle, but actually her father. Alban does not, however, make an explicit comparison between Elizabeth and Honor, or discuss the reasons why Murdoch twice connects the Medusa image with an act of observed incest.

Alban convincingly integrates her tracing of Medusa images with a critique of the misogyny latent in aspects of Freud's *Medusenhaupt* and in theories of the gaze in Sartre and Lacan. She is perhaps on shakier ground, however, in her assertion that seeing the Medusa look as alienating and petrifying is a function of the analytical and logical right hemisphere of the brain, and that recognising it as laughing or compassionate is a function of the intuitive and creative 'left brain'. Neurological considerations aside, this reading is problematic given the fact that the Medusa gaze is not a single real object to be subjected to analysis, but a mytheme with numerous aspects and potential interpretations. One might add that a male response of castration anxiety or arousal is as much an emotional and intuitive response as any other, having little to do with the logical or analytic.

Nevertheless, Alban has done a fine job of redeeming the image of Medusa which goes beyond simply placing her in a 'misunderstood monster' narrative. However, the image is so multivalent that the book might have lacked focus without the contention, advanced as something approaching a thesis statement, that the Medusa gaze is liberating to women. Yet this is also the book's most contentious claim. For what exactly is a Medusa gaze in practical terms? Murderous rage? The protective gaze of mother or sister? The capacity to return the gaze of the objectifying male and consider him critically? A powerful and smouldering glance given by an attractive and charismatic woman, which other women might sadly fail to pull off? A freezing look that might sometimes deter the sexual predator, but at other times result in the hapless practitioner being the victim of even more brutal violence? It is any or all of the above, and it is possible to find some aspects less empowering than others.

Yet to select only the more positive aspects is also somewhat problematic. While Medusa remains toxic and revengeful, one might hesitate to make her into an ideal – such a position might lead us to condone too easily gratuitous acts of extreme female violence if they can in any way be interpreted as a response to the evils of patriarchy. Yet to strip Medusa of her poison is more than stripping Zeus of his licentiousness, Hera of her jealousy, Hephaistos of his limp, Aphrodite of her faithlessness, Demeter of her sorrow, Athena of her virginity, or Apollo of his cruelty – it is to tear out the heart of the myth and symbol. It is as if Zeus should lose his power, Artemis her freedom, Apollo his lyre, Aphrodite her libido, or Athena her wisdom.

Pallas is, of course, the victim-blaming villainess in Alban's narrative – but perhaps Ovid misrepresented her. Be that as it may, the symbol of Pallas as personification of wisdom and strategic warfare with the *gorgoneion* as a weapon could also be adopted as a feminist icon. Fascinating as Alban is as Medusa's advocate, if compelled to choose a female role-model from Greek mythology, I would prefer that of grey-eyed Athena, with a Medusa-shield ready to hand.

Review of *Murdoch on Truth and Love* edited by Gary Browning (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018)

David J. Fine

The strength of *Murdoch on Truth and Love* might just lie in a word missing from its title. This fine collection, edited by Gary Browning, examines truth, love, and something else, a something that, at least for this reader, makes the text an important addition to scholarship on Iris Murdoch. Browning and the contributors address truth and love in a way that points forward – towards something else – and, in this pursuit, they contextualise Murdoch's thinking and expand its reach.

Let us start first with the words that the title claims outright: truth and love. As Browning makes clear in his helpful introduction, the collection aims to examine Murdoch's 'seemingly paradoxical equation of truth with love and her affiliated appreciation of the roles of both reason and emotion in shaping moral conduct' (6). Two essays – Carla Bagnoli's 'Constrained by Reason, Transformed by Love: Murdoch on the Standard of Proof' and Sophie-Grace Chappell's 'Love and Knowledge in Murdoch' – take up this paradox directly. Bagnoli examines Kant's place in Murdoch's philosophy and clarifies the often overlooked similarities and nevertheless salient differences between the two philosophers. For Bagnoli, Murdoch's endorsement of love's moral authority distinguishes her from Kant, who prioritises reason; and yet, Murdoch shares with Kant a rejection of reductivist empiricism. Chappell explores similar terrain in her analysis of love's relation to knowledge. In particular, she charts Murdoch's moral phenomenology, which links love to knowledge without, significantly, equating the two.

This examination of truth and love assumes a slightly different guise in Anne Rowe's '"The best moralists are the most satanic": Iris Murdoch – On Art and Life'. This essay, which opens the collection, analyses Murdoch's recently published letters in the light of their critical reception. Rowe, co-editor of the collected letters, rejects

the sensationalism and misogyny that have characterised public response to *Living on Paper*. Against this current, Rowe makes a strong case for the letters as a source of moral insight that can be placed alongside the fiction and philosophy. Throughout the essay, Rowe showcases the multi-faceted nature of Murdoch's personas, a theme that Rebecca Moden's '"Liberation Through Art": Form and Transformation in Murdoch's Fiction' picks up. Moden demonstrates how Murdoch's preoccupation with masks signals a certain anxiety, on Murdoch's part, surrounding the status of truth in relation to art. For Moden, this problem of aesthetic form hits its zenith in *The Green Knight*, where Murdoch faces her own imperfection and the possibility that truth is nothing more than fiction.

The themes and questions that I have cited above give readers a good sense of the topics covered in *Murdoch on Truth and Love*. I noted at the outset, however, that I felt the collection might make its most lasting impact in terms of a word absent from its title. That word just might be history. To my mind, an insistence on Murdoch's historicity distinguishes this anthology, which maintains that Murdoch's philosophy of love remains grounded in its historical – and, as Rowe expertly shows, Murdoch's personal – context. While all the essays share in this spirit, perhaps Niklas Forsberg's '"Taking the Linguistic Method Seriously": On Iris Murdoch on Language and Linguistic Philosophy' makes the sharpest departure from business as usual. Here, Forsberg claims Murdoch as a linguistic philosopher of sorts, one who accounts for changes in our concepts over time. He makes this case, which goes against the grain of most Murdoch scholarship, by historicising both the philosophy of language and Murdoch's particular methodology. Ultimately, he makes a valuable contribution for scholars looking to ground Murdoch's moral philosophy in her time and ours.

Browning's 'Murdoch and the End of Ideology' underscores this preoccupation with history. His essay places Murdoch squarely within her historical context and shows her continued engagement with politics. In this way, he pushes back against those who argue that Murdoch abandons political thinking in her later work. Frances White's '"It's like brown, it's not in the spectrum": The Problem of Justice in Iris Murdoch's Thought' extends this survey with a deep dive into the archive. Through an examination of Murdoch's personal libraries, White demonstrates Murdoch's sustained interaction with theories of justice and clarifies, thereby, the published writing's stance on this thorny issue. As White makes clear, Murdoch's sense of justice remains rooted within her lived experience of postwar Europe.

Ultimately, Sabina Lovibond's 'Iris Murdoch and the Quality of Consciousness' lodges the most pressing challenge to Murdoch scholars. Lovibond deftly traces the influence of Marxist thinking on both Murdoch's and Simone Weil's moral philosophy and shows where they depart from Marx. Lovibond uses her analysis of moral consciousness to query Murdoch's relation to the sociopolitical realm. Indeed, Lovibond shows how Murdoch's inward turn goes hand-in-hand with

an anti-intellectualist streak in the fiction. While I am not prepared to go as far as Lovibond does in her conclusion, she does Murdoch scholars a great service by posing the questions she does in the way she does. After all, the challenge to place Murdoch politically remains for all those who wish to historicise her philosophy, fiction, and letters.

And so, history is the word whose absence is felt most acutely. While I would have liked to have seen a deeper engagement with Murdoch's literariness (the specific ways that literature – rather than philosophy – helps one to approach questions of truth, love, and, dare I say, history) and her queerness (how non-normative sexual practices and desires have influenced her concept of love), the collection succeeds in getting important questions and, in Lovibond's case, challenges on the table. These debates will surely shape the next phase of criticism, and they, not surprisingly, swarm around the two philosophers who haunt the collection: Martin Heidegger and Martha Nussbaum. Are Murdoch scholars ready for the Heidegger manuscript's publication in 2021, and have they sufficiently answered Nussbaum's concerns about Murdoch's alleged flight from bodies and politics? These essays prepare scholars to go where that honey is, with increased agility and deepened love.

Review of Gary Browning, *Why Iris Murdoch Matters* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018)

Mark Hopwood

Why does Iris Murdoch matter? As Gary Browning notes on the first page of his new book, 'she matters in many ways'. She was a prolific and successful novelist, an original and influential philosopher, and a public figure whose colourful life and late struggles with Alzheimer's disease have been depicted in numerous memoirs and biographies, and, perhaps most famously, the movie, *Iris*. Indeed, Murdoch matters so much, in so many ways and to so many different people, that one might wonder whether it is really possible to give one single answer to the question suggested by the book's title, *Why Iris Murdoch Matters*. Does Murdoch matter to contemporary analytical philosophers in the same way that she matters to readers of her novels? Does she matter to literary critics in the same way that she matters to those inspired by her life story? Does she matter at all to those who might be sceptical that she has anything of interest to say about politics or history? Browning's answer to these questions is, in a qualified sense, yes. While recognising the undeniable diversity of Murdoch's contributions to philosophy, literature, and public life, Browning sets out to argue that 'most of all [...] she matters because she brings these things together, showing how they arise out of and reflect back upon experience in related ways' (1). The main thesis of the book might thus be summed up in the following way: Murdoch's philosophy, her novels and her life are all connected, and they matter so much precisely *because* they are connected. Furthermore, since Murdoch is both a political and an historical thinker, she can only fully be understood within the specific political and historical context that gave rise to her ideas.

This is, undeniably, an exciting set of claims. Since most of the existing scholarship on Murdoch has tended to focus on her novels (with passing reference to the philosophy) or on her philosophy (with passing reference to the novels), Browning's attempt to bring all of Murdoch's work together and situate it in the context of Murdoch's life and times is both daring and original. It is also hugely ambitious. Browning's strategy in the book is to organise each chapter around a

single broad theme: metaphysics, the novel, morality, the political, and seek to bring out the contours of Murdoch's thought in each area by connecting what she has to say about it in her philosophy, her novels, her letters, her unpublished works, and even her poetry. When this strategy works, the results are very stimulating indeed. Browning's discussion of Murdoch's unpublished manuscript on Heidegger in the chapter on metaphysics is highly illuminating, and his insistence on Murdoch's status as a political thinker in Chapter 5 leads him to make a set of very interesting connections between what might otherwise appear to be scattered remarks in her novels, her early essays and the late work *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*. The book is full of connections and small observations that even seasoned Murdoch scholars may find surprising. The parallel between Murdoch's famous discussion of the hovering kestrel in 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts' and her poem 'Fox' ('My footsteps creak in grasses, Quietness makes me stare, While in a woodland space a sudden fox, Peers with his brilliant face, and passes') is a particularly delightful example (109).

If Browning's insistence on the connectedness of Murdoch's work allows him to draw parallels that other readers may have missed, it also has its drawbacks. In the chapter on 'morality', Browning chooses to focus primarily on the three essays in *The Sovereignty of Good*. After a summary of the main themes of each essay, Browning explores the ways in which the themes of selfishness, goodness, moral progress, etc., find their way into the novels. This approach leads Browning to uncover a variety of interesting connections and parallels between different texts, but it does not really help to explain exactly how we should understand some of the more complex and difficult aspects of the philosophy itself. For example, the section on 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts' ends with a fairly lengthy summary of the plot of *The Good Apprentice*, concluding with the following observation: 'Edward, Stuart, and Harry have different conceptions of the good and pursue different goals and yet they are united by quests that will not be completed but which they can recognize as worthwhile and going beyond mere subjective desire. They can be said to be pursuing the good' (112–13). This seems fairly unobjectionable as it stands, but it does not really help to distinguish Murdoch's philosophical views from those of a whole host of other philosophers who would agree that we need an account of objective values that go beyond 'mere subjective desire'. If Murdoch's philosophy really matters, then it matters because of what makes it (even decades later) so radically different from the available alternatives. (Browning does contrast Murdoch's views with what he calls 'Anglo-American moral theory', but it might have been worth clarifying that the position that there are no 'objective values' and that we can ignore the inner life because it is 'insusceptible of verification' [91], is more characteristic of a particular strand within 1950s Oxford moral philosophy than anything a contemporary Anglo-American moral theorist would subscribe to.)

Browning's decision to focus primarily on drawing connections between Murdoch's philosophy and her novels does help to make some of her ideas more accessible, but at the cost of the kind of detailed critical engagement with other philosophers that would help to bring out just how unusual and exciting Murdoch's approach is.

It might be said that since Browning is attempting to write a book for a general audience, it would be unhelpful for him to get bogged down in academic disputes and technicalities. This is a perfectly reasonable point, and one of the great merits of Browning's project is his obvious determination to open up Murdoch's work to a wider audience. At times, however, the way that Browning takes the novels to provide fairly straightforward illustrations of points made more abstractly in the philosophy risks obscuring one of the most important points about Murdoch as a philosopher-novelist, that is, her deep ambivalence about the very idea of putting one's philosophy into one's novels. Browning, of course, is well aware that Murdoch 'had no intention of putting philosophical doctrines into her fiction' (65). He still wants to maintain, however, that the novels and the philosophy must be connected, since both are concerned with experience: 'Good literature reflects the world as it is and allows the reader to consider situations and characters that reflect experience. In exhibiting reality the novel performs a task that is connected to philosophy in that it is attuned to experience' (65–6). Stated at such a level of generality, this claim is hard to disagree with, but one might still be inclined to think that a great deal turns on how exactly the novels and the philosophy are connected. Browning's position seems to be that the novels show something that the philosophy says, for example, 'they show the fallibility and susceptibility to self-absorption and hence the moral difficulty of individuals operating in a messy world' (14). This is certainly an intuitive approach, but as Niklas Forsberg has recently argued in *Language Lost and Found: On Iris Murdoch and the Limits of Philosophical Discourse* (2013), the relationship between Murdoch's philosophy and her novels may turn out to be significantly more complex than the say/show distinction would suggest.

Having articulated some reservations about whether *Why Iris Murdoch Matters* fully succeeds in reaching all of its most ambitious goals, it seems appropriate to close in paying tribute to what it does do. Browning writes in the acknowledgments section that the book 'has been with [him] for a long time' (vi), and nothing is more evident than the love of Murdoch's work that has been poured into every page. Browning has read and re-read all of Murdoch's published works – both the novels and the philosophy – and scoured the archives for unpublished material that might shed light on what is already publicly available. In doing so, he has come across some real gems (Murdoch's application for the post of tutor at St Anne's College is particularly revealing) and, perhaps more importantly, succeeded in conveying a genuine sense of wonder at the breadth and richness of Murdoch's output. If Browning's aim in writing this book was to convince the reader that Murdoch's work

'fits together as a whole' (vi), then he has achieved that aim simply by showing how many interesting connections can be discovered if we proceed on the assumption that it *does* all fit together. Iris Murdoch matters to many people, but there is unlikely to be anyone who reads this book without finding that she matters in ways that they had not previously appreciated. For this achievement, we should all be very grateful.

Review of Christopher Boddington, *Iris Murdoch's People A to Z* (Washington: Anchovy Hill Press, 2018)

Gillian Dooley

Clearly this is a book that no one who is serious about Iris Murdoch can be without. At 521 pages it rivals Murdoch's later books in weight, volume, and profusion of tentacles, while of course being quite a different kind of beast.

The 'people' in question are her characters, and they are at the core of this remarkable book. The scope is 'her twenty-six novels, her one published short story and her plays' (xvii). Every single one of the characters (no matter how peripheral) are entered alphabetically with a description 'derived from Murdoch's own words' (xvii). After their names (surname, first name) comes the abbreviation for the works in which the characters appear, how they fit in, what they look like, what they do for a living (if anything), and cross-references to other characters, concepts, objects and much more. Such narrative elements as are included are purely scene-setting: there are no 'spoilers', let alone extraneous editorial speculation.

As the descriptions are extracts from the text of the novels, no polite veneer of objectivity intervenes between us and Murdoch's liberal use of free indirect discourse. Humphrey Finch is 'queer as a coot', and Gunnar Jopling is 'clever, but there are plenty of clever people in Oxford'. Ed Roper 'looks like a toad, quite a nice one'. Bradley Pearson 'looks about 35, well 40'. This reference book could become addictive.

One thing you should know is that the title is modestly misleading. This is an A to Z of more than just Murdoch's people. It is her (or her characters') places, books, artworks, music, historical events, theatres, vehicles, dogs and cats, countries, drinks, historical concepts – even roses. There are eleven 'Appendices' which are virtually indexes to various categories – they appear to be simple lists, but each term listed has a corresponding alphabetical entry in the body of the work which gives a brief context within Murdoch's fictional oeuvre. For example, you can find out which

three novels refer to Gilbert White, or all the novels which mention the Russian language. They can also be used to generate hypnotic found poetry: the following sequence appears under the heading 'Religious, Philosophical, Political and Other Traditional Systems, Movements, Concepts and Organisations':

> Dasein, Devil, Dialectic.
> Dominican Domovoi.
> Druids,
> Episcopalian Eros;
> Eurocommunist Fabian Fenians.
> Friends. [punctuation added, line breaks rearranged]

Another intriguing use of this book is to track Murdoch's occasional auto-intertextuality (yes, that is a word – I looked it up). When it appears unexpectedly in *The Book and the Brotherhood*, you can remind yourself in which novel Christopher Cather's band 'The Waterbirds' originates. You can confirm your suspicion that Charles Arrowby's friend Sir William Boase had a previous life in *Bruno's Dream*. You can try to sort out whether Septimus Leech ever really existed.

The main problem with a fantastically ambitious compendium like this is that you cannot help thinking of something else that it would have been useful to include, like a way of bringing all the references on one novel together. Perhaps even just a list of the characters in each novel – that would be so useful. (The obvious riposte to this is – read the novel!) And it's tempting to think, as there's a list of roses, why not a list of trees? Why not include references to foxes or spiders, as well as horses and birds? But any of these suggestions would expand this already large book, and a line must be drawn somewhere. And, as Boddington suggests in his Introduction, anyone who wants to follow any of the many leads to other works of art can 'take this work as a starting point and follow their trail where it leads them' (xviii).

The book is prefaced with a substantial essay, 'On Iris Murdoch: Constructing Characters', by Anne Rowe – more than the customary brief congratulatory throat-clearing. As she writes, this book stands 'as a joyous celebration of the diversity and enduring fascination for characters with and by whom generations of readers have been both enthralled and appalled' (xiii).

Iris Murdoch's People A to Z is a handsome hard-bound volume, a pleasure to handle and to browse. An electronic version would be handy though – it would make it easier to find characters who we know mainly by their first names, for example. (Can you remember the surname of Toby in *The Bell*?) But I am not inclined to be churlishly critical. This is an amazing book, a huge contribution to Murdoch literary scholarship and every home should have one.

Review of Anne Rowe, *Iris Murdoch* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019)

Bran Nicol

Twenty years since her death in 1999 and a century since her birth: is Iris Murdoch still relevant to literary studies and British literary culture now? Anne Rowe's new critical biography, published fittingly in Murdoch's centenary year, answers with a resounding yes. It presents us with a portrait of an author and her writing whose perspective on the novel and the individual is highly relevant to our age now, while also being still insufficiently accounted for by literary critics.

Its exact timeliness aside, Rowe's volume is a significant moment in Murdoch studies. It is the first major overview of Murdoch's work in over a decade (since Hilda Spear's study in 2006), and is also – true to the rationale of the long-established Writers and their Work series, now enjoying a new lease of life under its Liverpool University Press imprint – a properly critical life. In the first decade or so after Murdoch's death, writer and work often seemed increasingly hard to reconcile, as a combination of Peter J. Conradi's exhaustive biography, John Bayley's series of rather uncomfortably intimate memoirs about life with the writer, and the 2001 film *Iris*, tipped the balance in favour of scrutiny of Murdoch's dramatically complex and previously hidden personal life over a careful analysis of her contribution to literature and philosophy. Featuring in such a high-profile series, Murdoch's name now added to the lengthy roster of British and American writers examined in the series' volumes over the years, Rowe's book returns work to writer and writer to work in a way which resets the balance and provides a new basis for future readings of Iris Murdoch.

Besides the obvious authority and depth Rowe's many contributions to the study of Murdoch's life and work bring to the volume (contributions which include three edited or co-edited collections of essays, a research monograph, a co-written 'literary life', and a collection of letters, as well as her superb stewardship of the Iris Murdoch Archive Project at Kingston), it demonstrates Rowe's impressive ability

to synthesise and summarise the most important themes and interests which sustained Murdoch's writing career. Rowe continually draws links between Murdoch preoccupations in her fiction, her philosophical interests, and moments in her life. She persuasively connects, for example, the author's fascination with eros in a philosophical and aesthetic sense with Murdoch's own erotic biography, noting that: 'The novels warn that subversive desire and the thrill of casual sex can be damaging and should be resisted, but also suggest ways in which it can be psychologically cathartic and beneficial' (16).

To write a short critical biography of such a prolific writer whose work spans a wide range of literary genres and philosophy, and stretches over five decades, must be a daunting task. Rowe deals with this by providing in Chapter 1 ('A Writing Life: 1954–1995') a masterfully concise introduction to Murdoch and her major work in just over 30 pages – a mini-overview within a larger overview. This then allows Rowe to go on to explore in more depth in the following four chapters key broader themes which drive groups of novels and other writings: Murdoch's roles as philosopher and public intellectual, Murdoch's complex personal and professional perspective on religion and spirituality, the engagement with other arts – visual art, poetry and drama – which shaped her own art, the novel, and the significance of two main locations – Ireland and London – in her fiction.

This structure both keeps the book readable without being repetitive and enables Rowe to pick out issues which are either central to understanding Murdoch, or somewhat neglected in the critical reception of Murdoch to date. The section on London in Chapter 5, for example, is especially fresh and insightful, casting Murdoch convincingly as a *flâneuse* strolling around the London streets 'absorbing the ambience of the city, relishing its excitement and noting her surroundings with photographic detail, while all the time pondering the effect of the cityscape on the minds of those who inhabited it' (103). As well as providing some fascinating incidental details (quiz question for Murdoch enthusiasts: which poet did she dance with one night in The Pillars of Hercules pub in Greek Street?), Rowe demonstrates how London and its districts and monuments are more than simply settings for her fiction but formal structures through which the author channelled philosophical ideas and narrative preoccupations.

Throughout the study an Iris Murdoch emerges who is passionately interested in social justice – perhaps to a greater extent than she has been given credit for. Because her novels are set, as much as they are in London, in 'Murdochland', an analogous present-day world brim-full of intellectual psychodrama and apparently removed from the mundanity of everyday life, and because her philosophy focused on metaphysics rather than social pragmatics, it is easy to assume that Murdoch was out of touch with her time. However, Rowe makes it clear how willing she was to comment on a range of pressing social issues ranging from comprehensive education

to the Vietnam War, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), and the Rushdie affair. Much of this commitment is due to the author's conscious, at times uneasy, recognition of her responsibility as a public intellectual. However, as Rowe demonstrates, it finds its way into the work too. The portrayal of Michael Meade in *The Bell* is brave when written at a time (1958) when homosexuality was still illegal in the United Kingdom, for example, while there is a covert subtext about child abuse in *A Word Child*, considered by Rowe, which seems especially contemporary when revisited again now.

But this sense of Murdoch being rooted in her historical moment also strengthens the sense of enigma when it comes to positioning her in the history of modern literature and attempting fully to appreciate her contribution. Rowe reminds us that Murdoch 'remained committed to writing novels that foregrounded the spiritual and moral health of the individual, not national politics' (54). Furthermore, she insists that Murdoch 'understood such global tensions [as the Rushdie affair] as symptomatic of more personal ones that were playing themselves out in the common consciousness' (60). Both statements are entirely accurate in my view. But focusing on the individual rather than addressing broader social issues happens to be entirely at odds with the sense of purpose surrounding contemporary fiction – and as a motivating force behind contemporary literary studies – now. Contemporary fiction is distinguished by its willingness to enter what I call 'response-mode', that is, its readiness to regard as its primary responsibility to depict, reflect and comment on aspects of our contemporary landscape: environmental catastrophe, artificial intelligence, terrorism, transnationalism, and so forth.

So how do we account for Murdoch's place in the modern novel? The most radical part of Rowe's reading is her conviction that Murdoch developed a distinctive and experimental interdisciplinary form of writing, one which combines literary realism and effects from other arts, such as painting or drama. She contends that 'the critical failure to identify her unique interdisciplinary brand of formal experimentation as a novelist has been undervalued' (79). I am not entirely convinced that Murdoch's continued and restless fascination with other arts really produces a new fictional form, rather than providing a rich and evocative symbolic texture for her fiction. However, Rowe is right that critics have so far been unable satisfactorily to categorise Murdoch's fiction – and being suitable for pigeon-holing has been central to the practice of literary criticism from the 1980s onwards, for example in what Rita Felski has provocatively termed in *The Limits of Critique*, the age of 'critique'. Furthermore, Murdoch's own emphatic insistence on the value of realism and the achievements of previous novelists like Tolstoy or Henry James instead of the work of younger contemporaries, and her strange (to my mind) reluctance to extend her characteristic spirit of openness towards other people, ideas and art-forms to encompass modernism, postmodernism or deconstruction, has created an obstacle

to placing her work by blocking off the idea that she was producing a new kind of experimental fiction.

Maybe now, though, in these post-postmodern, post-theory, and post-critical times, literary critics will find a vocabulary to pinpoint what distinguishes Iris Murdoch's singular work. Perhaps this will be by bringing one of the new critical paradigms to bear on her work, post-critique perhaps, or exploring her fiction in relation to affect, a concept which surely relates interestingly to the combination of the sensational and the contemplative which structures Murdoch's narratives. I am speculating here, of course, but my thoughts are triggered by Rowe's book. Her study confirms that the future of Murdoch studies is secure, partly because there is a trove of new biographical material to be worked (Rowe mentions the tantalising prospect of the ongoing transcription of 60 years of Murdoch's journals), and partly because it shows there is so much in Murdoch's fiction and philosophical works still to be explored. Rowe's Iris Murdoch will figure both as a catalyst and an ideal base for further study. It is perceptive, comprehensive, and up-to-date: the perfect introductory overview of Iris Murdoch's rich and enduringly fascinating body of work.

Review of *Iris Murdoch: A Centenary Celebration* edited by Miles Leeson (Yeovil: Sabrestorm Fiction, 2019)

Maria Peacock

In his preface to this collection of writings by people who knew Iris Murdoch, Miles Leeson asks: 'But what was she really like in private?' This work offers alternatives to the public image of Murdoch as the novelist, academic and philosopher who died of Alzheimer's disease.

In conversation with Leeson at the 2017 Iris Murdoch International Conference, the transcript of which can be found in this volume, writer A.N. Wilson, friend of Iris Murdoch, and her husband John Bayley, commented that he did not think 'anybody who knew her on the kind of superficial level I knew her had any conception of quite what an adventure her life had been'.

This collection of articles by a variety of people who knew her at various times of her life gives some glimpses of that adventure. It is illustrated by personal photographs by Janet Stone, kindly reproduced with permission by Ian Beck, which include holiday snapshots of Murdoch enjoying time with friends, swimming, holding a cat or just being with John Bayley. These images reinforce the sense of affection and enjoyment, the conversations and the laughter recalled in the writings, while other images show Murdoch in pensive mood.

There are no footnotes or details of when the individual articles were written. While the reader initially feels a need for context, this does permit a chorus of voices to take us to a deeper understanding of Iris Murdoch as a person. The memoirs were written over a long period of time. Peter J. Conradi began the compilation during her lifetime as he intended to publish a *Festschrift* in celebration of Murdoch's 80th birthday which would have been in July 1999. The material has since been augmented by other writings, very few of which have appeared elsewhere, and include some contributions written very recently.

We are presented with Murdoch the philosopher, the teacher, the novelist, but most of all as a friend through the surprising memories of people she had contact with. We learn of the 'long and unrewarding correspondence' between her and Roy Jenkins when as students they were both active in the Oxford University Labour Club in 1939–40 from opposing left-wing ideological positions. Although in student politics there was no meeting of minds, they later enjoyed 'long hilarious and well-lubricated luncheon parties'.

Murdoch's talent for enduring friendship is demonstrated throughout. Philippa Foot writes that she was 'Absolutely loyal to her oldest friends, throughout her years of fame'. Father Pierre Riches observes how easily their friendship, based on mutual trust, was resumed after long absences. Kate Levey, daughter of Brigid Brophy, remembers that Murdoch's loyalty to her mother 'was unshakeable'. This quality is also found in accounts by John Grigg with whom the Bayleys went on adventurous travels, and Natasha and Stephen Spender whose holiday home they shared annually.

Although the collection consists of contributions by a wide range of authors, who share their stories of Murdoch as they knew her encompassing several decades, consistent themes recur throughout. Most significantly we read of her kindness and warmth. Time and time again contributors recount how they were nourished by the attention she gave to them from the moment they met. The late theatre producer Josephine Hart writes of a first meeting where, with Murdoch, she had 'the most complete conversation I have ever had in my life'. Saguna Ramanathan describes the affectionate correspondence and the 'astonishing' kindness she was offered when, as she described herself, an 'obscure academic' met a world-famous writer, and the correspondence continued after Ramanathan returned to India until 1996. Audi Bayley remembers Murdoch's kindness at a gathering of Oxford academics where she was usually ignored because she had no 'subject'. Murdoch befriended her, engaging in conversation by asking if she believed in God.

Murdoch's overwhelming interest in others is recounted by Marjorie Boulton, another lifelong friend whom Murdoch helped fulfil her potential. She is one of many who write of Murdoch's reluctance to talk about herself. Miklós Vető, whose PhD thesis on Simone Weil was supervised by Murdoch, wrote that 'she never talked about herself' and Eric Christiansen recalls that 'her intense interest in others is untainted by malice'. Her godson Ben Macintyre remembers how 'Iris always made me feel like the central character in a most important novel'. In a compelling account of painting her portrait, Tom Phillips found that in portraying her he came to know himself better.

This collection also of course pays tribute to aspects of Murdoch's remarkable intellect. Carmen Callil, her publisher from 1983, writes of her 'gimlet brain, her kind heart, and brilliant mind'. Twenty years after her death the reader's relationship with

Murdoch continues, as we re-evaluate our response to her novels and re-examine her philosophical work. There can be no answer to the question of 'what was she really like in private?' Jake in her first novel *Under the Net* asked himself, 'When does one ever know a human being?' and came to the conclusion that one must accept that one can only co-exist in love. This is reflected by A.N. Wilson when he said, 'I did know her on one level quite well, and on another level, I didn't know her at all'. While the novels, Conradi's biography, the diaries and the letters indicate depths of her life which are unknowable, this collection gives a unique insight into what it was like to know Murdoch personally and allows us to enjoy and share some part of the 'adventure that her life had been'.

How awfully considerate of Mrs Placid to go off and get herself massacred

Kate White

Everyone must bow to the lovers. The terrorists,
even, conspire to promote their happiness,
finishing off the redundant wife, already wounded,
at the airport. The mirrored elephant shall blacken
on the bonfire, the first son banished to roam
the new motorway. The lovers remake the old world
with buttered paws and Scandinavian furniture. Such
selfishness! Their minds blind as they do their stuff,
over and over, in the waltz of diminishing returns.

This poem, first published in the Spectator 10 February 2018, is reproduced here by kind permission.

The Royal Institute of Philosophy, London Lectures 2018–2019: 'A Centenary Celebration: Anscombe, Foot, Midgley and Murdoch'

A note from the editors

With so many events and lectures this centenary year, this reports section is much larger than is usual in the *Iris Murdoch Review*. So many voices talking about Murdoch are paralleled by so many voices reporting on these talks, voices from a wide variety of backgrounds – from established scholars and young students to retired readers. There is a virtue in this polyvocality, something Murdoch herself relished and achieved in fiction, and it is a central feature of the first lecture series reported here from The Royal Institute of Philosophy. We have only included those lectures in this series which were focused on Murdoch, not on the other three philosophers, though the polyvocality they all embraced and encouraged was our inspiration for letting different voices speak in their own individual styles in these reports.

Report on Benjamin Lipscomb's Lecture, '"The Women are Up to Something": Murdoch, Anscombe, Foot and Midgley and Their Place in Twentieth-Century Ethics', 19 October 2018

Frances White

The opening lecture of this series by Benjamin Lipscomb was a tour de force. Lipscomb wove his years of research into the lives and work of these four women into a seamless quartet, combining biography with analysis of their separate achievements in an illuminating account both of what they shared in common and of what is unique to each of them. He painted the picture of what it was like to be a woman in Oxford at a time when the prevailing model was logical positivism derived from the Vienna Circle. Ayer was the key figure who set the context and the task for the four women. Empirical facts and the rules of syntax were the only two permitted categories: all else was considered 'sound and fury', rendering ethical discourse meaningless and reduced to subjective moral approval/disapproval. Under the influence of Donald McKinnon, Murdoch and Foot, in particular, were to challenge this. The implicit common project of the four women was to make naturalistic defence of ethical objectivity more credible. The unfolding of this project began with questioning whether the dominant framing could be wrong and the leap they made outside the fact/value dichotomy was just such a challenge.

This report of the fascinating account of the interwoven lives and mutual influences of these four friends and colleagues is restricted here to Murdoch, for reasons of space. Lipscomb sees her as the most outside of the four in the male milieu of Oxford, but crucially she diagnosed several theories of ethics which they wanted to reject, identifying the underlying background. He explained how this diagnosis and identification was crucial to the radical thinking needed to replace those theories. Murdoch spotted the connection between French Existentialist

philosophy and the British philosophers and saw what was behind it, the fact versus value distinction. This late modern picture was culturally and historically local. It was also not fully self-consistent. Tropes of late 19th-century Romanticism (the Sublime) gave it glamour. Murdoch recognises that 'gloom conceals elation' and *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* reveals her recognition of the situation. Murdoch alone could offer her diagnosis but it marginalised her in the Oxford scene dominated by Austin et al. In a context with such an exacting ideal Murdoch's eclectic elusive essays seemed sloppy. Her work did not register in her milieu as really disciplined or truly philosophical. 'A lady not known for the clarity of her views', Isaiah Berlin said. An internalisation of a communal judgement can be seen in Murdoch's novels and self-deprecating remarks.

After a clear account of the individual contribution each of the women made to 20th-century philosophy, Lipscomb concluded by saying that contemporary philosophers and the West in general are still in the grip of the theories these women opposed. In Lipscomb's view, 'cultural infusion' of the fact/value dichotomy is still prevalent in schools where children are taught to oppose 'facts' and 'opinions', fact being a loose synonym for reality. Retraining this way of thinking is essential. Wittgenstein said 'a picture can hold us captive': the fact/value picture still holds us captive and these four women wanted us to be able to paint another.

Report on Hannah Marije Altorf's Lecture, 'Iris Murdoch and the Virtuous Peasant: What is it like to be a woman in philosophy?', 2 November 2018

Lucy Oulton

While researching Iris Murdoch for her post-graduate thesis, Hannah Marije Altorf recalls encountering some who rather discounted Murdoch. At the time, Altorf considered this perfunctory attitude actually rather positive, her own conviction being that women bring something new and different to philosophy.

Altorf paid tribute to Clare Mac Cumhaill and Rachael Wiseman's *In Parenthesis* project as a feminist one, 'if what we mean by feminism is a concerted effort to achieve equality', and I would like to think that Murdoch would have approved of the relatable quotidian example Altorf offered to illustrate what such equality might look like – that it was not about offering men and women an equal number of toilets, but an equal waiting time. When the project argues for a clearly defined philosophical school for Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Mary Midgely and Iris Murdoch, intent on ensuring that an important set of voices is not overlooked or written out of history, the project's social, historical and political importance is plain. 'It is important for philosophy to be inclusive, both for those who are included and for the discipline itself', explained Altorf.

In asking: 'What is it like to be a woman in philosophy?', Altorf acknowledged that as with anything Murdoch, the answer is both complex and nuanced. Murdoch, with her prescient conception of gender as fluid, had declared that she wanted 'to join the human race not invent a new separatism', yet would, I think, have been fully supportive of the tasks our speaker proposed – to take personal experience seriously and to listen to voices that would otherwise go unheard. After all, Murdoch offers a way of doing philosophy that relies on experience. Altorf described the perceptual

experience of picturing the inner life expressed in Murdoch's 'M&D' as illustrative of what an inclusive philosophy might look like, and, true to Altorf's own inclusive approach, her interpretation of 'M&D' was, for this non-philosopher, not only helpful but illuminating. Philosophy should neither be elitist nor a luxury and Altorf expressed her regret at the impending closure of five philosophy departments, all at universities that more often attract students from poorer economic backgrounds.

Altorf's richly informative lecture pictured the universal benefit of equality in philosophy: 'The serious philosophers may not perceive any value in what we do, but that is almost an indication of its worth'.

Report on Justin Broackes's Lecture, 'Iris Murdoch and Simone Weil', 18 January 2019

Hannah Marije Altorf

Justin Broackes's lecture had the simple title 'Iris Murdoch and Simone Weil'. Like other more recent studies on Murdoch's philosophy, Broackes returned to Murdoch's earlier work. Yet unlike others, he focused on Simone Weil, rather than Richard Hare and Oxford philosophy. Murdoch, Broackes claimed, looked for inspiration across the Channel. She wrote her first book about Jean-Paul Sartre, wanted to study Edmund Husserl when she went to Cambridge in 1947, and then started reading Weil in the 1950s.

Through meticulous reading of Murdoch's writing, Broackes was able to suggest that it took some time for Weil's ideas to become part of Murdoch's thinking. When they did, these ideas showed her a philosophical way to speak of, what Broackes called the 'supernatural'. Weil introduced Murdoch to concepts like attention, obedience and the void. Most importantly, it taught her to appreciate Plato. Murdoch had read Plato as a student and attended lectures on his work by great scholars. Yet, Broackes convincingly argued, it is not until she starts reading Weil that she appreciates Plato as a thinker who can write about suffering and about religion.

Not only did Murdoch adopt some of Weil's notions, but also a style of doing philosophy. As she writes in her review of the *Notebooks*: '[Weil] speaks only of what she has thoroughly understood and transformed by her own meditation'. A good part of the lecture consisted of a concise overview of, and introduction to, Weil's *Waiting on God*. For those familiar with Murdoch's work, it was fascinating to notice the similarities and the differences between the two thinkers, and most of all how Weil's ideas have been transformed into Murdoch's oeuvre. Broackes gave his audience a rich platter of facts and insights, that offers scope for much further study.

Report on Sabina Lovibond's Lecture, 'The Elusiveness of the Ethical', 8 February 2019

Sasha Lawson-Frost

Sabina Lovibond's lecture explored the rejection of 'departmental morality' in the philosophy of Iris Murdoch and Cora Diamond. For both Murdoch and Diamond, value is a ubiquitous part of human consciousness – morality and goodness are not specialised to some specific cognitive faculties (for example, the will), but instead they are irreducibly connected to the whole of our being. Lovibond is broadly sympathetic to this approach to philosophy, where an exploration of morality begins by looking at our ordinary understanding of human experiences. However, she also takes issue with the idea that ethics has to be all-pervasive in this picture.

For both Diamond and Lovibond, understanding ethical concepts is something which goes hand in hand with literature (especially the 'realistic' novels of writers like Henry James). Following on from Murdoch's emphasis on attention as something fundamental to ethics, they use literature as a way of understanding and appreciating what is evident in our ethical worldviews. The point is not to pick out something like a moral 'theory' which we can apply to moral problems; rather, it is about attending to the aspects of human consciousness which make up the fabric of our ethical understanding. Moral thinking, on this account, is not confined to a certain set of activities and associated language; instead, value pervades all of our activities. In Lovibond's view, however, we should be cautious about letting this draw us into a picture where moral judgements pervade everything. If, as Diamond argues, ethics has 'no particular subject matter', and everything is in some way moral, we might risk losing sight of the meaning of morality at all, for example.

The lecture was followed by a lively question and answer session where we discussed, among other things, Murdoch's commitment to a single transcendent good, the links between her philosophy and Simone Weil's, and the role of love in ethics.

Report on Julia Driver's Lecture, 'Literature and Moral Sensibility in Iris Murdoch', 8 March 2019

Amber Sahara Donovan

Julia Driver's lecture explored a tension between Murdoch's notions of unselfing and clarity of vision. Driver drew attention to the aspect of Murdoch's unselfing whereby we are required to eradicate self-deception and to cultivate the clarity of vision needed for moral sensibility. Self-deception is usually characterised as egoistic narratives; however, Driver used examples from literature (including Jane Bennet from Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*) to illustrate that not all forms of self-deception are egoistic and often facilitate acting well (as with Jane). Driver linked this to John McDowell's (also Bernard Williams's) notion of silencing, whereby the moral person either does not have, or silences, 'bad' thoughts – this is what Jane does in only thinking well of others. Overall, this suggested a tension between the spirit of unselfing and the requirement for clarity of vision. To accommodate this, Driver differentiates between three types of moral expertise – acting, judging and analysing – where clarity of vision is only required for the latter two and those who lack these may still be properly characterised as virtuous.

As Murdoch herself argued, the virtuous person need not be able to articulate why an action is good, merely to act well. Driver argues that by Murdoch's own light, the most important kind of moral expertise to be a virtuous person, is that of action. Indeed many expert moral theorists with considerable expertise in judging and analysing moral action may in fact be terrible at acting well and, without this component, we should not want to call them virtuous people. Thus, some avoidance and silencing, which compromise our clarity of vision, may facilitate being virtuous; this kind of self-deception appears to complement as opposed to contradict the Murdochian notion of unselfing.

Driver's use of examples from literature to illustrate her point would, I am sure, have been met with approval from Murdoch herself, and added a level of contextualisation which made her points clearer. Driver delivered a wonderful talk which expertly addressed some of the concerns that I, myself, have had reading Murdoch.

Report on the Conference of the Iris Murdoch Society of Japan, Kyoto, 27 October 2018

Koshi Okano

We, Murdochians in Japan, held our 20th conference at Kyoto Bunkyo University in Uji City, Kyoto. The city is about a 15-minute ride by train from Kyoto Station and very famous for its association with *The Tale of Genji*, which Iris Murdoch loved.

The presentations, the main part of our conference, started with Fiona Tomkinson's paper entitled 'Between Symbolism and Realism: Death, Rebirth and Intertextuality in *The Book and the Brotherhood*'. She focused on the influence of three novelists, Charles Dickens, Virginia Woolf, and D. H. Lawrence, on *The Book and the Brotherhood* with special attention to 'intertextuality'. Her reading of this very complex novel, setting it in the tradition of the English novel and giving a new historical perspective to it, was quite persuasively insightful.

Next, I discussed 'Something Special', which has been, it seems, little read in Japan, in spite of the fact that it was adopted as an English textbook for college students in 1959. Pointing out the similarity between 'The Dead' by James Joyce, and 'Something Special', making use of Joycean epiphany, I tried to explain the meaning of the 10- or 15-minute-long silence of the heroine, Yvonne, before her decision to marry. In the latter part of the presentation I analysed the symbolic meaning of the fallen tree beside the lake in terms of Murdoch's moral philosophy.

The third presentation, by Wendy Jones Nakanishi, was entitled 'Iris Murdoch's Letters in the English Epistolary Tradition'. Her close reading of *Living on Paper: Letters From Iris Murdoch 1934–1995*, a collection of Murdoch's letters which are supposedly private but, she believes, with sufficiently literary, social and historic interest to be made public, convinces her, and us, that 'Murdoch has become part of the English epistolary tradition'. After her presentation, responding to a question from the audience, she explained the difference between the letters of Virginia Woolf and those of Iris Murdoch, which was of great interest.

The last paper, presented by Paul Hullah, was entitled '"Usually The Better

Ones": Into Crystalline with Murdoch and Kuan Yin'. Hullah focused on the idea of 'crystalline' that Murdoch used in her essay 'Against Dryness'. He argued that in reading Murdoch, paying special attention to the 'crystalline' is essential. Taking the examples of *A Severed Head* and the poem 'Phoenix-Hearted', he shows those 'crystalline' pieces 'employ what might be termed *symboliste* strategies in an attention to the East Asian bodhisattva, Kuan Y'in'. Hullah's reading of those works is quite suggestive and shows a new viewpoint to fully understand and appreciate Murdoch's works and her attitude to life and art.

After these four presentations, the guest speaker of this year's conference, Gillian Dooley of Flinders University, gave a lecture entitled 'Iris Murdoch and Australia: Her Life, Her Novels and Her Reputation'. Dooley, the pre-eminent Murdoch scholar in Australia, says 'Australia is marginal in Iris Murdoch's life and work', but her lecture on Murdoch and Australia was of real interest filled with information little known outside the country and her comments on characters relating to Australia in Murdoch's novels were enlightening especially for Japanese readers living in the Far East.

The conference concluded with dinner at a hotel restaurant near Kyoto Station, during which Paul Hullah, as president of our society, thanked all the participants and extended a specially deep gratitude to Yasushi Nakakubo, Secretary of our society, who was responsible for the success of the conference, and to Gillian Dooley who gave us a wonderful lecture and, at the party, sang a beautiful song for us. After two hours of good companionship we broke up, looking forward to meeting again in 2019 in Tokyo.

Report of 'Iris Murdoch Twenty Years On', University of Chichester, 8 February 2019

Courtney Richardson

Exactly 20 years to the day, scholars and enthusiasts of Iris Murdoch's work gathered together for a special public event to mark the anniversary of her death and to explore her reception as novelist and philosopher over this period. Unique among the many events that mark the centenary of her birth, this occasion focused on her legacy over the past 20 years with a panel comprising Professor Anne Rowe, Dr Frances White and Dr Margaret Guise, with Dr Miles Leeson in the chair.

Miles Leeson opened by quoting Charles Taylor who, in 1994, had said, 'I cannot pretend to give an account of Iris Murdoch's contribution to moral philosophy, much less sum it up or give some verdict on it. Her contribution is much too rich, and we are much too close to it', and asked the panel for their observations on Murdoch's reception over the past 20 years. Frances White poignantly expressed just how far-reaching Murdoch's work is today, reading from accounts sent in by people from all over the world via social media, which themselves conveyed just how many have been touched by Murdoch's fiction and philosophy.

A wider discussion ensued which sought to explicate Murdoch's literary and philosophical endeavours. Anne Rowe said that she often used to ask herself why 'so many people all over the world go back to these novels, read them, and go back to them again'. Having taught Murdoch's novels for 25 years, Rowe believes she understands why. Murdoch was able to make people think differently and to change whole lives through her work. Many members of the audience agreed with Rowe's assertion that Murdoch's fiction could encourage her readers to truly love, to comprehend suffering and to negotiate life in a more self-aware and selfless manner. Ultimately, Rowe found that students would often ask her, after reading Murdoch: 'How can she know so much about me?'

Rowe described the richness and complexity of Murdoch's novels, suggesting that many and varied interests can be located in Murdoch's work, including

philosophy, theology, and psychology. Margaret Guise added that, evidently, the environment was a pressing concern of the novelist-philosopher too. Throughout the panel discussion, suggestions abounded for future scholarship as our panellists explained that, 20 years on, Murdochian scholarship is still as active as ever. In fact, Rowe argued, Murdoch might belong more fittingly to our 21st-century age than to her own time. After all, her key preoccupations of gender fluidity, sexual identity, love and self-obsession are more prevalent in modern life. The panellists suggested potential areas of further research might include Murdoch's connection to Proust, her portrayals of juvenile delinquency and bad parenting in her novels, and there was even a suggestion that Murdoch's fiction could be read in light of the #MeToo movement. The panel agreed that her prescience in many of these issues suggests that Murdoch's oeuvre is likely to resonate with the 21st-century reader, perhaps even more so than with those of her own generation.

The panel took the opportunity to acknowledge Iris Murdoch's centenary and the myriad events that are taking place during 2019. She is to be commemorated on a postage stamp, in articles, podcasts, at conferences in Pardubice, Czech Republic, Amiens, France, and at the Iris Murdoch Centenary Conference at Oxford in July. Leeson also took the opportunity to introduce the new Vintage covers of six of Murdoch's novels being reprinted this year to mark her centenary. While there was surprise among some at the particular selection, the new covers serve to reinforce the sense of Murdoch's 21st-century impact and the degree to which the literary world is keen to acknowledge her life and works in this important year.

Culminating in a question and answer session, the event enabled the audience to ask the panel to expand on previously discussed topics, and, for those who were new to Murdoch, an opportunity to discover where to begin reading her. Such an opportunity demonstrates how welcoming the Iris Murdoch Society is, that it comprises not only a group of specialist academic scholars but a diverse and warm, ever-expanding group of those from all over the world who are keen to come together and celebrate the work of one of the most important and prolific philosopher-novelists of the 20th century. Guise said that Murdoch's exploration of issues to do with the spiritual quest and moral endeavour mean that her work will always be of significance, because these questions are, after all, universal.

And of the Iris Murdoch Society, White acknowledged, 'It's been wonderful to find that we're not alone, that there are so many people out there making things happen'.

Report on Lucy Bolton's Research Seminar, 'Metaphysics as a Guide to the Movies', King's College London, 27 February 2019

Joseph Jenner

Lucy Bolton connected Iris Murdoch's moral philosophy to film, using Craig Zobel's 2012 film *Compliance*. The story centres on a spate of prank phone calls to restaurant chains in America in which male members of the public pretend to be policemen to exploit their assumed authority and take advantage of a female member of staff. Bolton drew attention to the significance of sight and vision in Murdoch's philosophy which she contrasted with the overemphasis, in Murdoch's view, on choice and rationality in works such as Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist philosophy. Bolton discussed how the formal composition of *Compliance* directs the way in which the audience is invited to witness the unfolding moral conflicts of the film and, by offering this specific perspective, impacts on how these moral conflicts are viewed and thus understood. Bolton discussed how the aesthetic strategies of *Compliance* 'formally involve us' in the film, and she indicated the many ways in which Murdoch's approach to morality intersects with the medium of film, with Murdoch's emphasis on 'vision' and 'images' that assist in formulating her moral philosophy.

The question and answer section proved lively, with much of the discussion not only addressing her choice of *Compliance* as a means to draw out Murdoch's moral philosophy, but more generally looking at the kind of film aesthetic that is most apt for drawing out the spectator's moral relationship with film.

Bolton's application of Murdoch's moral philosophy to film is significant and timely. As a scholar working at the intersection of film and philosophy, her inclusion of Murdoch into a hitherto broadly male-dominated canon of philosophers expands the possible points of entry into this field of research. Further, Murdoch's approach to morality bears many interesting points of contrast with the ethical turn in recent theories of spectatorship.

Report on the Symposium, 'Finished with Religion? Iris Murdoch and Theology' at Regent's Park College, University of Oxford, 9 May 2019

Frances White

This symposium was convened by Andrew Taylor and was comprised of four papers with discussion after each, concluding with a response to all papers from Priscilla Martin at a round table panel. Miles Leeson opened with a paper on 'Murdoch and Fictionalised Theology' which sought out the mysticism lying beneath her desire for a demythologised Christianity that can continue without a personal saviour. In '"Anchorites as God's Spies": Iris Murdoch and Dame Julian of Norwich', Anne Rowe gave an eloquent and impassioned account of the influence of Julian on Murdoch's theological thinking as well as her use of Julian's images in her novels. Paul Fiddes traced the strand of theology throughout Murdoch's fictional oeuvre in his paper 'Iris Murdoch on "God" and "Good": *The Time of the Angels, The Good Apprentice* and a Dialogue with Modern Theology', and finally Scott Moore spoke about 'Forgiveness and the Beautiful, Unexpected Strangeness of the World in Iris Murdoch', stressing her sense of the need for forgiveness of the self as well as of others. All four papers led to lively debate and it was a rare and valuable opportunity to have this perhaps neglected and under-discussed aspect of Murdoch's thought brought to the foreground. The intention is to produce a book inspired by this symposium which will put theological matters firmly on the Murdochian agenda.

Report on the Lecture by Gillian Dooley, 'Singers and Singing in Iris Murdoch's Novels', University of Chichester, 15 May 2019

Richard Wilby

Gillian Dooley proposes that Iris Murdoch celebrated the human voice in both her life and work, singers with their voices playing an important role in many of her novels. She has hunted down eleven novels in which attention is given to the characters' singing, from Anna Quentin in *Under the Net* with a heart-breaking contralto voice, to Jackson in her last work remembering that he could once sing, and in most of these cases singing is more than incidental.

Murdoch loved singing. She took singing lessons, while never trying to emulate her mother, who, trained as an opera singer, never stopped singing around the house. So, Murdoch grew up to the sound of her mother's voice and got to know and love the popular songs of the day and yesterday, and it is this very natural and elemental aspect in singing to which she most responds. As a listener, singing thus evoked nostalgic memories of Murdoch's upbringing and so it does for many of her characters, but there can be a more bitter and painful response linked to fear, sometimes sexually charged. As usual with Murdoch, complexities abound, and no two cases are the same.

The most famous reference to singing in her oeuvre must be when Bradley Pearson in *The Black Prince* attends a performance of *Der Rosenkavalier* and is physically sick from the attack on his emotions of the voluptuous and sensuous voices of the two soprano singers. This directly leads to his declaration of love for Julian Baffin, who, like Octavian in the opera, is a generation younger than her lover. Bradley doesn't much care for music. Nor does Charles Arrowby in *The Sea, The Sea*, but this is one of the three novels in which Dooley identifies music as significant. Charles feels excluded from his friends' informal singing sessions led by his ex-lover Lizzie Scherer, but they help to remind him of Aunt Estelle and how her singing 'always upset me with deep and frightening emotions'.

A later novel which also features a group of friends getting together to sing as a group is *The Message to the Planet*. Dooley draws our attention to the importance in the book of Gildas Herne, a musician who leads his friends in these sessions. They are all men because, as she points out, choirs in the Church of England in Gildas's era were composed of men and boys. The role of music and singing is explored not only with Gildas and the others in the group but also Franca Sheerwater, Jack's wife, who sees only deceit and insincerity in music.

Most of Murdoch's characters, however, are more positive in their musical attitudes. None more so than Emmanuel Scarlett-Taylor, always called Emma, friend of the hero of *The Philosopher's Pupil*, Tom McCaffrey. Emma is training to become a professional singer, a countertenor. Murdoch writes with great authority about this ethereal voice, the impact it has, the singer's relationship to it and to his teacher. The account of his singing lessons demonstrates great understanding of the art and technique and also insight into the mind of the singer. But it is the spontaneity and power of this voice which Murdoch so effectively uses at a crisis in the story when the rioters at the Slipper House are silenced by the enchanting sound of Emma bursting into song. Dooley wonders why Emma finds a conflict between his singing and his study of History. I think this could be because he is engaged in very different disciplines. The singer needs to harness his natural voice with a classical technique which does not hamper nature nor its emotional power, while the historian needs to exercise restraint in the more purely intellectual task of achieving the objectivity he requires in his study of the past.

Dooley should be congratulated for drawing attention to the importance of singing in Murdoch's life and work. Perhaps she might consider going on to examine references to non-human sounds in the novels, in particular, birdsong in *The Bell*.

Report on the Conference 'Ethics after Murdoch', University of Pardubice, 6–7 June 2019

Joseph Wiinikka-Lydon

Iris Murdoch's centenary has occasioned several academic gatherings, including this recent two-day conference at the historic campus of the University of Pardubice in eastern Bohemia in the Czech Republic. The conference's aim was to bring 'together scholars and philosophers to reflect over Murdoch's philosophical legacy and its potentials for addressing contemporary issues, in moral philosophy as well as in the complex moral present that we inhabit'. It attracted not only moral philosophers but also literary scholars and others, creating a space for interdisciplinary discussion around Murdoch's legacy.

'Ethics after Murdoch' was organised in partnership with the Iris Murdoch Society and the Iris Murdoch Research Centre at the University of Chichester. The Centre for Ethics at the University of Pardubice is an international research centre funded through the European Union focused on ethics and moral philosophy. The aim of the Centre is to 'to develop a conception of the nature and value of humanity and to apply it to a range of personal and political issues, including attitudes towards marginalized groups and issues surrounding populism, nationalism, religious conflict, migration and a changing European identity'. The Centre runs weekly seminars and regular workshops, creating international partnerships with universities in the United Kingdom, Sweden, Finland and Australia.

The conference started with a keynote lecture by Hannah Marije Altorf (St Mary's University London) who reflected on her own long engagement with Murdoch's work, calling on attendees to devote more sustained scholarly work to Murdoch's *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*. The other two keynotes lecture were by Gillian Dooley (Flinders University, Australia), who discussed Murdoch's philosophy of fiction, and Mark Hopwood (University of the South, USA), who reflected on Iris Murdoch's continued relevance to crises in today's moral philosophy.

In addition to these keynotes, the conference was comprised of parallel sessions chaired by members of the Centre for Ethics. The papers embodied a

diverse engagement with Murdoch's writing, exploring issues important in moral philosophy and literary studies as well as exploring ways that Murdoch's thought might shed light on current societal challenges. Presentation topics ranged from Murdoch's understanding of 'axiom' to papers that put Murdoch in conversation with queer theory, contemporary literature, moral injury and war, hip hop, animal ethics, the ethics of care and the philosophy of remorse, as well as others.

There were also a few papers critiquing Murdoch's approach or relevance. These included one paper providing a rich overview of her understanding and deployment of Buddhism, as well as another looking at Murdoch's thought in the light of issues of domestic violence. Indeed, although the conference provided a venue for rich interdisciplinary discussion, my hope would be that future conferences could attract more critical evaluations of Murdoch's work. Excellent as this conference was, this would nurture even richer conversation, as well as strengthen Murdoch studies by identifying areas where Murdoch's thought needs further development, thus truly furthering her legacy for the future.

What I appreciate perhaps the most about gatherings focusing on Murdoch's work is the way that such spaces cross the disciplinary divide in the humanities, bringing together writers grounded in different traditions and methods to engage the same material. It has the chance to open up our thinking and leave the silos of the modern academy. This conference was certainly no different. Coming a month before a similar but larger conference on Murdoch in Oxford organised by the Iris Murdoch Research Centre, it was well timed, creating conversation and connections that will no doubt help provide a successful foundation for the gathering at Oxford.

The Iris Murdoch Centenary Conference, 13–15 July 2019, St Anne's College, Oxford

Frances White

As the Centenary Conference has occurred so close to going to print with this issue of the *Iris Murdoch Review* only the bare facts are given here, and a full account of the conference will be published in the 2020 issue.

The conference, organised by the Iris Murdoch Research Centre at the University of Chichester under the directorship of Miles Leeson, was held at St Anne's College, Oxford, culminating in the conference dinner on the occasion of Murdoch's 100th birthday, at which her biographer and friend, Peter J. Conradi, was the after-dinner speaker and Mrs Audi Bayley paid a moving tribute to Iris Murdoch. Plenary speakers were the Hungarian-born French philosopher Miklós Vetö, the last PhD student Murdoch supervised at Oxford; Valentine Cunningham from Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and Gillian Dooley from Flinders University in Australia. The actress Annette Badland was 'In Conversation' with Anne Rowe, Visiting Professor at the University of Chichester and a concert of 'Words and Music for Iris' was arranged by Gillian Dooley, Kent Wennman and Paul Hullah. Over a hundred delegates from America, Australia, Brazil, China, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jersey, The Netherlands, Norway, Russia, Sweden and Turkey as well as the UK attended and 68 papers on a wide-range of philosophical and literary aspects of research into Murdoch's work were presented in parallel panel sessions. An exhibition 'Iris Murdoch and Oxford' was on display in the New Council Room at Somerville College and six books on Iris Murdoch were launched in the Mary Somerville Room. As a precursor to the conference Peter Garrard of St George's, University of London presented his new research into Murdoch's writing and Alzheimer's Disease at the Weston Library Lunchtime Lecture on 12 July 2019.

Delegates enjoying lunch

Kent Wennman performing at the concert

L - R: Cheryl Bove, Miles Leeson, Anne Rowe

Gillian Dooley and her choir

Peter J. Conradi with Miklós Vető

Editors and contributors to *Reading Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*

Audi Bayley with Donna Carpenter

Annette Badland in conversation with Anne Rowe

Iris Murdoch: Novelist or Philosopher? Symposium at Oxford Brookes University, 16 June 2019

Lucy Oulton

After the resoundingly successful Iris Murdoch Centenary Conference at St Anne's College, Oxford over the weekend of 13–15 July 2019, we welcomed the opportunity to attend Gary Browning's symposium at Oxford Brookes University. With Browning in the chair, the roundtable discussion comprised Justin Broackes, Anne Rowe, Niklas Forsberg and Miles Leeson. In describing Murdoch's assessment of philosophical history as 'strangely omnivorous', Broackes asked whether philosophy in the novels was to be taken seriously when it emerges from the mouths of dubious characters. Rowe reminded us of Murdoch's 'chronic insecurity' about her moral philosophy and asserted that she was driven to get the message out in the guise of her novels and in a form of good art that did not preach. Rowe reminded us that Murdoch believed that a moral philosophy should be inhabited. Forsberg asked, since philosophy and literature are separate things, why explain one with the other? Philosophy tells you what to think in a way that good art does not. So, if people say her novels are expressing her philosophy then, on Murdoch's terms, they are saying that her novels tell you what to think which would make them bad art. Leeson drew a link to Murdoch's theological imagination, arguing that whilst her philosophy's purpose was to clarify, her novelistic art was to provide her readers with a 'space to play'.

Browning mediated a remarkable variety of questions which included whether literature can make you morally worse, whether there were prescribed techniques for unselfing, why Murdoch might not have had an appetite for Aristotle, whether one should mistrust the language of novels or whether it was a medium that meant it was better understood and whether novels always led to moral improvement. Whilst it was generally agreed that non-didactic novels force the reader to reflect, Rowe cited a few of the novels' moments of valuable meditation.

It seems that in her novelistic art, omnivorous philosopher Murdoch was intent on 'going where the honey is'.

Reassessments and Fresh Perspectives: a Survey of Recent Publications

Pamela Osborn

The latter part of 2018 and the first half of 2019 have seen the publication of several long-anticipated texts on Murdoch. Gary Browning's *Why Iris Murdoch Matters* and *Murdoch on Truth and Love* were published to great acclaim in 2018, with the former described as a 'stunning account of the philosophical and, to a lesser degree, political, underpinning of Murdoch's novel writing [...] an important contribution to the growing sphere of Iris Murdoch studies'.[1] Anne Rowe's major work on Murdoch for the *Writers and their Work* series was officially launched at the Iris Murdoch Centenary Conference in Oxford in July along with *Iris Murdoch: A Centenary Celebration* edited by Miles Leeson – a commemorative volume of memoirs and photographs.[2] Also launched at the event were Lucy Bolton's ground-breaking *Contemporary Cinema and the Philosophy of Iris Murdoch*, Christopher Boddington's comprehensive and essential *Iris Murdoch's People A to Z* and Gillian Dooley and Nora Hämäläinen's much anticipated collection, Reading Iris Murdoch's *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*.[3] Peter J. Conradi's enthralling autobiography *Family Business: A Memoir* also reassesses his long friendship with Murdoch.[4] Briefer discussions of Murdoch's life and work featured in Heather Ingman's *Ageing in Irish Writers: Strangers to Themselves; Brief Encounters: Notes from a Philosopher's Diary* by Anthony Kelly; *The Routledge Handbook of Love in Philosophy*; and Homer B. Pettey's *Rule, Britannia! The Biopic and British National Identity*.[5]

A rich variety of journal articles has also contributed to the sense of renewal in Iris Murdoch studies in the past year. Yoshiaki Michael Nakazawa's 'Iris Murdoch's Critique of Three Dualisms in Moral Education' discusses her rejection of moral autonomy.[6] A.M Lorente reads *The Black Prince* as a rereading of *Hamlet* in 'The Modernisation of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: Identity and Gender in Iris Murdoch's *The Black Prince*', while Macarena Garcia-Avello also explores gender matters in the same novel in 'Re-examining Gender Matters in Iris Murdoch's *The*

Black Prince'.[7] Bariş Mete's 'The Question of Characterisation in Iris Murdoch's *Under the Net*' takes a fresh look at Murdoch's début novel and Jane Duran's paper, 'Murdoch's Morality: An Ontological Analysis' argues that Murdoch's views possess a 'structured ontology'.[8] My article in the Brigid Brophy Special Issue of *Contemporary Women's Writing* compares Murdoch's *A Severed Head* with Brophy's *The Burglar,* and Shauna Pitt's 'Tennyson's Influence on the Early Fiction of Iris Murdoch' featured in the *Tennyson Research Bulletin*.[9] Most recently Martin E. Turkis compared Murdoch and Michael Polanyi in terms of ethics, aesthetics, epistemology and ontology and Wendy Jones Nakanishi analysed the importance of Murdoch's letters.[10]

1 Gary Browning, *Why Iris Murdoch Matters* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018); Gary Browning, ed., *Murdoch on Truth and Love* (London: Palgrave, 2018); Jaki McCarrick, 'Why Iris Murdoch Matters review: A compact scholarly work', *Irish Times*, <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/why-iris-murdoch-matters-review-a-compact-scholarly-work-1.3753757> [accessed 15 June 2019].

2 Anne Rowe, *Iris Murd*och (Writers and Their Work Series) (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019); Miles Leeson, ed., *Iris Murdoch: A Centenary Celebration* (Yeovil: Sabrestorm Fiction, 2019).

3 Lucy Bolton, *Contemporary Cinema and the Philosophy of Iris Murdoch* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019); Christopher Boddington, *Iris Murdoch's People A to Z* (Washington: Anchovy Hill Press, 2018); Gillian Dooley and Nora Hämäläinen, eds., *Reading Iris Murdoch's Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (London: Palgrave, 2019).

4 Peter J. Conradi, *Family Business: A Memoir* (Bridgend: Seren, 2019).

5 Heather Ingman, *Ageing in Irish Writers: Strangers to Themselves* (London: Palgrave, 2018); Anthony Kenny, *Brief Encounters: Notes from a Philosopher's Diary* (London: SPCK Press, 2018); Adrienne M. Martin, *The Routledge Handbook of Love in Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2018); Homer B. Pettey, ed., *Rule, Britannia! The Biopic and British National Identity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2018).

6 Yoshiaki Michael Nakazawa, 'Iris Murdoch's Critique of Three Dualisms in Moral Education', *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, Spring 2018.

7 A.M. Lorente, 'The Modernisation of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: Identity and Gender in Iris Murdoch's *The Black Prince'*, *Journal of Irish Studies*, 13.2, 2019; Macarena Garcia-Avello, 'Re-examining Gender Matters in Iris Murdoch's *The Black Prince*', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 60.3, Summer 2019.

8 Bariş Mete, 'The Question of Characterisation in Iris Murdoch's *Under the Net*', The Journal of International Research, 11.58, Summer 2019; Jane Duran, 'Murdoch's Morality: An Ontological Analysis', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 58.4, Summer 2018.

9 Pamela Osborn, '"Stop. That's Wicked": Sexual Freedom in Brigid Brophy's *The Burglar* and Iris Murdoch's *A Severed Head*', *Contemporary Women's Writing*, 12.2, Autumn 2018; Shauna Pitt, 'Tennyson's Influence on the Early Fiction of Iris Murdoch', *Tennyson Research Bulletin*, 11.2, Winter 2018.

10 Martin E. Turkis, 'Post-Critical Platonism: Preliminary Meditations on Ethics and Aesthetics in Iris Murdoch and Michael Polanyi', *Tradition and Discovery: The Polanyi Society Periodical*, 44.1, Spring 2019; Wendy Jones Nakanishi, 'Iris Murdoch's Letters', *English Studies*, 100.3, Spring 2019.

Iris Murdoch in the Media

Pamela Osborn

Murdoch's online following has blossomed in her centenary year. As of July 2019, the Twitter account @IrisMurdoch now has well over 6000 followers, the Iris Murdoch Appreciation page on Facebook has 1200 members and there is a growing following on Instagram @IrisMurdochSociety. Media attention on Murdoch and her work has increased conspicuously since the beginning of 2019, a very truncated inventory of which follows: Michael Wood reviewed *Under the Net* for the *London Review of Books* in January.[1] On the same day the *New York Times* published Susan Scarf Merrell's evocative appreciation of Murdoch.[2] Valerie Stivers's celebration of food in Murdoch's novels appeared, with recipes, in the *Paris Review* in February.[3] The *TLS* published Anil Gomes's 'Iris Murdoch and the Power of Love' in their 'Footnotes to Plato' series in February and dedicated a mid-July edition to Murdoch. The 12–18 July issue included Peter J. Conradi's 'Recovery of Lost Things: How Iris Murdoch "lit up the mundane world"', Patricia Craig on Murdoch's ethical mind, reviews of new publications by Gary Browning, Anne Rowe and Conradi, and TLS contributors and Murdoch scholars including William Boyd, Jonathan Gibbs, A. N. Wilson and Rowe were asked what Murdoch means to them now. Mary Beard revealed that

> *A Severed Head* and *The Bell* had opened my eyes to another world. I took them as a rather elegant form of social realism (I still half-suspect they were), and I loved the new world they opened up to me – of men who actually worked as 'wine merchants', of errant schoolteachers, and of staggeringly intellectualized obsessions.[4]

Conradi also reassessed Murdoch's relationship with her Irish origins in the *Irish Times*.[5] The July edition of the *New Statesman* contained Leo Robson's long-form article, 'Iris the Insoluble', about the difficulty of categorising either her work or her personality and the hope that her writing will achieve longevity.[6] Also looking to the future, Miles Leeson wrote for *Times Higher Education* about what university leaders can learn from Murdoch, noting that the perception of selfhood in the 21st century,

one that today's students are confronting and universities struggle to support, is one that Murdoch foresaw in both her fiction and philosophy.

Again we turn to her argument that we continually need to give attention to the other, especially amid the messiness and contingency of the world, or we run the risk of acting in a destructive manner; and creating false images of each other.[7]

Coverage of centenary celebrations, new Vintage editions of the novels and the innovative 'In Parenthesis' postcard project, which invited people to write a postcard asking a philosophical question and posting it to Murdoch's place of birth in Dublin to be answered by a philosopher, appeared in the *Bookseller*.[8] The unveiling of Murdoch's blue plaque and commemorative stamps in Dublin were covered in the *Irish Independent* and the *Irish Times*, along with joyous photos of the occasion, which was attended by several of Murdoch's distant relations.[9]

1 Michael Wood, 'Never Mind the Pronouns', *London Review of Books*, 41.1, 3 January 2019 <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v41/n01/michael-wood/dont-worry-about-the-pronouns> [accessed 17 July 2019]

2 Susan Scarf Merrell, 'In Praise of Iris Murdoch', *New York Times*, 3 January 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/03/books/in-praise-of-iris-murdoch.html?smid=tw-nytbooks&smtyp=cur> [accessed 17 July 2019]

3 Valerie Stivers, 'Cooking with Iris Murdoch', *Paris Review*, 1 February 2019 <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2019/02/01/cooking-with-iris-murdoch/> [accessed 17 July 2019]

4 Various, *Times Literary Supplement*, no.6067, 12 July, 2019 <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/editions/july-12-2019/> [accessed 17 July 2019]

5 Peter J. Conradi, 'Iris Murdoch's Deep but Twisted Irish Roots', *Irish Times*, 15 July 2019 <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/iris-murdoch-s-deep-but-twisted-irish-roots-1.3950148> [accessed 17 July 2019]

6 Leo Robson, 'Iris the Insoluble', *New Statesman*, 12 July 2019 <https://www.newstatesman.com/iris-murdoch-novels-reissued-criticism-biography-100-years> [accessed 17 July 2019]

7 Miles Leeson, 'Iris Murdoch's philosophy: what use is it to higher education today?', *Times Higher Education*, 19 July 2019 <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/iris-murdochs-philosophy-what-use-it-higher-education-today> [accessed 20 July 2019]

8 Heloise Wood, 'Vintage unveils postcard campaign and special editions for "trailblazing" Murdoch's centenary', *Bookseller*, 15 July 2019 <https://www.thebookseller.com/news/vintage-unveils-postcard-campaign-and-special-editions-trailblazing-murdochs-centenary-1038241>; Áine Kenny, 'Booker Prize winning Irish writer Iris Murdoch honoured with new stamp', *Independent Ie*, 11 July 2019 <https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/booker-prize-winning-irish-writer-iris-murdoch-honoured-with-new-stamp-38303124.html> [accessed 12 July 2019]

9 Sarah Burns, 'Iris Murdoch centenary marked with stamp and plaque', *Irish Times*, 11 July 2019 <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/iris-murdoch-centenary-marked-with-stamp-and-plaque-1.3953918> [accessed 12 July 2019]

Update from the Archive

Dayna Miller

As you may remember from the previous issue of the *Iris Murdoch Review*, Katie Giles left Kingston University, London in June 2018 and I am pleased to report that since then she has been enjoying her role at the Cornwall Wildlife Trust. Though I had worked in the Archive for some time, taking on the Archivist role after Katie was always going to be a challenge but it has been made easier by the wonderful support I have received. For this I would like to thank Frances White, Anne Rowe, Miles Leeson and all of our researchers and transcribers for welcoming me so warmly into the Murdoch community.

This year we have seen a flurry of activities, events, and acquisitions related to our Iris Murdoch Collections. With exhibitions galore, several items from the Murdoch Collections, including letters, beer mats and stones, were displayed as part of the Archive's contribution to the 2018 national Explore Your Archive campaign. 'Exploring Archives: We Made, You Look' (19 November 2018–17 February 2019) was the outcome of a wonderful collaborative project between the Archive and third-year BA Graphic Design students from Kingston School of Art. The project asked them to create a piece of communication inspired by our collections, and the Iris Murdoch archive was one of several collections the students explored. The resulting works were a unique and insightful take on Murdoch as a prolific letter-writer, self-editor and beer-drinker, as well as someone on whose life and career Alzheimer's had such a profound effect.

Many of these items were also featured in the Kingston School of Art undergraduate degree show in June, and the 'Iris Murdoch and Kingston' exhibition at Kingston Museum (1–28 August 2019) allowed the students' works to be enjoyed again as part of the wider celebration of Murdoch's centenary. The Archive has also worked with Frances White on curating the exhibition for the Iris Murdoch Centenary Conference in Oxford which featured an eclectic selection of material from the Archive here at Kingston as well as items from Somerville College, Oxford, St Anne's College, Oxford and Newnham College, Cambridge. Through items that represented Murdoch's childhood, education, and personal and professional lives, 'Iris Murdoch and Oxford' told a fascinating story of Murdoch's relationship with the city of dreaming spires, or rather 'damn spires' as Murdoch described them.

A small exhibition of material illustrating the early, peak, and final periods of Murdoch's career accompanied Professor Peter Garrard's lecture 'Authorship, language and textual pathology: linguistic changes in Iris Murdoch's informal writings', which took place at the Weston Library, Oxford, on 12 July 2019. Prior to this, a selection of Murdoch's journal entries and letters written between 1986 and 1996 were used by Professor Garrard, Maya Kassiss, and Louay Madanat at St George's, University of London to create a complex statistical model with the aim of learning to read and analyse Murdoch's handwriting to explore the progression of Alzheimer's disease. The Archive would like to thank Professor Garrard and his team for the opportunity to contribute to this project. The Archive was also delighted to support a tribute to Iris Murdoch by composer Paul Crabtree. Paul's choral composition 'Forgive Me', which incorporated text from Murdoch's letters alongside that of *A Word Child* and Shakespeare's *King Lear*, was performed by The Cardinall's Musick at Portsmouth Cathedral in June.

In addition to these events, the Archive has enjoyed hosting 20 group visits over the last year, 13 of which have focused on the Murdoch Collections. Such visits offer a marvellous opportunity for greater familiarisation of the author and her work. Visitors this year have included filmmakers Garo Berberian and Tatevik Ayvazyan who hope to bring *The Italian Girl* to life in film, Norah Perkins, literary agent for the Murdoch estate, and pupils and teachers from Ibstock Place School, attended by Murdoch as a child when it was known as the Froebel Demonstration School. We can safely say that, in this centenary year, the Murdoch Collections continue to be our most popular as the Archive has also received 220 visits from 99 different researchers, constituting 91 per cent of our total visits since the last *Iris Murdoch Review*. We have welcomed researchers from London, Chichester, Oxford, Exeter and Southampton as well as those from further afield including the United States, China, Belgium, Hungary, and the Netherlands. We have issued 2,598 items to these groups and individual researchers and the Murdoch Collections have also been the subject of more than 50 per cent of the enquiries received by the Archive.

A sincere thank you is owed to our transcribers who continue to dedicate time and expertise to producing transcriptions which have helped to answer many of these enquiries and have proved invaluable for those researchers unable to visit the Archive in person. With ten of Murdoch's fourteen journals transcribed and one poetry notebook already complete, excellent progress has been made. There is plenty still to come however from further poetry books, as well as a series of notebooks featuring plans for Murdoch's novels and lectures, and her thoughts on philosophy.

The Archive is also very grateful for the ongoing support of Mrs Audi Bayley, the Iris Murdoch Society and our donors, whose generosity enables us to expand and

improve our holdings, assisting researchers and promoting the Collections. We are very pleased to have acquired several additions to the archive this year including:

- Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1931)
- Irving Block, ed., *Perspectives on the Philosophy of Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981) Both books were formerly owned by Iris Murdoch and inside Block's text is a letter from Murdoch to a recipient identified only as Mr Birch.
- Stella Aldwinckle, *Christ's Shadow in Plato's Cave: a Meditation on the Substance of Love*. This edition is no. 9 in a limited run of 76 copies, for which Murdoch wrote the foreword. Purchased with funds generously donated by Mrs Audi Bayley and kindly presented to the Archive by Dr William Baker, author and Professor Emeritus of Northern Illinois University.
- Research material relating to Valerie Purton, *An Iris Murdoch Chronology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) . The chronology is a popular resource in the Archive and, as such, this research is a very welcome addition to our collection. Kindly donated by Valerie Purton and presented to the Archive by Miles Leeson.
- Research material relating to John Fletcher and Cheryl Bove, *Iris Murdoch: A Descriptive Primary and Annotated Secondary Bibliography* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994). The collection includes essays, correspondence, and interviews that informed the bibliography, as well as a first edition of the published work. Kindly donated by John Fletcher and presented to the Archive by Anne Rowe.
- Copies of the first and second editions of Stanley L. Jaki, *Lord Gifford and His Lectures* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986 and 1995). These texts complement Iris Murdoch's Gifford Lecture notes and other material held in the Peter Conradi Research Archive. Kindly presented to the Archive by the estate of the late Paul and Patricia Brudenell, in their memory.
- A letter written in 1986 from Iris Murdoch to Dorothy Kent (née Thom), along with a photograph of Iris, Dorothy, and Dorothy's parents c. 1940s . Dorothy Kent read History at Oxford, where she met Iris at Somerville College. They shared an interest in politics and remained friends after leaving University. Kindly presented to the Archive by Dorothy's children, Judith, Philippa and Graham Kent.
- A copy of Nigel Watson, *Badminton School: the First 150 Years* (London: James & James, 2008). The book tells the fascinating story of the school and includes some interesting excerpts about Iris Murdoch's time there. Kindly presented to the Archive by Miles Leeson.

- Copies of letters from David Morgan to Iris Murdoch. David Morgan is a former student of Murdoch's and author of With Love and Rage: a Friendship with Iris Murdoch (Kingston: Kingston University Press, 2010). Kindly donated by David Morgan and presented to the Archive by Avril Horner and Anne Rowe.
- Transcriptions of letters written by Iris Murdoch to Michael Oakeshott. The original letters are held in the LSE Archives and Special Collections (London School of Economics and Political Science). Kindly presented to the Archive by Avril Horner.
- Photograph of the programme for the Arts Theatre Cambridge production of *The Three Arrows*
- Photograph of a postcard from Iris Murdoch to Annette Badland, thanking Annette for her help with a performance of Murdoch's play. Kindly presented to the Archive by Anne Rowe with kind permission of Annette Badland.
- Italian translations of a selection of letters featured in *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934–1995* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2015). Sofia Micheluzzi translated several of Murdoch's letters for her dissertation and has kindly given permission for her translations to be made available in the Archive for reference use. Kindly presented to the Archive by Anne Rowe.
- A Newnham College, Cambridge Alumna T-shirt. Kindly presented to the Archive by Frances White. One of our quirkier acquisitions, the T-shirt sees Murdoch's name listed among other prominent Newnham alumnae and comes complete with a headless torso mannequin.
- Letters and articles relating to Iris Murdoch and John Bayley. Kindly presented to the Archive by Frances White.
- Material relating to past Iris Murdoch Conferences. Kindly presented to the Archive by Anne Rowe.

As we look ahead to the coming year, the Archive is excited to be working with artist Carol Sommer on her project 'Will the Real Iris Murdoch Please Stand Up?' The project will investigate truth and perception through social media, selfies, and the thoughts of Murdoch's female characters, as featured in Sommer's book *Cartography for Girls: an A–Z of Orientations Identified within the Novels of Iris Murdoch*. The resulting photographic posters will be exhibited in and around the Archive in its new location in the University's newly built Town House building. Indeed, the Town House move will be at the top of the agenda for the next six months. Colleagues in the Collections Team have already been helping the Archive to prepare by getting involved in our stocktake project – a huge undertaking, we are currently at 49,898

items and counting. In order to make the move as efficient and as safe for the collections as we can, repackaging is also under way, along with listing and cataloguing activities. We aim to remain open leading up to the move and with as much of our material available as possible. Updates and details of closure periods will be posted on the Archive Blog as will an announcement for our reopening. The Reading Room is scheduled to be ready for visitors when the Town House opens in January 2020, with the full stock move taking place in February. We look forward to welcoming everyone to the new Archive where will we continue to support researchers, develop our collections, and collaborate on more exciting projects.

If you would like to visit the Archive, appointments are currently available on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays between 9:00am and 4:30pm. We ask for at least 24 hours' notice so that we can prepare the material you would like to see in advance of your arrival. Archival documents and unpublished material are searchable via our catalogue at http://adlib.kingston.ac.uk. Books and audio-visual material within our Archive collections are listed in our main library catalogue at http://icat.kingston.ac.uk. Appointment requests and all other Archive enquiries can be made by contacting archives@kingston.ac.uk.

Notes on Contributors

HANNAH MARIJE ALTORF is Reader in Philosophy at St Mary's University, Strawberry Hill, London. She has written on the philosophical and literary works of Iris Murdoch and on different forms of philosophical dialogue. She is the author of *Iris Murdoch and the Art of Imagining* (2008) and, together with Mariëtte Willemsen, she has translated *The Sovereignty of Good* into Dutch (2003). She is currently working on a project called 'Thinking in Public'.

CHRIS BODDINGTON, author of *Iris Murdoch's People A to Z* (2019), is an independent scholar. He has recently completed a Master's degree by research at Kingston University London. He has delivered papers on Murdoch at international conferences at Kingston and Chichester Universities in England and at Louisville University, Kentucky, USA. Some of these papers, together with his dissertation, can be found on www.academia.edu.

CHERYL BOVE was American editor of the *Iris Murdoch Newsletter* from 1998–2007 and editor of the *IMNL* from 1995–1998. Until her retirement, she taught Humanities at Ball State University. She has authored several books on Iris Murdoch, the most recent being *Sacred Space, Beloved City: Iris Murdoch's London*, co-authored with Anne Rowe (2008) and reprinted in paperback (2018).

AMBER SAHARA DONOVAN graduated from the University of Durham where she became involved with the InParenthesis project. She continues to work on the project as a research associate and has participated in several iterations of the reading group. Her current research examines the philosophical connections between Anscombe, Foot, Midgley and Murdoch, in particular on the topic of truth.

GILLIAN DOOLEY is an Honorary Senior Research Fellow at Flinders University in South Australia. She has published widely on Iris Murdoch, Jane Austen, V.S. Naipaul and J.M. Coetzee. She is the editor of *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction: Conversations with Iris Murdoch* (2003) and *Never Mind about the Bourgeoisie: The Correspondence between Iris Murdoch and Brian Medlin* (2014). She

recently co-edited the collection *Reading Iris Murdoch's Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (2019)

DAVID J. FINE is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Dayton, Ohio. His research focuses on religion and sexuality in the modern British novel. He is currently working on a monograph, *Sex and Secularization: The Catholic Novel in England, 1907–1965*, and on an article that compares the novelistic form of Muriel Spark and Iris Murdoch.

ROB HARDY holds a BA from Cambridge University and an MA and PhD from Cardiff University. He has spent several years teaching at universities in China, including periods at Shanghai International Studies University and Henan Normal University. His publications include articles on Paul Bailey, the social-worker novelist John Stroud and two books: one on religious and psychological narratives in Iris Murdoch's fiction, the other a study of the divine feminine in the work of D.H. Lawrence, Dion Fortune and Ted Hughes. He is currently working on a book-length study of Pearl S. Buck's fiction.

MARK HOPWOOD is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at The University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee. He has published papers on a range of topics in moral philosophy including love, beauty, narcissism, hypocrisy, and the nature of moral reasoning.

JOSEPH JENNER is completing a PhD in Film Studies at King's College London. Through his research on posthumanism, spectatorship and the science fiction genre, he is theorising a 'posthuman spectator' through contemporary examples of science fiction film. His article 'Gendering the Anthropocene: Female astronauts, failed motherhood and the overview effect' was published in *Science Fiction Film and Television*. He is a Graduate Teaching Assistant at King's College London, as well as a lecturer and tutor at MetFilm School.

SASHA LAWSON-FROST is studying for a Master's degree in Philosophy at Oxford University. She is currently working on the role of aspect perception in ethics, with a particular interest in Simone Weil and Iris Murdoch. She co-runs the Oxford chapter of the InParenthesis project.

MILES LEESON is Director of the Iris Murdoch Research Centre, University of Chichester and Lead Editor of the *Iris Murdoch Review*. His work includes *Iris Murdoch: Philosophical Novelist* (2010), the collection *Incest in Contemporary Literature* (2018), and *Iris Murdoch: A Centenary Celebration* (2019). He is currently working on *Iris Murdoch, Feminist*.

DAYNA MILLER joined Kingston University Library and Learning Services in 2001, moving into the Archive in 2009. She graduated from the Open University with a BA (Hons) Open degree in Arts and Humanities in 2015 and in August 2018 took on the role of University Archivist from Katie Giles while in the final stage of an MLitt in Archives and Records Management with the University of Dundee, which she successfully completed in June of this year.

BRAN NICOL is Professor of English Literature and Head of the School of Literature and Languages at the University of Surrey. His books include *Iris Murdoch: The Retrospective Fiction* (2004), *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction* (2009), and *The Private Eye* (2013), and he is currently working on a range of projects which explore the value of literature in a post-postmodern age.

KOSHI OKANO is Professor Emeritus at Heisei International University, Saitama, and the current Vice President of the Iris Murdoch Society of Japan. He contributed an article to *Reading Iris Murdoch: A Guide to All the Works by Iris Murdoch* (2008).

PAMELA OSBORN teaches at Kingston University London where she gained her PhD on grief and mourning in Iris Murdoch's work. Her most recent article on Murdoch and Brigid Brophy appeared in the Brophy special edition of *Contemporary Women's Writing.* She is an editor of the *Iris Murdoch Review*.

LUCY OULTON is a PhD student at the University of Chichester's Iris Murdoch Research Centre, and Assistant Editor of the *Iris Murdoch Review*. Her interests include ecocriticism and affect theory and she is currently building a case for Iris Murdoch's environmental imagination. She will be guest co-editing the *Iris Murdoch Review* 11 in 2020 with Rebecca Moden.

MARIA PEACOCK completed an MA with the Open University in January 2017 with a dissertation entitled 'Iris Murdoch and the Picaresque Novel' and is now studying at the University of Chichester for a PhD on displacement and rootlessness in Iris Murdoch's fiction.

COURTNEY RICHARDSON has recently completed a BA Honours degree in English Literature and Philosophy and Ethics at the University of Chichester with a dissertation entitled 'The Influence of Sartrean Existentialism on Iris Murdoch's Early Novels'.

JANFARIE SKINNER taught as a part-time tutor in English Literature for the University of Oxford Department of Continuing Education and the WEA. Her research interests have focused on works of George Eliot, Virginia Woolf and Iris Murdoch, and in the links between moral philosophy and the novel. She is now retired.

FIONA TOMKINSON is Associate Professor in the Graduate School of Humanities at Nagoya University. She holds an MA and PhD in Philosophy from Boğaziçi University. She has published articles on intertextuality in Iris Murdoch and is currently involved in a research project concerning the influence of Central and East Asian religion, philosophy and mythology on British thinkers of the twentieth century.

FRANCES WHITE is Visiting Research Fellow and Deputy Director of the Iris Murdoch Research Centre at the University of Chichester, Editor of the *Iris Murdoch Review* and Writer in Residence at Kingston University Writing School. She has published widely on Iris Murdoch and other writers. Her prize-winning biography *Becoming Iris Murdoch* was published in 2014. She is currently working on the sequel *Unbecoming Iris Murdoch* (forthcoming, 2021).

KATE WHITE has published poems in various magazines and anthologies and won the Poetry School/Pighog Poetry Pamphlet Prize in 2013 with *The Old Madness*.

JOSEPH WIINIKKA-LYDON is currently a Research Fellow at the EU-funded Centre for Ethics at the University of Pardubice in the Czech Republic. Previously, he was Assistant Professor of religion at Birmingham-Southern College, California. He is author of the forthcoming book, *Moral Injury and the Promise of Virtue* (2020), which applies Iris Murdoch's thought to questions of moral injury, war and subjectivity.

RICHARD WILBY is an organist and retired piano teacher. He founded and led the Chichester U3A Iris Murdoch Reading Group from 2014 to 2018.

Call for Papers

The *Iris Murdoch Review* is a peer-reviewed scholarly publication of international repute, published annually by the Iris Murdoch Research Centre at the University of Chichester in the UK, in collaboration with Kingston University Press. The Review's eleventh issue will be guest edited by Rebecca Moden and Lucy Oulton of the Research Centre and published in the summer of 2020.

We would like to invite essays of 7000 words for *Iris Murdoch Review 11*. It will follow an exciting year of centenary celebrations that commemorate the birth of Iris Murdoch and culminates in the Centenary Conference at St Anne's College, Oxford in July 2019. The focus of the 2020 issue will be on new lines of enquiry that reflect the current eclecticism of contemporary Murdoch studies.

We invite submissions on any topic from graduate, doctoral, post-doc and early career contributors (less than 5 years in post) who are currently working on original and innovative approaches to research related to the field of Iris Murdoch Studies. All submissions should follow the *IMR* style, using endnotes.

Please send, in the first instance, an abstract of 300 words and a short biography to: ims@chi.ac.uk

Deadline for abstracts: 30th September 2019.

Join the Iris Murdoch Society and receive the *Iris Murdoch Review*.

The *Iris Murdoch Review* is the foremost journal for Iris Murdoch scholars worldwide and provides a forum for peer-review articles, book reviews, event reports and notices.

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To become a member and for latest subscription rates please contact ims@chi.ac.uk or join online by searching on 'Iris Murdoch Research Centre University of Chichester'.

Kingston University Press publishes the *Iris Murdoch Review* on behalf of the Iris Murdoch Research Centre and the Iris Murdoch Society. It is a collaborative project between the University of Chichester and Kingston University, London. Kingston University is home to the Iris Murdoch Archives, an unparalleled world-class source of information for researchers on the life and work of Murdoch and her contemporaries.

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