The Iris Murdoch Review

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The Iris Murdoch Society

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The Iris Murdoch Review

The *Iris Murdoch Review* publishes articles on the life and work of Iris Murdoch and her milieu. The *Review* aims to represent the breadth and eclecticism of contemporary critical approaches to Murdoch, and particularly welcomes new perspectives and lines of inquiry.

The views and opinions expressed in the *Iris Murdoch Review* are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the editors or the production team.

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Miles Leeson

I am delighted to introduce this year's *Iris Murdoch Review*, our most substantial issue yet in terms of material, focused on an underappreciated area in Murdoch studies – her work in theatre. Although this edition of the *Review* did not start out dedicated to the dramatic arts, the natural development of the essays we received, and the generous responses of those from whom we commissioned new work, has culminated in this expansive, multifaceted publication. Not only does it contain a wealth of new material alongside the regular reviews and reports, but we are also pleased to include Murdoch's own reflection, 'A Note on Drama', which has not been reprinted since its first publication in 1970. Written as an introductory piece to the production of *The Servants in the Snow*, this short essay is important in its own right, giving insight into how Murdoch perceives the interrelatedness of fiction, poetry and drama. And what better issue in which to formally introduce our Society Patron, Annette Badland? Annette is a well-known actor on stage and screen and, since 2019, has been promoting the work of both Murdoch and the Society; her 'In Conversation' presentation with Anne Rowe at the Centenary Conference was a particular highlight. Here she talks to Frances White about her career and reflects on her experience of acting in *The Three Arrows* and of meeting Murdoch.

The essays which follow approach Murdoch's dramatic art from a wide variety of angles. John Fletcher's essay, 'A Novelist's Plays: Iris Murdoch and the Theatre' (1985), is the earliest substantial work in this area and has previously been difficult to access so we are pleased to reprint it here. Fletcher puts Murdoch's dramatic work in context as well as giving a critique of her plays up to that date. He regards her, like Henry James, as a great novelist who failed on the stage. Looking back almost forty years since publication, it may be difficult to argue with that as there have been so few revivals, but I hope the new essays published here, and the promise of never-performed material (alongside new adaptations on the horizon), may enable us to form our own judgements in the future. In response to Fletcher's account, Anne Rowe reflects on the twenty-first-century reception of her dramatic works, contending that 'exploring such dialogues between Murdoch's fiction and drama will not only suggest ways of extending the already formidable range of her

meaning but also identify unacknowledged aspects of her craft as a writer'. We hope this edition of the *Review* will encourage readers to explore the wealth of dramatic material that Murdoch has left us.

We are grateful to Christopher Boddington and Daniel Read for providing a definitive list of Murdoch's stage works alongside contextual material. It may well surprise you that Murdoch wrote or collaborated on eleven stage plays, to say nothing of later adaptations. Some, like *A Severed Head* with J.B. Priestley, are well-known. Others, like the unperformed *Joanna, Joanna* and the obscure *The One Alone*, are difficult to find and her adaptation of *The Sea, The Sea* has never been published or fully performed. I hope that a collected edition of all these plays will be published in the future.

Further new angles are given by my essay on the little-known play *Joanna, Joanna*, noting links with *A Word Child* which make it clear that Murdoch in the late 1960s was a writer in transition moving to a period of greater achievement; by Wendy Jones Nakanishi who draws on her experience of teaching Murdoch in Japan in her essay on the Japanese context of *The Three Arrows*; by Jaki McCarrick, a notable playwright herself, who has kindly reflected on Murdoch's dramaturgy, as well as on the impact reading Murdoch had on her own work; and by Emma Graeme who offers a fresh reading of the Shakespearian influence and intertextuality in *The Nice and the Good*. Finally, Carol Sommer revisits Richard Eyre's Oscar-winning film *Iris* on the twentieth anniversary of its release, giving a vision of it as a visually artistic achievement. We are also pleased to include two unpublished poems directly inspired by Murdoch written by the American poet Hannah VanderHart, who draws from the natural world for her work and whose connections with Murdoch are clearly evident.

As ever, numerous new publications are reviewed and I am grateful to all our reviewers for giving such considered thought to each. It is pleasing to see that in recent years both works directly focusing on Murdoch's philosophy and works applying her philosophy to diverse subjects are growing in number. Many new publications including major works in theology, philosophy, and literary criticism are in progress and the Iris Murdoch Research Centre is particularly pleased to have founded the 'Iris Murdoch Today' Series with Palgrave Macmillan which already has three major publications – two monographs and an edited collection – due in 2022. This open-ended series aims to publish at least two books a year for the foreseeable future.

Online events, including the first Iris Murdoch Society Christmas Lecture, a symposium in Dutch, the first major online conference hosted here at Chichester and the first Sino-British Murdoch conference, are reported, and Pamela Osborn reflects on recent developments in Murdoch-related publications as well as her growing presence in social media. Dayna Miller's update on activities at the Kingston University Archives and the development of online reading groups on

both Murdoch's fiction and philosophy indicate that imaginative innovations in the past difficult 18 months of pandemic restrictions have inspired diversification in Murdoch studies.

The continued growth of interest is highlighted by the worldwide reach of various Murdoch social media profiles, including the podcast which has produced much new content, for which I thank all the contributors. The fifth anniversary of the IMRC at Chichester in October this year will be marked by an exhibition in the university library, kindly curated by Dayna Miller. Despite the ongoing pandemic, the IMRC team very much hope to be welcoming you all to Chichester in June 2022 for our much-delayed Tenth International Conference, and to renewing our friendships in person. It is fitting that this edition of the *Review* concludes with celebrations of three of Murdoch's particular friendships in accounts of the lives and work of Jean Jones by Michael Kurtz, and of Yozo Muroya and Christopher Heywood by Paul Hullah.

This year's *Review* has, once again, been produced under difficult circumstances and I am grateful to the editorial team, Rebecca Moden, Pamela Osborn, Daniel Read and Frances White, for the months of effort they have collectively put into producing this issue, and to Heather Robbins who took it through the proofing and layout design stage – a substantial team effort as always. The particularly striking cover design is a reimagined version of the original poster for the staging of *The Italian Girl* in 1967; the original poster, and others, are reproduced on the back cover.

University of Chichester, August 2021

A Note on Drama

Iris Murdoch

There are a number of differences between plays and novels. A novel is (usually) enjoyed over a length of time by a reader sitting by himself at home. A play is (usually) enjoyed over a short period of time in public in the Theatre. Of course there are Chinese operas that go on for days and of course, solitary people also read plays. But in our tradition of literature the playwright has tended to earn his living, in co-operation with other artists, by persuading his fellow citizens that it would be amusing, delightful, spiritually uplifting or even instructive to sit still for two or three hours listening to his fictitious words and watching his fictitious actions. It is a strange art form, and sometimes one wonders why any citizens should wish to do this. The concept of an art is naturally set up and to some extent dominated by its great masters. Sometimes there are revolutionary periods when the definition given by the masters is challenged, and doubtless we are now (for better and for worse) entering such a period in all the arts. The Theatre has certainly (it seems to me) vested its just prestige, as apart from its day to day life as a going concern, upon a remarkably small number of great writers. However bad plays which survive may be, still there was Shakespeare, there was Aeschylus, and like gods they give (and I believe will continue to give) life and inspiration. Most of the few great dramatists of the past were also poets. It is not easy to make a list of great dramatists who were not. The drama is (I think) an essentially poetic form. It is a public form of poetry. Whereas a novel is a private form of prose. (This sense of 'public' and 'private' is the ordinary sense. In another sense any art object aims at being a public object. Rhetoric is, in the ordinary sense, a public form of prose.) The novel flourishes in the age of inwardness when society is rich enough and free enough and educated enough to allow people to have complicated private lives, the contemplation of which can arouse general interest. The art of the novel answers a curiosity about the inner lives of others which is a desirable luxury product of the human race. It is a product of and an instrument of freedom. All dictators fear and hate novelists. The dramatist, like the poet, has always existed. Poetry is an old form of human speech, a particular magical combination of the personal and the public (the secret and the revealed), and the drama (which has to be magical too in order to keep

the citizen in the Theatre) is more akin to poetry than it is to the novel. The drama however has a more obvious public aspect. It is more like an announcement, while a poem is more like a song. Public themes (politics, philosophy, social questions, problems of the day) belong naturally to the Theatre. So also does myth, which the dramatist shares with all poets and some novelists. The most famous of all myths has given its name to the most famous of all plays. (The most famous of all plays, incidentally, deals with the same subject.) The combination of public theme and myth is essentially Theatre. This does not mean that a good dramatist who works otherwise cannot get away with anything in the Theatre. The Theatre is also essentially a place where almost anything can be got away with.

This play of mine, such as it is ('The Servants and the Snow'), is about an old problem in political philosophy, the problem of sovereignty. (Why should anyone obey anyone?) It touches more cursorily [on] a number of other political problems such as the problem of freedom. (What is freedom? What kinds of freedoms are worth having at what price?) The play also rests upon the famous myth mentioned above.

This essay was originally published in CUE Greenwich Theatre Magazine *(September 1970). With the exception of two instances where the editors have standardised the capitalisation of Theatre, the piece remains as originally published. A copy of the magazine can be found in the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives (KUAS139/2). Copyright: Greenwich Theatre Ltd, September 1970.*

An Interview with the First Patron of the Iris Murdoch Society

Annette Badland and Frances White

Annette Badland was first introduced to the world of Iris Murdoch scholars and readers when Anne Rowe met her at the Globe Theatre in 2018. Anne went in order to photograph Annette's 1972 programme for *The Three Arrows* and a postcard sent to her by Murdoch, both of which are now in the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives. Finding that Annette had clearly been impressed with Murdoch's kindness to the cast all those years ago, and also that Annette herself is charming and approachable, Anne invited her to create a plenary session for the Centenary Conference in Oxford and they worked on this event together.

Being a fan of *Bergerac* and *Midsomer Murders*, the face and voice of Annette Badland had long been familiar to me from the television. So my heart lurched when I saw her coming into the lecture theatre at St Anne's College on 14 July 2019. She sat quietly at the back as Valentine Cunningham's lecture was just starting, and I nerved myself to greet her at the coffee break. I felt too insignificant for the attention of a great actress with an illustrious career, but as a host of the conference it behoved me to make our guest welcome. I need not have worried; the moment I introduced myself I was treated not only to Annette's warmly beaming smile which lights up the room but also to the Murdochian quality of attention which she gives to anyone who engages with her. She clearly enjoys meeting people and has a gift for putting them at ease. Chatting to her is a sheer delight, as all the conference team and delegates found. This was not Annette's first appearance in

the world of Iris Murdoch – her own essay below tells us all about her role in *The Three Arrows* that was the beginning of her connection with Murdoch – but it was the first time she had been involved with the Iris Murdoch Research Centre (IMRC) and the Iris Murdoch Society (IMS). That afternoon she was 'In Interview with Anne Rowe' and enthralled the audience both with her reminiscences of acting in the play and with her moving readings from Murdoch. Her recollection of being overawed by meeting Iris Murdoch, and thinking herself unworthy of notice from the great writer, mirrored my own experience of meeting Annette. Murdoch gave Annette much attention, yet looking back Annette wishes she had made more of the opportunity to talk to her.

We were delighted that Annette not only stayed for the rest of the conference and Murdoch's 100th birthday dinner but also chose to attend an event in the National Portrait Gallery on 19 July 2019, when Lucy Bolton and Rebecca Moden talked about 'Iris Murdoch's Relationship to Painting, in Philosophy and in Life'. Moreover, this was not the end of Annette's engagement with us all, just the beginning. On 21 September 2019 she took part in a panel chaired by Anne Rowe on 'Iris Murdoch and the Theatre' alongside Bill Alexander and Fiona McAlpine at the University of Chichester. She also came to watch the showing of *Iris*, which was put on for the IMRC at Chichester Cinema at New Park later that day, and joined in the ensuing discussion of the film. Realising that Annette's interest in Murdoch was deep and enduring, Miles and I approached her with the request that she become Patron of the Iris Murdoch Society, which had never previously had one. Annette agreed with characteristic enthusiasm and has joined in with a will, despite her busy professional schedule. The first event that Annette was involved with in her new role as Patron was the inaugural IMS Christmas Lecture, which was given by Anne Rowe on 17 December 2020 with Annette contributing readings of Christmas passages from Murdoch's novels and journals. She also took part in the last live Iris Murdoch event before lockdown: a panel discussion chaired by Gary Browning, with Anne Rowe, Carina Bartleet and Sarah Lucas, following a performance of 'Art and Eros: A Dialogue about Art' on 4 February 2020 at Oxford Brookes University. Post-pandemic, we very much look forward to Annette's presence at many future IMRC and IMS events. In the meantime she has continued to be involved by participating in this interview and writing an account of her experience playing the role of Page in *The Three Arrows*. Annette also introduced 'Sarah Perry in Conversation with Avril Horner' at the one-day virtual Iris Murdoch Conference on 15 July 2021. So here are the highlights of Annette's career in her own words.

Frances White: At the 2019 conference, we focused on your role in *The Three Arrows* and you have written more about this experience for us in this issue of the *Iris Murdoch Review*, but which other roles have been, for you, the highlights of your career?

Annette Badland: Actors often have only a handful of parts they treasure. I've been lucky and worked a great deal so my hands are carefully cupped around a few more. After the Actors Company in 1972 I went on to play Mole in *Toad of Toad Hall* (an early piece of gender-blind casting), then in early 1973 joined the Royal Shakespeare Company, which was a dream come true. I stayed for several years playing roles including Audrey in *As You Like It*, Hostess in *Taming of the Shrew*, Lady Montague in *Romeo and Juliet*, Sasha in *Summerfolk* and Chief Dormouse in … *Toad of Toad Hall*! (I've also played Mama Rabbit in … *Toad of Toad Hall* at Birmingham Rep!)

My first television role was in *The Naked Civil Servant* – Quentin Crisp learnt to tap dance in the mornings and taught in the afternoons – I was his willing but hopeless student. John Hurt was wonderful in the role and great company, Jack Gold a terrific director. I have played many misfits, rejected and unloved people in my career and I feel it is part of my work to make them understood, valued and acknowledged. Here are a few I love:

- *Last Day of Summer* was a 1984 television adaptation by Ian McEwan of one of his short stories in the Somerset Maugham Award-winning *First Love, Last Rites* stories collection. I played the main female character, Jenny, a misfit who spends an unexpectedly idyllic summer in a hippy commune but all does not end well. Nic Knowland was the cinematographer and he went on to work with Spielberg.
- I played Gladys in Agatha Christie's Miss Marple *A Pocketful of Rye* in 1985: a poor duped girl who is murdered and hung on a line with a peg on her nose.
- I also played Sadie-May in *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice*, written by Jim Cartwright, at the National and Aldwych Theatres in the 1990s. Words that were seemingly everyday but were actually poetry. The audience laughed at Sadie to begin with but by the end laughed with her. The joy of audiences on their feet every night and knowing we had taken them through the gamut of emotions and given them much laughter. Jane Horrocks – the lead actor in *Little Voice* – and I went on to make the film in 1997.
- I worked at the National on *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* directed by Phyllida Lloyd. I played alongside Fiona Shaw, reuniting with her after a production of *Electra* directed by Deborah Warner and also the film *Sacred Hearts*.
- I played Muriel Wicksteed in *Habeas Corpus* for Peter Hall's Company directed by himself. Such knowledge, wit and wickedness in the great man.

Film highlights include: *Jabberwocky* directed by Terry Gilliam, a Pythonesque piece where I was Michael Palin's beloved Griselda Fishfinger; *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* directed by Tim Burton; *Quiet Passion,* about the life of Emily Dickinson, written and directed by Terence Davies, and Mrs Fezziwig in *The Man*

Who Invented Christmas – spending several weeks working alongside the witty, intelligent, charming, talented Christopher Plummer and Dan Stevens who is also splendid.

Television highlights include Russell T. Davies writing an episode of *Dr Who* for me! Russell calls me Dame Bad and I call him The Master – a God! Margaret Blaine in *Boom Town* was a tremendous gift. I also played Brawdie in *Cutting It* by Debbie Horsfield, Mrs Fitz in *Outlander* and now Fleur Perkins, the pathologist, in *Midsomer Murders*, an intelligent, professional, older woman who has a colourful private life plus a sense of humour.

WHITE: When did you start reading Iris Murdoch?

BADLAND: I started reading Iris Murdoch in the late 1970s whilst living in Middleton Square, Islington. Not immediately after *The Three Arrows*, strangely.

WHITE: Do you have a favourite among her novels?

BADLAND: *The Sea, The Sea* is my favourite novel.

WHITE: What is it about this novel that appeals to you?

BADLAND: Maybe I was initially drawn to it because Charles Arrowby is a writer and director and it has a cast of theatre folk, but also the sea pulls me. The rhythm, the repetitive nature of it, its power calms me. It is tangible, unlike the cosmos which is intriguing but terrifying. It makes me consider where and who I am, and puts me in my place. In the novel I look at myself through Charles – what I share and question, what I dislike in him and me.

WHITE: Is there a novel that you would like to see on stage or screen?

BADLAND: I would love to see *The Black Prince* made into a television series. The characters are tremendous, complex and all have a voice. I think the period, early 1970s – the clothes, the buildings – would look fantastic and the way society conducts itself; everyday existence would also be extremely entertaining and appealing to today's audience. The HUMOUR, the witty humour. Sometimes even becoming farce – and there is intrigue.

WHITE: Finally, is there a character whom you would like to play, given the opportunity?

BADLAND: As for a role, Rachel Baffin, of course!

'The theatre is another world': Iris Murdoch and *The Three Arrows*

Annette Badland

IT WAS THE LATE SUMMER OF 1972, I HAD JUST GRADUATED FROM DRAMA school and was one of five Acting Assistant Stage Managers with The Actors Company. Though the leading players were kind to us, we were the lowest of the low: acting, understudying, providing props, painting flats, sweeping floors, doing 'all night fit ups'. These jolly events required you to start work on the morning of day one, work all through the night into the next day (if lucky grabbing a couple of uncomfortable hours' sleep under a dressing room table) before doing a dress run, resetting everything and then opening the play on the evening of day two. Now illegal, but we were young, eager, full of energy and enthusiasm … and what a grounding!

Ian McKellen formed the company along with Edward Petherbridge in 1972, inviting like-minded actors to join this venture of equals: Caroline Blakiston, Sheila Reid and Jack Shepherd among them. As the name suggests, this was an innovative concept: the actors would guide the company, choosing the plays and their directors, sharing the roles out among themselves, thus revolutionising the usual practice of performers being the ones hired in at the end of the process. East 15 Acting School, my alma mater, had grown out of the work of Joan Littlewood at Stratford East, who believed that actors could create their own theatre, so The Actors Company had huge appeal for me. Also, it had been intimated that I would take over from Felicity Kendal (who was pregnant at the time) as the hotel chambermaid opposite Ian's page-boy in the Feydeau farce, *Ruling the Roost*, but frustratingly for me Felicity refused to forego the fun and I had to stick with the role of hotel tart in peignoir and black corset – to this day I am called 'Boobs' by those who knew me then! Can't think why.

We opened at the Edinburgh Festival with John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* playing in tandem with *Ruling the Roost*. At the end of the festival we did a tour of England, eventually arriving at the Arts Theatre Cambridge where we started rehearsals for *The Three Arrows*, in which I played the part of a handmaiden to Keiko.

Iris Murdoch's love affair with theatre appears to have started in her youth, as did mine: when at Badminton Iris translated *Oedipus at Colonus*; at the age of ten I enacted Keats' poem 'Megs Merrilies' on Parents' Day and 'felt' the audience for the first time – I had the power to make them laugh and I could also make them stop laughing. Miraculous alchemy! What else might I be able to provoke? Iris performed with the Magpie Players in 1939 whilst at Oxford, so she too would have known this thrill. Theatre is a most seductive art form, and she was smitten.

After several theatrical adaptions of her books in the 1960s, Iris set aside the whole of 1969 to do nothing else but write plays. This intrigues me: a successful novelist keen to express herself in another medium. Like Picasso, never resting, never complacent, always curious. As a performer I wasn't merely seeking self-gratification but hoped to interpret the world for others, maybe even change it a little, and with Iris's intellect and philosophy she too must have felt she could illuminate and provoke in this immediate and tangible form. She was badly bruised by the poor reception of her play *The Servants and the Snow* at Greenwich in 1970 but, apparently finding the theatre impossible to resist, two years later, *The Three Arrows* was her next brave attempt at staging a play.

From 1968 until 1972 political activism erupted across Europe, which must have affected Iris and what she wanted to express. In *The Three Arrows* she ostensibly examines the politics and morals of Samurai culture in a medieval mythic Japan – but what does this setting obscure or reveal? Does it take us to another world, or does it poetically clarify and ask questions of the time in which it was written?

As research prior to rehearsals, whilst still on tour, we had a splendid night; all tumbling into a pub post performance where a 'lock-in' had been arranged, we set up a screen and watched the inspirational film *The Seven Samurai*. Sushi was unheard of in England at that time so I can't imagine what we nibbled on and I don't recall sake being drunk, but then I wouldn't!

The action of *The Three Arrows* takes place in a Royal Palace where Prince Yorimitsu (Ian McKellen) is held as a political prisoner. He can never be released, as neither of the two rival authorities – the Emperor and the Shogun – can execute him without ceding power to the other. There is a precarious balance achieved by the two sides, which are constantly vying for dominance. Individual power politics bring out themes of loyalty and treachery.

Yorimitsu faces a dilemma near the end of the play: he has to choose between three arrows representing Power, Religion and Love, as in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* where the suitors choose between three caskets. This is no coincidence and I could expand here on Iris's love of Shakespeare, and indeed my own: his psychological and emotional intelligence; the richness, depth and complexity of his characters; the beauty of his language; and his great understanding of our sorry human state. 'What fools these mortals be', but …

There are other 'prisoners' in this palace. One is Princess Keiko, sister to Emperor Taihito: she has rejected the path of holiness; we find her in her cell longing for snow. Naive and pure, it is she who secretly runs through the palace at night to meet Yorimitsu and it is she who takes her own life when he is given the choice of freedom or marriage to her in continued captivity. He chooses freedom.

The women in the play have humour, strength and truth, poetry, cynicism and wickedness, but no power in their society: 'We are women. They [men] make our lives miniature.' Iris isn't standing on a soapbox or waving a banner but I think she subtly makes the feminist point in an often comedic way so the audience are amused and hopefully brought to … enlightenment. There is also the figure of an old Zen teacher, Father Akita, who I think embodies Iris's philosophy of generosity, kindness and goodness, as set out in *The Sovereignty of Good*, which was published two years before *The Three Arrows* was performed.

Because *The Three Arrows* was a new play, and therefore interesting theatrically but unpredictable box office material, it was scheduled to be the final play to enter the repertoire. We rehearsed and performed only in Cambridge, hence its short run at the end of the season. Noel Willman was our director and I believe he and Iris continued a friendship beyond the production. He was himself a distinguished actor whom you may know from the films *Dr Zhivago* or *The Odessa File*. He worked often with Robert Bolt and had won a Tony Award a decade before in 1962 for his direction of the original Broadway production of *A Man for All Seasons*.

The set, by designer Hutchinson Scott, was stunning: a beautiful, intricate jigsaw of daisies and sliding screens. It was a demanding and nerve-wracking task for the company's scenery carpenter – would those 'cheese pieces' slot into place? Our costumes were simple and strong; drawings still exist in the V&A Archive. As entourage to the princess we wore silk kimonos in pastel shades adorned with golden embroidery. Mine remained treasured in my wardrobe for decades. I do recall it was difficult to move around thus attired; we wore Japanese sandals too – there was much elegant kneeling and gentle shuffling over the undulating terrain and between screens. Hopefully this appeared gracefully crane-like and authentic to the audience but they couldn't see our inelegant sprints backstage, often stumbling, kimonos hoisted to knee level. Ian was dashing, energised and warrior-like. Iris was very taken with his performance and admired him greatly. She told Philippa Foot in a letter of 3 November 1972 that 'Of course I have fallen in love with Ian – (Yorimitsu is, it occurs to me, the only *purely* romantic hero I have ever created)'.

Anyone who knows Iris Murdoch's work knows she has humour, and often the dialogue in the court is akin to 'Yes Minister' with characters addressing one another as 'old boy' or 'dear chap'. The author had lived through the Second World War and worked in the Treasury and UNRRA – could this dialogue be the legacy of those she encountered? Also some of her stage directions are delightful: right at the

beginning when our hero first enters she states that he is 'wearing black trousers and white shirt, standard issue, Imperial prisoners for the use of'. Deliciously, she wants the 'monks all [to] speak with Irish accents'.

I don't remember if Iris was at our first reading of the play but I do remember her very clearly in the dusty hall where we did our last run through before taking it into the theatre. She was overwhelmed. Quietly full of the emotional experience. Graciously standing, looking at us all and thanking us. For her we were all part of bringing the play alive. I still have the postcard she sent to me on our press night – quite unexpected and unusual for those of us so low of status to receive anything from an author other than a haughty sideways glance or bemused tolerance. It thanks me very much for my 'excellent help' and hopes 'you are enjoying it all as much as I have enjoyed it'. She says, 'It looks beautiful and I am so grateful' and ends with 'very, very best wishes to you, Iris'. Everyone in the company received a particular message.

When by chance Iris and I bumped into one another outside King's College she was again warm and generous. I like to think maybe if I'd been braver and less reverential we might have become friends and eventually swam together – who can say? Iris had a knack of making people feel valued and worthwhile.

Why did she write *The Three Arrows*? Sadly, it wasn't well received by the critics and it is a minor piece but with big, hidden, non-allowed emotions. There was something lingering and intangible that flitted around those screens and kimonos. Like a piece of *kintsugi*: broken but precious and held together by golden threads.

Iris and I were both theatrical novices immersed in the wonder, glory and cruelty of theatre. I have remained a devoted acolyte, unable or unwilling to be elsewhere, but for Iris, as she told Philippa Foot in the letter quoted above, 'The theatre is another world and I don't and can't live there. One has this intensely close relationship with a group of people and then they simply vanish.'

'We are such stuff as dreams are made on …'

The Dramatic Works of Iris Murdoch: A Chronological Catalogue

Christopher Boddington and Daniel Read

Iris Murdoch wrote a total of eleven dramatic works, alone or in collaboration with others, including plays, adaptations of her novels, and works with music. Many of these are rarely performed and comparatively unknown outside the world of Murdoch scholars and enthusiasts. The authors are not aware of any complete list of Murdoch's dramatic works and, as such, have reviewed currently available materials to create a chronological list of these dramatic works. A number of the works were written or first performed some years before publication in book form; the lists that appear below ascertain the date of writing, publication or first performance and are arranged by reference to the earliest such date. Additional performance details are supplied where available.

While Murdoch had a leading role in the adaptation of the dramatic works listed below, a number of her novels were also adapted or abridged for film, radio and television by other writers, most during her lifetime. Details of these adaptations, many of which have been publicly performed or broadcast, are included in the last two sections of this overview. As there is often more than one adaptation of the same work, they are arranged by the publication year of the novels from which they are derived. This list of Murdoch's dramatic works finishes with a description of her limited success in adapting her novels for film along with some hopes for future productions.

Iris Murdoch's Dramatic Works[1]

A Severed Head (written 1962–63) was Murdoch's first play,[2] an adaptation of the 1961 novel of the same name, written in collaboration with J.B. Priestley.[3] The play, directed by Val May, opened at the Theatre Royal, Bristol in April 1963. In July 1963 it moved to the Criterion Theatre, London where it ran for 1,044 performances with a cast including Paul Eddington, Sheila Burrell, Robin Bailey and Jessica Walter. It transferred to the Royale Theatre in New York in October 1964 and ran for a further

29 performances. There was also a performance at the Donovan Maule Theatre Club in Nairobi, Kenya in February 1968.[4] *A Severed Head* would turn out to be Murdoch's most successful staging of a play.

The Italian Girl (performed 1967) was written by Murdoch with James Saunders and was based on the 1964 novel of the same name. It was published in an acting edition with a diagram of the stage set and full instructions for dressing the stage.[5] The play opened at the Theatre Royal, Bristol with the Bristol Old Vic Company in November 1967, transferred to Wyndham's Theatre, London in February 1968 and ran for more than a year, with a cast including Richard Pasco as Edmund and Timothy West as Otto. The play ends with Maggie and Edmund singing '*La strada del bosco*', a popular Italian folk song.

The Three Arrows (written May 1969)[6] is set in Japan and is somewhat reminiscent of the plot of Puccini's *Turandot*. This was the first of three plays to be written in 1969. It shares the publishing history of *The Servants and the Snow*, but was the second of the two to be performed.[7] *The Three Arrows* opened at the Arts Theatre in Cambridge in October 1972 with Matthew Long, Teniel Evans and Ian McKellen – Annette Badland and John Vine also played minor roles. The play ran for less than a month. Murdoch was very struck by Ian McKellen as Prince Yorimitsu, and wrote in a letter to Philippa Foot, on 3 November 1972, that 'Of course I have fallen in love with Ian [McKellen] – (Yorimitsu is, it occurs to me, the only *purely* romantic hero I have ever created)' (*LOP* 406).

Joanna, Joanna (written July 1969) was the second of Murdoch's original plays to be completed in 1969.[8] The Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives (hereafter the Murdoch Archives) hold a copy of the original play as well as the correspondence and proofs relating to its publication in 1994. These materials show that the play was originally titled *Joanna, Joanna, Joanna*.[9] It has never been publicly performed. Colophon Press produced a collectors' edition of 143 copies in 1994, all signed by the author, 12 of them also with a manuscript quotation from the play; Copy XI, for example, includes the line: 'You must suffer it now, suffer the things you refused to conceive of, suffer the things you wanted not to know'.[10] Characters that appear in the play can be seen as precursors of those that appear in Murdoch's novels, such as Hilary Burde in *A Word Child* (1975) and Gilbert Opian in *The Sea, The Sea* (1978).[11]

The Servants and the Snow (written December 1969) is a drama written in the gothic mode of *The Unicorn* (1963) and is set in a similarly unidentified location. It shares the publishing history of *The Three Arrows*.[12] The names of the characters suggest a broad range of European origins, including English, French and German. *The Servants and the Snow* ran for three weeks at the Greenwich Theatre in London in September 1970, making it the first of Murdoch's non-adapted plays to be staged; its cast included William Marlowe, Tom Conti, Philip Bond, Maxine Audley, Adrienne Corri and Bill Stewart. On 27 July 1974, at 2.30 p.m., the play was also broadcast on BBC Radio 4 with a cast including Peter Jeffrey, Patrick Magee and Betty Huntley-Wright; this broadcast, which was produced by Harry Catlin, inspired the creation of the opera, *The Servants*, listed below.

The Servants (written 1977–78) is a libretto based on *The Servants and the Snow* set to music by William Mathias. Mathias explains how he received inspiration to create the work when he heard the play on the radio:

> I was doing something quite mundane one day in July, 1974, with a radio play on in the background. I suddenly realised the play would be ideal for a libretto. Musical ideas began to form and they simply would not go away.[13]

Murdoch was similarly excited by the prospect of having her play adapted into an opera and assisted by writing a libretto.[14] The opera was performed by the Welsh National Opera under Anthony Hose at New Theatre, Cardiff on 15 September 1980 under the auspices of the Arts Council of Wales with a cast including Nigel Douglas, Eiddwen Harrhy, Claire Powell and Henry Newman. It went on to be performed a further five times: at the New Theatre, Cardiff on 19 September, the Bristol Hippodrome on 25 September, the Liverpool Empire Theatre on 2 October, the Swansea Grand Theatre on 10 October and, finally, at the New Theatre, Cardiff on 15 October. A televised performance was broadcast on HTV Wales, 19 August 1983 at 10.30 p.m.[15]

Acastos: Two Platonic Dialogues (written 1977–80) comprises 'Art and Eros: A Dialogue about Art' and 'Above the Gods: A Dialogue about Religion', both of which were written at the suggestion of Michael Kustow, an associate director of the National Theatre.[16] After having been excited by reading *The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists* (1977), Kustow asked if Murdoch would translate her philosophical ideas into 'a piece for actors in Plato's dialogue form, using his key images and arguments, and adding new characters to make her points'.[17] Despite her hesitancy, Murdoch wrote both, and the first, 'Art and Eros: A Dialogue about Art', was performed at a National Theatre Platform Performance in February 1980, directed by Kustow, with Andrew Cruikshank as Socrates and Greg Hicks as Plato. The dialogues are unique in Murdoch's oeuvre for their engagement with drama, literature and philosophy, as illustrated by their later inclusion in *Existentialists and Mystics* (1997). 'Art and Eros: A Dialogue about Art' was performed with the Centro Dramatico Nacional at the Princess Hall in the Teatro Maria Guerrero, Madrid, in April 2018 and later at Oxford Brookes University in February 2020. Currently available records would suggest that 'Above the Gods: A Dialogue about Religion' has never had a debut performance.

The Sea, The Sea (written 1979–84) was adapted from Murdoch's 1978 novel of the same name and she made enquiries about producing the play in late 1984.[18]

Four typescripts in different stages of development are held in the Murdoch Archives.[19] A copy was passed by Murdoch to Bill Alexander (then a director with the Royal Shakespeare Company) in the 1980s for his interest. After Murdoch's death Alexander edited Murdoch's original typescript, and a reading of the play produced by Alexander was performed at the Rose Theatre in Kingston in 2013.[20] The Murdoch Archives hold Alexander's annotated copy and a list of the cast who attended the reading.

The One Alone (written 1982–7), a play with music, was first broadcast on Radio 3 on 13 February 1987 with music by Gary Carpenter performed by the BBC Concert Orchestra and Singers and the Finchley Children's Music Group.[21] The cast included John Church with mezzo-soprano Fiona Kimm and tenor Bonaventura Bottone, both from English National Opera. It is unique among Murdoch's fiction and drama in having no named characters. The cast are symbolic archetypes, defined by their roles, such as Prisoner and Angel, or by their voices, as Bass Solo. The original unpublished playscript is dated 14 January 1982 and presents a more extended meditation on its socio-political themes; the 1995 Colophon Press publication is closer in form to the radio play.[22]

The Black Prince (written 1985–89) was adapted by Murdoch from the 1973 novel of the same name at the encouragement of Josephine Hart.[23] It received its first performance in April 1989 at the Aldwych Theatre, produced by Hart.[24] The play was directed by Stuart Burge with a cast including Ian McDiarmid, Sarah Badel, Simon Williams, John Fortune and Norma West. Performances also took place at the Sewell Barn Theatre, Norwich in April 1991 and at the Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich in June 1993 – the first of these was the debut amateur production of the play with the Brief Encounter Theatre Group (*IMB* 775). Mark Patrick Hederman also showed interest in creating a musical version of the play in 1998, although attempts to produce this would undoubtedly have been hampered by Murdoch's declining health.[25]

A Year of Birds (written 1989–95) is a song cycle for soprano and orchestra.[26] Sir Malcolm Williamson set to music the poems written by Murdoch and illustrated by the engraver, Reynolds Stone, in a 1978 collection of the same name. The first performance took place in a Promenade Concert at the Royal Albert Hall on 20 August 1995 featuring the BBC Concert Orchestra with Alison Hagley. The piece was commissioned by the BBC and was dedicated to Murdoch's mother, Irene. The performance was attended by Murdoch and her husband, John Bayley.

Adaptations of Murdoch's Works

Under the Net (1954) was abridged in ten episodes by Jane Mays and read as a Book at Bedtime on BBC Radio 4 by Stephen Rea, commencing on 13 June 1986. Later, the novel was dramatised in two parts by Nick Fisher for BBC Radio 4, beginning on 12 October 2003, with a cast including Simon Day, Lloyd Hutchinson, Hugh Bonneville, Corin Redgrave and Sarah Badel.

The Sandcastle (1957) was adapted for television by William Ingram as Play of the Week on ITV 9 April 1963, with a cast including Anna Massey, Michael Gwynn and Rachel Kempson.

The Bell (1958) was adapted as a four-part television series on BBC One by Reg Gadney and broadcast from 13 January 1982, with a cast including Ian Holm, Tessa Peake-Jones and Michael Maloney. Later, the novel was adapted as a three-part BBC Radio 4 Classic Serial by Michael Bakewell, commencing in November 1999, with a cast including Cathryn Bradshaw and Jamie Bamber.

A Severed Head (1961) was adapted as a BBC Radio 4 15 Minute Drama in five episodes by Stephen Wakelam and broadcast in August 2015. The cast included Julian Rhind-Tutt, Matthew Marsh, Sam Dale, Helen Schlesinger and Victoria Hamilton.

An Unofficial Rose (1962) was adapted as a four-part television mini-series for BBC Two by Simon Raven, beginning on 28 December 1974. The cast included Maurice Denham, John Woodvine and Ann Bell.

The Sea, The Sea (1978) was adapted in four parts by Richard Crane, performed with a cast including John Wood, Joyce Redman, Siân Philips and T.P. McKenna, and broadcast in 1993 as a BBC Radio 4 Classic Serial. The novel was later adapted in two parts by Robin Brooks and broadcast on BBC Radio 4 in August 2015, with a cast including Jeremy Irons, Maggie Steed and Simon Williams.

Film Adaptations of Murdoch's Works

In *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (2001), Peter J. Conradi details the limited success Murdoch had in adapting her works for film.[27] Only one complete full-length film was made in her lifetime. *A Severed Head* was filmed for Columbia Pictures in 1969 with a cast including Richard Attenborough, Claire Bloom, Ian Holm and Lee Remick and was directed by Dick Clement.[28] Murdoch was said to have found Claire Bloom touchingly enthusiastic about her role as Honor Klein (*IMC* 115). While she may have been encouraged by the cast for the film adaptation of *A Severed Head*, she apparently had 'reservations' about Frederic Raphael's screenplay and, when she saw the film in May 1970, she noted that it was '[t]errible' (*IMAL* 533).

A collection of other novels were close to – or actually were, in part – produced, all without success: a film company tried unsuccessfully to shoot *Under the Net* in 1962; an option for *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956) was sold but no film was made; the Swedish director, Bo Widerberg, showed an interest in *The Sandcastle* in 1968 that came to nothing; *The Unicorn* was optioned by Tony Richardson in 1964 but he did not proceed with the project; finally, the film rights for *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970) were bought by Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward in 1971 (*IMAL* 532–3). Conradi explains that, although Murdoch was especially thrilled by the last project, both she and her theatrical agent, Peggy Ramsey, disliked Peter Ustinov's script (*IMAL* 533). These failed attempts reflect, Conradi recounts, what Murdoch saw as 'a persistent jinx on my cinema prospects' (*IMAL* 533).

In March 2019, however, *The Italian Girl* (1964) was optioned by Rebel Republic Films, and they are currently working on a screenplay under the direction of Garo Berberian. Interestingly, *The Italian Girl* marked a point of contention in Murdoch's relationship with Ramsey, whom she left in 1978 for another theatrical agent, Robin Dalton, after Ramsey appeared to have forwarded Murdoch's written reservations about James Saunders's wish to write the screenplay: 'She wanted', Conradi writes, 'Edward [*sic*] on film to be more serious than he had been in Saunders's stage adaptation' (*IMAL* 533). Nevertheless, the Rebel Republic Films adaptation of *The Italian Girl* may posthumously satisfy Murdoch's wish to get a 'decent film' of one of her books (*IMAL* 533).

The information for this chronological list has been gathered from a broad collection of sources, including John Fletcher and Cheryl Bove's *Iris Murdoch: A Descriptive Primary and Annotated Secondary Bibliography* (1994), Peter J. Conradi's *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (2001), Valerie Purton's *An Iris Murdoch Chronology* (2007), Avril Horner and Anne Rowe's edited *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934–1995* (2015) and the invaluable Murdoch Archives. Many of the textbooks and commentaries on Murdoch's works include lists of, and background details about, one or more of her dramatic works. Further information about broadcast adaptations of her works can be found using online resources, such as the BBC Genome website and IMDb.[29] Among the resources included in the Murdoch Archives are playscripts, original programmes, production photographs and contemporary reviews. There are very few essays other than theatre reviews which comment in depth on the works explored in this essay.[30] The resources listed above, however, provide ample resources for future scholars to engage with Murdoch's dramatic works.

1. An endnote is provided where additional information is required to corroborate the dates for the works in this first list. Some of the writing dates provided in this list come from Murdoch's manuscripts. While these dates offer a definitive idea of when the script was finished, Murdoch often expected her plays to undergo a process of editing – unlike her famously unedited novels – so that they could better suit performance. Many of the manuscript dates are listed in John Fletcher and Cheryl Bove's *Iris Murdoch: A Descriptive Primary and Annotated Secondary Bibliography* (London: Garland, 1994), hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *IMB*.
2. Murdoch received a production contract for *A Severed Head* in early 1962; in January 1963, she gave the playscript to J.B. Priestley, who said it needed more work to make it ready for performance, and in April 1963, when she saw a preliminary run of it, she felt happy with their work. See Iris Murdoch to Norah Smallwood (early 1962), in *Living on Paper*, ed. by Avril Horner and Anne Rowe (London: Chatto & Windus 2015), 221–2, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *LOP*; Valerie Purton, *An Iris Murdoch Chronology* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 91–2, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *IMC*.
3. Iris Murdoch, *A Severed Head: A Play in Three Acts* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964). Subsequently published as Iris Murdoch, *A Severed Head: a Play*, French's Acting Edition (London: French, 1964). Both editions list J.B. Priestley as a contributor.
4. Details of the Nairobi production of *A Severed Head* can be found at KUAS139/1, from the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives.
5. James Saunders and Iris Murdoch, *The Italian Girl: A Play*, French's Acting Edition (London: French, 1968). The copyright notice reads 'Iris Murdoch and James Saunders 1968'.
6. Murdoch's manuscript for *The Three Arrows* is dated 3 May 1969 (*IMB* 817).
7. Iris Murdoch, *The Three Arrows and The Servants and the Snow: Plays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973). Subsequently published in Iris Murdoch, *Three Plays: The Servants and the Snow, The Three Arrows and The Black Prince* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1989).
8. A journal entry dated 6 July 1969 – as well as the original manuscript of the play – confirms that Murdoch had 'Finished *JJJ* today'. See Iris Murdoch, Journal, Feb 1964–18 Mar 1968, 189, KUAS202/1/10, from the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives; Iris Murdoch, manuscript of *Joanna, Joanna, Joanna*, KUAS202/7/1, in the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives.
9. Although there were some attempts by the publishers to shorten the title to *Joanna*, by the last available proof the title was changed – despite the typographical challenges this apparently presented – to *Joanna, Joanna*. See KUAS228, from the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives, which contains the correspondence and proofs concerning the Colophon Press publication of *Joanna, Joanna*.
10. Iris Murdoch, *Joanna, Joanna: A Play in Two Acts*, collector's edition of 143 copies (London: Colophon Press with Old Town Books, 1994).
11. See Miles Leeson's essay in this issue of the *Iris Murdoch Review*, 49–54.
12. Murdoch's manuscript for *The Servants and the Snow* is dated 8 December 1969 (*IMB* 817).
13. William Mathias, quoted in an interview with an unknown author, *South Wales Echo*, Thursday 18 August 1983. Further details can also be found in the official programme issued by the Welsh National Opera.
14. William Mathias, *The Servants: Opera in Three Acts*, with a libretto by Iris Murdoch (London: Oxford University Press, 1980).
15. The Murdoch Archives hold photographs (see KUAS202/10/163) and a press pack (see KUAS202/10/166) for the HTV production.
16. Iris Murdoch, *Acastos: Two Platonic Dialogues* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1986). Subsequently published in an edition by Penguin, Harmondsworth, in 1987 and, later, in *Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. by Peter J. Conradi (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), 464–531.
17. Murdoch wrote to Peter J. Conradi in April 1983 explaining that 'the dialogue wasn't "commissioned", it was suggested in a friendly way by Kustow without reference to the theatre' (*LOP* 500). Michael Kustow's account of how Murdoch came to write *Acastos: Two Platonic Dialogues* is recounted in an interview: Michael Kustow, 'Boundary Breaker and Moral Maker, 1992', in *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction*, ed. by Gillian Dooley (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 2003), 241–4, 243.
18. A marginal note in Murdoch's journals suggests that she was considering adapting *The Sea, The Sea* into a play soon after it was published in November 1978: 'PLAY: Charles, Hartley, Ben, James – how simplify ?'. One of Murdoch's theatrical agents forwarded an early draft of *The Sea, The Sea* to a director at the National Theatre in November 1984. For Murdoch's journal entry see: Iris Murdoch, Journal, 23 May 1978–28 Dec 1980, 33, KUAS202/1/13, from the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives; the Murdoch Archives contain a folder containing details about the early draft of *The Sea, The Sea* (KUAS171).
19. The Iris Murdoch Archives contain three folders with scripts for *The Sea, The Sea*: KUAS171 is the earliest script, then KUAS132 is Richard Crane's radio playscript, and KUAS120 is 'copies of playscripts'.
20. For Bill Alexander's reflections on the process of editing the playscript, see Anne Rowe's essay in this issue of the *Iris Murdoch Review*, 36–48.
21. Iris Murdoch, *The One Alone*, collectors' edition of 232 signed copies (London: Colophon Press with Old Town Books, 1995).
22. Murdoch sent a typed carbon copy of the original typescript, dated 14 Jan 1982, to Peter J. Conradi in August 1990. See Iris Murdoch to Peter J. Conradi, August 1990, KUAS6/5/1/2, from the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University.
23. Murdoch met Josephine Hart in 1984 around 15–19 December at the Connaught Hotel – the earlier date is listed in Purton, although she gives the following year (*IMC* 173); the later date is given by Hart herself in an interview. At this meeting, Avril Horner and Anne Rowe note, Hart suggested that *The Black Prince* should be adapted for stage (*LOP* 471). Soon after, Murdoch wrote of her gratitude and interest at the prospect of the adaptation in a letter to Hart on 28 December, which she ends with 'hopes for 1985' (*LOP* 521). Later, on 21 August 1987, she writes to Hart about

various alterations to the playscript, which were suggested by Richard Eyre (*LOP* 540–1). For Hart's and Murdoch's recollections of their meeting, as well as Hart's involvement in the production of the play, see Louise Baring, 'How We Met: 51. Josephine Hart and Iris Murdoch', *The Independent on Sunday*, 13 September 1992, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/how-we-met-51-josephine-hart-and-iris-murdoch-1551214.html> [accessed 7 April 2021].

24. Iris Murdoch, *Three Plays: The Servants and the Snow, The Three Arrows and The Black Prince* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1989). Also published in a standalone edition, as Iris Murdoch, *The Black Prince: A Play* (London: Samuel French, 1989).
25. See Mark Patrick Hederman to Iris Murdoch and John Bayley, 22 July 1998, KUAS6/7/1/21/5, from the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University.
26. Originally published as a book of poetry by two different presses: Iris Murdoch, *A Year of Birds*, with engravings by Reynolds Stone (Tisbury, Wiltshire: Compton Press, 1978); Iris Murdoch, *A Year of Birds*, with engravings by Reynolds Stone (London: Chatto & Windus, 1984). As a song cycle, it is published as: Malcolm Williamson, *A Year of Birds*, with text by Iris Murdoch (Royston: Campion Press, 1995). The complete catalogue of Williamson's works, produced by the publisher Josef Weinberger, lists *A Year of Birds* as 1989–95, suggesting that he may have begun work on it some time before its debut in 1995. See 'Malcolm Williamson (1931–2003) Complete Catalogue' here: <https://www.josef-weinberger.com/downloads/Williamson_Catalogue_(Josef_Weinberger)_(reduced).pdf> [accessed 6 April 2021].
27. Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), 532, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *IMAL*.
28. According to the 'Trivia' page on IMDb, the production company, Columbia Pictures, struggled to secure a director because they had spent such a large amount of money on the screenwriter, Frederic Raphael; his fee of $210,000 apparently made him the highest-paid screenwriter in British movies at the time. See <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0067738/trivia?ref_=tt_trv_trv> [accessed 30 August 2021].
29. See <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk> [accessed 25 August 2021] for listings information that the BBC printed in the *Radio Times* from 1923 to 2009.
30. Wim Bronzwaer, John Fletcher, Wei H. Kao and Frances White are among some of the writers who have written critical pieces on Murdoch's dramatic works. See, for example, Wim Bronzwaer, 'Iris Murdoch's Image of Plato in *The Fire and the Sun* and *Acastos*', in *Encounters with Iris Murdoch*, ed. by Richard Todd (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1988), 55–67; Wei H. Ko, 'Domination, Resistance, and the Anglo-Irish Landlords in *The Servants and the Snow*', in *Iris Murdoch and the Moral Imagination*, ed. by M.F. Simone Roberts and Alison Scott-Baumann (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2010), 127–46; Frances White, 'A Post-Christian Concept of Martyrdom and the Murdochian Chorus: *The One Alone* and T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*', in *Iris Murdoch: Texts and Contexts*, ed. by Anne Rowe and Avril Horner (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 177–91. See John Fletcher's essay in this issue of the *Iris Murdoch Review*, 19–35.

A Novelist's Plays: Iris Murdoch and the Theatre

John Fletcher

Writing a novel can be a lonely, tedious, even painful job, requiring months and sometimes years of seclusion and self-denial with often uncertain success at the outcome of so much self-sacrifice. So it is not surprising that novelists are frequently drawn to the theatre: writing for the stage affords direct contact with the wide range of people and their exciting world of greasepaint, lights and costume, together with the possibility of ascertaining in rehearsal if a play is going to 'work', and if not of making the necessary adjustments in good time. To the novelist, weary of struggling alone with the blank page in a 'room of one's own' as Virginia Woolf put it, the theatre holds out the hope (and for some perhaps the illusion) that writing for thespians is the reverse of solitary.

Some great fiction writers, like Samuel Beckett, have made the transition to the stage successfully and painlessly (when he was tired of the monologues of Molloy and other garrulous narrators in his novels he breathed life into them by devising dialogue and stage-business for Estragon and Vladimir to perform). Others, like Henry James or Joseph Conrad, failed. Why this should be so is a fascinating question, one best answered, perhaps, by looking in detail at a particular case. An exceptionally interesting one is that of the leading British novelist Iris Murdoch who, in addition to writing major works of moral philosophy and of prose fiction, has always had a strong interest in the theatre. But keen as she has been to write good, professional plays, she has never quite succeeded in doing so. In this essay I try to find out why this very good – many would say great – novelist has turned out, despite strong motivation, to have been a reluctant, even rebellious, and therefore only partially effective writer for the stage. The first part of the essay, accordingly, is devoted to the history of Iris Murdoch's involvement in the theatre from the early 1960s to the present day; in part II, the earliest (and most successfully commercial) of her dramatic works, *A Severed Head*, is examined in some detail; and in the concluding section some reflections are offered on the wider issue of the difficulties faced by novelists who attempt to write for the stage, and on the

theoretical question of the different aptitudes required by the novelist on the one hand and the playwright on the other.

I

A Severed Head, Iris Murdoch's fifth novel, was first published in 1961, and soon afterwards she set about adapting it for the stage. She was already friends with J.B. Priestley, and he suggested a collaboration when she felt that her version was unsatisfactory. The resulting script was staged as '*A Severed Head*, a new comedy by Iris Murdoch and J. B. Priestley' at the Criterion Theatre, Piccadilly Circus, London, on 27 June 1963 after opening on a provincial try out at the Theatre Royal, Bristol, on 7 May, and before transferring to the Royal Theatre, New York (where it ran for about three weeks) in the fall of the following year. The play was (in London at least) a considerable popular success – it ran for more than two and a half years at the Criterion with 1,111 performances – but press reaction was mixed: the quality papers on the whole liked it, and the popular dailies found it either pretentious, or smutty (after all *Lady Chatterley's Lover* had been prosecuted for obscenity a few short years before), or both. Milton Shulman's verdict was typical of the tabloids: he dismissed the play as 'an unlikely game of musical beds' (*London Evening Standard*, 28 June 1963), while Roger Gellert spoke for most of the highbrow critics in recommending 'a marvellously bizarre and witty evening' (*New Statesman*, 5 July 1963). The joint authors certainly did well out of the play: in the financial year which ended in April 1964 Iris Murdoch received royalties amounting to almost double the starting salary of a university full professor of the time, and rights were sold in half a dozen foreign countries as well. The play was, for instance, performed in the Netherlands in Dutch translation in October 1964, shortly before the New York transfer. It was even filmed by Columbia Pictures a few years later in a production starring Lee Remick, Richard Attenborough, Ian Holm and Claire Bloom, directed by Dick Clement: Iris Murdoch was not involved in this enterprise, although she was consulted over it.

So the play, by all the usual standards, enjoyed a successful career, at least at first. There were several repertory productions in England after the première, and no doubt a number of amateur performances for which no reliable figures exist, but the only new professional production in recent years has been at the Palace, Westcliff, in August 1978, where it ran for just over a fortnight. A major revival is now unlikely, and today, over two decades after its composition, the play seems to have failed to become a repertory piece. The reasons for its early success and recent neglect are perhaps obvious enough: in 1963 the play was remarkably '*osée*' in its treatment of adultery and incest, but its power to shock in this respect has inevitably waned; moreover, Priestley's name on the playbill was undoubtedly a considerable asset at the time, but now – particularly after his death – could not be expected to legitimise a new production.

No doubt emboldened by Priestley's example, playwright James Saunders took an original play written by Iris Murdoch, based on her novel *The Italian Girl* which was published in 1964, and made a number of structural alterations to it, but most of the dialogue (especially the Italian song which Miss Murdoch considers so 'important')[1] is hers. It was first produced at the Bristol Old Vic on 29 November 1967, and transferred to Wyndham's Theatre, London, on the 1 February 1968. James Saunders explained in an interview with Michael Billington that the play, which took about three months to write, was conceived 'purely as an entertainment,'[2] and most of the press treated it as such. Mary Holland's review was typical: the 'fastest, best made farce in town' was given, she said, a 'tongue in cheek' direction in 'the outrageous style it deserves' (*Plays and Players*, April 1968). A more thoughtful Philip French pointed out, however, that '*The Italian Girl* doesn't exactly shriek out to be staged. If it had to be translated the obvious form would be a movie in the French style.' The novel, 'by no means Miss Murdoch's best', had been given, he said, a 'pretty faithful' rendering, 'yet by the act of making a relatively conventional dramatisation [Saunders] has made a thundering melodrama with overtones of black comedy' (*New Statesman*, 29 December 1967). Few other critics responded as conscientiously as French did. Peter Lewis considered it an 'enjoyable wallow' (*Daily Mail*, 7 February 1968), David Nathan 'a good excuse for sex' (*Sun*, same date), and Henry Popkin (London *Times*, same date) agreed that the play offered 'surprise and a little fun' but that it did not 'stand logical scrutiny'.

Thus greeted by the critics, the play failed to enjoy the success of *A Severed Head*; there were far fewer performances, fewer foreign sales, no New York transfer, and no approach from Hollywood. There were some repertory productions following the premiere, but there has been no revival since then, and the chances of a new production being mounted now must be considered remote. The factors which explain the box office success of *A Severed Head* (Priestley's participation in particular) were absent in the case of the second adaptation, and by the late 1960s the 'bourgeois sex comedy' aspect could no longer provoke the same *frisson* as at the start of the decade. Not to put too fine a point on it, the formula which had achieved a certain notoriety on the first occasion failed to work the second time around.

The publication of the script – by Samuel French in their 'French's Acting Edition' series in 1968 – passed largely unnoticed, whereas the issuing of *A Severed Head* by Chatto & Windus (publishers of all Iris Murdoch's novels) gave rise to a number of reviews, notably by the popular journalist Malcolm Muggeridge (in the *London Evening Standard*, 24 March 1964, and syndicated in a couple of provincial newspapers). Although Muggeridge was sceptical about the authenticity of the setting ('Hard-Drinking Men, Miss Murdoch,' his headline read, 'Don't Act Like

This'), the authors of *A Severed Head* must have been gratified at the publicity which he gave them.

It would need a detailed discussion of *The Italian Girl* to explain precisely why the adaptation does not work; apart from the fact that I want to devote the bulk of this essay to *A Severed Head*, there is only tedium to be gained from negative demonstrations. But a few indications are worth giving. Whereas *A Severed Head* has all the speed, elaboration and stylisation of a Restoration comedy, and developed an action which, if not particularly credible, never fails to sustain the audience's interest and involvement, *The Italian Girl* has a weak patch about two thirds of the way through where the spectator's attention is liable to wander, and a good half of the characters are difficult to animate on stage. The *Evening Standard*'s anonymous reviewer was not being particularly unfair in calling it a 'flawed and unsatisfactory play' (7 February 1968); nor was Ronald Hastings, writing in the *Daily Telegraph* (same date), in suggesting that the story becomes 'too frantic' as a play because too 'telescoped'. Perhaps Arthur Thirkell went to the heart of the matter when he noted in the *Daily Mirror* (same date) that the work is just 'not very amusing', something which certainly cannot be said of *A Severed Head*. And whereas the characters in *A Severed Head* are cheekily (and so rather attractively) amoral, the fornicators in *The Italian Girl* are repulsive, and those of greater sexual rectitude, Edmund and the Italian girl Maggie, are difficult to make interesting (in spite of Harold Hobson's curious judgement in the *Sunday Times* of 11 February 1968 that the character of Edmund is 'a thing of moral beauty'). Perhaps this stems from the fact that, as French pointed out, *The Italian Girl* is by general agreement Iris Murdoch's weakest novel. *A Severed Head*, on the other hand, is one of the most brilliant and profound of her entire fiction. Of course, many of the moral subtleties of the book become blurred in the play, as we shall see; but the problem with *The Italian Girl* is that this novel is too short, and the dénouement too rushed, to develop convincingly an argument (evidently intended by the author) about Edmund's spiritual renewal and Otto's seeing himself truly; the play's dénouement cannot then help appearing even more enigmatic and perfunctory.

With such material, therefore, James Saunders had a rather thankless task; still, it has to be said that his becoming involved in the first place implies in itself something about his own skills and instincts as a playwright, especially when contrasted with the formidable professionalism of J.B. Priestley. Saunders's structural alterations seemed to amount to the displacement of certain scenes (e.g. in act one, scene three, a particular piece of dialogue occurs at this relatively early point in the play whereas it is found later in the novel, and Isabel's revelation of her infatuation with Levkin is also sprung on the spectator earlier than on the reader of the book). Other features of the play – the greater exposure of Maggie (the Italian girl of the title), the well-managed *coups de théatre* such as the discovery that both Flora and her mother are pregnant by Levkin, and the *Lear*-like spectacle of Levkin bearing his dead sister's body onto the stage – were probably in the original script which Iris Murdoch produced on her own. Certainly such things as the thunderbolt occasioned by the revelation that Maggie is the sole beneficiary of the deceased mother's will are so characteristic of Iris Murdoch's ability to spring surprises in her novels that one would naturally expect her to have invented them here.

Whatever the reasons for the relative failure of the collaboration, Iris Murdoch decided that henceforth she would write plays without anyone else's assistance. She has written more drama than she has had published or performed, but I am of course concerned here only with what is in the public domain. The next play to see the light of day was *The Servants and the Snow*, first produced at the Greenwich Theatre, London, on 29 September 1970. It attracted little press comment (I have traced only four reviews) and ran only until 24 October. There have been no subsequent productions of the play itself, there has been an operatic adaptation by William Mathias, which I shall return to later.

The play is set in a Ruritanian country about the turn of the century, and the entire action takes place in a large, isolated country house in the depths of winter. Clearly the ensuing claustrophobic atmosphere appealed to Iris Murdoch and explains why she chose this setting. The old master has died and his son Basil returns from the capital to claim his inheritance; however, he makes it clear from the outset that he is going to be a very different landowner. The action of the play concerns his well-meant but misguided attempts to liberalise and democratise a community which is still profoundly feudal in its attitudes to authority. The predictable happens: sowing the wind, Basil reaps the whirlwind. His reforms and innovations are not merely misunderstood, they are rejected. Too late, he attempts to return to the tried and trusted ways of his ancestors, but by now he has dissipated the charisma normally surrounding his function and person, and he is murdered by his own wife, who is bitterly jealous over Basil's decision to take his father's mistress, the servant Marina, as his own. But although the bored, frivolous Oriane actually pulls the trigger, it is Marina's son Maxim, a revolutionary intellectual, who has already taken it upon himself to condemn Basil to death and appoint himself his executioner. This is well understood by Basil's brother in law General Klein, who arrives as a *deus ex machina* to take control of the situation in the closing seconds of the play. He orders Maxim to be put in chains, and 'Madam', now conveniently fainting, to be treated with care and respect. As in a Jacobean tragedy, blood has been shed in atonement for blood shed: Basil's death, in the eyes of these simple-minded, superstitious people, has avenged that of Marina's husband, murdered by Basil's father when the latter, invoking the *droit de seigneur* which so appals and yet fascinates his liberal son, insisted on unhindered access to Marina's bed. So as the curtain falls, order is restored, authority is re-established, and the estate has its proper 'master' once more.

This may strike some spectators as a cynical political message, especially coming from a writer whose public stance on such issues as homosexuality or the war in Vietnam has been an impeccably enlightened and liberal one. This is not the place to go into the issue of the discrepancies between Iris Murdoch's stated political and social views and the often harsh, almost reactionary 'subtext' of her creative writings, which are marked (like *The Servants* and indeed, *A Severed Head*) by a violence, and a toughness, curiously at odds with the undoubtedly sincere *bien-pensant* humanism of her nonfictional publications. My concern here is with the plays as works for the theatre, and *The Servants and the Snow* comes over as a strong, unsentimental meditation on the limitations of a good, well meaning, but weak man. Basil therefore offers a rewarding role for the actor, as does Oriane, who feels so out of place in this grim society that she stoops to flirting with the valet to distract herself from the cold and the rats of this (for her) barbarous world. Other characters are more difficult to render convincing. Marina is intended to be a *femme fatale*, almost a nymphomaniac, whose overpowering sexuality penetrates the defences of a master who flatters himself that he has nothing in common with his lecherous, brutish father, but the part as written does not assist the actress much in projecting the character: Iris Murdoch has not the ability of (say) a Tennessee Williams in creating a woman of smouldering, ultimately destructive erotic power. And if the play conjures up, swiftly and economically, a convincingly tense and claustrophobic atmosphere – the snow of the title maroons the protagonists as surely as an ocean would do – it fails to sustain this effect, as *coup de théâtre* falls thick on *coup de théâtre* to end in almost farcical melodrama as General Klein (played by the same actor as a vagabond gypsy who has been hounded out of the palace and whom the audience are rather coyly expected to recognise) suddenly makes his presence felt in the closing moments. In drama as serious as this, one should not be tempted to giggle at the rebellious thought that the dénouement would have been bungled if the general had got stuck in a snow drift and missed his cue. What is wrong with this way of resolving things is that it is so contrived as to be quite unconvincing, something Iris Murdoch usually avoids in her novels. These have their surprises – as I have already suggested, this is part of their undoubted appeal, of their sheer entertainment value – but however unexpected a revelation, it usually appears, once it has occurred, to have an inner logic, a situational necessity, which carries conviction as it simultaneously delights and impresses. Iris Murdoch simply does not seem to have the ability to pull off such satisfying surprises in works written directly for the stage. To be fair, she is herself acutely aware of this limitation. 'I can invent a story', she has said, 'I can write dialogue, but that's not being a playwright', and she accepts that it will be as a novelist that she will be remembered.[3] With engaging lucidity she herself has put her finger on the problem:

> I think the interior light of a play has to be something very hard and central, and, in a sense, simple, whereas in a novel you can do almost anything ... In a play you've got to hold the attention of the audience all the time.[4]

It seems that it is this essential simplicity of drama that is beyond her. Like her idol Henry James – who was also chagrined not to succeed as a playwright – she is immensely intelligent and self-aware, but a powerful intellect alone does not equip one to create effective works for the stage. One must have an instinct for the simple, central image around which a play can be built, such as the two clowns waiting at a roadside for Mr Godot, who twice never comes, or the wife and mother who agrees, with at once incredible and convincing alacrity, to be set up in a posh flat in Soho and work as a call-girl for her husband's family in Pinter's *The Homecoming* (to take only two examples from the contemporary theatre). Set beside such masterly inventions, Basil's dithering is dramatically as well as intrinsically feeble.

Nevertheless, there is something in *The Servants and the Snow* which can be preserved, and that is the claustrophobic atmosphere I have already referred to as the play's strength. By one of those extraordinary accidents which seem in retrospect predestined, the Welsh composer William Mathias was idly listening to the radio one day, as he did some routine task like copying, when he heard Iris Murdoch's play (it was given a radio production on 22 July 1974), and he sensed at once that this could serve as the basis of the libretto he was looking for. The playwright herself had had the same idea: she had offered the idea to Benjamin Britten, who had politely turned it down. It was therefore easy for writer and musician to agree on a collaboration. It soon became clear that the play would have to be drastically simplified: two characters (the bailiff and the valet) would have to be dropped, and the dialogue cut by half. That settled, Iris Murdoch and Mathias drafted a libretto, completed in 1977, which introduced a chorus both to abbreviate the action and to heighten the dramatic impact. The character of Marina was foregrounded, and her great physical beauty stressed. The brooding menace implicit in the play was more sharply brought out, particularly at the point where mass is in progress in the servants hall, and in the opera 'qui tollis peccata mundi,' appropriately for the theme of atonement, is sung threateningly. In the libretto, finally, the end is more carefully worked out, the effect created by General Klein's arrival being that of a *coup d'état*, less perfunctory and less of a *deus ex machina* than in the play, and thus a good deal tougher than in the first version. Appropriately, it is not Klein who speaks last in the opera, but Marina, whose closing aria, to a poem by Iris Murdoch, is 'a kind of reprieve song'[5] heard on tape through loudspeakers as the stage is cleared, *Hamlet*-like, with only Basil's dead body left on the set:

A Servant can think on liberty
And know what freedom means,
As those who have never seen the sea
Can visit in their dreams.
Though misery falls in a shower of rain
And sadness comes each day,
That wisdom can only be learnt through pain
Is what all wise men say.

The snow falls here and the snow falls there
And we suffer and hope to be,
Better by far than our fathers were
Gentle, and wise and free ...[6]

The Welsh National Opera gave the premiere of *The Servants* (as the opera was called) in Cardiff, at the New Theatre, on 15 September 1980. It then went on tour, and was later televised by Harlech Television. It provoked a good deal of press comment, much of it hostile, and most of it of course directed at the composer. Since opera lies outside my competence, I am diffident about offering an opinion, but the view of a sympathetic critic, Malcolm Boyd, is worth noting. The 'subtleties and complexities of motivation' which survived from the play into the libretto, he wrote, seem often (despite the gain of a 'sharper dramatic edge') 'to demand the explicitness of the spoken word rather than the cloak that music can easily provide for them' (*Musical Times*, November 1980); in other words, if Iris Murdoch had perhaps revised the work on the lines of the libretto, it might have improved it considerably as a stage play, but Mathias was courting failure in setting such a text to music. This view is reinforced by Paul Griffiths' backhanded compliment in the London *Times* (17 September 1980) to Iris Murdoch on her 'neat little melodrama'. For Rodney Milnes, however, William Mathias was not strict enough with his collaborator: 'the libretto is very much a shortened play rather than a libretto: many episodes that could have been conflated or telescoped haven't been' (*Spectator*, 27 September 1980); on the other hand, Mark Morris found 'nothing inherently wrong with the libretto' (*Classical Music*, 11 October 1980), to which, Tom Sutcliffe felt, the music failed to find 'an equivalent quality' (*Vogue*, November 1980).

Iris Murdoch's next work for the stage was *The Three Arrows*. Set in mediaeval Japan – a country which has fascinated her ever since she first read the *Tale of Genji* – it deals with the power struggle between the imperial family and the Shogun in which a highborn political prisoner, Prince Yorimitsu, is a pawn. It is even more concerned with political philosophy than *The Servants*, therefore, and thus also more of a 'debate' play. There is nothing inherently wrong with debate plays – Sartre wrote some good ones – but this one is too static, too 'pedagogical', to work in the theatre.

At the same time, it has a complicated plot which it is unnecessary to summarise here. Suffice it to say that, after many twists, Yorimitsu triumphs over his enemies but only at the expense, in the closing moments of the play, of the death of the Crown Princess who loves him. The 'three arrows' represent a traditional trial by ordeal which the suitor of the Princess must undergo, but at a deeper level they stand for the three choices which are offered to Yorimitsu as the price of his liberty: withdrawal into the contemplative life of the monastery; marginalisation as the husband of the Crown Princess in a gilded stud; and the uncertainties of a return to a career as a military chieftain. Willy-nilly – for there is something of Hamlet in Yorimitsu, as in so many of Iris Murdoch's characters – he chooses the military option, or rather, has it imposed upon him by circumstances.

The weakness of the play, once again, is a sudden and confusing dénouement, in which the emperor – hitherto presented as a weak and totally marginal figure – abruptly takes charge, like General Klein, and unravels the situation literally in the final moments. In this instance the Murdoch surprise is neither convincing nor plausible because, in spite of certain forward hints, it is not adequately prepared for or explained (in particular the important part played by the old Zen teacher Father Akita in the resolution of the problem is suggested but not made clear). Once again, a *deus ex machina* is offered in place of an intrinsically logical conclusion, and the result is pure melodrama. Moreover, the author relies too heavily on the audience picking up indications which are far from obvious. 'With luck the audience might suppose...' is a characteristically hopeful stage direction, like 'the audience ought to grasp' (what if it doesn't? who is to blame, the director, the set designer, or the author?). Such disarmingly modest remarks betray a lack of confidence on the playwright's part.

Still, there are as always in Iris Murdoch's writings some fine moments. The scene in which the Crown Princess is betrayed by her lady in waiting Kuritsubo reveals the insight of a master of psychological analysis:

Lady Rokuni: Tell me one thing, and stop trembling, I'm not going to eat you.
Kuritsubo: Yes?
Rokuni: Why did you come here to tell me this?
Kuritsub: I just – wanted to help. I thought you might be interested.
Rokuni: That is certainly a lie. Answer again.
Kuritsubo: The prisoner is my husband's best friend.
Rokuni: That is better, but still not good enough. Again.
Kuritsubo: I saw Yorimitsu once.
Rokuni: You don't want her [the Crown Princess] to have him. You couldn't bear it.
[Kuritsubo *dumbly signifies assent*.]

> That is good. That is the best of all ... Never be ashamed of what are called evil motives.[7]

Impressive as this fragment of dialogue is, the effect is unfortunately dissipated by a general lecture which Rokuni then gives Koritsubo about the basic egoism of human beings. Once again, the pedagogue takes over from the dramatist; it is perhaps revealing that Iris Murdoch told Ronald Hayman that she wrote plays 'about the problems my pupils used to write essays on.'[8]

Finally, there are too many arch allusions to Shakespeare, whom Iris Murdoch frequently mentioned in interviews as her great mentor. The three arrows recalls the choice of caskets in *The Merchant of Venice*, from which the Crown Princess's derogatory comments on her unwelcome suitors are also imitated, and Lady Rokuni somewhat too insistently recalls Lady Macbeth. In the light of all this, it is not surprising that the play has only had one production. It was premiered at the Arts Theatre, Cambridge, on 17 October 1972.[9] Press comment was almost uniformly unfavourable (the exception once again being the veteran critic Harold Hobson) although not hostile. Robert Brustein spoke for most of his colleagues in saying that 'there is something linear and scenically abrupt about the play's construction, something lacking in true inevitability that tempts one to nod' (The *Observer*, 29 October 1972), and B. A. Young in the *Financial Times* 24 October 1972 located this weakness in Act II, 'where the scenes are too many, too short, and too uneventful.'

Iris Murdoch's most recent play is *Art and Eros*, a Platonic dialogue in one act, staged as an animated debate in modern dress by Michael Kustow (who had suggested the idea to the author) at the Olivier Theatre (part of the National Theatre) on 5 February 1980, and again on 7 and 26 February, 4 and 7 March, and 2 April 1980. The text is currently being revised for publication, so it cannot be discussed here in any detail. But it is clear that this work carries the 'debate' play to its logical conclusion. There is no attempt, on the part of either Kustow or Iris Murdoch, to conceal the fact that *Art and Eros* is a dramatised version of her philosophical work *The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists* (1977). There were a couple of reviews: one predictably doubtful by Lorna Sage (*Times Literary Supplement*, 15 February 1980), and the other, equally predictably favourable, by A.S. Byatt (*Spectator*, 8 March 1980). Sage's has the merit of pointing out that *Art and Eros*, 'this curious hybrid bit of sub or meta theatre' fails to exemplify its argument: 'you would need an altogether sleazier, sexier event tricked out in all the tatty splendour of spectacle, in short a real play, to say it properly'; a critique which goes to the heart of the matter.

Nevertheless, if this survey of Iris Murdoch's plays seems too negative, it should be said in their defence that they have attracted some distinguished practitioners. I have already mentioned some of them. Priestley was one of the leading, certainly one of the most popularly successful playwrights of his generation, and James

Saunders has a solid reputation among those of a later generation. William Mathias is a leading British composer, and it would be perhaps premature to write off *The Servants* as an opera. As for directors and actors, Val May directed *A Severed Head* and *The Italian Girl*; the former play starred Robert Hardy as Martin Lynch-Gibbon, and the latter offered Timothy West a part almost made to measure in Otto, the huge, lecherous, gluttonous but touchingly vulnerable elder brother. Tom Conti played Maxim, Marina's embittered radical son, in *The Servants and the Snow*, and Ian McKellen took the leading role, that of Prince Yorimitsu, in *The Three Arrows*. Finally, veteran actor Andrew Cruickshank created the part of Socrates in *Art and Eros*. And these are only the most famous names; equally distinguished, if less well-known actors and actresses have been involved in Iris Murdoch's drama. This in itself says something about the way professional theatre people respond to her work.

II

I have already implied that *A Severed Head*, the first play, is Iris Murdoch's most successful and accomplished work for the theatre. Indeed, alone of her dramatic works, it repays close study. There are five known states or phases in the play's development:

1. The original novel (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961);
2. Iris Murdoch's first attempt at an adaptation;
3. A three-act reading version (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964);
4. The acting version in two acts (London: Samuel French, 1964);
5. The film script on which the 1970 movie was based.

Of the above, the second is not in the public domain and the last can be ignored since Iris Murdoch had little or nothing to do with it. I shall therefore concentrate on the original novel (abbreviated as N), the reading version (R), and the version for the stage (S). (Although R comes logically after S, it was in fact published a few months earlier.)

In all three states the plot is substantially the same. A wealthy wine merchant, Martin Lynch-Gibbon, feels secure in his clandestine relationship with his young mistress Georgie Hands, but his world begins to disintegrate when his wife Antonia announces out of the blue that their mutual friend, and her psychoanalyst, Palmer Anderson, is her lover and that she is moving in with him. For a time Martin accepts a sort of *ménage à trois* in which he is loved and patronised by Palmer and Antonia, but the arrival of Honor Klein, Palmer's half-sister, disrupts this cosy set up. Before long, although he is not aware of it, Martin has fallen out of love with his wife, is falling out of love with his mistress (both of whom represent a phase of his

existence which is now irrevocably over), and is falling *in* love with Dr Klein. The latter introduces Georgie to Martin's brother Alexander, who catches her on the rebound, and they become engaged. Meanwhile Martin, by now furious at what he sees as Honor's meddling, beats her up savagely, but as she perceives (although he does not) this is not an act of hatred but an act of love. As he tries to write a letter of apology, Martin realises the true state of his feelings for Honor, and hurries to her, only to find her in bed with Palmer. His star is now very much on the wane; so is Antonia's because she realises that Palmer is tiring of her. Georgie attempts suicide when she in her turn senses her lover Alexander abandoning her, but she is saved in the nick of time, and all the characters effect a kind of reconciliation around her hospital bed. The novel ends on a series of surprises: Antonia, who has been Alexander's mistress for years, announces that they are going to Rome together for a short honeymoon; Georgie leaves for New York with Palmer, where clearly he and she will make a new life together; and Honor calls on Martin, now at his lowest ebb, to offer herself to him. She takes care to warn him, however, that this seemingly happy ending has 'nothing to do with happiness, nothing whatever' (N, last page).

This complicated story, which inevitably sounds rather crude in summary, is by no means as frivolous as might appear at first sight. As the characters are left by the final pairings, each hitherto morally blind or immature partner (Martin, Antonia and Georgie) is linked up with a stable one (respectively Honor, Alexander and Palmer), undoubtedly for his or her good. However much pain the catastrophe causes him, it is undeniably healthier for Martin to grow up at last and become a fully mature adult: he has been too happy in the past taking refuge in filial or paternal relationships with women (he treats Antonia like a mother and Georgie like the child he never had).

As for Antonia, she has to stop enjoying the possession of three men, who flatter different facets of her mercurial personality, and settle for one of them. And Georgie, abandoned by one brother after the other, learns the hard way that a woman makes herself a doormat for men at her peril. Beneath the surface glitter of what Milton Shulman contemptuously dismissed as a game of musical beds, therefore, lies a tough moral argument: that to play with people is to run the risk of hurting them irreparably, that to abase oneself to one's lover is to invite humiliation, and that only upon mutual admiration and respect can a mature, adult love be built. Under the dazzling display of comic contingency, in other words, lies the harsher substance of an almost tragic determinism. Such dialectical tension between necessity and contingency is something which preoccupies Iris Murdoch as a philosopher, and it imparts a characteristically unsentimental toughness to the best of her novels.

Undoubtedly one of these, *A Severed Head* is comparatively short, full of dramatic incident and sudden reversals of fortune, and contains a lot of dialogue: it therefore lends itself naturally to adaptation for the stage. The title was, sensibly, kept in the theatre version: it refers to the myth of the Medusa's head, cut off by Perseus,

which turned anyone who looked upon it into stone. Honor represents the Medusa to Martin; it is his demonic passion for her which hurls him brutally but salutarily from his cosy Eden.

There are a number of small alterations which need not detain us: Palmer's residences change from Pelham Crescent to Chester Square; Rosemary, Martin's sister, who plays a minor role in the action, is a spinster, and not a divorcée as in the book ; Martin is not an asthmatic; Rembers, the Lynch-Gibbon clan's country house, is omitted, although used as a location for one of the scenes in the novel; Honor decapitates a statue, not napkins, no doubt because the former is an easier thing to accomplish on stage,[10] and so on. While some of these alterations have an obvious dramatic explanation, others seem merely accidental, or to be the result of second thoughts on Iris Murdoch's part.

More significant is the omission of all reference to Georgie's abortion. This is introduced at the end of the first chapter, and then painfully recalled when Martin, apparently thoughtlessly but no doubt betraying a Freudian slip, congratulates Georgie and Alexander at the beginning of their brief engagement on their decision to live at Rembers because it will be good, he says, for the house to have children in it again. One of the themes of the novel, sterility, both literal and metaphorical, is therefore left out altogether. Perhaps in 1963, the subject of abortion was still felt to be taboo, but this seems unlikely since incest is openly discussed in the play and indeed Honor and Palmer are revealed in bed together. More probably, the adaptors felt that this kind of psychological problem would introduce an element of complication which it would be difficult to render scenically. This was perhaps something which Priestley pointed out to his collaborator and which she accepted as being necessary in the pursuit of theatrical effectiveness.

Other changes offer sometimes brilliant solutions to problems of transposition from fiction to drama. For instance, in the book Martin goes to London Airport, and assumes that he has seen Honor and Palmer leaving together, and discovers only later, and to his great surprise, that it is Georgie, without the 'severed head', who alone boarded the plane with Palmer. In the play, he does not stir from the house, but learns on the telephone that 'Dr Palmer and party' have left the departure lounge. It is while he is actually speaking to the airport official that Honor enters quietly and the closing exchanges begin (S, 63). This not only saves stage time, it is also dramatically much more exciting to watch by allowing no slackening in the tension or dissipation of the suspense. In this way the adapters are careful to preserve the surprises which the novel springs upon the reader. For instance, Martin has no sooner told Georgie that he will never introduce her to his wife then the scene changes and he is doing just that (N, ch. 12; R, 59; S, 31); and the discovery of Georgie's hair in a parcel Martin is idly opening (her way of informing him that she is going to kill herself) is another fine *coup de théâtre* transferred intact (N, ch. 25; R, 92; S, 57).

The characters are much the same in all versions. For obvious dramatic reasons, Honor is introduced earlier, and not at Liverpool Street station as in the book but in Palmer's study (N, ch. 8; R, 26; S, 11). If anything, Palmer's humbug, or at least self-deception, is more clearly brought out in the play. This is in line with a greater explicitness generally which is a natural feature of the stage version; for instance, the meaning or tone of certain utterances not glossed in the book, are clarified in the play by means of stage directions. Shrewd use is made of theatrical correlates; for instance, Honor realises that Georgie has been hurriedly bundled out of the house by Martin because she recognises the girl's scarf, not her economics books as in the novel, since they could not be seen so clearly from the auditorium (N, ch. 10; R, 48; S, 24).

The basic dialogue is similar, most of it lifted straight from the book, but the action is tightened up and speeded up, sometimes to good effect as I have suggested but sometimes not so felicitously. Accelerating the pace comes perilously close to trivialising and ridiculing the dilemma of the characters. When, in all three versions, Martin exclaims 'Oh – Christ!' at Antonia's revelation of her affair with Alexander, the remark, part of a section of commentated dialogue in the novel – that is, dialogue in which the narrator keeps up the kind of running commentary and 'distances' the exchange thereby – the remark passes well enough (N, 230), but in the play, where it is not 'framed', it stands out and is in danger of provoking titters among the audience (R, 101; S, 60). There is, of course, a streak of farce in this play but not quite of that kind.

So much for the adaptation, which, as I have implied, is on the whole impressive, an object lesson in how to do such a thing well. Some additions amount to an interpretation of the original text which improves it. In the novel, for instance, Martin suddenly realises on the Thames embankment that he is in love, and hurries to Cambridge where he finds Honor and Palmer in bed. In the play, he is at home (for obvious reasons to do with the multi-purpose set), and telephones Palmer's London residence. Honor picks up the receiver, hears his voice, and puts it down, leaving it off the hook, before returning to join Palmer in bed. It is quite clear from this that she is luring Martin on, so that the discovery he makes shortly afterwards of the incestuous pair *in flagrante delicto* is in a real sense arranged by her. As she later explains, the fact that he has laid eyes on the taboo – the 'severed head' – means that 'he must kill Candaules and become king himself' (N, 252). But in the legend, it is Candaules who arranged for Gyges to see his wife naked; in the play, the 'wife' instigates the discovery herself. It is an important detail which helps to a clearer understanding of the novel's meaning.

Curiously, the story of Gyges and Candaules is not in the acting version. There are indeed many other textual discrepancies between the two playscripts. Iris Murdoch explains these as follows:

> The [Samuel] French edition is the play *as staged*. The reading edition, prepared by me, is a bit longer and contains things which were omitted from the stage play for reasons of time et cetera. There may also be slight textual differences where I preferred the fuller text.[11]

In fact, there are differences on almost every page, some trivial, others less so. I suspect that Iris Murdoch felt that the rigours of staging had been too cavalier with her initial draft (numbered as No. 2 above), and that she took the opportunity of publication by Chatto & Windus (her 'own' firm, as it were) to restore the cuts. This is borne out by the disclaimer in the Chatto edition: 'this reading addition of *A Severed Head* is an expanded version of the text used at the Criterion Theatre, and is not an acting version' (R, 7). Read in the light of the performing rights notice on the next page (R, 8) and of the fact that no mention is made in the Chatto edition of the forthcoming French's acting addition, this disclaimer must be seen as a trifle disingenuous. I do not of course wish to suggest that the collaboration between Iris Murdoch and J.B. Priestley was not as amicable as she says it was; I think the problem is deeper than that. I believe that Iris Murdoch is, in the last analysis, a reluctant dramatist: by which I mean that she cannot, when the chips are down, see cuts made in her prose without considerable regret. This would explain much about her practice as a playwright: why the 'reading edition' of *A Severed Head* (something of a contradiction in terms surely) was thought necessary; why *The Italian Girl* is a much wordier, and so a less effective playscript (perhaps because Saunders, who unlike Priestley was not a close personal friend, had neither the authority nor the prestige to trim the text down sufficiently); and why the plays she has written alone are all relative failures.

At bottom, then, Iris Murdoch is not a dramatist at all, any more than Henry James was. A talented practitioner like Priestley can get hold of one of her stories and (with whatever reservations on her part) make an entertaining and successful play out of it. At the same time, all the subtleties are ironed out; for instance, without the reference to Gyges and Candaules, which was no doubt thought too abstruse for a West End audience, the end of the play becomes a perfunctory and rather sentimental 'happy ending'. In other places (e.g. R, 58 and S, 30) important moral imperatives are omitted from the Criterion version. This particularly affects the character of Georgie Hands, to which justice is not done in French's edition because of the omission of important qualifications she makes to explain why she was prepared to put up with the suffering inevitably caused by the enforced secrecy of her liaison with Martin (R, 46; S, 23). At the Criterion, she was in danger of appearing just another silly girl who has got herself involved with a married man, whereas in the novel (a view the reading version seeks to maintain) she is a morally attractive person who loves Martin deeply and genuinely, and tries in very difficult circumstances to behave decently – indeed, so decently that she is taken advantage of.

But we must not forget that *A Severed Head* is an adaptation, not an original play. As with any transposition between one medium and another – as from novel to film, or play to opera – there are gains and losses about which critics will argue interminably. Sometimes the original is falsified beyond recognition, travestied and trivialised, as in the Rock Hudson/Jennifer Jones film of *A Farewell to Arms*; sometimes it is actually improved as in Hitchcock's adaptation of a Daphne du Maurier story in *The Birds*. Verdi created one of the great masterpieces of opera, *La Traviata*, from a boulevard melodrama by Dumas, but he also did not pervert Shakespeare in *Otello*. In such a context, *A Severed Head* certainly does not enhance the novel, but nor does it do it a serious disservice; it is a competent dramatisation and little more.

III

My conclusion, then, is that Iris Murdoch is a rebellious dramatist, someone who feels drawn to the stage for sentimental and financial reasons, but who finds its inevitable constraints irksome. There is nothing remarkable about this. The history of literature does not offer many examples of writers who are equally gifted as novelists and playwrights; as Iris Murdoch herself is well aware, the two genres are very different. She happens to be extremely skilled in the art of fiction, but not very gifted when it comes to writing plays. Her dramatic works are interesting to the critic not only for the theoretical problems they raise but also because they show – in the two stage adaptations and the opera libretto – a great artist's second thoughts about aspects of plot and character in the original works when she came to look at them closely again. But that is only to say in another way that they are only of academic interest, in the primary and best sense of that word. They are not – with the possible, if rather ephemeral exception of *A Severed Hea*d – successful works for the theatre in their own right. She is good at creating atmosphere but – rather like Sartre in his more tedious and tendentious plays – tends to set up debates in dialogue form so that, curiously, her theatre is less exciting – and a good deal less dramatic – than her fiction. She lacks a sense of theatre, so that her resolutions are sudden and contrived, lacking the forceful internal logic of her novels. Revelations come so thick and fast but at the end they are merely melodramatic, lacking the ironies on which they build – and which they reinforce – in the fiction. In her novels 'she writes spellbinding stories in beautiful prose; she knows how to master paragraphs and sentences and at her best achieves an extraordinary, luminous, lyrical accuracy' based on an 'intensely visual imagination'[12] but this narrative talent cannot help her much in creating work to be mounted on the stage before a live audience. As fellow-novelist Margaret Drabble, a far from unsympathetic observer, put it:

> It is ironic that Iris Murdoch, who is so often accused of gratuitous complexity, should become dull when she takes the trouble [in her plays] to be plain. The kind of writer who can create a difficult, powerful and complex stage play must find his energy from some quite different source. The history of drama indicates that it is one of the most mysterious and fitful of sources but, the theatre being what it is, it is sure to go on tempting many hopeful novelists. (The *Listener*, 17 January 1974)

Perhaps Iris Murdoch is indeed, as I have said elsewhere, the only Henry James our age deserves or is likely to produce, in the sense also of a great novelist drawn to, and defeated by, the exasperating elusiveness of perfect dramatic art, in which the noblest and sleaziest passions of man cohabit in such mysterious promiscuity.

This article originally appeared in Essays in Theatre: A Journal of Theatre and Drama 4:1 (1985), 3–20. *The formatting, grammar and punctuation have been kept as in the original and so do not conform to the usual style of the* Iris Murdoch Review.

1. In a letter to me postmarked 5 December 1984; the fact that James Saunders' name comes first on the play's title page was, she says, 'a random gesture of kindness on my part.'
2. 'Novels into play: James Saunders talks to Michael Billington,' *Plays and Players*, XV, 6 (March 1968), 26. Saunders goes on to say, a trifle defensively, that the play was not intended 'as a cry from the heart or a piece for our times.'
3. See interviews with Iris Murdoch by Hugh Herbert (*The Guardian*, 24 October 1972) and Ruth Pitchford (*Western Mail*, 12 September 1980).
4. Interview with Iris Murdoch by Ronald Hayman (London *Times*, 30 September 1970). She goes on to say that one of the things Priestley stressed was 'you've got to realise that people will be looking at their watches and thinking about the last bus.'
5. Iris Murdoch's term, in an interview with Tom Sutcliffe (*The Guardian*, 15 September 1980).
6. From the text of the libretto produced by the Publicity Office of the Welsh National Opera, 1980, pp. 24-25.
7. *The Three Arrows and The Servants and the Snow* (London, 1973), p. 203.
8. See the Hayman interview, note 4 above.
9. There is some doubt about the date. This is the date given in the Chatto text of the plays (see endnote 7 above), but *The Guardian* on 24 October 1972, p. 10, states that '*The Three Arrows* opened at the Cambridge Arts Theatre last night.'
10. It is also, of course, more in tune with the general symbolism of the 'severed head'.
11. In a postcard to me postmarked 18 September 1984. The Samuel French text is not quite the play 'as staged'; according to the Criterion Theatre programme, this was in three acts, like the reading version. Still, the number of scenes and their order are the same in both versions, so the difference is not significant.
12. Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: The Saint and the Artist* (London: Macmillan, forthcoming), ch. 1.

A poor player that struts and frets her hour upon the stage?: Iris Murdoch and the Theatre

Anne Rowe

> 'After all, a story is dramatic; one is dealing with drama the whole time as well as using drama in one's medium – in the novel as well as in the theatre'.[1]

> 'The drama is (I think) an essentially poetic form. It is a public form of poetry. Whereas the novel is a private form of prose'.[2]

As one of the twentieth century's most distinguished philosopher-novelists, Iris Murdoch's status as a playwright might come as a surprise even to the most dedicated readers of her fiction.[3] Yet her passion for the theatre spanned more than five decades, inspired three stage plays, a radio play, four adaptations of her novels for the theatre, a libretto and two Platonic dialogues. This substantial oeuvre has generated surprisingly little interest within Murdoch scholarship. Such an oversight is perhaps understandable in the light of its limited success. It is, nonetheless, lamentable, not only because Murdoch's drama provides a unique insight into her formidable grasp of political philosophy, largely withheld from her novels, but also because her narrative technique was informed by myriad theatrical and aesthetic devices borrowed from performative drama. It would be fair to say that an intertextual dialogue with drama creates a strong idiosyncratic 'signature' within her novels. This lack of critical interest also poses the question as to why one of the most successful novelists of her generation persisted in producing often poorly received drama that exacerbated sometimes painful insecurities about the quality of her work.

Murdoch's passion for the stage might be ascribed to several formative experiences: her early exposure to classical drama as a schoolgirl at Badminton, where she translated *Oedipus at Colonus*; her acting days with the Magpie Players, a student travelling troupe at Oxford, when she relished every aspect of stagecraft and was renowned for her acting ability; and, of course, her lifelong love of Shakespeare.[4] Despite her acknowledged fondness for drama and the omnipresence in her fiction of actors, theatres, dramatic dialogue and staged vignettes, only three critics have given these tropes sustained attention. Hilda Spear identifies how Murdoch's vocabulary draws attention to the theatrical elements of her stories and how her plots are framed in aesthetic devices that echo drama acted out on stage.[5] Frances White illustrates how failure to perceive Murdoch's theatricality in the late novels, in particular *The Green Knight* (1993), contributes to their baffled critical reception.[6] Wendy Jones Nakanishi also singles out *The Green Knight* as the apotheosis of Murdoch's attempts to adopt dramatic structure and theatrical elements into her novels which began after the disappointments occasioned by the failing dramas of the early 1970s.[7]

Other links between the novels and drama remain largely confined to Murdoch's attempts to emulate Shakespeare's psychological realism and moral seriousness. James Arrowby, in *The Sea, The Sea* (1978; a reworking of *The Tempest*), articulates the essence of Murdoch's Shakespearean idea-play when he suggests that 'even in a disciplined spiritual life it is hard to distinguish dream from reality'.[8] Her Shakespearean intertextuality is not always conspicuous, but *Hamlet* lies behind *The Black Prince* (1973) and *Nuns and Soldiers* (1980), and *The Tempest* was also predominantly in her mind when she wrote *The Philosopher's Pupil* in 1983. *As You Like It*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *King Lear*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Othello*, *Twelfth Night* and *The Winter's Tale* have also been acknowledged by critics as concentration points for the idea-play within the novels of the 1970s.[9]

Yet oddly, this interest in drama did not tempt Murdoch into theatreland: 'I don't go to the theatre much; I don't actually *like* the theatre very much', she confessed to Jack Biles, 'but I would like to write for it, which is a paradox' (*TCHF* 60). She explained to Christopher Bigsby that she was aware that she was better at writing novels and that her interest in writing plays was largely educational:

> I ought to be able to write a play because I can invent plots and I can write dialogue [but] there is something else of course which a play has which isn't covered by these two headings and that is the thing which I cannot get right and I am not sure what it is. I think it is something to do with the structure of the play [...] it isn't quite plot, it is something about dramatic structure which I can't do. But the thing challenges me really because it is more like poetry. (*TCHF* 105)

Murdoch was speaking here, in the 1970s, from experience. By now, two of her novels had been adapted for the stage with varying success. In 1963 she had sent her playscript of *A Severed Head* (1961) to the celebrated broadcaster, novelist and playwright J.B. Priestley, who declared it 'would not do' in its present form but agreed to rewrite it (*IMC* 91). Murdoch explained that she wrote the words and 'Jack contributed very important things in structure [...] I hadn't got much perception of dramatic theatre structure at that time' (*TCHF* 60). With the benefit of Priestley's expertise, the play opened successfully in Bristol in April 1963 and transferred to the Criterion Theatre, London, in July, where it ran for two and a half years. Conradi suggests its success had also much to do with the quality of its distinguished actors: Robert Hardy as Martin Lynch-Gibbon and Paul Eddington as Palmer Anderson. However, on reflection, Murdoch expressed regret at the 'much lighter effect' of the play by comparison with the novel, and denied that it was her intention to 'play up' the comic side of the book: 'it was just that the dialogue is fairly comic and so far as the novel has other aspects they're not really carried by the dialogue' (*TCHF* 17). The 'playing up' of the comedy nonetheless prompted a commercial success that provided a welcome confidence boost and a healthy financial gain, earning Murdoch almost £18,000, a large sum indeed in 1963.[10] Conradi reports that the windfall gave her the opportunity to help impecunious friends and relations which brought great pleasure, so perhaps a philanthropic motive should not be ruled out in Murdoch's future attempts at drama.[11] Either way, the stunning commercial success of *A Severed Head* was to prove difficult to replicate.

In 1967 Murdoch adapted *The Italian Girl* (1964) for the stage, working now in collaboration with the successful West End playwright James Saunders. The play opened at the Theatre Royal, Bristol in November 1967, then transferred to Wyndham's Theatre, London in February 1968. Once again, as Murdoch explained to W.K. Rose, the novel was comedified 'into a kind of funny object [...] in the form of a poor, rather gullible, confused man stumbling on from one awful blow to another. This is a comic form which is quite familiar' (*TCHF* 17). The play ran for just over a year but Murdoch felt that the collaboration with Saunders had not been as accomplished as that with Priestley: she complained that the timetable had been rushed and that she had not learned as much from Saunders as from Priestley. With uncharacteristic irritation she admitted, 'I am not pleased with [*The Italian Girl*]. I was told that nothing would happen until I was satisfied with the version, but in the end, I was hustled and it was a botched job [...] I didn't like it. It was imperfect [and] I'd never collaborate with anybody again' (*TCHF* 60). It is a testament to her resilience and lack of ego that the failure of the play did not deflect Murdoch from her determination to try harder, to do better. The legitimacy of the attempt was always to be more important than the success.

In a short article on her relations with her characters also written in 1967, Murdoch said that the process of adaptation had been 'eerie': re-meeting vanished characters not only illuminated their weaknesses ('it is soon evident which are the nourished living characters and which ones are paste on board') but also the faulty structure ('which in the novel is covered over by some sort of magic of talk or mood'). Such weaknesses, she said, 'cannot be ignored once one is looking at the novel from the point of view of the theatre', summing up *The Italian Girl* retrospectively as 'a tale with unfortunate structural weaknesses in the middle, with three good characters and three weak characters'. She had also come to understand how in her novels the formal needs of structure tended to wreck the realism of her characters, when she would prefer character to wreck the form.[12]

This quest for balance between character and form in her fiction haunted Murdoch's methodology and was a crucial aspect of her attempts to master the craft of the dramatist. She encapsulates the problem in an interview with Rose in 1968: in her early fiction, she said she alternated between 'open' novels, 'where there are more accidental and separate and free characters', and 'closed' novels, where the work has a stronger formal intensity and her own 'obsessional feeling about a novel draws it together'. She wanted to write the 'open' kind but understood both the necessity and the difficulty of reconciling both styles, allowing symbolism into her realism in a 'natural, subordinate' way and not, as she felt she was prone to doing, oscillating between two different types of novel (*TCHF* 22–3). This ongoing battle between creating a strong poetic structure and the portrayal of living, breathing characters who act spontaneously, behave irrationally, and think freely had informed Murdoch's *modus operandi* since her first novel, *Under the Net,* in 1954. Here she had openly borrowed from Queneau's *Pierrot Mon Ami* and attempted to emulate Beckett, describing *Under the Net* 'as a play really' (*TCHF* 105). Then, in 1956, the less than enthusiastic reception of *The Sandcastle* (1957), a more predominantly traditionally realist narrative which smothered form and imagery, highlighted this problem of balance and knocked her confidence. Letters from these years reveal how prone she was to brooding on such setbacks, which fed in turn into her more general reflection on the direction of the mid-twentieth-century novel in 'Against Dryness' (1961). While defending the 'unfashionable naturalistic idea of character' against the more symbolist 'crystalline' novel, she nonetheless claimed the crystalline to be the better of the two.[13] It may be no coincidence that this essay was written at a time when she was turning more directly towards drama to feed her attempt to marry more successfully her novels' 'crystalline' dependency on poetics, shape and form, with the 'journalistic' demand for conventional representations of character that were the more obvious hallmarks of her narrative style. She considers this dilemma in relation to her dual identity as novelist and playwright in conversation with Biles in 1978:

> A story is dramatic; one is dealing with drama the whole time as well as using drama as one's medium – in the novel as well as in theatre. But in the play [...] the drama has necessarily got a central poetic function which in the novel it hasn't. In fact, many novels rightly – this is something I also do – fight against the drama [...] In the novel very often, the novelist quite properly is destroying the shape because ordinary life doesn't have a shape. [...] The novelist very often attempts to convey the shapelessness by having a dramatic shape, which if he is telling a story, he usually has to have. At the same time, he is fighting against it and blurring it – even destroying it. For me this is a proper proceeding in the novel, but the theatre is a very different matter. (*TCHF* 59)

Brooding on how to perfect the process of using shape to illustrate shapelessness, in 1965, after working with Priestley on *A Severed Head* and before working with Saunders on *The Italian Girl,* Murdoch looked for inspiration from the master of the craft. She began re-reading all of Shakespeare's plays, a project which lasted until the beginning of 1969, and took this decision, Conradi reports, still hoping that the discipline might improve her prose. After this four-year Shakespearean feast, Murdoch spent the whole of 1969 writing plays although, as Conradi observes, still fearing that she was untalented (*IMAL* 468). The result was that the tenor of her drama changed. Acknowledging that 'public themes (politics, philosophy, social questions, problems of the day), belong naturally to the Theatre', her drama would now shift to a more politicised platform (*Cue* 14).

This fresh focus could now accommodate the strong political views that Murdoch had harboured with varying intensity since her student days at Oxford, when she became a member of the Communist Party. She did not, however, believe that the entrenched ideological ideas of novelists should intrude into their art: 'it's the novelist's job to be a good artist and this will involve telling the truth and not worrying about social commitment' (*TCHF* 18).[14] But, if she could write drama without difficulty, she claimed, she would write 'propaganda plays' (*TCHF* 17). So it was that Murdoch moved away from adaptation to writing directly for the stage where political themes could be explored freely. This shift in focus also may have been, in part, an attempt to reach a wider audience than that which she envisaged habitually read her novels. The novel, she suggests, 'only flourishes in the age of inwardness when society is rich enough and free enough and educated enough to allow people to have complicated private lives which can arouse general interest' (*Cue* 14).

Two of the plays written in 1969 both foreground political issues centred around several dominant characters, while in her novels (almost exclusively now third-person narratives) she attempts to develop an idiosyncratic brand of storytelling that 'decentres' the narrative away from egocentric heroes or anti-heroes to

peripheral characters who carry the story.[15] *Joanna, Joanna* is a short topical play that includes a sub-theme of student unrest, but it is more to do with humanitarian than political concerns. While the play is also pertinent in its observations on gender issues, homophobia, misogyny, incest and mental health conditions, this socio-political aspect is subsumed into a conventionally 'Murdochian' narrative which pivots on secrets and lies within relationships between a small central group of characters. The intention to sustain humour in tragic circumstances that had successfully furnished her earlier dramas strikes a somewhat false note here. The play's plot and characters were reinvented and developed later into the fourth of her first-person narratives, *A Word Child* (1975), suggesting perhaps that Murdoch may have been unhappy with the material in its dramatic form and decided it would work more effectively as a novel.[16] *Joanna, Joanna* was never performed and not published until 1994.[17]

Murdoch has described *The Servants and the Snow*, set in a remote country mansion in snowbound eastern Europe, as being 'about an old problem in political philosophy, the problem of sovereignty. (Why should anyone obey anyone?)' (*Cue* 14). The play opened at the Greenwich Theatre in London in September 1970 and, in the accompanying explanatory essay written for the theatre's magazine, Murdoch describes it as 'a gothic drama set in an unidentified location' which 'touches more cursorily on a number of other political problems such as the problem of freedom' (*Cue* 14). She also cryptically implies that it rests upon the Oedipus myth (there is a developing relationship between a young squire and a servant girl who was his father's mistress), suggesting that Murdoch might be attempting a marriage between political comment and the deep psychological truths of myth in a process that draws her signature themes as a novelist into her drama:

> Poetry is an old form of human speech, a particular magical combination of the personal and the public (the secret and the revealed), and the drama (which has to be magical too in order to keep the citizen in the theatre) is more akin to poetry than it is to the novel. The drama though has a more obvious public aspect. It is more like an announcement, while the poem is more like a song. Public themes (politics, philosophy, social questions, problems of the day) belong naturally to the theatre. So also does myth, which the dramatist shares with all poets and some novelists. (*Cue* 14)

This complex methodology might be the reason why, when Michael Bellamy pressed Murdoch on whether her drama was more political than her fiction because its 'closed form' was 'more amenable than the novel to this sort of allegorical statement', she resisted such a stark delineation (*TCHF* 48). Seemingly drawing

her fiction and drama closer together, she says that she only 'slightly' thinks that this is so: her plays are, she claims, 'plays of ideas' that 'happen to have political implications [and] that talk is more at home in the theatre' (*TCHF* 40). If her ambition in *The Servants and the Snow* had been to amalgamate myth and incisive political commentary in a form that would keep the audience in its seats, she was to be disappointed. The play sustained only a four-week run and the playwright Alun Vaughan Williams found her in tears at Greenwich Station after she had seen it. Conradi reports that this failure hit her hard. On first seeing the play she thought it had been 'full of magic' but on a second viewing thought it 'terrible': 'It's clear the play won't go to the West End after all the rotten notices' (*IMAL* 530). The decision to turn so much of her attention away from her fiction also seems also to have caused anxiety. On a cold evening in June 1969, still working on her plays, she seems to hear a message saying 'WAIT' (*IMC* 115). Even before the poor reception of *The Servants and the Snow*, Murdoch wrote to her agent at Chatto, Norah Smallwood, to say that this would be her last play.

However, her intentions were short-lived. The year 1970 turned out to be extraordinarily productive with the publication of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* and two philosophical works, 'Existentialists and Mystics' and 'The Sovereignty of Good'. Murdoch's presence on the London stage in the 1960s contributed to the increasing status of the Bayleys as high-profile members of the British establishment. Global political turbulence was also worrying her deeply and she brooded on student unrest, the Irish 'Troubles', the Vietnam War, the return to power of the Conservative Party and Britain's negotiations to join the European Economic Community.[18] Also, she and her husband had found themselves in financial troubles caused by John Bayley's taxes. Possibly because of the pressures of both personal and political concerns, the theatre was once again Murdoch's vehicle of choice when, in 1972, the production of *The Three Arrows* allowed her to explore further the concepts of freedom in her art.

A battle between political idealism and violent criminality lies at the heart of *The Three Arrows*, a play which opened at the Arts Theatre, Cambridge, in October 1972 with Ian McKellen in the leading role. Set in Japan, it concerns the struggle between the tyrannical ideology of a father against the reformative ideologies of his benevolent son. Imprisoned together, neither can be executed without their death surrendering power to the enemy. Although Murdoch was careful to balance the political theme with a poignant and tragic depiction of unrequited romantic love involving the ritual ordeal of selecting a husband for a beautiful crown princess, the play ran for less than a month. Its brevity, though, was not a reflection on the quality of the play, but to do with the time limit imposed on the production by the Actors Touring Company who were performing it.[19] Of all Murdoch's plays it was *The Three Arrows* that brought her the greatest sense of accomplishment. Even though she still considered herself 'a very inexperienced playwright' (Herbert 10), she also said, with uncharacteristic pride, that the play had been 'beautifully done with Ian McKellen. I think it is rather a good play' (*TCHF* 60). She had also greatly enjoyed the contact with people that the production had brought, explaining to Hugh Herbert that 'one's so damn lonely as a novelist [...] I think novel writing is the loneliest art' (Herbert 10). Yet, Conradi reports that during the 1970s Murdoch 'wrote reluctantly, or rebelliously for the theatre' and that 'her efforts, she knew, had "the formal stiffness of the juvenile work of a painter"' (*IMAL* 532).[20] The brave determination with which she continued writing only moderately successful dramas clearly fulfilled deep artistic desires and brought a satisfaction that rendered the anguish involved in their creation worthwhile, or irrelevant.

The 1980s brought fresh opportunities for Murdoch to extend her dramatic repertoire while at the same time allowing her to indulge her lifelong love of music. To her delight, she was invited to write the libretto for *The Servants*, an operatic version of *The Servants and the Snow,* composed by William Matthias, which was performed by the Welsh National Opera at New Theatre, Cardiff in September 1980. She thought it 'wonderful' (*IMAL* 531). Also at this time she was approached by Michael Kustow, assistant director of the National Theatre, who had read her philosophical essay, *The Fire and The Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists* (1977), and invited Murdoch to write Platonic dialogues for the stage: the result was *Acastos: Two Platonic Dialogues*. The first, 'Art and Eros: A Dialogue About Art', was performed at the National Theatre in 1980 and was well received. Conradi has suggested that 'nowhere else are her ideas brought so alive' (*IMAL* 548). The second, 'Above the Gods: A Dialogue about Religion', was never performed, but both plays were published as *Acastos: Two Platonic Dialogues* in 1986 and remain a rich source for scholars.

While the novels of the 1980s were becoming longer, more philosophically dense, and more relaxed and accomplished in their blurring of form, Murdoch continued to turn to drama to debate political and humanitarian issues. Her radio play with music, *The One Alone*, which was broadcast by BBC Radio 3 on 13 February 1987, comprised a dialogue of deeply moving and politically urgent poetry, partly recited and partly sung. Thematically the work is affiliated with the strong meditation on the nature of courage that also underlies her late fiction: a female prisoner of conscience dies in a prison cell achieving nothing other than simply doing the right thing. An Angel appears to convince her ghost that nonetheless she was right in her choices, and in a related article in the *Radio Times*, Murdoch speaks of her great admiration for political prisoners (*IMC* 180). This emotional and moving play reaffirms the fundamental beliefs that underpin both Murdoch's moral philosophy and her novels: that love, truth, annihilation of the ego and love of the Good must be the absolute values by which all should live.

At the end of the decade Murdoch's attempts to succeed on the stage came full circle with another adaptation, this time of her Whitbread Prize-winning novel,

The Black Prince (1973). The play opened in April at the Aldwych Theatre in 1989 under the patronage of her close friend, the impresario and novelist Josephine Hart. The technical agility involved in transposing a novel into a play had still excited her. In an interview with Nigella Lawson, she explained:

> If you're writing a novel there is no limit to what you can do. You can stop with the story and ramble for a while. You can address the reader or put in very long descriptions of places and so on, anything, and you're still within the form. But in the theatre every single word counts.[21]

Murdoch had spent a great deal of time working and reworking her playscript (although she famously forbade a word of her novels to be edited). She admitted to much 'paring down and speeding up' and had 'changed a lot of things and rewritten certain things because an actor wanted them slightly differently'.[22] Nonetheless, after so much hard work, and to her disappointment, the play was not commercially viable and closed after only five months in September that year. Yet despite this dispiriting lack of success, when asked what she had accomplished in the play that she did not accomplish in the novel, she said it was the 'special kind of "magic" of drama' that drew her, again and again, 'the miracle of why people stay there and don't get up and go' (*TCHF* 228). Whatever the disappointments, there was never any lessening of the charm, or the lure, of the stage that remained in her blood from her Oxford days with the Magpie Players. But now, her time had run out. After *The Black Prince,* no other of her plays were staged during her lifetime.

It was not to be until 2013, more than a decade after her death, that another of Murdoch's plays would appear on stage. When the eminent Shakespearean director Bill Alexander met Murdoch in the early 1990s at a Christmas lunch at an Oxford college and told her that his favourite of her novels was *The Sea, The Sea,* she mentioned that she had written a play version of the novel that had never been staged. No one, she told him, had wanted to do it. Would he like to read it? Indeed, he would. Alexander thinks that the playscript may have been written in the 1980s, at around the time Murdoch adapted *The Black Prince* for the stage. Having read it, he thought that its natural home was the West End, not the Birmingham rep, where he was then Artistic Director. The play lay idle until years later, when he was working as a freelancer and needed to find commercial projects:

> I had another look at [the play] [...] [and] felt there were two significant problems both of which I could fix quite easily. Firstly, it just needed cutting, the dialogue was too dense to flow easily on stage (and Hartley had to stop saying 'one' so much as she was lower middle class and unsophisticated). The other thing that was missing from the novel (apart from Peregrine and Rosina) was the sense of Charles as the storyteller, the unreliable narrator, around which idea so much of the book's humour revolves. So, in my adaptation I took passages from the book and gave Charles a direct relationship with the theatre audience through a series of narrative soliloquies blending these with the idea that he is directing the play as it evolves, but may not be entirely in charge of what he is doing. The set would be skeletal and the action would appear to be taking place in a rehearsal room rather than attempting heavy naturalistic sets. That's for the film! The big change that she made to the story (apart from James being brother not cousin to Charles) is that James succeeds in bringing Titus back to life! I don't know what audiences would make of this, but it's certainly theatrical.[23]

After making these changes to the original manuscript, Alexander kindly donated copies of both Murdoch's original manuscript and his own edited version of the play to the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives. He also produced a staged reading of his version of the play at the Rose Theatre, Kingston, in January 2013.[24] His hope that the performance might lead to the play being staged in the West End did not materialise and to date this production remains its only public performance, though Alexander still believes the play to be a viable and exciting prospect.

Each of Murdoch's play adaptations were linked with novels written in male first-person narratives: she had described her first, *Under the Net,* as 'a play really' (*TCHF* 105) and *A Severed Head, The Italian Girl* and *The Black Prince* also have male first-person narrators, as does *A Word Child* which is a psychological offshoot of *Joanna, Joanna*. While adapting only first-person narratives provides her plays with a strong central character, the dramatic form itself deprives them of the acute psychological acuity that defines her novels. Alexander's attempt to rectify this lack by adding Shakespearean-style soliloquies borrowed from the novel allows the spotlight to fall more intensely on Charles's inner life and encourages a more emotional relationship between audience and character. But why Murdoch strove to remove this crucial connection in her play version of *The Sea, The Sea* remains a mystery.

Alexander's instinct that the playscript is suitable for film would have especially delighted her. Murdoch was as keen to have her novels adapted for film as she was for them to made into successful theatre productions. There were indeed several attempts in her lifetime, but only one, *A Severed Head* (1969), starring Claire Bloom as Honor Klein, made it to the big screen and, when Murdoch saw it on release, she thought it 'terrible' (*IMAL* 533). Conradi reports that in 1962 a film company attempted unsuccessfully to shoot *Under the Net,* and in 1964 the producer and director, Tony Richardson, bought the film option on *The Unicorn,* but did not proceed with the project.[25] The film rights to *The Flight from the Enchanter* and

A Fairly Honourable Defeat were also sold, but came to nothing. Murdoch was frustrated and disappointed at these false starts and wrote to her theatrical agent Peggy Ramsay, 'I'd like to see a decent film of one of those books in any language before I die [but] there seems to be for one reason or another, a persistent jinx on my cinema prospects' (*IMAL* 532–3). Only two television serialisations of Murdoch's novels were made, both by the BBC: *The Bell* in 1982 and *An Unofficial Rose* in 1974.[26] Murdoch relinquished the adaptation of *The Bell* to the screenplay adaptor, Reg Gadney, and making only small changes to the playscript claimed to have enjoyed the exercise as a learning experience.[27] She hoped at this time for more such adaptations of her novels, naming *Nuns and Soldiers*, *Henry and Cato* and *The Sea, The Sea* as contenders because they are all 'very visual'.[28] But again, this was a wish that remained unfulfilled.

With so much of Murdoch's dramatic oeuvre insufficiently explored, the twenty-first century offers multiple invitations to Murdoch scholarship, not only to explore her drama as a separate entity to her fiction, but also to analyse further her novels' intertextuality with dramatic form and its effect on readers. Such an interest has begun spontaneously: writing in the *Spectator* in Murdoch's centenary year (1919), Leo Robson speculated that translating *Sophocles* at Badminton School may have instigated her interest in 'aftermath', what occurred *after* the King's discovery that he had killed his father and married his mother. The idea of 'unfinished narrative', Robson suggests, 'bled into [Murdoch's] novels especially in the 1970s which end by breaking from a governing time frame with sections entitled "Postscript", "Life goes on", or "What happened after"'.[29] Exploring such dialogues between Murdoch's fiction and drama will not only suggest ways of extending the already formidable range of her meaning but also identify unacknowledged aspects of her craft as a writer. Frank Kermode once astutely described Murdoch as 'the most serious and sophisticated theorist of the novel at present writing in English', and Wendy Jones Nakanishi has suggested that Murdoch attempted 'to implement innovation into the novel form by successfully incorporating into her story so many theatrical elements'.[30] Murdoch's expansion of the boundaries of narrative form are becoming increasingly clear to critics who are opening up her novels to aesthetic readings that can be revelatory. She did not, after all, see aesthetics as divorced from morals but intrinsic to it. This new century also provides opportunities for freshly conceived, innovative performances of her plays, and for film and television adaptations of the novels that would at last do justice to the effort she put into ensuring their suitability for such enterprises. The prescience of her novels and her plays in their challenges to sovereignty and freedom, and in their legitimisation of hitherto marginalised groups in society, make them eminently adaptable to present-day interpretations in terms of this century's reconfiguration of sexuality and gender stereotypes. Such developments would be a heartwarming fulfilment of a dream that so sadly and frustratingly eluded Murdoch during her lifetime.

1. Jack I. Biles, 'An Interview with Iris Murdoch, 1978', in *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction*, ed. by Gillian Dooley (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 2003), 56–69 (59), hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *TCHF*.
2. Iris Murdoch, 'A Note on Drama', *Cue*: *Greenwich Theatre Magazine* (September 1970), 13–14 (KUAS139/2), from the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *Cue*. A copy of this essay is published in this issue of the *Iris Murdoch Review*, 1–2.
3. There were exceptions in the 1960s when Murdoch's plays were being staged in London. In 1968 when she attended a dinner at the Dorchester in London to honour the actress Dame Edith Evans, *The Times* described her as a playwright rather than a novelist. See Valerie Purton, *An Iris Murdoch Chronology* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 110, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *IMC*.
4. See Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Writer at War* (London: Short Books, 2010).
5. See Hilda Spear, *Modern Novelists*: *Iris Murdoch*, 2nd edn (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
6. See Frances White, '"This Rough Magic I Abjure": Theatricality in Iris Murdoch's *The Green Knight*', *Iris Murdoch Review* 10 (2019), 31–41. For a fuller summary of how Spear and White discuss how dramatic techniques infiltrate Murdoch's novels see Anne Rowe, *Writers and Their Work: Iris Murdoch* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), 89–90.
7. Wendy Jones Nakanishi, '"All the World's a Stage": Iris Murdoch's *The Green Knight* as Theatre', *English Studies* 96:7 (2015), 1–13.
8. Iris Murdoch, *The Sea, The Sea* (1978) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), 335.
9. For a fuller discussion of Murdoch's links with Shakespeare see Richard Todd, *Iris Murdoch: The Shakespearean Interest* (London: Vision Press, 1979).
10. £18,000 in 1963 would be worth approx. £378,000 in 2021.
11. Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (2001) (London: HarperCollins, 2002), 461, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *IMAL*.
12. Iris Murdoch, 'Notes on Relations with my Characters', *Iris Murdoch News Letter* 13 (Autumn 1999), 6–8 <https://d3mcbia3evjswv.cloudfront.net/files/Murdoch%20Newsletters%2012-19.pdf?GFVCEVarn17MwK9KSdKp8REHAYiKndPI> [accessed 1 December 2020]. This essay was written in 1967 but not published until 1999 with the help of Peter J. Conradi and by kind permission of John Bayley.
13. Iris Murdoch, 'Against Dryness' (1961), in *Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. Peter J. Conradi (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), 287–96.
14. See also Iris Murdoch, 'Literature and Philosophy: A Conversation with Brian Magee' (1978), in *Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. Peter J. Conradi (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), 3–30 (6–18). For a fuller discussion of Murdoch's views on politics in art, see Anne Rowe and Sara Upstone, 'Iris Murdoch, Ian McEwan and the Place of the Political in Contemporary Fiction' in *Iris Murdoch: Texts and Contexts*, ed. by Anne Rowe and Avril Horner (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 59–76.
15. Hugh Herbert, 'The Iris Problem', *Arts Guardian*, 24 October 1972, 10, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as 'Herbert'.
16. See Miles Leeson's essay in this issue of the *Iris Murdoch Review*, 49–54, for discussion of the links between *Joanna, Joanna* and the novels.
17. See Chris Boddington and Daniel Read's essay in this issue of the *Iris Murdoch Review*, 11–18, for details of the history of the play *Joanna, Joanna*.
18. Murdoch's political views emerge in many of her letters of the 1970s, in particular her letters to the American professor of literature Naomi Lebowitz, whom she met in 1972 and corresponded with for many years. See *Living on Paper*, ed. by Avril Horner and Anne Rowe (London: Chatto & Windus 2015). Letters to Lebowitz begin in Part Six, 350.
19. With thanks for this information to Annette Badland, then a young actor with The Actors Touring Group, who appeared in this production of *The Three Arrows*.
20. Conradi is quoting from Murdoch's journal, 12 February 1971.
21. Nigella Lawson, 'The warm-hearted crusader for good', *Sunday Times,* 16 April 1989, C7.
22. Lawson, 'The warm-hearted crusader for good', C7.
23. Bill Alexander in an email to Anne Rowe, November 2020.
24. Charles was played by Nicholas Jones; James by Christopher Ravenscroft; Gilbert by David Hargreaves; Ben by Peter Guinness; Hartley by Gemma Jones; Lizzie by Carol Royle and Titus by Rob Challender.
25. Conradi also recounts that in 1968 a Swedish director showed interest in *The Sandcastle* but

this too came to nothing, although interestingly Murdoch accepted an out-of-court settlement when in 1965 an MGM film, *The Sandpiper*, appeared to have been plagiarised from the novel (*IMAL* 532).

26. *An Unofficial Rose* was adapted by Simon Raven. Hugh Peronett was played by Maurice Denham, Randall by John Woodward and Ann by Ann Bell.
27. Deirdre Macdonald, 'Ringing the Changes', *Radio Times*, 9–15 January 1982, 6. Murdoch admitted that the transformation of a novel into another medium had shown up inherent weaknesses. She could see now where she would write the novel afresh and do things differently (she would, she said, make the character of Paul Greenfield more attractive).
28. Macdonald, 'Ringing the Changes', 6.
29. Leo Robson, 'Iris the Insoluble', *New Statesman*, 10 July 2019 <https://www.newstateman.com/iris-murdoch-novels-reissued-criticism-biography-100-years?fbclidIwAR1ntoRkfjCG0npTgd7mhQZfz8AMqJqiGrJc5fXlf7vhMnbgIjkCIMul2Ck> [accessed 1 December 2020].
30. Unreferenced quotation in Lawson, 'The warm-hearted crusader for good', C7; Nakanishi, '"All the World's a Stage": Iris Murdoch's *The Green Knight* as Theatre', 9.

Joanna, Joanna: The Forgotten Play

Miles Leeson

It is probable that you have never read, or even seen, a copy of *Joanna, Joanna*. Written in 1969 during Iris Murdoch's major dramatic phase, but not published until 1994, it remains the least-known of her published works and has never been dramatised or received a public reading. A two-act play, with a cast list roughly equal to *A Severed Head* (1963) and a running time of at least an hour and a half if performed, it is clear that this was not written as a *jeu d'esprit* but conceived as a substantial work for the stage. The reasons for publishing it in the mid-1990s are unclear, and when the play was finally published by Colophon Press it appeared in a limited edition of just 143 copies, of which only 137 copies were made available for publication.[1]

As such *Joanna, Joanna* remains a completist's item for the well-heeled collector, and one to which no critical commentary has been given. It was published in the same year as John Fletcher and Cheryl Bove's *Iris Murdoch: A Descriptive Primary and Annotated Secondary Bibliography*, itself a major landmark in Murdochian criticism, and one which gave scholars a full vision of the complete extant material to date. As *Joanna, Joanna* could not be included, it has gone unremarked; due to these circumstances there are only a few references scattered among the biographical works.[2] The Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives contains a box of archival material (KUAS228) relating to the publication of the play by Colophon Press (incidentally revealing that it was at one point entitled *Joanna, Joanna, Joanna*), although this material does not provide many clues as to the genesis and writing of the play as it relates only to the 1994 publication.[3] This short essay will provide some background to the work, an overview of the play itself, its links to *A Word Child* (1975), and its position in Murdoch's oeuvre.[4]

Peter J. Conradi notes, in *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (2001), that 'the young Iris was renowned at Oxford for her acting ability [...] The puritan who [J.B.] Priestley accurately noted did not really like the theatre, none the less craved theatrical success'.[5] It was the substantial success of the adaptation of *A Severed Head* with

Priestley that convinced Murdoch that she should try to balance her fictional, dramatic and philosophical writing. She gave up formal teaching at the Royal College of Art in 1967, a move which enabled her to dedicate more time to her writing and, in the following year, to reading the complete works of Shakespeare. The success of *A Severed Head* was hard to replicate, as John Fletcher details in a 1985 essay reproduced in this edition of the *Iris Murdoch Review* (19–35). However, the latterly well-received play version of *The Black Prince* (1989) may have had a bearing on the much-delayed publication of *Joanna, Joanna* in the mid-1990s. It should be noted here that *The Black Prince* adaptation was to some extent inspired by her friend, the theatre impresario Josephine Hart – 'Dazzled by her novel *The Black Prince* I wanted to produce it as a play'.[6] But with *Joanna, Joanna* Murdoch was flying solo.

Joanna, Joanna is set in an Institute of Theoretical Studies 'somewhere in the English countryside'. When the first act opens, we are inside the Provost's office on a sunny summer afternoon. The newly appointed Provost of the institute, Sir Roger Saxonby, and his wife, Jill, are being welcomed by Professor MacFarlane who is the Dean of the Institute. Another member of staff – although not introduced until Scene Three – is Hilary Fitch, a more junior member of the faculty, who many years ago had formed a relationship with Joanna Saxonby, Roger's first wife, and eloped with her. At the opening of the play Roger has been away from academia for many years, and his entrance begins the chain of events. His meeting with Hilary will echo one to come in *A Word Child*:

> Roger (after a moment): You've changed. I'm not sure that I would have recognised you.
> Hilary: Anno Domini. I've lost a lot of my hair and that. You've changed too.
> Roger: Have I? In what way?
> Hilary: You're fatter.
> Roger (annoyed): Oh. Am I?
> Hilary: Sorry, perhaps you hadn't realised it. I think sometimes people don't realise it when they get fatter.
> *Silence*.[7]

Completing the mix are Hilary's son, Teddy, a student at the institute; his wife, Kathy (a sketchily portrayed victim of mental illness who never achieves fully realised characterisation); the doctor who attended to Joanna during her last illness and is now the local GP; as well as his own daughter who plays the role of college vamp. You have, then, the ingredients for a theatrical farce that looks back to the successful play version of *A Severed Head* (especially in terms of a sexual merry-go-round) and forward to *A Word Child* in terms of plotting. Jill Saxonby, in her turn, seduces Teddy (whose parentage is the subject of debate) and there is a student riot, drug use (LSD, used to horrific effect in *The Good Apprentice* later in her career) and other stock Murdochian moves. There is also the question of Joanna's death years before, and whether Hilary was really to blame. We are led to believe that Joanna died of heart failure and this may well have resonances with Murdoch's early love for Franz Steiner, who died young, of the same cause.

As we can thus see, classic Murdochian tropes appear frequently; in some sense Malcolm Bradbury's pastiche of Murdoch's fiction, 'A Jaundiced View', is not as parodic of her fiction as *Joanna, Joanna* is.[8] There are misunderstandings surrounding characters, references to philosophy (G.E. Moore, briefly), implied incest, madness, and questions regarding the male parentage of Teddy Fitch. It seems as if any of the major male characters noted above could have had the opportunity to be his biological father. The play, then, anticipates the campus-based novel that flourished in the 1970s. I am thinking here in particular of Malcolm Bradbury's *The History Man* (1975) and David Lodge's *The Campus Trilogy* (1975-89). Whilst it is clear that neither Bradbury nor Lodge had read Murdoch's play, all three were taking inspiration from the student protests of the late 1960s and the beginnings of the second wave of feminism, which Murdoch experienced first-hand through her work at the RCA and her friendships with David Morgan and Rachel Fenner.[9]

Murdoch is very clear as to how she wishes the stage to be set, the noises off stage, and the ways in which the actors arrive and depart. The play is certainly heavy-handed in parts, and if not carefully produced would raise groans of exasperation rather than laughs of surprise. Missing here is the lightness of comedy we have come to expect from Murdoch's novels, as well as any serious examination of the human psyche – in some regards it falls between two stools. This should not surprise us; her other dramatic work of the time was also criticised for not giving serious enough attention to the craft, even though she was writing some of the best fiction of her career. Take, for example, the interactions between Teddy and Jill in Act 1, Scene 8. The dialogue between them is stilted and wooden compared to that between Morgan Browne and Peter Foster in Chapter 15 of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*: both are scenes of seduction between an older woman and a younger man (Morgan of course, also being Peter's aunt) and yet the narrative form of the novel cannot be condensed into drama by Murdoch. In the play, this just becomes farcical.

As this brief overview indicates, there are numerous links to Murdoch's *A Word Child*. Most strikingly, Hilary Fitch is a precursor of Hilary Burde (Fitch will, of course, appear as a surname in *The Sea, The Sea*, with Mary Hartley Smith marrying Benjamin Fitch, and her son Titus also taking the surname). Hilary Fitch has, like Hilary Burde, studied at Oxford, although Fitch only earned a third, unlike Burde's first. However, Burde's seduction of Anne Jopling mirrors Fitch's seduction and

removal of Joanna Saxonby, and of course she – like Anne – is dead before the play opens: the revelation of Teddy's parentage and the ensuing fallout provides the denouement of the play. Thus the relationship between Hilary Fitch and Roger Saxonby mirrors that between Hilary Burde and Gunnar Jopling in *A Word Child*. There are also elements taken from the play in the construction of Gilbert Opian, a minor character in *The Sea, The Sea*. That Murdoch would do this is not unusual; indeed in her poetic work she regularly rewrote and reimagined scenes and ideas, producing several versions of the same poem over a number of years.

Clearly, Murdoch did not find it easy to relinquish characters, ideas and themes in early working manuscripts. Conradi notes that Murdoch 'abandoned one play – termed only "FN" – in depression. Another, *Joanna, Joanna*, was (rightly) never performed, but the plot was stolen and improved upon in the novel *A Word Child*'.[10] It appears as if the drafted version of the play did not receive a good first reading by the theatrical agent Peggy Ramsey, who observed that 'the naturalism Iris had chosen for her play *Joanna, Joanna* made for complicated set changes; that representing a student riot by "noises off" was a method not seen on stage for fifty years' and that Ramsey became 'exasperated'.[11] Murdoch herself was also disappointed with *Joanna, Joanna*, as a letter to her agent Norah Smallwood on 16 January 1970 reveals: 'I have, by the way, written another play [*The Servants and the Snow* – December 1969], and will send it to you when I am able to organise envelopes and things. This, you will be glad to hear, is my last offering to the theatre for the foreseeable future, and I am beginning with a new novel!'[12] Yet it is clear that she was still turning over the ideas for *Joanna, Joanna*, as highlighted in a journal entry from early 1971:

> Jan 27
> I suppose that I am trying to find how is a play: but a play
> Is no good unless it is utterly [?] a
> POEM. O let me find that, that.
> One cannot be a utilitarian because of the absolute importance of telling the
> truth, e.g. finding right form in art.
>
> Jan 28
> The theatre: a place to act out one's obsessions? Violence.
> X [in margin] Rewrite JOANNA.
>
> Feb 12
> Haha. Completely stuck with play. Dust and ashes.
> My efforts in the theatre have the formal stiffness of the juvenile work of a painter.[13]

These entries appear almost two and a half years before Murdoch was writing the final draft of *A Word Child* in November 1973. Although she did not end up rewriting *Joanna, Joanna*, some of the characters and scenarios were transposed – much as they were from the unpublished manuscript of *Jerusalem* [1959] to *A Severed Head* – into *A Word Child* or *The Sea, The Sea*, several years later.

Reading *Joanna, Joanna* again, I am inclined to agree with the criticisms directed at it by Ramsey, Conradi and Murdoch herself. I also share Anne Rowe's view:

> *Joanna, Joanna* is valuable to Murdoch scholarship not least because of its prescient observations on gender issues, homophobia, misogyny, incest and mental health conditions, which are more sharply focused in this medium than in her novels. However, Murdoch seems unable to sustain this politicised focus and gets drawn back to her 'moral psychology', making the play less successful dramatically. It is, nonetheless, deserving of publication as an illustration of her attempt at merging what she saw as the conflicting roles of the novelist and the public intellectual. Though she was aware of the play's limitations, and might well have been relieved that it never made it to the stage, she would be happy, I think, for it to become available to scholars as a record of her experimentation with a medium she was desperate to master. And in the hands of a gifted director, it might yet fare better on the stage than in print.[14]

This is not, then, a lost classic; it cannot be considered an important publication solely on its own merit. If it were not by one of the greatest novelists of the twentieth century *Joanna, Joanna* would be completely forgotten. I would agree with Rowe that it is of interest to the scholar who wishes to consider Murdoch's dramatic works in the round and, more generally, to those who are interested in the development of a writer who was moving into her major mature phase: letting go of her formal teaching role, widening her repertoire, and experimenting on the page.

1. Colophon Press (which ceased trading in 2016) approached major authors to re-publish works in deluxe limited editions. It is likely that Murdoch was approached in this manner, via her literary agent, Ed Victor, in 1992 or 1993. Six copies were made for private distribution by Murdoch. Currently there are five copies available online via www.bookfinder.com, costing upwards of £200. In the UK, publicly available copies of *Joanna, Joanna* are housed in the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives; Senate House Library, University of London; The British Library, London; The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford; Cambridge University Library and The National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.
2. There is also no reference to *Joanna, Joanna* in George Soule's *Four British Women Novelists: Anita Brookner, Margaret Drabble, Iris Murdoch, Barbara Pym: An Annotated and Critical Secondary Bibliography* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 1998) despite references made to both *The Three Arrows*

and *The Servants and the Snow* as well as the libretto *The Servants*.

3. Discovered on eBay in 2017; purchased and donated by the Iris Murdoch Society.
4. See Chris Boddington and Daniel Read's essay in this issue of the *Iris Murdoch Review*, 11–18, for details of Murdoch's complete dramatic works.
5. Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (London: Harper Collins, 2001), 530.
6. Josephine Hart 'Iris and the Theatre', in *Iris Murdoch: A Centenary Celebration*, ed. by Miles Leeson (Yeovil: Sabrestorm Press, 2019), 79–82 (79).
7. Iris Murdoch, *Joanna, Joanna: A Play in Two Acts* (London: Colophon Press with Old Town Books, 1994), 56.
8. 'A Jaundiced View' can be found in Malcom Bradbury's *Who Do You Think You Are?* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1976), 166–71.
9. Bradbury notes that 'Murdoch's fiction […] has clarified the view that her works deal with a vast imaginary theatre of human drama where the spectacle and action test and tease the power and nature of art and goodness'. Malcom Bradbury, *The Modern British Novel* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1993), 331.
10. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life*, 468.
11. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life*, 531.
12. Iris Murdoch to Norah Smallwood, 16 January 1970, in *Living on Paper*, ed. by Avril Horner and Anne Rowe (London: Chatto & Windus, 2015), 384.
13. Iris Murdoch, Journal, 18 Mar 1970–16 May 1972, KUAS202/1/11, from the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives.
14. Anne Rowe in an email to Miles Leeson, July 2021.

The Japanese Context of *The Three Arrows*

Wendy Jones Nakanishi

Iris Murdoch felt a particular affinity for Russia and Japan: she venerated the writings of Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy and was fascinated by what she considered the subtle wisdom of Zen Buddhism. This may explain why two of Murdoch's plays, *The Servants and the Snow* and *The Three Arrows*, which take as their setting these two countries, were published in a single volume by Chatto & Windus in 1973. Yet, if this were the case, surely Murdoch's adaptation of *A Severed Head* (1961), with its inclusion of themes and items from Japanese culture, should have made its way into this collection. With the assistance of J.B. Priestley, Murdoch had adapted *A Severed Head* into a successful play performed in Bristol and London in 1963 and in New York in 1964. The inclusion of this play would undoubtedly have complemented the 1973 collection, especially as *The Three Arrows* – which was first performed almost a decade later at the Arts Theatre in Cambridge in 1972 – is set in medieval Japan. This medieval period in Japanese history is considered by most historians to stretch from 1185 to 1603, and is characterised by the government of the shogun, or the hereditary military dictator. Shoguns, nominally appointed by the emperor, were usually de facto rulers of the country and faced constant challenges to their authority by rebel factions. This essay will examine how accurately Murdoch represents this medieval Japanese setting in *The Three Arrows*.

First, however, it may be useful to understand the plot and characters of Murdoch's Japanese play. The emperor in *The Three Arrows* is Taihito, a foppish, childish young man bored by his position, who longs to retire and devote himself to painting. His uncle Tokuzan, the former emperor, is the formidable power behind the throne, manipulating Taihito as his puppet. Tokuzan has become a monk, presumably by order of the shogunate in a bid to weaken imperial power even further. General Musashi is the shogun, the real ruler of the country, and it is likely he prefers to deal with the malleable and buffoonish Taihito rather than with Tokuzan. These three characters – the young emperor, his uncle Tokuzan, and the shogun – feel threatened by Prince Yorimitsu, the protagonist of the play, described

as a political prisoner. When the play begins, Yorimitsu is in the Imperial Palace, where he has been imprisoned for the past five years for leading a rebel faction in the north that attempted to overthrow General Musashi's shogunate. The term of Yorimitsu's imprisonment is indefinite. It is made clear he is unable to escape or be rescued by his army. When the play begins, Prince Yorimitsu contemplates the very real possibility of either growing old and dying in the palace or of being summarily executed at any time.

In the opening scene Yorimitsu, confined to his cell, is playing chess with his friend Prince Hirakawa. Murdoch captures authentic Japanese details in her stage directions, stating that the interior of his cell should contain a low table, a brazier, a vase containing three evergreen branches, and a painted scroll on the wall. The game the two men are playing must be *shogi*, the Japanese version of chess dating back to the Nara period that the emperor describes as 'that horribly intellectual Chinese game'.[1] The chess game is a metaphor for the action of the play that follows. *Shogi*, like chess, is a game of abstract strategy in which two players face each other over a board composed of rectangles in a grid. Each player has 20 pieces, including a king, a rook, a bishop, four generals, two knights, two lances and nine pawns, which are allowed to move in specified directions and across a designated number of squares. The player who can checkmate the other player's king – that is, present a threat the king cannot avoid through any move – is the winner.

The play consists almost entirely of political maneuvering between three factions jockeying for control. There is Prince Yorimitsu, the powerful, charismatic, handsome leader of the rebel army in the north of the country, aided by his two samurai, Okano and Norikura. General Musashi represents the shogunate, with his plans and schemes and interests abetted by his mother, Lady Rokuni, who is a nun. Emperor Taihito and his sister Keiko, the Crown Princess, and his uncle, Tokuzan, comprise the Imperial Household, anxious to recover power lost to the shogunate. The three factions remain, at least superficially, on good terms while fully conscious their every action is spied upon and scrutinised by the others. They are caught in a stalemate, reluctant to act lest it make matters worse. Yorimitsu treats Prince Hirakawa and Prince Tenjiku, members of the Imperial Household who often visit his cell, as friends; he confesses to a fondness for the shogun who keeps him prisoner and may have him executed at any time, and he regards the young emperor as an amiable ass. He recognises they are all pawns in a game: 'No one around here does as he pleases, not even the General. They're all slaves of the machine' (*TAP* 134). His military ambitions indefinitely thwarted, he dreams of becoming a monk like his father, who once had ruled half of Japan.

The shogun, General Musashi, at thirty-five or forty, is probably roughly Yorimitsu's age. He sees his rival as an equal, almost as a friend, claiming he failed to kill Yorimitsu when he first was captured because he enjoyed arguing with him about Confucius and subsequently because he relished their philosophical and literary discussions. The shogun's mother, Lady Rokuni, is more ruthless. She urges her son to kill Yorimitsu as soon as possible or, failing that, at least to blind him. Musashi recognises that he and the imperial household are locked in an uneasy balance: 'If [Tokuzan's] men and my men began to fight in the corridors of the palace this would create an entirely unpredictable situation, which at the moment I simply cannot afford' (*TAP* 140). Similarly, he sees the value of Yorimitsu as a hostage, preferring to maintain the status quo rather than jeopardise his position by an action that might topple him, although his mother finally convinces him to visit Father Akita, an old Zen teacher, in the hope that he might persuade Yorimitsu to adopt the life of a religious recluse, thereby removing him as a potential threat.

The uneasy balance of power finally is upset by the type of *coup de foudre* Murdoch often employs in her novels. Keiko, the young and attractive Crown Princess, suddenly conceives a desperate passion for Yorimitsu, a man she does not know, has never met nor even seen. Her love seems inspired by the news imparted by her lady-in-waiting, Kuritsubo, wife of Prince Hirakawa, that, according to palace gossip, Prince Yorimitsu may soon be beheaded. Kuritsubo herself is infatuated with Yorimitsu, describing him to Keiko as a 'real man', a romantic figure of action unlike the other male inhabitants of the palace (*TAP* 153). It may be that Keiko is influenced by Kuritsubo's obvious admiration for the captive when she suddenly decides she wishes to marry someone 'quite different and special' – that is, Prince Yorimitsu (*TAP* 181). Keiko contrives, disguised as a page, to gain entry to the prince's cell and, in declaring her own affection, to win his love and trust, seemingly within a matter of minutes.

Tokuzan, the ex-emperor and the real power in the Imperial Household, welcomes the news. He believes it may represent a means for him and his nephew to break the current deadlock and regain power. Married to Princess Keiko, Yorimitsu will become an ally rather than an enemy and one who might even succeed in unseating General Musashi. Tokuzan determines that the proposed marriage, which he terms 'Operation Arrow', must be kept a closely guarded secret given Musashi's probable opposition. He gives it that procedural title because of a curious custom whereby the suitor of the Crown Princess must first go through a special ordeal. To prove his love, he must choose one of three special arrows: one with hawk's feathers, one with swan's feathers, and one with dove's feathers. If the suitor chooses rightly, the target will glow green and the two may wed; if he chooses wrongly, the target will glow red and he must immediately kill himself by *seppuku*. According to Taihito, the ceremony is 'all rigged of course' (*TAP* 129).

Consumed by jealousy, Kuritsubo betrays Keiko's confidence, informing Lady Rokuni of the wedding plans. Yorimitsu chooses the wrong arrow and prepares to commit suicide when the young emperor suddenly intervenes, declaring there is an alternative. If a suitor fails the test of the arrow, he may choose either to marry

the princess on condition of agreeing to remain a prisoner in the Imperial Palace for the rest of his life, or to leave the palace on condition he never sees her again or wed any other woman. When Yorimitsu chooses freedom, the shogun is killed by the prince's samurai, Okano, and it is discovered that Princess Keiko, concealed in a litter nearby, has stabbed herself and is dead. Yorimitu leaves the palace with Prince Hirakawa and Okano. The emperor mourns his sister's death and Rokuni, her son's.

The Three Arrows, with its tale of rebel factions set against a rich medieval backdrop, appears to be a testament to Murdoch's well-documented love of Japan. Her Oxford library, for example, contains five books by Yukio Mishima, works on Japanese folklore, history, sociology, haiku and netsuke as well as books on Zen Buddhism.[2] She visited Japan three times: in 1969, 1975 and 1993. She made a visit to a monastery connected with *The Tale of Genji* during her 1975 visit, and it is claimed by Chiho Omichi that she borrowed some scenes from Lady Murasaki's much-loved story 'in the creation of her own works'.[3] However, Murdoch once remarked that, as a novelist, she should not write about what she did not know: 'One could bring in little funny details and oddities, bits of background, quirks, little vistas and so on, but I could obviously not set a novel in India or Japan because I don't know [...] what it's like to be in the place'.[4] Apparently, her concern about setting her works in another country was not motivated by anxieties over cultural appropriation but simply by Murdoch's belief that a lack of sufficient background knowledge would rob a story of its authenticity.

While Murdoch appears to have been wary of using foreign settings in novels, the same cannot be said of her plays. Indeed, *The Three Arrows* includes far more than the 'details and oddities' seen in *A Severed Head*, with its references not only to Japanese artefacts and prints but also to the Japanese legend of an incestuous relationship between the gods Izanagi no Mikoto and his sister Izanami no Mikoto. Moreover, unlike *The Servants and the Snow*, which appears – albeit not explicitly – to be set in pre-revolutionary Russia, the stage directions of *The Three Arrows* make it plain the play is set in medieval Japan. But does Murdoch offer an authentic representation of Japanese culture? Does *The Three Arrows* really live up to the kind of cultural authenticity that she seems to have wanted in her novels?

One of the similarities shared by *The Servants and the Snow* and *The Three Arrows* is their inclusion of long dialogues, where any dramatic action is confined to the final climactic scene. The two plays are also alike in that all their characters seem to talk like guests at a cosmopolitan Oxford dinner party, alternating light-hearted bantering with philosophical debate. There is little distinction in style and content between the speech of privileged aristocrats or highly ranked soldiers on the one hand and the servants or lowly underlings in their employ on the other.

This conversational style is particularly incongruous in *The Three Arrows*. One would expect its characters, and especially those representing upper-class members of medieval Japanese society, to be formal, taciturn, and reserved. Even now, Japan is a deeply conservative and rigidly hierarchical society, where language and behaviour signify social status. Japanese has an elaborate system of honorifics referred to as *keigo* that denote 'humble', 'polite' or 'respectful' speech. The language used in any social situation indicates and reflects the participants' assessment of their relative social status. This assessment of relative social status is also indicated in the depth of the bowing that occurs in any social interaction, generally ranging from a small bow of the head to a deep bow at the waist. In medieval Japan, the customs were even stricter, with anyone coming into the presence of the emperor or the shogun expected to throw himself prostrate on the ground and remain there, motionless and silent, unless or until invited to move or to speak.

Taihito, the young emperor in *The Three Arrows*, however, engages in Bertie Woosterish gush, is impatient of ritual, impetuously confesses opinions and admits personal failings and, in short, behaves with none of the ceremoniousness that would have been instilled from birth in a figure of his rank. The informality, the sense of social equality, observable in his interactions with Yorimitsu, Prince Hirakawa and Prince Tenjiku, with Tenjiku even complaining the emperor stinks of sweat, would have been inconceivable in medieval Japan. It also strains credulity that Yorimitsu, Tokuzan, and General Musashi hold forth freely on matters personal and political. The Japanese believe that discretion is the better part of valour. They are reluctant to divulge personal beliefs, believing it not only impolite but impolitic, that so doing may expose vulnerability and leave them open to criticism or attack. It is considered rude to discuss controversial topics such as politics or religion. And yet, in the final scenes of Act One, we see Yorimitsu accuse Tokuzan to his face of being a gangster like the shogun and Tokuzan complain that Yorimitsu has become a soft, womanish man prey to a dangerous idealism, while General Musashi deprecates his own country as a pale and inferior imitation of China (*TAP* 169–71, 174).

The Japanese make a great virtue of patient endurance without complaint. They believe in the adoption of principled resignation when faced with difficult circumstances. But the characters Murdoch depicts in this work are scarcely stoical. Prince Yorimitsu chafes at his fate, Emperor Taihito sighs after handsome young pages, wishing he were free to indulge his lusts, and Princess Keiko gossips and giggles like a bored schoolgirl with her ladies-in-waiting. The obedience and self-discipline instilled in the Japanese from their earliest years is conspicuous by its absence in these individuals preoccupied with matters of self-interest and self-gratification.

The Three Arrows thus portrays a milieu largely untouched by *bushido* – the moral code derived from the samurai or Japanese warriors that has been an integral component of Japanese culture for centuries and continues to be

employed in the country's social and economic organisation. *Bushido* is an ancient unwritten code of chivalry containing eight key principles warriors were expected to uphold. These include justice, courage, compassion, respect, integrity, honour, loyalty and self-control, virtues that would automatically and instinctively have formed the basis for the conduct of any Japanese ruler or soldier of the medieval period. These virtues also form the basis of Japanese society to this day. Great emphasis is placed in Japan on virtuous behaviour, as we may see in the fact that classes on moral education form a component of the curriculum at all Japanese primary schools. These classes address four areas: individual development, treatment of others, one's relationship with nature and the sublime, and one's relationship with society at large.

Although Murdoch failed to convey the pervasive influence of *bushido* in her Japanese play, she was aware of the darker side of the Japanese character. Murdoch professed affection and respect for Japan and the Japanese, and undoubtedly these sentiments were genuine. Yet, Murdoch's experience of the Second World War as a young adult must have familiarised her with reports of atrocities committed by the Japanese in the Pacific Ocean theatre as well as Japan's inhumane treatment of prisoners of war. Her difficulty in reconciling the country famed for its ancient traditional arts and for the development of Zen Buddhism with a Japan equally notorious for the brutalities engaged in by its soldiers in wartime is reflected in General Musashi's musings on the nature of the Japanese character:

> We are supposed to have become civilised, Yorimitsu. But how very primitive and barbarous we really remain in this little backward country. We are the greatest imitators in the world. We imitate the Chinese, we ape and copy and assimilate the superficial flowers of that great civilization. But while they are genuinely cultivated people we are merely peasants who have put on silk robes and perfume without in any way changing our savage hearts. Cruelty is never far from us. It is a national characteristic. The great sword- masters of the Samurai, like your friend Okano who pays you visits, are artists, who will bow to a man one moment, cut his head off, with the utmost elegance, the next, and then go and drink a glass of sake and arrange sprays of peach blossoms. That is what we are like. What I am like. What you are like (*TAP*, 174–5).

It is significant that Murdoch had five books by Yukio Mishima in her Oxford library. She admired him as a writer but her familiarity with his life and work may also have led her to believe the Japanese have the kind of unresolved contradiction at their core that Musashi remarks upon. Japan's most famous novelist, Mishima, committed an act which might be considered indicative either of heroic self-sacrifice or of idiotic delusion. On 25 November 1970, when he was 45, Mishima went to an army base in Tokyo, kidnapped the commander, had him assemble the garrison, and then tried to initiate a coup against the government, disgusted by the post-war constitution he believed had been foisted upon his country by the US military and passionately determined to return the emperor to his pre-war position as living god and leader. When his pleas to the army for support were met with jeers, Mishima knelt down and committed *seppuku*.

This astonishing event, widely reported throughout the world, must have been fresh in Murdoch's mind when she composed *The Three Arrows*. It had only just happened, and it may even have inspired some of the events Murdoch included in her play, with Yorimitsu also calmly contemplating such a death. But the Japanese public, disillusioned by the horrors of the Second World War and anxious to take their place in the modern world as citizens of a prosperous and peaceful nation, greeted the news of Mishima's attempted coup and suicide by samurai ritual with dismayed incredulity. Perhaps they would experience a similar emotion should they be asked whether *The Three Arrows* represents a convincing literary depiction of Japan in its medieval period. Or perhaps they would only be amused by Western misconceptions of their country and culture.

1. Iris Murdoch, 'The Three Arrows', in *The Three Arrows and The Servants and the Snow* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), 113–221, 123, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *TAP*.
2. See Chiho Omichi, 'Netsuke in Iris Murdoch's Novels', *Iris Murdoch Review* 2 (2010), 25–32.
3. Omichi, 'Netsuke in Iris Murdoch's Novels', 25. Omichi also draws attention to Yushiro Inouchi's *Iris Murdoch no Sekai* [*The World of Iris Murdoch*] (2003) for those interested in exploring the significance of Japan in Murdoch's novels.
4. Stephen Glover, 'Iris Murdoch Talks to Stephen Glover' (1976), in *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction*, ed. by Gillian Dooley (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 33–43, 41.

‘All those wonderful glittering absolutely vanishing pantomimes’: The Theatre and Iris Murdoch

Jaki McCarrick

As a playwright who loves the fiction of Iris Murdoch, I find it hard to believe that this icon of British and Anglo-Irish literature struggled with the writing of plays. According to Wendy Jones Nakanishi, Murdoch very much wanted to succeed as a dramatist but ‘she found writing plays difficult and had problems mastering modern theatrical techniques’.[1] While she might not have been as celebrated in this area as she was for her fiction and philosophy, by my reckoning she was indeed a successful dramatist.

Murdoch adapted several of her novels for the stage. Having adapted one of my own plays as a screenplay, and indeed refashioned a few plays into fiction, I can attest to the difficulty of turning an already existing idea into an entirely different form. Hence, to have distilled several novels, with all their complex ideas, into dramas must have been arduous indeed. Murdoch collaborated on many of these undertakings, but nonetheless the act of transmuting one form to another is not easy. My own screenplay adaptation of my play *Belfast Girls* took three times longer to write than the play itself. Emma Donoghue adapted her novel *Room* into an Oscar-nominated screenplay – but Donoghue also has a drama background, having already written several plays. In fact, it is rare to find a novelist involved with their own adaptations for stage or screen; that Murdoch often had a hand in her own adaptations, then, is certainly commendable.

Murdoch’s play of *A Severed Head*, adapted with J.B. Priestley, opened at the Theatre Royal, Bristol in April 1963, and later transferred to the Criterion in the West End. Directed by Val May, the West End production transferred to New York’s Royale Theatre the following year where it received lukewarm reviews: ‘“A Severed Head” is special – for the English more than us’, wrote Howard Taubman in the *New York Times*.[2] *The Italian Girl* was adapted by Murdoch in collaboration with James Saunders, staged in 1967 with the Bristol Old Vic Company at the Theatre Royal, Bristol, and directed by Val May. The production transferred in 1968 to the West End, at Wyndham’s Theatre. In 1989, Murdoch’s adaptation of her novel *The Black Prince* opened in the West End, at the Aldwych Theatre, produced by Josephine Hart and directed by Stuart Burge. In his review for *The Financial Times* Michael Coveney called the production ‘a tragical farce. And a deliciously cerebral one’, while Jack Tinker for the *Daily Mail* said the show was ‘chillingly funny’.[3] Murdoch also wrote original plays, *The Servants and the Snow*, *The Three Arrows* and *Acastos: Two Platonic Dialogues* – the first of which, ‘Art and Eros: A Dialogue about Art’, was staged by the National Theatre on the Olivier stage in 1980 and directed by Michael Kustow.

Such a production history would be an achievement for any playwright – even without the illustrious career in prose and philosophy – particularly with its numerous West End transfers and openings. Furthermore, recent statistics have shown that since the Olivier stage was built in 1977 only 19 plays by women have been staged on this largest of the three National Theatre stages. That is a staggeringly small number (two of these plays were co-written by men) and amounts to a tiny percentage of the overall plays staged at the Olivier. Plays by women are more likely to be shown at the Dorfman Theatre, formerly the Cottesloe, the smallest of the National Theatre spaces. Nonetheless, in the National Theatre overall, only 18 percent of all plays staged have been by women in the last decade. So even with the enormous pressure that has been brought to bear on the theatre industry in recent years, from groups such as Tonic (an independent charity that works with the performing arts to aim for equality and diversity), there still remains a lack of gender parity on the British stage, especially when it comes to writers.[4] So, for Murdoch to have been among that tiny group of female playwrights in Britain to have had work on at the National at all, never mind the large Olivier stage, is a substantial success indeed.

It is worth considering that her perceived lack of success in this area – as compared with, for example, Caryl Churchill – might have much to do with the lack of diversity and the gender imbalance in British theatre historically, especially at the time Murdoch wrote her plays. In fairness, the situation has been the same the world over – production opportunities are much less available to female playwrights, although this is improving in some countries as a result of campaigning and groups like Tonic. Had Murdoch not also been a famous novelist, one wonders if she would have had the opportunity to stage her work at all. Theatre programmers would have been well aware that Murdoch’s novel readership would constitute precious bums-on-seats at her theatre shows.

Many of Murdoch’s novels are set in London, a city that has been at the heart of the world’s theatre for centuries and which has some of the world’s best drama, dance and technical training schools. The period from the mid-1950s to the 1970s, when Murdoch’s plays were on in the West End, was a particularly heady time for theatre. Murdoch may well have shared programme schedules with the likes of

Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter and Joe Orton. A dramatic writer like Murdoch would have been naturally drawn to such a rich scene, with all its social life, late dining, liberal-mindedness and celebrity. On a purely quotidian level, her London-based characters are bound to have some contact with the theatre industry; what better crucible than the London theatre-scene for the Murdochian universe of characters who are fleeing their pasts, or striking up former relationships, or planning to seduce young women, or some such dramatic activity. While the theatre milieu itself might not always be depicted in Murdoch's novels, Hilda Spear states, with particular reference to *The Unicorn* (1963), that her 'vocabulary constantly draws attention to the theatrical elements of the story'.[5]

Drama was indeed a large part of Murdoch's life and her writings. One of the more tangible influences on her writing was Shakespeare, a writer for whom she professed an enduring love. Most of her 26 novels have some reference, whether explicit or implicit, to Shakespeare and/or to one or more of his 38 plays. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Tempest* and *Hamlet* appear in some of her earliest novels. *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956), her second novel, for example, refers to *Hamlet* when Calvin Blick introduces himself to two men 'of Austro-Hungarian appearance' whom he believes are called Rosencrantz and Guildenstern – these childhood friends of Hamlet are, notably, the subjects of Tom Stoppard's 1966 play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*.[6] While Murdoch's interest in Shakespeare informed her fiction, she was also well placed to be a dramatist. As a young woman she was a member of the Oxford students' amateur theatre company, the Magpie Players, which toured parts of the UK in 1939. While these early experiences would have furnished her with a love for amateur dramatics, her collection of plays and novel adaptations undoubtedly gave her a greater understanding of the world of a professional actor or playwright, which she would have seen up close many times in London. That heady theatre-centric city looms large in many of Murdoch's novels – albeit occasionally interrupted by stints in the country or trips abroad. The influence that London and Murdoch's love of drama and dramatists had on her life are writ large in her fiction from *Under the Net* (1954) to *The Green Knight* (1993) and mark some novels, like *The Sea, The Sea* (1978), more than others.

In *Under the Net*, Murdoch's first novel, Anna Quentin works in the Riverside Miming Theatre in Hammersmith. Jake Donaghue visits Anna in the props room and ends up sleeping there. Murdoch's description of this small crammed room takes up several pages in the novel, and there are many references to masks and the tools of stage artifice. The effect is curiously gothic. Murdoch's pleasure in lingering on each inanimate object (especially the rocking horse) used to recreate life on stage is evident: 'the contents of the room had a sort of strange cohesion and homogeneity [...] the room was full of eyes [...] the eyes of dolls and puppets'.[7] While in the room, Jake describes his looking around the space: 'I [...] surveyed the scene' (*UN* 38) – this is the language of drama. Also, he has 'an uneasy feeling of being observed' (*UN* 46), as if he were a character in a play. Instead, he is a character in a novel, and he is being observed – by us, Murdoch's readers. In drama this utterance would be close to breaking 'the fourth wall'; in a novel it is metafiction.

Under the Net also contains many references to the film industry. Sadie Quentin, Anna's sister, is a star of the screen; Hugo Belfounder, a former friend of Jake's, owns a film production company, Bounty Belfounder, which, we are told, had a period when it 'produced a lot of silent films which used to be called "expressionist"' (*UN* 65). Hugo is enthralled by the drama of pyrotechnics, as Jake attests:

> There was something about fireworks which absolutely fascinated Hugo. I think what pleased him most about them was their impermanence. I remember his holding forth to me once about what an *honest* thing a firework was. (*UN* 54)

When we are finally shown an excerpt from Jake's manuscript of *The Silencer*, it is presented as a play text, a dialogue between Tamarus and Annandine, characters based on Hugo and Jake. When I first encountered this section, it reminded me of the Circe section in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, also written as a script – so it is interesting to see Mrs Tinckham referred to as an 'aged Circe' (*UN* 251) towards the end of Murdoch's novel. The impression the dialogue of *The Silencer* leaves on the page is striking; it shakes up the prose somehow, providing an attractive visual contrast.

Many of Murdoch's novels, as revealed in *Under the Net*, are full of theatrical hints and echoes, including Shakespearean doublings, processions and 'the switch' (a theatrical device deployed in drama more usually with identities or genders or, as in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the switch of a manuscript with a baby at Victoria Station). Murdoch's love of doublings and twins begins with *The Flight from the Enchanter* and *The Bell* (1958): the former has two suicide attempts, two sibling pairs and Rosa's love for two brothers; the latter includes two bells and the Fawley twins. *The Bell* is also self-consciously theatrical in its use of both a procession for the unveiling of the new bell (complete with antediluvian Morris dancing and choral singing) and Dora Greenfield and Toby Gashe's planned 'switch' of the newly commissioned bell with the one they found in the lake. It is worth noting that, on my first reading of *The Bell*, Imber Court and its Gloucestershire environs recalled to me the sense of being transported to magical, Shakespearean places. Once Dora's train leaves the city, the novel takes on a pastoral quality, as if Murdoch were conjuring up *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and other Shakespeare plays that leave the court for the country, the claustrophobic city for the invigorating English countryside.

The Sea, The Sea, similarly, has Shakespearean echoes of *The Tempest* in Charles Arrowby's retreat to the coast to contemplate and write about his 'own dream text' of a life spent in theatre.[8] The novel is also one of Murdoch's most theatre-centric novels, with its narrative offered by actor, playwright, theatre director, 'firm friend of the Proscenium arch', Charles Arrowby (*TSTS* 35). As John Burnside states in his thoughtful introduction to the 1999 edition, Charles is 'self-consciously literary, and theatrical, as he considers his undertaking' (*TSTS* xi). While Charles himself would consider his task profoundly serious and not theatrical at all – 'Now I shall abjure magic and become a hermit; put myself in a situation where I can honestly say that I have nothing else to do but to learn to be good' (*TSTS* 2) – and while Charles constantly claims he wants to leave the world of theatre behind, his behaviour and choices are dramatic, as if he cannot shift a lifelong habit of performance. Before long he is caught up in a real-life drama of his own making, and he clearly misses the industry he has left with 'all those wonderful glittering absolutely vanished pantomimes' (*TSTS* 1–2). Peter J. Conradi declares that Shakespeare was Murdoch's 'tutelary deity' in *The Sea, The Sea*.[9] When I first read the novel, the creature in the sea which frightens Charles by reminding him of the 'dark half-formed spiritual evil' (*TSTS* 21) recalled to me Caliban – I thought of Caliban's lines to Stephano and Trinculo: 'Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises'.[10] Similar echoes of *The Tempest*, however, appear in other novels. Caliban makes an appearance in *The Italian Girl* (1964), when Otto says of Elsa to Edmund that 'I think I'm the first thing she has really loved. Perhaps she can only love a sort of Caliban'.[11] In *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983), moreover, when George McCaffrey apologises to John Robert Rozanov, his former teacher, for being rude to him in the past, he connects himself with Prospero's maligned servant: 'I prostrate myself', George says, 'Caliban must be saved too'.[12] Titus's cleft lip, in *The Sea, The Sea*, might even be thought to recall the physical marks of Caliban's difference from the other characters.

The Green Knight not only offers another example of Murdoch's proclivity for Shakespearean allusions but also reveals an enduring engagement with the lessons she learnt in the theatre. Clement Graffe, a charismatic actor and lover of theatre, represents another of Murdoch's Shakespearian doublings: he has an older step-brother, Lucas, an embittered academic, who attempts to murder him. In '"This rough magic I here abjure": Theatricality in *The Green Knight*', Frances White argues that Murdoch's penultimate novel is the apex of the novelist's theatre-rich milieu, after which there is a falling off of Murdoch's love affair with the theatre in *Jackson's Dilemma* (1995), her last work. 'All of these features are exhibited to the highest degree in *The Green Knight'*, White states, claiming that throughout Murdoch's writing career the theatrical constituents that are so ubiquitous in Murdoch's fiction were not 'a surface phenomenon, a bolt-on extra', but part of a definite methodology, a sort of blueprint to which the novelist worked.[13] For White, Murdoch's oeuvre, to be fully understood, must be seen in a drama-context:

> 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.[14]

White refers to this idiosyncratic novel style of Murdoch's as 'drama-in-prose' and cites *The Green Knight*, with its five chapters, as having a five-act play structure.[15]

I wonder, on reading Murdoch's 'drama-in-prose', to use White's term, if Murdoch's early experience with the Magpie Players established in her imagination a way of thinking about story that was more act-based in terms of plot structure, and more about the ensemble than one looming presence. Spear states that, for Murdoch,

> the novel is not concerned with introspection [...] 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.[16]

Plays and screenplays generally have act structures (screenplays usually have only three acts), with character arcs and resolutions at the end. Screenplays are more formulaic where certain actions are expected to happen on certain pages ('the inciting incident' and so on), and obstacles for the characters to overcome by denouement. In both plays and screenplays there are usually redemptions or attempts at redemption for the main protagonist(s). Both forms are heightened, rather than realistic entities. Even the most seemingly naturalistic (in performance) of dramas is usually formal in some way; Sam Shepard's plays, with their relaxed, naturalistic settings and characters, are in fact heavily influenced by Beckett. Even my own more naturalistic plays echo my interests in Jean Genet, Sarah Kane and Artaudian spectacle, elements that might be more obvious in my other plays. As Antonin Artaud opines, the aim of a play in the theatre is ultimately to achieve some kind of catharsis for its audience. Murdoch's novels, which are informed by her own experience of acting and playwriting, not only exhibit a dramatic understanding of plot structure but, arguably, also bridge the aesthetic gap between novels and plays.

Plays have not always had the same function in society as they do today, nor were they always received by their audiences in the same way. Religious fervour in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries saw a revival of passion and mystery plays in the British Isles. It was not until the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries that the drama's popularity increased significantly with the advent of the English language verse play. Many of the Elizabethan writers – Thomas Kyd, Jasper Heywood, Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville – took their leads not from the

Greek drama tradition – Euripides, Aeschylus and Aristophanes – which did not find an audience in these islands until the late sixteenth century, but from the Roman poet Seneca. A.K. Mcilwraith states in his introduction to *Five Elizabethan Tragedies* that Seneca 'probably meant his plays to be read aloud or recited by a single speaker, not to be acted or spoken by a company of players'.[17] The choice of Seneca as a model is crucial in the development of the English language play. It implies that the earliest Elizabethan dramas, not yet invaded by action-heavy physical scores, were written for a type of reading, as well as for a fairly stilted performance. Mcilwraith claims that with Thomas Kyd's greatest success, *The Spanish Tragedy*, Kyd discovered how to increase the play's appeal:

> Kyd learned from the inn-yard tradition that the presentation of violence and bloodshed can move an audience more than the narration of it, and the dramatic irony of Pedringano's trial (Act III, Scene VI) has this in common with the 'mixed' plays, that it is nearer to laughter than the dramatic irony of Greek Tragedy.[18]

Mcilwraith's reference to 'mixed' plays alludes to the later stage of Elizabethan writing, mastered by Shakespeare: namely, the combining of the Senecan poetic structure (often written as fourteeners or a continual sonnet form) with the medieval Mystery Play, which was populist and almost wholly action based.

Gorbuduc, the first English language tragedy, written by Norton and Sackville in 1561, was also written in imitation of Seneca. However, it was written in blank verse, which became the usual medium of English tragedy for the next three centuries. In *The British Theatre: Its Repertory and Practice*, E.J. Burton states:

> In medieval plays we have masks, grotesques, violent effects, vivid colour, intrusion upon the audience (where characters run amongst the on-lookers), a non-pictorial background, wrestling, songs, god-like visitants (i.e. the visitation of Jupiter in Shakespeare's *Cymbelin*e), supernatural, abrupt transition from mood to mood.[19]

This vivacious folk theatre mixes with the Elizabethan poetic drama to become henceforth the main model for the English language play. The general public began to also demand and enjoy published texts of these plays, which were read as avidly as novels are now, although English language novels would take a couple of centuries to find similar appeal. Hence, when Iris Murdoch is writing her 'drama-in-prose' she would seem to have created a form for herself that, as previously suggested, bridges the formerly popular play-text (as reading material) and the novel.

While White names *The Green Knight* as the apex of Murdoch's fictional engagement with drama, *The Sea, The Sea* confirms Murdoch's lifelong love

and knowledge of the theatre. Aside from being saturated with references to Shakespeare, it is also a masterful study of the heady, sometimes fickle, interrelationships in the world of theatre. By the time she wrote the novel, Murdoch would have had much experience of this world. She would have known at first-hand the intimate workings of this industry, having had several well-received plays on the West End. She herself wrote about the aesthetic role of theatre when *The Servants and the Snow*, her first original play to be staged, debuted at Greenwich Theatre. In 'A Note on Drama', a contribution to the *Greenwich Theatre Magazine*, she argues that the playwright has to persuade his audience 'to sit still for two or three hours listening to his fictitious words and watching his fictitious actions': for her, drama is closely related to poetry, 'an old form of human speech, a particular magical combination of the personal and the public (the secret and the revealed)', and the playwright has to draw on this 'magical' aspect of poetry to 'keep the citizen in the Theatre'.[20] Murdoch's experience of creating plays undoubtedly informed these reflections and, in *The Sea, The Sea*, Charles appears to voice a similar collection of ideas. He informs the reader that

> the theatre is nearest to poetry of all the arts. [...] The theatre is an attack on mankind carried on by magic: to victimize an audience every night, to make them laugh and cry and suffer and miss their trains. Of course actors regard audiences as enemies, to be deceived, drugged, incarcerated, stupefied. This is partly because the audience is also a court against which there is no appeal. [...] Drama must create a factitious spell-binding present moment and imprison the spectator in it. The theatre apes the profound truth that we are extended beings who yet can only exist in the present. It is a factitious present because it lacks the free aura of personal reflection and contains its own secret limits and conclusions. (*TSTS* 33, 36)

In these moments, Murdoch appears to charge Charles's more comic, self-important reflections on the heady world of theatre with her own understandings of the operation of drama. Charles's reflections, moreover, illustrate how Murdoch's 'drama-in-prose' is capable not only of carrying a basic narrative that drives character arcs with dramatic redemptions and resolutions but also of offering her an appropriate form within which to develop her many philosophical ideas, and even her personal reflections, in a less heightened, naturalistic prose style.

When I first read Murdoch – which was on the reissue of *The Sea, The Sea* in 1999 – I was acting and directing, but had not yet written plays, or published fiction. I now realise that my love for that book, and for her novels that I have read subsequently, is possibly due to the fact they not only regularly include a

recognisable theatre milieu, but that there is something in her prose very much like dramatic writing. With the centenary of Murdoch's birth, there has been a recent resurgence of interest in her fiction and philosophy, so surely it is high time now for enterprising directors and venues to revive Murdoch's plays.

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2. Howard Taubman, '*A Severed Head* at the Royale opens', *New York Times*, 29 October 1964, 40.
3. Michael Coveney, review of *The Black Prince*, *The Financial Times*, 26 April 1989, 23; Jack Tinker, 'Mayhem with a tax inspector who tweaks Hamlet by the nose', *Daily Mail*, 26 April 1989, 3.
4. For more information about Tonic, see <https://www.tonictheatre.co.uk> [accessed 5 August 2021].
5. Hilda D. Spear, *Iris Murdoch* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 48.
6. Iris Murdoch, *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956) (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 187.
7. Iris Murdoch, *Under the Net* (1954) (London: Penguin Books, 1960), 37, 46, hereafter parenthetically referenced as *UN*.
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9. Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: The Saint and the Artist*, 2nd edn (London: HarperCollins, 2001), 320.
10. William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. by Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan, Arden Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 161–308 (II.ii.135).
11. Iris Murdoch, *The Italian Girl* (1964) (London: Penguin Books, 1983), 76.
12. Iris Murdoch, *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983) (London: Vintage, 2000), 146.
13. Frances White, '"This rough magic I here abjure": Theatricality in *The Green Knight*', *Iris Murdoch Review* 10 (2019), 31–41 (32).
14. White, 'Theatricality in *The Green Knight*', 33.
15. White, 'Theatricality in *The Green Knight*', 39.
16. Spear, *Iris Murdoch*, 32.
17. A.K. Mcilwraith (ed.), *Five Elizabethan Tragedies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), 56.
18. Mcilwraith, *Five Elizabethan Tragedies*, 77.
19. E.J. Burton, *The British Theatre: Its Repertory and Practice, 1100-1900 A.D.* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1960), 117.
20. Iris Murdoch, 'A Note on Drama', *Cue*: *Greenwich Theatre Magazine* (September 1970), 13–14 (KUAS139/2), from the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives. A copy of this essay is published in this issue of the *Iris Murdoch Review*, 1–2.

Pain and Pleasure in Fictionalised Landscapes: The Shakespearean Imaginary in *The Nice and the Good*

Emma Graeme

It has often been argued that Iris Murdoch's work both contemplates and is nourished by Shakespeare's drama.[1] Indeed, in his comparison of Murdoch's novel *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970) with Shakespeare's foremost comedy, Robert Hoskins poses the question of 'whether Miss Murdoch employs *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in such a way as to make it essential to our understanding of her novel'.[2] His answer is that it does. Murdoch herself, during a 1978 symposium, confirms the references to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* within *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. She remarks that Julius King is, at the end of the novel, happy because 'he's going to go and make some more mischief somewhere else'.[3] This implicitly connects Julius with Shakespeare's 'shrewd and knavish spirit', Puck.[4] Murdoch also refers to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in her philosophical works. In *The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists* (1977), she borrows the phrase 'a local habitation and a name' from Theseus's reflection on imagination in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (V.i.14–17).[5] Later, in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992), she discusses the 'omnipresent operation of imagination in human life' and refers to 'poets and madmen' in an echo of the same speech by Theseus (V.i.7–8).[6] That many of Murdoch's novels are influenced by Shakespeare's art in both form and character is unsurprising considering that he was, as she acknowledges in 'On "God" and "Good"' (1969), one of her personal gods; 'the whole world was his,' she later argues in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 'he imbibed everything, he transformed everything'.[7] It is, of course, possible to read Murdoch's novels without any reference to, or knowledge of, Shakespeare, but increased knowledge and understanding of the myriad ways in which Shakespeare inspired her novels stimulates the reader's imagination and opens the novels up to fresh interpretations.

Even a cursory read of *The Nice and the Good* (1968) conjures up an echo of the journey of the lovers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* as they move from Athens to the outlandish woods outside the city and return as neatly organised couples. Through a comparison of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Nice and the Good,* this essay analyses the extent to which Murdoch not only adopts but also expands the Shakespearean imaginary using fictionalised landscapes and explores how this process affects readers' understanding of both the pain and the pleasure experienced by the characters involved. Comparisons between Shakespeare's and Murdoch's characters are complicated by the different forms adopted by each author; there are many more characters in Murdoch's novel, for example, and their journey from pain to pleasure, or at least resolution, is more complex. However, the broad outlines of the plot fall aptly into the same mould with regard to the imagined progression from the opening formal, rather constrained setting of London and Theseus' court, to the more informal and potentially subversive open landscape of the woods, the sea and the countryside. Similarly, at least on the surface, both texts end with key characters returning to their original setting and an arguably normal life, with the suggestion of their pain, if not completely eradicated through their experiences, lessened by the prospect of the pleasure that awaits them.[8]

As would be expected in a Shakespearean comedy of fantasy and illusion, the locations are used to frame the action of the play. Theseus' court is highly structured, is under strict rule, and those who transgress are threatened with punishment, as Hermia discovers when she goes against her father's wishes in her choice of a suitor. The court itself exists under an atmosphere of sanctioned and contained violence exemplified in Theseus's impending marriage to Hippolyta: 'Hippolyta, I woo'd thee with my sword, / And won thy love doing thee injuries' (I.i.16–17). Thus the court appears as a place where pleasure and pain are inextricably linked, posing the question of whose pain contributes to whose pleasure. This is a question that is also pertinent to the experience of Murdoch's characters. A.S. Byatt argues that *The Nice and the Good* is 'about the inextricable relationship between love and power, and the almost automatic pain and damage this combination causes'.[9] The extent to which the different landscapes affect the interplay between love and power in the novel is reflected in the power structures they contain. The formal landscapes are power-based and so love must not be transgressive, whereas within the natural landscapes power is held lightly by certain characters, primarily Octavian and Kate Gray, and consequently love is free to be pondered and explored. This exploration may itself cause pain, as it reflects on the damage done by power held in the more formal landscape, but it eventually leads to a working through of that pain in a journey towards the potential of pleasure.

As a couple, Octavian and Kate rule both the formal and natural landscapes of the novel much as Theseus and Hippolyta rule the court and Oberon and Titania

rule the open magical space in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In performance, this correlation between Theseus and Hippolyta and Oberon and Titania is often signified by using the same actors for both roles. They are the true figures of power who are largely unaffected by the pain of the others who share their space and, it could therefore be argued, remain static in their own journey of self-understanding. As benign rulers, David Gordon argues, 'Kate and Octavian are egoists of the hedonistic rather than self-absorbed variety, which means they can make others happy, and so, in this morality drama, they receive a limited punishment'.[10] However, unlike Shakespeare's Oberon and Titania, or indeed Theseus and Hippolyta, all of whom find new pleasure in each other at the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* Kate and Octavian are unchanged by the happenings around them. This is not their journey and they take little part in either the pain or the eventual pleasure experienced by others. Their egoism protects them from serious suffering, though it also prevents them from making progress towards genuine happiness. The revelation to the reader of Octavian's secret ongoing affair with his secretary suggests that the final outcome of their relationship may, in fact, be a painful one.

In *The Nice and the Good*, Murdoch's opening depiction of Octavian – 'A head of department, working quietly in his room in Whitehall on a summer afternoon' – momentarily sets a scene of calm order and structure in a contained London environment.[11] Octavian is a ruler over his domain much as Theseus is the ruler in his court. However, just as Hermia's disobedience to her father disrupts the wedding planning in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, so the sound of a revolver shot explodes, literally, into the calm of Whitehall, disrupting the order of *The Nice and the Good*. In both texts, this is a foretaste of the unpredictable contingency of human emotion and the possibility of accompanying pain that becomes the main focus of both the novel and the play. In the structured world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the order of the court must eventually be re-established, and any pain that threatens the pleasure of its normal life must be removed to bring a suitable conclusion to the action for its audience. For Murdoch, this problem of how to exert artistic control over one's characters, one's situation or one's status quo represents a moral paradigm. Aware of these difficulties for the novelist, she remarks in 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited' (1959):

> Form is the temptation of love and its peril, whether in art or life: to round off a situation, to sum up a character. But the difference is that art has *got* to have form, whereas life need not. And any artist both dreads and longs for the approach of necessity, the moment at which form irrevocably crystallises. There is a temptation for any novelist [...] to imagine that the problem of a novel is solved and the difficulties overcome as soon as a form in the sense of a satisfactory myth has been

> evolved. But that is only the beginning. There is then the much more difficult battle to prevent that form from becoming rigid, by the free expansion against it of the individual characters. Here above all the contingency of the character must be respected. Contingency must be defended for it is the essence of personality. (*EM* 285)

To address the tension between the need to provide textual form and the need to allow space for the contingent lives of their characters, both Shakespeare and Murdoch employ contrasting landscapes to create backdrops in which the characters can interact with their surroundings and with each other to acknowledge and explore the pain that interrupts their lives. Shakespeare uses the magic of the woods as a dominant force, meant for good, to manipulate love and balance the pairings of the play. Murdoch, however, is content to let her characters find their own resolutions as they move away from the pains of the past, aided by the form of the novel.

The woods outside Athens in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are representative of an unworldly 'other'; in contrast with the court, they are a place of fantasy and misrule, where nothing is as it seems. For Shakespeare, the woods are a place of bewilderment, where confusion reigns, people are not who they appear to be, enchantment clouds the senses, and the hopes of the lovers are threatened by the well-meaning but comically disruptive actions of Puck, the spirit of the woods. The lovers, two anticipating the pleasure of escape from Theseus's court and two acting out of the pain of rejection and unrequited love, are plunged into a nightmare of misunderstanding and deception as they dance to the tune of the magical rulers of the space. It is a drama acted out in the dark of the night where nothing can be seen clearly. In contrast, Murdoch turns not to fantasy but to the real world when depicting a landscape of transition for the characters who find themselves under the care and influence of Octavian and Kate and of each other. 'Real people', as Murdoch argues in 'Against Dryness' (1961), 'are destructive of myth, contingency is destructive of fantasy and opens the way for imagination' (*EM* 294). Instead of the strangeness of night and the magic of fairies, the open Dorset landscape is reminiscent of idyllic summer holiday escapes from the claustrophobic nature of the city. The sun shines, the sea is calm, the days are long. There is both physical and mental space for interaction between the characters, the majority of whom are suffering pain either from the past or in the present. However, even the pleasure of the surroundings begins to become a strain for its characters. The relentless heat becomes oppressive and rain does not arrive until the end of the novel, bringing not only a sense of relief from the heat but also a sense of the ending of an increasingly confused and painful season. It is almost as if the landscape has itself outlived its usefulness to the plot and so its pleasure must fade as the pain experienced within it also fades.

Murdoch differentiates between life in Trescombe House, inhabited by Octavian, Kate and the various members of their household, and the wilder outside space. From early in *The Nice and the Good*, it is apparent that the outside world can be an unwelcome intrusion. Stones, shells and fossils are brought into the house and play their part in both pleasure and pain for the occupants; natural objects are given as presents to be accepted or rejected. Pierce Clothier, in the grip of the pain and anxiety of tentative teenage love, creates a shell picture as a gift for Barbara Gray, who has outgrown him. This leads to the increased pain of rejection as the shells are dismissively swept from her dressing table. Richard Todd notes that 'the phase of sexual confusion is presented in terms of unrequited love', and it is unrequited love that underpins much of the pain felt by the different characters in their journey through the different phases and landscapes of the novel.[12] In the blurred lines of the landscape, the elderly Dachau survivor Willy Kost is in love with the teenage Barbara, but by the end of the novel may be at the beginning of a relationship with Jessica Bird, John Ducane's rejected lover. Theo longs for Pierce and is carrying the pain of a love that led to suicide; Pierce longs for Barbara; Mary Clothier is in love first with Willy, who cannot love her in return, and then with Ducane, for whom she feels so strongly that 'Great love is inseparable from joy, but further thought brought to her an equal portion of pain' (*NG* 332). Paula Biranne's twins, Edward and Henrietta, inhabit the wild space and bring it inside with them, much to the annoyance of Casie, the housekeeper, and Mary, who oversees the house in general. Like the fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the twins are childishly mischievous but also wise beyond their years, seeing and treasuring things that no one else does, and communing with a flying saucer that no-one else sees. Cheryl Bove notes that, for Murdoch, 'flying saucers signify the interconnectedness of all life, and usually it is only her clearly good characters who make such sightings'.[13] The twins are creatures who reflect the fluidity of the natural landscape, unaffected by the sexual confusion and pain that surround them. Due to their age they are frequently aligned with Mingo and Montrose, the family pets, in the simplicity, immediacy and transitory nature of their own pleasures and pains.

Paula and Mary, who live among the good-natured chaos of Trescombe, have both sought sanctuary in Dorset from the pain of past relationships in London. Like Shakespeare's lovers, they flee from one landscape to another. However, unlike Helena and Hermia, who are manipulated by enchantment, they find the space and time to face the pain of the past and move forward into pleasure on their own terms. Paula's pain is not immediately apparent in what for her is a safe environment among friends. Her role within the household at Trescombe House, described as 'coeval' with her twins (*NG* 14), is passive; she is happy to leave the maternal role to others and live her own life in what appears a comforting numbness. However, with the arrival of a letter from Australia, the full history

and extent of her pain is exposed. The loss of her philandering husband, Richard Biranne, after her own affair, the mental and physical pain emanating from the fight between Richard and Eric Sears, her lover, and the consequent loss of them both are brought dramatically to the surface. It is the letter from Eric heralding his return that unleashes the pain of a 'terrible time, its misery and its shame, [which] lived within her unassimilated and unresolved' (*NG* 40). The realities of life outside the natural landscape where Paula has sought refuge threaten to uproot her and force her to confront the pain from which she has fled. In a scenario where the wild natural landscape represents a space in which people learn and are changed, for Shakespeare through enchantment and for Murdoch through experience, Paula faces the moral requirement to work through her pain.

In contrast, Mary's pain is not primarily sexual; hers is the 'agony of possessive love' (*NG* 23) for her son as she watches his own growing pains and rejection by Barbara, Octavian and Kate's daughter. She is a self-appointed servant of others; she not only acts in a housekeeping capacity within Trescombe House, a bringer of some measure of control in an unruly landscape, but also likes to organise other people's emotional lives. To be unable to do so brings her, if not pain, then irritation. Her failure to organise Theo Gray, Octavian's brother, leaves her exasperated and self-pitying; 'Mary depended [...] on a conception of her existence as justified by her talent for serving people. Her failure with Theo hurt her vanity' (*NG* 88). She pays attention to those around her but, unlike the 'just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality' which, in 'The Idea of Perfection' (1964), Murdoch contends is 'the characteristic and proper mark of the active moral agent' (*EM* 327), Mary's gaze is directed by her own wish to be needed as a confidante and problem solver. She is in love with Willy, drawn to his pain and jealous of the time he spends with others. She wants her love for Willy to disturb – or even hurt – him; to break through his remoteness to her (*NG* 94). Mary's possessive forms of love illustrate that she has not yet learned that '[p]urification is the separation of good from covetousness', a step on the journey from nice to good expounded by Simone Weil, whose philosophy exerted a key influence on Murdoch.[14]

The Dorset shore, an open space with wide horizons, becomes the scene for the uncovering and investigation of the pain that has brought both Mary and Paula to Trescombe House. This is, as Jean-Michel Ganteau argues, the 'liminal space' in the novel, providing the scope for the incidents experienced in the past to move towards their resolution.[15] The openness of the landscape provides Murdoch's characters with an emotional and moral space to learn from the pain of the past. Paula's gradual shift of her gaze from herself to others begins with her acknowledgement that she had never understood the situation with Eric and had never seen things from her husband Richard's point of view. She reflects that 'I have never believed in remorse and repentance. But one must do something about the past. It doesn't just cease to be. It goes on existing and affecting the present' (*NG* 120). Similarly, Mary begins thinking about the anxiety surrounding the relationship with her dead husband, Alistair, and wonders whether she can break free from the person she feels herself to be to move forward into the potential pleasure of a new relationship with Willy. Both women revisit London to confirm their increasing awareness of the past, comprehend the steps required to confront the sources of their pain, and enable movement towards some form of pleasure and absolution. It is not until they come to terms with the trauma of the past that they can begin their moral progression; they each need to learn to direct attention beyond themselves by means of 'really *looking*' (*EM* 375), an ideal which Murdoch ranks alongside justice and realism in her discussion of love in 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts' (1967). Mary's decision to visit the house in which she formerly lived with Alistair – in particular, their garden, where she witnessed his death in a car accident – leaves her overwhelmed with remorse. While she attempts to confront the past by visiting their home, she nevertheless struggles to come to terms with the powerful emotions recalled by their relationship. Mary fails in her attempt to 'keep the attention fixed upon the real situation and to prevent it from returning surreptitiously to the self with consolations of self-pity, resentment, fantasy and despair', which Murdoch describes in the same essay (*EM* 375). As Mary reels from this painful confrontation, Ducane reminds her of the importance of emotional reticence when suffering a bereavement: 'Don't try to see him. Just love him', Ducane suggests, even if it is a love that looks 'into the darkness' (*NG* 206). Ducane's words imply that true loving attention is capable of confronting the void without flinching.

The journey of Ducane, the central and arguably most complex character, who interacts with all the others in some way, is the main focus of the novel. Todd sees Ducane as a 'Shakespearean figure of power' who gains advantage through the information he uncovers in his investigation of Joseph Radeechy's death.[16] However, as a Whitehall employee under the authority of Octavian, who has tasked him with this investigation into the gunshot that disrupted the London office at the beginning of the novel, he can, perhaps, be better seen as a Puck figure who is called to be the 'fixer' of whatever it is that troubles those in charge and causes them if not pain, then inconvenience and irritation. His relationship with Kate is subservient and reminiscent of the tradition of courtly love. It is Kate who controls the relationship in every respect, using him for her amusement and, indeed, for Octavian's amusement as well. Although the reader is told that 'John's depression, his tendency to be "horrid", affected [Kate] intimately' (*NG* 259), she does not experience the pain of sexual frustration or unrequited love endured by other characters. Kate's discovery of Ducane's relationship with Jessica leads to extreme annoyance and feelings of betrayal rather than the pain of love and he is easily jettisoned by Kate. Unlike Puck, the 'merry wanderer of the night' (II.i.43)

who exists primarily to serve his master Oberon and has no separate life within the play, Ducane's efforts to please Kate and Octavian both form and inform his own journey. The reader is fully aware not only of his own pain but also of the way in which his pain is affected by that of others. Consequently, as Gordon suggests, Ducane is 'the novel's central but not dominating figure'; his lack of personal agency is only confronted towards the end of the novel when – as will be explored below – he undergoes a transformative, or epiphanic, experience.[17]

As well as being the unofficial detective appointed by Octavian, Ducane is also a weekend guest at Trescombe House. Loved by Jessica in London and believing himself in love with Kate in Dorset, his regular crossing of the boundaries between the two spaces in his journey from pain to pleasure is more closely documented by Murdoch than any other in the novel. Ducane's sexually ambiguous journey is central to Murdoch's exploration of love and attention; 'Love of this sort', as Martha Nussbaum notes of Murdochian sexual love, 'is a crucial, apparently even a necessary, source of *motivation* for the soul in its search for the vision of the good'.[18] Early in the novel the pain of Ducane's relationship with the much younger Jessica is revealed. His ongoing attempts to reject her, which have been hampered by his own weakness and indecision, continue to cause her pain which he refuses fully to acknowledge. In many ways, Jessica is the stronger character, certainly the more forceful, in her efforts to remain in Ducane's life. The ending of their relationship is long-drawn-out and messy, and it is only the eventual intervention of Willy which brings it to a conclusion. Jessica's release from an obsessive, painful love for Ducane is instigated by Willy's wisdom which, in turn, displaces her love for Ducane with a new love for Willy. He argues that

> We are not good people and the best we can hope for is to be gentle, to forgive each other and to forgive the past, to be forgiven ourselves and to accept this forgiveness, and to return again to the beautiful unexpected strangeness of the world. (*NG* 191)

Here, again, Murdoch concurs with the Shakespearean imaginary: Willy's time in the unruly landscape has enabled him to begin to move through confusion towards his own release from pain. There is a suggestion that although others have failed in their attempts to set him free from his past, it could possibly be the traumatised Jessica – having tracked Willy to Trescombe – who will enable him to move towards freedom at the end of the novel, bringing pleasure out of pain for them both. However, the reader is left with the uncertainty of the future, wondering if this is a happy ending for characters who have experienced so much pain or if Willy will reject Jessica after having fled at her arrival. It is even possible that, by substituting Willy for Ducane, Jessica has embarked on another cycle of obsession that will merely continue her downward spiral into further pain.

Murdoch complicates the simplicity of the basic Shakespearean comic scenario by the addition of two other significant spaces that are more confined and serve as a more obvious authorial focus for both pain and pleasure than other landscapes; the vaults under the Whitehall offices and Gunnar's Cave in the rocks on the Dorset coast. Ducane is the only character who experiences the physical and emotional pain of both these landscapes; these places exacerbate his claustrophobia whilst also providing space for moral epiphanies. His detective role takes him to the vaults, a place that, echoing the subversive nature of Shakespeare's woods albeit existing in the heart of London, carries a more condensed version of the claustrophobic atmosphere. For Radeechy, the vaults provide a location for sadistic pleasure afforded by ritual sacrifice as well as by spiritual and sexual domination. His domination of others is ritualistic only and by consent; no human being is really hurt and most of the people in his circle are none the wiser. However, Radeechy himself undergoes a considerable amount of pain: he is disliked by his colleagues, is labelled an outsider, is blackmailed by Peter McGrath and suffers the infidelity of his wife Claudia with Biranne. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* Hermia is threatened with the law of Athens 'to death, or to a vow of single life' (I.i.121) for her transgression but is given the opportunity of reclaiming her choice of suitor and her place in the court through the pity of Oberon and the ministrations of Puck. Radeechy has no such guardian angel to smooth his way and provide an end to his problems. Eventually the extremity of his own pain is played out in his suicide on the stage of his office in front of Biranne. Murdoch offers little compassion for, or explanation of, Radeechy's need to dominate others and the reader is tempted to feel that his life is an expendable part of the plot's action, necessary only as a means of exploring the irritating effects of his painful actions on those around him. Although Ducane is described as feeling 'piercingly sorry' for Radeechy, it is sorrow for the schoolboyish and pathetic nature of his egoism: 'After all the machinery of evil, the cross reversed, the slaughtered pigeons, the centre of it all seemed so empty and puerile' (*NG* 320).

Ducane seeks to find pleasure by helping others in their exploration and confrontation of pain. However, his own search to move from being 'nice' to being 'good' is hampered by his need to think well of himself: 'How instinctively I assume that what everyone needs is help from me, Ducane thought bitterly' (*NG* 180). He flounders in a feeling of powerlessness which becomes itself a source of anguish: 'He was being infinitely sorry for himself because the power was denied to him that comes from an understanding of suffering and pain' (*NG* 54). Ducane's wish to rescue others takes physical form when Pierce – in an agony of unrequited love for Barbara – decides that he must overcome his fear of Gunnar's Cave by swimming into it in order to discover for himself whether it floods completely at high tide. This is a prospect which gives Pierce both pain

and pleasure; it fills him with horror but he also finds it 'curiously exciting' (*NG* 59). At this stage of his adolescent sexuality, this test becomes an echo of the ancient and often painful rites of passage that mark the change from boyhood into manhood. Gunnar's Cave is the most extreme landscape within the novel; its darkness echoes the confusion of the woods outside Athens. However, whereas the experience of the woods leads the Shakespearean lovers into intense mental anguish but only mild physical discomfort, Ducane and Pierce face both extreme mental and physical pain as well as confused sexual feelings and the possibility of death. Following Pierce into the cave is, for the claustrophobic Ducane, a totally selfless and sacrificial act.

Through this natural landscape, Murdoch facilitates an exploration of self-awareness for Ducane, leading to an act of self-denial and a pure form of attention that causes both pain and pleasure. Having come to a place where the 'concept of death [becomes] the supreme object of love' (*NG* 285), Pierce is also prompted to put aside his own wish for annihilation and look outside his own fear and pain to help Ducane reach a place of possible safety from the waves. In turn, Ducane keeps Pierce warm by sharing his jumper and making use of Mingo's animal warmth between them. There is a suggestion of unspoken sexual attraction on Ducane's part through Murdoch's imagery of the naked warmth under the shared jumper. Nussbaum suggests that 'sexuality itself, operating [...] in concert with the emotions and the intellect, serves the person as a reliable indicator of the presence of the good'.[19] Here, sexuality becomes an additional comfort and pleasure in the midst of pain. The description of Mingo licking Ducane's thigh is, perhaps, a veiled suggestion of a darker side to sexual pleasure in which we might see the faint echo of the relationship between *A Midsummer Night's Dream's* Titania and Bottom, itself darkly comedic.

Ducane's new self-awareness is forced on him by the extremity of the situation he experiences in the cave. This epiphany results, not in feelings of anxiety and self-hatred, but in a clarity of vision:

> He saw himself now as a little rat, a busy little scurrying rat seeking out its own little advantages and comforts. To live easily, to have cosy familiar pleasures, to be well thought of [...] He thought, if I ever get out of here I will be no man's judge. Nothing is worth doing except to kill the little rat, not to judge, not to be superior, not to exercise power, but to seek, seek, seek. To love and to reconcile and to forgive, only this matters. (*NG* 305)

Armed with this Murdochian discovery that, as argued in 'The Idea of Perfection', freedom is 'a function of the progressive attempt to see a particular object clearly' (*EM* 317), Ducane begins to move towards the freedom to understand others in their otherness. For Weil, there is 'absolutely no other free act which it is given to us to accomplish – only the destruction of the "I".'[20] Murdoch implicitly suggests that if Ducane can maintain his thought and action toward others, and gradually reduce his ego, he can move toward the good; certainly his return to London brings with it a release from pain for others. Ducane holds a position of power over Biranne but he does not use that power to punish him. Ducane's decision not to judge him, on the proviso that Biranne attempts reconciliation with Paula, saves Biranne's career. Similarly McGrath, who loses his job because of his role in blackmailing Radeechy and in helping him to procure women for his rituals, is given the fresh start of a new job with Ducane. So the healing of pain in the natural landscape could set the scene for a happier return to the more constrained London landscape. However, Ducane's employment of McGrath does beg the question of how far his moral vision has developed.

Throughout the novel, the puritanical aspects of Ducane's character both confuse and protect him. He appears too fastidious for sex, moving away from that part of his relationship with Jessica, preferring his courtly worship of Kate. He is tempted both by Fivey, his manservant, and McGrath into homosexual feelings that he perceives but does not acknowledge or follow up. He is also severely tempted and excited by the very available naked Judy McGrath but denies himself the pleasure of sex with her. He appears to find sex a complicated and painful rather than a pleasurable experience and the reader is led to speculate about how fulfilling the sexual side of his eventual marriage with Mary will be for her. Like Shakespeare's Helena, Mary is also in danger of unknowingly facing a potentially insecure future. The deception of enchantment has made Demetrius give up his love for Hermia to marry Helena, and it may well be self-deception as to his sexuality that has persuaded Ducane that his love for Mary's character and her goodness is enough for their future. He idolises her and sees her as a mother goddess but we are also told that she was 'the consoling part of his self-abasement' (*NG* 334) and this has the potential to be problematic.

By the end of the novel, however, the majority of the characters have started to resolve their past hurts and begun to move from pain to pleasure. There is, as for Shakespeare's lovers Demetrius and Helena, Lysander and Hermia, the possibility of a happy ending, as Ducane, Mary, Biranne and Paula pair off and the women who have sought refuge in the natural landscape return to the structured setting from which they came. The landscapes in both texts are undoubtedly different in detail. Shakespeare's confusions occur during one dark night of muddle, manipulation and restitution in the alien and dangerous woods beyond civilisation whereas, with the exception of the ordeal experienced by Ducane and Pierce in Gunnar's Cave, Murdoch's landscape is a gentler and safer space in which to work through pain. Characters explore their pasts and attempt to come to terms with their traumas; they experience the restoration of old loves and discover the value of companionship, as

they each move from the pain of old traumas to the pleasures of new relationships. Ruled over by the amicable Kate and Octavian, the Dorset landscape is rather like a benign version of Shakespeare's fairy realm. The slightly unreal nature of these landscapes, however, may illustrate how artistic form can have a distorting effect on reality. While some characters attempt to help others confront their traumas, the resulting relationships have not been without their prospective pains and deceits. The sense of contrivance inherent in benign or happy endings echoes Murdoch's observation in 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited' that the artist might be tempted to impose form order to 'round off a situation' or 'sum up a character', as opposed to respecting the contingency of characters (*EM* 285). In the same way as Demetrius's retention of his love for Helena through enchantment contrives a rather troubling 'happy ending' for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the ending for the lovers in *The Nice and the Good*, who will marry and return to London, carries some element of disquiet for the reader. Ducane and Mary will be living in a house with McGrath, the man who Ducane thinks of as beautiful, and Paula will live with the caveat that Richard will continue to be a philanderer. Theseus and Hippolyta have a marriage born out of violence and enmity and Oberon and Titania end up together through manipulation and humiliation; Octavian and Kate likewise end up with a marriage that is still affected by deception. Pierce loses interest in Barbara once she has capitulated to his wishes and is no longer excitingly unobtainable. Perhaps a happy ending is not possible simply because Murdoch's novel is not a fairy tale, and the future of her characters is idle speculation, thus paying homage to Murdoch's ability to open 'the way for imagination', as she discusses in 'Against Dryness' (*EM* 294). Theo may return to India in attempt to make peace with his inner demons; Willy and Jessica may perhaps end up together; even Mingo and Montrose are seen sharing a bed. This mix of past pain assuaged by present pleasure, and present pain mingled with the possibility of future pleasure, is more realistic than the traditional fairy tale ending. It also leaves room for further progress from the pleasurably nice to the morally good. Goodness, as Murdoch argues in 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts', is 'connected with the attempt to see the unself, to see and to respond to the real world in the light of a virtuous consciousness' (*EM* 376). For Ducane, the hope is that this access to goodness will be found in his relationship with Mary, whose 'mode of being gave him a moral, even a metaphysical, confidence in the world, in the reality of goodness' (*NG* 333). Murdoch's deployment of Shakespeare's imaginary plays a key role in her exploration of the pain and pleasure of human love. There is no doubt that the relief of pleasure is enhanced if it comes after pain, particularly for those who play the parts of the lovers in both *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Nice and the Good*, where pain seems to be a necessary part of the rites of passage in the emotional and sexual lives of the characters as they journey from one landscape to another.

1. For discussion of Iris Murdoch and Shakespeare, see Richard Todd, *Iris Murdoch: The Shakespearian Interest* (London: Vision, 1979); Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: The Saint and the Artist*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1989); Anne Rowe, *Iris Murdoch* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019).
2. Robert Hoskins, 'Iris Murdoch's Midsummer Nightmare', *Twentieth Century Literature* 18:3 (Jul 1972), 191–98, 192.
3. Jean-Louis Chevalier, 'Closing Debate, Rencontres avec Iris Murdoch', in *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction*, ed. by Gillian Dooley (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 2003), 70–96 (74).
4. William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. by Sukanta Chaudhuri, Arden Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 117–278 (II.i.33), hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text.
5. Iris Murdoch, *The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists* (1977), in *Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. Peter J. Conradi (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), 386–463 (461), hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *EM*.
6. Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992), 316.
7. Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 115.
8. For a discussion of how this 'Shakespearean felicity' for happy endings affects Murdoch's engagement with gender, see Sabina Lovibond, *Iris Murdoch, Gender and Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2011).
9. A.S. Byatt, *Degrees of Freedom: The Early Novels of Iris Murdoch* (London: Vintage, 1994), 261.
10. David J. Gordon, *Iris Murdoch's Fables of Unselfing* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995), 111.
11. Iris Murdoch, *The Nice and the Good* (1968) (London: Vintage Classics, 2000), 7, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *NG*.
12. Richard Todd, *Iris Murdoch: The Shakespearian Interest*, 78.
13. Cheryl K. Bove, *Understanding Iris Murdoch* (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 106.
14. Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (Abingdon: Routledge Classics, 2002), 22.
15. Jean-Michel Ganteau, '"If I could have given Willy my full attention this morning": Ethics as Perceptive Attention in Iris Murdoch's *The Nice and the Good*', *Études britanniques contemporaines* 59 (2020) <https://doi.org/10.4000/ebc.10076> [accessed 24 April 2021].
16. Todd, *Iris Murdoch: The Shakespearian Interest*, 114.
17. Gordon, *Iris Murdoch's Fables of Unselfing*, 113.
18. Martha Nussbaum, '"Faint with Secret Knowledge": Love and Vision In Murdoch's *The Black Prince'*, *Poetics Today* 25:4 (Winter 2004), 689–710 (694).
19. Nussbaum, 694.
20. Weil, *Gravity and Grace,* 26.
21. Alison Bechdel, 'Vita, Virginia and me', *Guardian Review*, 30 January 2021.

‘And do you go to bed with them?’: An Artist’s Response to *Iris*, Twenty Years On

Carol Sommer

Alison Bechdel writes of the problem of biopics about female novelists that ‘of course even the most brilliant performance can’t convey the minds and souls of these remarkable women the way their own words do’.[1] Bechdel is referring to Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West, but the same applies to Iris Murdoch. As Bechdel acknowledges, certain representations include particular idiosyncrasies of their model. In *Iris* (2001), its director, Richard Eyre, captures some of the subjectivity of Iris Murdoch, or at least in the model that I picture: she’s intense; she thinks and talks about love, goodness, happiness, freedom and education; she likes to keep her friends and lovers separate; she develops Alzheimer’s disease, she’s cared for by her husband in their home that some people might think needs a bit of a tidy, and it’s heart-breaking when she has to move into a nursing home to be cared for by others at the end of her life. Kate Winslet and Judi Dench give performances that convince me they are Iris Murdoch while I’m watching, although if the film is in anyone’s words, it’s in the words of John Bayley and his memoirs, on which Eyre’s film is based.[2]

I first saw the film after I’d started using Murdoch’s words to make artwork, probably around 2006, and I watched it again in January this year. Undoubtedly what struck me the most the first time was the film’s affirmation of the frightening truth that – never mind doing sudokus and crosswords – even writing 26 novels and being a philosopher, a poet, a playwright, a prolific letter writer, a lecturer, a Dame, doesn’t stop you developing Alzheimer’s. When I watched the film more recently, I recognised Murdoch’s words in the script because I’ve read, selected, appropriated, applied and rearranged them as part of my own creative practice over the years since I first saw the film. For example, through flashbacks of Bayley’s memories we hear young Iris merrily declaring that she’s like Proteus as the pair whizz down Oxfordshire country lanes on their bicycles; we witness formal dinner audiences held in thrall as she holds forth on the failings of language; we watch quarrels between John and Iris that show her paraphrasing aspects of her own philosophical writing. We regard the older Iris watching her younger self at the BBC speaking about the obsessions, fears and passions that people have but don’t admit to, and that it’s the novelist’s privilege to see how odd everyone is; elsewhere we observe her as an academic speaking on Plato. We witness words failing Iris when, in an interview with Joan Bakewell about the importance of language, she’s unable to finish her answer; during clinical tests we particularly feel her struggle to name objects and read simple words. At the end of the film as the couple leave the city of dreaming spires in a taxi on their way to Vale House, John with his arm around a silent Iris, another affecting flashback shows Iris in a lecture theatre addressing a gripped audience about love.

Murdoch’s observation that ‘Loving is an orientation, a direction of energy, not just a state of mind’ has been key to my own art practice, which attempts to consider the contemporary relevance of her fictional writing about women’s experience.[3] Working from the premise that feminine subjectivity might be located within the consciousness of her women characters, I have adopted Murdoch’s term ‘orientation’ to represent these trajectories.[4] Drawing on ideas of appearance and reality that conceivably apply as much to women’s thinking in novels by Murdoch as to social media profile construction, I use Instagram (@cartography_for_girls) as a contemporary platform to share these orientations. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the orientations of her fictional women – they are no strangers to issues of loss, grief, alienation and disorientation – have taken on a particular potency since March 2020 in the way that they chime with our encounters of lockdown. In these daily posts, each generally between eight and sixteen seconds, I combine film clips of women, appropriated from the internet, with Murdoch’s philosophically loaded text, and music by women artists. Assembling the posts around a point of contingency (a word, a phrase, a lyric, a scene, a look, a glance, a gesture) allows for a series of divergent clashes between these different kinds of female representation, a mash-up, a remix, a reimagining, that sets up the potential to read Murdoch’s literary representations, the orientations of her fictional women, differently.

In Eyre’s film, we are not party to Murdoch’s orientations; neither at times, as the film makes clear, is Bayley. Arguably *Iris* promotes particular impressions of Murdoch’s model; the secrecy of her personal life and the tragedy that she developed Alzheimer’s. The film plays a part in the mythologisation of both these aspects of Murdoch’s life. We witness her increasing disorientation as the disease progressively disconnects her from reality, and through a series of flashbacks we witness John’s recall of Iris’s covertness.

In 2019 I had the pleasure of collaborating with the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives on a project entitled ‘Will The Real Iris Murdoch Please Stand Up?’. Working with archival material relating to Murdoch, and the orientations of her fictional women, we invited participants (through a series

of workshops and also online via Instagram) to take part in a project exploring the construction of image and identity through Murdoch's twentieth-century universe and twenty-first-century social media. The sessions at Kingston afforded me the privilege of reading a little of Murdoch in her own words, and her own handwriting; glimpses of her mind and soul conveyed through her prolific mass of letters and journal entries. These are words, and words, and words, that reveal something of Murdoch's orientations, and the direction of her colossal energy. Her eloquent and imaginative use of language in her 26 novels, originally published over a period of 41 years, also make that vitality plain, not least in the trajectories of her fictional women's orientations. While these monumentally significant aspects of Murdoch's life aren't writ large in *Iris*, there's a scene in the film where the absence of Iris's words made me think about the processes that I employ in @cartography_for_girls, about which of her fictional women's orientations – which words – might self-reflexively apply to Bayley's interpretation of this encounter in his memoirs, and Murdoch's representation by Eyre, as portrayed by Winslet.

Just prior to the scene, which takes place in a café, an elegantly dressed woman kisses Iris goodbye as John arrives, watches this exchange, and sits down with Iris. Their conversation goes:

> Iris: Haven't seen her for ages.
> John: Oh. Jolly good. Nice. Takes all sorts, not that I … we're all men at St Anthony's … do you like women – I mean, do women like you?
> Iris: You mean lesbians?
> John: Yes.
> Iris: Would it bother you if they did?
> John: The same things happen with me, with homosexuals.
> Iris: And do you go to bed with them?
> John: Lord no.
> Iris: At the college, they are all as somebody once said to me, old-fashioned lesbians of the very highest type.
> John: And do you go to bed with them?[5]

Winslet plays the scene with metred perfection as she smokes a cigarette and finishes her coffee; a downward glance just long enough for us to acknowledge the pause after John's awkwardly delivered first question, a slightly tilted head, a series of looks, eye contact and no reply to John's gauche last question. What is Iris thinking? Do her gestures suggest she feels affection for John? That she likes what he's talking about? Or both? Or maybe neither? A little further on in the film we regard older Iris watching her younger self declaring in a televised interview that 'everybody has thoughts they want to conceal'. If we were to imagine and connect language to thought in this scene, via Iris's glances, gestures and silence, we might think of using words from Murdoch's take on female interiority, the orientations of her fictional women. So many of them might apply here, from descriptions of sensory affect while listening – 'She listened now with distaste to the hard patterns of sound which plucked at her emotions without satisfying them and demanded in an arrogant way to be contemplated', or 'As Paula looked at him, listening to his precise high-pitched voice so familiarly explaining something, expounding something, she felt a shudder pass through her which she recognised a second later as physical desire' – to subjective agency – 'There was a marvellous equality in the way she was able to meet his still rather suspicious gaze' – and magnetic agency – 'She had only to stretch out her hand, she had only to whistle ever so softly'.[6]

In a recent article on how the internet is changing the contemporary novel, Olivia Sudjic writes that 'No other person, not even a husband, can ever know you as well as your phone. Your phone, in fact, knows you better than you know yourself and alerts you whenever "YOU HAVE A NEW MEMORY".'[7] Arguably, phones, and social media as a space of both presentation and curated representation, afford us Protean means to explore ideas of appearance and reality. In an era when what constitutes the page is not limited to paper, connection is constant, and the sharing of affect in global online communities is instantaneous, it is interesting to consider how Murdoch might have expressed emotional, intellectual and physical intimacy through a digital self. Of course, *Iris* brings home the horror of the erasing effects of Alzheimer's on memory, but in considering Iris Murdoch through Eyre's flashback interpretations of her husband's memoirs, it's perfectly feasible that if she'd had a smartphone it would almost certainly have known a great deal more about her than John Bayley did.

1. Alison Bechdel, 'Vita, Virginia and me', *Guardian Review*, 30 January 2021.
2. For the purpose of clarity, this essay will use 'Murdoch' or 'Bayley' when referring to their thoughts and writings, whereas 'Iris' or 'John' will be used when referring to their representations in the film, *Iris*.
3. Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (Middlesex: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press 1992), 503.
4. I acknowledge that 'women' and 'femininity' are political and complex spaces.
5. *Iris*, dir. by Richard Eyre (Miramax, 2001). I have transcribed this conversation, but the official screenplay of the movie presents this text in a slightly more expanded format. See Richard Eyre and Charles Wood, *Iris: A Screenplay* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002), 21-2.
6. Iris Murdoch, *The Bell* (1958) (Middlesex: Penguin, 1973), 193; Iris Murdoch, *The Nice and the Good* (1968) (Middlesex: Penguin, 1974), 336; Iris Murdoch, *The Unicorn* (1963) (Middlesex: Penguin, 1972), 202; Iris Murdoch, *Nuns and Soldiers* (London: Book Club Associates by arrangement with Chatto & Windus, 1980), 460.
7. Olivia Sudjic, 'Compulsive reading', *Guardian Review*, 23 January 2021.

The Flaying of Marsyas

Han VanderHart

Painted by Titian, late and aged,
a work of *great and sustained cruelty*;
is this what art best offers – tragedy?

Image of what our hands have done to each other:
strip by painful strip, the skin pared from muscle
while someone plays a violin
and a little dog laps the blood;
the event of violence thoughtful, entertaining,
the crisp lines and colors of early Titian gone
to darkness, to blur – strokes dashed off.

If a painter is known by their brushwork
then here a painter is changed, passed through epiphany
or something more shadowed than epiphany –
not illumination or disclosure but a deepening,
a presence veiled and unveiled.

Murdoch loved Titian's flaying of Marsyas; it hangs
in the background of her own portrait: Apollo attending
meticulously to the chest of Marsyas, peeling him back,
another satyr's bucket close to catch skin or blood.
Iris sits before it: hair shorn, pale collar turned, sea-blue eyes
concerned with distance. A green spray of gingko leans
towards her: 'a tree I love and hold holy'.

At first it seems that Murdoch loved Marsyas's flaying because
it knows no consolation: holds to itself artistic disappointment
and harm: Marsyas's reed flute hung up with him, tied
with red ribbons, having failed to play better than a god.
The storminess and yet the careful tearing of the scene.
Mirror of art. But now I think the work fables how art opens
up a person: strip by tender strip, until each muscle and nerve
is exposed to the air and we burn, as our mothers burned in our births.

Review of *'The Common Darkness Where The Dreams Abide': Perspectives on Irish Gothic and Beyond*, edited by Ilaria Natali and Annalisa Volpone (Perugia: Aguaplano, 2018)

Ian d'Alton

This thoughtful collection of essays reflects on the Gothic within the Irish literary tradition. Spanning a period from the 1820s to the end of the twentieth century, it represents the fruits of a conference held in Perugia, Italy, in 2013. The contributors are Italian, Irish, American, Turkish and British, allowing a refreshing and wide-ranging conceptualisation of what exactly constitutes 'Irish Gothic', whether it be 'mood', 'mode', 'tradition', 'canon', 'form', 'register', 'tone', and so on. Authors whose works are examined include Charles Maturin, James Clarence Mangan, Sheridan Le Fanu, Oscar Wilde and Bram Stoker from the nineteenth century; and W.B. Yeats, James Joyce, Seamus Heaney, Elizabeth Bowen and John Banville from the twentieth century. That is quite a cast for Murdoch to be alongside, demonstrating that the Gothic is a central and integral part of the Irish canon.

'The tradition of the Gothic Novel runs like a trickle of blood through Irish literature', writes Elisabetta d'Erme (269), and in her refreshing, highly recommended (and to this historian, *connected*) essay, 'The Cliffs of Moher and Iris Murdoch's *The Unicorn*: An "Appalling Landscape" for a Gothic Novel', she examines Murdoch's contribution to the genre. Murdoch was fond of dismissing the influence of her own life in her writings; but in *The Unicorn* there is clear evidence of it. Not necessarily in the autobiographical sense, but rather emerging from the hinterland of where she imagined she sprang from. D'Erme approaches the novel from this aspect, placing it within the geopolitical and ancestral aspects

of Murdoch's own family and tribal background. That 'place' – the bleakness of an area in the remote west of Ireland, bounded by the Burren (a karst-like landscape) and some of the highest cliffs in Ireland, the Cliffs of Moher – is an appropriate setting for a confusion of murder, suicide, incarceration, pagan superstitions, love of all sorts, and great hatreds. An aura of ghostliness, the essential ingredient of the Gothic, pervades all.

The setting allows Murdoch free rein in exploiting the dramatic and narrative possibilities of the genre. And yet the place is never named, being almost one of idealisation and abstraction. *The Unicorn* exists as atmosphere, rather than place – Gaze Castle is 'belonging yet not belonging' to the landscape of which it is part, and it 'was nervous, too'. It is also religious Gothic, Protestant Gothic, characterised here in a quotation from Terry Eagleton as 'a world of decay, madness and murderous loathing, in which the burden of a bloodstained past weighs like a nightmare on the living, which can be seen as the political unconsciousness of a chronically insecure ruling class' (274).

But why then a setting so clearly identifiable, even if that setting is nowhere made explicit? D'Erme explains and analyses it by reference to Murdoch's 'representation of the Anglo-Irish socio-political and religious conflict' (270). I would go somewhat further and suggest that it is a reflection of Murdoch's own uncertainty as to what and who she might be. Yes, as d'Erme points out, drawing on Peter J. Conradi's work, Murdoch seems to have had a strongly held and self-professed 'Irishness' – a sense which, perhaps tellingly, remained with her even as she slipped into dementia. But what, precisely, was that Irishness? D'Erme perceptively writes that 'Murdoch tended to mythologize her own Anglo-Irish origins and she claimed to be entitled to a distant Ascendancy heritage from her mother's side' (272). That was hardly the declaration of a robust and well-defined identity – no Elizabeth Bowen or Molly Keane she, confident in their own sense of Irishness. The unpleasant bog in *The Unicorn* can be interpreted, if one is fanciful, as a metaphor for an Ireland that Murdoch wished to understand and belong to, but could not. It is encapsulated in the poetic symmetry between the 'appalling landscape' of which the bog was a part, and the dreary architecture of the Englishman Effingham's soul (with Murdoch's grandfather's name, incidentally) who is sucked into it. He was, in Murdoch's words 'in this place, an intruder' but is perhaps closer to it than he can admit.[1]

Murdoch used the description 'Of Anglo-Irish parentage' on dust jackets from 1961, thus emphasising her origins in terms of tribe rather than place. That is understandable – she left Ireland as a baby. Whatever about her family, her 'tribe', the obvious point about Murdoch is that, though born in Ireland, she never lived there. She could not possess first-hand an Irish sense of physical 'place'; she could only create it for herself in her writings: metaphoric in *The Unicorn*, historical in *The Red and the Green*, realist in her only short story

Something Special. Yes, Ireland as place played a large part in her childhood and later, but it was never 'home' in the sense that Bowen, for instance, would have – almost unconsciously – understood. Irishness for Murdoch was often an act rather than a description.

If Murdoch's 'Anglo-Irishness' and a feel for 'Ascendancy' dictate the dominant tropes of where *The Unicorn*'s place rests in the Irish Gothic tradition, it is necessary to interrogate the terms, and maybe a little more deeply than is done in this essay. Murdoch professed in 1978 that 'my Irishness is Anglo-Irishness'.[2] That is highly ambiguous, if not confusing. In Ireland, words are weapons, to be used with precision. 'Anglo-Irish', like 'West Briton', became pejorative in the late 19th century, as (mainly) Catholic nationalists set out to 'other' Irish Protestants. It was a term applied almost exclusively to the gentry and aristocracy – but it was a term resisted, many referring to themselves as the 'Irish gentry'. From there, it segued into a description of a particular kind of writing, encompassing authors whose social and economic backgrounds often lay far away from Bowen's Court or the Duke of Leinster's Carton. In that sense, it is a form of 'fusion literature'; and it may be that in that sense Murdoch can be considered 'Anglo-Irish'.

Murdoch's family origins, though, lay far away from the landed classes – rooted in a northern Irish Protestant *mélange* of Presbyterians, Brethren, Baptists, Quakers, Elamites and Anglicans. That was a tribe characterised by a self- and group-confidence born of a strong sense of local majority and a Calvinist religiosity, tempered by faint remnants of a radical political tradition. Yet Murdoch's Irishness seems predominantly of the southern style, where Protestants accounted for much less than 10 percent of the population, and who, like American loyalists after the 1780s, had been politically beached by the British departure in 1922. That peoplehood had been reduced to an irrelevant interior existence – as Bowen wrote, 'in the life of the new Ireland, the lives of my people become a little thing'.[3] Here they indulged in perpetual Protestant afternoon teas, while writing letters to themselves in the *Irish Times* and the *Church of Ireland Gazette*. Murdoch has an ear for this Anglo-Irish *ennui* – 'Days seemed of immense length and their simple pattern already seemed to her monstrous, as if the monotony were inherent and not cumulative'.[4]

'Ascendancy' is easier to deal with as an historical term, referring to the Anglican control of the state from the late sixteenth to the early nineteenth century. By the time of Murdoch's birth in 1919, that dominance had all but disappeared; and by the 1960s – in which *The Unicorn* is loosely set, though with a much earlier feel, as d'Erme points out – it would be more accurate to speak of the 'Descendancy'. If Murdoch 'claimed to be entitled to a distant Ascendancy heritage on her mother's side' (272), the Richardsons had indeed fallen on hard times. Murdoch's birthplace – 59 Blessington Street in unfashionable inner-city north-side Dublin – had a heterogeneous population of all occupations and religions. Blessington Street

Protestants were nearly genteel but not quite, so well brought to life in *The Red and the Green*. This was the territory of the 'precariat', the exotic, the slightly dangerous. Politically, the Richardsons were always suspect as prone to being a republican green; and, socially, Murdoch's mother often wore lipstick that was just a slightly too bohemian red. D'Erme suggests that Murdoch may have liked to imagine herself as part of the Ascendancy when visiting Bowen's Court; but in reality she was not, and never had been.

So: if Murdoch's Anglo-Irishness and descendant Ascendancy were somewhat fanciful gildings of the lily, does that actually make *The Unicorn* a novel more true to its Gothic origins? I think it does, and I agree with d'Erme's conclusion that 'here Murdoch reveals contradictory feelings about her alleged Anglo-Irish legacy' (283). Unsentimentally, it takes the inherent dichotomy between 'Anglo' and 'Irish' apart, and d'Erme marks this through the 'feudal sexual dynamics' (278) and relationships, or lack of them between masters and servants – not just in the economic relationship, but also how 'the "locals" are mockingly looked down on' (276). This is necessary to create the dramatic tension that the novel requires. The culture of fiction often requires extremes to be validated. Thus, from the opposite viewpoint, is Maurice Farley's poem 'Stately Home':

> We follow guides through rooms and galleries,
> Stare at ancestors' portraits in the hall,
> Remembering how long ago they took
> Our weeping daughters from their wedding feasts,
> Chattels to be used and given back,
> Droit de seigneur.[5]

In their way, both Murdoch and Farley are susceptible to the creation of caricature. The humanity, generosity and paternalism that history tells us allowed the landlord system in Ireland to function surprisingly well for so long as it did is missing in both novel and poem. That system began to break down as the economics ceased to work. With land purchased by tenants from the early twentieth century, exacerbated by the increasing unaffordability of servant labour, the Big Houses simply ceased to have utility. The vibrancy of the gentry in former times had vanished – in Bowen's words 'it could exist in detail – comings-and-goings, entertainments, marriages – but the main healthy abstract was gone'.[6]

'Descendancy' is marked by degeneracy. As d'Erme suggests, in *The Unicorn* 'the moral decay of the old manor house is emphasized by its domestic disorder, its filth and dirtiness' (276). But this is more than just decay; to use an Irish word, the 'shenanigans' of its inhabitants reflect a moral anarchy, too. Gaze Castle is in that sense a desert island that no one can leave but by death and madness. It, and the country region it inhabits, 'exist as troubled sites of negotiation, anxiety,

alienation and loss, rather than landscapes evoking home and community' (281). This is the antithesis of how, in the real world, the Big Houses were often seen as refuges and places of hope – Bowen's Court for instance, seen by Bowen as the child she never had, wayward, exasperating, expensive, but also a haven of love and the memory of love. Murdoch's castle takes on the characteristics of its inhabitants; it is no wonder that the outsiders Marian Taylor and Effingham flee from it in the end. On one level, D'Erme's essay is an exposition of the hermeneutic in Murdoch's writing. On another it is an important excursion into that element of Murdoch's Irishness, which is its location in the imagination rather than the real. This is Ireland as Gormenghast, almost impossible to escape from. But who would want to live there anyway?

> I stepped into the gentler evening air
> and saw black figures dancing on the lawn,
> *Eviction*, *Droit de Seigneur*, *Broken Bones*,
> and heard the crack of ligaments being torn
> and smelled the clinging blood upon the stones.[7]

1. Iris Murdoch, *The Unicorn* (1963) (London: Vintage Classics, 2000), 164.
2. Jean-Louis Chevalier, 'Closing Debate, Rencontres avec Iris Murdoch', in *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction*, ed. by Gillian Dooley (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 70–96 (95).
3. Elizabeth Bowen, *Bowen's Court & Seven Winters* (London: Virago, 1984), 437.
4. Iris Murdoch, *The Unicorn*, 29.
5. Maurice Farley, 'Stately Home', *Poetry Ireland Review* 8 (1983), 45.
6. Elizabeth Bowen, *Bowen's Court & Seven Winters*, 258–9.
7. Michael Hartnett, 'A visit to Castletown House', *Collected Poems* (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 2009), 136.

Review of Elin Svenneby, *Iris Murdochs velvalgte ord: Filosofi og fiksjon* (Oslo: Emilia Press, 2019)

Hannah Winther

In Norway, Iris Murdoch is arguably quite unknown both as a philosopher and as a writer of fiction. The main goal of Elin Svenneby's book *Iris Murdochs velvalgte ord: Filosofi og fiksjon* [*Iris Murdoch's Best-Chosen Words: Philosophy and Fiction*] is to remedy this. It is the first book to have been written about Murdoch in Norwegian, and one of very few publications that engages with her thought over here.[1] In her introduction, Svenneby remarks that Murdoch's writings were never part of any curriculum during her philosophy studies and that her name never came up, despite what Svenneby describes as her own generation's want of 'intellectual foremothers' (22). Svenneby's recollection resonates with my own experience years later. Like her, I never came across Murdoch during my years as a philosophy student. It was only when I randomly picked up *Under the Net* and started looking her up to find out about the Wittgensteinian references that I learned that Murdoch was a philosopher, one moreover who had worked and written during a historical period and tradition that my undergraduate curriculum had placed heavy emphasis on – mid-twentieth-century analytic philosophy – but in the context of which she had never been mentioned. When Svenneby writes in the introduction that her hope is that the book can lead to a 'renewed' interest in Murdoch in Norway (14), a pertinent question is therefore what kind of interest there ever has been. I am aware of less than a handful of philosophers in Norway who have done any work on Murdoch. I have only found one philosophy course, a graduate course in ethics, that has included one of her works among the assigned readings. Her novels fare better, and five of them have been translated.[2] Still, there has been little interest in her among literary scholars.[3] As one professor I asked about Murdoch put it, literary scholars have perceived her as being somewhat old-fashioned, and the philosophers have been interested in other things. A translation of *The Sovereignty of Good* was recently published in 2021.[4] Svenneby has acted as a consultant for that publication and has also written an introduction to it, which is a further testament to her efforts

to introduce Murdoch to Norwegian audiences. Briefly put, attention to Murdoch as both a philosopher and a novelist is long overdue in Norway and, in this context, Svenneby's book is a valuable contribution.

Before discussing the argument of the book, I want to comment on the fact that Svenneby decided to write it in Norwegian. With academic publishing being dominated by English, it is (unfortunately) becoming less common to write academic philosophy in Norwegian. Publications as extensive and specialised as Svenneby's, dealing with topics and thinkers that are relatively unknown to the general public, are rare. Svenneby made the conscious decision to write in Norwegian in order to reach a broader, non-academic audience in Norway, but this in turn makes her potential readership a lot smaller. This testifies to Svenneby's commitment to public philosophy in Norway, and I think the kind of effort she makes is important.

The problem that Svenneby sets out to solve concerns the relationship between Murdoch's fiction and her philosophy. Are they two separate genres which Murdoch mastered on an individual level, or do they build on the same ideas, explored through different approaches? Do we need to read the philosophy to understand the fiction, and/or the other way around (22)? Murdoch herself famously claimed that that her fiction and her philosophy should be viewed as separate endeavours.[5] Many of her readers remain unconvinced. If they are so different, why are the novels populated with so many philosophers and discussions of philosophical subjects and moral dilemmas? Why do the characters sometimes say things that sound as if they could come straight out of philosopher-Murdoch's mouth? It is hard to take Murdoch's remarks that she wants to keep philosophy out of her novels seriously when it seems to be so pervasively present in them. Svenneby is one of these sceptical readers, and her aim is to show how the fiction and the philosophy are 'concerned with the same thing' (25). We need to consider both if we want to understand Murdoch, she writes, but at the same time, we must respect their different natures. Precisely because philosophy and literature are so different, they can create an insight together that neither would be able to achieve on their own (25). In other words, Svenneby wants to remain true to Murdoch's frequently made assertion that as soon as philosophy comes into a novel it ceases to be philosophy, but she still wants to claim that there is an important connection to be made between them. Exactly what this connection is remains unclear, but I will return to that question later.

The book is divided into seven parts, the five main parts of which are each devoted to a decade, starting in the 1950s and ending in the 1990s. Each of these five parts is divided into a section on Murdoch's philosophical work of that period and a section on her literary work of that period. For the most part, the structure of these sections is to go systematically through each book or article one by one, laying out their main ideas. Svenneby covers the entirety of Murdoch's 26 novels, leaving out only plays and poems. Most of her articles, books and talks are also included. As a result, this is a long book, spanning more than 500 pages. In addition to these five main chapters, the book includes a short introduction that gives some biographical information on Murdoch's life, and a short concluding chapter.

This chronological structure works well to demonstrate the development of Murdoch's thinking throughout the decades. We see how she gradually develops her objections to the mainstream moral philosophy of her time, raising objections against both behaviourists and existentialists, and how she develops her own approach to describing moral thinking, drawing on both Ludwig Wittgenstein and Simone Weil. We also see just how broad Murdoch's philosophical interests were, reaching from her criticism of contemporary British philosophy and her engagement with the existentialist and phenomenologist traditions, to her love of Plato. Svenneby covers a lot of ground here, but the pace is reader-friendly, and these sections serve as a good introduction to Murdoch the philosopher for new readers.

The choice of treating the philosophical works and the novels separately and chronologically, however, reveals what I see as the fundamental challenge of the book. While the question Svenneby sets out to explore – what can we learn from Murdoch's philosophy and what can we learn from her novels? – is both interesting and important, it is never successfully answered because they are only brought into dialogue with one another to a very limited extent. The choice of treating the philosophical texts and the novels separately is something Svenneby explains as an attempt to stay faithful to Murdoch's own separation of philosophy and literature (30). As I understand Svenneby's intention here, she does not want to reduce the literature to the philosophy or vice versa, but rather ask what their individual virtues are. But treating each genre individually, and going through each work as comprehensively as Svenneby does, gets in the way of a reflection on her overriding question about their relationship. The sections on the novels, for example, read more as lengthy summaries of their plots than critical engagement with what they can teach us about morality that the philosophical texts cannot. The sections on, for instance, 'Against Dryness', 'Art is the Imitation of Nature' or the chapters on Plato seem as if they could have been promising points of departure for addressing this question, but the connection to Murdoch's novels is not made. It can sometimes feel like Svenneby is on two different missions – the first one being to give a detailed introduction to Murdoch's writing through the decades to new audiences and the second one being to explore the relationship between her philosophy and her fiction – and that the former takes precedence over the latter. A thematic rather than a chronological structure would, possibly, have made it easier to explore the second question. To make it possible for the reader to tie the pieces together, the main chapters of the book could at least have included a brief conclusion to spell out what Svenneby takes to be the relationship between philosophy and literature in every decade. But Svenneby never offers any such concluding remarks – quite the reverse, she proceeds without making any effort to explain the links between them to the reader.

When Svenneby engages directly with the question of how the fiction and philosophy can be brought together, her reflections are interesting. One example is her use of Murdoch's concept of the two-way movement in philosophy, which she mentions several times throughout the book. Murdoch describes this as 'a movement towards the building of elaborate theories, and a move back again towards the consideration of simple and obvious facts'.[6] Svenneby writes in the introduction that she wants to consider the relationship between philosophy and fiction in the light of this concept (34), and this is an interesting idea. The concept is mentioned several times throughout the book, but it is hard to understand exactly how it helps us to understand this relationship. Svenneby argues both that there are examples of two-way movements in Murdoch's fiction (409), when the characters struggle with moral dilemmas and are torn between reason and emotion (445), and that we can understand the relationship between Murdoch's philosophy and fiction as a two-way movement (441). But neither of these proposals are explained to the reader in further detail and, as an approach for a reading of Murdoch's complete oeuvre, the idea remains unresolved.

Having expressed some reservations about whether the book accomplishes what it sets out to do, I want to conclude by saying something about what it successfully achieves. Svenneby does indeed give an accessible and comprehensive introduction both to Murdoch the novelist and to Murdoch the philosopher. Svenneby writes in the introduction that one of her aims in this book is to encourage the translation of all of Murdoch's writings into Norwegian. I hope with her that Murdoch will reach new audiences in Norway, and that this publication will contribute to putting her work on the map.

1. A notable recent exception is Arne Johan Vetlesen and Knut Ivar Bjørlykhaug's use of Murdoch's concept of love to discuss ecological grief as a form of heartsickness. See Arne Johan Vetlesen and Knut Ivar Bjørlykhaug, *Det går til helvete. Eller?* (Oslo: Dinamo Forlag, 2020).
2. The Murdoch novels translated into Norwegian are *Sandslottet* [*The Sandcastle*], translated by Inger-Sophie Manthey (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1961); *Klokken* [*The Bell*], translated by Inger-Sophie Manthey (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1966); *Et avhugget hode* [*A Severed Head*], translated by Inger-Sophie Manthey (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1962); *Den italienske piken* [*The Italian Girl*], translated by Inger-Sophie Manthey (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1965); and *Nederlag med ære* [*A Fairly Honourable Defeat*], translated by Inger-Sophie Manthey (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1972).
3. Toril Moi has written about Murdoch's concept of attention in *Revolution of the Ordinary: Literary Studies after Wittgenstein, Austin and Cavell* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2017) and in *Språk og oppmerksomhet* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 2013).
4. Iris Murdoch, *Det godes suverenitet* [*The Sovereignty of Good*], trans. by Kjetil Røed and Elin Svenneby (Oslo: Cappelens upopulære skrifter, Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2020).
5. Iris Murdoch, 'Literature and Philosophy: A Conversation with Bryan Magee' (1977), in *Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. by Peter J. Conradi (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), 1-30.
6. Iris Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', in *Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. by Peter J. Conradi (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), 299–336 (299).

Review of *Moral Injury and the Promise of Virtue*, Joseph Wiinikka-Lydon (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019)

Scott H. Moore

In *Moral Injury and the Promise of Virtue*, Joseph Wiinikka-Lydon has written a thoughtful and moving investigation into how the experience of violence and injury transforms not only the individual but also one's ability to make moral sense of the world. As Wiinikka-Lydon puts it, 'political violence can undermine the moral intelligibility of one's world. Violent conflict does not just destroy lives and buildings. It destroys that which makes meaningful lives and communities possible' (2). Wiinikka-Lydon's text, however, is no abstract reflection on moral harm. Throughout the work, he relies on the heartbreaking and devastating testimonies and reflections of those who have suffered harm, the survivors, especially those who lived through the horrors of the Bosnian War of the 1990s.

Survivors of violent injury – like those who experienced the Bosnian crisis – face multiple difficulties. Not only do they struggle with how to express how their suffering from violent injury has utterly changed their world and their self-understanding, but they also frequently wonder 'what the worth of trying to be good is in such a fallen world' (2). Social scientific research has profound resources for examining the socio-cultural and historical contexts of violence, but it is poorly equipped to address the moral question 'why be good?'. According to Wiinikka-Lydon, when it comes to addressing the moral component of the experience, the social sciences often struggle. They are tempted to reduce the moral character of the experience to those known empirical categories which can be measured by the discourses of economics, ethnicity, gender, politics, history, and more. Wiinikka-Lydon believes that the social sciences provide essential but incomplete information for understanding the experience of violence, and by reducing and redescribing moral claims as essentially the products of economic or ethnic struggle, the uniquely moral character of the experience is lost or elided. Such a loss fails to understand the person who has suffered so greatly. If I am

that person, then the resources of social science discourse may give me neither insight into my own situation nor the sustenance to live morally in an immoral world.

In an attempt to redress these difficulties, Wiinikka-Lydon has turned to the resources of moral philosophy and religious ethics to provide the language necessary to do justice to the violent experience of suffering. Specifically, he is interested in whether, how, and to what extent the language and tradition of virtue discourse and ethics can offer a meaningful response to those whose moral subjectivity has been shattered by violence and injury. He believes, and attempts to demonstrate, that 'virtue can be used in creating an interpretative framework that can make better sense of an experience of violence, subjectivity, and change that survivors have said is important' (16). But Wiinikka-Lydon's project is no mere appropriation of virtue ethics. He is clear: this work 'is not an ethic' (25). His project grew out of the recognition that the social scientific disciplines lack a vocabulary sufficient to describe the experience of violent injury, and his principal interest in this text is in how the language and vocabulary of the virtue tradition can help survivors find 'better ways of talking about the experience of violence and how it affects the individual's moral architecture and sense of self' (26). Wiinikka-Lydon believes that 'the language of virtues need not be beholden to formal virtue ethics and virtue-ethical traditions. They can be creatively adopted and reworked to articulate the moral dimension of experience' (27).

In the course of the volume, Wiinikka-Lydon first explores how moral philosophy can transform social scientific inquiry by developing accounts of the moral subjectivity of the self and then of a virtue hermeneutic which can accurately give voice to the experience of violent suffering. Crucial to both of these investigations is the moral philosophy of Iris Murdoch. He uses Murdoch's philosophical anthropology and her account of moral vision and action to transform and challenge standard social scientific treatments of war, violence, and suffering. Wiinikka-Lydon's connection of Murdoch's thought with Arthur Kleinman's notion of 'local moral worlds' is particularly insightful. Throughout it all, Wiinikka-Lydon wants to recognise the validity of the emotional response as key to understanding the moral subjectivity of the individual.

Wiinikka-Lydon's treatment of the 'void' in Murdoch's *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992) is one of the most challenging (and provocative) subjects of the volume. Murdoch appropriates the concept of the void from Simone Weil, and it is well-suited to address Wiinikka-Lydon's concerns. Indeed, the experience and response to the void is at the heart of his project. Near the conclusion of *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, Murdoch turns explicitly to the question of whether the experience of the void can become an occasion for learning, growth or beneficence. She acknowledges that this is sometimes the case, but the dominant thrust of her argument is to disabuse the reader of the notion that the void can be filled or overcome by consoling fantasies. Wiinikka-Lydon uses this occasion to talk about hope, but for Murdoch, hope is not the antidote to the void. For Murdoch, the void is the experience of the absence of love, and love becomes the only adequate response for living in it.

Following closely from this reflection on the void is one of the more curious aspects of the text, Wiinikka-Lydon's treatment of the virtue of hope. The subject of 'hope' comes up regularly but he does not give his readers a clear understanding of what he thinks hope is and is not. Early on he describes hope as 'the ability to see a way through the present to a different future' (23). He notes that hope is not optimism and it requires 'a re-education of our instinctive feelings' (131) – a line from Murdoch in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*. By the end, he claims that hope is exemplified by a certain sort of methodological inquiry. 'Methodology can', he writes, 'be a practice of hope', where 'methodology' refers to a practice of inquiry which Wiinikka-Lydon understands as not just 'scientific' but 'a deeply human practice' (180).

Wiinikka-Lydon wants to dissuade Murdoch from her tendency to see suffering as 'spiritually efficacious' (132). I am not convinced that this is a persuasive reading of Murdoch. Throughout her work, she critiqued the attempt to turn suffering into redemption. In 'The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts' (1967), she asks 'what could be more satisfying, or a Romantic might say, more thrilling', than to 'buy back evil by suffering in the embrace of good'?[1] On the contrary, it is the role of art to 'show us suffering without a thrill and death without a consolation' (*EM* 371). And in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, she notes, 'It is difficult to suffer well, without resentment, false consolation, untruthful flight. One consolation which is usually false is that suffering purifies the soul'.[2]

Even the quotation cited above, 'a re-education of our instinctive feelings', is not a description of hope but a strategy for living with the reality of the void. The context for the quotation is precisely Murdoch's rejection of the notion that suffering can be efficaciously turned into redemption. She writes:

> We must experience the reality of the pain, and not fill the void with fantasy. [...] We have been unjustly treated, insulted, humiliated: we want to get our own back, to get even, if need be to hurt innocent people as we have been hurt. We console ourselves with fantasies of 'bouncing back.' We yield to the natural gravity which automatically degrades our thoughts and feelings. [...] Instead of this surrender to natural necessity we must hold on to what has really happened and not cover it with imagining how we are to unhappen it. Void makes loss a reality. Do not think about righting the balance, but live close to the painful reality and try to relate it to what is good. What is needed here, and is so difficult to achieve, is a new orientation of our desires, a re-education of our instinctive feelings. (*MGM* 502–3)

Wiinikka-Lydon quotes much of this passage but he mistakenly (in my view) attributes to Murdoch the view that 'void experiences' are 'short-lived' (132). I do not see evidence that Murdoch thought these experiences were 'short-lived'. Perhaps it is not 'redemption' that he has in mind here. Perhaps he is referring to what Murdoch calls 'making a

spiritual use of one's desolation'. This may be the 'spiritually efficacious' notion to which he objects. More likely, Wiinikka-Lydon is sceptical that Murdoch's confidence in love will be persuasive to those who have suffered so greatly at the hands of political violence.

Moral Injury and the Promise of Virtue is most successful as a model for how humanistic disciplines, in this case moral philosophy, might engage social scientific disciplines in a unified attempt to do justice to their objects of inquiry. The integration and mutual engagement of the social sciences, Murdoch's moral philosophy, and the historical testimony by and about those who lived through the Bosnian War make for a remarkable piece of scholarship. Wiinikka-Lydon clearly succeeds in demonstrating how the humanities can engage the social sciences to create a more accurate understanding of the experience of political violence. This is certainly a methodology which needs to be employed and expanded in the attempt to understand these important subjects of inquiry.

I am less persuaded by Wiinikka-Lydon's conclusion that such methodological procedures can rise to be a basis for the virtue of hope. The supreme confidence in method is one of the principal characteristics of much social scientific research, and it is precisely the limitations of such a perspective that Wiinikka-Lydon's fine work has sought to recognise and supplement with humanistic and philosophical insight. Though it is clearly not his intention, it seems that the social scientific trumps the philosophical in the end, and his proposal to recover the language of virtue in the end confuses the virtues of *techne* and *phronesis*. *Techne* is art, skill, method – a technique. *Phronesis* is practical judgment, the prudence of lived experience, the recognition that a rule or a procedure cannot always guide action within a political community. As Hans-Georg Gadamer would have put it, to confuse *techne* for *phronesis* is to confuse method for truth. Wiinikka-Lydon wants to recover the 'richly untapped' (178) language of virtue to understand moral subjectivity, but when virtue language is 'creatively adopted and reworked' (27), divorced from its normative usage, it loses its central characteristics.

Moral Injury and the Promise of Virtue is a fine model of scholarly engagement. It is a moving tribute to the survivors of political violence and a reminder to all of us of how much we do not understand about the experiences of others, especially those others who have suffered injury. This insight far exceeds the extreme conditions of the brutality of war. But hope, if it is to exist at all, must be more than a methodology. Formulae and procedures will not sustain those of us who find ourselves living in the void. Wiinikka-Lydon knows this and has aptly demonstrated it throughout his fine book.

1. Iris Murdoch, 'The Sovereignty of Good over other Concepts', in *Existentialists and Mystics* (1997) (New York: Penguin, 1997), 363–85 (367), hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *SOG*.
2. Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992) (London: Chatto and Windus, 1992), 130., hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *MGM*.

Review of *The Philosopher Queens: The lives and legacies of philosophy's unsung women*, edited by Rebecca Buxton and Lisa Whiting (London: Unbound, 2020)

Hannah Marije Altorf

The Philosopher Queens is a crowdfunded collection of short essays on 20 women philosophers. The editors, Rebecca Buxton and Lisa Whiting, are two postgraduate students who noted the scarcity of any such book in the curriculum and the local bookstore. In response, they created their own work. No publisher came forward, but fortunately more than 1,500 people did and the book has been widely discussed and promoted on social media.

The collection is not an academic work. Instead, it aims to change the popular perception that philosophy is a man's job. In their introduction Buxton and Whiting rightly draw attention to the fact that even recent works of philosophy avoid mentioning women. Their work introduces the reader to 20 women philosophers in short introductory essays. Each essay is preceded by a portrait of the thinker by Emmy Smith. The book contains bibliographies for further reading at the end as well as a list of many more thinkers for future studies.

There is much to like in this collection. To begin with, it includes philosophers from various traditions and periods. Even scholars who are better acquainted with the field are likely to find new names alongside more familiar ones. One encounters not just Hypatia, Mary Wollstonecraft and Simone de Beauvoir, but also the fourteenth-century Lalla, who is claimed by both Islamic and Hindu traditions, or the more recent Sophie Bosede Oluwole, whose name is slowly being introduced to the philosophical canon.

The essays are written in an accessible style, offering an overview of lives, ideas, inspiration and influence. To promote accessibility, there are only two footnotes in the entire volume. There are also no references to works cited, not even for

actual quotations. The latter omission is unfortunate when one wants to look up quotations and even more so when it creates some strange impressions. For instance, one could be led to think that Mary Warnock called herself 'woke' (134) all the way back in 1945, when she reconsidered the privileges of her upbringing.

The editors have not just asked prominent names to contribute, but also made sure of providing space for early career academics and for those not affiliated with a university. Of the twenty contributors, eleven work in academic departments, six are postgraduate students (with only half of them in a department of philosophy) and three authors work outside academia. Of course, the wide variety of contributors may be a consequence of the way in which the authors were recruited. Yet, whatever the origin, it is excellent practice as well as a reflection on the present and possible future state of philosophy in universities. The discipline is slow in becoming more diverse. Some philosophers may find a more encouraging environment elsewhere.

There are some excellent essays in this volume. The best ones do not just provide concise overviews of a philosopher, but also reflect on wider issues. Lisa Whiting describes Hypatia and the context of her life and work lucidly, but also reflects on her place in the canon. Shalini Sinha introduces Lalla and also reflects on the importance of practice as well as the difficulty of attributing texts to some of these authors. Kate Kirkpatrick provides a concise overview of de Beauvoir's life, work and legacy, and addresses persistent preconceptions about the relationship between de Beauvoir and Sartre.

The collection is clearly inspired by *In Parenthesis*. It includes four of the five thinkers who are central to that project: Iris Murdoch, Mary Midgley, Elizabeth Anscombe and Mary Warnock. Only Philippa Foot is left out, but she is mentioned in the list at the end. The inclusion of these four thinkers suggests a partiality for the Anglo-Saxon tradition of philosophy. Of course, every reader would make a different choice in their selection, but the absence of prominent French thinkers like Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous and Michèle Le Doeuff, of political thinkers like Rosa Luxemburg and Ágnes Heller, or of any thinker from the Middle Ages, is distinctive of a particular approach. Most of these philosophers are not even mentioned in the list at the end.

The essay on Iris Murdoch confirms this specific angle. Fay Niker provides a good overview of Murdoch's life and education, and especially of Murdoch's earlier work and her critical assessment of moral philosophy in both existentialism and the analytical philosophy of her time. The influence of Simone Weil is considered as well as the importance of the notions of the Good and of attention. Yet, the essay fails to notice recent scholarship on Murdoch as a political thinker. Its specific approach is also evident when it positions the literary work against the philosophical oeuvre and does not mention any of her novels in the bibliography at the end. The discussion seems largely focused on *The Sovereignty of Good*.

Neither *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* nor *The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists* is mentioned.

The editors suggest one may dip in and out of the different essays, but I recommend reading them one after another because doing so reveals important themes. One such theme is the significance of education to earlier philosophers, who were often self-taught or depended on their fathers, brothers or husbands for their learning. They also write about the perils of marriage, of love and of chastity, thus recalling Le Doeuff's argument in *The Sex of Knowing* (2003). Read consecutively, the essays offer further reflection on the creation of the philosophical canon and especially the question of whether or not to include philosophers on the basis of their writing. Some of them we only know from the accounts of others; this is as true of Diotima as it was of Socrates. For others, it is not clear which works can be attributed to them or it is difficult to determine their exact contribution to the work published under their husbands' names.

It is unfortunate that the introduction hardly reflects on these connecting themes and characteristics. Indeed, the editors show surprisingly little interest in trying to understand why women do not get a mention in most histories of philosophy, nor is there much recognition of recent scholarship on the inclusion of women in philosophy. Buxton and Whiting note the existence of Mary Warnock's *Women Philosophers* (1996), but not, for instance, Mary Ellen Whaite's *A History of Women Philosophers* (1987–95), even though it is mentioned in the first essay of their collection. This omission creates the illusion that there has been no research on this topic at all.

The limited reflection also takes attention away from the fact that inclusion of more diverse thinkers in the philosophical canon is not a mere matter of including women philosophers. Rather, it is changing the discipline. It alters topics of discussion, where subjects such as gender, sexuality, education or marriage could become as important as causality, free will and the mind. It can also change our perception of the discipline when it moves away from the image of the solitary genius toward one of collective thought. It challenges perceived understanding of what is and what is not philosophical writing. Such changes would affect, for instance, the study of Murdoch's work, as her later writing and her novels would no longer take a back seat.

Yet, reading this volume it becomes clear that such changes are not easy. The unwelcoming atmosphere of the field is apparent in the all too apologetic tone of some of the writing, when the women philosophers are expected to be no less than excellent and beyond reproach. Some essays go out of their way to make sure the thinker does not offend contemporary sensibilities. This is, for instance, true of the text on Mary Astell, where apologies are made for Astell's denying of the body and for the central role of Christianity in her thinking (45). At one point, I suspected that even the picture portraits are intended to please,

with their lovely young faces and flushed cheeks, though of course this may be a matter of taste.

The issue of inclusion is one that concerns not just the editors. The fact that no publisher took on this work is indicative of a wider problem and it is to be hoped that the popularity of this work may effect a change. The lack of interest from publishers suggests that the work of women philosophers is still a secondary issue, peripheral to the field. That this situation may be in some ways more severe in Britain than elsewhere is suggested by the excellent *Vrouwelijke filosofen: Een historisch overzicht* [*Women Philosophers: An Historical Overview*] (2012), edited by Carolien Ceton *et al*. Publishers could do much worse than start by translating this Dutch publication into English.

Buxton and Whiting's collection thus creates debate and further research. The essays in their volume, as well as the extensive bibliography and references for further study, including the mention of important projects like *Project Vox* or *New Voices in the History of Philosophy,* offer means and reasons to keep creating a more inclusive understanding and practice of philosophy. *The Philosopher Queens* could become an important contribution to that cause.

Review of *Fictions of God* by Frank England (Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2020)

Anne Rowe

Fictions of God comprises the transcripts of five lectures, each on one novel by a renowned twentieth-century novelist, delivered by Frank England at the University of Cape Town in 2019. His ambition is to investigate how far the fictions of others help us both confront ourselves and learn about ourselves, and how far they may, uncomfortably, reflect back images of ourselves, thus empowering us to mould 'more truthful narratives in the future' (2). In this vein he discusses in turn: 'The Courtesy of God: *The Bay of Angels* by Anita Brookner (2001)'; 'The Brutality of God: *Fight Club* by Chuck Palahniuk (1996)'; 'The Silence of God: *Fugitive Pieces* by Anne Michaels (1996)'; 'The Sound of God: *Orfeo* by Richard Powers (2014)', and 'The End of God: *The Time of the Angels* by Iris Murdoch (1966)'. England's challenge is not only to explore how the themes of each of these novels resound theologically, reminding one of 'forgotten human truths' (xi), but also, more personally, how readers can be helped 'to learn and re-learn on the path of self-formation', 'recover a form of civility', 'acquire – or re-acquire – the virtue of courtesy' and help with 'the forging of harmonious human relations' (2). In response to repeated requests from his audience for copies of these lectures, they were lightly edited and published in this volume.

The final chapter of this detailed and scholarly book explores Iris Murdoch's *The Time of the Angels* in the light of the sobering acknowledgment that perfect knowledge of the self and others inevitably recedes in the quest to become 'humanly human': no matter how selflessly we try, one's own needs perpetually threaten the perfect loving of another (102). This chasm between the character one is, and the one we would become with pure selfless attention is, England argues, the beginning and the end of the human condition, and this breach has provided literature not only with opportunities to examine attempts at moral goodness, but also to provide a prescient reminder that human beings possess a restricted spectrum of seeing rather than a capacity for looking deeply: 'Disconsolately,

human effort is frustrated and, ultimately, defeated' (103). Like Murdoch herself, England believes that the idea of original sin has had far too little attention in ethics and, as such, humanity 'lives in a state of loss' (105).

This loss, England suggests, is precisely that loss into which Murdoch writes in *The Time of the Angels* as a riposte to her colleagues in philosophy, who 'doubted it worthwhile to strive to become "morally better"' (105). He argues that the novel reveals the devastating loss of both 'the sacred informants that had shaped, directed and sanctioned human lives through the many and long centuries of Western civilisation' and a 'chain of values' that guaranteed human flourishing and well-being (105). In the world of this dark novel, knowledge is no longer founded on 'consensual terms of discussion and debate' (105) and action can no longer be referred back to a national and internationally recognisable 'moral value or worth' (106). Consequently, although England does explore the legitimacy of reading Murdoch's novels predominantly in relation to her philosophy later in the essay, his exploration of this novel is fitted tightly into Murdoch's *The Sovereignty of Good*, as he interrogates the ways in which *The Time of the Angels* explores the values of 'perfection' and 'good' and how Murdoch's use of narrative can be interpreted as a means to invite her readers to imagine the task of pursuing them.

The aligning of *The Time of the Angels* so closely with Murdoch's philosophy is productive, England suggests, because it was written at a time when Murdoch was undertaking her most focused philosophical thinking. As such, he reads the novel as both a contestation of and a commentary on *The Sovereignty of Good,* understanding that it challenges the reader to consider the necessity of morality when set against the depravity of the world of the novel, a technique which he describes as 'the negative foil of the positive image' (106). He explores the way readers are encouraged to read against the dark narrative world of the novel and engage with the virtues and the values that are absent as a moral duty in itself. He supports and illustrates his argument with a detailed and sensitive close reading of the novel, which begins by decoding the immoral implications of the metaphorical fogbound setting, the dysfunctional relationships at the heart of the novel, and the significance of its gothic undertones. His plot outline is detailed and artfully illustrates Murdoch's craft as a writer, while deftly pointing out how the detail of the novel is linked to its philosophical framework. In so doing, England homes in pertinently on some of the most morally testing moments in the narrative: the maid, Pattie's, punishing informing of Muriel that her beloved cousin, Elizabeth, is in fact her sister; Muriel's excruciating moral dilemma when she finds her hated father collapsed after a suicide attempt. The breakdown of Christianity that frames these vignettes is put into a concise theological context and England outlines the novel's challenges to orthodoxy through direct quotation from a series of Murdoch's characters, including Norah Shadox-Brown, Marcus Fisher and the extreme dogma of the central demonic figure of the novel, Carel Fisher. Carel illustrates, argues England, how the loss of faith is concomitant with a loss of specific and special identity that denies the possibility of altruism and selflessness: Carel's mantra that 'all altruism feeds the fat ego' epitomises and reinforces the contention that goodness is impossible for human beings (115). England's apposite synopses of Murdoch's evocations of competing beliefs are detailed enough to evoke precisely that moral urgency which lies within the novel itself.

This urgency is also contextualised through a succinct explication of Murdoch's significance within the zeitgeist of mid-twentieth-century philosophy. England places the central themes of *The Time of the Angels* within Oxford philosophy between the late 1940s and the early 1960s, the years when Murdoch was either a student at Somerville or a tutor at St Anne's. The clarity of this exposition of the debate between the Oxford philosophers' focus on action and language and Murdoch's focus on Plato and the inner life, and the deftness with which England links these debates to the novel, are the great strengths of this chapter. Murdoch's arguments against Hume and Kant, whose influence had led to the separation of the moral life from philosophy, and her quarrel with existentialism and behaviourism are deftly clarified here, and linked back to certain characters in the novel who are emblematic of these ideas. There is, of course, an inevitable risk in focusing closely on how Murdoch's characters serve as illustrations of her philosophical ideas, for so doing is limiting their individuality and their freedom from those boundaries that she was careful herself, as a writer, to allow them to exhibit. Her characters are multifaceted, complex and always individually morally responsible. It would have been of benefit to newcomers to Murdoch's fiction for this enduring contest within Murdoch's *modus operandi* to be acknowledged here, and how Murdoch's characters also function in a larger debate about the limitations of any dialogue between philosophy and actual human experience. Nonetheless, the fundamental issues being explored here are relevant and informative in relation to the over-arching philosophical and theological reaches of the novel.

I should acknowledge a particular interest in the concluding section of this essay where England analyses the role of Eugene Peshkov's reproduction of Rublev's *Icon of the Trinity* in the narrative. Having studied Murdoch's use of the visual arts for many years, a fully convincing rationale for Murdoch's inclusion of the icon in this novel has, frustratingly, remained elusive to me. However, by cross-referencing the appearance of the icon with the parable of M and D in *The Sovereignty of Good,* and focusing tightly upon Murdoch's emphasis on the imperative of looking justly upon another human being, England expands the significance of the icon by forming a link between the trinity of angels depicted on the icon, Murdoch's narrative devices in *The Time of the Angels* and her moral philosophy. His succinct and convincing detailed 'reading' of the enigmatic 'looking' of the angels on the icon and the multi-perspectives of looking that are recorded between the characters in the novel, makes for fascinating and enlightening reading. And in so

doing, England, like Murdoch, successfully challenges his readers to re-examine their own mode of looking at the world and others.

With so much to learn from this essay about what is Murdoch's most directly theological novel, I found myself wishing that this chapter had been more specifically adapted for a less specialised audience, or had been given a more sympathetic edit than the very light touch applied to the original lecture. Although we are advised in England's preface to this book that we should attempt to 'hear' the texts as vocal delivery, a more rigorous structure, and more concessions to readers who might feel disenfranchised from a sometimes esoteric vocabulary but unable to query it, would have been welcome here. Such barriers to understanding, of course, stand out less starkly when material is read aloud rather than written, and the benefits of expanding one's own knowledge of specialised discourses are, of course, rewarding in themselves. The effort would be well worthwhile, for this essay provides an informative introduction both to this novel and to Murdoch's moral philosophy generally, and these quibbles should not detract from the merits of England's detailed and scholarly interrogation of one of Iris Murdoch's most important novels.

Review of Devaki Jain, *The Brass Notebook: A Memoir* (New Delhi: Speaking Tiger Books, 2020)

Gillian Dooley

This is the extraordinary memoir of an extraordinary woman. Devaki Jain knew Iris Murdoch, Gloria Steinem, Julius Nyerere, and Nelson Mandela. Born in 1934, while still in her early twenties she travelled alone across India to meet Gandhi's disciple Vinoba Bhave, hitchhiked around Europe in a sari, and fell in love (briefly) with a Yugoslav at a Quaker camp in Saarbrücken. She later became a leading feminist figure in transforming economics in India and other developing countries.

The Brass Notebook is organised in seven unequal parts. Beginning with beginnings ('Where I come from' and 'The Awakening') and ending with endings ('Requiem'), she nevertheless, like Doris Lessing in her *Golden Notebook*, divides her adult life into four sections. The echo in the title is deliberate: Jain describes meeting Lessing in 1958 and talking to her for hours. Lessing told her to write her story and send it to her. Jain only gets round to it 60 years later – too late, of course, for Lessing. She uses 'brass' in her title, explaining that it 'is a hardier, homelier metal than gold' (xiv). The book's structural similarities, however, are not explicit. In Lessing's *Golden Notebook* the four sections, or notebooks, are separate parts of the protagonist's life which she struggles to bring together into the eponymous golden notebook. These are: her experience growing up in Southern Rhodesia; her political life; the painful end of a love affair; and her inner life. Jain's four parts do not correspond exactly to these, and I might not be justified in imposing this schema on the middle section of her memoir. Nevertheless, I was struck by the disconnection of these parts of her narrative – parallel rather than sequential, and sometimes difficult to reconcile.

Following Part 2, 'The Awakening', a mere few pages where Jain recounts her emergence from orthodox Hindu schoolgirl to Gandhian disciple, she goes on in Part 3 to describe the freedom she was allowed – to travel abroad with her father and then alone, staying in Oxford to study on the slenderest of incomes. From the way she relates her experiences, they seem almost like fairy tales. She wants

to study in Oxford – she applies to join Ruskin College – the principal is intrigued and grants her a full scholarship for a year to do a diploma in social sciences. In mid-1950s Oxford, she is struck by the novelty of being accountable to no one for her behaviour.

On returning to India, she is allowed at least one important freedom – freedom from the imperative to marry before she wishes. She falls in love with 'an unsuitable boy' – suitable, that is, in every way apart from his incompatible caste – and eventually marries him, at the age of 33, in an act of defiance against her family whose liberality (though unusual for the time) did not extend far enough to approve of crossing these inflexible barriers. Lakshmi Jain was a fellow Gandhi follower and idealist, and they had a long and happy marriage. Her parents eventually relented and accepted the union.

After this account of her personal life – places she went, people she met, marriage and family – Part 4 concerns the more intimate side of the same period in her life. Sexual encounters both welcome and unwelcome are described in frank detail. It was the last of these, a disgusting assault by a sexual predator who had been her employer in Oxford, that led her to St Anne's College and her encounter with Iris Murdoch.

This phase of her life, 1959–62, is described in Part 5, 'The Academy'. On their first meeting, when she was petitioning to join St Anne's, she found Murdoch to be 'a warm, beautiful woman, with a low, reflective voice. Her large blue eyes looked at you with a piercing intensity; sometimes I felt like she could see through me' (126). Jain found that all the tutors at St Anne's were fascinated by her saris and her exoticism. 'Iris, during her philosophy tutorials with me, would sometimes say, "Sit further back, won't you, so that the sunlight falls on your face." I did not find their attention intrusive; in fact, it was flattering, and never translated into any misbehaviour or harassment' (127). Murdoch was personally generous – she provided financial support for Jain when other options temporarily dried up – and more open-minded than many, with 'none of her colleagues' triumphalist attitudes to Western civilization and its intellectual heritage' (129). Murdoch and Jain remained lifelong friends, but Murdoch really only figures in these few pages of the memoir.

Although all this is interesting, for me the book becomes really gripping in Part 6, 'Building New Worlds'. Here Jain describes her emergence as a feminist economist, through various interactions and opportunities. She became aware of the prevalence in India of female infanticide – 'the paradox of a culture that venerated its goddesses but killed its baby girls' (153). Editing a book on the position of women in India led to a change of attitude. She began to question assumptions, such as those on which statistics about women's participation in the workforce were founded, and embarked on research to establish more realistic models. She often attended international conferences as a representative of third-world women:

> I frequently saw projects designed at solving the wrong problems and funding allocated inefficiently or wastefully simply because we lacked a vocabulary to describe the conditions that these projects were supposed to be addressing. My term for this phenomenon, 'the oppression of vocabulary', caught on among activists, encouraging theoretical work that aimed to find terminology adequate to the phenomena. (174)

It took some determination, and willingness to be disruptive, to change this situation:

> We were allowed, at best, to make constructive suggestions to help to put their ideas into practice. We were not expected to offer a fundamental critique. But a fundamental critique is what was needed. When we left the meeting, we [the women present] had the chance to articulate this feeling to each other. (176)

Devaki Jain was a pioneer in the theorisation and identification of, and advocacy for, the global south, though acknowledging that 'the south was, and perhaps will always be, an idea in the making rather than something fully made' (190). All her achievements are related with disarming modesty, always acknowledging the role played by colleagues in forming her ideas, and the salutary lessons she learned from the women she met in slums and villages. She gives the impression of being pleasantly surprised by her varied and unusual experiences and her good fortune. Nobel economics laureate Amartya Sen, another lifelong friend, wrote the foreword. 'When I first met her,' he says, 'I was struck not only by her joyful presence, but also by her remarkable ability to be easily amused' (ix). I am sure he did not mean it as a backhanded compliment, but it does indicate a certain very attractive wide-eyed openness to whatever life threw her way. It cannot really have been an easy life, but looking back from her mid-eighties, it seems to have been a charmed one.

Review of *Iris Murdoch: Een filosofie van de liefde* by Katrien Schaubroeck (Borgerhout: Letterwerk, 2020)

Edith Brugmans

The Iris Murdoch centenary year in 2019 has not gone unnoticed in the Low Countries. In November 2019 the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam invited Clare Mac Cumhaill and Rachael Wiseman to lecture on their *In Parenthesis* project; in June 2019 my study *Weg van de enkeling* [*Beyond the Self*] (Amsterdam: Sjibbolet Filosophie), in which Murdoch's work and the Iris Murdoch Society play a significant role, was published. But perhaps more could have been done in the Netherlands and Belgium on the occasion of the centenary. After all, Murdoch's novels were widely read and highly praised in the 1970s and 1980s, and many of them remain popular today, as illustrated by the publication of a new Dutch paperback edition of *The Bell* [*De klok*] in 2019. Moreover, in the last twenty years Murdoch's philosophy has been increasingly discussed and appreciated in Dutch and Belgian academia. In this context, it is a pleasure to welcome Katrien Schaubroeck's study *Iris Murdoch: Een filosofie van de liefde* [*Iris Murdoch: A Philosophy of Love*], published in October 2020. Although too late for the centenary, the publication of this work is timely too, since, as Schaubroeck notes, 2020 celebrates the semicentennial of Murdoch's *The Sovereignty of Good*. This brilliant work, and in particular the first essay, 'The Idea of Perfection', is the subject of Schaubroeck's study.

The first thing to notice about Schaubroeck's study is its elegance: a small book of some 18,000 words, it has been produced in a compact edition with an attractive layout. The study is divided into short chapters of two or three pages, each introduced by exciting titles, such as 'Do thoughts exist?', 'The moral consumer', 'Love doesn't mind', that command the attention and engagement of the reader. Schaubroeck's accessible writing style complements this handsome edition. With a few strokes she identifies a clear philosophical question and goes to the heart of the matter: with effective examples and personal anecdotes, she explains theoretical arguments and clarifies them for the reader. While she is well versed in the discipline of academic philosophy, her language effectively engages with the philosophically minded common reader.

Schaubroeck's compact study leaves little space to introduce and discuss all aspects of Murdoch's philosophy. She focuses on Murdoch's now well-known M and D exemplification of the importance of the inner life to moral development. For Schaubroeck, this argument first of all proves the reality and moral significance of inner mental activity. She stresses Murdoch's refutation of the behaviourism of Sartrean existentialism and Wittgensteinian analysis. In Schaubroeck's assessment, the heart of Murdoch's moral philosophy is that love is the way to moral perfection. Schaubroeck discusses Murdoch's concept of love in some detail, noting that Murdoch takes inspiration from Plato and Simone Weil, and explaining that for Murdoch love is connected with unselfing, with a true, just, attentive vision that respects the reality of the other.

At this point, however, Schaubroeck's interpretation of Murdoch's philosophy becomes somewhat uneven. She barely refers to other critical work on Murdoch. She pays little attention to the metaphysical and epistemological underpinnings of Murdoch's moral philosophy; for example, the ontological argument as developed in 'On God and Good' and in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* is not discussed at all. Finally, she emphasises the subjective feeling of love at the expense of the objective reality of Good. Murdoch's fundamental argument that Good is sovereign over love is not much elaborated upon; consequently, Schaubroeck does not explain in detail how for Murdoch the Good is the objective ideal reality that qualifies love and thus makes it possible to see how low Eros (impure or false love) differs from high Eros (refined or true love). Given a little more space, Schaubroeck's study could have benefited here from phenomenological analyses of Murdoch's novels, which would have offered a rewarding opportunity to examine the many aspects of love.

Nevertheless, she does offer something else. Schaubroeck discusses other philosophical arguments about love and compares these to Murdoch's view, thus placing Murdoch's philosophy in a wider context. For example, to clarify Murdoch's argument against the Sartrean and Wittgensteinian behaviourist theory of meaning, she refers to Joshua Knobe's distinction between the clear common meaning of descriptive concepts on the one hand and growing personal understanding of normative value concepts on the other hand. She suggests that Knobe is totally in line with Murdoch's suggestion that moral concepts envision ideals that require a lifelong learning process of moral perfection. However, I think that Schaubroeck could have added here that for Murdoch the distinction itself is highly problematic, as proven by Murdoch's argument against the separation

of facts and values. To give another example: Schaubroeck refers to Bernard Williams on utilitarianism to shed light on Murdoch's notion of unselfing, and she discusses the Keller-Jollimore debate on the connection between friendship and truthfulness in order to underline Murdoch's view that the true and the good are one. Of particular interest is the comparison with Harry Frankfurt. Schaubroeck points out that Frankfurt's will-oriented concept of love differs strongly from Murdoch's vision-oriented concept of love: for the former love definitely makes life meaningful, yet is not essentially moral, whereas for the latter love and morality go together. Schaubroeck writes that 'the moral attitude is not contrary to, but company to loving' (56). Or more accurately, as Murdoch explores in 'The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts' (1967), love is a force for good, a moral energy that joins us to the world in the light of the Good. Although Schaubroeck's discussion of the aforementioned arguments is again rather brief, this comparative part of her essay is interesting in framing Murdoch's moral philosophy clearly as a philosophy of love.

The final chapters touch upon two topical issues: feminism and politics. Here Schaubroeck mentions the *In Parenthesis* project and alludes to Murdoch criticism by Martha Nussbaum and Hannah Marije Altorf, although precise references are not given. Schaubroeck argues that Murdoch was simply not very interested in feminist or political activism; what she really cared about was spiritual morality, and this is why, for Schaubroeck, Murdoch puts love centre stage.

Schaubroeck's study is intended for the general public, and it has already received some media response. The essay was positively reviewed in *Trouw*, a Dutch national newspaper, on 8 November 2020 and, in the same year, the Flemish news magazine *Knack* published a long interview with Katrien Schaubroeck on Iris Murdoch. These are good things, things that will help raise and renew interest, popular and academic alike, in Murdoch's work and thought.

Review of *Iris Murdoch: A Guide to the Novels* by Peter Whitfield (Chipping Norton: Wychwood Editions, 2020)

Liz Dexter

In writing this book, Peter Whitfield has produced what he was looking for when he (presumably first) read Iris Murdoch's novels. As he states in the Introduction,

> I have compiled this book with the intention of helping other people to clarify their understanding of the novels. I know from experience how confusing some of the books are, especially in their opening chapters. I needed a reader's guide like this, not just to give a plot summary, although that is plainly important, but to open up some lines of possible interpretation. (12)

It is unclear when he first read the novels; A.S. Byatt's *Degrees of Freedom* (1965), for example, has been out in various editions for a number of years and takes the reader through the novels in a great deal more detail, and more academically and formally than Whitfield does or finds valid here. It is without doubt, though, that this is a handy guide to the novels, with an introduction on Murdoch's work as a whole followed by a short summary of each novel, outlining the main plot and characters, then a discussion of the novels' themes with (when the author feels appropriate) a note on the overarching development of Murdoch's thought and attitudes. Finally, there is a discussion of two works of philosophy, *The Sovereignty of Good* and *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, and their relation to the novels.

The Introduction places Murdoch into context within the English realist tradition, while her relation to Russian and French schools of literature, especially in the earlier novels in the latter, is explored within the individual chapters. An indisputable

point which runs through the work is this: 'What occupies her is not the outer life of people in society, but their inner lives, their hidden vulnerable selves' (7). Whitfield takes the view that it is not essential to understand the philosophy to understand the novels. Murdoch's comments in a 1990 interview with Jeffrey Meyers lend some support to this stance, though her 'ideal reader' would engage with both:

> Those who like a jolly good yarn are welcome and worthy readers. I suppose the *ideal* reader is someone who likes a jolly good yarn and enjoys thinking about the book as well, thinking about the moral issues.[1]

This quotation from Murdoch also backs up the view of reception theory: in essence, that each reader creates a new text, and that each reader's view of the book is valuable.[2] I will not therefore pick over each assertion about the novels in this study, although I do agree with most of them, but rather reflect on the general arc presented in it.

Murdoch's creative development is outlined in the Introduction. Whitfield sees the first six novels as an exploration of 'rather modish French-influenced works' (10) and conventional social realism in *The Sandcastle*, with religion entering the scene initially in *The Bell*, followed by sexual transgression in *A Severed Head*. (I would say that sexual transgression is there from the beginning of Murdoch's oeuvre, but Whitfield's point is made and explained.) The ten novels from *The Time of the Angels* to *The Sea, The Sea*, Whitfield claims, are stronger and rooted in lived philosophy, then he sees a gradual farewell to philosophy and to formalised religion and God (but not Christ) in the remaining novels. These points are emphasised in the individual chapters as well as being laid out in the Introduction. Whitfield's introduction finishes by asserting the lasting seriousness of Murdoch's fiction where her examination of human experience in non-attention-seeking or gimmicky modes outweighs the opinions of contemporary readers who saw them as shocking or immoral.

Whitfield pays close attention to the recurring themes and images in Murdoch's fiction that her readers will know well: drownings and near drownings and water in general, civil servants, the disruption of ordinary existence by unreasoning flashes of love, Eastern Europeans, siblings and half-siblings, second families. He generously mentions that *Jackson's Dilemma*, the last of her long line of novels, displays many of these themes. This study lacks space to look at all the other features many readers of her oeuvre come to love, including stones, women's hair, long and then chopped off, masks (mentioned once) and much else besides. A suspension of disbelief is necessary when reading Murdoch's fiction if readers are to accept the supernatural elements which are part of her world. Whitfield interestingly relates some of the themes in the novels to the prevailing tides of contemporaneous interest in the outside world, for example, the black magic in popular novels of the 1950s and 1960s may have influenced *The Time of the Angels*, or the kidnapping and terrorism flooding the news in the 1970s which connects with *Henry and Cato*.

Whitfield does not shy away from making personal judgements on the novels, including some occasional assertions that I found surprising: for example, that Julius King in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* is depicted as 'an elite person, a scientist and a philosopher, someone with deep self-knowledge' but about whom the 'passage of time has altered the way we feel about such a character, making him intolerable' (46). I am not sure this is the main character about whom opinions have changed. By comparison, in my own research, I found reactions to Michael Meade in *The Bell* which surprised me but do not appear in this study.[3] Neither does Whitfield shy away from criticising (as opposed to critiquing) the novels, wondering, for instance, whether the layered texts in *The Black Prince* 'may contain some profound reflections on art and psychology, or they may be pretentious nonsense, it is not easy to decide which' (50). Whitfield also dedicates a section at the end of the study to philosophy; although I am not qualified to comment on its accuracy, I can say that it is clearly written and refers back to both the novels as well as the arc of Murdoch's interests and themes.

This is the kind of study that a reviewer of my own book was seeking when they complained that I did not write enough about each novel. It will be of interest to those seeking guidance on the novels, their plots, main characters and themes. It will also be of interest to those undertaking the pleasing project of reading the novels through in chronological order, which illuminates the development of Murdoch's themes, her interests and her literary prowess. Situated halfway between the subgenre in which people relate their life as affected by a particular author and academic texts on the novels such as Byatt's, the study lacks footnotes, references and a bibliography, thus undermining some of the assertions that are made about Murdoch's intentions, e.g. her interest in Buddhism.[3] Some form of referencing or page numbering for the quotations from the novels and philosophy would have been useful and would have given Whitfield's study more authority. Furthermore, readers need to be alert for occasional factual errors, such as the early claim that 'five of the novels are male first-person narratives' (9), when there are of course six.

Nevertheless, this is could be a useful preliminary guide to the novels when read alongside Murdochian criticism and biographical works. It draws out Murdoch's 'lifelong role as a storyteller, trying to create fiction from which some truth will emerge' (76), which is of course a worthy pursuit.

1. Jeffrey Meyers, 'Two Interviews with Iris Murdoch, 1990 & 1991', in *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction*, ed. by Gillian Dooley (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 218–34 (230).
2. For a more detailed explanation of reception theory, see Stanley Fish, *Is there a Text in this Class: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).
3. Liz Dexter, *Iris Murdoch and the Common Reader* (Birmingham: self-published, 2017), 139–40.

Poem with a Pair of Fighting Hawks and Iris Murdoch

Han VanderHart

Because the hawk arrows its body
at another hawk, near its nest
in the sea pines. Their crying bodies
meet in air, a winged *X* of conflict,
desire for space. They tangle
in the pine boughs. After, one hawk
perches on a high branch and weeps –
keer, keer, keer – then lifts
in flight, wheels downwards
towards my child and I, lands
on the roof's ridge. Not a hawk
returns to the nest while we watch:
they have been emptied out of themselves
by fight and annoyance.
I have been emptied out of myself
by fight and annoyance – or, emptied
only. Full of myself, to the brim.
Everything trembling around
the world of me. The hawk,
arrowing its wings, lifts the self
out and up: fills the dark space
with the sky and green pines,
the plunge of feathered shoulders.

Report on Anne Rowe's Iris Murdoch Society Christmas Lecture, 'The Great task of Christmas is coming up', 17 December 2020

Maria Peacock

There were not many festive events in the period before Christmas 2020, after a year of lockdowns and a pandemic. It was therefore an especially welcome treat to get together with other Iris Murdoch lovers to enjoy the Zoom lecture given by Anne Rowe for the Iris Murdoch Society. Rowe presented extracts from a range of Murdoch's personal papers, letters, journals, and poetry. These gave us an insight into Murdoch's delight in the symbolism and rituals of the Christmas season, which also elicited emotions of yearning, loss and depression against the intensity of the cold and the snow. Annette Badland also read from Murdoch's novels to illustrate Rowe's talk on how the spiritual power and significance of the mythology of Christmas permeated her th=ought and her fiction.

The combination of biographical material and novels gave us a glimpse into the magical intimacy Murdoch enjoyed with her husband John Bayley, as they took comfort in the rituals and cosiness of traditional Christmases which seem always to have been snowy. Inside Cedar Lodge there was wine and wood fires and outside there was the natural life of birds and animals in winter. In London they always had the same walk on Christmas mornings, which took them through Kensington Gardens and past the statue of Peter Pan which frequently featured in her novels. In Bayley's memoir of Murdoch he records how, even in the last years of her life when her cognitive faculties were failing and her relationship with the world had faded, the Christmas walk momentarily revived her and lifted her anxiety as if the day provided spiritual power and peace.

The mythology and imagery of Christmas is a powerful force in portraying the psychological and spiritual states of Murdoch's characters. Rowe alluded to the

symbolism and scenery of Christmas in *A Severed Head* (1961), which reflects the complexity of the anguish of the conflicted protagonist Martin Lynch-Gibbon. In a different way, the birth of the Christ child is invoked in the conclusion of *A Word Child* (1975). The final two chapters, which are titled 'Christmas Eve' and 'Christmas Day', lead to an ambiguous conclusion. Nevertheless, Rowe suggests that a Christmas reading of the closing scene, which traces the route of the Bayleys' Christmas Day walk, offers the possibility of redemption and forgiveness.

Rowe's lecture was a poignantly enjoyable event in a rather bleak and uncertain time. It conveyed to us something of the passion of Murdoch's experience of Christmas and enriched our reading of her works.

Report on 'Iris Murdoch as a moral philosopher', Dutch Symposium, 17 May 2021

Katrien Schaubroeck

The centenary of Iris Murdoch's birth has stimulated interest in Murdoch's novels, philosophy and life worldwide. In the Netherlands and Belgium, scholars are rediscovering her work. On 17 May 2021 many of them found each other online for a symposium, in Dutch, on the moral philosophy of Iris Murdoch. The symposium was organised by Rob Compaijen and Katrien Schaubroeck and chaired by Thomas Crombez, who has produced a new Dutch translation of *The Sovereignty of Good* [*De soevereiniteit van het goede*] (forthcoming autumn 2021). One of the recurrent questions throughout the presentations and the ensuing discussion concerned the relevance of Murdoch to an age marked by social injustice and global crises. All four presentations revealed both the enduring relevance and the inherent limits of Murdoch's approach to moral philosophy as, first and foremost, a moral psychology.

Famously, when a member of the audience yelled 'they all sound the same' at Neil Young while he was performing his newest album on stage, the artist yelled back 'it's all one song'. Likewise, Murdoch's oeuvre might come across as a sustained exploration of the same theme: Plato's allegory of the cave. In her opening lecture, Edith Brugmans examined the limits of this Platonic scheme. Murdoch lauds a Platonic approach to the good life as a pilgrimage from illusion to reality not only as a much-needed alternative to analytical linguistic philosophy but also as a model for novels that resist 'dryness'. Murdoch's criterion when evaluating art and religion, for example, is whether they help us to direct our attention away from the self to reality beyond. But, Brugmans argues, *The Message to the Planet* reveals Murdoch's recognition of the extreme implications of the Platonic ethicist model: it sacrifices form to content and ultimately art to real life. In Murdoch's novels and in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* Brugmans discerns an alternative Freudian model of analysis that focuses on the text and on the struggles of inner moral life rather than exploring reality beyond the cave.

The second speaker, Lotte Spreeuwenberg, whose PhD research analyses Murdoch's conception of love and its significance for contemporary fights for social justice, defended Murdoch against feminist critiques. Partly siding with Sabina Lovibond, Hilde Nelson and Kate Manne, Spreeuwenberg recognises the danger of ideals of care and love becoming oppressive. Yet in exploring the parallel with feminist criticism of ethics of care, she finds resources to defend Murdoch against accusations, and even argues that care presents a greater risk of self-annihilation than Murdoch's loving attention. After all, for Murdoch, love is not meant as a final principle that tells us what to do, but makes room for the complexity of both internal and external moral claims. And, more importantly, Spreeuwenberg argues, loving attention is not presented as a blind form of self-care but as a corrective measure against egoism.

Katrien Schaubroeck's presentation picked up where Spreeuwenberg left off, namely with the issue of Murdoch's relevance to efforts to raise critical political awareness. The practice of loving attention could reveal one's entanglement in oppressive structures and thus contribute to social change, Spreeuwenberg suggested. In the same vein, Schaubroeck examined what Murdoch could add to the topical discussion of moral encroachment. Moral encroachment is the term given to the phenomenon that the epistemic status of a belief sometimes depends on moral features of the belief. A possible explanation for this phenomenon relies on the epistemology of probabilities: when the moral stakes are high, the threshold for what counts as knowledge (rather than opinion) may go up. When questioning whether or not Murdoch's philosophy could be seen to endorse this argument, a tension appears. On the one hand, Murdoch's thinking is underpinned by the idea that the moral domain includes our inner lives. Our thoughts and perceptions are not morally off limits, as the classic example of M and D reveals. Reality is not a scientific but a normative notion for Murdoch, hence our perception of it is never neutral. On the other hand, Murdoch's idiosyncratic notion of moral progress is not entirely compatible with the phenomenon of moral encroachment, which draws attention to the social structures in which individuals make up their minds. Moral encroachment demands communal social reform and ongoing scientific research into the real impact of prejudice and structural discriminations. Such interventions, in Murdoch's moral philosophy, however, are matters that concern the individual's moral psychology.

The meaning of 'reality' in the Murdochian vocabulary was also at the centre of Rob Compaijen's lecture on moral perception and obedience. For Murdoch, moral perception does not only refer to 'seeing what one must do', it also refers to looking at the world (and seeing what is there, like a hovering kestrel) and to seeing value in the natural world. In 'The Idea of Perfection', Murdoch writes that the 'idea of a patient, loving regard, directed upon a person, a thing, a situation, presents the will not as unimpeded movement but as something very much more like

"obedience"'.[1] Her claim that our ideal moral responses are marked by a necessary obedience to reality – that the cumulative work of attention can lead to the feeling that 'at crucial moments of choice most of the business of choosing is already over' – is well known.[2] But what exactly does she mean by it? Insofar as she meant that uncertainty is a sign of moral immaturity or imperfect perception, Compaijen finds her too demanding. Loving attention cannot do all the work. Our world is such that some situations call for deliberation or calibration between conflicting values, and uncertainty need not be read as moral imperfection.

The symposium was closed by a witty and truly Murdochian dialogue between Mariette Willemsen and Hannah Marije Altorf. They talked about their first encounters with Murdoch's work and thought, the first novels they read, the philosophical ideas that most impressed them, and their own experiences with attending lovingly to the world, all of which were inspired by the four lectures. Perhaps, they both said, deliberation is not as absent from Murdoch's idea of the moral life as it might seem. As life-changing as a moment of 'true vision' might be, this moment is almost always preceded or even prepared by doubting, brooding, pondering, and other forms of deliberation. Like Brugmans, Willemsen and Altorf turn as often to the novels as to Murdoch's philosophical work for answers. They argued, for example, that *The Flight from the Enchanter* is one of Murdoch most feminist works, enhancing critical understanding of Murdoch's views on feminism and gender inequality. After observing that Murdoch's interest in religion is downplayed in the current revival of Murdoch scholarship, and that a closer reading of *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* might remedy this lacuna, they concluded that Murdoch's oeuvre is indeed, in the words of Maria Antonaccio and William Schweiker, a 'huge hall of reflection full of light and space and fresh air, in which ideas and intuitions can be unsystematically nurtured'.[3] Even if it were true that Murdoch's oeuvre explores the same classic themes – the nature of truth, goodness and beauty – over and over again, it is precisely this continual scrutiny from different angles that ensures the enduring relevance of her thoughts. The acoustics in the huge hall of reflection are amazing, and one finds oneself in great company. It will be delightful to linger there for many years to come.

1. Iris Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', in *Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. by Peter J. Conradi (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), 299–336 (331).
2. Iris Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', 329.
3. Maria Antonaccio and William Schweiker, *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), xv.

Report on the Iris Murdoch Virtual Conference, 'Connection and Communication', 15 July 2021

Daniel Read

It was a great relief to read in the January Newsletter, early this year, that a one-day virtual conference was to replace the in-person conference that had, unsurprisingly, to be postponed. This new format for the Iris Murdoch Conference – undoubtedly a challenge to arrange for the organisers behind the scenes who had to juggle 24 presenters in 17 different time zones – was a resounding success. The decision to have pre-recorded presentations made the papers accessible to all attendees ahead of time, which left 30 minutes for each panel (of two or three papers) to have a question-and-answer session over Zoom. These sessions, all brilliantly chaired by Miles Leeson, were attended on average by about 40 guests, and experienced few, if any, problems with technology.

The conference was based, primarily, around the themes of connection and communication, and included papers on, among other topics, intertextuality, letters, music, pluralism, poetry and privacy. Despite the panels being arranged around time zones, they nevertheless had complimentary themes that allowed the question-and-answer sessions to be lively and engaging. Of particular note, for myself, at least, were the papers presented by Arka Basu, Gillian Dooley and Mark Hopwood, along with the panel that offered postcolonial readings of *A Word Child*, *The Green Knight* and *Jackson's Dilemma*, and the panel that focused on Murdoch and morality in technology, vocabulary and education. These papers illustrated how Murdoch studies are being continually broadened by the fresh perspectives offered on her fiction and philosophy in the biennial Iris Murdoch Conferences, all of which provide the audience with stimulating topics to discuss throughout the event and beyond.

While the panels had an average of up to 40 attendees, the same could not be said of the plenaries, both of which drew many more. The ability to fill these events was testament to the great plenary speakers who were able to take part in the virtual conference: Cora Diamond joined us from Virginia, USA and gave a paper entitled 'Murdoch off the map; or Taking Empiricism back from the Empiricists', introduced by Hannah Marije Altorf (one of the more recent additions to the Iris Murdoch Research Centre's scholars), and the novelist Sarah Perry joined us from Norwich in a conversation with Avril Horner, entitled 'Iris Murdoch's Gothic Imagination'. Diamond's plenary offered an illustration of the ways in which Murdoch's philosophical style is rendered antagonistic to the Analytic tradition by setting up questions about the nature of philosophy that lie partly outside its own disciplinary remits. Perry's plenary, alternatively, provided fascinating reflections on how the reader encounters Gothic texts not as a genre but as a feeling and argued, in ways fundamentally linking Perry with Murdoch, that the Gothic is a deeply serious moral medium in which you 'can't play with evil unless you play with goodness' and vice versa. These discussions of the Gothic, as well as of Perry's adaptation of her novel *The Essex Serpent* (2016) into a television drama of the same name (currently in production), resonated with the paper given earlier by Tatevik Ayvazyan on Republic Films' new film adaptation of *The Italian Girl*, which is currently searching for financial backing.

The virtual conference was a fitting celebration of the 102nd anniversary of Murdoch's birth. The only disappointing part of attending a virtual conference was the fact that some attendees had to leave, as their local times got out of sync with the group; attending the whole day was, of course, less challenging for those in British Summer Time. Nevertheless, there were some stalwart attendees who managed to start, or end, way into the early hours of the morning, or into the later hours of the night, in their local time zone. There was also time set aside for meeting-and-greeting, a part of the in-person conferences that I think many of us enjoy just as much as the papers and plenaries themselves. (There was even something of a misbehaving school-boyish thrill to be told to hush when time came for the panels to begin.) While we were unable to break off into separate groups, we were nonetheless able to catch up with friends and colleagues in the congenial, engaging, loving atmosphere for which the Iris Murdoch Conferences are known.

Report on 'Iris Murdoch: East Meets West', Sino-British Symposium, 8 August 2021

Lucy Oulton

The first Sino-British Symposium was organised as a joint initiative between Duan Daoyu, Lecturer of English at the College of Foreign Studies, Nanjing Agricultural University (NAU), and Miles Leeson, Director of the Iris Murdoch Research Centre (IMRC), the University of Chichester. Conference participants included scholars from the IMRC and from a further five Chinese universities: the University of International Business and Economics, Beijing (UIBE); Nanjing University (NJU); Nanjing Medical University (NMU); Tianjin University (TJU); and Beijing International Studies University (BISU). The conference was also pleased to welcome other attendees including Sofia de Melo Araújo, Rob Hardy, Paul Hullah, Wendy Jones Nakanishi and Priscilla Martin.

Pei Zhengwei, Professor of English and Dean of the College of Foreign Studies at NAU, and Miles Leeson welcomed delegates and offered opening remarks. Pei Zhengwei gave expression to the degree of interest in Iris Murdoch across a number of universities in China, many of which were represented at this conference. Leeson told delegates that Murdoch had visited China as part of a British delegation (that included Brian Aldiss and David Attenborough) in 1979, meeting Deng Xiaoping and keeping a journal of her travels, which is now in the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives. Duan Daoyu then introduced and welcomed two panel chairs: He Ning, Professor of English and Dean of the School of Foreign Studies, NJU, and Wu Yueming, Professor of English at the School of Foreign Languages and Literatures, BISU.

The first panel, chaired by He Ning (NJU), began with Ma Huiqin, Vice Dean of the English Literature Department at UIBE, on 'The Making of Modern Selves in Murdoch's Writing'. Ma Huiqin's research draws on Murdoch's concerns around the retreat of Christian faith and Charles Taylor's discussion of the malaise of modernity. This paper was the first of quite a number to discuss Murdoch's thirteenth novel, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. My paper followed, on ecological themes in Murdoch's early poems presented in the context of one of her great sources of poetic inspiration, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and the paper culminated in a discussion of two early Murdoch poems, 'The City in the Plain' and the untitled poem known as 'You Take Life Tiptoe'.

In chairing the second panel, it was a particular personal pleasure to be able to welcome Zhou Liyan, Associate Professor at NMU and a visiting scholar at the University of Chichester during 2019. Her paper, titled 'Moral Freedom as it is in Iris Murdoch's Novels', traced the historical and philosophical context of Murdoch's view of moral freedom and sought to illustrate Murdoch's concern about the lack of human sensibility in these traditions of thought. Zhou Liyan's research draws connections to Zen Buddhism via Simone Weil, using *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* to explore what moral freedom might mean in this context. Chichester's Maria Peacock gave a fascinating paper, titled '"One Ought to Feel Continuous, Oughtn't One?": The Need for Roots in Iris Murdoch's Fiction of the Mid-1960s', exploring the extent to which Murdoch can be considered a writer of exile. Peacock offered detailed biographical insights into Murdoch's personal experience of, and interest in, 'refugees, misfits and exiles' in a post-war Europe of dislocated peoples, and illustrated her talk with reference to *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* and *The Time of the Angels*.

Peacock then offered a warm welcome to another former IMRC visiting scholar, Yue Jianfeng, Assistant Professor at TJU. Yue Jianfeng discussed 'Void and Syncretism in Iris Murdoch's Fiction', looking at its articulation in *The Sea, The Sea* and *The Green Knight*. Her research offers a fascinating perspective on Murdoch's engagement with Buddhism of the sort made popular in the mid- to late twentieth century by Tibetan Buddhism and the Dalai Lama, suggesting that this form of Buddhism is not authentic but represents a hermeneutic image of Buddhism, heavily influenced by Western reading and understanding. Yue Jianfeng argues instead for an examination of the social historical context that presents Zen Buddhism in dialogue with Christianity, suggesting that Murdoch's narratives in any event serve to challenge the notion of a necessary hegemony of one religion dominating another. Duan Daoyu's (NAU) paper, titled '"Must be Sought within a Human Experience": The Everydayness in Murdoch's Works', presented an engaging linguistic examination of Murdoch's usage of 'ordinary' and 'everyday' in her unique approach to philosophy. With reference to *The Time of the Angels* and *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, Duan Daoyu attaches this approach to a 'feminist poetics of everyday life'.

For the keynote lecture of the Symposium, Wu Yueming (BISU) introduced Miles Leeson. Leeson's engaging and insightful paper, titled '"Turning East": Murdoch's Engagement with Eastern Thought and Mysticism in Her Late Works', traces a growing obsession with Eastern mysticism that begins far earlier in her writing career, he argues, than is often thought. Leeson suggests that a desire to

destroy false images, for example, can be traced back to the destruction of Bounty Belfounder Studios in *Under the Net* and there is a certain mysticism to be divined in the development of Dora Greenfield's character in *The Bell*. While Murdoch's background lies firmly in the Western religious tradition, he explains that in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* she is constantly making connections between Schopenhauer, Eckhart and Eastern influences, and drawing comparisons between Buddhism and Simone Weil's thought in her own ultimate quest for 'a new theology which can continue without God'. Leeson suggested that the Church of England had not caught up with Murdoch's way of thinking. Leeson talked about Murdoch's unpublished Heidegger manuscript as being one important source that reveals Murdoch's conflation or synergy of these traditions. Here she suggests that 'Mystical disciplines (Platonic, Jewish, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist), together with everyday religious teachings, exhort us to seek the divine beyond human icons and idols. Such conceptions belong in the centre of the human'.[1] Murdoch, after all, saw a certain compatibility between Heidegger and Zen Buddhism. Leeson went on briefly to discuss these influences on three novels, *The Message to the Planet*, *The Green Knight* and *Jackson's Dilemma*.

In a round table discussion Wu Yueming enquired about the reception of Murdoch's novels among today's LGBTQ+ community. A further discussion suggested that one should perhaps not overstate the role of Buddhism when discussing Chinese interest in the novels, as most people in China no longer belong to any particular faith. Reference was also made to the growing secularisation of life in Britain. However, *The Sea, The Sea* is one of Murdoch's novels that is translated into Mandarin Chinese, and it was suggested that its depiction of spiritual crisis and Charles's nihilistic feelings are what make this novel particularly appealing to Chinese readers.

The first Sino-British Symposium not only provided an opportunity for the IMRC to showcase current research projects but also opened what promises to be an ongoing dialogue with colleagues in China, bringing further opportunities to engage with new and rich perspectives presented by Chinese scholars on Murdoch's fiction, philosophy and poetry. With the technical frustrations that inevitably accompany an online conference, all participants hoped that the next Sino-British Symposium might be in person.

1. See Iris Murdoch, 'Heidegger' (unpublished typescript), 165, KUAS6/5/1/4, from the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives. The work is currently being edited for publication by Justin Broackes.

Publications Update: Love and Justice

Pamela Osborn

Iris Murdoch's philosophy, specifically her writing on love and quality of consciousness, has been the chief focus of attention to her work in publications during the pandemic era. Gary Browning's 'Brief Lives: Iris Murdoch' focuses on the significance of Murdoch's life and body of work, asserting that 'Murdoch is a thinker who resists classification, working within and beyond the analytic tradition'. He suggests that what sets Murdoch apart from many of her peers is the endeavour to make her philosophy relevant to 'how one might live one's life', as evidenced in the famous philosophical example of M and D in 'The Idea of Perfection'. Browning writes that the capacity envisioned in this example, to 'rethink and to move away from our prejudices is central in Murdoch's consideration of the moral significance of paying attention to other people and situations'.[1] Jessy Jordan also offers a picture of 'a philosopher who is keen to return us to the ordinary experiences of the ordinary person and whose constructive philosophical project is transcendental in structure'. Jordan's article emphasises the distinction between Murdoch's 'distinctive, Platonic alternative to the now well-developed Neo-Aristotelian naturalism' pursued by Mary Midgley, Elizabeth Anscombe and Philippa Foot.[2]

Like Browning and Jordan, Iris Van Domselaar also calls attention to the real world applicability of Murdoch's philosophy in a chapter that examines the relevance of Murdoch's moral philosophy in law. 'All Judges on the Couch? On Iris Murdoch and Legal Decision-Making' contends, with reference to Murdoch's M and D example, that a Murdochian approach to legal decision-making, dubbed MAL by the author, places the history and experience, the 'prior "beings and doings"' of the judge, at the centre of his or her evaluative landscape.[3]

Julia Driver, Nora Hämäläinen and Raja Rosenhagen all consider Murdoch's conceptualising of consciousness in different ways in their recently published work. In 'Love and Unselfing in Iris Murdoch', Driver contrasts the mainstream view of love as erasing the faults of the love object with Murdoch's ideas about love as a form of close attention to the reality of the other.[4] Hämäläinen's article, 'Iris

Murdoch on Pure Consciousness and Morality', pays close attention to Murdoch's treatment of 'pure consciousness' in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, placing her 'in the context of currently growing interest in philosophy as a self-transformative practice'.[5] Rosenhagen's 'Murdochian Presentationalism, Autonomy, and the Ideal Lovers' Pledge' in *Love, Justice and Autonomy: A Philosophical Perspective*, a collection with much to offer Murdoch enthusiasts, connects Murdoch's philosophy of love and attention with theories of 'presentationalism', formulating 'Murdochian Presentationalism' as a way of thinking about moral reasoning.[6]

2020 also saw the publication of the second volume of essays by the distinguished American theologian David Tracy. This study is devoted to profiles of significant theologians, philosophers, and religious thinkers. Tracy is an admirer of Simone Weil and dedicates two chapters to her in a section entitled 'Seekers of the Good', which also contains his chapter on Murdoch, 'Iris Murdoch and the Many Faces of Platonism', previously published in Maria Antonaccio and William Schweiker's *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*.[7]

Significant relevant publications in 2021 have so far included Maria Gila's biography of Murdoch in Spanish. *Iris Murdoch, La Hija de las Palabras* [*Iris Murdoch, Daughter of Words*] attempts to discover the real woman behind the description 'the brightest woman in England'.[8] In *Examples and Their Role in Our Thinking*, Ondřej Beran considers Murdoch's work, among many others, as a response to Wittgenstein, while acknowledging her 'independence of thought', and he examines the literary examples of individual experience Murdoch that employs in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*.[9]

Murdoch's legacy has now extended to children's fiction. Sam Copeland's *Charlie Morphs Into a Mammoth*, the tale of a boy-superhero who can transform into animals, references a little girl character called Iris Murdoch (from class 2P). Iris's snail, The Black Prince, is a finalist in the school snail race.[10]

Last, but by no means least, the paperback edition of Lucy Bolton's highly successful *Contemporary Cinema and the Philosophy of Iris Murdoch* was published in February 2021.[11]

1. Gary Browning, 'Brief Lives: Iris Murdoch', *Philosophy Now* 139 (2020), 51–53.
2. Jessy Jordan, 'On the transcendental structure of Iris Murdoch's philosophical method', *European Journal of Philosophy* (2021), 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.11.11/ejop.12655>.
3. Iris van Domselaar, 'All Judges on the Couch? On Iris Murdoch and Legal Decision-Making', in *Virtue, Emotion and Imagination in Law and Legal Reasoning*, ed. by Amalia Amaya and Maksymilian Del Mar (Oxford: Hart, 2020), 77–98.
4. Julia Driver, 'Love and Unselfing in Iris Murdoch', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 87 (2020), 169–80.
5. Nora Hämäläinen, 'Iris Murdoch on Pure Consciousness and Morality', in *Methodological Reflections on Women's Contribution and Influence in the History of Philosophy*, ed. by Sigridur Thorgeirsdottir and Ruth Edith Hagengruber (London: Springer Nature, 2020), 173–84.
6. Raja Rosenhagen, 'Murdochian Presentationalism, Autonomy, and the Ideal Lovers' Pledge', in *Love, Justice and Autonomy: A Philosophical Perspective* ed. by Rachel Fedock, Michael Kühler and Raja Rosenhagen (London: Routledge, 2020), 102–31.
7. David Tracy, *Filaments, Theological Profiles: Selected Essays*, volume 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020); David Tracy, 'Iris Murdoch and the Many Faces of Platonism', in *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*, ed. by Maria Antonaccio and William Schweiker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 54–75.
8. Maria Gila, *Iris Murdoch, La Hija de las Palabras* (Córdoba: Editorial Almuzara, 2021).
9. Ondřej Beran, *Examples and Their Role in Our Thinking* (London: Routledge, 2021).
10. Sam Copeland, *Charlie Morphs Into a Mammoth* (London: Puffin Books, 2020).
11. Lucy Bolton, *Contemporary Cinema and the Philosophy of Iris Murdoch* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021).

Iris Murdoch in the Media

Pamela Osborn

The Iris Murdoch Society Podcast has been an outstanding success in the last year, with over 12,000 listens overall. Guests with wide-ranging knowledge of and interest in Murdoch have joined host Miles Leeson to discuss topics such as wild swimming, Ireland, feminism, singing, religion, children's literature, and individual novels including *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* and *The Unicorn*. A special episode was also dedicated to Murdoch's close friend and fellow writer, Brigid Brophy. The podcast can be found on Soundcloud and Apple Podcasts.[1]

The Iris Murdoch Society Blog launched in December 2020 with a post by Arka Basu, the first recipient of the Barbara Stevens Heusel Research Fund for Early-Career Scholars.[2] Rebecca Moden has since published a post on Murdoch and the painter Harry Weinberger; Mark Hopwood wrote about *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* and football; Jill Apperley reflected on Murdoch's connections to Chiswick; Gillian Dooley described her encounter with John and Audi Bayley; and Maria Peacock wrote about researching Murdoch during the pandemic, appreciating the resourcefulness of archivists and other innovations which have enabled her work to continue as much as possible. The Iris Murdoch Society Podcast is one such innovation; it is 'such a valuable resource for the future,' she writes, which 'has also helped sustain the Iris Murdoch community during the year.'[3]

The online Murdoch community has grown again this year, with over 7,500 followers on Twitter (@IrisMurdoch), over 1,800 members of the Facebook Iris Murdoch Appreciation Society and over 300 followers of the Iris Murdoch Society Instagram account. The Kingston University Archives Instagram account, which often posts about the Iris Murdoch Collections, is also growing fast.

Murdoch's fiction and philosophy has continued to be a touchstone for journalists during the pandemic era and has been a regular feature of 'listicles' (articles based on lists). Arguably the most prestigious list in which Murdoch appeared this year is the *Telegraph's* '100 Greatest Novels of all Time', which places *Under the Net* at number 90.[4] Aoife Bhreatnach in *The Irish Times* counts *The Flight from the Enchanter* among the best novels to have been censored in Ireland.[5] *The Sunday Times*, somewhat surprisingly, includes *The Black Prince* in a list of 'our favourite romantic stories in literature'.[6] In a piece about the manifold interpretations of *Hamlet*, *The Black Prince* is praised as a 'masterpiece', a 'novel written in the first person in which the over-controlling male hero "models" the idea of a bisexual/transvestite Hamlet on the daughter of a rival author with whom he has fallen, or thinks he has fallen, in love.'[7] Another listicle about the best books connected to the sea identifies *The Sea, The Sea* as an important novel about 'impermanence' and 'haunting'.[8]

Pauline Beaumont also chose *The Sea, The Sea*, when speaking to Christine Manby about the value of this particular novel as a therapeutic tool: 'In Murdoch's writing, every character is important, no matter how flawed and in *The Sea, The Sea* she has created the most flawed character of all in Arrowby, and this helped the penny drop for me. Murdoch writes about good and evil and the possibility of redemption. We're all flawed. We all kick ourselves for saying or doing something we regret. But it doesn't mean that we're doomed. *The Sea, The Sea* showed me that we don't have to be perfect.'[9]

In a detailed piece about comic novels, John Self bemoans the failure of judges of literary prizes, and the reading public in general, to take such comedic novels seriously. He recalls being unexpectedly 'bowled over' by Murdoch's comic writing because, 'in books such as *The Black Prince* and *The Sea, The Sea*, Murdoch is a very funny writer: and I don't mean witty exchanges at dinner parties – there is a bit of that – but slapstick, farce and the comedy of madness and mayhem unleashed. From kidnapping movie-star dogs to games of sexual musical chairs, no behaviour is too daft for her characters. Yet in the profiles written about Murdoch last year, there was little mention of her comic brilliance. This is not a new phenomenon: in his 2001 biography of Murdoch, Peter J. Conradi noted that contemporaneous critics sometimes overlooked how funny her work was. "To miss the comedy in [her best novels]," he wrote, "is not to miss a detail, but their heart."'[10]

Murdoch featured in several 'staff pick' segments, including one in the *Paris Review*, in which Lauren Kane recommends *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* as 'a robust, devastating novel [that] has set me on my own Murdochian evangelism.'[11] *The Bell* appeared in the 'New and Noteworthy' section of the *New York Times* in February this year. Staff writer Ruth Graham recounts reading the novel for the first time and subsequently 'pressing it on other kindred spirits. In a dark season, sharing the existence of a story as propulsive and transportive as this one is practically a moral duty. And did I mention its impeccably satisfying ending?'[12] In another New York publication, the *New York Review of Books*, author Sarah Chihaya writes of her 'quarantine obsession' with Murdoch, that '[t]here's a kind of madness and inexplicability to the ways her characters want each other, and I don't understand it, but I keep going back for more – fortunately, she wrote twenty-six novels, so there always *is* more.'[13]

There is gratifying news that Murdoch will be studied as part of the French baccalaureate after it underwent a reform with the intention of including more female philosophers. Simone Weil, Elizabeth Anscombe and Simone de Beauvoir will also be included alongside a number of non-western writers.[14]

Murdoch's peers continue to remember her in their articles, as Margaret Drabble does in her piece about Monica Jones, who is best known as Philip Larkin's long-term lover. Drabble recalls the couple's 'scatological' defacing of a copy of *The Flight from the Enchanter*.[15] Salman Rushdie writes of his admiration for the 'rich, expansive' world of Murdoch's novels, which he had in mind when he wrote his own *Midnight's Children*.[16]

Finally, early April 2021 saw the death of Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, whose appreciation for a quotation by Iris Murdoch is recalled by his biographer, Gyles Brandreth: 'I came across a sentence by the writer and philosopher Iris Murdoch and showed it to him because I thought he'd like it: "Happiness is a matter of one's most ordinary everyday mode of consciousness being busy and lively and unconcerned with self." "That's it exactly," he said. "You can put that in your book."'[17]

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9. Christine Manby, 'Pauline Beaumont shares "fantastical" novel *The Sea, The Sea* by Iris Murdoch', *Independent*, 23 October 2020 <https://www.independent.co.uk/independentpremium/the-sea-the-sea-pauline-beaumont-iris-murdoch-book-reccomendation-b1076535.html> [accessed 8 May 2021].
10. John Self, 'Why the funniest books are also the most serious', *BBC Culture*, 10 November 2020 <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20201109-why-the-funniest-books-are-also-the-most-serious> [accessed 10 November 2020].
11. *Paris Review* Staff, 'Staff Picks: Comma Splices, Nice Zones, and Ladies Alone', *Paris Review*, 9 April 2021 <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2021/04/09/staff-picks-comma-splices-nice-zones-and-ladies-alone/> [accessed 4 May 2021].
12. *New York Times* Staff, 'What we're reading', *New York Times*, 16 February 2021 <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/16/books/review/new-this-week.html> [accessed 7 May 2021].
13. Lucy Mckeon, 'I always hope to be totally destroyed by a novel', *New York Review*, 24 April 2021 <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2021/04/24/what-we-want-when-we-read/> [accessed 8 May 2021].
14. Pauline Petit, 'Philosophie: plus de femmes au programme du baccalauréat', *France Culture*, 12 February 2021 <https://www.franceculture.fr/philosophie/philosophie-plus-de-femmes-au-programme-du-baccalaureat> [accessed 13 May 2021].
15. Margaret Drabble, 'The misrepresenting of Monica Jones', *New Statesman*, 21 April 2021 <https://www.newstatesman.com/monica-jones-philip-larkin-biography-john-sutherland-review> [accessed 13 May 2021].
16. Salman Rushdie, 'Salman Rushdie on *Midnight's Children* at 40: "India is no longer the country of this novel"', *Guardian*, 3 April 2021 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/apr/03/salman-rushdie-on-midnights-children-at-40-india-is-no-longer-the-country-of-this-novel> [accessed 8 May 2021].
17. Gyles Brandreth, 'Prince Philip regarded Fergie as "simply beyond the pale": Gyles Brandreth reveals how the Duke of Edinburgh gave his former daughter-in-law a wide berth at Balmoral after her toe-sucking photos', Mail Online, 12 April 2021 <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9463693/Topless-toe-sucking-Prince-Philip-thought-Fergie-simply-pale.html> [accessed 12 April 2021].

Update from the Archive 2021

Dayna Miller

It is hard to believe that fourteen months have passed since writing our last update. In that time Kingston University Archive, like many others, went through the ups and downs of short periods of opening followed by long periods of closure, and we would like to thank everyone for the patience and understanding shown to us throughout. It has been a difficult and confusing time, and though it appears to be coming to an end, it will probably be a while before a sense of normality returns. We hope, however, that researchers will continue to feel comfortable when visiting the archive.

Having been open for only 22 weeks in total, one might think that things have been quiet, but we are very pleased to report that in this relatively short time the Archive has hosted 73 appointments with 22 individual researchers. Over 400 items from the Iris Murdoch Collections and Peter Conradi Archive have been issued, which makes up 93 percent of all material consulted. We were happy to greet new visitors alongside some of our regular researchers and transcribers, and seeing people face to face, or rather mask to mask, has been welcome indeed!

The majority of our time, however, has been spent working from home and supporting researchers from afar. We have received more than 600 enquiries, with over half of these relating to the Iris Murdoch Collections. Some limited access to the archive during the pandemic has allowed us to undertake more in-depth research on behalf of those studying remotely and also to fulfil requests for scans of archival material, which have increased significantly.

What else have we been up to? Well, as theatre features prominently in this year's *Iris Murdoch Review*, we thought we would talk a little about our shared learning project with the University of the Third Age (U3A), which has been inspired by the archive's Cary Ellison Theatre Programme Collection. Cary Ellison (1915–2002) was a well-known and respected advisor for the Spotlight casting directory and his collection consists of programmes dating from 1954 to 1981. A unique feature of the collection is the personal notes Ellison wrote inside the programmes. In a quirky twist of fate, among them is the programme for the 1968 production of *The Italian Girl* at Wyndham Theatre directed by Val May, with a cast including Richard Pasco and Timothy West as Edmund and Otto, and Jean Hardwicke in the title role. Ellison remarks on how well written the play is and he is particularly appreciative of the well-placed humour.

For the project, U3A members from across the UK researched the fate of venues that Ellison visited between 1954 and 1959. The result is a wonderful combination of theatre history and personal memories accompanied by images of theatres past and present alongside those of the original programmes from Ellison's collection. The final presentation is available to view via the archive's digital collections page at https://cdm16680.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16680coll4 and an article about the project also featured in the latest edition of U3A magazine, *Third Age Matters*. It was great to be part of a project that provided interest and distraction during the lockdown periods, and we hope to work with U3A in the future, particularly when group visits can resume in the archive itself.

Since returning to campus more regularly, much of the time has been spent working in a bubble to complete the packing and labelling of the archive collections in preparation for the move to the University's Town House building. We hope to become a one-site archive before the new academic year, and a huge thank you goes to my bubble-mates Alison and Jo for their brilliant efforts, and to our Collections Team colleagues who have given us this time to work behind the scenes by supervising researcher visits in the Reading Room.

Despite the difficulties and distractions of the pandemic, the archive has also continued to receive invaluable support from Mrs Audi Bayley, the Iris Murdoch Society and individual donors, to all of whom we extend our sincere gratitude. Additions made to the collection over the last year include:

- 'Iris – *Acastos* – Art and Eros'; a printed copy of the talk given by Annette Badland at Oxford Brookes University in February 2020. Kindly donated by Annette Badland and presented to the archive by Frances White.
- A typed manuscript of *The Queer Captain* by John Bayley. Kindly donated by Ian Beck and presented to the archive by Miles Leeson.
- An Honorary Degree certificate awarded to Iris Murdoch by the University of Caen in 1982, complete with original wax seal. Kindly donated by Miles Leeson on behalf of the Iris Murdoch Society.
- Typed notes in Italian summarising a lecture given by Iris Murdoch entitled 'La voce della filosofia nel mondo di oggi' ['The voice of philosophy in today's world']. This is accompanied by a photograph of Murdoch taken by David Sim and 12 letters from Murdoch to a Professor Antonetto and his wife. Purchased by the Iris Murdoch Society with funds kindly donated by Mrs Audi Bayley.
- A copy of *Iris Murdoch: La hija de las palabras* [*Iris Murdoch: the daughter of words*] by Maria Gila Moreno (Córdoba: Editorial Berenice, 2021). Kindly donated by the author.

It is important to note that the past year has been a time of reflection, and an opportunity to reassess priorities. With that in mind, we say a heartfelt thank you to Deirdre Wilkins, one of our long-serving and stalwart transcribers, who is stepping away from transcribing to spend quality time with her family and pursue some creative projects of her own. Deirdre's contribution to the archive has been instrumental to Murdoch research, and readers of our blog will remember the fascinating account of the connections Deirdre discovered between Iris Murdoch and her own past while transcribing Murdoch's journals. Though Deirdre's regular visits will be missed, the Collections Team and I wish all the Wilkins family well and look forward to Deirdre popping into the archive from time to time.

Looking ahead to the coming year we have a lot to be excited about, including an exhibition at the University of Chichester to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the Iris Murdoch Research Centre and, after a long delay, we very much hope to mount Carol Sommer's exhibition 'Will the Real Iris Murdoch Please Stand Up'. We are delighted that the Iris Murdoch Collections have provided a source of research for upcoming publications by Clare Mac Cumhaill and Rachael Wiseman, Benjamin Lipscomb, Paul Fiddes and Rebecca Moden, and we look forward to continuing our support for future scholarship, including one publication sure to liven up the coffee table, or should that be the bar? We are keen to settle into the Town House, to welcome back researchers and transcribers on a more regular basis and to rebuild the momentum we were gaining with outreach activities before the pandemic.

We are also pleased to announce the introduction of an archive wellbeing programme. In recent years, engagement with archives has increasingly been recognised as having a positive effect on health and wellbeing and we plan to launch a series of workshops in the autumn led by our very own Jo Skilbeck. The Iris Murdoch Collections will feature alongside material from our other collections to present opportunities for discussion, debate and creativity. Workshops planned so far:

- Introduction – A session to introduce the archive and the wellbeing programme.
- The Archive Assassin – A whodunnit with an archive twist.
- Exploring 'Ourselfies' and the Good Life – What makes us happy? How does social media impact our wellbeing? Relaxing sounds and modelling clay will help us find the answers.
- Poetry and Perception – Do perceptions change depending on our personal experience? A look at poems related to mental health and a chance to compose some blackout poetry.
- Archive Dilemmas – A discussion around archive ethics, preservation, access, and censorship.

We hope that these workshops will appeal to our students and the wider community. Please get in touch to express your interest.

With all this to come, I would like to end our update by reassuring researchers that in whatever circumstances we may find ourselves as we try to look beyond COVID-19, the archive remains committed to providing a safe and enjoyable experience for all. We look forward to seeing you soon.

For general enquiries, blog contributions, and information about the wellbeing programme please email archives@kingston.ac.uk

To search for documents and unpublished material in our collections please visit the archive catalogue at https://adlib.kingston.ac.uk

To search for books and audio-visual collections please visit the main library catalogue at https://icat.kingston.ac.uk

Postcards, Paintings and Stone Circles: Jean Jones's Friendship with Iris Murdoch

Michael Kurtz

Jean Jones (*née* Robinson) (1927–2012) was a figurative painter who exhibited regularly in Oxford and London in the 1970s and had a solo show at the Ashmolean Museum in 1980. For a number of reasons – in particular her rejection of artistic fashions and her struggle with severe bipolar disorder – she was unable to develop her career successfully and has fallen into obscurity. Over the past 18 months, the Jean Jones Estate has been working to reclaim the legacy of this unknown painter and to process not only the rich collection of paintings but also the unpublished novels, letters, diaries and notebooks that she left behind. This fascinating archival material reveals the hitherto little-known friendship between Jean Jones and Iris Murdoch.

Jones and Murdoch met as students at the University of Cambridge in 1947–48. They would both shortly move to Oxford – Murdoch to become a fellow of St Anne's College in 1948 and Jones (then Robinson) to marry another ambitious young academic, John Jones, in 1949. Within this lofty milieu, an intense friendship formed between Murdoch and the newlyweds. Jones's diaries document these years and describe some key events, including the dinner party she gave on the evening of 21 February 1954 at which Murdoch appears to have first properly met John Bayley. A few months later, Jones details Bayley's account of his first date with Murdoch, a dance at St Antony's College. The two couples saw each other remarkably frequently in this period, several times each week and sometimes multiple times in a single day, and their relationships appear to have been intellectual, competitive and passionate in equal parts. Murdoch was even godmother to Jean and John Jones's daughter. This close friendship – albeit a little strained on the part of John Bayley – continued for over fifty years until Murdoch's death.

Murdoch was a formative figure in the early years of Jones's artistic practice. Jones recounts in one letter how Murdoch sent her a different Vincent van Gogh postcard every day for three weeks when she was ill in hospital in the early 1960s, just before she started to paint in earnest. Murdoch repeatedly told A.N. Wilson that Jones's paintings would 'one day be spoken of in the same breath as those of Van Gogh'.[1]

Unfortunately, very few of the postcards and letters the pair exchanged survive but it is nevertheless clear from Jones's writings that Murdoch greatly influenced her art. Jones demonstrates a suspicion of contemporary artistic and theoretical trends and a stubborn commitment to closely observed representation that resonate with some of the values for which Murdoch is famous. Jones particularly admired *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970) and there are several passages in a short novel she wrote in 1971–72 that closely align her ideas on painting with the moral approach to vision propounded in Murdoch's book.[2]

Jones adored the letters of Van Gogh and through them was exposed to the nineteenth-century colour theories he used. These theories – which formulate ways in which painters can make colours appear more intense and harmonious through their placement next to complementary colours – can be seen in action across her oeuvre. Murdoch was also interested in colour theories and capitalises in her novels on 'the expressive opportunities offered by the post-impressionistic use of colour' to communicate with the reader in experiential, non-verbal ways, as shown by Anne Rowe.[3] The pair bonded over a mutual love of art history, so it seems likely that the discussion of such artistic ideas was at the heart of their friendship.

In June 1976, Murdoch and Bayley bought three landscapes by Jones and hung them at Cedar Lodge. Given Murdoch's obsession with prehistoric stones, it is unsurprising that one of these canvases depicts the Ringmoor stone circle, which was Jones's favourite subject and a short walk away from her cottage in Dartmoor. Although Murdoch appears to have been concerned by the idea of being the subject of artists' attention, it does seem a little surprising that over the course of their friendship she never let Jones paint her portrait.

I am aware of the growing academic interest in ways in which the visual arts influenced Murdoch's work and think it is exciting to introduce this previously overlooked figure to the field. I would like to encourage interested researchers to get in touch and make use of the varied material held by the Jean Jones Estate. The archive also contains items relating to Murdoch's personal and intellectual relationship with John Jones. There is, for example, a draft manuscript of Murdoch's talk given to the Aristotelian Society in 1956 on 'Moral Insight and Moral Choice' accompanied by an amusing letter asking John to proofread it. The materials in this archive are sure to stimulate new research into Iris Murdoch's writings, their relationship to the visual arts, and also to make Jean Jones's work more widely known.

For more information on Jean Jones and the Estate, email contact@jeanjonesestate.com or visit www.jeanjonesestate.com

1. A.N. Wilson, *Iris Murdoch: As I Knew Her* (London: Hutchinson, 2003), 85.
2. Jones's novel, *The Competition*, is unpublished. It exists in a two-volume handwritten manuscript owned by the Jean Jones Estate. The second volume is largely in note form while the first is drafted in prose.
3. Anne Rowe, *The Visual Arts and the Novels of Iris Murdoch* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press Ltd, 2002), 5.

Yozo Muroya (1935–2020): Obituary

Paul Hullah

Yozo Muroya, Japan's first and foremost Murdochian scholar, passed away peacefully in Okayama on 27 October 2020, aged 85. A personal friend of Iris Murdoch and John Bayley, he authored two groundbreaking Japanese monographs on Murdoch, translated two of her plays, co-edited an authorised edition of her *Poems* as well as her *Occasional Essays*, and founded the Iris Murdoch Society of Japan in 1999. Singlehandedly responsible for introducing Murdoch's work to Japanese academia, he awakened the Japanese publishing world to her novels, and tirelessly promoted her wider appeal in his homeland.

Yozo was born on 6 October 1935 in Hakodate, a coastal city of Hokkaido, the northernmost of five islands comprising mainland Japan. Hakodate was then a place of crisis and refugees, a town ravaged by fire in the year before his birth that destroyed much of the area's housing. His childhood further interrupted by war, and seeking solace in literature, Yozo began his tertiary studies at Tokyo University in 1957, majoring in English Literature. After graduation he worked at a Tokyo high school for three years, moving westward in 1964 to teach in the Faculty of Letters at Okayama National University.

In 1972, having already encountered and fallen in love with Murdoch's fiction, he took up a year's overseas scholarship at University College, London, with Iris as his research focus. It was a 'a pilgrimage', he once told me: 'I found out where she lived [...] I just went there one day and knocked on her door [...] She invited me in for tea.' Thus began a friendship and correspondence that continued until Murdoch's death.

Back in Japan, Yozo's 1988 monograph, *A Study of Iris Murdoch's The Black Prince*, was the first sustained academic analysis of Murdoch in Japanese. Identifying direct thematic and stylistic lineage from Ryūnosuke Akutagawa's modernist story *In A Grove* (1922) through to Murdoch's fiction, it established Muroya as a formidable literary critic. Encouraged, he set about establishing a weekly 'Murdoch Study Group' at Okayama University. This discussion circle eventually expanded and developed into the official Iris Murdoch Society of Japan.

His translations of Murdoch's plays *Joanna, Joanna* and *The One Alone* were published in 2000. In the same year, he retired from Okayama University and was appointed Emeritus Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Letters at Notre Dame Seishin University, a private college also in Okayama. He finally retired from teaching in 2006 to work on his second critical study of Murdoch, *The Homogeneity of Iris Murdoch and Kenji Miyazawa* (2013), a comparative study which proffered Rabindranath Tagore as a uniting influence, referencing discussions he had shared with Murdoch and Bayley in support of the book's original hypothesis.

His pioneering scholarly achievements aside, those of you that knew Yozo will not need me to tell you what a remarkable human being he was: how kindhearted, how caring, how agile-minded, how vivacious. And those of you that know me do not need me to tell you how much I loved him. I first encountered him in March 1992, the same month I was awarded my PhD. Having chatted with him on the telephone for about five minutes ('Your job interview!' he quipped), I journeyed from Edinburgh to Japan, aged 28, to become his colleague, 'Foreign Professor' (he chortled at that), at Okayama University. In the bright, airy Arrivals Hall of the old Osaka Airport, his warm firm handshake, irresistible impish grin, and clearly sincere, most cordial salutations shattered forever my woefully misconceived expectations of the Japanese male. We became friends on the spot.

Yozo became my mentor – he was a wonderful teacher. I had read only one of Murdoch's novels before we met: he handed me a 'reading list' at the end of our first day, and off we went. I owe him so much: without his generosity of spirit, so many pleasurable aspects of my life would never have come to pass. He looked after me, paternally, on a daily basis, and was a principal factor in my deciding to make Japan my second home a few years later.

Iris was his obsession. Under his tutelage, I understood why. He was always eager to talk about her. As President of the Murdoch Society of Japan, until 2012 when ill health forced him to adopt a background role, he was in his element. I will miss long Friday afternoons in his office discussing Iris, followed by 'Friday Night Club' trips to Okayama's only Indian restaurant with any that cared to join us: animated exchanges over wine and papadams, and the way he would theatrically remove his spectacles before hammering home a match-winning conversational point.

It had initially seemed strange to me that Yozo would choose to recruit into his patronage a 'poetry person' such as myself, when his own field was the novel. But I soon saw what he was doing, and I am glad he did it. With Iris's kind permission (the matter was first discussed when she and John visited Okayama at Yozo's personal invitation in 1993) and active participation thereafter, he and I edited a limited-edition hardback selection of *Poems by Iris Murdoch* (1997). Yozo was immensely proud of that book, and I accompanied him from Okayama to Charlbury Road, Oxford, in the summer of 1997, to present Iris with a copy in person. As we ambled back to the station for the last London train, he said his favourite place on earth was 'the Bayleys' kitchen'. Neither of us would ever see Iris again – it was his final pilgrimage to her door – though our correspondence

Left to right: Rumiko Muroya (Yozo's wife), Yozo Muroya,
Iris Murdoch, John Bayley, Chris Heywood.

with John Bayley continued. (I am currently negotiating with Yozo's son Takashi – his only child – for permission to view, and hopefully collect and preserve for posterity, his father's papers.)

Yozo and I also edited, in 1996, two short stories by the then relatively unknown Scottish crime writer Ian Rankin, with whom I had been friends at university: the first 'Inspector Rebus' stories to be published outside the UK. Ian visited us in Okayama that year and became friends with Yozo too. Everyone who met Yozo became friends with him. That's what he was like. I never heard Iris say Yozo's name without placing the term 'dear' before it.

When not attending to Murdoch, Yozo was a respected exponent of the Japanese game of Go: regional champion, and national finalist on more than one occasion. After retirement, he opened a Go academy near his home in Okayama to instil a passion for the traditional pastime in younger people. His 'Go Salon' soon attracted a waiting list of hopeful students, featuring often on local news programmes. In 2015, for his promotion of Go as well as his academic achievements, he was awarded the prestigious Japanese 'Order of the Sacred Treasure' for 'distinguished achievement and extraordinary civil merit'.

Throughout his career, Yozo approached Murdoch's writing in a meaningfully inquisitive, interrogative way, eliciting a productive synthesis of western and

eastern metaphysics by interpreting her novels alongside the work and ideas of major Asian writers. He was eclectic in his voracious and attentive consumption of literature, always keen to discover new authors, new texts, and his childlike love of life seemed limitless. He was clever and funny. He was a lovely, decent, pure-hearted man, the living 'embodiment of goodness', I so often thought. No wonder Iris was so fond of him.

Yozo had been unwell for several years, his increasingly fragile health compounded by the loss of his beloved wife, Rumiko, to cancer, and he became gradually withdrawn. Latterly, residency in a care home had adversely affected his demeanour as well as his physical condition, so, though his passing had not been entirely unexpected, it remains a great shock, and no less of a significant loss to us all.

Christopher Heywood (1928–2021): Obituary

Paul Hullah

Christopher Heywood, the respected literary historian, Brontë scholar, painter, and friend to Iris Murdoch and John Bayley, passed away peacefully in his sleep on 18 February 2021, near his home in Gargrave, North Yorkshire, aged 93. Though he never published critical work specifically on Murdoch, Christopher nonetheless features significantly in her story.

Born on 2 July 1928, and South African by birth, Christopher was raised on his father Arthur's fruit farm (now a renowned winery) in the Banhoek Valley of the Western Cape. His mother, Katherine, a skilled pianist and minor novelist, became best known as a progressive educator, a vociferous campaigner against corporal punishment, and spokesperson for a holistic mode of education that emphasised self-development via the fostering of innate curiosity and independence, eschewing examinations. In 1930, as Christopher and his older brother, Brookes, neared school age, rather than send them off to urban institutions, Katherine decided to turn the Manor House within the farm grounds into a 'natural' primary school, run solely by herself on her favoured radical experimental nurturing principles (and run without electricity for its first five years). Local farm children were her pupils, taught outside in warmer months, encouraged in creativity and play, and classes ended by lunchtime. Foregrounding and extending Montessorian values and methods, Katherine Heywood's school was enormously successful and widely influential; she was invited to lecture both domestically and overseas, including a tour in Britain.

This particular aspect of Christopher's backstory was paramount to his own development: Christopher inherited his mother's humanism and curated it into a lifelong crusade of his own. His militaristically applied *laissez-faire* (yes, Zen paradoxes were at play in him) views on teaching in particular, and on living in general, fuelled the potent mystique that defined him. Some found his ever-morphing mixture of pragmatism and idealism contradictory, mercurial even, perhaps a sign of flightiness; others, I among them, treasured it as inspirational, epitomising his allure, the engine of his up-and-at-'em unstoppable quest for moral betterment. Part 'old-school' bluster, part free-thinking bohemian, he wore his complicated heart on his sleeve.

After graduating from the Boys' High School of Stellenbosch, nearest town to the Heywood homestead, 30 miles east of Cape Town, Christopher studied English and French at Stellenbosch University before travelling to England to enter New College, Oxford, on a Rhodes Scholarship in 1948, the same year Murdoch became Fellow at St Anne's. He studied English to postgraduate level at Oxford under John Bayley, by which time, the mid-1950s, Iris and John were already a couple, and the three of them became friends.

Post-Oxford, after a research fellowship to study English Victorian fiction at Birmingham University, Christopher was recruited to Sheffield University, where he taught for over 30 years. There he continued to work on the English novel, focusing on the Brontës, and singlehandedly pioneered forward-looking undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in African literature. He was contributor editor of *Perspectives on African Literature* (1971) and *Aspects of South African Literature* (1976). He played violin in the Sheffield University Orchestra and was a co-founder of the Sheffield University Fine Art Society.

Following early retirement from Sheffield, and a brief lecturing stint in Ife, Nigeria, Christopher was recruited by Yozo Muroya to Okayama University in 1989 by virtue of the 'Iris connection', as they both liked to call it. Yozo and Christopher entered my life as a 'set' when I journeyed to Japan in 1992 to join them both at Okayama University, which was by then fast becoming the focus and fulcrum of Murdoch studies in Japan: 'Murdoch HQ' was the nickname for our little hub in those days. During that period, and for some time thereafter, Christopher maintained a house in Oxford, just 15 minutes from the Bayley residence at 30 Charlbury Road, at which Yozo and I stayed while working on *Poems by Iris Murdoch* in the mid-1990s.[1]

Indeed, Christopher was an instrumental convivial conduit in our ever-so-gently persuading Iris to allow us to publish her poetry. After consultations with the author, Christopher settled on and painted the 'Irises' watercolour for the cover of our edition as a special commission. If I remember correctly, he painted a series of four versions: one he retained, I have one in my office, Yozo kept the version used for the book, and we presented Iris with the fourth. His next 'commission' became the 'Royal Oak Pub, Oxford' image (suggested by John Bayley) on the front of our *Occasional Essays by Iris Murdoch* (1998).[2] Christopher's watercolours were of Fauvist persuasion, filtered through a manner of the neo-minimalist naturalism he detected in a lot of traditional Japanese prints. He had a sharp eye for detail, and a consciously understated but persuasive touch. In these respects, his paintings very much echoed his approach to literature (clearly influenced by the agile-minded, incisive and witty critical style of John Bayley). He contributed a wonderful essay on Emily Brontë to a volume I edited called *Romanticism and Wild Places* (1998).

In it, he alludes to 'the Romantic ideal of emancipation from past horrors through a restoration of moral values'.[3] So typically him, such a phrase, such a notion.

After producing several articles on *Wuthering Heights* and starting work on an illustrated critical edition of the novel for Broadview Press (published in 2001, complete with his own introduction and notes), Christopher retired from teaching and left Japan in 1998. He bought and lived in a stone cottage in Gargrave, Yorkshire, 15 miles from Haworth, a location he believed, and argued in an unpublished article, had important under-investigated Brontë connections. There he completed *A History of South African Literature* (2005); he was collecting his own articles together for publication when he died. His children, Giles and Katherine, both from his marriage (dissolved) to the South African literary scholar Annemarie Gaerdes (1927–2016), survive him.

Christopher was a mesmerising raconteur – he was far from 'understated' in this regard – expansive and infinite of charm, a quicksilver fountain of knowledge, warmth and intellectual energy. Humbly, I might claim we were kindred spirits to a degree: I certainly looked up to him greatly. Fellow son of a pragmatist agrarian father and a saintly literate mother intent on moral betterment and social improvement through education, I saw much of myself in Christopher and, he once remarked, he heard echoes of himself in me. He was full of love. He was full of tall stories too, and told them all wry and twinkle-eyed and punctuated by his adorable, trumpeted guffaw of a laugh. There was something gorgeously Dickensian about him: his bird-like, vigilant roving gaze. A 'one off' is the term I most hear used to describe him, always with affection, and always with a broad smile. Huge of heart, and spacious of soul, Christopher really was a sweet man. He will be greatly missed.

1. *Poems by Iris Murdoch*, ed. by Yozo Muroya and Paul Hullah (Okayama: University Education Press, 1997).
2. *Occasional Essays by Iris Murdoch*, ed. by Yozo Muroya and Paul Hullah (Okayama: University Education Press, 1998).
3. Christopher Heywood, 'The Romantic Non-Picturesque: Emily Brontë's Yorkshire Landscape' in *Romanticism and Wild Places*, ed. by Paul Hullah (Edinburgh: Quadriga, 1998), 118–29 (127).

Notes on Contributors

HANNAH MARIJE ALTORF is a Visiting Research Fellow at the Iris Murdoch Research Centre, University of Chichester. 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* (Continuum, 2008) and together with Mariëtte Willemsen she translated *The Sovereignty of Good* into Dutch (Boom, 2003).

ANNETTE BADLAND is an English actor known for a wide range of roles on television, radio, stage, and film. She is the first Patron of the Iris Murdoch Society.

CHRISTOPHER BODDINGTON is an independent scholar and retired lawyer. He is the author of *Iris Murdoch's People A to Z* (Anchovy Hill Press, 2018) and has an MA by Research from Kingston University. His unpublished dissertation 'Precious Dead: the commemoration of Frank Thompson in the novels of Iris Murdoch' (2015) is available at academia.edu.

EDITH BRUGMANS was Professor of Philosophy at Leiden University and Associate Professor of Philosophy of Law at Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands. She has published on topics of moral philosophy, including several articles on Iris Murdoch. She is currently working on Murdoch's view on the common ground between philosophy and literature.

IAN D'ALTON is a historian of Protestant Ireland, including its literature. He has written and spoken on Murdoch's Irishness, most recently at the Iris Murdoch Centenary Conference at St Anne's College, Oxford in 2019.

LIZ DEXTER is a lifelong Murdochian, who discovered her favourite author at the age of 14 and has read all the novels in publication order several times. As an independent scholar, she has presented at several Iris Murdoch Society Conferences and researched, written and published a book on Iris Murdoch and book groups, *Iris Murdoch and the Common Reader* (self-published, 2017). Liz is an editor and transcriber by profession and a runner, book reviewer and sports volunteer in her spare time.

GILLIAN DOOLEY is an Honorary Senior Research Fellow at Flinders University in South Australia. She has published widely on Iris Murdoch, including *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction: Conversations with Iris Murdoch* (University of South Carolina Press, 2003); *Never Mind about the Bourgeoisie: the Correspondence between Iris Murdoch and Brian Medlin* (Cambridge Scholars, 2014) and *Reading Iris Murdoch's* Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). She also writes on Jane Austen, V.S. Naipaul and J.M. Coetzee.

JOHN FLETCHER is Emeritus Professor of French and Comparative Literature at the University of East Anglia and Honorary Senior Research Fellow in French at the University of Kent. His publications include *The Novels of Samuel Beckett* (Chatto and Windus, 1964), *Claude Simon and Fiction Now* (Calder and Boyars, 1975) and *Novel and Reader* (Marion Boyars, 1980). His *Faber Critical Guide to Samuel Beckett* was published in 2000.

EMMA GRAEME studied the MA course in English Literature at the University of Chichester. She is a retired Anglican priest of the Diocese of Chichester.

PAUL HULLAH is an award-winning poet, tenured Associate Professor of British Poetry at Meiji Gakuin University, Tokyo, and the current President of the Iris Murdoch Society of Japan. With Yozo Muroya he edited Iris Murdoch's *Poems* (University Education Press Okayama, Japan, 1997) and *Occasional Essays* (University Education Press Okayama, Japan, 1998), and he is the author of *Rock UK: A Sociocultural History of British Rock Music* (Cengage, 2013), *We Found Her Hidden: The Remarkable Poetry of Christina Rossetti* (Partridge, 2016), and *Climbable: Poems by Paul Hullah* (Partridge, 2016). He is currently working on Murdoch's unpublished poetry.

WENDY JONES NAKANISHI was a full-time Professor in Japan for 36 years, first at Tokushima Bunri and then at Shikoku Gakuin University, who retired in the spring of 2019. She has published widely on Murdoch, and particularly on her letters, with articles appearing in the Holland-based journal *English Studies* in 2010, 2013, 2015 and 2019 as well as a piece in 2015 in *Transnational Literature*. In 2008 she provided an article on *The Good Apprentice* for the *Iris Murdoch Guidebook*, published in Japanese. She is currently working on her fourth crime fiction novel to appear under the pen name of Lea O'Harra.

MICHAEL KURTZ is currently studying for an MA in History of Photography at Birkbeck, University of London. He is curator of the Jean Jones Estate, which works to research and share the life and art of this late British painter. He is also research assistant to the writer and curator Michael Peppiatt.

MILES LEESON is the Director of the Iris Murdoch Research Centre, University of Chichester. He is the author of *Iris Murdoch: Philosophical Novelist* (Continuum, 2010), the editor of *Incest in Contemporary Literature* (Manchester University Press, 2018) and *Iris Murdoch: A Centenary Celebration* (Sabrestorm, 2019) and the co-editor of the forthcoming *Iris Murdoch and the Literary Imagination* (Palgrave, 2022). He is the Lead Editor of the *Iris Murdoch Review*, the host of the Iris Murdoch Podcast, and the Series Editor of *Iris Murdoch Today* with Palgrave Macmillan.

JAKI MCCARRICK is an award-winning writer of plays, poetry and fiction. Her debut short story collection, *The Scattering*, was published by Seren Books in 2013 and was shortlisted for the 2014 Edge Hill Prize. Her play *Belfast Girls*, developed at the National Theatre Studio, London, was shortlisted for the 2012 Susan Smith Blackburn Prize and the 2014 BBC Tony Doyle Award. She is currently working on her second collection of short fiction and her first novel. Jaki also writes critical pieces for the *Times Literary Supplement*, *Irish Examiner*, *Poetry Ireland Review* and other publications.

DAYNA MILLER is the Kingston University Archivist. Her responsibilities include promoting and facilitating engagement with the University's Archives and Special Collections, while also working to ensure their vital long-term preservation.

REBECCA MODEN recently completed her PhD at the University of Chichester's Iris Murdoch Research Centre. She is currently developing her PhD thesis into a monograph, *Iris Murdoch and Harry Weinberger: Imaginations and Images*, for Palgrave Macmillan's *Iris Murdoch Today* series. Her interests include the visual arts, art history, and interconnections between the visual arts and literature. She is Assistant Editor of this edition of the *Iris Murdoch Review* and guest co-edited *Iris Murdoch Review* 11 with Lucy Oulton.

SCOTT H. MOORE is Associate Professor of Philosophy and Great Texts at Baylor University, Texas. He is the author of numerous essays and the books *How*

to Burn a Goat: Farming with the Philosophers (Baylor University Press, 2019), *The Limits of Liberal Democracy: Religion and Politics at the End of Modernity* (Inter-Varsity Press, 2009) and the co-editor of *Finding a Common Thread: Reading Great Texts from Homer to O'Connor* (St Augustine Press, 2013).

PAMELA OSBORN teaches at Kingston University London where she gained her PhD on grief and mourning in Iris Murdoch's work (2013). Her most recent article on Murdoch and Brigid Brophy appeared in the Brophy special edition of *Contemporary Women's Writing*. She is Assistant Editor of the *Iris Murdoch Review*.

LUCY OULTON is a PhD student at the University of Chichester's Iris Murdoch Research Centre. Her interests include ecocriticism and affect theory, and she is currently preparing a thesis on Iris Murdoch's environmental imagination. She has contributed a chapter on 'Nature and the Environment' to the forthcoming Routledge volume *The Murdochian Mind*, edited by Mark Hopwood and Silvia Panizza. She organises the online Iris Murdoch Book Club with Maria Peacock.

MARIA PEACOCK started research with the Iris Murdoch Research Centre at the University of Chichester in 2018. After a career with the Civil Service she completed an MA with the Open University in January 2017, with a dissertation on Iris Murdoch and the picaresque novel. She is currently working towards a PhD with a thesis focusing on aspects of displacement and uprootedness throughout Murdoch's fiction.

DANIEL READ recently completed his PhD at Kingston University, London with his thesis, 'The Problem of Evil and the Fiction and Philosophy of Iris Murdoch' (2019). He is Assistant Editor of the *Iris Murdoch Review*, to which he has also contributed essays and reports. His interests include psychopathy and the writings of William Blake. He is currently researching unpublished material in the Iris Murdoch Archives with the view to creating a new interview collection.

ANNE ROWE is Visiting Professor at the University of Chichester and Emeritus Research Fellow at the University of Kingston. She has published widely on Iris Murdoch, most recently an edition on Iris Murdoch in the *Writers and Their Work* series (Liverpool University Press, 2019). She is currently working on a book on *Iris Murdoch's Beer Mats* with Unbound.

KATRIEN SCHAUBROECK is Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Antwerp. Her research is situated in the philosophy of love, moral psychology and feminist epistemology. She has published a Dutch introduction to Iris Murdoch's philosophy, *Iris Murdoch: Een filosofie van de liefde* (Letterwerk, 2020).

CAROL SOMMER holds a PhD from Leeds Beckett University (2019) for her practice-led research and her thesis entitled 'Contingent Form and the Feminine in the Novels of Iris Murdoch'. She is an artist based in the North East of England. Since 2005 she has been applying Iris Murdoch's philosophical ideas about classification to her fictional material as a way of making artwork, and since 2012 to her fictional depictions of women's experience. This work includes a book, *Cartography for Girls: An A-Z of Orientations Identified within the Novels of Iris Murdoch* (self-published, 2016), and an Instagram account, @ cartography_for_girls, live since May 2017.

HAN VANDERHART lives in North Carolina and is the author of the Artemisia Gentileschi-inspired chapbook *Hands Like Birds* (Ethel Zine Press, 2019) and the poetry collection *What Pecan Light* (Bull City Press, 2021).

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*, Writer in Residence at Kingston University Writing School and the Series Editor of *Iris Murdoch Today* with Palgrave Macmillan. She has published widely on Iris Murdoch and other writers. Her prize-winning biography *Becoming Iris Murdoch* was published by Kingston University Press in 2014. She is currently working on the sequel *Unbecoming Iris Murdoch*.

HANNAH WINTHER is a PhD candidate in philosophy at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. She does research on animal ethics and bioethics. In her dissertation project, she asks if it is morally acceptable to use genome editing technologies on farmed salmon, using Iris Murdoch and Cora Diamond as key thinkers.

Matching Fund for the Barbara Stevens Heusel Research Fund for Early-Career Scholars

Barbara Stevens Heusel, who founded the Iris Murdoch Society in New York City in December 1986.
Photographer: Robert Howard.

The Iris Murdoch Society, in partnership with Barbara Stevens Heusel and her husband Dennis Moore, are delighted to announce the continuation of the Barbara Stevens Heusel Research Fund for Early-Career Scholars which was awarded in 2020–21 to Arka Basu at the University of Auckland. Arka has been prevented from visiting the UK by the pandemic but intends to take up the bursary as soon as travel becomes possible again.

Each year, a £500 stipend will help fund a junior scholar's* visit to the Iris Murdoch Research Centre at the University of Chichester or the Archives at Kingston University, or participation in one of the IMRC's conferences or research events.

* Postgraduate taught students (MA and equivalent), postgraduate by research students (PhD/DPhil/MRes or equivalent), and those who have completed their PhD (or equivalent) within the last five years.

By donating £6,000, Professor Dennis Moore, lifetime member and former officer of the Iris Murdoch Society, has already double-matched the first contributions (one from the Murdoch Estate and three from private donors) and has generously offered to match the next £5,000 in further donations. Please consider making a contribution to this matching fund that will provide Barbara Stevens Heusel Research Grants to Early-Career Scholars.

The matching fund is a simple, ongoing way for the Murdoch community to honour the life and achievements of Professor Heusel while helping to nurture ongoing research into Murdoch's life and work. To donate, to apply, or for more details contact Miles Leeson at the Research Centre by emailing ims@chi.ac.uk

Tenth International Iris Murdoch Conference, University of Chichester, 24–26 June 2022: First Call for Papers

Following a successful Centenary Conference at St Anne's College, Oxford in 2019, and the first virtual conference in 2021, the Tenth International Conference on Iris Murdoch will take place at the University of Chichester in 2022. The conference will showcase ongoing, and published, Murdoch scholarship with a particular focus on Place and Space.

Panels should not be confined by this focus, however, and all researchers currently working on Murdoch's fiction, philosophy, theology, personal journals, letters and poetry – and/or the political and cultural significance of any of these – are invited to submit proposals. We also welcome panel proposals of three papers linked by a common theme or text.

The Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives will be extending its opening hours both before, during and after the conference to accommodate researchers. Bookings should be made in advance to archivist Dayna Miller by emailing archives@kingston.ac.uk

Please forward abstracts of up to 300 words by 15 February 2022, and any enquiries relating to the conference itself, to organisers Dr Miles Leeson and Dr Frances White, at ims@chi.ac.uk

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-reviewed essays as well as book reviews, event reports and notices.

Iris Murdoch Society members will receive the *Iris Murdoch Review* on publication, keeping up to date with scholarship, new publications, symposia and other related information, and be entitled to reduced rates for the biennial Iris Murdoch Conferences at the University of Chichester.

For current subscription rates and to become a member, please contact the society at ims@chi.ac.uk or join online by searching for 'Iris Murdoch Research Centre University of Chichester'.

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.