THE IRIS MURDOCH REVIEW

No. 15 2024

The Iris Murdoch Review

Published by the Iris Murdoch Research Centre, University of Chichester

ISBN 978-1-907852-78-7

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Typesetting by Heather Robbins.

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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 enquiry.

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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A collage of selected beer mats from Iris Murdoch's collection, KUAS3, from the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives and Special Collections.
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Editorial Preface

Miles Leeson

It is a truism to say that each time we publish the *Iris Murdoch Review*, the diversity of material contained within the latest edition feels the most wide-ranging. Whilst each issue celebrates new publications and events, the variety is heightened this year with the focus on Murdoch's love of conviviality and, especially, beermats. Originally planned for publication as a standalone work on this subject, I am delighted that we were able to include the majority of pieces here. The inclusion of these, and so many other wonderful articles and reviews, makes this year's edition of the *Review* the most expansive yet. It is also pleasing to be able to republish Murdoch's own reflection on drinking in her essay 'A Woman Don's Delight', which is unavailable online and rare in physical copy, as well as her unpublished after-dinner speech for J. B. Priestley on the occasion of his 76th birthday. I must thank Anne Rowe for all her diligence in undertaking this project with me, Daniel Read for his work on pubs in Murdoch's fiction, and Dayna Miller for providing not only an overview of Murdoch's tegestology but the image which adorns the front cover – just a few of the many beermats that are now housed at the Kingston University archives. This section of the *Review* also benefits from essays on the same subject by Elin Svenneby and Rivka Isaacson for which we are most grateful. Both essays highlight the importance of alcohol in Murdoch's work, and by extension her life, including the social benefits and medical pitfalls of indulgence. One of the most important publications of this year, Gary Browning's *Iris Murdoch and the Political*, is highlighted by Gary's own essay on Murdoch's lived political experience. A review of his work is forthcoming in the next edition of the *Iris Murdoch Review*.

Our reviews section carries substantial reflections on three new monographs by Frances White, Lesley Jamieson, and Matthew Congdon – all of which come highly recommended by their respective reviewers – as well as a report on Luey Graves' exhibition earlier this year in London: we're delighted to be able to reproduce some of her artwork here. As highlighted in last year's *Review*, there has been an upsurge of interest by visual artists working in a range of media on Murdoch's fiction and philosophy. Currently there is an exhibition of artwork by Kevin Petrie at the University of Kingston, as well as the recent exhibition

'(Un)Real Ireland' at the University of Galway, which included visual and filmic work focused on Murdoch. Reviews of both exhibitions will be featured in the next edition of the *Review*. Wendy Vaizey has kindly reviewed the Iris Murdoch Podcast series as it reached its 50th episode since starting in 2020. As I write this editorial it has now reached 60 episodes, with plans in place to produce many more. These can be accessed via the Society website.

The reports section covers a range of symposia, conferences, one-day events, talks and lectures from around the world, from Oxford to Japan, Paris to Ireland and beyond. I was fortunate to be at a substantial number of these and can confirm that the reports here chime with my own experience. It was a pleasure to have so many of our members with us recently for the Eleventh Biennial Conference at Chichester, although perhaps the most notable was the unveiling of the English Heritage Blue Plaque at Murdoch's former home in Cornwall Gardens, London. This brings the total number of plaques dedicated to Murdoch in Great Britain and Ireland to four, all of which have been installed since her centenary in 2019. She is surely now a permanent fixture – literal and literary – in the Anglo-Irish Canon.

In the past year we sadly lost two important Murdochians. The first, Dame Antonia Byatt, is best known as a prize-winning novelist, short story writer and public intellectual; however, we also know her through her academic criticism, particularly *Degrees of Freedom: The Early Novels of Iris Murdoch*. Her friend and Murdoch's biographer, Peter J. Conradi, reflects on her life, work and relationship with Dame Iris here. We also remember Barbara Stevens Heusel, who did so much for the founding and early life of the Iris Murdoch Society and, in recent years, has supported early-career scholars through the annual research fund. Her husband, the academic Dennis Moore, writes movingly about her life.

Finally, we are grateful to Luey Graves for the use of her artwork; to the University of Bradford Archives for permission to reproduce Murdoch's After-Dinner Speech for J.B. Priestley; to Heather Robbins for her hard work and dedication in typesetting and designing this issue; to our hardworking editorial team of Rebecca Moden and Lucy Oulton; our authors, reviewers and reporters; and, as ever, to our Society members and readers, whose constant support allows us to continue to thrive.

University of Chichester
October 2024

A Woman Don's Delight

Iris Murdoch

'The Compleat Imbiber' first appeared in 1953 as the magazine of W. & A. Gilbey Limited, distillers and wine shippers, and a selection edited by Cyril Ray, was published by Putnam in time for Gilbey's centenary in 1957 (in which year the 'Compleat Imbiber' exhibition – of the drinking customs and paraphernalia of Britain from Roman times – was put on by Gilbey's in London). This second 'Compleat Imbiber' volume, also edited by Cyril Ray, consists of entirely new material, especially commissioned and written for what it is hoped will become an annual series.[1]

It is the misfortune of woman to have had to arrive second on every scene, including the first one. It is not recorded of Adam that he initially regarded Eve's appearance with scandalised derision and subsequently asked for her impressions, as a woman, of the Garden of Eden; but then Adam was as yet uncorrupted. The pioneering woman has always been a figure of fun, where she has not met, as she usually has, with grimmer opposition as well. Dr Johnson said his say about woman preachers in terms which would still find an echo today. Even at the beginning of this century *Punch* was doubled up at the idea of women MPs; and as I write the notion of women peers is the stand-by of every cartoonist hard pressed for a certain laugh. The invariable technique is to greet our arrival with mockery and follow it up with patronising interest. When it has at last become clear that one has come to stay, one is classed as woman lawyer, a woman writer, or whatever it may be, and encouraged by journalists to discuss 'the contribution of women' to the field in question. All this is of course is a transparent attempt, which tries with regrettably frequent success to win the co-operation of the women themselves, to put off the day, still I fear far distant, when men are forced to admit that women are simply human beings, just as clever as they are and often cleverer.

So it is with the question of drink. I belong, I suppose, to one of the first generations of women who were able to be drinkers in their own right, able to drink as and when they wished, without having to regard their action as a gesture of revolt or indeed as in any way noteworthy. Even now there is, of course, much left to be achieved. The movement of liberation has as yet touched only parts of our society. In other parts, the drinking woman is still looked at askance, or where conventionally permitted to indulge, is limited to certain 'ladies' drinks'.

The case of Oxford is a special one, in that Oxford scandalously supports self-contained communities of women, not parasitical on male society, but composing societies of their own. Jokes on this subject are familiar, too. At Oxford, even in the comparatively recent past, there have been changes. When I was an undergraduate, just before and during the war, we were not allowed to enter pubs and not allowed to keep drink in our rooms. At least, I have the impression that the latter was a rule of my college; the notion of having drink simply waiting about to be drunk was one so alien to me, even in the days when drink was plentiful, that I never troubled to verify the matter: and I think that a great many of my contemporaries had a similar attitude. Entering a pub was a delightful adventure, partly because one might be 'progged' and partly, as I remember, because I still profoundly felt that a woman in a pub was an odd bird. I can still clearly recall my very first, drink, a gin and lime which I consumed in the Royal Oak opposite Somerville in the company of two other students. The drink was ordered for me of course, by one of my companions, as I did not then know what drinks were called. The experience comes back to me surrounded by a halo of the purest and most intense joy.

Nowadays, when I turn to consider the habits and customs of my own pupils, I find it is still the case that a surprising number of them would not think of entering a pub alone. (The proctorial restriction, which of course applied to both sexes, is gone.) However, there is on the whole a more sensible and matter-of-fact attitude to pub life – and it is also as much the custom as not that when one calls on the young women one is offered 'a drink' from the bottle in the cupboard. This development, it must be admitted, is a mixed blessing, in that drink regrettably remains an expensive item, and the offering of drinks, once it has become established as a social habit, tends to be compulsory. Above stairs, in the Senior Common Room, the scene has also changed. All but one (I believe) of the women's colleges now have cellars, and in at least two of them (St. Anne's and Somerville) the cellar is available to undergraduates. At my own college (St. Anne's) our active wine steward has organised wine tastings for the Junior Common Room, and encouraged them to do their buying with intelligence and even with foresight. As St. Anne's has not yet got a central dining hall (it is being built at this moment) we have not yet developed any pattern of communal drinking. So these delightful traditions remain to be invented.

There are, as Hegel has pointed out, important advantages attached to being the underdog. Since women do not have to keep up the dreary *persona* of being top sex and knowing more about everything, their pleasures, when they come, can be simpler and purer. So with drink. We are perhaps more able with impunity simply to please ourselves. The minor conventions, after the initial stage of liberation, weigh less heavily, and we may indulge an unpretentious following of our own taste. We missed many aspects of the 'good living' of the nineteenth century, and have indeed, in our community life where it exists, scarcely acquired the concept. I cannot think this is altogether a misfortune. We are able to follow in an eclectic way such innovations as are now becoming visible here and there in the Senior Common Rooms of our male colleagues: a good Italian vermouth before dinner, claret after, or a white burgundy; hock at a party instead of sherry.

Personal tastes and wishes do, and should, show where drink is concerned as much as elsewhere. Civilisation consists in a judicious mixture of custom and personal eccentricity. Increase of knowledge and absence of pretension are the marks of freedom. Great expertise in the matter of wine, like expertise in any other field, is to be welcomed as valuable in itself and as a guarantee of the maintenance of standards. However, it is given to comparatively few to attain this; and there is no need for the inexpert drinker to model his pleasures, as I fear some do, upon those of the expert, preferring an abstract and notional to a realised and present joy. Such a preference may be the prelude to greater knowledge, but it is often not. And meanwhile there are simpler and more convivial uses of wine which are their own justification. To the woman drinker insight will come as the unsought-for by-product of an unpretentious enjoyment.

To end on a more personal and heretical note: for me drink is essentially connected with talk and not with food. I appreciate good food, especially the simple and well-cooked vegetable, but I by no means idolise it, and serious eating, if it interferes with serious talking, is to be deplored. The proper use of wine is delightfully to stimulate the flow of talk. So let us have no vast board groaning with intricate meats and sauces, but a simple dish, a steak or perhaps an omelette, with a light salad, and cheese and fruit ready upon the table. And let there be no solemn talk of vintages or ponderous tastings of exquisite and expensive wines of which the host can only afford one bottle. Rather let there be an indefinite supply of some light and inexpensive wine, possibly Italian, such as Montepulciano or Valpolicella, which can be drunk continuously, which flows gaily and unostentatiously down the throat, inspiring the mind and kindly entreating the stomach, a wine which can be drunk before and during and after eating, so that the meal is, as it should be, a mere incident in the prolonged enjoyment of convivial conversation.

1 From the frontmatter of *The Compleat Imbiber: An Entertainment* edited by Cyril Ray (London: Putnam, 1958).

An After-Dinner Birthday Speech for J. B. Priestley, 13 September 1969

Iris Murdoch
Introduction by Anne Rowe

Iris Murdoch and John Bayley were close friends of the novelist, playwright and broadcaster J. B. Priestley and his wife the archaeologist, writer and broadcaster, Jacquetta Hawkes. Murdoch first met Priestley in the 1950s on a BBC radio programme and in 1963 he helped Murdoch adapt A Severed Head *for the stage. With the benefit of Priestley's expertise, the play opened successfully in Bristol in 1963 and then transferred to the Criterion Theatre, London where it ran for two and a half years. The two couples remained close friends and the Bayleys would sometimes visit the Priestleys' home, Brook Hill, on the Isle of Wight, where they would walk together on the cliffs and drink 'Dog's Nose' (gin and a half pint of bitter) in the local pub. 'Thank you both for such splendid days', Murdoch wrote to her friends. 'I loved talking, and listening, and looking out the window, and swimming and drinking and seeing the night jars…'.*

The original handwritten manuscript of this birthday speech is held in the Jacquetta Hawkes Collections at Bradford University (15/4/17/120). The editors of the Iris Murdoch Review *would like to thank Bradford University's archivist, Julie Parry, for sharing the manuscript with the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archive.*

This is a very happy occasion. I think one of the nice things about being a writer, or about being an artist of any kind, is that you can celebrate things that you like. You can point them out and lift them up and say, 'Look, isn't this super'. It is not so often however that one has a decent chance to

celebrate one's friends. Unless of course one puts them into one's novels, which I don't do. Pleasure in friendship is usually, and properly, rather informal and inexplicit. But it's special and exciting when one has a chance to say something formal about somebody one loves: though this can be intimidating since one is giving a momentary form to something which is multiform and endless, one's appreciation of another person. And how multiform and how endless is one's appreciation of Jack.

Jack tends to turn up everywhere. Quite lately my husband and I heard Jack's name mentioned, by people who didn't know we knew him, in two quite separate contexts. One was in a pipe shop in Piccadilly where the owner of the shop was boasting to his clients that Jack bought his pipes there. And one felt really there could hardly be a prouder or more appropriate boast for a pipe shop proprietor. The second occasion a few days later was in Prague, where several people joined in recalling Jack's broadcast at the time of Munich, when Jack had spoken grimly about the consequences of abandoning Czechoslovakia – and they'd said how very much that broadcast had meant in Czechoslovakia and how it was still remembered today. It was heartwarming for us to hear Jack's name mentioned in the midst of that rather gloomy scene. And of course when we shyly mentioned that we actually knew him personally our stock went up no end.

Jack is ubiquitous because he is in the most glorious and desirable sense versatile. Kierkegaard says somewhere that admiring somebody is a good way of becoming quite idle and doing nothing. You admire somebody as a substitute for taking the trouble of emulating them. But I think admiring Jack can never be like that and for a good reason. Because to admire Jack is to love him, and love is a great source of energy. So if one admires Jack one wants, not necessarily to do what he does – one certainly wouldn't be able to – but at least to do something. To do one's own thing. Energy is communicated, cheerfulness, interest, curiosity, wonder. Even in his famous role as a pessimist Jack invigorates and cheers. I expect most of us have been treated to Jack's pessimism at one time or another. In my family we even have a phrase for it: Jack's law. The general form of Jack's law is that everything all the time in every respect is getting worse. Airports. Income tax. Food. Architecture. The Trade Union movement. Harold Wilson. And so on. But somehow, after one has heard Jack blasting forth on one of these topics one comes away feeling: things are all right really, life is pretty good. One feels energetic. Jack may be pessimistic but he is never cynical. And even as a professed pessimist he is the cause that optimism is in other people.

Perhaps Jack invigorates us so because he appeals at a deep level to our human nature. If a Martian were to come to us and say: what are human beings like really, point one out, a typical one, one might offer him Jack. This would of course prove to be a source of considerable puzzlement. Our Martian might come back and say, but if this one is typical why is your planet in such a perfectly awful

mess! Or he might say: you say he's typical but I can find only one like that. Then one would have to explain that one had meant typical in the Aristotelian sense. Jack is a fully developed human specimen whereas the majority of men exist only potentially as human beings. Jack is large in a completely human way, he is human all the way through. He is what the thing could be like. To take one out of many possible instances of what this specimen illustrates, he illustrates the proper position of art in human life. All human beings ought to be in some sense artists, art should be near to the centre of their lives and connected both with their sense of joy and with their sense of discovery and truth. In fact art probably is the connection between joy and truth. And this is something which Jack triumphantly incarnates, as a versatile practitioner and a versatile enjoyer of the arts. Indeed what a case of incarnation he presents generally! This, one might finally tell one's Martian friend, is the way for spirit and flesh to get along happily together.

Quote: 'Why should not the qualities of a master of men, everything that makes for greatness, serve for once far removed from the standards of ambition.' Unquote. I quote Jack, speaking here about another great rather large and witty man, a creation of Shakespeare. And we might turn these words back upon their author. His triumph is a perfectly human triumph, it is one up to our species. To celebrate Jack is to celebrate our human world, the sobriety of its pessimism, the naturalness of its optimism, its special sort of goodness, its endless concern for truth, its variety and its delight. And indeed, to adapt the words of another great man for whom cheerfulness was always breaking in, one might say at last that: if you are tired of Jack, you are tired of life.

Iris Murdoch Twenty-Five Years On: Reputation and the Development of Murdoch Scholarship[1]

Anne Rowe

The acclaimed novelist and public intellectual Iris Murdoch died on 8 February 1999, at Vale House in Oxford, just a few months short of her eightieth birthday. Her husband, Warton Professor of English at Oxford, literary critic and writer, John Bayley, was at her side. Her death made big news. Such was her stature in British cultural life, the announcement on the BBC Evening News took precedence over the death of King Hussain of Jordan. Her fame stemmed largely from the novels of the 1950s, 60s and 70s; the late 'baggy monsters' had been less popular. But the Bayleys were still news and quite a celebrity couple – sometimes weekending with the upper echelons of British society, such as Lord Maurice Saatchi and his wife the novelist and entrepreneur Josephine Hart, who had financed Murdoch's stage adaptation of *The Black Prince* at the Aldwych Theatre in 1989. Murdoch was deeply fond of all her society friends and they of her – but all human experience was grist to the mill for her 'moral psychology'; she was fascinated by their personalities, just as she was by the motives and the behaviour of everyone she met: "Do you believe in God?" was apparently a common conversation opener (as reported to me by Audi Bayley, John Bayley's second wife).

The couple had been much in the public eye in the year prior to Murdoch's death for reasons quite other than her work. John Bayley's memoir, *Iris,* describing Murdoch's descent into Alzheimer's, her fascination for the Teletubbies, details of their sex life, and her physical and mental deterioration, had been published in 1998.[2] The book had titillated the tabloid press and caused offence in some quarters. I remember in particular a review in the *Financial Times* by Jackie Wullschläger who pointed to the book's uncomfortable ambivalence between devotion and malice.[3] She may have been right, but I am not sure it matters. Such was Murdoch's understanding of the human psyche and her capacity for empathy, she would have understood that emotion in her husband and forgiven him the impulse, though perhaps not the execution of it.

Fortunately, obituaries in the quality press focussed more on Murdoch's legacy to English literature. The finest of her generation lauded her achievements: A. S. Byatt said that she was 'the most important novelist writing in her time'; A. N. Wilson said, 'she spoke to a generation trying to discover its moral sense after the war'; Sebastian Faulks suggested that 'the perspective of time would place her magically bewitching, but intellectually austere novels at the top of British fiction of the second half of the twentieth century'. Although much of the praise appeared to pigeonhole her novels within the century in which they were written, there were others who looked forward to the twenty-first century. John Updike predicted universality: 'the questions with which she persistently grapples in her fiction are the ones upon which the interest of all fiction depends'. Lorna Sage thought her fiction would endure 'because it spans such an extraordinary range, which includes high seriousness'; Harold Bloom had confidence that her work would survive because he saw her as 'a pivotal link in the evolutionary chain of the English novel that stretches back to the nineteenth century and forward to the twenty-first'.[4]

So, what evidence is there, twenty-five years after her death, that her influence has extended into twenty-first century literature? In 2007 I published an essay which explored strong links between Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001) and *The Black Prince* (1973) (and there may well be more to be said in regard to other of his novels despite McEwan's reluctance to acknowledge any debt).[5] Other writers however are not so shy in doing so, including those novelists who introduced the new Vintage Classics series in 2019 that marked the centenary of Murdoch's birth. Sophie Hannah, Sarah Perry, Charlotte Mendelson, Daisy Johnson – all acknowledge the impact of reading Iris Murdoch on their own work. Others who have acknowledged her work as inspiration include Monica Ali, Zadie Smith, John Banville, and Sarah Waters, and a recent little anecdote is worth mentioning here – within the past few weeks Peter Conradi has been in correspondence with the Booker Prize judge and literary critic Leo Robson, who suggests that Martin Amis was reputed to have been a big fan of Murdoch's novels and says he finds echoes of Murdoch in both Amis's novels and in those of John Updike. This list I am sure could go on – her impact on twentieth and twenty-first century literature was profound.

But what distinguishes Iris Murdoch as apart from her contemporaries and those who came after is of course her concomitant status as a highly respected practising moral philosopher. To give a brief assessment of her status as a philosopher on her death I turned to Justin Broackes's *Iris Murdoch: Philosopher* (2012). Murdoch's philosophical credentials were good, he says, as one of that prestigious group of females (Elizabeth Anscombe, Mary Midgley and Philippa Foot) who were taught by Donald MacKinnon at Oxford.[6] She had been enthusiastically received into the philosophical world after meeting Sartre in

Brussels in 1945 which sparked her confidence to return to the philosophical fold. But we should remember that her philosophical output was relatively small. After her death, suggests Broackes, there were those who suspected that Murdoch was not quite serious, substantial or professional as a philosopher, and those who perceived her philosophy as the work of a novelist who had once been a philosopher, rather than the culmination of sustained attention which in fact advanced a view of large areas of moral philosophy. Broackes sums up by saying that her philosophy was brave: 'ambitious, independent and quite opposite to the philosophical fashions of the time'.[7]

The saddest thing of all, perhaps, is that after her death all such debates about the stature of Murdoch's fiction and philosophy became eclipsed in the public view by the continuing media frenzy that once again focussed primarily on her private life. After John Bayley's untimely memoir in 1998 came Richard Eyre's film, *Iris,* in 2001, starring Kate Winslet and Judi Dench as the young and old Iris respectively, which said almost nothing about her as a writer or philosopher and ensured her private life overshadowed her intellectual achievements.[8] Peter J. Conradi's biography *Iris Murdoch: A Life*, also in 2001, written with great integrity by a devoted friend, attempted to give a sensitive and honest account of her life that paid tribute to her intellectual seriousness and her literary achievement.[9] While Conradi anguished about how much of her private life it was wise to reveal he took advice from Philippa Foot who counselled truthfulness. But once again, the press feasted on scandal. When A.N. Wilson's vitriolic *Iris Murdoch: As I Knew Her* was published in 2003, extracts appeared in the *Daily Mail* under the heading 'A Hellish Kind of Love: gay affairs, sexual secrets and why Iris Murdoch called her husband "princess"'.[10] Less publicly but equally as contentiously, in his 2010 memoir *With Love and Rage*, David Morgan, a former student at the Royal College of Art, recounted his sexually charged friendship with Murdoch that came close to public scandal.[11]

This notoriety in the tabloid press (which would have cut her to the core) where her personal life was sensationalised created an impression of her as 'promiscuous'. The epithet endures. Only on Saturday last week [10 February 2024] the word was used in an article in *The Times* by James Mariott, in which he declared that 'her high principles were married to both sexual promiscuity and sexual ambiguity'.[12] The word 'promiscuous' implies more than its literal meaning, which refers to one with a number of sexual partners – with it comes the implication of indiscrimination. And indiscriminate in her sexual partners Murdoch was not. Nonetheless, on the publication of her private letters in *Living on Paper* in 2015, that catalogued a plethora of romantic entanglements, this louche impression was rekindled, despite the fact that many of these relationships were not consummated.[13] The process of editing Murdoch's letters suggested that many of these erotic epistolary relationships were often contrived – so much

so that the 'voice' in her letters echoes those of many of her female characters, particularly in the 1970s (Lizzie Scherer's letters to Charles Arrowby in *The Sea, The Sea* (1978) frequently come to mind). Without doubt Murdoch intensified her own emotions, inflamed her feelings and solicited deeply personal information that fed into the psychological acuity of her characters. This ventriloquism in the letters was understandably missed by critics and her reputation was besmirched yet again. Roger Lewis's unforgivable vitriolic review of *Living on Paper* in *The Times* claimed that 'in her prime she was a nymphomaniac' and 'had she come from the working class [...] would have been a candidate for compulsory sterilisation: [...] from the moment she left school and arrived at university in 1938 she felt obliged to sleep with everyone she met'.[14] Mr Lewis should have noted a letter on page 32 of *Living on Paper* to Murdoch's Oxford friend Frank Thompson, Secret Operations Executive (SOE) officer, in which she writes, 'I should tell you I have parted with my virginity'. She was twenty-three years old and wanted integrity to be the foundation of her friendship with a young man for whom she cared deeply. The impact of Thompson's execution by firing squad in Bulgaria at the age of twenty-four lasted to the end of her life. In later letters, Murdoch confessed a preference for what she calls a kind of 'diffused eroticism', where sexually charged encounters fell short of full consummation. What would have mattered to her in all such experiences (often conjured by Murdoch) was their authenticity, that was to be invested in the psychology of her characters. She said repeatedly: 'a moral philosophy must be inhabited'.

However, ignoring such public drubbing, serious scholars of literature and philosophy simply got on with the work of Murdoch scholarship and the framework for the current global academic interest in her work was being established. The Iris Murdoch Society was inaugurated in 1986 under the auspices of Barbara Heusel and Cheryl Bove with its associated 'Iris Murdoch News Letter' and scholarly interest was steadily growing. But from the 1970s trouble had been brewing for Iris Murdoch within academia. The radical change in the way that academics approached literary texts was one with which Murdoch's philosophy of writing and reading was particularly out of joint. Theorists of language (and most antithetical to Murdoch was Derridean deconstructionist theory) had now abandoned the discussion and analysis of moral issues in favour of 'high theory', and the idea of literature having an ethical dimension was dismissed as old-fashioned. As universities adopted a more rigorously theoretic approach to literary texts, Murdoch's ideas about how literature should be written and read became viewed as outmoded. Her novels were now viewed with at best suspicion, at worst derision, and her brand of moral philosophy was also found suspect.

During these years Peter J. Conradi – whose seminal work *Iris Murdoch: The Saint and the Artist* was published in 1986 – was teaching at Kingston University where Murdoch's novels were integrated into the syllabus (I was indeed a recipient

of that good fortune). By the time Iris Murdoch's Oxford library came up for sale in 2003, Peter was Emeritus Professor and I had taken his place teaching his Murdoch Special Study course. Avril Horner, then Professor of English, sanctioned work on the bid for the acquisition of this collection of over 1,000 books (many heavily annotated), from Murdoch's home in Oxford that became the bedrock of the Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies which was established at Kingston University in 2004. The £120,000 necessary to buy the archive was raised through the generosity of members of the Iris Murdoch Society, a number of funding bodies and the general public.[15] More appropriate media coverage influenced the rollercoaster of acquisitions that now give the Murdoch Collections their huge international status today.[16] Over four hundred researchers have visited the Murdoch Collections in the past year. And here I must mention the archivists who have presided over this phenomenal growth – Jane Ruddell, Katie Giles and Dayna Miller.

The necessity for moving the intellectual core of Murdoch studies from Kingston to Chichester in 2016 came about because the particular brand of literary and philosophical interest that underpinned the huge success of the Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies was peculiarly out of joint with the Centre for Modern European Philosophy now established at Kingston University. As a result, the university formally withdrew its support not only for the Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies but also for the exclusive teaching of Murdoch's novels on the Special Study course. While the Murdoch Collections were by now clearly influencing the trajectory of Murdoch scholarship worldwide, within the university the teaching and discussion of her work was being restricted. The Murdoch Collections, themselves, having been acquired with public money and institutional gifts are bound to remain there, but the intellectual core found a new home at the University of Chichester under the tutelage of Dr Miles Leeson where Murdoch scholarship has thrived intellectually. The achievements of the Iris Murdoch Research Centre at Chichester of particular note are Miles's development of the Iris Murdoch Society internationally (it now has 250 members), the annual publication of the *Iris Murdoch Review* which is now a highly respected international journal of Iris Murdoch studies, and the establishment of the Iris Murdoch Research Centre, which now comprises a multi-disciplinary collaborative international network of scholars and boasts a worldwide community of researchers, including many from the East.[17] The success of the biennial conferences that attract scholars globally pays testament to Miles's skills as an ambassador for Murdoch scholarship.

Reading Iris Murdoch's Novels in the Twenty-First Century

But what about those twenty-six novels? Information on how well they are currently selling twenty-five years on is not only difficult to find but also difficult to gauge, so there is no real way of knowing how extensively her novels are being

read, either here or abroad (although Audi Bayley tells me that she has recently received £27 in royalties from Romania and £250 from South Korea!). Nora Perkins, who heads up the Iris Murdoch Estate at Curtis Brown, is hoping that Vintage might rejacket their 'uninspiring' recent editions – but that will take some years and sales may not be strong enough to justify the project. The six novels republished with (to me inappropriately) colourful contemporary jackets in 2019 do not seem to be plentifully available in book shops – and I see only defeat in any similar attempt to rebrand her novels as 'chick-lit'. On a more encouraging note, audio editions of most of Murdoch's books will be published in the coming years (though there is no detail yet on who will undertake the project).

Murdoch scholars now need to consider what could be done to 'sell' Iris Murdoch's novels more widely to the public. A review by Kevin Power of Howard Jacobson's latest novel, *What Will Survive of Us*, in the *Guardian* on 31 January, describes it as a 'Hampstead adultery novel'; Power defines these as 'novels about professionals sleeping with people who aren't their spouses' and adds that 'Iris Murdoch wrote several of the best (see among others 1961's *A Severed Head*)'.[18] This reductive attitude is, I think, precisely the kind of limiting reference to Murdoch's novels that needs to be challenged; while she writes more perceptively about sexual obsession than any other writer I can think of, the novels surely have much more to offer the twenty-first century.

The anniversary of Murdoch's death seems to have triggered other similarly reductive attitudes to the novels. James Mariott in his recent article for *The Times* reports that after adoring her as a teenager, he 'fell out of love with Iris Murdoch' and no longer reads her novels (which is perhaps why he has forgotten that Dora, not 'Dorothea', is a character in *The Bell* and Julian, not 'Julia', appears in *The Black Prince*). 'She just wrote too much' he opines – there are too many 'Julians' and 'Hilarys', and 'the plots are indistinguishable'. He also (rather unkindly to us) suggests that now 'the encomia seem rather wan' (which means that those like us who praise her work are pale and uninteresting): '[Murdoch] lacks the core of dedicated cultists who will tend the sacred flame, and has to be content with the occasional polite attention of critics whose true enthusiasms lie elsewhere'. Well, I refute the claim that we are all pale and uninteresting, but perhaps now it's up to us as Murdoch scholars and devotees to ask seriously what Murdoch's novels have to offer contemporary readers twenty-five years on from her death – and how can we newly promote them? Even Mariott believes there is a strong case for revivification, acknowledging that the novels are 'titillating, readable and with a virtuous but untaxing atmosphere of intellectual improvement'. Although he says that the novels no longer come to life, he also concedes that everything he loved is still there, and he is 'still half hoping that someone will write the essay that will charge all the civil servants, the debates about Plato and complicated love affairs with new electricity' – because he would 'quite like to believe in it all again'.[19]

I will make a start by pointing out how the current range of scholarly publications coming out of the Iris Murdoch Research Centre is offering radically fresh insights that are quite dramatically expanding the ways the novels can be read. The Centre boasts a growing successful cohort of doctoral students investigating a diverse range of subjects that would not have been considered by students in my day: Dr Lucy Oulton's landmark thesis 'Wild Iris: Iris Murdoch's Environmental Imagination' is the first ecocritical study of Iris Murdoch's work and it cross-references not only Murdoch's novels but also her newly discovered poetry. Oulton garners attention to the landscape in Murdoch's novels in an age of heightened concern for the condition of the natural world. Other current doctoral research includes Maria Peacock's exploration of deracination and exile, a crucial investigation in the context of the current global political issues and crises of diaspora. Other innovative studies, for example on neurodiversity and the influence of Russian literature on Murdoch's novels, will continue to enlarge the contemporary significance of, and expand interest in, Murdoch's novels.

While scholars rightly cling to the status of the novels as 'novels of ideas' Murdoch herself preferred to describe them as 'moral psychology' and often claimed disingenuously that she did not want the philosophy to get into the novels. She was right in that for the general reader these philosophical themes remain extraneous and invisible, although I think now that I emphasised this fact too often, took perhaps too much care in public lectures to introduce the novels as emotionally 'gripping', 'compelling', 'compulsive reading'. And so they are of course, but the novels also fulfil a diverse range of readerly demands and their philosophical seriousness should be acknowledged, alongside their relevance to a general readership. I would argue this case more openly now and suggest that her novels will survive because they are 'shapeshifters', their meaning manifestly adaptable not only to readerly demands but also contemporary changes in society. 'Kaleidoscopic 'might also be an appropriate moniker, for the impact of the psychological acuity within the novels (generations of students would ask 'how can she know so much about me?') also shifts with age and time; once seemingly urgent issues will inevitably fade into the background of the novels to be replaced by focus on issues more urgent and central to middle or later years. I have always said that there is an Iris Murdoch novel for every decade of one's life and it is the same Iris Murdoch novel. And as more varied nuances in human psychology, sexuality and behaviour patterns have become more openly acknowledged in society, unconventional character traits, once unnoticed and unremarked, emerge from the dark corners of the novels and can now be identified and openly discussed, revealing her wise and practical suggestions on how they might be acknowledged, understood and accepted.

So many of Murdoch's characters are simply stuck in a century with which they are out of step and would be happier and more fulfilled living more openly

and freely in society today than within the milieu to which they are confined in the novels. Gertrude Openshaw, in *Nuns and Soldiers* (1980), newly married to Tim Reede, seemingly the most unsuitable husband imaginable, longs for a future where love defies societal expectations – 'Why should love be classified and constrained and denied and destroyed all the time? People can love each other honestly and truthfully in all sorts of situations and all sorts of ways'.[20] Anyone can love anyone in an Iris Murdoch novel: men can love men, women can love women, old men can passionately love young girls (even their granddaughters); young girls can love ageing men, and these feelings are not superficial or prurient – they can be life enhancing – and they can also be dangerous, even deadly. New freedoms come at a cost that Murdoch does not shy away from. In *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983) the eponymous philosopher Rozanov's illicit love for his granddaughter, Hattie, costs him his life. Murdoch understood all too well many forms of deviant emotions – and does not sweep such inclinations under any bourgeois carpet.

In the decades since Murdoch's death more peripheral kaleidoscopic shifts in reading the novels have become evident, for example, with the societal acceptance of homosexuality and a greater awareness of gender fluidity. *The Bell*, published in 1958 when homosexuality was still illegal in the United Kingdom, famously includes a closet homosexual as its central character whose denial of his authentic self leads to pederasty and a suicide. The narrator explains wisely, through the self-questioning of the intelligent eighteen-year-old Toby Gashe who had been inappropriately kissed by Michael Meade, that he was 'far from the sophistication of holding that we all participate in both sexes'.[21] Murdoch herself was to reveal confusion about her own sexuality in a letter in 1967: 'I am probably not at all normal sexually [....] I think I am sexually rather odd, which is a male homosexual in female guise'.[22] Since Murdoch's own complex sexuality and her gender fluidity have come into the public domain other characters emerge as less rigidly gender defined than one might have originally assumed. The homosexual impulses of Emmanuel or 'Emma' Scarlett-Taylor in *The Philosopher's Pupil* are openly acknowledged by the narrator. But his sexuality emerges now as more complex – he dresses in drag for a garden party, wearing a blonde wig and a smart silky multicoloured dress. Having made a sexual approach to his friend, Tom McCaffrey, who rebuffs him, he lazes under a gingko tree, where he is discovered by the gypsy girl, Pearl Scotney, with whom he has had a brief sexual encounter. When she recognises him she is shocked: 'It's horrible, dressing up like that, it's vulgar, you look awful, it's all awful [...] it's hateful, I can't understand it. [...] Take off that wig!'[23] This reaction is mitigated by Murdoch's loving, detailed representation of Emma's inner life which alleviates such negativity, although she most certainly does not deify him. Murdoch understood well the emotions she ascribes to this character – her long relationship with Brigid Brophy sometimes

involved conflicting sexual urges and cross-dressing, and any more such complex, conflicted characters are probably concealed within the novels, still hiding in plain sight.

Murdoch's reputation as 'not a woman's writer' was highlighted in Rachel Cusk's essay, published in the *Iris Murdoch Review* in 2022 but shared with students for several years prior to publication, which illustrated how Murdoch's work does not sit easily with some feminist readers and theorists.[24] I was once challenged by students on a Women's Writing in the Twenty-first Century course while teaching *Under the Net* (1954) and found myself having to defend the novel against such concerns and revisited it afresh. Again, it was not in the central narrative, but in its shaded corners and its imagery that I found a counter-argument. Indeed, a small army of 'maidens in the margins' emerged that defied the feminine stereotypes to which the two central female characters ironically subscribe. Even in the early 1950s, strong intelligent women are being depicted living happily, independently and successfully in the world: the chain-smoking corner shop owner, Mrs Tinkham; the cheerful young woman in blue jeans whom Jake bumps into on the stairs of the mime theatre who turns out to be the company's accountant, and those sassy qualified nurses who joke with Jake and heal his fractured self-esteem after a mental breakdown. It's worth pointing out also that the three central female characters in this novel are two successful film stars and a famous jazz singer. It remains true, of course, that many female characters are willingly oppressed by charismatic and coercive men, yet a close look at *The Book and the Brotherhood* (1987) reveals how Murdoch unstintingly invites readers to consider the moral and physical repulsiveness of such behaviour. She constructs here a striking gothic image of moral ugliness that stands as a symbol of the ultimate deadly perversion of sexual enslavement. Jean Cambus prepares, for the second time, to desert a loving husband for the dangerous, unstable political extremist David Crimond, by whom she has long been sexually enslaved and who will woo her into a suicide pact. Before she leaves, she pauses to look into her mirror and sees 'a mad scattered convulsed face. All the time, as she packed and dressed and dealt with her face, she was shuddering and trembling, her lower jaw moving compulsively, a faint growling in her throat'.[25] The image evokes the shapeshifting of a human face into a werewolf. While Murdoch's deep understanding of the seductive and dangerous thrill of deep mutual erotic love can, at other times, appear morally ambivalent, here she refuses to shy away from the utmost moral and physical ugliness of erotic servitude that leads to deadly perversion.

The self-assigned status of her novels as 'moral psychology' necessitates such unstinting explorations of the 'inner life' which could now designate them as studies of various kinds of mental issues. Of the former nun Anne Cavidge in *Nuns and Soldiers* the narrator observes, 'She felt for the first time in her life afraid of her mind, afraid of some independent cancerous life of its own which it

seemed to be developing'.[26] There is real insight here; Murdoch herself suffered spells of depression, so much so that she was once advised by Raymond Queneau to seek psychiatric help. As such her representation of mental suffering is visceral and authentic. She writes convincingly too of the effects of trauma and mental abuse. Feelings of guilt, shame, rejection or anger can end in suicide. Dysfunctional families abound and there is a great deal of bad parenting – a serious study of juvenile delinquency in the novels (Beautiful Joe, Peter Foster, David Gavender, Leo Peshkov, among others), that brings current psychological theories on delinquency to bear, is long overdue. In her recently published *Iris Murdoch and Remorse,* Frances White's analysis of the novels contributes significantly to contemporary research on the mental trauma that results from remorse. 'But oh, [...] the frail crying wish that it had all never happened at all and things were as they once were', cries Paula Biranne in *The Nice and the Good* (1969).[27] White explores the possibilities for redemption offered in the novels, and indeed, while there is a great deal of practical advice to be found, it can at times be disconcerting: when in *The Good Apprentice* the psychotherapist Thomas McCaskerville comforts the grieving Edward Baltram who is *in extremis* having carelessly caused the death of his best friend, a difficult moment occurs when Thomas suggests to Edward that 'You are undergoing by accident and by your own fault a spiritual journey which many would consciously purchase at a great price, but cannot buy'.[28] In *The Black Prince* Bradley Pearson articulates Murdoch's understanding of moments of human wickedness as 'more usually [...] the product of a semi-deliberate inattention, a sort of swooning relationship to time', but she is never admonishing or didactic – deliberate gaps in her narratives allow for readers themselves to consider how tragedy could have been avoided.[29] I can think of only one direct moral imperative, also voiced by Bradley Pearson. Dying in prison, convicted of a murder he did not commit, and desolate at the loss of the young woman he loved, he understands too late that 'There are no spare unrecorded encapsulated moments in which we can behave "anyhow" and then expect to resume life where we left off. The wicked regard time as discontinuous, the wicked dull their sense of natural causality. The good feel being as a total dense mesh of tiny interconnections. My lightest whim can affect the whole future'.[30] Good advice for any generation of readers, though she understood how few of us would heed it.

Finally, the novels seem to move into the realms of prophecy, as if Murdoch could see deep into the upcoming century, where politicians of all persuasions are now suggesting that the world is in a state of great danger and instability, and fear another war of global proportions Particularly harrowing on our TV screens are images of children, innocent victims of war, enduring the most appalling suffering. Murdoch, herself, appears to have been haunted by the suffering of innocent children. Two children appear in her final novel, *Jackson's Dilemma*,

a work generally accepted as marred by the onset of her Alzheimer's disease, but these children nonetheless stand as lucid and meaningful symbols of her deepest fears for the future of mankind and a last shred of hope for its survival. The first child, long dead, appears in a conversation between Rosalind and Tuan who remembers the story of how, at the beginning of the Second World War, his Jewish family belatedly attempted to flee Nazi persecution by train. Tuan's grandparents, along with his father and his twelve-year-old sister, successfully board the train. But the young girl is crying because they had to abandon the family dog. The train is agonisingly delayed and the deserted family home is close. The girl's empathy for the abandoned dog is so great that she suddenly jumps on to the platform and runs. Tuan's father attempts to follow but his grandfather violently restrains him. The train moves off, slowly speeds up, and looking back they see the girl standing on the platform with the dog in her arms. They never saw her – nor ever found a trace of her again. '"I think of her, I think of *them*," says Tuan, "millions, tens of millions – how can there be such evil, it must be held up before the whole world forever"'.[31] And this is what Murdoch does here, beatifying this image of the abandoned child as a damning indictment of the circularity of history and the barbarity that inevitably seems to resurface every few generations.

But a second child appears in the novel, one who has also been touched by death, that of his beloved father. Bran Dunarven, also aged about twelve or thirteen, has much in common with Murdoch herself: born in Ireland he feasts on myths, and has had an excellent education at a *lycée* in Paris. An intellectually gifted child, he is passionate about literature and history; he speaks English, French and Italian, is good at Latin and is learning Greek. Like his creator, he collects and treasures stones: when Mildred Smalden goes to the British Museum , one of Murdoch's favourite places, to see the Parthenon frieze she spots Bran by the door. He seems to be the ghost of Murdoch, like Jackson himself, who acknowledges that 'at the end of what is necessary, I have come to a place where there is no road'.[32] Apart from Jackson, Bran is the last character to appear in the novel. What is also special about this boy is an empathy with animals that links him to the girl left stranded on the railway platform. Having risen at dawn Bran creeps to the stables to visit his pony, 'and [they] look at each other with amazement, and with passion and with love'. He leaves to find the great hunter, Spencer, and 'reaching up his arms to the horse's neck, stroking his huge face, looking into his beautiful eyes, tears came to Bran as he said his name [...] and it was if he were holding up all the world'. It is empathy that is the essential human quality that can save mankind. But the moment fractures: 'I am sorry, oh I am so sorry' cries Bran and as he leaves the horse he falls, his ankles tangled by thick bindweed. The horse follows as far as he can, but is 'very old and tired. Bending his elegant legs he lay down in the long grass'.[33] The bond is broken and the

scene is almost unbearably poignant. The point perhaps is how far the brilliant child is humanised by the experience of unconditional love. Through empathy we feel the pain of others as if it were our own. Bran may be read as a symbol of hope in every new generation in whom humanity must place its trust: children, well educated, empathetic and deeply loved. In the early 1990s Murdoch gave a valedictory speech to just such young talented students at Kingston University in which she applauded this generation in the next decade of their lives moving into the troubled unfamiliar world of the twenty-first century. I was there sitting just behind her and remember her warning them of the dangers of technology and political extremism that are now more urgent today than they were then. She ended her speech – as I will now, and say to this generation of young talented students here – 'as we wave you onward, we say, the very best of luck'.[34]

1 Thanks are due to Frances White, Miles Leeson, Norah Perkins, Lucy Oulton, Audi Bayley and Dayna Miller for facts and information included in this talk.

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

3 Jackie Wullschläger, *Financial Times*, 10 February 1999.

4 A detailed chapter on Murdoch's 'Afterlife', which includes full details of the sources quoted in this section of the essay, appears in Priscilla Martin and Anne Rowe, *Iris Murdoch: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 163-171.

5 Anne Rowe, 'Policemen in a Search Team': Iris Murdoch's *The Black Prince* and Ian McEwan's *Atonement',* in *Iris Murdoch: A Reassessment,* ed. by Anne Rowe (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp.148-160.

6 For further information about this group, see Clare Mac Cumhaill and Rachael Wiseman, *Metaphysical Animals: How Four Women Brought Philosophy Back to Life* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2022), and Benjamin J. B. Lipscomb, *The Women Are Up to Something: How Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Mary Midgley, and Iris Murdoch Revolutionized Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

7 Justin Broackes, ed., *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.8.

8 Richard Eyre, dir., *Iris* (Miramax, 2001).

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

10 A.N. Wilson, *Iris Murdoch: As I Knew Her* (London: Arrow, 2004); *Daily Mail*, 18 August 2003, pp.40-41.

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

12 James Mariott, 'Why I fell out of love with Iris Murdoch', *The Times*, 10 February 2024.

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

14 Roger Lewis, 'Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934–1995 edited by Avril Horner and Anne Rowe', *The Times*, 14 November 2015 https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/living-on-paper-letters-from-iris-murdoch-1934-1995-edited-by-avril-horner-and-anne-rowe-klpfr2vkr3p [accessed 22 April 2024].

15 These funding bodies were the National Heritage Lottery Fund, the Bresslauer Foundation, the Friends of the National Libraries, the V & A Purchase Grant Fund, the Iris Murdoch Society and many individual personal donations.

16 Further information about the Iris Murdoch Collections, including the Archive catalogue, is available at <https://www.kingston.ac.uk/library-and-learning-services/archives-and-special-collections/our-collections/literature-and-publishing/>

17 Interest in the novels on social media continues to grow. Leeson gives online courses for Cambridge University which have included 'Iris Murdoch and London', 'Iris Murdoch and the Gothic' and in 2024 will discuss 'Iris Murdoch and Love'. Particularly interesting is the way Murdoch's work has been inspiring visual artists. The artist Carol Sommer explored the contemporary relevance of

Murdoch's writing about women's experience in her 2022 exhibition at 36 Lime Street, Newcastle, 'Sometimes she tried to think about painting'. In an exhibition in the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives showcased *Good*, an illustrated book by Matthew Richardson, which was inspired by Murdoch's planning notes for *The Bell* written inside her copy of Colin Wilson's *The Outsider*. This work was part of Matthew's final project for his PhD, 'Para-illustration: Gaps, Fragments and Spaces of the Literary Imagination'. *Good* has since been shortlisted for the 2024 V&A Illustration Awards. Kevin Petrie's *Other Journeys – Paintings and Drawings* was exhibited at The Gallery, Gateshead, Central Library in 2023. The Murdoch Collections is currently planning a new Murdoch-inspired exhibition with Kevin to be launched in the autumn. In January the artist Luey Graves opened an exhibition entitled 'The Bell, The Bell' at Cromwell Place, which featured paintings accompanied by a text by Brighid Lowe, Associate Professor of Sculpture at the Slade. Note also: Rebecca Moden, *Iris Murdoch and Harry Weinberger: Imaginations and Images*, in the Iris Murdoch Today series (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan/Springer Nature, 2023).

18 Kevin Power, 'What Will Survive of Us by Howard Jacobson review – end of the affair', *Guardian*, 31 January 2024 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2024/jan/31/what-will-survive-of-us-by-howard-jacobson-review-end-of-the-affair> [accessed 22 April 2024].

19 James Mariott, 'Why I fell out of love with Iris Murdoch', *The Times*, 10 February 2024.

20 Iris Murdoch, *Nuns and Soldiers* (1980); (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p.462.

21 Iris Murdoch, *The Bell* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958), p.175.

22 Anne Rowe and Avril Horner, eds, *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934–1995* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2015), p.347.

23 Iris Murdoch, *The Philosopher's Pupil* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1983), p.390.

24 Rachel Cusk, 'On Iris Murdoch as a Woman Writer', *Iris Murdoch Review* 13 (2022), 29–32. Editor's note: Cusk's piece drew a spirited response from Lucy Bolton: 'Iris Murdoch may not be a "women's writer", but she certainly writes for me', *Iris Murdoch Review* 14, 48-51.

25 Iris Murdoch, *The Book and the Brotherhood* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1987), p.75.

26 Iris Murdoch, *Nuns and Soldiers* (1980); (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p.242.

27 Iris Murdoch, *The Nice and the Good* (1969); (London: World Books, 1969), p.159. See Frances White, *Iris Murdoch and Remorse* in the Iris Murdoch Today series (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan/Springer Nature, 2023).

28 Iris Murdoch, *The Good Apprentice* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1985) p.70.

29 Iris Murdoch, *The Black Prince* (London: Vintage, 2013), p.189.

30 Iris Murdoch, *The Black Prince* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), p.95.

31 *Jackson's Dilemma* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995), p.166-7.

32 *Jackson's Dilemma* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995), p.249.

33 *Jackson's Dilemma* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995), p.247-8.

34 Iris Murdoch, 'Address to Kingston University Humanities Graduates', *Iris Murdoch News Letter*, 9 (1995), 1-2, 2.

The Pub in Iris Murdoch's Fiction

Daniel Read

The Albert Tavern, the Balloon Tavern, the Barley Mow, the Big Tree, the Black Horse, the Black Lion, the Butt Bar, the Claverden Arms, the Castle,[1] the Cockpit, the Devonshire Arms, the Doves, the Ebury Arms, the Emperor, the Ferret, the Fitzroy, the George, the Green Man, the Hedgehog, Henekey's house, the Horse and Groom, the King's Arms, the King's Head, the King Lud, Kimball's bar, the Lion and Unicorn, Little's Public House, the Little White Rose, Liverpool Street Station bar, the London Apprentice, the Lord Ranelagh, the Magpie and Stump, the Marquis of Granby, the Mountjoy bar, Nagle's Bar, the Pack Horse, the Old Shades, the Old Swan, the Orange Tree, the Pearl Bar, the Pike, the Pillars of Hercules, the Porpoise, the Prince of Denmark, the Rat Man, the Raven, the Red Lion, the Running Dog, the Sea Kings, the Seven Stars, the Sherlock Holmes, Short's, the Silent Woman, the Six Bells, the Skinner's Arms, Sloane Square Station bar, St Stephen's Tavern, the Swan, the Tabard, the Three Blind Mice, the Tournament, the Viaduct Tavern, the Volunteer, the Wheatsheaf, the White Hart, the White Lion, the York Minster, Younger's house…

Iris Murdoch's fiction is, as the above paragraph illustrates, populated by public houses and drinking places, replete with references to bars, inns, pubs and taverns.[2] This paragraph also excludes cafes, hotels and restaurants as well as the more vague or unnamed locations mentioned in the novels, like the departure lounge at London Airport in *A Severed Head* (1961) where Martin Lynch-Gibbon nervously drinks whiskey, the newly-opened Austrian Wine Bar in *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983), the ship's bar where Matthew Gibson-Grey and Ludwig Leferrier plan to meet while journeying to America in *An Accidental Man* (1971), or the anonymous establishments of Marsington, home to Tim Burke's jewellery shop in *The Sandcastle* (1957), whose streets had, 'in the warm twilight', 'a remote and peaceful air, the long brown façades of its inns and spacious houses withdrawn and reassuring'.[3] Within Murdoch's novels some of these establishments are intensely meaningful places with personal significance for characters. Some of them are spaces for significant scenes or events. Others serve little to no fictional purpose, instead appearing as locations that characters pass on their way home, perhaps for a short lunch or a quick

drink. These pubs and drinking places also frequently lend geographic or socio-political realism to a given novel – a great deal of them are (or were) real places. The reader of *A Severed Head* (1961), for example, is located in London when they read, in Chapter 12, that Martin Lynch-Gibbon stops, before seeing George Hands, in a pub in Covent Garden. While pubs – named or unnamed, real or imagined – may seem to appear in Murdoch's novels for relatively mundane reasons, further investigation reveals that they display her keen sense of the importance that spaces and places hold for the individual. But why is Murdoch so drawn to pubs and drinking places in her literature, and what purpose do they serve in her novels? Is the presence of pubs in her literature unique?

Before answering these questions, it will help to turn away from Murdoch to consider the pub's role in literature more broadly. For the well-informed reader of our topic, the opening paragraph listing the drinking places within Murdoch's fiction may be easily taken for Steven Earnshaw's opening to a chapter on Charles Dickens in *The Pub in Literature: England's altered state* (2000).[4] Therein, Earnshaw explores the pub's prominent role within English literature from Chaucer to Martin Amis. Along the way, he traces the cultural and political changes that have informed the development of what we now come to associate with the pub. Taverns, public houses and inns are quintessentially British spaces whose cultural importance was reinforced by literature, particularly of the nineteenth century – 'when people think of the traditional English pub', Earnshaw suggests, 'they are usually imagining something like a Victorian public house'.[5] These culturally rich drinking places gain their importance within the literary canon not only from their portrayal of 'all [those] homely English comforts – fire, food, conversation – that seem to be desirable' to its visitors but also from their reflection of contemporary changes to drinking culture, such as those motivated by the Gordon riots of 1780, or by the changes to pub opening times that occurred in 1988.[6] The drinking places presented in English literature, however, are not always convivial safe spaces. Throughout history they have had the capacity to either unite or divide people along social and economic lines. Shakespeare's Prince Hal must eventually abandon the 'chaos and conviviality' of the Boar's Head and its most infamous drinker, Falstaff.[7] The titular character of *Oliver Twist* (1837–39) experiences two sides of London's pub culture: he is first bought a comforting pot of beer by the Artful Dodger in the public houses of Barnet but later journeys to a pub in 'the filthiest part of Little Saffron Hill', home to Mr William Sykes who seems to embody this 'dark and gloomy den'.[8] In *Silas Marner* (1861), Eliot portrays Raveloe's public house, the Rainbow, as the symbolic centre of the town's community: it is, Earnshaw argues, 'an image of olde England' that gathers both 'the superior spirits-and-water drinkers and the lower beer drinkers'.[9] The inn, pub and tavern, then, are ambiguous spaces that can be morally and

socially divisive, revealing both the differences and the similarities between individuals in a community.

When modernist writers engaged with the pub, it began to lose its quintessential nineteenth-century warmth and became, instead, a space that solitary drinkers (or perhaps groups) encountered in a more passive, and less convivial, way. The pub's central communal role changed not only as governments invoked pragmatic rules during wartime to reduce people's ability to drink but also as increasing forms of transport and new services in hospitality (like hotels or bed-and-breakfasts) altered people's movements around towns and cities. The pub may have maintained its often cliquey, rural or working-class associations, but its clientele now lived in more a modern, fast-paced and socially diverse world. Earnshaw argues that these contemporary changes, as well as the changes motivated by a more self-contained literary form, instigated the pub's decline within twentieth-century literature. Previously, the broad social dynamic of the pub had facilitated the realist agenda of nineteenth-century writers. For modernist writers, though, the pub's conviviality and social breadth was not conducive to their more solipsistic focus; for them, the alienating and frenetic city more effectively served their literary agendas.

At this point, there will likely be readers wondering what Earnshaw says about how a contemporary writer like Iris Murdoch engages with pubs. Where does she fit in this story? While Earnshaw discusses writers like Kingsley Amis, Doris Lessing and Muriel Spark, either in passing or in detail, he does not mention Murdoch. This omission undoubtedly invites conjecture, but maybe Earnshaw was not a reader of Murdoch. Or perhaps he simply did not have room in his study to discuss her oeuvre. The last two chapters, for example, 'Our mutual wasteland' and 'Kegged' respectively focus on pre-1950s writers and on the literature of the Angry Young Men, on the publican-turned-writer J. M. O'Neill and on more postmodern works.[10] Earnshaw's study, moreover, was published before the release of many of the landmark writings on, or about, Murdoch's fiction and her life, such as Peter J. Conradi's *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (2001). In his biography, Conradi argues that Murdoch's writings have been overlooked in the literary canon, most notably in their contribution to the literature of London, 'the city her fictional world is in love with'.[11] For those who have not already gleaned this from her fiction, Conradi elaborates on Murdoch's deep love, quoting from a letter to David Morgan, in which

> she wrote of 'feeling ordinary & buying cigarettes & feeling a whole city, as it were, backing up one's incognito'. The idea of an urban 'incognito' eloquently implied the twin, related pleasures of disguise and of moving unrecognised, 'invisible'. She loved London pubs all her life.[12]

Conradi's final sentence – short and to the point – provides the perfect impetus to consider Murdoch's fictional engagement with the pub. This essay attempts to place Murdoch within the pub-literature tradition that Earnshaw so brilliantly outlines. It will focus on how the pub supports four crucial aspects of Murdoch's fiction: her enjoyment of London and the city, her awareness of the social diversity contained within (or represented by) pubs, her engagement with a pub's sometimes gritty or morally problematic clientele, and finally her appreciation of the social and spiritual value of a pub's often warm and hospitable environment.

Anne Rowe and Cheryl Bove's *Sacred Space, Beloved City: Iris Murdoch's London* (2008) broadens the focus on London that Conradi's biography so clearly invites. Rowe and Bove illustrate how her novels 'detail and celebrate London with an acuity that matches that of more celebrated "London Writers"', situating her among the ranks of William Blake, Charles Dickens and Virginia Woolf – much like them, Murdoch's plots 'thrive' on the city, on 'its buildings, icons, pubs, river and, most of all, its people'.[13] Unsurprisingly, *Under the Net* (1954) and *A Word Child* (1975) figure prominently in their study. These two first-person narratives focus on a male protagonist who spends large amounts of time – either alone or in company – traversing the London landscape, its pubs and its transport systems. Jake Donaghue's pub-crawl with David Gellman and Peter O'Finney (Finn) in *Under the Net* leads him through a bomb-scarred network of London pubs and churches. In *A Word Child*, Hilary Burde seeks refuge in the tube-station pubs of the Circle Line. These drinking places guide Jake and Hilary around the city into spaces that provide a healing secular spirituality and social intimacy.

For characters like Jake and Hilary their intimate knowledge of the city of London is based on, or signposted by, pubs and drinking places. In *Under the Net*, Jake is given an address that 'lies between the Doves and the Black Lion', between Chiswick and Hammersmith, to visit Anna Quentin at the Riverside Miming Theatre, but this is an area that, for Jake, is 'contingent', lying as it does west of Earls Court.[14] Other characters would, of course, be affronted by Jake's view of these parts of west London. In *Nuns and Soldiers* (1980), Tim Reede hopes to move to this area with Gertrude Openshaw: 'It's a sort of sacred area, between Hammersmith Bridge and Chiswick Mall,' he says, 'and there are such lovely pubs'.[15] When Jake does venture west of Earls Court, in Chapter Eleven, he directs his taxi driver in search of an ironmonger in Fulham and, later, to a quiet disused timber yard near Hammersmith Bridge so he and Finn can free Mars the dog from his cage. This 'contingent' part of London is frequented by Danby Odell in *Bruno's Dream* (1969). Danby is 'a shambler through pubs', who would spend 'every possible moment' in them if he could, even if only for 'a breather'.[16] But he would never journey north into Jake's comfortable Kensington Borough: 'he never felt at home over that particular border. Fulham, Battersea, where he knew every public house, this was the London on whose mystery he meditated'.[17] These

more mysterious, often darker, areas of London seem to be what Murdoch has in mind – even if only for their atmosphere – for *The Time of the Angels* (1966), whose only drinking place is 'a little public house' that Pattie and Eugene pass on their way to a quay on 'the huge river', surely the Thames.[18] In Murdoch's fiction, then, pubs are not simply locations for drinking and/or socialising but are an inherent part of the identities of people and of places. Murdoch's pubs lend geographic verisimilitude to her fictional worlds, they are indicative of a character's topographic understanding of their home, and they often generate a feeling of refuge and safety.

While characters like Jake or Danby chart their journeys around London with the help of pubs and bars to guide them, others bemoan their disconnection from the city's bustling atmosphere and the social and sexual freedoms that are often aligned with pub culture. There is, as Charles Arrowby pronounces in *The Sea, The Sea* (1978), something fundamentally enriching about living in 'London flats, hotels, rented apartments in capital cities: I have always lived in hives, surrounded by human presences behind walls'.[19] An awareness of the life-giving necessity of these spaces in shared by Ludwig Leferrier in *An Accidental Man* who declares that Oxford has become 'more real' without Garth Gibson Grey: 'not a dream place of the future but a real city with libraries and shops and pubs'.[20] Ludwig and his fiancé Gracie Tisbourne, who 'adored pubs, which were new to her', enjoy trips around London that invariably include going to 'a pub with a funny name'.[21] This love of pubs and their intimate connection with the city is repeated, again, in one of Murdoch's less urban novels, *The Unicorn* (1963). Murdoch sets the novel in a rural west Irish village with few accessible routes to nearby towns and cities. Marian Taylor, a young English teacher, travels to Gaze Castle hoping to find a nearby village, to find 'a real civilized place with shops and public house'.[22] But her hopes are disappointed on discovering that the closest pub, based in the town of Blackport, does not admit women. She is later reassured, however, to find that Blackport does have a fishing hotel where she would be able to drink at the bar:

> Today all seemed suddenly gay and normal and Marian was quite simply delighted at the thought of a visit to civilization. To see a paved street, to buy a newspaper, to enter a shop, see ordinary people passing, these things seemed positive treats; and although the pubs were taboo, there was apparently a little fishing hotel where she could see a row of bottles and order herself a drink: old rites, familiar and greatly missed.[23]

As these disparate examples illustrate, pubs and drinking places allow characters to feel comfortable and real: they thrive with 'human presences' that enliven the characters who visit them.[24] For Murdoch, pubs are intimately connected

with the city; they offer a teeming, hive-like space that can welcome people into convivial atmospheres ideal for personal reflection or moral development, or for connecting with fellow kindred spirits or suitors.

If we could distil the experiences of Murdoch's London-based characters to a particular geographic location, we might be tempted to say they were mostly based around the borough of Kensington and Chelsea.[25] Unbeknown to many of the characters in *An Unofficial Rose* (1962), for example, Randall Peronett divides his time in London between his flat in Chelsea and Emma Sands' flat in Notting Hill. There he meets Emma's secretary and companion, Lindsay Rimmer, with whom he begins an affair – the two occasionally visiting pubs, like the 'big Edwardian pub near the corner of Church Street', to spend time sitting side by side, with hands clasped under the table.[26] This may well be a reference to the Duke of York, or perhaps to Trader's Inn, about a ten minute walk from Edgware Road tube station. These areas covered by the western stations on the Circle and District Lines are familiar to many of Murdoch's London-based characters, particularly the more affluent ones. But another important location for her characters is Soho, as well as the areas surrounding Tottenham Court Road, Bloomsbury and Holborn. Jake's pub crawl in *Under the Net* begins in Holborn; Emily McHugh and Blaise Gavender of *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* (1974) have their first private drink together in a pub near the British Museum; Dorina, estranged from her husband Austin Gibson Grey, finds herself in a hotel in Bloomsbury at the end of *An Accidental Man*; Bradley Pearson goes into a 'featureless modern' pub near Tottenham Court Road with Rachel Baffin in *The Black Prince* (1973);[27] Hilary Burde spends time wandering around North Soho and Charlotte Street in *A Word Child*; Paula in *The Nice and the Good* (1968) lunches at the Pillars of Hercules; towards the end of *Henry and Cato* (1976), Lucius Lamb fantasises about living in London to enjoy the Soho literary scene; in *The Message to the Planet* (1989), Patrick Fenman wishes to become a 'penniless poet in Soho' and hopes to 'style himself as "a literary man"';[28] both Tom McCaffrey in *The Philosopher's Pupil* and Tim Reede in *Nuns and Soldiers* go on pub crawls in Soho. Tim 'loved the charm of noisy messy changing London, pedestrian bridges and roads on stilts, the magic of Westway, of modern pubs beside noisy roundabouts. Soho in summer was his South of France' (*NS* 85). Murdoch's London, then, is not limited to one traversed by a wealthy 1960s Knightsbridge resident: she and her characters are also drawn to Soho, an area renowned for its drinking culture, for its creativity, and for its progressive sexual attitudes.

Many of her characters' identities, like those of Lucius, Patrick or Tom, are inherently linked to Soho, and these feelings are even stronger for Murdoch's gay or queer characters, as she would call them. Soho and its surrounding areas have long been associated, albeit not always positively, with the homosexual community.[29] In *The Bell* (1958), James Tayper Pace, who had previously worked

in London's East End, shares Wolfenden Report-era prejudices and perpetuates gay stereotypes when he discusses Nick Fawley.[30] 'He looks to me like a pansy,' James says, 'I didn't like to say so before, but I had heard about him in London. They're always trouble-makers, believe me. I've seen plenty of that type. There's something destructive in them, a sort of grudge against society. Give a dog a bad name, and all that, but we may as well be prepared!'[31] While Murdoch contributes to the breaking down of taboos around homosexuality in *The Bell*, it is her later novel, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970), that is often hailed as her most progressive engagement with queer characters.[32] In *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, Simon Foster reminisces about his experiences as a young gay man in Soho. These experiences, the narrator tells us, had sometimes been 'depressing and sordid [...]. Yet he had enjoyed some of his adventures and liked the jokey parochial atmosphere of the gay bars which he had been used to frequent in the days before Athens and Axel'.[33] A similar Soho experience resurfaces in *The Book and the Brotherhood* (1987) when we are told about Gulliver Ashe's attempt to come to terms with sexuality:

> In his raffish persona he at one time frequented various, reportedly *louche*, gay bars. He wore black leather and studded belts and chains and sinister boots. He could never decide whether this was mere play-acting or whether it was a brave and ingenious search for reality. There was always a lot of talk about 'identity'. But when he went to the gay bars he couldn't tell pretence from real. Later he wondered why he hadn't been murdered.[34]

Here Murdoch mixes quintessential gay imagery – perhaps echoing the emergence of the Tom of Finland aesthetic during the 1970s – with an awareness of the lingering prejudices and stereotypes problematising Gull's ability to explore and understand his sexual identity. Gull cannot separate his 'brave' liberated experiences within these bars from their 'reportedly' sordid nature – a sentiment which resonates with the discourse surrounding the AIDS epidemic. Gull does not discuss this identity crisis with the other gay character of the novel, Gerard Hernshaw, despite the fact 'that it was in a rather special gay bar that he had first heard Gerard's name mentioned' (*BB* 137).[35] By the end of the novel, Gull has entered into a relationship with Lily, and after these earlier explorations readers may be tempted to ask what this says about his sexuality: is he a repressed gay man or has he perhaps always been bisexual but unable to express it? Such binary judgements of Gull's sexuality can be approached more sensitively or perhaps negated entirely, not only if we remember the still-lingering stigma attached to bisexuality, but also if we turn to more contemporary understandings of the full LGBTQIA+ spectrum that would perhaps identify Gull as questioning, queer or

pansexual.[36] What remains clear from his experience, moreover, is that Soho night life has had the same positive, formative role for Gull as it had for Simon in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. The narrator of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* spells this out clearly: 'The love [Simon] had hoped for was real love. But the search had had its lighter side' (*FHD*, 29). There is, as Conradi rightly argues in *Family Business* (2019), a quietly revolutionary attitude revealed here: an ostensibly emotionless hook-up culture is 'depicted with a sympathy so pronounced as to approach sentimentality' and without any 'mention of the greed, cruelty or disease implicit in promiscuous sex'.[37] LGBTQIA+ individuals may, like Gull, struggle to understand whether their exploration of these spaces is an affectation or an authentic, true reflection of their identity. The bustling (perhaps dangerous) experiences of gay night life might be rendered taboo by society's prejudices and stereotypes, but Murdoch charges her narrative voice with a fundamental point: these (safe) spaces allow people to forge, discover or (re)examine their sexual identity with a greater freedom than society would otherwise allow them.

Clearly, as the preceding discussion illustrates, one of the crucial roles played by pubs in Murdoch's fiction is their ability to invite, represent or unite different groups of people. The local pubs that appear in Murdoch's fiction, however, bely an ambiguity that she also shares with her literary forebears: pubs are not always universally beloved, neither are they always hospitable to the outsider. In this sense, Murdoch shares what Earnshaw terms Dickens's 'even-handed ambiguousness towards drinking places': his pubs are cold and warm, disquieting and comforting, cliquey and convivial.[38] In Murdoch's fiction, we see a range of local pubs whose appearance and clientele share this ambiguity. *The Philosopher's Pupil* is an example of this *par excellence*: it is a novel whose plot and character dynamics are often driven by, and intertwined with experiences based in, pubs and the behaviour often associated with them, including physical violence, sexism and lesser social ills like exclusion, gambling or gossip. The fact that the pub can shine a light on issues such as these, or indeed on class difference or gender inequality, illustrates that its socially unifying capacities can also fail. Murdoch engages with such issues throughout her oeuvre: *The Sea, The Sea* and *The Message to the Planet* portray, respectively, cliquey and convivial local pubs; 'Something Special' highlights the ways in which sexism, prostitution and misogyny are issues often aligned with the pub; and *Nuns and Soldiers* and *A Word Child* meditate on the pub's not-unrelated long-term associations with the working class.

Earnshaw focuses on John Wain's *Hurry on Down* (1953) to illustrate how pubs can often highlight the presence of division within society, not because these spaces are inherently unwelcoming to outsiders, but because their 'working-class aura' can be jarring to outsiders from the middle or upper classes. The internal class struggle of Wain's middle-class main character, Charles, is revealed by

his visit to a pub which he believes is 'peopled by raw, angular personalities who had been encouraged to develop their sharper edges'. In novels like this, Earnshaw argues, 'the working classes are destined to remain "fixed" in social and geographical locations, symbolised by a town or city pub, whereas the middle classes are mobile and have choices, no matter how much they might despise their own class'.[39] The fact that the pub is seen as a home for the lower or working classes stems, in part, from its history. In its medieval incarnations of alehouse, tavern and, later, public house, this lower-class association was often pejorative.[40] Moving away from the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century, however, when delineations between these spaces had collapsed, the pub's lower-class identity became, instead, an aspect of its charm. All of these traits – from a charming lower-class rurality to a cliquey working-class urban grit – are now enshrined in dramas like *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders*.

While Murdoch's fiction may not, at first sight, appear to sit comfortably alongside any of these works she does directly engage with the kind of social struggles explored by Wain, not only through the attitudes of her characters but also through their actions. In *An Accidental Man* she considers how an ineffectual Welfare State limits the opportunities available to the lower classes. Garth writes to Ludwig, 'You would be surprised how many people, especially children, are ill-clad in our Welfare State' and, later, to Charlotte:

> I have been kept very busy in the East End. The scenes here are depressing beyond words. One sees how little impression the Welfare State has made and how many people are still very poor indeed and desperate, particularly women with strings of children and unable to cope. The men at least can go to the pub.[41]

Daisy Barrett in *Nuns and Soldiers* voices the inverse and considerably more critical version of this idea, telling Tim that 'everybody in this pub is on social security, and I bet they all squeeze more than we do out of the bloody Welfare State' (*NS* 92). Such (undoubtedly drunken) anti-working-class rhetoric reveals Daisy's own internal class struggle as well as her hypocrisy: she is unemployed and collects National Assistance. Similarly, we can also read Hilary Burde's obsessively repeated visits to the Sloane Square and Liverpool Street station bars in *A Word Child* as an example of his failed attempts at 'getting away from [his] working-class background'.[42] This harsh diagnosis of Hilary's class struggle that Christopher Cather voices – a character with whom Hilary later eats the idiosyncratically-phrased 'sausages and mashed and beer' in a pub near Gloucester Road – is comparable to that of John Wain's authorial judgement of Charles in *Hurry on Down*.[43] For Hilary, however, it is his familiarity with such spaces, not his attempt to get away from them, that seems partly indicative of

his inability to escape his class.[44] In each of these novels, Murdoch examines, and diagnoses with marked social acuity, the prejudices surrounding the Welfare State and its connection to the British class system. She understood that the social immobility and poverty exacerbated by class could be brought to light through the literary lens of the pub.

Where working-class men often found a home in the quintessential English pub, the same cannot be said of women, working class or otherwise. Up to the late twentieth century, women's freedom to enter pubs remained in question.[45] For the majority of the twentieth century, when women did enter a pub, an escort was often expected, they rarely bought their own drinks, and they were sometimes segregated from men. Indeed, it was only in 1982 that a law was passed making it illegal to refuse women entry into a pub. Murdoch brings this social realism into her depiction of pubs. As mentioned earlier, Marian is affronted when she cannot enter the pub in Blackport. The reader of *The Unicorn* is invited to interpret this sexist rule as an illustration of the backward nature of this rural Irish village. Murdoch explores similar attitudes in 'Something Special', her only published short story. Yvonne Geary, the young, fun-loving main character of the story, wishes to explore Kimball's new saloon lounge as well as the older, and considerably less reputable, pub. 'I don't like your going to those low places', her mother states. 'It's a relief they have those saloon lounges in the pubs nowadays', she continues, 'where you can get away from the smell of porter and a lady can sit there without being taken for something else'.[46] This warning is validated later in the story when Yvonne witnesses the outbreak of a brawl in the basement pub.[47] Yvonne soon finds herself in the centre of a fight when she is given a carnation by a drunken poet, stolen from the hair of one of the regular women, Patsy, which is quickly 'snatched' back by 'the woman's escort'.[48] The fight reveals that the clientele of this lower-class establishment – where the 'floor was slimy' and the 'atmosphere was thick' – are 'jagged and harsh'.[49] The sexism on display within this drinking environment, moreover, is not a unique event in Murdoch's fiction. In *Henry and Cato* Stephanie Whitehouse recounts how 'there were only one or two men I met in pubs, but they were horrible and just wanted sex'.[50] Midge McCaskerville's dislike of pubs in *The Good Apprentice* (1985) presents an unspoken awareness of these issues: 'You know I hate pubs', she says to Harry Cuno, 'I don't want to be stared at any more'.[51] These novels reveal how prejudices, toxic masculinity and misogyny can all flourish within the traditionally male-dominated space of the pub. We should be careful to remember, however, that many of Murdoch's women – Dora, Marian, Paula, Morgan, and many more besides – go to pubs despite their associations with sexism and violence, and these often-solitary actions arguably represent an aspect of Murdoch's under-discussed feminism.

Drinking, gossip, gambling and other pub-going pastimes are undoubtedly representative of behaviours that contradict some people's ethics and/or belief systems. Some of these activities appear in *The Nice and the Good*, when George Droysen is sent to Fleet Street 'to the old pubs!' to 'track down' who leaked the story of Radeechy's faked suicide to the press, and in *Jackson's Dilemma*, where the local 'inhabitants of the village' make various 'bets' at their pub, the Sea Kings.[52] A more in-depth exploration of such activities, however, appears in *The Philosopher's Pupil* where the narrator highlights numerous hypocrisies found in the town of Ennistone, a town with 'a strong and long-standing puritan and non-conformist tradition'.[53] Despite the town having a 'strong social conscience' and containing many '"responsible citizens"', gossip is a frequent occurrence (*PP* 23). A greater source of irony is the town's social centre: a Roman spa complex, once said to have been the site of 'a cult of Venus' (*PP* 25). Although the Roman Baths are often worshipped by many as 'a temple of hedonism', there are strict injunctions against the sale and/or consumption of alcohol (*PP* 30). A later discussion in the novel begins to offer support for this statement. The narrator explains that

> centuries of non-conformism has left Ennistone rather short of pubs. [...] Ennistone is not a town for an easy drink, and a surprisingly large number of Ennistonians have never entered a pub in their lives. The resistance to serving alcohol at the Institute remains firm, though this may change in time with the altered *mores* of the younger generation. (*PP* 368–9)

These two statements, however, bookmark an almost-one-page-long explanation of the town's pubs, implicating the narrator in the same kind of hypocrisies as his fellow townspeople. The irony of the older inhabitants' apparent dislike of alcohol, as Murdoch reveals, is undermined by the large and elaborately described number of pubs, including the Albert Tavern, the Ferret, the Green Man, the Little Wild Rose, the Porpoise, the Running Dog, the Rat Man, the Silent Woman and the Three Blind Mice.[54] It is in these pubs that the news of William Eastcote's death is first passed around the townspeople. An individual beloved by his fellow townspeople, known affectionately as Bill the Lizard, Eastcote's funeral unites the town and concludes with people flocking to the Green Man, as well as other 'public houses', to celebrate his life and to gossip about his will (*PP* 473). The Green Man, it is worth pointing out, is among the more progressive of these pubs, having 'abolish[ed] the old distinctions between public bar, saloon and snug' (*PP* 369).

For many of the townspeople, a puritanical dislike of alcohol would appear to preclude an enjoyment of pubs, yet they nevertheless clearly rely on them for recreational activities and for sharing the news of the day. Such a love-hate

relationship of pubs and drinking is reflected in the most ambiguous character of *The Philosopher's Pupil*. George McCaffrey, we are told, was 'not a frequenter of bars' (*PP* 78), and yet he came across a scene of pub-violence that 'fascinated' him: 'George had once witnessed a brawl in a pub in London. A thug had attacked a man and knocked him down [... and later began] kicking the head of his victim [...]. No one intervened. Everyone stood spellbound.' (*PP* 219) The pub can, as Earnshaw rightly claims, be a 'frightening' place.[55] Yet in *The Philosopher's Pupil* there is an inherent irony in this scene. Transfixed by this violence, the non-pub-going George is more like his fellow townspeople than they may be prepared to admit. Like him, they are transfixed by George's immoral behaviour and seem to gain vicarious pleasure from being able constantly to gossip about his latest violent actions. In this novel, then, Murdoch scrutinises the cliquey and morally suspect behaviour of local communities that is enabled by, or occurs within, communal spaces like pubs, or indeed spas.

While pubs may provide an overlooked and disquieting home for Ennistone's hypocritical gossipy behaviour, they nevertheless remain for many characters here, and throughout Murdoch's fiction, central to social interaction. Indeed, the 'local' frequented by many of Murdoch's characters does not always retain such problematic associations or clientele; it can also be home to communities capable of extending a welcome or a friendly warning.[56] The novels within Murdoch's oeuvre that contain the best vignettes of the rural pub are *The Sea, The Sea* and *The Message to the Planet*. In the former, Charles Arrowby's newly-discovered local pub in Narrowdean – the closest village to Shruff End, the new home to which he has moved from London – is the Black Lion, and Murdoch's inclusion of it within the novel reminds us of Charles's egotistical superiority to the townspeople as well as the potential for the townspeople themselves to be gossipy, cliquey and menacing. 'The bar' at the Black Lion, Charles informs the reader, 'falls silent when I enter and bursts into raucous chatter when I leave, but I propose to make a habit of coming nonetheless. The mild hostility of the villagers does not worry me' (*TSTS* 24). As the novel goes on, this hostility becomes less mild: 'silent dull hostility' turns to 'inquisitive dangerous hostility' (*TSTS* 67, 439). The exclusionary behaviour of the townspeople, Charles informs us, is encouraged by the landlord, Freddie Arkwright, 'a sort of Victorian cad', who 'leads the bar in the game of embarrassing me' (*TSTS* 30–31). This imagined and/or real hostility means that Charles persists in his arrogant belief that he understands the landscape and the sea better than its locals; they 'resent the fact that I go swimming in a sea whose killer propensities they are so proud of' (*TSTS* 66). For the familiar reader of this novel, Charles's arrogance – an arrogance that carries an inherent classism – is painfully disproven when Titus drowns. Narrowdean's 'yokels', as Charles had once referred to them, had been right all along: 'That sea's a killer,' says the landlord's brother, 'I told you, didn't I, didn't I?' (*TSTS* 76, 404).

Unlike *The Sea, The Sea*, the villagers and their local pubs in *The Message to the Planet* offer a great deal of warmth and hospitality – though this is a difference, we should be careful to remember, that probably has more to do with the visitors than the local inhabitants. The Black Lion in *The Message to the Planet* – an establishment that shares the name of Charles Arrowby's 'local' – is a quintessential countryside pub within short walking distance from Bellmain, the mental institute-cum-residential care home where Marcus Vallar lives. There are other local pubs nearby, including the (more expensive) White Lion, the (cheaper) Hedgehog, and the Lion and the Unicorn (a proto-gastropub, albeit in the next village), but the Black Lion – along with its landlord and landlady, Mr and Mrs Toller – offers the warmest welcome to its visitors. The pub itself, we are told, 'was as pleasant inside as it was outside, the oak beams were genuine, the bar was full of "snugs" and alcoves and ancient country furniture' (*MP* 206). Franca Clearwater and Maisie Tether later enjoy a secluded drink at the bar, which is 'rather dark, resembling a cave honeycombed with other caves', and 'whose small original windows had not been tampered with' (*MP* 266). As well as the bar, there is also a restaurant or 'small dining room [that] looked out on the garden and the river' and a residents' lounge for visitors occupying one of its three rooms (*MP* 206, 459). The pub's setting on the river Fern is idyllic: the garden is encircled by the Fern, itself later crossed by a bridge leading into the village. The characters enjoy a great deal of food and drink in these pubs, each of which provides a relaxing counterpoint for both characters and readers to the increasingly bizarre and fraught dramas that develop at Benbow.

The Message to the Planet's Black Lion clearly illustrates Murdoch's love of idyllic rural pubs. But its value lies in more than just the provision of a welcoming communal space. Indeed, for Murdoch, pubs are often charged with spiritual value: they are like secular churches. In *The Red and the Green* (1965) the stained-glass windows depicting 'the Meeting of the Waters' and 'the Snowy Breasted Pear' in Butt's Bar hint at an alignment of the sacred and the secular that Gerard, in *The Book and the Brotherhood*, explicitly spells out: pubs, for him, 'are universal places, like churches, hallowed meeting places of all making, and each one is different' (*BB* 239).[57] As already mentioned, Murdoch's alignment of the pub with the church occurs as early as *Under the Net*, and a similar treatment of them appears in another early novel. Dora Greenfield in *The Bell* is (perhaps) the first female character to share Murdoch's own love of city life. Before she has even arrived at Imber, she is reminiscing about 'far away London, and the friendly dirt and noise of the King's Road on a summer evening, when the doors of pubs stand wide to the pavement' (*TB* 21). Dora clearly associates visits to the pub with convivial city life: not long after visiting the local pubs, the White Lion and the Volunteer, she 'misse[s] London' – the White Lion, after all, 'was a very long way' (*TB* 136). But she is 'transported with delight' when she discovers the local

pubs are open where she can relish the opportunity to sit 'dreaming in the dim light of the bars, enjoying that atmosphere of a quiet pub which was connected with her pleasanter memories of being in church' (*TB* 71). This closing reference subtly critiques the enclosed lay religious community of Imber: pubs can provide a secular space for private reflection, perhaps more comforting than the sacred space of the church. This is a conceit that recurs throughout Murdoch's oeuvre and builds in intensity in her later fiction.

Nuns and Soldiers and *The Book and the Brotherhood* draw the clearest parallels between the sacred church and the secular pub. Gulliver's experience in King's Cross Station, although not specifically a drinking place, follows a similar connection of city-pub-church to *The Bell*. On arrival, he notes how the station 'with its sombre yellow brick and its dimmed lights beneath its high arches was like a cathedral' (*BB* 429). Later he finds a seat and 'after sitting motionless for a time began to feel dazed, almost sleepy. He thought, yes, this place is like a church, a place of meditation, or perhaps it's like a Greek orthodox church where you can walk about too and light candles. I wonder when the bar opens?' (*BB* 430) This comic stream of consciousness illustrates the close alignment of city, church and pub within Gull's thoughts: all of these places are capable of affording an anonymous place for reflection in an open communal space. A more overt illustration of this connection appears in *Nuns and Soldiers*, not within the free indirect discourse of a character as it does above, but within a more ambiguous narrative voice. The scene is painted as follows:

> Tim Reede and his girl Daisy Barrett were sitting drinking in the Prince of Denmark. [...] There was a big mahogany bar with a superstructure or screen composed of little pivoting panels of Victorian engraved glass which looked like the east end of a Greek orthodox church. There was indeed an ecclesiastical atmosphere. The place was dimly lit and smoky and the customers talked in low voices. Little cubicles, like confessionals, lined one wall. Tim and Daisy were seated in one of these. There was no juke box. (*NS* 72–3)

Murdoch presents this scene through an omniscient third-person narrator, but the opinions of this speaker are, like those of Tim and Daisy, somewhat complicated and suspect. Why is Daisy qualified as Tim's 'girl'? Who makes the same connection to 'a Greek orthodox church' that we will later read in *The Book and the Brotherhood*? The final statement is also somewhat cryptic: is the lack of 'juke box' to be praised, or does it represent a sarcastic criticism that we are to read as being endorsed by Tim and/or Daisy, or indeed Murdoch herself? These ambiguities arguably fuel our enjoyment of the novel. What remains unequivocal, however, is the sacred imagery and language used to describe the

Prince of Denmark: 'There was indeed an ecclesiastical atmosphere'. Tim himself shares an awareness of the pub's ability to combine the sacred and secular. The reader is told that

> When he tired of painting he went to the pub. [...] He drew people, figures in pubs or on streets, whom he thought of as 'spectators at a crucifixion'. A man drinking beer watching a crucifixion, a man selling newspapers watching a crucifixion, a man on a passing bus watching a crucifixion. The crucifixion scene itself, however, never materialized. (*NS* 83)

This search for the sacred, for a meaningful 'dream [that] does not cease to haunt us' which Murdoch explores in her philosophy, is thus partly encapsulated in the environment of the pub.[58]

The pub that appears in Murdoch's penultimate novel, *The Green Knight* (1993), merges the modernism feared by characters like Bradley in *The Black Prince* with the same sacredness that so many of her other characters find within pubs. Bellamy goes to the Castle with Peter Mir, a 'quiet and almost empty' pub with a 'well-lighted little bar', 'a few tables in the central space' and a collection of 'little shallow alcoves, saucer-like depressions, [...] set in a neat semi-circle', each in different colours.[59] On his first night-time visit, Bellamy finds the space 'so bright and clean and empty [that] it's like science fiction, it's like in a spaceship', but later, in the daylight, the pub becomes 'less stark and metallic, less positively weightless and spherical' (*GK* 170, 223). On this later visit, while sitting in a green alcove, Bellamy makes a familiar comparison:

> Perhaps it [the pub] was like a little theatre, or a tiny chapel, where the bar took the place of the stage, or the chancel, and the landlord [...] that of the actor or the priest, as he stood there with his arms stretched out and his large hands gripping the counter, gazing with benign inquisitive satisfaction upon his clientele (or spectators or sinners). [...] A few customers were occupying the other alcoves and talking in low tones, thus adding to the ecclesiastical atmosphere. (*GK* 224)

The imagery and symbolism here move from the purely sacred into the more secular and theatrical. Gone is the twice-repeated comparison to a Greek Orthodox church in favour of a theatre analogy. In this more secular but no less spiritual pub, the landlord presides benignly over the space and its clientele with its still-palpable 'ecclesiastical atmosphere'. Murdoch's altered analogy, moreover, reminds us of the performative aspects of both sacred and profane

communal spaces. These are sites where characters or clientele can come to see a performance (intended or otherwise), to witness (perhaps unwanted) scenes of morally questionable behaviour, to engage in private reflection, or simply to take part in a cultural or spiritual ritual. One of Murdoch's central concerns as a moral philosopher was how the loss, or absence, of such rituals could starve the imagination: 'when we say that "religion is disappearing" part of that disappearance is both the occurrence of certain experiences, and also of our tendency to *notice* them and, instinctively or reflectively, to lend them moral or religious meaning'.[60] By frequently aligning pub with church, Murdoch offers another space for people to engage in such ritualistic experiences; by creating analogies where the client approaches the pub as a customer-cum-theatregoer-cum-worshipper, she reminds us that the rituals traditionally associated with religion can thrive in new places and in modern contexts.

Murdoch's engagement with London's queer spaces, particularly drinking places, represents an example of how her fiction can speak to a modern audience. Contemporary readers can still journey to some of the drinking places described in novels. The Pillars of Hercules, for example, has not always looked the same as it did when Murdoch herself visited it and wrote about it: until quite recently, the early-twentieth-century mock-medieval structure was juxtaposed by a bubblegum-blue entrance.[61] Some of Murdoch's characters would undoubtedly appreciate its return to a more traditional décor and would have been affronted by such modernisation. When Bradley visits the pub near Tottenham Court Road with Rachel in *The Black Prince* he notes with disdain that it was

> a featureless modern place, ruined by the brewers, all made of light plastic (pubs should be dark holes), but with the sun shining in and the street door open it had a sort of southern charm. We visited the bar and then sat at a plastic table which was already wet with beer.[62]

Perhaps Bradley's disdain here is charged with Murdoch's voice as well. Yet I favour the view that she would have appreciated that tastes can change, that old rituals can find homes in new spaces and, in so doing, bring with them a new group of followers. The Pillars of Hercules's modern make-over is an example of how such changes can attract new customers or speak to a different clientele. Indeed, there are characters in Murdoch's novels that specifically search out such comparatively new establishments. In *Nuns and Soldiers* we are told that Tim 'went to pubs, new pubs, and made some casual acquaintances (no girls). He went to the White Hart at Barnes and the London Apprentice at Isleworth and the Orange Tree at Richmond' (*NS* 411). We might also imagine Stephanie Whitehouse at the end of *Henry and Cato* enjoying such places: she longs for the 'London life [...] of shops and pubs and adventures'; she pictures herself 'sitting in

bars and night clubs, ordering the most expensive drinks, a solitary well-dressed mysterious woman'.[63] Randall, in *An Unofficial Rose*, lives out this dream when he wanders through affluent Jermyn Street in Piccadilly: 'He entered a pub, smiling uncontrollably, and absorbed two double whiskies into his nebulous floating being with as little consciousness of what was going on as an amoeba swallowing its prey'.[64] While the pub's appearance has a part to play in its appeal, it is more often than not the atmosphere that draws in customers – these places are open and welcoming, and they allow characters to live out dreams, to escape their current situation, and even to change or learn new behaviours. We see this occur in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, when pub-hater Julius King tries to walk away from pub-lover Morgan Browne, but the pub on 'the corner of Drayton Gardens [...] with golden windows and a friendly hubbub coming from within' draws them inexorably inside (*FHD* 92–93).

Murdoch's fictional pubs serve a wide range of purposes and speak to readers through a broad range of analogies, images and symbols. The pub is, for many characters, a homely place; it also helps illustrate the vibrancy of the city, with the call of its bustling convivial atmosphere. Murdoch's pubs and drinking places reinforce the socio-political and moral realism of her fiction by highlighting their inherent links to the working class or to sexism, or their importance to people within the LGBTQIA+ community. For the latter, especially, drinking places can provide a safe and judgement-free space within which to explore different sexual identities. The communal value of these spaces is similarly revealed in Murdoch's fiction, where the 'local' often provides an invaluable welcoming environment to visitors. The forms of conviviality and freedom, both social and sexual, on display within these drinking places, moreover, offer a secular alternative to churches, allowing individuals to engage in ritualistic experiences outside a consecrated sacred space. These positive aspects of pub-going life, however, do not downplay the pub's dangers. Interestingly, in *The Italian Girl* (1964) – one of only two novels that does not contain pubs, the other being *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956) – Murdoch engages with alcohol addiction, a problem more often aligned with pubs. Edmund Narraway confides in the reader that 'Drunkenness disgusts me' and, thinking of his brother, he recalls how 'Otto, at best an uncontrolled and sometimes a violent man, would make a horrible drunkard'.[65] Sexism and misogyny, segregation and exclusion, cruelty and violence, as we see in Murdoch's fiction, is often fuelled by alcohol and can find an all-too-easy home in the pub. True to the ambiguity Earnshaw finds in Dickens, Murdoch's drinking places can be both pleasant and dangerous, comforting and sinister. By aligning such a broad range of experiences with these spaces, Murdoch's pubs offer an illustration of what she lauded as one of literature's greatest values: a cathedral-like space, 'a great hall of reflection where we can all meet and where everything under the sun can be examined'.[66]

1 *The Green Knight*, *Henry and Cato* and *Bruno's Dream* contains pubs – including The Raven, the *Horse and Groom* and The Castle – that adopt a different presentation from the rest of Murdoch's novels. In the interest of ensuring consistency throughout this essay, I have made all pub-names follow the same format, without an upper-case definite article or italics. The capitalisation of bar/Bar is as it appears in each novel.

2 I will use the terms pub and drinking places throughout this essay; there are, of course, times when Murdoch's fiction focuses less on the pub *per se* and more on drinking places where alcohol can be bought and consumed.

3 Iris Murdoch, *The Sandcastle* (1957) (London: Vintage, 2003), p.59. The description of Marsington in *The Sandcastle* appears in the context of Bill Mor's reflection on Tim Burke, a man who he prefers to see 'relaxed in a pub', where he would often 'produce and place' knickknacks 'in the hand[s] of his interlocutor[s]' pp.56, 62.

4 Steven Earnshaw, *The Pub in Literature: England's altered state* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.9. Earnshaw lists 45 pubs, followed by an ellipsis. The list I offered at the beginning contains 68 pubs and drinking places visited or noted by characters in Murdoch's fiction; the list could, of course, extend if including places like hotels or bars, or if one were able to include the number of unnamed establishments where characters consume alcohol.

5 Earnshaw, *The Pub in Literature*, pp.196–97.

6 Earnshaw, p.204.

7 Earnshaw, p.45.

8 Earnshaw, p.194.

9 Earnshaw, p.210.

10 More stringent criticisms of Murdoch's omission from *The Pub in Literature* could, perhaps, be levelled at Earnshaw, but these would require a more delicate focus than is available in this piece.

11 Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), p.585.

12 Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life*, p.537.

13 Cheryl Bove and Anne Rowe, *Sacred Space, Beloved City: Iris Murdoch's London* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), p.1.

14 Iris Murdoch, *Under the Net* (1954) (London: Vintage, 2002), pp.38, 26.

15 Iris Murdoch, *Nuns and Soldiers* (1980) (London: Vintage, 2001), p.483, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *NS*.

16 Iris Murdoch, *Bruno's Dream* (1969) (London: World Books, 1970), pp.9, 179, 259.

17 Murdoch, *Bruno's Dream*, pp.24–25.

18 Iris Murdoch, *The Time of the Angels* (1966) (London: Vintage, 2002), p.145.

19 Iris Murdoch, *The Sea, The Sea* (1978) (London: Penguin Books, 1980), p.18, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *TSTS.*

20 Iris Murdoch, *An Accidental Man* (1971) (London: Vintage, 2003), p.171.

21 Murdoch, *An Accidental Man*, p.73.

22 Iris Murdoch, *The Unicorn* (1963) (London: Vintage, 2000), p.9.

23 Murdoch, *The Unicorn,* p.44.

24 At the end of *The Unicorn*, Effingham Cooper also voices a more frivolous or mundane awareness of 'the familiar ordinary world' to which he is to return with 'the round of office and pub and dinner parties' (268–69).

25 Indeed, this was often used as a criticism of her novels, as though they were replete only with privileged people based in Knightsbridge. In a comic and metafictional moment in *The Black Prince*, Murdoch gives to Julian Baffin a parody of this criticism: Julian's father, a famous and prolific novelist, is said to live 'in a sort of rosy haze with Jesus and Mary and Buddha and Shiva and the Fisher King all chasing round and round dressed up as people in Chelsea'. This loose caricature of Murdoch's fiction is later followed by Bradley Pearson's criticism of him as 'always trying, as it were, to take over the world by emptying himself over it like scented bath water.' Iris Murdoch, *The Black Prince* (1973) (London: Vintage, 2006), pp.137, 186–7.

26 Iris Murdoch, *An Unofficial Rose* (1962) (London: Vintage, 2000), p.100.

27 Murdoch, *The Black Prince*, p.215.

28 Iris Murdoch, *The Message to the Planet* (1989) (London: Vintage, 2000), p.5, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *MP*.

29 The associations between Soho and the LGBTQIA+ community go back as far as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with notable revivals in the late nineteenth century, the early twentieth century and, finally, the 1980s. See 'A History of Soho's LGBTQ+ Bars', <https://londonist.com/london/history/lgbt-soho-history> [accessed 1/7/22]. This website presents extracts from Alim Kheraj's *Queer London: A Guide to the City's LGBTQ+ Past and Present* (London: ACC Art Books, 2021).

30 For a discussion, and portrayal of, the opinions that informed the Wolfenden Report, see Brian Lewis, *Wolfenden's Witnesses: Homosexuality in Postwar Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

31 Iris Murdoch, *The Bell* (1958) (London: Vintage, 2004), p.117, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *TB*.

32 Both Peter J. Conradi and David Fine have praised the homosexual relationship within *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. See, for example, Peter J. Conradi, *Family Business* (Wales: Seren, 2019), p.80; Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life*, p.596; David Fine, '"What a fuss about probably nothing": Iris Murdoch's Ordinary Queerness', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 51:2 (Fall 2018): 115–35.

33 Iris Murdoch, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970); (London: Vintage, 2001), pp.28–9, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *FHD*.

34 Iris Murdoch, *The Book and the Brotherhood* (1987); (London: Vintage, 2003), p.137, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *BB.*

35 The subject of these gay bars comes up more than once in *The Book and the Brotherhood*: 'Lily talked a bit about the plausible men, Gull about the gay bars'; 'Only his pure brown eyes (like a pond of obscure but fragrant water, someone in a gay bar once told him) retained a childish boyish expression of uncertainty and fear' (pp.141, 264).

36 Murdoch's fiction – and, indeed, Iris Murdoch herself – offers a prescient awareness of non-conforming sexual identities and gender fluidity. Characters like Adam MacCaffrey in *The Philosopher's Pupil*, for example, understand their gender in more fluid terms. For a recent discussion of these aspects of Murdoch's fiction, see Anne Rowe, *Iris Murdoch* (Liverpool: University Press, 2019), 113.

37 Peter J. Conradi, *Family Business* (Wales: Seren, 2019), p.80.

38 Earnshaw, p.195.

39 Earnshaw, p.261.

40 See Earnshaw, p.5.

41 Murdoch, *An Accidental Man,* pp.214, 258.

42 Iris Murdoch, *A Word Child* (1975); (London: Vintage, 2002), p.230.

43 Murdoch, *A Word Child,* p.322.

44 Of course, we could in a sense also read this from a different angle and suggest that Hilary's repeated return to the tube-station bars, which are themselves part of a city on the move and therefore socially progressive, represents a continued attempt to enact the kind of social mobility he craves. His solipsism within these places then represents his failed attempt to connect with fellow social climbers. Instead, he spends time chasing lovers whose connection to the upper echelons of society are ultimately, and tragically, dead-ended.

45 A 1942 examination of 'Adolescents in public houses' in *A Monthly Bulletin* aimed at 'improv[ing] public houses' and 'maintain[ing] an adequate licensing law' reveals that women were often unwelcome: 'the first stages of the woman's, and particularly of the young woman's, invasion of the local inn was apt to be bitterly resented by its older male frequenters'; the 'elders' of these establishments would frequently 'retreat' behind 'the warning announcement: "NO LADIES SERVED IN THIS ROOM"'. Unknown author, 'Adolescents in public houses', *A Monthy Bulletin*, August 1942, pp.1–24, p.3.

46 Iris Murdoch, 'Something Special' (1957); (London: Vintage, 2001), p.12.

47 Speaking from a not-unrelated American perspective, Sascha Cohen explains how, for decades, 'bars excluded single women, claiming the crowds were too "rough" and "boisterous" and citing vague fears of "fallen girls".' Sascha Cohen, 'No Unescorted Ladies Will Be Served', *Jstor Daily*, 20 March 2019 <https://daily.jstor.org/no-unescorted-ladies-will-be-served/> [accessed 15/7/22].

48 Murdoch, 'Something Special', p.33.

49 Murdoch, 'Something Special', p.26, 29.

50 Iris Murdoch, *Henry and Cato* (1976) (London: Vintage, 2002), p.262.

51 Iris Murdoch, *The Good Apprentice* (1985); (London: Vintage, 2000), p.294.

52 Iris Murdoch, *The Nice and the Good* (1968) (London: Vintage, 2000), p.36; Iris Murdoch, *Jackson's Dilemma* (1994) (London: Penguin Books, 1997), p.5.

53 Iris Murdoch, *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983) (London: Vintage, 2000), p.24, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *PP*.

54 Although The Little Wild Rose, we are told, is 'beyond the Tweed Mill [so] hardly counts as being in Ennistone' (p.369).

55 Earnshaw, *The Pub in Literature*, p.1

56 Interestingly, the *Monthly Bulletin* also suggests that 'the local' was still a new burgeoning term in the 1940s: 'The very name of "the local", which has

arisen within the period of women's invasion of it, points to a change in the tradition' of the public house. In the past, '"the pub" was the gossip-shop for the male; "the local" is the gossip-shop for both sexes, plus darts and other diversions'. Unknown author, 'Adolescents in public houses', p.3.

57 Iris Murdoch, *The Red and the Green* (1965) (London: Vintage, 2017), p.146.

58 Iris Murdoch, 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts', *EM*, p.365.

59 Iris Murdoch, *The Green Knight* (1993) (London: Penguin Books, 1994), pp.170, 224, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *GK*.

60 Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p.307.

61 The Pillars of Hercules was built in 1910 but a pub is known to have existed in this spot from around 1733. See <https://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20170601082335/http://londonist.com/pubs/the-pillar-of-hercules> [accessed 20/6/22].

62 Murdoch, *The Black Prince*, p.215.

63 Murdoch, *Henry and Cato*, pp.316, 317.

64 Murdoch, *An Unofficial Rose*, p.169.

65 Iris Murdoch, *The Italian Girl* (1964) (London: Vintage, 2000), p.26.

66 Iris Murdoch, *The Fire and the Sun*, *EM*, p.461.

‘Gone to the Pub’: Iris Murdoch’s Beer Mats

Anne Rowe

‘Pubs and dogs have to be pretty bad not to be lovable.’[1]

‘One day we’ll meet in the pub of pubs.’[2]

When Jake Donaghue, in *Under The Net* (1954), seeks out his old friend, Hugo Belfounder, he tries Hugo’s flat, but to no avail. However Hugo has left a note pinned to the door: ‘It read simply: *Gone to the pub*’.[3] Just such a note could well have been pinned to any one of Iris Murdoch’s many front doors. She adored pubs and frequented them at every opportunity – from the days when, against the rules, she sneaked inside pubs as a student at Oxford, to the war years in London when she found camaraderie there, and then to later years when she was living again in Oxford, teaching and meeting colleagues to talk philosophy. Throughout her married life she relished visiting pubs with her husband and close friends, but most of all, perhaps, she loved the emotional frisson of trysts with lovers in dark secluded corners where emotions ruled and intimacies were exchanged. At other times, sitting quietly alone with a clear view of a handsome mahogany bar, she relished the dim atmospheric light and savoured the exotic smell of smoke mixed with beer.

Pubs, of course, are intrinsic to the plots of many of her novels in myriad ways. One particularly pertinent mention comes in *The Book and The Brotherhood* (1987), when two friends of many decades, Gerard Hernshaw and Jenkin Riderhood, break a country walk for a pint of beer in the Pike. In response to Gerard’s exasperated, ‘I can’t understand your passion for pubs’, Jenkin replies, ‘[t]hey are like universal places, like churches, hallowed meeting places of all mankind, and each one is different’.[4] Unbeknown to either man, along with his pint Jenkin has been served his last rites: he will soon be killed by an accidental bullet through the head. Time and again Murdoch invites her

readers to pause and savour not only the social, emotional and psychological significance of pubs to those who frequent them, but also their sanctity and splendour. Treat the humble public house with love and respect, she seems to say, it can prove a blessing or a damnation. Going to the pub changes lives; it certainly changed hers.

From the moment Murdoch consumed her first alcoholic drink in 1938 at the Royal Oak on the Woodstock Road in Oxford, 'surrounded by the halo of the purest and most intense joy', she sensed pubs' potential for drama.[5] She was just nineteen and the drink was a gin and lime, ordered on her behalf because she did not know the names of any alcoholic drinks herself. Freshly arrived at Somerville College, she was not officially allowed to enter a pub at all, let alone drink in one, so the fear of being 'progged' by vigilant proctors may have contributed to the frisson that would lend itself to every establishment she entered thereafter. She could never resist the opportunity to imbue the humble pub with something magical or spiritual. In her final year at Somerville on tour with the Magpie Players, a travelling student acting troupe, she performed in many Oxfordshire pubs and once boarded at the Blade Bone in Bucklebury. On being woken by roosters and crows, enchanted, she played the recorder to them.

Darker times, of course, were to follow, and after being conscripted to the Civil Service to aid the war effort on leaving Oxford in 1942, she lived 'desk-bound and pub-bound' in a flat in Seaforth Place, a tiny alley off Buckingham Gate, just a few hundred yards from Buckingham Palace. The local pubs offered both a blessed relief from tedious administrative work and the thrill of socialising with the London literati. With fellow Somervillian and flat-mate, Philippa Bosanquet (later the renowned moral philosopher, Philippa Foot), the women relished the atmosphere of bohemian London pub-life, dropping in to the Gay Hussar, the Pillars of Hercules, the Swiss, the Wellington, the Wheatsheaf, the Black Horse or the Fitzroy. In the Gargoyle Club in Dean Street, Soho, Murdoch once danced with Dylan Thomas. She tired, however, of the louche behaviour of pub clientele, finding it difficult to present herself as 'neither a whore or a blue stocking'.

After her work with displaced persons with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Association in Austria, Murdoch spent a year studying philosophy at Cambridge. In 1948, she then returned to Oxford to teach philosophy at St Anne's College, where she stayed until 1963. Having been married to John Bayley since 1956, the three years between 1963 and 1967 were spent teaching philosophy to art students at the Royal College of Art in London, and, although her primary home would, from now on, remain at Oxford, it was London, the city which had fundamentally shaped her identity since childhood, that drew her most strongly. Until her death in 1999 she kept a home in both cities and seminal moments in the construction of her own sense of identity were played out in both locations, and not infrequently in their pubs.

During her teaching years at Oxford she habitually met 'happy and free spirits' and 'hard-drinking companions' at the Horse and Jockey on the Woodstock Road, while friends and lovers, including Wallace Robson, a fellow don to whom she was briefly engaged, also provided good company in the surrounding pubs. When tiring of Robson, she chose to chide him at the Mitre in the High Street for not 'reverencing people enough'. Later she would meet another lover, the anthropologist and poet Franz Steiner, in the Lamb and Flag in St Giles Street. On 31 October 1952, at the Eagle and Child (the Bird and Baby), also in St Giles Street, she and Steiner drank beer together in a cocoon of intimacy that was destined to become a treasured memory. Steiner, with whom she was deeply in love and later claimed she would have married, died suddenly of a heart attack a few weeks later. Soon after, on the evening of Christmas Day, and now back in London, Murdoch first drank with Steiner's friend, the Bulgarian polymath, Elias Canetti, in the North Star on the Finchley Road. They left together that night for his flat and thus began what was to be one of the most obsessive and definitive relationships of Murdoch's life. Something of a tyrant, Canetti once confessed to travelling to the Porcupine on Charing Cross Road in March 1953 to watch Iris with another lover, Arnaldo Momigliano.

Yet more than forty years of happy domestic life with John Bayley were to provide the emotional stability for the writing of her twenty-six novels. The pressures of Murdoch's rigorous work ethic intensified the pleasures of a secure, but 'open', marriage that involved the joyous frequenting of pubs in London and Oxford: from the 1960s until her death she was systematically organising her life between the family home in Steeple Aston and a London base. At home in Oxford she and her husband would retire to the pub for no other reason than to relax and try out John's experimental drinks (once a gin and peppermint); or to provide neutral ground for meaningful family occasions (she first met John's brother Michael at the Catherine Wheel in Windsor). Pubs were part of the fabric of the couple's domestic happiness.

In London pubs fulfilled a quite different purpose. Murdoch's kindness to her many friends, including her students, is legendary and she would often meet one from the RCA, David Morgan, in either the Dog and Duck in Soho or the Hoop and Toy near South Kensington tube station.[6] In one letter to Morgan she wrote, 'I know a bit about rough cider – there was a place in the Harrow Road I used to frequent for the cheapest drink in London. See you tomorrow at a very different establishment.'[7] That particular 'establishment' was the Hollywood in the Boltons, near Murdoch's Harcourt Terrace flat, which they frequently visited together during the two years she was Morgan's tutor. He remembers how she would give him money to go to the bar and order 'two schooners of dry sherry' and how, after their second drink, their conversations took on a 'rather false profundity':

> I remember thinking once that perfection for her consisted of sitting in a pub amid clouds of smoke, with a drink in her hand and a dog to look at under a nearby table and at the same time holding forth about Shakespeare. She was so in love with these last two that she became more and more ponderous and rapt. She often seemed not to be listening to what I was saying and I would catch her looking beyond me at the dog.[8]

It seems something of a paradox that such a deeply reserved and introspective woman so frequently coveted the congeniality of the pub. Having spent many hours in Murdoch's company there, deep in conversation among clouds of smoke and the chatter of other drinkers, Morgan remembers that she would never be completely lost in their conversation, that her eyes would constantly stray to the scene round her taking everything in. He recalls, 'if any of the drinking throng offered her a drink, as a gang of Australians did in an Earls Court pub, she would stammer a polite refusal and rebuff any attempts to break in on the séance for two. She loved being part of the crowd but also being cosily in an enclave within the crowd'. Pubs were 'her attempts to close the gap that was always there between her and the rest of us', suggests Morgan. Murdoch confessed in a letter to him, 'I am not a good communicator with the rest of the human race at the best of times', and he thinks that pubs were a way an essentially isolated woman could dive into company.[9] However, if pubs did indeed provide a means of closing the gap between her own sense of isolation and humanity, they also bore witness to many tortuous moments of self-reflection.

When in London Murdoch relished the 'urban incognito' of being able to haunt her favourite pubs, unrecognised and invisible. This complex desire for both experience and isolation manifested itself on many occasions when Murdoch would visit these well-frequented familiar pubs alone. Quietly and unobtrusively keeping her own company, out of a capacious handbag, she would produce a pen and a small red Silvine pocket notebook. Now, while sipping her cider or schooner of sherry, she became a covert watcher, noting down first impressions and the appearance and mannerisms of fellow drinkers as they sat relaxing, talking, perhaps arguing or silently ignoring each other. She would conjecture on psychological impulses for certain kinds of behaviour, and imagine background histories or dramatic repercussions for her fellow drinkers, all of which would be fodder for her current novel.

A selection of these notebooks, discovered in a forgotten cupboard at her Oxford home, has found its way into the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives, providing a unique glimpse of the writer at work: 'the girls have different hair'; 'Mouth glassy, sardonic, wrinkly'; 'Boring face; Wig-like dry brown hair; High cheek bones'; 'a middle-aged dropout'; 'A bearded man

enters with walking machine attached to his wrist'; 'She suddenly straightens her fingers in a spikey gestured horror'.[10] Later, these vignettes might be filtered through her imagination to inform dramatic scenes within her stories and the deep psychological realism that defines her characters. She once connected the experience of sitting quietly alone in a pub with her moral philosophy: 'Reality is connected with a certain small self-being which is really an aspect of unselfing. Sitting quietly in pubs, gardens etc.'[11]

'Still drunk', Murdoch once wrote in her journal, on arriving safely home from supper with friends in 1948.[12] The continuing centrality of pubs in Murdoch's day-to-day life is evidenced in her later journals which are awash with evidence of meetings there with various friends: '12.30 the Earls Court Tavern in Earls Court Road'; '1pm Chelsea Potter, Kings Road, Chelsea'; '12.50 Duke of Wellington Wardour Street'; '11.45 Fitzroy pub Charlotte Street'; 11.45 the Nellie Dean in Dean Street Soho'. She was even eager to know which pub had won the *Evening Standard* 'Pub of The Year' contest and she remembered going into a bar to drink beer and play Beatles songs on a juke box. In pubs she could express her strong political views that she was careful to exclude from her novels. In the 1960s, after a public talk about the future of the short story which had turned political, she afterwards met with a group of anarchists in the pub. And it was to the pub she would go to drown her sorrows. During the interval of her play of *A Severed Head*, disappointed, and thinking it seemed slow and dead, she left for the pub with the playwright Alan Vaughn Williams. At the end she returned there with him, now distraught.[13] A few drinks before and after social events, that she could sometimes find difficult, made them easier: reflecting on a dinner at Elizabeth Anscombe's she confesses that she 'got pretty drunk beforehand on champagne' and 'drank more afterwards'. We can only speculate what her close friend the writer and activist Brigid Brophy had written in a letter she sent to Murdoch describing their pub fantasy life. The women would regularly escape to Brighton to spend the weekend enjoying the sea air and the local taverns.

Murdoch's public death due to Alzheimer's in 1999 was painfully catalogued in Richard Eyre's film, *Iris*, in 2001. However moving and well intentioned, she would not have wished the plight of her declining years to be the defining image by which she was remembered. A more appropriate scenario in which to picture her would be a quiet, enclosed corner of a busy public house, its ecclesiastic barman pulling pints of bitter ale, while Murdoch, invisible but vigilant amongst the revellers, recluses and lovers, glass in hand, watched life being lived in all its peculiarity.

Iris Murdoch's Beer Mats

In the light of her passion for pubs it should have come as no surprise that when, in 2004, over one thousand books from Iris Murdoch's Oxford library

arrived at Kingston University Archives we found, nestling amongst volumes containing the wisdom of the world's most esteemed writers and thinkers, an old black net shopping bag containing eighty-four well-worn beer mats: 'Young's Ram Rod Bitter', 'Royal and Ancient Whisky', 'Bass Pale Ale', 'Mackeson Stout' all jostled for position, seemingly excited to be found. It seems that Murdoch's fondness for pubs compelled her to slip the odd memento into her capacious handbag then store it in the bag she kept in her study for the purpose. As no biographical information explains their presence, we can only conjecture how far the beer mats may be mementoes of happy times spent in the company of colleagues, friends or lovers, or merely serendipitous souvenirs of quiet reclusive moments away from the pressures of work.

As it was in this upstairs study that, in the mornings, Murdoch settled to write her novels with her Mont Blanc fountain pen, we might speculate also whether she treasured such ephemera to revive an ambience or jog a memory that served to conjure authentic inspiration for those crucial moments when her characters go to the pub with a purpose. Perhaps the proximity of the beer mats would help furnish an emotionally charged moment within her plot, or inspire it to be redrawn as part of the imaginative process through which she transformed life into art. Wit, comedy, anger and fear inform the many dramas that are played out in pubs as characters confront the emotional, psychological and philosophical dilemmas that are the hallmark of Murdoch's trade. In pubs they seduce, fall in love, quarrel, drown their sorrows, reflect, philosophise, make plans, contemplate their own mortality, tell ghost stories, get comically morose – and horribly drunk. All such lived experiences would evolve to inhabit the pages of her fiction, transformed through the brilliance of her imagination into the anonymity of her art. The ambience of pubs helps make Murdoch's novels compulsive reading.

At first glance her beer mat collection appears random, comprising an odd, disparate collection of mats advertising ales, ciders, bitters and special brews commonly served in pubs in the last half of the twentieth century. Yet even if those light fingers did reach out for no other reason than to add to a serendipitous collection, the mats are nonetheless emblematic of the geographic division that characterised Murdoch's life, some advertising Oxford breweries, others London breweries, while a smaller number advertise more rural brands, perhaps collected weekending in the country with friends: some indeed advertise Cornish, Dorsetshire and Gloucestershire beers but also, inexplicably, a few advertise patriotic Welsh bitters ('triple crown' and 'Y cwrw chwerw cymraeg'). In any event serendipity cannot entirely account for the curiosity of this collection; its compartmentalised nature suggests a kind of strategy and being fond of riddles herself, it is possible that she relished the prospect of creating one of her own.

Fifteen beer mats advertise various brands of German lager and eight advertise 'Ram Rod Strong Bottled Bitter by Youngs,' suggesting they may be the fruits of frequent visits to the same pub. Another five advertise Guinness, and five Morells Brewery in Oxford. Yet oddly, only two advertise the equally popular brands of Mackeson and Manns, and we are left to wonder just why there are so many duplicates and why only two promote Jim Beam Bourbon and only three promote Royal and Ancient Whisky, beloved of so many characters and intrinsic to many plots. (David Morgan remembers that she never herself ordered whisky in a pub, though he thinks she handed it out at parties in her London flat.)[14] Most of the remaining beer mats advertise a range of specific alcoholic drinks. As a lover of all kinds of visual art Murdoch would have been drawn to the aesthetics of an unusually colourful or artistically pleasing beer mat, especially one that provided a quirky vignette: two eye-catching Babycham mats feature, one bearing information on how Greek women trained their eyebrows, another on how Egyptian women were the first to wear heavy makeup. Several amusing mottos would have appealed to her keen sense of humour: Foster's gives instructions on how to order their draught beer at the bar: 'G'day, a pint of the golden throat, charmer sport' while John Young's London lager entertains with cockney rhyming slang:

> John Young's Forsyte Saga is now on sale in this rub-dub-dub.
> So get your north and south round a pint.
> Its's so Robin Hood you won't Adam and Eve it.

Paine's Traditional Ale (drank at the New Sun Inn, Kimbolton) would have titillated Murdoch's interest in the supernatural with the story of how the ghost of Catherine of Aragon was said to roam the corridors of Kimbolton Castle. Other breweries, such as Yorkshire bitter and John Courage, use beer mats to provide a potted history of their companies, always useful to enrich the detail Murdoch assiduously accumulated to furnish her plots. Historical events are commemorated on a Gaynor's cider mat that advertises the Moscow Olympics in 1980. Only three beer mats advertise cigarette brands (Lambert and Butler, Bristol and Embassy) all of which would have been in circulation in the years before smoking was banned inside public places on 1 July 2007. Some provide stern warnings to drinkers: 'Think Before You Drink Before You Drive' and 'Over 80 in the breath and you're on a loser' and these would have been purloined soon after drink-driving laws were introduced on 1 January 1966. Only one beer mat does not advertise alcohol but celebrates Schweppes Tonic Water (a traditional accompaniment to gin or vodka which there is no known record of Murdoch ever drinking – a half pint of cider, a schooner of sherry, or a glass of cheap red wine were more to her taste).

Ultimately, the collection remains an enigma. We can never be sure what impulse motivated that momentary decision to secrete a humble beer mat into a pocket or handbag. Nonetheless, the oddity of this collection may reveal something distinctive about the kind of woman, and the kind of writer, Iris Murdoch was, for noticing the unique character of a pedestrian beer mat and reaching out a hand to preserve it was one of the ways she was acutely conscious of *being* in the world. Now collectors' items, the beer mats stand as emblems of the transience of time, and of the common humanity that informs Murdoch's fiction. They reside in the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives as a tantalising curiosity, emerging to delight and surprise visitors, inspire students' art projects, or lend an unexpected intrigue to the serious intellectual persona presented to the world at academic conferences and exhibitions.

1 Iris Murdoch, 24 February 1977, Journal 12, KUAS202/1/12, Iris Murdoch Collections, Kingston University Archives.
2 Iris Murdoch, letter to Brigid Brophy, undated (c.1970s) KUAS142/3/36, Iris Murdoch Collections, Kingston University Archives.
3 Iris Murdoch, *Under the Net* (1954); (London: Chatto & Windus, 1982), 104.
4 Iris Murdoch, *The Book and The Brotherhood* (1987); (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1988), 239.
5 Much of this biographical detail has been gathered from Peter J. Conradi's *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (London: HarperCollins, 2001).
6 See David Morgan, *With Love and Rage: A Friendship with Iris Murdoch* (Kingston: Kingston University Press, 2010), 11; David Morgan, email correspondence with Anne Rowe, 11 August 2021.
7 David Morgan, email correspondence with Anne Rowe, 11 August 2021.
8 David Morgan, email correspondence with Anne Rowe, 8 August 2021.
9 David Morgan, email correspondence with Anne Rowe, 12 August 2021.
10 Iris Murdoch, KUAS202/4/1, Iris Murdoch Collections, Kingston University Archives.
11 Iris Murdoch, 24 February 1977, Journal 12, KUAS202/1/12, Iris Murdoch Collections, Kingston University Archives.
12 Murdoch had been out to supper with Elizabeth and Ann Eliot at White's. Iris Murdoch, 12 November 1948, Journal 6, KUAS202/1/6, Iris Murdoch Collections, Kingston University Archives.
13 Despite Murdoch's distress, *A Severed Head* was in fact a 'triumphant, uproariously successful adaptation', which ran for 1,111 performances. Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), 460-61.
14 David Morgan, email correspondence with Anne Rowe, 8 August 2021.

Iris Murdoch's Beer Mats: The Ephemera Effect

Dayna Miller

Beer mats are ephemera. They are not meant for the long-term, and as long as their purpose is simply to protect surfaces from spillages and drinks from invading insects, it is easy to accept their fleeting existence. Once they become little gems of advertising with colourful, eye-catching designs, however, it seems such a shame just to throw them away after use. So you begin to save them. Then, as time moves on, they become more than aesthetic objects. They are mementos now – souvenirs and reminders of people, places and events, and as such all the more difficult to part with. Then comes the point at which these ephemeral items make their way into an archive. Disposing of them is now out of the question. They are primary sources – physical evidence of societies past, and an avenue by which to get acquainted with the person who thought these throwaway items were worth keeping in the first place.

Thus, Iris Murdoch's beer mats were a most welcome surprise. Murdoch had collected just over 80 of them and they appeared at Kingston University Archives with the books from her Oxford Library. The mats arrived in a net bag which had apparently hung on the back of the door to her study. Since acquiring the Oxford Library in 2004, the Iris Murdoch Collections have gone on to include items such as Murdoch's journals, poetry notebooks, unpublished writings and thousands of letters written to friends, lovers and associates over a 50-year period. In comparison to this wealth of material which has contributed significantly to Murdoch scholarship and revealed so much about Murdoch's life and works, a relatively small collection of beer mats may seem rather trivial – and yet they are sometimes just what an archive needs.

To put this into some context, an important aim of the Archive is to engage with its students, but as time passes there are few students who arrive with an existing knowledge of Murdoch and perhaps fewer who have read her novels. However, when they see these pieces of cardboard dotted among a display of Murdoch's Booker Prize winning edition of *The Sea, The Sea*, her Sartre notebook, the journals, the poetry, the letters – inevitably someone will ask, 'Why the beer

mats?' and so begins our introduction. While any introduction to Murdoch must of course include an overview of her literary and philosophical career, the beer mats offer an opportunity to humanise her. We can all imagine sitting in the pub sliding an attractive beer mat off the table and into our bag and being able to produce the evidence that Murdoch did just that makes her immediately more accessible to students and other audiences who are otherwise unfamiliar with Murdoch the novelist and philosopher.

Indeed, in some instances the beer mats have exceeded their role as visually appealing conversation starters and become the main focus of a project. In 2018–19, the Archive worked with graphic design students tasked with creating an original piece of work in response to something they had viewed in the Reading Room Of the many items on show from the Iris Murdoch Collections, two students, who have both gone on to professional graphic design practice, chose the beer mats as their inspiration. From this, Iris Murdoch Centenary Lager was created by the aptly named Suzy Brewer, complete with its own neon-orange branding. Emily Cary, meanwhile, designed a range of beer mats based on a 'good idea' from the makers of a certain Irish stout. Emily's beer mats featured quotes by Murdoch and original pub games aimed at encouraging people to be more sociable.

A few months after these commemorative events marking Murdoch's centenary, we headed into the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns and, while working from home and unable to be sociable, we decided to revive the Archive blog. During the months that followed, the blog covered all sorts of topics taken from various archive collections and, when pubs reopened for business, the beer mats provided the ideal subject matter. In addition to discussing some of the history of beer mats, the blog post was another way to highlight the Iris Murdoch Collections and, perhaps more importantly, to consider Murdoch the person and to appreciate her pub-going and beer-mat-pilfering habits at a time when so many of us needed some light relief and a reminder of normal things. It was also then that an entire website dedicated to beer mat enthusiasts was discovered and the term tegestology, that is the hobby of collecting beer mats, became known to the Archive.

Whether Murdoch considered herself a tegestologist is not known, but the presence of the beer mats, especially when put together with other items, indicates that Murdoch was a collector of things. In a letter to artist and friend Harry Weinberger she notes 'how one does love things' and the Iris Murdoch Collections are certainly testament to this.[1]

It might even be said that Murdoch was a bit of a hoarder – a quality often frowned upon in society at large but which can be fundamental to creating an archive collection. Statuettes representing figures from Hinduism, other eastern religions and those of unknown origin sit alongside replicas of medieval Christian icons. Animals carved in Inuit tradition from natural stone and minerals are

joined by actual stones, fossils and a sea anemone. Match boxes, trinket boxes, a puzzle cube, a paperweight, Roman oil lamps and an arrowhead are among the many other things that lived alongside the beer mats in Murdoch's study and which today occupy several boxes in the Archive store.

The items are intriguing in and of themselves and can be viewed quite apart from their connection with Murdoch. Those interested in ornamental craftsmanship, design and materials, in religious iconography, social history and marketing can all gain useful knowledge from the things Murdoch collected. The fact that she collected them, though, surely says something about Murdoch herself. Representing more than just a love of things, these items suggest she wanted to be surrounded by reminders of her travels, be inspired by other cultures, and feel the presence of the natural world. It is also possible to draw connections between Murdoch's things and Murdoch's writing and maybe to question whether these connections are deliberate or coincidental – Murdoch's statue of Parvati, for example, whose namesake appears in *Bruno's Dream*. Her collection of stones remind us of characters collecting and gifting stones in novels such as *The Message to the Planet* (1989) and *The Green Knight* (1993). And the beer mats recall the numerous pubs that feature in several of the novels. Her numerous meetings with people in pubs are also reflected throughout Murdoch's journals and letters.

Based on the mats' designs, and advertising campaigns they represent, we can surmise that Murdoch's tegestological tendencies peaked during the 1960–80s. The Iris Murdoch Collections in their entirety span a much longer period than this, however. In fact, most of Murdoch's 79 years are represented by photographs, documents, books or objects. At the Archive's recent twentieth anniversary event, an original and thought-provoking performance from students at-Kingston School of Art asked how we make sense of a life from the contents of an archive. Exploring those things left behind can be at once fascinating, exciting, confusing, strange and affecting and it is up to archives to preserve them physically and contextually so that researchers can access and interpret them. The Iris Murdoch Collections offer a combination of things personal and professional, complete and fragmentary but all of them, however frivolous they might seem, play a part in getting to know Murdoch. Of course, if she had never appropriated those beer mats from the pub we would be none the wiser and the Iris Murdoch Collections would still contribute to scholarship and attract enthusiasts, readers and researchers the world over. But that is the thing about ephemera such as beer mats – by their very nature we can live without them, but would we want to?

1 Letter from Iris Murdoch to Harry Weinberger, 14 Oct c. 1988/89, Iris Murdoch Collections [KUAS80/1/61]

Celebration, Consolation, and Distinction: Aspects of Champagne (and Some Other Double-edged Drinks) in Iris Murdoch's Novels

Elin Svenneby

Beer, wine and whisky are age-old drinks, but the tradition of drinking champagne is modern. The invention of the sparkling wine is credited to French Benedictine monks, and among them, Dom Pierre Pérignon (1638–1715) has become famous as the one who supposedly called out with joy, savouring the refreshing bubbles stemming from a second fermentation: 'Come quickly, I'm tasting the stars!' The expensive drink that first became associated with royalty and the upper classes slowly spread to the emerging middle class. After the French Revolution, champagne also became part of several secular rituals, such as the well-known tradition of naming a new ship and wishing it luck by breaking an expensive bottle of champagne against its hull.

While always enjoying Murdoch's novels and having fun making indexes while reading, this occasion has given me the extra joy of looking deeper into my collection of passages where champagne occur.[1] Here, I will ask if they are restricted to the social meanings of celebration and/or distinction, or whether they have other uses as well. To help me in my analysis, I will bring in some thoughts from Pierre Bourdieu's famous structuralist article 'Social Space and Symbolic Power' (1989), where he uses champagne and other liquid refreshments to illustrate social distinctions. But why a social scientist? It may go without saying that we all know (or think we know) fiction, philosophy and social science to be different enterprises with different methods and terminology, and yet I will claim that interdisciplinary practices have shown that they can learn from each other, for example by borrowing theoretical concepts. Here I will borrow concepts like 'semantic elasticity', 'social fiction' and how '[…] one can make things (i.e., groups) with words.'[2] For Bourdieu (1930–2002) such concepts were useful in his discussion of social classes that seemed to be, but

were not in real life, to be found as stable or permanent entities. This entailed that the experience an agent has of his or her or whatever's place in life as, for example, 'high' or 'low' contains both objective, intersubjective and subjective elements. But one cannot construct anything anyhow about one's position without the risk of weakening one's grip on reality, and there are always intersubjective elements mingling or competing with the subject in the mixture of one's social genesis.[3] I hope that establishing an interdisciplinary connection between Bourdieu and Murdoch may explain what I am trying to say here. Indeed, Murdoch the philosopher was sceptical about a structuralism that tended toward moral relativism and solipsism, as Peter J. Conradi reminds us: 'By 1978 and her interview with Magee, structuralism (and post-structuralism) had started to emerge as her chief philosophical adversary.'[4]

Yet, the philosopher who called herself a Wittgensteinian Neo-Platonist[5] added in the same interview with Magee: 'One could say that Wittgenstein was a "structuralist"',[6] and in her well-known essay from the same year, 'Art is the Imitation of Nature', she writes of Wittgenstein's structuralist remarks that his work: 'may, indeed, be described as a process of dissolving substances into uses of language' and that 'before we became aware of certain truths about the relation of language to the world, we constructed or imagined as substances lying beyond the net of language – in fact we thought it might be possible to crawl, as it were under the net.'[7] Indeed, she advises us to 'not picture the world as lying separately behind the signs by which we designate, characterise or constitute it, in a sense there is nothing but signs, and literature must take up this challenge by no longer producing works which encourage what might be called the realistic fallacy, the illusion of looking through the words into another world.'[8] And to my mind, this illusion is exactly what Bourdieu is trying to avoid.

Indeed, what we are looking into while reading one of Murdoch's great imaginary novels is of course the same world that we live in, but even if we may have experienced something similar, we have most certainly never realised it quite like she did, nor do we own her mastery when it comes to choosing and putting together good words for life's comical, tragical or ethical points of view, of which I will now give some hints, trying to focus on aspects of champagne (and some other double-edged drinks) in her novels.

As mentioned, in Bourdieu's social scientific words what one prefers to drink hints at one's social status or distinction. Thus:

> those who drink champagne are opposed to those who drink whisky, but they are also opposed, in a different way, to those who drink red wine; those who drink champagne, however, have a higher chance than those who drink whisky, and a far greater chance than those who drink red wine, of having antique furniture, playing golf at select clubs, riding horses or going to see light comedies at the theatre.[9]

For a convinced Marxist, such differences may be said to be ordinary social and economic class differences, but it is an important point in Bourdieu that one can never be totally aware of them. He describes these 'structures' that are constituted within interactions between people, as fields of power embodying a relational mode of thinking, and argues that what we experience as stable social distinctions are hidden in the shifting connections between structures that are realized in them – be they of economic, cultural, intellectual, or symbolic origin, each having a 'relative weight of the different species of capital [...] in the total volume of their assets.'[10]

In *The Black Prince* – 16 years before Bourdieu's essay, by the way – Bradley Pearson says critically about his rival Arnold Baffin, that: 'although he was 'in life' a clever man and an intellectual and a tough arguer, 'in art' he went soft and failed to make distinctions.' And then he adds in parenthesis: (The making of distinctions is the centre of art, as it is the centre of philosophy.)[11] I must hasten to add that this is Pearson's point of view, not necessarily Murdoch's, of course! But although I have found that what people prefer to eat and drink and what it means to them in Murdoch's novels may symbolise important distinctions in social status and values, I am unsure about what her reaction to Bourdieu's rather neat system might have been. It occurs to me that she plays with such structuralist categories too, tongue in cheek. Just think about Charles Arrowby's withdrawal from his classy life as a well-known and busy theatre director, longing for a better, but as it turns out, impossible life in simplicity and solitude where he can be 'a serious eater and a moderate drinker', or Mother May's vegetarian menu in 'the Seegard city state' where home-made elderberry wine is reserved for special days, while Ilona giggles that they have special days quite often when Edward is offered last year's vintage.[12]

Today, popping the cork and toasting with bubbles as the clock strikes midnight on New Year's Eve is a tradition in many households around the world where the costly drink is never touched the rest of the year. Drinking champagne has become a widespread ritual of joy and hope and in at least one of Murdoch's novels it is also used as a token of vice, as when at one of the gossiping parties in *An Accidental Man,* George Tisbourne, is called 'the meanest man in the world', because he actually once gave someone some non-vintage champagne for Christmas.[13] To many of us, the act of sharing and enjoying a bottle of champagne is a welcome sign for celebration on a joyful birthday or wedding day, but in other cases, the bubbles are not even consumed. Successful football players and racing-car drivers have champagne poured all over them, without even tasting the delicacy. Such waste may look like an insult in the face of more modest spectators, probably serving its distinguishing purpose.

So far, I have found that some of Murdoch's characters also use champagne for consolation, and others in a context of envy, producing disturbing distinctions

through their own imagination. In this last case, I remember Edward Baltram in *The Good Apprentice,* looking out of his window at Seegard in grief and loneliness after his best friend Mark and his long-lost father are both dead. He sees some sailing boats in the distance and thinks there is going to be a race – or maybe the race is over.

> And suddenly he thought, there are people out there in a totally other world, people laughing and joking and kissing each other, men and pretty girls opening bottles of champagne. He turned back to the room, seeming now so small and quiet and lonely and sad.[14]

Could such a self-made social distinction be better described? Related, of course, to Edward's deep depression. Generally, *The Good Apprentice* is a novel with plenty of structuralist 'food for thought' about intricate relations between what subjects experience and what is really – or at least more really, going on. Speaking of food, it should not be ignored that there is an abundance of different types of nourishment in Murdoch's novels too to be explored further, but in this context I will concentrate on the beverages. As in real life, her people need to quench their thirst, and her characters often prefer champagne. And champagne is not reserved for characters who have antique furniture, play golf, ride horses or go to see light comedies, to quote Bourdieu's examples. Champagne occurs frequently and in at least 20 of the 26 novels, but let me hint in passing to some of the other liquid delicacies that are consumed.[15] We find wine – red, white and rosé, beer and whisky, of course, but also madeira, port, vermouth, Campari, kir, sherry, gin, ouzo, Pernod, sake, cider, vodka, brandy, cognac, rum and Cointreau. But seek, and you shall also find non-alcoholic drinks like milk, cocoa, coke, apple juice, blackcurrant juice, orange juice, pineapple juice, tomato juice, ginger beer, coffee and tea of course; in the case of *The Philosopher's Pupil* even water – mainly because no alcohol is served in the Institute in Ennistone, but also because the famous water is free of charge. In *Under the Net*, Jake the lone wolf has spent many a peaceful hour resting from his friends and their pub-rounds in Mrs Tinckham's newspaper shop, where red and green non-alcoholic drinks in bottles are the only thirst quenchers to be bought.

Before we turn to some of the more amusing scenes I have found where champagne plays a part in the novels, we should pay attention to how three of the characters who drink champagne for consolation are described: Barnabas in *The Red and the Green*, Daisy in *Nuns and Soldiers*, and Otto in *The Italian Girl*. (I'll come back to Bruno in *Bruno's Dream*.) I should also mention Emmanuel Scarlett-Taylor in *The Philosopher's Pupil,* who had seen terrible alcoholics in Dublin and wonders if his grandfather, whom he can scarcely remember, might have been an alcoholic. That could explain why his father, a moderate drinker, had always warned him

against alcohol. Might alcoholism be hereditary? The puritan and Protestant Hilda Chase-White, Brian Dumay's sister in *The Red and the Green*, thinks not. She openly blames her brother Barnabas' wife Kathleen for his 'progressive demoralization'. When his drinking bouts began, Hilda would say: 'It's all of a piece!' meaning that there is a uniting structure between Catholicism, Kathleen, alcohol, and the Irish saints.[16] (I take 'alcohol' in this instance to mean beer or whisky.) Later in the same novel, before the violent Easter Rising takes place, the extravagant, progressive, cigar-smoking and trousers-wearing Millie Kinnard, who has given Christopher Bellman what he feels to be her world-changing yes, runs away for an Easter retreat at Rathblane. But then, 'Spiritually refreshed, she would return to Christopher to celebrate the new era with rivers of champagne.'[17]

Now what about the charming and penniless Daisy Barrett in *Nuns and Soldiers*, who spends many an hour at the pub with the Shakespearean-inspired name 'The Prince of Denmark', socialising with Perkins the cat and Barkiss the dog, getting drunk on beer, collecting beer mats and waiting for her boyfriend Tim Reede to bring her stolen food from the affluent Gertrude Openshaw's fridge? Daisy's flat smells of alcohol and dirty clothes. Her language is coarse, and when Daisy is drunk enough, she has the courage to insult Tim by telling him some feminist truths until he politely asks her to stop – 'and have some more wine.' The unemployed artist Daisy is not invited for a drink, an honour Gertrude (who becomes a widow and marries Tim) reserves for the person who was her best friend at Cambridge, the former nun Anne Cavidge, telling her that Manfred North has just brought the car back from France, and 'it's absolutely *full* of champagne.'[18]

Daisy would probably never admit to being dependent on alcohol. She considers herself a free being in every possible definition of the word, not least as 'not tormented' – as opposed to Otto Narraway in *The Italian Girl* who advises his brother Edmund: 'The trouble about becoming an alcoholic is that ordinary states of consciousness are simply a torment. I suppose that *is* being an alcoholic. You keep off it, Ed.' To which Edmund simply replies: 'I do', seeing Otto debating, looking at him, looking back to his drink.[19] After the horrible fire, Otto and Edmund are waiting together in shock in the hospital for news about Elsa, Otto's wife. Otto had struggled to get her out of the house, but her dress burned so fast, 'she was like a burning torch.'[20] Elsa did not survive. Now Otto seeks consolation in the only drink he claims one can go on and on with, while Edmund, the narrator, can scarcely bear the sight of the bottles.

> Otto opened another bottle of champagne. We had been there for some very long time shut in that little white hospital waiting-room. The cork struck the ceiling and joined other corks on the floor. Otto hit the rim of the glass unsteadily with the neck of the bottle. The white smoky foam rolled over his bandaged hand. He drank hastily

> and then began to pace again, turning and returning in the confined space. There was a mark upon the wall where he brushed it each time with the swing of his shoulder.[21]

In *Bruno's Dream*, Bruno Greensleave is old and dying and aware of the fact that he is tied to his bed for the rest of his life, 'playing telephone' and looking at his stamps through the days, but alas: 'then it would be seven and he could start drinking champagne, then read some spider books or a detective novel, then it would be supper'.[22] In contrast to the consolation-seeking alcoholics Barnabas, Daisy and Otto, Bruno's drinking may have more to do with celebration; maybe he is actually enjoying life in his own way, perhaps intuiting that champagne is a far better painkiller than the palliative morphine used in hospitals.

Let us now turn to the celebratory aspect of champagne. In *A Fairly Honourable Defeat,* Hilda and Rupert Foster are marking their twentieth wedding anniversary with a bottle of rather dry champagne, sitting by their swimming pool in the late summer evening sun. Hilda wonders if it is awful of them to start drinking before the guests arrive, but Rupert replies: 'No. Anything is permitted to us.'[23] Sometime later, champagne is still being consumed but no guests are in sight. Finally, Simon and Axel arrive, and Hilda asks Axel to open yet another bottle:

> The cork flew out and plopped neatly into the water. Creamy champagne flowed into four glasses. 'Happiness, my pets!' cried Simon. 'Happiness!' 'Happiness!' they all said and drank. (*FHD*, 34)

Simon and Hilda discuss interior decoration details, while Axel and Rupert nurse replenished glasses of champagne, discussing politics. Hilda's sister Morgan arrives and is offered bubbles, but she is in a low mood and prefers whisky. The good spiritual person Simon loves birthdays and anniversaries and celebrations of all kinds, to which his lover Axel comments unkindly: 'Any excuse to get drunk, in fact!' These words hurt Simon's feelings, so when Axel begins to finger the lobe of his right ear (his signal to leave or to stop drinking) Simon does not obey, but pours himself out a stiff whisky, following Morgan's example (*FHD*, 73-74). In Part Two, Hilda again serves champagne, this time to Rupert's old classmate, the 'Prince of Darkness' Julius King,[24] while Simon – having a swim – is watching the party from the pool, reflecting:

> What a remarkable talent English people have for hiding their feelings, thought Simon, observing from water level the well-dressed convivial little gathering above him on the pavement [...] Corks popped, bottles tilted, glasses clinked, faces smiled, olives and savoury biscuits were enthusiastically selected. (*FHD*, 358)

Simon intuits that all is not very well. Repressed feelings stemming from unprocessed emotions will announce themselves, and no more champagne will be served for the rest of this story.

Celebrating with champagne is indeed a frequent ingredient in many of Iris Murdoch's novels, but the reasons for celebrating may vary: there are ambiguous birthday parties like the Fosters'; there is Marcia Cockeyne and John Rainborough's relief after Marcia's daughter Annette survives in *The Flight from the Enchanter,* and there is the scene in *A Word Child,* where Gunnar and Anne Jopling want to give the talented Hilary Burde a warm welcome in Oxford by bringing a bottle of champagne and three glasses to his new flat. Hilary falls for Anne and observes that her face 'shone upon him as they drank the champagne in his empty rooms on that sunny summer day, and they chattered and laughed and were utterly happy. We were very young. I was twenty-three. Gunnar was twenty-seven. Anne was twenty-five.'[25] Then terrible things happen, and the champagne disappears until Hilary announces that he is engaged to be married to Thomasina ('Tommy') Uhlmeister, and she 'was so pleased and so happy and drank so much champagne she became almost speechless'.[26]

Since this text was originally written for the purpose of celebration, I will end it in an uplifted spirit with (what I consider to be) the extremely amusing Chapter Nine in *The Flight from the Enchanter,* where the dutiful and not very enthusiastic Rosa has decided to open a campaign to appeal for funds to save the feminist journal the *Artemis* from being bought by the wealthy Mischa Fox, who probably intends to destroy its radical profile. Christopher Boddington comments: 'Of Mischa, Rosa Keepe knows much ill and suspects more, so that he becomes for her at moments the very figure of evil.'[27] Although he is also a man of attraction for Rosa, she nevertheless decides to try to stop his cunning plan, starting with a personal visit to appeal for support from the wealthy Mrs Camilla Wingfield, co-founder of the *Artemis* with Rosa's late mother: 'That distinguished Socialist (who) had possessed an almost uncanny sensitivity to social differences'.[28] When Rosa knocks, the servant, Miss Foy, who is rudely called 'the old trout' by 'her ladyship' Mrs Wingfield, opens the door and lets her in:

> [Rosa] began to mount; and as she went, she became aware that the curious sound which had met her as she entered and which had continued during her conversation with Miss Foy was in fact made by a human voice. [...] Rosa knocked on the drawing-room door. There was no reply, and the singing continued. So she knocked again, more loudly, and then walked in [...] there was revealed a tall grey-haired woman, dressed in a tweed jacket and corduroy trousers, who lay prostrate with her feet raised well above her head, while beside her upon the floor stood a champagne bottle and a glass. (*FFE*, 108)

Mrs Wingfield turns to Rosa and exclaims:

> 'You're just in time for the row in the hall.'
>
> 'I beg your pardon?' said Rosa.
>
> 'I said you're just in time for the row in the hall,' said Mrs Wingfield. 'It's simply an expression. Before your day, I expect. Fashions of idiom change so rapidly [...] Have some champagne. It's the only thing I can drink now that doesn't upset my stomach. Sorry there's only one glass.' (*FFE*, 109)

She pours out the champagne for Rosa, asking who the hell she is. Then, looking at Rosa's profile, she recognizes her mother, 'an absolute bolshy', adding that 'she'd have had her bellyful of it by now if she'd lived, continuing: 'I suppose you want some money, though; that's the only reason why anyone calls on me nowadays. Well, you can't have any. Hasn't anyone told you? I'm an old skinflint.' Rosa, who is 'poised between annoyance, amusement, and despair', timidly thanks her, drinks, and intends to give the glass back to its owner. 'Oh, you want some *more*, do you?' says Mrs Wingfield, telling Rosa arrogantly to fetch a cup herself in the cabinet. Rosa picks a beautiful Dresden cup while Mrs Wingfield fills and empties her own glass twice with startling rapidity, hinting at an excusable consolation for her stomach to drink champagne (*FFE*, 109-110).

Some readers may find it surprising that this sarcastic person, who tells her guest to help herself and calls her servant a 'trout' (meaning an old woman who is unpleasant and complaining) and appears to be no fan of the Murdochian philosophy of unselfing one would otherwise think becoming for an old socialist, after Rosa's visit decides to contribute morally and financially to save the journal. Deep down she must have kept her feminist soul intact, socialist or not. When Rosa says that they especially want to be helped by her mother's co-founder, Mrs Wingfield reacts appropriately as a self-confident woman while Rosa appears servile:

> 'Flattery!' cried Mrs Wingfield, 'Here, have some champagne [...] or would you rather have some tea?'
>
> 'Don't bother about the tea,' said Rosa, 'I'll drink champagne.'
>
> 'She says don't bother about the tea, she'll drink champagne!' cried Mrs Wingfield. 'Do you realise how much this champagne costs a bottle?'[...]
>
> 'All I mean,' said Rosa desperately, 'is please don't bother. I don't really want either tea or champagne.'
>
> 'So you've been drinking my champagne without really wanting it, have you!' cried Mrs Wingfield. (*FFE*, 117)

Some fifty pages later the reader witness the hilariously funny meeting about the future of the *Artemis* and 'the lady with the veil' suggests that they break off for refreshments before they formulate a proposal to vote on, and Mrs Wingfield finds that a jolly good idea, and yells:

> 'Somebody find the bell and ring it.'
>
> 'In fact, I took the liberty,' said Mrs Carrington-Morris, 'of ordering tea and biscuits as I came in.' [...] There was a knock on the door and a waiter looked in. He asked, 'Is the lady here who ordered eight bottles of champagne?' (*FFE*, 174)

Indeed she is! Mrs Wingfield explains to the elderly female participants, reuniting them in a feminist group reminiscent of themselves in their younger days, proposing a toast:

> 'I ordered this stuff [...] to celebrate the liberation of our beloved paper from an impending doom. Before we go any further, let me give you a toast. The *Artemis*!
>
> As one woman the company rose, holding aloft their cups and glasses. 'The *Artemis*!' (*FFE*, 175)

Mrs Wingfield then formulates the question for the vote in the simplest way: 'Are we going to sell our beloved journal to this press lord – Yes or No?' 'No!' says the assembled company, (with varying shades of emphasis). One lady tries to utter that she would also have liked to propose a vote of censure 'upon those responsible for ordering alcohol at a meeting of this kind', but Mrs Wingfield wards off with the words to end the chapter: 'Were the Amazons teetotallers? Was Mme de Staël? Was Sappho?' The embarrassed Rosa's cheeks flush and her hair begins to come down (*FFE*, 176). In this scene, champagne and the miracle of the toast are clearly important parts of the 'semantic elasticity' that can make groups with words and create 'social fiction' – to reach back to Bourdieu.

Let me end with an allusion to Matthew Gibson Grey, the character in *An Accidental Man* who thought of himself in conclusion that he would be until the end of his life a man looking forward to his next drink, looking at his watch and drifting down to the bar.[29] Understanding pretty well what he means and tending to agree, my conclusion will be slightly different: I will be until the end of my life a woman looking forward to her next reading of a vintage novel by Iris Murdoch, tasting the stars in sober reflection.

1 The Iris Murdoch Centenary Conference, organised by the Iris Murdoch Research Centre, University of Chichester 13–15 July 2019, St Anne's College and Somerville College, Oxford. I want to thank Miles Leeson heartily for his generosity in sharing the idea that inspired me to write this paper.

2 Pierre Bourdieu, 'Social Space and Symbolic Power', *Sociological Theory*, 7, 1, Spring 1989 (14–25), 23.

3 Bourdieu, 'Social Space and Symbolic Power', 18. Murdoch seems to use 'structuralism' as a common denominator for post-structuralism, deconstruction, modernism, and post-modernism (*Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1992, 185) leaning especially on Jacques Derrida, not mentioning Bourdieu, who defines structuralism in a different way: 'By structuralism or structuralist, I mean that there exist, within the social world itself and not only within symbolic systems (language, myths, etc.), objective structures independent of the consciousness and will of agents, which are capable of guiding and constraining their practices or their representations.' (Bourdieu, 'Social Space and Symbolic Power', 14)

4 Peter J. Conradi (ed.), *Iris Murdoch: Existentialists and Mystics* (London: Penguin, 1999), xxix.

5 Iris Murdoch, 'Rencontres avec Iris Murdoch' (1978), in *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction: Conversations with Iris Murdoch*, ed. by Gillian Dooley (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 2003), 92.

6 Bryan Magee, *Men of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 244-245.

7 Iris Murdoch, 'Art is the Imitation of Nature' in *Existentialists and Mystics,* 249.

8 Iris Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics,* 250. For a deep understanding of the relation between elements from Wittgenstein and Plato in Murdoch's thought, I highly recommend Nora Hämäläinen's essay 'What is a Wittgensteinian Neo-Platonist? – Iris Murdoch, Metaphysics and Metaphor' (*Philosophical Papers*, 43, 2 (July 2014). Hämäläinen discusses in a Murdochian spirit what metaphysics can be today, 'after positivism, after the linguistic turn, and after postmodernism.'

9 Bourdieu, 'Social Space and Symbolic Power', 19-20.

10 Bourdieu, 'Social Space and Symbolic Power', 17.

11 Iris Murdoch, *The Black Prince* (London: Vintage Classics, 1999), 187.

12 Iris Murdoch, *The Good Apprentice* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1985)*,* 105.

13 Iris Murdoch, *An Accidental Man* (London: Vintage Classics, 2003), 226.

14 Murdoch, *The Good Apprentice*, 481. It seems to end well, with Harry, Stuart, and Edward celebrating their reunion on the very last pages of the novel. 'Edward drank some of the champagne. It tasted heavenly', 519.

15 The six novels where I so far have found no reference to champagne are: *The Sandcastle*, *The Bell*, *The Time of the Angels*, *The Black Prince, The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*, and *The Philosopher's Pupil*.

16 Iris Murdoch, *The Red and the Green* (London: Vintage Classics, 2002), 26.

17 Murdoch, *The Red and the Green,* 206.

18 Iris Murdoch, *Nuns and Soldiers* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1980), 456.

19 Iris Murdoch, *The Italian Girl* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964), 92.

20 Murdoch, *The Italian Girl*, 181.

21 Murdoch, *The Italian Girl*, 181.

22 Iris Murdoch, *Bruno's Dream* (London: Vintage Classics, 2001), 10.

23 Iris Murdoch, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (London: Vintage Classics, 2001), 8, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *FHD*.

24 Iris Murdoch, 'Rencontres avec Iris Murdoch', 73.

25 Iris Murdoch, *A Word Child* (London: Vintage Classics, 2002), 115.

26 Murdoch, *A Word Child,* 163.

27 Christopher Boddington, *Iris Murdoch's People A-Z* (Washington: Anchovy Hill Press, 2019), 162-163.

28 Murdoch, *The Flight from the Enchanter* (London: Vintage Classics, 2000), 107, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *FFE*.

29 Murdoch, *An Accidental Man*, 372.

‘It depends on the liver’: Alcoholism, Detoxification, Regeneration and Wound-healing in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*

Rivka Isaacson

‘No more to drink, I have to look after my inside. Is life worth living? It depends on the liver. Freud’s favourite joke’; thus quips Julius King, quoting William James, via the pen of Iris Murdoch in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970).[1] Alcohol, in all its forms, features heavily in Murdoch’s novels and, in particular, four characters – Hilda, Morgan, Rupert and Simon – display serious alcohol dependency. Whisky alone is mentioned fifty-two times in the novel. Each character undergoes at least one significant life-changing event, which can either be blamed on or is initiated by excessive alcohol consumption.

In our bodies, the liver is the major site for alcohol metabolism and the acute phase of wound-healing after trauma. The liver has such reliable back-up mechanisms, spare reserves and capacity for regeneration that noticeable symptoms only manifest themselves when it is often too late to prevent complete liver failure. Similarly, while cracks steadily seep into the middle-class stability of the scene in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, the true extent of the damage takes a long time to make itself known. In this essay I will consider the cascade of drink-fuelled decision-making that drives the plot of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* in the context of the molecular pathways for detoxification and wound healing implemented by the human liver.

How a professor of molecular biophysics became ensconced in the world of Iris Murdoch scholarship is a story for another day but, although I feel fully embraced by this academic community, I’m certainly an outlier in my education and approach, usually seeking parallels between scientific concepts and the novels’ plots. The theme of the Eighth International Conference on Iris Murdoch (September 2017) was ‘Gender and Trauma’ and from sleuthing through my email archive I deduce that, contrary to my usual habit of taking the theme as a

starting point to alight on the topic of my paper, that year I was trying to find a way of weaving *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* into the theme because Julius King is a biochemist. I plumped for the trauma aspect by tying it in with liver disease. At the conference, more than one veteran participant (who shall remain nameless) mentioned that they planned to avoid my talk as they preferred to remain in denial about any effects alcohol might be having on their liver. Fair enough.

From my very first appearance at an Iris Murdoch conference in 2004, thanks to the encouragement of Anne Rowe to develop my ideas around the parallels between the forces explored in A.S. Byatt's *Degrees of Freedom* (1965) and the energetics of protein folding that drive Alzheimer's disease, I've always ad-libbed from a series of animated PowerPoint slides. Initially, this was because I was unaware of the traditional format for English Literature conferences in which people prepare their eloquently worded speech in advance and read it off a paper. Then the way I did it, science-style, went down so well that I've continued in the same vein ever since. The major disadvantage comes if I'm asked to submit my paper for publication because I then have to actually write it up coherently. I achieved this successfully with my 2004 paper 'Alzheimer's amyloid analogy: disease depicted through *A Word Child*', which became a peer-reviewed chapter in *Iris Murdoch: A Reassessment* in 2006; my 2006 paper 'Rebarbative Wire? Compartments and Complexity in *The Bell* and the body' became a peer-reviewed chapter eight years later in *Iris Murdoch Connected: Critical Essays on Her Fiction and Philosophy* in 2014.[2] A charitable explanation for the discrepancy in the time delays might reflect the progression of my scientific academic career that leaves less and less time for my beloved Iris Murdoch. Whatever the reason, I was pleased for the push from Lucy Oulton and Frances White to write this one up and especially for the opportunity to adopt a flexible format and allow my quirky voice to come through. My other past papers on crowding (2008), indirect observance (2010), group dynamics (2012), pace (2014), sex hormones (2019) and energy landscapes (2022) will have to wait their turn.

What makes a novel alcoholic? In light of the above admission about my 2017 thought process, I deduced that I had not made a thorough enough case for choosing *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* as the tie-in for liver disease and decided to conduct some qualitative research to find out which is Iris Murdoch's most alcoholic novel. I conducted a poll via the Iris Murdoch Society Facebook on 19 April 2024, and reached out to X (formerly Twitter) social media communities ten days later, asking which novel people consider the most alcoholic. I started with some suggestions and allowed others to add theirs to the poll options. Inevitably there arose some discussion on what makes a novel 'alcoholic' – is it the number of times drink is mentioned (either as an absolute figure or in relation to the book length), the total volume of alcohol consumed, the proportion of the plot that is driven by alcohol, or how much the plot deals with alcoholism? Obviously there

can be no definitive answer to this question but to address the first, and only quantifiable, possibility, I took the four poll winners, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (in the lead on Facebook at 37% of 68 votes), *A Severed Head* (1961), *Under the Net* (1954) and *A Word Child* (1975) (in the lead on Twitter at 41% of 17 votes) and searched through each novel on my Kindle for mentions of a variety of alcohol-associated words (Table 1). I couldn't run to specific wine types so, for example, the 'two bottles of Puligny Montrachet and a bottle of Barsac' that were 'uncorked and put in the fridge' for Simon's dinner party, were left uncounted (*FHD* 64). Cider and rum occur in none of these four, so I've removed them from the table, despite cider featuring substantially in *The Bell*: a likely symptom of its West Country setting.

The numbers are impressive: *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* wins on overall mentions, but *A Severed Head* leads if one considers these results in proportion to the length of the novel (this concurs with Miles Leeson's prediction on the matter). Hence I feel justified in focusing on *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* in this paper, particularly since my 2014 talk 'Moving somewhere fast!' (a quotation from one of Murdoch's letters to the artist Harry Weinberger) examines *A Severed Head* in connection with the idea of 'pace' in technological progress.[3] It's also interesting to observe which novels feature which forms of alcohol, offering clues to their respective social settings, which are sometimes at odds with my memories of them. For example, *Under the Net* which in my recollections includes so many pints, apparently has only two mentions of beer, two of pint and none of lager. Morgan is largely responsible for the fifty-two mentions of whisky and while it seems to me, too, that 'creamy champagne' is guzzled constantly in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (*AFD* 32), thirty mentions of whisky possibly do more to fuel the plot of *A Severed Head*. Rachel Hirschler, one of the heroic Iris Murdoch Archive transcribers, muses,

> I'm not sure which novel is the most alcoholic overall, but this quotation came to mind from *The Sea, The Sea* [1978]: 'I walked back over the causeway, aware now of a dreadful headache and a swinging sensation in the head: not surprising, since, as I established later, James and I had drunk between us nearly five litre bottles of wine'.[4] Wouldn't like to work out how many units that is![5]

The question struck a chord with many Murdoch enthusiasts: Michiel Borgman suggests *The Unicorn* (1963) as a candidate because of

> the constant drinking of whisky. It is said that at Gaze, people drink whisky like water, and Hannah's room has a familiar smell, whisky! Then there is the Burgundy Jamesie and Scottow have been drinking

> when they go shopping in Blackpool. And of course, the delivery of a new dress for Hannah is reason enough for drinking champagne, and 'a better wine than usual'. I say: Cheers, Gaze and Riders folks![6]

Charli Connor writes, 'Great question! *The Message to the Planet* [1989] for me [...] most of the characters could be described as intoxicated, through alcohol or delusions'.[7] And I enjoyed this musing from On 19 April 2024,: 'I have often wondered what my life would be like if I followed the drinking patterns of her characters. Would I be more fun? Would I be dead by now? I've never fancied a mug of straight gin, but her characters seem to have no problem with it. Different times I guess'.[8]

Tatevik Ayvazan, normally the first to champion *The Italian Girl* (1964), writes: 'I was feeling positively drunk when I finished *A Severed Head*, without consuming any alcohol'. Others did suggest it, including David Morgan: '*The Italian Girl*? Otto is never sober, and if only for the precious description of him, as a man who would urinate in the sink even if a urinal was nearby (or something like that)' and Daniel Read, 'I've got *The Italian Girl* in my head, but mainly because it discusses alcohol addiction'.[9]

	Under the Net	*A Fairly Honourable Defeat*	*A Word Child*	*A Severed Head*
drink	49	82	54	39
drunk	8	16	21	17
bottle	17	38	23	26
wine	2	10	34	12
champagne	1	16	7	30
beer	2	15	5	0
lager	0	9	0	0
gin	2	18	4	5
whisk(e)y	19	52	29	28
bourbon	0	5	0	0
cognac	3	0	0	0
cocktail	0	2	9	2
martini	0	5	0	4
total	103	268	186	163
pages	307	497	418	226
terms/pages	0.34	0.54	0.44	0.72

Table 1: Alcohol statistics in the four Iris Murdoch novels voted 'most alcoholic'.

In 2017, my brother who lives in Gateshead put me in touch with a retired philosophy academic in Sunderland, Dr Arnold Spector, who had known Iris Murdoch. For a long time, and in true over-committed character, I have been working on a paper describing this friendship but here I just want to mention some interesting things he said about Murdoch and alcohol. Spector and Murdoch first made contact over the launch of a new journal *Ethics in Literature* for which she had agreed to join the editorial board. I share an excerpt from the transcript of one of my interviews with him in which he describes his own inadvertent pub crawl with Iris:

> AS: ...when we first met, so this was half-past ten in the morning, and she wanted to go to a pub. I think the first one was being decorated, so we moved on. The next one had a very noisy jukebox, so this was the third one, in Earls Court, when we first met, and she was drinking, at half-past ten, she was drinking orange juice with wine.
>
> RI: Mixed together?
>
> AS: Oh, yeah. Yeah.
>
> RI: White wine?
>
> AS: I don't remember. I don't remember. That's what she ordered. I couldn't face alcohol at that time in the morning.[10]

Despite the discrepancies in their drinking habits and the fact that the journal never quite materialised, Arnold and Iris became good friends. I had the sense that, like me, Dr Spector was the sort to take on too many projects with the inevitable consequence of some of them becoming elongated or falling by the wayside. At one stage he was trying to write novels and, at various points, bravely sent them to Murdoch for her opinion. In one instance, she sent him quite a thorough critique which he had typed up and has treasured all these years (see page 68). The reason I include it here is for the interesting comment: 'and there was, I felt, too much drink'. Some might say this was pot calling kettle black. On that note, let's move on to *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*.

Rupert and Hilda comprise a successful, slightly self-congratulatory couple whose only major worry is their wayward son Peter who has dropped out of Cambridge and gone to live with Tallis, the estranged do-gooding husband of Hilda's academic philosopher sister Morgan who, in turn, left Tallis for a now defunct affair with scientist Julius King. Other important characters in the novel are Simon, Rupert's brother, a sweet-natured, artistic and somewhat flamboyant man who is in a long-term relationship with Axel, a university friend of both Rupert and Julius; and Leonard, comedic foul-mouthed father of Tallis who

lives with him in squalor alongside a motley collection of others whose lives are also troubled.

Initially, we observe scenes of apparent domestic bliss that are gradually poisoned by the cavalier Shakespearean manipulations of Julius King. Close to the end of the book, we discover that Julius and Tallis have both suffered unusual evils which offer some explanation of their behaviour; Julius has spent the war in Belsen and Tallis has lost his sister to a sexual predator when she was only fourteen, also a terrible tragedy for Leonard, one must assume. Tallis is described as Christ-like as he channels his trauma into trying to improve the world to a seriously self-sacrificing degree, in contrast to both Julius and Leonard whose suffering likely underpins their inclination to visit adversity upon others.

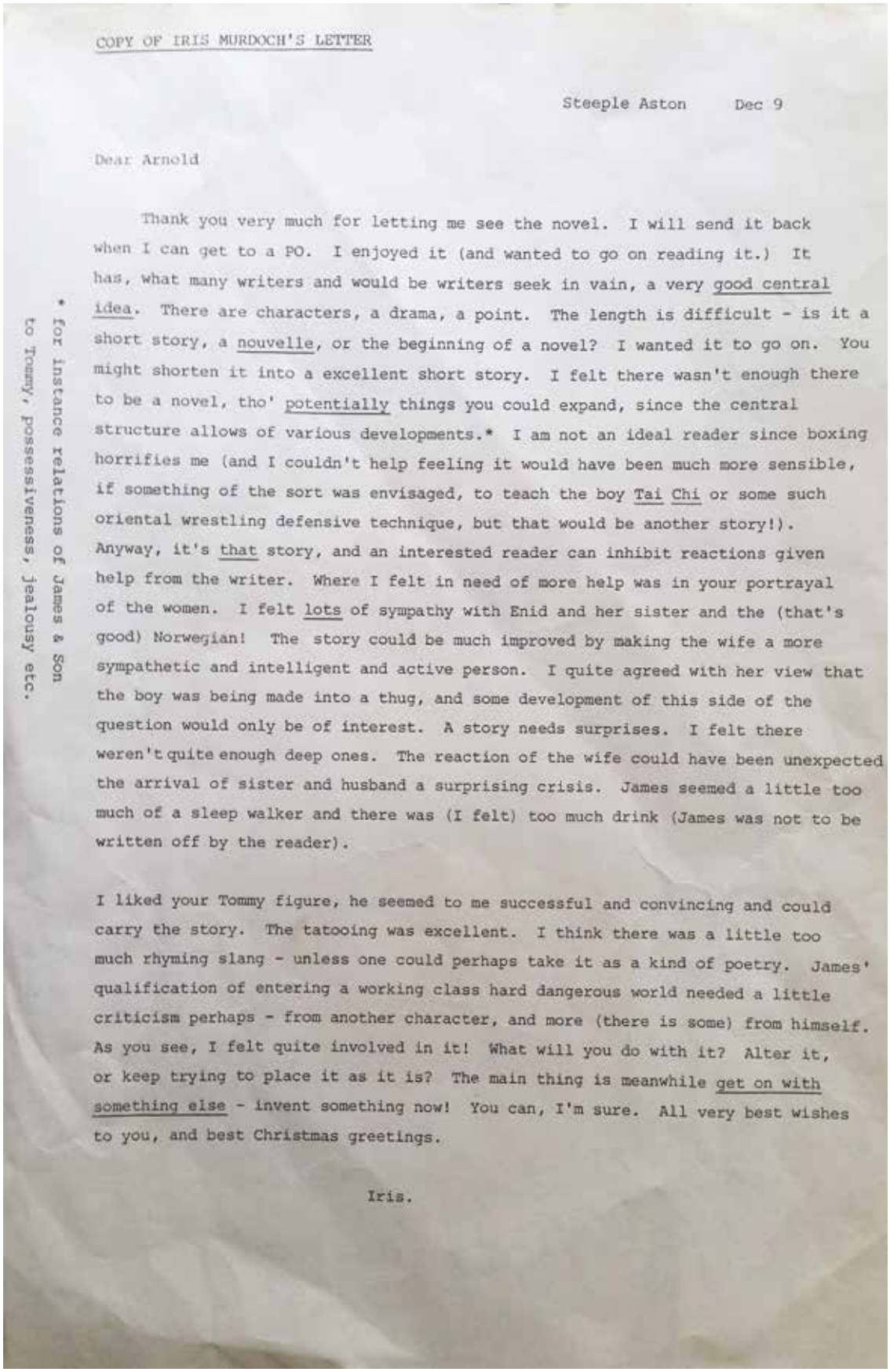
As the story draws to a close, Rupert calamitously drowns in his own swimming pool, particularly so as the truth has been revealed nearly in time to save him. The other characters later rally: Simon and Axel in a strengthened, more honest, relationship; Hilda and Morgan in an apparently man-free Californian paradise; Peter in therapy; Julius swanning around Paris; Tallis being Tallis.

What is the liver? And what is its role in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*? The liver is an essential organ found in all vertebrates – it is the largest internal organ (skin is considered the largest organ overall) and it can occupy up to a quarter of body mass in certain species – sharks are the most extreme case in this regard. The liver has important constructive and destructive roles: a bit like Julius King who has contributed first to general scientific understanding, then to weapons development, now seriously disrupts the lives of most of the characters *in A Fairly Honourable Defeat* and yet is seen to help selflessly in certain cases, for example, cleaning up the deadly microclimate of Tallis's kitchen. The liver builds specialised molecules that are essential for our survival while breaking down toxic compounds for removal from the body. It's a busy multifunctional organ with lots of coordinated activity taking place simultaneously, much like a Murdoch novel. The liver converts our food into useful bodily substances, stores these and dispenses them as needed, neutralises toxins, aids blood clotting, regulates blood sugar, among many other vital functions.

Liver cells generally fall into five varieties, each with a possible paralogue in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*:

1. The most common liver cells are called hepatocytes. They are all-rounders, effecting many of the roles for which the liver is most famous, and are recently shown to spearhead inflammatory response; 'rallying the troops' for battle with the long term goal of calming things down. Perhaps this is Tallis, contributing to society through social action and deploying violence when necessary to defuse an injustice. Hilda fits too with some of these functions: volunteering, making places habitable.

2. Stellate cells are found in dormant and active states, rather like Morgan, with activation triggered by alcohol consumption and liver damage, also rather like Morgan. Stellate cells are responsible for structural reorganisation of collagen, which can contribute to scarring and eventual cirrhosis. I have known a lot of people like Morgan – intelligent, effective characters who lose their minds and sense of responsibility over relationships. We don't know much about her past drinking habits but, in the novel, she is rarely seen without a drink and her dubious decision-making is nearly always fuelled by alcohol; the significant exception is her unwise clinch with Peter, for which excessive sun and bucolic euphoria get the blame. 'I've been crying whisky for the last six months. I think I must have undergone a chemical change', declares Morgan (*FHD* 45). Although intended as metaphor, this is yet another example of Murdoch's prescience: alcohol consumption can now be determined through the analysis of tears. In 1991, Canadian scientists patented a device that measures tear-alcohol content in 15 seconds and represents a potential alternative to the breathalyser used by traffic police.11 Many related technologies have followed. In 2019, an international team from Spain, Brazil and the United States designed and tested a pair of glasses, incorporating biosensors and a microfluidics system to collect tears from the wearer, that is able to report on levels of alcohol, glucose and other biomarkers, suitable for a wide range of healthcare and forensic applications.[12]
3. Cholangiocytes are the second most abundant cells in the liver and form the lining of the bile ducts, modifying the bile as it passes through. Leonard and Peter also sit around and generate a lot of bile over the course of the novel.
4. Sinusoidal endothelial cells are specialised gatekeepers that arrange themselves into a barrier that selectively allows traffic of particles within a particular size range between capillaries and the main liver tissue. Axel and Julius could be said to fall into this category since they both display controlling behaviour, albeit with differing motivations. Julius is a self-described puppeteer throughout his involvement in the ménage, and Axel exerts power over Simon, being especially judgemental about his drinking habits: 'And for God's sake Simon, don't drink too much tonight. Remember, when I start fingering the lobe of my ear, it means I think you've had enough' (*FHD* 62).
5. Kupffer cells, named after German anatomist Karl Wilhelm Ritter von Kupffer (1829–1902) who discovered them, are the liver's macrophages: immune cells that can engulf and eliminate invading microbes. Perhaps this is Simon, the lovable character whose 'enjoyments were similar in kind though not in degree, whether stroking a cat or a Chippendale chair or drinking a dry martini or looking at a picture by Titian or getting into bed with Axel' (*FHD* 29). Simon is quite insecure and relies on drink for courage. 'It was never



COPY OF IRIS MURDOCH'S LETTER

Steeple Aston Dec 9

Dear Arnold

Thank you very much for letting me see the novel. I will send it back when I can get to a PO. I enjoyed it (and wanted to go on reading it.) It has, what many writers and would be writers seek in vain, a very good central idea. There are characters, a drama, a point. The length is difficult - is it a short story, a nouvelle, or the beginning of a novel? I wanted it to go on. You might shorten it into a excellent short story. I felt there wasn't enough there to be a novel, tho' potentially things you could expand, since the central structure allows of various developments.* I am not an ideal reader since boxing horrifies me (and I couldn't help feeling it would have been much more sensible, if something of the sort was envisaged, to teach the boy Tai Chi or some such oriental wrestling defensive technique, but that would be another story!). Anyway, it's that story, and an interested reader can inhibit reactions given help from the writer. Where I felt in need of more help was in your portrayal of the women. I felt lots of sympathy with Enid and her sister and the (that's good) Norwegian! The story could be much improved by making the wife a more sympathetic and intelligent and active person. I quite agreed with her view that the boy was being made into a thug, and some development of this side of the question would only be of interest. A story needs surprises. I felt there weren't quite enough deep ones. The reaction of the wife could have been unexpected the arrival of sister and husband a surprising crisis. James seemed a little too much of a sleep walker and there was (I felt) too much drink (James was not to be written off by the reader).

I liked your Tommy figure, he seemed to me successful and convincing and could carry the story. The tatooing was excellent. I think there was a little too much rhyming slang - unless one could perhaps take it as a kind of poetry. James' qualification of entering a working class hard dangerous world needed a little criticism perhaps - from another character, and more (there is some) from himself. As you see, I felt quite involved in it! What will you do with it? Alter it, or keep trying to place it as it is? The main thing is meanwhile get on with something else - invent something now! You can, I'm sure. All very best wishes to you, and best Christmas greetings.

Iris.

* for instance relations of James & Son to Tommy, possessiveness, jealousy etc.

> too early for Simon to start to drink' but he regularly does the right thing (*FHD* 25). His bravest moment in the novel, taking on the racists, is achieved without alcohol and in fact usurps his plan to 'have a decent drink' (*FHD* 212) before the others get a chance to impose the accepted accompaniment to Chinese food – lager or, God forbid, tea.[13]

I think a lot about the novel's title and whether there is anything honourable about Julius King's value system. He is respected among his friends for his intellect and frankness and he abuses this trust to conduct deceit and undermine their smug existence. There is a lot of interesting literature around the ethics of providing liver transplants to patients who struggle with alcoholism, both in terms of blame for the degradation of the original liver and responsibility for the transplanted organ in the context of limited supply and public support for organ donation.[14] These arguments evoke Simone Weil's thinking about the generational transmission of suffering that influences so much of Murdoch's work. The beauty of physiological processes is that they aren't motivated by good or evil and they just get on with things as best they can. As Rupert says to Hilda early on in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, 'You can't cheat nature, you can't cheat biology' (*FHD* 13). Many of the worst killer diseases evade early detection because of the myriad compensatory mechanisms that exist in our bodies and usually tend to work in our favour. Earlier detection of Julius King's subterfuge would have saved Rupert's life, but would Axel, Simon, Hilda and Morgan have experienced the jolts that steered their lives towards more authentic courses? And who would be happier? Who sadder? Some things change some stay the same. Peter is still a leeching pawn in the quest of others for his own improvement. Tallis still does too much and has no time to think. This is all speculation, of course, but it's also a good way to picture the complex networks of interaction and influence that drive biological processes as well as the plots of good novels.

1 Iris Murdoch, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), 201, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *FHD*.

2 Rivka Isaacson, 'Alzheimer's Amyloid Analogy: Disease Depicted through *A Word Child'* in *Iris Murdoch: A Reassessment, ed. by Anne Rowe* (Basingstoke; Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 204–213; Rivka Isaacson, 'Rebarbative Wire?: Compartments and Complexity in *The Bell* and the Body' in *Iris Murdoch Connected: Critical Essays on Her Fiction and Philosophy* ed. by Mark Luprecht (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2014), 97–112.

3 Iris Murdoch, 3 October 1979, KUAS80/7/32, Iris Murdoch Collections, Kingston University Archives.

4 Iris Murdoch, *The Sea, The Sea* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1978), 448.

5 Rachel Hirschler commenting on Facebook survey, 19 April 2024.

6 Michiel Borgman commenting on Facebook survey, 19 April 2024.

7 Charli Connor commenting on Facebook survey, 19 April 2024.

8 Nicola Doig commenting on Facebook survey, 19 April 2024.

9 Tatevik Ayvazan, David Morgan and Daniel Read, commenting on Facebook survey, 19 April 2024.

10 Author's own transcript.

11 Edmund L. Andrews, 'Patents; Tears Tested

to Measure Alcohol Level', *The New York Times*, 16 March 1991, https://www.nytimes.com/1991/03/16/business/patents-tears-tested-to-measure-alcohol-level.html [accessed 20 June 2024].

12 Juliane R. Sempionatto et al., 'Eyeglasses-based tear biosensing system: Non-invasive detection of alcohol, vitamins and glucose', *Biosens Bioelectron*, 15 July 2019, vol 137, 161–170, doi: 10.1016/j.bios.2019.04.058. Epub 2019 May 7. PMID: 31096082; PMCID: PMC8372769.

13 Elijah Trefts, Maurine Gannon, David H. Wasserman, *The Liver*, Curr Biol. 2017 Nov 6;27(21):R1147-R1151, doi: 10.1016/j.cub.2017.09.019. PMID: 29112863; PMCID: PMC5897118.

14 For example, Diehua Hu and Nadia Primc, 'Should responsibility be used as a tiebreaker in allocation of deceased donor organs for patients suffering from alcohol-related end-stage liver disease?', *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy*, 26 June 2023, vol 2, 243-255, doi: 10.1007/s11019-023-10141-3. Epub 2023 Feb 13. PMID: 36780062; PMCID: PMC10175331.

Iris Murdoch and the Politics of Lived Experience

Gary Browning

Iris Murdoch is renowned as a philosopher and novelist. On this all of us are agreed. Yet is she a notable political theorist? Does she even consider politics? On these issues, there is less agreement. Lawrence Blum has commented perceptively on her political thought and the literary commentators Frances White and Anne Rowe have pointed to her incorporation of political themes within her novels.[1] Yet philosophically, Murdoch is standardly taken to be concerned with personal morality rather than with a wider concern for public affairs and social issues. Likewise, literary critics tend to see her novels as focusing upon individual spiritual development alongside exploring friendships and sexual entanglements. The upshot is that Murdoch is seen as either ignoring or downplaying the political world. My book, *Iris Murdoch and the Political*, challenges this interpretive frame to urge that she does respond to the political world in her novels and philosophy. More than that, it argues that Murdoch interweaves literature, politics, and philosophy in providing thoughtful commentary on the social and political world.[2]

To my mind, Murdoch answers the question that she set herself in her letter to Raymond Queneau in 1947 when she wondered, 'Can I really exploit the advantages (instead of hitherto suffering the disadvantages) of having a mind on the borders of philosophy, literature and politics?'[3] How does Murdoch show herself to have a mind on the borders of philosophy, literature and politics? She does so by reflecting perceptively and imaginatively upon her own lived experience. It is a rich and varied one, as even a mere perusal of her letters and journals indicates, and it provides the material for her philosophising and literary imagination. Lived experience, for Murdoch, is shaped by the historical currents with which it flows, and notable amongst these currents are the political events and changing political attitudes that she identifies and diagnoses.[4] Politics figures prominently in her record of her experience, as she observes and comments on events and issues of the moment in her journals and letters. These, along with her radio broadcasts, occasional essays and reviews, are all now recognised as possessing merit in themselves, and also serve as signs of an engagement with politics that

informs her novels and philosophical texts. Murdoch was at pains to separate the distinct forms of art and philosophy. She was also clear that art should not be misconstrued as propaganda, and her more considered philosophical consideration of the political does not merely rehearse reactions to current events. Yet it is also clear that Murdoch's novels are informed by a philosophical awareness of aspects of experience, such as the significance of attention and the possibilities of affliction. She is also aware that art can be of great importance in revealing aspects of the human condition, including the political.

Murdoch acknowledges that art can shed light on society by showing its character. It can serve society profoundly, even if its goal is not utilitarian. Murdoch's own novels deal with the lived experience of politics along with other activities, shedding light on contemporary political issues without pressing particular imperatives. In her application to Newnham College, Cambridge for a Sarah Smithson Studentship (1946), Murdoch refers to Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* as a landmark in her developing conception of ethics, and writes admiringly of the contemporary relevance of *Darkness at Noon* and *The Power and the Glory*.[5] Her recognition of the potential insight of the novel into significant political events is evidenced in her imaginative review of *Dr Zhivago* in *The New Reasoner* (1958). Murdoch highlights how the interplay between public events and personal lives can be captured in a literary masterpiece. At a time when interpretation of the Russian Revolution and the Soviet Union was controversial, Pasternak's *Dr Zhivago* divided the Left, and Murdoch's review is itself of political moment in taking the novel to convey how lives were shaped and reshaped by a tumultuous revolution and its aftermath. She observes, 'A work such as *Zhivago* makes one realise how far a great artist can become the most profound consciousness of his time, deepening the understanding of his readers, joining dissimilar peoples to one another'.[6] Murdoch's largely forgotten review highlights the political insight of the literary imagination, while in itself contributing to the debate on the political Left over the Russian Revolution and the Soviet Union.

Murdoch's political thinking reflects her engagement with her contemporary political scene. Starting out on the Left, she moves to the Right, and all the while relates the political to wider reflection on experience. At the outset, her attendance at the progressive Badminton School instils in her a sympathy for the downtrodden, for refugees and a commitment to a progressive course. She visits the League of Nations and hears directly about the plight of refugees. At Oxford University, she plunges into the world of leftist politics, and joins the Communist Party, campaigning vigorously against the Tory appeasement candidate in the 1938 Appeasement by-election in Oxford. Her friend Marjorie Boulton, in her diary, records Murdoch's striking persona, which combined warmth and humanity, with a deep knowledge of literature and fierce political commitment.[7] During the war her reviews for *The Adelphi* journal show her to be urging the

joining of spirituality with politics. Her commitment to the political cause of refugees and the displaced leads her to work with UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) and to be directly involved with those whose lives had been turned upside down in the Second World War. Her letters to friends, notably David Hicks and Raymond Queneau, show her commitment to those suffering in displacement camps. Her enthusiasm for the socialist cause and the new Labour Government in 1945 is evidenced in letters and in her journals. Subsequently, and under the impact of post-war events, her letters and journals reveal her movement away from communism and support for the Soviet Union. Her broadcasts and letters on French literature and existentialism show her to be, like the existentialists, searching for a middle ground between liberalism and socialism. In the 1950s and 1960s she maintains a non-aligned form of socialist progressivism.

Murdoch's commitments to progressive causes and to socialism lead her to reflect more formally on the political in her sharply written essay, 'A House of Theory' (1958), published in *Conviction*, an edited collection of essays by non-aligned thinkers of the Left.[8] It combines her reading of the contemporary prospects for socialism with her wider sense of the historical meaning of modernity. She sees a loss of imaginative capacity due to the processes of demythologisation at work in modern life, whereby supernatural elements of religion, metaphysics in philosophy and ideological doctrines of the Left and Right have been discarded. The working class is less amenable to socialist appeal, given post-war economic development and welfare measures mitigating extreme poverty. She urges the imperative of bold theorising to galvanise political support for socialism, against a backdrop of the general decline of theory. She invokes Hegel as a paradigmatic post-metaphysical philosopher who works with forms of belief and cultural practices so as to set out an overall philosophical picture of things. In turn, she calls for a radical utopian vision of socialism, which highlights the possibilities of community and meaningful work. In the 1960s, Murdoch argues more specifically for a number of left-wing causes: notably, the case for legalising homosexuality, for ending the war in Vietnam and for protesting against nuclear weapons.

By the end of the 1960s and into the 1970s, Murdoch's commitment to progressivism is qualified by doubts as to how the Labour Party is operating. She questions its policies on Ireland, industrial relations and education. She fears that comprehensive education and a lack of streaming might undermine the prospects of bright children. The student revolt of the late 1960s troubles Murdoch because of its apparently thoughtless dismissal of authority and educational values. She is also put off by what she takes to be the violence of trade union picketing, seemingly tolerated by Labour politicians. Her letters and journals show her to be greatly exercised by the political state of play in state socialist societies in Eastern Europe and China. She is supportive of Russian dissidents. Her increasing concern

to guard against oppressive states and political repression leads her to reflect more philosophically on the interplay between personal and public morality. In her postscript to 'On God and Good' she urges that adherence to axioms in politics, laying down strict rules of conduct, are to be respected.[9] In this regard the imperative to avoid the dangers of oppression and violence renders the public morality of politics different from the perfectionism of personal morals. They are different, but both contribute to the overall good.

The notion of axioms figures in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992), her late impassioned metaphysical work, which not only links metaphysics to morals but also demonstrates how art and politics are connected by and to metaphysical speculation. Truth and goodness for Murdoch are not the termini of discrete routes, but are deeply connected. Good conduct is to be guided by an overall understanding of lived experience. In this regard, politics is held to demand a series of axioms which provide discrete obligatory stipulations on conduct, notably specifying rights – such as the rights to life and liberty – but also to promote welfare and the refusal to operate torture.[10] If 'A House of Theory' conceives the conditions of a possible utopia, then *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* is motivated by its determination to guard against the dangers of utopian thinking, and unbridled state power. It concentrates upon dealing with what it sees as the imperfection of politics, which demands adherence to strict axioms that will avoid undue violence and oppression. Public morals establish safe conditions by providing rights that guarantee security for individuals. The focus on the potential dangers of the public world, and its manifest imperfections, contrasts with Murdoch's reading of personal morality. Whereas in the public realm, there has to be fixed and absolute safeguards against public dangers, in personal morality an individual is engaged in their own pursuit of moral perfection, attending carefully to other people and particular circumstances in their pursuit of the right thing to do. Murdoch maintains that there is a dividing line between personal and public morals, even though it is not fixed absolutely. She calls for a clear difference to be registered between public morals and personal morality, even though there are evidently connections between the two spheres, with the public sphere providing protection for individuals and personal morals impacting upon public attitudes.

If Murdoch's political views change radically from imagining a future utopia to arguing against utopian thinking, her willingness to be open to friends and critics on the Left remains in evidence. Towards the end of her life, Murdoch reviewed Brian Medlin's *Human Nature, Human Survival* and, in spite of her own movement to the political Right, she extended imaginative sympathy to her friend, an uncompromising Marxist philosopher. She expresses concern for the plight of the planet amidst looming ecological disaster, a sensitivity to the inhuman treatment of aboriginal peoples, and a weary recognition of the political ordeals of the twentieth century. She wonders about the fate of the

planet and highlights the urgency of averting an ecological disaster. Murdoch's review of *Human Nature, Human Survival* shows her continuing to think hard about politics, responding to its many challenges, some of which are only being recognised in the early twenty-first century.

Politics mattered to Murdoch, just as they do for ordinary citizens; hence it is not surprising that politics figure in all of her novels. Politics are part of our lived experience, hence in framing novels that map lives of free individuals, politics form an aspect of their lives. In an interview with Stephanie de Pue, Murdoch observes that while she tends not to write about politicians she nonetheless addresses political questions as a citizen in her novels.[11] She eschews the kind of ideological or crystalline novel-writing that she critiqued in her essay 'Against Dryness', but allows that social questions come into her novels. Murdoch's novels are set in the post-war world and, insofar as she aspires to be a realist novelist, the political questions and issues that arise reflect her own sense of what matters in the lived experience of the period. A single point of view about those issues is not promulgated, as different characters in the novels see things from different points of view. The novels, though, provide a key insight that is not evident in Murdoch's non-fictional accounts of politics. They provide a phenomenological perspective on the political, in that characters in the novels reveal how political questions can affect their interactions and their lives as a whole. In *Iris Murdoch and the Political* I show how the novels exhibit three areas of politics, namely, (i) socialism, community and limiting the over-mighty state, (ii) outsiders, migrants, the displaced, refugees and the Holocaust, and (iii) sex, sexuality, gender and feminism. The novels cover politics more widely, but these designated political themes are significant and indicate how Murdoch is prescient in picking out issues that have only increased in importance subsequently. The ways in which these themes are framed in the novels alter with the changing nature of Murdoch's reading of politics, and the exigencies of plot development, but throughout her fiction, they show the power of her imagination in depicting political aspects of our lives.

The political questioning of socialism which informs 'A House of Theory' registers in Murdoch's first novel *Under the Net* (1954), where its major protagonist, Jake Donaghue, and Lefty Todd, a radical socialist, debate the meaning and prospects of socialism in post-war Britain. Throughout the novel, money and commodification are in evidence while Jake rejects a life that depends upon capital. In *The Sandcastle* (1957), another early novel, Bill Mor eventually decides to stand as a Labour candidate in a forthcoming election, and lectures on freedom and the dangers of seeing political freedom as a virtue in a local Workers' Educational Association (WEA) lecture. While there is a plurality of plot lines in *The Bell* (1958), at its core is the lay spiritual community that operates as a co-operative collective, established by Michael Meade in Imber Court, his

relations with Rosa. In seeking to neutralise their threat, she turns to Mischa Fox who enlists a Conservative MP to call for tightening of controls on migrants, and to turn the political tide against migrants. Stephan and Jan have to move on, and Nina becomes so anxious that she takes her own life. Murdoch's novels depict the difficulties migrants have to face, as the state and their acquaintances do not guarantee their security.

Another early novel, *The Italian Girl* (1964), includes Maria Magistretti, or Maggie, housekeeper and servant to the Narraway household, whose lack of individual recognition is symbolised by her being known as 'the Italian girl'. Russian Jewish exiles in the novel, David and Elsa Levkin, offer differing accounts of their background, which reflects the difficulties migrants experience in orienting themselves in a new society. In *The Time of the Angels* (1966) Pattie O'Driscoll, a half Jamaican housemaid in the household of the Heideggerian vicar, Carel Fisher, and the Russian émigré, the caretaker Eugene Peshkov, are fractured by their pasts, so that they are unable to adapt to their present circumstances. Their imaginative evocation highlights the precarity of migrants' lives.[12]

References to survivors of concentration camps and the Holocaust inform many of Murdoch novels, including *The Nice and the Good*, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970) and *Jackson's Dilemma* (1995). It is central to the plot of *The Message to the Planet*, and highlights how the suffering of vulnerable people is a reality amidst twentieth-century politics. The central figure in this novel is Marcus Vallar, a philosopher who may or may not have a message to the planet. To the consternation of his disciple, Ludens, Vallar imagines the Holocaust to be of great philosophical significance, for he takes suffering to represent perhaps a fundamental principle, which underpins all possible meaning. Other characters in the novel interpret the Holocaust in different ways. Daniel Most, a rabbi, interprets the Holocaust as possessing a special meaning for the Jewish people, constituting a primary event in specifically Jewish history. Ludens presumes that the Holocaust is a significant but contingent event to be explained by ordinary historical methods. Vallar is also put into the care of the psychiatrist, Dr Marzillian, which is perhaps a sign of mental instability connected to his preoccupation with the Holocaust. All of these perspectives possess some credibility, and can be seen as contributing to our understanding of the Holocaust. What is beyond dispute is that the suffering inflicted on the Jews by the Nazi state is awful and should serve as a salutary reminder of the vulnerability of migrants and ethnic minorities.

Another arresting theme of Murdoch's novels is the politics of sex, sexuality, gender and feminism. In Murdoch's novels, wives suffer under the yoke of domineering men who demand unreciprocated love from their women. In the early novels homosexuals have to deal with persecution and marginalisation, though in later novels homosexuality is treated as being more socially acceptable in the context of its legalisation. This bare summary of Murdoch's portrayals of

ancestral home. Its values and mode of operation are markedly different from the capitalist background. Unlike the notion of a utopian community set out in 'A House of Theory', in the Imber Court community problems are revealed as individual characters making up the community are shown to differ on what is to be done and the novel portrays the difficulties of making collective decisions. *The Red and the Green* (1965), set during the Easter Rising in Ireland in 1916, depicts rival notions of political community. Some Irish Catholics support Irish nationalism and Anglo-Irish characters favour continued union with the British state. Subsequent novels, *The Nice and the Good* (1968) and *An Accidental Man* (1971) each portray sensitivities to political failure. A character in the latter witnesses the arrest of protestors in Moscow, which is a reminder of his own moral weakness and the power of an unprincipled state. In the former, a legal advisor to the government, John Ducane, sees the moral weaknesses of the state and the civil service at close quarters. In late novels, Murdoch explores problematic aspects of the state and the political, which justify limiting state power. In *The Message to the Planet* (1989), the major character Marcus Vallar reflects upon the Holocaust and the awful features of twentieth-century tyrannies come to the fore. *The Book and the Brotherhood* (1987) considers the fate of a major political text to be written by Marxist firebrand David Crimond and which is commissioned by a group of former Oxford University students. For a time the book does not get written and the group drifts to the Right. Eventually the book emerges, despite the group's lack of enthusiasm. To the surprise of Gerard Hernshaw, a leading member of the group, who fears the worst, the book stimulates critical engaged thinking about politics, despite its overly deterministic reading of history in which decent Parliamentary states are to be overturned. The narrative of the book contains a critical response to Crimond's heady utopian ideas, and yet the debate that takes place and the expression of challenging views appear to be salutary.

Murdoch's novels highlight the experience of migrants, refugees and outsiders and their characterisation contributes to the richness of the novels. Notwithstanding some criticism of a supposed narrow cast of characters, Murdoch's novels are enriched by the incorporation of European migrants, gypsies, Jews, and outsiders of various sorts. Their inclusion in turn puts pressure on the question of how political communities can be inclusive so as to welcome outsiders. *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956) is a case in point. The novel includes many migrants. Their experiences are varied, just as their resources vary wildly. Mischa Fox is a global media tycoon who controls lots of things: governments and particular people, such as Nina, a dressmaker, who is worried about her status in the UK. Rosa Keepe, one of the major figures in the novel, is an ex-journalist who takes up working in a factory to add to her life experience and, in so doing, befriends two migrant Poles, Jan and Stephan Lusiewicz. They are hard-working and energetic but become threatening when they assume sexual

sexuality gives an idea of the politics that are at play, particularly in the light of the legal and social world of the 1950s, when Murdoch's early novels first appeared. In these early novels, homosexual characters react to the social and legal status of homosexuality either by repressing or masking their sexuality. Homosexuality is outlawed, and homosexuals inhabit a culture where homosexuality is stigmatised. *The Bell* is a compelling novel for many reasons, but the repressed homosexuality of Michael Meade, the leader of the Imber Court community, is portrayed movingly. At the outset of the novel, Michael's establishment of the lay spiritual community contributes to the rebuilding of his life, after he has had to resign from his post as a school teacher, following the disclosure of his relationship with a pupil, Nick Fawley. The past and his own repressed sexuality undermine his determination to move on from his earlier difficulties. The troubled Nick Fawley represents a menacing presence at the edge of the Imber community, and Michael underestimates the force of his own sexual desires. He kisses a young man visiting the community and he avoids a demanding conversation with Nick. The latter takes his own life and the community collapses along with Michael's aspirations to lead a respected life. The novel represents a convincing critique of prevailing sexual norms, and, in depicting Michael's agonised sexual sensibility recognises the debilitating pressures of repressed sexuality. Subsequent novels react to the legalisation of homosexuality in 1967 by portraying homosexuality as more socially acceptable, with homosexual relationships allowing characters to develop their sexuality more freely. Murdoch herself contributes to a change in the sexual atmosphere of British society, and, more specifically, to the change in the law. Her novels drew attention to the suffering that was imposed by the illegality of homosexuality, and she wrote a lucid and persuasive essay, calling for reform of the law in 'The Moral Decision about Homosexuality.' (1964)[13]

Murdoch's novels explore relations between men and women within a patriarchal social context. In her rollicking first novel, *Under the Net*, its protagonist Jake Donaghue responds to a question from the socialist Lefty Todd about what he values by venturing, 'Being loyal to one's friends and behaving properly to women'.[14] Even if Jake fails to live up to his ideals, his comment stands as a marker for what Murdoch admires. Social values and the legal system markedly favour men in the 1950s, and this imbalance is reflected in Murdoch's novels. At the outset of *The Bell*, Dora Greenfield lives in fear of her husband and then suffers, in the opinion of other characters, because of her alleged disloyalty to his authority.[15] Here and elsewhere, Murdoch reports, without evident qualification, on a one-sided relationship in which a man dominates. Likewise, Bruno Greensleave in *Bruno's Dream* (1969), while nearing death, muses on his life and justifies his extra-marital affair as being inconsequential until his final epiphanic recognition of the meaning of love. Harriet Gavender, in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* (1974), accepts unthinkingly the conventions of marriage and loyalty to her

husband, the psychiatrist Blaise, and is rewarded by his gross insensitivity and long-term adultery. George McCaffrey in *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983) bullies his wife Stella and his mistress Diane Sedleigh. Murdoch's representation of unbalanced relationships is heightened by her frequent use of male narrators, who see the world in one-sided ways, taking for granted their right to dictate matters to women. In *A Severed Head* (1961), Martin Lynch-Gibbon takes both his wife, Antonia, and his mistress, Georgie Hands, for granted. The classic example of Murdoch's framing of a novel through the eyes of a dominant and controlling male is *The Sea, The Sea* (1978). The narrator, Charles Arrowby, informs the reader that he is planning to withdraw from the world and to become a good person, but in fact shows himself to be vain and egotistical, aiming to corral a former sweetheart into accepting his fantasy of their relations.

Murdoch's deployment of male narrators and her assumption of a male voice, expressing power, may be taken to be unfortunate in their reflection of gendered power relations. A more telling counter-argument, however, is that Murdoch's unrestrained disclosure of the male perspective, along with her cool exposure of male bullying, constitutes a powerful implicit critique of prevailing sexual and social norms. Murdoch is an artist, dedicated to conveying the truth, and to revealing realistically the nature of society. Without the truth, there can be no progress. Her use of the male storyteller highlights the partiality of unreliable narrators, just as her portrayals of male dominance expose rather than justify current social norms. In interviews, Murdoch describes herself as a feminist, and while she does not support women-only forms of protest and organisation, her writing does express a commitment to equality.

Murdoch's plays are express vehicles for exploring the political. While their plots may be contrived, they deal with live political issues. Three of her plays, *Joanna, Joanna*, *The Servants and the Snow*, and *The Three Arrows*, drafted at the end of the 1960s, capture Murdoch's movement from radical politics to a more conservative perspective. Murdoch's plays are a vital resource for appreciating her politics, because they raise political issues and questions which reflect Murdoch's lifelong engagement with politics. In *The Servants and the Snow*, which is set somewhere in Ruritanian Eastern Europe, young aristocrat Basil succeeds his autocratic father in ruling the estate. He encourages political reform and aims to rule in a liberal manner, but his liberal style of leadership gives rise to uneasiness as traditions die hard. Basil's support dwindles and his rule ends in catastrophe. In *The Three Arrows*, set in medieval Japan, Prince Yorimitsu, a political rebel from the North of Japan, is held prisoner while imperial factions plot to exercise control. Yorimitsu commits to marrying the Imperial Princess Keiko which will secure his release from prison. An ancient ceremony of the three arrows is to be undertaken, which is usually a formality, but is now rigged by one of the imperial factions. Yorimitsu faces death, but the Emperor offers

him his liberty if he renounces his bride, which Yorimitsu duly does. The upshot is that the courageously principled Yorimitsu has to compromise between love and political commitment, and chooses to sacrifice his love. Both plays reveal complexity. A strong case is presented for advancing political reform, and yet traditions and contextual considerations constitute obstacles to change.

In *Joanna, Joanna*, Sir Roger Saxonby is appointed as Provost to the Institute of Theoretical Studies in the south of England to implement changes in order to make philosophical studies more relevant and vocational.[16] His business and management background suits the task, and he implements a package of reforms involving redundancies. One of the philosophers to be made redundant, Hilary Fitch, is popular with students but lacks publications. Saxonby's former wife Joanna had left him for Hilary, though Joanna has died and her presence throughout the play is powerful but spectral, haunting the characters. Students protest on learning that Hilary is to be made redundant, and the protest is inflamed by Saxonby's arrogant and patronising manner. Romantic entanglements and unanswered questions loom from the past, but the ill-informed student protest fizzles out after Fitch declares that he does not dispute his redundancy. The play is prescient in highlighting problems associated with manipulating the agenda of higher education to fit an uncertain form of relevance, and is implicitly critical of the obtuseness of management and students. In Murdoch's later operatic radio play, *The One Alone*, performed in 1987, a lone dissident is in prison, conversing with her interrogator, an angel, and unborn children. The angel and the children are perhaps projections of her unconscious, under the strain of imprisonment. The play is a remarkable focus of attention upon a lone political prisoner, whose protests against a tyrannical regime are not heard. The prisoner is alone, absolutely. In dialogue with the interrogator, the people and the angel, she has to face up to the apparent pointlessness of her actions. Nothing will change. There is no authorial judgement on her situation and actions, and yet the scenario and its language are evocative. The play makes us reflect upon a tyrannical regime: to consider its power over dissidents and to weigh the value of apparently pointless dissent. It fits with the pessimism of Murdoch's later political thought, her awareness of the dangers facing dissidents and her concern to support axioms which guard against the imperfections of the political world.

Murdoch's engagement with politics is expressed in many ways. Her own experience, as recorded in journals and letters, shows a lively interest in the political, and she responds to politics in poetry, plays, novels, theoretical essays and philosophical texts. In philosophy, she accepts the modern turn against dogmatic metaphysics, just as she rejects supernatural beliefs in religion. Her own metaphysics is designed to make sense of lived experience by observing its conceptual conditions and connecting forms of life. Hence she sees connections between art, personal morality, politics, and metaphysics. In her essay, 'A House

of Theory', she calls for inventive theorising to revive socialism and imagines how a socialist community might be established that respects worthwhile and satisfying forms of work. Subsequently, in the context of a gathering pessimism, based upon her experience of twentieth-century politics, she divides public morals from the perfectionist aspirations of personal morality, and invokes axioms in public life to protect citizens.

Murdoch's philosophical exploration of the political reflects her consideration of lived experience, and her novels, likewise, respond to the politics of the twentieth century. They track the experience of migrants and outsiders, frame the meaning of the Holocaust and its survivors, explore the politics of sexuality and relations between the sexes and consider socialism, new forms of community and the possibilities of politics at the end of the century. The novels do not present political doctrines, but they do examine phenomenological aspects of the political, allowing readers to appreciate, for instance, what life can be like for survivors after the Holocaust, or what living might mean for a homosexual when homosexuality is regarded as transgressive. In the light of Murdoch's tracking of the political in multiple ways, her status as a political thinker must be respected. In *Iris Murdoch and the Political*, I reinforce her credentials as a political thinker by comparing her political thinking to other notable political theorists of the twentieth century: Hannah Arendt, Michael Oakeshott and Simone Weil. She was affected by and commented upon all of these thinkers, whose liveliness and clarity render them the kind of imaginative theorists whom she admires in her unpublished 'Manuscript on Heidegger'.[17]

If Murdoch is to be acknowledged as a political thinker, is she a valuable and notable one? Her changing formulations about the political should not be held against her. She reacted to the events of the twentieth century, and her continued reflection responded to changing circumstances and attitudes. It is true that she does not provide the sustained exploration of aspects of politics that Arendt, for instance, gives to the nature of totalitarian regimes in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* or to revolution in *On Revolution*. However, Murdoch looks at political phenomena from a variety of angles. While Murdoch's account of a utopian notion of community in 'A House of Theory' does not consider its possible problems, the imagined community at Imber Court in *The Bell* deals with the pitfalls of co-operative life. In *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, Murdoch looks to provide security through adherence to axioms in public life, but she neither shows how axioms might be put onto the political agenda nor how they would operate. These are omissions. Moreover, her commitment to the notion of public axioms functioning independently of the personal moral sphere does not allow for a plausible dialectical interaction between the two.[18] Yet her novels and occasional writings do demonstrate how a change of axioms might be canvassed.

For instance, in 'The Moral Decision about Homosexuality' she argues for a legal change in the status of homosexuals, and in *The Bell* she imagines the lived experience of an individual suffering under the constraints of homosexuality being banned. Murdoch is a lively, engaged political thinker, who imagines and comments upon the political in many forms of writing, and shows how it plays a significant role in our lived experience.

1 See Lawrence Blum, 'Murdoch and Politics', in S. C. Panizza and M. Hopwood (eds) *The Murdochian Mind* (Abingdon and New York, 2022), 424–38. Anne Rowe, *Iris Murdoch* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019); Frances White, 'Iris Murdoch and Hannah Arendt: Two Women in Dark Times', in *Iris Murdoch and The Moral Imagination,* ed. by M. F. Simone Roberts and Alison Scott-Baumann (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2010), 13-33.

2 Gary Browning, *Iris Murdoch and the Political* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), 17-23.

3 Iris Murdoch, 'Letter to Raymond Queneau', 17 October 1947, in *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1993* ed. by Avril Horner and Anne Rowe (London: Chatto and Windus, 2013), 99.

4 For a reading of the historical aspect of Murdoch's thought, see Gary Browning, *Why Iris Murdoch Matters* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), and Gary Browning, 'Iris Murdoch: History Woman', *Iris Murdoch Review*, 9 (2018), 17-23.

5 Iris Murdoch, 'Letter Applying for Sarah Smithson Studentship', 1946–47, 9 April 1946, Newnham College, C/5/2 Student Files.

6 Iris Murdoch, 'Review of *Dr Zhivago*', *The New Reasoner*, 7 (1958).

7 Marjorie Boulton, Diaries, SC/AO/3/4/MB/1, Somerville College, Oxford University.

8 Iris Murdoch, 'A House of Theory', republished in Iris Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. by Peter J. Conradi (London: Penguin 1997), 171-86.

9 Iris Murdoch, 'Postscript on Politics' – A Postscript to 'On "God" and "Good"', *Iris Murdoch Review*, vol.1 no. 3 (2011), 7.

10 Iris Murdoch*, Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* ((London, Chatto and Windus, 1992), 357.

11 Iris Murdoch, 'Meeting the Enchantress. Unpublished Interview with Stephanie de Pue', *Iris Murdoch Review* 1 (2008), 10.

12 See Frances White, '"The World is Just a Transit Camp": Diaspora in the Fiction of Iris Murdoch', Iris Murdoch Review 2 (2009), 6-14.

13 Iris Murdoch, 'The Moral Decision about Homosexuality', *Man and Society* 7, 1964, reprinted in *Occasional Essays by Iris Murdoch* ed. by Yozo Muroya and Paul Hullah (Okayama: University Education Press, 1988), 31-38.

14 Iris Murdoch, *Under the Net* (London: Vintage, 2002), 109.

15 Iris Murdoch, *The Bell* (London: Vintage, 2004), 1.

16 This play tends to be neglected but see Miles Leeson, '"Joanna, Joanna": The Forgotten Play', *Iris Murdoch Revie*w, 12 (2021), 49-55.

17 Iris Murdoch, 'Manuscript on Heidegger', KUAS6/5/14, Iris Murdoch Collections, Kingston University Archives, 85.

18 For a reading of Murdoch as a dialectical theorist, see *Murdoch On Truth and Love* ed. by Gary Browning (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 7-20.

Review of Frances White, *Iris Murdoch and Remorse: Past Forgiving?* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023)

Mariëtte Willemsen[1]

Very few philosophers have paid attention to the concept of remorse. An exception is W.D. Ross, who in *The Right and the Good* (1930) mentions 'compunction' as the feeling we have when we, for example, tell a lie or harm someone because we think we have reason to follow a different path than the one prescribed by our common duties, truth-telling and not harming others.[2] Ross introduces the notion of compunction, without further developing it, to differentiate between what he calls 'prima facie' duties, those that in general tend to be our duties, and 'actual' duties, those we really have reason to follow in a concrete situation. Sometimes we must go against our general duties, in Ross's view, because the factual circumstances ask for a different kind of behaviour than required by these 'prima facie' duties. Ross develops his pluralist ethics as a kind of compromise between Kantianism and Utilitarianism, with strong Aristotelian overtones.

Murdoch hardly refers to Ross in her philosophical texts, although he was one of the leading ethical thinkers in the first half of the twentieth century. She does, however, mention him in two of her published letters, calling him 'Sir David bloody Ross' in a letter to David Hicks, (June 1945), and referring to his 'loathsome' humour when writing to Leo Pliatzky (October 1945).[3] And in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992) she mentions him once, in a subtler tone, as can be expected in a philosophical treatise, suggesting that morality is more complicated than going for Rossian distinctions.[4]

While reading Frances White's book I was reminded of Ross's notion of compunction, learning how Murdoch gives remorse a central place in her novels and moral philosophy, critiquing contemporary ethics à la Ross, seeing remorse not as a byproduct of unavoidable (and therefore not really wrong) behaviour, but

as the starting point of moral growth or even spiritual transformation. Although White does not mention Ross, she does illustrate how Murdoch sketches a warmer and more ambitious moral philosophy, with an eye on Platonic Goodness.

The book contains six chapters and a short concluding seventh. In the first, White paves the way for what is to come, underscoring the importance of the ethical dimension of Murdoch's work, before moving to remorse as a 'crucial concept in her ethical vision' (9). From the start of her book White provides examples of characters suffering from remorse, not only from *A Word Child* (1975) and *The Good Apprentice* (1985), which she considers '"Ur-texts" for this subject' (9), but also from most of Murdoch's other novels, revealing that remorse is mentioned in all but two of Murdoch's 26 novels (9). It is interesting that Murdoch refers to remorse even more often in her later novels, written after 1970, presumably a sign that older age brings experiences of this deep emotion, a point that White touches upon in the concluding chapter, where she refers to biographical sources in a careful, non-reductionist way (200).

Providing a working definition of remorse, White distinguishes it from regret, guilt, and shame – three related concepts that shed light on the focus of her research. White explains how regret does not necessarily contain a moral component, whereas remorse does. The distinction between guilt and remorse receives less attention in White's account, but it seems that it is especially the liability or justly deserving penalty (15) that explains the dissimilarity. Shame is about '*being seen by others* to have done wrong' (15) while remorse is an internal emotion. Given Murdoch's critique on behaviourism, famously illustrated by her mother and daughter-in-law (M and D) example from 'The Idea of Perfection' (1964), this in itself, of course, demonstrates the importance of the inner life for Murdoch's ethical stance. White's working definition of remorse provides direction for the chapters to follow: 'remorse is a painful state of mind, focussing on the irrevocability and irreparability of a regretted action in the past culpably caused by an agent who will subsequently and recurrently suffer as a direct result of this action' (13). White unpacks this working definition, pointing, for example, to the fact that the damage cannot be undone, the importance of ownership of and responsibility for the deed, and the deep suffering that follows from having done wrong.

White then gives special attention to suffering through a section on Simone Weil's concept of affliction (18-22). She refers to the final two chapters of *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* to explain the importance of Weil for Murdoch's concept of remorse, to be considered as 'a form of Weilian affliction – an aspect of the void' (19). White underlines the intensity of remorse as a painful state of mind. To understand the kind of suffering that is at stake in remorse, White helpfully introduces Weil early in her study; Weil's void denotes a kind of deep emptiness, or – to quote from *Gravity and Grace*: 'Void. The dark night.'[5] This

deep suffering, the realisation that one has harmed someone else, can be 'the starting place for moral awareness', says White, using a phrase that is only one out of many that sticks with the reader: 'the agent is *shocked* out of solipsism' (22).

It would be remiss not to mention that White respectfully refers to Raymond Gaita's *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception* (2004) which underpins some of the distinctions she works with, applying them to Murdoch. Gaita speaks of the 'shock of remorse' (21), indeed a shock that makes a culpable agent realise they are not alone. In the second chapter of her study White returns to Gaita and the central premise of his book, that 'remorse "is an astonished encounter with the reality of the ethical"' (38). This encounter, the shock that we are not alone and that we are responsible beings, triggers what could become either a chronic kind of remorse or a lucid kind (17, 40 and passim). In the first case the evil-doer drowns in remorse, whereas in the second case the evil-doer 'grows in moral stature' (40).

The two Murdochian 'Ur-texts' of remorse, *A Word Child* and *The Good Apprentice*, can be viewed as exploring chronic remorse and lucid remorse, respectively. White offers an extensive reading of *A Word Child* in Chapter Three, followed by a close reading of *The Good Apprentice* in Chapter Four. Her account of chronic remorse is paired with an exposé on what White calls Murdoch's neo-theology, looking for 'grace – albeit grace in a secular form' (89), whereas her investigation of lucid remorse brings in trauma theory. It is through the word 'wound', a 'dominant metaphor in [Murdoch's] last six novels' (110), that White clarifies the connections between trauma and remorse. White's close reading of *The Good Apprentice* shows an eye for detail and depth of insight that is at times moving. White follows Edward Baltram's long road towards salvation and transformation after the terrible death of his friend Mark, caused by Edward, who had given him a sandwich containing drugs. The process of 'restoration from the trauma of remorse' (126) is a slow operation, with forgiveness by the people involved – in *The Good Apprentice* Mark's mother – as an essential element. However, more important than being forgiven is to perform acts of unselfing, 'doing something for someone', as Edward himself says, interpreted by White as a sign of 'solipsism giving way to attention to others' (128). When White, after her intensive analysis of the novel, refers to the moments when Edward notices a kingfisher and starts to be interested in books again (120), as reader of this study, one has a kestrel moment of the second order.[6]

In her sixth chapter, via a discussion of the remorseless Lucas Graffe, figuring in Murdoch's penultimate novel *The Green Knight* (1993), White addresses Martin Heidegger's 'remorseless silence' after the Holocaust (145). She connects two of Murdoch's last novels, *The Message to the Planet* (1989) and *Jackson's Dilemma* (1995), to Murdoch's still unpublished Heidegger manuscript. As in all the other chapters White connects sentences from different novels and to Murdoch's

philosophical work which leads to the following intriguing quote about Marcus Vallar, protagonist of *The Message to the Planet*:

> Marcus, disaffected with both morality and metaphysics, is against everything for which Murdoch stands. Jack thinks 'Marcus is beyond good and evil', a notion opposed by Gildas who, like Murdoch, believes that 'Beyond good and evil equals evil' [...]. Gildas sums Marcus up as a 'false prophet, pseudo-scientist, pseudo-philosopher' [...] – a description which foreshadows the views of Heidegger offered both explicitly by Benet in *Jackson's Dilemma* and implicitly by Murdoch herself in the manuscript *Heidegger*. (157)

Here we see White's multi-textual cento-approach in full bloom, with the novels shedding light on themselves, through the voices of different characters, as well as on other novels, and with Murdoch's moral philosophy as a kind of sub-text in each. In the Heidegger chapter the theoretical framework is, furthermore, strengthened by post-Holocaust theory, narrative theory and the ethics of Levinas (147).

It is only after the full reading experience of *Iris Murdoch and Remorse* that one can understand the deep meaning of the linocut that is inserted after the title page of White's book. The linocut was crafted by Murdoch and published in *Badminton School* magazine in the autumn of 1936, when Murdoch was seventeen years old. It is called 'The Prisoner' and shows a figure sitting on the floor of a small room with bars, indeed imprisoned. The figure's posture is a sad one, their arms resting on their bent legs, their head bowed. Having shown how many of Murdoch's characters are held captive by remorse, White finally reflects on Murdoch's 1986 musical radio play *The One Alone*. The play 'dramatises the extreme situation of unjust imprisonment' (189) with an 'un-named Prisoner, and Interrogator, an Angel, and two Choruses' (191) as cast.

As opposed to the situations of remorse discussed in the previous chapters, here the protagonist is not only mentally but also physically confined to loneliness and has lost their freedom. In contrast to the previously analysed contexts, there is no question of remorse in response to a wrong action, but to a good action. The play tells us how the Prisoner stood up against evil, 'saying "no" and "Stop!" [...] to an unspecified tyrannical regime' (191). Their courageous behaviour has not resulted in anything but their own imprisonment, however, and the (evil) Interrogator calls their motivation 'vanity, egoism, and desire for love, admiration, and fame' (191). The Interrogator jeers at the Prisoner that they have sacrificed 'everything for nothing' (192).

White then reinterprets this taunting mention of 'for nothing' through a close reading of the (sung) conversation between the Prisoner and the Angel. It connects to Murdoch's philosophical defence of the Good in 'The Sovereignty

of Good', where Murdoch writes that 'The only genuine way to be good is to be good "for nothing"' (192). As a final chapter, before a short conclusion, it stands as a great and convincing beauty, like a gem – in the sense used by Kant in the first section of his *Groundwork* when he gives his account of the intrinsic value of Goodness, writing how 'a good will is good not because of what it effects, or accomplishes [...] but good just by its willing, i.e. in itself [...]. [I]f despite its greatest striving it should still accomplish nothing, and only the good will were to remain [...] then, like a jewel, it would still shine by itself, as something that has its full worth in itself.'[7]

1 My thanks go to Tirza Brüggemann for her insightful comments on an earlier version of this review, and to Dawn Skorczewski for her editorial improvements.

2 W.D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (1930) (Oxford, Oxford University Press 2007), 28.

3 Avril Horner and Anne Rowe (eds.), *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2015), 44, 50.

4 Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (London: Penguin, 1992), 367.

5 Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (1952), trans. by Emma Crauford (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2002), 11.

6 In 'How Iris Murdoch can Change your Life', White notes the importance of Murdochian unselfing kestrel moments. Murdoch refers to liberating moments of observing a hovering kestrel both in 'The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts' and hovering kestrels feature in her novel *Henry and Cato* (1976), see Frances White, 'How Iris Murdoch can Change your Life', in Silvia Caprioglio Panizza and Mark Hopwood (eds.), *The Murdochian Mind*, (London: Routledge, 2022), (94-107), 104.

7 Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (2012), trans. and ed. by Mary Gregor and Jens Timmermann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 10.

Review of Lesley Jamieson, *Iris Murdoch's Practical Metaphysics: A Guide to her Early Writings* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023)

Victor Jeleniewski Seidler

I think that it could be helpful to our appreciation of Iris Murdoch's philosophy and the ways that it was to transform over time to reflect upon the moment when we might have come into philosophy as students ourselves. A strength of Lesley Jamieson's *Iris Murdoch's Practical Metaphysics* is that this book is so much more than a guide to her early writings that it impresses upon us the significance of these early stages for what we later learned to take for granted as philosophy. Jamieson shows how such reflection can make a difference to how we read Murdoch's philosophy – not only her early writings but also philosophy written at different times in her life – and the different connections her philosophy has to her writing of novels.

There were times when Murdoch was insistent that her novels had nothing to do with her writing philosophy and that if they dealt with philosophy this was simply because it was what she happened to know about and be familiar with. There were moments when she seemed a little more willing to concede potential complexities and relationships between literature and philosophy. She had a mind that could move across the boundaries of philosophy, literature and politics and if at times she could appreciate this as a strength, she often felt it was a weakness in writing philosophy.

I found it helpful to reflect upon the time when I came into philosophy: 1964, the year that Murdoch stopped lecturing and gave up her position at St. Anne's. I was taught by a close friend of Murdoch's – John Simopoulos at St Catherine's – and he made me aware of certain elements in her ethics. This was a time soon after J. L. Austin had died, though his influence on doing the philosophy of language was very present and the tension between Austin and A. J. Ayer helped shape a certain framework within which we were encouraged to think.

There was a focus upon recent articles in *Mind* or the *Aristotelian Society* that would shape our philosophical work. The influence of Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* had passed, with its emphasis upon the verification principle and its dismissive attitude towards ethics, with Hare's insistence in his prescriptivism upon ethics having its own rational structure. As students our ethics course was organised around the conflicts between Hare and Philippa Foot and the possibilities of an ethical naturalism.

There was a focus upon language and the meaning of concepts were to be established through their use. The focus was clearly upon concepts, as if they did not themselves carry histories of their own that needed to be investigated. Ideas were to be framed through the language that helped us make sense of them, so in the mid-1960s Hart's *The Concept of Law* was as close as you could get to a practical metaphysics that showed some connection with institutional practices. Philosophy as focused through everyday language was radically separated from history. Isaiah Berlin was giving lectures on the Counter-Enlightenment that illustrated through Vico and Herder's challenges to an Enlightenment rationalism that there were different, more socially and historically attuned ways of doing philosophy. But in the mid-1960s this put Berlin beyond the pale of analytical philosophy, and he understood himself as having left philosophy for the history of ideas. It was only in the memorial service after his death that Bernard Williams suggested that Berlin was exploring a different way of doing historically attuned philosophy.

Murdoch, along with others in the Quartet – Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot and Mary Midgeley – was exploring ways of writing a different kind of ethics that had been taught by Donald MacKinnon during the war years, and engaged with the world in a morally serious way. She wrote in a letter to her friend Frank Thompson: 'This man MacKinnon is a jewel, it's bucked me up a lot meeting him. He's a moral being as well as a good philosopher. I had almost given up thinking of people and actions in terms of value – meeting him has made it a significant way of thinking again' (17).

There are ways, as Jamieson recognises, that questions of value help open up connections across generations, as we see with the influence of the ethical intuitionists, Pritchard and Ross as well as Collingwood and an older generation of idealists, Bradley and Bosanquet, who had been influenced by Hegel. Though Hare was to describe Collingwood (who died in 1943) as a stimulating lecturer and charismatic figure, he insisted, Jamieson notes, that he had 'little lasting influence' (30). By the mid-60s Hegel was to be dismissed as making no sense, as was Heidegger. These earlier generations were cut out of the syllabus and analytical philosophy became synonymous with philosophy as such. What is striking is that Jamieson's readings of Murdoch help to restore a conversation across generations that stretches back before the narrowing of philosophy that

was shaped by the dominance of Ayer's logical positivism. In the mid-60s there was a welcome democratic ethos that was inclusive of students who as language-speakers could be heard and listened to even in the serious and hushed atmosphere of Anscombe's seminars. Philosophy was yet to become professionalised and it was the influence of Wittgenstein's later writings that enabled a broader vision of philosophy that could connect it to other areas of life.

Thinking about what is meant by 'practical metaphysics' took me back to reading Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* in the early 1970s. There seem to be resonances with Wittgenstein's later work. Gramsci has an awareness that 'we are all philosophers' even if we are unaware of the fragments of philosophy, theology and traumatic family and cultural histories that make up a 'common-sense' taken for granted within our families, carried and adapted under the pressure of the wider common-sense of a liberal moral culture. Wittgenstein, in his notebooks and in his later works, opened up possibilities of making similar connections. As Jamieson contends, there are ways – despite Murdoch's particular focus on inner life as part of her questioning of Wittgenstein – in which Murdoch, possibly drawing upon inspirations from an earlier generation of teachers, is able to explore the liberal assumptions that were unknowingly carried within traditions of analytic, or ordinary language, philosophy.

Jamieson draws attention to H. H. Price's 1945 address to the Aristotelian Society 'Is Clarity Enough?' Though he was, like Ryle, more disposed to developments in logic than the older generation of idealists and realists, Price was taking stock of the post-war status quo and reflecting upon whether philosophy was in danger of becoming too narrow in its focus. He notes that quite a number of people, rightly or wrongly, felt that 'during the twenty years between the two world wars Philosophy had somehow taken the wrong turning. It is even said sometimes that the wrong turning which it took was one of the main causes of the disasters that have befallen civilisation' (19).

As Jamieson notes, in ways that might resonate still, 'Price considered whether "clarity is not enough" with two particular concerns in mind. First he asked whether clarificatory philosophy was too specialised and, as a result, trivial relative to the needs of the wider public. If philosophers are meant to provide public moral or political guidance, then clarificatory philosophers had failed to fulfil their responsibility (and post-war philosophers should try to avoid repeating their mistake). Second, Price wondered whether the aim of philosophy had been understood too narrowly during the interwar period' (19). Jamieson recognises how 'Murdoch would later identify the distinction between fact and value – a hallmark of linguistic moral philosophy – as an expression of liberal values.' Since the publication of Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* in 1936, 'the very idea of a philosopher advancing moral and political views was verboten' (18).

In the mid-1960s there was an emerging tension between the common-sense of a liberal moral culture that we might have absorbed within middle-class families, and resistance to the Vietnam War. American students studying at Oxford were being faced with the draft. There were also family memories of losses in the Holocaust that were difficult to engage with in the terms of the moral philosophy we were learning. Brought up within the post-war terms of an Enlightenment rationalism and a masculinity that taught that as rational selves we needed our minds to be in control of our bodies, we were often unknowing of the fears and traumatic memories carried in our bodies that were to be silenced. Berlin's lectures on the counter-Enlightenment offered different possibilities of identity and belonging, even if they felt outside the philosophy we were learning at the time. Some of us looked to Durkheim to make connections between philosophy and social theory, encouraged by Wittgenstein to think about the contexts of use.

As Jamieson recognises, 'To see why Murdoch thought of her borderland mind as both a liability and as a tension, but *possible*, source of strength' we need to understand that she 'was struggling to find her feet during a period when the dominant view of the aims and ideals of philosophy was itself shifting. [...] The narrowing of British philosophy meant the sedimentation of a narrow interpretation of these norms that made literariness and political commitment into liabilities' (18). Jamieson quotes Murdoch's recognition, in *Sartre, Romantic Rationalist* (1953), that British philosophy was left with tools to analyse and describe a world 'in which people play cricket, cook cakes, make simple decisions, remember their childhoods and go to the circus' but the French philosophy she was learning from Sartre and de Beauvoir was better suited to 'the world in which they commit sins, fall in love, say prayers or join the Communist Party' (14).

Murdoch was active in the Communist Party in Oxford as a student and, living a complex sexual life and relationships, was drawn to relational philosophies. Jamieson notes, 'In her correspondence from the time, she described her ambition of approaching ethics in a manner that would do justice to the complexity of human psychology and the difficulty of our relationships with one another' (15). She was looking towards Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard and Buber for inspiration. After her experience working with the UN Relief and Rehabilitation Agency in Europe, in her application to the Sarah Smithson Fellowship at Cambridge she looked to Buber to overcome the naïve psychology that dominated British moral philosophy at the time. This remains an important task, though Murdoch makes significant moves.

Dorothy Emmet in her *Philosophers and Friends* points out that the examples that had concerned Ross and Prichard in the interwar period at Oxford seemed far away from the moral problems that students were worried about in a world of fascism, genocide and war. Collingwood in *Autobiography and Other Writings* observes of his contemporaries: 'For all their profession of a purely scientific

detachment from practical affairs, [they] were propogandists of a coming fascism. I know that fascism means the end of clear thinking and the triumph of irrationalism. I know that all my life I have been engaged unawares in a political struggle, fighting against those things in the dark.' (26)

Emmet, a former student of A. D. Lindsay, also rejected the vision of philosophy as – so Jamieson frames it – 'the insular weeding out of verbal confusions. Philosophy should discuss questions that matter deeply to human life and should be part of a general education [...] For Lindsay, philosophers are tasked with articulating the standards operative in our society and reflecting on how they shape our practice' (27). This attitude influenced Emmet's own work and possibly helped to shape a resonance and shared understanding with Murdoch in vital respects. In the moral realm this can involve a questioning of established standards and the taken for granted morality of a liberal moral culture because the domain of the moral is not exhausted by the rights and duties of ordinary life.

Murdoch, in her early work, especially in her paper 'The House of Theory' (1958), took this argument in a clearly socialist direction, investigating how there had been a loss in moral and political imagination since the recent post-war years. This was a falling away from a socialist vision that was framed in moral as well as economic terms, and that recognised class in cultural terms, not as being simply to do with levels of income. Jamieson points out, drawing on Murdoch's essay 'Against Dryness' (1961), that a 'simple-minded faith in science, together with the assumption that we are all rational and free, engenders a *dangerous* lack of curiosity about the real world, a failure to appreciate the difficulties of knowing it' (166). On her reading, 'Murdoch warns us that we've lost the concepts we need to picture ourselves as beings whose moral lives involve an ongoing exploration of reality' (167). She also explores the scholarship of Cora Diamond, inspired by Murdoch, who notes Murdoch 'is struggling to make plain a form of conceptual loss which, she thinks, affects the whole educated Western world and which affects philosophers in a particular way' (164).

There are ways that we might think that there is a falling away in Murdoch's later writings because they find it hard to stay in connection with some of the insights and ways of thinking in her earlier work. Jamieson's work gives us resources for thinking this through in different ways. According to Diamond in 'Losing Your Concepts' in *Ethics* 98 (1988) our cultural conceptual amnesia relates to our conceptions of the human being, or as I would frame it, ethical human. Although Murdoch does not really engage with the disembodied masculinities that have so often been taken for granted within visions of the rational self, Jamieson notes Diamond's observation that Murdoch does at least acknowledge: 'The philosophy of mind which is the source of our inarticulateness in ethics presents to us, as a philosophical necessity, that picture of the human personality which our culture has inherited from the Enlightenment. We see ourselves as capable, using reason

and our senses, of describing the world; and we take the application of scientific language as the model for such description of reality' (164).

But Murdoch goes beyond this critique in different ways, also relating to issues of bodies and energies and ways that people can exhaust themselves and have nothing left to give in their relationships with themselves and with others. This is where she considers drawing on transcendent sources, including prayer, as well as an acknowledgment of human beings as spiritual selves that they might resist. As Jamieson acknowledges, reminding us of the significance of value, 'the danger of not understanding what we value is that we cease to believe that it is valuable. When it comes to great literature, this means that we may lose our connection to an important source of spiritual energy and guidance' (160).

For Murdoch, Jamieson notes, 'it is in the coining of new concepts that we communicate new and persuasive visions' but at the same time, with Hare's prescriptivism, 'The rejection of metaphysical ethics and the attaching of morality to the fabric of the world made it impossible to forward moral visions that depend on pictures of moral agency as insight into transcendental realities' (160). But even so many people feel secure in the sense, as Murdoch affirms, 'that moral values are real and fixed' (160). The true animus of Hare's approach to moral philosophy is the moral dictum, as Murdoch has it in 'Metaphysics and Ethics' (1957), that 'you cannot attach morality to the substance of the world'. While for Murdoch, as Jamieson recognises, 'To clearly understand what we are, what we do, and what we value is not a matter of specialists; it is a *human* need' (153).

Jamieson notes, 'While Murdoch agrees that metaphysical truths cannot be philosophically established, there are forms of critical moral reflection – on our concepts and what they illuminate, rather than on our principles – that require *faith* in a "transcendent background" and in the power of vision for their health. Maintaining this critical outlook requires the humility of believing that moral reality outstrips one's present grasp, which can only ever be provisional.' (168) Murdoch reflects on how William Morris expresses visions of ideal communities in which, she observes in 'A House of Theory', 'work would once again be creative and meaningful and human brotherhood would be restored' (172). She also notes how after World War Two 'equality' was no longer associated with the elimination of exploitation and alienation through the ending of capitalism. Murdoch writes, 'it now seems possible that capitalism is not doomed after all [...] On both the theoretical and the practical plane economists have led us to believe that capitalism can (perhaps) [...] does not inevitably [...] grind the faces of the poor' (171). For post-war critics and theorists, 'Political activity, like moral activity, is thought of as the making of empirical choices' (174).

According to the Murdoch of 'A House of Theory', a fresh socialist vision would 'involve a rethinking and regrouping on the theoretical plane of concepts such as "exploitation" and "alienation" which were formerly gathered about the Labour

Theory of Value. The familiar ideas of "equality", "democracy", "freedom" need to be understood anew in the light of the problem of labour and not treated as independent "absolutes" whose meaning is taken for granted. To treat them so is to ultimately imperil them' (184). This is an insight I took to heart in writing *Ethical Humans* (London: Routledge, 2022) where I sought to make connections between life, love, labour, learning and loss.

As Murdoch insists, in ways possibly even more relevant in a time of globalised de-industrialisation and social media – 'What is needed is an *area of translation,* an area in which specialised concepts and recommendations can be seen and understood in the light of moral and social ideas which have a certain degree of complexity and yet are not the sole property of technicians' (177). At the same time Murdoch recognises that orthodox Marxists have to be challenged, as Gramsci does in his *Prison Notebooks*, because often they do not view human beings as valuable *qua* individuals. Rather, as Jamieson notes, 'they reduce human beings to their class position and role in bringing the end of capitalism' (18).

Jamieson notes that the ethical vision of the New Left, as framed by Edward Thompson but also as revisioned in terms of feminism in the writings of Sheila Rowbotham, 'was humanist in that it condemned the prioritisation of political expediency over human life and individual freedom' (180). She affirms that, 'Throughout Murdoch's writings, she highlights the importance of regarding ourselves as free with respect to the psychological and socio-historic forces operative in and on our psyches, that is, neurosis and convention. This is not to say that they don't overdetermine how we think about and imagine the lives of others or that we can simply choose to escape their influence' (181).

Iris Murdoch's Practical Metaphysics is an early and valuable contribution to the 'Iris Murdoch Today' series. A striking feature of this book is an awareness of how the formative styles through which we come into philosophy – often to do with the generations we are part of as students – can guide, even determine how we read Murdoch's early writings and also how we make sense of the development of her philosophical writings. This is a theme with which Jamieson both opens and closes her reading of Murdoch's early writings.

Jamieson provides insights into different ways of reading Murdoch – and not only her early writings. These readings are shaped through the philosophical styles that people have learnt to take for granted. They reflect the formative traditions that shaped people as philosophers and sit in uneasy tension with the common-sense ways of thinking and feeling they are likely to have grown up to take for granted in their class, gender or racial formations within a liberal moral culture. She notes, 'there is sometimes the uncomfortable appearance that Murdoch is being saved from her own excesses [...] beneath the "compelling pictures" and the awkward displays of ethical and political commitments, Murdoch's work contains *real arguments* (or at least fine material for constructing them') (3).

Jamieson observes that there are two strategies that are followed to rehabilitate Murdoch's philosophy: 'The first concedes that Murdoch's writings are profoundly insightful but unclear; it attempts to extract her most insightful remarks and reassemble them in a form more palatable to analytic moral philosophy. The second insists that Murdoch's "unclarity" is only apparent; if we look at her work in the right way – *synoptically* – we can see her using legitimate argumentative methods to defend a familiar sort of position' (3). At different stages of Murdoch's work Jamieson explores these two strategies and in her readings of Murdoch's early writings, alive to tensions in Murdoch's practical metaphysics, she offers an alternative reading that shows the weakness of these positions and what they are likely to get wrong. This argument might be developed still more forcefully: Murdoch's work gives us a way of radically questioning prevailing ways of doing philosophy.

Jamieson quotes Jessy Jordan appreciation that at some level Murdoch shares with Charles Taylor the 'need to recover the history of philosophical positions that have attained the unquestionable common sense. By doing so, we can recognise their contingency' (4). Jamieson observes that in *Iris Murdoch's Genealogy of the Modern Self* Jordan pictures Murdoch as a genealogist, crafting 'a historical narrative designed to subvert a dominant philosophical consensus, thereby liberating one to consider an alternative philosophical picture' (4). But rather than taking these alternatives seriously, and even considering how Murdoch might have lost some of these values in her later writings, Jamieson contends, 'On this reading, we should understand Murdoch's earliest forays in academic philosophy as preambles to a defence of moral realism' (5).

Jamieson also recognises, 'The synoptic approach avoids accusing Murdoch of obscurity [...] however [...] [Jordan] elides the very aspects of her writing that lead philosophers to accuse her of excessive literariness or *moralizing*. Her work may be replete with metaphors, analogies, and compelling pictures, and she may draw regular linkages between philosophy and the ills of post-war literature and politics, but the synoptic view makes these aspects of her writing look like stylistic quirks, at best ancillary to her more fundamental philosophical aim: displaying the universal (moral) structure of human consciousness' (5-6).

Lesley Jamieson's *Iris Murdoch's Practical Metaphysics*, as I have shown, offers so much more than a guide to her early writings. She offers us a helpful investigation into different ways of reading Murdoch by contemporary analytic philosophers and the different approaches that they have taken. But not only does she show the limits of these dominant approaches, she also helps us understand how Murdoch's moral writings can offer us so much more, while hinting that the move away from some of her vital political insights shows a certain loss of concepts on her part in her later philosophical writings, particularly when it comes to the interrelations between ethics and politics and the relational concepts we need to engage in the fearful times we are living through, that she could not have anticipated.

Review of Matthew Congdon, *Moral Articulation: On the Development of New Moral Concepts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023)

Samuel Filby

'I write', Gillian Rose tells us in the preface to *Judaism and Modernity*, 'out of those moments of anguish which are nameless'.[1] Uttering the nameless – how does one so much as begin to undertake such a task? For Rose, this endeavour could only be accomplished by drawing upon philosophical and religious traditions, the sole available means by which she could adequately 'articulate and explore that anguish'.[2] It was ultimately Judaism, not the fashionable poststructuralism of her contemporaries, that offered Rose the resources needed to articulate her nameless anguish, providing her with frameworks and concepts that empowered her to 'develop a perspective on quandaries which would otherwise remain amorphous and alien', as she puts it in her memoir *Love's Work*.[3]

When we situate ourselves within a philosophical, political or religious tradition, we inherit a vocabulary for making sense of things, a repertoire of concepts through which we can understand ourselves and articulate our experiences. While we need not take on this vocabulary wholesale – we may find, after all, that we can no longer be confident in the words bequeathed to us; discover that they find no grip on us; learn that they distort rather than clarify our lives – traditions nonetheless provide us with conceptual means of making sense of the world and our lives, including our initially elusive experiences.[4] What happens, though, when the concepts we have inherited cannot do justice to our experiences, when none of the words we might call upon do not express what has happened to us, when they fail to register what we are feeling? Iris Murdoch laments just this in 'Against Dryness', claiming that we need a richer moral and political vocabulary than the one we have inherited from the Enlightenment, Romanticism, and liberalism.[5] These traditions have led to a loss of concepts, a result of which is that we can no longer capture the

difficult and opaque aspects of ethical life in anything but the barest outline. What we need are new ethical concepts.

How we come to engender new ethical and political concepts in the face of initially nameless but nonetheless meaningful experiences is the driving concern of Matthew Congdon's remarkable book, *Moral Articulation: On the Development of New Moral Concepts*. In this text, Congdon offers a highly original account of how initially inchoate experiences can lead us to produce new ethical concepts, contending that the articulation of these concepts contributes to the constitution of the very ethical reality they seek to capture. On Congdon's picture, it is when we undergo experiences of 'discursive breakdown' that our need for new value-concepts arises. Discursive breakdown occurs when, confronted by some experience, we possess a sense that our words fail us, that any word that we might summon cannot capture what we want to express. The experience nevertheless strikes us as meaningful, as something for which we want to find the right words. Congdon calls this sense of inchoate yet meaningful experience 'proto-discursive meaning'. Rose's nameless anguish can be understood as an experience of proto-discursive meaning, one that philosophical and religious traditions provided her with means discursively to articulate. In Congdon's cases, however, we precisely lack concepts which would allow us discursively to express our sense of meaning: the vocabularies we have inherited are not fully up to the task of capturing our experiences. The challenge is, therefore, how to formulate and develop new concepts.

A noteworthy instance of the movement from discursive breakdown to the articulation of a new ethical concept can be found in Susan Brownmiller's record of the United States' women's liberation movement, *In Our Time*. In that memoir, Brownmiller famously reports how victims of unwanted sexual advances were 'at a loss to describe the hate episodes' until they collectively conceptualised these experiences as 'sexual harassment'.[6] The kind of discussive breakdown undergone by the victims of these hate episodes leads as a consequence to what Congdon calls 'moral articulation': the process of developing new concepts to apprehend initially nameless ethical experiences, an undertaking which 'transforms one's latent sense of moral significance into a discursively articulatable moral claim' (3). In Congdon's terminology, a sense proto-discursive meaning in the face of discussive breakdown can press upon us the need to develop new concepts so that we can articulate those experiences.

This brings us to the central metaethical claim of the book. When we capture ethical reality under new descriptions via the process of moral articulation, such as in the cases Brownmiller reports or when Raphael Lemkin envisioned the moral atrocities of the Ottoman Empire and the Nazi regime as genocide, Congdon contends that we are not simply putting a new label on a pre-existing moral reality, but rather are contributing to the constitution of ethical reality itself. Our

language, Congdon contends, both 'reveals and reshapes the objective layout of ethical life' (2). It does so by ushering us into to 'appropriate evaluative standards and practical responses' to our ethical experiences (59). Accordingly, one of the guiding aims of *Moral Articulation* is to 'identify a conceptually distinctive way in which language shapes morality' (2).

The six chapters that make up *Moral Articulation* explore various aspects of ethical life in which the reshaping of ethical life occurs through moral articulation, as well as a number of other related themes. These include the picture of language and mind which underpins Congdon's view (Chapter Two); the role emotions might play in the process of moral articulation (Chapter Three); how moral articulation is related to debates concerning the construction of social reality (Chapter Four); a neo-Aristotelian framework for understanding how ethics can be simultaneously historically dynamic and objective, providing moral articulation a role in the constitution of the conditions of human flourishing (Chapter Five); and how to think about the relationship between new ethical concepts and moral progress (Chapter Six).

My aim in this review will not be to examine each of these chapters in detail, but instead will be to think through some overarching lines of thought and substantial conclusions found throughout the book. Congdon's most ambitious claim comes in Chapter Five, where he develops and defends the view that moral articulation contributes to the constitution of ethical reality in the most detail. I want to begin by exploring how this claim might be motivated, for we might reasonably be sceptical that our conceptualisation of some phenomenon can contribute to its constitution at all. If that is so, then moral articulation (as Congdon defines it) will seem implausible. To help motivate it, I will look at cases where our conceptions of a phenomena seem to partially constitute those phenomena, rather than merely describe it. My aim here is to follow what I take to be Congdon's central line of thought, ultimately raising concerns about what it means to recognise someone as a human being.

Central to Congdon's book is the distinction between 'articulation' and 'description'. Drawing from Charles Taylor, Congdon's notion of articulation is meant to capture 'an activity of conceptualisation that strives to be faithful to an object it simultaneously transforms' (8). Articulations are to be contrasted with descriptions, which have no such transformative effect: the objects they describe, are, as it were, 'indifferent to the ways we speak about them' (8). This is the initial distinction that should be made, for while it is natural to think of things as indifferent to the ways we speak of them, it is harder to get a grip on what it would mean for our speech to transform the constitution of something in this kind of way. A fruitful way of getting these notions into view is by reflecting on the role self-interpretation plays in our emotional lives, for such self-interpretation is perhaps the most intuitive and plausible instance of our articulation of a

phenomenon contributing to the constitution of it. If such self-interpretation can plausibly be seen as contributing to the constitution of what it conceptualises, then maybe the same will hold in the metaethical domain.

Sometimes we can immediately conceptualise what we are feeling. When you tell me I have not been investing enough time in my family, I instantaneously feel guilty and conceptualise my feelings as such. On other occasions, though, it can be far less clear what we are feeling. Sometimes our feelings are more inchoate, and although we might sense we are feeling something, we are unable to say exactly what. After being publicly slighted by you about the quality of one of my published poems, I might know I feel some sense of discomfort, though it is not yet clear to me what kind of discomfort. After some rumination on the matter, I eventually come to formulate my feeling as shame. How should we think of this act of self-interpretation? One picture of mental life suggests that my feeling of shame is already fully formed before I can articulate what I am feeling. This picture envisions my emotional landscape as entirely independent of my awareness of that landscape, as if my acknowledgement of shame is the same sort of discovery as when I find out my cholesterol is high. My self-interpretation does nothing whatever to constitute whether I have high cholesterol and I can very well experience either of these without coming to know those facts about myself. What's more, it seems that my cholesterol can be high without my so much as possessing the concept of cholesterol. To use Congdon's terminology, this picture presents both my high cholesterol and my feeling of shame as descriptions about myself.

Yet thinking about our emotions in terms of descriptions seems misguided. In the first place, it is hard to see how someone can be said to feel some emotions without possessing the concept of those emotions.[7] Without possessing the concept of shame, I might very feel uncomfortable or generically bad, but I do not feel shame. This is because conceptualising my emotion as shame not only is an interpretation of what I am feeling, but how those feelings are connected to my understanding of what has happened, as well as what routes of response are appropriate in light of what has happened. I can only understand my action as shameful once I possess that concept, and as such can only feel that I want to flee from the sight of others if I conceptualise my feelings in that light. Possessing the concept of shame orients me in a space of what you have said to me, what I have done, and what I am feeling: it alters the configuration of what has been said, what I feel, and how I should respond through my articulation of what I am feeling. It organises not just a bare feeling, but rather situates me in a whole social space. It is for reasons along these lines that Bernard Williams wrote that 'what people's ethical emotions are depends significantly on what they take them to be'.[8] In Congdon's language, we can say that we (at least sometimes) 'articulate' what we are feeling, not only describing what we feel.

There is, therefore, plausibly an important case for articulation in our lives: that of articulation of our emotions. This at least gives the distinction between articulation and description some legitimacy; our question, now, is whether such a distinction applies to how we speak about the ethical domain. In a similar way that articulating what I feel is shame orients me in a network of possible responses and modes of evaluation in relation to what I am feeling, what you have said, and what I have done, conceptualising our experiences with distinctly ethical concepts can similarly situate us in a social space. Shame is, after all, an ethical emotion, hence bringing with it normative and evaluative baggage. If conceptualising how I feel as shame can partially constitute what emotion I have, perhaps moral articulation can shape ethical reality in a similar way. Congdon writes that

> the sorts of new moral concepts that are our focus, like 'sexual harassment', 'child abuse', 'hate speech', and beyond, purport not only to help us to *notice* patterns of difference and unity in the social world, but to adopt appropriate evaluative standards and practical responses to those patterns. (59)

Understanding one's experience as being a victim of sexual harassment gives a shape not only to one's feelings, but also to how to conceptualise the cause of those feelings. To conceptualise it as such is to situate oneself in normative and evaluative terms, understanding that one was wronged in a particular kind of way. This conceptualisation is therefore not mere description, as Congdon stresses, but an articulation partially constituting ethical reality itself, similar to how articulating my feeling as shame contributes to the constitution of what I am feeling. If this seems right, then it seems to follow that when we articulate new ethical concepts, we come to realise new configurations of ethical reality through our discursive practices.

It is noteworthy that there remain difficulties with such an extension. My formulation of how I feel can plausibly play a constitutive role in determining what I feel because I exercise a certain kind of authority over my own emotional states. They are decidedly my feelings, such that your interpretation of those emotions cannot play any kind of constitutive role in determining what they are, though I might very well take what you think into account. However, I do not exercise the same kind of interpretive authority over morality as I do over my own emotional life: morality is not mine in the way my emotions are.

That said, there is something important to in the claim that new ethical concepts partially constitute ethical reality. These cases will be particularly plausible when they involve the ethical emotions in some way, or the subject's feeling that they have been wronged or harmed. Congdon's claim, though, is ultimately much stronger:

he argues that moral articulation goes all the way down. Congdon's target is what he calls the 'immutability thesis', the claim that 'if objective moral grounds exist, they must be (traceable to grounds that are) historically inalterable' (164). Against this, Congdon argues for an historised metaethical view. For him, we need not buy into the idea that there must be historically unalterable grounds in order for there to be objective ethical truths. Whatever ethical truths there are have a historically contingent basis, articulated by subjects existing with concrete societies during particular historical time periods.[9]

Metaethical realists typically do not go in for this kind of historicism, but Congdon nonetheless takes himself to be a metaethical realist. He follows philosophers like Philippa Foot in seeking to ground ethical judgments in the human life-form: in the kind of biological and social animals human beings are. On this kind of neo-Aristotelian view, what it means for human beings to live an ethically virtuous life flows from what it means for the human species to flourish. The goodness of the ethical virtues is therefore determined by human nature and the needs of the species: human beings in some sense need the virtues. Talk of human nature typically suggests that there is some unchanging core to the human life-form such that, say, justice will be a virtue no matter what changes the human life-form undergoes. If there is some invariant core to human nature, the neo-Aristotelian maintains, then we can develop some objective account of how human beings should live across different societies and historical epochs.

We need not, Congdon tells us, take on this ahistorical view of human nature. Drawing from Foot's work in *Natural Goodness*, Congdon acknowledges that neo-Aristotelians typically accept the view that individual species undergo evolutionary change, albeit over long periods of time. Congdon's suggestion is that relevant changes can occur over shorter historical timelines, such that what counts as a human being's flourishing turns on the historical period and social form of life in which they exist. Since 'social relations, needs, dependencies, and vulnerabilities that, taken together, set conditions upon the possibilities of human flourishing' and those conditions are historically dynamic, it follows that the possibilities of human flourishing are also historically dynamic (159). Such a view allows us to make objective ethical judgments about what it means for the human-life form to flourish during certain historical periods. We therefore can think of this account as broadly realist in nature, though not a realism that buys into the immutability thesis. Whatever moral truths there are will be contingent, indexed to naturalistic facts about the human life-form at a particular time.

Moral articulation fits into this metaethical picture through what Congdon calls 'life-form articulations'. As we might expect, life-form articulations are not descriptions of biological features of our species, but instead conceptualisations that shape the kind of life-form we are. If we accept that human nature is historically dynamic, then we can accept that different historical and social

circumstances make available to us new possibilities for our life form. When those possibilities are discursively articulated, this partially constitutes what it means to be a human being, hence what it means to flourish during some particular period of time. Congdon explains this along the following lines:

> Moral facts are grounded in naturalistic considerations concerning the condition of our flourishing, given the sorts of creatures we are; yet the successful articulation of the latter can, sometimes, not only illuminate but help create anew the possible forms our flourishing might take, thus developing the sort of creatures we are. (149)

This said, we do not transform what it means to be human by fiat. As Congdon stresses, what it means for us to live an ethically good life is not up to us in the sense that we can construct what it means to be human however we please, but rather that it is dependent on us, i.e., those naturalistic facts about our flourishing. Our articulations must 'work upon rational considerations that are, in some sense, already there prior to their conceptualization' (194). Those considerations are the aforementioned 'naturalistic considerations about what we need to survive, flourish, and be actualized' (194). Our life-form articulations will be rationally constrained by these biological, historical, and social features of our life, though they will also transform what it looks like to flourish in some period of time and social formation. The result is a historically dynamic picture of the human life-form, one which grounds ethical truth in that life-form's articulations about itself, articulations whose legitimacy is constrained by the objective, naturalistic facts about what it means for that life-form to flourish in that period of time.

One of the upshots of Congdon's account is that it purports to preserve objectivity and realism while eschewing the questionable idea of an invariant core to human nature. There is, however, a question of how open the field of human change might conceivably be. Recall that, on neo-Aristotelianism, what it means for a member of the human life-form to live an ethically good life depends upon facts about that life-form and the historical circumstances in which it is situated. So far, so good. But Congdon also seems to think the same seems to go for value, not just species well-being (186). Congdon tells us that it is 'emotional and evaluative tendencies in human beings that render phenomena such as friendship, art, conversation, and communion with nature' as good; it follows that life-form changes which alter those tendencies will correspondingly remove our need for such goods (187). Stronger still, Congdon suggests that those things will no longer be valuable if our emotional and evaluative tendencies change. 'Subtract from our natures the relevant emotions and evaluations', Congdon writes, 'and such goods go' (186). All the same, Congdon holds 'shifts as profound as this [...] may articulate new ways of realizing a recognizably human life' (194).

Recognisable to whom, though, and why? If Congdon allows such a degree of flexibility in the human life-form such that all these aspects of human feeling and desire can be removed, what changes make those forms of life recognisably human? What guarantees that I will recognise them as such, or that I should? If such a life-form finds nothing valuable that I could conceivably find valuable, is engaged in none of the practices, modes of evaluation, patterns of desire, and routes of feeling that I now understand as forming some part of recognisably human experience, it is difficult for me to see how I could recognise such a life-form as human beyond those beings taking on a bodily form similar to mine. I would feel far less ethical kinship with a group of Martians that found friendship and art worth going in for, than a being that purportedly shares my life form yet cannot conceive of their value. Those Martians and I participate in ethical life together in a sense that I do not with those other beings that share my life-form. If this is the case, why should I think of the foundation of ethical life as a shared life-form?

What seems to be needed here is an account of what it means to recognise someone as a human being, of what it means to acknowledge that we are engaged in ethical life together. This is not to say that all the possibilities of human life need to be given in advance in order for us to intelligibly recognise some life-form change as remaining human; it is not a call for conservativism or to suggest we return to the invariant core view of human nature. Congdon is prescient in his insistence that our understanding of human life must be historically dynamic, open to historical change and varying in social and cultural configurations. But we might also think that part of what it is to lead a recognisably human life is to find value in at least some of the activities that Congdon maintains could be subtracted or, if not in that explicit list, values that could in principle be subtracted on his view. We might think that to recognise someone as human is, minimally, to recognise that their life is shaped by something we could conceivably find valuable. It may not be what we find worth going in for – not everyone needs to value communion with nature for instance – but we must be able to grasp that this is the kind of thing human beings could find worthwhile and command our love. We might go as far as to say that to acknowledge a life as human is to recognise a life-form as living a life with these values. This is just to say that we do not fully capture the concept 'human being' without grasping its life with what is valuable.[10]

We can consider this issue from another angle. Let us say we grant Congdon the view that what it means for a species to live well is dependent on various facts about that species' life-form, situated as it is in a concrete society at a particular time in history. As such, judgements about what it is good for human beings are dependent on those facts. Does it follow from this that value is dependent on the human life-form? It is not clear that it does. Congdon is surely right in thinking

that if our emotional and evaluative tendencies change, our responses to what is valuable would be different. It is plausible that we would not find those things worth going in for any longer. But it does not follow that those things would cease being valuable, nor that we would cease to conceive of those things as valuable. Human beings already value incommensurable things across time and social worlds, hence cannot conceivably value all the same things at the same time: that is the nature of incommensurability. But to acknowledge incommensurable values is in a sense to acknowledge that while I cannot attune myself to some purported value, I nevertheless recognise that it is the kind of thing someone else might find worth going in for, that it is worthy of some allegiance or devotion. I might not be able to choose it for myself, or I might simply be missing out. The value nonetheless remains.

My suggestion here is that we can take on board Congdon's historically dynamic view of the human life form while still maintaining there are some constraints on what counts as a recognisable form of human life, constraints not to be found in an 'invariant core' but in the network of values that we can conceive human beings of demanding allegiance, commanding our love, and finding precious. What we do in fact value will be socially dynamic and historically in flux, but as well what we can understand ourselves as conceivably valuing, even if we do not in fact value it. There too is flexibility, but there is also constraint.

This is, of course, all a mere sketch, and nothing about it ultimately suggests that Congdon could not either reject it or take it on board. I have, after all, relied a great deal on something more like assertion than on argument, and Congdon has written about recognition elsewhere much more instructively than I have here. My aim is simply to bring out how aspects of moral articulation can naturally lead us to consider how our life with value and our recognition of the human life-form might be tied up in a way that might cause us to reshape some of the contours of Congdon's view. The constraints on what we can rationally articulate will include facts about our biological, historical and social needs, but also might include the kind of things we can conceive of as desiring or find worth wanting, not just what we do, as a matter of fact, desire or want.

In 'Metaphysics and Ethics', Murdoch wrote that 'we have not considered the great *variety* of concepts that make up morality', stressing that we will make progress in what we take ethics to be only when we attend to the 'cloudy and shifting domain' of concepts by which humans live.[11] Congdon's work is a testament to the importance of this project, showing us what it can look like when it is deeply and rigorously done with a sensitivity to our social and political life. *Moral Articulation* is a book anyone interested in moral philosophy, or the afterlife of Murdoch's philosophical vision, should read.

1 Gillian Rose, *Judaism and Morality* (London: Verso Books, 2017), vi.
2 Rose, *Judaism and Morality*, vi.
3 Gillian Rose, *Love's Work* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2011), p.57.
4 In *The Years*, for instance, Annie Ernaux frames Catholicism's 'unceremoniously vanish[ing]' from her as a of loss of concepts: 'Venial and mortal sins, the commands of God and the Church, grace and theological virtues belonged to an unintelligible vocabulary, an obsolete mindset' (London: Fitzcarraldo Press, 2017) p.146.
5 Iris Murdoch, 'Against Dryness', in *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. by Peter J. Conradi (London: Penguin, 1999), pp.287–95.
6 Susan Brownmiller, *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* (New York: The Dial Press, 1999), p.280. See also Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.150.
7 I draw inspiration from Chapter Two of Richard Moran's *Authority and Estrangement: An Essay on Self-Knowledge* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001) here.
8 Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (California: University of California Press, 1994), p.91.
9 This is not to say that *ethically necessary* norms cannot arise from historically contingent sources. See pp.177-179 for more on this.
10 This suggestion is in the spirit of Chapter Five of Anastasia Berg and Rachel Wiseman's *What are Children For?* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2024), as well as the work of Cora Diamond.
11 Iris Murdoch, 'Metaphysics and Ethics', in *Existentialism and Mystics*, pp.73-74.

An Introduction to the Art and Writing of Luey Graves

Frances White

An unexpected but very welcome new aspect of response to Iris Murdoch's work over the past decade has come from outside the traditionally boundaried academic preserves of philosophy and literary criticism. Carol Sommers has brought her textual artist's mind to bear on Murdoch in prose and film; para-illustrator Matthew Richardson curated an exhibition based on his book, *Good*, composed from texts juxtaposed with artefacts from Murdoch's personal belongings preserved in her archive; ceramicist Kevin Petrie painted his own response to Murdoch's fiction in his exhibition 'Other Journeys'. Together, these three artists discussed her influence on their work with Miles Leeson in an Iris Murdoch Society podcast , 'Iris Murdoch and Artistic Inspiration' on 9 October 2023.

These artists are now joined by another prize-winning painter inspired by Murdoch's novels, Luey Graves, who tells her own story below. She writes a fascinating account of her engagement with *The Sea, The Sea* and *The Bell*, initially through hearing these novels read aloud (Graves pays tribute to Miriam Margolyes's reading), which inspired her exhibition, *The Bell, The Bell* – a cunning conflation of the titles. This was presented under the umbrella of Taymour Grahne Projects (a nomadic exhibition programme that collaborates with important contemporary artists) in a light-filled gallery at Cromwell Place in January 2014. Blink and you would have missed it. The window of opportunity was very narrow, only Wednesday 17 to Sunday 21 January, but I was privileged to see this gem of an exhibition during its all too brief public life. Fifteen of the sixteen paintings displayed were inspired by *The Bell*: the last, 'Iris, Reaching', pays more general homage to the novelist.

The glowing colour-drenched canvases (all in gouache and oil on panels ranging from 40x30 to 83x67 cm) have stayed in my mind, even though seen so fleetingly. *The Sea, The Sea* is referenced, but the predominant presence is *The Bell* and particularly Dora's experience. Butterflies, swinging jazz skirts, art classes, dreams, pubs, water, gardens and graves (tantalisingly conflated), birds, kitchen

sinks and window frames are the images through which Graves's accomplished paintings conjure up the novel, and specifically one reader's personal response to it. Her response resonates strongly with my own as well as augmenting it through a medium other than words. I am grateful for the fresh insight as well as the pure pleasure this excitingly colourful exhibition gave me and I think Murdoch, who loved painters and paintings so much, would also delight in it. Graves asks, 'You know when a book just speaks to you?' and in this representation of her 'dreamlike encounters' with *The Bell*, she speaks to her viewers too. And who better to convey the experience of this novel than a young female artist who trained at the Slade (as well as the Royal Academy) and who can imagine glancing 'between Dora's name and my own in the imposing student register'? Graves's own experience of casual misogyny at art college mirrors Dora's. But her concluding remembrance of a tutor saying to her, 'I don't give a shit what books you are reading', would shock and displease Murdoch, who worked hard at the RCA to engage students with works of art composed of words. In Luey Graves's exhibition, *The Bell, The Bell*, and in her memoir of its conception and actualisation published here, she reveals herself to be an artist in both paint and words. Iris Murdoch would have loved her.

Exhibition: *The Bell, The Bell*, London, 16–21 January 2024

Luey Graves

You know when a book just speaks to you?

One night in September 2022, I lay, unable to sleep, in a tall, crumbling house in Camberwell, the ceiling pounding with impervious bass. Usually, I would push wax or silicone plugs into my ear canals, forming a seal between myself and the world – but this was not my house. I didn't want to wake Colm who was sleeping beside me. I leaned quietly towards the floor and reached for my bag. My hand recognised the smooth tangle of headphones.

During the pandemic I had read *The Sea, The Sea.* Hemmed in by roads and people, I felt relief at an imagined taste of salt in the air, imagined gulls calling. Recognition of Iris as someone who knows longing – for past loves, for the crashing of waves.

The savage sun glared down that summer as I sat at my kitchen table. I held an art club for children in the north of the city over Zoom and it was strange to see into the private spaces of the children I had taught.

In my kitchen, my view extended to a wall of concrete blocks fringed with ivy, I drew wave after wave, the rhythm of my hand mirroring the sea. Sometimes I drew blank faces, hands reaching – people drowning, not distinct personalities at all. I sold some through the Artist Support Scheme, so they were life-floats, in a way.

"The Bell is a quaint, dated novel about religion and sex in a community of self-obsessed people," I read in an Amazon review and immediately added the book to my basket.

When the pandemic was over, and I found myself in that crumbling house in Camberwell, with the music thudding above me and my hand grasping for the headphones, *The Bell* called out to me.

The unhappy marriage of a girl who studied art at the Slade.

After that first night, I kept going back.

Alone in my house, unable to sleep. In my room, Miriam Margolyes spoke directly to me.

A prayer (Miriam Margolyes's dulcet tones).

As I drifted in and out of consciousness, I was aware of Dora holding a butterfly in her hand. She releases it to the astonishment of the men around her. I seemed to wake most nights around the time of the drunken embrace, pouring rain and glaring car headlights. That Paul was a violent man was clear from the start. Is this Dora's knowing or my own? Heart heavy.

After weeks of restless nights, Colm gives me a copy of the book. I read it in sequence. The pace slows and quickens. My dreamlike encounters with the spoken book inflect my reading, imagery hazy and already half known.

Still, at night, my mind continued along these half-formed paths, where Dora is my mirror and Iris is –

One moment I am walking home, my determined step outpacing any swaying. Oh, the confidence of someone very young! And then I waken early, in my dream or some years earlier, to snow falling through Crittall windows, landing softly on the back gardens of quiet north London. The tube is closed, buses aren't running. I will not miss a day in the studio. I walk south and west through muffled streets to Gower Street. The quad is almost empty, only a few lone figures break the spell – and the

Slade is locked. I feel angry with the postgrad students whose job it is to open the doors: scorn their rounded lives, their lack of commitment. My studio mate – my closest friend – arrives on foot from Whitechapel. We wander around for a while with linked arms and steaming breath and watch a film at the Brunswick Centre.

Now I am sitting with Iris in the Lord John Russell in Bloomsbury. A crowd of students tower high with pints and cigarettes outside, celebrating the success of one lucky boy painter. The unspoken symbols and ciphers that fly between them make me wonder what is really happening.

I don't know what Iris and I talked about in the pub, but feel we covered all bases – art, books, people. She is a good person to talk to.

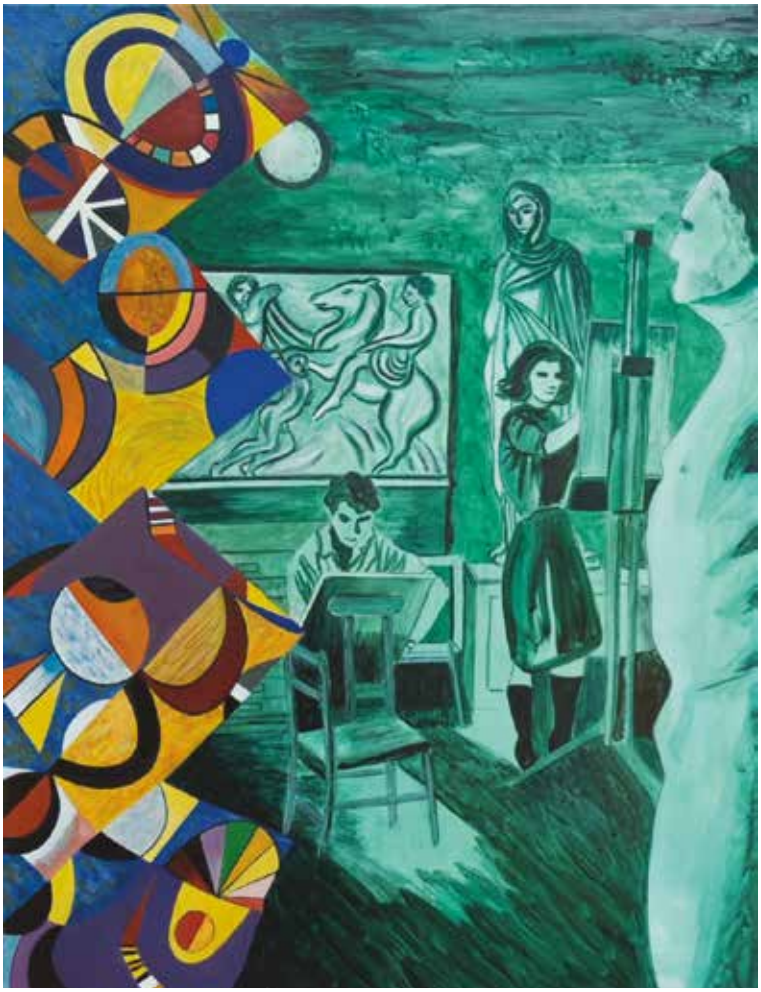
I picture Dora's multicoloured jazz skirts while she sets the Slade on fire. She was never a serious painter and always felt like an imposter. Is this in the book?

My mind's eye hovers somewhere near the foot of the sweeping stairs to the painting studios. I glance between Dora's name and my own in the imposing student register, as the edges of the page blacken and curl.

The bell, the bell. Echoing through the woods in the cloak of the night, the word repeats and reverberates like waves.

Slade on Fire or "Big Skirts".

Life Room
(Dave Bruebeck).



I am asked to do a solo exhibition. It has been eighteen years since I came to the Slade at eighteen.

One, a figure standing alone; eight, a woman's breasts, sideways. How eighteen felt or feels, an unknowable stretch of time backwards and forwards, hard to make sense of, even in the past tense.

Of course, I imagine Dora to be eighteen when she starts at the Slade. To set the scene, I must cast my mind back, along familiar white-grey corridors lined with casts and caryatids that throw long shadows.

I press the arrows to rewind quickly, fast, past Covid, into Before.

Warehouse studios in preciously forgotten parts of town, that last months, maybe a year if you're lucky. Long walks from overground stations past industrial estates and football stadiums, gaps in the windows and sleeping bags for months outside of summer. Churches that seem to spring from disused factories, exploding with song each Sunday, only to disappear again. A caff that doesn't serve avocado, where you're better off with tea than coffee.

Teaching jobs where art becomes something altogether different, the monolith formed over seven years of art school starting to crumble, revealing something more nebulous, glowing, warm.

A stale smell of booze and cigarettes – the tension before a fight breaks out – the tension when nothing happens. Unable to stand my ground in crits, unable to walk away. Paintings becoming smaller and quieter over three years at the Royal Academy Schools, until they're almost not there at all. How strange.

Finally, I am back at the Slade, standing at the precipice of all that is to come. Oh, how I feel for Dora! Her willingness to give away her future, her choices, herself – to a person she perceives to be stronger, wiser. I feel queasy, uncomfortable, familiar. Yes, I nod, still standing with Dora in my mind, holding her hand, as her trust in his superiority unravels, as her reluctance to be with him grows. You have your own strength, your own voice, I tell her. She struggles to believe it.

Give yourself to a higher power!

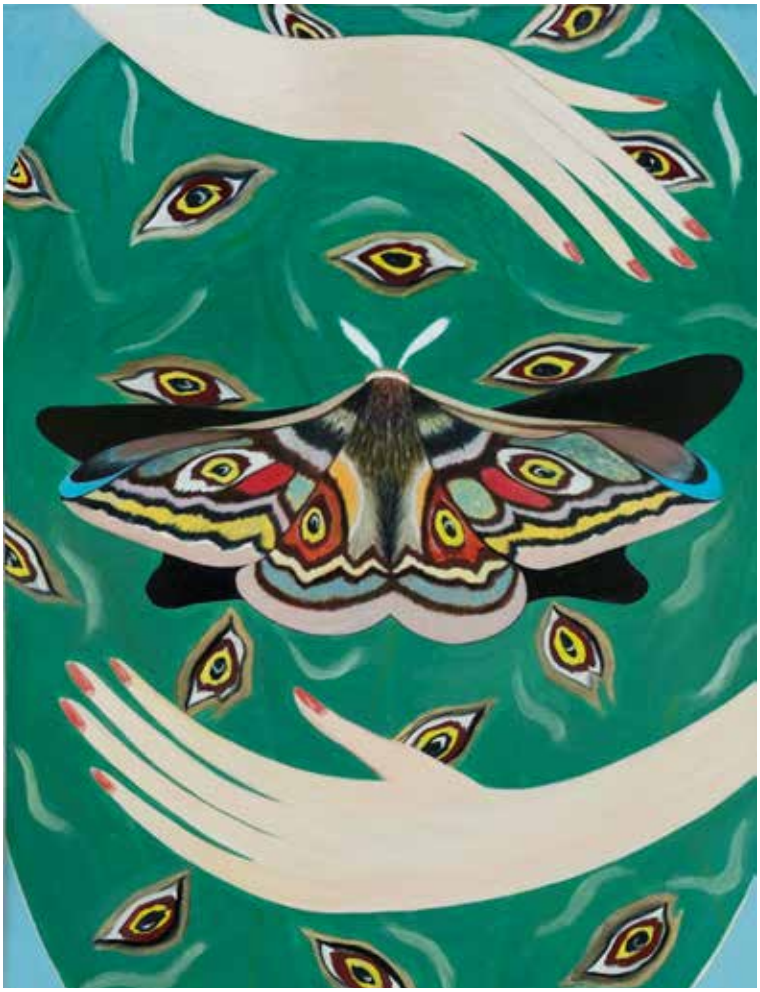
A religious community. Make life meaningful, make work meaningful. I remember thinking, as a teenager, perhaps that is what art school will be. Later, walking past Scientologists offering personality tests on Tottenham Court Road, Hare Krishnas offering dahl in Bloomsbury, I would mourn the absent presence of my beliefs, a blanket nestled around nothing. In my small room behind Euston Station, I'd scroll through *Art Monthly* and wonder what the artists believed in, compared to – say, Fra Angelico – or Malevich. And think of impending seminars, tutorials and crits and panic – what am I painting for? Painting against?

I was drawn to medieval painters like Bosch and Bouts – the fervour, the mysticism! Not knowing what I believed in myself, as an artist, I looked around me at the Slade and tried to study the gestures of artists who did.

Maybe it's because my grandparents lived beside an Abbey. My grandma swerved the local Catholic Church to attend Mass at the chapel with the nuns. My dad went to school in a monastery, and he had extra tuition from the nuns because he was terrible at Latin. Another nun would illustrate the credits for films he made. This set up, one generation back, seemed alluringly Other to me, under my own parents' post-religious, highly secular influence.

At the Royal Academy Schools, I wrote a letter to Joris-Karl Huysmans about religion and meaning. I felt like he was someone who had wrestled with the 'big questions' his whole life and had come to different conclusions. I wasn't sure if he'd have been aware of the other writers I thought he'd be interested in – at least, probably not the BBC adaptation of *War and Peace* with Anthony Hopkins in it as Pierre. When I had to present some version of this as my dissertation in that life room – the oldest in the country! – I choked and crumpled under the

Flit
(To leave).



quiet gaze of students and antique anatomical models. Never mind that – writing to him was what mattered to me – and a lot rested on his response. When I was writing my letter, my gentle, elderly tutor took me for tea at Strawberry Hill and told me that when you get to his age, you run out of space for books and need to get a Kindle.

If you can hear me, Joris-Karl, knock twice.

There was something liberating about making paintings for Dora. Position yourself as a new person, a work of fiction. Throw off the hang-ups, scrape off the layers of crusted oil paint building up on the round glass from a discarded microwave that you use as a palette. Imaginary women can make work under, or against, the scrutinous eyes of an overwhelmingly male art authority. Think tweed jackets, private members' clubs, sleeping with life models. There is a distance, a remove, and this creates safety.

I think about Dora, this unhappy girl and art student. I remember a crit in my third year. A tall, wide man with pale blue eyes and a cold edge, had made

Death By Crit
("Tits on Fire").

a comment about – my paintings, or was it my body? Could it have been both? Were they related? Not to me, not then. That throwaway comment stuck with me for years, a painful knot somewhere in my gut. Misogyny so casually announced that I wasn't sure if anyone else had heard.

Rhythmic ellipses, effervescent and alarmingly colourful: the loop between Dora and me circles once more, like something drawn by spiritualists in the nineteenth century. I feel a dissonance. Did that really happen in one of my crits? It would surely make more sense if it had happened to Dora in the art schools of the 1950s.

What comes next? *A Severed Head.*

A woman glares on the cover, sword in hand. Black, white, orange. A Judith you can hold in your hand.

At the Slade, I stayed away from books about contemporary art, feeling that what I desired wouldn't be contained within them. I was pleased when I found *Defaced: The Visual Culture of Violence in the Late Middle Ages* by the deliciously named Valentin Groebner.

I read about how humans have, for a long time, used body parts to dehumanise each other. This rang a bell, even then, long before that crit.

Imagine a time when noses were cut off, for crimes such as adultery, leaving a scarred or empty face, rendering the person formless, unhuman.

Panels prepared in the studio, in bed, my mind's eye arrowing this way and that. I dream of St Agatha, her breasts on a plate. I dream of fire, of Savonarola, of a bonfire of the vanities. I freeze an episode of *Cheers*, zoom in on the model ship behind the bar and imagine a tempest where severed breasts crash and sway. I remember a tutor saying, 'I don't give a shit what books you are reading' – and I think how far I have come.

Luey's exhibition The Bell, The Bell *was held at 4 Cromwell Place by Taymour Grahne Projects, in January 2024. For any enquiries, please contact Luey via her website: www.lueygraves.art*

Fifty Episodes of the Iris Murdoch Podcast

Wendy Vaizey

At the start of the global pandemic, a unique podcast was born, dedicated to mining all aspects of the multifaceted work of Iris Murdoch. Now, after more than 50 episodes, the Iris Murdoch Society podcast stands as an archive in its own right. It's also a testament to the enduring fascination with her work – and how much there remains to say about it. This piece reflects on the podcast's transition from a pandemic project to a staple in Murdoch studies, whose engaging format exemplifies the best qualities of open culture.

It's fitting that the series opens with Murdoch's debut novel (revisited in episode 55). However, what looks like an intentional project designed by Miles Leeson, Director of the Iris Murdoch Research Centre at Chichester University, was anything but. He says, 'The intention wasn't to start a podcast at all! As it happened, I was teaching *Under the Net* to my first-year undergraduates in early 2020 and had Anne Rowe, Frances White and Lucy Oulton on campus – Anne was going to give the lecture and we'd then each take a seminar group as there were around 50 students on the course. As we were all together, I thought it would be rather fun to get together in our recording studio on campus and have a chat about the novel that I could use for teaching at a later date. I enjoyed the process and thought I might get around to recording another at some point – then COVID struck and it seemed the ideal time to record them remotely.'

In the first podcast, Leeson and the other guests sound surprised, but pleased, to be there. Leeson had some recordings already in the bag to include: notable conference keynotes, interviews or talks never aired widely. These, featuring A. N. Wilson, Anne Rowe and Daniel Read, had the added frisson of breached exclusivity, with listeners let in on prior events now thrown open, valuable not only to scholars unable to attend the conferences, but to general readers worldwide.

Since its launch, the podcast has explored the extensive range of Murdoch's works and ideas. Interviews with scholars, writers, and enthusiasts are a standout feature, presenting a range of perspectives on Murdoch's work. Each episode provides thoughtful examinations of aspects of her novels, philosophical essays,

and personal correspondence, and the podcast's ability to balance scholarly depth with accessibility has been a key factor in its success, appealing to both academics and general readers, as social media commentators confirm.

This balance struck between catering to newcomers to Murdoch and to seasoned academics is seen from the inception. For instance, one can also find Brian Magee's excellent 1972 interview, alongside a companion piece by Murdochian scholar Gillian Dooley from Flinders University, Australia. Both offer a rounded picture of Murdoch both as philosopher and novelist. This episode was soon followed by 'Murdoch for Beginners', a podcast featuring Cheryl Bove, Avril Horner and Kieran Setiya.

Other episodes feature eminent and seasoned Murdoch scholars showcasing new research and publications; the podcast has come to have a role in promoting and disseminating new academic contributions in the field of Murdoch studies, such as, recently, Frances White's book on remorse. PhD candidates are not neglected, and this is an important aspect of keeping listeners informed about current scholarship on Murdoch, highlighting ongoing academic work contributing to the evolving field of Murdoch studies.

Reflecting, inevitably, Murdoch's own preoccupations, the podcast manages to cater to both literary and philosophical audiences, and this dual focus enriches the content. Philosophical episodes discuss Murdoch's contributions in that field, including key philosophical themes like morality, goodness, and the nature of art, whereas literary episodes often highlight specific novels, their plots, character analyses, and literary significance. The separate but related twin tracks Murdoch ploughed as philosopher and novelist mean that listeners in either field might be experts or novices who might need to have ideas explained, but this is covered. There's even an episode with Lyra Ekström Lindbäck which helpfully explains to philosophy newcomers (like me) why literature is not philosophy. Episodes dedicated to Murdoch's books of essays, such as *The Sovereignty of Good* and *Existentialists and Mystics*, offer accessible explanations of her thoughts on morality, love, and the self as well as Murdoch's influence on contemporary moral philosophy. The host's ability to break down complex ideas into understandable discussions has made these philosophical concepts more approachable for a broader audience.

Unsurprisingly, a significant focus of the podcast is its detailed analysis of Murdoch's novels. Each episode dedicated to a specific novel delves into its themes, characters, and philosophical underpinnings. Through these analyses, the podcast illuminates Murdoch's storytelling verve and the contested integration of philosophical concepts into her narratives. But this isn't always the approach: in some episodes, such as 'Childhood and Adolescence' featuring Jan Skinner and Anne Rowe, a slew of the novels is analysed through the lens of a particular topic. These thematic explorations are another strong aspect of the podcast, with

episodes dedicated to recurring aspects of culture and ideology in Murdoch's work, such as Iris and swimming, Iris and art (at the Wallace Collection), Iris and film, Iris and music, Iris and politics, Iris and Ireland, Iris and feminism, Iris and religion. Another format places Murdoch in negotiation with figures such as Blake, Shakespeare, T. S. Eliot, Austen and Woolf.

I'm not sure if such variety is unique to Murdoch studies. Murdoch had so many areas of expertise and intense interest – as mentioned, fiction, philosophy, fine art, poetry, music, swimming, animals, gender fluidity – and the podcast offers introductory windows into these avenues of research. Many listeners will have one specific area of interest – mine is the novels – but there are so many other jigsaw pieces that are not only engaging in their own right but also enrich understanding of the primary focus. Listeners can dip in to this tin of scholarly Quality Street. There is also a recent lecture upload, given by Leeson, about the relationship of Iris and John Bayley but, rather than being mildly scandalous, this thankfully turns out to be about their shared reading and writing, of which I hope there will be more to hear and read in due course.

Some of the most interesting episodes are biographical and quasi-historical, concerning Murdoch's friends such as Philippa Foot, Elizabeth Anscombe and Mary Midgley, novelists Elizabeth Bowen and Brigid Brophy, as well as less known figures like Dorothy Emmet, which flesh out the intellectual and social contexts in which such intellectual women lived and worked.

Guests are suitably wide-ranging too; one stand-out episode focusing on *The Bell* features Fr Mark Patrick Hederman, former Abbott of Glenstall Abbey in Ireland and author of two books with a focus on Murdoch, as well as Frances White, Deputy Director of the IMRC at Chichester, and the Deputy Books Editor of *The Times*; their discussions provide perspective on the novel's religious and moral themes, connecting Murdoch's fiction with her broader philosophical concerns.

These episodes that visit, unpack and sometimes revisit the novels do send me back to the novels to re-read them on hearing updates of interpretation of novels; for example, I'm now due to reread *Under the Net* and there are still plenty of novels to go: perhaps I've missed it, but I can't find an episode on *The Sea, The Sea*.

Listener feedback has also shaped the podcast's content and format. The recent 50th anniversary episode comprised a Q&A with Daniel Read of Kingston University, who responded to questions sent in by listeners; this participation through questions and comments no doubt fosters a sense of community among Murdoch enthusiasts. Special episodes, often tied to anniversaries, Christmas or significant events, bring a celebratory and reflective tone to the podcast. Featuring multiple guests and diverse perspectives, these episodes commemorate important milestones and reinforce the continued relevance of Murdoch's work. The pandemic changed academic conferences and conversations, benefiting this

podcast as much as others, and one 'In Conversation' edition, an upload rather than the usual podcast format, featured Avril Horner and Sarah Perry at the 2021 online conference. Another episode is based (virtually) in the Iris Murdoch collection at Kingston University Archives, with archivist Dayna Miller describing the intriguing one-sided letters, journals, objects and artifacts.

Murdoch's letters, such as those to her close friend and fellow writer Brigid Brophy, have informed much of the Murdoch scholarship in the years since her death and that of John Bayley, with the volume of biographical material only increasing as diaries and letters from third parties come to light. These insights offer a more personal perspective on Murdoch, complementing the discussions of her published works. The various podcast episodes featuring Anne Rowe, one of the editors along with Avril Horner of a volume of collected letters, frequently offer fresh insights into intersections of Murdoch's life and work.

The sheer weight of material to measure and sift, its correspondence to the timelines of her philosophical and artistic writing, and then the methodical re-examination and then, sometimes, reinterpretation or at least consideration of alterative interpretations of aspects of her work in the light of new information revealed means that fresh illuminations detonate quite regularly across the field of Murdoch studies. All of this takes time, and promises the continued unearthing of significant research insights for decades to come. In his presentation of emerging scholarship, Miles Leeson is quite sensitive to the potential for charges that biographical interpretations may close down other readings of the novel. This does sometimes seem to be happening. In a recent episode that revisits *Under the Net*, for example, Anne Rowe jokes, in the light of rereading a letter from Murdoch to Raymond Queneau, that 'I've been teaching that novel wrong for years'. But she's done no such thing – and Leeson too seems happy not to use the recent discoveries to shut down interpretations, but rather, to open them up.

Reaching its 50th episode is a significant milestone for the Iris Murdoch Society podcast. Its in-depth discussions and expert interviews make it a valuable resource for Murdoch scholars and enthusiasts, contributing to the understanding and appreciation of her work. The podcast's ability to make Murdoch's ideas accessible has likely expanded her readership and inspired many to explore, and explore further, her novels and philosophical writings. Its impact on Murdoch scholarship and its role in keeping her the conversations about her work publicly available are noteworthy achievements. As the podcast continues, it will remain a significant resource for understanding and appreciating Iris Murdoch's unique contributions to philosophy and literature.

Quite apart from the intellectual content, one aspect of the podcast that always attracts me, during the pandemic and since, is the prospect of listening to a group of informed adults who, while they clearly enjoy to speaking to each other about a topic of mutual interest for an hour, are not fawning or near-vaporising with

excitement, unlike some other hosts and guests in my podcast feed. Nor are they trying to sell me dodgy supplements. The 50th of these episodes has marked an important moment in the podcast's ongoing journey and now, well beyond that tally, the podcast continues to engage, inform and advance Murdoch scholarship with each subsequent release.

Report on 'Iris Murdoch and the East', online conference, 8 September 2023

Gillian Dooley

Anyone who reads Iris Murdoch detects her fascination with cultures and philosophies from beyond Western Europe, but this is only the second time to my knowledge that 'the East' has been the focus of a whole conference. This one-day meeting, held entirely online and cleverly timed to make it viable for a global audience, was organised by Rob Hardy and Fiona Tomkinson, with support from the Iris Murdoch Research Centre.

The convenors' extensive networks in east Asia allowed them to put together a programme that included scholars from Korea, Japan, and China as well as India and Turkey. As the day progressed, there was a distinct eastward movement, following the sun, beginning with a keynote lecture from Duan Daoyu in Nanjing, China and ending with concluding remarks from Miles Leeson in Chichester. That came at 1am South Australian time for me – a long but rewarding afternoon.

Various themes emerged strongly in many of the papers we heard. Duan's opening keynote lecture charted in detail the reputation of Murdoch as a novelist and philosopher; as a subject of translations into Chinese and of study at Chinese universities, beginning with her introduction to China in the late 1970s, growing slowly over the ensuing twenty years, and accelerating since 2000, with a number of academic studies of her work now available and signs of more activity to come. It was fascinating to hear about the reception of Murdoch in China, and other speakers followed up with similar studies of her fortunes in Japan, Korea, and India.

Evidence for Murdoch's reach into non-Anglophone countries can be gauged to some extent by the number of translations of her work that appeared over the years, but there is also the question of how much her books were studied at Asian universities, as we heard from the various speakers. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century attitudes to the study of contemporary British literature underwent various revisions. In the early part of her career, Murdoch was not yet established as a writer who was canonical (or perhaps male) enough to be

on English literature syllabuses. When, during the 1970s and 1980s, the turn to contemporary literature came in these countries, particularly those with colonial histories, a writer like Murdoch whose novels did not superficially deal with post-colonial themes was not considered relevant for study. The novels and stories of Doris Lessing, born in Iran in the same year as Murdoch was born in Ireland, and growing up in Southern Rhodesia, were apparently studied more in Asian (and, as I had discovered in my own research, Australian) universities during those years. Lessing also had the advantage of being – however rebelliously – more readily classified as a feminist writer than Murdoch. This seemed to be the story in Korea, as traced by Hyungseob Lee from Hanyang University. There are interesting exceptions to this trend. Chiho Omichi, from Aoyama Gakuin University, spoke about the Albion Club, formed in Japan after the Second World War to foster the study of British culture, with an apolitical bias, and where Murdoch was well-regarded during the Cold War period.

However, as was amply demonstrated during the conference, Asia was a constant presence in Murdoch's life, in her philosophy, and in her novels. Several papers dealt with Japan and India in her work, and her travels to those countries. The novels *A Severed Head*, *Bruno's Dream*, *The Sea, the Sea*, and *Jackson's Dilemma* were discussed by several speakers, as well as the play *The Three Arrows*. Fiona Tomkinson looked at a possible Japanese literary influence on *Nuns and Soldiers*, in which the significance of a dog blocking a waterfall seems to echo a similar trope in Yukio Mishima's tetralogy *The Sea of Fertility*. Wendy Jones Nakanishi also mentioned Mishima, famous for the political principles which led him to commit *seppuki* in 1970, but concentrated on the intriguing possibility that *A Severed Head* and *The Three Arrows,* in particular, might have been influenced by Junichiro Tanizaki's 1935 novel *The Secret History of the Lord of Musashi*. She acknowledged a difficulty with her theory, in that Tanizaki's novel was not available in English translation until after these works were written, but found a way to explain its plausibility notwithstanding.

Resonances between Murdoch's thought and historic Chinese theories of art were explored by Zhiqi Wang of Zhejiang University. Zhiqi showed how Chinese literati paintings – beautiful artworks containing both image and text – embody the relationship between art and moral progress in a similar way to Murdoch's philosophy of art. Buddhism was prominent among the topics discussed. Yue Jianfeng from Tongji University, Shanghai, explained the 'dazzling' Tibetan Buddhist magic practices that appear in *The Sea, the Sea*. Tugba Gulal, based at Wuhan University, suggested comparisons between Confucian virtue ethics and Murdoch's moral philosophy.

Another aspect of Murdoch's philosophy can be linked with themes in the Bhagavad Gita, as Ponapalli Prasanti Prabha showed in her discussion of several of Murdoch's characters in tandem with the work of Indian philosopher Vinoba

Bhave. Smriti Gopalakrishnan took another approach with her consideration of whether *Jackson's Dilemma*, *The Sea, the Sea*, and *Bruno's Dream* can be regarded as postcolonial novels, given the presence of India as an enduring reference point in the world views of various characters in these novels.

As we moved further west, Nurdan Balci of Yedipe University drew a compelling link between Murdoch's Charles Arrowby and the tormented main character of Turkish writer Sabahattin Ali's novel *The Devil Within* (1940). Farzaneh Naseri-Sis, based at the University of Cincinnati, explored the literary theories of intertextuality and hypertext to expound the links between Murdoch's literary and philosophical works and eastern mysticism.

One paper that I have not yet mentioned, although it appeared early on the programme, is Paul Hullah's illuminating talk titled 'Crystalline Iris', where he dared to contradict Murdoch's distrust of the crystalline in her theory of art, and celebrated the Zen-inspired distillation of the exquisite miniature object in various of her works, including *A Severed Head* and some of her poetry.

Frances White gave the last paper, turning the gaze back from Britain towards the Asian world and the work that has been done on Murdoch by Asian scholars, and scholars based in Asian countries. She found, to her dismay, that much of this excellent work is not widely recognised by European scholars and, with typical generosity, takes on board the responsibility of ensuring that the *IMR* reviews and publicises this scholarship in future.

The conference organisers are, indeed, to be congratulated for convening this stimulating day of talks, facilitating cross-cultural conversations on an international platform where Murdoch scholars can share their research and explore previously unconsidered ideas and new pathways to the appreciation of her multi-faceted legacy.

Report on '"A Quietly Dangerously Violent Mood": The Sea in *The Sea, The Sea*', public lecture by Lucy Oulton, University of Chichester, 21 October 2023

Daniel Read

Lucy Oulton's lecture was a brilliant debut plenary, aptly marking the completion of her PhD and perfectly ending yet another day of rich and interesting papers at the IMRC Postgraduate Research Day. Oulton's lecture offered a self-admittedly abridged version of Chapter Four, 'Enacted by the elements: the sovereignty of the sea in *The Sea, The Sea*', from her thesis, 'Wild Iris: Iris Murdoch's Environmental Imagination'. The talk focused on Murdoch's Booker Prize-winning novel, *The Sea, The Sea*, and drew on Murdoch's philosophical writings as well as Caspar David Friedrich's quintessential Romantic painting, *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer* (1817).

Oulton argued that the sea in Charles Arrowby's first-person narrative appears not only as a passive symbol, or as a Romantic proxy for his own majesty, but as an active character. Charles's narrative is constructed in such a way that readers are seduced by the beauty of his romantic landscapes. Charles sits on his rocks, or in his house, self-consciously wondering at its contingent beauty, but the sea has a different message to offer him: he is the chaotic figure, trying in vain to master a landscape that will always evade his understanding and that is sublimely indifferent to his interests. This message inverts the Romantic vision that Murdoch frequently questioned in her philosophy, and the point is also an eco-critical one: we need to stop imposing ourselves upon the natural world.

Oulton explored how this point directly relates to how readers engage with Charles's first-person narrative. Violence underpins many of Charles' interactions: the novel's women are most frequently subjected to this behaviour, but so are characters like Ben and Peregrine – and the sea is no exception. Charles's

continued attempts to overpower the sea, both literally and figuratively, mirror his misogynistic and coercive behaviour over other characters in the novel. Oulton also noted how the opposing views of the sea shared by Charles and his cousin James mirror their contrasting characters: soldier-Buddhist James sees its contingent power as spiritually refreshing, but theatre director-dictator Charles sees it as a cause for danger, fear and loneliness. Charles describes it as a 'sportive sea', attributing a hostile form of intentionality to it so that it becomes his nemesis. For Oulton, however, the sea has the power to breach Charles's egoism in the novel. In Charles's unreliable narrative, the sea is the only constant for the reader, alerting us to his failures and limitations, and offering us lessons in moral attention and in the planetary indifference of nature to man's wishes.

Unlike Charles, the reader often finds, in the passages concerning the sea, a richly inhabited seascape. Oulton beautifully illustrated these sections of the novel and reminded her audience that the sea is, of course, not a 'character' but a community of flora and fauna functioning in ways that likely elude our understanding. Murdoch presents the sea as a 'convincingly rich and diverse biota' filled with and surrounded by more-than-human life – by seagulls, oyster catchers, mare's tails, lugworms, gannets, crabs, and so on. This fully realised landscape belies readings offered by past critics, who saw the sea as empty, as a fierce and alien home to monsters, and as a symbol of human consciousness. To refocus attention on the sea as active and teeming with life is to afford it the ethical and ecological importance it deserves, not as symbol but as a multispecies environment of its own.

Oulton ended with some more positive readings of Charles's character. He does exhibit momentary glimpses of a more ecologically sensitive form of attention to the natural world in his contemplation of the stars in the sky at night. This vision reveals to Charles a truly untameable universe in the sight of which his significance dwindles. Ultimately, however, Charles is a symbol of self-obsession and human imperfectability. The sea operates in the novel not as a passive symbol, or simply as a countervailing presence to Charles's anthropocentric attitudes, but as an environment to 'dispel our very human delusions of significance, apartness, and primacy'.

The audience, which included Iris Murdoch Society members, the previous speakers for the day and members of the public, greatly enjoyed this wonderful plenary. *Iris Murdoch's Wild Imagination: Nature and the Environment* (forthcoming 2025) will surely make an exciting, stimulating and valuable addition to Palgrave Macmillan's Iris Murdoch Today series.

Report on Twenty-Third Conference of the Iris Murdoch Society of Japan, 4 November 2023

Paul Hullah

Predictable as Christmas, coming gradually then suddenly with its mix of pleasure and panic, post-November conference season, we brace ourselves for that perennial end-of-year Iris Murdoch Society Japan (IMSJ) existential crisis. *Whither shall we go? We need new members. How to smuggle more Murdoch into our teaching? Can we survive…?*

We can. We will. We have the capability; need to keep kindled the desire. As Geoffrey counsels Marian in *The Unicorn*: 'Stop thinking that life is cheating you. Take what there *is* and use it'. For, whatever relentless tragedies haunt our nightmarish newsfeeds, this has been a good year for the IMSJ and for Murdoch studies in general. Most eventfully, in our 25th year of existence, our 23rd conference took place at Aoyama Gakuin University's elegant Tokyo Shibuya Campus (against a suitably invigorating background: their annual student festival, punk soundtrack, *yakitori* fragrance) on Saturday 4 November. This was our first 'in person' event (albeit simultaneously broadcast 'live' online) since 2019, with that venerable UK-based energetic engine of international Murdochian academic activities, Dr Miles Leeson, our charismatic guest keynote speaker. A quite splendid day of fruitful discussion focused on new takes on a range of texts, agile insightful ideas delivered with grace, gusto and good humour. Iris Murdoch would have heartily approved. The spirit of good living via selfless attention still moves within us, stronger, more useful and relevant, in these challenging times. And Leeson's lecture, a revelatory assessment of the synergistic intellectual/academic relationship between John Bayley and Iris, was superb: a hitherto largely overlooked open goal for Murdoch scholars revealing yet another reason to demonstrate her (and Bayley's) fecund reach as thinker, reader, and writer. Iris's gift is the gift that keeps giving. And what a gift it is.

Thank you to all speakers and attendees. Always, I leave our conferences with a soaring spirit, a fizzing set of fresh ideas, and a lengthy new reading list. These

precious academic endeavours summon my imposter syndrome from smug slumbers, but I've become accustomed to that and it's OK. We all need to strive to be better. Iris said stuff like that, and she was right, and, in our humble society's silver anniversary year, it is a pleasure to honour her work, her legacy, once more.

It was apt (and altogether wonderful) to have Miles with us to mark that quarter-century of togetherness. He is one third of the 'triumvirate', Rowe-White-Leeson: those most erudite, indefatigable vessels of Murdochian vim, all three of whom we've now been blessed to welcome as as keynote speakers. Alongside countless others in the Iris Murdoch Research Centre at Chichester and the Kingston University Archives, they work ceaselessly to manage the Iris Murdoch Society in the UK and promote Iris's profile, in both a scholarly and public sense. They are our role models, and it was reassuring to hear Leeson's very positive assessment of Murdoch studies going forward, as his main talk on John and Iris's symbiotic artistic synergies morphed organically and usefully into a discussion (to borrow Bowie, as I love to do) of 'Where Are We Now?'

Answer: in a better place than we might suppose. Personally speaking, I have (at last!) a sabbatical year next year, much of which I will gladly devote to boosting our own society's profile and forging new and stronger links with Murdoch-related ventures elsewhere. Newly appointed Vice-President Professor Chiho Omichi and I are making plans. I will be introducing more items from Iris's oeuvre into all my own classes in 2025, hopefully thereby ensuring an annual intake of new blood. Murdoch conferences, both literary and philosophical, dot the horizon like affirmative beacons, lighting us easily discouraged travellers' ways out of these self-exaggerated ruts into which, at the close of each year, we seem prone to sink. This notorious recurrent post-conference dysphoria is needless: something we can consciously work to overcome.

We should be always trying to consolidate, expand, improve, widen our scope. So, let's go forth confidently caring. 'We need a moral philosophy in which the concept of love, so rarely mentioned now, can once again be made central', we learn in *The Sovereignty of Good*. Our conferences, our society, each new Murdochian we meet on our way, we would like proudly to say, all embody and persevere in promoting and propagating that glorious notion, a good and ongoing endeavour: the maintenance of Murdoch's presence in a disorderly disharmonious world that needs the tonic of her curative moral philosophy and elegant use of language perhaps more than ever before.

Thanks, again, to everyone who shares my concerns. I hope you will share my confidence too, and I hope we will all meet again, regularly and soon.

Report on the Postgraduate Research Day at the University of Chichester, 17 February 2024

Lucy Oulton

February's Postgraduate Research Day produced a lively afternoon of discussion. Rob Hardy gave a wide-ranging talk which addressed some of his 'spectres', as he identifies them: the inner voices that terrorise our insecurities and worry away at the ethical responsibilities associated with producing a chapter of criticism on a public intellectual, novelist and philosopher such as Iris Murdoch. The multiplicity of titles for Hardy's paper, 'A trepidatious gender assignment: or, how (not) to live with spectres; or, how (not) to overthink, underthink, or think at all; or, how (not) to make decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse; or, how (not) to write the first page of a chapter on Iris Murdoch; or: an Exercise in Self-Criticism in Real Time', reflected the cacophony of interior dialogues that contribute to such academic anxiety. He touched on imposter syndrome and equally the dangers of a certain literary arrogance; he explained a current preoccupation with Murdoch's adoption of the male, male-empathising or male-complaisant voice in her philosophical writings prior to *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* and what we are to make of this; and he discussed a common concern among writers of how to deal with the trivialising effects on ordinary life and work of devastating world events such as those of 7 October 2023.

Danika Brown, the Research Centre's newest PhD student, gave an assured and beautifully produced presentation of her plans for her project, 'Neurodiversity in the Works of Iris Murdoch'. Neurodiversity is defined as the 'diversity of human minds, the infinite variation in neurocognitive functioning within our species' (Walker, 2014). We heard that society has a baked-in sense of a cognitive norm and sets mental difference against this perception. But such a position begs the question: different from what? Brown plans to explore the 'established normal' of some of Murdoch's fictional texts against contemporary neurodiversity theory to argue that Murdoch's is a literature of 'cognitive decolonization' that 'centralizes

marginality, thereby marginalizing the centre' (Rosqvist, Chown & Stenning, 2020). Anyone doubtful of Murdoch's interest in such matters should perhaps visit the Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives. With Frances White's and Archivist Dayna Miller's help, Brown has pulled together a remarkable list of titles that collectively manifest Murdoch's engagement with cognitive issues and mental health. Brown's thesis will be constructed through the biographical; the philosophical – drawing parallels between depersonalisation and unselfing; the theological – examining the ethical through investigation of such notions of a cure, ableism, saintliness and eugenics; and the literary – the language around mental difference, madness and the great artist. Brown offered her initial thoughts on three Murdoch novels that she sees as supporting her thesis: *Under the Net* (1954), *The Time of the Angels* (1966) and *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983) and anticipates involving much more of the fiction as the project evolves. We wish her the very best in what promises to be a fascinating piece of research into a whole new area of Murdoch Studies.

The Centre was delighted to welcome independent scholar Sita Turner to speak on 'Iris and spiders: Desire in the Wallace Robson Poetry Collection' which is a post-war collection of poetry Murdoch wrote in 1952. Turner observes an implicit intertextuality between these poems and both Romantic and Modernist poets. She reminded us of the prevalence of spiders in Murdoch's writing from the arachno-voyeurism in *Under the Net* in Jake's 'In my experience the spider is the smallest creature whose gaze can be felt', to the observation Murdoch makes in her journal in 1981, 'Don't spiders and hawks see different worlds!', and thus asserted their symbolic significance in her poetry. In an analysis of two of the Wallace Robson poems, Turner noted both the Gothic and transgressive characteristics of the work. In Poem 10, 'Truth in the spider's womb/ is spun into a tenuous thread', Turner suggests an inference of speaker's caution where female desire is concerned, just as an arachnophobe might be wary of spiders. It was refreshing to be able to put to one side gnawing questions of Murdoch's intentions and ambitions for her poetry and to listen to Turner's appreciation and analysis of the Wallace Robson collection and her ideas around Murdoch's use of spiders to convey desire and further her fight to protect her (or her speaker's) body's truth.

Next up was Daniel Read, who is currently completing his monograph, *Iris Murdoch and Evil*, which is shortly to be published as part of Palgrave Macmillan's Iris Murdoch Today series. Read spoke eloquently on Murdoch's theological engagement with the Book of Job, the eighteenth book of the Old Testament which is thought to have originated around 700–400 BCE, and makes its appearance roughly contemporaneous with the works of Homer, Aeschylus and Sophocles. The major theme of the Book of Job is the eternal problem of needless or gratuitous suffering. Read went on to describe Murdoch's own preoccupations with the problem of evil and why it exists in the world, and elucidated when her

engagement with this theological tract is thought to have begun through the teachings of Donald MacKinnon and Eduard Fraenkel. This was during 1938–1942 at Oxford, Read explained, and made particular mention of Fraenkel's *Agamemnon* seminars and in particular the 'Hymn to Zeus' – knowledge through suffering. Read explained that Murdoch's continued interest can be traced through both her fiction and her philosophical writing and he offered examples such as the deep reflections on suffering in *The Unicorn* (1963) and pointed to references to the Book of Job in *The Nice and the Good* (1968), *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970) and *The Time of the Angels*. Finally Read ruminated on the relationship between the novel and tragedy, asserting that the Book of Job is not a tragedy. The consolation of art is incomplete without evil and suffering.

The event's public lecture was given by Anne Rowe to mark 25 years since the death of Iris Murdoch. A full transcript is given elsewhere in this journal so I have the good fortune not to have to attempt to do it justice in this short report! Suffice to say that we are all grateful to Anne, as ever, for marking the occasion with wise words and reminiscences, providing an excellent finale to a day of truly accomplished talks.

I feel certain that scholars participating regularly in Postgraduate Research Days at the Iris Murdoch Research Centre would agree that they provide invaluable opportunities to share and discuss new material, and would wish to join me in thanking Miles Leeson for organising them.

Report on 'Gestalt Themes in the Work of Iris Murdoch' Conference at Kyoto University, 9 March 2024

Paul Hullah

The 'workings of the ethical environment can be strangely invisible', according to Simon Blackburn in his *Being Good: A Short Introduction to Ethics*. Whether or not this be so, on a freezing snowy March Saturday, we gathered in Japan's ancient capital to see for ourselves: specifically, at Kyoto University Graduate School of Letters for a one-day conference promisingly titled 'Gestalt Themes in the Work of Iris Murdoch'.

To commence with a gentle gripe, this event was poorly advertised; *The Iris Murdoch Society of Japan* learned about it fortuitously, via Twitter, less than 72 hours in advance and, consequently, it was poorly attended. This was regrettable, as it turned out to be a supremely worthwhile venture. Anne Rowe recently suggested that new ways of decoding Murdoch will be essential in order to sell her work to new generations of readers. She is, of course, right. The conference's revelatory application of a care ethics lens to Murdochian moral philosophy, with the clear implication of sundry open goals for budding students of the author's work, certainly qualifies as a starting point for a scholarly sales pitch focusing on practical approaches to living that better life on which Murdoch's philosophy is centred. The calibre and subtle variances in viewpoint in the wide-ranging debate that made this one-day event so intellectually enriching indicate this is fertile ground for further reflection.

In any case, this unexpected but welcome event comprised three distinct self-contained yet developmentally connected sections. We began with 'The World as Gesture', a 90-minute morning lecture from Kyoto University Graduate School of Literature Ethics Assistant Professor Michael Campbell who asked whether gestalt is a useful frame via which to approach Murdoch's work. Assessing the instances of philosophers using the word 'world' in a gestural sense, Campbell discussed the historical development and contextual expedience of gestalt therapy, referring to the emergence of notions of holism in therapeutic practice in the 1950s, to help

patients receive a more rounded version of care. This shift was in opposition to Freud's dream work and the authority of the analyst. The drive was toward monitored measurable quality in therapy: increased focus on the here and now and physical reality. Field theory also emerged: individuals exist within a field, and carry it in their interactions, so in all diagnoses contextualisation is imperative.

Though Iris Murdoch had not yet made an entrance, Campbell's talk already assumed a Murdochian character. The self, Campbell reminded us, is co-created through modulated dynamic interaction with the world. Contact with others is present and ongoing, a malleable boundary (like a shoreline – an image which Murdoch indubitably would have approved of and inventively used in novels such as *The Unicorn* and *The Sea, The Sea*). The fundamental notion is that of the self as bodying forth (Murdoch uses that exact image, originally from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, purposefully too).

Our endlessly changing world was then discussed, not paradoxically but politically and pragmatically. Citing Thomas Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* and Peter Winch's *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*, Campbell reminded us that 'when paradigms change' (scientific revolutions, for example) 'the world itself changes with them' and, thus, our idea of what constitutes reality is lent to us in the very language we choose and need to use. The inadequacy of language to represent reality is something Murdoch wrestled endlessly with, even when she claimed otherwise. Is this relativist? Idealist? Does this deny us agency and/or an objective position from which to decide how to interpret our own and others' actions?

Moving usefully through Wittgenstein's famous proclamations that 'the limits of my language mean the limits of my world' and 'if the words "language", "experience", "world" have a use, it must be as humble a one as that of the words "lamp", "table", "door"', we found Murdoch to be seamlessly central to Wittgenstein's claims, with lively asides on morality and (non) choice. Murdoch herself most notably (and perhaps only once?) uses the term 'gestalt' in *Existentialists and Mystics*, and the section was quoted and discussed. The fruitful section that followed on 'Morality as Gestalt' was truly Murdochian and that alone, for me, made the Kyoto wintry pilgrimage worthwhile.

The peculiarly Murdochian conception of art and attention was outlined and contextualised. My own interest was piqued when our thoughts were drawn to that passage in *Existentialists and Mystics* where Murdoch opines that '[h]uman beings are naturally "attached" and when an attachment seems painful or bad it is most readily displaced by another attachment'. This perfectly squares with the Japanese notion of 'amae' which Murdoch knew from her annotated reading of Tokyo psychologist Takeo Doi's *The Anatomy of Dependence*. Relating this to gestalt was not an entirely new notion to me but witnessing Campbell voice it as an option certainly reassured me: the pilgrimage made priceless.

A brief, weird, detour into American cartoon-land ensued: we watched an instalment of Chuck Jones's brilliant *Roadrunner* series, introduced with aplomb by Campbell. Campbell concluded by noting that, unlike most philosophers, how gorgeously Murdoch writes. We all know that! He suggested that another of her unique strengths as a philosopher – and gestalt plays a part in this process, surely – lies in her selection of domestic scenes (rather than myths or life-changing heroic male quests) to drive home this or that particular metaethical point. Take the mother-in-law.

Campbell's articulate and thought-provoking lecture with discussion thereafter was followed post-lunch (at a nearby bistro: traditional Japanese dishes spiced with congenial conversation) by the main event, *Attention to Detail and the Ethics of Care,* from invited guest, renowned French moral philosopher Sandra Laugier, professor of philosophy at the University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne and a senior member of the Institut Universitaire de France. Laugier is a philosopher of spellbinding perspicacity: widely read, razor sharp of intellect and wit. A regular visitor to Japan, Laugier's Kyoto talk was part of a tour: she had lectured in Tokyo beforehand, and spoken at the Maison Franco-Japonaise, founded by Eiichi Shibusawa and Paul Claudel, in Shibuya. A Parisienne neo-Wittgensteinian (though she will, with good reason, protest at the inadequacy of that label) with an interest in modern cultural film and TV tropes, Laugier's works on moral philosophy, political philosophy, philosophy of language, gender studies, and popular culture are internationally revered and feature prominently in university philosophy modules.

Quoting Wittgenstein's observation that ethics is 'an attitude to the world', Laugier began by stating that Murdoch's ideas had strongly influenced the development of care ethics, an alternative to mainstream ethics in its attention to ordinary life. If ethics has a place in ordinary life, primacy of ordinary language is clear, and, the American philosopher Cora Diamond has observed in *The Realistic Spirit*, 'ethical thought goes on in argument but also not in argument, but (e.g.) in stories and images'.

It is difficult to define care, Laugier noted, but easy to define carelessness. Either way, we need to be attentive to the texture of experience itself: I must observe myself against my background, and the background is life, ordinary life. So many echoes of Murdoch already resonant here. But Murdochian attention, Laugier made clear, is not a starting point: *perception* is attention. Similarly (in Diamond's reading of Wittgenstein) we must admit that, just as 'logic penetrates all thought' so ethics is not its own peculiar sphere: it penetrates all our thought and all our talk. To simplify: it seems obvious that meaning is dependent on and defined by context. A drunk in a roomful of drunks is not the same as a drunk in a roomful of teetotallers. Words (and gestures, about which both Campbell and Laugier spoke instructively) are so, and language is similar. The context of

morality is life, reality, me and you. Ethics is not (just) what is right or wrong, but what matters and what is important (or not) in your life. Moments such as these are fleeting, and we almost always know the importance and value of such moments in hindsight.

Nevertheless, Laugier posited, Murdoch was correct: attention is the core of moral judgement. Attention must be capable of being unsentimental and detached but, at other times, loving and bestowed caringly. Context demands this: situations differ, persons act in different ways on different days, so attention must be appropriate, flexible, yet focused. This, Laugier memorably remarked, is the 'texture' of being: of human beings and of being human.

To illustrate this, the discourse and context of clips from the movie *Philadelphia* and the TV drama *The Wire* were eloquently deconstructed, from a partly care ethical, partly Murdochian viewpoint. And here we returned to the impact language can have in our assessment of the way people are. Laugier drew attention to the work of the Wittengensteinian analytic philosopher Hilary Putnam and the metaphysician John McDowell, who paid tribute to the centrality of literature to our ethical lives and when so doing jointly acknowledged their debt to Murdoch.

'How we see and describe the world is morals too,' Murdoch argues in her essay 'Vision and Choice in Morality', and Laugier's talk concluded with a commentary of consensus on both Murdoch's greatness as a writer and a thinker: shaper of stories, shaper of ideas. To state that all present enjoyed Laugier's talk and learned a lot is preposterous understatement. I wish a recording existed. I would be listening to it now and (like re-reading Iris's novels) finding something new again, I am certain.

The one-day schedule concluded with a round-table discussion at which implications of what had been proposed and discussed up to that juncture were further interrogated and intellectually refined, and thoughts brewed, and time flew till dinner beckoned.

A splendid day. Just as there's no end point in therapy, there's no end point in Murdoch. There is only progress towards a better place. Gestalt philosophy proposes the principle that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, encouraging a holistic outlook, disparate elements perceived together as a coherent entity. Metaphysics such as that advocated and explored by Murdoch persuasively argues that such a seemingly simple (yet, in effect, complex and, of itself, gestalt-ish) perspective can be a useful part of how we live. It asks us, wherever possible, properly and carefully to (in Iris's case, lovingly, humbly, ideally selflessly) consider the entire setting of a situation and the overall character of an individual, rather than isolated actions and events, when we attempt to form this or that moral conclusion, or make this or that moral choice. Virtues become historically, narratively or figuratively interconnected qualities that shape our

ethical decisions and behaviour holistically, rather than one-dimensional rules that monopolise our attention on isolated yes/no moral conundrums.

So, whether it be in philosophy, psychology, care ethics, or football, gestalt is a fertile furrow to plough, and it certainly applies more, and more meaningfully, to Murdoch's work than most commentators have noticed. At the end of such a satisfying, gestalt Saturday, each Murdochian that attended this stimulating and convivial event went home with the sense that useful work had been done here. And there is more to be done, for with Murdoch, as we all know, her sum will be always much more than her so many separate parts.

Report on 'Iris Murdoch: the latest', a talk by Gary Browning, St Barnabas Church, Oxford, 16 March 2024

Janfarie Skinner

The Italianate church of St Barnabas in the Jericho area of Oxford is rich in literary associations. It is the subject of a poem by John Betjeman, appears in Hardy's *Jude the Obscure,* and is the setting (imaginatively relocated to London) for a gruesome double murder in P. D. James's novel *A Taste for Death*. It is also the regular venue for the 'My Jericho' meetings, a series of talks organised by a local resident, directed particularly at fellow residents but open and welcoming to a wider audience. On the evening of 16 March the speaker was Professor Gary Browning whose subject was 'Iris Murdoch: the latest'. Browning, a regular and distinguished contributor to Iris Murdoch conferences, is Professor of Politics at Oxford Brookes University. His many publications include *Why Iris Murdoch Matters* (Bloomsbury, 2018) and *Iris Murdoch and the Political* (Oxford University Press, 2024). He had spoken about Iris Murdoch at an earlier 'My Jericho' meeting. The aim of this second occasion was to focus on Murdoch's engagement with politics and to suggest ways in which her novels may be read through a political lens. He described researching in the archives of Badminton School where Murdoch received her secondary education and in the archives of St Anne's College, Oxford where she taught philosophy. He also had discussions with David Morgan, Murdoch's student and friend from the time when she taught at the Royal College of Art.

Browning concisely and humorously traced Murdoch's political trajectory from Left (Communist Party member, spying activities whilst working at the Treasury) to Right (at one point voting for Margaret Thatcher). His analysis of these shifting loyalties threw light on Murdoch's influences and possible motivations. It was clear that her Badminton education gave her an international perspective. As a student in Oxford she joined the Communist Party; like many others there

she campaigned against appeasement in the 1938 by-election in Oxford. After the war, whilst working for UNRRA in Europe, she witnessed the impact of that war on the lives of displaced persons and refugees. She moved away from her communist sympathies as the gap between Marxist theory and Soviet practice became known. She also read and was impressed by Boris Pasternak's novel *Dr Zhivago*. However, many years after she abandoned her far Left alliances she was still open to sympathetically sharing ideas and experiences of that time, as she did for example with the Australian Marxist academic Brian Medlin.

Murdoch was always, Browning argued, thinking of politics. In terms of social issues, and particularly attitudes towards homosexuality, she was significantly ahead of her time and her novels reflect her views of sexual politics, her understanding of power relations between men and women, the politics of the Holocaust and the world of the migrant and the refugee.

The final part of the talk covered specific examples of Murdoch's exploration of the political in her fiction. In *The Flight from the Enchanter*, in a memorable party scene, Mischa Fox's fish tank is broken and the fish are scattered flailing and helpless. This can be read, Browning suggested, as a metaphor for the 'migration world'; the novel also includes refugee figures, Nina the dressmaker, and the Lusciewicz brothers, who are Polish immigrants. In *The Bell,* Murdoch explores male/female power relationships and the state of mid-twentieth century marriage in her depiction of the marriage of Paul and Dora Greenfield; she raises difficult issues of sexual politics in the homosexual character of Michael Meade. In *The Book and the Brotherhood* she questions the role, if any, for grand narratives such as that being written by David Crimond, commissioned to do so by friends who have themselves moved to the Right. Browning suggested that Lyotard's rejection of the notion of grand narratives is reflected both here and in the late novel *The Message to the Planet* where Murdoch, in exploring the suffering of the mystical leader Marcus Vallar, seems to be trying to make sense of the twentieth century and of the Holocaust.

This talk was an excellent example of a specialist in a field of study applying that knowledge to Iris Murdoch studies. Gary Browning achieved this with a deft mixing of scholarship with accessible examples and anecdotes and gave his audience an enriching and entertaining account of the political in Iris Murdoch's fiction. He was keen to stress, however, that although Murdoch's fiction always includes the political it is never reduced to that one dimension. Those in the audience for whom much of this material may have been new will surely have gone away with the intention of reading one or more of the novels mentioned; those in the small group of Iris Murdoch Society members who were able to attend will equally surely be looking forward to reading *Iris Murdoch and the Political*, due to be published in July.

Report on 'Literature and Philosophy in Dialogue', Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University, 12–13 April 2024

Lewis Brewster

'I need small persuading to go to Paris at any time; least of all now', says Jake Donaghue in *Under the Net* and, feeling akin to Jake in this sentiment, I needed little encouragement to attend the Iris Murdoch: Literature and Philosophy in Dialogue Conference at the Sorbonne. For two days in April, Camille Braune and Maria Dianetti hosted a forum in which Murdochians were able to come together, listen to papers and discuss ideas. It was my first time inside the Sorbonne: I found it very welcoming and, although name badges would have been helpful, I was able to meet people who I had only previously encountered through their work.

The first morning began with Miles Leeson's keynote lecture. It was packed with people, some standing at the back, and the atmosphere of the room felt quite removed from the academic elitism that I had naively expected from such a prestigious university. Leeson's talk focused on how Murdoch utilised and built upon Derridean ideas within her work. The light-hearted feel of the lecture set the tone for the rest of the conference; questions from the audience enhanced the discussion and everyone left the keynote with new things to think about. Incidentally, I learned that it was on the Pont Neuf, pictured in the opening slide of Leeson's talk, that Murdoch declared her love for Raymond Queneau. The following day, with this knowledge in hand, I was able to cross that bridge myself, experiencing Paris in a new light.

After the opening keynote, conference delegates moved to two parallel panel sessions. I attended a panel on Time and Space which featured Paul Hullah taking many fascinating tangents as he discussed the similarities between Japanese verse and Murdoch's poetry. Such was the extent of Hullah's digressions that he was unable to finish his paper in the allotted time and yet still had a lot of

interesting analysis to convey. Sabina Lovibond's paper showed how the firepower in Murdoch's narratives is usually philosophy. I discovered how accessible the philosophical canon is within her fiction. Frances White's thoughtful presentation highlighted the importance of Paris and France not just in Murdoch's work, but in her life as well.

Breaking for lunch gave scholars and enthusiasts the opportunity to digest the morning's exploration of Murdoch's work and the chance to hear from those who were witness to the other panel, which was equally riveting, I understand. Many of us took lunch in the Jardin du Luxembourg which was a real treat, once benches had been secured; the less formal setting gave way to the acquisition of new friends within the Murdoch sphere and prepared us for Silvia Caprioglio Panizza's keynote lecture.

Caprioglio Panizza's exploration centred on encountering the Real and its effects on the human mind. Her philosophical examination illustrated how art, like philosophy, shows what is true but invisible and how there is a distinct difference between what is invisible and what is unobservable. This led on to workshop sessions on Moral Perfectionism and the Good, or Practising Attention. Afterwards we reconvened for a musical performance to round off the day's events. Theresa Delaplain and Fiona Slaughter's oboe recital, a particular highlight of the conference, performed music inspired by Murdoch's novels and provided a welcome change of pace from the day's invigorating discussions.

The second day began with an extensive keynote lecture from Sandra Laugier, whose paper provided a comprehensive exploration into attention to detail and the ethics of care. By making use of Cora Diamond's thought, Laugier was able to show how Murdoch's moral perception of paying attention is 'thready and knotty'. According to Laugier, the moral expressivity of the individual is shown through the difference of choice and the texture. The knots and threads of our lives show the solution in opposition to the rigour of logic and the failure to pay attention.

The first panel sessions of the day offered choices of Exploring Forms and Healing and Bettering. In the latter session, I learned from Megan Laverty how Murdoch considered herself 'a wanderer in the neighbourhood of being', revealing Kierkegaard's influence, and how 'turning attention away from the particular, may be the thing that helps most when difficulties seem insoluble'. Laverty's discussion of Murdoch's theory of attention helped solidify my own understanding of the topic and was an easily digestible talk, incorporating the poetry of George Herbert – a welcome departure from the morning's session of unfiltered philosophy.

The final keynote speaker of the conference was Anil Gomes and, as he gave his lecture, I took a moment to register that here was an Oxford professor, chalk in hand and scribbling on a blackboard at the Sorbonne, and I was in

the audience. I recognised in that moment how fortunate we were and what a successful conference this had been. Gomes's animated discussion was titled 'The Constructive Task of a Philosophy of Mind'. By pivoting around the difference between private and public, Gomes explained how these are interwoven both subjectively and objectively and how the 'context of acquisition for a mental concept is essentially public.' This was shown in action as we listened to his talk and collectively acquired knowledge from his paper.

The remaining panel and workshop session of the day were equally stimulating and as the conference drew to a close the last hurrah sounded with a group photo and drinks at a nearby bar. As the wine flowed, I concluded that, although the Sorbonne – hosting two events simultaneously – had allocated their main lecture theatres to the 'Sorbonne's International Model United Nations' conference, our less opulent allocation of rooms was very much in the Murdochian tradition. And, while Paris was all scaffolding and smells of fresh paint in preparation for the Olympics, the Murdoch contingent was able to add another successful conference to the tally, awaiting the Eleventh Murdoch Conference in Chichester at the end of August.

Report on Three Remarkable Women: Hannah Arendt, Iris Murdoch, Simone Weil and the Politics of Experience, Oxford Brookes University, 17 April 2024

Lucy Oulton

'Three Remarkable Women', a Think Human Festival 2024 public event, was hosted by Gary Browning, Professor in Political Thought at Oxford Brookes University. Browning also spoke on Iris Murdoch during the course of the evening. He was joined by Beverley Clack, Professor in Philosophy of Religion at Oxford Brookes, who spoke on Hannah Arendt, and PhD student Sasha Lawson-Frost of Durham University, who spoke on Simone Weil. The evening's major theme was the twenty-first-century political significance of these three acclaimed twentieth-century philosophers. Browning, Clack and Lawson-Frost were joined on stage by actor and Patron of the Iris Murdoch Society Annette Badland, who skillfully brought Murdoch, Arendt and Weil to life through her wonderful readings of extracts from their works.

Introducing the event, Browning argued eloquently for the vital importance of the study of humanities and the arts to temper the direction, development and domination of science. This, he explained, was Murdoch's major theme in a speech to mark the occasion of her honorary doctorate award by Kingston University on 4 November 1993. With characteristic prescience, Murdoch addressed the dual threats of nuclear weapons and environmental disaster: topics that engender mounting anxiety today. For Murdoch, the arts and humanities are critically important in the effort to explore the complexity, nuance and, indeed, ethics of such ongoing discussions.

'Three Remarkable Women' examined how the life experiences of Hannah Arendt (1906–1975), Iris Murdoch (1919–1999) and Simone Weil (1909–1943) had had significant impact on their individual political perspectives. Each speaker

sought to demonstrate the contemporary political relevance of their particular subject. Political philosopher Hannah Arendt is best known for her work on the nature of power and evil. She was deeply concerned about absolutist politics: her particular interest resting in those systems of thought that enable contrarians to rise to the top. Her best known work is her report of the trial of Adolf Eichmann, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Eichmann was found to have played a pivotal role in the implementation of the Final Solution during the Second World War, and was hanged following his trial in Jerusalem in 1961. At the time, Arendt's report seemed to capture the imagination of popular culture but, more recently, has aroused a certain amount of controversy; there is a suggestion that Arendt's ideas play down the magnitude of Nazi crimes. Clack said that this was to misunderstand the philosopher. She said that Arendt was horrified by the very ordinariness of Eichmann, a petty bureaucrat before the war. Eichmann was no monster, no Iago, and Arendt was merely commenting on evil's propensity to flourish in the failure to think or to act.

Arendt observed a unique connection between politics and friendship in the act of talking with others and, as Clack explained, went as far as to rekindle her friendship with former Nazi and one-time lover Martin Heidegger after the war. Arendt would remain convinced that, in future, evil could be averted if people could think beyond politics to meet each other in love. Clack concluded by arguing that our contemporary obsession with heroes and villains, the hallmark of our contemporary conformist politics, suggests that we need Arendt's thought more than ever. Badland brought discussion of Arendt to a close by reading a short extract from *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.

Next, Browning argued compellingly for broader recognition of Murdoch as a political philosopher, noting her early interest in the political scene. Towards the end of her time at Badminton School she contributed to and produced a fundraising poetry booklet for the Fund for Chinese Medical Aid and visited the United Nations. Browning quoted from one of the many letters Murdoch wrote to French novelist and poet Raymond Queneau in which she wonders if she can 'really exploit the *advantages* (instead of as hitherto simply suffer from the disadvantages) of having a mind on the borders of philosophy, literature and politics – all bloody doubtful'. Browning asserted that Murdoch's letters, novels and her philosophical writing provide evidence of this political mind. Murdoch, he said, was very concerned about the significant political issues of her time. She was aware of the fluctuation of human rights protections at the behest of political expedience, for example, and on this topic Browning directed us to the portrayal of the difficulties refugee characters confront in her novel *The Flight from the Enchanter*. In the course of his talk, Browning pointed to the political constitution at the heart of the lay community in *The Bell*; he discussed *The Message to the Planet*, and *The Book and the Brotherhood* in which Murdoch

returns to the larger political project. *The Bell*, in particular, is significant for its depiction of homosexual relations at a time when homosexuality continued to be outlawed by the government of the day. Badland read from James Tayper Pace's 'sermon' where he declares with easeful simplicity, 'sodomy is not disgusting, it is just forbidden'. However, for Michael Meade such tendencies, created by God, run to 'the very core of the personality'. Murdoch appears to make a generalised stand in this novel for those who find themselves outside the politically driven convention of the day, having to dig deep to source inner strength instead to give direction to the moral life.

Finally, Sasha Lawson-Frost, who is currently researching obedience in ethics, gave a robust and illuminating talk on Simone Weil. She centred her exposition on Weil's writings on suffering and its attendant social degradation and humiliation. Lawson-Frost explained that Weil draws attention to the political dimension of society's need to take the suffering of oppressed people seriously. Suffering, Lawson-Frost explained, deprives people of the ability to think with any clarity and divests them of their own subjectivity through a sense of subordination; this experience is psychologically humiliating. Weil argues that most of our lives are spent mired in illusion because we fail to pay attention to the other; those who do suffer are labelled as hysterical, or categorised as objects of pity. Weil identifies the need to attend to people on their own terms, and so pursue the good in everyone. Instead, Lawson-Frost explained, we are inclined to create victim narratives around individuals to avoid facing up to the suffering and injustice they are experiencing. This amounts to their subordination which, Weil believes, is the antithesis of love and mutual respect. Instead of thinking in terms of the world in relation to self, Lawson-Frost said, we need to shift in order to place other people at the centre of the universe: relationships should be consensual, and not based on power.

Badland read three short pieces from Weil's *Waiting on God* (*Attente de Dieu*, May 1942). The first extract was from a letter to Father Joseph-Marie Perrin about school studies that serve to illustrate the development of the faculty of attention at a lower level that provides the preparation of a spiritual life and prayer; the second, also addressed to Fr. Perrin, was about extreme affliction: 'Forms of the Implicit Love of God'; the third, from an essay titled 'Love of the Order of the World', expresses the idea that nothing in this world rests at its centre apart from an omnipresent God. We, as humans, must relinquish any illusion of our own central significance. By relating Weil's thought to some of the big contemporary issues of the day such as domestic violence, people trafficking and the politicisation of the refugee crisis, Lawson-Frost deftly illuminated Weil's significance as a philosopher for the twenty-first century and her excellent talk brought this wonderfully informative and engaging evening to a close.

Report on 'Mapping Attention: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow', University of Galway, 18–19 April 2024

Amy Ward

Following a lovely Murdochian gathering at *La Sorbonne* in Paris, a similar group of individuals met in beautiful Galway to discuss theories and practices of attention. This theme stimulated much conversation about moral attention in Iris Murdoch's work alongside Simone Weil's philosophy. Lucy Elvis and Michela Dianetti were gracious hosts to around thirty scholars and students during the conference, including those local to Galway and the university as well as international attendees.

Prior to the conference, there was an optional 'Attention Lab' on 17 April led by visitors from the Strother School of Radical Attention, New York.[1] The Lab involved various practices of attention, from the introspective (attending internally 100%, or 50% internally and 50% externally), to more interactive (asking only questions in a conversation to focus attention on one's interlocutor). Some participants reported that the informal and contemplative experience of the Lab was a great way to start a philosophical conference, particularly one themed around attention.

The conference itself took place over the two days following, shifting through the themes of 'Attention Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow'. The 'Yesterday' section included several papers on theories of attention, primarily from Murdoch's work (her concept 'unselfing') and connections to Weil. Papers explored attention and love, justice, the Good, and reciprocity. Silvia Caprioglio Panizza gave the first keynote presentation, exploring her intuition that the practice of attention is itself good. She argued for this position by considering cases of so-called 'bad attention'.

Attention 'Today' included presentations on how attention and attention studies can be integrated into our contemporary moment. We heard about possibilities

of shared attention, art practices exploring attention and digital spaces through autoethnography, and teaching attention in school through digital media (such as movies). In her keynote address, Megan Laverty discussed curated experiences as an obstacle to enriching experiences of attention. Like the tourist who is impeded by their expectations of 'an experience' when visiting famous landmarks, Laverty argued that learning is more difficult in overly curated spaces (such as school classrooms, social media, the internet and so forth). Attention practice could allow us to learn more effectively because this mode involves being curious toward things unknown.

Presentations looking ahead to 'Tomorrow' explored future applications of attentional practice. We heard about loving attention to insects (drawing on Dora's experience in *The Bell*), a reading of Murdoch's view of *akrasia*, difficulties of attention for non-native speakers (with links to linguistic justice), and strategies for attending to human extinction and global destruction. The final keynote speaker, Nora Ward, explored some ways that animals attend to humans and how this experience challenges the common view of the 'attentive gaze' as being one-directional.

Overall, the conference atmosphere was very friendly and collaborative. There were many questions and discussions both during and following the sessions. A group dinner in a quaint Irish pub on the first night encouraged participants to continue conversations from the day. With excellent keynotes and a wide range of interesting presentations, this conference offered a very rich experience for all involved.

1 More information about this school and their practices can be found at https://www.schoolofattention.org/programs/attention-labs.

Report on 'Iris Murdoch and Love': Literature Cambridge, March-May 2024

Elizabeth Whittome

'Iris Murdoch and Love' was the title of the Literature Cambridge series of lectures and seminars on Murdoch presented by Miles Leeson earlier this year, the successor to his series examining the Gothic in four Murdoch novels in 2023.

Murdoch said herself that her 'major topic' was love: an abiding concern in every novel that she wrote, as well as in her philosophical investigations. How could one possibly distil this obsessive focus into just five hour-long lectures? (Spoiler alert: this was a great success!) The challenge of charting the philosophical background, selecting novels about love which are both chronologically representative and exploratory, as well as linking them with her life, her beliefs and her genius as an original writer, was sustained throughout the ten-week course by Leeson, in what he termed a 'developmental lineage'. His lectures were enthusiastic, imaginatively planned and meticulously cross-referenced, leaving participants with a core of valuable material on the diverse aspects of the love theme.

The first lecture – on the philosophical background – had required reading from the Murdoch collection *Existentialists and Mystics* (1997), edited by Peter J. Conradi, notably the essays 'Against Dryness' (1961), 'Existentialists and Mystics' (1970) and 'On "God" and "Good"' (1969).

This was a challenging start for those of us who are more well-read in the fiction than the philosophy! Leeson outlined four central types of love observable in Murdoch's credo: Eros as an often disruptive force; knowledge of, and attention to, the individual; distance and detachment (letting the lover go); and familial life (often sacrificial). Leeson emphasised the importance to Murdoch's thinking of Plato and his *Symposium*. Plato's 'Diotima's ladder' was discussed, its rungs showing the ascent of the lover from the purely physical through to the Form of Beauty itself (the source for our familiar idea of Platonic love); ascending through admiration for the particular to general admiration of physical beauty; then

through to beautiful souls; beautiful laws and institutions created by them; the beauty of knowledge; and finally the Form or essence of Beauty and its vision of perfection – every particular beautiful thing being so because of its ultimate connection to this – from the lowest rung of the ladder to the uppermost. Cross-references to Murdoch's characters in our texts helped to reify this; the discussion of Plato was indeed a supporting foundation to all the set texts studied in detail.

Murdoch's rejection of the existentialist hero – her crucial recognition that we are not 'monarchs of all we survey' – together with her profound interest in, and attachment to, the work of French philosopher and mystic Simone Weil, further advanced the philosophical background. In considering love, Weil emphasises focused attention on other people, the necessity of moving beyond selfishness ('the fat relentless ego') towards goodness. Murdoch herself in 'The Sublime and the Good' (1959) demands our recognition that 'Love is the extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real. Love, and so art and morals, is the discovery of reality.' Actively paying attention to others and forgetting the self is fundamental.

This first lecture – the underpinning philosophical base of the lecture series - never became too theoretical. At all points, Leeson reminded us of relevant elements of Murdoch's biography, her family life, her own first loves; as well as examples from the four novels he had chosen to develop his theme: *The Sandcastle* (1957), *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970), *The Sea, The Sea* (1978) and *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983) – spanning three of the four decades of Murdoch's fiction-writing career. Throughout the course he suggested the relevance of other Murdoch novels, too. It was evident from the questions at the end and a wide-ranging discussion that all the participants had done their reading homework, had appreciated the development of the philosophical and moral themes and were ready to plunge into the novels themselves. The first questioner in the discussion afterwards raised the pertinent question of Murdoch's Christianity – since arguably one could apply the insights of Diotima's Ladder to Christ's perfection. An engaging discussion developed and Leeson elaborated on his comment that Murdoch was 'an atheistic post-Christian'.

The lectures on the four novels which formed and informed the rest of the course revealed an enormous range of love relationships: familial love towards children; that between husbands and wives or partners; sibling and other family connections; lustful, passionate and adulterous heterosexual and homosexual liaisons; animal attachments; incestuous relationships; transgressive love; religious faith as sometimes Christian or Platonic wisdom, or sometimes self-indulgent masochism. They are all here in the novels, including, occasionally, purer and less egotistical, more other-centred forms of devotion.

The Sandcastle was the perfect choice to start the analysis of the love novels; it is in many ways Murdoch's first realist novel, linking with the nineteenth-century

tradition and an early exploration of interrelationships. It encompasses all four types of love outlined in the first lecture: the disruption of Eros, evidently, in Mor's routine existence, but also attention to the individual (linked with the portraiture theme); letting the lover go, as both Mor and Rain must do ultimately; and, importantly, familial love, with Mor's inability to express his love for his adolescent children and the effect on them of his brief affair. Its early critical reception was undeservedly lukewarm, with both Conradi and A. S. Byatt making unfavourable comparisons with other novels (*The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* (1974) on the one hand and *The Bell* (1958) on the other). Other reviewers dismissed it as a conventional novel of a failed love affair, 'women's magazine fiction', even. It is more worthy than this. The links made, through Murdoch's artistic conception of *The Sandcastle*, between the erotic senses and the natural world and the presence of vibrant, seductive colours (emphasised by Anne Rowe in *The Visual Arts and the Novels of Iris Murdoch* (2002)) establish the vital energy of Eros. The early sequence of Mor and Rain in the darkening rose garden, with its intense perfume and soundless atmosphere, has Biblical echoes and was aptly contrasted with the later moment when Mor realises he is in love: 'now he felt that the world had started to rotate about him with a gathering pace and he was at the centre of its movement'. The 'fat relentless ego' is dominant here!

Leeson also emphasised the importance of the three 'sermons' as counterpoint to the indulgence of self-centred love: Mor's own lecture to the Workers' Educational Association about freedom; Evvy's religious sermon on love about crucifying our selfish desires; and Bledyard's direct attacks on Mor, emphasising that Mor is not truly paying attention to the other. The discussions on portraiture and Rain's reworking of Demoyte's portrait emphasise the links between this aspect of artistic endeavour and the need to see other people as separate and worthy of loving attention.

Nonetheless, the reader is sympathetic to Mor: his marriage is not a happy one and his life is drab and conventional. He is seduced by this world of colour, beauty and art. In the splendid final scene, at the dinner, his wife uses all her cunning to keep him. She has never wanted him to become a Labour MP, but can sacrifice this to keep him. The family is shown to be dysfunctional: Nan with her unrealised potential and sense of inadequacy; the children with their 'tears of blood' and magic rituals; the absent dog Liffey. These difficulties are only partially resolved by the end of the novel: the final scene is a sombre one. Discussion of *The Sandcastle* was very lively, with different opinions of Nan ('does she 'win' in the novel?'), how far Mor's desire is truly 'erotic', the significance (or not) of the gypsy and the difference between what Murdoch calls her 'closed' and 'more open' novels. The engagement of the group alone justified this selection of Murdoch's early, more realist novel in the course.

In the next session, we found ourselves in much more complex territory with *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. Aptly described by Leeson as 'richer, more diverse, more stimulating', this novel explores a number of key love types: familial love and heterosexual marriage (Rupert, Hilda and Peter); devoted child and parent (Tallis and his father); a strong homosexual partnership (Simon and Axel); an incestuous liaison (Peter and Morgan); a deceiving ego-ridden love (Rupert and Morgan); and the overarching demonic passion of Julius King.

In Julius, described by Murdoch in a letter to Conradi as 'the Prince of Darkness', we see one of Murdoch's most evil forces, a type of characterisation missing from *The Sandcastle*, though present in Mischa Fox in *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956). This novel's late revelation that Mischa has spent the war in a concentration camp reinforces Simone Weil's perception that 'when harm is done to a man, real evil enters into him'. Murdoch suggests in a 1985 interview that 'one identifies with the demonic characters in books', but here the perhaps more powerful characterisation of Simon, who struggles against Julius and manages to triumph, gives the lie to that claim. Against Julius, we also see the selfless, saintly Tallis, for whom love is a kind of steady, resigned devotion. Perhaps this seems dull, but the problem of creating truly good characters and avoiding their seeming lacklustre is an abiding challenge for Murdoch, one that is met more successfully in the next two novels on the course in the characters of James in *The Sea, The Sea* and Emma and Bill in *The Philosopher's Pupil*. It is Tallis, nonetheless, who makes Julius confess to what he has done and to some extent repair the awful outcomes of his behaviour, and Tallis who reminds the troubled Morgan that Peter needs not to be toyed with for her amusement, but to be loved properly and cared for continually, in a secure and devoted way.

In addition to exploring these very complex relationships and resonances, Leeson drew attention to the novel's suggested Nietzschean duality of Apollo and Dionysus, revealed in the contrast between passion and idealism, and noted, as an example of the former, the Arcadian scene between Peter and Morgan, so beautifully described. It is a tragi-comic novel, using the contrasts of conventional and non-conventional love throughout. Its mythical resonances are also foregrounded in the iconic episode of the *kouros*, where Simon's experience unites the totemic or symbolic with the realistic in a movingly described sequence. Perhaps even more overt are the Shakespearean elements of the novel, its links with the late comedies in which tragic events are overcome. There is a happy ending, for some characters. (Leeson reminded us that this novel can be examined in conjunction with *The Nice and the Good* (1968) which is even more Shakespearean.) Interestingly, the tendency of characters to role-play and to discuss their relationships in theatrical terms is, in the novel, inimical to the development of authentic relationships. This is what makes so many of the characters vulnerable to Julius's machinations ('Anyone will do to play the

roles', he declares) but it is Simon who triumphs and refutes this, Simon who tries in his daily life to really love Axel, to think affectionately about him and to please him, giving him presents which he will like, for example; it is he who is most successful in asserting the love between them in the face of Julius's cynical assertion that 'there is no relationship … that cannot easily be broken'. Poor conventional Rupert is the one who tragically loses out: in the light of his fate the novel's opening dialogue between him and Hilda is revealed as deeply ironic, its smug self-satisfaction an obvious hostage to fortune in a world which harbours evil manipulation. The discussion that followed was extremely engaged and focused. It was clear that participants find this a most engrossing work; some people said it was their favourite of all Murdoch's novels, with Simon a much-admired character. There was widespread sympathy for Rupert – was his folly really so great as to merit such a downfall? And a suggestion that Tallis, though evidently good, seems somewhat lifeless.

The course moved on to Murdoch's Booker Prize-winning novel *The Sea, The Sea*. Leeson was reassuring: this was a novel which many readers and critics thought to be her best, but others did not rate so highly. It was not possible in an hour's lecture to give it full justice, but nonetheless it is essential for understanding Murdoch's love themes: the use of a flawed first-person narrator, Charles Arrowby, a supreme egoist and fantasist who, as a well-known theatre director retiring to a magic-realist space by the sea, thinks of himself as Prospero now relinquishing his magic. Charles's version of love is to seize power and control; he is motivated by sexual rapacity and jealousy, as well as an obsessive revisiting of his past. The novel is absolutely compelling: by turns amusing and horrifying, and underpinned by a tension between Plato and Freud, what Murdoch termed high and low Eros. Additionally, the relationship explored between Charles and his cousin James is key. James is in many ways the counterpart to Charles; he has conquered his ego and is loving, wise and moral – one of Murdoch's most genuinely good characters, who embodies to a great extent Murdoch's own Buddhist sympathies at that time.

Leeson outlined some ways in which Murdoch's own life and her losses inform the novel: the meditations on death, dying and resurrection relating to the 'precious dead' of her own life and her desire to explore in the novel ideas of purgatory or Bardo. Her profound interest in visual art manifests itself here in the paintings of Titian's Perseus and Andromeda and Rembrandt's depiction of the artist's son, Titus (the name of the character who bears the brunt of Charles's failure in the novel). These symbolic works suggest the relationship between great art and the mysterious intersection of the conscious and the unconscious mind. Charles's vision of the sea monster has been variously interpreted, but seems to suggest a variety of symbolic links between Charles and his unconscious. The sea itself, magnificently described in all its moods by the novelist, is a central symbol

of the human mind and its complex inner life. The monster he sees rising up is surely an image of his own desire for power, particularly over women – his past loves, his monstrous egotism, his obsessive jealousy, all masking his fear and inadequacy. It is overall 'a vision of the cosmos', according to Malcolm Bradbury.

Shakespeare's late tragi-comic plays are a very obvious influence on this novel. Charles was a theatre director and his productions of *The Tempest* were apparently famous. He is still attached to Lizzie, who played Ariel. He sees himself as giving up his magic like Prospero and he uses a Caliban figure – Gilbert – to work for him, maintaining nonetheless a fantasy of ego to sustain himself, with only very occasional moments of self-recognition. However, with the advent of James as a catalyst and enabler, Charles does perhaps move towards some more spiritual ideas, some resolutions by the end of the novel. As may be imagined, the discussion following this fascinating lecture ranged widely. Some felt Charles showed signs of self-awareness and redemption eventually, others thought he was the old Charles, perhaps a little more self-aware. Some participants think the novel too painful in its merciless depiction of cruel egotistic obsession to be described as funny. There was discussion of whether this was a worthy Booker winner and whether there were others in her oeuvre that would have been more praiseworthy (for example, *The Black Prince* (1973), another first-person narrative). But it was agreed that although this is an exhausting read, it is a very important work on the theme of love, with significant range and depth.

The Philosopher's Pupil, our final set text, is one of Leeson's favourites – a 'baggy monster' of 558 pages, polyvocal and diverse, hugely complex and powerful. His description of Murdoch 'letting off the handbrake' was an apt one! This is not a first-person narrative but one with a storyteller, a narrator, N, who lives in Ennistone (N's town) and can observe it and its inhabitants closely, with 'the assistance of a certain lady' (IM, no less!). Murdoch was multi-tasking during the 1980s, working very hard on various projects, and the novel has some rough edges, to which she admitted. For example, Stella disappears from the action for hundreds of pages after a vivid opening chapter. There are also many contrived moments, especially in the dialogue sections, though the description and sheer invention of the novel as a whole are overwhelming. The evocation of the town and the extensive spa with its accompanying buildings and developments, to say nothing of the 45 minor and ten major characters in the action, is truly astonishing in its detail, and possibly unique in her work. There are additionally many set pieces which are utterly compelling and moving, such as William's sermon; the encounter between the dog Zed and the fox; George's redemptive rescue of Zed from drowning; Rozanov and Jacoby's long walk and philosophical conversation – one could easily add to this list.

This is a tale of male domination, with the female characters playing a lesser role. The male characters can be categorised in three age groups: the older group

includes the returning philosopher-king Rozanov, the priest Bernard Jacoby and William Eastcote, one of Murdoch's good men, none of whom survives – Jacoby remains alive but has exiled himself). The middle-aged group is formed of the brothers George and Brian, both in different ways disturbed, filled with overt or suppressed violence, and N the narrator/observer, everyone's confidant. The young, such as Tom and Emma, are shown on the other hand to retain a kind of innocence: and their loves for each other and for Hattie, are tenderly described. This novel is a love story which explores how to deal with death in mind and body, the sadness of unfulfilled middle age, and the untainted passion of youth. There is also a wide variety of human perversions in this town, however. The four types of love identified in Leeson's first lecture are developed here: Eros as a force, mostly of male eroticism, symbolised in in the baths of the spa with its hot water spurts; love as knowledge of the individual; the love manifested in distance and detachment; and familial love, with its past resentments and hurts. Rozanov's erotic lust for his grand-daughter (Murdoch's common incest theme) is transgressive and leads to his suicide, but the idea of suffering as redemptive also runs as a thread through the events of the story and George is released at last by this death. We see the influence of both Henry James and Dostoevsky in this novel, with the former's ironic view of social roles and spaces and the latter's *The Brothers Karamazov* as inspiration. Additionally, the riotous evening at the Slipper House with its disguise, deception, cross-dressing and revelation is redolent of Shakespeare's earlier comedies, such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. And the ending is mostly a 'happy' one, with enough closure to satisfy many readers.

Such a dense novel inevitably engaged the course participants and there was, following the lecture, a wide range of questions, points of information and reminders of particularly moving or well-written scenes. Looking back at the subject matter and substance of the discussions it was evident how far we had travelled over the five weeks of the course, from the relatively straightforward realism of *The Sandcastle,* through the juxtapositions of success and failure in relationships in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat,* in the face of evil manipulation; then on to the weighty exploration of egotism and goodness in relation to love and loss on a cosmic scale in *The Sea, The Sea;* and finally into the massive landscape of *The Philosopher's Pupil,* teeming with complex characters trying to deal with the past and find love and fulfilment, both erotic and spiritual.

The texts chosen by Leeson were unquestionably challenging and varied, within the over-arching theme of love. I particularly appreciated his infectious enthusiasm, his scholarship, the enormous number of cross-references to Murdoch's biography and other writing, and to critics. The bibliographies at the end of each set of lecture notes were very helpful for further reading and references. Perhaps most telling of all, the excitement generated evidently drove

us to return to the philosophical essays, our set texts and the other linked novels: from *The Sandcastle* to the 'adultery' novels like *An Unofficial Rose* (1962) and *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine;* from *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* to *The Nice and the Good;* from *The Sea, The Sea* to *The Black Prince* and *A Word Child* (1975); from *The Philosopher's Pupil* to *The Good Apprentice* (1985) and *The Green Knight* (1993).

All in all, this was a hugely successful lecture series. We await next spring's 'Iris Murdoch and Art' with keen anticipation.

'Iris Murdoch and Art' is scheduled for March-May 2025. For further details, go to https://www.literaturecambridge.co.uk/murdoch-2025

Report on 'Write and Shine: Ways of Seeing – Iris Murdoch', hosted by The London Library, 3 May 2024

Denise Wrigglesworth

At 7.30, on the morning of 3 May 2024, twenty-three writing workshop participants revealed themselves one by one on Zoom, each describing for the others the murky, misty outlook from their window at home or the view, in one case, from an airport lounge. The 'Write and Shine' event was hosted by The London Library, part of a series of writing workshops led by author Gemma Seltzer. Taking former members of the Library as their subject, the workshops explore the connections between image, writing and seeing inspired by John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*. The person whose 'way of seeing' we were to engage with for the next ninety minutes was Iris Murdoch. To anyone present that morning who was familiar with photos of Murdoch, there was an added frisson as one participant put on her camera and showed herself to have an uncanny likeness to the philosopher-novelist, something she told us had often been remarked upon previously. The on-screen chat lit up with recognition. It was a mesmerising way to start, as if Murdoch herself was in attendance on screen, and this led to thoughts of what she would have made of such online group gatherings, yet to be invented at her passing twenty-five years ago; furthermore, one convened to discuss her writing style. Like a dawn chorus, the atmosphere on the Zoom workshop gathered momentum under the gentle stewardship of Seltzer and a colleague, who were both enthusiastic and well-prepared.

The workshop was structured around a series of on-screen writing prompts read out, at our host's invitation, by individuals from the group. The first writing prompt was themed by a couple of letters sent by Iris Murdoch to Brigid Brophy:

> 'Just off to swim in swimming pool of gun-owning farmer'.
> Nettlepole, Kent, 14 July 1964

and

> 'It's snowing (big flakes) and I love you. I feel depressed'.
> January 1966.[1]

Six minutes of silence descended as each participant busied themselves with whatever thoughts had been provoked: to write either a continuation of their current work or a spontaneous fresh piece, based on swimming and snow.

Before a second prompt, the host engaged us all in conversation around Louise Gluck's observation on how, with a Murdoch novel there is always 'something delicious' within: often hilarious tales about people doing bad things. Chatter sparked on the sidebar and screen about the various memorable characters through whom Murdoch interrogates morality and provides readers with recognition of and association with common human frailties. We agreed that Murdoch sees people very clearly and that it was an acknowledged writing goal to put successfully down on paper what we perceive about people and somehow also to show what we miss seeing. The next excerpt came from *Under the Net* (1954), describing Jake Donaghue's uncanny encounter with the silent masked actors:

> I was looking straight into seven or eight pairs of staring eyes, which seemed to be located a few feet from my face. I stepped back hastily and the door swung to again with a faint click which was the first sound I had heard since I entered the house. I stood still for a moment in utter incomprehension, my scalp prickling.[2]

We were invited to write for thirteen minutes on a character in a setting in which they think they are alone and something disorientating, unsettling or uncanny occurs. The symbolism of the mask scenes in *Under the Net* mirrors the string of deceptions and revelations by the characters to each other and to themselves within the story. On the topic of masking we read on from this excerpt from *Under the Net* which included:

> 'the two female masks, one of them sensual and serene, and the other nervous, watchful, hypocritical. These two masks had the eyes filled in, but the male masks had empty eyes through which the eyes of the actors gleamed oddly'.[3]

This led to a discussion about how the novel is told from Jake's first-person narratorial perspective. He believes 'that the universe is ordered around him, that his face is a "tell-tale surface" revealing every thought to a fascinated world and his intelligence and charm make anything possible, to the realisation that he is no more important than anyone else'.[4] *Under the Net* is filled with women who are opaque to Jake. One such character is the Buddha-like Mrs Tinckham. Her presence

in the story was mentioned, within the group, as an example of Murdoch writing about women as complex and enigmatic while she seems to present her male protagonists with a clarity, as if with open eyes. The masks' open or closed eyes seem to mirror these ideas. Whatever the reading provoked in the minds of the writers, we were all absorbed by our thoughts of disorientation and the uncanny, completed the second prompt and were ready for the final look at Murdoch's writing: description. Participants had already commented on the simplicity and clarity of her phrasing; 'as clean as an apple'[5], for example, which crisply draws attention to the gleam of the carved wooden balustrade noted by Jake when he enters the 'neat and nicely appointed'[6] house at Chiswick Mall. The final reading was an extract from 'Prehistory' at the beginning of the popular, Booker Prize-winning *The Sea, The Sea* (1978):

> The cloudless sky is very pale at the indigo horizon which it lightly pencils in with silver. Its blue gains towards the zenith and vibrates there. But the sky looks cold, even the sun looks cold.[7]

The host and participants discussed Murdoch's use of high and low registers to alert the reader to what is to follow in her novel. The host summed up that Murdoch wants to show us something which we take to be both universal and specific and she does so by how she writes about people or location. She draws the reader in and then reminds us firmly that things are not as they seem. For example, the simple use of 'cold' is used not to describe the water as one might expect ordinarily, but for the sun itself and this unexpected association of words puts us on notice. The final writing exercise was for us to use nature as an agent of jeopardy and momentum. We were given ten minutes to write on an aspect of nature that takes on a prominent role in our own work. When the participants are in writing mode some kept their cameras on while others switched them off: visible or not, a surrender to concentration and creative flow takes over. Fellow writers become oblivious to each other or of being witnessed as they tap keyboards or put pen to paper and attempt to capture the elusive fireflies of words and images stimulated by the reading prompts.

The workshop closed with warm, friendly exchanges about recommendations and titles not yet read, including Murdoch's philosophical writings. From these conversations and side bar notes, I finish with a list of the books referred to or recommended by the host and writing group as their 'to be read' take away from the Write and Shine workshop on Iris Murdoch's Ways of Seeing : Murdoch's novels, *Under the Net*, *The Unicorn*, *The Italian Girl*, *The Bell, The Sea, The Sea* and *The Philosopher's Pupil*; Murdoch's philosophical essays, *Existentialists and Mystics*; Avril Horner and Anne Rowe, eds., *Living on Paper*: *Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934–1995*; John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* and Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*.

1 Iris Murdoch, in *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995*, ed. by Avril Horner and Anne Rowe (London: Chatto & Windus, 2015), 270, 312.
2 Iris Murdoch, *Under the Net* (1954) (London: Vintage, 2019), 36.
3 Murdoch, *Under the Net* (1954), 36.
4 Charlotte Mendelson, 'Introduction', in Iris Murdoch, *Under the Net* (1954) (London: Vintage, 2019), xx.
5 Murdoch, *Under the Net* (1954), 35.
6 Murdoch, Under the Net (1954), 35.
7 Iris Murdoch, *The Sea, The Sea* (1978) (London: Vintage, 1999), 1.

Report on the Twentieth Anniversary Celebration of Kingston University Archives and Special Collections, 7 June 2024

Rachel Hirschler

Donors, past and present staff, volunteers, and others associated with Kingston University gathered on 7 June to mark the 20th anniversary of its Archives and Special Collections. Archivist Dayna Miller organised a most impressive and enjoyable event that reflected the development of the Archives over the years to create a place where visitors exploring its collections make it work as a 'living' entity.

Dayna opened the event by outlining the Archives' journey from the first acquisition of the Vane Ivanovic Collection in 2004 (when a dedicated archive space was yet to be created), through to today's diverse collections that include Iris Murdoch's libraries, letters, journals and poetry notebooks. A slide show illustrated the Archives' many projects and exhibitions supported by visiting artists and volunteer transcribers and cataloguers. Dayna's presentation also touched on the recent challenges presented by the pandemic, and the move to the new Town House building.

Visual artist Carol Sommer entertained everyone with a few of her Instagram posts (@cartography_for_girls) which combine phrases from *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* with twentieth-century film clips and pop music. An earlier discussion with Dayna about the correlation between catalogue key words and social media hashtags inspired Carol to ask the attendees how they would tag her posts. The wide range of responses bore out Dayna's earlier comments regarding the subjectivity of cataloguing and the inevitability of archivist bias.

Students from several courses at Kingston School of Art presented 'The Archive Syndrome' in the Town House Studio Theatre – a piece of performance art created in response to their participation in workshops that explored the role of the Archives. Graphics, dialogues and humorous representations of how

to behave in a reading room were used to illustrate their experiences. The Iris Murdoch Collections were the principal inspiration for the show, though Vane Ivanovic's typewriter also made an appearance.

The opening of an exhibition encapsulating the many facets of the Archives' collections, and visitors' engagement with them, brought the formalities to a close. And in celebratory style we raised our glasses to toast the success of the past 20 years.

Report on the unveiling of an English Heritage blue plaque for Iris Murdoch in Cornwall Gardens, London SW7, 19 June 2024

Lucy Bolton

On a beautifully sunny day, the leafy gardens near Gloucester Road in London SW7 saw an influx of Murdochian scholars, fans and devotees, assembling for the unveiling of a fourth commemorative plaque erected in Iris Murdoch's honour. Murdoch clearly loved living in Cornwall Gardens; she initially rented Flat 4 at number 62 in 1970 but, within less than two years, she had purchased Flat 5 at number 29, on the other side of the square.

Murdoch lived in this flat on and off for 25 years, and it is an integral element of her writing and her personal life. She often spent up to three days a week here. Her fourth-floor flat was apparently a struggle to reach; there was no lift and the height of the ceilings in these mid-Victorian terraced buildings made the flat a more extreme climb than visitors might have expected. This flat, and this square, were inspirations to Murdoch. Many of her 1970s London-based novels were written here, including *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* (1974) *A Word Child* (1975) and *Henry and Cato* (1976). She referred to London as 'another main character in my fiction', and it is clear that this flat fulfilled a vital role in her creative life, fuelling and freeing her imagination.

The unveiling of the blue plaque was a celebratory occasion, introduced by Claire Harman of English Heritage's Blue Plaques Panel, and marked by contributions from Professor Anne Rowe, Dr Miles Leeson, and novelist Sophie Hannah. Rowe described the importance of this London life to Murdoch, and Leeson – reading a speech prepared by Peter J Conradi – expressed how this blue plaque stands as testament to both her literary genius and her love of London. Hannah spoke enthusiastically and generously about her love for Murdoch's work and praised the humour and the world view of Murdoch's novels, which Hannah found immensely identifiable and inspirational. It fell to Annette Badland, Patron of the

Iris Murdoch Society, to speak the final ceremonial words and to carry out the unveiling. Badland, who acted in Murdoch's play, *The Three Arrows* alongside Sir Ian McKellan in 1972, described Murdoch as an 'important philosopher, thinker, novelist, poet, playwright, and extraordinary human being'. As she proceeded to pull the cord that unveiled the plaque, the surprising sound of ripping Velcro was accompanied by cheerful applause of the appreciative crowd. Making the most of the far more reliable mechanism than the pulling of a curtain, Badland was able to reveal the plaque in all its glory and without a procedural hitch.

This is the fourth blue plaque to commemorate Murdoch. The others can be found at 30 Charlbury Road, Oxford, where Murdoch lived for the last ten years of her life; Badminton School, Bristol, where she was Head Girl; and at 59 Blessington Street, Dublin, where she was born. The current occupant of Flat 5, 29 Cornwall Gardens was gracious enough to allow a few select Murdochians to visit Murdoch's onetime home, and all confirmed the strikingly airy view across the rooftops of London, and the clear view of the Post Office Tower. There was a welcoming and joyful reception in Cornwall Gardens, courtesy of the Cornwall Gardens Management Committee, where Murdochians were able not only to toast the plaque, and the recognition of Murdoch's ongoing importance to London's literary culture, but also to spend time appreciating the gardens where Murdoch sat, and thought, and probably wrote in her notebooks. Imagining her at home there, and taking solace, succour, and inspiration from her surroundings, enabled a connection with the living and writing Murdoch, who so loved London, and particularly Cornwall Gardens.

Report on Eleventh Iris Murdoch Conference: 'Aspirations and Inspirations', University of Chichester, 30 August–1 September 2024

Danika Brown

'Aspirations and Inspirations' was the title of this year's conference, held across three days in August and September. Although it was difficult to decide which panels to prioritise, I was able to hear a satisfying variety of fittingly inspiring papers. Detailed here are some which I found thought-provoking.

In terms of 'Inspirations', the conference featured papers focused on creating art inspired by Iris Murdoch. Kevin Petrie discussed how his artwork, as a method of recording experience through looking, examining and understanding, can be seen as a form of 'attention'. His prints, thus, are a method of capturing that attention. His focal pieces were inspired by *Bruno's Dream*, and he discussed his curatorial idea of presenting his prints alongside letters, books, objects and other fragments which belonged to Murdoch. This discussion served as an introduction to his September 2024 exhibition at Kingston University in collaboration with the Archive. Also part of that panel was Carol Sommer, who gave a paper on Murdoch, Eros and Minimalist sculpture. Her paper was both funny and deeply thought-provoking. Carol used a combination of slides and video, the latter being her chosen art-form. She made analyses of minimalist sculpture, particularly works by Carl Andre, and attempted to decipher some of the metaphors surrounding them by looking at them through the lens of Murdoch's concepts of high and low Eros.

I also attended a panel in which the speakers took philosophical inspirations from classic novels and linked them with Murdoch's work. Cathy Mason discussed the concept of the self and self-transcendence in Murdoch and explored similar

themes in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. Elise Ruthenbeck also made links between Murdoch's work and *Middlemarch*, specifically the theme of searching for 'real' love as outlined in *The Sovereignty of the Good*. Eva-Maria Düringer gave a paper covering George Eliot and also Jane Austen's novels and the themes of being truly seen and understanding words in relation to our private feelings.

The theme of 'Aspirations' was prominent from the first panel I attended, which focused on aspects of Murdoch's work in the context of the modern-day education sector. Andrea Delaune proposed that today's teachers can use Murdoch's concept of attention in their teaching, and suggested that this integration could be seen as a philosophy of education which benefits all parties. Rebecca Moden explored ways in which Murdoch's ideas about education are of relevance and value to today's secondary English classrooms. Both papers aspired to an educational environment which could be enriched by Murdochian ideas.

A number of papers and panels aspired to ways of reading Murdoch's novels through new lenses. These included perspectives on themes of ageing (Liz Dexter), colour (James Jeffries), Eastern philosophy (Zhiqi Wang, and Paul Hullah), ecocriticism (Madeleine Lèger, Lucy Oulton, and Marta Romagnoli), and elements of genres such as philosophical poetry (Gillian Dooley), tragedy (Scott H. Moore), fantasy (Yanni Ratajczyk), and autobiography (Francesca Scapinello). My own paper focused on reading *The Philosopher's Pupil* through a neurocritical lens. My friends who shared the panel with me also discussed their new readings of *The Philosopher's Pupil,* and *The Message to the Planet*, Rachel Handley focusing on links to Machiavelli, and Rob Hardy concentrating on links to Howard Jacobson.

A number of inspiring keynote speakers were featured; Frances White gave a compendious plenary on Murdoch's life on the first day, followed by Gillian Dooley who presented 'A Year of Birds: Song Cycle for Soprano and Orchestra' by Malcolm Williamson, originally performed at the BBC Proms in 1995, which provided a wonderful musical interlude. Justin Broackes from Brown University gave the plenary on the second day via Zoom from America, and Tatevik Ayvazyan gave a much-anticipated preview of scenes from the film adaptation of *The Italian Girl* which is currently in production. The second plenary on this day was an interview conducted by Miles Leeson with Jemma Kennedy and Giles Smart to discuss Kennedy's in-progress adaptation of *The Sea, The Sea* for screenplay, which sparked lively discussion in the following Q&A session. On the final day, Nikhil Krishnan, author of *A Terribly Serious Adventure: Philosophy at Oxford 1900-60*, gave a hugely entertaining talk on Iris Murdoch's irony. Anne Rowe and Miles Leeson gave the closing remarks, which neatly recapitulated the delights the weekend had afforded.

This being my first academic conference, I did not know what to expect. But I was encouraged from the start by the large number of attendees, and their

enthusiastic appreciation of the book stall, which I was appointed to run. It was a fantastic experience full of fun, both social and scholarly in equal measure, during which I met many fellow Murdoch scholars who I hope and expect to become long-term friends. Finally, I will again lament the challenge of choosing which panels to attend; I found myself wishing, as did many others, that I could have attended them all. Nevertheless, I look forward to facing the same challenge in 2026.

Update from the Archive 2024

Dayna Miller

Rather a lot has happened since our last update and this past year feels like it might have been our busiest yet. Looking back to this time in 2023, we were then preparing to launch our first ever exhibition to be curated by volunteers. 'The Talk of the Town (House)' ran from September to December and was a fitting start to the academic year. It connected our collections to the University's Town House Strategy which focuses particularly on providing students with future skills that can be taken into the workplace. Material from the Iris Murdoch Collections, including Murdoch's letters to Rachel Fenner and the many versions of her poem 'The Agamemnon Class 1939', demonstrated the critical thinking, creativity and determination to succeed that we hope will have inspired some of our student visitors.

Students have really been at the heart of our more recent activities too. We again hosted group visits for MA Creative Writing Distance Learners, BA Fine Art, Art History, Graphic Design, Criminology and Drama students. The 2023–24 academic year also saw the first cohort of students enrolled on the new MA module: Archives in Contemporary Media Culture. In addition to taking part in the module induction, the Archive held two workshops for the group, both of which included items from the Iris Murdoch Collections. Our 'Archive Dilemmas' session used some of Murdoch's most personal letters and journal entries to discuss the question of research value versus privacy; our second session involved a light-hearted, yet thought-provoking, activity that required students to justify why an archive would keep such seemingly random items as Murdoch's stones. With the module revalidated for the coming year, we will be involved for a second time and hope to encourage students to further their interest and involvement in archives.

Talking of which, we were delighted to welcome Amy Simpson who joined us on a work placement from October to December 2023 as part of her Creative Writing degree at the University of Westminster. An aspiring novelist herself, Amy was enthused by Iris Murdoch and over the months she ably assisted with repacking and arranging the Iris Murdoch Collections – an ongoing process for all of our collections now that we are permanently situated in the Town House. Amy's natural aptitude for archive work and organisational skills enabled

Murdoch's *Joanna, Joanna* archive to be fully catalogued, and in so doing we were able to narrow down when the play title went from three '*Joanna*'s down to one and back up to two!

We also spent a very enjoyable August afternoon with Justin Broackes and students from the University of Göttingen. Delving into Murdoch's letters to Hal Lidderdale and Raymond Queneau, her 'Notes from a lecture given by Jean-Paul Sartre' and several books from her Oxford Library, the students gained a glimpse of the younger Murdoch and the philosophers who influenced her in the 1940s. The group also had the pleasure of hearing a talk from Anne Rowe and an opportunity to view some of Murdoch's own paintings before taking a trip to the National Gallery with Anne the following day. As well as this lovely group from Germany, the Archive received visitors from Wales, Canada, Sweden and Italy, evidencing the continuation of Murdoch's global appeal this year.

A bit closer to home, we hosted two visits from members of Ealing U3A. After a presentation in Ealing that focused on our Cary Ellison Theatre Programme Collection, but shamelessly plugged our other collections as well, a joint Ellison/Murdoch session was requested at the Archive in May and June. The mornings flew by as the groups explored materials which prompted reminiscences about the heyday of repertory theatre and discussions about the Murdoch novels they had or had not (yet) read. On seeing some of Murdoch's letters to Brigid Brophy and journal entries that touched on Murdoch's view of her own identity, one U3A member remarked that after decades of reading the novels she now had a better understanding of how Murdoch wrote so well from the male perspective. The discussion was prompted by an undated letter sent by Murdoch to Brophy in the form of a poem during the 1950s. In the third stanza she declares:

> Of course, one has a sex, I can't deny it.
> For purposes of passports, clothes etcetera
> I am a woman, & I don't decry it.
> Since man has always done his best to fetter her,
> A woman would be man, if she could try it,
> In many cases – but this would not better her
> In any deep respect, and as a spirit
> Woman is man's superior in merit.
> (KUAS142-1-3)

Murdoch's many identities were also considered during an engaging visit from the KU Menopause Support Group, whose members were fascinated to learn more about Murdoch as a woman who did not always conform to social norms.

The Ellison/Murdoch partnership continued into the summer and I was very honoured to deliver the Archives for London June Seminar at London Metropolitan

Archives (recently renamed The London Archives). 'Through Stage and Page' offered a view of London through Cary Ellison's experiences of West End theatre during his career with Spotlight Casting Directory and through Murdoch's letters and novels. The presentation noted potential research avenues and also observed a connection between the two collections brought about by Ellison's attendance at the London productions of *A Severed Head* and *The Italian Girl*. And with the timing of the seminar working out perfectly, I was able to incorporate the unveiling of Murdoch's blue plaque at Cornwall Gardens into my talk.

While a great deal of outreach work has taken place over the last year, other important work has been happening behind the scenes. The Archive catalogue received a long-awaited upgrade in July and is now in the Cloud. The new system meets the University's IT requirements and, from an Archive perspective, should be more reliable for background cataloguing tasks. We also took the opportunity to refresh the public-facing catalogue. The search page now features tiles which take you directly to some of our collections and we have also switched on the request form function. This means that queries about particular items or requests for digital copies can be sent directly from the catalogue to the Archive. See instructions for this at the end of the update.

In July, after many months of preparation, we submitted our Archive Service Accreditation application to The National Archives. We first gained accredited status in 2017 and retained it in 2022. This year we are attempting to achieve full accreditation for a second time. New questions around digital preservation and equality, diversity and inclusion gave us a lot to think about, not only in terms of what we have accomplished since 2017 but also what more we need to do to create a service that addresses the increasing demand for digital resources and makes the Archive welcoming and representative for all. Our application will be followed up with a site visit from the Accreditation assessors in October and we hope to hear the outcome by December.

In amongst all of these happenings, the Archive's twentieth-anniversary year began and with that in mind we decided to document our activities on the blog. We managed a monthly post from January 2024 through to May but unfortunately were unable to continue as the blog service was withdrawn by the University. This meant that we did not get to regale readers with news of our anniversary event in June. However, once an alternative to the blog is found we will certainly include a retrospective look at what turned out to be a wonderful occasion, with high points including Carol Sommer's Classification Game and 'The Archive Syndrome' – a weirdly wonderful performance by Kingston School of Art students.

Our accompanying exhibition, 'A Bit of Shelf Reflection', was unveiled at the event and though scheduled to close on 5 September, was extended to 19 September to allow new students to catch it during induction week. The

exhibition celebrated the development of Kingston University Archives and Special Collections from its first acquisition of the Vane Ivanovic Library and Archive, which was closely followed by Iris Murdoch's Oxford Library, eventually becoming home to many other fascinating collections. The exhibition emphasised the work of our transcribers and volunteers and our growing partnerships with external organisations and artists and, of course, taking us back to where this update began, highlighted our involvement with students through workshops, modules and, yes, exhibitions!

Looking back on the last twenty years has also underscored how fortunate the Archive has been to have had such wonderful support from the Iris Murdoch Society and Mrs Audi Bayley, for which we continue to be very grateful. While new Murdoch acquisitions have naturally reduced during the period we appreciate all those who have donated the material that has enhanced our collections and enriched Murdoch research over two decades. Acquisitions this year include:

- A letter from Iris Murdoch to Xavier Villers, 1992. Kindly donated by Xavier Villers.
- Documents relating to the rights to produce a film adaptation of *A Severed Head*, dated 1969 and 1998. Kindly donated by the Iris Murdoch Society.
- Typescript of *The Unicorn* dated 1962, with Murdoch's handwritten amendments. Kindly donated from the estate of Francesca 'Franki' Owen.

As we head into the autumn and our twenty-first year, we will continue to work on transcribing Murdoch's Oxford Library annotations – a project which is progressing apace thanks to our dedicated team of transcribers. We are also excited to announce our new exhibition 'Web of Life: New Prints by Kevin Petrie' which runs from 27 September–12 December 2024. The exhibition showcases artworks inspired by the writings of Iris Murdoch and features selected items from the Iris Murdoch Collections.

As ever, we look forward to supporting researchers near and far and we welcome contact from all readers, enthusiasts and groups who would like to explore the Iris Murdoch Collections.

For general enquiries and appointment requests, please email archives@kingston.ac.uk.

To search for documents, artworks, and objects please visit the archive catalogue at https://adlib.kingston.ac.uk.

To use the new request form function: Find the relevant item in the catalogue > click on 'Add to selection' > click on 'Selection' in the menu at the top of the page > click on Request form > Enter your details and enquiry > click on 'Send request'.

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

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Obituary: Dame Antonia Susan Byatt (1936–2023)

Miles Leeson

Dame Antonia Byatt, who died last November at the age of 87, was a novelist, literary critic, poet and short story writer. Best known for her Booker Prize-winning *Possession* (1990) she was the author of ten novels, five short story collections and a range of other works; she garnered various awards throughout her career and was acclaimed in *The Times* in 2008 as one of the 50 greatest British writers since 1945 (she came in at 34th, Iris Murdoch at 12th). Her non-fiction work included books on Wordsworth, Coleridge and *Portraits in Fiction* but she is best known to those who read Murdoch's work as the author of the first major critical study on Murdoch: *Degrees of Freedom: The Early Novels of Iris Murdoch* (1965) – commissioned by another mutual friend, Cecil Day-Lewis – which was subsequently updated and republished in 1994. She was also the author of *Iris Murdoch: A Critical Study* (1976) for the 'Writers and their Work' series (the forerunner of Anne Rowe's 2019 study *Iris Murdoch*). Whilst her fiction, rightly, overshadows her critical work and whilst George Eliot is a stronger influence on her mature fiction, Byatt always recognised Murdoch as a formative influence as well as a mentor and friend. She said of writing *Degrees of Freedom* that,

> The book was, as I said in my final chapter, written out of passionate curiosity about how Iris Murdoch's novels *worked*, what the ideas were behind them, how the ideas related to the forms she chose, how her world was put together. It was a writer's curiosity about techniques that started me on the work. When I had finished it I had developed a deep admiration for Murdoch's wisdom, her understanding of the way philosophical, political, aesthetic, and narrative thought worked (or failed to work). It is not too much to say that I was morally changed, for the better, I think. And I learned a great deal about both writing and thinking. (New introduction to *Degrees of Freedom*, 1994)

And Byatt would go on to recognise Murdoch's lasting impact in interviews throughout her life. Byatt leaves behind a great legacy for the reader of fiction and criticism alike and will, no doubt, be acclaimed as one of the most important literary voices of the late twentieth century, not just for her long-form work but for her superb short stories: she is arguably the best short story writer in Britain in the past thirty years.

I am glad that her friend, and Murdoch biographer, Peter J. Conradi has written such an excellent memoir of Dame Antonia that celebrates her life and work as well as providing even more critical connections between Byatt and Murdoch, both key figures in British post-war writing.

Recollections of Dame Antonia Byatt (1936–2023)

Peter J. Conradi

> *'[Iris Murdoch] is the living person whose mind has done most for mine.'*

Miles Leeson invited me to write an obituary for Dame Antonia Byatt, Dame Iris's most distinguished acolyte. It seemed that offering some personal reminiscences to illustrate their complicated friendship might be as or more useful.

A.S. Byatt began writing her pioneer study of Iris Murdoch's first six novels as she initially planned and believed) – *Degrees of Freedom* (1965) – around 1962 in Durham. Her first husband Ian Byatt was lecturing in Economics at Durham University; Antonia at that stage had no academic post but was taking care of their two small children. The writing was not easy: it was vexed first of all by what she later criticised as the puritanical influence on her of F.R. Leavis, which resulted in a tone of voice she later judged on occasion excessively harsh. Then Byatt was startled to learn two things from correspondence with Murdoch. One was that a seventh novel was on its way: *The Unicorn*. The second piece of news was Murdoch's averral of the importance to her of Simone Weil. Both these items of news resulted in substantial revisions. They met briefly for the first time after the publication of *The Unicorn* when Murdoch impressed Byatt by bringing her an eccentric gift: a single-coloured Christmas-tree bauble. Murdoch chose always to call Byatt 'Toni', rather than Antonia, one of the androgynous first names for women that she favoured, on the analogy of 'Georgie' and 'Julian'.

Byatt and I first met at University College London for two lunches in the early 1970s, and during 1980–83 she supervised my PhD thesis on 'Iris Murdoch and the Purification of Eros'. This cannot have been too arduous: I was 35, highly motivated and determined. Indeed I was also under contract with Macmillan to publish my thesis (*The Saint and the Artist: A Study of the Fiction of Iris Murdoch*)

before I had finished drafting it. (Not recommended: a monograph and a doctoral thesis turn out to require very different idiom.) Byatt was generous, imaginative and kind. I had attempted a PhD ten years earlier but suffered a breakdown instead. She saw to it that my then supervisor Malcolm Bradbury, at the University of East Anglia, and I repaired our relationship, all of us going together to watch Leo McKern as Brecht's *Galileo* at the National Theatre in 1980; she also helped on my commission to write a volume in Bradbury's *Contemporary Writers* series.

Byatt's attitude to Murdoch was both reverential and territorial. She knew little about her, but treasured that little. I recall her fascination when Murdoch – most unusually –confided a story concerning Murdoch's pursuit of Canetti in Italy in the early 1950s, to his evident displeasure.[1] Byatt valued Murdoch as a thinker, as a novelist and as a mentor. The value she put upon this discipleship was attested whenever the BBC celebrated Murdoch's work: Byatt worked hard to ensure that she was consulted and included as the principal 'keeper of the flame'. Her motivation was not obscure: the chief flame-keeper is well-placed to become the presumptive heir.

She was given to announcing, (with unconscious irony given today's hindsight) that this friendship had rendered it impossible for her to tell a lie. A.S. Byatt, 'frightened' at their first meeting, was still alarmed 25 years later, finding Murdoch 'very hard to talk to because she is always very scrupulous and just and is watching'.[2] Murdoch's 1970 journal entry compares Byatt with three lesbian friends, each of them in love with Murdoch: Brigid Brophy, Esme Ross Langley, and Margaret Hubbard. By contrast with these three 'Toni has touches of greatness. Her tense tough intellectual fibre, fabric. ...This is just homage to Toni'.[3]

The relevance of this friendship to Murdoch's novels – if any – is of legitimate interest. A novelist cannot help in some sense but plunder her own experience, albeit Murdoch strongly scorned and tried to eschew direct biographical theft. Yet Murdoch and Phillipa Foot's traumatic exchange of lovers in 1943–4 is surely distantly echoed within many of Murdoch's erotic imbroglios. Lisa and Diana's flirtations with one another's partners in *Bruno's Dream* is – to take one example – only a remote reflection.[4]

Of no less interest are the ways in which a novelist may unwittingly predict a possible future: art as prophecy or foreshadowing. During her 1982 Gifford lectures, Murdoch echoed Canetti in maintaining that 'true writers encounter their characters *after* they've created them'.[5] Exactly this happened after she had created Anne Cavidge in *Nuns and Soldiers,* then met Marjorie Locke (Sister Ann Teresa) who had left the Anglican-Augustinian convent of St Mary's, Wantage, after fifteen years there, rather as Cavidge left her convent. Locke, unlike Cavidge, never lost her faith but, like Cavidge, found her Abbess in 1969 difficult, recognising the accuracy of Iris's description of arriving bravely back

in the world without friends or know-how, like an ex-prisoner. She and Murdoch exchanged many hundreds of letters. More striking and disturbing (to me) is the fact that the London flat where Anglo-Jewish Boris Villers died in 1992 was, like the dying Anglo-Jewish Guy's in *Nuns and Soldiers*, in Ebury Street in Belgravia, near Victoria. When she invented Guy's death in Ebury Street in 1978, however, the Villerses had not yet dreamt of moving to this address. Her art sometimes anticipated life. In 2000, Boris's widow Audi Villers married John Bayley. The plot of *The Black Prince* too may contain some unconscious augury: a point to come back to.

Byatt was happy while writing *Possession*, a novel whose artful shape and miraculous combination of playfulness, fun and elegy I – like so many – much admired. She wrote to me of inventing the blank verse within that novel as 'exciting to do … a liberation'. She felt as if writing this were a form of light relief or holiday, in some way freeing her from the portentousness that (for some readers) impairs her Frederica Potter tetralogy, and sometimes made her unintentionally sound – as Gabriele Annan caustically noted in *The New York Review of Books* – 'showoff and hectoring'.[6] Frederica is described as longing to experience freedom from 'vehemence', an interesting choice of word: Frederica's creator was no stranger to intensity.

Possession perhaps distantly echoes *The Black Prince* in that – for all the great and evident differences between them – both nonetheless concern relations between two writers, and both explore questions of literary inheritance, where the disciple may be possessed by her master and may have to struggle in turn to achieve ownership. Does the Disciple own her Master, or vice versa… or both? Who owns – or possesses – whom? Here, it seems to me, is a rich field for the literary scholar to explore in future. After 1990, when *Possession* deservedly won the Booker Prize, Byatt on three occasions shared with me her perception that she herself had – in her own startling words – '*now turned into Dame Iris*'. This struck me then, and still strikes me now, as a very strange formulation, albeit its crudity is suggestive. What exactly did Byatt learn from Murdoch? Perhaps Byatt's brilliant characterisation of Murdoch's work as 'mandarin and yet sensational' is helpful here.[7] That typification works well for *Possession* too; it suggests how Murdoch's example both empowered and liberated Byatt.

Dame Antonia had a perfect right to change her view over time of Murdoch's oeuvre, as also every right to hope and believe that her own achievement came in time to surpass that of Murdoch. Some will agree. What is interesting is her acknowledgement of what she terms her Bloomian desire to – by implication – take revenge on Murdoch by turning her into a St John the Baptist prophesying her own role – i.e. Byatt's – as true Saviour. Thus – to take a single instance – in the March 2011 Royal Society of Literature seminar entitled 'Iris Murdoch, Revisited' Byatt appeared to be downgrading the novels of Murdoch's that

followed *Under the Net*.[8] The partial trashing of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* in its 2008 foreword by her close ally Philip Hensher no doubt has its place in this saga of diminishment.[9] There may be echoes here for the Murdoch scholar of Bradley's jealous demolition of the collected works of Arnold Baffin, a writer whose initials are fortuitously those of Antonia Byatt.

This Bloomian desire to deny influence – to deny possession – is of legitimate interest to the literary historian. In *Iris Murdoch: A Life* I noted this politics, a syndrome Murdoch herself clearly explored when writing *The Black Prince*:

> In *The Black Prince* the blocked-writer Pearson is the 'discoverer' of the facile best-seller Arnold Baffin. If Iris had a 'discoverer', A.S. Byatt might merit the title, having written the first academic monograph in 1965, after Iris had published nine novels, Byatt one. [...]
>
> Iris understood how literary discipleship involves unique indebtedness. In 1945 she had noted that she sometimes wanted '*to be*' Queneau, sometimes Thomas Mann. After 1953 Canetti took Queneau's place as (literary) master. The 'discovery' of an older artist's talent or genius may give rise both to a sense of ownership of that artist's mind, and of having one's own 'stolen away'. To have one's talents unlocked by an older artist engendered special claims. Harold Bloom [in *The Anxiety of Influence*, 1973] memorably pictured the literary master-disciple relation as an Oedipal – or cannibalistic, à la Canetti – drama: the jealous acolyte's secret wish, beneath public admiration, is for a diminution of the reputation of the older artist so that the younger can more effectively appropriate his '*mana*' – prestige or power. The older artist can then be turned into a John the Baptist heralding the significant arrival of the younger. The creation of a Mischa Fox or a Julius King may be a secret act of revenge on or acquittal with Canetti. In any case *The Black Prince* concerns the jealous, implicitly murderous hostility that underlies the friendship between a facile artist-protégé and his serious-minded discoverer-patron.[10]

This Bloomian drama had its comical side. At the close of one literary festival in the mid-1990s Dame Iris and Byatt coincided, Murdoch being driven off by John Bayley in their unwashed and beat-up small Fiat, the passenger door of which was inconclusively closed and sealed with Sellotape. Alongside stood Byatt's smart, polished chauffeur-driven limousine commandeered no doubt at some expense via their joint publisher, Chatto. Byatt was scandalised by John Bayley's three volumes of memoirs and expressed her fury to all comers. She also maintained – against the evidence – that Murdoch did not want her biography written. Finally, when in 1994 her pioneer study *Degrees of*

Freedom was reissued (under its original title despite being brought up to date), she included an afterword by a critic who attested her indebtedness by terming Iris Murdoch Byatt's 'literary mother'.[11] She now objected to this phrase –'one I intensely dislike… put into my mouth by a journalist' she wrote to me.[12]

The letter to me from Byatt that follows (now in the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives) was evidently written in 1995, when, in advance of publication, Chatto were circulating proofs of *Jackson's Dilemma*, whose incoherence was causing alarm. Dame Iris's state of mind on her and John Bayley's first visit to stay with me and my partner in Wales that May also caused concern. Byatt mentions Charles, her son by a first marriage, who in 1972 was run over and killed, aged only 11, by a drunk driver.

> …I too have been weeping about Iris. I had lunch with her & Carmen [Callil] (Ed Victor had asked Carmen to see if she thought Iris was all right or not) and she was gentle & lost & child-like, but some of it was deafness & some of it was Carmen rushing, so I wasn't sure. She could always disappear from under the surface. And she often simply contemplatively said mm, mm, mm. But nevertheless I felt she was very gently lost. Jonathan [Burnham] like you & I, thinks she is the greatest living English novelist – I think he is right to publish – he says she telephones every day about the book – but when I think about Against Dryness and The Sovereignty of Good and the clarity of what she taught me – I do weep. I think there is only you to whom I can write this like that. I talk rather briskly to everyone else. To fend things off. I never knew her and I don't think she ever knew me, but I loved her, – love her, & she is the living person whose mind has done most for mine. So much that I have a Bloomian brief desire to deny how much, from time to time. I wonder whether to ask Peter Kemp if I can review the book [*Jackson's Dilemma*] – Chatto have sent it, but it hasn't come.[13]
>
> Hundreds of little white flies are falling like ghosts, on this letter. There is a horse wandering in the unseen river, with its hooves/hoofs? sliding on the stones & clashing. The village is quiet, & the mountains are quiet, – I think about people going South in *The Italian Girl* & *Flight from the Enchanter* & *Nuns and Soldiers* – I thought I couldn't just get up & go, but have lived long enough to be able to.
>
> Perhaps that is all I can say. There are other things I daren't say. When Charles died, she was the only person to whom I could say one or two things – she just sat & looked at me, with tears running down her face and let me say the things no one else wd let me say. Ordinary

> things she was apt to misconstrue (dailiness was an imaginative exercise, to her, most of the things most people struggle with, & sink in) but the big things, the best & the worst, she understood and looked steadily at.[14]

Byatt's honest acknowledgement of her 'Bloomian [...] desire' to deny Murdoch's importance to her is impressive and touching.[15] If these reputational developments had their comical aspects, they also had a melancholy one. In 1978 Murdoch reviewed Byatt's *The Virgin in the Garden*;[16] reviewing was a time-consuming chore she disliked and performed, if at all, for only a very few friends – and she also interviewed her at the Institute of Contemporary Arts on publication of *Still Life*. Murdoch helped Byatt through a number of crises, coming to London in 1968 when Byatt had a health-scare, breaking other arrangements in the autumn of 1972 to be with her after her son Charles died, listening weeping (as already recounted) to the things Byatt could say to no one else, and, when able, helping over the years in many ways. During 1972, in particular, Murdoch's support was life-giving, not least in relation to Byatt's fraught relations with her academic colleague Frank Kermode, who had been hosting her son Charles when he was run over and killed, and the possible appointment of whose second wife Anita to teach at University College London threatened to become an ongoing source of grief and contention. When, in 1997, I asked Murdoch what news she had of 'Toni', she replied with a shocking cogency and simplicity, *'Since I started sailing away into the darkness, I hear nothing from her'*. There is also the related question of Murdoch's missing journal from 1972 on. I speculate that Murdoch – who edited all her surviving journals – may have found editing this one too hard and – if so – destroyed it.

I was grateful for support in drafting the biography. Writing took courage and it was somehow clear – without any public falling out – that Byatt's help was not to be relied upon. I missed her backing. When Chatto – against all common sense – challenged my quoting from Murdoch's novels in my biography of her it seemed likely that Byatt's desire to control the narrative underlay this. A major artist is by definition a contested site, and it was not easy for the many who had each been convinced that they were closest to Murdoch, to accommodate a broader field and a larger perspective.

Byatt had also the ordinary human right to inconsistency. The findings of Arthur Green – amateur Ulster genealogist – included that Murdoch's mother was probably already two months pregnant with Murdoch at the time of her marriage, and also detailed Murdoch's life-long romancing about her mother's family's Anglo-Irish past. Byatt – despite her publicly avowed hostility to biography – encouraged Green to send these findings to Chatto, their joint publisher. Then, when Sue Summers published 'The Lost Loves of Iris Murdoch'

– her ground-breaking 1989 interview in the *Mail on Sunday*, in which Murdoch for the first time acknowledged the importance to her of Franz Steiner and Frank Thompson, Byatt and I were equally interested.

In reply to my congratulations on her 70th birthday, she wrote 'Many thanks for your good wishes. I send mine to you and hope all is well. *I cannot bear to think of Iris, though of course I constantly do*. Best wishes, ASD'. It is good that her exemplary 1999 foreword to the Penguin Classics edition of *The Bell* was reissued in *Literary Hub* as a centenary celebration for 15 July 2019. Byatt had always been impressed by Murdoch's unique ability to convey what the activity of thinking feels like. To this she now adds praise for her ability to change the ways in which we look at things. *The Bell*, she argues, was 'a novel about goodness, the good life, power, cruelty, and religion. It is also funny, sad and moving'.[17] Byatt praises Murdoch's ability to communicate sexual urgency. Lastly, she commends Iris Murdoch for revealing how deep human truths may be contained in the unreal patterns of Shakespearean comedy and romance, as well as in high tragedy. We owe her much for these insightful and truthful perceptions.

1 This same incident seems to be alluded to in Murdoch's journal on 8 November 1954: 'C.[anetti] said – your appearing suddenly like that in oblivion, just as we arrived, made her [Veza] identify you with Friedl. F. used always to do that, having waited perhaps for hours out in a corner', 8 November 1954, Iris Murdoch, Journal 8, KUAS202/1 in the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives and Special Collections, 147.

2 'A Certain Lady', *Bookmark*, BBC TV, 29 December 1989.

3 23 May 1970. See Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), 518.

4 Situational logic she certainly borrowed. In *The Time of the Angels*, Anthea's love for Marcus and Carel may reflect Gloria Richardson's devotion to all three Bayley brothers. In *The Message to the Planet*, the secondary plot concerns a ménage à trois involving the artist Jack Sheerwater, who had been Vallar's painting instructor, Jack's wife Franca, and his mistress Alison. This seems to reflect an extra-marital *engouement* of Susan Gardner's. And Henry's relationship with Gerda in *Henry and Cato* may owe something very distantly to George Clive's relationship to his mother lady Mary Pakenham at Whitfield.

5 Elias Canetti, *The Human Province* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978), 75.

6 Gabriele Annan, 'Letting Go': '*Elementals: Stories of Fire and Ice'* by A.S. Byatt'*, New York Review of Books*, 10 June 1999.

7 This phrase comes in her British Council pamphlet on Murdoch in 1976, incorporated into her wholly revised 1994 study of Murdoch confusingly also entitled *Degrees of Freedom*.

8 A.S. Byatt, Bidisha, Philip Hensher, Anne Chisholm, 'Iris Murdoch Revisited', https://rsliterature.org/library-of-articles/iris-murdoch-revisited/ [accessed 24 June 2024].

9 For a brief discussion of this point, see Peter J. Conradi, *Family Business* (Bridgend: Seren, 2019), 201.

10 Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life*, 518.

11 A.S. Byatt, *Degrees of Freedom* (London: Vintage, 1994), 338.

12 See Byatt's annotations responding to Peter Conradi's letter to A.S. Byatt, 11 December 2000, KUAS6/3/20/5 from the Peter J. Conradi Archive at Kingston University Archives and Special Collections, 3.

13 Letter to Peter J. Conradi from A.S. Byatt, 10 June 1995, KUAS6/3/20/1, Peter Conradi Archive. Carmen Callil was Chairperson at Virago, and Managing Director at Chatto, Murdoch's and Byatt's publishers where Jonathan Burnham also worked. Ed Victor was Murdoch's literary agent and Peter Kemp was fiction editor on *The Sunday Times.*

14 A.S. Byatt to Peter J. Conradi, 10 June 1995,

KUAS6/3/20/1, Peter J. Conradi Archive.

15 Byatt to Conradi, 10 June 1995.

16 'Force Fields', *New Statesman*, 3 November 1978, 586.

17 A.S. Byatt, 'A.S. Byatt on Iris Murdoch's *The Bell*', 15 July 2019, Literary Hub https://lithub.com/a-s-byatt-on-iris-urdochs-the-bell/> [accessed 2 July 2024], first published as A.S. Byatt, 'Introduction', in Iris Murdoch, *The Bell* (London: Penguin, 1999).

Professor Barbara Stevens Heusel – Rest in Peace (1935-2024)

Dennis Moore

Barbara Stevens Heusel, who founded the Iris Murdoch Society in Manhattan in 1986, passed away peacefully on Friday 10 May 2024, at her home in Tallahassee, Florida. She had lived there since retiring in 2005 as Professor of English Emerita at Northwest Missouri State University and is survived by her husband, Dennis Moore. In 2019, following her diagnosis of mild Alzheimer's, Dr Moore retired early from the Florida State University English Department to serve as Barbara's full-time caregiver and they married, on the deck of the Black Dog Café, following a nearly 38-year courtship.

A native of Louisville, Barbara is the daughter of Ruth Lydia Wiesman Stevens and Jay T. Stevens and the sister of Bonnie Stevens Lyons, of Memphis, and Sandra Stevens Bergdoll. She had started a family in Louisville with her first husband, Richard, and they had three daughters: Heidi Heusel Freeman (Rob), of Greenville, SC; Lisa Heusel-Gillig (Rick) of Decatur, GA; and Gretchen McCathern (Eddie) of Elliott, SC. She was the proud grandmother of Paul Gillig, Michelle Gillig, Sara Freeman Stanko (Caleb) and Leslie McCathern.

Dr Heusel's undergraduate degree in 1957 is from Heidelberg College in Ohio. She earned an MA at the University of Louisville in 1967 and a PhD at the University of South Carolina in 1983, with the support of a Mellon Fellowship. Forty summers ago, she participated in the first of nine NEH Summer Seminars at Cornell University led by Professor Daniel Schwarz. She taught for more than a dozen years at Furman University in Greenville, SC, and later taught at Wake Forest University. Upon her retirement, she agreed to teach several 'Women in Literature' courses at Florida State.

She took a turn serving as President of the Iris Murdoch Society, which is currently based in Britain. Dr Heusel's publications, including two book-length studies of Dame Iris's fiction and its influence, serve as the basis of much of the ongoing work on this novelist, who was a professor of philosophy at the University of Oxford. Four years ago, in response to the Covid crisis, Dr Moore created the Barbara Stevens Heusel Research Fund for Early-Career Scholars,

which the Murdoch Society already administers along with a matching fund to help support the scholarly work of PhD students. Recipients so far have included young scholars from New Zealand, from the Sorbonne in Paris, from the National University of Ireland in Galway, and from the School of Foreign Languages at Tonji University in China.

A brilliant teacher who inspired hundreds of students throughout her career, Dr Heusel had a passion for life, loved to laugh, and relished live bluegrass, Tupelo honey, painting and the arts, aerobics and swimming, and nature, including morning glories and the Angel Oak, outside Charleston, SC. Since 1981 she and Dr Moore had travelled whenever possible with trips to Ireland, including the Aran Islands; England, including Virginia Woolf's place in Charleston in Sussex; Italy, including Pienza; Spain; and Turkey, including Cappadocia, as well as to cities large and small throughout the United States. Whenever possible they

would attend each other's academic conferences; in 2019 one of those scholarly organizations focusing on US culture and history, the Southeastern American Studies Association, created the Barbara Stevens Heusel and Dennis Moore Graduate Student Travel Grants, recognizing her longtime participation in the group's conferences and her generosity in contributing funds to help young scholars attend and participate in the group's biennial conferences.

In lieu of flowers, the family encourages anyone who would like to do so to make a contribution in Barbara Heusel's memory to the matching fund that Dr Moore established when he created the Barbara Stevens Heusel Research Fund for Early-Career Scholars. Details are available on the Iris Murdoch Society's website and in this publication.

In the last four years a number of early-career scholars have benefitted from the Barabara Stevens Heusel Fund. To find out more about them, and their research, see the links below:

- Jianfeng Yue https://irismurdochsociety.org.uk/2023/11/13/bsh-2024/
- Camille Braune https://irismurdochsociety.org.uk/2022/10/20/bhs-fund-fellow-2023/
- Michela Dianetti https://irismurdochsociety.org.uk/2021/11/09/bsh-fund-fellow-2022-michela-dianetti/
- Arka Basu https://irismurdochsociety.org.uk/2020/12/10/bsh-fund-fellow-arka-basu/

Applications for 2024-25 will open later in the summer. You can find our more here: https://irismurdochsociety.org.uk/about/the-iris-murdoch-research-centre/.

Notes on Contributors

LUCY BOLTON is Professor of Film Philosophy at Queen Mary, University of London. Her research focuses on the relationship between film and philosophy, with a particular interest in feminist philosophy and phenomenology. She is currently writing a book on the relationship between film stardom and philosophy, including the concepts of *photogénie*, worship, whiteness and beauty. Her monograph *Contemporary Cinema and the Philosophy of Iris Murdoch* was published by Edinburgh University Press in 2019.

LEWIS BREWSTER is a PhD student at the University of Chichester, completing a thesis connecting the golden age of Russian writing to the fictional works of Iris Murdoch.

DANIKA BROWN is a PhD student at the University of Chichester, completing a thesis on neurodiversity in the works of Iris Murdoch. She is interested in psychological literary criticism, particularly in relation to autism and mental illness within fiction.

GARY BROWNING is Emeritus Professor of Politics at Oxford Brookes University and is the author of many books, including *Iris Murdoch and the Political* (Oxford University Press, 2024), *Why Iris Murdoch Matters* (Bloomsbury, 2018), and *A History of Modern Political Thought* (Oxford University Press, 2016), and co-editor of *Dylan at 80* (Imprint Academic, 2022). He engages with the public through talks, walks and comedy.

PETER J. CONRADI FRSL is Emeritus Professor of English Literature at Kingston University. His books include *The Saint and the Artist: A Study of the Fiction of Iris Murdoch* (three editions), he edited Dame Iris's essays as *Existentialists and Mystics* (1997) and published her authorised biography, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* in 2001. His recent *Family Business: A Memoir* (2019) recounts the history of his friendship with Murdoch. His website is www.peterjconradi.co.uk.

GILLIAN DOOLEY is Honorary Associate Professor at Flinders University in South Australia. Her primary field of research is literature but she is also interested in cross-disciplinary research, particularly with music. Her book *Listening to Iris Murdoch: Music, Sounds and Silences* was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2022, and her latest book is *She Played and Sang: Jane Austen and Music* (Manchester UP, 2024).

SAMUEL FILBY is currently writing his PhD thesis on Murdoch at Northwestern University, Chicago. His work focuses on Murdoch's aesthetics and moral psychology.

LUEY GRAVES is a London-based artist and teacher who draws, paints and writes. Luey studied at the Slade and Royal Academy Schools. Recent exhibitions include *The Bell, The Bell*, with Taymour Grahne Projects in 2024 and *Perspectives*, with Petronilla Silver, in 2023.

RACHEL HIRSCHLER has been a volunteer at Kingston University Archives since 2012, working on the Iris Murdoch Collection. She is part of a team transcribing Murdoch's letters, book annotations, journals and poetry notebooks.

PAUL HULLAH is an award-winning poet, Associate Professor at Meiji Gakuin University, Tokyo, and President of the Iris Murdoch Society of Japan. With Yozo Muroya he edited *Poems by Iris Murdoch* (1997) and *Occasional Essays by Iris Murdoch* (1998), authored *We Found Her Hidden: The Remarkable Poetry of Christina Rossetti* (2016), and is now writing a monograph on Murdoch's affinities and interactions with Japanese Zen psycho-philosophical thought.

RIVKA ISAACSON is Professor of Molecular Biophysics in the Department of Chemistry, King's College London. She is passionate about radical interdisciplinarity, conducting many projects across the arts-sciences interface, including an ongoing multimedia collaboration with London Fine Art Studios called *Viewing the Invisible*, and has a longstanding relationship with the Iris Murdoch Research Centre at the University of Chichester around science and literature.

MILES LEESON is the Director of the Iris Murdoch Research Centre, University of Chichester. He is author of *Iris Murdoch: Philosophical Novelist* (Continuum, 2010) and editor of *Incest in Contemporary Literature* (MUP, 2018), *Iris Murdoch: A Centenary Celebration* (Sabrestorm, 2019), *Iris Murdoch and the Literary Imagination* (Palgrave, 2023) and *Iris Murdoch and the Western Theological Imagination* (Palgrave, 2025). He is the Lead Editor of the *Iris Murdoch Review*, the host of the Iris Murdoch Podcast and Series Editor of the Iris Murdoch Today series with Palgrave Macmillan.

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 is a Research Associate at the Iris Murdoch Research Centre at the University of Chichester, where she completed her PhD. Her monograph, *Iris Murdoch and Harry Weinberger: Imaginations and Images*, was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2023 as part of the Iris Murdoch Today series. She is an Editor of the *Iris Murdoch Review*. She is Visiting Lecturer at Birmingham Newman University.

DENNIS MOORE was a Professor in English Literature at Florida State University, and a past president of the interdisciplinary Society of Early Americanists. He is now retired.

LUCY OULTON is a Research Associate at the Iris Murdoch Research Centre at the University of Chichester where she completed her PhD titled 'Wild Iris: Iris Murdoch's Environmental Imagination' in 2023. Her monograph *Iris Murdoch's Wild Imagination: Nature and the Environment* will be published in the Iris Murdoch Today series with Palgrave Macmillan in 2025. She is an Editor of the *Iris Murdoch Review*.

DANIEL READ is a Visiting Lecturer at Kingston University, London, where he completed his PhD in 2019. He is also an Editor of and contributor to the *Iris Murdoch Review*. His first monograph, *Degrees of Evil in Iris Murdoch's Fiction and Philosophy* will shortly be published by Palgrave Macmillan as part of the Iris Murdoch Today series.

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).

VICTOR JELENIEWSKI SIEDLER is Professor Emeritus in Social Theory at the Department of Sociology, Goldsmiths, University of London. He has worked and published across the boundaries of social theory and philosophy; his most recent book is *Covid-19 and Global Inequalities: Vulnerable Humans* (Routledge, 2024).

JANFARIE SKINNER taught for the Oxford University Department for Continuing Education and for the WEA. Her research focused on the work of George Eliot, Virginia Woolf and Iris Murdoch, and on the links between moral philosophy and the novel. She is now retired.

ELIN SVENNEBY has been an Associate Professor in Philosophy at the University of Tromsoe, where her research focused on feminist philosophy and women philosophers. Since retirement, her main intellectual interest is to encourage the reading of Iris Murdoch in Norway and to promote critical discussion about interactions between philosophy and literature.

WENDY VAIZEY is a Senior Lecturer at Kingston University and Course Director of a Creative Writing MA. Her fiction has appeared in literary journals, anthologies and national newspaper magazines. Her doctoral thesis explored Iris Murdoch's use of metaphor in *The Sea, The Sea*.

AMY WARD recently completed her MA in Philosophy at the University of Guelph, Canada – her thesis was entitled 'Pictures of Self in Iris Murdoch's Unselfing'. She is the creator and producer of the *Women in Parenthesis Podcast*.

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 Series Editor of the Iris Murdoch Today series 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 and she has recently published her monograph, *Iris Murdoch and Remorse: Past Forgiving?* (Palgrave, 2023).

LIZ WHITTOME is an avid reader, and re-reader, of Murdoch. For many years she was the Chief and Principal Examiner of English for Cambridge Examinations. She has published several books on studying English at A-Level with Cambridge University Press.

MARIËTTE WILLEMSEN is Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at Amsterdam University College. She teaches courses in Ethics and the History of Philosophy. Together with Hannah Marije Altorf she translated Murdoch's *The Sovereignty of Good* into Dutch (Boom 2003). Her most recent publications look into connections between Schopenhauer and Murdoch, and Weil and Murdoch.

DENISE WRIGGLESWORTH is a Literature and Creative Writing Masters student at the University of Chichester and a recently retired Sociology teacher of 24 years in Hampshire sixth forms. She volunteers as a transcriber at the Kingston University Archives.

Barbara Stevens Heusel Research Fund for Early-Career Scholars

Applications are now open for the 2024–2025 funding scheme. Each year, a £500 stipend helps fund a junior scholar's* visit to the Iris Murdoch Research Centre at the University of Chichester and/or the Archives at Kingston University, and/or participation in one of the IMRC's conferences or research events. Applications for the fund must include:

- A current CV.
- Evidence of current study mode, or completion of doctoral work within the last five years.
- A 500-1000-word statement outlining current research and planned development. This must include (but is not limited to) the benefits of the fund to current study/research, outline of how the funds would be used, the progress the applicant wishes to make within one year.
- A reference from the current academic supervisor (or former supervisor) confirming the suitability of the applicant and their research plan.

The closing date for receipt of materials is **1 November 2024**. Applicants will be informed of the outcome by **15 November 2024**. Applications and supporting documents must be sent ims@chi.ac.uk. Informal queries to the same address.

*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.

The fund is administered by the Iris Murdoch Society.

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. 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 Archive at Kingston University, or participation in one of the IMRC's conferences or research events.[1]

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

1 Junior scholars are 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.

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.

Iris Murdoch Research Centre

Iris Murdoch Society

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