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IRIS MURDOCH SOCIETY

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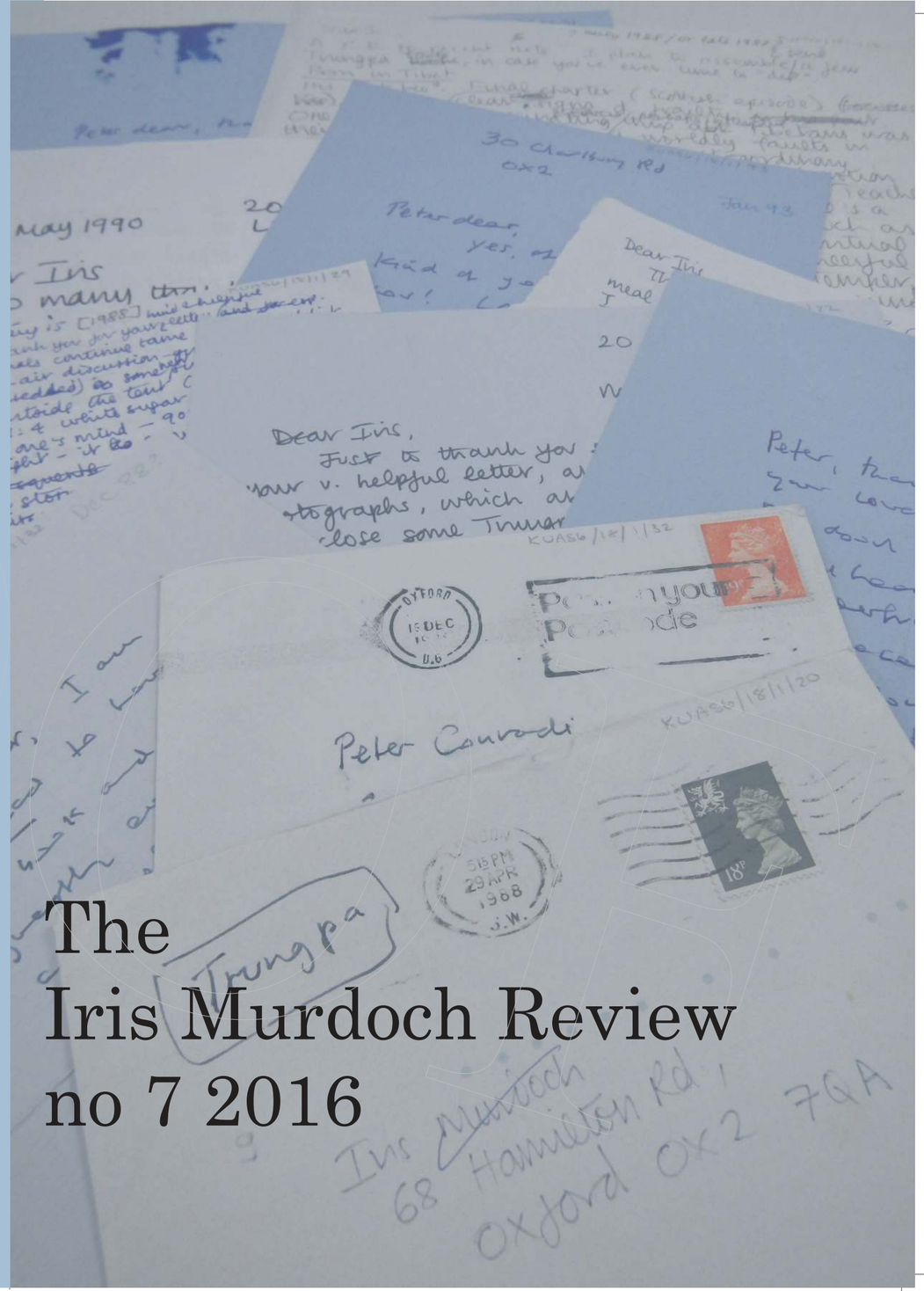

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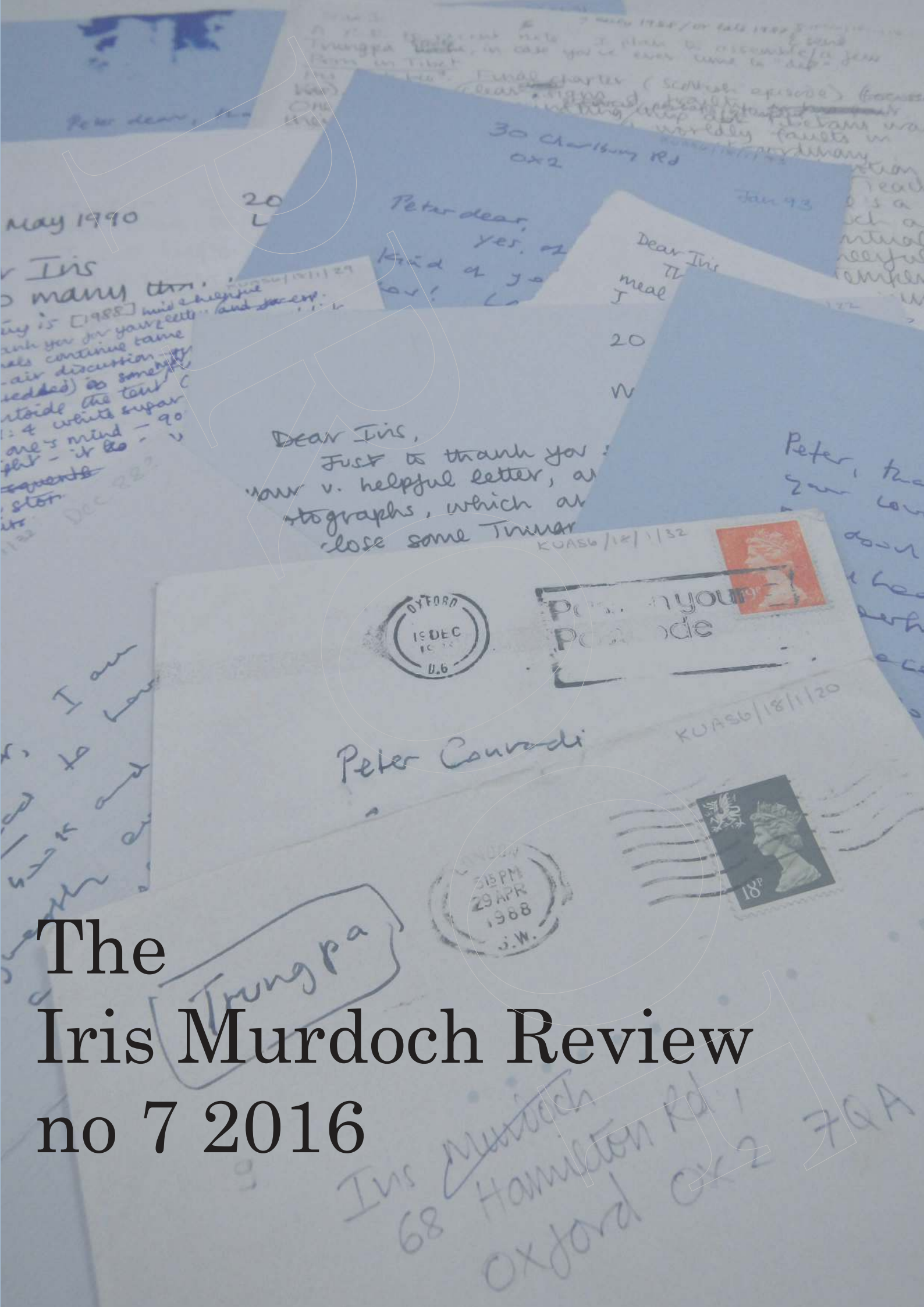
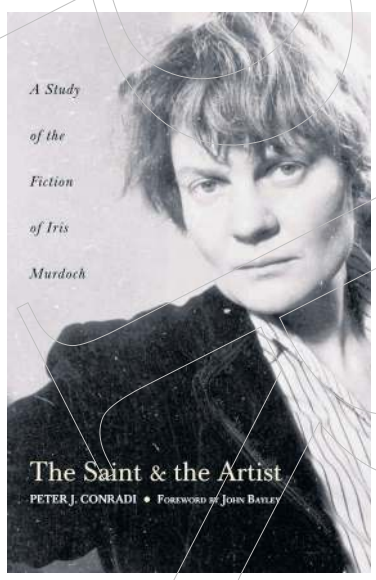
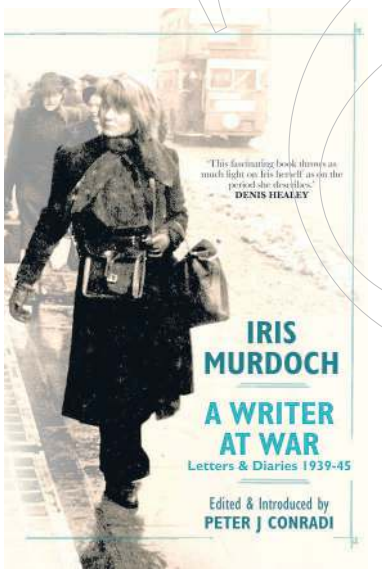


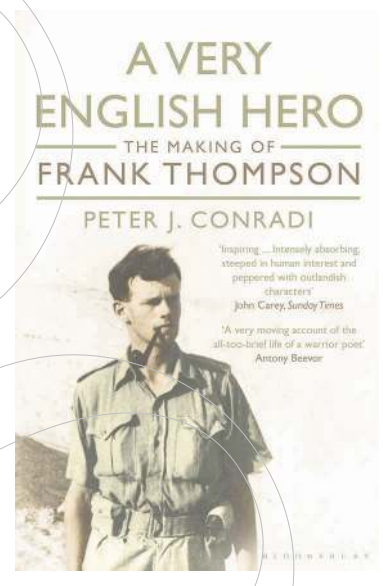
The Iris Murdoch Review no 7 2016

For
Peter J. Conradi FRSL

4 November 1993: Peter Conradi with Iris Murdoch,
when she received an Honorary Degree from Kingston University
[KUAS6/18/1/99 from the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives]







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The Iris Murdoch Review

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We wish to thank the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives for permission to use the letters from Iris Murdoch to Peter Conradi [KUAS6/18/1] as a front cover, and Jim O'Neill for permission to use the photograph of John Bayley, Iris Murdoch, Peter Conradi and Cloudy on the back cover.

A record of this journal is available from the British Library.

The Iris Murdoch Society

The *Iris Murdoch Review*

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

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, production team, or Kingston University Press.

Contents

Valete

Writing in the preface to the first *Iris Murdoch Review*, published by Kingston University Press in 2008, Peter Conradi suggested that 'the most important development in Murdoch studies over the last twenty years is the commitment of Kingston University to Murdoch scholarship' which was 'an ongoing investment showing real imagination and courage'. In that first edition, and the five that followed, the *Review* has provided a repository for scholars globally to give unfettered opinion, and a home for hitherto unpublished interviews, essays, poems and letters written by Iris Murdoch. By celebrating and disseminating fresh acquisitions to the Murdoch Archives and providing scholarly reviews of all important publications on Murdoch and her contemporaries, the *Iris Murdoch Review* has provided a service for, and paid testament to, the growing body of national and international scholarship on Murdoch's novels, philosophy and life.

Yet there have been less conventional contributions to these editions, of which I believe Murdoch would have been especially, perhaps even more, proud. Amongst them are two prize-winning entries for the 'Letter to Iris Murdoch' competition for sixth-formers who participated in the community project 'Iris Murdoch and Philippa Foot: An Arc of Friendship', run by Frances White for the Iris Murdoch Archive Project in 2012-13. Frances and I were moved deeply when two teenagers, Susannah Rees and Sukaina Kadhum, spoke of how learning about Iris Murdoch's life and work had given them new values to live by. Susannah ended her letter by saying,

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

Friendship as much as scholarship was at the centre of Murdoch's life, just as it is at the heart of global Murdoch scholarship, and amongst the greatest achievements of the Society and the *Review* has been the facilitating of such friendships. Penny Tribe, our previous administrator for the Society, commented often on how especially kind were those weighty academics from all over the world who travelled to Kingston for the Murdoch conferences. I count many of those intrepid travellers, from the USA, Australia, France, Spain, Portugal, Poland, Norway, Sweden, Turkey, Japan, India and many other countries, as friends. This network of friendship that has strengthened and supported Murdoch scholarship in the past will continue to flourish in a spirit of collaboration that was central to Murdoch's professional and personal relationships.

With my retirement from teaching and my roles as Director of the Iris Murdoch Society and of the Iris Murdoch Archive Project, this seventh edition of the *Iris Murdoch Review* is produced under the auspices of the Society's new Director and the *Review's* new Lead Editor, Dr Miles Leeson at the University of Chichester: they are left in the safest of hands. My years of teaching Murdoch's work to generations of students at Kingston and working with Murdoch scholars worldwide have been a privilege and the most rewarding of my career. There are so many colleagues deserving of mention that I could not list them here, but my heartfelt thanks go out to each and every one. Two, though, must take centre stage: Katie Giles, our archivist, in whose care the Iris Murdoch Archives reside and thrive, and Frances White, without whose persistence and effort so very much less would have

been achieved. Frances has not only been the most diligent worker but also unstinting in extending the hand of friendship when pressures were extreme. 'Dearest Anne' she would write, 'we will get there. We *will* get there'. And we always did.

The fresh collaboration between Kingston and Chichester Universities heralds in another innovative new era in Murdoch studies that will continue to demonstrate imagination and courage. This first edition of the *Review* to be published under the auspices of its new Lead Editor will speak well enough for itself. But it is entirely fitting that the intellectual rigour of Peter Conradi's engagement with Iris Murdoch's life and work, along with his dedication to the Iris Murdoch Society and the *Iris Murdoch Review,* is being paid due tribute in these pages.

Anne Rowe
Emeritus Research Fellow with the Iris Murdoch Archive Project
Kingston University
July 2016

Editorial Preface

I am delighted to be taking over from Anne Rowe as Lead Editor of the *Iris Murdoch Review* at such an exciting time for Iris Murdoch studies. As you will see from the contents page, the range of the material the editorial team have put together makes this issue not only the longest *Review* so far but also, I think, the most diverse and wide-ranging. This, coupled with the ongoing archival acquisitions (detailed in Katie Giles's report), heralds a bright future for the new collaboration between Chichester University, which will now be an international focus point for Iris Murdoch research, and Kingston University which will continue to host the archive and visiting researchers.

I am very pleased that I am able to present, and indeed pay tribute to, the work of Professor Peter Conradi. No introduction is needed, of course, for such an eminent scholar whose work on Murdoch has been universally praised in the UK, the USA and beyond. When I began postgraduate work in the early 2000s I was grateful to have both *The Saint and the Artist* and *Iris Murdoch: A Life* to draw on and it is these two books in particular that will continue to have a major impact on the development of Murdoch studies. Of immense importance at the time of their publication, they remain so today. The three new essays contained in this edition expand our knowledge of Murdoch in relation to Elias Canetti, Shakespeare and Lawrence Durrell – although all three were originally given as lectures they have been edited here to provide works of insight and clarity. The essay on Canetti, in particular, will be of interest for the extra richness it provides to Peter's previous discussion in *Iris Murdoch: A Life*; this essay is polemical in nature and by turns a fascinating and disquieting read. During this period of change I am grateful to Peter for agreeing to stay on as advisor to the *Review* and for his support for Murdoch studies more widely.

Our other major piece in this issue comes from the American academic Ray Byram, who met Murdoch at the University of California, Santa Barbara in the late 1970s and subsequently visited the Bayleys at Steeple Aston. His letters from Iris and a short memoir of this episode in his life are now in the Murdoch archive and they are presented here. They add fresh flavour to her biography – Iris's hand-drawn maps are certainly unique in their simplicity – but what is perhaps most interesting is Ray's eye to detail regarding Cedar Lodge and his experience of the Bayleys' domestic setting. The review-essay by Pamela Osborn that follows, highlights the impact in the British and American press of *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995* recently published by Avril Horner and Anne Rowe. Readers will no doubt have noticed the diverse range of responses to this collection, from praise of the editorial work undertaken to disappointing commentary on Murdoch's sexuality. This is an important essay assessing not just the reach of *Living on Paper* but the current status of Murdoch in the popular press and beyond.

The range of reviews is, as ever, varied, with major studies concerning literature, philosophy and theology that take Murdoch as their primary or dual focus. As Murdoch's reach broadens in print and online this shows the developing sphere of Murdoch studies and her burgeoning influence. The speed at which her work is becoming more widely known and cited is increasing yearly and I am sure that readers will be both impressed and surprised at her reach into a variety of academic disciplines.

Recent Murdoch-focused events have also been very well received and it was a pleasure to be in attendance at both Oxford events, as well as the lecture at the National Portrait Gallery. Most heartening was the invitation to the symposium at Mansfield College as this was organised and run by the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Oxford without any input from the Iris Murdoch Society. It is very good to see Murdoch's philosophy being taken so seriously, and by such a good number of Oxford academics, in the one place she thought would be forever dominated by the traditional analytical model: Fiona Tomkinson's review puts all the papers into clear focus. It is also gratifying to see young scholars at undergraduate level engaging with research-led events and I am pleased to include Shauna Pitt's review of the excellent two-day conference organised by Gary

Browning at the Ashmolean Museum late last year, alongside his own account of the experience.

It is a great relief to me that Frances White has stayed on as editor of the *Review* and we now welcome Pamela Osborn – another well-known Murdochian scholar – as editor also. Both Frances and Pamela have written and spoken widely about Murdoch, and their breadth of knowledge, patience and unstinting commitment have enabled me to put this issue together. I look forward to our work together on future issues and other projects.

My final word of thanks must go to Anne herself for her kindness and patience as she guided me through the process of taking over the *Review*. Her work on Murdoch is of enormous value to the community of scholars and her most recent publication in partnership with Avril Horner, *Living on Paper*, will, I am sure, be a mainstay of any Murdoch scholar's shelves. She has been unfailing in her support over the past few months and I am delighted that she has agreed to stay on as an advisor to the *Review*. Although she has now retired from Kingston her work continues and her legacy to Murdoch studies will not only continue but will surely grow as more scholars recognise the ground-breaking work she has undertaken: it is thanks to Anne's vision and courage, and her dauntless work securing funding, that the Iris Murdoch Archive came into existence and continues to grow, inspiring fresh research and scholarship.

The future of Iris Murdoch studies is secure and Murdoch's impact is growing rapidly: this is an exciting time for all of us in this field. I am pleased to announce that the *Iris Murdoch Review* will now be published annually, in the Autumn, the next edition being focused on 'Iris Murdoch and Visual Culture' and guest edited by Lucy Bolton from Queen Mary, University of London. I hope many of you will be able to attend the conference here at Chichester in September 2017 and, looking further ahead, the numerous events we have in preparation for Murdoch's centenary in 2019.

Miles Leeson
University of Chichester
July 2016

Peter J. Conradi

Iris Murdoch and Lawrence Durrell: The Poetry of Transformation

In his book *Lawrence Durrell, A Critical Study*, G. S. Fraser, a Scottish poet and critic (1915-1980), advanced a comparison between Lawrence Durrell and Iris Murdoch.[1] He argues,

> Perhaps the [...] writer whom Durrell most resembles is Iris Murdoch, who, like Durrell, enjoys playing [...] with the permutations and combinations of possible sexual relationships, who enjoys both the violent and the improbable, and who likes to show sexual and religious drives improbably and grotesquely fusing. Like Durrell, Miss Murdoch writes what might be called philosophical fables, and like Durrell she does not disdain the tall story or the purple patch.

This comparison was made around the time that Iris Murdoch's eighth novel, *The Italian Girl*, was published, a novel that won Murdoch few new admirers. Perhaps for that reason Fraser continues, 'Like Durrell, she has, in England, a very wobbly critical reputation; there are those who would describe both of them as brilliant frauds'. If during the 1960s Murdoch's reputation was 'very wobbly' or if she was seen as a 'brilliant fraud', Fraser does not in fact believe that Durrell, whom he had probably met in Cairo during the Second World War, merits such detraction. He was an enthusiast for Durrell's work. Fraser also admires the way both Durrell and Murdoch are writers of romance. Each wrote fiction, he argues, against the grain of English realism. Durrell, who famously lived in happy exile abroad, in Corfu, then southern France, spoke of 'the English death'. He was, indeed, Anglophobe and set his four best-known novels in Alexandria and other novels in Greece, France, Cyprus, Istanbul – never in England.

Fraser was associated during the Second World War and after with the so-called New Apocalyptics described by Murdoch in 1943 as the 'sensibility boys who think with their stomach'.[2] These New Apocalyptics arguably represent the first wave of a new sensibility that would turn into a post-war neo-romanticism. Fraser was attuned early and sympathetically towards such possibilities and saw Murdoch and Durrell as the twin ambassadors or envoys of this new post-war mood. But is there any substance to Fraser's comparison?

Murdoch and Durrell never met and nor, according to Murdoch's husband John Bayley, did Murdoch read Durrell. She rarely read her contemporaries.[3] While Murdoch, unlike Durrell, never referred to 'the English death', she did in 1963 voice an echoing sentiment about 'the English dullness'. 'The pattern of English life,' she wrote, 'can be something rather dull, something that makes little appeal to the imagination. Whether it's the climate, or the price we pay for having such good characters in other ways, I don't know'. And she noted 'a nostalgia for [...] something exotic, colourful, vital, missing from English life – for cafés, for Latin lovers'.[4] What is striking about this utterance is how poorly it describes her own work, in which English life is anything but dull or commonplace: English life in Murdoch's work is indeed distinctly odd.

When Murdoch's detractors are asked what it is that puts them off, it is generally this *oddness*

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[1] G. S. Fraser, *Lawrence Durrell, A Critical Study* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co, 1968), chapter 1.

[2] Letter to Frank Thompson, 12 November 1943, in *Iris Murdoch: A Writer at War: Letters and Diaries 1939-45*, Peter J. Conradi (ed.), (London: Short Books, 2010), p.158.

[3] As a result, Murdoch sometimes believed that she had no contemporaries. Or that – if she did – they consisted, in a famous list, of Patrick White, Muriel Spark, William Golding, Saul Bellow and Graham Greene – mystics as opposed to existentialists or angry young men: novelists with a similar soul-picture to her – mystics who kept alive, indeed, a place for the soul and for inwardness.

[4] Yozo Muroya and Paul Hullah (eds.), *Occasional Essays by Iris Murdoch* (Okayama: University Education Press, 1998), 'IM regrets she was never a teenager', 27-30, p.29.

that they cite: odd characters, odd twists of plot, odd authorial ratiocinations, odd Christian names and odd family names; it is a many-faceted oddness. Then there is also an odd and uncomfortably intense vividness about the scenes she invents: Gabriele Annan once wrote of the way her novels can seem flood-lit by klieg-light – the intense carbon arc lamps used in film-making (more recently tungsten halogen). Reading her novels can thus resemble a sort of voyeurism. Murdoch's novelistic world is, in its way, as odd and as exotic as Durrell's Alexandria. It has oddnesses indebted to Queneau and to Sartre, and other oddnesses that owe something to Shakespearian comedy, and something too to the cult in her work of what I have called 'the Metaphysical Hostess' – a figure in Henry James; Mrs Ramsay and Mrs Dalloway in Virginia Woolf; Mrs Wilcox in E.M. Forster; and in Murdoch – whose task is to focus the book in which she finds herself.[5] On the topic of oddness, Samuel Johnson famously remarked that 'Nothing odd will do long': a point to which I will return.[6]

It is worth recalling that the early work of both Durrell and Murdoch (after Durrell's three pre-war novels) was published in an England exhausted by war, during the age of austerity that ensued: a time when – as Muriel Spark famously and wittily described the matter – 'all the nice people in England were poor, allowing for exceptions [...] at least, that was a general axiom, the best of the rich being poor in spirit'.[7] *Under the Net* appeared on 20 May 1954; on 4 July that same summer, while the novel was still garnering its good reviews, meat rationing was finally lifted. England, bedevilled by currency restrictions and poverty, had a hunger for colour, the exotic and for foreign travel. Paul Fussell notably describes this hunger, accentuated by war, in his fine study of the inter-war period called *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars*.[8] In *Under the Net* that hunger is variously assuaged – for example by the scenes in Paris.

Fraser's collocation of Murdoch and Durrell makes them into a literary equivalent of Christian Dior's 'New Look', a fashion Murdoch liked once she found it, a collective way of cheering up in the grey years of post-war austerity by investing in all we had been deprived of for so long: style, excess, voluptuousness. We might recall the striking contrast in *Under the Net* between the hugely valuable paintings in Hugo Belfounder's unsecured Holborn flat – Murdoch mentions Renoirs, a Miro, a John Minton – and the nearby back-drop of the bombed-out City, with its desolation, willow-herb and fallen buildings. Minton, who committed suicide in 1957 (his depression visible in the portrait by Lucian Freud that he commissioned in 1952), is the least remembered of this trinity. Illustrations by Minton had in 1950 enlivened Elizabeth David's *A Book of Mediterranean Food* and in 1951 her *French Country Cooking*, two revolutionary works that re-introduced colour, quality, and pleasure to the English: a culinary New Look. Hugo's proficiency at fire-work displays – the one in Paris for the *Quatorze Juillet*, for example – similarly bespeak a talent for creating new happiness, beauty and high style.

High style also marks a sequence of opulent Murdoch interiors. A late variant is Gunnar Jopling's flat in *A Word Child*: 'I had never seen a place so casually gorgeous', Hilary Burde relates.[9] This casual gorgeousness belongs within a series. The first may be Sadie Quentin's Welbeck Street flat with its expensive carpets and its *foie gras* in the fridge; followed by the mysterious grandeur of Mischa Fox's palatial house in *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956), the sumptuousness of Demoyte's sitting room with its overlapping Persian carpets in *The Sandcastle* (1957), the golden gothic of the country house Riders in *The Unicorn* (1963), and the patrician routines of Henry Marshalson's house, Laxlinden Hall, in *Henry and Cato* (1976) where Murdoch evokes Yeats's 'Prayer for my Daughter', that this was a house 'where all's accustomed, ceremonious'.[10] These interiors variously partake of what Malcolm

[5] Peter J. Conradi, 'The Metaphysical Hostess: The Cult of Personal Relations in the Modern English Novel', *ELH* Vol. 48, No. 2 (Summer, 1981), pp. 427-453.

[6] James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson LL.D* (1791) (London: Everyman's Library, 1992), p.612.

[7] Muriel Spark, *The Girls of Slender Means* (1963) (New York: New Directions Classics, 1998), p.7.

[8] Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

[9] Iris Murdoch, *A Word Child* (1975); (London: Vintage, 2002), p.261.

[10] W.B. Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1933), p.214.

Bradbury termed 'the Murdoch baroque'.[11] Murdoch also produced settings and scenes that are not so much patrician as sheerly exotic or highly inventive: the cold-cure centre in *Under the Net*; Annette Cockeyne swinging on a chandelier in *The Flight from the Enchanter*.

Those characters who freshen the English death, and those who enliven its dullness, for better and for worse, are often foreign. This is a simple point that sometimes gets overlooked. From Hugo Belfounder who is Central European, to the Russian Peter Mir in Murdoch's penultimate novel *The Green Knight* (1993), many of what Bradbury called her 'psychopomps' – whom we could also call shamans – are exotic, messengers from elsewhere.[12] This is true of the demonic figures – Mischa Fox and the Lusiewicz twins in *The Flight from the Enchanter*, Honor Klein and Palmer Anderson in *A Severed Head* (1961), Julius King in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970) – as well as of some of the innocent outsiders who disturb the settled English scene, like the half-French Rain Carter in *The Sandcastle*.

It is interesting that in the novel that many think Murdoch's greatest, *The Sea, the Sea* (1978) both the saintly James Arrowby, and the dark artist-figure, Charles Arrowby, are English, as if she had found a way to naturalise the strange knowledge each carries, about the heart of the matter. Rosina in that book is Welsh, Peregrine Irish, and Lizzie Scherer Scottish, but *The Sea, the Sea* eschews what we might rudely call the stage foreigners we had learned to expect until the 1970s. *The Black Prince* (1973), too, that mysteriously potent and private testament, does without refugees from central Europe.

Unlike Durrell, Murdoch was Anglophile, not Anglophobe. Conceiving or constructing herself as Irish, she manages in much of her work to make England – her educated Southern England – seem thoroughly odd itself, and yet recognisable too. Durrell's exoticism is different. It is curious that in his satirical parody of Murdoch, Bradbury invented a duel by whaling harpoon at Tottenham Hotspur football ground: a harpoon plays a major part in the fourth Alexandria book, *Clea*, in which Darley firstly harpoons Clea's hand and then saws it off to save her from drowning, thus turning her, incredibly, into a wonderful painter. The Quartet – *Justine, Balthazar, Mountolive* and *Clea* – was published between 1957 and 1960 and had immediate historical interest.[13] The novels celebrate the old cosmopolitan Alexandria, whose principal language had for one thousand years been not Arabic but Greek, but whose links with its own past were decisively broken by the 1956 Suez Crisis and the expulsion or emigration of non-Egyptian ethnic groups that followed.

I read and enjoyed Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet* in 1963, appropriately perhaps travelling deck class on a boat sailing from Cyprus via Beirut to Port Said and Alexandria; but have never felt the urge to re-read it. When I mislaid these books I did not replace them. Murdoch's world, by contrast, retained my interest; and it is in part her continuing willingness to think about the English scene that compels me. It also impressed William Golding. Golding recorded how much he admired and envied Murdoch's ability to address 1970s London life in *The Black Prince*, saying that he could not think about the contemporary English world himself, preferring to set his novels elsewhere – on Ballantyne's coral island in *Lord of the Flies* to the pre-history of *The Inheritors* and the eighteenth century pastiche of *Rites of Passage*.[14] This testimony from Golding – a Nobel-prize winning Laureate and contemporary, whom Murdoch elected a 'fellow-mystic' – is crucial to the case made here.

The same point could be put differently by saying that it is the redemption of the English scene that interests us in Murdoch. This redemption has different aspects. Frank Thompson wrote to Murdoch in February 1943, (a year during which he himself both met and was also unimpressed by Lawrence Durrell and the so-called Cairo poets), that 'For us, who are young, and have the

[11] Malcolm Bradbury, *Possibilities: Essays on the State of the Novel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p.233.
[12] Ibid., p.264.
[13] Lawrence Durrell, *Justine* (London: Faber & Faber, 1957); *Balthazar* (London: Faber & Faber, 1958); *Mountolive* (London: Faber & Faber, 1958); *Clea* (London: Faber & Faber, 1960).
[14] John Haffenden (ed.), *Novelists in Interview* (London: Methuen, 1985), p.119.

faith that we can recast the world, the struggle that comes after will be bearable'.[15] The phrase 're-casting the world' comes from his translation of a poem by Mayakovsky entitled 'The Secret of Youth': 'The young ones / those are they / Who, when the fighters ranks are thinning / In the name of all young folk say / "We shall recast the whole of living"'.[16]

The idea that the whole of living can – or should – be re-cast runs through Murdoch's developing thought, from the Marxism she and Thompson shared in 1943, through the Anglo-Catholicism that followed, up to, and including, her mature philosophy, Christian-Buddhist in its attitude and neo-Platonic in its provenance. Each of these belief-systems has aspects of puritanism and romanticism: a recoil from aspects of contemporary life; a yearning for renewal. I was recently convinced by a review by Carey Seale that inadequate attention has been given to Murdoch's Marxism.[17] Perhaps our cue has been taken too much from her: Murdoch pooh-poohed her generation's Marxism as evidence of their youthful simple-mindedness. They were certainly naive about Stalin, as about the USSR. And Marxism scarcely touches her fictional world, unless one makes an exception for the politics of Lefty Todd in *Under the Net*, or Jake, disaffected since leaving the Young Communist League, or the figure of Rosa Keepe in *The Flight from the Enchanter*, the representation of whose sympathy for the working-class is surely coloured by Simone Weil's quixotic spell working in factories from 1935 on as power press operator, then milling machine worker in the Renault factory at Boulogne-Billancourt. 'Slumming' was the rude 1930s word for the work freely chosen by Rosa and Weil alike. In *The Book and the Brotherhood* (1987) the youthful Marxism of many characters is contrasted with David Crimond's adherence to what the others have long abandoned or drifted away from.

But Murdoch's landmark essay 'A House of Theory' reminds us that she was still *Marxisant*, as the French say – *a fellow-traveller* – as late as 1958.[18] And she thought that Marx deserved to be taught to her students in Oxford – I believe – throughout her period of teaching at St Anne's College Oxford, which ended in 1963. This need not overly concern the student of her novels, but might make for a different emphasis for the student of her early thought. Karl Marx compelled her attention for two decades. So far as students of her novels are concerned, we note the emphasis throughout on transformation and altered states of being, but we see also that this ties in with the radical stress on inwardness and privacy that can make her seem apolitical. If Murdoch put increasing emphasis on the need for an inner revolution, this is not because social or political change lost meaning for her: the novel-form in itself never seemed its proper platform or vehicle.

One social change Murdoch was caught up with was that sexual morality was altering fast, and the stress in her novels on erotic imbroglio was therefore topical. She was personally involved in such changes, and imbroglios, and in the biography I have put effort into representing her own life as interesting in this way. In some respects, as Philippa Foot once remarked to me, Murdoch's was an astonishing life. But to have led an interesting *life* is an insufficient precondition for writing good novels. It is essential, as Bayley has often pointed out, to have an interesting *mind*; and it is with aspects of the interesting-ness of her mind that this paper is concerned. Murdoch has the intelligence and courage needed to express and explore the longing for goodness in our post-religious age, for one thing: the re-enchantment of England happens not through politics, but through love, through ascesis or unselfing, about each of which much has been written. And through 'attention', that term from Simone Weil that recalls the highest of all teachings in Tibetan Buddhism, which puts a premium on mindfulness and awareness.

Another aspect of her interesting-ness might be said to be that she is a poetic novelist. The idea of the 'poetic novel' now seems perhaps faintly dated: it bespeaks Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, with its self-conscious investment in leitmotiv and thematic imagery. And Murdoch resisted the tendency

[15] Iris Murdoch, *A Writer at War* (London: Short Books), pp.129-30.

[16] Peter J. Conradi, *A Very English Hero: The Making of Frank Thompson* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), p.273.

[17] Carey Seale, review of *Iris Murdoch: A Life* in *Yale Review of Books*, Vol.4 no.3, Fall 2001. Available at: http://yalereviewofbooks.com/iris-murdoch-a-life-book-by-peter-conradi/ [accessed 16-6-16].

[18] Iris Murdoch, 'A House of Theory', in Peter Conradi (ed.), *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), pp.171-186.

of Woolf's modernism towards narcissistic self-sufficiency. The poetry I have in mind differs from that offered by Durrell's work, too, because it is concerned not with the romance of 'elsewhere-and-abroad' but with the romance of 'here-and-now'. She had poetic gifts: the ability to use both language and story to startle us into fresh perception. It was not, in the end, England that was dull, but our perception of England that had become dulled. One of the functions of Murdoch's fiction was to remind us of what the Tibetan meditation master Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche once called 'ordinary magic'. An early example occurs when Jake Donaghue in *Under the Net* announces, 'I had quite forgotten about rain'.[19] There is comical inadvertence about his utterance, which depends on our seeing that we share Jake's careless self-absorption, and share, too, the capacity to be woken up from solipsism into simple wonder at ordinary magic. These six words could not perhaps have been written by any other English writer: their subversively simple emphasis on awakening is deeply Murdochian. If I let my memory wander it settles on images from her novels that carry a similar enchantment, often where the poetry of the material world is figured in terms of animism. A log-fire in *Henry and Cato* whose dying embers recall a hill-town seen at night; the bamboos in the garden in *An Unofficial Rose* nodding to one another 'with the secret gestures of friends';[20] Miles Greensleave's notation in *Bruno's Dream* of the 'ecstatic flight of a pigeon, the communion of two discarded shoes'.[21] While in a memorable phrase in *A Severed Head* Martin Lynch-Gibbon beautifully records that 'Snow fell [...] into the depths of its own sleep',[22] a phrase catching so simply the strange and silent changes that every snow-storm births within the world. That the world is alive and 'other' – or odd – is one burden of her poetry.

That the world is alive and 'other' – or odd – is also one burden of her plots. And perhaps one of the best-known single oddnesses of her world is the facility and speed with which her characters fall in love. Here are passages from three novels:

> When the idea had come to me that I was desperately, irrevocably, agonizingly in love with Honor Klein it had seemed at first to shed a great light.[23]

> I had fallen in love with Julian [....] It is odd that falling in love, though frequently mentioned in literature, is rarely adequately described [...] for most people it is after all the most astonishing thing that ever happens to them: more astonishing, because more counter-natural, than life's horrors.[24]

> There was no doubt about the fact of her being in love with Tim, and Tim being in love with her. This was the real, the indubitable and authoritative Eros: that unmistakeable seismic shock, that total concentration of everything into one necessary being, mysterious, uncanny, unique, one of the strangest phenomena in the world.[25]

Falling-in-love marks Murdoch's artistic vision and informs her philosophy. It is yet another index of the oddness of her fictional world, both its unexpectedness and – in some of the later work – its formulaic near conventionality as an aspect of plot. Murdoch's descriptions of falling-in-love are many, and – considering the difficulty Bradley Pearson describes – it is remarkable how she manages to enliven and keep them fresh. Sappho (c 630-570 BC) in a famous poem translated by Catullus

[19] Iris Murdoch, *Under the Net* (1954); (London: Vintage, 2002), p.176.
[20] Iris Murdoch, *An Unofficial Rose* (1962); (London: Vintage, 2000), p.67.
[21] Iris Murdoch, *Bruno's Dream* (1969); (London: Vintage, 2001), p.56.
[22] Iris Murdoch, *A Severed Head* (1961); London: Vintage, 2001), p.44.
[23] Ibid., p.124.
[24] Iris Murdoch, *The Black Prince* (1973); (London: Vintage, 1999), p.169.
[25] Iris Murdoch, *Nuns and Soldiers* (1980); (London: Vintage, 2001), p.194.

and others was the first to evoke the psychopathology of falling-in-love: the heart beating faster, the speechlessness, the sweating, trembling, turning pale, sightlessness, fainting. Here is Bradley:

> Nothing really had prepared me for this blow [....] I was felled by it physically. I felt as if my stomach had been shot away, leaving a gaping hole. My knees dissolved, I could not stand up, I shuddered and trembled all over, my teeth chattered. My face felt as if it had become waxen and some huge strange weirdly smiling mask had been imprinted on it, I had become some sort of god. (p.169)

The falling-in-love experience, in Murdoch's view of the matter, is as we know spiritual or quasi-religious, a transformation of consciousness in the direction of truth. It is only a first step within the schematic stages of the journey from the cave to the sun. After a first stage of ecstatic unselfing, in *The Black Prince* termed a false ascesis, comes a second painful stage of conniving at possession, of grasping and clinging where the de-centred ego tries to re-establish territory and to swallow that which is magnetically other into its own being. She recorded this as if it were both an involuntary and also a widespread occurrence. It is also axiomatic to her that love offers a redemption of the dull English world, that it shows us a world analagous to that revealed to the mystics, whose particulars are redeemed.

Plato of course importantly underwrites the significance of falling-in-love.[26] 'Falling out of intense 'love' [...] and in love with the separate world and the separate people it contains': this is how Murdoch pictured the significance of the Platonic pilgrimage.[27] This transmutes the disappointment of sexual desire into one pre-condition of wisdom. The distribution, as it were, of falling-in-love experiences within her fictional oeuvre is of interest. There is no account of it in *Under the Net* or *The Flight from the Enchanter*: Bill Mor and Rain Carter's love in *The Sandcastle* is the first 'case'. It comes to the fore in the 1960s when Murdoch recognises her own Platonism and explores it in her philosophy and fiction alike. In the late novels, it might be said that falling-in-love perhaps risks on occasion becoming a 'mannerism', formulaic, a reflex recourse rather than something freshly or deeply imagined in detail.

It is clear that *The Black Prince* is both an ongoing disquisition or treatise on the relations between love and wisdom, and a fine novel. And Bradley goes on to describe how falling-in-love floods the being with immediate ecstasy and expands the specious present: 'Time had already become eternity' (p.171); how it resembles 'a condition of insanity [....] Were it not reasonably common, men could surely be locked up for such a change in consciousness'; and finally, how it connects us with the whole world to become a new mode of experience 'whereby we overcome duality, the force which made separateness as an aspect of oneness at some moment of bliss in the mind of God' (p.174).

Finally: the oddness of Murdoch differs from the oddness of Durrell. Durrell is no philosopher, and his rhetoric in the *Quartet* about bringing Einsteinian relativism into fiction I recall – perhaps unfairly – as pretentious. His is too often the oddness of what is picturesque, escapist and kinky. It would not take the talent of an Edward Said to see Durrell's quartet as orientalising of a kind that recalls James Elroy Flecker in *Hassan* or Frederic Leighton's genre paintings. And by contrast Murdoch's is the oddness of what is so close to our faces as to stay invisible until talent or skill unveils it. When Samuel Johnson, as we have noted, remarked that 'Nothing odd will do long,' he of course added, '*Tristram Shandy* did not last'. But *Tristram Shandy*, despite all Johnson's prognostications, has born the test of time: more than *The History of Rasselas*. Samuel Johnson was wrong, wasn't he?

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[26] In the *Symposium* Pausanias postulates that there is not just one god of Love, but two: there is the Pandemian (or common) Love, who presides over ordinary relationships, as well as 'transient and fortuitous connexions', which is to say, sex for the sake of sex. The other god of Love, the Uranian (or heavenly) Love, is concerned with higher things.

[27] Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (London: Chatto & Windus 1992), p.109.

Peter J. Conradi

Canetti's Weakness

In 2005 Sven Hanuschek published his authorized biography of Elias Canetti.[1] It provides a rounded and hence valuable picture of both man and writer. In doing so, it necessarily attacked the comical and flat portrait to be found in John Bayley's memoir Iris, where Canetti appears as the God-Monster from Hampstead and is called a tyrant; and it also contested some implications of my portrait of Canetti in *Iris Murdoch: A Life*.[2] Although translated from German into Japanese, Spanish, and Dutch, no English translation of *Elias Canetti* is under way. I offer here my own best understanding of what its author intended.

Hanuschek summarizes the Bayley/Conradi Canetti composite as follows: we had concocted the image of a jealous, cruel Chinese, a resentful (*missgünstig* can also connote envious or malevolent) hate-filled poison-dwarf who gave out nothing but invective or calumny, a recognition-craving satyr who had countless women in his power (p.425). Against this unbelievable and demonic chimera Hanuschek asserts: 'In no way did Canetti give the impression of a tyrant or a *Machtmensch*' (p.367). Hanuschek's Canetti was a weak man. And Hanuschek does not believe that a weak man can also act as a tyrant or a power-figure. One point of this essay is to suggest that weakness and woundedness are perfectly consonant with bullying and power-play, are indeed often their pre-condition or trigger; another is to consider how relations between Iris Murdoch and Canetti should now be understood. Perhaps a weak Canetti implies a strong Murdoch.

Hanuschek's advocacy of Canetti's softer side is endorsed in an important letter-run discovered in 2003 in a Paris basement. These letters had been sent from Elias Canetti and his first wife Veza over a period of nearly forty years to his brother Georges, who died in 1971. They were published in German in 2009, in English the following year.[3] Veza was in some sense in love with her brother-in-law Georges, a noted medical researcher and a director of the Institut Pasteur in Paris. He was also gay, and Veza resorted to him as a confidante and support in her strange and difficult marriage. These letters show how fragile Canetti's psychological economy was, given not just to bouts of paranoia, drink and adultery but also to periods of depression and doubt, to breakdown and to suicidal impulses.[4] Veza believed that her husband was a great man who got matters spot on in art, but fumbled real life. She took on the role of navigator of the real world for Canetti whom she regarded as essentially both genius and child.

One crux within Hanuschek's argument comes in 1947 when Canetti ordered his sometime mistress, the writer Friedl Benedikt, to abort her child-to-be by another writer, Willy Goldmann.[5] Although Benedikt was happily pregnant, she obeyed Canetti's injunction; Hanuschek believes that

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[1] Sven Hanuschek, *Elias Canetti: Biographie* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2005): it was celebrated, together with other Canetti-related books, in Ritchie Robertson 'The Great Hater', *Times Literary Supplement*, 2 September 2005, pp. 6-7.

[2] John Bayley, *Iris: a memoir of Iris Murdoch* (London: Duckworth, 1998); Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (London: HarperCollins, 2001). The latter is painted with what Hanuschek terms a 'startling wealth of detail', p.742 n.32.

[3] W. C. Donahue and J. Vogt (eds.), *In Her Own Words: Veza Canetti's Letters to Georges* (Universitaetsverlag Rhein-Ruhr & Duke University Libraries: 2011), vol.2, pp. 81-98. And see Karen Lauer and Kristian Wachinger (eds.), *"Dearest Georg": Love, Literature, and Power in Dark Times: The Letters of Elias, Veza, and Georges Canetti, 1933-1948* (New York: Other Press, 2010).

[4] An excellent precis in English can be found online – with quotations from the letters themselves in German – by W.C. Donahue at Duke University.

[5] Ines Schlenker and Kristian Wachinger (eds.), *Elias Canetti und Marie-Louise von Motesiczky: Liebhaber ohne Addresse, Briefwechsel 1942-1992* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2011), p.92, describe Friedl as Canetti's '*Schülerin*' and finally '*Geliebte*' or mistress until 1951. Those who testified that Canetti 'ordered' Benedikt to terminate her pregnancy included three key witnesses in three countries speaking between 1997 and 2001: Friedl's sister Susie Ovadia in Paris; Friedl's first cousin Margaret Gardiner in Hampstead and perhaps most significantly, Friedl's lover and close friend to Canetti, Alan Forbes, in Boston and Naushon, MA., USA in 2001.

Canetti's 'position of weakness throws a different light on the question of Benedikt's pregnancy and abortion' (p.367). He accordingly quotes Canetti's claim that he was 'living in the service of three witches' or hag-ridden, each throwing her weight around (p.366). His wife Veza threatened divorce, Benedikt played complicated games, while the third was his official mistress Marie-Louise von Motesiczky. Hanuschek does not deny that Canetti told Benedikt that if she had this child he would never see her again. But just before this revelation Hanuschek carefully places Veza's judgement that Canetti was '*hoffnungslos romantisch, selbstlos, naiv, tatsächlich wirkt er schwach und überaus verletzlich*' (p.367): hopelessly romantic, selfless, naïve, he actually came across as someone weak and above all vulnerable. Eyebrows need not rise at '*Selbstlos*' or selfless: he was capable of real generosity.[6]

Was Canetti a good man or a bad man, asks his biographer? This is indeed a proper question for a biographer. '*Vor allem, war er ein verwandlungsfähiger Mensch*' (p.426): 'above all was he a man capable of transformations or metamorphoses, a Proteus – it was a matter of containing all human possibilities and of exploring them'. *Verwandlung* is a major theme in Canetti's work, *Crowds and Power*, where it means 'a kind of empathy based on identification, an alternative to the merely external unity that exists within a crowd'.[7] There may be an echo in Bradley Pearson's pronouncement in Murdoch's novel *The Black Prince* that we are 'tissues and tissues of different personae and yet we are nothing at all'.[8] Canetti himself defined the Master of Transformations as the *Dichter* or poet.

But this special word *Verwandlung*, which Canetti charged with meanings, can be made to cover a multitude of sins; and arguably his twin propensities for jealousy and lying also connect with it. He was without doubt morbidly – or pathologically [*krankhaft*] – jealous. Hanuschek acknowledges that jealousy connects with power and with control, and also points out that jealousy bespeaks the intensity or size of the love-emotion. Hanuschek repeats the stories of both Benedikt and Motesiczky each on different occasions explaining away a rustling in the bushes during a walk in the Park: 'That's just Canetti – he's so jealous' (p. 426). Hanuschek excuses such frailties as further symptoms of weakness.

Hanuschek acknowledges that Canetti was also a manic liar. About this tendency Canetti himself wrote on 1 May 1954 (i.e. during his affair with Murdoch) a remarkable testimony showing a fine romantic contempt for bourgeois decencies and mixing up third and first persons:

> I need to be clear about what lying means to me – and why I need lies. Maybe he lies in order to preserve his independence of mind; or to lead to a multi-faceted existence which as a quiet and thoughtful man I cannot have, caught up, ever more deeply and more complicatedly by lies. I have always to remember exactly what I have said to this person and to that, and as I never give up on anyone, I am forced to continue this game with ingenuity and circumspection. It is as if I live in many novels at the same time, instead of writing them. The incompatibility of these fictions together, the tension between them I need [....] The risk of confrontation I love above anything in the world; in little and also in large I cause [such confrontations] myself and know how at the last minute either to impede or guide [the outcome].[9]

Of course his habit of untruth had consequences but these are exempted either as jokes, or as pastiche Viennese cabaret turns, or else as simple teasing. A partial exception is made for Canetti's April Fool's Day 1952 joke of ringing to pretend to the dying Franz Steiner that his beloved poems

[6] As for Bernice Rubens's recollection that Canetti pretended to envy Rubens for bearing children, when at the same time Veza told her he had put her through many abortions, Hanuschek is sceptical. He believes that Veza and Canetti stopped being lovers in the early 1930s.

[7] Elias Canetti, *Masse und Macht* (Berlin: Claassen Verlag, 1960), Carol Stewart, *Crowds and Power* (trans.) (London: Gollancz, 1962).

[8] Iris Murdoch, *The Black Prince* (1973); (London: Vintage, 1999), p.200.

[9] Elias Canetti, *Aufzeichnungen*, 1 May 1954. [Murdoch and Bayley fall in love 14 May 1954].

had – at last – been published. This was less harmless – it was even '*übel*': translatable as 'bad', 'wicked' or 'evil'. On the other hand, advises Hanuschek, Steiner should have met this April Fool's Day joke with composure '*den Steiner gleichwohl mit Fassung getragen haben soll*' (p. 427). That is a strange judgement. Anne and Michael Hamburger, witnesses in Steiner's tiny Notting Hill flat that day and our only source for the story, reported that Steiner changed colour but 'carried it off with courage'. Courage is surely predicated on, indeed a pre-requisite of, composure. What Hanuschek apparently wants is that *we readers* not be discountenanced by Canetti's cruelty, that we take it in our stride with *our* composure intact.[10] Although Hanuschek questions the anecdote's accuracy, the tale bears the unique Canetti stamp of *Schadenfreude*-dressed-up-as-levity that Murdoch caught so beautifully in two characters inspired by Canetti: Mischa Fox in *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956) and Julius King in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970).

The most interesting symptom of weakness connects with *Party in the Blitz*, his memoirs of his time in England, within which Canetti bequeathed us a toxic and scandalous portrait of Murdoch whose power to distress does not diminish, and to which we will return. Canetti, Hanuschek explains, never meant this for publication. He made a distinction between his *Aufzeichnungen* or notebooks, which might be published, and his many *Tagebüchern* or diaries, never intended for publication, and closed until 2024. In the latter he lets rip with – and also hides – his obsessions, rages and moods that he could not otherwise control. Hanuschek calls this a method of *Triebabfuhr* or instinctual discharge: here was the means by which he calmed himself down. His chapter on Murdoch resembles diary entries, designed to allow him privately to let off steam. They begin, after all, with a key signifier: '*Yesterday*, the thick philosophical tome by Iris Murdoch arrived'. 'Yesterday' suggests diary notes. To calm oneself down by means of working oneself up is no doubt another symptom of poor Canetti's regrettable 'weakness'. It was how this 88-year-old habitually struggled to regain his equanimity.

It is, says Hanuschek, a pity that the distinction between diaries and *Aufzeichnungen* is on occasion unclear, an unclarity that licensed his daughter and publisher to proceed with the publication of a book that was only half-meant, and parts of which – incidentally – Canetti had destroyed by burning around 1992, before changing his mind and dictating it once again to his short-hand typist in 1993. It appears possible that among the pages burnt were some concerning his resentment or grudge against Veza.

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Hanuschek declines to see Canetti simply as a *Machtmensch*, a word variously translated as a power seeker, power player or simply power hungry. There is no attempt strictly to define this term; but if Murdoch's beloved mentor Simone Weil is right that 'all human beings use all the power at their disposal',[11] then by this definition all of us are *Macht-Menschen*. And yet Canetti does seem to have brought something extra to this particular commission. His *Party in the Blitz* is fascinated by the ways in which literary and political power, fame and influence operate in England: legitimate and interesting fields of enquiry. In his private life too, however, as Bayley has noted, he had 'an air of keeping, at every moment, every advantage'; while Carol Stewart, translator of his *Crowds and Power*, recorded that '[h]e ruled over both men and women'.[12]

Recent years have seen a number of publications that touch on this. I will limit myself to three. Julian Preece's good and subtle *The Rediscovered Writings of Veza Canetti: Out of the Shadows of a Husband* celebrates Veza's literary achievement without buying in to a crude narrative about her husband simply eclipsing her ambition. In his introduction Preece claims Canetti was offered a 'job'

[10] Hanuschek questions the anecdote's accuracy on the grounds that Steiner mentioned it to H.G. Adler without naming Canetti (or anyone else) as the perpetrator. Against this, both Michael and Anne Hamburger wrote an account of it to Murdoch in 1994. Hanuschek, p.746, n.43; Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), p.356.

[11] Iris Murdoch in Peter Conradi *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), pp.157-160.

[12] Peter Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), p.358 and p.355.

reviewing for the *New Statesman*, seeming to imply a salary-earning position that Canetti turned down.[13] This is not accurate. What actually happened was that around 1949 the new deputy literary editor Janet Adam Smith, invited Canetti to review a book on Hieronymus Bosch. Canetti had such a raft of questions – exactly who would be appearing in the same issue, i.e. were they worthy of his company? – and conditions, such as that there must be no sub-editing, that she lost patience with his grand-standing and withdrew her offer.

In 2005 Bernice Rubens published her memoir *When I Grow Up* containing an intemperate reminiscence: 'One day, I was driving up Haverstock Hill and Mr Canetti, deep in filthy thought, crossed the road in front of me. It was not a pedestrian crossing, and I could, quite legally, have killed him on the spot'. She continues: 'he had but one single talent. That of self-promotion. He created mystery about himself [....] I thought it all rather pathetic. My father met him once and declared him evil. And as it turned out, he was right, though evil might have been an overstatement. He did not have the imagination to be evil. He was wicked rather, depraved, vicious and spiteful. His own life was dull and uneventful, and to compensate he would create intrigue in the lives of other people'.[14]

Hanuschek does not dispute Canetti's love of playing Svengali (though he does not put it in those terms) and accounts for Rubens's hatred of Canetti with the claim that Rubens wished to have the role of Canetti's *Schülerin* or pupil and was bitter at her rejection. I know no reason to doubt Rubens's own version: Canetti had interfered comprehensively in her marriage, choreographing first of all her husband Rudi Nassauer's affair with Christine Porter (who bore Nassauer's child) and simultaneously Rubens's affair with Allan Forbes. Though this story is touched upon in *Iris Murdoch: A Life*, I withheld the fact that before Canetti introduced Rubens and Forbes to one another at the Cosmo Restaurant in Swiss Cottage, he had advertised successfully in the *New Statesman* for a bed-sit for the American Forbes, specifying that it be close to where Rubens lived, so that he was able to present them to one another, *fait accompli*, as neighbours.

Finally, in her memoir *Somewhere Towards the End*, the distinguished editor and writer Diana Athill celebrates her friendship with the notable Vienna-born painter Marie-Louise von Motesiczky, leading pupil of Max Beckmann, whom Athill remembers as funny, warm, charming and indiscreet. The two became friends when Motesiczky discovered that Athill worked for André Deutsch who had published Canetti's *Aphorisms* in English. Motesiczky became excited, disregarding the fact that Athill had never met him. 'She plunged at once into telling me how [Motesiczky and Canetti] had been friends and lovers for over twenty years before she learnt that he had a wife and daughter' [in Zürich].[15]

Motesiczky had become Canetti's 'official' mistress around 1941 and remained so for thirty years. She led a quiet life, circumscribed by her painting and by care for her aged mother. When Canetti's first wife Veza died in 1963, Motesiczky, by her own account out of respect for Veza's memory, did not press her own case but continued to wait patiently in the wings as an 'extra' in the play. Then in July 1973 two journalists staying in her house in Compayne Gardens stunned her with the news that Canetti had been living for a decade with a much younger woman called Hera Buschor who worked at the Zürich Kunsthaus: they had married and shared a flat and a two-year old daughter. Motesiczky first cut Canetti dead in the street; he visibly trembled. Athill comments: 'Her seclusion seemed to have spared her the knowledge of Canetti's many other women [so] that the revelation of his being married had brought their affair to a sudden and agonizing end' (p.7). Friendship in fact survived, and the recently published (again, untranslated) letters of Motesiczky and Canetti throw a curious light on what his admirers perhaps see as his capacity for *Verwandlung* or transformation, and the rest of us might see differently. Motesiczky handled the new situation with simple dignity. Meanwhile Canetti justified himself in one letter by saying that he thanked God he had kept her in ignorance

[13] Julian Preece, *The Rediscovered Writings of Veza Canetti: Out of the Shadows of a Husband* (New York: Camden House, 2007), p.8.

[14] Bernice Rubens, *When I Grow Up* (London: Abacus, 2006). A useful extract, featuring Canetti, is available at: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/oct/15/featuresreviews.guardianreview3 [accessed 23-07-16].

[15] Diana Athill, *Somewhere Towards the End* (London: Granta, 2008), p.7.

for ten years, for by this means he forfeited neither her delightful company, nor her paintings which were 'essential' to him. Moreover, 'no one can feel as much bitterness against me as I do myself'.[16]

Though Canetti had confided to his diary his boredom with Motesiczky, he soon invented another ingenious Transformation: he tried to console her by claiming that he hated his second wife because she was a German, and that he summonsed his first wife's ghost from her grave to curse his second. Motesiczky was unimpressed. She dwells on her jealous hurt – heart-breakingly – in one letter lamenting that she has been deprived of the care of Canetti's child, of dressing and feeding it, and monitoring its growth.

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Party in the Blitz celebrates Britain's war-time courage while deploring its post-war decline, especially under Mrs Thatcher, whom Canetti detested. His connection with Britain was a long one: he had spoken English as a child in Manchester in 1911 before he learnt a word of German. He lived in London from January 1939 and kept his Thurlow Road flat on until his second wife's death in April 1988: around fifty years of residency. He held a UK passport and stayed a British citizen to the end of his life. And he called himself an 'Englishman by attachment, loving it twice over on account of Veza's attachment to the place'.[17]

His ambivalence about England was surely increased by righteous anger at lack of recognition. The reception of *Crowds and Power* in Britain in 1962 is a case in point. The book, which had eaten up decades of his life, mattered passionately. While Tom Nairn gave it a very favourable review in the *New Left Review*; and John Raymond reviewed it positively in the *The Sunday Times*, the *Times Literary Supplement* was hostile and Geoffrey Gorer gave it a stinging reception in the *Observer*.[18] Gorer, himself an anthropologist, started by quoting Tallulah Bankhead's witticism that 'there is less to this book than meets the eye' deploring its incomprehensible neglect of Freud and its outdated anthropology. The anthropologist Mary Douglas – a friend of Canetti's – told me that she privately agreed with this view of the book's methodology.[19]

Happily, George Steiner in *Encounter* painstakingly explained Canetti to his English audience:[20] in its obsession with philosophic constructs and with 'totalisation', *Crowds and Power* belonged to the continental tradition of *Kulturphilosophie*. It was, he argued, 'immensely perceptive' – an important if uneven essay about the road that led from Goethe to Belsen. This foreignness of Canetti's approach may account in part for an undercurrent which he was too astute not to have noticed. Janet Adam Smith referred to Canetti as an intellectual 'Merdle', the name of the social and financial outsider and fraudster in Dickens's *Little Dorrit* who takes everybody in, before his exposure. Athill, who edited Canetti's *Aphorisms*, agrees: she finds his ideas pompous, self-important, and vain.[21] This ground-swell of antipathy may help to gloss Canetti's curious rhetoric about English 'arrogance.' Although he sometimes seems to mean a combination of modesty and self-possession, he surely also encountered superciliousness or hostility. At the same time those inclined to believe Canetti-phobia uniquely English, might read the pages on Canetti in *Mein Leben* (1999) (translated as *The Author of Himself*) by Marcel Reich-Ranicki, doyenne of post-war German literary critics, who knew

[16] Schlenker and Wachinger, p. 307.

[17] Elias Canetti, *Party in the Blitz: The English Years* (London: Harvill, 2005), p. 68.

[18] Tom Nairn, 'Crowds and Critics', *New Left Review*, 1 (17), Winter 1962. Available at: https://newleftreview.org/I/17/tom-nairn-crowds-and-critics [accessed 8-6-16]; John Raymond, 'Elias Canetti: Crowds and Power' *Sunday Times*, 9 September 1962; Kenneth Anderson, 'Measurement and Myth', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 2 November 1962, p.839; Geoffrey Gorer, 'Elias Canetti: Crowds and Power' *Observer*, 9 September 1962.

[19] She thought Canetti's focus on *Trieben* or drives – she used the German word – 'hopelessly out-dated'.

[20] George Steiner, 'Canetti's Crowd', *Encounter*, December 1962, pp. 85-7.

[21] Canetti made British publication of his *Aphorisms* his stated price for the issuing of his memoirs in English. A useful article by Athill on Canetti is available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/14/books/chapters/chapter-somewhere-towards-the-end.html

Canetti for twenty years.[22] He, too, convicts him of mythomania, vanity and self-importance.

Canetti's greatest British advocate was Murdoch. When his German publisher re-issued *Crowds and Power* in two volumes in 1973, Canetti, though hesitant about whether her name was sufficiently well-known in Germany, used her praise on his book jacket. In 1981 his much-praised and impressive memoirs helped win him the Nobel Prize for Literature; yet he refused permission for them to be translated into English or published in the UK. In 1982 *The Sunday Times* printed Murdoch's short letter, under the title 'No resentment', as follows: 'Your article [...] suggests that Elias Canetti is not allowing publication of his autobiography in Britain because he resents neglect of his work in this country. This is not his motive; he wishes simply to avoid hurting the feelings of certain people who live here'.[23] As Hanuschek points out, there are few if any references to anyone in these islands in his first three autobiographies. But Murdoch defends him loyally and by all accounts inaccurately.[24]

Murdoch disliked reviewing and – though frequently importuned – only agreed to write her few reviews as acts of friendship or homage. Those reading her marginal comments on *Crowds and Power* in the Kingston archive – i.e. her work-in-progress towards the published review – have noted how critical these *marginalia* sometimes are, in comparison with the tone of respect within the published review. There is no great mystery here: she believed that one should not deliberately hurt others in print, and that any qualification of one's praise could be communicated positively rather than negatively.[25]

That the uses to which she none the less put Canetti *in the novels* – where he believed that he sometimes recognized himself – evidently hurt and 'shamed' or disgusted him is a paradox for scholars to explore in the future. If aspects of Canetti inspired mysterious power-broking Mischa Fox in *The Flight from the Enchanter*, demonic puppet-master Julius King in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, and rapacious woman-hating tyrant Charles Arrowby in *The Sea, the Sea* (1978), these aspects are so digested, transmuted and re-imagined that the alchemy of creation apparently left her oblivious to her own practice. Canetti's influence on Murdoch's novels is explored by Elaine Morley in *Iris Murdoch and Elias Canetti: Intellectual Allies* and in an interesting chapter in an unpublished thesis by Pamela Osborn.[26]

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A strange and disturbing image that I connect with Canetti recurs in three of her novels, from 1966

[22] Marcel Reich-Ranicki, *The Author of Himself: The Life of Marcel Reich-Ranicki*, Ewald Osers (trans.) (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[23] Signed: Iris Murdoch, Steeple Aston, 29 August 1982.

[24] See e.g. Athill: Canetti 'has taken so violently against the British, I think because they had failed to recognize his genius [...] that he determined never to be published in this country' (p.6).

[25] Compare her long, generous and scrupulous re-reading of Sartre (1905-80) in 1987, which took her months, for a new introduction to the second edition of *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* at a time when he was antipathetic to her. His continuing Stalinism, as well as his shallow voluntarism as she saw it, must have made him in some ways obnoxious.

[26] Elaine Morley, *Iris Murdoch and Elias Canetti: Intellectual Allies* (Oxford: Legenda, 2013); Pamela Osborn, 'Another Country: Bereavement, Mourning and Survival in the Novels of Iris Murdoch', Kingston University, unpublished PhD thesis (2013). Before turning to one instance of this influence, I would like to clear up a misunderstanding. Both Morley and Osborne assert that the fact that Murdoch chose to include her *Spectator* review of *Crowds and Power* in *Existentialists and Mystics* shows her continuing reverence for its author. As her 70th birthday approached, I planned two celebrations for her: firstly a *Festschrift*, for which I collected tributes that were in the event supplanted by and digested within the biography; secondly the collection of her essays that became *Existentialists and Mystics*. Although it naturally had her and Bayley's blessing, Murdoch had no part in its editing. Chatto & Windus were receptive and I came up with the seven-part structure fast, within a month. I decided early on to exclude her few book reviews as too slight but nonetheless to include so-called article-reviews of 2,000 words or so – like her appreciation of *Crowds and Power* – as weightier and less ephemeral. That is the sole reason for the inclusion of the Canetti review in *Existentialists and Mystics*, as part of a section reflecting simultaneously on the need for – and inadequacy of – theory. Though Bayley and Murdoch attended a small launch-party it is doubtful whether by that time – we are speaking of 1996/7, just before her diagnosis – Murdoch could still have cooperated, and in any case co-operation was never in question.

to 1970. In *The Time of the Angels*, Carel asks 'Suppose the truth were awful, suppose it was just a black pit, or *like birds huddled in the dust in a dark cupboard?* [my italics]. Suppose only evil were real, only it was not evil since it had lost even its name?'[27] These birds huddled in the dust in a dark cupboard return in *The Nice and the Good*, where Radeechy, the civil servant who killed himself, practised in a basement a form of black magic entailing the sacrifice of pigeons.[28] Finally in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* we learn that Julius King, while both were teaching in South Carolina, has shown Morgan 'a deep truth [or] mystical vision into the heart of reality' that turns out to be 'with all the sense of significance and reality fully preserved [...] a few mouldering chicken bones lying in a dark corner covered with dust and filth'.[29]

Where does this uncanny image of dead or dying birds in a cupboard come from? I believe that it stems from probably our most ancient text, dating from Mesopotamia around 1800 BC, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, a book Canetti celebrates in *Crowds and Power* as having influenced his work and way of thinking more profoundly than any other.[30] Like so many epic narratives, it includes a trip to the Underworld. In Tablet 7, days before his death, Enkidu has a proleptic and terrifying dream of the afterlife:

> Then he [a lion-headed eagle] turned me into a dove,
> so that my arms were feathered like a bird.
> Seizing me, he led me down to the House of Darkness, ...
> ...to the house where those who enter do not come out,
> along the road of no return,
> to the house where those who dwell, do without light,
> where dirt is their drink, their food is of clay,
> where, like a bird, they wear garments of feathers,
> and light cannot be seen, they dwell in the dark,
> and upon the door and bolt, there lies dust.[31]

Of all the ancient world's *katabases* or descents into the underworld – compare Homer's or Virgil's– the author(s) of Gilgamesh's vision of birds locked in in the dark is surely the most bleak and terrible.[32]

In his 1976 Munich speech Canetti celebrated his favourite three foundational texts: Homer's *Odyssey*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*[33] and *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Though scholars regret that he failed to elaborate further on its importance to him, he kept returning to his third classic 'as a kind of Bible'. In the *Epic* Gilgamesh sits with Enkidu's corpse as it rots and tries, movingly, to understand his beloved friend's death, and has a series of confrontations with seers and shamans whom he charges with explaining to him the mystery of mortality itself. This mystery is of course the one with which Canetti is obsessed: all his life he claimed that his job was to overcome death.

Dead-birds-in-a-cupboard is a vision of life that Murdoch's novels contest; or – to use the discourse

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[27] Iris Murdoch, *The Time of the Angels* (1966); (London: Vintage, 2002), p.170.

[28] Iris Murdoch, *The Nice and the Good* (1968); (London: Vintage, 2000), p.212.

[29] Iris Murdoch, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970); (London: Vintage, 2001), p.141.

[30] Johann P. Arnason and David Roberts, *Elias Canetti's Counter-Image of Society: Crowds, Power, Transformation* (New York: Camden House, 2004), p.118. The authors also express wonder or incomprehension that Canetti fails to mention that Gilgamesh is builder and ruler of the city of Uruk and that the epic therefore touches upon the themes of the humanization and civilization of power.

[31] Andrew George (trans.), *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (London: Penguin, 2003), p.92.

[32] Compare the image in *The Odyssey* of the ghost of Achilles speaking regretfully of the dead as 'as mindless disembodied ghosts'; or the famous couplet from Virgil's *Aeneid* where the souls of the dead stretch out their arms from the farther shore in longing for life and for the living.

[33] Odysseus is among other things a shape-changer or trickster living in multiple worlds; Ovid collates many ancient narratives of transformation.

of philosophy – such a vision forms part of their dialectic. I believe that, in accommodating such darkness, Murdoch is struggling to negotiate something Canetti taught her.[34]

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Finally, the imagery of *Crowds and Power* – the Survivor, the Pack, the Sting or '*Stachel*', the Command and so on – are interesting, strange and slippery.[35] But perhaps Canetti's idea of the Sting may illuminate *Party in the Blitz*. Here Canetti convicts Murdoch of various sins: of dress, of ambition, of obtuseness, of low social origin, and of initiating a one-sided affair to which he was indifferent without regard to his inclinations. Most of these charges reduce to matters of taste; this last claim is debateable as a matter of record. True, the references he makes to her over the years in the open part of his *Nachlass* are few, cursory and off-hand. Some examples: Veza's death on 1 May 1963 disturbed him intensely and he wrote resentfully and dismissively of many (around forty) women-friends who had survived her. Canetti and Murdoch went together to a restaurant he and Veza had frequented. While he recounted his life without Veza, she 'scarcely concealed her unease'. She admired Canetti's courage. She had lost two men whom she loved, her father and Franz Steiner. 'But then she has evaded death. She experiences death differently than me'. This somewhat cryptic entry is not any clearer than an earlier one in which he writes of how given to and busy with emotion she is, commenting: 'She is so shallow, as Veza was so deep'.

In 1992 Murdoch flew to Zürich where Canetti recorded her as a broadly-built woman bringing with her a huge tin of sweets painted with English tin-soldiers, presumably for Canetti's ten-year-old daughter. The contents were old and inedible and Hanuschek tells us that Johanna Canetti's memory of her is of someone chaotic. Nonetheless, there is a strange mismatch between his jaundiced account of their affair forty years later, and her journal contemporary with it. By 2024 when his literary estate is opened, it may be possible to reconcile these; and Murdoch's journals may also by that date be in the public domain.

Four entries:

> April 12 1953 C. made love to me savagely, tearing my clothes off.
>
> June 24 1953 We made love with great fierceness. He said: 'you are not defenceless against me, because I love you. I do, although I don't say it often'.
>
> July 25 1953 C's birthday. He said 'I love you' at Crawford St – and then cursed himself for saying it again. I said he needn't repeat it for two years. He said it yet again as we were walking along to Carol's, & kissed me in the street.
>
> January 10 1954 C. so gentle, he fears that I may too much identify myself with Friedl. 'You are yourself!' he keeps telling me, 'I don't love you just because of that.'

Party in the Blitz expends two contemptuous pages on a diaphanous blouse Murdoch wore at a dinner in Hampton Court, with the dumb intention of seducing Aymer Maxwell, who was gay. Murdoch's journal reference to that same dinner expatiates only on Aymer's touching devotion to – and fear of – Canetti: 'At dinner at Hampton Court [Aymer] gave me an opening to say I thought C. a great writer, & absolutely pushed me into it!'. Eleven days later Canetti warned her against Aymer (whom he called a were-wolf) saying 'Aymer would do anything he could to drive a wedge between us, even to trying to seduce me. He added, if you do do anything you regret, remember that I am merciful! I should be furiously angry – but I am merciful. I was exasperated extremely by this – but

[34] See Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), p.350.

[35] 'slippery': Arnason and Roberts argue that Canetti's 'Transformation' is double: 'it is the common ground both of despotism and also of subversion' (p.127).

touched too, in an absurd way'.[36]

Though he represents their affair as entirely one-sided, Canetti recalled, even in *Party in the Blitz*, Murdoch's face at moments as beautiful as that of a Memling Madonna. On 30 June 1954 Canetti, having learnt that Murdoch and Bayley were lovers, refused his permission for their affair to continue. They obeyed his edict for eleven weeks until 17 September, even when visiting Paris and staying in separate hotels. Little here endorses Canetti's later claim to indifference.

Here Hanuschek's emphasis on Canetti's 'weakness' is illuminating. He was an émigré who had lost his culture, his chosen language and his beloved city (Vienna). Murdoch was at home in these islands and a don in Oxford, a place where he passionately desired to be recognized, hungering to meet Isaiah Berlin. That never happened, though Murdoch knew Berlin. Hence the poisonousness of his attack on Oxford in *Party in the Blitz*: Oxford had left a *Stachel* or sting that never healed. Canetti was eldest of three brothers competing for the affections of a mother whose will-power makes her seem almost demented; Murdoch had all the deep self-contentment and solipsism of a much loved only child. He was also if not a blocked writer, then – and despite winning the Nobel Prize – a disappointed one. He intended eight novels, but completed only one; and he finished three volumes of autobiography instead of five. Murdoch by contrast wrote with alarming facility, and won greater literary and social acclaim than he during their lifetimes. 'Vulgar' success he calls it, jealously. He repeats the phrase 'she has published 24 novels' three times. She had more lovers and admirers than he and he puts on record his wonderment at her strange loyalty to each of them: here was something he had never before encountered. Loyalty to old friends is not conspicuous in *Party in the Blitz*.

Murdoch was, he noted incredulously, the only woman in his life who never sought to capture him. 'This is the only time in my life that I was with a woman who didn't seek to hold me to her'.[37] Her independence evidently attracted and alarmed him. Murdoch's least forgivable crime was also a symptom of strength: she was the only person who listened more than he did. '*Greedily*' is the word he uses to record this. There are eight separate passages in *Party in the Blitz* where he celebrates his own famous gift for listening even to those who bored him, or boasts that 'my willingness to listen led to a dependency, a craving' (p.67). There can be such a thing as listener's rape, where the person confiding comes to feel his privacy has been violated, his inner being 'robbed'. Canetti liked others to feel dependent on him. But he secretly enjoyed talking even better than listening. Murdoch spotted and elicited his Mr Toad-like boastfulness.

Murdoch's ultimate crime was to listen, steal and cannibalize her friends' lives with more inwardness than Canetti. 'I told her everything', he bitterly laments: 'she got to hear about all the people I knew, and also a good many of those I had known [...] she took it all in. She wanted to hear everything I had to say [...] But I never [...] understood in what spirit she listened to me talking about my present friends [...] she had a buried robber's nature, and her aim was to rob each one of lovers not of his heart, but more of his mind; she was generally, greedily silent; she made a lot of booty out of me [i.e. in the novels] but mixed with so much other prey that I'd feel ashamed' (pp.216-226). Plucking out the heart of the mystery of others, as Hamlet puts this, was Canetti's own expertise.[38]

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Murdoch explicated *Crowds and Power* thus: 'Each command when we obey leaves behind in us its "sting". This [...] remains in us unchanged. We do not forget or forgive any command. This in turn provides us with a major source of our energy: the desire for a reversal, the desire "to get rid of our stings"'. And Murdoch noted a fault in Canetti's argument; 'Our most pressing need [...] is to

[36] Iris Murdoch, Journal, 10 July and 21 July 1953.

[37] Elias Canetti, *Party in the Blitz: The English Years* (London: Harvill, 2005), p. 223.

[38] cf. Hamlet's vexation with Rosencrantz: and Guildenstern. 'Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me! You would play upon me; you would seem to know my stops; you would pluck out the heart of my mystery', William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act III: scene ii.

control the "survivor mania" of our rulers, and the key to this is "the humanisation of command". But how is command to be humanised? Canetti has not given us a psychology with which to picture the humanisation of command.' This cavil suggests disputation rather than affinity; and whether and how the world of power-relations might be redeemed is an ongoing preoccupation in the novels.

When Murdoch felt blocked after *The Bell*'s success, Canetti on 29 January 1959 helped at her request, advising her to go beyond the weak and sentimental, not to fear offending and hurting people, to be willing to draw blood. The result was *A Severed Head*, in its miniature way a perfect achievement. It contains some of Canetti's tough-talking: Martin Lynch-Gibbon fears his sister's 'glow of excitement and pleasure' analagous to that 'felt at the death of an acquaintance': this is pure Canetti.[39]

The sheer audacity of the plot of *A Severed Head* with its comical and bewildering multiple revelations of love-on-the-rebound may owe much to Canetti's notion of how we struggle to recover from the sting or *Stachel*. Such quasi-mechanical plots seem to us today the very essence of the 'Murdochian', but the earlier novels *Under the Net*, *The Flight from the Enchanter*, *The Bell* and *The Sandcastle* do not employ this carousel aspect of love in their plotting; while, to varying degrees, many novels that follow do. Love-on-the-rebound of course hides an aspect of recovering from loss of power.

Murdoch's novels contain many spokespersons for power as the underlying realpolitik of human relations, but they never get the last word: their pronouncements are fruitful in stimulating and enabling the on-going idea-play of the novels. One well-known instance: Palmer Anderson in *A Severed Head*: 'The psyche is a strange thing [...] and it has its own mysterious ways of restoring a balance. It automatically seeks its own advantage, its consolation. It is almost entirely a matter of mechanics, and mechanical models are the best to understand it with' (p.29).

Max's disquisition on *Até* in *The Unicorn* also develops Canetti's idea of the sting: that suffering is passed on automatically (i.e. mechanically) only until it finds an innocent, pure or non-powerful person who absorbs or quenches it.[40] To be non-powerful is different, this passage asserts, from being powerless. Similarly, Bradley in *The Black Prince* could be explicating Canetti's doctrine of the Sting when he says 'The ego is engaged in filing damage done to its vanity [....] The mind, so constantly busy with its own welfare, is always sensitively filing and sorting the ways in which self-respect has been damaged. In doing so it is at the same time industriously discovering methods of making good the damage' (p.191).[41] The crucial word here is 'vanity'. It is the egotistical mind that collects and nurses grievances. And – though Canetti raised grievance-collection to a high art – our vanity, as *The Sovereignty of Good* suggests, need not be the sole available source of our psychic energy.[42]

If loss and death are, as one Buddhist teacher argues, the ultimate insult to ego, Canetti's obsession with the defeat of death seems another symptom of egomania. By contrast how moving, nourishing and attractive is Murdoch's belief that what connects us to truthful vision is love – and humility. In the mysterious final pages of *The Sovereignty of Good* Murdoch argues that love is a capacity really to see another. Love celebrates complexity. Hatred simplifies.

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[39] Iris Murdoch, *A Severed Head* (1961); (London: Vintage, 2001), p.33. Equally Canettian is Martin's avowal of atheism as he 'cannot imagine an omnipotent sentient being sufficiently cruel to create the world we inhabit' (p.11), a view Murdoch on occasion echoed.

[40] Iris Murdoch, *The Unicorn* (1963); (London: Vintage, 2000), pp.98-99. Note that Weil also believes that the lowest reaches of the human spirit are realms of the mechanical. That is as striking an aspect of Weil's 'system' as her belief in the heroic difficulties of transcendence.

[41] See Elaine Morley, *Iris Murdoch and Elias Canetti: Intellectual Allies* (Oxford: Legenda, 2013) for Murdoch's novelistic instrumentalisation of Canetti's concept of the sting, pp.73-79.

[42] cf. Iris Murdoch, *Bruno's Dream* (1969); (London: Vintage, 2001), where Nigel Boase, perhaps optimistically, advises Diana Greensleave, 'let them trample over you' (p.223).

Peter J. Conradi

Iris Murdoch and 'Shakespeare the Novelist'

I first saw Iris Murdoch in the flesh fifty years ago, when the University of East Anglia Student Literary Society invited her and John Bayley to address them. This was in 1965. Perhaps three or more dozen of us convened in a paneled room in Gurney Court, Norwich. Angus Wilson, whose good offices had helped secure the Bayleys' acceptance, joined the small discussion panel. A contemporary recalls that many of us sat on the floor and that it was our upward gaze as much as the quiet authority of her answers that sanctified Murdoch as sage. She seemed much more other-worldly than Wilson, whose cheerful gossip about writers living and dead was a more open and inclusive affair. Although Bayley and Wilson somewhat hogged the action, with a lively discussion of Henry James, Murdoch did – a little stiffly and shyly – discuss *An Unofficial Rose*[1] and she also answered questions.

A German post-graduate asked which writers inspired her, and the august list of those by whom she would like to be influenced caused a hush to fall. She began with Homer, and went on to include (from memory) Tolstoi, Jane Austen, Proust, Henry James and Shakespeare. This was not a modest list. She was surely aware that to be observed praying to be influenced by Shakespeare – the greatest, in her view, of all writers – could look fantastical or hubristic.

That same autumn, I later discovered, she decided to re-read the whole of Shakespeare, and she studied the plays over four years, hoping they might help her improve as a writer. She recorded in her journal in October 1965: 'I've written ten novels and that's enough. If not a masterpiece now, no point in writing anything. Shakespeare, Shakespeare.' She felt compelled to produce her novels fast, and she also felt compelled towards the form of erotic imbroglio. The contrast between the choicelessness with which her own artistic *daimon* dictated how and what she wrote, and Shakespeare's glorious scope and freedom, preoccupied her.

Murdoch started her re-reading with the Comedies – *The Tempest*, *Twelfth Night*, *Much Ado* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*: 'An odd experience, not quite like anything else. The plays seem so exceedingly short. One has so filled them out with thoughts & imaginings there is a great aura round each.'[2] *Henry IV Part I* provoked an 'oh marvellous!', *Troilus*, the child-like question, 'With what purpose does Shakespeare have Achilles kill Hector in that sinister way?' The Shakespeare reading-programme continued into 1967 and 1968 when she studied the Tragedies. In February 1969 she read *Lear*, and again re-read *The Tempest*.

In her journal for 8 March 1971 Murdoch recorded 'The question: what would Shakespeare have done? is never idle!' Repeated later: 'Always make sense to ask: what would Shakespeare have done'. In 1976 she told a journalist, 'I often read [Shakespeare or Homer] when I am writing in the hope' of being influenced by them. 'Unfortunately somebody that great hasn't got a style you can imitate. The greatest writers have an evasive tone, they are open to the world'.[3] Great writers, according to this definition, were somehow absent from their own texts, a point to which we shall return.

Bayley devoted a whole book to Shakespearean tragedy, but Murdoch never wrote even an entire

[1] She explained how the novel title came from Rupert Brooke's poem 'Grantchester' and how it illuminated the 'formless' Anne – referred to within the title – whose lack of definition offended her form-obsessed husband Randall. She proposed that this contrast (form versus formless) was one that could be observed in life. Another question that lingers in my mind came from my close friend (David Palmer-Jones) who asked Iris Murdoch whether she felt with the passing of the years 'more enchanted or more disenchanted?'. She may have tried to dodge answering but none the less came down on the side of disenchantment.

[2] cf. 'How short the plays of Shakespeare are when we re-read them, compared with the vast radiant object about which we have in the interim been thinking.' Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992), p.142, hereafter *MGM*.

[3] Sheila Hale, interview from 'Women Writers Now: Their Approach and Their Apprenticeship', in *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction: Conversations with Iris Murdoch,* Gillian Dooley (ed.), (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 30-32, p.31.

article uniquely on Shakespeare (unlike a very short one on Tolstoy). Her remarks about him are scattered within her best essays over nearly forty years, within interviews, in her journals, and asides within her novels. Creating a coherent account of her Shakespearian interest entails bricolage. That said, there is a remarkable consistency to her contemplation. And – before turning to her fiction – I would like to sketch five aspects of her celebration of him: his stature, which connects with his creations of character; his invisibility; his simplicity; his status as a religious writer especially in *King Lear*; and finally his propensity towards the tragi-comic. I then move to three of Murdoch's strongest novels, each in my view nourished differently by her Shakespearean interest.

1: Stature

We start with stature and the question of how Shakespeare's pre-eminence relates to his creation of character. Murdoch venerated his invention of character, for example in her land-mark essay 'Against Dryness' in 1961.[4] The previous year Bayley had championed 'personality' in his *The Characters of Love: A Study in the Literature of Personality*: he wrote, '[t]here is a sense in which the highest compliment we can pay Shakespeare is to discuss his great plays as if they were also great novels'.[5] Both Bayley and Murdoch well understood that to celebrate 'character' was then to risk being seen as middle-brow. L.C. Knights in 1933 had written 'How many children had Lady Macbeth?', arguing that speculation about Shakespeare's characters as if they escaped the text and lived independently – a tendency made fashionable by Romantic criticism – was stupid and misplaced.[6] Characters were mere verbal artefacts and speculation about them ignored the over-arching form within which they subsisted.

Both Murdoch and Bayley were content to be unfashionable. Murdoch (like Bayley) championed the common reader, and lamented his or her abandonment by critics and novelists alike, while ruefully acknowledging that Russian writers' retention of the knack of creating character – Solzhenitsyn and Pasternak – was 'a case of arrested development. They are still writing as if it were the nineteenth century [...]'.[7] In 1961 Murdoch's and Bayley's insistence on character as central to literature looked quaintly nostalgic. Today it seems ahead of its time. Stephen Greenblatt – who wrote in 2005 of the stupendous power of Shylock, the explosive power and inwardness of *Hamlet* and of 'Falstaff's [...] mysterious inner principle of vitality [...] as if he could float free not only of Shakespeare's sources in life and in art but also of the play in which he appears'[8] has also asked, '[h]ow do characters in a play – who are, after all, only jumbles of words upon a page – convey that they have something going on inside them? How do spectators get the impression of depths comparable to those they can barely fathom and understand within themselves?'.[9] These are Murdoch's questions too: 'great characters in great novels have this inexhaustible quality [....] people argue endlessly about characters in Henry James [...] in Tolstoy [...] in Proust [...] in Shakespeare. There's something profoundly and interestingly unclear about them'.[10]

Shakespeare was to Murdoch the patron saint of novelists, displaying everything a novelist needs:

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[4] Iris Murdoch, 'Against Dryness', in *Existentialists and Mystics*, Peter Conradi (ed.), (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), p.287-95, hereafter *EM*.

[5] John Bayley, *The Characters of Love: A Study in the Literature of Personality*, first published by Constable, 1960, reprinted by Chatto & Windus, 1968, p.42.

[6] L.C. Knights, 'How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth? An Essay in the Theory and Practice of Shakespeare Criticism' (1933) in *Explorations* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), 15-54.

[7] Dooley, p.31. Both Murdoch and Bayley had a love affair with the idea of the un-mediated – or innocent – text. The professionalization of English Literature teaching famously divided writers from their audiences who henceforth required salaried professors to decrypt and mediate literature's formal and/or ideological codes. This coincided with Modernism, with its inbuilt contempt for the common reader.

[8] Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (2004); (London: Random House, 2012), p.222.

[9] Ibid., p.282.

[10] Dooley, p.80.

'magic, plot, characters, construction'.[11] She regarded the novelist's creation of character as the most precious of gifts, a moral reminder of human difference, an exercise of freedom and charity, and hence an education in itself. 'There is a breath of tolerance and generosity and intelligent kindness which blows out of Homer and Shakespeare and the great novelists. The great artist sees the vast interesting collection of what is other than himself and does not picture the world in his own image. I think this particular kind of merciful objectivity is virtue […]' (*EM*, p.30). It was as if Shakespeare, despite writing before the age of the novel, were nonetheless writing novels as well as plays. Bayley develops this idea: most Shakespeare plays appear to have a phantom novel behind them (albeit not *Troilus*) which may be productively at odds with the text that generates it. He interested Murdoch in the idea of the Shakespearean tragic hero as 'really' an ordinary person upon whom a tragic *role* is foisted. She noted in her journal: 'Hamlet, a bookish young man interested in the theatre, Lear a silly old chap who idealises his family'.[12] This last perception she expanded on when she wrote, 'All good tragedy is anti-tragedy [….] Lear wants to enact the false tragic, the solemn, the complete. Shakespeare forces him to enact the true tragic, the absurd, the incomplete' (*EM*, p.240).

Even Shakespeare's minor characters famously enjoy a margin of excess life, their speech often opening interesting and unexpected new perspectives. Consider Justice Shallow's invitation to the company to enter his orchard in Gloucestershire and 'eat a last year's pippin of my own grafting' together with a dish of caraway seeds.[13] His innocent pride in his domesticity and his discursive vanity, here as elsewhere, let in fresh air, comedy and pathos. Murdoch twice praises Shallow and Silence's scenes in which – you may remember – they dilate upon the mysteries of economic inflation ('How [much] a good yoke of bullocks at Stamford Fair?') and the mysteries of mortality ('Death is certain. Is old Double of your town living yet?') with a comical equality.[14] In Shakespeare, as in Dostoyevsky and Dickens, 'while vast destinies are being decided', as Murdoch puts this, whether the major characters live or die, 'somewhere else quite close by something small and frivolous and quite ridiculous is happening'.[15] That helps to give the great plays their air of inclusiveness.

2: Invisibility

Shakespeare's quality of invisibility made a deep impression on Murdoch. She followed Keats and Romantic critics in pointing out that his creation of character is dependent upon his own absence from the text. She connected this to virtue ('Negative Capability').[16] Her Shakespeare, like Keats's, unmakes or unselfs himself in order to clear a space for others, so that we know little or nothing about who he really was. She evidently believed that he had a self to decreate and was always aware that a great artist could be a bad man, the virtue living uniquely – as it were – within the work. Her reference to him to one friend as 'a wordsmith trying to practise his craft while continually distracted by needing to bow and scrape and "keep the grandees happy"' suggests self-interest as one motive for camouflage;[17] her allusion to him in *The Black Prince* as a 'businessman […] interested in making money' might endorse this.[18] In her journal entry of 10 November 1970, she wrote: 'Any high theory about Shakespeare tends to be inadequate not because he is so divine but because he is so human. Art too is jumble in the end. (Even great art is.) How important is this?' The following month she referred cryptically in her journal to Shakespeare as a 'cheerful, nose-picking whore-master'. She once remarked on what a disaster it would be if a contemporary biography of Shakespeare one day came to light.

She believed that very occasionally Shakespeare did reveal an obsession in his work. Masochism

[11] Dooley, p.31.

[12] Iris Murdoch, Journal, 13 April 1970.

[13] William Shakespeare, *Henry IV: Part 2*, Act 5: scene 3.

[14] Ibid., Act 3: scene 2.

[15] Dooley, p.191.

[16] John Keats, Letter, 21 December 1817.

[17] Letter from David Morgan to Peter Conradi 13 February 2000.

[18] Iris Murdoch, *The Black Prince* (1973); (London: Vintage, 1999), p.201.

for instance, is flagged up in *The Black Prince* where Bradley Pearson tells Julian Baffin 'Shakespeare is the king of masochists' (p.200). (Bradley does not explain, beyond suggesting that the emotional politics of the Sonnet-sequence in general shows Shakespeare crucified by love. But consider Sonnet 57, 'Being your slave, what should I do but tend / Upon the hours and times of your desire?'). Shakespeare's sado-masochism, she noted in her journals, is blown about and largely blown away by the fresh gales of his genius. She pondered how within his work Shakespeare was able to enjoy his obsessions and transcend them at the same time.

3: Simplicity

With regard to the simplicity of Shakespeare, Murdoch noted in her journal for November 1965 whilst reading *As You Like It* that it 'has a kind of lucidity I could fawn on. If only, if only'. She often praised Shakespeare's 'unassuming simple lucidity' or simplicity (*EM*, p.242). The student may protest. Much of Shakespeare is neither simple nor lucid. His language is, as Patrick Parrinder observes, 'archaic in grammar, syntax and vocabulary [...] marked by idiosyncrasy [and] lexical profusion [...] instability and tolerance of apparent redundancy [....] He has frequent lapses into pedantry and obscurity.[19] He requires elaborate foot-noting; and even his contemporary Ben Jonson famously caviled, 'His wit was in his own power; would the rule of it had been so too.'[20] Samuel Johnson echoed the criticism, 'A quibble was to him the fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it.'[21]

Happily, this is of course not the whole story. Peter Foster in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, suffering late adolescent *Angst*, pleads to be told of the existence of one good thing in a fallen world where all is contaminated and muddled and nasty and slimed over and cracked. He wants one good icon or starting-point. His aunt, Morgan, fumbles, then recites Ariel's 'Full fathom five thy father lies', at the end of which Peter concedes 'Yes that's perfect.'[22] The song's mysterious simplicity cuts and changes his mood. And it is of course not only the short lyrics ('When icicles hang by the wall') that have the quality of immediacy Murdoch favours.[23] Prince Hal's 'I know thee not old man' has a breath-bereaving directness that connects to its pain and pathos.[24] 'Thou'llt come no more / Never, never, never, never, never', pierces to the heart of grief, rendering comment supererogatory.[25] There are such moments in every play of what Bradley Pearson terms *oratio recta*, when the reader or play-goer feels uncannily and directly addressed. That Shakespeare's could be a *difficult* simplicity she never directly admits; but in any case the whole structure of *The Black Prince* does this for her.

4: Religion

Murdoch thought of Shakespeare as a religious poet, especially in King Lear. Her single longest published meditation on Shakespeare comes in chapter 5 of *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, called 'Comic and Tragic'. Much of this is devoted to *King Lear*, in her view the greatest of modern tragedies, contemplation of which causes her to call Shakespeare a 'deeply' religious poet. The play's religiousness connects for her to the desolation induced by its double ending, its absence of any false consolation and consequent power to distress. Act V scene 3 begins with the false promise engendered by its vision of redemptive peace: 'We two alone will sing like birds i'th cage', which is destroyed by Cordelia's hanging and Lear's expiring at the end. 'Tragedy must mock itself internally through being essentially, in its own way, a broken whole' (*MGM*, pp.116-7); this *Lear* achieves.

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[19] Patrick Parrinder, 'Shakespeare and (Non) standard English, *European English Messenger*, V.1, (1996), 14-20.

[20] Ben Jonson, *The Works of Ben Jonson* (London: D. Midwinter, 1756), p.91.

[21] Samuel Johnson, 'Preface to Shakespeare,' in *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, Volume VII: Johnson on Shakespeare*, Arthur Sherbo (ed.), (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), p.74.

[22] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act 1: Scene 2; Iris Murdoch, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970); (London: Vintage, 2001), p.180.

[23] William Shakespeare, *Love's Labours Lost*, Act 5: Scene 2.

[24] William Shakespeare, *Henry IV: Part 2*, Act 5: Scene 5.

[25] William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act 5: Scene 3.

This ending famously so shocked Samuel Johnson that he could not bear to re-read the play. And so Johnson had no objection to Nahum Tate's 1681 re-writing whereby Lear and Gloucester survive, Cordelia is saved and marries Edgar. Tate's was of course the standard stage version of Shakespeare's play until well into the nineteenth century.[26]

But the concept of poetic justice – that virtue should triumph – itself seemed to Murdoch scandalously false to life, and it was precisely in its challenge to poetic justice that she thought the play's greatness lay. She accordingly cordially endorsed Schopenhauer's scornful attack on Johnson: 'The true sense of tragedy is the deeper insight that it is not his own individual sins that the hero atones for *but for original sin, i.e. the crime of existence itself*' [my italics], Schopenhauer remarks, anticipating Kafka.[27] *King Lear* is great because it looks out on what she terms the Void.[28] The play contemplates the huge power and triumph of evil with a 'steady eye' and shows 'the connection of truth and justice with the apprehension of death' (*MGM*, p.117). 'Perhaps', she argues, 'there is no mystery and no God, only pain and utter loss, and helpless, senseless death' (*MGM*, p.119). The figure of Cordelia fascinates Murdoch: 'Part of the weirdness of the play belongs to the curiously hard, unresponsive semi-symbolic nature of the character of Cordelia' (*MGM*, p.118). Cordelia is 'like a Platonic Form' (*MGM*, p.122), an object of love but also a symbol of death; 'Cordelia is a religious figure [...] an image of the highest morality, the truth which wears the face of death and does not console or respond, yet (and so) can enlighten, bring about "new being"' (*MGM*, p.143).

To praise a writer's depiction and embrace of a universe that is both godless and unjust as 'religious' is – to put the matter bluntly – original. There are a number of aspects here. Although Murdoch countenanced the possibility that Shakespeare's religious sympathies lay secretly with the Catholic cause, she approved of the way the plays themselves read as post-Christian and therefore as flattering her own world-view. She had come to see both God and the after-life as anti-religious bribes to us – like children – into behaving well. The religious task, as she expressed it, was to be good-for-nothing, without thought of reward – a point of view she associated with the Christian mystics; any punishment for bad behavior would come – if at all – not in a fictitious future life but in this one. Perhaps she expresses this best where she writes that 'God does not and cannot exist. But what led us to conceive of him does exist and is *constantly* experienced and pictured' (*MGM,* p.508).

In the middle of Murdoch's disquisition on the bleakness of *King Lear*, she asks rhetorically, 'How can such a terrible planet dare to have any art at all?' (*MGM*, p.122). Why on earth should our planet *not* have art? This aside overlooks both the fact that art creates not real but counterfeit worlds and also that in any case humankind cannot, as Eliot observed, bear very much reality.[29] I breathe a sigh of relief when in another aside she observes that 'Outsiders often help bereaved people by reminding them that they have urgent duties and must not remain in stilled contemplation of what is uniquely terrible' (*MGM*, p.140). Exactly so: we are not suited to the long perspectives, as Larkin puts this, that link us to our losses.[30]

5: Tragi-Comedy

The tragi-comic aspect of Shakespeare is central to Murdoch's thought about his work. Her account of *King Lear* – like Nahum Tate's though for opposite reasons – neglects the role of the Fool, of foolery, and fooling. Happily, this is not her last word. She knew – and indeed insisted – that the novel is a comic form, as it were intrinsically given to the sad-comic or tragi-comic. Two passages

[26] Tate's version of *Romeo & Juliet* (1679) also ended happily.

[27] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol.1. (1818); E.F.J.Payne (trans.), (New York: Dover, 1969), p.254.

[28] Iris Murdoch, *MGM*, pp.498-503.

[29] T.S Eliot, *Four Quartets: Burnt Norton in The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* (London: Faber & Faber, 1969), p.172.

[30] Philip Larkin, 'Reference Back' in *Collected Poems* (London: Marvell Press and Faber & Faber, 1988), p.106.

illustrate this. In *The Sovereignty of Good* Murdoch wrote,[31]

> The great deaths of literature are few, but they show us with an exemplary clarity the way in which art invigorates us by a juxtaposition, almost an identification, of pointlessness and value. The death of Patroclus, the death of Cordelia, the death of Petya Rostov. All is vanity [....] Perhaps one of the greatest achievements of all is to join this sense of absolute mortality not to the tragic, but to the comic. Shallow and Silence. Stefan Trofimovitch Verkhovensky [in Dostoyevsky's The Devils].
> (*EM*, p.372)

She arrived again at a similar idea in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*:

> Much of the greatest literary art is a tragi-comic, or perhaps we should say sad-comic, condensation, a kind of pathos which is aware of terrible things, and which eschews definition and declared formal purpose. Such pathos is everywhere in Shakespeare.[32] We also see it in the great novels. The novel is the literary form best suited to this sort of free reflection, sad-comic and discursive truth-telling [....] What it loses in hard-edged formal impact, it gains in its grasp of detail, its freedom from tempo, its ability to be irrelevant, to reflect without haste upon persons and situations and in general pursue what is contingent and incomplete. (*MGM*, p.93)[33]

The observation that Shakespeare mixes pathos and comedy goes back at least to Coleridge: 'He was not droll in one scene and melancholy in the other but both the one and the other in the same scene'[34] – and it is saluted by the contemporary critic James Wood who terms it the Comedy of forgiveness (laughing with) as opposed to the Comedy of correction (laughing at).[35] Wood agrees with Murdoch that Shakespeare is in this regard a progenitor of the English novel.

6: Influence

On the question of influence,[36] I think that contemplating Shakespeare (together with Dostoevsky) allowed Murdoch to relax in her mature novels, and to let go of any urge towards simple realism.[37] Re-reading her novels to prepare for this talk, I am struck by what elegant, *ingenious – and lethal* –

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[31] cf. *The Black Prince*, 'We are bottomlessly comic to each other [....] The novel is a comic form. Language is a comic form, and makes jokes in its sleep' (p.81).

[32] See Don Pedro in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Act 2: Scene 1: 'out of question, you were born in a merry hour', and 'No sure my Lord, my mother cried; but then there was a star danced, and under that was I born'; Lear in *King Lear*, Act I: Scene 4: 'Dost thou call me fool, boy?' 'All thy other titles thou hast given away; that thou wast born with'; Sir Andrew Aguecheek in *Twelfth Night*, Act 2: Scene 3: 'I was adored once, too'.

[33] cf. Iris Murdoch, *The Fire and the Sun*, where, apropos of a sublime absurd, comic or tragic, Murdoch commends *King Lear* Act 5: Scene 3, and *Henry IV: Part 2*, Act 3: Scene 2 (*EM*, p.456).

[34] R.A. Foakes, *Coleridge on Shakespeare: The Text of the Lectures of 1811-12* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p.106.

[35] James Wood, *The Irresponsible Self: On Laughter and the Novel* (London: Random House, 2013).

[36] A.S. Byatt addressed this in *Iris Murdoch* (London: Longman and the British Council, 1976) when she proposed that Shakespeare was useful in four different ways to Murdoch: a) enabling her to side-step the arid debate among English novelists in the 1970s about whether to rebel against, or to parrot, the conventions of the great nineteenth century realist novelists; b) representing the Good; c) developing a very large cast of characters whose peripheral characters have life too, and d) dispensing with average probability in the story while having intense realism of character portrayal.

[37] Dostoyevsky – referred to in *The Black Prince* (p.351) though never named as the writer questioning his fellow-prisoners in Imperial Russia about their sufferings – surely provides another leading prototype, with his hectically compressed plots, his fascination with perversities of the spirit, his love of making his characters 'sin their way to Christ' (as D.H. Lawrence observed) and – in *The Idiot* – his use of erotic imbroglio as a plot device. Murdoch told me in 1982 that she often re-read *The Idiot* too.

machines these plots are. 'Stories are art too, you know,' Bradley tells Julian (*The Black Prince*, p.240.) They are not probable, but their cavalier artifice permits her – under Shakespeare's star or banner as it were – to tell various sorts of truth. They combine strict formal and dramatic contrivance – or fantasy – with an outward flow of meaning.

There are, to start with, incidental echoes. Murdoch's novels usually open by inventing an in-bred and inward-looking *court* of characters. Then love is her central and important topic as in Shakespeare's Comedies (the routine complaint that her treatment of work or money is inadequate seems to me like charging *Anna Karenina* with saying nothing about China). *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It* feature girls dressed up as boys (played of course by boys): Murdoch favours boys' names for girls – Georgie, Tommy, Julian – and at the crisis of *The Black Prince* Bradley can make love to Julian only when she dresses as a man – in fact as Hamlet. Both writers, we might say, are bisexual and favour erotic casuistry. Finally, the plots of both Shakespeare and Murdoch are sometimes powered by rivalry between brothers (*Hamlet*, *The Tempest*, *As You Like It*, *A Severed Head*, *The Italian Girl*, and – if first cousins are included here – *The Sea, the Sea*).

By 'influence' – rather than being given a prototype to copy or re-write (as Shakespeare of course himself did)[38] – Murdoch seems in the first instance to mean being invisibly helped, 'inspired' or 'given courage'. But there is also often one key point of public intersection between her novel and a Shakespeare play. It is as if through such conduits that she hopes for a blood transfusion from the bard, a transfer of blessings. It was a source of sorrow to her that her plots threatened to overwhelm and victimise her characters, who were – as Lorna Sage quipped – 'far too individual to remember'.[39] But her characters in the novels of the 1970s are, under Shakespeare's influence, her most memorable. Simon Foster is one of the most attractive gay characters in English fiction. Gilbert, Lizzie, Rosina and Peregrine stay with you after you stop reading *The Sea, the Sea*. And so on.

A pivotal – and thrillingly improbable – scene in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (Part two: chapter three) has the wicked Julius King and the hugely sympathetic Simon Foster hiding behind a Robert Adam portico in a museum to eavesdrop. Two stooges duly appear – Simon's brother Rupert Foster and Rupert's sister-in-law Morgan Browne – and they tentatively embark on a love-passage. Julius has – it turns out – stolen, doctored and sent love-letters to deceive each into believing that the other is in love with him or her. This scene of course borrows from or plunders *Much Ado About Nothing* in those middle scenes where friends within the arbour first cozen, flatter and shame Benedick, whom they know to be listening, into falling in love with Beatrice by claiming that she loves him; this is then mirrored by the same ploy with Beatrice in the pleachèd bower. But the novel's indebtedness to the play is more complex than this. Don John in the same play stages a scene to deceive Claudio into believing that his beloved future wife Hero is – on the eve of their wedding – treacherously, shamelessly sleeping with someone else. Julius in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* combines both roles, as he works hard to separate Simon from his partner Axel Nilsson at the same time as he works to bring Morgan and Rupert together and divide Rupert from his wife, Hilda. Murdoch awards Julius the props of an evening cape and a silver-topped cane to make the point that he is essentially a stage demon.

It is surely astonishingly daring – outlandish, extravagant – to borrow Shakespeare's conventional comedic stage-business of eavesdropping and situate this within the detailed verisimilitude of a realistic novel. Murdoch thereby stretches credulity in order to test out her – and Julius's – hypothesis that everyone is intrinsically promiscuous or – as Benedick finally puts it – 'Man is a giddy thing, and this is my conclusion'.[40] She acknowledges her Shakespearian inspiration by making Julius call his manipulations a 'midsummer enchantment with two asses' (*A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, p.256). We are to defer to Shakespeare's authority – as does Murdoch herself – in order to enjoy what

[38] Richard Todd's interesting *Iris Murdoch: The Shakespearian Interest* (London: Vision Press, 1979) seems to this reader to suffer from the misconception that any given Murdoch novel attempts to re-write a Shakespeare play.
[39] Lorna Sage, 'The Pursuit of Imperfection' in *Critical Quarterly*, 19, no. 2 (Summer 1977), p.61-8.
[40] William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, Act 5: Scene 4.

ensues. A later scene with Hilda wandering all night on a Pembrokeshire moor also distantly recalls *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*.

But Murdoch's novel has a quite different flavour – of bitter comedy or tragi-comedy – and a quite different agenda. She is not 're-writing' *Much Ado* in 1960s South Kensington: more stealing one plot device for her own purposes. Her brooding about the theme of inconstancy is given a radically different top-spin. I think *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* probably her single most successful novel and – once you grant the extreme artificiality and absurdity of its premise – its psychology is acute and its characters more deeply and thoroughly imagined than before. Julius partly succeeds in proving his thesis, destroying Rupert thereby, but partly fails, as Simon and Axel survive his machinations.

7: Universality

In his memoir *Iris*, Bayley records Murdoch saying in 1954 that she wanted – like Shakespeare – something for everyone in her novels.[41] *The Black Prince* notably aspires to this multi-layered condition. The novel compels us as a superb thriller, a black book about marriage – 'I say we will have no more marriages', as Hamlet puts the matter – and a dark book about authorial rivalry.[42] It also keeps up a running commentary about *Hamlet* and contains a seminar on the play, while advancing an esoteric form of Neoplatonism. The Black Prince of the title is Apollo, not Hamlet, and the novel explores connections between love and the path towards wisdom.

The novel makes a number of uses of *Hamlet*. The simplest is to continue Hamlet's metaphysical complaint about the contract of human life. Another is to licence a playful self-reflexiveness. The narrator early expresses his intention to create 'a hero not unlike myself [pursuing] a series of reflections about life and art. I wanted to produce a statement of what could be called my philosophy' (*The Black Prince*, p.62). The most famous speech in the whole of Shakespeare catalogues the 'heart-aches' and humiliations that might drive the moral agent to suicide: 'The whips and scorns of time, Th'oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely'.[43] Johnson observed that Hamlet, in enumerating these miseries, 'forgets [...] that he is a prince, and mentions many evils to which inferior stations only are exposed'.[44] These are indeed presumably evils Shakespeare himself encountered. T*he Black Prince* sometimes reads as if Murdoch had set herself the task of updating Shakespeare's famous catalogue of woes:

> The world is perhaps ultimately to be defined as a place of suffering [....] if boredom and disappointment were our gravest trials, and if [...] we grieved little at every bereavement and went to death as to sleep our whole morality might be immensely [...] different. (*The Black Prince*, p.348)[45]

> This is the planet where cancer reigns, where people regularly [...] die like flies from floods and famine and disease, where people fight each other with hideous weapons to whose effects even nightmares cannot do justice, where men terrify and torture each other and spend whole lifetimes telling lies out of fear. This is where we live.
>
> (*The Black Prince*, p.349)

In his seminar with Julian, Bradley describes the singularity of *Hamlet* as a great work of literature in which everyone – unusually – identifies with the hero. He says 'of course Hamlet is Shakespeare' (*The Black Prince*, p.197), and 'if the greatest of all geniuses permits himself to be the hero of one his

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

42 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 3: Scene 1.

43 Ibid. The passage continues: 'The pangs of despised love, the law's delay, The insolence of office, and the spurns That patient merit of th' unworthy takes'.

44 Samuel Johnson, *Johnson on Shakespeare: Essays and Notes Selected and Set Forth* (Oxford: Milford, 1916), p.192.

45 On the idea of 'going to death as if to sleep', recall Hamlet's twice-uttered 'To die, to sleep – No more'.

own plays, has this happened by accident? [....] the play concerns Shakespeare's own identity'[....] 'Shakespeare is at his most cryptic when he is talking about himself [....] by the sheer intensity of his own meditation upon the problem of his identity has produced a new language, a special rhetoric of consciousness' (*The Black Prince*, p.198).

In *The Black Prince*, as Murdoch tacitly concurred in interview (Bellamy), we also feel her presence to be close, generating 'a kind of trembling emotional excitement'.[46] Both Murdoch and her first-person narrator Bradley are puritans alarmed by contingency and educated by passion. Then Murdoch famously jokes about her own writing, when Julian describes her father's novels as like 'Jesus and Mary and the Fisher King all chasing round and round dressed up as people in Chelsea' (*The Black Prince*, p.137).[47] If the Fisher King refers to Carel Fisher in *The Time of the Angels*, 'Jesus and Mary' comprise an ironic reference to *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, which contains both a Christ-figure (Tallis Browne) and a comical God-the-Father (Leonard Browne.) If *Hamlet* is self-referring, so too is *The Black Prince*, with its conflict between two rival writers, each of whom carry aspects of Murdoch herself. This is implicit in Bradley's seminar, which picks up the idea that the simplicity of *Hamlet* is in some sense a difficult simplicity.

> *Hamlet* is nearer to the wind than Shakespeare ever sailed, even in the sonnets [....] He has performed a supreme creative feat, a work endlessly reflecting upon itself, not discursively but in its very substance [...] a meditation upon the bottomless trickery of consciousness and the redemptive role of words in the lives of those without identity, that is, human beings. *Hamlet* is words and so is Hamlet. He is as witty as Jesus Christ, but whereas Christ speaks Hamlet is speech. He is the tormented empty sinful consciousness of man seared by the bright light of art, the god's flayed victim dancing the dance of creation. The cry of anguish is obscure because it is overheard. It is the eloquence of direct speech, it is *oratio recta* not *oratio obliqua*. But it is not addressed to us. Shakespeare is passionately exposing himself to the ground and author of his being. He is speaking as few artists can speak, in the first person and yet at the pinnacle of artifice. (*The Black Prince*, p.199)

8: The Tempest

In compiling the draft of a list of works by which she has been influenced in 1976, *The Tempest* is the only Shakespeare Murdoch mentions: by implication the play she loves best of all, *primus inter pares*. In her journal she writes: 'For B[ritish] C[ouncil] etc: a list with comments of books and authors that influenced me? ... *Iliad*, *Symposium*, *Tempest*, *Sir Gawain*, *Mansfield Park*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Our Mutual Friend*, *The Golden Bowl*, *Fear and Trembling*, *L'Attente de Dieu*, *Brothers Karamazov*, *Proust*?'[48] She often returned to *The Tempest*. She thought about that play throughout the spring of 1969. 'Reading *The Tempest* immediately tears stream down. Why?' It concerned 'power undoing itself in favour of love'; 'the triumph of spiritual (free) power over magical (obsessional) power'. It concerned the 'role of forgiveness'.

The Tempest was on her mind again in 1976 because it fuelled the novel she was then drafting, *The Sea, the Sea*, arguably her greatest, and the one for which she would win the Booker prize in 1978. The narrator Charles Arrowby was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, and his grandfather lived in a house called Shaxton. 'Shax' is Murdoch's private code or shorthand for Shakespeare and by such means she is once more invoking Shakespeare's help and inspiration. Charles's profession – he is a theatre director – allows theatrical reference and metaphor to play throughout the book and helps license the artificiality of the plot. Charles retires to the sea to repent of a life of egoism, to abjure

[46] Dooley, p.47.

[47] Also when Bradley criticises Baffin as 'trying [...] to take over the world by emptying himself over it like scented bathwater' (*The Black Prince*, pp.186-7).

[48] Iris Murdoch, journal: 4 July 1976.

both the rough magic of stage direction and also his lifelong and rapacious habit of manipulating friends and lovers. Many of those with whom he has unfinished business – or he has hurt – arrive to settle scores. Among these are Lizzie Scherer and Gilbert Opian. Lizzie loves Charles with a servitude so unselfish as to recall that of Ariel for Prospero. Gilbert is jokily designed to recall the monster Caliban: he is gay and – though in his sixties – wears make-up and still hunts for boys, and, Caliban-like, he comes to fetch and carry for Charles. When Charles refers to one evening as 'like a masque put on by the spirit of melancholy' (*The Sea, the Sea*, p.389), Murdoch may possibly be recalling the famous masque Prospero puts on for Miranda and Ferdinand.

But the discontinuities between the novel and the play are as striking as the similarities. Prospero is a good, white magician, while Charles – to put it mildly – is power-drunk and un-good. He kidnaps Hartley – now an old lady – whom he loved when they were growing up until she jilted him, and in so doing creates remarkable chaos. The part of the good magician Prospero has now to be played by Charles's first cousin James, a Tibetan Buddhist adept, capable – we are invited to believe – of tricks such as raising his body temperature, levitating, and choosing the moment of his own death. A sub-text suggests both that James has always loved Charles and also that James's unselfish ability to relinquish Charles contrasts with Charles's inability to let go of Hartley. James abjures his own rough magic more convincingly than does Charles.[49]

Murdoch admired Shakespeare's ability to combine form and character in a felicitous way so as to produce a large space in which the characters can exist freely and yet serve the purposes of the tale. He gives us 'a sense of space, as if one had been invited into some large hall of reflection' (*EM*, p.28). She did not undervalue form or structure. 'I think the work of art should have a very strong internal structure [....] within this closed structure you can picture free beings [....] Shakespeare is the king of this whole business [....] he is the king of the novel, he is the greatest writer who ever wrote and if one thinks how those plays combine an extraordinarily strong form with the cohabitation of these characters who are so independent that they were strolling around in real life as it were, they are strolling around in our minds as independent people'.[50] Through her own devout meditation on Shakespeare, this is an achievement Murdoch herself got closest to in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, *The Black Prince* and *The Sea, the Sea*.

[49] Murdoch noted that in Shakespeare while great destinies are being decided, somewhere else quite close by something small and frivolous and quite ridiculous is happening. Charles's overhearing Hartley and Ben peacefully playing 'Greensleeves' together on their twin recorders towards the end of the novel has something of this quality of serendipity. So does – at a crucial and potentially violent juncture – James's recognizing Ben from a photo he once spotted in World War 2 and establishing a degree of instant trust thereby. (This also echoes a lost scene from *The Devils*, where Bishop Tikhon recognizes Stavrogin from one distant encounter.)

[50] Dooley, p.101.

Ray Byram

Memoir and Letters from Iris Murdoch

Iris at the University of California, Santa Barbara

That I should meet, let alone later visit, Iris Murdoch was a very unlikely event indeed. *A Severed Head* was required reading in a college course in contemporary fiction and, though I was a philosophy major, her work in ethics was not a part of the curriculum. My earliest memory of her and John is warm and admiring more than it is vivid and accurate; this is, I think, due to my only meeting her briefly, at first.

The cultural role of the Committee on Arts & Lectures in the intellectual and musical life of the University of California, Santa Barbara fifty or so years ago was vital. The campus was known in the 60s and 70s as 'party central' and confirmed the stereotype of 'sun, surf, and beer': it may still be like that. From 1972 until June 1980 I was the Arts & Lectures Assistant for Lectures and Films and this meant an administrative function to the subcommittees for those two areas. Films would include a presentation, with a semester focusing on a series of ten Fellini films (for example), a lecture series entitled 'The Future of Man', weekly guest lectures to augment the academic department, and the Regents Lectureship program that was designed to bring scholars to campus for a period of four to ten weeks. It was in correspondence, offering Iris a three-week lectureship, that we first had contact. She graciously declined but expressed interest in visiting if it became possible. All of this correspondence can now be found in the archives at UC Santa Barbara. I replied that we would welcome a visit anytime, although the stipend we could offer would be far less than the lofty sum of $2,000.

In late 1977 or early 1978, Iris wrote to say that she and John would be visiting California and, if we still had interest in them spending a few days on campus, they would be delighted to visit: we were more than interested. I believe I offered $600 for a three to four-day visit that would include one public lecture and their being available to meet with students. There was never any quibbling about the fee as I assumed we would be an interesting stop between Los Angeles and Berkeley. All that follows can perhaps be confirmed from details in Iris's journals: this is my memory almost forty years later.

Iris was instantly likable and there was nothing of the 'literary lion' about her. I wanted to be acquainted with her and not merely the host. John was another matter: charming, equally disarming and seemingly ingenuous, his stammer made it very difficult for conversation. I got around it but it was not easy. She was very quiet, the low voice, and she always had rapt attention for others. There was nothing casual about the way in which Iris listened and made one feel heard. Simone Weil's statement that 'Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity' was how I felt being in her presence.

A friend and I met them at the train station and settled them into the Faculty Club a little way off campus. There was a public lecture by Iris and she met with graduate students in both the Departments of English and Philosophy whilst John ran a casual seminar with English students. There was the obligatory dinner at the home of William Frost, Chairman of the English Department.

In the midst of all this, John and Iris came to dinner at my flat with friends of mine where conversation flowed, the evening went on until the early hours, and we all drank too much. On another afternoon, we took a picnic into the hills at Franceschi Park and stopped in at the home of Margaret Mallory, who was hosting a lunch for the Art Department. We then went to the beach for a long walk and to search for moonstones. I did not understand then what the sea, water in general, and stones (in particular) meant to Iris: that would come later during my visit to Oxford. I wish a camera had been there to catch us barefoot, John with a long piece of driftwood on his shoulder positioned like a cannon, sitting on the rocks laughing: a glorious end to the day. The four days were

an understandably heady experience and remain a treasured memory for me. It was a wonderful visit and one more thing to be noted was that everywhere Iris went one hand held a notebook, the other, a pen. She made notes on everything and I do hope these survive.

Over the next two years we corresponded and that is the package of letters sent to the Kingston archive, along with this memoir. I would fear ever reading mine and hope they are lost! One letter in this small collection captures the 'attention' aspect and the openness of my correspondence with Iris. I had broken up with a partner and Iris responded; in that letter there is also mention of my coming to England the following year.

Visiting Iris at Cedar Lodge

Margaret Mallory was an extraordinary person, a valued colleague, and a treasured friend. She was invited to Sir Peter Pears's 70th birthday celebration in the UK and invited me to join her. It would be a six week trip that would take us to England, Germany and Czechoslovakia and I have never travelled like it since. In planning the trip, I wrote to Iris and she invited us to stay at Cedar Lodge, where she would give a dinner for friends she thought we might enjoy meeting.

Arriving early in Oxford, Margaret and I took tea at The Randolph Hotel in Oxford and then set out for Cedar Lodge. It was a somewhat wet English afternoon when we arrived. The trees and shrubbery surrounding Cedar Lodge had grown large and the gravel entrance was surrounded by knee high grass that grew right to the front door. Iris met us at the door and, after hugging us both, we got the first sight of the interior. It was an English Grey Gardens scene (from the Maysles Brothers film) and not to the point of unsanitary … but almost. Clutter reigned, furniture stood though dilapidated, the upholstery was torn, the rugs threadbare and dirty, and the main room wall covered on two sides by a sagging, equally threadbare tapestry. Paper was everywhere along with books and magazines. One could be shocked (I was at first), appalled (I was not), or rather charmed by the chaos of it all (I was). Margaret was not, not aided by Iris first calling her Marjorie.

Margaret was to have Iris's bedroom which had a very high double bed. Iris's tunics, along with smocks and jackets hung on hooks, not hangars or in a wardrobe. I was to sleep in Iris's study and was thrilled. Stones, some of which she had collected in California, were everywhere; floor, desktop, window sills. Outside the study the upstairs hallway was lined with stacks of old New Yorker magazines. Everything here was beyond mere eccentricity.

We joined Iris downstairs for a drink and tour of the 'garden' which consisted of a large, sloping expanse of knee high grass with three paths cut through it by a mower. One path, to the base of the garden, ended at an enormous, three-metre-tall hogweed, another to the left, possibly went around to the front, and the third to the right went to Iris's glass conservatory. It was perhaps two metres square and had a cistern heated by electricity (!) in which Iris liked to bathe. I think it was Stephen Spender who said that Iris and John were the two most piscine people he had ever known. I knew it then, and at the beach in Santa Barbara; everyone else was to learn of it in John's *Elegy for Iris*.

It could not be more appropriate that thirteen of us would dine that night. Dinner had been prepared at college and was served on a collection of mismatched china, silver, and glassware: it was enchanting. I sat next to Iris, Margaret next to John, and the guests included Rachel Trickett (Principal of St Hugh's College), Lord Anthony and Lady Quinton (All Souls), John and Myfanwy Piper, Francis and Larissa Haskell, and Larissa MacIntyre (who knew C.S. Lewis and that kept us chatting through cocktails). There was a case of twelve bottles of French red wine on the floor and the party drank it all before retiring to the main room for after dinner drinks. Heady does not do justice to what I felt in this august setting. Rachel Trickett only had a few wisps of hair and I had never seen a bald woman except in the case of cancer treatment, so I asked Iris if Rachel was ill. She said she didn't think so because Rachel had always been bald – and that was that. At some later hour, everyone left and Margaret went to her room, and I to the study. Iris all but tucked me in and I jumped when my feet slid into the covers. She had placed a hot water bottle in the bed and this was

my one and only experience of one.

The next morning I awoke, mildly hungover, to a very quiet house and another grey day. I went downstairs and saw that everything was exactly where it had been left the night before. Glasses in the main room and an uncleared dining table. I found Iris and John in the kitchen, it being equally a shambles. They made tea and coffee and we toasted bread on an open fire in a fireplace desperately in need of cleaning. It was a sweet recap of the night before and close of the visit. I had never had an evening like it, nor since. Margaret did not appear and when I went up to her she declined breakfast and would dress for departure. I was surprised by her not getting into how eccentric it all was as Iris had gone to great lengths with the guest list, particularly the Pipers for Margaret, and I thought Margaret uncharacteristically unadventuresome and ungrateful.

After farewells, we left for The Grove for lunch with David Hicks and Lady Pamela Mountbatten (Margaret and her friend Ala Story had chaperoned them after the engagement announcement in 1959) and then to Cambridge, where we were staying the night with my friends, George and Zara Steiner. A wonderful visit and the clear highlight of my trip to Europe.

An introduction to the letters by Frances White

This short run of letters kindly gifted to the Iris Murdoch Archive by Murdoch's Californian colleague and friend, Ray Byram, is published here for the first time along with this specially written memoir which sets them in context. Apparently slight in content, this letter run has interesting features which enrich the portrait of Murdoch being built up as more letters and memoirs emerge. Murdoch shows deep gratitude for the care and entertainment offered to her and John Bayley by Ray and his friend Joe on their visit to Santa Barbara. She clearly wished to reciprocate their kindness and hospitality but, equally clearly, she found this a very stressful thing to achieve. Living the life of the mind with scant attention to domesticity or society, Murdoch often evaded attempts by American friends to visit her when they were in England, being vague about dates until the visit was imminent, then suddenly announcing she would be away at that time, giving a telephone number but failing to answer it, then once the danger of invasion was safely past sending messages saying sorry I missed you. So this visit is perhaps of greater significance that it might be in the lives of those for whom entertaining is habitual. The earlier correspondence offers the characteristic features of Murdoch's letters to friends, warm interest in their lives, encouragement, seasonal comments on the weather and flowers, envy and woe about the sea, minor mentions of her and Bayley's work and travels. But the letters from January to June 1980 concerning plans for Byram to stay (with his colleague Margaret Mallory – whose name Murdoch muddles, calling her Marjorie at times) at Cedar Lodge in Steeple Aston, read like a nervous breakdown unfolding on paper. Murdoch's urgently repeated instructions about the date, the time, the means of transport, booking a hotel, where to park a car, how to find the house, and the little maps she draws and re-draws, suggest that such practicalities were a source of deep anxiety to her, and it says much for her affection for Byram that the visit was successfully accomplished. He clearly enjoyed his stay in the Bayley household, but Murdoch's letters give no account of how she experienced the event – perhaps her journals will one day tell her side of the story.

Cedar Lodge Steeple Aston Oxford
19 April 1978

Dear Ray,

So many thanks to you for your great kindness to us in Santa Barbara (including your active concern about those suitcases, which you somehow magicked back from limbo) – we kept hoping we would arrive at Santa Barbara-by-the-sea, and looking forward to it so much, and under your generous care it was even more delightful than we expected, and full of lovely charms and surprises! Thank you. Ever since I was first invited to your paradise-like corner of California I felt I must somehow get there – and it was most kind of all concerned to let John & me sort of invite ourselves. You and Joe made us feel so much at home from the very start and that was delightful. Altogether it was great fun and I wish we could have stayed longer, gone swimming, surfing, dancing under the palm trees & so on. (And we loved our motel.) We loved our drive with you and Joe, including a perfect picnic and lovely surprise visit to Miss Mallory. I hope we shall see you and Joe in England one of these days – do keep in touch. We enjoyed your company so much, and hope to do so again. Love to Jo. All best best wishes from rather cold England (the icy rain is battering the daffodils) and with love from Iris

[On reverse of third sheet:]

Dear Ray, dear Joe,

It has been so nice to meet you both & we shall always remember your kindness & the beautiful things you showed us. Remember if you are in London we have a pad – tiny but with lovely view – near Gloucester Road Station. Do perch, & we will hope to see you.

All the best John

Steeple Aston Oxford
9 May 1978

Dear Ray,

Thank you so much for your super letter. We loved the story of the seal and are so glad it had a satisfactory ending. Seals always look so movingly happy and cheerful. Good beasts. What a lovely visit we had to Santa Barbara, so much thanks to you and Joe. Since we got back we have been experiencing the English Spring in the usual form of rain and icy winds. Nest week however we are off to so some (rather different) lecturing work in Austria. We don't usually rush about so, but John has sabbatical leave. We hope & trust we shall see you both over here before long. How lucky you are to live in such a beautiful place by the sea. Alas that Oxford is so remote from the sea. Keep in touch, au revoir, and with much love, and to Joe
ever

Iris

And we miss that great restaurant The Enterprise Fish Company, well worth waiting to cross the road to get to it, where I had one of the best fish meals ever.

Cedar Lodge Steeple Aston Oxford
12 Oct 1978

Dear Ray,

Thank you and Joe very much for the lovely card. I expect your term has already begun and ours (rather late this year) is about to start. Autumn (Fall) and term bring one back home and to sober tasks! Not that we have been far away from sober tasks this summer, since, although we have been in Italy & Spain, we have been staying in houses where we could still work which is always good for morale. We saw a bit of the sea, always a treat for us, taken for granted by lucky you! (Santa Barbara is not only in the right place, it is exactly the right size, and 136 West Cota St is of course its exact centre.) (Let me know by the way if you move house. Americans move more often than English, because you have easier renting arrangements.)

It's beautiful golden autumn weather here; I expect it's still summer with you. This is just to send beginning of term greetings from John and me, and many happy remembrances, and all love. Keep in touch!

Iris

Steeple Aston, Oxford
23 January 1979

Dear Ray,

Thank you very much for your interesting letter. (Do write to me about anything at all.) I agree Jimmy Carter is somewhat out of place in that list! I'm glad you were enjoying the book. About being adopted: yes, it must be strange. Finding 'real' parents could give them a shock – and of course those who adopted you are your real parents. Both sides take a risk. But I can imagine one would want to know.

Talking of 4 seasons, we are having a proper winter with persistent snow. The sun shines at the moment & it is beautiful, but it also makes life difficult. (There are also a number of strikes.) I well recall our Mallory day. It must be sad and odd to hear one's erstwhile voice. All bestest to you and Joe. Say hello to a seal from me.

With love,
Iris

Steeple Aston Oxford
1 September 1979

Dear Ray,

We were so glad to hear from you and most interested in your news. Congratulations to Joe, & give him our love. I wonder is his university capital Washington – I assume it is – an exciting place to be. I hope your plan will work out too – one does want changes – let us know about developments on both fronts. It is sad about being in different places – but I think Americans manage this better than most because they take air travel for granted and are philosophical about distance! By the way, do put us in touch with the

young chap who is coming to Balliol, he sounds like a good fellow. Not much news of us. John is writing a book on Shakespeare & is rather discouraged at the moment but will recover. I have just finished a novel (partly about an exiled Pole). We had a working holiday, taking our books to friends' houses in France & Spain – I like that, plenty of meditation and swimming and a glimpse of that amazing phenomenon, the sun. Very very best wishes to both your plans & projects – and do write again before long. We have no USA schemes at present. Will you be over here? All very best and with love

Iris

Steeple Aston
29 October 1979

Dear Ray,

Thanks very much for your letter. I would have answered sooner but I've been away. I was sorry to hear of your break with Joe – such deep changes are sad & painful. But as you intimate, it may indeed be for the best – a proper moment of change which one must welcome too. I am glad you are looking forward with hope – and the move to SF seems right & timely. (You don't say what you will do there – I hope a better & happier job.) I am delighted to hear you will be in England next year, & under such good auspices! We shall look forward to seeing you. This too will make a good part of your 1980 year of movement and new life! Thank you for writing to me about these things.

I wish you all the very best, keep in touch. John sends v. best wishes.
It is misty autumn here and we light wood fires. Work goes on (too many things on hand as usual.)

We have happy memories of our visit to you. With all cordial wishes & love

Iris

Steeple Aston, Oxford
31 January 1980

Dear Ray

Thank you very much for your letter and news. We note your possible England dates and we do hope we can meet then – what fun – the sun will be shining (perhaps) and the roses will be in flower! I do hope meanwhile that you will get some super job that you want, and in SF. Best of luck for the job hunt.

It is quiet & very determined winter here, not cold, but there is a sense of hibernation, not unpleasant.

I imagine you under those blue skies. From John & me all very best wishes and love

Iris

Steeple Aston
Tel. 0869.40229
22 March 1980

Dear Ray,

Thanks so much for your letter. I'm not sure how to read it! You say evening of 16th is 'fixed' item. Do you mean with us, or have you another engagement then? I assume with us. In fact we cannot manage the 15th as we are away that weekend & many not be back till Monday. So I trust 16th is free for you for dinner and stay! I shall have to go to London on the morning of the 17th, but we could leave you in Ox. if you wanted to stay on. We shall invite Haskells to dinner Monday June 16th & hope to see you circa 6 – 6.30. Unfortunately Haskells have no car, and I imagine you won't, but we'll think out the transport. There is a bus leaving Ox. 5.45, arrive here 6.30, but I trust we can fix a car! I will, unless advised otherwise, book you into an Oxford hotel for 15th night. I hope I've got it all right!
Much looking forward.

With love
Iris

Steeple Aston
3 May 1980

Dear Ray,

Thank you for your letter & pleasant news. Monday June 16 would be fine. Francis and Larissa Haskell (Francis is Slade Prof of Fine Art) are also hoping to see and entertain Margaret. Should I sort things out with them? Rooms in college would I fear be impossible as it is a very 'social' week in Oxford. You could stay here with us, unless you would prefer a hotel in Oxford (we are 12 miles out in the country)? Will you have a car? Let us know roughly what you would prefer and I will sort out a joint plan with Francis and Larissa. I don't know whether they have yet made any definite arrangement with Margaret. I look forward to hearing your news, and to seeing Margaret again. Let us hope the sun will shine, Oxford can be so beautiful in the summer. I am so glad you are coming! All very best & au revoir & love,

Iris

P.S. brooding over your letter, I hope I've done right! In clearing 16th I should have made clear 15th no good for us. If you arrive evening of 15th (hotel says please not too late) and depart 17th before or after lunch, spending 16th night with us, you won't I think have had too much time for the city. I hope that's ok – but if you want hotel <u>cancelled</u> could you send <u>me</u> a brief cable? Oxford is crammed and I rang a number of places before getting this one, so they would like notice of cancellation. Tuesday morning we take off, I for London, John for college, & we could leave you in Ox or take you to station. Do hope this will be convenient for you both – & much look forward see! Love
Iris.

Steeple Aston, Oxford
22 May 1980

Dear Ray,

Much thanks your letter. I have also written to chez M., and hope I've got it all right. Dinner here & stay with us night of June 16. We are away June 15. But for that night I have booked you both into St Giles Hotel, St Giles. It was difficult to find any beds in Ox. for that time, which is the height of the season with dances & jollities of all kinds, and I'm afraid there are no private bathrooms (sorry). It is a modest hotel, but very central and with very nice people running it. If this is not what you want let me know soon! I hope I've understood your letter! We have invited Haskells for June 16th dinner and we'll expect you, say. 6.30-7.

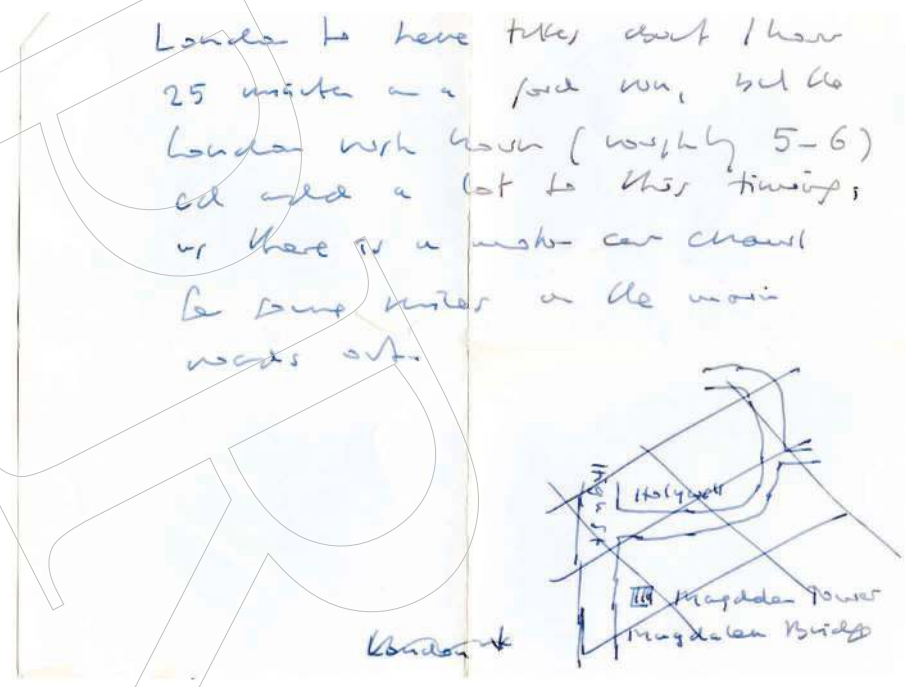
Haskells have no car so there are transport problems; there is a bus from Gloucester Green, no X59, leaves 5.45, reaches Steeple Aston White Lion pub, 6.30. Also taxis of course. But we'll try to fix other transport. Let me know whether all this seems ok? All best & love

Iris

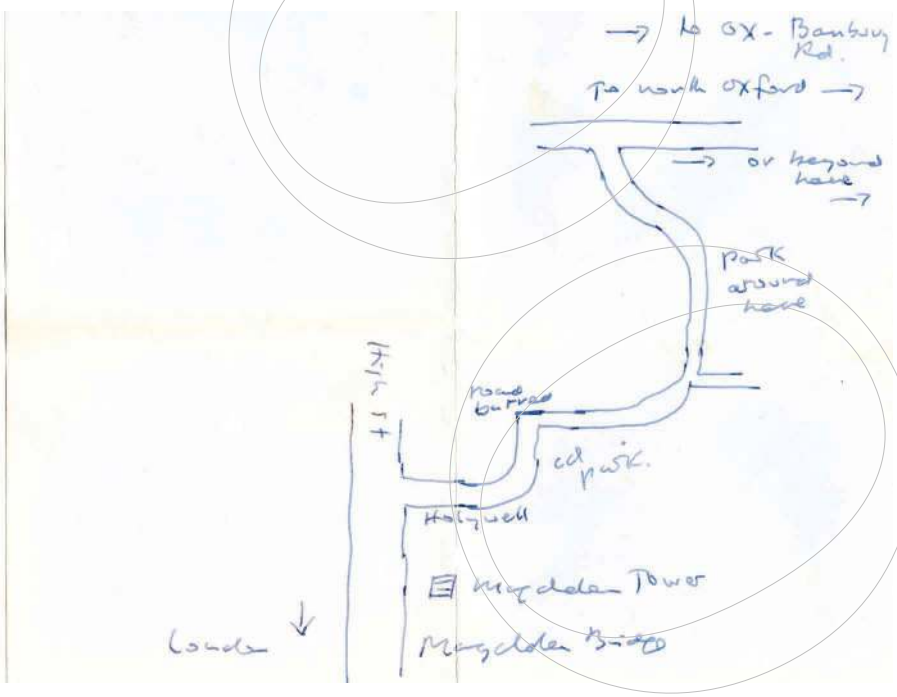
I shall have to go to London morning of 17th.

1980

If you decide to stop in Ox on the way, do not try to park in the city centre. Best parking is, as you come into city from London road crossing Magdalen Bridge. Magdalen Tower [*note in left margin* (in scaffolding)] on your right, take first turn sharp right after Magdalen and proceed bearing left into roads of north Oxford looking for a parking space! (Some competition.) See map –>
On reverse: London to here takes about 1 hour 25 minutes on a good run, but the London rush hour (roughly 5-6), could add a lot to this timing; as there is a motor car crawl for some miles in the main roads out.



Crossed out map of Magdalen Bridge and Tower, and Holywell Street
[KUAS184/14 Letters from Iris Murdoch to Ray Byram from the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives]



Sketch map showing Oxford-Banbury road with suggestions for possible places to park
[KUAS184/14 Letters from Iris Murdoch to Ray Byram from the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives]

Cedar Lodge, Steeple Aston, Oxford Tel 0869. 40229
London 937.6029
1980

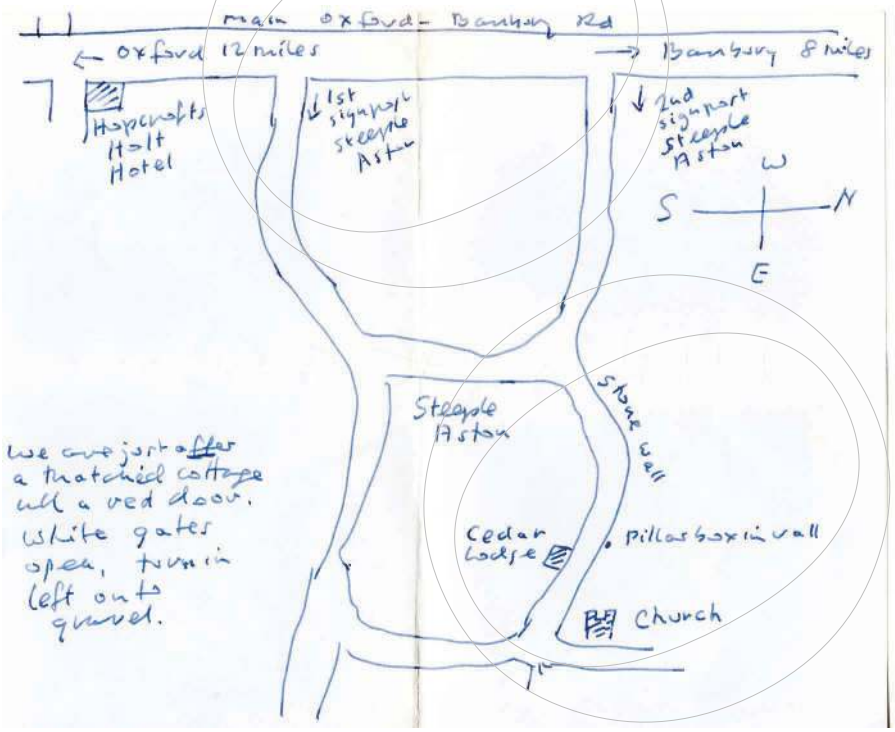
Dear Ray,

Welcome to London! So glad you're here. I've cancelled St Giles hotel in accord with (thank her) Marjorie's telegram. We'll expect you both here for dinner & the night June 16. I think it will be easiest, if you don't mind, if you come by bus. We must cook, and it would be nice if you arrived a goodish bit earlier than the others (who will come at 8). The bus is the X59 going to Coventry, leaves Ox 17.45 hours, reaches Steeple Aston, White Lion pub, 16.24 hours [sic] – a pleasant ride through Oxfordshire country, once you get out of Oxford suburbs. I trust that is ok? Ask the driver to tell you when White Lion comes – the bus sometimes stops first on Steeple Aston outskirts at top of steep hill. We'll await you at the pub. Bus leaves from Oxford bus station, Gloucester Green, very near centre of Oxford (Carfax & Cornmarket). Anyone would tell you. Carfax is central cross-roads.

I expect we can telephonically communicate before then. I hope you'll have a lovely time in London and we so much look forward to seeing you both & hearing news! All very best, and to Marjorie,

With love Iris.

1980



Sketch map of Steeple Aston

[KUAS184/13 Letters from Iris Murdoch to Ray Byram from the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives]

We are just <u>after</u> a thatched cottage with a red door. White gates open, turn in left onto gravel.

Dear Ray,

We greatly look forward to seeing you on Monday circa 6.30. If you are coming straight here, don't go into Oxford but follow the ring road signposts for Banbury, & keep following them up main Ox-Banbury road. (Turn right at first roundabout just outside Ox, then right again at second roundabout 2-3 miles on.) I expect you'll have a map.

Steeple Aston
1 January 1982

Dear Ray,

Thank you so much for your letter and news. You seem to have got a very interesting job in a very interesting city! Let us know if you will be in England. We have visited SF & loved it, tho' we know LA better. I hope life and friends are working out better & better. We are as busy as usual (too busy I often think) and we've had some lovely SNOW!
All very best wishes for 1982, which has now as I write been going for 8 ½ hours!
With love & from John,
Iris

Pamela Osborn

Turning the Kaleidoscope: Critics' Responses to *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995*, edited by Avril Horner and Anne Rowe

The publication of Murdoch's selected letters was momentous for a great many reasons. Not least because the 'kaleidoscopic picture' of Murdoch that emerges from this collection reminds us of the inadequacy of the labels she has received to date.[1] *Living on Paper* marks a new phase in Murdoch's afterlife in which her own voice has finally joined the conversation about her life, legacy and future. Murdoch's letter to E.P Thompson, in which she is attempting to provide a picture of his brother, Frank Thompson, for publication in *There is a Spirit in Europe* contains her own thoughts on the value of letters once the writer is gone: '[t]he letters speak best for him. How can one "describe" a personality of such richness?'[2] The intervention of Murdoch's own voice may mean that what Rosemary Hill called 'the battle for her memory', is, to some extent, over.[3] It would now be foolhardy to define her as saintly or immoral, manipulator or manipulated, politically to the left or right, perhaps even male or female. Her letters disclose that she was all of these at various times which makes the experience of reading this collection, as both Steve Donaghue and Lara Feigel suggest in their positive reviews, somewhat 'dizzying.'[4] Critics may yet be freed from a perceived duty to define Murdoch in terms of her personal life by the now indisputable impossibility of doing so. Malcolm Forbes rightly suggests that 'Murdoch's correspondence constitutes a kind of surrogate autobiography, the nearest to one we will ever get [....] revealing as it does a fuller portrait of Murdoch at work and at play, as a writer, thinker, friend and companion.'[5]

Praise was universal for the 'meticulous' editors whose comprehensive footnotes and illuminating introductions were roundly commended.[6] Martin Rubin of the *Washington Times* hails Rowe and Horner for their 'intuitive insight into their subject, backed up with superb knowledge of Murdoch's life, character and entire oeuvre. Their introduction, footnotes and what they term "Directory of Names and Terms" [...] in themselves alone make the book worthwhile. So much so that most of what stayed with me after reading the book comes not from the letters themselves but from this most impressive editorial work.'[7] Likewise Ian d'Alton praises the editors' 'careful contextualisation'

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

[2] Avril Horner and Anne Rowe (eds.), *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2015), letter to E.P Thompson, winter 1945, p.59.

[3] Rosemary Hill, 'I Will Tell You Everything', *London Review of Books*, 32 (2010), 41-42 (p.41).

[4] Steve Donaghue, '"Living on Paper" wonderfully displays the many faces of Iris Murdoch', *Christian Science Monitor*. Available at: http://www.csmonitor.com/Books/Book-Reviews/2016/0203/Living-On-Paper-wonderfully-displays-the-many-faces-of-Iris-Murdoch [accessed 3 February 2016]; Lara Feigel, 'Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995, ed by Avril Horner and Anne Rowe, review: "flirtatious"', the *Telegraph*. Available at: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/books/what-to-read/living-on-paper-iris-murdoch-letters-review/ [accessed 14 November 2015].

[5] Malcolm Forbes, 'Book Review: Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995 reveals the writer's secret life', the *National*. Available at: http://www.thenational.ae/arts-life/the-review/20151203/book-review-living-on-paper-letters-from-iris-murdoch-1934-1995-reveals-the-writers-secret-life [accessed 3 December 2015].

[6] Lara Feigel, the *Telegraph*.

[7] Martin Rubin, 'Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995', the *Washington Times*. Available at: http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/feb/15/living-on-paper-letters-from-iris-murdoch-1934-199/ [accessed 15 February 2016].

in conjunction with the decision to allow the letters to 'speak for themselves.'[8] Stephanie Dowrick of the *Sydney Morning Herald* commends the 'exemplary skill' with which the editors 'have collected and framed with highly readable, illuminating commentaries the only self-portrait this writer will have. As their title promises, Murdoch lives again. And that was needed.'[9]

The majority of biographies and memoirs of Murdoch to date have detailed each author's desire to revive Murdoch and therefore his or her personal connection with her. Murdoch's textual resurrection is undoubtedly a consequence of the publication of her letters but opinions differ about the personality behind them. Robert Fulford of the Canadian *National Post* is pleased to find a 'lovable' character, by contrast to the 'cold' persona he detected in aspects of Murdoch's other writing.[10] John Carey finds the letters 'alarming' and Murdoch disloyal, as does Rachel Cooke who also describes her as 'ruthless [...] in affairs of the heart' and 'gelid when in a corner'.[11] Ostensibly all of these impressions are valid, contributing to a three-dimensional picture of a woman who thought, did and achieved so much over the course of the sixty years covered by these missives. Impressions gained of Murdoch's working life are equally disparate, with Roger Lewis of *The Times* calling attention, somewhat ludicrously in this case, to the 'charmed, lazy life of overpaid Oxford academics – the short hours, endless long vacations and sabbaticals, the high table boozing, international conferences, holidays to be sponge [sic] off the Cecils, the Spenders or the Griggs, the general unaccountability'.[12] In contrast, Stephanie Dowrick of the *Sydney Morning Herald* is impressed with Murdoch's 'quite exceptional commitment to work and friendship'.[13]

As Alex Ramon notes in his own appraisal of *Living on Paper*, there is a strong sense in certain other reviews that 'it's not so much the collection but rather Murdoch's conduct that [is] coming under review'.[14] Long term fans of Murdoch, characterised as an 'endangered species' by Cooke, could have predicted the fixation of a handful of reviewers on her sexuality and sex life.[15] Almost every biography and memoir of Murdoch published to date has been met with the same indignation about Murdoch's supposed promiscuity and pointed references to her childlessness ('she never did become a mother', mourns Carey in his review of *Living on Paper*).[16] It was Lewis's contribution that sparked controversy on social media and a retaliatory response from the editors. His implication that Murdoch's 'muddy metaphysics' was an attempt to 'rationalise, if not ameliorate, her incredible solipsism and callousness' discloses incredible bitterness towards a woman he claims to have known, which escalates throughout the review. 'In her prime she was a nymphomaniac,' he states,

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[8] Ian d'Alton, 'Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995 review: lady of letters', the *Irish Times*. Available at: http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/living-on-paper-letters-from-iris-murdoch-1934-1995-review-lady-of-letters-1.2518042 [accessed 1 February 2016].

[9] Stephanie Dowrick, 'Living on Paper review: A wonderful opportunity to meet Iris Murdoch again', the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Available at: http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/living-on-paper-review-a-wonderful-opportunity-to-meet-iris-murdoch-again-20160422-goctct.html [accessed 22 April 2016].

[10] Robert Fulford, 'The Intimate Biography of Iris Murdoch', *National Post*. Available at: http://news.nationalpost.com/arts/books/the-intimate-biography-of-iris-murdoch [accessed 27 January 2016].

[11] John Carey, 'Living on paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995, edited by Avril Horner and Anne Rowe', *The Sunday Times*. Avaialble at: http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/culture/books/non_fiction/article1625254.ece [accessed 1 November 2015]; Rachel Cooke, 'Living On Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995 review – ruthless in affairs of the heart', the *Guardian*. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/nov/08/living-on-paper-iris-murdoch-letters-review [accessed 8 November, 2015].

[12] Roger Lewis, 'Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934 – 1995 edited by Avril Horner and Anne Rowe', *The Times*. Available at: http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/arts/books/non-fiction/article4610312.ece [accessed 14 November 2016].

[13] Stephanie Dowrick, the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

[14] Alex Ramon, '"Living on Paper" Illuminates the Intimacies That Influenced Iris Murdoch's Work', *PopMatters*. Available at: http://www.popmatters.com/review/living-on-paper-letters-from-iris-murdoch-1934-1995-anne-rowe-and-avril-hor/ [accessed 7 April 2016].

[15] Rachel Cooke, the *Guardian*.

[16] John Carey, *The Sunday Times*.

inaccurately claiming that 'from the moment she left school and arrived at university in 1938, she seemed to have felt obliged to sleep with everyone she met, particularly dreary ugly foreign intellectuals such as Elias Canetti'.[17] His deeply misogynistic declaration that 'had she been from the working class, instead of a fellow of an Oxford college with heaps of honorary degrees, she'd have been a candidate for compulsory sterilisation' is shocking not only because of the hatred it reveals, but also because of the irrelevance of the statement to the review at hand.

It is unsurprising that Rowe and Horner, neither of whom is prone to overreaction, felt compelled to respond and were given the opportunity to do so by the *Guardian*. 'We have been astonished by the number of reviewers who have been so fiercely judgemental of Murdoch's personal life', they write, while pointing out that reviews of Jonathan Bates's biography of Ted Hughes praised the poet for far worse behaviour. 'Men are glorious phallic trail-blazers when they tear through many women's lives', Rowe and Horner conclude, 'whereas women who have had many lovers are "ruthless" and "self-indulgent". How have such double standards survived in an intelligent reading population of the 21st century?' The response from readers was overwhelmingly in favour of the editors and the article remains the most shared piece of writing on Murdoch across social media.[18]

The negative judgement of Murdoch based on her sex life partially obscured that which is truly revelatory about that subject in her letters: the fact that she seriously and persistently identified as a male homosexual and that she was evidently what we now call polyamorous. John Mullan correctly surmises that 'readers of her novels [...] have long thought Murdoch the novelist a sage of sexual identity and its mutability'.[19] She is always matter-of-fact about the vacillations of gender identity which, given the amount of time she devoted to discussion of the subject in her letters, particularly to Brigid Brophy, is unsurprising. When Murdoch frequently identifies in letters as a male homosexual, or a male homosexual 'in a female guise' it is done lightly but she is unequivocally serious.[20] In a letter written after Brophy has evidently imagined her to have a heterosexual interest in sadomasochism Murdoch jestingly admonishes her: 'I thought I had explained that I am a sadomasochistic male homosexual, and ergo am not interested in boys beating girls or girls beating boys or girls beating girls'.[21] Her perception of several of her female lovers, including Brophy, as young males also seems to support this identification. In an interview with Princeton University Press, who published the American edition of *Living on Paper*, Anne Rowe cites Murdoch's comprehension of gender fluidity as a defining factor which places her 'decades ahead of her time'.[22] This element of her writing is perhaps most in need of reassessment in light of the publication of these landmark letters.

Murdoch's apparent need for multiple simultaneous loving relationships, and the management of these relationships which forms the backbone of the selected letters, is now recognisable as polyamory. While Murdoch was rather more secretive within her concurrent relationships than the polyamorous lifestyle of today requires, her need to love and nurture multiple people and to be loved by them is at its core. Her letters reveal just how immersed Murdoch was in polyamorous relationships and thus sheds considerable light on the novels which examine in detail the positive aspects as well as the moral and operational difficulties of this lifestyle. If sexuality and gender are

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17 Roger Lewis, *The Times*.

18 Avril Horner and Anne Rowe, 'Iris Murdoch is "promiscuous" while Ted Hughes is "nomadic". Why the double standards?', the *Guardian*. Available at: http://theguardian.com/books/2015/nov/27/iris-murdoch-letters-sexism [accessed 27 November 2015]..

19 John Mullan, 'The amorous intensity of Iris Murdoch's letters', *New Statesman*. Available at: http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/books/2015/12/amorous-intensity-iris-murdoch-s-letters [accessed 15 December 2015].

20 Avril Horner and Anne Rowe (eds.), *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2015), letter to Georg Kreisel (1967), p.347.

21 Avril Horner and Anne Rowe (eds.), *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2015), letter to Brigid Brophy (6 September 1965), p.304.

22 Kayla Whittle, 'Iris Murdoch: A writer ahead of her time', *Princeton University Press Blog*. Available at: http://blog.press.princeton.edu/2016/02/23/iris-murdoch-a-writer-ahead-of-her-time/ [accessed 17 May 2016].

increasingly being understood, particularly by the 'millennial' generation, in terms of a spectrum rather than in binary terms, it follows that relationships may also be regarded in this way.[23] The polyamorous way of life is as fraught with moral pitfalls as the monogamous lifestyle and Feigel recognises Morgan Browne's destructive 'emotional promiscuity' in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* as an examination of Murdoch's 'own powers of destruction' in this arena.[24] Murdoch's letters, not to mention her novels, are important chronicles of how non-monogamous relationships operated, sometimes flourishing and sometimes failing, in the twentieth century.

The few critics, such as Cooke, who sense a disconnect between the letters and the novels could be forgiven for missing subtle images, events and ideas in the letters which later materialise in the novels. These are perhaps the most rewarding aspect of the collection for habitual Murdoch readers: the showering of torn paper into the streets in the 'faintly hysterical' atmosphere of London in the summer of 1945 is the same method of exorcism used by Julian Baffin after her split with Oscar Belling in *The Black Prince* (1973);[25] Murdoch recalls paint 'rather enchantingly' entangled in David Morgan's hair in a letter in 1964, an image which occurs during Diana's flirtation with Will as he paints the railings in *Bruno's Dream* (1969),[26] and a fleeting reference to David Morgan's encounter with 'the woman in the house' recalls the mystery of the terrible crying stranger stumbled upon by Harvey in *The Green Knight* (1993).[27] The letters are infused with the images and symbols which captured and triggered her imagination and with evidence of her hunger for such details.

But her real legacy may yet be her much neglected contribution to comic writing, more specifically to the concept of the letter as a comic device. Murdoch's mastery of the comic possibilities of the letter in her fiction is surely only possible because of the complexities of her letter-writing life. As Rivka Isaacson observes, Murdoch's humorousness is nowhere more evident than in her letters to Brigid Brophy: 'in a 1980 discussion of Arthur Scargill's "Yorkshire propaganda" Murdoch quips, "When Scarborough is the capital city, they won't even have to change the name"'.[28] Her letters are constantly and deliberately irreverent, self-deprecating and riotous but this aspect, as in her fiction, has lain in the shade of her progressive attitudes to love and sex and the gravity of her philosophy. She prophesied her own literary afterlife when she wrote of George Eliot, that '[o]ne forgets the funniness of serious writers sooner than anything'.[29] *Living on Paper* goes a long way to remind us of the constancy of that mischievous glint in Iris Murdoch's eye.

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[23] A 2013 *Guardian* report suggested that '15-28% of heterosexual couples and about 50% of bisexuals and gay men have some sort of "non-traditional" arrangement'. Laurie Penny, 'Being polyamorous shows that there is no "traditional" way to live', the *Guardian*. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/20/polyamorous-shows-no-traditional-way-live [accessed 23 May 2016]. Millennials are defined as people who reached adulthood in or around the year 2000. Available at: http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/millennial [accessed 23 May 2016].

[24] Lara Feigel, the *Telegraph*.

[25] Avril Horner and Anne Rowe (eds.), *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2015), letter to Leo Pliatzky, 11 August 1945, p.46.

[26] Avril Horner and Anne Rowe (eds.), *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2015), letter to David Morgan, 20 June 1964, p.265.

[27] Avril Horner and Anne Rowe (eds.), *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2015), letter to David Morgan, September 1964, p.275.

[28] Avril Horner and Anne Rowe (eds.), *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2015), letter to Brigid Brophy, 17 December 1980, p.482; Rivka Isaacson, 'Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995, edited by Avril Horner and Anne Rowe - book review', the *Independent*. Available at: http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/living-on-paper-letters-from-iris-murdoch-1934-1995-edited-by-avril-horner-and-anne-rowe-book-review-a6715566.html [accessed 1 November, 2015].

[29] Avril Horner and Anne Rowe (eds.), *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2015), letter to Albert and Naomi Lebowitz, 24 January 1973, p.407.

Lara Feigel

'Flirtatious': Review of *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995* edited by Avril Horner and Anne Rowe (London: Chatto & Windus 2015)

'Yes, I'm afraid I do rather dig diffused eroticisms that last forever,' Iris Murdoch wrote to the novelist Brigid Brophy in 1967, aged 47; 'I have a number of them.' This is Murdoch at her most alluring and her most maddening: flirtatious, honest, self-knowing, unrepentant. The language – that brilliantly placed 'dig' – is typically precise and her whole emotional philosophy is here. What she wanted in relationships was usually eroticism rather than sex, and she wanted the eroticism to be diffuse both in the sense of being drawn out slowly over months or years and in permeating every area of the relationship. *Living on Paper*, the first comprehensive edition of Murdoch's letters, reveals the extent to which talking, writing, reading were all erotic acts for her. In 1968 she wrote to the philosopher Georg Kreisel that she couldn't think of 'any corner of the universe' that did not involve sex for her, though she had 'never been much good at going to bed'.

The situation with Brophy was characteristically complex. Brophy was a friend, erstwhile lover and prolific correspondent (the two women had written daily letters for years). She had now fallen in love with someone more disposed to commit to a full love affair and was asking to be set free. Murdoch was reluctant to lose Brophy but was able to be light-hearted because there were other ambiguous eroticisms in the mix: she was also half in love with two former students, an old friend and several philosopher mentors.

In his insightful 2001 biography of Murdoch, Peter Conradi suggested that it was sometimes hard to decide whether she was an unusually generous friend or a misleadingly flirtatious vamp. Her letters support both views, though the vamp is at least self-knowing even when she is not self-admonishing. As a young woman, she was at once priggish and wayward, committing to communism ('we've got to reorganise society from top to bottom – it's rotten, it's inefficient') at the same time as finding herself 'quite astonishingly interested in the opposite sex, and capable of being in love with about six men all at once'. This gave way in early adulthood to a more sober observation of her own 'tendency to want to be loved, and not engage myself in return'. And this in turn transmuted into the diffused eroticisms of middle age. In the meantime, everything and nothing changed in her philosophical outlook and conduct.

What changed was both that she married and that she grew up. There is comparatively little mention of Murdoch's marriage to the literary critic John Bayley in her correspondence. The inevitable problem with books of letters is that certain relationships are emphasised at the expense of others; domestic relationships are unlikely to be epistolary. There are, however, occasional reminders that it was because of Bayley that Murdoch could sustain such complicated emotional intensity without loneliness. 'When I got married I was determined to stop being unhappy,' she told one former lover in 1958, 'and on the whole with John's help I've succeeded very well.' A few years later she observed that 'from my own experience, the married state has so much to recommend it – one achieves a sort of calm closeness and trust'.

At the same time, Murdoch became conscious of her own responsibility. It becomes clear that there was a complex moral code governing her life and her treatment of those she involved in it. She wanted intimacy – emotional, intellectual and certainly physical, with as many people as possible. 'As far as I am concerned any day is a kissing day,' she told Brophy in 1964. But the sexual interludes in her romantic friendships tended to be brief and rare. This was because of her own wavering interest in sex and her very particular notion of freedom. Freedom is a central concept in Murdoch's letters, novels and philosophy. In this respect she seems to have been a product of her time. Doris Lessing, who was born in the same year as her, also saw freedom as crucial, personally and politically. These were writers whose political lives began at a moment when communism was promising to free the world from its chains, and whose personal lives unfolded against a background of Edwardian constraint.

Where Lessing conceptualised freedom as expansiveness – as an absence of physical and mental restraint – Murdoch's understanding of freedom was sometimes contradictory. In middle age she wrote that she had begun as 'a kind of Existentialist believing in freedom' but had come to see that love and goodness were paramount. In Murdoch's 1957 novel *The Sandcastle*, Bledyard tells the lost, lovable philanderer Mor that he is wrong to live on dreams of happiness and freedom. 'You speak as if to be a free man was just to get what you want regardless of convention,' he complains, when in fact 'real freedom is a total absence of concern about yourself'. This is a lesson that characters learn repeatedly in Murdoch's novels. In *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970), Morgan hopes that by loving everyone she can experience freedom, but then learns through her lover Rupert that true freedom is found in 'loving people, loving art, loving work' without attachment. Freedom here is experienced through living lightly; through loving without claims.

Murdoch's own trajectory can be traced through her references to freedom in her letters. At the age of 23 she announced that she had 'parted company with my virginity' and felt 'calmer and freer' as a result. Freedom at that moment seemed to lie in sex and love, but in fact it turned out that physical passion trapped her. 'When I am in love I am INSANE,' she told Brophy 20 years later, urging her friend to understand her need to love without being in love. 'Just now I feel free and happy and I want to go on feeling so.' In 1972 she announced to her former student and quasi-lover David Morgan that she disapproved of promiscuity, which is 'often connected with being not oneself, but in a daze'. Here she stated that to 'be oneself, free, whole, is partly a matter of escape from obsession, neurosis' and, by implication, sexual love.

Seen in the context of these statements, the dispersal of Murdoch's attachments becomes essential for her particular experience of freedom. Murdoch knew what it felt like to have her heart broken. This is clear in the references to her youthful affair with Thomas Balogh and in her letters to her wartime fiancé David Hicks. 'I miss you constantly, with a sort of physical pain,' she wrote to Hicks in 1945, shortly before he threw her over for another woman. It is notable that she never talked about missing anyone in this way again. After that, no one had a chance to overwhelm her. There was an element of vampishness in this – certainly it was a way of satisfying her craving for novelty ('the metaphysics of the first kiss'). But it is also more urgent. She was protecting herself from the insensitivity of others and she was providing herself with the mental freedom she needed both to write her novels and to do good, as a wife and as a friend.

'I have a considerable capacity for dividing my mind (rather than my heart) into compartments and giving apparently a full attention to a number of people at once,' she wrote in her diary when falling in love with Bayley. After her marriage she faced her own powers of destruction squarely, exploring them mercilessly in her novels. Morgan's emotional promiscuity in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* results in the death of her brother-in-law and the breakdown of her nephew (both are quasi-lovers). Murdoch was determined to be a force for good in the lives of those she loved, and the overwhelming sense from reading the letters is that she managed it, once her correspondents had learnt not to ask too much of her.

In return, they received astonishing loyalty and astonishing epistolary abundance from a woman who meant it when she told a friend that she could 'live in letters'. In their excellent introduction, the meticulous editors Avril Horner and Anne Rowe inform us that in her latter years Murdoch spent up to four hours a day on her letters and even had a separate study reserved for correspondence. Because she was constantly writing, her letters provide a wonderfully oblique window onto the 20th century, whose tragedies intermingle with Murdoch's own. 'I get a frisson of joy to think I am of this age, this Europe – saved or damned with it,' she wrote at the end of the war, shortly before going off to help the Displaced Persons in Austria, whom she found were 'irrevocably broken' by war. Over the course of the correspondence we see her visiting Hitler's headquarters at Berchtesgaden, meeting Jean-Paul Sartre and Derrida ('we listened to him talk, in French, for two hours, the most terrible tosh') and encountering the Sixties.

'I feel pretty puritanical about marijuana etc,' she informed Brophy in 1965. 'Is one just being stuffy?' In fact, she was often puritanical but rarely stuffy. Despite the rigours of her ethical

demands, she was prepared to think through any situation from first principles and in this respect she serves as a useful corrective to our own, emotionally if not sexually, stuffier age. 'How could anyone imagine a woman who couldn't have as good a fantasy life as a man?' she asked Brophy, wondering whether she was a male homosexual in female guise. Few books leave the reader with as dizzying a sense of the need to question absolutely everything.

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Tony Milligan

Review of *Language Lost and Found: On Iris Murdoch and the Limits of Philosophical Discourse* by Niklas Forsberg (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2015)

In terms of academic philosophy, Murdoch is something of an anomaly and has been from the start of her career. From her very first papers on Sartre, Ayer, and our moral predicament it is clear that she does not fit easily into the proposition-stating and argument building tradition of the Analytics, whilst the thrust of what she has to say looks very different from anything going on in the Continental tradition. Her texts do not fit, and this is simultaneously one of the reasons for her long marginalisation and for a certain kind of fascination on the part of those who think that the dominant traditions leave something out, or at least push it towards the periphery of our vision.

Forsberg's approach responds to this in two related ways. Firstly, he situates her non-fiction strongly in relation to a Wittgensteinian approach to a number of key philosophical issues. So, the philosophical authors she ties in with are people like Cora Diamond and Stanley Cavell. This leaves her texts still anomalous but not quite *out on their own*, not cut off from core strands of thought and a recognizable set of questions. Secondly, he stresses the idea of a conceptual (and not simply moral) predicament in a way which emerges out of the Wittgensteinian tradition but cuts across philosophical traditions and avoids the narrowness of simply focusing upon *where to put Murdoch*. (As if the real problem were one of cataloguing.) This is, in short, big philosophy and not a book aimed only at the community of scholars who have a specialist interest in Murdoch. It is also philosophically challenging in a way that a streamlined philosophical overview of Murdoch's approach to ethics would not be. Big philosophy and difficult philosophy, presupposing familiarity with a set of debates on the overall relation between philosophy and literature.

There are set-piece chapters outlining Murdoch's approach (as Forsberg sees it) dealing with the ideas of the novel as a mirror of life, the idea that we have undergone conceptual loss, issues in reading *The Black Prince*, and themes from Coetzee, Cora Diamond and Stanley Cavell. Cherry picking of these chapters is possible, but this is a strongly integrated text rather than a series of easily segmented studies. Throughout, there is a concern to shift the discussion on the relationship between philosophy and the novel; and between Murdoch's philosophical texts and her fiction. He tries to move beyond familiar debates about whether or not Murdoch's philosophy (or an ironic commentary upon it) is present in her novels and in what sense. This standard debate, although insightful, carries various presuppositions about the relationship between philosophy and fiction that Forsberg believes to be mistaken. However, the thought here is not that a better definition of either, and of their differences, is in any way likely to clarify matters.

What leads us towards the standard debate is a number of assumptions about Murdoch's use of concepts such as love and attention, concepts that are present in both her fiction and non-fiction. The task then seems to be one of clarification, a determination of exactly what these concepts mean and then a fixing of them in the context of some more or less coherent account or 'theory' that Murdoch presumably upholds. We may then track the concepts (and theory) in the novels and see whether or not the fit between theory-in-philosophy and theory-in-novel is good. This is an approach that Forsberg identifies, for example, in Martha Nussbaum's reading of *The Black Prince*. But it is problematic because it assumes that Murdoch's concepts, and indeed our own, are easily captured and under our control, it carries a number of flawed assumptions about the nature of language and what it is to struggle with language and engage in philosophy, under conditions of conceptual loss of precisely the sort that Murdoch's writings attempt to come to grips with.

What misleads us into believing that we have language and a set of manageable concepts under control, is the way in which words stay the same while the concepts that they express or body-forth, shift, change and are sometimes lost. (A point that features prominently in Murdoch's early writings

on language.) And here, the idea of conceptual loss is a deep one. It cannot be tackled simply by referring back to some earlier text or philosophical tradition which will then set us straight. Under conditions of loss, what we will recognize are the words but not their meanings. The idea, on this view, that there is a single invariant sense or easily specifiable set of senses in which Murdoch is using 'love', 'attention' and 'the Good', looks suspiciously like a mistake. And because the problem of conceptual loss is deep, this is also not simply a call to move away from an essentialist definition of these Murdochian concepts towards something like a family resemblance account. Rather, Forsberg struggles to get the reader to treat Murdoch's early idea of a 'loss of concepts' seriously. This is a welcome move for those of us who have puzzled over its significance in her essay 'Against Dryness' and its development in Cora Diamond's seminal article on 'Losing Your Concepts'. Both have always looked important but the way in which their insights might be developed has never been obvious. Forsberg does a good deal of the required work.

With Forsberg, let us suppose for a moment, that we are not in command of our language or at least not in command of it in the way that we believe ourselves to be. And let us suppose that a significant portion of the unnoticed background against which we engage in self-reflection and self-understanding has simply gone. How then are we to proceed? How do we recover the horizon within which self-reflection and self-understanding might be possible? We could continue to use the same words (indeed this is what we tend to do) but we would not be doing quite the same thing, a lot of the time language would simply be 'idling' but this is something that we might not notice.

This is, of course, a problem that applies to Forsberg as well. And it is something that gives me cause for concern. How does Forsberg's own text deal with this same difficulty? He does not, however, lapse into the anthropological fallacy, the attempt to describe the predicament of a group of natives observed from the outside as if he too were not caught up in it. Rather, from the very first paragraph, his text attempts to convey and communicate (both directly and indirectly) the sense of a struggle: 'Words are worn and torn, and so turned (differently). At times they are torn and worn out. But since words are turned – changed but not necessarily exchanged since words may look the same while their concepts change – it is often hard to come to see that one may fail to be in command of one's language' (p.1). This is not, of course, the claim that language falls into a semantic abyss, but rather that it is elusive and only *to an extent* or *up to a point* pinned down. Those who have pondered over Murdoch's relation to Derrida will, I suspect, like these reflections, although Derrida himself does not figure directly in the text.

For Forsberg, the key point about a loss of concepts is not simply local (as it sometimes seems to be in Murdoch and others, the most obvious being Alasdair McIntyre). The point is not that we have lost the background to this or that concept, but much broader. Conceptual loss is a general feature of philosophical endeavours. Murdoch's goal then can be understood as a kind of *anamnesis*, an unforgetting, that may allow us to recover an understanding. This does raise some concerns about a level of nostalgia in her writings, a sense of things being better or clearer in the past. Forsberg is perhaps a little too generous to Murdoch on these matters, but understandably so given that Murdoch commentary is not his primary concern. Rather than an idealized past where meanings were accessible, he looks synchronically, to what is present in our lived ethical practice. There are things that we all seem to know but which elude us when we attempt to theorize. This too is a Murdochian point, the idea of a double movement between life and theory building. But Forsberg's approach strengthens the sense in which our attempts at theorizing are significantly out of step.

This puts his text in line with an important move in contemporary analytic ethics, a trend which downgrades clear-cut principles and sometimes extends to a rejection of theories (when principles are placed at their heart). The techniques of analytic ethics are also evident throughout the book. The scene is, for example, set in Chapter 1 by a standard 3-way split between lists of claims that Murdoch makes which do not obviously sit well together. Forsberg's move is, however, a slightly different one. It is strongly Wittgensteinian (drawing upon an idea of 'ordinary language' and the failure of philosophy to grasp what is captured in the latter) but also Kierkegaardian in the sense that Murdoch's goal and her perfectionism is seen as a struggle for a certain kind of more authentic

form of life, a struggle to *truly carry the sense of our words* rather than being at odds with the latter. Where the novels fit into all of this is in the role of a mirror. They help us to see something about our ordinary lives that our attempts to philosophize, capture and nail down various concepts often fail to grasp. They help us to see what life is like and what is missing from, for example, philosophical discussions of love and what it is to be concerned about what kind of person we are (good, bad, flawed?). This mirror imagery is going to be controversial and challenged, particularly from those who come from the continental tradition in which it has come (multiply) under attack.

In its favour, it may be pointed out that this is not a claim about absolute transparency and illumination. But it also does not imply any manner of *ineffability* thesis. Forsberg is not claiming that there are topics that Murdoch's novels (or anyone else's novels) tackle and that philosophy simply cannot deal with properly. Rather, the thought is that philosophy and literature are equally capable of addressing the same things but neither does so in exactly the same way, or without a personal struggle. The temptations of each are also, perhaps, a little different. Literature then is philosophically significant not because it is better at capturing the ineffable, or because it provides another way to set out a philosophical theory but because it is *not* philosophy and because it can still (in some respects) show us what life is like. The task then, when we encounter someone like Murdoch or Coetzee who clearly engages with philosophical themes and concepts in their fiction, is to try and make sense of why they do so in any particular case, and what it is that they are trying to get us to see that might otherwise easily be missed or misunderstood. It can help us to overcome the gap between the understanding of ethics that is embedded in our practices and the shortcomings of our attempt to theorize what it is to be human.

This is all good stuff, and difficult stuff. A rewarding but not an easy read. There are times, many times, when I wonder just how well the Murdoch that I know (or think I know) aligns with the Murdoch who emerges in these pages. But that might also be seen as a matter of Murdoch herself succumbing multiply, and repeatedly, to the problems that she also struggles to diagnose. (And this is something we should have expected all along.) Forsberg's text is, by any reasonable standards, a major contribution not just to Murdoch scholarship but also to the Wittgensteinian tradition and its engagement with language and morals. Definitely one for the bookshelves.

J. Robert Baker

Review of *Iris Murdoch Connected: Critical Essays on her Fiction and Philosophy* edited by Mark Luprecht, Tennessee Studies in Literature, Vol. 47 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2014)

Mark Luprecht and the contributors to *Iris Murdoch Connected* have done those who admire the work of Iris Murdoch a very good turn. Luprecht's aim in bringing these essays together with all their insights, delights, and surprises is 'to forge an expanded, if not entirely new, understanding' of Murdoch (p.xi). Linking Murdoch's fiction and philosophy to other writers before and after her, the essays do just that: they enlarge our understanding of Murdoch's fiction and philosophy, and provide scholars and newcomers with accessible insights into her work.

The volume begins with essays that re-evaluate Murdoch's connection to contemporary writers. Reassessing Murdoch's attitudes toward Virginia Woolf, Frances White felicitously argues that Murdoch was more connected to Woolf than she realized. Even though she found Woolf appealing, Murdoch mistrusted Woolf for what she took to be the modernists' egoism and lack of moral focus. White demonstrates that Murdoch and Wolfe, in fact, shared similar ethical concerns. Both were suspicious of authorial ego and sought to decenter the novel so that it reveals the contingency of human life. 'Woolf's art is indeed "for life's sake," and [...] her fiction is very much about "the discovery of reality" and "perception of individuals," and thus it has a strong ethical dimension' (pp.12-13). Despite Murdoch's anxiety about Woolf's influence, White seconds Frank Kermode's idea, almost fifty years ago, that Murdoch is Woolf's heir.

Elaine Morley and Miles Leeson also reassess Murdoch's relationship to contemporary writers. Morley reconsiders the influence of Elias Cannetti on Murdoch, pointing out that 'there is no evidence that Murdoch suffered from any kind of "anxiety of influence" in relation to Canetti' (p.41). Morley suggests, instead, that the two thinkers and writers were 'intellectual allies' who shared concerns about power and unselfing (p.41). Miles Leeson shows how much *Under the Net* owes to Raymond Queneau's influence. 'Her early philosophical essays, especially 'Nostalgia for the Particular' (1952) and 'Vision and Choice in Morality' (1956), are also influenced by his approach to literature in his fiction' (p.50). In particular, Leeson comments that Queneau strengthened Murdoch's goal to write fiction that entertained and prompted readers to think about contingency and moral responsibility.

Anne Rowe observes that Murdoch's letters to the painter Harry Weinberger, collected in the Murdoch Archives, evidence the shared interests of writer and artist, and reveal substantial new information about Murdoch's painterly concerns as she worked them out in her novels. Rowe notes 'that Weinberger's influence almost certainly led Murdoch to a reconsideration of her suspicion of the consolatory function of art' (p.65).

David James turns from Murdoch's predecessors and contemporaries as he considers Murdoch's influence on John Banville. James takes Murdoch's interest in character, attention, and moral improvement as her legacy to postmillennial writers who, like Banville, 'are asserting the affective, consolatory, even therapeutic role of fiction in the wake of postmodern cynicism' (p.82).

Two essays take up, through widely divergent vertices, the gay characters in Murdoch's *The Bell*. Pamela Osborn perceives that the adjective 'Hyacinthine' used to describe Nick Fawley's hair invokes the myth of Apollo and Hyacinth to characterize the relationship between Michael Meade and Nick. Like the god who cannot foresee the danger to the boy to whom he is attracted, Michael cannot grasp the jeopardy he puts Nick in. Unlike the god who is unscathed by his desire, Michael undertakes a romance that ultimately destroys Nick and the community at Imber. Osborn convincingly suggests that the love may not be mutual; certainly the novel never offers Nick's perspective on the initial relationship with Michael. She dispassionately points out that Michael misreads Nick's behavior to justify his approach to a minor.

Comparing *The Bell* and the human body, Rivka Isaacson uses cell biology to map the geography of

Imber Court and the human relationships there. Her ultimate argument focuses on the devastation that comes to Nick because of a lack of communication. Using a metaphor of apoptosis, she argues that as compromised messages between cells in the body can destroy the life of that body, the inability of Michael and Nick to communicate leads to Nick's self-destruction.

Tony Milligan analyzes Murdoch's understanding of puritanism as a denial of human imperfection. It 'is central to her ethic and [...] constrains, or gives shape, to her account of truthfulness' (p.113). Milligan characterizes three forms of puritanism: the attempt to escape human limitations, the belief one should escape, and an obsessive consciousness of fault. Milligan takes *A Fairly Honorable Defeat*'s Axel Nilsson as the primary exemplar of all three. That so many of the essays in this book take up Murdoch's gay characters as a matter of course indicates that scholarly consideration of her work has caught up with her own construal of gay men; like the variegated kittens at the end of *Under the Net*, they are 'just one of the wonders of the world.'

The final three essays turn to Murdoch's philosophy, particularly her commitment to the contingent, Simone Weil's idea of *metaxu*, Kierkegaard's effect on *The Black Prince*, and her own influence on Charles Taylor. Justin Jiménez Heffernan argues that the relationship between Murdoch's preoccupations with contingency are rooted in Hegel's understanding of contingency and Henry James's emphasis on the disorderly muddle of life. Heffernan identifies three aspects of the contingent in Murdoch's critical writings: '(1) contingent as *possible* ("chancy"), (2) contingent as *material* ("thingy"), and (3) contingent as unintelligible ("messy")' (p.135). Kate Larson focuses on three concepts that Murdoch took from Weil – attention, unselfing, and *metaxu*. The first two are fairly well known in Murdoch scholarship; the third involves Weil's idea of a bridge or intermediary. Murdoch applied the idea of *metaxu* to the moral life in finding bridges to moral improvement through art and other modes of attention. Paul Martens reads *The Black Prince* as Murdoch's meditation on Kierkegaard's good man. Martens insightfully remarks that although Bradley Pearson embraces resignation and moves beyond selfishness, he is no Kierkegaardian knight of faith because Murdoch rejects the consolation of faith Kierkegaard's knight achieves. Matthew J.M. Martinuk demonstrates Murdoch's influence on Charles Taylor and Taylor's resolution of the difficulty posed by the oscillation in her argument 'between a modest and strong form of transcendental argumentation' (p.189). Despite differences in their positions, Murdoch is a source for the moral realism and virtue ethics championed by Taylor and others.

Taken together, the essays in *Iris Murdoch Connected* provide new insights into Murdoch's connection with other novelists and philosophers; a short review cannot possibly reveal all the intricate arguments developed here. The essays judiciously and luminously expand our understanding of one of the post-war period's most compelling intellectuals and Luprecht has brought together a fine collection of academics, all of whom contribute fascinating and original material.

Frances White

Review of *A Mystical Philosophy: Transcendence and Immanence in the Works of Virginia Woolf and Iris Murdoch* by Donna Lazenby (London: Bloomsbury, 2014)

'By a partial, prejudiced, & ignorant' reviewer, with apologies to Jane Austen.[1]

Donna Lazenby's meticulously structured study of the precise nature of the mystical in the work of Virginia Woolf and Iris Murdoch is based on a dialogical pendulum swing between cataphasis and apophasis. As this opening remark suggests, this work (by an ordained priest who is currently Tutor and Lecturer in Spirituality and Apologetics at the Anglican College of St Mellitus) has a theological thrust, and requires of the reader some understanding of theology as well as of philosophy and literature. It is therefore with trepidation that I attempt to give an account of this book, and, for the sake of those as ignorant as myself, in rhetoric *cataphasis* is the use of affirmative statements in discussion of a subject, and *apophasis* the denial of intention to speak of a subject that is at the same time named or implied. Each term has specific theological usage, being respectively the knowledge, understanding or description of God through positive statements ('God is good') or negative statements ('God is not confined by space or time').

Lazenby stakes a bold claim that these 'sophisticated atheists' (p.263) produce 'distinctly mystical works in ways that indicate the perseverance of irreducibly mystical categories within consciousness', whilst remaining respectful of her subjects 'distancing themselves from so-called "traditional" models of religious belief' (p.1). Her analysis proceeds methodically from initial identification of mystical elements which have been debated in Woolf (taking particular issue with Woolf scholars Jane Goldman and Jane Marcus *en route*) and in Murdoch, through painstakingly thorough exploration of the cataphatic and apophatic dimensions of each writer's work (with reference in the case of Woolf to connections with the philosophy of Plotinus and Pseudo-Dionysius, and in the case of Murdoch to the influence of Plato), and concludes with an assessment of their contributions to a contemporary theological aesthetic. This sturdily constructed thesis (transparently a published PhD) is rooted in classical scholarship, a thorough understanding of contemporary developments in mystical theology, and a strong working knowledge of current Woolf and Murdoch criticism. It is saved from dullness (the potential hazard of a book written for higher educational attainment purposes rather than to engage the lay reader) both by Lazenby's passion for her subject and by her subtle interweaving of Woolf's fiction with Murdoch's philosophy, and she succeeds in making a convincing case for her central contention.

Woolf and Murdoch occupy a shared position in being 'twentieth century British atheist women metaphysicians excluded from the academic philosophical mainstream' (p.2), though they offer distinctively different perspectives to theology, Woolf's being more 'horizontal', a 'latitudinal appreciation of life in its brokenness' whereas Murdoch's Platonic stance is more 'vertical', fixing the Good as the point of reference and viewing life 'as a moral and spiritual pilgrimage on a model of "ascent" towards this transcendent reality' (p.3). Woolf's position is defined by Lazenby against that represented by Bertrand Russell; Murdoch's against the positions of her contemporaneous colleagues in Britain (Ayer *et al*) and on the Continent (Sartre, Wittgenstein), in reaction and response to whose thinking her own was forged. Woolf and Murdoch each stress the priority of vision as an ethical as well aesthetic capacity, and likewise perceive the power of the ego as the impediment to such vision. Both resist the notion that the mystical is esoteric or magical, locating it rather within the everyday experience of the ordinary individual. Each made repeated attempts in her novels to say the unsayable, to capture the uncapturable, and both novelists reflect on their failures to do so in ways which, paradoxically, are rich and fertile in themselves.

[1] Jane Austen, *Love and Freindship* (1791); (London: Chatto & Windus, 1922).

The two writers share, in Lazenby's view, 'several foci', which she delineates as 'a concern with picturing a (not uncontested) metaphysical unity'; 'a restored conception of the self as integrating rational and affective dimensions, and of the inner life as constituting something "real"'; 'an elevation of literature and art, as pointing "beyond" subjective "impressions" in their foregrounding of landscapes of consciousness'; 'a concept of "vision" as contemplative, and an appreciation for the artistic consciousness as being particularly able to convey this' and 'the conveyance of an ethics of vision'. She summarises their mutual endeavour as 'the shaping of metaphysical perspectives in contrast with contemporary approaches to the self and her world' (p.178).

With all of this I concur. My subsequent readerly response to Lazenby's critical expositions of Woolf and Murdoch is that of a non-theologian with a (post-Christian)-Christian bias, coming more from the Murdoch corner than the Woolf corner (a very different account of this multi-disciplinary study might be offered by a Woolf specialist, yet another by a theologian). As a non-philosopher I find Lazenby's exegesis of the links between Woolf's cataphatical aspects and Plotinus and between her apophatical aspects and Pseudo-Dionysus adds little to my appreciation of the transcendence and immanence clearly discernible in Woolf's work. That said, I applaud the general corrective this study offers to Woolf criticism which has tended 'to interpret, exclusively, the negativity of Woolf's aesthetic as signalling the emptiness, arbitrariness and meaningless of life' (p.185). That is so *not* what it is *like* reading Woolf's novels, and Lazenby's repositioning of this apparent negativity in relation to 'positive construals of unity (of vision and form) and transcendence' is invaluable. To that end I warm to her close readings of *To the Lighthouse* and *Between the Acts*, through which she finely illustrates otherwise dryly abstract points about Woolf's mysticism and neo-theological imaginary. But I find her contention that Woolf differs from Murdoch in that only Murdoch gives '*substantial* ethical content to the concept of envisioning' (p.164) reductive of the subtle ethics that other Woolf critics have uncovered in her work and would argue that a case could be made for saying the same of Woolf.

My sense of Lazenby's response to Murdoch is similarly mixed. I find her reading of *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* illuminating, particularly in her paralleling of Murdoch's spiralling methodological practice with that of her mentor Simone Weil, in the *Notebooks* which Murdoch perceptively reviewed. (An instance of something being so obvious once it has been pointed out that one wonders how one had not seen it for oneself.) I agree with Lazenby that there are 'substantial limitations' to Murdoch's understanding of Christianity (p.217) – *wilfully* so, I have at times found myself thinking with some irritation; I admire her sense that Murdoch takes her reader on 'an iconoclastic pilgrimage, one related to the demythologisation of religion, but simultaneously bringing the reader into relationship with the image-making and image-breaking dialectics of theological mysticism' (p.216), and I share with Lazenby her sense of a 'haunting loneliness, a difficult groundlessness, in Murdoch's world where the individual contemplates "the good without God"', which she poignantly expresses as 'Murdoch's closing appeal for the preservation of holiness echoes plaintively, uncertainly around an empty hall, for the statues are covered over' (p.251.) From the perspective of contemporary mystical theology, this study has strength and, without disrespect to their avowed atheism, brings the work of both Woolf and Murdoch closely and insightfully into harmony with it.

What imbalances Lazenby's account and makes it less thick than it might otherwise have been, to the reader's enrichment, is the lack of close readings of any of Murdoch's fictional work as a counterpart to that of Woolf's. There are points in Lazenby's argument which cry out for a parallel sensitive use of Murdoch's novels. Thus when she says, 'Murdoch teaches the student of doctrine how to attend concretely to instances of sin, temptation, evil and love, to examine individual practical instances of what otherwise become abstract categories' (p.177), I find so many of Murdoch's characters' dilemmas and sufferings yearning to be drawn attention to (from Michael Meade in *The Bell* to Tamar Hernshaw in *The Book and the Brotherhood*), but all Lazenby offers by way of illustration is the omnipresent example from the philosophy of the unfleshed-out M and D. Even more tantalising is Lazenby's acknowledgement of Murdoch's claim that at the 'highest level' of 'practical mysticism' Christ becomes forgotten as the absolute appears 'incarnate and immediate

in the needs of others,' (*MGM*, p.430) without a corresponding reference to Anne Cavidge's veridical vision of Christ in *Nuns and Soldiers*, surely one of the most haunting, multi-layered and enigmatic fictional enactments of mystical theology.

Despite the somewhat 'curate's egg' nature of this review, *A Mystical Philosophy* is a fruitful contribution not only to contemporary theological thinking but also to the critical canon of both Woolf and Murdoch. Lazenby illuminates a neglected thread in Woolf's novels, and I particularly welcome her approach to Murdoch for two reasons: first, it is good to see Murdoch being read in juxtaposition with Woolf, a slant on her work to which I have attempted to draw attention;[2] second, this is a substantial extension to the study of Murdoch's neo-theology on which critical attention is increasingly focusing.[3] This is not an easy read and at times, as I have indicated, a frustrating one, but it is nonetheless a rewarding, persuasive and revelatory study to which scholars of Murdoch's thought would do well to pay attention.

[2] See Frances White, 'Despite herself: the resisted influence of Virginia Woolf on Iris Murdoch's fiction', in *Iris Murdoch Connected*, Mark Luprecht (ed.), (University of Tennessee Press, 2014).

[3] From Fergus Kerr, *Immortal Longings: Versions of Transcending Humanity* (London: SPCK, 1997); through the papers by: Maria Antonaccio, Stephen Mulhall and Suguna Ramanathan in 'Reinstating Theology', Part I of *Iris Murdoch: A Reassessment*, Anne Rowe (ed.), (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), by Anne Rowe, Pamela Osborn, Tammy Grimshaw and William Schweiker in 'Morality Without God: Iris Murdoch's Secular Theology', Part III of *Iris Murdoch and Morality*, Anne Rowe and Avril Horner (eds.), (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); and by Don Cupitt and Heather Widdows in 'Theological and Visionary Contexts' Part I of *Iris Murdoch: Texts and Contexts*, Anne Rowe and Avril Horner (eds.), (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); to Franklin I. Gamwell, *Religion among We the People: Conversations on Democracy and the Divine Good* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2015).

Miles Leeson

Review of *Literature and Moral Theory* by Nora Hämäläinen (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015)

This fascinating study of the links and fissures between literature and moral philosophy is based, primarily, on a reading of Iris Murdoch's and Martha Nussbaum's contribution to this developing field. Although a difficult work for those not versed in its respective elements – and Hämäläinen makes it clear from the start that this is a difficult area – her developed PhD thesis (and this should not put anyone off) provides a clear and systematic framework for the reader. Unlike a literary-focused work, and we are under no illusions that this is written very much from a philosophical standpoint, the layout is made plain from the beginning. Hämäläinen's aim is clear, 'to show the trend of reading narrative literature for the purposes of moral philosophy – from the 1970s and early 1980s to the present day – as part of a larger movement in moral philosophical thought and to present a view of its significance for moral philosophy overall' (p.2): clearly then, a project with scope and ambition. The topography is delineated and set forward in detail and Hämäläinen sees her work weaving a path between the overtly-philosophical, represented here by the work of not only Nussbaum's and Murdoch's philosophy (specifically *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*) but other philosophers, among them Richard Eldridge, Cora Diamond, Richard Rorty, and the literary-theoretical, supported by the work of Wayne C. Booth, Samuel Goldberg, David Parker and Adam Newton. A genuine balance then. As we move through the work a shift toward the philosophical is palpable, but not unexpected.

The introductory work is fast-paced and, although perhaps sympathetic to those coming from a literary perspective, sees its ideal reader as well-versed in contemporary Anglo-American ethics. This is not a criticism per-se; interdisciplinary work often sides with one or other of the disciplines under discussion and this is, of course, entirely natural and to be expected. Yes, Hämäläinen favours the philosophical/theoretical but the exploration of the literary is not confined to a few well-chosen examples later on in the work. There is nothing particularly new here, the history of the 'ethical turn[s]' is well documented, but this serves as a useful reminder to some and a clear introduction to others. The following chapters, broken down into useful sub-sections, evaluate not only the impact that Murdoch, and subsequently Nussbaum, had on the development of the respective 'ethical turn[s]' in both philosophy and literature but the dialogue (or lack of it) between the two.

The first three chapters continue in this vein as Hämäläinen sets out three major areas for discussion; the literary turn in a Neo-Aristotelian Framework; literature, moral particularism and anti-theory; and, finally, generality in literature. All three are self-assured pieces in their own right and make for excellent, discursive reading. Absent, however, is any reference to the key work on 'Against Theory' – the seminal collection edited by W.J.T. Mitchell including the title essay by Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michael – from the early 1980s that did so much to cause a paradigm shift, the forerunner of the later 'ethical turn[s]'. The book would certainly benefit from reference to these collected papers as Hämäläinen produces an ongoing historical narrative that leads up to the final two chapters that will be of most interest to Murdoch scholars.

Chapters four and five are the highpoint of this work and for good reason. In Chapter Four, 'Between Language and Theory', Hämäläinen 'investigate[s] two ways of combining the insights provided by literature – both particular and general – with a theoretical and generalizing framework of ethical thought, as presented in the work of Martha Nussbaum and Iris Murdoch [...] they both find a natural place for generalizing functions of literature in their respective frameworks' (p.133). Hämäläinen notes the impact of Murdoch's work upon Nussbaum and also neatly discusses the later divergence of Nussbaum's work away from her predecessor's reliance on a neo-platonic framework. More than this, what is most useful is the clear working through of later philosophers, Stephen Mulhall and Maria Antonaccio amongst them, who comment on and build upon Murdoch's own

philosophy. Hämäläinen does not shy away from critiquing generally accepted positions springing from the work of Antonaccio and others. Readers orientated toward Murdoch's work would do well not to miss the preceding chapters, however tempting it might be to move straight to the real 'meat' of the book, as Hämäläinen skilfully builds up her case before approaching Chapter 5; indeed, her positioning of Diamond with Murdoch, with Nussbaum further diverging from their ethical positon, is enlightening. In this final chapter the reader is presented with the possibility of an enabling solution to the ongoing conflict between anti-theorists and theory-oriented philosophers, of whom Nussbaum (we are told) is one. Hämäläinen tells us that we need 'a perspective on moral philosophy which enables us to make use of both directions of thought, a viewpoint which can endure internal conflicts, and plural approaches and genres' (p.185). I think any academic interested in this area (unless wedded securely to one point) would concur with this: an inclusivist position focused around ethics in alliance with literature must be welcomed. Hämäläinen is methodical here in her working – setting the 'alliance' and 'adversarial' positons in context – and this will enable a clearer, more nuanced reading of literature.

I was surprised that this work, although illuminated by a range of useful earlier theoreticians, does not pick up on the excellent work already done critiquing Nussbaum's ethical thought; specifically, the work done by Robert Eaglestone in *Ethical Criticism: Reading After Levinas*. This would surely have given greater depth to the work. Another small issue is the repetition of the tired cliché 'on the one hand [...] on the other' which crops up far too often: better proof-reading would have eliminated this. True, it does not detract from the overall argument – which is sound and secure – but it does effect the aesthetic of the reading experience and renders some passages rather more formulaic than they should be. For readers primarily interested in Murdoch's fiction there may be a little disappointment that more is not made of the obvious connections that Hämäläinen makes here; more exemplars of links and divergences would be most useful indeed and a myriad of examples come to mind that could be drawn down from the novels. These are, however, relatively minor issues compared to the obvious benefits this study brings.

Hämäläinen is clearly well-versed in the philosophical works of both major writers discussed here and this monograph, although in need of a little more literature to add to the palate already offered, is not only clear and well developed but illuminating and challenging in equal measure. This is sure to be a fixture on the bookshelves of all those working in this area and will be of interest to those more squarely focused on the literary work of Murdoch.

Stephen Mulhall

Review of *Selfless Love and Human Flourishing in Paul Tillich and Iris Murdoch* by Julia T. Meszaros (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016)

As one might expect from a contribution to a series entitled 'Oxford Theology and Religion Monographs', this book is not primarily intended for the layperson, and its central concern is with issues arising within the Western Christian tradition of practice and thought, as a result of its distinctive call to selfless love – which the author defines as a love unselfish in its motivation and centred not on the subject but on 'the other'. As that tradition has long realized, such a call appears to stand in tension with an equally Christian regard for the needs and limitations of the concrete individual; more specifically, it appears to dismiss those needs and disregard those limitations. And in the late modern era, with its enhanced emphasis on the individual's ability to stand up for her rights and dignity, and to develop her needs, desires and potential to the full, that call appears to encourage masochism and frustration, and more generally to conflict with the pursuit of human flourishing. Julia Meszaros thinks that both concerns are misplaced; for one can develop a conception of selfless love which not only dissolves this appearance of conflict, but in fact reveals that the aspiration to such love forms an essential part of genuine human flourishing. In this book, she draws extensively upon the work of Tillich and Murdoch in elaborating just such a conception, and the book's structure reflects this dual dependence.

The first three chapters set the intellectual scene. The first outlines the conflicts that Meszaros aims to address, and chapters two and three utilize the work of Kierkegaard, Nygren, Weil and Sartre to delineate the late modern context in which those conflicts come to appear both pressing and insoluble, and to provide a sketch of some of the philosophical and theological resources that Tillich and Murdoch react against and draw upon as they reconceive selfless love against the contemporary late-modern grain. Meszaros then devotes two chapters to a detailed critical account of Tillich's theology of the self and of love, followed by two covering the same aspects of Murdoch's atheistic mode of metaphysics and moral philosophy. A final chapter summarizes Meszaros's view of the strengths and weaknesses of these two parallel projects, and suggests various respects in which they might be revised or supplemented so as to avoid what she sees as their most significant shared limitations.

The basic shape of the shared conception of selfless love that Meszaros finds in these two authors is one according to which cultivating such love is critical to the full emergence of a genuinely human self, because human beings are conceived of as creatures whose individuality can flourish only in and through a participatory relation with the world they inhabit and in particular with the other human beings they encounter in that world. Both Tillich and Murdoch conceive of this ontological truth about human existence as itself grounded in a further participatory relation: for Tillich, it is with God, the creator and sustainer of the individual and her world; for Murdoch it is with the Good, conceived of as an absolutely necessary structure of reality and of our consciousness of that reality. The key weakness of this common conception, on Meszaros's account, is that both authors underrate the role of mutuality or reciprocality in love, without which the essentially personal dimension of love, and so of human existence, remains insufficiently acknowledged. Hence, her suggestions as to how to improve that conception centre on ensuring that it incorporates the human need to receive love as well as to give it, and that it conceives of God or Goodness not only as the locus in which both self and other achieve individual fulfilment, but also (and here is where her theological commitments become particularly salient) as itself an inherently personal ground or structure.

Professional theologians and philosophers will no doubt raise questions about various aspects of Meszaros's interpretations of her chosen authors and their intellectual interlocutors. For myself, for example, her reading of Sartre as the advocate of absolute human freedom may allow her to portray both Tillich and Murdoch as more attractively nuanced on the matter, but in so doing

she misleadingly downplays the fact that Sartre combines his emphasis on what he calls human transcendence with an equal emphasis on what he calls facticity, acknowledging the inherently situated or conditioned nature of our freedom. For the readers of this *Review*, however, a more important question is what they might learn from this book about Iris Murdoch.

Those primarily interested in her novels will not find any really detailed attention being paid to them here, as Meszaros acknowledges, although she makes regular illustrative reference to a representative sample of them. However, those interested in the philosophical writings will find that the two chapters devoted to a detailed critical evaluation of Murdoch's conception of selfhood and love are detailed and carefully argued, draw upon the best contemporary scholarship concerning the philosophical dimensions of her writing, and offer a number of insights along the way: for example, I was struck by Meszaros's suggestion that Murdoch envisages eros (continuously operative spiritual energy) and attention (disciplined attentiveness to reality) not as alternative forms of love but as complementary aspects of love. The book as a whole also makes a strong case for seeing Paul Tillich (a copy of whose *Systematic Theology*, densely annotated, formed part of Murdoch's personal library) as a significant intellectual resource for Murdoch's own thinking. But beyond specific matters of interpretation and critical evaluation, what is most salutary about Meszaros's project is that her courageous and still unusual attempt to treat Iris Murdoch as a potential interlocutor in such highly sophisticated and complex theological and philosophical controversies generates so little sense of strain or discomfort in the reader. She plainly belongs in this exalted intellectual company.

Pamela Osborn

Iris Murdoch's Broadening Influence

'The question is, can I really exploit the advantages [...] of having a mind on the borders of philosophy, literature and politics.'[1]

When Charles Taylor was asked about Murdoch's legacy upon her death in 1999 he replied 'summing up her contribution is impossible. Her achievement is much too rich and we are much too close to it'.[2] Now the extent of her achievement and influence is coming into focus. Frances White asserts that the 'world of Iris Murdoch studies is expanding geographically and deepening through the calibre of scholars engaging with her work'.[3] Many of these scholars are making use of the vast and incomparable resource that the Iris Murdoch Archives at Kingston University provides.

The past four years have seen an increase in references to Murdoch, her work and her letters in critical and philosophical works. The most prominent publication dedicated to Murdoch is *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995* (Horner and Rowe) which committed to print several hundred of her most illuminating letters to much acclaim and some controversy. *Never Mind about the Bourgeoisie: The Correspondence between Iris Murdoch and Brian Medlin 1976-1995* (Dooley and Nerlich) is dedicated to Murdoch's friendship with the Australian philosopher. *Remembering Iris Murdoch: Letters and Interviews* (Meyers) reproduces Murdoch's letters to Jeffrey Meyers alongside the *Paris Review* and *Denver Quarterly* interviews. Murdoch's early life and work is also the subject of Frances White's *Becoming Iris Murdoch* which won the Kingston University Press short biography competition in 2012. Murdoch's own foreword to *The Pyrgic Puzzler: Classic Conundrums* (Maslanka) was reprinted in 2012. Murdoch has featured in a number of biographies about contemporaries, friends and students such as *A Very English Hero: The Making of Frank Thompson* (Conradi), *Frank Cioffi: The Philosopher in Shirt-Sleeves* (Ellis), *A Companion to David Lewis* (Loewer and Schaffer), *Olivia Manning: A Woman at War* (David), and her own authorised biography by Conradi is analysed in *The Philosophy of Autobiography* (Cowley).

Critical work on Murdoch is flourishing and includes several collections of essays such as *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher* (Broackes), *Iris Murdoch: Texts and Contexts* (Rowe and Horner), *Iris Murdoch Connected* (Luprecht), *Iris Murdoch and her Work* (Kırca and Okuroğlu). Monographs on Murdoch include *A Philosophy to Live by: Engaging Iris Murdoch* (Antonaccio), *Metaphysics and Philosophy in the Work of Iris Murdoch* (Patenidis), *Language Lost and Found: On Iris Murdoch and the Limits of Philosophical Discourse* (Forsberg), and *Form and Myth in Three Novels by Iris Murdoch: The Flight from the Enchanter, The Bell, and A Severed Head* (Ashdown). She is the co-subject in *Iris Murdoch and Elias Canetti: Intellectual Allies* (Morely), *A Mystical Philosophy: Transcendence & Immanence in the Works of Virginia Woolf and Iris Murdoch* (Lazenby) and *Selfless Love and Human Flourishing in Paul Tillich and Iris Murdoch* (Meszaros).

Chapters on Murdoch appear in texts as diverse as *Philosophy and the Flow of Presence* (Costello), *The Year of Reading Dangerously: How Fifty Great Books Saved my Life* (Miller), *Better Worlds: Education, Art, and Utopia* (Roberts and Freeman-Moir), *Mirror, Mirror: The Uses and Abuses of Self Love* (Blackburn), *Religion among We the People: Conversations on Democracy and the Divine Good* (Gamwell), *Art, Literature and Culture from a Marxist Perspective* (McKenna) and *Feminisms* (Mulvey and Backman Rogers) which contains Lucy Bolton's chapter on the film, *Iris* (2001).

Murdoch's influence continues to permeate works of literary theory and criticism and her fiction and literary criticism is referenced in *Modernity Britain: Opening the Box Book One: 1957- 1959*

[1] Avril Horner and Anne Rowe, *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2015), letter to Raymond Queneau, p.99.

[2] Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), p.595.

[3] Frances White, *Becoming Iris Murdoch* (London: Kingston University Press, 2014), p.17.

(Kynaston), *The 1970s: A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction* (Hubble, McLeod, and Tew) and *Gay Novels of Britain, Ireland and the Commonwealth, 1881-1981* (Gunn) in which it is suggested that '[b]ecause of her prestige she introduced more readers to gay men than any other author at the time'.[4] Murdoch's progression and development as a storyteller is traced in *Entranced by Story: Brain, Tale and Teller from Infancy to Old Age* (Crago). An 'interlude' on *The Bell* in *The Collar: Reading Christian Ministry in Fiction, Television, and Film* (Sorenson) describes Murdoch as 'the twentieth century's George Eliot, a seriously moral writer unwilling to subscribe to religious belief who nevertheless borrows respectfully from Christian tradition'.[5] She is also referenced in *The Cambridge Companion to British Fiction since 1945* (James), *Object Lessons: The Novel as a Theory of Reference* (Bartlett), and *Forgiveness and Love* (Pettigrove), the *International Encyclopedia of Ethics* (LaFollette), the *Encyclopedia of the British Novel* (Brackett and Gaydosik), *The Journalist in British Fiction and Film* (Lonsdale) and a study of rubbish and waste entitled *Trash Talks: Revelations in the Rubbish* which examines Tallis in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (Spelman).

Perhaps most significantly, her philosophical influence emerges in a variety of texts across a number of disciplines from introductory works such as *Philosophy* (Perry), feminist and queer perspectives including *A Feminist Perspective on Virtue Ethics* (Berges), *Essays on Ethics and Feminism* (Lovibond) and overviews of contemporary philosophy such as *Philosophy Bites Again* (Edmonds and Warburton). Murdoch has a large role in *Literature and Moral Theory* (Hämäläinen) which classifies Murdoch as an 'important inspiration for many philosophers with a critical stance towards moral theory'.[6] Her ideas about existentialism and Sartre are referenced in *Narrative, Philosophy and Life* (Speight), *At the Existentialist Café: Freedom, Being and Apricot Cocktails* (Bakewell) and her connection with Wittgenstein is explored in *Wittgenstein: The Crooked Roads* (Lyons). Murdoch's concept of attention and the essay 'The Idea of Perfection' are identified as a 'sharp and early criticism of the picture of the moral self presented by contemporary moral philosophy as "behaviourist, existentialist and utilitarian"' in *The Act of Faith: Christian Faith and the Moral Self* (Springsted).[7] She is invoked in several works on animals and the natural world, *The Aesthetics of Care: On the Literary Treatment of Animals* (Donovan), *Re-Imagining Nature: The Promise of a Christian Natural Theology* (McGrath), *Science and the Self: Animals, Evolution, and Ethics: Essays in Honour of Mary Midgley* (Kidd and McKinnell) and on modern concepts of beauty, *The Recovery of Beauty: Arts, Culture, Medicine* (Saunders, Macnaughton and Fuller).

Her presence in works about concepts of the self and/or moral vision is considerable. She is referenced in *The Challenge of Things: Thinking Through Troubled Times* (Grayling), *Transforming the Teaching of Shakespeare with the Royal Shakespeare Company* (Winston) in which Murdoch's concept of unselfing is cited as an important way that students 'can possess and be possessed by the beauty of Shakespeare',[8] *The Language of Ethics and Community in Graham Greene's Fiction* (Salvan), *Black Queer Ethics, Family, and Philosophical Imagination* (Young), *Understanding Love: Philosophy, Film, and Fiction* (Wolf and Grau) and *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology and Counselling: Pathways of Mindfulness-Based Therapies* (De Silva).

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[6] Nora Hämäläinen, *Literature and Moral Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p.134.

[7] Eric O. Springsted, *The Act of Faith: Christian Faith and the Moral Self* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2015), pp.193-4.

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Katie Giles

Iris Murdoch Archive Report 2016

It seems a very long time since our last update for the *Iris Murdoch Review* back in March 2014. The last two years have been extremely busy ones for Kingston University Archives and Special Collections. One reason we have been so busy is that some of our lovely team of transcribers who worked on the letters from Iris Murdoch to Philippa Foot have continued to come in to work on other items in the Murdoch collections. They have transcribed all the letters written by Murdoch held in our collections (there are well over 3,000 of them), and have now moved on to transcribing Murdoch's annotations within the books of the Iris Murdoch Oxford Library. We are extremely grateful to them for their hard work and dedication.

It was fantastic to see so many of the letters by Iris Murdoch that we hold here at Kingston University featuring in *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995* edited by Anne Rowe and Avril Horner (London: Chatto & Windus, 2015). This text will open up Murdoch's letters to a great number of people who would not otherwise have been able to read them. We are still very pleased to welcome researchers to the Archive who would like to see the original letters, as well as the many others which could not be included in the book.

Since our last update we have added a large number of items to the Murdoch Collections here in the Archive. They include:

- Letters from Iris Murdoch to Brigid Brophy – this vast correspondence from Murdoch to a fellow author consists of over 1,000 letters and postcards. The letters were purchased for the Archives with assistance from Iris Murdoch Archives Project at Kingston University, the Iris Murdoch Society, Kingston University Alumni Fund (Opportunities Fund), V&A Purchase Grant Fund, the Breslauer Foundation and the Friends of the National Libraries.
- A copy of V.S. Pritchett, *The Living Novel* (Chatto & Windus, 1949) previously owned by Iris Murdoch and annotated by her. Kindly donated by Anne Rowe and Frances White.
- Two letters from Iris Murdoch to Chet DeFonso, thanking him for sending letters praising her novels. Kindly donated by Chet DeFonso.
- Special editions of the Murdoch texts: *The Existentialist Political Myth* (including a forward by Robin Waterfield) and an uncorrected proof of *The Nice and the Good* signed by Iris Murdoch. Kindly donated by Cheryl Bove.
- Additional documents relating to Frank Thompson and E.P. Thompson. Kindly donated by Peter Conradi.
- Copy of Arthur Koestler, *Arrival and Departure* (Jonathan Cape, 1943) previously owned by Iris Murdoch, with a note in the front by Murdoch and an inscription by Thomas [probably Thomas Balogh]. Also a Ceres Medal created by the Food and Agriculture Organisation on the United Nations from the 1970s, featuring Iris Murdoch. Kindly donated by Miles Leeson.
- Reprint society edition of Iris Murdoch, *Under the Net* (1955) with an unusual cover design. Kindly donated by Miles Leeson.
- Iris Murdoch related items collected by the Iris Murdoch Archives Project at Kingston University.
- Ten books by Iris Murdoch previously owned by A.S. Byatt, some with annotations inside by Byatt. Kindly purchased for the Archives by members of the Iris Murdoch Society.
- Two books by Iris Murdoch, *Poems* (Okayama: University Education Press, 1997) and *Occasional Essays* (Okayama: University Education Press, 1998) edited by Yozo Muroya and Paul Hullah, previously owned by A.S. Byatt. Kindly donated by Anne Rowe and Chris Boddington.
- Additional material on Iris Murdoch and Frank Thompson. Kindly donated by Peter Conradi.
- 13 photographs of Iris Murdoch collected by Peter Conradi while researching I*ris Murdoch: A Life*.
- CD of an interview of John Bayley by Dr Anthony Clare for BBC Radio 4 programme 'In the

Psychiatrist's Chair' on 10 Oct 1999. Kindly donated by Michael Howard.

- Original script for the play adaptation of Iris Murdoch's *The Sea, the Sea* with a covering letter. Kindly presented by the National Theatre.
- 6 photographs from the opening of the Iris Murdoch Archives Project and launch of the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University in 2004. Kindly donated by Janfarie Skinner.
- Two photographs of William Wallace Robson. Kindly donated by Anne Robson.
- Photograph of Iris Murdoch, John Bayley and Peter Conradi. Kindly donated by Peter Conradi.
- Copy of Charles Lamb, *The Essays of Elia* (Everyman, 1932) previously owned by Iris Murdoch and annotated by her, with a letter by Murdoch to Dr William Baker confirming her ownership of the book. Kindly donated by Mark Yoes.
- Large photograph of Elias Canetti by Helen Craig c. 1960s, with the catalogue for Craig's photographic exhibition 'Thirty-nine Writers of Hampstead' in 1962 also featuring Elias Canetti. Kindly donated by Helen Craig.
- Invitation to a celebration of the life of John Bayley hosted by Lord Saatchi and Ed Victor at the House of Lords on 1 Jun 2015. Kindly donated by Anne Rowe.
- Photographs of Iris Murdoch and John Bayley with Georgia and David Crowne, with three letters from Murdoch to Georgia and David Crowne and a book of David Crowne's photographs. Kindly donated by Georgia Crowne.
- 18 letters from Iris Murdoch to the academic Ray Byram at the University of California dated 1978-1982. Kindly donated by Ray Byram.
- Copy of Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (London, 1962) previously owned by Iris Murdoch and annotated by her. Purchased for the Archives by the Iris Murdoch Society.
- Ordnance Survey Map of Westminster and Victoria from 1894, reprinted by Godfrey in 1996. The map shows the location of 5, Seaforth Place where Iris Murdoch lived with Philippa Foot during the Second World War. Kindly donated by Peter Conradi.
- Items previously owned by Iris Murdoch. These include a number of religious statues that were on her desk, a stone, a gold edged bowl, a painting by Murdoch from 1941, a tapestry by Murdoch, letters from Iris Murdoch to Boris and Audi Villers, a large bust of Iris Murdoch, and Iris Murdoch's teddy bear Jimbo. Kindly donated by Audi Bayley.

As always we are extremely grateful to all of our donors. We would especially like to extend our thanks to those who donated towards the fund for the Brophy letters, and to Audi Bayley for not only presenting us with the lovely items owned by Iris Murdoch, but also for a very generous financial donation which will go towards the care of the Iris Murdoch Collections we hold here.

The last two years have also seen the Archive very busy with researchers. Since March 2014 we have had 502 visitors and 20 group visits to the Iris Murdoch Collections, and have issued 1,169 items from the Collections. We have also answered 1,093 Iris Murdoch related enquiries.

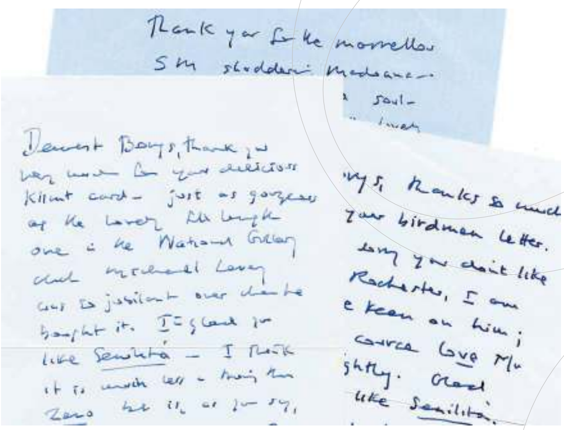
We have continued to updated the listings of our Iris Murdoch related archival collections on our online catalogue at **http://adlib.kingston.ac.uk**, and have added further records to the AIM25 and National Archives websites at
http://aim25.ac.uk and **http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/**

We also now have collection level entries on the Archives Hub website
http://archiveshub.ac.uk/

All three of these websites draw together catalogue entries from Archives across the UK, and are another way for us to raise awareness of our archival holdings here.

We have also been promoting the Murdoch collections by including them in our exhibitions held here in the Archive – we created a display of our newest acquisitions in September 2014 to tie in with the Iris Murdoch Conference held then, and also featured items from the Murdoch collections in our two most recent Explore Your Archives campaign exhibitions – the first celebrating the tenth anniversary of the archives, and the second looking back at the Second World War. We also hope that many of you are following our series of blog posts '25 Objects for 25 Years' – this series of posts is highlighting one item a month from our collections counting down to the 25th anniversary of Kingston's becoming a University in 2017. So far our count down has included two Murdoch related items and there will be more to come! You can see these posts, and all the other latest news from the Archives, by visiting our blog at **http://blogs.kingston.ac.uk/asc**

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


Thank you for the marvellous

Dearest Boys, thank you
very much for your delicious
Klimt card – just as gorgeous
as the lovely, although
one in the National Gallery
which Michael Levey
was so jubilant over
bought it. I'm glad you
like Senilità – I think
it is much less – than
Zeno but is, as you say,

ys, thanks so much
your birdman letter.
sorry you don't like
Rochester, I am
keen on him;
course love
ghtly. Glad
like Senilità.

Top left: Bust of Iris Murdoch created by Faith Faulconbridge [KUAS191]
Top right: Ceres medal created by the United Nations featuring Iris Murdoch [KUAS151/2]
Bottom left: Letters from Iris Murdoch to Boris and Audi Villers [KUAS191]
Bottom right: 'Jimbo' the teddy bear [KUAS191]

All items can be found in the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives.

Lucy Bolton

Iris Murdoch in Norwich
Report on 'An Afternoon with Iris: Life, Thought, Writing', Symposium at the University of East Anglia, 6 December 2014

Some forty or fifty Murdoch fans, students and scholars assembled in the OPEN Building on Bank Plain, Norwich, to spend 'An Afternoon with Iris', discussing her life, thought, and writing, both fictional and philosophical. The symposium was convened by Silvia Panizza, a PhD student in the philosophy department at the University of East Anglia, who is researching the moral philosophy of Iris Murdoch, particularly her thinking about attention and moral perception. In publicizing the event, Panizza posed the question of whether, despite Murdoch being a much loved cultural figure, we are doing her justice by the ways in which we celebrate and remember her through her novels, her philosophy, and in film.

Panizza introduced the afternoon, setting out the basic principles of Murdoch's moral philosophy. Something that Panizza really wanted the afternoon to explore was the role that our interest in Murdoch's life plays in understanding her thought and her novels. To this end, we heard from an interdisciplinary set of speakers and a variety of presentations and events. Pamela Osborn and Frances White from Kingston University, London enacted a fictional conversation which they had written between the young Murdoch and her older self, reflecting on the reception of her work and the perceptions of her as a passionate young woman and an intellectual. This conversation poignantly suggested how Murdoch might view some of the opinions held about her biography and assumptions about her intentions and sources, which offered a provocative starting point from which to develop our consideration of her work.

Marije Altorf from St Mary's University, Twickenham gave a paper entitled 'The film I would like to see next: reflections on biography and gender', discussing possibilities for representing a female philosopher onscreen. British film specialist Melanie Williams, from the University of East Anglia, gave a paper called 'Let us now praise famous women: *Iris* and British female biopics'. Williams examined the types of biopics made about British women, usually royalty, and teased out the ways in which the Richard Eyre film *Iris* (2001) focused on Murdoch's youthful sexuality and later-age illness rather than her work.

There was then a screening of *Iris* and roundtable discussion both about the representation of Murdoch in the film and also people's encounters with her work and her thinking on goodness and morality, as well as sympathetic exchanges about her novels and biographies. The 'Afternoon with Iris', then, addressed issues of gender and the representation of women intellectuals as well as providing a forum for people to inquire further into the reasons for Murdoch's continuing cultural popularity, to which the lively success of the afternoon itself provided testament.

Gary Browning and Shauna Pitt

Iris Murdoch at the Ashmolean
Two conference reports on 'Why Iris Murdoch Matters: Truth and Love', Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 13-14 November 2015

Gary Browning, Conference Organizer

When organizing a conference, there is always a moment of doubt. Will it work? Will the speakers be stimulating? Will there be a good atmosphere? All of these questions were answered positively, demonstrating why it is always a good idea to have a conference.

There was a spirit of friendship at the conference that enacted the spirit of Murdoch's philosophy. Experienced Murdoch scholars and a new generation of fledgling scholars mixed easily and productively. Members of a wider public interested in Murdoch dropped in on things and later wrote to me expressing their gratitude for learning more about her.

This multi-dimensional enquiry into the various ways in which Murdoch engages with the world seemed to fit perfectly with the Ashmolean Museum, and its evocative sense of Murdoch's Oxford and her reverence for art, religion and truth. Murdoch explored many aspects of the human condition in inter-connected ways, and the speakers at the conference followed her in exploring religion, philosophy, politics, art and psychology. The relevance and nature of Murdoch's life was also discussed.

The conference began with a roundtable discussion that proved a notable introduction to the conference themes. Panel speakers presented differing angles of vision on Murdoch. Stephen Mulhall (New College, Oxford), Christiana Payne (Oxford Brookes University) and Frances White (Kingston University) reviewed Murdoch's contributions to art, religion, morality, politics, philosophy and literature. Mulhall talked of Murdoch's ongoing relevance, White recognized Murdoch's telling contributions to morality and literature, and Payne, a celebrated art historian, reviewed the role of art in Murdoch's novels.

Anne Rowe (Kingston University) talked of Murdoch's life, in the light of the recently published collection of Murdoch's letters *Living on Paper* which she co-edited with Avril Horner. Rowe brought Murdoch's life vividly before us, recognizing its power and truthfulness. Sabina Lovibond (Worcester College, Oxford) explored how Murdoch's moral philosophy lays stress on how one can become a better person by resisting the natural human tendency to self-absorption and turning one's attention outward, so as to register 'justly or lovingly' the value present in nature, art, and other persons. Miles Leeson (University of Chichester) offered a lively paper on Murdoch's fiction in which he celebrated the serious fun of her writing. Alison Denham (St. Anne's College, Oxford) examined the relationship between Murdoch's view of empathetic love and evidence provided by the discipline of psychology of the psycho-pathological dynamics of empathy. Sophie-Grace Chappell (Open University) re-examined Murdoch's treatment of the moral life, noting the puzzles that are generated by her enquiries. Carla Bagnoli (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia), reviewed Murdoch's treatment of the notion of love and how it relates to the moral field and critiques of Kantian rationalism. Niklas Forsberg (Uppsala University) reviewed Murdoch's thinking on language and how language allows for expression of ways of life. Gary Browning (Oxford Brookes University) drew things to a close by speaking on 'Murdoch and the End of Ideology', observing how *The Book and the Brotherhood* can be read as Murdoch's recognition of the continuing role of ideology in changing times.

The academic world can offer wonderful chances to explore common interests with others and to seek to develop ways of understanding the truth in concert with others. This conference was such an occasion.

Shauna Pitt, Undergraduate Student Delegate

There is no impersonal world of facts. This I discovered at the Iris Murdoch conference organised by Gary Browning and held at the Ashmolean Museum. I found instead the warmth and laughter of an enthusiastic Iris Murdoch society; a whole other world behind the books I had read in the University of Chichester's library.

As an undergraduate student, I wondered if I might be ill prepared for an Iris Murdoch conference but I was delighted to find all the papers of the weekend accessible. Each topic was engaging and thought provoking in its own way, even to my novice state. Anne Rowe and Frances White were particularly encouraging through their own energetic engagement with Murdoch studies. By the end of the weekend I was eager to continue my own journey through the work and life of Iris Murdoch. I say continue because this journey had begun during Miles Leeson's *Reading Women's Writings* module at the University of Chichester. It was Miles's own passion for Murdoch studies that brought me and my fellow student Dave Clayton to this conference. We were both supporters and avid listeners.

The first day focused mainly on Murdoch's fiction, the second on her philosophical work. Starting with a roundtable discussion chaired by Gary Browning, the speakers Stephen Mulhall (New College, Oxford), Christiana Payne (Oxford Brookes University) and Frances White (Kingston University) set the tone for the weekend ahead; we were obviously in for a diverse and in-depth exploration of the different paths that lead to Murdoch's work. Throughout both days the topics were varied and insightful in a way that made time seem precious and fleeting. Around forty people attended this conference and I believe that, as an audience, we could have enjoyed at least one more day of celebrating why Murdoch matters.

With a backdrop so rich in academia, peopled by scholars of so much talent, it was easy not to notice that we sat in a room with no natural light. The discussions being held and the papers being read kept the room bright and animated. It was inspiring to hear each speaker express the personal significance of Murdoch's work as well as her importance to specific areas of study. Eight papers were read at this conference, not including those of the roundtable discussion, so it is impossible to do justice to them all in this space. However, it is worth noting a few papers briefly to show the level of diversity present among them: Christiana Payne provided us with the perspective of the Art Historian (with some suggestions of how virtuous those who study art must be); Sophie-Grace Chappell's paper 'Murdoch and Epiphanies' served as a reminder that some of Murdoch's ideas will always be delightfully puzzling; Niklas Forsberg brought Murdoch's thinking on Language and Linguistic Philosophy into view; and Alison Denham's paper explored the relationship between psychopathy and Murdoch's ideas of love and attention.

The greatest impression left on me by the new world I had been let in upon was its sense of community. On the second day of the conference Anne Rowe read aloud the reviews of her and Avril Horner's newly published book *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1935-1995*, an amazing body of Iris Murdoch's letters. The whole room seemed to hold its breath together, ring its hands together and then breathe a sigh of relief together. Every one cared and shared a stake in the emotions. Some of the philosophical and critical insights explored at this conference may have been challenging but the sense of commitment and enthusiasm was obvious. I sincerely hope to hear again the inspiring voices that spoke throughout this weekend. I doubt that any community of scholars is as friendly and welcoming as this. Most likely, it is due to the energy and passion infused in Murdoch's own work that is revived and re-lived when studied. I certainly left Oxford with the firm conviction that Iris Murdoch matters.

Fiona Tomkinson

Iris Murdoch at Mansfield
Conference report on 'The Philosophy of Iris Murdoch' Mansfield College, Oxford, 11 June 2016

This one-day conference on 'The Philosophy of Iris Murdoch' was organised by Paul Lodge at Mansfield College with additional support from the Faculty of Philosophy of Oxford University and the Dalai Lama Centre for Compassion in Oxford. It was a delight to attend this event, which, following up on the Iris Murdoch conference at the Ashmolean in November 2015, constituted a long-delayed celebration of Murdoch on her home ground of Oxford. The four speakers all engaged with Murdoch as a moral philosopher, both deepening our understanding of her in her own terms and critiquing her views in the context of contemporary debate. Although the focus was on Murdoch as a philosopher, occasional pertinent reference was also made to the presence of moral philosophy in her novels.

Justin Broackes's opening paper 'Reading "On 'God' and 'Good'"' discussed Murdoch's transcendental conception of the Good as existing beyond our ability to grasp it in the context of the development of her 'Platonism'. He showed in detail how Murdoch's reading of Plato was mediated by her engagement with other thinkers from Simone Weil, through Anselm, Marx, Freud and Wittgenstein to Frege, and even by her experience of falling in love with Canetti. He also illustrated Murdoch's awareness of the dangers of a false pursuit of the Good ending in a kind of sadomasochism through his analysis of Kafka's *The Trial* in terms of Murdoch's comment that Kafka was engaged in a fight with the devil that ends up in bed.

Edward Harcourt's paper, 'The Last and Secret Name of All the Virtues', engaged in a rigorous discussion of the Murdochian concept of love as the ultimate virtue in the light of objections arising from the tendency of love in its guise of passionate attachment to turn to jealousy and selfishness. He points out that although one can claim that the apotheosis of love as virtue applies only to disinterested and compassionate love, or insist on the Kantian distinction between the pragmatic love that can be commanded and the pathological love which cannot, this does not solve the problem, since disinterested 'pragmatic' love is usually seen as something completely different from love as *eros*. He finds a way out of this impasse through adherence to a developmental psychology which sees attachment as something to be perfected and extended rather than eradicated, and locates virtue in the purification rather than the eradication of desire.

Mark Hopwood in 'Murdoch, Moral Language and the Universality of Moral Reasons' took issue with the tendency to see Murdoch's moral philosophy simply in terms of a revival of Aristotelian virtue ethics. Focusing on her paper 'Vision and Choice in Morality' as an example of her opposition to mainstream theories of moral agency in the 1950s, he presents Murdoch in contemporary terms as a particularist in moral philosophy, with the distinction that whilst contemporary particularists tend to critique the possibility of generalising moral axioms to cover similar situations, she is instead concerned with critiquing the universality of moral axioms by arguing that there are certain moral decisions which are imperative for a particular person only. He concluded with a reading of James Joyce's 'The Dead' which presented Gabriel Conroy's decision that the time had come for him to journey westwards in terms of a personal non-universalisable imperative.

Sabina Lovibond in 'Iris Murdoch and the Quality of Consciousness' discussed Murdoch's concept of self-improvement through the overcoming of the human quality of self-absorption and by the turning of one's attention outwards. She suggests that Murdoch's early Marxism and her later rejection of it have left traces in the way in which she sees human beings as having states of consciousness which differ in quality, and also in the idealist course of her project of moral self-critique. However, her fiction also gives us a warning against the over-intellectualisation of moral virtue. It is significant that in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, the least moral characters are more adept

at discussing virtue than the virtuous but muddled quasi-intellectual, Tallis Browne. Tallis is seen as functioning as an equivalent of Tolstoy's 'virtuous peasant', Platon Karataev – a character who is able to find his way out of Plato's cave without even noticing the fire.

Delegates also had ample opportunity to continue discussion over coffee and later over drinks in the University Club and dinner in hall at Mansfield. The only thing which was sadly lacking was the presence of Iris Murdoch herself. It was the kind of day I think she would have enjoyed. It was, however, also good to hear the announcement by Miles Leeson and Frances White that the Iris Murdoch Society bi-annual conference will be continuing under the auspices of the University of Chichester as of September 2017 with a planned centennial conference in Oxford in September 2019. I hope this marks the beginning of a continuing engagement with Murdoch's work in the city in which she flourished for so long.

Rivka Isaacson

Iris Murdoch in Portraits
Report of National Portrait Gallery Lunchtime Lecture: 'The Mystical and Mysterious Iris Murdoch', 21 July 2016

It was a full house at the Ondaatje Wing Theatre in the National Portrait Gallery for the Lunchtime Lecture: 'The Mystical and Mysterious Iris Murdoch'. The speaker was Lesley Chamberlain, journalist, Russianist, novelist and all-round Renaissance woman who, perhaps unsurprisingly, set out to display the many facets of Iris Murdoch using pertinent images from the Gallery's collection in combination with bold subtitles such as The Philosopher, The Academic and The Androgyne. She began with the iconic portrait of Iris Murdoch by Tom Phillips which was finished in 1986 and was very much a collaboration with the author. Behind Murdoch sits a representation of part of *The Flaying of Marsyas*, Titian's last painting which, for her, represented the cruelty and messiness of life from which one requires God or the Platonic Good for redemption. In the foreground are leaves from a ginkgo tree, the oldest known tree and much beloved to both Murdoch and Phillips. Most importantly Chamberlain used the figure itself to set the scene for the remainder of the lecture describing her as 'not just a writer, an imaginative mind and radiant historical figure'.

Much was made throughout the talk of Murdoch's luminous face of which we were treated to stunning views photographed by names such as Cecil Beaton, Lord Snowdon and Gisèle Freund, among others. Each photograph shed light on different aspects of Murdoch. Particularly evocative were two of her, in her Oxford room with its single bed, captured by Ida Kar. Far from T.S. Eliot's typist's life in a bedsit, Chamberlain explained that this modest room meant freedom – a modern woman whose life was her own, with her packet of cigarettes and the distinctive proof pages of her latest novel in her domain. A 1967 photograph by Madame Yevonde shows Murdoch sitting in a fancy chair, private yet theatrical, her legs looking particularly shapely in patterned tights that she seemed to favour. She is leafing through a book which depicts a sort of androgynous Pierrot figure in accordance with her trademark ambiguity.

Chamberlain portrayed an enticing image of Parisian existentialist café society, black polo necks and all that exemplifies Murdoch's 1945 meeting with Sartre, a connection that gave birth to her 1953 philosophical study *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*. She made the fascinating suggestion that, since the description of Sartre as romantic is possibly unique to Murdoch and certainly not intuitive, it probably represents a projection of her own, sweetly held, default position that everything comes back to love and sex. Chamberlain made mention of Murdoch's multiple sexual exploits in this context although gratifyingly most attention was paid to her literature and philosophy, including an analysis of which works have best stood the test of time. *A Severed Head* was particularly plugged, still a fast-paced entertaining romp, along with *The Red and the Green*, one of Murdoch's most 'realist' novels. Refreshingly the talk bore no mention of Murdoch's famous decline into Alzheimer's, partly due to an understandable lack of NPG portraiture from that era. It did come up in the final Q & A when the questioner drew parallels between the disarray of dementia and the horror and confusion of life which breaks the harmony and requires escape to the Good in the absence of Christianity (whose fall from grace in the sixties was a great focus of Murdoch's thought). Overall we were treated to a candid, visual account of Iris Murdoch's life and legacy. The event was a true celebration of her literature, philosophy and compelling radiance – and confirmation, if any were needed, that renewed interest in Iris Murdoch's work is in a productive phase of exponential growth.

Pamela Osborn

Iris Murdoch Online and in the Media

Iris Murdoch's legacy continues to expand online with over 500 members on the lively Iris Murdoch Appreciation Facebook page and the Archive Project account on Twitter (@IrisMurdoch) currently followed by around 4,000 users. The media attention which followed the publication of *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995* seemed to inspire several well-known figures to reveal themselves in interviews as Murdoch fans. Perhaps the most notable figure to do so was the former Greek finance minister, Yanis Varoufakis, who quotes from *The Unicorn* in his highly rated *Foundations of Economics: A Beginner's Companion* (1998) and described himself in several recent interviews as 'crazy about Iris Murdoch'. He also chose *The Black Prince* and *The Sea, the Sea* as his favourite books of all time.[1] The novelist Sarah Waters picked *Living on Paper* as one of her cultural highlights in a the *Guardian* article in which she divulged

> I've always been a big Iris Murdoch fan, so I was delighted to receive a copy of this book as a present from my parents-in-law last Christmas. It's a lovely read, revealing Murdoch to have been warm, bold, passionate and loyal – to have lived her life with an incredibly open heart. And, crucially, it's made me return to her novels and remember how bloody good they are – how intelligent, how lucent, how divinely crazy. They're fun – I'd forgotten that.[2]

Sarah Churchwell paid tribute to *The Sea, the Sea* in another well-received article for the *Guardian* which marked the Everyman reissue of *The Sea, the Sea* and *A Severed Head*. She describes Murdoch's fiction as 'shot through with the dark energies of occult forces, variously figured as Eros, the id, the unconscious, the repressed, the monstrous, the supernatural, the libidinous: all that the conscious mind cannot comprehend stalks her hapless protagonists, as their precarious fantasies of control are exposed for the delusions they are'.[3] The *Guardian* also published a reflection on the food described in *The Sea, the Sea* as part of their 'Food in books' series, the writer of which confirmed that Murdoch's novel is one that she gets 'a lot of emails about'.[4]

Murdoch also captured the imagination of bloggers including Maria Popova on brainpickings.org who wrote two entries on her letters earlier this year. The first examines Murdoch's 'most beautiful, electrifying, and psychologically revealing' letters to Brigid Brophy, while the second highlights a 'brief and brilliant meditation on causality, chance, how love gives meaning to existence, and why every aspect of it, including the difficult and seemingly unbearable, is essential to our human

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[1] Ruth Sunderland, 'Greek finance minister who became sex icon has a warning: Britain must stay in the EU – to save us from the Germans', *This is Money*. Available at: http://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/news/article-3572231/Greek-finance-minister-sex-icon-warning-Britain-stay-EU-save-Germans.html [accessed 1 June 2016].

[2] Kathryn Bromwich, 'On my radar: Sarah Waters's cultural highlights', the *Guardian*. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/may/22/on-my-radar-sarah-waters-cultural-highlights [accessed 22 May 2016].

[3] Sarah Churchwell, 'The Sea, The Sea - Sarah Churchwell on the making of a monster', the *Guardian*. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/02/iris-murdoch-the-sea-the-sea [accessed 2 April 2016].

[4] Kate Young, 'Food in books: fish cakes from Iris Murdoch's *The Sea, The Sea*', the *Guardian*. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/mar/31/food-in-books-fish-cakes-iris-murdoch-the-sea-the-sea [accessed 31 March 2016].

wholeness' in a letter to Rachel Fenner.[5] Murdoch was also the subject of a blog entry by Lesley Chamberlain intriguingly titled 'Why Pamela Hansford Johnson disliked Iris Murdoch'.[6] This piece includes Hansford Johnson's surprising observation, after meeting her at a dinner party, that Murdoch was 'profoundly and deeply feminine, despite appearances' and her perception that Murdoch's life 'has not been easy'. Finally, *Vogue* magazine celebrated their centenary year with the publication on their website of Murdoch's 1956 article, 'Iris Murdoch on the Cinema'.[7]

[5] Maria Popova, 'Iris Murdoch on the Fluidity of Gender and Sexuality: Her Intensely Beautiful Love Letters to Brigid Brophy', *Brain Pickings*. Available at: https://www.brainpickings.org/2016/01/26/iris-murdoch-love-letters-brigid-brophy/ [accessed 1 June 2016] Maria Popova, 'Iris Murdoch on Causality, Chance, and How Love Gives Meaning to Human Existence', *Brain Pickings*. Available at: https://www.brainpickings.org/2016/02/24/iris-murdoch-causality-chance-love/ [accessed 1 June 2016].

[6] Lesley Chamberlain, 'Why Pamela Hansford Johnson disliked Iris Murdoch', *Lesley Chamberlain*. Available at: https://lesleychamberlain.wordpress.com/2015/10/15/why-pamela-hansford-johnson-hated-iris-murdoch/ [accessed 5 January 2016].

[7] Iris Murdoch, 'Vogue 100: Iris Murdoch on the Cinema', *Vogue*. Available at: http://www.vogue.co.uk/arts-and-lifestyle/2016/05/vogue-archive-article-iris-murdoch [accessed 17 May 2016].

Forthcoming events

Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900, the University of Louisville, 23-25 February 2017

Call for Papers: Confessions and Repetitions: Iris Murdoch's Letters and Novels

The Iris Murdoch Society invites proposals for papers for a panel at the Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900, which will be held at the University of Louisville 23-25 February 2017. Murdoch's letters recently published in *Living on Paper* suggest that Murdoch repeated in her characters some of the feelings and behaviors she reveals in her letters. Our panel at the University of Louisville's Conference will examine the connections between Murdoch's letters and her fiction. Discussions of Murdoch's understanding of gender and sexuality are also welcome.

Please submit papers along with a 250-word abstract and a 100-word biographical sketch, as Word documents, before 1 August 2016 to:

Professor Barbara Heusel, 1134 Sarasota Drive, Tallahassee, Florida 32301
barbaraheusel@gmail.com

'Gender and Trauma': Conference on Iris Murdoch
University of Chichester, UK, 1-2 September 2017

First Call for Papers

This Eighth International Conference on Iris Murdoch celebrates a new collaboration between the University of Chichester, where Dr Miles Leeson, author of *Iris Murdoch: Philosophical Novelist* (London: Continuum, 2010) is teaching Iris Murdoch at undergraduate and postgraduate level, and the Iris Murdoch Archive Project at Kingston University London. It will take place in the new venue of the beautiful university town of Chichester in Sussex, an area of England rich in literary connections which we hope delegates from abroad will enjoy discovering. The conference will showcase published and on-going Murdoch scholarship with a particular focus on the themes of gender and trauma. However, panels will not be confined by this focus and all researchers currently working on Murdoch's fiction, philosophy, theology and/or their political and cultural significance are invited to contribute papers to this fresh celebration of Iris Murdoch's life and work. Plenary speakers will include Emeritus Research Fellow Anne Rowe (Kingston University, London) and Professor Gary Browning (Oxford Brookes University). Archival material will be available during the duration of the conference. Delegates may also pre-book visits to the Kingston University Archive either side of the conference by emailing Katie Giles in advance: **archives@kingston.ac.uk**

A London walk and pub lunch will be organised for Sunday 3 September.

Organisers: Dr Miles Leeson, Email: **M.Leeson@chi.ac.uk**
Dr Frances White, Email: **frances.white@kingston.ac.uk**

Abstracts of up to 300 words to be sent by 30 April 2017 to: **ims@chi.ac.uk**

Iris Murdoch Society

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

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

http://fass.kingston.ac.uk/research/iris-murdoch

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Notes on Contributors

J. Robert Baker is Professor of English at Fairmont State University where he directs the Honours Program.

Lucy Bolton is senior lecturer in film studies at Queen Mary University of London and is currently writing *Cinema and the Philosophy of Iris Murdoch* for Edinburgh University Press. She is the author of 'Winslet, Dench, Murdoch and Alzheimer's Disease: Intertextual Stardom in *Iris*', in *Feminisms*, ed. by Laura Mulvey and Anna Backman Rogers (University of Amsterdam Press, 2015).

Gary Browning is Professor of Politics and Associate Dean for Knowledge and Research (Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences) at Oxford Brookes University. He has published widely in political thought publishing books on Hegel, Collingwood, Lyotard, Political Economy and Global Theory. he has recently completed a big book entitled *A History of Modern Political Thought: The Question of Interpretation* (OUP, 2016) and is currently working on a book on Iris Murdoch.

Ray Byram is a native Californian who became a friend of Iris Murdoch and John Bayley during his work at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Their friendship continued through further visits and correspondence.

Lara Feigel is a literary critic and cultural historian, reviewer and Senior Lecturer in the English department at King's College London. Her most recent book is *The Bitter Taste of Victory: In the Ruins of the Reich* (2016).

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

Miles Leeson is Senior Lecture in English and Director of the Iris Murdoch Research Centre at University of Chichester, along with being a Visiting Fellow at Kingston University with special responsibility for the Iris Murdoch Archive. He is lead editor of the *Iris Murdoch Review* and has published widely on Iris Murdoch's work. He published *Iris Murdoch: Philosophical Novelist* with Continuum in 2010 and has a forthcoming co-edited collection with Manchester University Press titled *Incest in Contemporary Fiction*.

Tony Milligan is a Teaching Fellow in Ethics and the Philosophy of Religion with the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at King's College London. His most recent book is *The Next Democracy? The Possibility of Popular Control* (2016) and previous publications include *Love* (2011), *Animal Ethics: The Basics* (2015), *Civil Disobedience* (2013), and a co-edited volume on *Love and its Objects* (2014).

Stephen Mulhall is a Professor of Philosophy at New College, Oxford. The relationship between philosophy, literature and the arts more generally is one of his research interests. His most recent books include *The Self and Its Shadows* (OUP, 2015) and *The Great Riddle: Wittgenstein and Nonsense, Theology and Philosophy* (OUP, 2016).

Pamela Osborn is a part-time lecturer at Kingston University. She is currently adapting her PhD thesis, 'Another Country: Bereavement, Mourning and Survival in the novels of Iris Murdoch', for publication. She has published several essays on Murdoch and is currently researching connections between Murdoch and Patricia Highsmith.

Shauna Pitt is an undergraduate student at the University of Chichester. Her dissertation focuses on Murdoch's links with Tennyson and Platonic thought and she is planning to study for an MA in 2017.

Anne Rowe is Emeritus Research Fellow at Kingston University. She was Director of the Iris Murdoch Archive Project between 2004 and 2016 and Lead Editor of the *Iris Murdoch Review* between 2008 and 2016. She now acts as advisor to both the Archives and the *Review*. She has published widely on Iris Murdoch and is currently writing an edition on Murdoch for the *Writers and their Work* series, which will be published by Northcote House Press in conjunction with the British Council in 2017.

Fiona Tomkinson is Associate Professor in the English Language and Literature Department at Yeditepe University, Istanbul, where she also teaches part-time in the Philosophy Department. She has published a number of articles and book chapters on Iris Murdoch and is currently working on a monograph on Murdoch and intertextuality.

Frances White is Writer in Residence at Kingston University Writing School and editor of the *Iris Murdoch Review*. She has published widely on Iris Murdoch; her *Becoming Iris Murdoch* (Kington University Press, 2014) won the Kingston University Press Short Biography Competition.

John Bayley, Iris Murdoch,
Peter Conradi and Cloudy

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