

# The Iris Murdoch Review

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# The Iris Murdoch Society

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## **The Iris Murdoch Review**

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

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.

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## Editorial Preface

This year's *Review* has a strong focus on both philosophy and history and I am delighted that we have material drawn from a variety of different disciplines. The range of the major essays highlights the work being undertaken across the spectrum of academia, and indeed beyond, by major figures in intellectual history, moral philosophy, English literature, and interdisciplinary work. Essay contributors range from renowned Murdochians through to early career academics and each essay highlights a shift in how we perceive her writing, and intellectual legacy. I am especially pleased that as we draw on new thinking in these areas we look back to her own writing, highlighted this year by a selection of letters to her final doctoral student, Miklós Vető, introduced by a former student of Miklós (and Murdochian), Dávid Szőke. Miklós' early life as a refugee from Hungary, from where he had to flee after being an active participant in the anti-communist revolution of 1956 to various camps in Yugoslavia, was always going to be of interest to Murdoch. In the letters chosen here they discuss philosophy, his life and work, and *The Unicorn* - 'it is full of Simone Weil tho' few (apparently) are those who can spot the greater source of my "wisdom": the full letter run can be viewed at Kingston. In last year's review Justin Broackes highlighted Murdoch's earlier engagement with Weil. We can now see that Miklós' doctoral work on Weil, supervised by Murdoch, continued her major interest. We look forward to Miklós joining us as a plenary speaker at the centenary conference next year to discuss his professional relationship with her.

I am also delighted to publish Gary Browning's, and James Jefferies', developed plenary papers from last year's conference at Chichester. Gary's work is in some respects an overture to both his monograph *Why Iris Murdoch Matters*, and edited collection, *Murdoch on Truth and Love*: both are published this month. He draws our attention to Murdoch as being immersed in history, and how her philosophical thought reflects the age in which she lived. James' work as a creative technologist, coupled with his love of Murdoch's fiction, inspired 'The Iris Murdoch Information Service' which he talks through here. This free online resource will be vital to all working in this area and the Murdoch community owes James a debt of gratitude for developing this in his spare time.

Another major project, *InParenthesis*, is being led by Rachael Wiseman and Claire MacCumhaill. Their work brings together Murdoch, along with Elizabeth Anscombe, Phillipa Foot, and Mary Midgley to discuss the intersections in their philosophy, and asks if they can be considered a philosophical school. The two central aims of the project are to highlight the work of these women, and make women's philosophy more prevalent today; we are delighted that the British Council funded this essay. It is timely that we have new work from Nora Hämäläinen discussing why we need to see Murdoch not as an interesting liminal figure in late twentieth century ethics (as she has sometimes been) but as a precursor to those now working in descriptive ethics considering concrete realities. James Riley's new work, inspired by his postgraduate research at Chichester, discusses *The Black Prince* via the work of Lacan – a theorist whose work Murdoch knew at least partially. His essay discusses how we can read Murdoch's fictional use of low and high Eros via a Lacanian lens to, as Riley

contends, traverse the pleasure/pain barrier in the novel.

The highlight of this year has undoubtedly been the Eighth International Conference held here, in Chichester. With over 90 attendees from 16 different countries our small campus was certainly 'Murdochland' for a weekend and Gillian Dooley's review brings back many happy memories for those of us who were there. As she says, it is only a partial review as so many parallel sessions had to be sadly missed but I am sure that many papers will be developed into forthcoming publications. There were so many excellent events that have occurred over the past year that not all of them are reviewed in this edition but I am pleased that so many were hosted by the Research Centre, with support from the Society. My thanks go to all those who assisted with the organisation of these events, but especially to Donna Carpenter, Shauna Pitt, and Paula Scorrer – all of whom have written reviews. It has been heartening to host major international figures including Devaki Jain from the University of New Delhi who discussed her student life with Murdoch, and the Illustrator and artist Ian Beck whose illustrated talk on Janet Stone's photography drew a very large crowd. It was also a pleasure to be at Queen's College, Oxford earlier in the year for another symposium organised by the philosophy department, dedicated to Murdoch's work. As Mark Hopwood highlights in his review she is now a part of mainstream thinking at Oxford. My thanks also to Pamela Osborn and Lucy Oulton for their diligence and dedication to the production of this *Review*. As always, Pamela brings together a round-up of academic works of interest.

I must also thank Katie Giles for all her work. After nine years Katie has now left Kingston University and her final report is as comprehensive as ever; she has been a wonderful help and resource for so many enquiries and we shall miss her but hope that she can join us next year in Oxford. Dayna Miller has been appointed as the new archivist and will be looking after the Murdoch collections from now on.

The planning for the centenary conference is now well advanced and the first Call for Papers was released on the 99<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Murdoch's birth, just last month. For this major event we are not specifying an overarching conference theme but ask for papers celebrating her achievements, and the future for Murdoch studies generally. We look forward to receiving abstracts for papers by 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2019. Next year's *Review* will, quite rightly, celebrate the whole of her life and work and not only highlight new scholarship in this area, but bring together major figures to reflect on her legacy a hundred years since her birth, and twenty since her death.

The last few months have seen us lose two Murdochians, the philosopher Kate Larson, and Paul Brudenell; in very different ways both were stalwarts of the Iris Murdoch Society and gave so much to every conference they attended. Kate will be especially remembered for her excellent work 'Everything Important is to do with Passion: Iris Murdoch's Concept of Love and its Platonic Origin'; Paul, along with his wife Patricia, for his support of the Archive Project at Kingston, and latterly the Research Centre at Chichester. We dedicate this issue of the *Review* to them.

Miles Leeson

University of Chichester, August 2018

## Letters from Iris Murdoch to Miklós Vető: thirty years of friendship

Iris Murdoch began corresponding with her former student, Miklós Vető, whilst working at St Anne's College Oxford in 1962 and they continued to exchange letters until 1995, the year before she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. The distinctive feature of these letters is the colour they add to the complex picture of Murdoch's character as teacher, philosopher and friend. This selection, from a larger run of letters to Vető, provides an insight into how various philosophical movements inspired Murdoch the thinker and the writer. Her letters reveal a broad-minded and witty woman, whose radiant spirit was often influenced by her close professional relationships with her students, and their philosophical and spiritual interests and ideas.

Miklós Vető was the very last of Murdoch's Oxford students. After completing his studies at the Sorbonne in Paris, he went up to Oxford in 1959 and wrote his DPhil thesis on Simone Weil under Murdoch's supervision. Owing to a controversially unsuccessful defence of his thesis in 1963, Vető did not earn his DPhil until 1964. This was the year after Murdoch had resigned her Fellowship, and we now know that her leaving was mainly due to difficulties in her relationship with Margaret Hubbard. Murdoch then began working in the General Studies Department of the Royal College of Art in London. In the 1960s, the general mood at Oxford was dominated by a continental philosophy that tended to ignore metaphysical ideas. At odds with this mood, Murdoch had turned to moral philosophy and religion. She was later to explain in a 1977 interview with Michael O Bellamy: 'I believe in religion in a sort of Buddhist sense of the word, and in that way I feel very close to Christianity. I used to feel it had all gone out of my life, but I don't feel like that now. It's all present in my life in another form, as a spiritual guide and inspiration, but not as a dogma.'<sup>1</sup> Weil's spiritual views served as an essential guide to Murdoch and her notions on attention, suffering, gravity and the inner life are much in evidence in novels such as *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956), *The Bell* (1958) and *The Unicorn* (1963).

Thus, Vető found an exceptionally keen supporter in Murdoch, whose special interest in Weil's philosophy was evident to him from the very start of their friendly professional encounters. In Vető's recollections of his Oxford years, he describes Murdoch as a sharp-eyed and dedicated teacher and friend who 'gave practical help' by tirelessly correcting his use of English in his thesis and trying

to find a suitable job for his wife, Odile. Their long-lasting letter exchanges are testament to how Murdoch and Vetó's teacher-student relationship evolved over the years into a mutually inspiring and loyal friendship that only foundered as Murdoch's Alzheimer's took hold.

The letters (in which Murdoch anglicizes Miklós to Nicholas) reproduced below, provide an edited record of these thirty years. Letters 1 to 3 offer a new understanding of Murdoch, the profoundly encouraging teacher, where she is striving to bring out the best in her students. Moreover, they demonstrate her deep fascination with theological thought and with Weil's religious approach to metaphysics. As Murdoch confirms to Vetó, Weil's spiritual thinking forms an integral part of *The Unicorn* (1963) and she is clearly both delighted to confirm his observation and generous when she remarks that 'few (apparently) are those who can spot that greater source of my "wisdom"' (letter no. 3). It should be noted that, where Murdoch's letters are partially dated or undated, Vetó has sought to date them. This appears in square brackets above the relevant letter, with a question mark where Vetó is unable to confirm to be certain.

Murdoch's letters of December 18, 1963 (no. 4) and June 15, 1964 (no. 5) are written in deep anguish. Following a bitter clash with two examiners, Vetó had failed the defence of his doctoral thesis and Murdoch's responses clearly express how personally she took this failure and also reveal her concern for Vetó's future, not to mention the deep distress she felt about the incident. Moreover, these letters were written at the time she began giving lectures at the Royal College of Art and, as such, confirm how much she was enjoying both the role and her students who she describes as 'unpretentious and natural, like engaging animals' and 'intelligent, though ill-read'.

The most interesting feature of the subsequent letters is that they shed light on how Murdoch's political and philosophical interests were developing. Letter no. 6 reveals an issue that has hardly ever been touched on by Murdoch scholarship – her sympathy for the African-American civil rights movement of the 1960s. Declaring Naomi Haywood Burns to be 'a brave girl' to have married the black rights advocate W. Haywood Burns, she clearly embraces interracial marriage and equality, a highly controversial topic of the time.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, this letter indicates Murdoch's early interest in Heidegger, 'uncanny, dangerous, etc, most of [his ideas]' she says, having remarked: 'Oddly enough I am trying to [...] read Heidegger just now. I tried in German but gave up, alas [...] I struggled with him earlier but could never make up my mind'. Later, in letter no. 7, she adds that she had so far read one third of *Sein und Zeit* and that she feels quite uncertain about it. Her apparent difficulties with Heidegger's work are particularly remarkable given Murdoch's engagement with the philosopher, most notably in her novels *The Time of the Angels* (1966) and *Jackson's Dilemma* (1995), and also given her last and unfinished manuscript on Heidegger.<sup>3</sup>

At the beginning of the 1970s, Murdoch arrived at a new phase in her literary career. As Peter Conradi argues, from the publication of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970) her novels of the period reached a new form of 'artistic maturity' that involved a deep and more complex portrayal of characters as well as an 'aesthetic weight' in the structure of her books.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Murdoch's writing was gaining attention on stage, film and television. *A Severed Head* (1961) was in production and she felt increasingly dedicated to writing plays, revisiting some of Shakespeare's works and pro-

ducing *Joanna, Joanna*, which was eventually broadcast in 1987.<sup>5</sup> In an undated letter (no. 8) from this period, she tells Vető: 'I think I have given up philosophy! Time will show.' Coincidentally, it is in 1970 that Vető's doctoral thesis *La métaphysique religieuse de Simone Weil* (1971) is accepted and published, and includes a warm display of gratitude: 'The initial version of this book took shape under the sympathetic eye of Iris Murdoch, the novelist and philosopher, who unstintingly offered me encouragement and critiques'.<sup>6</sup>

Murdoch's interest in Heidegger appears to have grown over the following twenty years. On 17 November [1989] (no. 9), she writes to Vető that Heidegger 'continues to fascinate me, though I don't "buy" his views' and asks whether Vető would include him in his book, *De Kant à Schelling*.<sup>7</sup> This particular letter was also written after Vető had completed his first reading tour of India, and Murdoch's admiration for the country and for the Hindu tradition is here very much in evidence. She writes, 'I was also in India (my second visit) earlier this year and love the place (and feel at home there). (Perhaps a result of reading *Kim* at an early age!) I very much like all those vegetarian curries, and find I forget all about alcohol!' It seems relevant to note here that Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism, in their capacity to grasp goodness and humility in their own way and to link philosophy with religion, had always made a significant impact on Murdoch's thinking. These religious concerns are present in *The Sea, the Sea* (1978), and more clearly in *The Book and the Brotherhood* (1987) and *The Message to the Planet* (1989).

Iris Murdoch's final letter to Miklós Vető (no. 10) is also the most poignant one. Here, while never failing with kind words for her friend and former student, the simplicity of her language clearly reveals signs of her illness. She ends the letter, 'I am writing another novel but very slowly'. As is now known, during the writing of her last published novel, *Jackson's Dilemma*, Murdoch was already suffering the first effects of Alzheimer's, which at the time she attributed to writer's block. The illness soon overwhelmed her cognitive function. This final letter is, therefore, particularly moving because Murdoch's attentiveness to her friend was about to be overshadowed by her illness.

Alongside these letters to Vető, I include another sent by Victor Gollancz to Murdoch regarding his views on publishing Vető's manuscript. Gollancz, a Jewish intellectual, was also a publisher and humanitarian of repute who became equally renowned for anticipating the Nazi extermination of the Jews.<sup>8</sup> His publishing house produced, among many works of classical and contemporary literature, several religious tracts. From the letter, pivotal to the Murdoch-Vető story as Murdoch has annotated it in three places, one can see that Gollancz had some misgivings about the publication of Vető's manuscript. He calls Weil's ideas 'out of fashion', claiming that 'at the very height of her fame, she sold no more than about 3,000 copies', against which Iris Murdoch has written in the margin, 'Jewish caution!' Gollancz also expresses his concern that 'reviewing being what it is, it is quite likely that nobody would take the slightest notice of [Vető's] book'. This comment is all the more remarkable in view of Weil's undeniable impact not only on Murdoch's thinking but also on post-war European philosophy and literature, on Albert Camus, and on the Hungarian poet János Pilinszky in particular. Gollancz concludes his letter by saying that, despite his concerns, Vető's manuscript should be published and even asks Murdoch if she would write the foreword to it, against which she

has written somewhat coyly: 'Maybe, if you wished'.

This selection of Iris Murdoch's letters to Miklós Vető seeks not only to enrich Murdoch scholarship, but also to preserve the memory of a friendship that lasted for more than three decades and served as a mutual source of inspiration. Copies of these letters, and others, are held in the Iris Murdoch Archive at the University of Kingston; the originals remain with Miklós Vető.

1.

St Anne's  
[Autumn or late Spring] 1962

Dear Nicholas, this in haste to catch you before you go. I hope my comments are legible. I now think your method of exposition is fine, provided you make clear what you are doing and what you think she is like as a thinker, in the way suggested in your letter. The general tone is much better and the exposition clearer in this part. I think altogether most interesting and jolly good! You will see my particular comments. Your English much better too. Good work. I'm sorry I have not had time to chase your reference though the *Cahiers* and some of my comments may be off the mark for that reason.<sup>9</sup> Also I read the chapters in the wrong order, sorry! – and was bothered about introduction of veg. and add. energy without apparent explanation – though where you *do* introduce them they still need more comment I think.<sup>10</sup>

It might be good to approach St. Clare's etc in an introductory way now (*might* get something at colleges, but that needs a little time and contacts.) May I suggest you let me have several typed copies of Odile's curriculum vitae which I cd send off with covering notes? (And her age.) And cd say you'll turn up yourselves in Sept?

*Best* of wishes for your departure to France and greetings to Odile

I

Cedar Lodge  
Steeple Aston  
Oxford

Dear Nicholas,

I return these with commentary. I have to go to London and doubt if I can see you before you go. I have made little alterations of English in the text throughout, and the other (mostly minor) comments on the two enclosed sheets.

I think this stuff is *good*, indeed very good. Your method of exposition has improved greatly, and your English is far better: you now have a *style*, which is a notable feat! I admire the way in which you've hung onto these very difficult ideas and managed to fit them so convincingly together. I feel great confidence in your thesis. I think the Introduction is absolutely right in tone – it has the right impersonal air of authority. And note 8 yes, certainly in place!

(That neat aside might please your examiners!)

The introduction, while being impersonal, puts *you* on the map too and makes suitably clear the nature of your interest in SW. You'd better just change the reference to linguistic philosophy (see my suggestion) on page 4! After all, they come in all kinds now.

Apropos my rebuke in my note on page 1 of *Time and the Ego*, I have just looked in the Oxford dictionary [sic] and find that the word "constate" *does* exist! "Rare, 1773."

So I think you'd better not use it! Anyway, your punishment is cancelled!

Altogether I think your stuff is really interesting and good – it's certainly taught me a lot!

What a marvellous mind she has and how many true things she knows.

Apropos, your Introduction page 5, is it so unusual for theologians to think of the Trinity, Incarnation, etc as *somehow* "written in to the structure of the universe"? She is so convincing on this, she practically converts me!

Best affectionate Christmas wishes to you both, Iris

3.

Steeple Aston  
[undated, October or November 1963?]

Dear boy, this is just a short note to thank you for yours ---- and to ask you to write your address in CAPITAL LETTERS, as I can't read it! I hope the college gets you and I haven't got something wrong there.

No, you are not dreaming about *Unicorn*, it is full of Simone Weil tho' few (apparently) are those who can spot that greater source of my "wisdom". One cannot get away from these ideas.

I was very interested to hear of Margrette - I expect you were not surprised about the students. Yes, the lake - I saw it too this summer - a strange thing, its being not the sea.

About your viva ---- it doesn't matter much when it is so long as you start getting it *fixed* up early, so that the great man can be asked in easy time. An early one wd be slightly better if anything at least, one before July. June is ideal time, preferably early June as people won't have gone abroad. Excuse this semi-legible scrawl written in a train. I hope Odile will enjoy it. Give her my love and love to you Nicholas,

Iris

Steeple Aston Dec. 18 [1963]

Dear Nicholas,

Very good to hear from you. It didn't occur to me to think of suggesting a new supervisor, as you wd be so far away from Oxford (though I suppose you cd have found an Oxford-type philosopher somewhere in Chicago!). In any case you can get any help you personally wanted locally without any formal "supervision" arrangements. In fact the notion of "help" for you at this point seems to me fairly empty. You need essentially different examiners (preferably theologians) and not a different thesis – the latter is good anyway and as you also say you can't change yourself and why ever should you! To the devil with Montefiore – you might with luck next time get an examiner who detested Hare, Montefiore and all their works. I am glad you feel you have improved the thesis within the bounds of your own conception of it. We must now just hope for the best about examiners – I have written a strong letter to Ryle on the subject, and will write to James Joll at St Anthony's too, in case he can have a say.

I hope you are both enjoying life over there. I hope you'll get away for a splendid Christmas holiday – you must be very tired after a first term in a strange place. Best, very best, Christmas and New Year wishes,

affectionately, Iris

[PS] Let me know anything you can about the time when you are asking for the viva – or did you decide against coming?

June 15 [1964]

Dear Nicholas, much thanks for your letter and forgive my not having written sooner. (I hope this *address* is right.) I was so dashed by the news of your examiners and upset. I had written *at length* to both Ryle and the secretary of faculties. Damn them. I have done a little enquiry but got nothing back. I'll let you know if enquiries yield any more – though the damage is done now and I feel I have failed you at an important point and am sorry. I hope you are not worrying about it any more, as in an obvious sense it “doesn't matter”, except at a practical level, which can be dealt with.

I'm glad you've met Pierre!<sup>11</sup> I enjoyed your joint postcard. I have been lecturing in London at the Royal College of Art – it is a refreshing choice from Oxford. The students are so unpretentious and natural, like engaging animals! And intelligent, though ill-read.

I hope you are enjoying your new flat and life generally and will have a grand travelling summer. Send postcards! Best to Odile, ever

affectionately, Iris

6.

[undated, Spring 1965]

Thank you very much for your letter. This in haste to pass on to [sic] address of a friend of mine in New Haven – at least, she is daughter [sic] of a friend of mine, and I know her a bit. She has just got married (her husband is a negro: brave girl) and gone to live in USA and I'm sure wd be glad of European friends. (She is English Jewish.) Mrs Haywood Burns, (first name Naomi) 363 Sherman Avenue, New Haven. Her husband is a law student at Yale.<sup>12</sup>

Oddly enough, I'm trying to (or beginning to) read Heidegger just now. I tried in German but gave it up, alas and am now reading him in English. I struggled with him earlier but could never make up my mind. Will be interested to hear your further views. Yes, uncanny, dangerous, etc, most of them! Hope all is well with Odile and E[tienne] E[manuel].

with love, Iris

[PS] Send me a photo of the three of you.

7.

[undated, 1965]

My dearest Nicholas, please forgive me for not having replied sooner to your splendid Heidegger letter (I have put it inside my copy of *Sein und Zeit* as a charm) and now you have sent those splendid photos – thank you so much, I'm delighted. What a look of formidable intelligence and thereness on the face of that very small creature. How mysterious it all is. Very nice photos of you and Odile as well. And I approve of the Teddy Bear (it obviously has a most aimiable [sic] character.) I wish I cd be a godmother to E.E. but (even if I were asked!) it would be technically impossible for at least two reasons, but perhaps I might elect myself to be a sort of honorary one. No time to write properly now. I have been putting off writing till I had something coherent to say about Heidegger, but I don't know when that will be. I've got side tracked onto other jobs and have so far read one third of the book. Will resume shortly though. It is certainly by a remarkable philosopher. I feel so far though (in so far as I understand) that this part of the job has been done better by Wittgenstein. (I think it is largely the same job though.) I saw John Smith and Marilyn lately and we talked of you. Love to Odile. Will write better later.

Ever with love,

Iris

8.

Steeple Aston  
[undated]

Nicholas, here are the names of some possible translators. Best of luck. I am thrilled to hear the book on that remarkable subject is nearly ready and I *much* look forward to reading it.<sup>13</sup> Will you publish it first in France? I wd love to see you and talk but have no immediate plans to be in Paris. If I develop any I'll let you know and do then let me know if you'll be in London. I *think* I have given up philosophy! Time will show. Very best wishes and love, Iris

9.

68 Hamilton Road  
Oxford OX2 7QA  
Nov 17 [1989?]

Cher Nicholas,

How good to hear from you and with news of the family. Do tell your student who is in Oxford to get in touch with me. I'm glad to hear of your BOOKS they sound very valuable. I wonder if you will include Heidegger in your later one.<sup>14</sup> He continues to fascinate me, though I don't "buy" his views. I was also in India (my second visit) earlier this year and *love* the place (and feel at home there). (Perhaps a result of reading *Kim* at an early age!) I very much like all those vegetarian curries, and find I forget all about alcohol! Glad to hear news of Etienne – give him my best wishes. With all affectionate cordial greetings to you and to Odile – do keep in touch –

Iris

30 Charlbury Road  
Oxford  
Jan 30 [1995]

Dear Nicholas,

So glad to hear from you, and with beautiful picture [sic] of Marie-Elisabeth's wedding with, YOU, and Etienne handsomely in the background! You have a very happy family. Marie-Elisabeth is so beautiful [in margin <and so happy!>] Also you are onto your second volume of *From Kant to Schelling*.<sup>15</sup> I still follow Kant, but more weakly and Simone Weil – sorry, only one badly translated into English.

John has retired but is constantly hauled back into his college to help for this and that. He enjoys this. I am writing another novel but very slowly. Do come back to see Oxford some time. I hope Odile is steadily better and that you are having a good Calvin tour. Have a happy 1995 – with all best wishes and love

Iris

### **Victor Gollancz's letter**

At the top of this letter Murdoch has written, 'Nicholas, to see. (Don't bother return.) I will let you have my book on Sartre, I keep forgetting to bring it in. I'. The lines in italics below indicate those in the original that Murdoch underlined, her associated margin annotations following in square brackets.

Victor Gollancz Ltd

14 Henrietta Street

Covent Garden WC2

Miss Iris Murdoch,  
St Anne's College,  
Oxford.

14<sup>th</sup> March, 1963

My dear Iris,

Very many thanks for your letter. Yes, I should very much like to see *the manuscript* [i.e. NV on SW.] Ruth and I are going to America on April 11<sup>th</sup>, and shall not be back until the end of May: and I could read the manuscript at any time after that (I should like to read it myself).

It is not what they call a "commercial proposition": *at the very height of her fame, she sold no more than about 3,000 copies, and now she is quite out of fashion* [Jewish caution!]: reviewing being what it is, it is quite likely that nobody would take the slightest notice of the book. But I feel pretty certain that it is a book that ought to be published. *Would you consider writing a foreword?* [Maybe, if you wished.] That would make all the difference.

Yours ever,

Victor Gollancz

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Michael O. Bellamy, 'An Interview with Iris Murdoch', in Gillian Dooley, ed. *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction: Conversations with Iris Murdoch* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), p.49.
- <sup>2</sup> Peter J. Conradi writes at length in his biography about Murdoch and politics. Although her views were complex and sometimes contradictory, she was always politically active. Her interest in politics is clearly present in her early sympathy and later disaffection with Communism, her support of gay and lesbian rights in Ireland, her campaign against the Vietnam war and her political concerns about education. Cf. Peter Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (London: HarperCollins: 2001), pp.497-501.
- <sup>3</sup> Iris Murdoch, 'Sein und Zeit: Pursuit of Being', in Justin Broackes, ed. *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.93-114.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid; Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: The Saint and the Artist* (London: MacMillan Press, 1989), p.159.
- <sup>5</sup> Iris Murdoch, *Joanna, Joanna*, a radio play broadcast on BBC Radio 3 in February 1987 (London: Colophon with Old Town, 1994).
- <sup>6</sup> Miklós Vető, *The Religious Metaphysics of Simone Weil*, trans. by Joan Dargan (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), p.xi.
- <sup>7</sup> Miklós Vető, *De Kant à Schelling*, 2 vols. (Grenoble: Million, 1998, 2000).
- <sup>8</sup> Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Victor Gollancz: A Biography* (London: Faber & Faber, 2012), p.218.
- <sup>9</sup> Simone Weil, *Cahiers 1-3* (Paris: Plon, 1951-1956); Simone Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, trans. by Richard Rees (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).
- <sup>10</sup> Vető, 1994, p. 56 sq.
- <sup>11</sup> Pierre Riches (1928-), Egyptian Catholic priest and educator.
- <sup>12</sup> Murdoch here is referring to Naomi, the first wife of W. Haywood-Burns, an American lawyer and civil rights activist working with Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., who will go on to coordinate the defence for inmates indicted in the Attica prison uprising.
- <sup>13</sup> Miklós Vető's book on Simone Weil was eventually published in French in 1971. The book's English translation (*The Religious Metaphysics of Simone Weil*, trans. by Joan Dargan) only appeared in 1994.
- <sup>14</sup> Vető, *De Kant à Schelling*.
- <sup>15</sup> The second edition of Vető's book eventually appeared in 1998.

## Iris Murdoch: History Woman

In a letter to Raymond Queneau of 1946 Murdoch poses a rhetorical question, ‘The question is can I really exploit the advantages (instead of as hitherto suffering the disadvantages) of having a mind on the borders of philosophy, literature and politics’.<sup>1</sup> By the end of Murdoch’s career the answer to this question would be clear. Murdoch’s novels and philosophical writings represent imaginative and thoughtful achievements that comment incisively upon political issues as well as reflecting upon morality and metaphysics. Murdoch’s interweaving of politics, philosophy and literature is evident from first to last: from her moving depiction of migrants in her second novel *The Flight From the Enchanter* to her subsequent considered reading of public and personal morality in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* where she highlights the need to establish basic axioms or rights to secure public order.<sup>2</sup> Her novels imagine individuals in political dilemmas just as her philosophical writings reflect upon the inter-relations between the public and the personal. Yet to recognise Murdoch’s claims as a novelist, a philosopher and a political commentator should not obscure what constitutes perhaps the most compelling aspect of her work. In all of her writings, Murdoch operates with an informing awareness of history. Her philosophy is predicated upon her reading of historical change, just as her novels reflect and disclose a particular historical milieu. Her novels and her philosophical writings recognise the historicity of their subject matter. Philosophy for her is not timeless and a modern philosopher has to deal with modern issues just as a modern novelist is to reflect upon what it means to write a novel in modern times.

Throughout her philosophical career Murdoch comprehended philosophy in historical terms. In her application to become Tutor in Philosophy at St. Anne’s College in 1948, she wrote, ‘More recently I have had the time to see the existentialist and phenomenological movements in their historical perspective, and have been attempting to sift the valuable from the useless in their rich but confused philosophical development’.<sup>3</sup> Subsequently in her celebrated philosophical essays that constitute *The Sovereignty of Good* she identifies what is distinctive about contemporary forms of moral philosophy in their framing of moral commitments by reference to an individual’s will. She highlights how this subjectivism is distinct from what has gone before, when moral life and theory embraced a vision of things, whereby the individual’s will was not seen to be primary. In ‘On “God” and “Good”’ she observes, ‘Briefly put, our picture of ourselves has become too grand, we have isolated, and identified ourselves with an unrealistic conception of will, we have lost the vision of a reality separate from ourselves, and we have no adequate conception of original sin’.<sup>4</sup>

Murdoch recognised that moral philosophers of her time might pose as being indifferent to history but in fact they were responding to features of modernity, notably the processes of demythologisation that she saw as distinguishing modern times. Her late work on metaphysics, *Metaphysics*

as a *Guide to Morals* begins by formulating her sense of the significance of these processes of demythologisation. She remarks:

‘the pluralization or demythologisation of history, art, religion, science, which is characteristic of our age, largely takes the form of an analysis of old and prized unities and deep instinctive beliefs thought to be essential to human nature’.<sup>5</sup>

Murdoch identified and responded to a loss of unifying beliefs in the wake of the rise of science, technology and individualism in her fiction and non-fiction. In ‘A House of Theory’ she highlights the decline in ideological convictions in the context of a prevailing sceptical turn within post-war culture, remarking: ‘This void is uneasily felt by society at large and is the more distressing since we are now for the first time in our history feeling the loss of religion as a consolation and guide; until recently various substitutes (socialism itself, later Communism, pacifism, internationalism) were available; now there seems to be a shortage even of substitutes’.<sup>6</sup>

In her own metaphysics Murdoch imagined an overall unity to experience that had been displaced by the anti-metaphysical temper of modern times. In *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* and in her unpublished ‘Manuscript on Heidegger’ she maintains connections between forms of experience such as art, religion and philosophy while acknowledging the force of a modern questioning of dogmas and accenting of individual freedom.<sup>7</sup> Murdoch is modern to the extent that she values individuality, freedom and critical thinking but she imagines that individuals are to be guided by orienting metaphysical beliefs if they are to reach out towards others and follow a path that leads to goodness. The moral perfectionism that Murdoch imagines is not to be conceived as the pursuit of a supernatural end state that lies beyond imperfect critical endeavour but it involves a sense of goodness as being indefinable and embracing a vision of the world and the reality of others that supersedes a focus upon mere subjective choice. Her critique of modern moral philosophy combines a sense of its break from preceding forms of morality and philosophy with a recognition of its denial of its own historicity. Murdoch’s critique of contemporary moral philosophy resembles MacIntyre’s criticisms of modern Continental and Anglo-American philosophy. In *A Short History of Ethics* MacIntyre maintains:

‘Like Sartre the prescriptivist and emotivist do not trace the source of the necessity of choice or of taking up one’s own attitudes to the moral history of our society. They ascribe it to the nature of moral concepts as such. And in so doing like Sartre they try to absolutize their own individualist morality and that of their age [...] But these attempts could only succeed if moral concepts were indeed timeless and unhistorical [...]’<sup>8</sup>

Murdoch’s fiction, alongside her non-fiction, is framed by an historical sense of how the modern novel differs from preceding forms. She was critical of contemporary literature because it had lost sight of the power of evoking reality and effective characterisation as the nineteenth century novel had done. In ‘Against Dryness’ she maintained: ‘The nineteenth century (roughly) was the great era of the novel: and the novel thrived upon a dynamic merging of the idea of the person with the idea of class’.<sup>9</sup> Individual characters in the novels of the nineteenth century are set against the back-

drop of society but the modern novel either succumbs to a journalistic excess of detail or strives to reduce plot and characters to the status of instruments for the rehearsal of authorial ideas and what she terms crystalline form. She maintains: 'Against the consolations of form, the clean crystalline work, the simplified fantasy-myth, we must pit the destructive power of the now so unfashionable naturalistic idea of character'.<sup>10</sup> Against the tide of a modern turn away from the realistic depiction of things, Murdoch aimed in her novels to open out towards a sublime appreciation of characters that cannot be reduced to the neatness of a crystalline form. She invoked Kant to justify her sublime reading of what the novel can do. Nineteenth century realism could not simply be revived. The modern novel cannot rehearse the self-confident realism of the great nineteenth century writers, whose fiction reflects the contemporary surge of social forces and the consolidation of Western nation states but a modern novelist might envisage a range of characters that can strain against the confines of authorial form so as to allow a sublime intimation of real human individuals.<sup>11</sup>

Murdoch's attitude to the demythologising forces of modernity was ambivalent. On the one hand, she thought that challenges to traditional beliefs and the freedom that was now enjoyed by individuals were not to be dismissed. Freedom and a critical perspective that eschews supernatural justifications of religion and questions presumed moral and political truths are not to be denied. On the other hand, she resisted a wholesale ditching of metaphysics, religion and moral and political ideals. She combined a historical sense that the present questioning of traditional forms of life was the context in which she must work, with a determination to sustain forms of thinking that might underpin a philosophical exploration of reality that would enable individuals to see their lives as meaningful and to relate their conduct to an informing moral vision. The questions that Murdoch addresses in her philosophy are historical, in that they emerge from and reflect a specific historic culture. Questions arise out of experience, which is necessarily present, but relate to a past from which they have emerged. Murdoch's thought arises out of a particular, modern historical conjuncture. The questions that are posed in the modern world are different from those that have gone before. Modern philosophy in a spirit of rational inquiry that is exemplified by Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* takes the dogmas of the past to be unacceptable. While Murdoch does not abandon metaphysics she recognises that the intricacies of metaphysical thinking must now recognise experiential limits that condition its work.<sup>12</sup>

If metaphysics is to serve as a guide to morality it must deal with the current historical situation. In the wake of disintegrating demythologised traditions, Murdoch's philosophy represents a countervailing response, which continues metaphysics in a post-metaphysical age by drawing together forms of thought and action so as to make sense of them as a unity. Her metaphysics does not rely on top down first order principles but works with the grain of experience.<sup>13</sup> It does not shirk the dissonance and fragmentation of late modernity but maintains a continuing commitment to orient personal and moral development by attending to unifying notions of truth and goodness that are evidenced within lived experience. Hence religion is to be valued for its orienting capacity to value experience as a whole rather than for its supernatural claims. In the light of the political traumas of the twentieth century, utopian schemes for political renewal are to be abandoned in favour of pro-

tecting the rights of individual citizens.<sup>14</sup> Again, representational claims for art are to be modified rather than revived, so that its role in enabling an individual to perceive things accurately is to be cherished notwithstanding the iconoclastic temper of the contemporary world.<sup>15</sup>

In engaging with the historical questions of the present, Murdoch turns to Plato and Platonism. She revives Plato in a modern context to challenge prevailing cultural and philosophical presumptions. In doing so, however, she interprets Plato in the light of the modern world, and does not conceive of Plato and Platonism as otherworldly forms of thought. Martha Nussbaum is wrong to take Murdoch's thought to be Platonic in an otherworldly sense.<sup>16</sup> Plato's thought is susceptible to many interpretations and Murdoch interprets Plato as providing an account of the Good and perfectionism that can challenge contemporary forms of subjectivism without assuming a supernatural or otherworldly form.<sup>17</sup> In interpreting other philosophers Murdoch acknowledges that she goes where the honey is.<sup>18</sup> She acknowledges how in making Plato relevant to her own thought and age she is interpreting Plato in a particular light. Perhaps, as Gadamer suggests, she is fusing past and present horizons.<sup>19</sup> Conradi observes how it is difficult to distinguish between Murdoch and Plato in considering Murdoch's reading of Plato.<sup>20</sup> Murdoch admits, 'In my own case I am aware of the danger of inventing my own Plato and extracting a particular pattern from his many-patterned text to reassure myself that, as I see it, good is really good and real is really real'.<sup>21</sup> Murdoch turns to Plato in recognising the redundancy of previous forms of religious truth. Plato's notion of the Good can serve as a metaphor for the magnetic force of a sense of goodness that supersedes a merely subjective form. But the force of the metaphor depends upon reading Plato in a spirit that is consonant with a modern context that eschews supernaturalism. In drawing upon Plato, Murdoch not only shows a sense of how the modern context of philosophy and morality differs from preceding ones, but she also operates self-consciously in interpreting a preceding philosopher in the light of the circumstances of her own time as well as that of the past author.<sup>22</sup>

Murdoch's philosophy arises out of her reflection upon modern culture, and her novels, insofar as they aspire to be realistic and truthful, reflect her times just as her critical reflection aims to make sense of those times. For instance, her novel, *The Time of the Angels* reflects the current religious atmosphere.<sup>23</sup> The phrase, 'the time of the angels' conveys a world that is subject to the death of God and the phrase crops up again in *The Philosopher's Pupil*. The sense of a world without God informs all of the novels.<sup>24</sup> In *The Time of the Angels*, the setting is one of which Murdoch observes elsewhere, 'The destruction for which Nietzsche called has taken place.'<sup>25</sup> Its focus is upon Carel Fisher, a rector who no longer believes in God and who substitutes existentialist assertion for moral restraint to the extent of breaking the incest taboo. His ineffectual brother Marcus is writing a book that aims to establish a non-theocratic basis for morality in a godless age but Carel is shown to be powerless to protect his ward in the face of his brother's amorality. The uncertainties of Marcus reflect the indeterminate status of religion in a modern demythologised world and these uncertainties inform the action of Murdoch's novels. What remains in the wake of a waning of belief in the supernatural elements of religion, such as the existence of a personal God, the resurrection of Christ and God's miraculous intervention into the world is a question that is taken up by the priests, iconoclasts and

moralists who populate her novels. The rational temper of the modern age and its corrosive effect upon traditional beliefs constitutes a contextual component of the world that individual characters negotiate in her novels. Niklas Forsberg, in *Language Lost and Found: On Iris Murdoch and the Limits of Philosophical Discourse*, conceives of Murdoch's novels as pursuing a kind of philosophy in registering a loss of traditional concepts in the ways that their characters struggle to make sense of their world. He remarks, 'What drives my work here is the thought that a loss of concepts is something that permeates our culture and is not something that can be reduced to a loss of a certain set of words that we can do without'.<sup>26</sup>

Of course, Murdoch's novels are indirect rather than direct expressions of how she understands the world. They reflect rather than expound the issues of modern identity that are discussed directly in her philosophical writings. But her novels aim to be truthful in composing pictures of how individuals negotiate the world, of how they cope with its contingencies and of how they explore the freedom and respond to the challenges of modern times. The novels' characters question the orienting myths of preceding times and work within contemporary conventions and social practices that allow for choice and freedom in contrast to their previous rigidity and constraints. Characters in Murdoch novels explore sexual freedom, practise homosexuality and have abortions and reflect upon these matters without recourse to previously authoritative pronouncements on the part of the state or church. The novels show the decline of ideological politics in the aftermath of the Second World War but also point to troubling political issues such as the situation of migrants, the acceptability of civil disobedience and the continuing role of grand narratives in politics. *The Book and the Brotherhood* (1987) appears to see a role for radical critical political theory even if it critiques what Murdoch in her later years took to be the positive features of Western liberal democracy. The novel's discussion of the possibilities of a grand theory of politics in the late twentieth century reflects Lyotard's discussion of the contemporary relevance of grand narratives and show how the historicity of the present is a feature of Murdoch's novels just as it underlies her philosophical thinking.<sup>27</sup>

Murdoch is a multi-dimensional thinker and author, whose novels and philosophical writings explore features of the post-war world. She is notable as a thinker for many things but an unremarked and significant aspect of her thinking is her self-consciousness in addressing the historicity of the forms of philosophy and literature with which she engaged. She participated in philosophical debates, recognising that the philosophies against which she was setting her own theories were products of a particular historical conjuncture. Likewise in literature she sought to counter the prevalent style of modern novels. Her self-consciousness of the moment enabled her to focus upon composing a different kind of novel and to make a telling contribution to contemporary philosophical debate by observing what had been lost by the development of critical modern forms of thinking. Her novels are not designed to make a succession of philosophical points, nonetheless they deal with issues of the moment and of the age, showing political, moral, religious and philosophical features of the present to which her philosophical writings were directed. Murdoch may have been a philosopher and novelist but she was also a history woman.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Iris Murdoch, 'Letter to Raymond Queneau', 17 October 1947 in A. Horner and A. Rowe (eds.) *Living on Paper – Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2015), p.99.
- <sup>2</sup> Iris Murdoch, *The Flight from the Enchanter* [1956] (London : Vintage, 2001); I. Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (London : Chatto & Windus, 1992).
- <sup>3</sup> Iris Murdoch, 'Application for the Post of Tutor in Philosophy', St. Anne's College Library, p.1
- <sup>4</sup> Iris Murdoch, 'On "God" and "Good"' in I. Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystic: Writings on Philosophy and Literature* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), p.138.
- <sup>5</sup> Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*.
- <sup>6</sup> Iris Murdoch 'A House of Theory' in Iris Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997).
- <sup>7</sup> Iris Murdoch, 'Heidegger: Pursuit of Being' Iris Murdoch Archive, University of Kingston.
- <sup>8</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), p.246.
- <sup>9</sup> Iris Murdoch, 'Against Dryness' in Iris Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), p.291.
- <sup>10</sup> Iris Murdoch, 'Against Dryness', p.294.
- <sup>11</sup> Iris Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited', in Iris Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997).
- <sup>12</sup> Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, pp.431-60.
- <sup>13</sup> I deal with these issues at greater length in related publications. See Gary Browning, *Why Iris Murdoch Matters* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018) and Gary Browning *Murdoch On Truth and Love* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2018).
- <sup>14</sup> For a wider discussion of how political theories change with changing times, see Gary Browning, *Global Theory from Kant to Hardt and Negri* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011) and Gary Browning, 'A Globalist Ideology of post-Marxism? Hardt and Negri's *Empire*', *Critical Review of international Social and Political Philosophy*, 8 (2), 2005.
- <sup>15</sup> Murdoch's argument for the sublime in fiction is linked to Lyotard's Kantian argument for the sublime as a way of appreciating the differend in art. See Gary Browning, *Lyotard and the End of Grand Narrative* (Cardiff: UWP, 2000).
- <sup>16</sup> See Martha Nussbaum, 'Love and Vision: Iris Murdoch on Eros and the Individual', in Maria Antonaccio and William Schweiker (eds.) *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
- <sup>17</sup> For an outline of Hegel's view of Plato, see Gary Browning, *Hegel and Plato Two Modes of Philosophising about Politics* (New York: Garland Press, 1991).
- <sup>18</sup> Iris Murdoch, 'Heidegger: Pursuit of Being', Iris Murdoch Archive, University of Kingston.
- <sup>19</sup> See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* trans. and revised J. Weinscheiner and D. G. Marshall (London: Sheed and Ward, 1960) and Gary Browning, *A History of Modern Political Thought: The Question of Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
- <sup>20</sup> Peter Conradi, *Iris Murdoch — A Life* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), p.547.
- <sup>21</sup> Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p.511.
- <sup>22</sup> See Gary Browning, 'Agency and Influence in the History of Political Thought: The Agency of Influence and the Influence of Agency', *History of Political Thought*, 31 (2), 2010.
- <sup>23</sup> Iris Murdoch, *The Time of the Angels* (1966) (London: Vintage, 2002).
- <sup>24</sup> Iris Murdoch, *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983), (London: Vintage, 2000), p.187.
- <sup>25</sup> 'The Existentialist Hero' in Iris Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), p.109.
- <sup>26</sup> Niklas Forsberg, *Language Lost and Found- On Iris Murdoch and the Limits of Philosophical Discourse* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) p.3.
- <sup>27</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* trans. G. Bennington and B. Assumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989).

## Iris Murdoch and the Descriptive Aspect of Moral Philosophy

In her book *The Sovereignty of Good*, Murdoch states a dual requirement for moral philosophy. Firstly, the examination should be realistic. Human nature, as opposed to the natures of other hypothetical spiritual beings, has certain discoverable attributes, and these should be suitably considered in any discussion of morality. Secondly, since an ethical system cannot but commend an ideal, it should commend a worthy ideal.<sup>1</sup>

This can be read as Murdoch's personal caution against moral philosophies that are written as if for angels and thus not responsive to the real-life limitations and imperfections of human life. A useful ethics is one that we can 'live by', but the formulation also states the fundamental complementary duality in moral philosophy between a descriptive task and a normative one.<sup>2</sup> Moral philosophy must accurately describe what human life and human morality are like, and proceed to make worthy and responsible recommendation concerning how we ought to live. This latter point, the emphasis on worthy ideals, is to be seen against Murdoch's notion that there can be no perfectly neutral moral philosophy, a pure meta-ethics for example, since all moral philosophies reveal fundamental moral commitments in their very selection of questions to discuss, their very choices of words and their grounding views of human nature and human reality. Every moral view (and every normative ethics) relies on an image of human reality, which had better be responsive to our actual lives, unless we want to end up with a muddled or impracticable set of precepts.

Readers of Murdoch tend to focus on her normative contributions: the moral ideals she puts forward through her ethics of vision and her imagery of Platonic ascent. But when reading her without the standard expectations of moral philosophers one should be struck by her clear philosophical focus on description – on an attempt to see and understand the world around us, our time and society and the ways we value things and make meaning.<sup>3</sup>

This descriptive dimension of moral philosophy, which will be the main focus here, can be understood and has been understood in a variety of ways in moral philosophical practice. Murdoch's interpretation of it is very different from that of her Anglophone peers of the latter half of the twentieth century. In contemporary Anglo-American ethics, a substantial proportion of the descriptive task has been performed by meta-ethics, the abstract discipline dedicated to the nature of moral concepts and utterances, and the metaphysical status of moral insights, among other things. Much less energy has been invested in attending to actual moral practices, frameworks, tendencies and

cultural imaginaries concerning the moral life. This is perhaps because such descriptive enquiries tend to fall outside the scope of what is seen as moral philosophy proper, or because references to actual moralities assume the role of mere examples or illustrations, which are evoked to present the pros and cons of normative or meta-ethical theories.

In contemporary mainstream ethics, Murdoch's insistence on the descriptive work of moral philosophy is easily overlooked simply because philosophers educated in the contemporary context of moral theory and meta-ethics go straight for the normative or meta-ethical theory in philosopher's texts when they want to know what he or she has to say. Eliciting a normative or meta-ethical theory from a philosopher's work is also the simplest way to get one's work published and make it count in the context of contemporary Anglophone moral philosophy.<sup>4</sup> Efforts in this direction have produced valuable work on certain aspects of Murdoch's oeuvre, but the emphasis placed on normative and meta-ethical concerns tends to distract readers from her distinctive insistence on descriptive work, and its implications for the pursuit of moral philosophy overall.

A glance at contemporary feminist ethics and a more applied context, however, can provide Murdoch's descriptive emphases with a more resonant contemporary framework. In her introduction to the anthology *Naturalized Bioethics*, Margaret Urban Walker espouses an ethical naturalism, understood as a 'self-reflexive, socially inquisitive, politically critical, and inclusive move toward an ethics that is empirically nourished but also acutely aware that ethical theory is the practice of particular people in particular times, places, cultures, and professional environments'<sup>5</sup>. She emphasises 'working partnerships between philosophical and empirical inquiries in ethics and the accountability of ethics to the reality of actual practices and people's very different relations to these practices and to each other within them.' Indeed many of the contributions to the book highlight bioethical cases, where philosophical discussions go astray due to insufficient knowledge of the situations, reasoning and world-views of the people involved, and where better normative and theoretical thought can only be achieved through complex situated inquiry.

Rather than framing Murdoch as an interesting half-outsider in late twentieth century ethics, we need to see her as a precursor to this contemporary insistence on a better descriptive understanding of moral situations: individual, local, social and historical. For Urban Walker and her colleagues, as it is for Murdoch, descriptive understanding of human situations is not just something that is needed in the application of moral theories to real life. Rather, it is something that goes to the very heart of moral philosophy. All philosophical reflection on things moral rests on some explicit or implicit description of the human being and human life and, for the philosophy to be viable, this description better be adequate and responsive to corrections. Furthermore, the descriptive work called for is multifaceted and can be pursued in many ways, including: through cultural analysis; in dialogue with empirical research; in narrative form; in the form of critique of habitual narratives; and through re-description of things that pass unquestioned in the work of other philosophers. Several of these methods are used for complementary purposes by Murdoch, Urban Walker and the authors of *Naturalized Bioethics* alike.<sup>6</sup>

This emphasis on descriptive richness and adequacy was crucial to Murdoch's group of women

philosophers who graduated from Oxford in the 1940s, among them Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, and Mary Midgley, although it was less pronounced and more theoretical in the work of Anscombe and Foot whose academic careers were the most prominent early on. For Murdoch and Midgley, this emphasis led out of mainstream ethics, at least temporarily: in Murdoch's case to literary work and later to the richness of *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, and in Midgley's case to extensive readings in biology, among other things.<sup>7</sup> It could also be argued, although I will not attempt it here, that an insistence on a more adequate description of human life in ethics is distinctive to a range of late twentieth century woman ethicists, including Carol Gilligan and Annette Baier.

The task here is a more modest one, and does not involve general claims concerning the role of women philosophers in the recent history of moral philosophy.<sup>8</sup> I simply trace the presence of the descriptive emphasis in different parts of Murdoch's work. This should be of exegetical interest for those who wonder what Murdoch's philosophy is all about. But I also believe that this perspective on Murdoch will help to contextualise and give tools for understanding the descriptive turn at work in contemporary feminist ethics.

### **Cultural analysis in Murdoch's philosophy**

In Murdoch's work, human nature always shows itself against the backdrop of social, material and historical conditions, and an inquiry into human nature is by necessity an inquiry into the conditions of actual, contingent people. Moral philosophy comes forth as a kind of social inquiry that we perform on ourselves. We, who in Murdoch's words are to judge the worthiness of an ethical system, are not just human beings but historically placed in given social settings which shape and constrain our imagination. As Murdoch describes the predicament of her contemporaries:

We live in a scientific and anti-metaphysical age in which the dogmas, images and precepts of religion have lost much of their power. We have not recovered from two wars and the experience of Hitler. We are also the heirs of the Enlightenment, Romanticism, and the Liberal tradition. These are elements of our dilemma, whose chief feature, in my view, is that we have been left with far too shallow and flimsy an idea of human personality.<sup>9</sup>

Describing human nature and proposing worthy ideals is complicated by the very limited ways in which we are aware of our condition – what it is like and how it could be different. These limitations are to some extent structural and necessary; we can never quite see ourselves as it were from the outside. But Murdoch's belief is that, by inquiring into what we are like – historically, socially, emotionally and metaphysically – we can come to a better understanding of our situation.

Murdoch does this kind of descriptive and explorative work in most of her philosophical texts, constantly relating to the moral and intellectual limits, handicaps and virtues of modernity and of her own time and context. She also does this in her novels, aiming at a truthful vision of people and society, such as they have come to be. 'Our consciousness changes, and the change may appear in art before it receives its commentary in a theory, though the theory may also subsequently affect the art.'<sup>10</sup> It may be helpful to think of a large part of Murdoch's moral philosophy as a kind of phil-

osophical anthropology, building on a constant re-reading of her times.<sup>11</sup> She does address purely academic issues, such as the priorities and tendencies of post-war philosophy – existentialism, ‘linguistic philosophy’, later structuralism – but these are always in different ways seen against a framework of a human society where certain intellectual tendencies have become possible, meaningful and even seemingly inevitable. In her Neo-Platonism she also traces the contours of an a-historical phenomenology of morality – an image of human directedness in terms of value, towards an idea of the good. But this image too is constantly placed in a framework of historically conditioned moral life. The liberal man, as he comes to the fore in Murdoch’s early papers, is the human being as he is imagined in mid-twentieth century analytic philosophy.

He is rational and totally free except insofar as, in the most ordinary law-court and commonsensical sense, his degree of self-awareness may vary. He is, morally speaking, monarch of all he surveys and totally responsible for his actions. Nothing transcends him. His moral language is a practical pointer, the instrument of his choices, the indication of his preferences. His inner life is resolved into his acts and choices, and his beliefs, which are also acts, since a belief can only be identified through its expression. His moral arguments are references to empirical facts backed up by decision. The only moral word which he requires is ‘good’ (or ‘right’), the word which expresses decision. His rationality expresses itself in awareness of the facts, whether about the world or about himself. The virtue which is fundamental to him is sincerity.<sup>12</sup>

If moral philosophers of her time did not perceive the one-sidedness of this ‘liberal’ figure, the inhumanity of this freely choosing, acting, ‘rational’ agent, supposedly without inner depths, community or history, it is because the modern moral imagination overall has taken this image hostage. This figure, Murdoch notes, is also the major protagonist of twentieth century literature, and the hero of Sartre’s existentialism (and, we could now add, the protagonist of neo-liberalism). It is certainly not the only possible way to picture the human being in a modern setting, but it is Murdoch’s belief (in 1961) ‘that, for the liberal world, philosophy is not in fact at present able to offer us any other complete and powerful picture of the soul.’<sup>13</sup>

This is not just a matter between philosophers. The omnipresence of the ‘liberal man’, and the simplification of human reality which it produces, are central targets of her criticism, and the genre crossing nature of her criticism is an essential rather than accidental or instrumental feature of her thought. This is because powerful and thus pervasive cultural images do not respect disciplinary boundaries – they are with us on the bedside table as well as in the seminar room, in parliament as well as in the nursery.

### **Cultural analysis in literature**

In an interview with Bryan Magee which opens the collection *Existentialists and Mystics*, Murdoch concisely describes the roles of philosophy and literature respectively, insisting on the irreducible plurality of the roles and functions of literature.<sup>14</sup> But literature does have one quite distinctive task, which interests her philosophically.

As I have already said, philosophy does one thing, literature does many things and involves many different motives from the creator and the reader. Art is mimesis, and good art is, to use another Platonic term, anamnesis, 'memory' or what we did not know we knew. Art 'holds the mirror up to nature'. Of course this reflection or 'imitation' does not mean slavish or photographic copying. But it is important to hold on to the idea that art is about the world, it exists for us standing out against a background of our ordinary knowledge.<sup>15</sup>

'Being about the world', 'anamnesis', 'holding up the mirror to nature' – these are tentative characterisations rather than attempts at explaining art. Yet the mirror metaphor offers a central though ambiguous source of insight concerning Murdoch's view on the philosophical roles of literature. One way of understanding the use of the mirror metaphor here is to say that the purpose of literature's capacity as a mirror is to deliver the reader from misconceptions and help her give birth to an accurate vision. We could call this the maieutic understanding of the mirror metaphor. In its very rough initial form, this is an idea that is likely to be acceptable to readers of many different persuasions. But this image can be interpreted in several different ways. One is the idea that there is a true moral/philosophical vision that can be born out of reading, and the author has already seen it. The author thus uses a form of indirect communication (telling a story rather than arguing) in order to instill in the reader's mind the truth that the author has already discovered. In this interpretation, the literary text is a kind of rhetoric strategy which is used either because it is a more persuasive means of communication, or because the contents are of such a kind that they cannot be otherwise expressed. This, roughly, is also the manner of reading Murdoch chosen by commentators as diverse as Bran Nicol (2001), Martha Nussbaum (2004), Miles Leeson (2010) and Sabina Lovibond (2011).<sup>16</sup>

A second interpretation has it that there is a true moral/philosophical vision that can be born out of reading, even if the author did not specifically intend it. This line of interpretation can help us deal with those (not unusual) cases where a given insight derived from reading a literary work seems to go against the grain of the author's intentions. It also helps account for all of those cases where the author is not a philosopher or moralist and could not care less for the moral or philosophical implications of his work. Wayne Booth, for example, takes an interest in the possibilities of receiving moral insight by reading works like the popular novel *Jaws* or *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* against the grain, and thinks of books as moral conversation partners rather than as ready-made sources of insight.<sup>17</sup> In relation to Murdoch this line of interpretation is more unusual because commentators generally take for granted that Murdoch does have a moral philosophical intent with her novels and certainly must have sufficient command over her text to communicate this intent through them.

These two interpretations are based on the presupposition that the central moral and philosophical task of literature is to bring home some specifiable moral message: the importance of empathy (how lack of it can be a lack of intelligence), the plurality of human situations (and how moral principles must be flexible), the good as an unattainable goal (the good as represented by the sun). Literature certainly does bring home such messages, and it has been used in this maieutic manner by literary writers, readers and critics alike. However, Murdoch's use of the mirror metaphor can and, I believe, should be given a plainer reading, much less concerned with ideality and deliverance

and much more concerned with the accurate observation of the social reality we live in. This plainer interpretation is in fact truer to the spirit of the mirror metaphor in Shakespeare with Hamlet's instruction to the group of actors who are soon to perform for his stepfather:

Suit the action to the word,/ the word to the action, with this special/ observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of/ nature: for any thing so o'erdone is from the pur-/pose of playing, whose end, both at the first and/ now, was and is, to hold as 'twere the mirror up to/ nature: to show virtue her feature, scorn her own/ image, and the very age and body of the time/ his form and pressure.<sup>18</sup>

Hamlet uses the mirror metaphor quite literally – what are reflected are not some abstract or general, moral or philosophical truths or lessons or insight, but whatever there happens to be in the world.

Reflected in Murdoch's literature we see a complex world of people, ideas, words, relationships, emotions, woollen sweaters, worn out shoes, buildings in London, cottages on the seaside, trinkets, books, stained carpets, unfulfilled hopes, dogs, cats, philosophers, misunderstandings and swimming pools. On this reading, Murdoch does not write literature in order to reflect glimpses of an ideal order, or an ideal quest for goodness, a platonic ascendance, or the like. She does not aim to argue for philosophical ideals in her novels (although some of her characters can be described as paradigms of selfless goodness). Neither does she aim, specifically, systematically, to deliver us from philosophical or moral or existential misconceptions, for example, by the use of morally unattractive characters, who we are supposed to see through. Insofar as these possible moral functions of fiction are activated in Murdoch's text, they are subordinated to the larger task of giving a vivid realistic picture of our reality and our moral lives.

Murdoch is not impressed by a 'literature of ideas' where an argument is presented in the form of a narrative. She notes that 'the novels by Rousseau and Voltaire are certainly robust cases of "novels of ideas" and have been very influential books in their time. Now they seem dated and rather dead, and that is the penalty of the form'.<sup>19</sup> To Sartre's *La Nausée* she grants a unique status of being a philosophical novel which works as both as art and as philosophy. Highly sensitive to the difficulties of doing both philosophy and literature in the very same work, and cautious of the risk of being read in such terms, she emphasises that this is not her aim. For her these are two distinctive and very different tasks.

In Murdoch's complex mirror images, we get glimpses of 'what we did not know we knew', ordinary facts or aspects of our world that suddenly become more salient when processed through the medium of literature. Curiosity and imagination are directed at the world we live in, in its plurality, rather than toward a transcendent good or an ideal morality. Understood in this way literature offers a complement to the descriptive task of philosophy rather than to the normative one. It does not teach us, primarily, to value, but rather to observe and describe.

### **Implications for moral philosophy**

To see beyond Murdoch's philosophical text, we need to recognise Murdoch's object. Not her immediate concern, a fixed, given moral predicament of late modernity and twentieth century Anglo-

French philosophy that she has criticised, or a Neo-Platonic theory of the good. Rather we look to the overall object: an ever-changing panorama of morality, value, culture and change against which our own lives, and our moral and spiritual strivings take place. Surely some of Murdoch's analyses (such as the criticism of the omnipresent 'liberal man') have lasting validity. However, we cannot make use of her most essential insights in philosophy, if we stick to those of her cultural diagnoses which still seem useful. Rather than offering a diagnostic template, she offers us the model of a diagnostic activity which is omnivorous, curious, constantly active and sensitive to continuities as well as discontinuities in our moral habitat.

Moral philosophy must be historicised and contextualised, it must come with an explicit interest in and concern about the contingencies and historical specificities of our predicament. If modern moral philosophy has one vice above others it is its limited curiosity about human life and morals, its implicit belief that it knows what morality is and what human life is like. Murdoch was not alone with this analysis in late twentieth century Anglophone philosophy. The broader turn towards literature in this context bears witness of a shared concern.<sup>20</sup> Another ally, as already mentioned, is to be found in Annette Baier, a philosopher inspired by both Hume and Wittgenstein to pursue a descriptive, empirically informed inquiry into the moral life. In her early book *Postures of the Mind* Baier urges moral philosophers to take broad interest in the phenomena of lived morality:

We can try to reflect on the actual phenomenon of morality, to see what it is, how it is transmitted, what difference it makes. We may, as a result of the resulting consciousness of what morality is, think we can make some improvements in it; however, these will come not from surveying abstract possibilities, but from seeing how, given the way it is, it can, by some move we can now make, improve itself, work better, correct its faults. Only when we think we know what it is, how it is now working, what it is doing, will we be in any position to see how it might really change, let alone if that change would be for the better.<sup>21</sup>

This sounds surprisingly like Murdoch. It crystallises the idea that a rich understanding of all things moral and their place in society and human consciousness is a prerequisite for a useful moral philosophy. Moral philosophy is not a field for narrow experts. If we are to derive a single lesson from Murdoch it would be a methodological one: if you want to learn about morality, look at life, look at all the things that human beings value, and how they value. Inquire into it by all available means, listen to writers and historians. Many things necessary for the understanding of moral phenomena do not come with a label attached, indicating that they belong to morality. If Murdoch's adventures in the realm of philosophical description of our contingent moral life are still quite abstract, general and slogan-like, then the contemporary ethicists who work at different intersections between philosophy and empirical inquiry should be better placed to continue the endeavour that she envisaged. Appreciating the integrity of this descriptive searching activity in relation to normative work will, I believe, place it on a continuous sustainable path.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts* (1970), (London: Routledge, 2001), p.76.
- <sup>2</sup> See Maria Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- <sup>3</sup> See also Niklas Forsberg, *Language Lost and Found, On Iris Murdoch and the Limits of Philosophical Discourse*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), hereafter LLF, and David Robjant, 'The Earthy Realism of Plato's Metaphysics, or: What Shall We Do with Iris Murdoch?', *Philosophical Investigations* 35:1, 2011, pp.43–67 and Nora Hämmäläinen, 'What is a Wittgensteinian Neo-Platonist?', *Philosophical Papers* 43:2, 2014, pp.191–225. For the descriptive theme in ethics beyond Murdoch see Nora Hämmäläinen, *Descriptive Ethics: What does Moral Philosophy Know about Morality?*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
- <sup>4</sup> For related reflections on the difficulty of representing a philosopher like Murdoch in contemporary analytic moral philosophy, see Niklas Forsberg, 'Iris Murdoch on Love', in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Love*, Christopher Grau and Aaron Smuts (eds.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
- <sup>5</sup> Margaret Urban Walker, 'Introduction Groningen: Naturalism in Bioethics', in *Naturalized Bioethics*, Hilde Lindemann, Marian Verkerk, Margaret Urban Walker (eds.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.5.
- <sup>6</sup> See also Margaret Urban Walker, *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics*, (New York: Routledge, 1998).
- <sup>7</sup> See Benjamin J. B. Lipscomb, 'Slipping out over the Wall': Midgley, Anscombe, Foot and Murdoch,' in *Science and the Self – Animals, Evolution, and Ethics: Essays in the Honor of Mary Midgley*, Ian James Kidd and Liz McKinnell (eds.), (London: Routledge, 2017).
- <sup>8</sup> Murdoch's philosophical interest in love brought her to the attention of women and feminist moral philosophers in the 1990s and 2000s, but her position as an icon in feminist philosophy is compromised by her own lack of interest in feminist thought, and her desire to escape the role of 'woman philosopher', which comes forth in the interviews collected in Gillian Dooley, *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction*, (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), e.g. p.82. As Caroline Guerin notes in 'Iris Murdoch – a Revisionist Theology? A Comparative Study of Iris Murdoch's *Nuns and Soldiers* and Sara Maitland's *Virgin Territory*', *Journal of Literature and Theology* 6:2, 1992, pp.153–170, Murdoch 'does not write from a specifically feminist consciousness'. Recent debate on this issue has revolved around Murdoch's ability to engage in structural social criticism, see Sabina Lovibond, *Iris Murdoch, Gender and Philosophy*, (London: Routledge, 2011), Bridget Clarke, 'Iris Murdoch and the Prospects for Critical Moral Perception,' in *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher*, Justin Broackes (ed.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.227–254, and Nora Hämmäläinen, 'Reduce Ourselves to Zero: Sabina Lovibond, Iris Murdoch, and Feminism,' *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 30:4, 2015, pp.743–759.
- <sup>9</sup> Iris Murdoch, 'Against Dryness', in Peter Conradi (ed.), *Existentialists and Mystics* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), p.287, hereafter *EM*.
- <sup>10</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, 'Literature and Philosophy', p.22.
- <sup>11</sup> Murdoch calls it 'moral psychology', but this labelling has rather misleading connotations today, when moral psychology is increasingly an activity of psychologists and philosophers working in close proximity to empirical psychology.
- <sup>12</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, 'Against Dryness,' pp.288–289.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p.289.
- <sup>14</sup> For a thorough discussion on Murdoch and her critics on this issue see Forsberg, *LLF*, chapter 1.
- <sup>15</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, 'Literature and Philosophy', p.12.
- <sup>16</sup> See Bran Nicol, 'Philosophy's Dangerous Pupil: Murdoch and Derrida,' *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 47:3, Fall 2001, pp. 580–601, Martha Nussbaum, 'Faint with Secret Knowledge': Love and Vision in Murdoch's *The Black Prince*, *Poetics Today* 25:4, 2004, pp.689–710, Miles Leeson, *Iris Murdoch: Philosophical Novelist*, (London: Continuum, 2010), and Lovibond.
- <sup>17</sup> Wayne Booth, *The Company We Keep*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).
- <sup>18</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* Act 3, scene 2, 17–24, in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
- <sup>19</sup> Murdoch, *EM*, 'Literature and Philosophy,' p.20.
- <sup>20</sup> See e.g. Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) and Robert Pippin, *Henry James and Modern Moral Life*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) on Henry James, and Alice Crary, 'W. G. Seebald and the Ethics of Narrative', in *Language, Ethics and Animal Life – Wittgenstein and Beyond*, Niklas Forsberg, Mikel Burley and Nora Hämmäläinen (eds.), (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), pp.195–212, on Seebald, for discussion on ethics and literature with reflection on the socio-historical placing of literary characters, and its relevance to the character's moral thought as well as the use of such novels for purposes of moral philosophy.
- <sup>21</sup> Annette Baier, *Postures of the Mind – Essays on Mind and Morals*, (London: Methuen, 1985), p.224.

Lacan, Jouissance, and the Sublimation of Self in Iris Murdoch's  
*The Black Prince*

References to psychoanalysis within Iris Murdoch's work appear frequently throughout both her fiction and philosophical writings. Allusions to Freudian psychoanalytic theory and practice are placed strategically throughout her novels, often becoming defining and memorable aspects of the characters, objects, or scenes in which they are imbued. This should come as no surprise when we understand how well versed Murdoch was in psychoanalytic literature. The archive at Kingston University holds dozens of texts on psychology and psychoanalysis, many of which are heavily annotated and cross-referenced in Murdoch's hand. Of particular interest is *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1978) by Jacques Lacan published in the original French and bearing the same attentive deliberation of Murdoch's notes. Lacan is representative of the post-Freudian movement of psychoanalysis which ran concurrently to Murdoch's own career as a writer, scholar and teacher. By determining the thematic similarities between Murdoch's work and the psychoanalytic theory of the time, we can justify such an approach as a necessary and unique method of contrasting two prominent theoretical ideals of the mid-twentieth century.

Often, Murdoch is critical of such theory and depicts Freud, as well as other psychoanalysts, as misguided, yet acknowledging them all as intelligent scholars of the mind. Whilst Freud makes the claim that 'no one can really know how far [people] are good or wicked', Murdoch's work is concerned with the conflicting moral circumstances of existence.<sup>1</sup> Murdoch argues that, if we are to live morally, we should redirect our attention towards others in an attempt to transcend our passions and desires instilled by Low Eros into those of the more ethical and fulfilling High Eros. This essay will demonstrate that Murdoch's fiction, in particular *The Black Prince* (1973), is illustrative of Murdoch's attitudes towards the representation of Eros and how this correlates to the psychoanalytical theories of Jacques Lacan. In particular, Lacan's theory of jouissance, serving as a form of pleasure that is often indistinguishable from pain, manifests itself as representative of the transition between Low and High Eros within Murdoch's novels. By examining the psychoanalytic discourses of Murdoch's characters, we are able to explore their attempts to attain jouissance whilst redirecting their own morality.

Lacan argues that an individual's transition through life is governed by experiences that are all arbitrary allusions to jouissance, the ultimate pleasure akin to pain. This form of pleasure, however,

is not to be confused with the gratification of the everyday which Lacan differentiates as *plaisir*. To push past this boundary or, to quote Freud, to go 'beyond the pleasure principle', one can enter the domain of *jouissance* where the resulting pleasure manifests itself as pain, or as an erotically charged abstraction of pleasure.<sup>2</sup>

We may read the somewhat dysfunctional, and potentially controversial, relationships depicted within Murdoch's work as the relevant character's pursuit of *jouissance*: one that will never be fully realised. One may call to mind the dysfunctional love triangle in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* (1974) where the only resolution is a deep tragedy and the utter disintegration of one long-term relationship in order to strengthen another. Lacan hypothesised that through the process of adolescence, through being introduced to societal and psychological concepts, rules, and language itself, an individual is forcibly detached from the Mother, unconsciously aware that this once primal bond has been severed forever. As such, within the examples in Murdoch's novels, each partner is to the other reduced to that of a surrogate, carrying the representation of the abstract Mother to which the subject unconsciously desires to be symbiotically connected once again. Hence, for a subject to pursue such a relationship, one must first attempt to deconstruct one's ego, to once again return to a state of dependency with the representational Mother. The result is often an autonomous relationship that is potentially masturbatory and sado-masochistic.

Lacan's theory of *jouissance*, originating from the desire to detach oneself from one's ego in order to return to the mental symbiosis with the Mother, is ever present in *The Black Prince*. In one scene in particular, Bradley is reminiscing with his sister when he admits often dreaming about their parent's shop when they were children. Priscilla asks if Bradley remembers their childhood games when, '[w]e used to lie on the shelves under the counter and we'd think the counter was a boat and we were in our bunks and the boat was sailing? And when Mummy called us we'd just lie there ever so quietly'.<sup>3</sup> Murdoch explicitly evokes a Freudian reading when Marloe interprets the shop as the womb. Such an inclusion is by no means the sole Freudian reference within the novel. The symbolic role of the Post Office Tower is a subtle reference to the observant reader. Murdoch comments that 'Freud takes on a thoroughly pessimistic view of human nature. He sees the psyche as an egocentric system of quasi-mechanical energy'.<sup>4</sup> Regardless of Murdoch's personal distaste of Freudian analysis, her work consciously portrays Freudian themes as a point of reference. She uses practitioners of psychoanalysis as literary shorthand for moral shortcomings in character and this is evident in the characters of Thomas McCaskerville in *The Good Apprentice* (1985) and Blaise Gavender in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* (1974). Murdoch appears to invite a psychoanalytic approach with her clear allusions to varying psychoanalytical practices and theory, yet this invitation is marred by the obvious caricatures of its practitioners. In this instance, the character of Marloe offers base psychoanalytic readings which more often than not simplify the scenes and wider themes into sterile and analytic terms.

Bradley's input into Priscilla's memory brings up further Freudian and Lacanian similarities when he continues: 'And the door with the curtain on it and we'd stand behind the curtain and when someone opened the door we'd move quietly back underneath the curtain'.<sup>5</sup> Here we have a representation

of the formation of Bradley's initial ego. The young Bradley and Priscilla's unwillingness to reply to their mother is not a conscious portrayal of childish mischief, but of the fact that they have yet to formulate an internal voice, or ego, of their own with which to respond. If this scene is representative of the construction of Bradley's most basic ego, its deconstruction is the manifestation of jouissance contained within a memory, or a dream.

If we accept Lacan's hypothesis that the unrivalled form of jouissance is to deconstruct one's ego in an attempt to associate with the representational Mother, then the developmental processes of an individual's ego must be undone before jouissance can be attained. This notion of regressing to a state of non-being, from an internal viewpoint, is not uncommon in much of Western philosophy. In *Gravity and Grace* (1952), Simone Weil talks of the process of decreation where the ego is but a component of the subject's being that is relative to their position within the imaginary. She writes 'In the same way that we raise the ego [. . .] we degrade ourselves to an infinite degree by confining ourselves to being no more than that. When the ego is debased, we know that we are not that'.<sup>6</sup> By consciously constructing one's ego, the subject limits their being to a singular predetermined ideal. David J. Gordon informs us that this 'unselfing [. . .] is the moral goal, the point of contact with an "imageless good", and it must be understood as such'.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, once the subject removes themselves from the imaginary through the breakdown of the self and ego, they are able to advance towards a more moral existence.

Lacan hypothesises that the root of all jouissance originates within the psychological detachment from the Mother as dictated by the mirror stage. As such, in order to attain any form of jouissance, one had to break free from the symbolic order and let go of one's ego. Artistically, the theme was explored in Titian's *The Flaying of Marsyas*. Murdoch sees within the painting the conceivability of Marsyas and his subsequent flaying as representative of the destruction of his own ego and thus the sublimation of the self. Murdoch interprets the painting as 'an image of the death of egoism. Religion is about the death of the ego. The ego disappears and you see the world with absolute vividness and clarity'.<sup>8</sup> Gordon describes Murdoch's interpretation as 'a moment of acute asceticism, equally an agony and an ecstasy, whereby man in an age without God makes contact with the divine'.<sup>9</sup> It is this agonised ecstasy that is the result of jouissance in the image, the acknowledgment of the sublime and the collapsing of the self.

There is an uncanny doubling in Murdoch's interpretation of Titian's painting and the events and themes of *The Black Prince*, primarily in the character of Bradley Pearson, his rivalry with Arnold Baffin, and his sexual relationship with Julian. Cheryl K. Bove emphasises that crucial to this reading is that 'Pearson's own suffering and death is necessary for the production of his work of art'.<sup>10</sup> As such, Bradley takes on the symbolic role of Marsyas as, in order for *The Black Prince* to exist, he must suffer at the hands of some othering force, or rather, through being accused of Arnold's murder and the prior breakdown of his relationship with Julian. At the beginning of the novel Bradley admits: 'The paradox of perhaps my whole life, and it is an absurdity upon which I do not cease to meditate, is that the dramatic story which follows, so unlike the rest of my work, may well prove to be my only "best seller"'.<sup>11</sup> Much like Weil's allegory on decreation, despite Bradley having dedicated his life to

becoming a writer in order to create a great work of art, it is only through his suffering and ultimate death that this is ever more than a fantasy.

We can look to Loxias's Postscript as an example of Lacanian theory at work. He writes: 'All artists dream of a silence which they must enter, as some creatures return to the sea to spawn'.<sup>12</sup> The allusions to *jouissance* within this small section are significant. It reinforces the entire story from an othering perspective: that of a divine God. The silence that Loxias speaks of is evocative of the non-existence brought forth with death – from which such a divine other is immune. This is reminiscent of Lacan's most basic theory of *jouissance*; that the human subject is forever striving to return to a state of joint identification with the mother, as they were before the construction of the ego.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, for the subject to regress (or transcend) into this state is the epitome of the deconstruction of the ego, and the resulting sublimation of the self. Indeed, 'the creator must suffer formlessness. Even risk dying of it' in order to achieve this most primal form of *jouissance* by enduring such a fragmentation of both the body and ego through death.<sup>14</sup>

Bradley is forced to suffer 'a pain that can be endured and absorbed' – an unattributable redemptive suffering.<sup>15</sup> According to Anne Rowe: 'the experience of extreme suffering can be redemptive or destructive [. . .] between suffering which leads to moral growth and redemption, and suffering which leads to Ate, the sadomasochistic impulse to pass one's pain on to others'.<sup>16</sup> However, Murdoch's suggestion that the transition towards the moral life is brought about through the redirection of attention towards others is corrupted by Bradley's negative attitudes towards his relationships. Whilst he may redirect his attention towards others, this is usually either in the form of negative attention or in an attempt to bolster his own ego – such is his relationship with Julian. Rowe observes that, 'Bradley can make love to Julian successfully only when she is dressed as Hamlet. It is both violent and selfish on Bradley's part [. . .] which hurts and distresses Julian'.<sup>17</sup> In this ambiguous form of sadomasochism, Bradley merely emulates the pain that is constitutive of his ego and transfers this to Julian. This transferral of the ego emulates the reality of *jouissance* however excruciating, or indeed pleasurable, it may be. In his description of his sexual encounter with Julian, he uses painful imagery: 'I felt as if my stomach had been shot away, leaving a gaping whole. My knees dissolved, I could not stand up, I shuddered and trembled all over, my teeth chattered'.<sup>18</sup> However, evidently he is still unable to undergo a complete sublimation of self as he concludes that he had 'become some sort of god' indicating that his ego is still intact and even potentially bolstered by such an experience.<sup>19</sup>

Rowe adds that 'when intense suffering is redemptive, it must co-exist with the death of the ego, which is accompanied with [an] exhilaration or deep joy' – a near perfect allegory for *jouissance*.<sup>20</sup> Midway through the novel, Bradley experiences a brief glimpse of this redemptive power when he attempts to right the wrongdoings done unto his friends and family: essentially, transitioning towards a more moral existence. He admits, 'I loved and the joy of love made a void in me where self had been. I was purged of resentment and hate, purged of all the mean anxious fears that compose the vile ego'.<sup>21</sup> Bradley's own confession aligns with the workings of *jouissance* which Lacan lays out. Metaphorically, Bradley admits the masochistic composition of the ego. However, this realisation is only brought about when he experiences a moral epiphany owing to his display of positive

attention towards the other characters. Bradley claims that he feels a void where the self had once been, indicating that the self was the hindrance which made him unable to previously live a just and moral existence.

Murdoch emphasises this moral shift by attributing it to the physical. Christian remarks, 'Brad, what is it, you look extraordinary, something's happened to you, you're beautiful, you look like a saint or something, you look like a goddamn picture, you look all young again'.<sup>22</sup> Bradley's moral transition has seemingly manifested itself within his physical appearance – essentially causing a bodily rejuvenation. Metaphorically, he has been born again as an abstraction of himself that is reminiscent of a pious or Christ-like figure. Of course, for such a remark to hold any value to us we have to take Bradley's account as it stands. Murdoch presents us with an individual who is battling with their own ego, this can either be interpreted as a transcendence into something beyond, or as a reinforcement of the very ego of which they are attempting to rid themselves.

If we perceive Murdoch's depiction of Bradley as a representation of Christ, the inclusion of a quasi-divine reference also alludes to Murdoch's reference of abstract Christian iconography within the novel. Bradley pairs himself with Arnold when he says '[Arnold] sometimes seemed an emanation of myself, a strayed and alien alter ego'<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Loxias refers to Bradley when he writes '[Bradley] found me, his alter ego'.<sup>24</sup> If we are to view Bradley, Arnold, and Loxias as some representation of the Holy Trinity, Bradley becomes more reminiscent of a Christ-like figure. He endures suffering and death in order to be reborn, redeemed, and transcendent. As such, Christian's remark is a vague indicator of what is possible if Bradley continues to deconstruct his own ego and endure the sublimation of his own self. The Christian symbolism, with which Murdoch imbues *The Black Prince*, allows Bradley to represent more than himself, to transcend beyond his own ego. The inclusion of such a trait by Murdoch herself presents a philosophical intertextuality throughout the construction of her characters.

The allusions to Titian's painting, moreover, offer further interpretation. Rowe comments that 'an important aspect of [Murdoch's] quarrel with Christian iconography is that it encourages masochistic suffering rather than selfless suffering, and portrays suffering as an end in itself rather than as a way through to a new orientation of being'.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the role of Titian's painting within *The Black Prince* is not to affirm a Christian allegory, rather to make reference to the aesthetic sublime in which Bradley sacrifices his ego in an attempt to write his 'best seller', albeit achieving some form of moral redemption in the process.

The way in which morality manifests itself within human consciousness is essential to this essay, as well as to the study of Murdoch's work in regard to Lacanian theories. Murdoch defines Eros as:

the continuous operation of spiritual energy, desire, intellect, love, as it moves among and responds to particular objects of attention, the force of magnetism and attraction which joins us to the world, making it a better or worse world: good and bad desires with good and bad desires.<sup>26</sup>

Murdoch clearly references the duality inherent in the concept of Eros. She contrasts good and evil

as two sides of the same coin – one which is ever present and which imposes a choice upon the individual. Therefore, we can apply this duality to the sublimation of the self in an attempt to go beyond the pleasure principle and into the domain of *jouissance*.

Murdoch hypothesises that the concept of Eros and the vehicles that drive its manifestations, are to be redirected towards the attention of others through one's own morality and individual choices. However, as she states: 'A person can be scrupulously honest but unkind, or generous but deceitful'.<sup>27</sup> She is convinced of the goodness inherent within humanity, and its centring on morality, yet she admits that there is not always a clear correlation. She writes, 'we cannot sum up human excellence for these reasons: the world is aimless, chancy, and huge, and we are blinded by self'.<sup>28</sup> As such, human beings are subject to the varying forms of Eros both high and low. These are the forms of morality that range from debasing desires (i.e. lust, deceit, greed) to compassionate, committed, and consensual relationships with other human beings. Through this redirection of morality, one can utilise one's sexuality in order to transgress from the realms of Low to High Eros, thus pursuing a moral, and just, existence.

This does not, however, mean that Murdoch 'accepts sexuality as a dark instinct that should be totally abolished'.<sup>29</sup> She writes 'On the other hand I do not think that [the moral life] can be satisfactorily characterized by an enumeration of varying "goods"'.<sup>30</sup> In fact, Murdoch's literature and coinciding philosophical positions are dependent on this duality of Eros. Her work alludes to the choices that are constantly presented to an individual, the outcomes of which deviate either towards High Eros or towards Low Eros, alternative paths depicting the moral contrast. Her characters are all subject to the external workings of their respective fictional realities in which they are but a small, influencing factor. This touches on Murdoch's use of character placement within her novels. Her reverence towards the aesthetic sublime is where, ultimately, her characters are all but dependent on their own morality in order to initiate an ethical, albeit fictional, existence. Murdoch writes 'we experience the sublime when we control the awful contingency of nature or of human fate and return into ourselves with a proud shudder of rational power'.<sup>31</sup> Here, Murdoch emphasises human agency as a crucial component of the sublime. The transition to a moral existence must be a conscious effort in order to offer any form of redemption.

The unfolding events of *The Black Prince*, and the apparent conviction and death of Bradley can be viewed as such a transitioning between the duality of Eros. Reminiscent of the Marsyas and Apollo myth, Bradley is able to deconstruct his ego in order to produce his own work, ironically titled, 'A Celebration of Love'. However the conclusion, Bradley's conviction and death, is left obscure and not entirely resolved. The implied reader is left to formulate their own view as to whether they believe that Bradley did, in fact, murder Arnold Baffin. As such, 'justice (indifferent to happiness) should be thought of primarily as retributive, making even: this is not revenge, it works for, as well as against, the accused'.<sup>32</sup> Therefore the conviction of Bradley, whether true or otherwise, should not be deemed as retributive or as a resolute solution. Murdoch herself admits that justice should also work for the accused. In this case, we are presented with an image of Bradley managing to deconstruct his own ego, whilst transgressing the desires instilled through Eros from the Low to the High. However, the

validity of such an image is ultimately left down to whether we believe in Bradley's narration and subsequent resolution. If 'the activity of Eros is orientation of desire', then Bradley's desires must first be reoriented in order to transgress the ensuing Low Eros into the more moral High Eros<sup>33</sup>. The main body of Murdoch's novel, *The Black Prince*, is the fictional work of Bradley, purportedly describing his version of events. Utilising postmodern narrative techniques, the novel's depiction of truth is left opaque. As such, any attempt to gleam a solid truth is compromised by Bradley's unreliability both as a narrator and as an arbiter of ethics. As Murdoch is presenting us with Bradley's own morality supposedly through his own words, the supposed truth being relayed to us is mired in bias. To this end, Murdoch is suggesting that it is not for ourselves to determine our own moral positioning, but that our pursuit of High Eros outwardly determines how we perceive ourselves as well as others. Arguably, this search for the truth can be aligned with Murdoch's Platonic attitudes towards Eros, and its resulting transition into a form of moral good.

*The Black Prince* serves as Bradley's transformation in terms of both his ego as well as his relationship with Eros. Whether Murdoch's readers decide to consciously convict Bradley or not, his transcendence into High Eros remains a conceptual certainty amidst the uncertainty. Leaving behind his immoral behaviours, desires, and wrongdoings, Bradley is able to pursue a more fulfilling existence, unrestricted by his own egotistical inclinations. In essence, 'the idea of good or goodness remains a magnet; the higher part of the soul speaks to the lower part of the soul, the good lightens and reforms the bad, the bad darkens the good'.<sup>34</sup> Murdoch refers to the duality inherent within Eros, and how both extremities must coexist in order to bring about a moral change.

Murdoch offers a good summary when she writes that human consciousness 'constantly seeks consolation, either through imagined inflation of the self or through fictions of a theological nature'.<sup>35</sup> This 'inflation of the self' is the constant bolstering of the ego that manifests itself in a sadomasochistic sense. Through pursuing desires associated with Low Eros, the subject is unable to reach any moral epiphany, constantly consoling the ego in an unending cycle. However, the character of Bradley we are presented with is able to supposedly transgress this metaphorical boundary by releasing himself from his own ego. His sacrifice and indeed his suffering initiates a process of 'unselfing'. Whilst it is important to bear in mind the bias and potential distortion which Bradley's narration brings to this reading, the sacrifice leading to his self-described redemption is his own and not the work of a supreme God. Bradley has become both a mortal and a form of transcendent being – much like the figure of Christ – due to his suffering and consequent redemption. However, Murdoch is insistent that Bradley remains a mortal and flawed figure as the 'fictions of a theological nature' must remain fictions, or there can be no moral realisation. Bradley is represented as a figure worthy of redemption, not by an omnipotent God, but by his own conviction and personal sacrifice. Only achievable through his own redemptive suffering, Bradley is able to 'unself' his own ego, and transcend his existence into a bare life – a sublime abstraction of existence.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (London: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.58.
- <sup>2</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, (London: The Psycho-analytical Press, 1992).
- <sup>3</sup> Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p.149.
- <sup>4</sup> Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p.51; abbreviated to SG in the endnotes that follow.
- <sup>5</sup> Iris Murdoch, *The Black Prince*, (London: Vintage, 2003), p.149; abbreviated to BP in the endnotes that follow.
- <sup>6</sup> Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, E. Crawford (trans.), (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952), p.29.
- <sup>7</sup> David J. Gordon, *Iris Murdoch's Fables of Unselfing*, (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri, 1995), p.9.
- <sup>8</sup> Iris Murdoch, Interview by Eric Robinson, from 'Revelations', Channel Four Television, 22 September 1984.
- <sup>9</sup> Gordon, p.71.
- <sup>10</sup> Cheryl K. Bove, *Understanding Iris Murdoch*, (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina, 1993), p.77.
- <sup>11</sup> BP, p.12.
- <sup>12</sup> BP, p.414.
- <sup>13</sup> Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience' in *Ecrits*, Bruce Fink (trans.), (London: W.W. Norton & Company Ltd, 2006), pp.75–81.
- <sup>14</sup> Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage', p.414.
- <sup>15</sup> Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage', p.350.
- <sup>16</sup> Anne Rowe, *The Visual Arts and the Novels of Iris Murdoch*, (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press Ltd, 2002), p.162.
- <sup>17</sup> Rowe, p.169.
- <sup>18</sup> BP, p.206.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> Rowe, p.162.
- <sup>21</sup> BP, p.232.
- <sup>22</sup> BP, p.227.
- <sup>23</sup> BP, p.186.
- <sup>24</sup> BP, p.9.
- <sup>25</sup> Rowe, p.167.
- <sup>26</sup> Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, (London: Vintage, 1992), p.496; abbreviated to MGM in the endnotes that follow.
- <sup>27</sup> MGM, p.492.
- <sup>28</sup> SG, p.100.
- <sup>29</sup> Seda Arikian, 'There is no Such Thing as a Sexual Relationship: Lacanian Principals in Iris Murdoch's *The Sea The Sea*', *Ataturk Universitesi Soysal Bilimer Enstitusu Desgiis*, 19(3), 2015, 103–126, p.105.
- <sup>30</sup> MGM, p.492.
- <sup>31</sup> SG, pp.81–82.
- <sup>32</sup> MGM, p.493.
- <sup>33</sup> MGM, p.497.
- <sup>34</sup> MGM, p.492.
- <sup>35</sup> SG, p.79.

## Anscombe, Foot, Midgley, Murdoch: A Philosophical School

### 1. Beginnings

Iris Murdoch went up to Oxford in 1938 and so did Mary Midgley – or Mary Scrutton, as she was then called. Both women were enrolled in Classics, or ‘Mods and Greats’, but unlike the public-school boys who were their peers, the classical education they had received at school was patchy, and they banded together over a shared necessity to master Greek grammar. The following year, Philippa Foot arrived at Somerville College much to the dismay of her mother, who had received only scant reassurance from friends, ‘don’t worry dear, she doesn’t *look* clever’.<sup>1</sup> This was at a time when, at least for members of a certain class, wearing glasses for a woman was close to ruination; closer still was the wearing of ‘slacks’. Elizabeth Anscombe arrived in Oxford in 1938 but, unlike the others who were at Somerville, she was at St Hugh’s College. A year later, the country was at war.<sup>2</sup>

The Oxford scene altered steadily. From the beginning, a number of University dons and male students were enlisted in war work, mostly in the intelligence services. A. J. Ayer and Gilbert Ryle were among them. In 1941, the age of conscription for men was lowered to nineteen and undergraduate numbers sharply declined. Male students were forced to enlist after only one or two year’s study, postponing completion of their degree until after the war. The ethicist R. M. Hare, born in the same year as Murdoch, suspended his studies after his second year, only returning to take up the remainder of his degree in 1945. The result was that Anscombe, Foot, Murdoch and Midgley found themselves in an intellectual milieu that was extraordinary. Women were no longer in the minority, as they are in academic philosophy even today. This was all the more remarkable given that women were not permitted to take degrees at Oxford until 1920, a change that was fiercely resisted by the male undergraduate population. Unaccompanied women making their way around campus may still have been something of a novelty: the necessity of female chaperones at all social occasions was ended only in 1925. Midgley recalls being told by the Dean on arrival to remember that ‘the women are still on probation in this university’ and she relates the excitement around Somerville College when it was decided that men could be invited to take tea at women’s colleges on Sunday as well as Saturday.

The scene was highly cosmopolitan too. Refugee scholars poured in from all over Europe and it was claimed, perhaps improbably, that you needed to speak German to get by in North Oxford.<sup>3</sup> Despite this clamouring on the pavements, tutors were few. Only conscientious objectors, refugee scholars or those too old or infirm to fight remained. Both Midgley and Murdoch took Eduard Fraenkel's notorious *Agamemnon* seminar, and all the women but Anscombe were taught by the theologian and classicist Donald MacKinnon. Fraenkel, born of Jewish parents, had lost his post in Berlin in 1933 and fled to Britain; MacKinnon was a pacifist. Speaking of their intellectual development, Midgley describes MacKinnon as 'extremely important'. For Murdoch, he was a 'jewel'.<sup>4</sup> Kant was MacKinnon's favourite, especially the *Third Critique*, never far from the surface of the mature writings of Murdoch and Foot. But various other 'moth-eaten traditions' were pored over too – mostly Plato and Aristotle, but also the pre-Socratics.

By the standards of the day the education that Murdoch and her friends received was exotic. It was also fairly outmoded. H. H. Price, a sense-datum theorist, delivered lectures on the philosophy of perception. Anscombe records that she used to 'sit tearing [her] gown into little strips because [she] wanted to argue against so much that he said'. His lectures were nevertheless 'intensely interesting' and 'absolutely about the stuff'.<sup>5</sup> C.S. Lewis's *The Allegory of Love* was in the air. And the monumental R.G. Collingwood, though close to the end of his life – too old, we think, to have taught Murdoch and her friends – lectured occasionally on the concept of human nature, a taboo.<sup>6</sup> It was the kind of the instruction that would have been imparted a generation or more before. At another time the difference of a generation would not have mattered so much, but British philosophy was in the middle of – as Geoffrey Warnock described it – a 'Revolution'. The metaphysical theories of the previous generation were an embarrassment to the modernising linguistic philosophers that, had it not been for the war, would have taught these women. So it was that their outmoded education had a significant bearing on what was to happen when the men returned after the war.

In 1946, Collingwood's *The Idea of History* appeared posthumously. In it, he writes: '[E]very new generation must rewrite history in its own way; every new historian, not content with giving new answers to old questions, must revise those questions themselves.' After the war, Murdoch's generation found that they did need to revisit history. The horrors of total war, the atomic bomb, and the holocaust required new thinking about old questions – questions about how to live, and about what is good and bad, about what can intelligibly be found pleasant or enjoyable or valuable. As we explain, their old-fashioned education gave them valuable resources for answering those questions – resources that were not available to their more modern-minded peers.

## **2. New questions, new directions**

When the war was over the men returned to Oxford, many of them in their prime and ready to deploy the energy and focus that had got them through the war. J.L. Austin's forensic study of ordinary language is sometimes said to owe much to his war work in the intelligence services. A democratizing philosopher, Foot once said that Austin was the 'cleverest thing on two legs'<sup>7</sup>. She, unlike the other women, was sometimes invited to the Saturday morning gatherings at his house where

groups of hand-picked philosophers would catalogue and decode the intricacies of the parlances of the plain man. Ryle, a general in the war, also had a mission. The Butler Education Act 1944 had led to the expansion of secondary education and demand grew for university places. The Percy Report of 1945 recommended an ambitious expansion of the higher-level sector and the transformation of some technical colleges into universities.<sup>8</sup> In 1948, Ryle founded the BPhil and he was to train an army of philosophers<sup>9</sup>. Many of his men took up service in far-flung outposts. Among them would be Geoffrey Midgley, Mary Scrutton's soon-to-be husband, who was found a post in Newcastle Upon Tyne. Mary, of course, would go with him.

Post-war philosophers viewed themselves as progressive and modernising. In many cases, however, wartime technologies and a desire to sweep out superstition went hand in hand with a drive towards the scientism that had been somewhat characteristic of the interwar period – and of the modern philosophy that Murdoch and her friends had missed. But a scientific moral philosophy, and the associated need to chase out value from all corners of human life or to tidy it away into the recesses and responses only of an empirical subject, sat badly in the post-Hitler world in which the new generation were living.

A young man, back from war service took one approach to the question of how to rebuild a moral community in the aftermath of war. He sought to strip out theory and ideology and – in step if not always in sympathy with the French existentialists – to call on each man to exercise his freedom and judgment to make and bind himself to his own morality. But Murdoch and her friends took a different direction, drawing instead on the Aristotelian tradition and looking to human nature and the pattern of human life to provide a normative structure in which all of us, in virtue of being human, participate. As they saw it, the war had changed the task of moral philosophy itself. Moral philosophy had to make the fact of the new post-war reality intelligible, namely by situating what had happened in an account of what is possible and good in a human life and an understanding of what a human animal can intelligibly find desirable and pleasant. Speaking of the holocaust in a 2003 interview Foot says: 'we had thought that something like this could not happen'.<sup>10</sup>

In *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, Murdoch gestures too at a sense in which the enquiry of moral philosophy is transcendental - the sense of being concerned with the limits of the possible, in this case, the limits on the form of a human life. Unlike the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*, she does not think that the ethical is outside limits of what can be spoken and thought about.<sup>11</sup> She asks: 'Can we not see a little beyond those transcendental barriers, do we not have intimations, gleams of light, glimpses of another scene?'. For Murdoch and her friends, attention to our shared human life provides the relevant intimations and glimpses. And, as we explain, such forms and structures in turn provide not barriers but grounds or limits, in terms of which it becomes possible to speak, with substance, of what is good and bad.

Though not all the women would recognise their work as self-consciously transcendental, we think that the concepts proper to transcendental enquiry can nonetheless show us a way into isolating in what respects their individual philosophical responses to the horrors of the War – the death camps, Hiroshima and 'total war' – converge. They overlap and supplement each other in ways that

make it plausible to suggest that we can excavate a unified – an untapped – philosophical system from their collective corpus. For instance, in *Intention*, Anscombe is insistent that a prolegomenon to any kind of ethics – a condition for the possibility of ethics, if you like – is a proper moral psychology. We need a philosophy of mind to ask: what sorts of things can we make sense of through human desiring? What sorts of actions are intelligible as chosen? Murdoch's moral psychology can also be read in this vein. 'Unselfing', as she calls it, is an ideal condition of seeing the world justly. This involves the work of the moral imagination – conscious mental activity – and moral philosophers must be able to make sense of this sort of inner work. Foot and Midgley tell us about the limits of and limitations on what is possible for a human animal; the limits of a human life, of what can be found pleasurable and enjoyable; the intelligibility (or not) of lives that are deprived or disordered. In *Natural Goodness*, Foot reports being haunted by a collection of letters written by those who had defied the SS and were condemned to death. One farm boy from the Sudetenland wrote to his parents: 'Both of us would rather die than stain our consciences with such deeds of horror'.<sup>12</sup> How is such a choice possible? Foot's response, like that of Murdoch and Anscombe, is to return to the virtues. To be virtuous is to be responsive to what is good for humans, to what humans need. Certain facts show up as moral reasons for those who possess the virtues. It is not such a far leap to regard practical knowledge of the virtues, in this Footian sense, as akin to forms of intuition.

These indications are inadequate in their brevity – they are only hints at a larger picture. Nonetheless, there is one dimension along which it seems we can straightforwardly assemble their work as unified and this is partly down to the methods and aims of their interlocutors. All of these philosophers are engaged in making certain uses of the terms 'good' and 'bad' intelligible in the face of the new post-Hitler reality. This emphasis on language is in keeping with the Wittgensteinian background of their shared project.

### **3. 'Good' and 'Bad'**

Let us return to the story, to the modern moral philosophical education that Murdoch and her friends had missed out on. In her memoir, Mary Midgley writes about a dinner she and Iris Murdoch were invited to, arranged by their tutor Isabel Henderson, in celebration of their both obtaining firsts. The guests of honour were distinguished historian A. L. Rowse and musicologist J. B. Trend. At dinner, Iris and Mary 'listened attentively to their distinguished and contemporary opinions'. On their way back to Somerville that evening, Mary asked Iris: 'So, what about it? Did we learn something new this evening?'

'Oh yes, I think so,' declared Iris gazing up at the enormous moon. 'I do think so ... Trend is a good man and Rowse is a bad man.' At which exact, but grotesquely unfashionable, judgment we both fell about laughing.

Iris seems to have been right. Rowse's posthumously published letters reveal him as a misanthrope. Trend, on the other hand, wrote that intellectual activity must be guided by the 'art of doing good to other people rather than being great oneself'.

To understand why the judgment ‘Trend is a good man and Rowse is a bad man’ was deeply unfashionable in Oxford in the 1940s, we need to return to 1936. A. J. Ayer’s *Language, Truth and Logic* had been published, a work that, in her *Ethics Since 1900*, Mary Warnock describes as ‘a bombshell’. The women came up two years later in the midst of the debris. Philosophy itself, it seems, should be laid to waste:

The traditional disputes of philosophy are, for the most part, as unwarranted as they are unfruitful [...] If there are any questions which science leaves it to philosophy to answer, a straightforward process of elimination must lead to their discovery.

The ‘traditional disputes of philosophy’ include the old question of how to live, but also what there is. Like Hume before him, Ayer argued for the elimination of metaphysics. While Hume’s bonfire of metaphysics was really a thinly veiled attack on the religious authorities of his day, Ayer’s empiricism, marked by the zealotry of logical positivism, has no particular target in mind. As Midgley puts it, it is a ‘brand of weedkiller [...] packaged so as to be spread much more widely. [Ayer’s] formula could be used at will against any form of thought that went beyond the direct reporting of sense-data’. Murdoch remarks that Ayer ‘diminishes the human scene to the scale of a logic puzzle’.

Because of the war, the full philosophical influence of Ayer’s *Language, Truth and Logic* was not felt until the mid-1940s. Reports of the book’s effect on students in the pre-war years give a sense of battle lines that were to emerge, broadly tracing a generational divide. The book was ‘read with breathless excitement’ by every undergraduate but the reception by the older generation – those who remained in Oxford when the young men took up arms – was different. When Pears and his fellow-students brought a copy to their discussion group, their tutor, sixty-year-old Christian Socialist A. D. Lindsay threw it out of the window.

At the heart of *Language, Truth and Logic* was the insistence on a sharp distinction between factual and evaluative language. Ayer argued that propositions about value – particularly moral value – cannot be derived from propositions about empirical facts. Accordingly, just as you cannot get values from facts, you cannot get an ought from an is. Under Ayer the fact/value distinction transformed from, as Murdoch puts it, a ‘well-intentioned segregation’ designed to keep value ‘pure and untainted, not derived from or mixed with empirical facts’ – something which can be attributed to Moore – into ‘ethical weedkiller’. Seen from the former perspective, insisting on the distinction is a plea to recognise that the world of empirical facts is not the whole world, that there are true propositions that are not logically dependent on statements of contingent fact. It reflects recognition that the ethical comprises a distinct and significant realm outside the scope of scientific knowledge. It makes space for the recognition of the transcendental character of the ethical. However, when empiricism reaches its logical conclusion in Ayer’s *Language, Truth and Logic*, the distinction is used rather to obliterate value completely. Ayer’s conclusion that only the ‘propositions of natural science’ are meaningful implies that propositions which purport to make value-judgment do nothing of the kind. Rather, they are a combination of a factual statement and the expression of an emotive attitude towards that fact. To say: ‘You shouldn’t have been so rude’ is to say: ‘You were rude’ and to

express the attitude of disapproval. *You were rude, and boo to that!* Rather than marking a practical limit on the application of scientific method, the fact-value distinction now excludes value from the realm of the real entirely. In doing so it both introduces the idea of science as limitless in its scope and application and disconnects objects of moral approval from (the now defunct category of) what is objectively good.

R. M. Hare's prescriptivism, developed over the three-year period while he was a prisoner of war in a Japanese camp, was another option for the modern moral philosopher. In Hare's view, when I say: 'It was bad of her to lie,' and you reply: 'No it wasn't', we are not merely expressing our differing emotive attitudes toward the facts, but are rather evaluating the facts in light of our own moral principles or prescriptions. If those principles are different then we will reach different evaluations, but as there is no such thing as the wrong set of principles, there is no question of one of us being right and the other wrong. This view of man as 'monarch of his own universe'<sup>13</sup> – as Murdoch put it – perhaps gave Hare a way to picture himself creating meaning and value in an environment stripped of all human goodness and compassion. On both emotivism and prescriptivism, then, the question of whether Trend is a good man and Rowse a bad man cannot be objectively settled, and Murdoch's words merely masquerade as judgments of fact.

It is hard to exaggerate the influence of Hare's prescriptivism on English moral philosophy in this post-war period. Midgley remembers feeling depressed by the sight of whole shelves in the Oxford bookshops taken up by the purple spines of Hare's *The Language of Morals*. Elizabeth Anscombe was invited onto the BBC Third Programme to discuss whether 'Oxford moral philosophy' – by which was meant Hare's moral philosophy – corrupted the youth. (She argued not, but only because the youth were already hopelessly corrupt in her view.) In an interview in 2003, Foot recounts her own dismay:

What these theorists tried to do was construe the conditions of use of sentences like 'it is morally wrong to kill innocent people' in terms of a speaker's feelings or attitudes, or of his or her commitment to acting in a certain way. And this meant that, according to these theories, there is a gap between the facts, or grounds, for a moral judgement and that judgement itself. For whatever reasons might be given for a moral judgement, people might without error refuse to assent to it, not finding the relevant feelings or attitudes in themselves. And this is what I thought was wrong. For, fundamentally, there is no way, if one takes this line, that one could imagine one-self saying to a Nazi, 'but we are *right*, and you are *wrong*' with there being any substance to the statement. Faced with the Nazis, who felt they had been justified in doing what they did, there could simply be a stand-off.

And I thought:

'Morality just cannot be subjective in the way that different attitudes, like some aesthetic ones, or likes and dislikes, are subjective.' The separation of descriptions from attitudes, or facts from values, that characterized the current moral philosophy had to be bad philosophy.

The joint project of Anscombe, Foot, Midgley and Murdoch was to give the conditions on the

possibility of saying, with substance, that some action or human being is good or bad – some philosophy salvific or corrupting even – and all in light of the facts of our human nature, in the face of a post-Hitler world.

## 5. A joint 'No!'

The story of Trend and Rowse helps to bring into focus a shared target and joint task for the quartet. They are united in their rejection of the orthodoxies of the day, the philosophies of Ayer and Hare and they share the unfashionable view that an account of human nature will yield an understanding what is good for, and in, a human animal. As Midgley remarks in a recent essay:

[W]hat, for me, makes the unanimity-story still important is a persisting memory of the four of us sitting in Philippa's front room and doing our collective best to answer the orthodoxies of the day, which we all saw as disastrous. As with many philosophical schools, the starting-point was a joint 'NO!' No (that is) at once to divorcing Facts from Values, and – after a bit more preparation – also No to splitting mind off from matter. From this, a lot of metaphysical consequences would follow.<sup>14</sup>

The women set about dismantling the orthodoxies in different ways and this may explain why philosophers have been slow to recognise their work as contributing to a shared project.

Midgley was to focus her attack on the implied scientism of Hare's prescriptivism, and on the claim that statements about what is good or evil cannot be derived from facts about the kind of animals we are. To do this work she developed an ethological study of human nature, motivation and behaviour, with a view to showing that as a matter of objective fact, some actions are good and others bad, some people good and others bad. Foot's early work on thick moral concepts and in virtue ethics took aim at the appearance of a clean cut between statements of fact and statements of value. Anscombe, who like Foot called for a return to virtue in ethics, argued that as we can get an 'owes' from an 'is' (as in 'He delivered potatoes so I owe him £2'), there can be no problem getting an 'ought' from an 'is'. To make this case she developed an account of human action that shows how what a person thinks can make a difference to the truth of a description of what is physically happening. Murdoch rejected the dual assumptions that only observable facts about human behaviour are relevant to moral evaluation and that the world in which we choose to act is valueless and presented us as ethically neutral. For Murdoch, a good person sees the world differently to a bad one, and a person who has learnt to see justly and lovingly inhabits a world that contains possibilities for acting and living that will not show up for the unjust and the egoistic.

It is unsurprising to find that Murdoch's copy of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, now housed in the Iris Murdoch Archive at Kingston University, is heavily annotated, especially the material on seeing-as. Anscombe, who translated the *Investigations*, shared the manuscripts with her friends long before they were published. Murdoch records reading it in German – it's 'like nothing on sea or land' she reports.<sup>15</sup> It is Wittgenstein's method, coming undistilled from Anscombe, that came to electrify their outmoded education. Wittgenstein's reflections on intelligibility and the human form of life, coupled with the realistic spirit of his enquiry, animate their shared vision – one that

had its genesis in the living room of a Victorian terraced house in Oxford.

## 6. Reading Murdoch through the quartet

How does our understanding of Murdoch change when we read her as part of a philosophical school? Consider Foot's way of giving substance to the terms 'good' and 'bad' as applied to living things. Foot identifies 'natural goodness'<sup>16</sup> and 'natural defect' in a living thing - a particular oak tree, squirrel or barn owl - by reference to the life-form to which the living thing belongs - the species oak, squirrel or barn owl. For each life-form or species there are patterns and ways of being in the world that are not merely (sometimes not even) statistically normal for things of that kind but rather are constitutive of the life form itself. Michael Thompson, Foot's student and collaborator, has described the formal character of the propositions that make up life-form descriptions. *The oak grows in the spring; the squirrel buries acorns for the winter; the barn owl hunts at night.* These propositions are atemporal, non-empirical and have a species-name as the grammatical subject. Foot tells us: an oak tree, squirrel or barn owl that fails to do these things is not merely a statistical anomaly but defective of its kind. Conversely, a squirrel who hides her nuts acts *well* and is *good* vis-a-vis her nut-hiding activities.

Now consider Murdoch's observation, inspiration for a number of important exegetical works on her philosophy: 'Man is a creature that makes pictures of himself, and then comes to resemble the picture'.<sup>17</sup> Read in light of Foot's work, this looks like a natural historical judgment, replete with the name of a life-form as the grammatical subject: 'Man is a creature that makes pictures of himself'. And this is surely true. The human animal is an expressive, art-, myth- and culture-producing animal - something that Midgley's work in particular hones in on. And wedded to that is a second claim: 'and then comes to resemble the picture'. This is a constitutive claim, but on what metaphysical grounds can we begin to understand that very possibility? Reading Murdoch's account of moral perception in the light of Anscombe's philosophy of action and perception, we think offers a suggestion.

For Anscombe, we see things 'under descriptions'. A description under which the perceiver sees what is seen is one that a perceiver would typically give in response to the question: 'What do you see?'<sup>18</sup> For example, if I am looking out of my window at the scene on the street below, I would typically answer: 'People hurrying about' or: 'Cars driving along the street' or: 'A tree with bare branches' (and not, for example: 'A pattern of coloured patches' or: 'Moving coats'). What we see reflects our interests, our histories, our concepts and our expectations about how the world is and should be. To connect this to a central and familiar example of Murdoch's, M sees D under certain descriptions. First 'vulgar' and 'undignified', and later 'refreshingly simple' and 'spontaneous'. Murdoch tells us that M's observable behaviour towards D in no way changes. But, remember Murdoch's insistence that we can only choose in the world that we can see. While M's external behaviour towards D in no way changes, the ways in which she sees D set the limits of the ways in which she can respond to the reality she confronts.

Read at a monumental scale, pictures, including myths, are descriptions under which we, often collectively, see and act - sometimes without even knowing what we are doing. This is why for Murdoch the production of art is a moral act. And it is also why philosophy - itself a matter of cre-

ating pictures – is not ethically neutral. This returns us to Collingwood’s injunction at the outset that every generation must rewrite its own history.

## **7. A picture of a philosophical school**

We have told a story of a group of women with a shared philosophical project, one that begins with a joint No! to the orthodoxies of the day. What emerges from reading their work collectively is a philosophical system, an integrated perception, action and ethics, underpinned by a thoroughgoing metaphysics and epistemology that has not been recognised and which is potentially transformative.

There are philosophical differences between the women, but they are involved in a common project – one we have cast here as a project of making intelligible certain true uses of ‘good’ and ‘bad’. As such, we can think of the Quartet as a philosophical school. An objection to this naming might be that what we have here is just a matter of philosophical family resemblance among onetime acquaintances – not enough philosophical or social context to warrant thinking of the four as a philosophical school. However, in writing history, it matters which stories we seek to revise.

Women are still under-represented in academic philosophy. If pictures and myths do dominate our thinking, shaping our ways of interacting and our self-conception, there is a reason to think that a natural antidote to at least some of that under-representation is to create pictures – ways of seeing – which change those capacities to self-imagine. Some ways of instigating change are necessarily shallow but others revise in a deeper way. The story of an all-female mid-century philosophical school – a group of women who were friends as undergraduates and at the start of their professional lives – suggests deep reform.

For their existence all philosophical schools require is recognition. The methods and doctrines that characterise many philosophical movements or schools are named not by their disciples but by their detractors, who in naming them acknowledge the threat that these challengers pose. To be defined as a philosophical school is to be recognised by one’s community as serious interlocutors. This is a reminder about how we should approach the history of philosophy: if a set of voices are deemed by their peers to be irrelevant, uninteresting, unworthy, they may not be recognised by those peers as articulating a distinctive philosophical perspective, worthy of recognition as such. To recover those voices then, is to rewrite history – a feminist project, the social and political importance of which is plain.

Anscombe, Foot, Midgley and Murdoch are striving to insert a new picture of the human into philosophy. Their deep critique of the orthodoxies they refuse is that those theories, like much of modern European philosophy, literature and politics, has at its roots, a conception of human nature which, as Midgley puts it, ‘women’s experience falsifies’. That is to say, women’s lives are typically shaped by relationships of friendship and kinship, by intimacy, vulnerability and co-dependence that stand in stark contrast to the picture of the isolated individual who transcends his animal nature to become monarch of his world. If this is part of the truth, then the absence of men at the start of this story and the peculiarities of what turned out to be life-long female friendships becomes deeply significant.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> This remark was told to us in conversation with Mary Midgley.
- <sup>2</sup> Lifelines for the four women can be viewed at <http://www.womeninparenthesis.co.uk/category/library/>
- <sup>3</sup> See Peter Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (London: Harper Collins, 2001) pp.109–34
- <sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p.123.
- <sup>5</sup> G. E. M. Anscombe, *Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind*, p.viii
- <sup>6</sup> See the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on Collingwood: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/collingwood/>
- <sup>7</sup> Quoted in Benjamin Lipscomb, 2016. 'Slipping Out Over the Wall', in Kidd, I.J and McKinnell, L. (eds.) *Science and the Self: Animals, Evolution and Ethics: Essay in Honour of Mary Midgley*. (London and New York: Routledge), p.213, see also fn. 18
- <sup>8</sup> For further information on University expansion after WWII, see <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/themes/before-after-second-world-war.htm>
- <sup>9</sup> Mary Warnock, *A Memoir: People and Places*, (London: Duckworth Publishers, 2000) p.17
- <sup>10</sup> Alex Voorhoeve, 'The grammar of goodness: an interview with Philippa Foot', *Harvard Review of Philosophy*, XI. pp.32–44.
- <sup>11</sup> 'Ethics is transcendental', Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 6. 54.
- <sup>12</sup> (2001, pp.92–94). See also Foot (2004) for discussion.
- <sup>13</sup> Ved Mehta, *The Fly and the Flybottle*
- <sup>14</sup> The full manuscript of the paper from which this excerpt is taken – 'Then and Now' - can be read at <http://www.womeninparenthesis.co.uk/then-and-now/>
- <sup>15</sup> Letter to Hal Lidderdale, 1948.
- <sup>16</sup> Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness*
- <sup>17</sup> Peter Conradi, *Existentialists and Mystics*, London, Penguin, 1997, p.75
- <sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Anscombe, 'The Intentionality of Sensation: A Grammatical Feature', in *Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind*, pp.3–20.

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## An Introduction to The Iris Murdoch Information Service

In 2015 I started working on a project in my spare time: at its core, a database of characters, locations and objects from the novels of Iris Murdoch. A project like this is only ever a great idea if you also have the data to populate it. I have been very fortunate to have had access to two fantastic pieces of research to provide the initial content: *Sacred Space, Beloved City* by Anne Rowe and Cheryl Bove (reviewed in Vol 1 Issue 3) and Cheryl Bove's *A Character Index and Guide to the Fiction of Iris Murdoch* from 1986. With this data, the project came to life and I have called it 'The Iris Murdoch Information Service'. This is the story of the project so far.

Visitors to London may find themselves walking in the footsteps of some of Iris Murdoch's best known characters and sometimes of Iris herself. All but two of her novels are either set in or reference London: it's buildings, parks, railway stations, pubs and rivers.

A couple of years ago, having re-read *A Word Child* that summer, I found myself in London with a few hours to spare. I began to ponder Murdochian pubs, specifically those related to the Circle Line. Since I was a small child, I've been fascinated by the workings of the Underground. It has many secrets, but what I hadn't known until I did a little research after re-reading *A Word Child* is that, at one time, there were in the region of 30 pubs on London Underground stations throughout the network. Two of those establishments had bars actually on the platforms themselves. Hilary Burde spends a fair bit of time in the novel travelling around the Circle Line, frequenting both of these platform bars, one at Sloane Square station and the other at Liverpool Street.

The nearest to me at that moment was the latter, so I boarded the next Eastbound train to get there. It was apparently known as 'Pat-Mac's Drinking Den' until 1977 when it became a cafe. Now it is the less excitingly named 'J & R Kiosk', a little shop selling snacks and drinks. Sadly, you can no longer buy a pint and sup it on the platform. It did make me think though, how could I find my nearest Murdochian pub, the next time I was in London with time to spare?

Being a creative technologist by profession, my first thoughts were to build a simple phone application as a side project, but where would I get the data? It would take me a long time to re-read the books and extract all of the London pubs, work out which ones were still pubs and which ones had gone. So what to do? I sought help, initially on social media, specifically Twitter. As a follower of the Iris Murdoch Twitter account (<https://twitter.com/irismurdoch>), having quotes and pictures related to Iris popping up in my Twitter feed is a real joy. I thought it might be a good idea to get in touch to see if anyone had done the hard work before me. Pamela Osborne, who looks after the account, reminded me of *Sacred Space, Beloved City* by Anne Rowe and Cheryl Bove, a book I had on my wish list for many years, but had, to my embarrassment, never purchased. I had a look on Amazon using the 'Look Inside' feature and was overjoyed when I saw that the book included a Glossary of locations – exactly what I needed for my project.

When the book arrived I could see that a great deal of research had gone into its production, not only the Glossary, but the walks, the locations and the lovely illustrations. I really liked the quote from the beginning of the Glossary, from Valentine Cunningham's essay: 'Shaping Modern British Fiction':

Murdoch is one of our best novelists of London. This locale, the most awing of man-made creations for the nineteenth century novelists she admired, is the great people-container she repeatedly maps, traverses, celebrates. From her first novel, , the very affectionately dwelt-on London streets, pubs, churches, the river Thames set Murdoch's favourite scene. It's a crowded scene, home of the original English fictional crowd. Her novels act as its A-Z guide.<sup>1</sup>

Having the Glossary on paper was one thing, but what I really needed for my project was to have a digital copy. In November 2015, Anne Rowe kindly put me in touch with her co-author, Cheryl Bove, who had collated the Glossary in the book, to ask if it was available digitally. The good news was that it probably was, the bad news for me was that she thought the file was on a computer in Colorado whereas she was then in Arizona. My US geography isn't great but as we were looking at a different state I thought there might be a delay.

The delay wasn't a problem for me, I had plenty of work to keep me busy until I had a few weeks free in Autumn 2016 when I wondered whether Cheryl might be in the same place as the digital version of the Glossary. I got back in touch and on the 29 October, Cheryl found the document, burned it on to a CD, transferred it to a different machine and was then able to email the file to me. Once I had this file containing the Glossary in digital format, I could turn to the tools of my trade. I worked on extracting the data, writing some code to parse the file line by line, extract the locations and store the name and description in a database.

There were 484 locations in total within the Glossary and by storing the locations in a database I could then do a first pass at geolocating them. Geolocation is the process by which you find the 'real world' geographic location of a thing or place. By combining the location name in the glossary and appending London, my geolocation code could automatically find a latitude and longitude for many of the locations.

Of those locations in the glossary, some no longer exist, so any guess at locating them requires a bit of further research. Some of the others didn't locate correctly the first time through and required tweaking. Most of the time, this could be done by adding a street name or similar. For example, geolocating the 'Red Lion, London' will definitely find a pub called the Red Lion in London, but whether you've found the pub 'where Jake Donaghue buys beer and sandwiches on the evening he plans to break into (the) hospital ward' is another matter. If you geolocate the 'Red Lion, Barnes, London', then you do get the right place.

The initial import of locations felt like real progress, but it then got me thinking about whether there were other interesting data sources I could import and therefore incorporate in to the application.

I'm going to take a minor diversion in our story to the fictional village of Ambridge in the heart of the Midlands where the Radio 4 drama *The Archers* has been set since 1950. I'd been working on a project with the BBC's Research and Development team on *The Archers*. I was fortunate enough to be able to visit the studio where they record the programme and the offices where the production team are based. As the programme has been produced, continuously since 1950, it's important for the team to keep track of the locations, characters and storylines to ensure continuity.

Initially, records were kept on index cards and stored in drawers, more recently they used a Microsoft Access Database which was ok, but was definitely showing its age. I worked with the BBC's team to extract all the data in to a modern database. As we had all this incredible continuity data, we then built an application called the *Archers Story Explorer* which enabled a user to visit a web site and explore all of the continuity data from the programme. The application included a 'google maps' style map of Ambridge, featured stories which you could listen to, character pages showing family relationships, and a family tree. We used timelines to portray the storylines and the lives of the characters, scene by scene.

Sadly the *Archers Story Explorer* never went live or became available to the public. You can get a flavour of it though by looking at the follow up we did for the Radio 4 drama, *Home Front* which was released to the public: <http://homefront.ch.bbc.co.uk>.

It did get me thinking though about the characters in the novels. It was one thing to have the locations, but could I list all the characters from the novels too and start to create something else? It usually takes me the first quarter of her novels to work out who's who and how they relate to each other. It would be useful to have a description of each character, and maybe a family tree or their relationships. I asked around to see if there was an existing spreadsheet or something with all of the characters from the novels in it and there didn't seem to be one. The nearest thing was another of Cheryl Bove's books – *A Character Index and Guide to the fiction of Iris Murdoch* published back in 1986.

I managed to find a copy online, ordered it, and again was excited to have a look at it once it had arrived. Although the index finishes at *The Good Apprentice*, the other novels are covered comprehensively. Having been written in 1986 there wasn't a digital copy of the character index and typing up the index would have been too time consuming for a side project: there were over 2000 entries. It was time then for me to research book scanning services, which was a lot harder than I thought

it was going to be. In the end though I found a company which did destructive scanning, where the book gets all of its pages chopped out, and non-destructive, where they aim to scan each page intact. I decided on the latter: this book was too precious to me to chop up. I sent off the book with trepidation and awaited its return. After a couple of weeks I received a couple of links to download the scanned version in Microsoft Word format and PDF. Unfortunately the Word version was mostly unusable, however the PDF was in better shape and I felt I could probably get along with it.

There were still plenty of niggles in the PDF version too, for example, here is the Emma Sands entry from the PDF file:

A famous detective-story writer who had had an affair with Hugh Peronett in her youth and had turned to the consolations of art when he would not leave his wife for her. Emma is an egoist who enjoys manipulating others. She has decided to get into Hugh's family by making Penn Hugh's grandson, her heir.

You can see it's a bit garbled and for records like this, of which there were many, I'd correct the text by referring back to the printed book to work out what it was supposed to say.

A famous detective-story writer who had had an affair with Hugh Peronett in her youth and had turned to the consolations of art when he would not leave his wife for her. Emma is an egoist who enjoys manipulating others. She has decided to get into Hugh's family by making Penn Graham, Hugh's grandson, her heir.<sup>2</sup>

I have therefore spent a lot of time going through the scanned data to correct where the scans have gone wrong and also to provide a first pass at categorising the entries. The book highlights major characters with an asterisk – everything else was a combination of characters, including non-human and historical, works of art and more locations. For the project, if each entry could be categorised with finer granularity, then that information might also prove to be useful. Each entry therefore, now has corrected text and a category.

Finally I got the data files into a fit state for importing into the database and instead of simply mapping Murdochian locations, I was building a larger and more expansive application which could be used for many things, such as my nearest Iris Murdoch location, nearest Murdochian pub, random character from a novel per day, or a Baltram/Cuno family tree. It provided a foundation of information and data as a service for others to use, hence the Iris Murdoch Information Service.

Having created a database, the best way for people to see the data was to build a public web application to enable anyone to access it. Fortunately, being a creative technologist, this is my bread and butter. The initial design was an 'off the shelf' design but I felt that the work required something more fitting. Working freelance has introduced me to some other great freelancers, including one of the best designers I've worked with, Dean Vipond. I asked him to have a think about what the website could look like and he came up with some brilliant designs. Another good and talented friend, Richard Jones, then helped me implement Dean's design. I meanwhile wrote all of the code to stick everything together and make it work.

The GoodReads website is a good source of information about the various editions of the novels,

including covers, so initially I wrote an integration with their site to get their book covers. The quality wasn't always great though, so I approached the UK publishers, currently Vintage Classics, to ask whether they could provide good quality images of the latest book covers. We had a good meeting where I was able to demonstrate the project. They sent over what they had and I was able to add them to the application.

All of the hard work paid off when the project was officially launched at the 8th Iris Murdoch Conference in Chichester on 1 September 2017. The final keynote session was an opportunity for me to tell the story and give a demonstration of the application in its first public state. Since then the locations have been further updated and categorised, and duplicate locations and characters have now been combined. Most recently the character index data for *The Book and The Brotherhood* was completed as Cheryl finished working on it over the winter.

Other enhancements I have on my list for the future include adding:

- The illustrations from *Sacred Space, Beloved City*
- Paintings from the National Gallery with appropriate records
- More links for characters and locations when mentioned in descriptions
- Universal search which cuts across the whole database
- Locations from Iris Murdoch's life
- Visualisations for number of characters in books
- Walks – currently only existing as a proof of concept
- A general resources page, with links to YouTube, SoundCloud, etc.

You can explore for yourself by visiting <https://irismurdoch.info> in a web browser of your choice. Any feedback can be sent to me at [mail@irismurdoch.info](mailto:mail@irismurdoch.info).

Whilst this project has been motivated by my love of the works of Iris Murdoch, I'd like it also to be of benefit to the wider community of Iris Murdoch readers, whether academics, researchers or simply readers who enjoy the novels like myself. I have some ideas for future enhancements, assuming I have the time and the data, but am also open to collaborating on any new features which the reader might find useful.

Thanks must go to Cheryl Bove, Anne Rowe, Pamela Osborn, Miles Leeson, Dean Vipond, Richard Jones and all those who have encouraged me to continue this work.

To give a flavour of the application, here is a screenshot of the home page with the two main entry points, Explore Locations or Explore Data.

[Home](#) [Map](#) [Explore](#) [Walks](#) [Books](#) [Locations](#) [Characters](#)

# Iris

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## Explore locations

Find locations from Iris Murdoch's novels on a map of London



## Explore data

Books, characters, locations and more, from all of Iris Murdoch's published works

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### About this site

This site comprises data collected from a number of works on Iris Murdoch and is designed to make that data easy to search, including character and location data. It is in 'Beta'.

### Note on data

This is an initial import of the data, tidied up to be usable, but not necessarily complete. Some of the data will also contain mistakes, mainly due to the digitisation process used on the books. Please send me an email if you have any corrections or issues: [mail@iris Murdoch.info](mailto:mail@iris Murdoch.info)

### Data sources

[Sacred Space, Beloved City](#), by Anne Rowe & Cheryl Bove

[A Character Index and Guide to the Fiction of Iris Murdoch](#) by Cheryl Bove

Illustrations from [Sacred Space, Beloved City](#) by Paul Laseau

[Vintage Classics](#)

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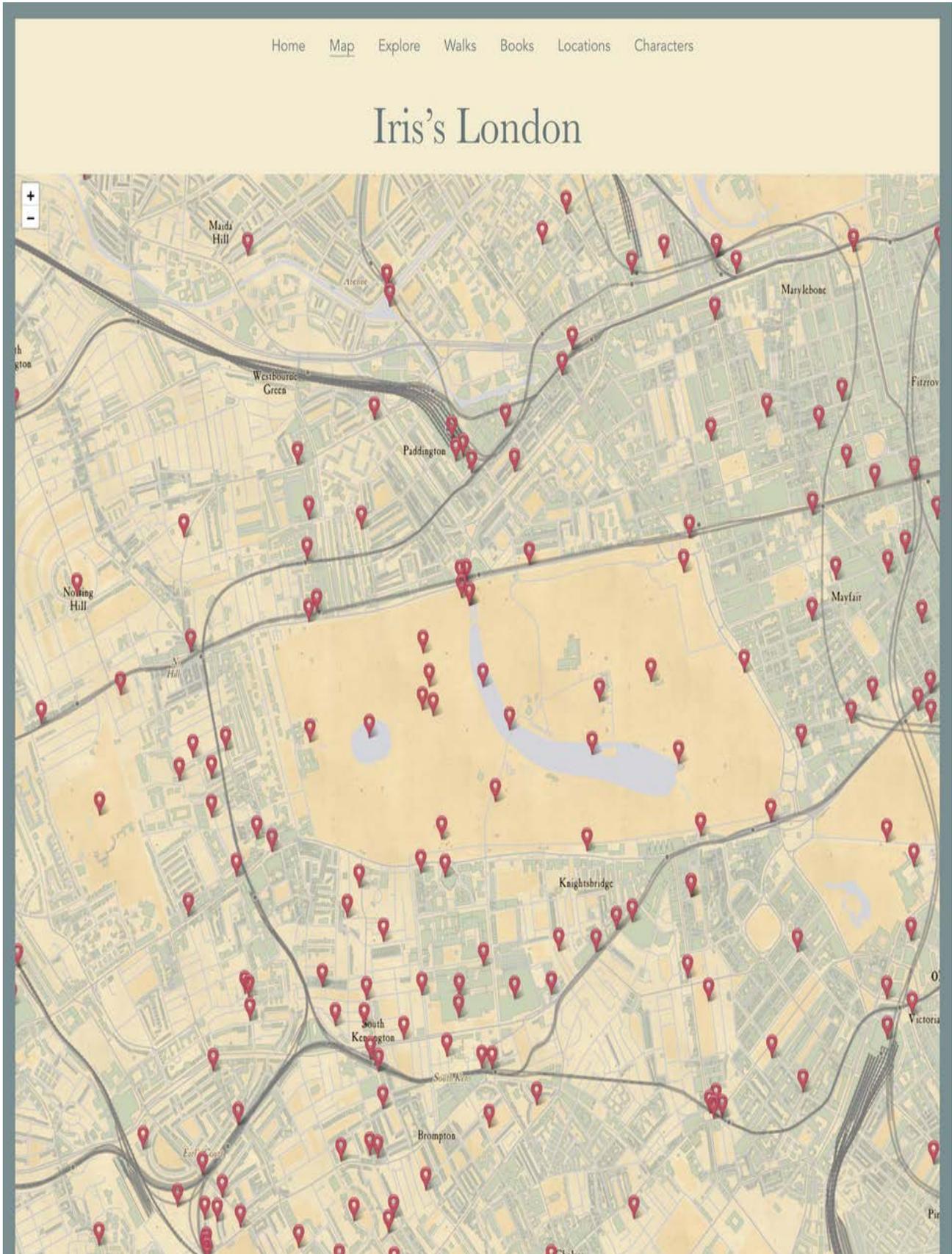
Application: James Jefferies of [ShedCode](#)

Design: [Dean Vipond](#)

Interface development: [Recodesign](#)

Data from [Sacred Space, Beloved City](#), [A Character Index and Guide to the Fiction of Iris Murdoch](#), [Vintage Classics](#) & [GoodReads.com](#)

Explore Locations takes you to a map of London with the locations geolocated. Clicking on one of the place markers opens a panel with the description and references of the location.



The Explore Data page has a variety of categories of entries which can then be searched and viewed, including Characters, Objects and Pubs which are still open.

Home Map Explore Walks Books Locations Characters

## Explore the data



### Books

Every novel by Iris Murdoch



### Characters

Every character from Iris Murdoch's novels



### Groups

Groups of characters mentioned in Iris Murdoch's novels



### Works

Historical events, creative\_works, art and concepts that feature in Iris Murdoch's novels



### Locations

All locations mentioned in Iris Murdoch's novels



### Objects

Objects which feature in Iris Murdoch's novels



### London map

Explore a map of London, featuring places mentioned in Iris Murdoch's novels



### London Walks

Walks through London linking up Iris Murdoch locations



### London Pubs (Open)

London Pubs identified as still being open

### About this site

This site comprises data collected from a number of works on Iris Murdoch and is designed to make that data easy to search, including character and location data. It is in 'Beta'.

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Data from [Sacred Space, Beloved City](#), [A Character Index and Guide to the Fiction of Iris Murdoch](#), [Vintage Classics](#) & [GoodReads.com](#)

Selecting Locations, for example, gives a list of locations, with search functionality and an A-Z.

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# Locations

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These locations are a combination of those found in *Sacred Space*, *Beloved City's* London Location Glossary & those locations found in the *Character index & Guide To The Fiction of Iris Murdoch*.

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A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

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[All locations](#)

NAME	BOOKS
<a href="#">A La Ville De Tours</a>	<a href="#">FHD</a>
<a href="#">Albany Street</a>	<a href="#">GK</a>
<a href="#">Albert Hall</a>	<a href="#">BP, UN, JD</a>
<a href="#">Albert Memorial</a>	<a href="#">GK, AM, FHD, JD</a>
<a href="#">Amorne Farm</a>	<a href="#">TSTS</a>
<a href="#">Ashburnham Road</a>	<a href="#">BD</a>
<a href="#">Bailey's Hotel</a>	<a href="#">AM</a>
<a href="#">Baker Street</a>	<a href="#">MP, FHD, BD</a>
<a href="#">Baker Street Station</a>	<a href="#">FHD, NS</a>
<a href="#">Balloon, The</a>	<a href="#">BD</a>
<a href="#">Bank Of England</a>	<a href="#">MP</a>
<a href="#">Barbican Station</a>	<a href="#">WC</a>
<a href="#">Barkers</a>	<a href="#">JD, FE</a>
<a href="#">Barley Mow, The</a>	<a href="#">NS</a>
<a href="#">Barnes</a>	<a href="#">TSTS, NS, UN</a>
<a href="#">Barons Court</a>	<a href="#">FHD</a>
<a href="#">Barons Court Station</a>	<a href="#">FHD</a>
<a href="#">Battersea</a>	<a href="#">NS, BD, UN</a>
<a href="#">Battersea Bridge</a>	<a href="#">BD</a>
<a href="#">Battersea Dogs' Home</a>	<a href="#">GK, AM, SPLM</a>
<a href="#">Battersea Park</a>	<a href="#">BD, UN</a>
<a href="#">Battersea Power Station</a>	<a href="#">TSTS</a>
<a href="#">Bayswater</a>	<a href="#">B, GA, WC, AM</a>
<a href="#">Bayswater Road</a>	<a href="#">UN, FE, BB</a>
<a href="#">Bayswater Tube Station</a>	<a href="#">WC</a>
<a href="#">Bedford Street</a>	<a href="#">BP</a>
<a href="#">Benjamin Disraeli</a>	<a href="#">WC</a>
<a href="#">Big Ben</a>	<a href="#">HC, UN, FHD, WC, BB</a>

Each Location then has its own information page with references and a map if appropriate.

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# Albert Hall

Also known as: Royal Albert Hall

Referenced in: [Jackson's Dilemma](#), [The Black Prince](#) and [Under the Net](#)

## Descriptions

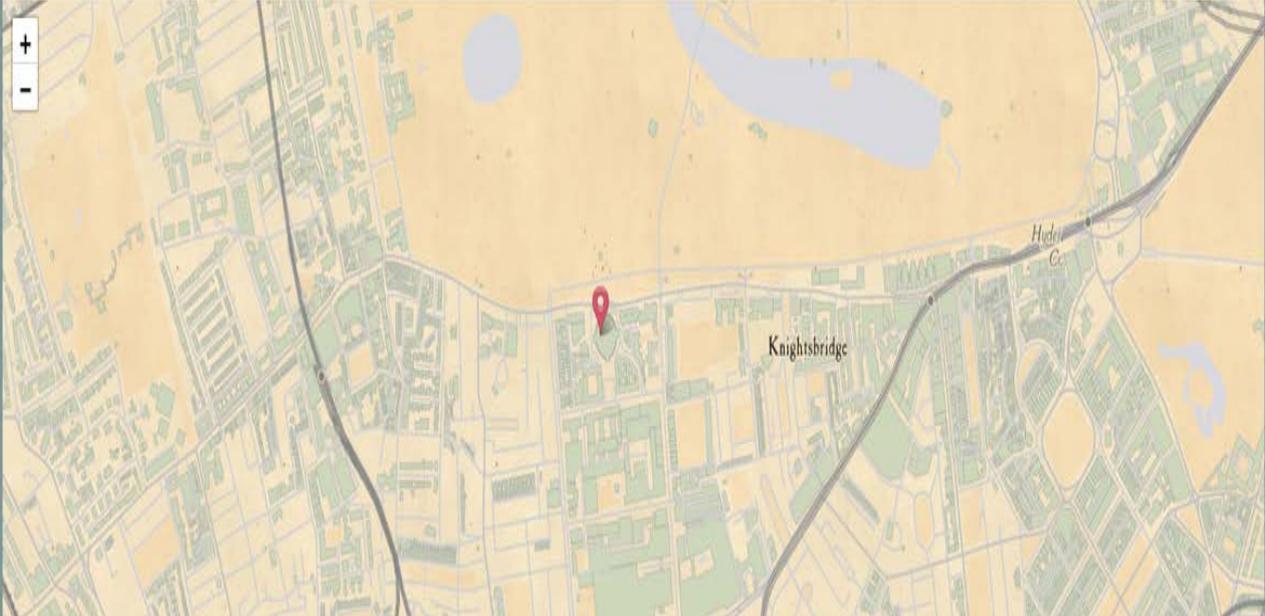
From: Sacred Space, Beloved City

see also Royal Albert Hall. Jake Donaghue jumps out of a removal lorry filled with props from Anna Quentin's theatre as the lorry passes the Albert Hall [Under the Net](#) p. 125

Seen by Bradley Pearson and Julian Baffin from the Post Office Tower restaurant in The Black Prince [The Black Prince](#) p. 200

Part of the London skyline seen from Owen Silbery's attic [Jackson's Dilemma](#) p. 176

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Valentine Cunningham, 'Shaping Modern British Fiction' in *On Modern British Fiction* ed. Zachary Leader. OUP, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Cheryl Bove's *A Character Index and Guide to the Fiction of Iris Murdoch*, New York: Garland, 1986.

Review of *Iris Murdoch and the Common Reader* by Liz Dexter  
(Self-published, 2017).

This unusual study drew the interest of many delegates at the International Iris Murdoch Conference at the University of Chichester in 2017, including plenary speaker A.N. Wilson who walked away from the bookstall excitedly clutching a copy. *Iris Murdoch and the Common Reader* was a serious undertaking for the author, independent researcher and Murdoch enthusiast, Liz Dexter. It was borne of a positive experience at the Murdoch conference at Kingston University in 2010, during which she shared the idea of studying the attitudes of book groups to Murdoch's novels and was encouraged to take it further. The aim of the study was to discover whether 'the novels of Iris Murdoch are suitable candidates for selection by modern book groups', many of whom prefer to focus on contemporary, bestselling and prize winning novels. As Dexter explains, this question of whether Murdoch is 'in general, still readable and enjoyable by the "ordinary reader"' is intrinsic to this aim. *The Bell* was carefully chosen due to its manageable length, availability to buy, wide-ranging themes and the response of the Iris Murdoch Reading Group, who read all of the novels and 'universally liked this novel'. Dexter uses Reception Theory, which centres the reader's individual response to a text, as a framework for her research. The author justifies all of her terms, theoretical frameworks and academic influences thoroughly. There is some unnecessary anxiety in places about her own academic credentials in comparison with the likes of Bran Nicol and Cheryl Bove, but this is a very minor criticism. As with Janice Radway's famous 1984 study of romance, which uses the same theory and book group model to analyse the Romance genre, *Iris Murdoch and the Common Reader* is a reminder that 'ordinary readers' create their own meanings and derive pleasure from texts in ways that are often overlooked in academic criticism. It is both refreshing and informative to read about the lively discussions provoked by *The Bell*, how it challenged preconceptions of Murdoch novels amongst readers who had not been exposed to one before, and inspired at least one group to go on to explore other 20<sup>th</sup> century novels which they were reluctant to take a chance on before. What is perhaps most interesting in the book group responses is the general opinion, summarised by Dexter, that Murdoch is 'no longer in vogue' and has slipped out of the post-war literary canon. The study sheds light on some of the reasons for the decline in Murdoch's popularity, which include the impression that she is 'a frighteningly intellectual writer whose books would be too hard' (a belief that was, in many cases contradicted by the book groups' experience of reading *The Bell*), and the list of words

associated with Murdoch by the participants before reading the novel ('Alzheimer's', 'film', 'literary', etc) is particularly telling.

This study has much to offer to Murdoch fans, scholars and those with an interest in book group behaviour. It manages to combine academic seriousness with a warmth and humour which is often absent from studies of this kind. If Murdoch's work is to continue to reach audiences in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it needs to appeal to the 'common reader' and Liz Dexter's study suggests several important ways in which this can be done.

Review of *Incest in Contemporary Literature*, ed. by Miles Leeson

This invaluable collection of essays investigates representations of incest in literature, film and television from the latter half of the twentieth century and draws links between these fictional engagements with contemporary and taboo debates about sexual abuse. In so doing, the collection resonates not only with a modern audience, increasingly aware of the traumatic instances of historic sexual abuse, but also with the reader of Murdoch's novels, in which various sexual transgressions are depicted with striking psychological accuracy.<sup>1</sup> Focusing on four aspects – domestic abuse, the child protagonist, political incest, and the rhetoric of narrating incest – the essays discuss writers including Margo Lanagan, Ian McEwan, Iris Murdoch and Vladimir Nabokov. This short review will outline the importance of this study to Murdoch's writings by looking at Miles Leeson's introduction and his closing essay, 'Avuncular ambiguity: Ethical virtue in Iris Murdoch's *The Black Prince* and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Mandarins*'.

Leeson's introduction, written with Emma V. Miller, contextualises contemporary debates surrounding sexual abuse and outlines the political, psychological and social complexities that have contributed to the ignorance toward and misunderstanding of incest. Leeson and Miller use sensitive terminology for the various forms of incest (such as quasi-incest, 'emotional incest' or 'covert incest') and the individuals subjected to it (i.e. the complainant, survivor or victim). Following the introduction, the essays within the collection locate the fundamental role that literature has to play in elucidating such traumatic experiences and confronting the taboo of incest.

Miller clearly contributes an innovative and valuable voice not only to the introduction but also to Murdoch scholarship more broadly. While she does not examine Murdoch's fiction within this collection of essays, she completed her doctoral thesis on "Literary Incest": Intertextuality and Writing the Last Taboo in the Novels of Iris Murdoch'.<sup>2</sup> In an article published in 2012, she argues that:

Iris Murdoch was one of the first authors to depict incest directly as an abusive practice [...]. [As such,] Iris Murdoch's fiction can be seen to respond to [the] changes in scientific and cultural attitudes toward incest in the postwar era, and her writing reflects and challenges the social perspective contemporaneous with her individuals works.<sup>3</sup>

Murdoch's fiction, as both Miller and Leeson illustrate, abounds in appearances of incest, quasi-incest, sexual abuse and domestic violence. *A Severed Head*, *The Time of the Angels*, *The Good Apprentice* and *The Philosopher's Pupil* are among the novels in which varying forms of incest play a crucial role

in the narrative, equivocating the moral complexity of the given novel.

Leeson's contribution to this collection draws a fascinating comparison between the ethical implications of Murdoch's *The Black Prince* and de Beauvoir's *The Mandarins*: both novels with their depiction of quasi-incestuous relationships, he argues, illustrate the moral and political necessity of a Weilian 'attention to the other' and, one implicitly and one explicitly, engage in an 'ethical thinking about bodies'. He also considers the ways in which de Beauvoir's and Murdoch's different attitudes to life-writing affect their fiction. Where de Beauvoir's novel is a *roman á clef*, Murdoch's develops from her own 'deeply personal' interest in incest. '[K]nown for a wide variety of sexual relationships throughout her life', Murdoch's engagement with the moral ambiguities surrounding sexual abuse is, as Leeson indicates, partly informed by her own sexually-charged relationships with power figures.

Murdoch engaged in sexual relationships not only with her contemporaries but also her students. Arguably, these taboo relationships, or 'diffused eroticism[s]' as she described in a letter to Brigid Brophy, influence novels such as *A Word Child* and *The Philosopher's Pupil*, where characters in the position of teacher or mentor exert an ambiguous, sometimes covert, sexual power over younger individuals.<sup>4</sup> These potentially controversial resonances between Murdoch's life and fiction remain an under-discussed area in Murdoch scholarship. Yet, as Leeson's essay illustrates, such investigations into the dialogue between Murdoch's life and fiction are relevant to an examination of the socio-political context of sexual transgressions, relationships or abuse.

This brilliant collection of essays highlights the importance of confronting the abuse, taboo and trauma that inhabit the complex and emotionally fraught borders of language and memory. Moreover, it illustrates how Murdoch represents a crucial voice in the literary engagement with such morally challenging acts. While this edited collection has far more to offer than this short review can do justice, it makes clear that we must, as Leeson's Weilian focus suggests, attend to these problems in an attempt to understand what motivates abuse and sexual transgressions.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> News coverage of the past ten years, as Leeson and Miller attest in their introduction, provides evidence that the twentieth century was a period in which sexual abuse took place on a far larger scale than previously believed. After the wide coverage of Saville's abuses during the 1950s and 1960s, for example, we are all increasingly aware of silenced instances of abuse and the long-lasting effect they can have on individuals.

<sup>2</sup> Emma V. Miller, "Literary Incest": Intertextuality and Writing the Last Taboo in the Novels of Iris Murdoch' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Durham University, 2011). The monograph arising from this study is forthcoming with McFarland & Company, Inc.

<sup>3</sup> Emma V. Miller, "We Must Not Forget That There Was a Crime": Incest, Domestic Violence and Textual Memory in the Novels of Iris Murdoch', *Journal of Literature and Trauma Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Fall 2012): 65-94 (pp.66-7).

<sup>4</sup> See Anne Rowe and Avril Horner (eds.) *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995*, (London: Vintage, 2015), p.341.

**Eighth International Iris Murdoch Conference: Gender and Trauma  
Chichester University, 1-2 September 2017**

My first Iris Murdoch conference was at Kingston University in 2006 and since then I have missed only one, in 2008. It is an irresistible attraction for me, though I live ten thousand miles away in Australia. I'm not alone in travelling long distances to attend this meeting of philosophers, literary academics, students, readers and other admirers of Iris Murdoch. This year there were also presenters from Japan, China, Hungary, USA, Norway, Czech Republic, Spain, France, the Netherlands, Finland, Italy, and Sweden as well as the UK.

This year for the first time the conference was held in Chichester, at the new Iris Murdoch Research Centre, opened in October 2016. We convened on the first morning of September in the spectacular university chapel for welcomes by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Catherine Harper, and our genial Director, Miles Leeson. Miles was clearly delighted to introduce the last director of the former Iris Murdoch Centre at Kingston, Anne Rowe, who gave us a history of teaching Iris Murdoch's fiction to her students over the decades – one thousand students, many of whom have told her that their lives had been changed by studying Murdoch's novels. Anne treated this claim with a proper amount of caution but the degree of enthusiasm displayed is certainly gratifying.

Then the first panels of the day began, and with them the angst of being unable to be in three places at once. It is especially cruel at a single-author conference, where everything is interesting and relevant, to have to make a choice and doubly so when particular friends and colleagues are presenting simultaneously. However, I cast my die and attended panel B, on Discourses of Trauma. Daniel Read spoke first, on the necessity of evil in the novels, with special reference to *The Message to the Planet* (1989) – a novel which, as several people remarked, continually resurfaced during this conference, despite many of us believing that it is not among Murdoch's best. I might differ from Daniel's proposal that Marcus is the dangerous demonic figure in this novel – but more of that later. David Sándor Szőke then took us back to examine Murdoch's engagement with the post-Holocaust world in the early novels, up to *The Nice and the Good* (1967). David made the point that her Holocaust survivors are often highly ambiguous characters, inevitably carrying with them a degree of ethical ambivalence. To conclude this stimulating panel, David Fine described a project using Murdoch's philosophy to lead his undergraduate students to redefine trauma and see the difficulties faced every day by their fellow inhabitants of Dayton, Ohio, who are living in poverty. I was particularly struck by the idea that empathy is of no use in understanding Murdoch's difficult realisation that other people are profoundly different to oneself, and the challenges this poses for those who want to help

people in need.

The difficulty of choosing became more challenging after lunch, with four concurrent panels. I chose E, on *The Sea, The Sea*, and thus heard two excellent papers on trauma in this troubling and exhilarating novel. Elin Svenneby examined the complications of the gender-related traumas, highlighting how Charles's self-serving interference in Hartley's life only compounds her troubles. Adéla Branná then made the intriguing claim that Rosina represents for Charles a monstrous Dionysian realm in opposition to what he sees as his own rational, Apollonian world. Adéla used many wonderful images of monsters to illustrate her presentation, drawing parallels between these and the terms in which Rosina is described in Charles's narration. As the third speaker was not able to attend, I took the opportunity to slip downstairs and hear Scott Moore in panel F, who was talking about Murdoch's 'vexed relationship with Christianity', a topic of endless fascination for me and, as this panel suggested, for others as well.

For the rest of the day I was relieved of any choices more difficult than which flavour of Danish to eat for afternoon tea. The late afternoon plenary was a conversation between Miles Leeson and A.N. Wilson. I believe I was not the only one who expected to hear something controversial from Wilson, whose book *Iris Murdoch as I Knew Her* had caused a stir in Murdoch circles fifteen years ago. However, we were treated instead to Wilson's considered account of how the book had come about and his re-evaluation of it with the aid of hindsight, gently guided by Miles' thoughtful questions.

An early evening session included my own paper on music and gender in *The Message to the Planet* so there was no question of being anywhere else but in panel H. As I hinted earlier, I proposed a theory that rather than Marcus being the malevolent spirit in the novel, that honour might fall to a character who is easy to overlook: Gildas, the musician. But on either side of my paper were two presentations which broke the mould of the usual Murdoch conference fare. Rivka Isaacson's title speaks for itself: 'It depends on the liver: alcoholism, detoxification, regeneration and wound-healing in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*.' Rivka continued her unique approach to reading literature through biochemistry and showed how the liver, an organ that has to work overtime in many of this novel's characters, can be endued with symbolic force in this particularly boozy novel. The last paper of the day came from artist Carol Sommer who described her project of 'uncreative writing' resulting in the unique and hypnotic book *Cartography for Girls*. See the 2017 IMR (launched at a reception immediately after this panel) for reviews of Carol's book by Frances White, Rivka and myself – or even better, get a copy and see it for yourself.

Day two started with an excellent plenary by Gary Browning entitled: 'Iris Murdoch: The History Woman'. Gary set out to explore this epithet in all its aspects – in morality, philosophy, literature, religion, and politics – and to place Murdoch in history herself, as well as demonstrating her acute understanding of her own historical situation as a philosopher and an artist. I have often wondered whether her deference to the great canonical writers affected or inhibited her own novelistic practice, so I found Gary's talk most interesting.

More difficulties of choice after morning tea, but I couldn't resist Pamela Osborn's analysis of Murdoch's influence on Sue Townsend, of 'Adrian Mole' fame, so I headed for panel L. It seems

unexpected on the face of it that Townsend, a very different kind of writer, should owe so much to Murdoch, but Pamela made a good case and entertained us thoroughly in the process. Janfarie Skinner's thoughtful comparison of George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* with *A Word Child* made a compelling case for Murdoch's engagement with Eliot, particularly where death and guilt are concerned. The third speaker in this panel failed to appear so we had plenty of time for a lively discussion taking us in all sorts of directions.

After lunch, I opted again for a panel comparing Murdoch with other writers, in this case poets. Shauna Pitt found traces of Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shalott' in various early novels of Murdoch – perhaps most intriguingly in *The Unicorn*. Priscilla Martin turned her attention to Byron and other poets, examining Murdoch's use of the Byronic verse form and echoes of Shakespeare and others in a verse letter to Brigid Brophy to convey a message running counter to the usual tendency of Byron's verse. Paul Hullah appeared just in time, from Tokyo, to give his talk on Haiku and Murdoch's poetry. His paper was a revelation. This was perhaps the first time I have heard Murdoch's poems treated seriously, and Paul's deep understanding of Japanese verse forms and his demonstration of their influence on many of Murdoch's poems added new depth to my understanding of her achievement as a poet, and also of the poetic nature of much of her prose – something of which Carol Sommer's book had already given me a hint.

Finally, James Jefferies dazzled us in the last plenary with his geospatial project to map the locations in Murdoch's London, now online at <https://irismurdoch.info> in beta form. James has drawn information from Cheryl Bove and Anne Rowe's books about Murdoch's London and her characters to make a website which looks as though it is going to be both useful and addictive for Murdochians of all kinds. The exciting thing about James' project is its infinite scope for expansion and its capacity to include all sorts of additional data. The fact that James has done all this work in his own time seemed infectious, and before question time had finished he had several offers of help to develop the site. A lovely demonstration of cooperation and generosity to end the formal part of the conference.

This is of course a partial and prejudiced view of the conference. I counted over thirty presentations I missed – enough to make up a whole other conference. I went to very few presentations on Murdoch's philosophy, for example, and I hope someone else might be able to report on some of the panels I missed.

The conference was bookended by tours – firstly of Chichester on Thursday evening, and the traditional London walk, around Soho and Bloomsbury, on Sunday morning, followed by lunch at the Sherlock Holmes pub.

Congratulations must go to the conference convenors, Frances White and Miles Leeson, for the feat of organisation that these three days represents. The food was good, the venue worked well, the social events were never more than pleasantly chaotic. I know there were students involved in the organisation too but such is the self-effacing nature of these people that they failed to acknowledge themselves in the programme.

And there is another strand of the conference which I have left out of my report, and that is the social side: a dinner every night from Thursday to Saturday; breakfasts, lunches, tea breaks – intense

discussions aided by the full gamut of beverages from tea to whisky; projects mooted which may or may not lead to great things; and gales of laughter and liveliness and good fellowship. And that is perhaps the secret of the success of this biennial event. The chance to reconvene every two years with some of the cleverest people I know – people who manage to be both nice and good – is what draws me across the world each time.

**'Iris Murdoch's Philosophical Journey' Burnham-on-Sea Philosophy Society,  
13 September 2017**

On a particularly wet and gloomy September evening a group of around fifteen keen amateur philosophers, along with a few Iris Murdoch Society members, convened in the Burnham-on-Sea community centre in Somerset for an exploration of 'Iris Murdoch's Philosophical Journey' delivered by Tony Lane. Lane, a society member who since retiring has returned to philosophy, a subject he studied as a university student. He gave a meticulously researched and accessible overview of Murdoch's engagement with, and contribution to, philosophy.

Taking as his starting point a quote from a letter that Murdoch wrote to Raymond Queneau questioning how she could 'exploit the advantages of a mind on the borders of philosophy, literature and politics', Lane embarked on the not-so-simple task of tracking Murdoch's philosophical journey as she developed her own ideas about morality. Through this he argued that she ultimately found an outlet for her 'mind on the border' by combining philosophy with elements of literature, history and religion to develop a moral psychology. As a recent MA graduate who had initially been captivated by Murdoch's fiction and only recently begun to immerse myself in the world of her philosophy, I was particularly keen to gain a more detailed understanding of the ways in which her thinking evolved throughout her career.

Lane began by setting the philosophical scene of wartime Oxford as Murdoch was beginning her career. He stressed the prevalence of analytical philosophy during this period, which offered an innovative take on the function of moral language and ethical reasoning. Ultimately, this mode of thinking evolved into a prescriptivism, which centred around the question of what good means. Lane detailed how this form of thought was inherently incompatible with Murdoch's focus on the inner moral life. This departure from the popular and fashionable philosophy of the time initiated her journey and led her to explore many different avenues. Lane introduced the group to Murdoch's short-lived, but serious early commitment to Marxism, and participation in the Communist Party as a way to fight fascism; to her subsequent recognition of Freud's ground-breaking and realistic picture of man's ego which challenged ideas about individual will; and to her connections to existentialism through her writings on Sartre. In each case Lane identified the points that Murdoch was

unable to reconcile with her own thinking.

Having established what Murdoch left behind during her journey, Lane turned his attention to the abiding influences on her philosophy. Here he spent some time discussing her adoption of Simone Weil's concepts of 'attention' and 'unselfing' as means of preventing a preoccupation with the self. He also explored Murdoch's relationship to Christianity and attempts to construct a workable neo-theology. It was this connection to religion which seemed to resonate most with the group, sparking a lively debate at the end of the talk. The society members discussed the practicalities of following a philosophy which draws upon moral codes from religion in the absence of a God. As Murdoch strove for a philosophy which people could live by, it felt apt that Lane's talk ended with this consideration of how her ideas could be put into practice in the real world.

## In Conversation: Iris Murdoch and Visual Culture at the National Portrait Gallery, 12 October 2017

The visual arts played a significant and lifelong role in Iris Murdoch's fiction and non-fiction work. On 12 October 2017, Dr Anne Rowe, Dr Frances White and Dr Lucy Bolton came together for a Late Shift event in the auspicious setting of the National Portrait Gallery, London (where an arresting portrait of Murdoch by Tom Williams has hung intermittently since 1987) to examine the impact of the visual arts on Murdoch's work. The event showcased the rich possibilities of considering Murdoch's writings (both literary and philosophical) alongside visual culture. The presentations examined a diversity of topics: the ethical role of portraits and self-portraits in Murdoch's novels and non-fiction writing, paintings as 'vehicles of grace' in Murdoch's novels, and Murdoch's concept of 'loving attention' as applied to the experience of film viewing. Showcasing a range of approaches to thinking about Iris Murdoch and visual culture, these presentations shared a common theme: Murdoch's abiding interest in the ethical possibilities of looking at visual art, whether it be painting, photography, sculpture or cinema.

### **Severed Heads: portraits and self-portraits in Iris Murdoch**

In her opening address, Frances White discussed the preponderance of references to portraits and self-portraits in Murdoch's novels. Murdoch frequently showed characters looking at portraits, referring to portraits or, in the case of *Under the Net*, conversing with portraits. Drawing on Murdoch's philosophical treatise, *The Sovereignty of Good*, White suggested that in Murdoch's novels paintings provide characters with moments where their love and concern is directed towards the other. This is a moment Murdoch defined as one of sublime moral education. Indeed, in Murdoch's novels, paying rapt attention to a portrait engenders moral change. According to White, such a transformation occurs when Dora sees Gainsborough's 'The Painter's Daughter Chasing a Butterfly' in *The Bell*, a moment in which she undergoes a spiritual transformation. Concluding her presentation, White reflected on Murdoch's novel *A Severed Head* (in which Martin says, 'I do not like a sculpted head alone') suggesting that, for Murdoch, the severed head constitutes an inversion of the moral purpose of art, which is to direct love and concern towards another living subject.

### **'The Vehicles of Grace': three paintings in Iris Murdoch's novels**

The presentation by Anne Rowe examined the role of several paintings in Murdoch's novels–

Gainsborough's *The Painter's Daughters Chasing a Butterfly*, Bronzino's *An Allegory: Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time*, Giorgione's *Il Trombato* and Titian's *The Death of Actaeon*. Just as White drew comparisons between Murdoch's *Sovereignty of Good* and portraiture in her novels, for Rowe paintings in Murdoch function as 'vehicles of grace' which illumine her moral philosophy. Rowe's analysis of these paintings suggested that Murdoch's novels provide examples of art as evidence for the existence of the Good (an idea which Murdoch presents in *The Sovereignty of Good*). Rowe's presentation therefore suggested a strong ideological correspondence between the role of visual art in Murdoch's philosophical output and her literary writing.

### **Iris Murdoch and the cinema**

The final presentation, delivered by Lucy Bolton, also considered the relationship between Murdoch's moral philosophy and art, and examined whether Murdoch's view of experiencing art as moral work applies to the experience of watching film. Also drawing on *The Sovereignty of the Good*, Bolton suggested that the idea of art being a way of seeing outside oneself, of taking on a moral journey by paying attention to the other, has particular resonance with the act of viewing cinema. Bolton also noted that in her writing about cinema Murdoch was particularly interested in the specificity of the filmic experience (as opposed to the experience of other works of art). In her short article on the cinema (first published in *Vogue* magazine), Murdoch suggested that cinema is uniquely positioned to confront viewers with intensities of emotion (particularly through the depiction of the face) and the experience of being 'taken out of oneself'. Bolton concluded her paper by suggesting that the film *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* (dir. Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 2014) provides the perfect example of the cinematic qualities Murdoch describes. In presenting us with a scene where a conflicted doctor breaks the fourth wall, looking directly at the viewer to defend his moral choice to lie to a little boy, Bolton suggests that *Anatolia* demonstrates how film is able to enact Murdochian moral philosophy.

The event was well attended by members of the public with an interest in Iris Murdoch and/or visual art and by those with a special scholarly interest in Murdoch's moral philosophy and literary work. The engaging talks encouraged pertinent discussions on the impact of the visual arts on Murdoch's own work, and the ways in which Murdoch's writings can enhance our understanding of visual culture. The presentations of all three speakers suggested that there is a strong moral dimension to Iris Murdoch's personal relationship with and in her writing about art. It is clear that, for Murdoch, art was moral training as opposed to mere entertainment. Certainly, the discussions arising from this event highlight the significance of Murdoch's belief in the moral purpose of art within a political climate concerned with 'goodness', or the lack of it, in society. Perhaps now, more than ever, it is time to look (as Murdoch does) to 'salvation by art'.

**‘Cocoa After Wine’: Theological and Spiritual Perspectives in the novels of Iris Murdoch, Sarum College, Salisbury, 2 November 2017**

This study day, led by Jeremy Davies, formerly Canon Precentor at Salisbury Cathedral and currently undertaking a PhD which explores the theological perspectives within Iris Murdoch’s novels, proved as engaging as its title. As the publicity material for the day indicated, Murdoch described herself as a ‘Christian Buddhist’ (in addition, it could be added, to other self-descriptions such as a ‘reserved friend of theism’ or, more straightforwardly, an ‘atheist’) and her novels are replete with characters who are priests, members of religious communities and spiritual guides of various types. In addition, the more ‘complex’ of her characters tend to be on quests which could, in the broadest sense of the term, be described as ‘spiritual’. Although at times Murdoch appears to be poking fun, in a gentle way, at the more ridiculous or self-deluded aspects of such quests, the characters themselves, and their strivings towards human goodness, are treated with the utmost seriousness and compassion.

Murdoch’s interest, both as philosopher and novelist, in goodness as a moral imperative is well known, but it is interesting to note that, in her later novels especially, she seems also to be exploring the possibilities inherent in reinterpreting specifically Christian doctrines of redemption, atonement and Christology. As Jeremy indicated, within the first of the day’s lectures, these references should not necessarily be understood as denoting Murdoch’s return to any ‘orthodox’ form of Christianity. She remained, in fact, suspicious of dogmatic or creedal formulations. Rather, Christianity is one resource among many upon which she drew in order to explore, through the lives of her characters, the ways in which love, sex and spirituality are inherent and inescapable aspects of being and becoming truly human. Jeremy suggested that we can almost ‘hear’ Murdoch debating with herself on religious and spiritual topics in the conversations of her characters. Whilst distancing herself from any realist ontology in relation to the divine transcendence, and insisting upon the necessity of wariness with respect to the ‘false consolations’ of religion, Murdoch could never distance herself entirely from a religious perspective. As Jeremy put it, she could neither ‘do with’ religion, nor ‘do without’ it, and her novels may be read *inter alia* as fascinating explorations of the ambiguities and paradoxes arising from that tension.

In the second lecture, Jeremy explored the theme of negative theology, bringing out the influence upon Murdoch of demythologising theologians such as John Robinson and Don Cupitt. Murdoch considered Cupitt a ‘very great and valuable pioneer’ whose work resonated with her own under-

standing of the need for theology ‘to continue without God.’ She was convinced that the values, rather than the practices, of conventional religion were necessary for the good ordering of any society but remained conflicted as to the way in which this might be accomplished without the support of realist understandings concerning divine grace; as she herself expressed matters, ‘If organized Christianity collapses then there is no reason to love each other.’ For Murdoch, then, negative or apophatic theology offered a way forward, a ‘borderland’ between knowing and unknowing which could produce moral and spiritual fruit without the ‘certainties’, which she regarded as questionable of more kataphatic or positive, assertions.

Alongside this approach, and inextricably linked to it, was Murdoch’s interest in the process of ‘unselfing’ or the development of ‘detachment’, brought about through contemplation of and attention to ‘the other’ – whether that ‘other’ be another person, the natural world, or God. Much has already been written of the extent to which Murdoch was influenced by Simone Weil in this respect, but Jeremy referred also to her interest in Freud, and her understanding of the need for the ‘fat relentless ego’ to be stripped of its fantasies and capacity for wishful thinking. Within the context of spiritual practice, this is the pre-condition for prayer and for growth in both compassion and dispassion. Jeremy ended this session with references to a few of the many moments in Murdoch’s novels when characters are granted, or achieve, particular moments of attentiveness which prove redemptive or revelatory for them. Through such moments, Murdoch, it could be said, gave new currency to doctrinal understandings in relation to salvation, opening the way towards a fresh appreciation of the need, within busy and distracted lives, for stillness and contemplation.

The final session included consideration of the disjunction, for Murdoch, between the kind of ethical idealism which she espoused and the recognition that most of us can only ‘pursue the Good as best we can.’ As has often been stated, Murdoch was a moral realist. She was resistant to the idea that voluntarism alone can lead to the Good and accepted that moral or spiritual progress was likely to be limited. This is certainly the case with many of her characters, the best of whom tend to be puzzled by evil, and the worst of whom (the ‘evil enchanter’ figures) deliberately manipulate the emotions and lives of others, to their detriment. Murdoch, in other words, was open to the diversity of the world and its experiences, and this must include an acknowledgement of the reality of the capacity for evil, as well as for good.

This brief summary hardly does justice either to the depth and interest of Jeremy’s presentations or to the stimulating discussions which they evoked, but it is hoped that it is indicative, at least, of the scope of this topic, which surely deserves even further consideration as we approach Iris Murdoch’s centenary year.

Iris Murdoch and 'the Era', Oxford in the '50s: An evening with Professor  
Devaki Jain. University of Chichester, 10 November 2017

'Great modesty, great curiosity. She was a genius.' Professor Devaki Jain was reminiscing about her time as an undergraduate student of Iris Murdoch's at Oxford and was sharing her memories with her audience at the Iris Murdoch Research Centre, Chichester University, on 10 November 2017. She added, 'I am so happy that Iris is celebrated by you all today.'

Miles Leeson was delighted to introduce Devaki to general readers and scholars alike, and especially to reunite her with another former student of Murdoch's, Maureen Gruffydd-Jones. The wet and windy autumnal evening was soon forgotten as the fond reminiscences of the two women warmed our hearts.

Devaki Jain studied Philosophy, Politics and Economics at St Anne's College, Oxford (1959-1962) going on to teach Economics at Delhi University. She has accomplished a formidable career as an economist in India, including founding the Institute of Social Studies Trust in New Delhi, and becoming Chair of the Advisory Committee for the United Nations in Asia-Pacific. Throughout her career, she has taken an active role in feminist issues: writing, lecturing and supporting women, introducing the terms 'feminization of poverty' and 'feminization of work' to the field of economics, in her book *Women, Development, and the UN: A Six-Year Quest for Equality and Justice*. However, these achievements were put to one side as Devaki brought the audience a step closer to meeting the 'real' Iris Murdoch, through an informal lecture and questions fielded on Murdoch's philosophy and 'Murdoch Mythos'.

Devaki transported us back to the Oxford of the 1950s, the city of dreaming spires, 'where few dons were women'. Notable, and colourful, colleagues of Murdoch's included Peter Ady, 'a beautiful exotic woman', who would stride into tutorials wearing breeches and leather boots and carrying a riding crop; Enid Starkey, recalled as wearing long red stockings, short skirts and a Texan hat, ('well, it was the eve of the sixties!') and Margaret Hubbard, whose 'heart was broken when Iris married John Bayley'. Murdoch's fashion was described as 'freaky' and 'unconventional'. In some ways, these women were 'more modern than we are now'.

In philosophy, Murdoch was attracted to Rousseau and Kant but also Camus, 'unique in Oxford at the time'. She was interested in human psychology and the complexity of human emotions and her illustrations to bring in philosophy were 'earthy', like M and D; 'this analogy of mother and

daughter-in-law, is relevant to all of us, I discovered,' Devaki smiles, 'as a philosopher Iris was not only brilliant but had a deep engagement in human lives'. Maureen joined Devaki to answer questions on Murdoch's teaching style. She recalled her interview with 'Miss Murdoch sitting on the floor wearing blue stockings ... a real Oxford blue stocking!' Both former Murdoch students agreed that their tutor was not interested in the syllabus. 'She was completely free to do what she liked', but, they added, they were 'well prepared for the exams and could answer any of the questions on the paper'. When questioned whether Iris was intimidating, there was an emphatic 'No! She was not at all intimidating. However, her tutorials were too short!'

Although an undergraduate, Devaki formed long friendships with both Ady and Murdoch. She was to revisit Oxford several times as a guest of Ady, visiting Iris with 'books stacked so high on the floor the door could hardly open'. Regrettably Devaki has 'no photographs of those lovely lunches in the beautiful sun', but she painted a picture fit for any university prospectus. She would be 'always grateful for Iris's generosity', which extended to paying Devaki's fees for one year so she could complete her studies. 'Perhaps it was because I was from India, I fascinated her', she recalled. 'Iris saw a warmth and curiosity in me and she wanted to learn from me too.' We discovered Murdoch was fascinated by Indian culture and religion. She was 'excited by worshipping many gods and goddesses, not just one' and in particular the asceticism of Buddhism appealed to her. As Devaki explained, 'Iris thought death as contingent to life—facing death is not fearsome. ... life is like walking through a live show'. Iris and John became friends with Devaki and her husband, making several visits to India. Whilst there, Iris visited the spiritual city of Varanasi, where Hindus believe the soul's journey toward heaven begins. She 'had a deep interest in the passage from life to death and salvation'.

Perhaps the most poignant moment came when Devaki lowered her eyes and talked about John Bayley's biography of Murdoch. 'John should not have done that,' she said shaking her head in true despair, 'he should not have treated her like a celebrity in her final years'. It is ironic perhaps, that the Iris of the fifties, to whom we were introduced during this fascinating evening, was pictured as the sort of artistic, imaginative and talented individual who might well have embraced today's celebrity culture.

**'Iris Murdoch, Cinema and Film Philosophy'  
University of Chichester, 28 November 2017**

Lucy Bolton's talk was an unveiling of further research and readings of her work looking at contemporary cinema through the prism of Iris Murdoch's moral philosophy. The films being discussed were a detailed analysis of the Turkish crime drama *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* (dir. Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 2011), and a tantalising glimpse at her work on *Clouds of Sils Maria* (dir. Oliver Assayas, 2011).

As a film specialist, I settled into my seat confident on the 'cinema' from the title, keen to see how Iris Murdoch's philosophical writings were being used to examine films made more than a decade after her death. Imagine my surprise then, when the first quote Lucy Bolton read was from a letter Murdoch had written to her friend Brigid Brophy in which she said of film: 'Films hold my attention, but too much. That is why I detest them. I just undergo them'. Detest them? Oh no! Lucy quickly followed this up with a quote from Murdoch's article on cinema from *Vogue* (August 1956) where she wrote: 'From a painting we can stand back, from a novel we can pause and ponder. But a film is as near to us as our own self-awareness, and it comes over us with the inevitability of time itself.' Good, that's better!

Despite the difference in mood (Lucy reckoned that Murdoch was just having a bad day when she was writing to Brigid Brophy), both these quotes make explicit how film differs from other art forms, and how Murdoch responded to film as a viewer. It is worth noting that, when Murdoch was writing in *Vogue* in 1956, film studies was only just emerging as a subject at UK universities, and the only way one could see a film was in a cinema-setting. From the quotes Lucy shared, I got a sense that Murdoch was frustrated by her lack of control as a cinemagoer, and was resistant to being seduced and manipulated by the myriad of film techniques a director has at their disposal. However, she also recognised film as a powerful medium for eliciting individual emotional responses.

This big-screen cinematic experience of the 1950s is a far cry from our usually far smaller-scale film viewing experiences today, which may be why Murdoch wrote about the importance of faces: 'Here we can find tragedy and comedy made minutely concrete in the movement of muscle [...] If cinema could do nothing but present faces it would have enough material to be a major art'.

Having set up Murdoch's views on film spectatorship and the power of the close-up (a technique unique to filmmaking), Lucy then offered an overview of the key areas of moral philosophy, namely: the inner life; the inadequacy of language; the use of metaphorical issues; morality as vision; the idea that we as individuals can grow by looking. The first four can clearly be drawn from a film's narrative, characters and film form, but the fifth links directly to how we as a viewer respond to material.

For Bolton it is films that can be described as 'moral fables' that hold the key. For Murdoch there

are fables which are ‘morally relevant’ and those which are ‘purely decorative’ i.e. those that provoke an emotional response and require personal reflection (morally relevant), as opposed to those that simply entertain (purely decorative). Bolton offered three film examples of ‘purely decorative’ moral fables, all of which were based around the premise, ‘would you accept a million dollars: ... to sleep with someone; ... if you knew someone else would die; ... that didn’t belong to you.’ And although I would have loved to have seen Lucy talking about *Indecent Proposal* (dir. Adrian Lyne, 1993), *The Box* (dir. Richard Kelly, 2009) and *Good People* (dir. Henrik Ruben Genz, 2013), it was to films that were ‘morally relevant’ that Lucy turned, as these are the films that for her, ‘offer a vision of the world in which moral journeys take place. Not simply narrative arcs, but transformative moral experiences’.

Lucy’s talk then focused on her close readings of key scenes from *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia*, drawing our attention to the Ceylan’s use of film language and form in crafting his shots. She explained how his use of cinematography (camera angles, framing, movement, distance), sound and the absence of sound, pace created through editing or indeed the lack of edits, performances and mise-en-scene (locations, costumes, props, etc.) are all used to explore and develop further a character’s inner life and morality.

The quotes with which Bolton opened her talk that offered insights into Murdoch’s somewhat critical response to watching a cinema – that they should hold her attention, but too much, that she must ‘undergo’ them, and that they ‘come over us’ – all link to a lack of control, and the inability to take in all the visual and auditory cues which underpin a film’s character and narrative arcs in a single viewing, as she would have had to do in the 1950s.

For film scholars in the twenty-first century we now have the technology that allows us to examine films in close detail; we can literally ‘pause and ponder’, as Murdoch could with a novel. We can allow the film to wash over us on our first viewing, and then take that all important step back (as she did with a painting) to uncover all the hidden layers of meaning hidden within its form.

A few weeks before this talk I had written a chapter in an A-Level Film textbook on another contemporary Turkish film, *Mustang* (dir. Deniz Gamze Ergüven, 2015) and I had watched *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* as part of this research. I was therefore approaching it from institutional, cultural and political contexts, seeing where points of comparison and difference could be made with *Mustang*, and New Turkish Cinema more generally. Seeing the film through another perspective, and one which advocates that individuals can grow by looking, was a refreshing and enlightening experience.

Lucy Bolton’s thorough and entertaining work in studying the film shot by shot and overlaying Murdoch’s moral philosophy onto Ceylan’s bleak crime drama offered an alternative framework in which to engage with a film. In her introduction, she said that *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* is a film that ‘demands effort and attention’, and so I look forward to re-visiting it with this film philosopher’s comments swirling around my head.

To get a greater sense of Bolton’s research and how she has used Murdoch’s philosophical writing to analyse film, do read her essay on *Blue Jasmine* (dir. Woody Allen, 2013) in *The Iris Murdoch Review* No 8.

Iris Murdoch: Novelist, Film Star, Philosopher  
Talk by Hannah Marije Altorf at the University Women's Club, Mayfair,  
London, 30 January 2018

On 30 January, in the academically apposite setting of the University Women's Club (UWC) library, Hannah Marije Altorf spoke to a packed house about Murdoch's philosophical career, focusing on *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (MGM) and *The Fire and the Sun* (F&S). The audience was comprised of Murdoch researchers and devotees, UWC regular attendees, and guests who were particularly interested in hearing about Murdoch.

Altorf began by stating Murdoch's belief that philosophy is something we should all be doing all of the time, and highlighted the fact that Murdoch's involvement with philosophy had spanned forty years – the same length of time as she was writing fiction. Altorf set out the publications where Murdoch's philosophical writing is to be found: *MGM* (1992) and *F&S* (1977), as well as *Sartre, Romantic Rationalist* (1953), *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970) and Peter Conradi's edited collection, *Existentialists and Mystics* (1997). She explained how there has been a reluctance to talk about Murdoch the philosopher, despite the growing interest in her over the last twenty years, given John Bayley's three memoirs (1998, 1999, 1999), the authorised Conradi biography (2001), and the film directed by Richard Eyre (2001). In popular culture, the emphasis tends not to be on her philosophical work but on her biography, especially the end of her life, and on her novels.

As Altorf explained, Murdoch was one of the 'Golden Generation' of women philosophers at Oxford, along with Elizabeth Anscombe, Mary Midgley, Philippa Foot, and Mary Warnock: a group of women who were prominent thinkers, who exchanged ideas and became friends. Murdoch herself looked beyond the linguistic analytical philosophy at Oxford and yet was also disappointed with existentialism. She, as Altorf reminded us, believed that 'a moral philosophy should be inhabited'. The big question Murdoch wanted to ask (and Altorf was musing as to why more philosophers and philosophy students don't ask this) was, 'how can we make ourselves morally better?'

Altorf described how Murdoch starts the first page of *MGM* right in the middle of a philosophical problem: 'The idea of a self-contained unity or limited whole is a fundamental instinctive concept. We see parts of things, we intuit whole things'. Altorf considered this statement, drawing on the metaphor of the dice or the cube to explain how we intuit what we cannot see, and used this first sentence to demonstrate how Murdoch is not always an easy thinker to read, or indeed to place in a context in relation to other thinkers. For Altorf, Stephen Mulhall's analysis of the cover image of the hardback edition of *MGM* is a good indicator of the complexity and convolution of the text. It is

not a systematic treatise; there is overlapping and moving backwards and forwards across theories and facts. Altorf argued that this is not a fault, however, but rather it is a virtue.

Moving on to consider *F&S* in more detail, and confessing to a passion for or even obsession with this work, Altorf described how Murdoch considers Plato's views on who is 'in' and who is 'out' – referring to Plato's metaphor of the cave from the *Republic*. Murdoch, Altorf argued, 'dissolves the difference' between inside and outside of the cave. The people can go into the sun, and the sun can come into the cave – we all meet in a nurturing place. And art, 'especially literature', plays a hugely important role for Murdoch as a 'great hall of reflection where we can all meet and where everything under the sun can be examined and considered' (*E&M*, 461). As Altorf reminded us, Murdoch considered that 'for both the individual and the collective salvation of the human race, art is doubtless more important than philosophy' ('On God and Good', *E&M*, 362). This regard for art and the vital role that she believed literature could play in moral thinking perhaps accounts for why Murdoch left the academy, whereas, as Altorf observed, 'the others stayed'. This sheds further light on the comparative neglect of Murdoch's philosophical work, or at least the fact that she is so much more widely regarded as a novelist.

Altorf's thoughtful and generous talk ranged across Murdoch's philosophical works, demonstrating the unique style and position of her thinking and writing, and conveying the accessibility of her thought and the inclusivity of her moral philosophy. Audience members shared stories about how they had taught Murdoch's work in the past, or were reading it now as an aspect of her work that they had not encountered before, or indeed were going to seek it out as the philosopher Murdoch was news to them. The library staff had created a display of Murdoch's novels and philosophical works, and there was plenty of wine enjoyed by all, of which Murdoch would surely have approved.

## The Shaman and the Intertext, University of Chichester, 3 February, 2018

Since the launch of the Iris Murdoch Research Centre at the University of Chichester, the university's most picturesque room, Cloisters, has seen many brilliant Murdoch-related events; the one on 3<sup>rd</sup> February was no exception. The day was spent with familiar faces as we gathered to support each other in new and upcoming Murdochian research projects, listening to each other and providing advice and encouragement. It was a fantastic platform for viewing the extensive and varied scope of the future of Murdoch studies, across the globe. Into this receptive and welcoming atmosphere came Rob Hardy, to complete what had been a motivating and inspiring day with his entertaining and thoughtful talk, 'Shakespeare, T.S. Eliot and Iris Murdoch: The Shaman and the Intertext'.

For Rob's talk, the room filled with the usual mix of diverse academics, students of varying degrees of familiarity with Iris Murdoch, the Iris Murdoch U3A group from Chichester, and other members of the community with interest piqued. Thus, the scene was set for an elucidating and theatrical portrayal of Iris Murdoch in a light many have never considered before.

From Han Normal University in China, Rob Hardy, author of *Psychological and Religious Narratives in Iris Murdoch's Fiction*, was in Chichester to share a balance of personal and research-based ideas concerning Iris Murdoch's status as shaman. As he explained, his talk concerned the consequences of two statements: (1) that Iris Murdoch was a shaman in the sense that Ted Hughes said that Shakespeare and T.S. Eliot were, and (2) that Murdoch's shamanism was deeply linked to the intertextuality of her fiction – and that he did with contagious energy.

The broad view of Iris Murdoch as a figure and voice of an era, rather than an author or philosopher *within* an era, was both endearing and provoking. Through the eyes of A. N. Wilson, Martha Nussbaum, and then his own, Rob brought a touch of the personal, often unavoidable when reading and thinking about Iris Murdoch, to his portrayal of Iris the Shaman. Explaining to us that 'reading Iris Murdoch is like being seen by God', he tied together the numerous threads of thought that informed his talk and he balanced this with a close reading of Eliot in relation to *A Word Child*. Rob's ultimate optimism for 'a world where Iris's message of hope can be heard' had the characteristic feeling of toil and good heart which fill most of Murdoch's novels and was a particularly apt end to a thoroughly enjoyable day.

Overall, a day spent appreciating Iris Murdoch's work, as well as encouraging and supporting all those sharing their current projects, was nicely crowned by Rob's nuanced and animated talk – reminding us that the intertexts are as important as the texts when considering what Iris Murdoch means to us today.

Metaphysics as a Guide to Machines – a seminar by Manny Rayner,  
Flinders University, 21 March 2018

On an autumn afternoon in Adelaide, South Australia, a dozen or so philosophers, literary scholars, and other interested people convened at Flinders University to hear Dr Manny Rayner of the University of Geneva, computer scientist and specialist in human-computer interactions and artificial intelligence, explain why he thinks that ‘geeks’ – of which he counts himself one – should read Iris Murdoch’s philosophy.

As Manny explained, although Iris Murdoch’s *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* appears to come from a very different tradition to that of the modern artificial intelligence (AI) researcher, there are some interesting similarities between her underlying conceptual framework and the geek’s. Murdoch’s most important images, which can be found throughout her philosophical works, are derived from Plato: the quest for the Sun, which represents the Good, the conflation of Beauty, Truth and Virtue as different aspects of the same underlying thing, the purification of erotic energy as the driving motor of the pilgrimage towards the light, the transformation of the spirit through quiet attention and contemplation. Manny argued that, recast in an appropriate vocabulary, Plato’s images give a surprisingly good account, phrased in poetic terms, of a modern neural net’s mode of operation. He gave the following examples of equivalences between the pictures:

- “Shadows” in Plato = “training examples” in a neural net
- “Eros” in Plato = “minimising loss function” in a neural net
- “Climbing out of the cave” in Plato = “finding a minimum” in a neural net

Interesting as this correspondence is, a sense of urgency of Manny’s work comes in his discussion of a new development in game technology. In 2017, a system named AlphaZero mastered Go, Chess and Shogi in a weekend, learning only by playing against itself. This development makes it just a matter of time until machines start developing independent thought. Manny asks questions such as, ‘What is the machine’s view of other minds?’, and ‘What is the machine’s view of the past?’ So far, the answers are unclear. At the moment, AI agent’s universe only contains itself and the person who created its goals (= God?). They have little idea of other minds and exist only in the present. This might change if they knew more about using language as humans do.

Manny went on to explain why he thinks moral philosophers should be concerned. To illustrate his point, he discussed some publications over the past decade dealing with the intersection between machines and morality. These include:

- Wallach and Allen's *Moral Machines: Teaching Robots Right from Wrong* (OUP, 2008), which talks about making 'ethical' military hardware.
- Lin, Bekey and Abney's *Autonomous Military Robotics* (Office of Naval Research, 2008). They conclude that it's unrealistic to develop robots with a deep understanding of ethics, but robots can probably be programmed to conform to the Laws of War and the Rules of Engagement as well as a human soldier, which will make it easier to apply 'proportionate use of force'.
- Nick Bostrom's *Superintelligence* (OUP, 2014). Bostrom believes (with Manny) that if we create a human-level intelligence, it will soon evolve into a superintelligence ("intelligence explosion"). However, we have no idea how to control a superintelligence, which would be far more intelligent than any human, and the only realistic strategy would be to design the machine as a benevolent moral agent, and we don't know how to do that.
- Max Tegmark's *Life 3.0* (Knopf, 2017). Tegmark, while believing that we need to be careful when creating superintelligences, things that we have to do it all the same: they will let us realise our destiny and turn the universe into a single Cosmic Mind.

By this time, Manny, who is not particularly reassured by any of these approaches, had convinced everyone in the room that the human race is heading for trouble. He quoted Bostrom, who he felt was the most circumspect of these authors:

Before the prospect of an intelligence explosion, we humans are like small children playing with a bomb. Such is the mismatch between the power of our plaything and the immaturity of our conduct. Superintelligence is a challenge for which we are not ready now and will not be ready for a long time.

Manny then suggested that a solution might be for machines to learn about human society and moral values by reading literature. A superintelligence's actions could have enormous consequences. It would need appropriate goals. For example, neither naïve utilitarianism nor techno-Hegelianism will be the answer. Furthermore, the questions involved in giving it these goals are not about computer science/AI, but rather about moral philosophy, ethics, and even religion.

Manny concluded that the key problems of the future are in moral philosophy. They are extremely difficult. However, AI developers are not looking at the issues and may not even be aware that they exist. AI experts, if they read philosophy at all, might read Wittgenstein. While most moral philosophy doesn't translate into AI, the picture in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* does translate well, and he would be reassured if he saw more geeks reading Iris Murdoch.

An animated discussion followed Manny's presentation. One interesting idea that came up in discussion was the seeming impossibility that humans will be able to refrain from developing AI to the stage where it wields power beyond anything we can now imagine, even though that is the safest option and the alternative might well be catastrophic. The literary and cultural scholars in the room could see equivalences with Faust, with Greek drama, and even with the expulsion from

Eden in Genesis.

The discussion continued over a long lunch and then became an email thread. Connections have now been made between researchers in philosophy, drama, literature and computer science. Whether we can save the world remains to be seen.

‘Through the Lens of Janet Stone’: A book launch and talk by Ian Beck  
22 March, 2018

On a clear night in March 2018, students, academics and members of the public gathered to listen to author-illustrator Ian Beck discussing an eclectic selection of images taken by his mother-in-law, the internationally renowned photographer Janet Stone, who died in 1998. Beck has collected these images into a new book, *Through the Lens of Janet Stone: Portraits, 1953–1979*.

Transporting the audience back into the past, Ian offered new insights into Stone’s portraits of Iris Murdoch and John Bayley, along with others such as Cecil and Daniel Day-Lewis, John Sparrow, Leonard Woolf, Siegfried Sassoon and Sylvia Townsend-Warner. Ian also presented images of the beautiful homes and rooms of the Stone family, pictures of local villagers and even engravings by Janet’s husband, Reynolds Stone. Beck made Janet Stone’s life celebratory and engaging, and his delivery amusing and light. He imbued his talk with such rich detail of the lives and stories behind the images, and of the woman behind the camera. The friendship between Stone and Murdoch resulted in Murdoch and Bayley visiting Stone’s Dorset home frequently and adding to the convivial atmosphere. Ian’s wife, Emma Stone, told him that when Iris and John were visiting there was ‘nothing but laughter’. The perfectly catalogued images, with little damage other than marks made by publishers on specific ones, included many studies and candid images of Murdoch, Bayley and Reynolds in the grounds of the Stone’s Dorset home, on picnics and ‘floating on ivy’ in local graveyards. With stories of family life and Stone’s photography, and not forgetting her friendships and many visitors, Ian even found time to mention their cherished housekeeper, Winnie Jones, who was the ‘uncomplaining engine of the house’.

A later discussion of both Beck’s own memories and those of his mother-in-law made for a delightful investigation into whether the people captured in Janet Stone’s images – close friends of Murdoch’s or not – featured in her novels and, if so, where. The distinct images and Ian’s commentary left us wishing to see the image of Murdoch dressed in red, white and blue stockings and ribbon at Ian and Emma’s wedding. The black and white, and colour images distinctly captured the emotions and atmosphere within the setting and their lives, and Ian’s commentary preserved some of Janet’s own personal scrapbook details and thoughts. The expansive range of nearly 100 images became alive and resonated individually with the audience. Over dinner, Ian Beck further indulged us with personal stories of his memories of Murdoch, much to the delight of his smaller but invested audience. Stone’s images allowed the past to become vivid and, as to the audience so to her son-in-law, ‘I felt like they were all still alive, [...] they all seemed to be there’.

## Mark Hopwood

Report on a Conference on ‘Moral Perception in Iris Murdoch’ at The Queen’s College, Oxford, 28 April 2018.

### **‘Murdoch isn’t anymore, I think, a neglected philosopher.’**

It is a measure of how far Murdoch scholarship has come in the last few years that these words, uttered by Anil Gomes at the beginning of a recent conference at The Queen’s College Oxford, seemed entirely uncontroversial. As Justin Broackes notes in the preface to *Iris Murdoch: Philosopher*, when the philosophy department at Brown University was considering putting on a Murdoch conference in 2001, she was considered ‘a rather vague figure one might connect with existentialism and aesthetics’. Once Broackes admitted to actually having read some of *The Sovereignty of Good*, he found himself running the conference. Seventeen years later, Murdoch is no longer such a peripheral figure. The conference at Queen’s – organized by Silvia Panizza and Ben Sorgiovanni on the topic of ‘Moral Perception in Iris Murdoch’ – was the second on Murdoch’s philosophy to be organised at Oxford in the last couple of years, and garnered sufficient interest that the talks had to be moved to a larger room at the last minute to accommodate all the attendees.

Since it is no longer necessary to justify one’s interest in Murdoch’s philosophy, Gomes continued, there are three kinds of project open to Murdoch scholars. One can attempt to explicate her views, one can go further and seek to defend those views, or one can ‘take her views and try to do something with them’ as Gomes put it. This third project – the task of showing how Murdoch’s insights might be brought to bear on problems elsewhere in philosophy – was the task that Gomes set himself in his entertaining and original presentation ‘On Complacency’. A subject is complacent about some project, Gomes argued, when she culpably overestimates her standing with regard to that project and thus comes to hold an attitude of self-satisfaction with respect to it. We might thus understand complacency as a vice of inattention. Gomes suggested that Murdoch’s account of attention, allied to contemporary psychological theories of inattention blindness, might help us to understand what kind of failings are involved in complacency and how these failings can be rectified.

Like Gomes, Casey Doyle took up the task of showing how Murdoch’s views might be deployed to shed light on other topics – in this case, the contemporary debate over the philosophy of love. Although the naïve view that love is a response to the good qualities of the individual appears to be subject to a range of objections, Doyle argued that Murdoch’s account of love as the process of refining one’s vision of the other allows us to arrive at a defensible version of the naïve view – although one that is perhaps less radical and mystical than the view Murdoch herself ultimately embraces.

Other papers at the conference took up the equally important tasks of explicating and defending Murdoch’s views. In her paper ‘Moral Perception and Relational Self-Cultivation: Reassessing Attunement as a Virtue’, Anna Bergquist sought to defend Murdoch’s insistence on the moral

importance of attending to others as particular individuals, and illustrated the point with examples drawn from the contemporary literature on counselling and psychotherapy. Niklas Forsberg, meanwhile, returned to Murdoch's famous case of the mother and daughter-in-law, arguing that in order to understand what is really going on in this example, we need to take seriously Murdoch's suggestion that M's reassessment of D takes place after the latter has either emigrated or died. 'We need,' Forsberg suggested, 'to think about death.' Through an analysis of C.S. Lewis's reflections on bereavement in *A Grief Observed*, Forsberg presented a subtle and original interpretation of what has become Murdoch's most well known (but perhaps still not fully understood) example.

At a conference on the topic of moral perception, it is worth being reminded – as Lawrence Blum sought to do in his presentation – that Murdoch uses various visual metaphors in her work, and that it is not always clear exactly how these metaphors are supposed to be understood. In particular, Blum argued, we need to distinguish – in a way that Murdoch herself did not always succeed in doing – between what an agent sees in the sense of the subjective world within which she chooses and acts (but which does not necessarily reflect the world as it is) and what she sees when she is genuinely succeeding in paying just and loving attention to reality. A better sense of this distinction – and a fuller account of how our subjective perceptions are influenced by social and cultural factors – might help us to develop an account of moral perception that is more attentive to the political context in which moral perception takes place.

All of the papers provoked lively and critical discussion that continued well into the night. If – as seems to be the case – Murdoch is no longer a neglected philosopher, it is exciting to reflect upon the new work and insights that the next few years of Murdoch scholarship are likely to produce.

## Lucy Bolton

### A visit to the Iris Murdoch archive at McMaster University, Hamilton, Canada

It was an unexpected joy to discover that there was an archive of Iris Murdoch material located just about mid-way on my journey from Toronto, where I was to present a paper on the last films of Vivien Leigh at the largest film and media studies conference in North America, the Society of Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS), and Niagara Falls, where I was planning to marvel at the beauty of the falls themselves and retrace the steps of Marilyn Monroe from the 1953 film that was set there. I am grateful to Miles Leeson for making me aware of this archive, and I searched the archives online to see what they hold before making contact. The material listed is not extensive by any means, but does offer some temptations. Described on the library's website as a 'small adjunct to the main book collection of over 400 books and translations by and about Murdoch', the items were purchased from Thornton's of Oxford in 1990 and 1991. There is one box, holding ten folios, containing some correspondence and publications.

The list can be accessed at: <http://library.mcmaster.ca/archives/m/murdoch.htm>.

Having decided that there might indeed be some gems in here, I contacted the archive and arranged a visit, requesting several of the items be made available. The archivists could not have been more helpful, giving information about practical matters as well as revealing that they also hold a substantial Bertrand Russell archive, which contains a few items of interest to Murdoch scholars.

The visit was thoroughly worthwhile and my hope that there were a few gems was indeed well founded. Some notes to publishers, in Murdoch's familiar handwriting, were unsurprisingly in keeping with her polite, friendly and gracious style of more formal letter writing, and the original publications of essays such as 'The Novelist as Metaphysician' and 'The Existential Hero' in *The Listener*, and 'The Darkness of Practical Reason' and 'Against Dryness' in *The Encounter*, were interesting to see and assess in that form alongside other essays of their times. It was good to see early issues of The Iris Murdoch Newsletter, from 1987 to 1989, and to read four of Murdoch's poems published in *Poetry London*, from 1979.

The most interesting items emerged from the Russell archive. Firstly, there is the anti-Goldwater manifesto, opposing Goldwater's pro-nuclear policies, written by Russell and signed by Murdoch in 1964, with her note attached saying she gives her 'most wholehearted endorsement'. There is also a note from Russell to Murdoch thanking her for signing. Then there is a fascinating short letter run between Russell and the then editor of *The Observer*, David Astor, concerning Murdoch's review of *Words and Things* by Ernest Gellner. The correspondence is both before the review (which is running late due to Murdoch's trip to America) and after it has been published. The letters reveal that the

book had caused some controversy when Gilbert Ryle refused to allow the book to be reviewed in the journal *Mind*, of which Ryle was editor. Russell wants Astor to ‘ventilate’ the matter in the *Observer*, as he clearly feels Ryle’s attitude to be ‘rabid partisanship’ (3 November 1959). However, when Murdoch’s review does appear on 29 November 1959, Russell is not at all happy with it, considering it to be ‘grossly unfair’ (29 November 1959), and indeed Astor replies that he also was ‘surprised by the line she took’ (3 December 1959). Despite their disappointment with Murdoch’s review, they agree that it is too late to ‘revive the Gellner-Ryle controversy’ (Russell to Astor, 10 December 1959). Murdoch’s review is also held here, and it is strongly critical of Gellner’s book, which she takes to be an ‘attack on modern philosophy as a whole’ (*Observer*, 29 November 1959, n.p.). This episode offers a fascinating insight into the machinations of the philosophical establishment, and is notable for the way Murdoch’s contribution to the discussion is only available on the printed page, in her published work. There is no evidence of her attitude to this ‘Gellner-Ryle controversy’, other than her carefully weighed, analytically and knowledgably argued review of the book’s position.

The items relevant to Murdoch in these archives at McMaster, then, may not be copious in number, but there are pieces of great interest. And being placed somewhere between Vivien Leigh and Marilyn Monroe seems a rather suitable spot for me to encounter Murdoch on my research and my travels.

## Update from the Archives 2018

It has been just over a year since our last update for the *Iris Murdoch Review*. This year has once again been a very busy one for us, with work taking place on additions to the Iris Murdoch Collections as well as wider work planning for the future of the Archive.

We have been very fortunate to receive a further collection of notebooks from Iris Murdoch's former home. These notebooks contain philosophy work, including notes on the Gifford lectures, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* and Murdoch's unpublished book on Martin Heidegger. There are also planning notebooks for some of Murdoch's later novels, notebooks from trips abroad, and appointment diaries. We are once again extremely grateful to Audi Bayley for her generosity in presenting these items to us for the benefit of our researchers.

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

- a memory of Iris Murdoch and Brigid Brophy at the Ouzel Galley restaurant, kindly presented by Chris Boddington
- a 'Definition of Love' written by Iris Murdoch, with accompanying documents, kindly presented by George Pappas
- a press release issued by Chatto & Windus for *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, kindly presented by the Minster Gate Bookshop
- a copy of Jean Giraudoux's *Racine* (Cambridge, 1938). Inside the front page is a handwritten dedication to Iris Murdoch from 'K' [full name unknown] dated 20 Jul 1950, with a handwritten verse of a Robert Graves poem, kindly presented by Miles Leeson
- first editions of Iris Murdoch's novels and other works, kindly presented by Cheryl Bove
- a letter from Iris Murdoch to Sue Lovatt and Annie Dunsmore regarding symbolism in *Under the Net*, kindly placed on loan by Sue Lovatt
- a letter from Iris Murdoch to Myles Burnyeat regarding the latter's work on Aristotle and Vlastos, kindly presented by Myles Burnyeat
- a theatre programme for *The Black Prince* at the Aldwych Theatre in 1989, kindly presented by Anne Rowe

- material relating to Iris Murdoch's play *Joanna, Joanna* including typescripts, proof copies and accompanying documents, kindly presented by the Iris Murdoch Society
- letters from Iris Murdoch to writer and economist Devaki Jain, kindly presented by Devaki Jain
- an article from *The Times* magazine on a new book of photograph by Janet Stone, featuring images of Iris Murdoch and John Bayley, kindly presented by Anne Rowe

We are very grateful to all of our collection donors, and in particular would like to extend our thanks to Anne Rowe, Miles Leeson and the Iris Murdoch Society for their continued support of the Archives.

This previous year has also been a busy one for visitors. Since our last article we have had 242 researchers using the Iris Murdoch Collections in the Archive, and have hosted 13 group visits. For these we have issued 1042 items from the Collections, and we have also answered 589 enquiries.

Our researcher numbers include visits by our loyal body of transcribers, who have invested a great deal of time and energy into transcribing Iris Murdoch's journals. We are incredibly grateful to them for all their hard work and the help this will give Murdoch scholars for years to come.

Other visits, including some group visits, have been made up of students travelling from the University of Chichester to see the records here, as well as researchers from around the globe. We are very pleased to welcome such a diverse group of researchers to the Archives to use our materials.

Promotion of the Iris Murdoch Collections continues, with documents from the collections included in numerous group visits and tours. Items from the Iris Murdoch Collections also formed a key part of our 25 Objects for 25 Years series of blog posts which highlighted select items from across our collections, and were amongst the 25 objects which were placed on display for the University's Civic Reception last year. We have a forthcoming exhibition of items from our collections relating to London as part of this year's London History Day on 31 May 2018, and this will include correspondence and other items from the Murdoch collections. It is also anticipated that this exhibition will form part of this year's Civic Reception in June. The Archive has also been involved in discussions for proposed activities to mark the centenary of Iris Murdoch's birth in 2019 – more details to follow. If you would like to keep up to date with news from the Archives make sure you visit our blog on a regular basis at <http://blogs.kingston.ac.uk/asc>.

Behind the scenes, the Archives staff have also been working hard, listing and repackaging items in the Collections. Our Archives catalogue was upgraded last winter leading to a greatly improved appearance and functionality – you can visit the new look site at <https://adlib.kingston.ac.uk>. Our library catalogue, which hosts listings for our book collections, also has a new look which you can see by visiting <http://icat.kingston.ac.uk/>. We also successfully achieved Archives Service Accreditation last summer, a national standard that recognises excellence in Archives services. Preparing for this application was the result of many years hard work on behalf of our staff, and we were thrilled to be recognised for our dedication in looking after and giving access to our archival materials. Our official

certificate and plaque were presented in a ceremony taking place in April 2018, and the plaque is now on display in the Archives gallery close to the display cabinets- do look out for it next time you visit. If you visit us you will also notice the large amount of construction taking place on campus- this is for the new Town House building which has been taking shape over the last year. This new building will include a new Archive, and we have been planning how best to utilise this much improved space for the benefit of both our researchers and our Collections. It is expected that the Archive will move at some point in the late summer or early Autumn in 2019 - this will result in a short closure so do keep an eye on our blog for more details as we know them.

This article marks my last piece for the Iris Murdoch Review, as after over nine years working with the Archives I am moving on this summer to a new job role. I have greatly enjoyed my time in the Archive, and would like to thank all of our Murdoch scholars for helping to make the last nine years very enjoyable! It is a wrench moving on from collections I have spent a long time working with, but I know the collections here will continue to go from strength to strength in the future. Whilst there is expected to be a transition period after I leave post, rest assured, the Archive will be offering appointments and visits as normal during this time.

Finally, please do remember that 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 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](mailto:archives@kingston.ac.uk).

## ‘Child of the Future’<sup>1</sup>: A survey of recent and future publications

Mid-2017 to early 2018 has seen the publication of Anna-Lova Olsson’s article ‘A Moment of Letting Go: Iris Murdoch and the Morally Transformative Process of Unselfing’, which places Murdoch’s concepts of attention and unselfing in the context of higher education, arguing that the latter is crucial to an understanding of education as a process of moral enrichment, rather than as a means to maximising the vocational potential of the individual.<sup>2</sup> Manuel Botero Camacho and David Alvaro Martinez Gonzalez’s article, ‘Reconstructing the Romantic Subject through Mythological Archetypes in Iris Murdoch’s *The Sea, The Sea*’ analyses the mythology present in the novel to suggest that Murdoch redefines the traditional concept of the Romantic subject.<sup>3</sup> Finally, Mark Hopwood argues for a reevaluation of Murdoch’s approach to love as a ‘form of Platonic *eros* directed at two objects: the Good and the particular individual’ in his article for the *European Journal of Philosophy*.<sup>4</sup>

In this issue we also look ahead to several books scheduled for publication in the next year as we approach Murdoch’s centenary. Anne Rowe’s addition to the ‘Writers and their Work’ series is one of the major texts on Murdoch due for publication in the next year, while Gary Browning’s two much-anticipated studies of Murdoch will be available by the time this issue is published.<sup>5</sup> *Murdoch on Truth and Love*, a review of the breadth of her thought in her philosophy, fiction and correspondence, is due for publication in mid-July, followed by Browning’s contribution to Bloomsbury’s ‘Why Philosophy Matters’ series, *Why Iris Murdoch Matters* in August.<sup>6</sup> September will also see the publication of George Pattison and Kate Kirkpatrick’s *The Mystical Sources of Existentialist Thought*, which discusses the legacy of existentialism in Murdoch’s ‘mystical’ thought.<sup>7</sup>

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This is a phrase Murdoch uses in an undated letter to Brigid Brophy, part of a collection of letters in the Iris Murdoch Archive, University of Kingston (KUAS142/3/38).

<sup>2</sup> Anna-Lova Olsson, ‘A Moment of Letting Go: Iris Murdoch and the Morally Transformative Process of *Unselfing*’, *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, vol. 52, no. 1, (Spring 2018), pp. 163–77.

<sup>3</sup> Manuel Botero Camacho and David Alvaro Martinez Gonzalez, ‘Reconstructing the Romantic Subject through Mythological Archetypes in Iris Murdoch’s *The Sea, The Sea*’, *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* vol. 40, no.1, (Summer 2017), pp.13–22.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Hopwood, ‘The Extremely Difficult Realization That Something Other Than Oneself Is Real’: Iris Murdoch on Love and Moral Agency’, *European Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 26, no. 2 (Spring 2018), pp. 477–501.

<sup>5</sup> Anne Rowe, *Writers and Their Work: Iris Murdoch* (forthcoming: Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> Gary Browning, *Murdoch on Truth and Love* (London: Palgrave, 2018); Gary Browning, *Why Iris Murdoch Matters* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> George Pattison and Kate Kirkpatrick, *The Mystical Sources of Existentialist Thought* (London: Routledge, 2018).

## Notes on Contributors

**Lucy Bolton** is Senior Lecturer in Film Studies at Queen Mary, University of London. She is the author of *Film and Female Consciousness: Irigaray, Cinema and Thinking Women* (2011) and is currently writing *Contemporary Cinema and the Philosophy of Iris Murdoch* for Edinburgh University Press, to be published in 2019.

**Lauren Bond** is a recent MA graduate from the University of Bristol. Her dissertation focused on metanarratives and the attainment of the Good in Iris Murdoch's fiction. She is currently working at the Royal Academy of Arts.

**Gary Browning** is Professor and Associate Dean (Research and Knowledge Exchange) at Oxford Brookes University. He has written extensively across many areas ranging from political thought to the music of Bob Dylan. His monograph *Why Iris Murdoch Matters*, and his edited collection *Murdoch on Truth and Love* are both published in 2018.

**Donna Carpenter** is currently writing her dissertation on colour application and phenomenology in the short fiction of A.S. Byatt and is considering her options for postgraduate study.

**Ellen Cheshire** is a researcher, writer and lecturer specialising in Film and Cultural Studies. Her book *In the Scene: Jane Campion* was published by Supernova Books in May 2018, and she is one of four writers for the WJEC/eduqas Film Studies for A Level Text Book. Her previous books include *Electric Pictures: A Guide to Films, Filmmakers and Cinemas of Worthing and Shoreham* (The History Press, 2017) and *Bio-Pics: A Life in Pictures* (Columbia University Press, 2015). She is currently writing *In the Scene: Ang Lee* for Supernova Books.

**Gillian Dooley** is a Honorary Senior Research Fellow at Flinders University, Adelaide, South Australia, and the author and editor of a range of publications, including *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction: Conversations with Iris Murdoch* (2003) and *Never Mind about the Bourgeoisie: Correspondence between Iris Murdoch and Brian Medlin 1976-1995* (2014).

**Katie Giles** was the Archivist at Kingston University for over nine years. This work included caring for and promoting the wide range of collections the Archive holds, including working with unique material relating to Iris Murdoch. She now lives in Cornwall.

**Margaret Guise** is an Associate Lecturer for the Department of Theology, Philosophy and Religious Studies at the University of Chichester, and tutor for the Church of England ministerial formation programme, based in the Diocese of Portsmouth. Her specialisms are Christian doctrine, patristics, soteriology and ecclesiology, with a particular focus upon the ways in which patristic texts may be re-read in the light of modern and postmodern concerns. Current research projects include an evaluation of the 'soteriologies' implicit within Murdochian fiction.

**Nora Hämäläinen** is a senior researcher at the Centre for Ethics as Study in Human Value, University of Pardubice, Czech Republic. She is the author of *Literature and Moral Theory* (Bloomsbury 2016, paperback 2017) and *Descriptive Ethics: What does Moral Philosophy Know about Morality* (Palgrave Macmillan 2016).

**Mark Hopwood** is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee. His articles have appeared in the *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, the *European Journal of Philosophy*, *Philosophical Papers*, and *Philosophy and Literature*.

**James Jefferies** is a freelance Creative Technologist based in Sheffield. He specialises in working with interesting data and creating interactive visualisations & maps for the web. He has worked with the BBC's Research and Development team on many projects, his latest being the *Civilisations Explorer* for the BBC's *Civilisations* documentary: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/taster/pilots/civilisations-story-explorer>

**Miles Leeson** is Director of the Iris Murdoch Research Centre, University of Chichester. His work includes *Iris Murdoch: Philosophical Novelist* (2010) and the collection *Incest in Contemporary Literature* (2018). He is currently working on a new monograph entitled *Iris Murdoch, Feminist*.

**Alice Pember** is a PhD researcher in the Department of Film Studies at Queen Mary, University of London. Her research examines philosophical approaches to the figure of the dancing girl in contemporary European cinema. She has published articles and film reviews in *Arty* and *Garageland* magazines and blogs for the Oxford Queer Studies Network. You can find her on twitter @alpember.

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

**Shauna Pitt** is currently studying for an MA in English Literature at the University of Chichester. She is interested in the relationship between the work of Tennyson and Murdoch and is working on her dissertation that considers traditional literature in new media.

**Daniel Read** completed his MA at Kingston University in 2014 with a dissertation entitled 'Psychopathy, Morality and Art in A Word Child'. Continuing his research at Kingston University, he is currently completing his PhD, titled 'The Problem of Evil and the Fiction and Philosophy of Iris Murdoch'.

**James Riley** is a graduate from the University of Chichester. His current research seeks to explore the relationship between Murdoch's writings and the theories brought about with the rise of psychoanalysis in the 20th Century. Primarily concerned with the ideas presented by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, he is intending to pursue a PhD investigating Murdoch's philosophy and its relation to psychoanalysis.

**Paula Scorrer** is a postgraduate student at the University of Chichester. She won the Hugo Donnelly Prize, 2018 for best dissertation for her work 'An Exploration of Rhetoric in *The Black Prince* and Beyond'.

**Dávid Sándor Szőke** is a PhD student at the University of Szeged, Hungary. His most recent essay 'The Search of Identity and the Process of Emasculation in Iris Murdoch's *A Severed Head*' appeared in *Tiszatáj Literary Journal*, Hungary. He is currently researching the influence of the German-speaking Jewish literature and culture on Iris Murdoch's early novels.

**Miklós Vetó** was Murdoch's final PhD student at Oxford, completing work on what was to be *The Religious Metaphysics of Simone Weil*. He became one of the world's leading experts in German Idealism. Now retired, he lives and writes in Paris.

**Rachael Wiseman** and **Clare MacCumhail** are philosophers at the Universities of Liverpool and Durham respectively, and Co-Directors of In Parenthesis ([www.womeninparenthesis.co.uk](http://www.womeninparenthesis.co.uk)). Research for this essay was supported by the British Academy. Clare is co-editor of a recent OUP collection *Perceptual Ephemera*. Rachael is the author of the Routledge *Guidebook to Anscombe's Intention*.









