

# 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 enquiry.

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

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# Editorial Preface

*Miles Leeson*

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IT GIVES ME GREAT PLEASURE TO INTRODUCE THIS GUEST-EDITED ISSUE OF THE *Iris Murdoch Review* dedicated to early career scholarship. I was delighted to be approached prior to the Centenary Conference last year by Rebecca Moden and Lucy Oulton, both of whom are researchers and emerging scholars at the Research Centre at Chichester. They had noted the growth in new lines of enquiry into Murdoch's work in the past five years, and it was clear that the range and diversity of approaches in recent scholarship warranted this special issue. The central essays published here by Daniel Read, Robert Murphy and Athanasios Dimakis cover a broad sweep of approaches and demonstrate the widening web of connections from which Murdoch studies now benefits. Lucy and Rebecca have produced an excellent overview of these essays, and indeed the entire edition, so I direct you to their introduction that follows this preface. This issue looks to the past with full reflections on the celebrations of Iris Murdoch's centenary year, and to the future with fresh approaches in Murdoch scholarship, new ventures emerging and the next conference on the horizon.

As those of us involved in academia are acutely aware, support for the Arts and Humanities has, in recent years, been rapidly depleted. The Iris Murdoch Society board is delighted, therefore, to announce the foundation of the Barbara Stevens Heusel Research Fund for Early Career Scholars. Information on the scholarships, and how to support the fund, is outlined towards the end of this edition, on page 115. Barbara is a founding member of the Iris Murdoch Society and was an early president. Both she and her husband Dennis Moore are keen to sustain new scholarship and we are very grateful to them.

For the first time in its history the Iris Murdoch Society has a patron. We were delighted that actor Annette Badland, who played in Murdoch's 'The Three Arrows', kindly agreed to take on this role following her appearance at the Centenary Conference. She has been much involved with Research Centre and other Murdoch events since then and we are grateful for her enthusiastic support for the Society.

As always, the quality of the reviews and reports presented here is exemplary. I am particularly thankful to Dávid Szóke for his loving obituary in memory of Murdoch's final PhD student, the philosopher Miklós Vető; to Anne Rowe for her detailed essay on one of the highlights of the centenary year – the publication of the six new editions

of Murdoch's novels by Penguin Vintage Classics; and to Kate Levey for her fascinating piece on the relationship between her mother, Brigid Brophy, and Murdoch – Kate builds on her essay in *Iris Murdoch: A Centenary Celebration* that was published last year and adds another dimension to one of Murdoch's closest friendships. As ever, my co-editors, Pamela Osborn and Frances White, have done sterling work, as well as mentoring Rebecca and Lucy as they put this edition together. Thanks also go to Dayna Miller for her detailed report from the Kingston University Archive – at the time of writing this was still closed due to COVID-19 but we look forward to it reopening in the autumn of this year. Meanwhile, we continue to produce regular e-Newsletters updating you with the latest developments in Murdoch studies, and our new venture, the Iris Murdoch Podcast, has had very positive reviews with listeners, and indeed guest contributors, from across the globe.

We are also pleased to include Liyan Zhou's reflections on her time spent at the Research Centre over the past year or so, and all of us who worked with her on her monograph project gained as much as she did from her work in progress. We very much look forward to seeing the finalised version in print and hope there will be an English translation at some point.

Last year's inaugural Summer School, held at the University of Chichester, was a resounding success with participants from the United Kingdom and United States and we had organised another, focusing on 'Murdoch and London', for June 2020. Although this was unavoidably cancelled, we look forward to restaging it in the Summer of 2022. Our plan is to alternate the Summer School with the Conference, so we have a major event each summer.

In closing, I would like to draw your eye to the Call for Papers for the Tenth International Conference to be held here in Chichester, 25–27 June 2021. All of us at the Centre look forward to continuing conversations initiated in Oxford last year. As Murdoch increases in academic popularity, we have maintained its three-day length to enable all those who wish to present new work to do so.

University of Chichester, July 2020

## Introduction

*Rebecca Moden and Lucy Oulton*

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RIISING TO HIS FEET AT ENNISTONE'S QUAKER MEETING HOUSE, WILLIAM Eastcote declares: 'My dear friends, we live in an age of marvels [...] Our homes are full of devices which would amaze our forebears. At the same time our beloved planet is ravaged by suffering and threatened by dooms'. As we compile this year's *Iris Murdoch Review* in lockdown conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic, Eastcote's words from *The Philosopher's Pupil* take on new meaning. Locking down has caused us to pause and appreciate the quite remarkable technological developments since Iris Murdoch published her first work almost 70 years ago, which allow the two of us to stay safely in our own homes 150 miles apart, conferring by text message, email and video conference, to edit this year's journal. Essays, reports and reviews have reached us from China, Denmark, France, Greece, Hungary, Sweden, the United States and all around the UK. We want, first of all, to thank all our contributors for their perseverance in these difficult times. Murdoch was inclined to be suspicious of technology, but we can certainly be grateful for our reliance on these marvellous devices that allow the *Iris Murdoch Review* to get to press on time this year.

Murdoch's life and work are currently undergoing a process of significant reassessment as, in true Murdochian spirit, the space in which they are debated continually expands. The celebration of Murdoch's centenary in 2019 has contributed to a sense of renewal in Murdoch studies. The commemorative highpoint was, of course, the Centenary Conference in July on which Miles Leeson reflects in this issue. The number of publications, conferences and events of this past year is evidence of burgeoning scholarly interest in Murdoch and, moreover, the ever-increasing eclecticism of this attention to her work.

This issue of the *Iris Murdoch Review* is primarily dedicated to showcasing the work of emerging Murdoch scholars. The essays by early career academics presented here enrich current scholarship by offering imaginative and innovative approaches to Murdoch. Her journals, unpublished poetry, personal letters and pocket notebooks, acquired in recent years by Kingston University Archive, continue to transform our picture of the novelist, the philosopher and the person, as well as opening up new and exciting lines of enquiry and inviting more diverse perspectives on her life and work.

Our cover image, a photograph of Murdoch taken at Duval Studios, Chiswick in the late 1940s, portrays a serious and resolute woman on the threshold of her career. At

this time she was an apprentice writer, suffering bouts of self-doubt and experiencing rejections by publishers. She was continually dissatisfied with her work and relentlessly scrutinised her shortcomings, pitting her ideas against each other in persistent debate with herself as she strained towards an unattainable standard of perfection. The image on the cover of this issue belies these deep insecurities, revealing instead the characteristic determination which would drive her on.

As numerous former students of Murdoch have testified, she interested herself keenly in those who were beginning their own careers and offered them her warm and dedicated support. One of those who benefited was Miklós Vető, forced to flee his country after participating in the Hungarian Uprising of 1956. He became a student of philosophy at Oxford and wrote his DPhil thesis on the religious metaphysics of Simone Weil under Murdoch's supervision, completing it in 1964. Murdoch and Vető developed an enduring friendship, and her letters to him (published in *Iris Murdoch Review* 9) are evidence of her exacting teaching, ceaseless encouragement and practical support. Vető became a renowned philosopher and historian of German idealism. His plenary address, 'Selfhood, Attention, Love: Themes from Simone Weil in the Philosophy of Iris Murdoch', was a memorable highlight of the Centenary Conference at St Anne's College, Oxford in July 2019. Miklós Vető died in January 2020 and, in this issue, Dávid Szőke remembers him with a fitting tribute to his humility and wisdom.

Among the many others whom Murdoch supported in the early stages of their careers, giving generously of her time, expertise and empathy, were the literary scholars and teachers Stephen Medcalf and A.D. Nuttall, the sculptor Rachel Fenner, the historian Julian Chrysostomides and the art lecturer David Morgan, all of whom went on to become extremely well respected in their fields. Jože Jančar, a medical student whom Murdoch had met in a refugee camp, desperately poor and about to abandon his studies, unexpectedly received a large cheque from her which enabled him to complete them. He eventually became an eminent psychologist, his career made possible by her generosity. It seems apt, then, that this issue of the *Iris Murdoch Review* is centred on the work of emerging scholars, in recognition and appreciation of the loving attention and commitment which Murdoch gave to so many individuals.

We have selected three essays by early career researchers that offer diverse and stimulating interpretations of Murdoch's novels and philosophy. Daniel Read, by means of a compelling analysis of the portrayal of George McCaffrey in *The Philosopher's Pupil*, reveals the influence of William Blake on Murdoch's moral vision. He observes striking correspondences between Murdoch and Blake which belie Murdoch's critique of Romanticism and her expressions of antipathy towards Blake in her early philosophy and her letters to Brigid Brophy and Rachel Fenner. George McCaffrey is often understood as a figure of evil but Read exposes the inadequacy of such an interpretation. Read presents a Blakean reading of George, the philosopher John Robert Rozanov and George's wife, Stella, which draws out their ambiguities,

explores the complexities of evil and emphasises the inherently dialectical nature of morality.

The relationship between Murdoch's philosophy and her fiction has, in recent years, received sustained scrutiny by critics, among them Miles Leeson (2010) and Niklas Forsberg (2013). Exploration of the ways in which Murdoch's novels might contest and equivocate the philosophy is revitalising debate and drawing out new readings of her work. Robert Murphy's contribution enhances this area of research. Murphy reveals ways in which Murdoch's early novels *Under the Net*, *The Flight from the Enchanter*, *The Bell* and *A Severed Head* engage with the ethics of existentialism, despite Murdoch's apparent rejection of this line of philosophical enquiry in the late 1950s. He contends that, in these novels, Murdoch merges existentialism with an ethics of alterity and difference more usually associated with deconstruction. Murphy further relates the disjointed interactions in Murdoch's novels to contemporary readers' experiences of enforced social distancing and isolation at this challenging time.

Athanasios Dimakis directs critical attention to imagery pertaining to vision and surveillance in *The Bell* and explores its complex moral implications. He interprets Nick Fawley as Murdoch's reimagining of the mythological Argus Panoptes, exercising unremitting surveillance over the community of Imber from his panopticon. Dimakis reinforces his analysis by foregrounding textual details that connect Toby Gashe with the god Hermes, slayer of Argus Panoptes. Dimakis makes a case for *The Bell's* significance in relation to contemporary society's preoccupation with the ethics of surveillance, and the acts of monitoring and being monitored.

Reviews, reports and other short pieces follow the three essays. We are delighted to include Anne Rowe's review of the new introductions commissioned for six Murdoch novels that were republished in Vintage Classics editions to mark her centenary. The introductions are written by a selection of highly respected contemporary writers including the broadcaster, filmmaker and journalist Bidisha and the novelist and poet Sophie Hannah. As Rowe reveals, the introductions offer fresh, thought-provoking perspectives on the novels and will undoubtedly attract a new generation of readers to Murdoch as well as appealing to those already familiar with her work. Six further book reviews are testament to the far-reaching influence of Murdoch scholarship. They feature recently published work by Lucy Bolton, a memoir by Peter Conradi, and edited collections by Nora Hämäläinen and Gillian Dooley, Judith Maltby and Alison Shell, Richard Canning and Gerri Kimber, and Kate McLoughlin. We are grateful to Kate Levey for the short memoir piece on her recollections of the enduring, if at times perplexing, relationship between Murdoch and her mother, Brigid Brophy.

Reports on key Murdoch-related events since the Centenary Conference include the launch of the new Vintage Classics editions at The Second Shelf bookstore; Lucy Bolton and Rebecca Moden's presentation on Murdoch's relationship to painting in philosophy and life at the National Portrait Gallery; Lucy Oulton and Frances White's lecture on Iris

Murdoch and her environmental imagination at the Université de Picardie Jules Verne, Amiens; and the performance of *Art and Eros* at Oxford Brookes University.

We are very pleased to publish Liyan Zhou's reflections on the year she spent at the University of Chichester while undertaking research for her book on Murdoch's mysticism. We are grateful to Pamela Osborn for her diligent recording of Murdoch's many appearances in print, on the airwaves and in the media over the past year. On that note, we trust you have been tuning in to the Iris Murdoch Research Centre's new podcast series, hosted by Miles Leeson and available at soundcloud.com. Murdoch scholars are, as ever, greatly indebted to Dayna Miller, Archivist of the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University, who reports on her complex and painstaking preparations, in collaboration with Frances White, for last year's exhibition installations at Oxford and in Kingston. Miller also offers insight into the feat of logistics involved in moving the Archive to its new premises whilst trying to keep the archive service operating – a move complicated further by the sudden and untimely closure of this and all UK universities at the start of the pandemic.

It remains for us to thank the editorial team of the *Iris Murdoch Review* – Miles Leeson, Frances White and Pamela Osborn – for reviewing and reporting to us on abstracts and essays, and more generally for their support, insights and wise words; our copy-editor Heather Robbins for her meticulous eye; and typesetter Noemi Vallone for bringing this issue to print in unusually challenging conditions.

## Evil and Violence: Murdoch's Ambiguous Moral Vision and her Engagement with the Writings of William Blake in *The Philosopher's Pupil*

*Daniel Read*

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IN *THE PHILOSOPHER'S PUPIL* (1983), THE PUPIL OF THE TITLE, GEORGE MCCAFFREY, is described as a 'monster', a 'fool' and a 'bully', as 'nasty', 'terrible' and 'wicked'.<sup>1</sup> Many of these descriptions, which are employed by a wide range of characters, including George himself, are synonymous with evil and violence. Evil and violence, however, are ambiguous words capable of fluid meanings.<sup>2</sup> Violent behaviour involves 'physical force intended to hurt, damage, or kill' someone or something; it is, like that which is described as evil, something 'harmful', 'undesirable' or 'unpleasant'.<sup>3</sup> These definitions not only intersect with questions of morality but also with philosophical and religious concerns. The philosopher John Kekes defines evil as an action that causes 'undeserved harm' to its victim and sees it as an affront to humanity and moral judgement and thus to 'the fundamental goal of morality: promoting human welfare'.<sup>4</sup> Alternatively, James Aho, a sociologist who has written on the religious problem of evil, argues that, '[w]hether incarnate in human form or in bestial guise, evil presents itself to our consciousness as horrifying and beguiling, terrifying and wonderful', as 'something both awful and enchanting'.<sup>5</sup> The ears of most Murdochian critics would prick up at the sound of this last word; to state that her *oeuvre* contains a great number of enchanter figures, often powerful and violent men, is to offer a truism. This figure, to borrow a phrase from Miles Leeson, usually 'holds the other characters within their grasp by fear and sexual intrigue'.<sup>6</sup> George may not be the enchanter proper of *The Philosopher's Pupil* – a role perhaps more accurately filled by the philosopher of the title, John Robert Rozanov – yet he does illustrate, according to the narrator, 'how glamorous a thoroughly nasty man can seem' (*PP* 35).

This essay explores how George McCaffrey's portrayal as a glamorously violent figure is symbolic of the fact that evil can be both 'awful and enchanting' and argues that

Murdoch's ambiguous picture of the moral life in *The Philosopher's Pupil* draws on the ethical vision of William Blake, an author toward whom she displayed an antipathy, most notably in her letters. The essay begins by illustrating how George's enchanting violence oversimplifies his role as a figure of evil within the narrative and obscures rationalisation for his acts, which resonates with Blake's picture of the moral life. The central part of the essay finds that, despite Murdoch's epistolary and philosophical critiques of Blake and the Romantic movement within which his writings are placed, both writers share a similar moral vision. Finally, the essay concludes by elucidating a Blakean reading that focuses on the self-centred characters of Stella McCaffrey, George's wife, and John Robert Rozanov. Arguably, *The Philosopher's Pupil* belies Murdoch's disagreements with Blake by illustrating the problems caused by placing limits on the unique value of the individual and on the complexity of the moral life, with their attendant contraries of good and evil, innocence and experience, reason and passion.

Many instances within *The Philosopher's Pupil* illustrate the fact that George is a volatile and sometimes dangerous figure. Brian McCaffrey, George's brother, notes that he is 'violent' in his marriage, 'gets into rages', 'hits people' and enjoys destroying things (PP 46–7). On one occasion he escapes the charge of 'grievous bodily harm' (PP 53) with the aid of the family lawyer. The reader is reminded five times that George lost his job at Ennistone's Museum because he destroyed a 'small but very precious collection of Roman glass' (PP 14, 35, 81, 144, 483). As evidence of the fact that he was even 'a little horror when he was a boy', Brian also recounts a curious and disturbing tale to his wife, Gabriel, of how the young George 'enjoyed drowning those kittens' (PP 57–8). Despite Brian arguing that the kittens 'had to be drowned' (PP 58), he nevertheless sees George's acts as proof that, like an extreme criminal, he 'might do – almost anything' (PP 47). This vision, shared by many of the townspeople of Ennistone, obscures the status of his attempted, rather than actual, murders of Stella and, later, Rozanov and paints, instead, a deserving picture of George as a villain.

While George may be capable of cruelty, a great deal of his violence is fuelled by both his fantasies and his engagement with the ideas of others. George not only fantasises about doing 'awful things' (PP 362) but also has macabre dreams, including a recurring one of drowning babies (PP 91). This dream echoes one of the 'Proverbs of Hell' listed in William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: 'Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires'.<sup>7</sup> Blake's ostensibly amoral sentiment, which critiques the sublimation of passionate action, resonates with the philosophical ideas by which George was enthralled as a student. Rozanov's Nietzschean interest in the necessary 'duty' to go 'beyond good and evil' (PP 196) instigated George's fascination with amorality: 'You destroyed my belief in good and evil,' insists George, 'you were Mephistopheles to my Faust' (PP 146). George attempts to rekindle this relationship by linking his apparent attempt to murder Stella with a philosophical speculation that 'crime is like a duty' (PP 145). While Rozanov 'rais[es] his eyebrows' interestedly at George's declarations, he

hypocritically repudiates George's claims 'without animation' (PP 144–45) and denies the impact his captivating role as teacher had on George's amorality.<sup>8</sup> Such revelations problematise the moral judgement of George by equivocating the amoral heritage of his physical and symbolic acts of violence, which are impacted not only by his predisposition to fantasy but also by Rozanov's amoral philosophy.

The somewhat unreliable narrator of *The Philosopher's Pupil*, who calls himself N so as to remain a 'shadow' in the narrative (PP 23), draws specific attention to the complexity of evil, to the townspeople's superstitious fascination with it and to the difficulty involved in interpreting violent behaviour.<sup>9</sup> Ennistonians believe their Roman Baths, and its connected hot spring called Lud's Rill, to be 'a source of a kind of unholy restlessness' (PP 26) or 'moral unrest' that suggests the presence of a 'deep psychological or moral disorder' (PP 32–3). Following these superstitions, the townspeople see the eruptions of Lud's Rill, which coincide with the beginning of George's 'unhealthy mood' (PP 35), as 'a veridical harbinger of the onset of a funny time' (PP 34). Despite the malaise that the townspeople acknowledge in George's behaviour, they nevertheless benefit from, or enjoy, his violent outbursts. Alex notices 'the gleam in their eyes' (PP 46) as members of the town discuss her son; Brian believes, echoing Stella's earlier declaration that George is 'rather popular' (PP 10), that he reveals the extent to which 'people like horrible men' (PP 58); and George, like his fellow Ennistonians, revels in his appearance as a villain: 'I'm more popular than ever now that I've killed my wife', he sardonically admits to his mistress Diane (PP 74). Early in *The Philosopher's Pupil*, N declares that the narrative will be driven by such speculations and superstitions:

It was interesting that almost everyone, at once and on no evidence, took it for granted that George had driven the car into the canal on purpose, though opinions differed about whether or not he had intended to kill his wife. Serious citizens and prudes who did not care for this kind of irresponsible speculation said that all this showed was how glamorous a thoroughly nasty man can seem to be. Others, however much they disapproved, saw George in a different light. It would be an exaggeration to say that almost every man in Ennistone envied George's liberation from morals and almost every woman believed she could save him from himself, but it is an exaggeration worth recording. (PP 35)

These reflections reinforce not only George's willing characterisation as an attractive, morally liberated 'monster' but also the enchanting nature of evil. George becomes a 'scapegoat' (PP 53): a passive symbol upon whom the townspeople can offload their own fears, superstitions and, indeed, their wishes for evil-doing. Gabriel is one of the few characters to note society's complicity in George's appearance as a figure of evil: her suggestion that 'we are all to blame' (PP 57) is echoed later when she argues that 'we



all exaggerate what he does, everyone exaggerates, we pounce on every little thing and call him wicked. [...] It's like a conspiracy' (PP 483). Like N's earlier reflections, Gabriel's vision illustrates how the universally enchanting nature of evil drives a fascination with wrongdoing that, while devolving into exaggeration and 'spiteful gossip' (PP 414), obscures other rationalisations for wickedness. While George may be volatile and is capable of both legitimately and illegitimately arousing fear, his appearance as a figure of evil within the narrative has as much to do with those surrounding him as it does with himself.

Murdoch's inclusion of N's reflections on the moral life, human wickedness and gossip invites the reader to engage with various rationalisations for George's violence. Is he an evil 'monster' as some characters believe? Are the townspeople complicit in his violence? Does being treated like a villain, being both glamorised and shunned by society, affect George's personality? Is he too eager to participate in his own fantasies, or self-mythologisation, as revealed in his philosophical discussions with Rozanov? Such implicit rhetorical questions allow the reader to reflect on the internal and external dilemmas that drive George's actions. There are, as N concludes at the end of the novel, many 'chance "triggers" which may determine our most fateful actions' (PP 556) and, therefore, many acts that may or may not be responsible for motivating George's violence. Arguably, George's amoral disposition and his disturbed mental state are affected not only by the enchanting nature of evil that drives Ennistone's mythologisation and superstitious scrutiny of him but also by the caging, controlling and negating actions of characters within the narrative that echo Blake's warnings about the moral life. Blake saw all forms of cruelty, especially those which hinder emotional understanding and a respect for autonomy, as an affront to the individual's moral significance. Following Blake's moral vision, the two characters that most significantly contribute to George's disturbed mental state are Rozanov, who denies the cherished philosophy lessons that influenced George's amorality, and Stella, whose emotionally fraught relationship with George is marked by apathy and vanity. The aim in following Blake's moral vision will not be to absolve George of blame for his undoubted cruelty but to reveal how an unquestioned acceptance of his wickedness neglects the evils of those around him. Before launching into this discussion, however, it is pertinent to confront Murdoch's opinions of Blake and Romanticism and to consider the compatibility of their respective moral visions.

Murdoch engages with Blake's sometimes controversial writings in almost all of her works. She not only critiques his ideas in her early philosophy and letters but also references both his artistic style and his poetry in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992) as well as nearly one quarter of her fictional works, including *The Unicorn* (1963), *The Time of the Angels* (1964), *Bruno's Dream* (1969), *The Black Prince* (1973) and *Nuns and Soldiers* (1980). Despite Murdoch's numerous allusions to his works, critics of Murdoch's fiction and philosophy have rarely explored her engagement with Blake.

Such a lacuna exists because Murdoch critiques the Romantic movement within which Blake is located. In Murdoch's moral philosophy, the Romantics are criticised for 'the weakness of [their] theory of personality'; their ignorance of moral absolutes and their enjoyment of fantasy appear to praise an existentialist moral solipsism that has led to regrettable 'changes in the portrayal of character in novels'.<sup>10</sup> Murdoch does, however, as critics such as Megan Laverty, Daniel Majdiak and Gabriel Pearson attest, engage with Romantic ideas and writers in her fiction and philosophy, including some of those about whom she is most critical.<sup>11</sup> Such a paradox appears in her reference to Blake in 'T. S. Eliot as a Moralist' (1958). While Murdoch praises Eliot for reintroducing 'certain kinds of moral standards into literary criticism' (EM 161) that highlight the importance of ideals, language and truth, Blake is listed among the Romantic progenitors of the culturally and morally bankrupt liberalism that so troubled Eliot. This criticism, however, does not sit well with modern commentators, for whom the writings of many Romantics, including Blake, are not amoral. The Romantics, as Laurence Lockeridge argues, are neither moral subjectivists nor relativists; for them, '[t]he imagination is not an exclusively subjective power; its sympathy leads the self toward the world. Its ultimate moral function, beyond benevolence, is love'.<sup>12</sup> This vision of Romanticism chimes with Murdoch's praise of 'art and morals' as 'the discovery of reality' (EM 215) and as a loving attention to the world including the contingently existing person or, to echo the Blakean terminology used in George Steiner's preface to *Existentialists and Mystics*, the 'minute particular' (EM xv). The writings of both Blake and Murdoch thus combat the evils of inattention by highlighting the value of liberalism, humanism and art, in whose ambiguous vision the individual can be respectfully and lovingly portrayed.

Murdoch's sympathies with Romanticism are subtly expressed in 'T. S. Eliot as a Moralist', where she is careful to distinguish her own liberal vision of art from Eliot's critical vision of the liberal environment within which the Romantics flourished. Eliot believes that the central moral problem that literature faces, as Murdoch explains, can be traced to liberalism, Puritanism and Romanticism, which have 'inspired' an 'emotional individualism' where 'every man may now invent his own religion' (EM 162). For Eliot, Blake is indicative of these problems. His works lack 'a framework of accepted and traditional ideas' and, in being 'too much occupied with [his own] ideas', Blake's works exhibit 'a certain meanness of culture'.<sup>13</sup> Murdoch's essay, however, argues that Eliot's vision of culture is too narrow: 'It may be that the Christian tradition must be the salvation of the West; but to argue this too narrowly is to neglect aspects of liberalism which are, to put it mildly, worth preserving' (EM 169). Here Murdoch implicitly reverses Eliot's criticism of Blake and his neglect of liberalism: Eliot is right to criticise 'the self-absorption of the individual', but he is wrong to discount liberalism and Romanticism on these grounds. Murdoch's vision of liberalism, as she outlines it in 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited', is more accurately reflected by the 'great' nineteenth-century novelists who present a 'loving toleration of, indeed delight in, manifold different modes

of being' (EM 277). These artists represent a form of liberalism that can be detached from Eliot's criticism, where compassion, freedom and love drive the creator's struggle for an artwork that represents the value of 'knowing and understanding and respecting things quite other than ourselves' (EM 284). Such a moral task is, interestingly, one that Murdoch perceives in Eliot's poetry: his writings 'penetrate our anxious trivial world with such a profound compassion' (EM 169), she argues, and this imaginative task 'is, of course, to take up a Romantic attitude' (EM 170). While Murdoch does not directly rescue Blake from Eliot's argument, where he appears as a straw man for Eliot's limited vision of liberalism, her argument nevertheless mediates his criticisms and reinstates a compassionate liberal vision of literature within which there is a place for the imaginative task of Romanticism.

Despite Murdoch's reserved sympathy toward the imaginative task of Romanticism, she goes on to express her disagreements with Blake in her letters to Brigid Brophy, fellow novelist and intimate friend, and to her student Rachel Fenner, whose dissertation Murdoch supervised in the 1960s. In June 1966, Murdoch agreed with Brophy that 'much of Blake's prophecy is "false prophecy" & damn dangerous stuff'.<sup>14</sup> In contrast to Brophy and Murdoch, however, Fenner praised Blake's Romantic vision; her dissertation, entitled 'William Blake and the Problem of Dualism', was based on the theme of 'The Imagination as a Moral Tool' and contained references not only to Blake but also to Jacob Boehme, Plato and Thomas Treherne.<sup>15</sup> The letters between Murdoch and Fenner, concerning Fenner's dissertation, offer Murdoch's most significant engagement with Blake: Murdoch not only provided Fenner with a reading list, for which she drew on Brophy's help, but also expressed philosophical and theological concerns about Blake. In a letter dated 9 November 1964, Murdoch defines his morality as a form of monism akin to that which can be found in 'Eastern religions' where 'all things, good, bad, plural etc. somehow blend into a natural unity' and, while she acknowledges that this is an 'oversimplified' definition of Blake, she goes on to argue that her own philosophical 'assumption that God and Good must connect' problematises his 'monistic theology'.<sup>16</sup> Here, Murdoch develops a more substantial criticism of Blake than that which appears in her essay on 'T. S. Eliot as a Moralist' published a few years earlier and, more importantly, suggests that her own philosophy invalidates his moral claims.

Murdoch's comparison of Blake's morality with her own, however, reveals her inconsistent use of the term 'monism' and, crucially, offers a definition of Blake's morality that has since been debunked. Her reference to a philosophical 'assumption' most likely refers to the ideas that would inform 'On "God" and "Good"' (1969) – which was written two years after her letter to Fenner – where Murdoch suggests, to complicate matters, that her 'own temperament inclines to monism' (EM 340).<sup>17</sup> Murdoch outlines a monist vision in this essay akin to Christianity where goodness retains its sovereign moral value. Conversely, in the letter to Fenner, the label of monism is used to constrain a moral dualism: Blake's good and evil are depicted as equally powerful moral categories

contained within a single moral struggle and, thus, blend into one another. Lockeridge acknowledges the ease with which such an interpretation of Blake arises: his works, he argues, appear to 'say that everything negative in human existence – death, hypocrisy, envy, pestilence, and tyranny – constitutes one necessary pole in an indefinitely extensible process' that leads to 'a morally neutralized process of negatives and positives, or worse, some version of commonplace adolescent relativism'.<sup>18</sup> Both *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and *The Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, however, are defined not by the unification of opposites but by the tension between two contrary states: 'Without Contraries is no progression', Blake writes in the former, 'Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human Experience'.<sup>19</sup> Following this view, Blake's dialectical moral vision is balanced between dualism and monism. Evil must be acknowledged, but it does not simply represent a substantive moral force whose meaning is blended into goodness. Instead, for Blake, as Lockeridge explains, 'evil is accidental, not essential; imagination can ultimately triumph over negation and human freedom over constraint'.<sup>20</sup> Blake's writings, therefore, do not conform to Murdoch's label of monism and can be divorced from her critiques of Romanticism.

When confronting Murdoch's contrast of Blake's morality to her own and contextualising her definition of Blake within modern interpretations of his work, the reader can see that her moral vision is in fact nearer to Blake's than she countenances. Blake's works, as Lockeridge argues, present an 'embattled dialectic' that 'point[s] to a new state of being', which 'promotes the energies of doing in acts of wrath and violence' as well as acts of benevolence, forgiveness, joy, justice, mercy and love.<sup>21</sup> The possibility of evil should be kept in check, not through a passive denial of it, but through an active acceptance of it, as illustrated by the 'Proverbs of Hell' in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which include:

The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom.  
 He who desires but acts not, breeds pestilence.  
 The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction.  
 You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough.  
 Exuberance is Beauty.  
 Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires.<sup>22</sup>

Blake's intent here is not, as Murdoch claims, to 'blend' moral categories or choices into 'a natural unity', but to reassert the presence of passionate actions such as violence, repulsion or hatred, which had been divorced from their opposites by dualist and contemporary visions of the moral life.<sup>23</sup> Blake notably critiques the Bible and the writings of Bacon, Newton and Locke: the former conforms to a dualist 'error' by portraying the body and soul as two separate 'principles', while the latter fail to capture the reality of the moral experience by denying 'Inspiration & Vision'.<sup>24</sup> In his earliest works, *All*

*Religions are One* and *There is No Natural Religion*, Blake aligns 'Poetic Genius' with moral vision: 'Man's desires', he writes, 'are limited by his perceptions' and, 'He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God'.<sup>25</sup> Blake's 'Poetic Genius' symbolises the creative and passionate faculty of vision that is central to human development and moral insight and his repeated use of the word 'contraries' engenders an inherently dialectical picture of the moral life. Moral improvement is not dictated by a separation of good and evil into discrete moral categories, but by attending to their existence within the ambiguous continuum of the moral life.

The philosophical discussions that Rozanov holds with Father Bernard Jacoby and George in *The Philosopher's Pupil* are perfused with Blakean concern about how to picture the moral life, with its necessary inclusion of evil. On the surface, Rozanov's belief that goodness is problematised by the inclusion of evil seems to argue in favour of the kind of Christian monism supported by Murdoch in 'On "God" and "Good"', where the good remains entirely separate from evil. 'If the holy even knows of the demonic', Rozanov explains to Father Bernard, 'it is lost' (PP 196). As Father Bernard questions him, however, Rozanov's monist belief in the need for good to remain untainted by the demonic devolves into amorality. The illusive nature of the demonic, Rozanov claims, illustrates the need 'to go beyond good and evil' (PP 196); this task would allow the individual to find a physical 'proof' of the 'riddle' of morality, such as 'suicide' or 'murder', but in so doing would 'make everything else permissible' (PP 197). Unlike Rozanov, for whom the existence of evil ultimately negates morality, Blake's vision captures the complexity of the moral life, where developing an awareness of the tension between good and evil requires imagination, a creative and passionate faculty that had been deemed dangerous and demonic. Rozanov's heated conversation with his granddaughter, Hattie Meynell, later in the novel, reveals that he, like those critiqued by Blake, denies the value of imagination. 'No, no, not there,' Rozanov argues, 'we will not go *there* [...] where everything switches and starts to run the other way. No, I will not imagine' (PP 526). Rozanov's discussions of the moral life speak to both Blake's and Murdoch's visions of morality: Rozanov's inability to move away from the temptations of evil – in his case, his incestuous impulses – toward the guiding light of goodness is motivated by his fear of the passionate and fundamental faculty of imagination. Unlike Rozanov, Murdoch shares with Blake an awareness of how single-minded moral thinking and an ignorance of the power of the imagination limits moral autonomy. In *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, she argues that the human tendency to 'grasp ourselves as unities' is problematic: in fearing 'plurality, diffusion, senseless accident [and] chaos', we want to 'transform what we cannot dominate or understand into something reassuring and familiar' and into the 'old and prized unities and deep instinctive beliefs thought to be essential to human life'.<sup>26</sup> One of the ways out of this limited perspective, for Murdoch, is an awareness of the power of the imagination, which represents 'the searching, joining, light-seeking, semi-figurative nature of the mind's work' (MGM 322) that allows

the moral agent 'not to escape the world but to join it' (EM 374). Here, as in Blake's 'embattled dialectic' which highlights the inherent danger of ignoring the power of the Senses and the Infinite variety of the world, Murdoch's vision stresses the fundamental role of the imagination and the importance of acknowledging the plurality and diffusion of life, where the individual needs to attend to both good and evil, to both the positive and chaotic aspects of the moral life.

Blake, therefore, is not an amoral Romantic writer whose vision blends good and evil; for him, as for Murdoch, the individual requires active, positive imaginative energies, even violent forces, for moral development.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Murdoch uses similarly militant or revolutionary language in her discussions of morality and literature. 'Good novels', she argues, 'concern the fight between good and evil' (MGM 97) and, especially in the case of her own fiction, a fight against 'the selfishness which is more natural to [human beings], together with how this is sometimes overcome'.<sup>28</sup> Blake's picture of morality similarly praises an attention toward others away from the self: in his works, the dangers of selfishness and vanity are illustrated by the reprehensible acts of constraint and negation. In the marginalia to Lavater's *Aphorisms of Man*, which are, according to Lockeridge, 'the most succinct expression of Blake's moral views', Blake argues that:

To hinder another is not an act it is the contrary it is a restraint on action both in ourselves & in the person hinderd. for he who hinders another omits his own duty. at the time / Murder is Hindering Another Theft is Hindering Another Backbiting. Undermining Circumventing & whatever is Negative is Vice.<sup>29</sup>

These evil activities symbolise the moral problems explored within *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and 'The Tyger', from *The Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, the first of which repeatedly attests the moral dangers caused by a 'passive' attitude that negates the 'contraries' that are 'necessary to Human existence', the second of which critiques those who would seek to cage others or restrain their autonomy.<sup>30</sup> Here, unlike the self-indulgent Romantic writings appraised by Murdoch, Blake's writings facilitate the imagination in its fight against the limiting powers of fantasy and vanity which can both, as Murdoch argues in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 'imprison the mind, impeding new understanding, new interests and affections, [as well as] possibilities of fruitful and virtuous action' (MGM 322). Both writers not only exhibit an awareness of the inherent plurality of the human being and the importance of action (perhaps, even violent action) in the moral life but also praise imagination, an attention to the individual and the 'unutterable particularity' of the Other (EM 215).

In view of this shared moral task, *The Philosopher's Pupil* is arguably Murdoch's most Blakean novel, containing explicit references to his writings and implicit allusions to his picture of the morality. As in *The Songs of Innocence and of Experience*

where Blake contrasts the tiger with the lamb, Murdoch contrasts George with his younger half-brother, Tom McCaffrey, a carefree, 'young, unspoilt and "rather sweet"' (PP 118) twenty-year-old man, frequently noted for his 'innocent' happiness (PP 198).<sup>31</sup> Conversely, George is a restless and troubled figure, often seen 'padding and pacing' (PP 76), 'loping on dark paws' (PP 122), 'as a strong wild animal might move in a cage, walking with unnecessary energy' (PP 301). Following Murdoch's exotic animalistic imagery, George quotes 'The Tyger' in response to Diane, who implores him to relax: 'I'm too restless,' he claims, 'tiger, tiger, burning bright' (PP 302). In Blake's mythopoetic vision, according to Northrup Frye and S. Foster Damon, respectively, the tiger's fire symbolises 'imagination' and 'the creative spirit of love'.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, in *The Philosopher's Pupil*, George's heart beats 'in tune' with the 'vibration' of Ennystone's Baths (PP 296), the town's symbolic centre of not only moral restlessness but also creativity and love (see PP 25, 32). The sublimation of such creative energies is critiqued in 'The Tyger', where the alteration of the opening rhetorical question, 'What immortal hand or eye, / Could frame thy fearful symmetry', to 'Dare frame thy fearful symmetry' in the final line, illustrates Blake's twofold moral vice of denying the role of passion in the moral life and caging, framing or hindering the moral autonomy of the other.<sup>33</sup> Murdoch echoes these Blakean vices in *The Philosopher's Pupil*, where Stella shuts down George's emotional autonomy and contributes to his appearance as a figure of evil; she not only displays coercive and passive aggressive tendencies but also a concern with vanity that, as with Rozanov, generates emotional apathy.

In *The Philosopher's Pupil* Murdoch explores the universality of hubris, a defiant self-confidence shared not only by Stella but also Father Bernard, George, Tom and, most frequently, Rozanov. 'John Robert was an arrogant independent eccentric' individual, N explains, who 'blundered uncalculatingly though life ready, in pursuit of his own goals, to face men's indifference, incomprehension and dislike' (PP 413). Rozanov displays such self-assured apathy when he ridicules and spurns George's intelligence by calling him 'a dull dog', 'an ordinary dull mediocre egotist' and 'a clown' (PP 224) and suggests that George 'has an entirely illusory view of [their] relationship' (PP 147). While Rozanov denies their bond, and even George's 'exist[ence]' as a person (PP 224), this does not mean to say that there is nothing linking them, as George affirms: 'There is structure! How can you deny it? There is! we are human beings! You taught me philosophy and I love you' (PP 225). Father Bernard's physical and verbal interruption of this 'battle' underlines the apathy caused by Rozanov's hubris. Seeing George's 'defeat', Father Bernard spontaneously kisses him and, after George has left, implores Rozanov to give George 'any signal of kindness' (PP 227). 'Just a little gentleness', he explains, 'could help George so much' (PP 227). For Rozanov, however, such empathy is 'banal' and worthy of 'contempt' and, quoting Dante's warning to Virgil, he tells Father Bernard '*Guarda e passa*', look and pass on (PP 227). Father Bernard's forthright denial of this 'cruel' Dantean indifference reveals his awareness

of the dangers of vanity, whose self-centred vision obscures the 'gentleness' and 'kindness' necessary to loving attention (PP 227).

When George later claims that Stella shows 'no tenderness, no gentleness, no forgiveness' (PP 489), Murdoch gives to him a phrase that implicitly echoes Father Bernard's awareness of how the inseparable moral faults of apathy and hubris hinder sympathetic attachment to others. Stella's behaviour within her marriage lacks 'the language of tenderness': she was 'entirely unsentimental about George', she 'could not conceal her strength' and she 'never soothed or accepted George's manner of being himself. Strength and love were one for Stella, love redeeming strength, power corrupting love' (PP 79). Stella's controlling, emotionally distant behaviour within her marriage is partly understandable: 'Stella tried to conceal George's domestic violence, just as she tried (vainly) to conceal his infidelities' (PP 52). His violence includes hitting his wife (PP 13), ostensibly trying to drown her (PP 14), kicking her (PP 17) and breaking her belongings, including her prized Japanese netsuke (PP 140, 495, 512). Such violent actions, and Stella's attempt to conceal them, appear to prove N's later claim that '[m]any men are violent (the sealed doors of houses conceal how many)' (PP 80). This gendered commentary on the role of empathy and power within the institution of marriage, however, is undermined by Stella's behaviour within the narrative. Later in the novel, she admits that, 'I did provoke him. I taunted him about Rozanov. If he ever did kill me it would be accidental' (PP 364).

While George may, more often than not, be portrayed as the central figure of evil in the novel, Stella's behaviour within their marriage presents striking, albeit sometimes intangible, examples of cruelty. Stella is not the weak figure many townspeople believe her to be; she is not, as George sarcastically notes, 'long-suffering Stella, the virtuous wife' (PP 12). For George, Stella is a 'cold – cold – beast' (PP 488), an introspective, passive witness to his pain, and the discomfort she causes leads him to question the validity of their marriage (PP 12, 489–90). George repeatedly draws attention to Stella's 'tricks' and 'bloody power mania' (PP 10) and is disturbed by her composure during their arguments: 'You provoke me so that you can blame me' (PP 10), he claims; 'You humiliate me in order to love me' (PP 490); 'everything about you' is 'power, power, contempt, contempt [...] – it's common mean spite and jealousy' (PP 491). Unlike George's volatile physical violence, Stella's behaviour corresponds with bullying, which flourishes on an 'imbalance of power' and includes passive aggressive markers such as ambiguous communication, blaming, obstructing and victimisation.<sup>34</sup> Stella's responses to George are controlled and unemotional: she calls him farcical and 'idiotic' (PP 10–11) and admits that 'I might say I hated you but it wouldn't be true. I guard my tongue. [...] I've switched off my feelings' (PP 12). When Stella does display emotion in the narrative, her tears issue more from a lack of control than from emotional engagement. Gabriel, who had 'never before seen her crying or even imagined her crying' (PP 17), witnesses Stella's tears in hospital, as she recovers from 'severe shock' (PP 18). The reappearance of these

tears when George arrives at the hospital leaves Stella feeling 'very anxious to stop. She regarded crying as a kind of rather shameful and unusual disease' (PP 21). On the surface, these moments disprove George's claim that Stella 'never cr[ies] like a real woman' (PP 10), but the fact that her unwanted 'accursed wild tears' (PP 107) are either involuntary or motivated by a feeling of weakness resonates with George's critique that 'nothing touches you, nothing' (PP 10). Such emotional control and lack of empathy reinforce Stella's passive aggression. These traits, moreover, align Stella with other characters in Murdoch's *oeuvre* – such as Nan Mor in *The Sandcastle* (1957), Emily McHugh in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* (1974) or Mother May in *The Good Apprentice* (1985) – whose similarly psychopathic traits foster their dominance and narcissism.<sup>35</sup>

Murdoch invites the reader to be wary of Stella throughout *The Philosopher's Pupil* with images that highlight her power and superiority, some of which implicitly echo Blake's works. Her dominant appearance within the narrative, like George's portrayal as a villain, is reinforced by the characters around her. George notes that she is 'grand like [...] a princess' (PP 22). The sight of her in hospital prompts Tom to ask why she is not 'booted and spurred' (PP 109); usually, he explains later in the narrative, she is 'beautiful' and 'strong' like an 'Egyptian Queen' (PP 334). Brian sees her as a 'brave strong woman' (PP 483), as 'a cut above' the rest of them like 'royalty' (PP 514). While those that respect Stella often draw on noble imagery to highlight her enchanting strength, the same images also reveal her dangerous and wilful exertion of power. Ruby, the reader is unequivocally informed, 'did not like Stella, whom she regarded as the sole cause of George's misfortunes' (PP 105), and Gabriel sees Stella as a 'noble ridiculous person' (PP 19), whose love is 'made of idealism and awful self-confidence' (PP 53). For George, Stella's behaviour aligns her with a morally ambiguous range of figures: a 'buddha', a 'devil' (PP 10), a 'policewoman' (PP 79) and even, echoing a famous image by Blake, 'a leech, a flea, a blood-sucking parasite' (PP 10). Blake's monstrous figure in 'The Ghost of a Flea' stands proud holding a cup in its hand ready to capture the blood of its victim; both flea and vampire, its eyes shine with a bloodthirsty instinct. The repellent image of Blake's parasite, which reflects George's earlier accusation that Stella was 'quietly pouring all [his] blood into [her] body' (PP 10), is echoed by Brian's later revision of his opinion of Stella's nobility. At the end of the novel, rather than witnessing the enchanting woman he and many others have grown accustomed to, Brian is confronted with a changed figure:

Stella looked older, her face thinner. [...] Her dark immaculate hair rose [...] above her brow, like to a crown or ceremonial helmet. Her clever mouth [...] was calm. Her dark eyes gleamed with a light which Brian had but rarely seen in them before, not a quiet communicative luminosity, but a fanatical light, a light of will. She was to him an alien, a phenomenon, a kind of being whom he absolutely could not understand. (PP 514)

Here, Stella's eyes gleam like the figure represented in Blake's 'The Ghost of a Flea' with a 'fanatical', wilful gaze. As Brian reflects more deeply on Stella's curious visage, he becomes aware of her danger: '[S]he's a witch', he thought, 'She's worse than George. I do believe she's capable of murder. What is she waiting for?' (PP 515). Stella's resolve to 'wait and see' (PP 515) does not represent an attentive, patient, loving attitude but an indifferent, silent exertion of willpower.

Stella's vision of her marriage reveals an awareness of her emotional coldness – including her silence about the death of their son, Rufus, who was killed by her 'carelessness and stupidity' (PP 359) – and an ignorance of its impact on George's mental state and his ostensibly villainous appearance. In her conversation with N, she explains that,

Of course I feel the loss of Rufus every second, that death is the air I breathe, I relive that accident ... But that has got mixed up with ... George and ... that's extra ... [...] It was impossible to talk about it afterwards [...]. George never asked for the details and I never told them, except for saying, oh – very vaguely – what happened. (PP 359)

Although Stella's examination of her grief is punctuated by ellipses, her preoccupation with her own reactions to the loss of Rufus, and her seeming unwillingness to communicate with George, indicate a narcissistic displacement of grief. Rather than empathise with George's plight, or submit to her own grief, she prefers to control both herself and George. 'Vanity,' she reflects earlier in the novel, 'I am stiffened by it, it is my last shred of virtue not to be seen to break down. I married George out of vanity, and I have stayed with him out of vanity. George was a vast mistake, but he was her mistake, and in that her was all her vanity and all her love' (PP 105). Here, in an ambiguous paragraph that balances both Stella's internal voice and N's subjective narration, Murdoch directly aligns Stella with other hubristic characters in the narrative; Stella's grief exhibits, just as Brian attributes to George, an egotistical fear of the 'loss of face' (PP 57). Stella's silent approach to Rufus's death not only places her and George in an 'ineffable' (PP 359) marriage – 'tied together' (PP 360) by what could have been a shared experience of grief – but also preserves her moral superiority by leaving the townspeople's gossip unchallenged. Many Ennistonians, following their superstitions about George, believe that Rufus's death was George's 'fault', even a 'deliberate' act (PP 359). Despite these 'terrible' assumptions (PP 359) being untrue, and despite her admission to N that 'I am to blame', Stella does not 'stoop to counter the vile things people were casually saying about George' (PP 360). This attitude covertly reinforces her appearance as 'long-suffering Stella, the virtuous wife' (PP 12) while denying the reality of George's grief. Early in the narrative, the sight of the 'poplar tree' in their garden, which was planted by Stella to mark Rufus's death, freezes George's thoughts: 'Lord, how full of pain the world

was. The tree was tall now, its young buds glowing' (PP 15). For Pamela Osborn, such appearances of Rufus within the narrative as 'an obvious lacuna' illustrates a 'general inability to verbalise grief'.<sup>36</sup> However, while Stella's silence about the details of Rufus's death suggests an inability to express her grief to George, George's delicate metaphorical reflection on the tree's lifeforce represents an engagement with Rufus's tragically lost life. Towards the end of the novel, George vocalises his discomfort and grief to Stella: '[Y]ou want to destroy me – and you killed Rufus, you killed Rufus, you killed Rufus ...' (PP 489). The fact that their argument ends on another unresolved ellipsis highlights the morally problematic nature of Stella's silence: her inability to correct the townspeople's assumptions and to engage with Rufus's death denies George's emotional autonomy, contributes to his image as a villain and reinforces her own appearance as a strong, proud and morally superior individual.

Stella's conversation with N two-thirds of the way through *The Philosopher's Pupil* reveals not only the impact that Rufus's death has had on her marriage but also her tendency to be possessive, controlling and apathetic. The revelation of Stella's possessiveness resonates with images throughout the narrative that, much like Blake's thematic exploration of caging in 'The Tyger', interrogate the damage caused by emotionally and psychologically trapping others. We are told that Stella's enchantment with her husband began at university where she met, and was 'friendly' with, both George and Rozanov; finding herself deeply fascinated with the former, she began to 'study' him (PP 362).<sup>37</sup> The same analytical response to George appears in her conversation with N. Stella explains how, in order to return to George, she must 'stay rational', 'think clearly' and approach him with 'a clear head and a policy' (PP 361). This conversation, however, concludes on a sinister note: 'Sometimes I feel', Stella confesses, 'as if George were a fish I'd hooked ... on a long long line ... and I let him run ... and run ... and run ... What a terrible image' (PP 364). This image, which illustrates Stella's patient resolve to control and trap George, resonates with multiple moments in the narrative: it echoes George's earlier declaration that he feels 'reduced' by Stella 'to a gibbering puppet' (PP 11); it foreshadows Brian's later confusion at Stella's ability to 'wait and see' (PP 515); and it presciently alludes to the end of the novel at which point Stella finds herself once more 'profitably "occupied" with her husband' (PP 548). Despite George's later transformation into a docile, 'gentle, polite, quietly humorous' individual (PP 547–48), Stella continues to monitor him with an 'absolute possession' (PP 555).

While her 'possessively watchful' attitude may, as N argues, be 'more tender and "sentimental"' (PP 548) than in the past, she nevertheless 'keeps Brian and Gabriel at a distance' (PP 555). In the context of Blake, these images of entrapment and possession can be fruitfully compared to a parable in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, where the Giants of 'sensual existence', which are 'the causes of [...] life and the sources of all activity', are chained by 'the cunning of weak and tame minds which have power to resist

energy'.<sup>38</sup> Stella's possessive behaviour, following Blake's moral vision, is dangerous and reprehensible: when she resists emotion, she not only damages her own sense of self, rendering herself 'weak' and 'tame', but also restricts her passionate counterpart, whose creative, emotional and sensual existence symbolises the driving energies of human life. Gabriel's final critique of Stella evinces an awareness of this Blakean vision: '[Stella] always wanted [George] maimed, she's his nurse now, she imagines her love-cure has saved him, but it's just that he's broken' (PP 555). While George's change may awaken in Stella a 'new and better' love (PP 548), her continuing cold, introspective, passive possession of him conforms to a Blakean vice that highlights the damage caused by symbolically, psychologically, physically or emotionally trapping others.

*The Philosopher's Pupil* reveals a sophisticated literary engagement with Blake's moral vision that belies Murdoch's antipathy to his writings in her philosophy and her letters. Murdoch equivocates Stella's and Rozanov's actions in the light of the universal human tendency to be enchanted by evil and obscured by vanity. N's conclusion to the novel notes how Stella and Rozanov have both contributed to George's mental breakdown and the 'liberated euphoria' (PP 556) that has driven him to attempt Rozanov's murder. While 'the philosopher's final savage letter' may have 'provoked' George, it may also have been 'the peculiar shock of [Stella's] return, with its reminder of an old jealousy, [that] had some decisive effect upon her husband' (PP 556). N's final cautionary reminder about the complexity of the moral life, however, evinces an even deeper awareness of Blake's moral vision. N argues that:

The motivation of terrible deeds tends to be extremely complex, full of apparent contradictions, and often in fact bottomlessly mysterious, although for legal, scientific and moral reasons we 'have to' theorize about it [...] It would be a sad irony if [Stella's] inopportune mention of the philosopher's name should have prompted the violence which ended this tale as well as that which began it. Was the final 'provocation' hers after all, and not John Robert's? Such are the chance 'triggers' which may determine our most fateful actions and yet remain opaque particulars with which science can do little. (PP 556)

Unlike Rozanov and Stella, who have confidently denied George's emotional and moral autonomy, N is driven by an awareness of how the ineluctably and inexhaustibly 'opaque' nature of the moral life inherently complicates interpretations of human behaviour. Father Bernard suggests that this elusive but fundamental moral vision has motivated Rozanov's death by suicide: 'John Robert died because he saw at last, with horrified wide-open eyes, the futility of philosophy. Metaphysics and the human sciences are made impossible by the *penetration of morality into the moment to moment conduct of ordinary life*' (PP 553). Here, N's and Father Bernard's commentaries on the characters

and events of *The Philosopher's Pupil* harmonise with both Blake's and Murdoch's visions of the moral life. People cannot be described by strict dualist philosophical visions of the moral life that deny the complexity of 'ordinary life', separating innocence from experience, activity from passivity or good from evil. 'We are frail creatures,' as Father Bernard tells George, 'all our good is mixed with evil. It is good none the less' (PP 494). Murdoch's implicit awareness of such a Blakean moral lesson reveals their shared liberal vision of art, in which readers can attend to the complexities of the individual, acknowledge the inherently dialectical nature of morality, and attend to the realities of evil and violence.

- 1 Iris Murdoch, *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983) (London: Vintage, 2000), 53, 47, 18, 35, 301, 483, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *PP*.
- 2 For a discussion of the fluidity inherent in the definitions of evil and badness see Sophie-Grace Chappell, 'Chapter 9: Socrates and Plato', in *History of Evil in Antiquity: 2000BCE–450CE*, ed. by Tom P.S. Angier, series ed. by Chad Meister and Charles Taliaferro (New York: Routledge, 2019).
- 3 *Paperback Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. by Maurice Waite, 7th edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 824, 245.
- 4 John Kekes, *Facing Evil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 235.
- 5 James Aho, 'The Religious Problem of Evil', in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*, ed. by Mark Juergensmeyer, Margo Kitts and Michael Jerryson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 200.
- 6 Miles Leeson, 'Avuncular ambiguity: Ethical virtue in Iris Murdoch's *The Black Prince* and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Mandarins*', in *Incest in Contemporary Literature*, ed. by Miles Leeson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 278.
- 7 William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790), in *Blake's Poetry and Designs*, ed. by Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant, Norton Critical Edition, 2nd edn (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), 69 (X, 67); hereafter Blake's works refer to Johnson and Grant's *Blake's Poetry and Designs*. Where appropriate, plate and line numbers are given in Roman and Arabic numerals respectively.
- 8 The narrative provides warnings elsewhere of the dangerous impact that Rozanov has on others: his granddaughter, Harriet Meynell, in following Rozanov, appears to exhibit incestuous feelings of love for him (PP 528); Tom McCaffrey, George's half-brother, is left feeling 'profoundly flattered' and, later, 'trapped' by Rozanov (PP 418); and Father Bernard Jacoby, who first cannot decide whether he likes, loves, or hates him (PP 198), later realises with 'horror that now and henceforth John Robert Rozanov was there inside his mind, like a virus' (PP 230).
- 9 In *The Philosopher's Pupil*, N appears as an omniscient narrator and as a character, giving the novel a narrative voice that drifts between first and third person, between subjectivity and objectivity. Furthermore, Murdoch highlights the fact that N is not entirely trustworthy and has a tendency for hypocrisy. For example, N's choice to name the novel's setting "'N's Town", or, let us say, "Ennistone"' after his own self-anonymised title belies his ostensibly 'self-effacing' narrative voice (PP 23).
- 10 Iris Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited' (1959), in *Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. by Peter J. Conradi (New York: Penguin, 1999), 262, 261; hereafter this and other essays from this edited collection are referenced parenthetically in the text as *EM*.
- 11 Megan Laverty, *Iris Murdoch's Ethics: A Consideration of her Romantic Vision* (London: Continuum, 2007); Daniel Majdiak, 'Romanticism in the Aesthetics of Iris Murdoch', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 14.2 (Summer 1972), 359–75; and Gabriel Pearson, 'Iris Murdoch and the Romantic Novel', *New Left Review* 13–14 (Jan–Apr 1962), 137–45. For a more in-depth discussion of the critical engagement with Murdoch's allusions to William Blake, see Daniel Read, 'Chapter Five: Iris Murdoch, William Blake and the "Contrary" Nature of the Moral Life' in 'The Problem of Evil and the Fiction and Philosophy of Iris Murdoch' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Kingston University, 2013), 234–99.
- 12 Laurence S. Lockeridge, *The Ethics of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 71.
- 13 T. S. Eliot, 'Blake' (1920) in *William Blake: Songs of Innocence and of Experience: A Casebook*, ed. by Margaret Bottrall (Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1970), 93–8.
- 14 Iris Murdoch to Brigid Brophy, 24 June 1966, letter, KUAS142/5/184, from the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives.
- 15 Horner and Rowe confirm the title, and Conradi the critical focus, of Rachel Fenner's dissertation in *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934–1995*, ed. by Avril Horner and Anne Rowe (London: Vintage, 2015), 608 and Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), 474.
- 16 Horner and Rowe, *Living on Paper*, 285.
- 17 Iris Murdoch wrote the essay 'On "God" and "Good"' as a contribution to a Study Group that took place in August 1966. See Justin Broackes's 'Introductory Note' to Iris Murdoch's Postscript to 'On "God" and "Good"', published in the *Iris Murdoch Review* 3 (2011), 5–7 (5).
- 18 Lockeridge, *The Ethics of Romanticism*, 175.
- 19 Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 69 (III).
- 20 Lockeridge, *The Ethics of Romanticism*, 156–57.
- 21 Lockeridge, *The Ethics of Romanticism*, 3, 205.
- 22 Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 71–3 (VII–X, 3, 5, 44, 46, 64, 67).
- 23 Horner and Rowe, *Living on Paper*, 285.
- 24 Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 70 (IV); William Blake, 'From On Reynolds, Works (1798; notes c. 1798–1809)', 465.
- 25 Blake, *All Religions are One and There is No Natural Religion* (1788), 5–7.
- 26 Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992) (London: Vintage, 2003), 1–2, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *MGM*.
- 27 Murdoch's concept of unselfing often exhibits such violence; her fiction, to use Lockeridge's description of Blake, 'narrates the violent mental labors leading up to and preparing for true act and vision' (Lockeridge, *The Ethics of Romanticism*, 174). In *The Black Prince* (1973), for example, where Bradley Pearson's love for Julian Baffin is aligned with Titian's *The Flaying of Marsyas*, the presence of suffering and violence lead to positive moral development. Murdoch lauded Titian's *The Flaying of Marsyas* for its symbolism of 'the death of the self', where flaying represents how the moral agent can 'lose [their] egoism in [a] sort of agony, which is also ecstasy'; this 'death of the ego' represents a move away from consoling fantasy that allows the individual 'to see the world with absolute vividness and clarity'. Iris Murdoch, interview with Eric Robinson, 'Revelations', Channel 4 Television, 22 September 1984, quoted in Anne Rowe, *The Visual Arts and the Novels of Iris Murdoch* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), 175.
- 28 Barbara Stevens Heusel, 'A Dialogue with Iris Murdoch', in *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction: Conversations with Iris Murdoch*, ed. by Gillian Dooley (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 199.
- 29 Lockeridge, *The Ethics of Romanticism*, 89; Blake, 'From On Lavater, Aphorisms on Man (1788)', 454.
- 30 Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 69 (III). For Kathleen Raine, the moral questions that form the theme of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 'with its vindication of the fiery energies wrongly condemned as evil', most likely inspired the central problems confronted within 'The Tyger'. Kathleen Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, Bollingen Series XXV.11, 2 vols (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), II, 3.
- 31 For discussion of how the theme of innocence is explored in Murdoch's fiction, see Daniel Read, 'Innocence in *The Bell*, *The Time of the Angels* and *The Philosopher's Pupil*', from 'Chapter Five: Iris Murdoch, William Blake and the "Contrary" Nature of the Moral Life', in 'The Problem of Evil and the Fiction and Philosophy of Iris Murdoch' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Kingston University, 2013), 256–74.
- 32 Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (1947) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 196; S. Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* (1965), ed. by Morris Eaves (New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press, 2013), 138.
- 33 William Blake, *The Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1789–94), 38–9 (XLIV, 3–4, 24).

- 34 For an exhaustive exploration of what constitutes passive aggressive behaviour, see Andrea Harn, 'What is passive aggressive behaviour?' <<https://www.counselling-directory.org.uk/memberarticles/what-is-passive-aggressive-behaviour>> [accessed 29 January 2020].
- 35 For a discussion of these pseudo-psychopathic characters, particularly Nan Mor in *The Sandcastle*, see Daniel Read, 'Psychopaths, Enchanters, Mothers and Saints', in 'The Problem of Evil and the Fiction and Philosophy of Iris Murdoch' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Kingston University, 2019), 150–233.
- 36 Pamela Osborn, 'Minding the Gap: Iris Murdoch's Destructive and Deconstructionist Works of Mourning', in 'Another Country: Bereavement, Mourning and Survival in the Novels of Iris Murdoch' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Kingston University, 2013), 51–106 (94).
- 37 Stella discounts N's suggestion that they were 'friendly' at university, suggesting instead that he respected how 'good [she was] at philosophy' (PP 362). However, Murdoch undermines Stella's answer by leaving it with a hanging dash, 'And I –' (PP 362).
- 38 Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 76 (XVI).

## Existential Deconstruction: Iris Murdoch's Early Novels

*Robert Murphy*

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IN THE LATE 1950S, IRIS MURDOCH SEEMS COMPREHENSIVELY TO REJECT SARTREAN existentialism as an egocentric strain of thought: a 'dramatic, solipsistic, romantic and anti-social exaltation of the individual'.<sup>1</sup> Yet, in spite of her misgivings, Murdoch takes two crucial insights from Sartrean existentialism: a response-dependent epistemology and a related recognition of 'the opacity of persons' (EM 293). Building on these points, I argue that Murdoch's early novels can be read as a consideration of the ethics of existentialism and of an ethics of alterity and difference more often associated with the ethical turn of deconstruction. Bringing the precepts of literary realism into question, this ethics struggles with the difficulty of representing the difference of others without reducing that difference to a reified representation of sameness. In *Under the Net* (1954), *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956), *The Bell* (1958) and *A Severed Head* (1961), Murdoch presents a fictionalised ethics of existential difference. The latter two novels, however, suggest the problems that this existential ethics poses for social life. In this time of pandemic and social distancing, Murdoch's private, reflective ethics has an equivocal resonance.

This essay aims to triangulate two ways of approaching Murdoch's novels, finding common ground between Murdoch's later engagement with deconstruction and her earlier engagement with existentialism. A. S. Byatt's 1965 study *Degrees of Freedom: The Early Novels of Iris Murdoch* remains a foundational treatment of the existential dilemmas faced by Murdoch's characters. For Byatt, Murdoch's early novels capture a 'sense of the mystery and formlessness of people's lives'.<sup>2</sup> In 1975, Ben Obumsele extended this argument, associating Murdoch's 'lonely and absurd' fictional world with a breakdown in traditional realism.<sup>3</sup> The relationship of Murdoch's novels to existentialism was, however, somewhat neglected amid treatments of her moral realism until Miles Leeson's *Iris Murdoch: Philosophical Novelist* (2010), which reads *Under the Net* and *The Flight from the Enchanter* in the context of Murdoch's early engagement with the liberal tenets of Sartrean existentialism, with its emphasis on the unique individual. Ultimately, however, Leeson argues that, with Sartre's view of being-for-others as a struggle against objectification, 'there is no sense of equilibrium, no-one



is allowed to obtain balance with Sartre's system and this is ultimately what Murdoch objects to'.<sup>4</sup> Julia Jordan reaches a similar conclusion about Murdoch's treatment of contingency and referential uncertainty, suggesting that she 'found a way to balance these ideas in harmony'.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, I am more inclined to see Murdoch's fiction as unbalanced and inharmonious in its subjectivism.

Murdoch's existentialist emphasis on contingency and difference is also reflected in her complicated relationship with Derridean poststructuralism. Terry Eagleton famously suggests that Murdoch's criticisms of poststructuralism – which she incorrectly refers to as structuralism in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992) – are so strong because 'it represents her own vision of things pushed to an embarrassingly radical extreme'.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, Bran Nicol's *Iris Murdoch: The Retrospective Fiction* (2004) explores the epistemological and referential doubts that are represented in Murdoch's fiction and argues that 'a contradiction opens up in [Murdoch's] work between the realist faith in referentiality and a counter-conviction about the fundamental inaccessibility of reality through language'.<sup>7</sup> Two essays in Anne Rowe's edited collection, *Iris Murdoch: A Reassessment* (2007), also examine this contradiction. Suguna Ramanathan studies the late novels in the light of Murdoch's deconstructive, processual theology while exploring this theology's links to Hinduism and Buddhism.<sup>8</sup> Rowe's own essay, meanwhile, reads *The Black Prince* (1973) alongside Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001), discerning a key paradox at the heart of both novels: 'the impossibility of a stable truth and the premise of the novel as a truth-revealing form'.<sup>9</sup> More recently, Niklas Forsberg's 2013 study, *Language Lost and Found*, concentrates on Murdoch's sense of a disconnect between language and concepts, the result of which is that 'we may end up failing to mean what we want our words to mean'.<sup>10</sup> Considering that Forsberg also takes *The Black Prince* as his case study, the concentration of arguments about Murdoch's sense of the difficulty of accessing reality and otherness through language around *The Black Prince* is one reason why it is fruitful to examine these issues in the earlier and less formally radical existential fiction.

Bringing together the existential and the deconstructive strands of Murdoch's thought is not as contradictory as it might seem. What is at stake in both is a processual, decentred philosophy, one which refuses a stable, realistic form of representing both self and other. Shifting the focus of existentialism away from its romantic solipsism, but always seeing the difference of others through the prism of the self, Murdoch's early fiction merges existentialism with an ethics of alterity. Murdoch's fiction thus anticipates the ethical turn of deconstruction. Simon Critchley's *The Ethics of Deconstruction* (1992) formalises a poststructuralist ethics of alterity by blending the philosophies of Levinas and Derrida. Yet Critchley's description of Levinas's ethics is also an apt description of the philosophical work that Murdoch's early fiction carries out, whereby 'ethics occurs as the putting into question of the ego, the knowing subject, self-consciousness'.<sup>11</sup> Sartre's liberal account of individual freedom is taken by Murdoch

to demand exactly this 'putting into question' of the self in the face of the irreducible difference of others. Fred Alford also notes similarities between Murdoch's and Levinas's respective attempts to account for human relationships without a totalising domination of one party over another, but sees Murdoch and Levinas as differing over their account of the other when he observes that 'it is the "concrete other person" that distinguishes Levinas from Murdoch, for in many respects the other is an abstraction for Levinas'.<sup>12</sup> In Murdoch's novels, however, the attention to a concrete other is always mixed with the self-reflective admission that the other is always beyond reification.

My approach to the relationship between Murdoch's fiction and her philosophy can be seen as akin to Forsberg's, for whom literature, rather than straightforwardly being either the obverse or the correlative of philosophy, 'can do philosophical investigations, exploring our lives in language, on its own'.<sup>13</sup> Yet the philosophical work that Murdoch's fiction does can also be tangentially related to the ambiguities within her theory of moral realism – particularly the existentialism of its response-dependent structure. Murdoch strongly repudiates existentialist thought in 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited' (1959) for its voluntarist view of freedom, its 'terror of anything which encloses the agent or threatens his supremacy as a centre of significance' (*EM* 269). 'Freedom is not choosing [...] Freedom is knowing and understanding and respecting things quite other than ourselves', she concludes (*EM* 284). But freedom for Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* (1943) has less to do with choice than with the fact that consciousness cannot but mediate and negate the external world, because consciousness is always (in a typically phenomenological way) consciousness 'of something'.<sup>14</sup> Consciousness thus mediates a gap, a nothingness, between subject and object. Richard Moran also stresses this point with regard to Murdoch's criticism of existentialism's supposed fact-value distinction, observing that 'it is a classic (or notorious) Existentialist thesis [...] that the facts we apprehend and which serve as premises in our arguments exist for us as colored by our concerns'.<sup>15</sup> For Murdoch too, the process of understanding others requires an existentialist consciousness of the external world – the phrase 'respecting things quite other than ourselves' assumes a phenomenological separation of self from other. Moreover, as Carla Bagnoli points out: 'Contrary to the standard realist, for Murdoch there is nothing outside the picture which we make of reality that makes the picture normative'.<sup>16</sup> Whether or not Murdoch's subjectivist, existential phenomenology undermines her broader theory of moral realism, I will not decide here.<sup>17</sup> The point is that the theoretical ambiguity over the function of a reflective existentialist consciousness is accentuated in the philosophical work that Murdoch's fiction does. This much is evident in Murdoch's comments on what a tolerant form of realism should look like in 'Against Dryness' (1961). Murdoch insists on 'the difficulty and complexity of the moral life and the opacity of persons' and that the world of other people is both intractably 'real' yet 'impenetrable' (*EM* 293-94). Dominic Head notes that this tension between 'the desire for convergence' and 'a studied irresolution' is typical of both Murdochian

and Levinasian ethics.<sup>18</sup> It is at this point that we can start to see connections between Sartrean existentialism as a philosophy which, to use Murdoch's words from 1978, 'attacks the idea of the unified self' (*EM* 250), and the ethical turn of deconstruction, for which Levinas is such an important figure in his attention to an always-impenetrable otherness.<sup>19</sup>

That Sartre destabilises and, in some ways, decentres the 'unified self' may seem surprising. Murdoch is not alone in framing Sartrean phenomenology as primarily a philosophy of egocentricity and individual will. Derrida makes a similar criticism of Sartre's philosophy of self-presence, calling it the arrest of 'the march of the unknown' in *Glas*.<sup>20</sup> However, Sartre's phenomenology in *Being and Nothingness*, notwithstanding the very different views of the subject held by Sartre and Derrida, persistently complicates self-present conceptions of consciousness: for Sartre, 'the Present is *not*'.<sup>21</sup> Thus, 'human reality' is 'a perpetual surpassing toward a coincidence with itself which is never given'; or, more famously, a 'useless passion'.<sup>22</sup> It follows from this refusal of epistemological stasis that the very utilitarian view of prose espoused in *What is Literature?* (1948) is called into question. In Sartre's words, 'the for-itself [the subject] is always something other than what can be *said* of it'.<sup>23</sup> In this comment, one can see that the existentialism which Murdoch rejects as egocentric has much to say about the self's relation to others, and the difficulty of realising other people in words without reducing them to a component of that self (a self which is also in flux). Sartre's caution about what can be said about others without reducing them to a reified symbol has much in common with Murdoch's task of making the novel 'a house fit for free characters to live in' (*EM* 285-86). Both are response-dependent, subjectivist epistemologies which prioritise the opacity of self and others. The fact of renewal, of permanent change within the self, is something that Murdoch, before the ethical turn of deconstruction, and in a Levinasian manner, transposes into a liberal recognition of the essential difference of others in her fiction.

This concern with the difficulty of realising a subjectively experienced world is shared by Jake Donaghue in Murdoch's first published novel, *Under the Net*. Although Murdoch had criticised the 'ego-centric and nonsocial' world of *Being and Nothingness* in *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* (1953), *Under the Net*'s publication precedes (but for Peter Conradi anticipates) Murdoch's development of a more other-centred moral philosophy.<sup>24</sup> The existentialist concerns that, as we have seen, continue to permeate Murdoch's moral philosophy are thus especially pronounced in her debut novel. Jake is a narrator who is profoundly nervous about his task. He stresses that his 'shattered nerves' are of central importance 'for the purposes of this tale [...]. Never mind how I got them. That's another story, and I'm not telling you the whole story of my life', he adds.<sup>25</sup> Jake's anxiety about transcribing his dialogue with Hugo in the cold-cure centre and reflecting Hugo's words without turning them into a 'pretentious falsehood' (*UN* 70) symbolises the nervousness about representation at the novel's heart. For Jake, it becomes impossible to tell, as

with the reflection of the Pont Neuf in the Seine, 'what is reflected and what is not' (*UN* 189). The problem that *Under the Net* delineates is the problem of how consciousness mediates the world.

The Wittgensteinian 'philosophy of silence' contained in the novel's title and expounded by Hugo is plainly a key influence, but the way that the novel grapples with the phenomenology of imaginative reflection has perhaps received less attention. For example, Conradi argues that the confusion which emerges from Jake's misunderstanding of the novel's love square involving himself, Hugo, Anna and her sister Sadie is resolved, or at least mitigated, through the emergence of an increasingly attentive imaginative perception of the world: 'Once you can admit you don't fully know, you can begin, a little, to "see"'.<sup>26</sup> Conradi's qualification is instructive, for what such a progression obscures is the fact that *Under the Net* is concerned precisely with the muddy nature of perception. Murdoch's words in her study of Sartre are relevant here: 'In every sphere our simple "thingy" view of the world is being altered and often disintegrated at an unprecedented rate; and a crisis in our view of the operation of language is inevitable'.<sup>27</sup> Referential anxiety herein follows consequentially from an anxiety about perception. Murdoch's early engagement with Sartre's view of perception as always involving mediation is clearly relevant both to this quotation and *Under the Net*. As Frederic Jameson writes of Sartre's view of consciousness or imagination (the two are, for Sartre, synonymous) as reflective negation: 'Only in the moment of the act itself can something be said to happen really: this moment without past or future, a place of silence and of total freedom'.<sup>28</sup> From this perspective, the silence that pervades the reflective space of the novel, the silence that surges out of the Riverside Miming Theatre 'like a cloud' (*UN* 39) is Sartrean as well as Wittgensteinian.

*Under the Net*, therefore, dramatises an imaginative subjectivism that struggles with the responsibility of representing the world of others through the prism of a mediating consciousness. At the start of the final chapter of the novel, the implications of this subjectivism for referential language are reinforced as Jake reflects on the strange adventures that have formed the substance of his narrative. The reader is given to understand which bus Jake is on, where exactly he is sitting, where the bus is and what Jake is doing (stroking Mars the dog's head). Yet the reader suddenly has a sense of losing touch with these realistic details, as they 'stream past us' into a 'shaft of nothings' (*UN* 275). Jake here seems to accept the liberating negativity, the contingency, that a mediating consciousness of the world entails and, as such, he appears to distinguish himself from Roquentin in Sartre's *Nausea*, a novel which is also about the difficulty of writing a novel. John Vickery and Daniel Majdiak both argue that the dialogue that Murdoch is undertaking with *Nausea* is often a negative one.<sup>29</sup> Certainly the moment at the end of *Nausea* in which Roquentin hears a record playing and decides to write a 'hard as steel' novel is at odds with the changeability of Murdoch's ethics.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, when Jake hears Anna singing on the radio at the end of *Under the Net* (283), Roquentin's

search for aesthetic permanency is recast, with the help of some kittens, in terms of a sense of renewal and endless rebirth. This sense of self-renewal, however, is exactly that which Sartre sets out in *Being and Nothingness*, where, in several sections, Sartre is arguing precisely against the totalising Hegelian subjectivity that Murdoch later identifies with Roquentin – ‘Hegel’s man who abhors the contingent’ (*EM* 269).<sup>31</sup> It is instructive, therefore, to see *Under the Net* as being in dialogue not just with Roquentin’s nausea towards the contingent, but also with the non-totalising subjectivism that comes across more clearly in *Being and Nothingness*.

Even if Jake ultimately recognises that he does not have to represent the world exactly, his worries about the responsibility of representing others are not dispelled in this ending. It remains the case that Jake has distorted Hugo’s words into a ‘pretentious falsehood’ (*UN* 70) in *The Silencer*, a fear of Jake’s that Hugo confirms when he barely recognises himself in Jake’s record of their dialogue. Hugo, however, is dismissive of Jake’s confession that he is ‘ashamed’ by his misrepresentation of Hugo’s thought: ‘I suppose one always is [ashamed], about what one writes’ (*UN* 248). Such shame has much to do with a sense that, in writing, one attempts to reify the world, and other people, in a way that is necessarily falsifying and inadequate. As Sartre puts it, language ‘is the fact that a subjectivity experiences itself as an object for the Other’.<sup>32</sup> Jake’s nervous shame has much to do with this feeling of objectification, and worry about objectifying others, in language. This same pattern of thought lies behind Jake’s neurotic tendency not just to narrate the world but to see it as a plot, with his actions determined by ‘destiny’ (*UN* 101, 130, 133, 206, 234). This metafictional device draws attention to the subjective fictions which Jake constructs by projecting his own existential authorship of his life onto Hugo. The dilemma represented by Jake, therefore, is essentially a dilemma about authorship, which morphs into a dilemma about being authored in his paranoid sense of an objectifying destiny and plot.

This layering of fictions is replicated in many of Murdoch’s early (meta)fictions through the figure of the enchanter. Hugo fulfils the role in *Under the Net*; in *The Flight from the Enchanter* it is Mischa Fox, while in *A Severed Head* it is Honor Klein. Conradi writes of the enchanter figure: ‘It is the main point of *The Flight from the Enchanter* that those enslaved to Mischa Fox – men as well as women – are enslaved voluntarily’.<sup>33</sup> Conradi’s point is broadly about the need to break free from the illusory sites of authority, but these characters’ enthrallment to a supposedly authorial figure is also a metafictional reminder to the reader that the subjective freedom of fictional characters is necessarily illusory – fictional characters do not exist, readers do. Unlike characters in a text, therefore, readers must take responsibility for their imagination of the world. Whether reading a novel or not, real people read and mediate the world all the time. Murdoch’s characters show that these fictions are necessarily flawed and contingent so that if readers, like enchanted characters, are mistaken in their reading of the world around them it is because being mistaken about others is a condition of knowing about others.

Although Jake’s nervousness about writing suggests an awareness of his responsibility in writing otherness, Murdoch’s third person narratives more clearly supplement an existential subjectivism with a deconstructionist ethics of alterity. However, as in *Under the Net*, in *The Flight from the Enchanter* this ethics manifests as a persistent concern with miscommunication. Consider, for example, Rosa, Hunter and Rainborough in their hapless attempts to explain why Mischa wants to take control of the *Artemis*, an obscure periodical of women’s writing. It soon becomes apparent from the dialogue, full of shrugging and attempted clarifications and disagreements, that communication is always fraught with miscommunication.<sup>34</sup> The novel never does provide specific reasons as to why Mischa wants control of the *Artemis*. Margaret Moan Rowe uses the fact that the magazine is a publication of women’s writing to argue more generally that Murdoch’s novels often express the difficulty of maintaining a female voice and presence in a male world.<sup>35</sup> From Rowe’s interpretation one can begin to see the significance of the *Artemis* as a *mise-en-abyme*, an in-built replica of the gendered struggle for significance that the narrative enacts on a larger scale, through characters’ interactions and readers’ responses. This incessant hunt for meaning, emphasised by Murdoch’s naming the periodical after the goddess of hunting, is reproduced through another symbol in the figure of Peter Saward, a Mr Casaubon figure who is attempting to codify a selection of what he thinks are early Indo-European hieroglyphics. Peter is something of a caricature of the rationalist existentialist who believes in the capacity of his own imagination to cast meaning on the world, and who accordingly avoids newspapers (*FFE* 29), which would pose the trouble of an alternative view of reality. Yet, peculiarly, he is from the outset aware of the extent to which he has buried himself in ‘a morass of imagination and conjecture’ (*FFE* 24). Peter’s is a ‘useless passion’, to use Sartre’s words, and the novel brings him to embrace the fatuousness of his search for objective significance: “Well, what can one do?” said Peter. “One reads the signs as best one can, and one may be totally misled. But it’s never certain that the evidence will turn up that makes everything plain. It was worth trying” (*FFE* 287). Calvin Blick puts this same recognition in more extreme terms: ‘Reality is a cipher with many solutions, all of them right ones’ (*FFE* 278). In the symbolism of the *Artemis* and these conversations about language, Murdoch demonstrates that any individual hunt for control of textual meaning must only hit upon absence. Yet she does not concur with Calvin’s nihilism, but rather with Peter’s earnest recognition of one’s obligation to try to read the signs that can never be completely read. Murdoch’s flight from the authorial enchanter is a flight from any philosophy which would reduce (or decipher) the contingent complexity of the world to an objectively communicable plot, and the impenetrability of others to an objectification.

Murdoch’s early novels repeatedly insist on making the deconstructive existential point that other people are inscrutable, and resist being fixed in language. In *The Flight from the Enchanter*, where characters are made aware of being fixed in language, the

experience is, as it was for Jake, a shameful one. Early in the novel, Rosa walks in on a conversation between Peter Seward and John Rainborough. ‘Don’t mind me’, she remarks, ‘Go on talking’, to which Rainborough replies: ‘Don’t be absurd, Rosa! [...] How can we ignore you?’ (FFE 32). The decentring presence of another person is reproduced in the presence of the Lusiewicz brothers’ mother during Rosa’s already bizarrely triangular sexual encounters with them (FFE 56), and in the moment Rainborough shuts Annette into a cupboard while he and Calvin Blick continue their conversation (FFE 129). The awkwardness of these episodes arises from the fact that the characters are never more aware of the way in which one is heard, interpreted, judged.

In this regard, the refugees in *The Flight from the Enchanter* are perhaps the most forceful example of an arbitrary and facile objectification of others in Murdoch’s entire corpus. In the characters of the Lusiewicz brothers and Nina, Murdoch is documenting the darker side of Britain’s post-war reconstruction, which involved the coerced labour of refugee workers from displaced person camps. From 1947 until 1949, over 90,000 European Volunteer Workers entered Britain to fill labour shortages in British industries. As Diana Kay and Robert Miles have established, their choice of industry was largely circumscribed, and the Home Office was at pains to retain the capacity to deport these workers, ‘if found unsuitable or surplus was limited’.<sup>36</sup> In representing these workers, Murdoch touches on where the ethics of deconstruction has found its most important application: as a means of understanding and thinking through difference without reifying it into racial difference. Frances White argues along similar lines in a previous issue of this journal, suggesting that the novel displays concern regarding the British state’s ‘[c]allous, unthinking, accidental, blind indifference’ towards the immigrants whose lives – and deaths, in Nina’s tragic case – are determined by the arbitrary machinations of statutory immigration policy.<sup>37</sup> In SELIB’s (Special European Labour Immigration Board) specification that the jobs they allocate are only ‘for the benefit of people born west of a certain line’ (FFE 98), Murdoch shows the political consequences of a totalising and entirely arbitrary process of othering. By fictionalising this very recent historical injustice, the point is made (albeit largely implicitly) that the difference of others should never be fixed and reified so as to sustain racialised inequalities. One might question, however, whether Murdoch’s presentation of the Lusiewicz brothers as strange and slightly unsettling in their ‘otherness’ does not stereotype in itself. Still, the novel makes it clear that people are not reducible to what any bureaucracy might think of them; nor are the fictional characters we suspend our disbelief to take as ‘people’ reducible to what any author or fellow character might say of them.

Murdoch’s first two novels, then, blend questions of existential freedom with questions of alterity. Leeson discerns ‘the natural beginnings of Murdoch’s fictional use of Platonism’ in her third novel, *The Sandcastle* (1957).<sup>38</sup> It is her fourth novel, *The Bell*, however, that would seem to represent a more decisive turning point in her career, a movement away from existential questions to a sense, as Conradi puts it in his discussion

of the novel and the sublime, that ‘[l]ove, like the sublime, is a matter of unselfing’.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, it is easy to see why Cheryl Bove views *The Bell* as consolidating the notion that ‘[g]ood art, for Iris Murdoch, can bring one outside oneself and expose truths about the world’.<sup>40</sup> The point is made conveniently, but not unambiguously, through Dora’s spontaneous trip to the National Gallery. Looking at the pictures, Dora feels that ‘here at last was something real and something perfect’.<sup>41</sup> By contrast, ‘[w]hen the world had seemed to be subjective it had seemed to be without interest or value’ (TB 191). Yet this important passage on the capacity of art to bring a subject out of a self-centred malaise consists of free indirect narration, which constantly foregrounds Dora’s subjective musings. Consider, for example, the question that Dora asks herself in the midst of her supposed abstraction from herself: ‘Who had said that, about perfection and reality being in the same place?’ (TB 196). (The answer, of course, is James Tayper-Price in his sermon earlier in the novel.) Self-centred thoughts continue to intrude upon this apparently selfless experience: ‘Even Paul, she thought, only existed as someone she dreamt about’ (TB 191). Dora’s imagination constantly mediates what she reflects on as an experience of selfless objectivity. The impossibility of self-present objectivity is reaffirmed when the narrator relates that Dora ‘looked anxiously about her, wondering if anyone had noticed her transports’ (TB 191). A close reading of this scene thus adds nuance to the argument that *The Bell* demonstrates the power of realistic art to draw a person out of the enclosure of the self: it is instead the case that an encounter with the abstract otherness of art prompts a process of re-evaluation within the self.

Selfless objectivity thus remains an ideal in the face of a response-dependent consciousness of the world, and the ethical problems of the novel are thought through on a subjective level. The formal dynamics which allow that mediating consciousness to appear are not experimental: Murdoch relies on nothing more complex than free indirect style. Still, at times this free indirect style leads *The Bell* to resemble *Under the Net* in its recognition that the events which form the basis of narrative cannot be metonymically described, because the inner-life cannot be reduced to a series of ‘thingy’ realistic snapshots made available through language. When Dora, for example, agonises over whether to give up her seat for an elderly lady on the train, the dilemma culminates with the following logical disjuncture, ending one paragraph and beginning another:

She decided not to give up her seat.

She got up and said to the standing lady ‘Do sit down here, please’. (TB 17)

Her act, represented in contradiction to her thought, reinforces the fact that the movements of consciousness are inscrutable and often inarticulate. It also extends Dora’s sense of ‘paralysis’ (TB 10) early in the novel. When Noel tells Dora that she is ‘a free agent’, she replies, ‘Am I?’ (TB 15). There is a feminist aspect to this question, as

Dora quickly seems to realise: 'That was marriage, thought Dora; to be enclosed in the aims of another' (TB 18). It is only, however, in a 'fit of solipsistic melancholy', in which '[e]verything was now subjective', that Dora recognises that she has no reason to stay with Paul: 'Nothing stopped her from going, she was free' (TB 182–83). As we have seen, Dora dismisses this subjectivism as 'without interest or value' in the National Gallery, yet it surely holds an ethical value in this liberating perspectival shift, allowing Dora to re-evaluate her place in the world, in relation to, but separate from, others.

*The Bell* thus comes to place its different characters in uneasy juxtaposition, and this determination to do justice to each of its characters' perspectives on the world results in a decentred proliferation of truths. The multiplicity of attempts to make the bell signify are crucial in establishing this polyphony of voices – and in this sense the bell, like the *Artemis* in *The Flight from the Enchanter*, operates as a *mise-en-abyme* of these polyphonic resonances. Michael and James, of course, have their own religious readings of the bell. Likewise, immediately after Paul first recounts the myth, he and Dora argue over Dora's identification with the ill-fated nun. As the novel progresses more and more characters and events are involved in increasingly complex symbolic indications. These layers of meaning, moreover, are always mediated on a subjective level. Dora considers the bell to be 'black inside and alarmingly like an inhabited cave' (TB 266). Deborah Johnson reads this moment as a feminist revision of the ascension entailed in Plato's allegory of the cave: 'The woman's experience of the Cave is subtler and more problematical in Iris Murdoch's fictions for in going into the Cave she confronts herself; in an important sense she is the Cave'.<sup>42</sup> The reading is instructive: the Platonic ascension toward reality is rejected, and the bell/*The Bell* can toll, finally, only through its hollowness, through its being a space of (self-)renegotiation. For, as Nicol has argued, the interpretative muddle within the text about the bell must inevitably reproduce itself at the level of the reader as 'decoder' of *The Bell*.<sup>43</sup> The illusory, cave-like world of *The Bell* becomes a space for individual readers to inhabit and to listen as it tolls, subjectively, for them. Accordingly, the novel ends, as Dora rows alone across the lake at Imber, by reaffirming the fact that the world to which the text refers is never objectively given, but always mediated: 'From the tower above her the bell began to ring for Nones. She scarcely heard it. Already for her it rang from another world. Tonight she would be telling the whole story to Sally' (TB 315). The novel thus ends with the promise of another telling, another layer of fiction, another encounter with others.

If *The Bell*, however, continues Murdoch's efforts to work out a deconstructionist ethics of existentialism, it also sounds a note of concern about this ethics. After all, the community at Imber collapses. Something has gone wrong in the attempt to understand and to live harmoniously with difference. In this regard, the unchecked racist expression voiced by James, who describes Toby as 'working like a black' (TB 149), should not go without interrogation. *The Flight from the Enchanter* attempts to portray sympathetically the plight of eastern European refugees in the 1940s and 1950s, but these decades also

saw the arrival of the Windrush generation under similar circumstances, a demographic change that goes largely unnoticed in Murdoch's fiction (though there are situations of racist violence against black people in *An Accidental Man* and *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*). I am not necessarily blaming Murdoch for writing overwhelmingly about the upper-middle-class, white social spheres in which she moved and which she knew best. But nor do I find entirely satisfactory Murdoch's frustrated view that 'this criticism of the novels on the basis of class is very silly and very artificial. I write about human nature'.<sup>44</sup> There is a slippage here from a valid defence of writing about the limited world one knows to a belief that it is possible to write about a tacitly universal 'human nature'. This contradiction speaks of the fact that Murdoch rarely politicises the philosophical principles of subjectivism and alterity that her fiction uncovers. The limited social sphere of her novels is especially significant because, as Lawrence Blum in particular has shown, in the context of South African racial inequality, Murdoch's ethics of attention and alterity can be an important moral compass for white people living in a privileged position in a multi-cultural society.<sup>45</sup> By way of contrast to Murdoch's monocultures of middle-class muddle, J. M. Coetzee's fiction shows how a deconstructionist, Levinasian ethics of fiction can respond to issues of race from a white writer's perspective (I am thinking here of a novel like *Age of Iron*, which depicts a white liberal woman's confrontations with apartheid violence).<sup>46</sup> The limited range of characters in Murdoch's fiction begs questions: how much do Murdoch's characters actually learn about others in her novels? How much do they learn, instead, only about variations of themselves? Are Murdoch's novels a limit case for the very ethics of existential deconstruction that they think through?

*A Severed Head* would suggest as much. Again, this is a novel about the real dangers of objectifying others and the importance of a respect for difference but, as with *The Bell*, this is also a novel about the failure of a white, middle-class community. Elizabeth Dipple describes the amoral world of *A Severed Head* as 'redolent of real evil'.<sup>47</sup> The novel is, however, representative of an important paradox in Murdoch's ethics of fiction: that where others are respected only for their difference from oneself, the world comes to seem a lonely, heartless place. The tendency of characters in *A Severed Head* to objectify each other only extends the recognition of the earlier novels that loving attention to difference is no guarantee against existential solipsism. Love, the 'non-violent apprehension of difference', can be lonely too (EM 218). Following the pattern set by earlier novels, *A Severed Head* is a novel of contingency and muddle, miscommunication and failures of comprehension. The ethical salience of difference is again emphasised in opposition to the violent reduction of other people to objects of contemplation for one's own sake. But it is in this novel that Murdoch most squarely confronts the potential costs of a decentred existential ethics of alterity.

*A Severed Head* is organised according to the same failing dialectic of the earlier novels, a dialectic which moves between the attempt to realise the world and the

recognition that the contingent, response-dependent world of other people resists total realisation. Accordingly, in *A Severed Head*, the narrator Martin is disconcerted by his brother Alexander's sculpture of Antonia's (severed) head because it represents exactly such a Hegelian reduction of the fundamental inscrutability of being. He feels that there was 'nothing there of the warm muddle of my wife', and the head finally reminds him of a 'death mask'.<sup>48</sup> Martin, however, will repeat this very process of objectifying the elusive muddle of another subjectivity in his attitude towards Honor Klein, which culminates in his physical assault on her. Disingenuously, Martin suggests that he carries out this assault unthinkingly – he describes his head as 'suddenly asserting its existence' at the end of the assault (ASH 112). But Martin's supposedly mindless assault is foregrounded in his earlier objectification of Honor: 'I said to myself, relates Martin, 'I don't care what this object thinks of me' (ASH 54). This cold reflection is followed up by his description of Honor's body as lying beside him 'like a headless sack' (ASH 55). Clearly, the suggestion is that imaginary attempts to objectify another person can culminate in real acts of violence.

Martin's assault, then, reveals the inadequacy of an objectifying reduction of the other's subjectivity, but it also reveals the danger of an equally objectifying solipsism, through which Martin mystifies Honor's difference to the point where he no longer respects her freedom as a fellow human subject. Simone de Beauvoir's revision of Sartre's work is highly instructive in this regard. For Beauvoir, reification must be resisted in the name of existential freedom, but so too must a mystification of femininity as unknowable and thus not worthy of sympathetic understanding. People, stresses Beauvoir, possess 'both transcendence and immanence'.<sup>49</sup> Beauvoir relies on an idea of sympathetic understanding to mitigate the Sartrean tension between subjective transcendence and objective immanence. Murdoch would call such sympathetic understanding love but, in this novel, love is more absurd than it is sympathetic and understanding. Consider Antonia's revelation to Martin that she is in love with someone else: 'I know it's absurd and I know it's dreadful, but I'm in love and I'm absolutely relentless. I'm sorry to surprise you and I'm sorry to speak like this, but I've got to make you understand what I mean' (ASH 22). 'Relentless' though she may be, the absurdity of Antonia's love is confirmed in her eventual return to Martin. Love, in this novel especially, is an existential reaching out towards another person that is always contingent and fraught with misunderstanding. Yet where social understanding is permanently fraught with self-reflective misunderstanding, the result is a cold, lonely fictional world. *A Severed Head* is not an aberration from Murdoch's fictional ethics of existential difference, it is a logical extension of it.

Writing this essay in the midst of COVID-19 lockdown seems uncanny. As I have argued, Murdoch's early novels portray an ethics of existentialism, a reflective deconstructionism that shows characters grappling with the impact of contingent others upon their own equally inscrutable selves. But this ethics, reflective and perceptive of the difference of self from other as it is, struggles to imagine successful forms of social life, even within the

materially comfortable middle-class society that Murdoch's novels depict. In this time of social distancing, of isolation and remote communication, the private dimensions of ethical reflection have rarely been clearer. Yet the crisis has also made clear the absolute importance of social life as fundamental to society, whether that be through a renewed sense of the importance of a properly funded national health service, or concern over the disproportionate spread of the virus among lower-income BAME communities.<sup>50</sup> The question for us, as it is in Murdoch's fiction, is how to find the right balance between reflective ethics and social action. Murdoch's characters often struggle in that task. Unlike them, we have a chance to reflect, and to do things differently.

- 1 Iris Murdoch, 'Existentialist Bite', in *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. by Peter Conradi (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997), 151–53 (153), hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *EM*.
- 2 A. S. Byatt, *Degrees of Freedom: The Early Novels of Iris Murdoch* (London: Vintage, 1994), 313.
- 3 Ben Obumselu, 'Iris Murdoch and Sartre', *English Literary History* 42.2 (1975), 296–317 (296).
- 4 Miles Leeson, *Iris Murdoch: Philosophical Novelist* (London: Continuum, 2010), 50.
- 5 Julia Jordan, *Chance and the Modern British Novel: From Henry Green to Iris Murdoch* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 119.
- 6 Terry Eagleton, *Figures of Dissent* (London: Verso, 2005), 260–61.
- 7 Bran Nicol, *Iris Murdoch: The Retrospective Fiction*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2004), 18.
- 8 Suguna Ramanathan, 'Iris Murdoch's Deconstructive Theology', in *Iris Murdoch: A Reassessment*, ed. by Anne Rowe (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007), 35–44.
- 9 Anne Rowe, "'Policemen in a Search Team": Iris Murdoch's *The Black Prince* and Ian McEwan's *Atonement*', in *Iris Murdoch: A Reassessment*, 148–60.
- 10 Niklas Forsberg, *Language Lost and Found: On Iris Murdoch and the Limits of Philosophical Discourse* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 8.
- 11 Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, 3rd edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 4.
- 12 C. Fred Alford, 'Emmanuel Levinas and Iris Murdoch: Ethics as Exit?', *Philosophy and Literature*, 26.1 (2002), 24–42.
- 13 Forsberg, *Language Lost and Found*, 11.
- 14 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes (London: Routledge, 2003), 17.
- 15 See 'Iris Murdoch and Existentialism' in *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher*, ed. by Justin Broackes (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 181–96 (187).
- 16 Carla Bagnoli, 'The Exploration of Moral Life', in *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher*, 197–225 (213).
- 17 See Maria Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human: The Moral Thought of Iris Murdoch* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 115–16 for a defence of what Antonaccio calls Murdoch's 'reflexive realism' against charges of subjectivism, by reference to the ontological proof.
- 18 Dominic Head, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction, 1950–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 258.
- 19 Nicol makes a similar point in *Iris Murdoch: Retrospective Fiction*, 17 when he says that Murdoch regards structuralism and post-structuralism 'as late twentieth-century manifestations of the romantic rationalism which characterised the philosophy of the mid-century'.
- 20 Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. by John P. Leavey Jr and Richard Rand (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 28. See also Christina Howells for a comparison of Sartre with Derrida in 'Derrida and Sartre: Hegel's death knell' in *Derrida and Deconstruction*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman (London: Routledge, 1989), 169–81.
- 21 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 146.
- 22 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 113, 636.
- 23 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 461.
- 24 Iris Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), 106. Miles

- Leeson takes exception to Peter Conradi's retrospective reading of *Under the Net* as a 'Buddhist quest to get beyond the duality of self and the world'. Leeson argues that this was not Murdoch's concern at the time of writing the novel, in Leeson, *Philosophical Novelist*, 17.
- 25 Iris Murdoch, *Under the Net* (London: Vintage, 2002), 23, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *UN*.
- 26 Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: The Saint and the Artist* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1986), 51.
- 27 Murdoch, *Sartre*, 65.
- 28 Frederic Jameson, *Sartre: The Origins of a Style* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 12.
- 29 John Vickery suggests that Jake prioritises 'social' epistemology where Roquentin prioritises 'private' phenomenology in 'The Dilemmas of Language: Sartre's "La Nausée" and Iris Murdoch's "Under the Net"', *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, 1.2 (1971), 69–76 (74–5); Daniel Majdiak traces Murdoch's departure from Roquentin's 'dry' or 'crystalline' or 'neurotic' form of writing in 'Romanticism in the Aesthetics of Iris Murdoch', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 14.2 (1972), 359–75 (364).
- 30 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. by Robert Baldick (London: Penguin, 2000), 252.
- 31 For Sartre's criticism of Hegel's 'totalitarian point of view', see *Being and Nothingness*, 267.
- 32 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 394.
- 33 Peter J. Conradi, 'Holy Fool and Magus: The Uses of Discipleship in *Under the Net* and *The Flight from the Enchanter*' in *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher*, ed. by Justin Broackes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 119–33 (130).
- 34 Iris Murdoch, *The Flight from the Enchanter* (London: Vintage, 2000), 32–3, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *FFE*.
- 35 Margaret Moan Rowe, 'Iris Murdoch and the Case of "Too Many Men"', *Studies in the Novel*, 36.1 (2004), 79–94 (80).
- 36 Diana Kay and Robert Miles, 'Refugees or Migrant Workers? The Case of the European Volunteer Workers in Britain (1946-1951)', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 1.3/4 (1988), 214–36 (218).
- 37 Frances White, "'The world is just a transit camp": Diaspora in the Fiction of Iris Murdoch', *Iris Murdoch Review*, 2 (2010), 6–13 (11).
- 38 Leeson, *Philosophical Novelist*, 87.
- 39 Conradi, *Saint and the Artist*, 112.
- 40 Cheryl K. Bove, *Understanding Iris Murdoch* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 46.
- 41 Iris Murdoch, *The Bell* (London: Vintage, 2004), 190, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *TB*.
- 42 Deborah Johnson, *Iris Murdoch* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 93.
- 43 Bran Nicol, 'The Curse of *The Bell*: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Narrative', in *Iris Murdoch: A Reassessment*, ed. by Anne Rowe (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007), 100–12 (105).
- 44 See 'Iris Murdoch talks to Stephen Glover 1976', *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction: Conversations with Iris Murdoch*, ed. by Gillian Dooley (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 33–43 (42).
- 45 Lawrence Blum, 'Antiracist Moral Identities, or Iris Murdoch in South Africa', *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 30.4 (2011), 440–51.
- 46 See also an important critic of the fictional ethics of alterity, Derek Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee & the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
- 47 Elizabeth Dipple, *Iris Murdoch: Work for the Spirit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 150.
- 48 Iris Murdoch, *A Severed Head* (London: Vintage, 2001), 42, 44, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *ASH*.
- 49 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. by H. M. Parshley (London: Vintage, 1997), 284.
- 50 Christine Ro, 'Coronavirus: Why some racial groups are more vulnerable', *BBC Future*, 21 April 2020 <<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200420-coronavirus-why-some-racial-groups-are-more-vulnerable>> [accessed 2 May 2020].

## 'I've seen you at it': Visual Frenzy and the Panopticon in Iris Murdoch's *The Bell*

Athanasios Dimakis

TWO RELATED EXTRACTS CONSTITUTE THIS ESSAY'S STARTING POINT. THE FIRST concerns Ovid's narration of the mythological ocular predicament of Argus Panoptes: 'Argus lay dead; so many eyes, so bright/ Quenched'.<sup>1</sup> The second is taken from Jeremy Bentham's reimagining of the myth of Argus Panoptes in his imaginary prison: 'The more constantly the persons to be inspected are under the eyes of the persons who should inspect them, the more perfectly will the purpose X of the establishment have been attained'.<sup>2</sup> Ostensibly unconnected, Iris Murdoch's *The Bell* (1958) appears to resonate with the themes and imagery of both, marked by a haunting presence of Argus and his panopticon.

This essay explores the ocular intensity and the numerous depictions of quasi-literal surveillance technology in *The Bell*. In doing so, it contemplates Tammy Grimshaw's Foucauldian reading of the novel, drawing on her theoretical formulations. Grimshaw maintains that 'like the person who observes from the Panopticon', Nick Fawley seems 'to have been given a special position of power in which at any moment one can see everything without being seen'.<sup>3</sup> While acknowledging the indebtedness of the essay's theoretical framework to Grimshaw's primary discussion of the moral extensions of power through Nick's panopticism, I aspire to introduce new possibilities for criticism by directing attention to the covert presence in the novel of Argus himself. This haunting mythological presence has not been discussed in such a light and the analysis of its implications will direct critical attention to *The Bell's* significance as a novel palpating with underexplored visualist intensity.

This essay, then, is concerned with highlighting the neglected centrality of Nick Fawley as Panoptes as he exercises relentless literal and metaphorical surveillance over the lay community of Imberites. It aims to contribute to the eclecticism of Murdoch criticism by unveiling the complex moral extensions, illuminated by the supremacy of sight in classical metaphysics and Murdoch's philosophical works on moral vision; the rudiments of surveillance technology; the repulsive visual acuity of Nick as Argus and the voyeuristic cinematography presented in *The Bell*. The case study of Nick is an in-depth

exploration through the scope of Murdoch's idiosyncratic, quixotic conception of moral vision and the philosophical idealism and spiritualism governing her morally charged novels. Through the literal and metaphorical centrality of Nick residing at a Lodge that serves both as watchtower and as a topographical remaking of the lodge in Bentham's panopticon in itself, Murdoch simultaneously blurs the boundaries of watcher and watched, masterfully dealing with the complicated issues of visibility and surveillance.<sup>4</sup> More specifically, I maintain that the dynamics of the novel's male homosexual/homosocial triumvirate, Michael Meade, Nick Fawley and Toby Gashe, deserve greater exploration when they appear to involve libido-ridden voyeurism, obsessive watching and the panoptic surveillance and blackmail of others. *The Bell* constitutes one of Murdoch's finest attempts at tracing the ethically challenging issues of surveillance and the moral extensions of a surveillant's power. One might even argue, in the light of this essay's findings, that *The Bell* seems to anticipate Michel Foucault's theoretical formulations and interpretation of the panopticon. *The Bell* acquires additional relevance with the ubiquitous nature of surveillance and the pressing contemporary concern about the state of monitoring or being monitored.

All sensory and extrasensory powers of cognition possessed by the omniscient and omnipresent Nick convey his prowess as a monstrous and sly watcher as he goes about terrorising and blackmailing others at Imber Court. These activities artfully point to his moral failure and a connection to his covert mythological counterpart – Argus Panoptes himself. This reconstellation, the critical reimagining of Nick as Argus, is further supported by the corroborating evidence of Toby as Donatello's *David*/Hermes amalgam which will be addressed in the final part of the essay. Toby punishes Murdoch's secular Argus, finally depriving him of sight and control over the moral impasses of the Imberites.

Set in an unworldly locale, Murdoch's fourth novel is marked by its eschatological intensity and Christian sombreness. In highlighting the uninterrupted flow of panoptic frenzy in *The Bell*, I argue that the abundant images offered by this novel are also enlightening as far as Murdoch's philosophical, moral vision is concerned in that they showcase Murdoch's consistently Hellenic visualist metaphysics and poetics. In *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, in the chapter entitled 'Martin Buber and God', Murdoch offers a sketchy overview of Hellenic visualist metaphysics, poetics and aesthetics. The Hellenic privileging of all things visual is also apparent in the ethically charged interplay of sight and blindness, the cult of Apollo as the sun god, as well as the leitmotif of the Greek light itself as an indispensable medium for transmitting the Apollonian ideals of clarity and transparency. Influenced by the legacy of this perceptual logic, Murdoch's thought consistently privileges vision over the other senses, thereby designating vision as the arbiter *par excellence* of morality.<sup>5</sup> In particular, the ethical extensions of Nick's characterisation as a quasi-literal embodiment of the mechanics of the panopticon, and as a transposed secular Argus at the heart of an English Arcadia, bear testimony to the primacy and 'dominance of sight over the other senses'

in Murdoch's moral universe (*MGM* 15). Deeming visualisations indispensable to any understanding of morals, Murdoch claims that these must be 'understood in a moral-religious sense which pictures salvation or enlightenment as wisdom or true vision' (*MGM* 175). Murdoch resorts to the rich ocular imagery of Hellenism and classical myth in striving to achieve an ethically laden visualist logic and transparency.<sup>6</sup> Set amid the pervasive atmosphere of pleasing Gothic-style suspenseful terror, the underexplored parade of the ocular, the panoptic and the Apollonian insignia of Greek visualism in *The Bell* is indicative of the 'naturalness of using visual images to express spiritual truths' (*MGM* 15) that Murdoch tells us is suggested in Plato's *Phaedrus*. Murdoch's *The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists* (1977) evokes Plato's metaphysics of light and constitutes a lengthy exegesis of the Hellenic tenets of her philosophical and fictional reanimation of moral vision.<sup>7</sup> This philosophical work showcases the perennial fascination for Murdoch of the interplay between literal and metaphorical seeing and the complexity of sight. Her discussion of Plato's 'plainly metaphorical' and figurative 'language of vision' and the call for the 'conversion' of a mediocre 'life of illusion' through the influence of 'unimpeded vision' exposes the tenets of classical visualism (*FS* 26). Besides, Murdoch repeatedly acknowledges her indebtedness to the primacy of sight in Greek aesthetics and metaphysics, quoting, as she does, extensively from Martin Buber in the context of her discussion about the Greeks who 'established the hegemony of sight over the other senses, thus making the optical world into *the* world, into which the data of the other senses are now to be entered' (*MGM* 461). They also gave an optical character to philosophy, 'the character of the contemplation of particular objects' (*MGM* 461).

Murdoch's discussion of Buber illuminates her conception of moral vision. It corroborates her consistent intellectual affinity with Greek visualism that defined philosophy as a visual field through contemplation and conspicuously privileged literal sight as the pathway to metaphorical insight. This interplay between literal and metaphorical seeing seems apparent in *The Bell*. Dora Greenfield's first timorous impressions of Imber Court present us with the very first glimpse of its 'immense lake'.<sup>8</sup> Dora observes that the lake is 'glowing very slightly, darkened nearby to blackness, yet retaining here and there upon its surface a skin of almost phosphorescent light' (*TB* 35). The *chiaroscuro*, the alternation of darkness and light reflected in the waters of the lake, seems to traverse the distance from the chthonic to the celestial and points to the novel's critically underexplored visualist repertoire. In her introduction to the novel, A.S. Byatt maintains that the etymology of the Imberites 'must derive from "umber", "umbra", shades or shadows' (*TB* xii). What seems to evade Byatt's attention is the sheer luminosity of Nick's quasi-literal interrogation lights, as well as the voyeuristic frenzy of the novel. The encounters of Nick, Michael and Dora with the youthful Toby, their mutual point of contention, are invariably marked by their optical intensity.



In her discussion of Michael's moral shortcomings, Grimshaw offers a reading which maintains that, in accordance with Foucault's theoretical formulations, Michael 'becomes subject to and a subject of the power of the church'.<sup>9</sup> While Michael's characterisation certainly offers itself to a range of Foucauldian insights regarding the ambivalent intertwining of sexual orientation, power and morality, it is the critically neglected, profoundly Foucauldian presence of Nick as Argus which complicates matters. Having been a stigmatised victim of Michael's seduction in his early adolescence, Nick progressively becomes Michael's victimiser, a haggard and intractable person intimidating most Imberites and subjecting them to an unending sequence of panoptic trials.<sup>10</sup> Banished from the banal activities of the congregation, Nick remains ostracised, indulging in fits of chronic bitterness.

In Foucauldian manner, Nick possesses knowledge of Michael's closeted nature and acquires uncontrollable power when he observes Michael making sexual advances and kissing Toby. From his little panopticon across the lake, the all-seeing Nick scrutinises Michael, Toby and Dora's every illicit act. Nick's quintessentially panoptic trait of acquiring power through seeing fuels the subsequent disequilibrium of power between Nick, Michael and Toby. Same-sex affinities or sexual free-floating were more susceptible to blackmail in the period this novel was conceived. The novel's Argus impugns Michael and Toby's queer amorousness. Nick, empowered by his visually exerted control and panoptic regulation of the Imberites, fails to realise his own susceptibility to homophobic blackmail. Nick's coercion and despotism are also evident in his patronising, didactic admonition to Toby to confess his crime to the guarantor of the rigid moral standards of the lay community: 'You're going to go like a good boy and make your confession to the only available saint, indeed the only available man, and that is James Tayper Pace' (TB 260).

Peter Conradi draws our attention to Nick's keen understanding of the complexities and operation of mechanical contrivances, devices, apparatuses and instruments of all kinds. Michael claims that 'Nick used to work in aero-dynamics' and that he 'knows a lot about engines' (TB 53). As Conradi contends: 'It is surely no accident that unlike the hapless Michael, of all the cast, it should be the devilish, tortured but practical Nick who best understands the workings of machines' while Toby, commonly referred to as Nick's understudy, 'wishes to study engineering at Oxford'.<sup>11</sup> The text offers detailed accounts of his engineering feats connecting them with the mechanics of his hunting habits:

Nick was given the nominal post of engineer and did in fact occasionally attend to the cars and cast an eye over the electricity plant and the water pump. He seemed to know a lot about engines of all kinds [...] and until asked to stop, shot down with remarkable accuracy crows, pigeons, and squirrels, whose corpses he left lying where they fell. (TB 117)

I maintain that Nick's aptitude and propensity is profoundly allegorical and symptomatic of his covert identification with the skills and dexterity of his uncanny, mythological counterpart, Argus Panoptes. Nick's macabre array of machines is indispensable. He wanders around carrying a '.22 rifle' and is 'adept at slaughtering hares' (TB 94). At a later stage, he is seen 'edging out from underneath the lorry, his feet disappearing on one side, his head appearing on the other' (TB 207). One could draw a connection here with the mechanics of the panopticon: it compels physical exertion and must be assiduously maintained. Evidently, Bentham's analysis in *The Panopticon Writings* of the panoptic mechanics that comprise 'the engine, a machine, – a system of machinery' is of great relevance as it reinforces the existing analogy.<sup>12</sup>

This essay is indebted to Grimshaw's work in her elucidation of Nick's outstanding skill in handling apparatuses, appliances and machines, as evidenced by her claim that 'Nick's function in this novel in many ways resembles that of the person who occupies the panopticon, Bentham's surveillance system'.<sup>13</sup> The surveillance field that the whole Imber community of *The Bell* inhabits seems to anticipate the archetypal Benthamian panoptic construct, with Nick's constant gaze ultimately coming to resemble the form of the jailer in the panopticon. Confidently operating the machine and attaining empowerment through spying and punishing accordingly, Nick confines the novel's male characters within a field of constant visibility and relentless optical exposure, observing them from the Lodge, which offers unrestricted views to the Abbey, the parkland, Imber Court and the lake itself. The reference to Nick's Lodge further corroborates the panoptic centrality of Nick. '[T]he man at the Lodge' (TB 52) seems to be consonant with Bentham's geometric configuration, marked as it is by the haunting presence of the all-seeing male observer who occupies it: 'The apartment of the inspector occupies the centre; you may call it if you please the *inspector's lodge*'.<sup>14</sup>

Further references to Nick's perennially illuminated and uncurtained Lodge, so affording unobstructed circumferential views, seem to reflect the layout of the panopticon prison designs and are, most certainly, Benthamian:

The light beacons out clearly [...] The light from the living-room, through the door and the uncurtained windows, revealed the gravel, the tall grasses, the iron rails of the gate. (TB 224)

Maintaining that 'a moderately good light' would be 'afforded to the lodge' and that this light should be enhanced by 'the luminous zone thus given to the circumference', Bentham sets the tone for the line of inquiry proposed here.<sup>15</sup> Inhabiting the epicentre of the novel's topography, Nick's visual field encompasses the area where his scrutinised individuals dwell and err. The all-seeing panoptic mechanism that he inhabits establishes his sovereignty, thereby utilising visibility as a 'trap' in tandem with Foucault's later theoretical formulations in *Discipline and Punish*, which *The Bell* arguably anticipates.<sup>16</sup>

The pertinence of Foucault's insights may also be traced in Michael and Toby's interchangeable states of 'permanent visibility' and 'permanent observation'.<sup>17</sup> Hence, through panoptic control, Nick acquires paradoxical retributive power, punishing his subjects for their misdemeanours and moral crimes.

Thus, vision becomes the arbiter *par excellence* of morality amongst the members of the parochial community of Imberites. The occasion of Toby's entrance into the eccentric world of Imber signals his entry into Nick's dazzling panoptic field. The totality of Murdoch's visualist register inhabits the scene of Toby's literal and metaphorical admission to Nick's surreally illuminated premises. The blinding rays of light penetrate Toby's eyes, and his nausea emphasises the moral queasiness of constant surveillance. The Lodge does not glow with the light that moral vision bestows, but with the artificiality of electricity. The repulsive power of Nick Panoptes can be traced in, and apprehended through, the scope of the bright glow of electricity. Searchlights are used to facilitate his relentless surveillance:

Toby saw that a light was shining from one of the windows [...] He shaded his eyes. All the electric lights were so bright at Imber. The door opened straight into what must be the living-room. In a quick dazzled glance Toby saw a large stove in the wall. (TB 53)

Occupying the transparent, floodlit Imberite configuration of the Benthamian panopticon, Nick's scopic control remains unchallenged. The moral extensions of panopticism and questions of surveillance are not only a preoccupation of this novel but are revisited in Murdoch's *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983). Nick's eclectic visualist affinities with this later novel's omniscient male narrator become more palpable through the Narrator-Panoptes's mysterious self-identification: 'I shall call myself "N"'.<sup>18</sup> The narrator and discreet moraliser of *The Philosopher's Pupil* is another example of a character that haunts protagonists with the omniscience that his voyeurism and panopticism allows. In critical moments, the narrator of *The Philosopher's Pupil* not only observes but also acts and manoeuvres, affecting plot development in tangible ways. The protagonist's contempt for the all-seeing narrator remains blatant: 'N, that impotent voyeur [...] I saw his sly old face in the street, he's always after me' (PP 489). In the novel's finale, the narrator confesses to his panoptic mastery: 'Who, drawing back his curtain in the early morning saw, in that clear sunny light, through empty streets, Tom McCaffrey running away with Hattie Meynell? I did' (PP 529). The multiplicity of gazes and the state of constant visibility in the novel recalls *The Bell* and presents a similar matrix of the masculinist panopticon, rendering George's deeds visible to the narrator, who in turn clearly defines himself as 'observer' (PP 23). The functioning of power through panoptic practices and a condition of permanent visibility in both novels discloses a consistent disciplinary programme. Specifically, Nick's panoptic privilege

appears to depend on the passivity of the observed Imberites, maintained by consistent blackmailing made evident in the series of Nick's admonitions and threats to Toby. As an apparatus of power, Nick's gaze seeks to expose the moral sins of his fellow Imberites and it is through a convergence of this power and surveillance that Nick starts to bear uncanny resemblance to his Greek mythological counterpart.<sup>19</sup> Resorting to an exclusively visual register in his description of the surveillant power of Panoptes – 'Argus of the hundred eyes', the 'all watching' and the 'star-eyed' giant – Ovid points to the ocularcentric tenets of the myth.<sup>20</sup>

This essay now traces Murdoch's ocularcentrism in *The Bell* through further examination of Nick as secular Argus and identifies the processes through which it adheres to the Hellenic primacy of sight and light in classical aesthetics, poetics and metaphysics. In the Greek myth that inspired Bentham's design of the panopticon, Zeus abolishes Argus's panoptic reign by having him slain by Hermes. Hermes 'lull[s] the watching eyes' of Argus in order to free nymph Io, Zeus's mistress, from Hera's tormenting captivity.<sup>21</sup> According to Ovid, Hera has the hundred eyes of Argus preserved forever in a peacock's tail in order to commemorate her faithful watchman:

Juno retrieved those eyes to set in place  
Among the feathers of her bird and filled  
His tail with starry jewels. At once her wrath  
Flared up and soon her anger was fulfilled.<sup>22</sup>

Bentham's appropriation of the paradigmatic myth of Argus Panoptes and his conception of the prison as monument to the notion of panopticism has prompted numerous critical responses. Most notably, the panopticon and the vicissitudes of optical engagements that entail empowerment or docility of individuals in certain institutional or ideological contexts feature in Foucault's discussion with Jean-Pierre Barou and Michelle Perrot.<sup>23</sup> In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault invokes the disciplinary aspect of the gaze in his interpretation of the panopticon by designating it as a metaphor of the normalising discourses and practices of institutions that manipulate vision in order to induce submission. Thus, Bentham's original architectural conception in *The Panopticon Writings* becomes more semantically laden through Foucault's analysis of the visualist logic pervading Bentham's sequence of 'Letters', 'Selections from Postscript I', as well as 'A Fragment on Ontology'.<sup>24</sup> Bentham's architectural model has become over time a synonym for relentless and interminable exposure to surveillance and unbearable visibility.

Murdoch's appropriation of the classical myth of Argus Panoptes is corroborated by the text itself in the seemingly unconnected scene of Toby's swim in the natural pool set in a little clearing in a wood that is intended to invoke the sort of mythic innocence of an Arcadian wilderness. Throughout the novel there are persistent references to Toby's

physical charm and to his gradually becoming a point of contention between Michael, Nick and Dora. The latter also indulges in clandestine observation of Toby's sensual immersion. The strong visual interplay and the multiple viewpoints of observation are also sustained through the revelation that Michael simultaneously enjoys the spectacle of Toby's youthful, 'very pale and slim body' being 'caressed by the sun and shadow' beneath a willow tree (TB 77). In this erotically charged passage, Michael observes unsuspecting Toby while remaining unaware of the fact that he is concurrently being observed by Dora in an ocular triangle; a *ménage à trois* of libidinal observation. Having 'looked boldly' at Michael, Dora feels 'a complicity between them because of the pastoral vision which they had enjoyed together' (TB 77). Even the libido-ridden description of Michael and Dora's lust is rendered in a visualist register as the sight of Toby produces 'a tremulous beam of physical desire' (TB 77). Toby's charm haunts Michael, whose mind, in a fit of visualist erotica and sexual frenzy, reproduces 'with a vividness amounting to violence the image of the pale body of the boy naked beside the pool' (TB 124).

Another scene that facilitates the interpretation of the novel as a locus of vision concerns Murdoch's intense visualisation of the ever-increasing enmity between Nick and Michael. Toby heads towards Nick's panoptic Lodge across the lake under Michael's keen observation. Michael also suspiciously eyes the all-seeing Nick. Thus, the ocular intensity of the surroundings of Nick's panoptic Lodge form a theatrical stage, yet another site of vision as per Michael Levin's formulation, whereby a spectacle progressively unfolds under the observation of an entourage of spectators:<sup>25</sup>

Michael saw that he was carrying his rifle [...] As Nick came up to Toby he turned and saw Michael watching them from the other side. It was too far for speech, and even a shout would have been indistinct. Nick's face was a distant blur. For a moment Michael and Nick looked at each other across the water. (TB 98)

The long sequence of voyeuristic *ménages* and dalliances reaches its culmination through the reportages that Nick's panoramic view affords him; these are even related to the British press itself in purely visualist terms: 'All I can promise you is a spectacle. I hope you've got a camera with you?' (TB 263). The protagonists themselves frequently reflect on the panoptic frenzy of the novel. It is worth quoting at length from Michael and Toby's discussion, a telling example of the unremitting ocularcentrism of the novel, hitherto overlooked, when Murdoch writes that the

grey-golden walls of tall-windowed houses [were] looming up quickly and vanishing, the tress bunched and mysterious above the range of the headlights. Every now and then a cat was to be seen [...] its eyes glowing brightly as it faced the beam of light.

'You're a scientist,' said Michael. 'Why don't human beings' eyes glow like that?'

'Are you sure they don't?' said Toby.

'Well, do they?' said Michael. 'I've never seen anyone's eyes glow.'

'It may be that human beings always turn their eyes away,' said Toby. 'I remember learning at school that Monmouth was caught after the rebellion, when he was hiding in a ditch near Cranborne, because his eyes were gleaming in the moonlight.'

'Yes, but surely not like *that*,' said Michael. An unidentified animal faced them at some distance down the road, a pair of greenish flashes, and then was gone.

'I believe there's something about special cells behind the eyes,' said Toby. 'But I'm still not completely sure that our eyes mightn't glow too if we really faced the headlights. Let's try it! I'll get out and come walking towards you facing the light, and you see what my eyes look like!' (TB 154-55)

Michael and Toby indulge in a quasi-delusional musing on vision, made more emphatic by references to the Imberite fauna and the particularity of animal sight. They are enchanted by these ephemeral spectacles and sense the proximity and constant gaze of the novel's animalistic Panoptes. Having returned to the all-encompassing Imberite visualist prison house, the surveillance mechanism of which is artfully mastered by Nick, the two men become entrapped by a hallucinatory vision that includes *exposés* on beams, blazing lights, flashes, apparitions, photoreceptors and the complex physiology of the eyes.

The passage reads as an ocular exercise that seeks to put on trial the very potency of the panopticon itself – 'we can do that thing with the headlights now' (TB 157). Perceiving and processing visual stimuli while testing the accuracy of the panopticon and the degree of their visibility, Michael and Toby naively strive to transgress this order of relentless visuality to which they have been subjected:

He saw the boy running away down the road until he was nearly beyond the range of the beam. Then he turned and began to walk slowly back, keeping his eyes steadily fixed on where Michael was behind the blaze of the lights. His brightly illuminated figure approached at an even pace. His dark eyes, wide open and strangely like those of a sleepwalker, were unblinking and clearly visible. They did not gleam or glow. (TB 157)

Seconds later, when Michael eventually kisses Toby in his car some one hundred yards short of the Lodge, the spectral, panoptic master of the novel reappears: 'Hello you two' (TB 158). The panoptic intensity of the ensuing fictional close-up highlights the queer

physiology of Nick's all-seeing eyes. It grants him the capacity of a keen-sighted lethal predator, that returns to haunt them, when he sees someone come 'into view on the road, another figure vividly revealed and walking slowly up into the beam of the lights' (TB 158). Nick's apocalyptic, godlike apparition instils fear in Michael who, 'following an instinctive desire for concealment', switches 'the lights off again' (TB 158). Having of course seen everything, the novel's Panoptes initiates his interrogation: 'What's the game, stopping such a long way from the gates?' (TB 158). Michael flees, panic-stricken, and wonders whether he and Toby have indeed been caught in the act: 'He and Toby had been behind the headlights; but Nick might have seen something all the same [...] it was this thought which tormented him most' (TB 158). Michael's worst fears about Nick's incessant surveying are subsequently confirmed by Nick's blackmailing of Toby.

Having entrapped Toby in the living room of his Benthamite Lodge, the novel's Argus interrogates him relentlessly: '[H]e switched on the electric light. He surveyed Toby with his wide fixed smile. They faced each other. Toby frowned, dazzled by the unshaded bulb' (TB 256–57). Nick's panopticism thus is projected onto the physical layout of the room and its material elements, transforming Nick's lakeside home into a conventional interrogation room as the presence of the single overhead light bulb suggests:

'[Y]ou think I don't notice what goes on under my nose – but I've made you a subject of loving study, Toby [...] I've seen you at it,' said Nick. 'I've seen your love life in the woods, tempting our virtuous leader to sodomy and our delightful penitent to adultery. What an achievement! So young and so extremely versatile!' [...] 'After all, we're supposed to be looking after each other, aren't we? We are members one of another. You never bothered to look after me, but I take my responsibilities more seriously. I can hold the mirror up to you as well as the next man. What are you going to do about it? That's what I want to know. And what about your little frolic with the bell? Oh yes, I know all about the bell too, and that faked-up miracle you're planning with your female sweetheart.' (TB 258–59)

Nick's sharply ironic reference to the social responsibility of looking-after as a false pretext for his surveillance highlights Murdoch's dissociation of ethical, attentive seeing from its recurrent, erroneous conflation with the mere physiology of optical seeing. Besides, the novel's secular Argus repeatedly prides himself on the efficiency of his potent surveillance system and his virtuosity in mastering the panopticon, which is far removed from Murdoch's agapeic moral vision:

Nick said, 'Don't you want to know where Toby is?'

Michael flinched at the question. He hoped his face was without expression. He said, 'Well, where is he?'

'He's in the wood making love to Dora,' said Nick.

'How do you know?'

'I saw them.' (TB 227)

However, the moral dimension of sight that Nick persistently disregards eventually marginalises him and thus prompts his downfall. The exposure of Nick's deplorable deed invites the moral re-education of the other Imberites – and primarily of Michael, who will finally behold the spectacle of Nick's corpse in a retelling of the classical myth. Thus, a reversal of the order of visibility takes place as the viewer, very much like his mythological counterpart, ultimately becomes a macabre spectacle and a sorrowful object of scrutiny when his vulnerable body is so dramatically exposed. The inherent immorality of Nick's panoptic activity is finally revealed, and his blasé, solipsistic complacency forever challenged. Having shared the fate of his mythological archetype, Nick endures a violent, albeit self-inflicted, death. His tragic end is perhaps foreshadowed in the very opening of the novel and in the seemingly unconnected scene of Michael and Dora's admiration of the sight of Toby swimming. This introduces the possibility of a further association of Nick with his mythical counterpart.

Revisiting the scene, the clandestine view of Toby's charming body romantically portrayed as 'dressed in a sun hat and holding a long stick' (TB 76) reanimates Dora's memory of 'the young David of Donatello, casual, powerful, superbly naked, and charmingly immature' (TB 77). Toby's countenance and posture – 'except for his sun hat Toby was quite naked. His very pale and slim body was caressed by the sun and shadow [...] He bent over his stick, intent upon the water, not knowing he was observed, and looked in the moment like one to whom nakedness is customary' – seem to recall that of Donatello's bronze statue of David (TB 77).<sup>26</sup> According to Andrew Butterfield, apart from being regarded as an iconic Renaissance depiction of classical male nudity, the first free-standing male nude since Roman times has often been perceived as a sure indication of the artist's alleged homosexuality, or as a covert reference to Florentine homosocial values against the backdrop of the Catholic condemnation of sodomy.<sup>27</sup> Thus, this image acquires added significance within the masculinist universe and the closeted homosexual erotica of *The Bell*.

Murdoch's reference to Donatello's *David* in 1958 becomes compelling in terms of the novel's visual aesthetics and poetics when one considers a most intriguing development in the identification of Donatello's *contrapposto* bronze statue occurred in 1939. Jenő Lányi, a scholar of Donatello and Italian Renaissance sculpture, first questions the conventional identification of the bronze figure with David, offering a more decisively mythological interpretation of this work.<sup>28</sup> Despite his untimely death, Lányi's scholarly approach reshaped Donatello's reception and influenced the renowned British Renaissance art historian and later director of the Victoria and Albert Museum, Sir John Wyndham Pope-Hennessy. The director succeeded in bringing greater critical attention

to Lányi's early reflections on the matter of the statue's erroneous identification, claiming that the work – being an eclectic mix, a heterogeneous amalgam of conflicting Judeo-Christian and Hellenic, classical and pagan tendencies – becomes intelligible only if viewed syncretically.<sup>29</sup> Quite strikingly, Pope-Hennessy's Lányi-inspired modification and revisionism of the semantic interpretation of Donatello's bronze *David* as a David/Hermes amalgam was published in 1958 – the same year Murdoch published *The Bell*.<sup>30</sup>

The revision in identifying Donatello's statue with Hermes, or at least an idiosyncratic David/Hermes amalgam, certainly makes sense, primarily on account of the tricky inclusion of helmet and sword. Both are unorthodox accessories whose presence would for the most part be deemed redundant and implausible according to Judeo-Christian biblical accounts of David's killing of the Philistine giant, Goliath. Besides, the biblical narration of David's triumph over the giant exaggerates the fact that David prevailed with sling and stone, thereby rendering Donatello's depiction of David problematic. The wings that adorn the helmet of Goliath's head on which David stands are equally perplexing, as winged caps are traditionally associated with the messenger god Hermes. Thus, if Donatello's *David* is to be associated with Hermes, or perhaps conceived as an idiosyncratic David/Hermes amalgam, then the head being stepped upon is not Goliath's, but that of Argus Panoptes.<sup>31</sup> According to the myth, it was Hermes who slayed Panoptes with a sword, having put all of his one hundred eyes to sleep with charms. The gory and bloodstained termination of Argus's ocular regime affords Hermes one more of his common epithets: Argeiphontes (Ἀργεϊφόντης) / Slayer of Argus.<sup>32</sup>

While one cannot profess to having any degree of certainty over whether Murdoch was aware of the concurrently evolving debate regarding *David's* identification, it still has a powerful relevance. If she was aware, then the identification of Toby with Donatello's *David* can be seen in a drastically different light. Toby is the one that eventually forces Nick to end his surveillance. He is also the character that dazzles Nick's panoptic, enchanted eyes with his sensual presence. When the lights are finally extinguished at the Lodge, it signals the demise of Nick's panoptic machine: 'It was already getting dark outside, and the unlighted room was obscure and bleak' (TB 256), and Nick, embarking on his own 'sermon', enquires: 'What is there to lighten our darkness?' (TB 257). His suicide renders irreversible his final severance from the entourage of lay Imberites. Nick shoots himself, putting 'the barrel into his mouth' and emptying 'the shot-gun into his head' (TB 296–97). Nick terminates his panoptic control with the assistance of a gun and, thus, willingly destroys the literal and metaphorical eye which had secured his control over the Imberites. Ovid's narration of Hermes's grotesque slaying of Panoptes's eyes represents a similar brutality and moral downfall. Panoptes's head is severed by Hermes's sword and Argus's precious eyes are soaked in blood:

Quick then with his sword  
Struck off the nodding head and from the rock

Threw it all bloody, spattering the cliff with gore.  
Argus lay dead; so many eyes, so bright  
Quenched, and all hundred shrouded in one night.<sup>33</sup>

Accounts of Nick's literal and metaphorical monstrosity offer corroborating evidence to support this connection. Early in the novel, Toby observes the menacing tooth of Nick's dog Murphy, a sure projection of Nick's ferocity and atavistic instincts: 'A long gleaming fang carelessly wrinkled the soft dark skin of his lower jaw. Toby eyed him uneasily' (TB 54). Toby's close observation of Nick's physiognomy conveys the notion of the latter's animalistic monstrosity, and foreshadows the bloody finale:

Here was the same long slightly heavy face, the leaden slumbrous eyelids, the curling fringe of dark hair over the high forehead, the large eyes and secretive expression. Only Nick was wrinkled around the eyes, which were red-rimmed and watery, as if from much laughing, and this, together with a sagging of the cheeks, gave him something of the look of a bloodhound. (TB 54)

This ocularcentric extract with its repetition of 'eye' fuels the aura of suspense. The grotesque presence of 'an unsavoury-looking dish of meat', as well as Murphy the dog, function as projections of Nick's sentience and vulnerability that is soon to be exposed (TB 55). With 'the look of a bloodhound' (TB 54), a large scent hound bred for hunting and tracking people, Nick/Argus Panoptes fulfils the prophecy and atavistically comes to resemble his mythical archetype: 'He kicked open the door and turned the electric light on with his elbow' while 'the dog's paws and smiling jaws appeared over his shoulder' (TB 56). A largely sexualised excerpt, whereby Nick stands at the door staring, followed by his dog Murphy licking Toby's hands, is also revealing. Toby's ruminations are indicative of Nick's panoptic monstrosity:

Murphy considered the matter and then licked his hand thoughtfully, looking up at him from under what seemed to Toby extremely long eyelashes for a dog. This reminded Toby that his master had extremely long eyelashes for a man. (TB 57)

Bentham's assertion that 'the persons to be inspected should always feel themselves as if under inspection, at least as standing a great chance of being so', also sheds light on Michael's permanent fear of relentless visibility in the fictional panopticon of the novel.<sup>34</sup> Throughout *The Bell*, Michael remains fearful that 'Nick might have seen something' (TB 158). Aghast at Nick's relentless monstrosity, Michael is also strikingly alarmed by Nick's 'watery eye' (TB 124). Later, pointing to the monster within Nick, Toby senses that

he looks ‘like the Wolf pretending to be Grandmamma in the story’ (TB 140). Alarmed by the presence of the ogre that artfully operates the panopticon from the premises of the Benthamian lake Lodge, Michael merges Nick’s technical virtuosity and physical dexterity as Panoptes with the monstrosity of the quasi-mythological bearded demon forever staring. The grossness of Nick’s dust-covered head with its inverted, swivelling eyes most certainly recalls Argus:

He lay supine, half emerged, his head resting in the dust. He swivelled his eyes back towards Michael who, from where he was standing, saw his face upside down [...] He continued to lie there, his strange face of a bearded demon looking up at Michael. (TB 207)

Apart from the fear that Nick’s relentless monstrosity instils, what seems to emphatically connect Nick with his mythological counterpart is the persistence of the idea of panopticism itself. While seemingly unconnected, Nick becomes a secular embodiment of Panoptes’s myth through the representation of his physical and moral repulsiveness, serving as a metaphor for the monstrosity of surveillance and, specifically, panopticism.

Through Nick, Murdoch makes the invisible emphatically visible in dealing with the moral extensions of a quasi-Orwellian or Huxleyan dystopic surveillance. Nick’s demise finally deprives him of his precious one hundred eyes. However, in Murdoch’s de-mythologised secular age, there shall be no Hera to adorn the peacock, her most sacred animal, with Nick’s ocular jewels. This kind of closure is only reserved for Argus’s panoptic eyes in the classical myth that the novel seems to evoke and reanimate. Nevertheless, in its fits of atavism, ocular paroxysm and sheer monstrosity, Nick’s neo-mythological panoptic drama in *The Bell* also eventually reveals its true, albeit less iridescent, colours.

1 Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (Book 1), trans. by A. D. Melville (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 22.

2 Jeremy Bentham, *The Panopticon Writings* (1787) (London: Verso, 1995), 34.

3 Tammy Grimshaw, *Sexuality, Gender and Power in Iris Murdoch’s Fiction* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005), 129.

4 Murdoch’s capitalisation of Bentham’s panoptic formulation to Lodge emphasises its literal and metaphorical centrality to the novel.

5 Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992) (London: Vintage, 2003), 461–80, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *MGM*.

6 For a detailed account of the Hellenic visual bias that has influenced western philosophy, see Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994); *Sites of Vision: The Discursive Construction of Sight in the History of Philosophy*, ed. by Michael Levin (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1999); Milton Scarborough, ‘Myth and Phenomenology’, in *Thinking through Myths: Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. by Kevin Schilbrack (London: Routledge, 2002). For an exploration into the current upsurge in interest in Greek visual culture, see *Gaze, Vision, and Visuality in Ancient Greek World*,

ed. by Alexandros Kampakoglou and Anna Novokhatko (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2018).

7 Iris Murdoch, *The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists* (1977) (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1978), hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *FS*.

8 Iris Murdoch, *The Bell* (1958) (London: Vintage, 2004), 28, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *TB*.

9 Grimshaw, *Sexuality, Gender and Power*, 125.

10 Their illicit *affaire de coeur* is consistently desexualised in accordance with Murdoch’s recurrent portrayals of homosexual chastity. For the most recent exploration of male homosexuality in *The Bell*, see Christopher Boddington, ‘The Bell and the Brotherhood: from Wolfenden to Section 28’, *Iris Murdoch Review* 10 (2019), 63–75 <[https://d3mcbia3evjswv.cloudfront.net/files/IM10%202019%20FINAL\\_1.pdf](https://d3mcbia3evjswv.cloudfront.net/files/IM10%202019%20FINAL_1.pdf)> [accessed 29 May 2020].

11 Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: The Saint and the Artist*, 3rd edn (London: HarperCollins, 2001), 152.

12 Bentham, *Panopticon Writings*, 149.

13 Grimshaw, *Sexuality, Gender and Power*, 128–29.

14 Bentham, *Panopticon Writings*, 35.

15 Bentham, *Panopticon Writings*, 108–9.

16 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975) (New York: Random House Inc., 1995), 200.

17 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 201, 249.

18 Iris Murdoch, *The Philosopher’s Pupil* (1983) (London: Vintage, 2009), 23, hereafter referenced parenthetically in the text as *PP*.

19 Pamela Osborn explores the hyacinthine extensions of Michael and Nick’s characterisation, connecting Michael’s seduction of Nick to the myth of the youth’s tragic death from Apollo’s discus. The essay traces their abusive relationship, highlighting Nick’s consistent subjection to Michael’s solipsism and manipulative tendencies: Pamela Osborn, ‘“Robbed of Thy Youth by Me”: The Myth of Hyacinth and Apollo in *The Bell*’, in *Iris Murdoch Connected: Critical Essays on her Fiction and Philosophy*, ed. by Mark Luprecht (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2014), 85–96.

20 Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (Book 1), 19, 20, 21.

21 Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (Book 1), 21.

22 Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (Book 1), 22.

23 Michel Foucault, ‘The Eye of Power,’ in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. by Colin Gordon (Harlow: Longman, 1980), 147–64.

24 Bentham, *Panopticon Writings*, 29, 97, 115.

25 *Sites of Vision*, ed. by Levin.

26 Donatello’s *David* (c. 1440s) is part of the permanent collection of the Florentine Museo Nazionale del Bargello.

27 Andrew Butterfield, ‘New Evidence for the Iconography of David in Quattrocento Florence’, *I Tatti: Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, 6 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 115–33.

28 Jenő Lányi, ‘Problemi della critica Donatelliana’, *La critica d’arte: rivista bimestrale di arti figurative*, 4 (Firenze: Sansoni, 1939), 9–23. Lányi’s life was tragically cut short when the SS *City of Benares*, the boat carrying him to North America from the ruins of war-torn continental Europe, was torpedoed in the North Atlantic by the Germans.

29 John Pope-Hennessy, ‘Donatello’s Bronze David’, *Scritti di storia dell’arte in onore di Federico Zeri* (Milan: Electa, 1984), 122–27.

30 John Pope-Hennessy, *An Introduction to Italian Sculpture, Volume II: Italian Renaissance Sculpture* (London: Phaidon, 1958), 6–7.

31 The presence of Giambologna’s *Hermes* (the flying Mercury) in the Florentine Museo Nazionale del Bargello also attests to the validity of this hypothesis. The 1580s bronze shares eclectic stylistic affinities to Donatello’s statue. Marked by the winged feet and the helmet of Hermes and standing atop a similar mythological head in the style of the significantly older *David/Hermes* by Donatello of 1440, Giambologna’s bronze statue is not only housed in the same gallery, but also pays tribute to the artistic legacy of its predecessor.

32 ‘Argus’, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 27 December 2017 <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Argus-Greek-mythology>> [accessed 6 January 2020].

33 Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (Book 1), 22.

34 Bentham, *Panopticon Writings*, 43.

## Finding the ‘Grip Factor’: Six Iris Murdoch Centenary Classics

Anne Rowe

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ONE OF THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE HUGE SUCCESSFUL IRIS MURDOCH centenary year in 2019 was Vintage Classics’ publication of six new editions of Murdoch’s most popular novels. They certainly added a splash of colour to the occasion, with dazzling cover designs by Suzanne Dean featuring abstract depictions of the natural world out of which emerge tantalising glimpses of a human face that hint at the identity of a central character. Such eye-catching and witty designs give the novels a contemporary appeal, purposefully designed to attract a new generation of readers. A prestigious group of contemporary writers were commissioned to write succinct introductions: the novelist Charlotte Mendelson for *Under the Net* (1954); broadcaster, filmmaker and journalist Bidisha for *The Sandcastle* (1957); novelist Sarah Perry for *The Bell* (1958); American poet and author Garth Greenwell for *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970); poet and novelist Sophie Hannah for *The Black Prince* (1973); and the novelist Daisy Johnson for *The Sea, The Sea* (1978). Together these writers provide not only incisive insights into Murdoch’s novels that will chime with the interests of new generations of readers but also have something fresh, and often surprising, to offer the most seasoned Murdoch scholar.

Most likely to send the casual bookshop browser to the nearest till is Sophie Hannah’s exuberant introduction to *The Black Prince*. Hannah gets straight to the heart of what she terms the novel’s ‘grip factor’, enticing readers into this ‘brilliant’, ‘too purely enjoyable’ novel by cheering its compulsive storytelling and the thrills that sit alongside its profound emotional and intellectual appeal. It is indeed a pleasure to see Hannah explaining to possibly intimidated new readers that Murdoch is ‘not a writer of great but tedious classics’ but a ‘writer of books as compelling as any Christmas-special-extra-dramatic omnibus’. Such a dramatic rebranding of Murdoch’s fiction pleasingly foregrounds its accessibility; here is a writer, suggests Hannah, who makes her readers feel that she knows them inside out, one who allows them to relish the ‘comic ludicrousness’ of life while at the same time making them feel they were reading ‘something more representative of reality’ than anything they had ever read before. Such genuine enthusiasm for one of Murdoch’s most complex, highly acclaimed novels

is a welcome reminder of how, when they were first published, Murdoch’s novels so effortlessly crossed the boundary between literary and popular fiction, more easily than they seem to do now.

Bidisha’s luring of new readers to *The Sandcastle* takes the form of a witty linking of its location to a ‘sit-com’, its tone to one of ‘cruel comedy’ and, while wisely avoiding direct identification of Murdoch as a feminist writer, striking a blow for a feminist reading of the book’s gender relations. Bidisha acknowledges that the ‘disrespectful’ attitudes of the male characters to the beautiful young artist, Rain Carter, ‘in scenes which make a twenty-first-century reader uncomfortable’, are indeed rather problematic. While such attitudes to women would not have so disturbed contemporary readers in an age when they were so prevalent as to go unremarked, Murdoch’s objective representation of them does not mean she subscribed to them. Her keen satiric eye may well have observed as acutely as Bidisha’s that Rain was being objectified, ‘watched and leered over sloppily [...] in a crudely reductive and infantilising way’, for Bidisha notes too how Murdoch takes care to reveal Rain’s ‘status and power as an individual and not a sexual gimmick for others’ that puts her ‘in a different league from the banality of the schoolmaster, Mor, who is in love with her’. Such insights undermine claims that Murdoch tiresomely fails to portray strong, successful women in her novels and it is high time that such observations are now brought to bear on them. They bring Murdoch closer to twenty-first-century values than previous critics have understood and invite a more nuanced understanding of her narrative techniques. Daisy Johnson briefly makes a similar observation in her introduction to *The Sea, The Sea*, when she notes that the book’s first-person narrator, Charles Arrowby, who is at once ‘funny, unkind, pitiable, and lovable’, is also relevant to twenty-first-century discussions of toxic masculinity. Perhaps new, younger readers, predisposed to demand a more rigorous political correctness from novelists, will be more inclined to recognise an Austenian irony underlying Murdoch’s novels, for it is irony, as Bradley Pearson, the writer-narrator in *The Black Prince* observes, that is the writer’s most ‘dangerous and necessary tool’.

Garth Greenwell’s introduction to *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* also focuses on Murdoch’s brave representation of socially contentious issues by confining the bulk of his commentary to the relationship between the two gay characters, Simon Foster and Axel Nilsson. In so doing, he draws attention to Murdoch’s prescient representation of homosexual relationships as simply one aspect of an everyday societal norm in a book published only three years after homosexuality was made legal in the UK. These two gay characters are identified as personifications of two recognisable homosexual types who are so lovingly rendered that readers engage with them on a far deeper level than their sexual identities. Greenwell argues that Murdoch adds status to the relationship by allowing this homosexual ‘marriage’ to be the only relationship in the novel that survives the machinations of the evil Julius King and the only relationship represented in the light of the ‘idea of perfection’ to which Murdoch alludes in her moral philosophy,

that 'love is a just and loving gaze directed upon the individual'. A sharply focused introduction such as this is an ideal place for new readers to understand not only how far ahead of their time Murdoch's novels were, but also how effortlessly, relevantly and accessibly her moral philosophy is woven into everyday human experience.

Sarah Perry's fascination with Murdoch's appropriation of the Gothic genre in *The Bell* provides the atmospheric background to a rich introduction that leans more towards conventional literary criticism. As such, she gladdens the heart of many a Murdoch scholar who has mourned the lack of critical attention to the multitude of Gothic tropes embedded in Murdoch's novels. For Perry, *The Bell* stands as a surrogate for *Northanger Abbey*, *Rebecca* or *Jane Eyre* as she relishes Murdoch's exploration of Gothic 'sensation' through astute psychological acuity and the mixing of intense realism and heavy symbolism. Together they evoke the 'uncanny' feeling of being 'suspended between that which is absolutely familiar and that which is absolutely strange'. Daisy Johnson's introduction to *The Sea, The Sea* also briefly takes up the idea that, in a time when fiction seems to be breaking boundaries and reaching for the strange and uncanny to better understand the world, Murdoch is a 'perfect companion'. She interprets *The Sea, The Sea* as a ghost story about 'what comes back, what returns, what will not stay down' and sees in the book 'the same fierce growing momentum that horror has'.

Intrinsically linked to the Gothic is the phenomenon of the supernatural, and several of these introductions stray into discussions of how Murdoch's novels engage with spirituality and matters of faith, which Sarah Perry describes as 'an element in the whole metaphysical problem of how to be'. In *The Bell's* tackling of issues of guilt, love and morality, Perry suggests that the novel is 'godless but essentially spiritual'. Sophie Hannah, too, goes as far as to suggest that Murdoch's fiction will respond to the spiritual as well as the emotional cravings of a new century. Hannah suspects that *The Black Prince* both subscribes to, and contributes to, the idea of there being a mysterious higher power in the world, adding for good measure that: 'Surely an ordinary flawed human being, however talented, cannot alone and without divine intervention have produced this work of genius'.

In attempting to quell any lingering doubts in new readers about Murdoch's authorial credentials, Charlotte Mendelson's introduction to *Under The Net* identifies her as one of a band of underrated women writers in postwar British fiction, one who has been, in fact, 'grievously misunderstood'. In mitigation she goes as far as to identify Murdoch as a 'superpower', a great writer whose books have 'all the relevance in the world'. Mendelson, like her companion writers, is careful to cut straight to the heart of the book's relevance to everyday life by explaining the Murdochian moral philosophy that underpins the existential journey of the book's first-person narrator, Jake Donaghue, as he battles between grievous solipsism on one hand and a genuine desire to be a better man on the other. Such a neat, accessible cataloguing of Jake's journey will touch the heart, and prick the conscience, of many similarly challenged readers as they learn how

Jake must accept the fact that becoming good is not only a difficult and endless moral task, but also the result of pure chance. This foregrounding of Murdoch's seamless merging of moral philosophy and fiction is to be applauded in this and other of these introductions, and will ease the path for readers who may be dipping their toes into the novel of ideas for the first time.

The last in the chronology of these six books is Murdoch's Booker-prize-winning *The Sea, The Sea*, introduced by Daisy Johnson who bravely acknowledges that this was indeed her own first encounter with an Iris Murdoch novel. While intending to read the book with the critical eye necessary to write her introduction, she owns up to having been 'unprepared to love the book as much as I did'. For this she can be forgiven, for *The Sea, The Sea* is one of Murdoch's most charismatic novels and Johnson, like many before her, was captivated by the book's 'pitch-perfect plotting' and mesmerised by the omnipresent sea. She interprets the novel as being at heart a story about ageing, about looking back on a life both well and badly lived. Shruff End, Charles Arrowby's house on the cliffs, evokes for Johnson 'some underworld place of judgement where everything we have done is paraded before us, all of our decisions gone over again and again'. Her introduction provides a sobering insight, or a timely reminder perhaps, for a new audience: as one's life stretches out ahead, it would be wise to live that life as well as one can.

I should acknowledge a few uneasy moments in undertaking my task: when Charlotte Mendelson rather too fulsomely outlines why Murdoch's fiction has become 'extremely unfashionable'; when the smattering of intertextual literary and philosophical allusions that crop up throughout these introductions, as insightful as they are, made me fear they might alienate the common reader whom we so hoped these new editions would encourage; and when a proofing error in Sarah Perry's introduction to *The Bell* diminishes the courage and social significance of such a brave novel, published nine years before, not one year after, the decriminalisation of homosexuality between men, as the introduction states. Nonetheless, with so much energy and admiration emerging from a group of writers whose fingers are so firmly placed on the pulse of contemporary society, these introductions should make an appropriate and moving contribution to securing Iris Murdoch's place in the consciousness of generations to come.



## Review of Lucy Bolton, *Contemporary Cinema and the Philosophy of Iris Murdoch* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019)

*Anna Backman Rogers*

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AS WE KNOW, 2019 MARKED THE CENTENARY OF IRIS MURDOCH AND, AS IS culturally befitting of such occasions, Murdoch's work was both celebrated and reappraised by cultural critics and scholars within popular forums and academic circles. Being what can only be described as an avid fan of Murdoch's novels (verging on the near-obsessional as an adolescent) and a film-philosophical scholar (with more than a passing interest in Murdoch scholarship), I was struck by the reluctance of various cultural critics to acknowledge the deeply imbricate nature of these two facets of Murdoch's working life, acknowledging Murdoch the novelist to the detriment of appraising Murdoch the philosopher. For as Lucy Bolton renders clear in her excellent new book on Murdoch's ethical thought and its considerable merits as a film-philosophical framework, Murdoch worked and wrote against the deeply entrenched views of her time not only as a novelist, but also as an important philosopher. In other words, if we neglect to attend to Murdoch's thought and its intrinsic connection to art, we fail to grasp an expansive view of her work. Bolton takes this principle – the interconnectedness of thought and art – as the central focus of her careful and loving study and threads it through Murdoch's philosophical tenets. That is, she asks whether art (specifically film) can function as a kind of 'moral training'; if film, in particular, can exemplify the sort of art that, for Murdoch, constitutes philosophy; and, daringly, whether art can, in fact, make us better ethical agents in the world.

Film-philosophy, as a somewhat niche field, is currently beset by a fascination with theories loosely developed in the vein of post-structuralism (from which they borrow without necessarily acknowledging their considerable debt). Having seemingly (and, some might say, finally) moved on from a resolute core of Deleuzian and Derridean readings of film, many film-philosophical scholars are now concerned with a strain

of theoretical application which can, at best, be described as post-human. Indeed, humanism seems to have become a veritably dirty word in some scholarly circles today. Murdoch focused her attention on a form of Platonic ethics and morality of the everyday during a period in which behaviourist analysis and existentialism were in vogue. Bolton has produced a book which may, I conjecture, similarly baffle contemporary scholars bound up almost exclusively in contemporary debates of the Anthropocene to the near exclusion of everything else. I, for one, welcome this brave, meaty, engaging and serious return to moral principles *through* art, and I am sure many other scholars will, too. For, as Bolton acknowledges, Murdoch's use of 'the terminology of transcendence, metaphysics and morals does not mean that her thinking is outmoded' (18). Indeed, Bolton astutely argues and lucidly demonstrates that contemporary cinema is, in fact, 'increasingly occupied with the questions that occupied Murdoch, such as how to become a better person, how to act justly and how to learn from experience' (18). These are not abstract issues. Bolton states that, 'for Murdoch, paying attention to art is a way of training oneself in the objectual attention required to address issues in our own moral thinking about others' (21). Just as Siegfried Kracauer (1922) and Walter Benjamin (1938) had argued that film, as the modern art form of reproducibility *par excellence*, could foster a training ground for the denizens of 20th-century modernity, Murdoch advocates for a complex engagement with art as a means to strengthening one's own moral connection to the world and our fellow beings. One might argue, as Bolton clearly does, that we overlook this kind of robust ethical thinking and the place of art in this world at our peril. I agree with her.

This form of studied and devoted ethical engagement, though, requires a form of attention that is increasingly, we are told, imperilled in contemporary society. Murdochian concepts of distance, loving attention, contemplation and unselfing are seemingly at odds with a self-obsessive, fast-paced consumer culture that has been amplified to breaking point in our current era of late capitalism (unless recuperated and packaged into a bogus 'lifestyle' philosophy or product, of course). Murdoch's relationship to art, as profoundly ethical, demands that we not only slow our lives down in order to pay the kind of attention needed to elucidate moral thinking – what Murdoch calls a 'true vision' (26) – but that we also pierce the 'fat relentless ego' (80) that, by 'obsession, anxiety, envy, resentment and fear' (26), prevents us from seeing beyond our own 'dull fantasy' lives (26). Art, at its very best, draws us out of our own hermetic interests and obsessions and helps us to extend ourselves into the world as moral agents. Film, argues Bolton, is not only a 'perfect example' of the kind of ethical-artistic experience, but one that is more 'efficacious and affective' than many other art forms (25). Bolton does not brook here the churlish assessment of film viewers espoused by 1970s apparatus theory: that they are but passive entities mindlessly (and perhaps dangerously) absorbing a series of images without recourse to critique. As a renowned film-philosopher herself, Bolton argues persuasively that the act of watching a film is,

precisely, a form of loving Murdochian attention that requires we not only contemplate and assess cinematic images in order to build informed and nuanced judgements about their broader cultural meanings, but that we also learn to harness our raw emotions of empathy, anger, fright, disgust and love as a kind of moral progress. For Bolton, the resolutely contemporary and global corpus of films she examines in her book facilitates a Murdochian ethical engagement with the image that extends, vitally, well beyond the boundaries of the screen. This is precisely why this kind of artistic engagement matters.

The range of films and film cultures that Bolton addresses in her book is extensive and impressive. Her love of cinema as an art form is evident and she duly pays attentive care to this corpus in true Murdochian fashion. I will not be able to address the full scale of Bolton's analytical accomplishment in this review so I will focus on several readings which are, in my view, outstanding examples of film-philosophical thought in action. Kenneth Lonergan's *Margaret* (2011) and *Manchester by The Sea* (2016) are highly complex ethical dramas, the diegetic worlds of which would not be, I contend, out of place in one of Murdoch's own novels. Both films adumbrate the notion of how best to act or what kind of recourse to action one has in the wake of eviscerating trauma. Bolton weaves this pair of films through Murdochian readings of, respectively, the moral fable and tragedy in order to counter the idea that 'morality is something that can be decided upon in isolation from the real world and the real people in it' (53). For Bolton, these films demonstrate to devastating effect the always situated and individual nature of ethical response and that, because of this, developing one's moral vision is necessarily fraught with difficulty, but integral to our survival in the world. What we bear witness to here is 'the development of another's moral vision' which, in turn, can inculcate 'moral development in us'. (53) These films test our empathy and endurance as viewers and demand that we engage with the messy stuff of life. In direct contrast to tragedy, Bolton also turns her attention to comedy in order to ponder Murdoch's own question, 'what may I properly laugh at, even in my private thoughts?' (143). While this analysis centres on Armando Iannucci's *The Death of Stalin* (2018) and certainly does not serve to deflate enjoyment of it, it does, by extension, raise important questions over what Murdoch herself has called the 'cheapening and brutalising effect of an atmosphere where everything can be ridiculed' (143). It is a testament to the power, breadth and intelligence of Bolton's analysis here that I could not help but contemplate more than once the manifold ways in which humour has been used to mask serious breaches of democracy in our own contemporary political world of late. To laugh is a wonderful thing, but we must exercise care with regard to what it is we choose to laugh at.

I highly recommend this brilliant, robust and incisive book, which has much to offer to readers well beyond the fields of film studies and philosophy. It is absolutely essential reading for any serious scholar interested in an ethics of art or the philosophy of aesthetics.

## Review of *Reading Iris Murdoch's 'Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals'* edited by Nora Hämäläinen and Gillian Dooley (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019)

Anne Eggert Stevens

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**R**EADING IRIS MURDOCH'S 'METAPHYSICS AS A GUIDE TO MORALS', EDITED BY Nora Hämäläinen and Gillian Dooley, is the first anthology devoted entirely to Murdoch's 'major philosophical testament', *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (hereafter referred to as *MGM*) published in 1992 (1). The anthology, with essays from Dooley, Hämäläinen, Hannah Marije Altorf, Gary Browning, Anne-Marie Søndergaard Christensen, Christopher Cordner, David J. Fine, Niklas Forsberg, Andrew Gleeson, Mark Hopwood, Megan Jane Lavery, David Robjant, Craig Taylor, Fiona Tomkinson, Frances White and Mariëtte Willemsen, provides commentary to the 18 chapters of *MGM* and relates Murdoch's work to a wide range of current discussions within philosophy, theology and literary studies. The more experienced reader of Murdoch is provided with expert scholarly perspectives on *MGM*. For the less experienced reader, the volume serves as a thorough introduction to the intellectual breadth of Murdoch's late philosophical work.

The volume begins with Hämäläinen's and Dooley's concise introduction to Murdoch's intellectual ambitions for *MGM*. The work has at times been considered a rather loose, even unstructured, collection of philosophical essays on a variety of topics and, at first glance, each chapter may be perceived as a type of stream of consciousness rather than a tightly structured 'to the point' philosophical argument (2). However, Murdoch's personal philosophical style is not an indication of a lack of focus but can in fact be read as deliberately chosen to support her overall philosophical ambitions. Hämäläinen and Dooley provide the reader with a fine introductory overview of her three major ambitions they see as keys to understanding *MGM*. Firstly, they point to the philosophical ambition that amounts to giving 'nothing less than a comprehensive view of the human situation at the time of writing' (3). We learn that this ambition is

closely connected to both a strong historical awareness and a literary sensitivity that strongly influences how Murdoch writes about and how she reads other philosophers throughout *MGM*. Secondly, the editors emphasise how religion plays an important role in Murdoch's moral thought. This has been a central part of Maria Antonaccio's important work that shows how Murdoch's thought transgresses traditional approaches to morality (rules guiding action) and ethics (the good life) by a sustained interest in the 'unconditional' as a central part of morals. This is normally a theological interest in God, but in Murdoch's thought we are instead presented with a secularised 'Godless' theology with the 'Good' as the unconditional element of human morality. Thirdly, there is Murdoch's thorough-going preoccupation with metaphysics. She continually looks for the metaphysical underpinnings of any (even the naturalist) view of 'what the world is fundamentally like'. In contrast to the Kantian model, Hämäläinen and Dooley rightly suggest that Murdoch's own metaphysical outlook is an attempt to locate *historical a priori*s (not too far from Foucault's project) and to give an 'affirmative account' of the human being as 'irreducibly placed between good and evil, striving for the good' (8).

This informative introduction equips readers well to approach the essays in *Reading Iris Murdoch's 'Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals'*; they can be read sequentially, but also as independent essays on separate topics. As it is not possible to give space to them all in this context, I have selected three essays that, put together, give an impression of the broad range of topics covered in *MGM*. Niklas Forsberg's reading of the first chapter of *MGM*, 'Conceptions of Unity. Art', presents Murdoch's idea that fundamental is the human urge for constructions of 'unity' *vis-à-vis* the continuous threat of disorder, change and chaos in human life. One of Forsberg's important points is that philosophy (and theory-construction in general) is one typical way of making general sense of our world and to 'domesticate' it through conceptual classification, but it is not the only way and perhaps not even the best (36). Instead, Forsberg makes us see how Murdoch is interested in showing how the unified metaphysical pictures provided by philosophy and science are fundamentally iconoclastic and thus built upon pictures of how we conceive of ourselves within a given historical period. Murdoch suggests that it is very often the artworks of a given *Zeitgeist* that provide us with the most adequately unified metaphysical depictions of the human predicament at a given time, because they accommodate both the iconoclastic and historical nature of our general views of ourselves (46).

Another central topic is touched upon in Craig Taylor's reading of the chapter 'Fact and Value'. Taylor offers a thorough examination of Murdoch's engagement with the thought of Immanuel Kant and early Ludwig Wittgenstein as unsatisfying examples of the sharp distinction between fact and value within modern philosophy (68). Taylor shows how Murdoch detects the fault of both positions as related to their philosophical starting points. By taking departure in the world of scientific fact as absolutely certain and to be kept apart from any moral values, they end up having great trouble explaining

the reality of value, although they see it as the most important reality to be accounted for (70). Taylor concludes by referring to Cora Diamond's reading of Murdoch, where she argues that Murdoch also works with a distinction between fact and value, but not one that renders value unreal. On the contrary, our way of looking at the world already involves a huge range of attitudes through which we can 'take it in', and this is the sense in which the world is already 'soaked' in value (75-6).

The last chapter discussed here is Andrew Gleeson's article on Murdoch's re-reading of the Christian monk Saint Anselm's 'ontological argument' in 'The Ontological Proof'. Gleeson takes a different approach from most of the other contributors and does not give an account of the chapter as a whole. Instead, he briefly lays out Murdoch's central argument in order to present possible philosophical objections and corrections to it. His paper is divided into three parts: in part one Gleeson presents Murdoch's ontological argument of the Good as a necessary aspect of human experience that we discover via our experience of degrees of goodness; part two focuses on how a 'quietist' way of thinking can save Murdoch's argument from accusations that moral experience is not the experience of something really real; part three presents his own alternative ideal of perfection in the ontological argument. The middle section, which contains Gleeson's critique of Murdoch's conception of the Good, is the most interesting. Whereas Murdoch conceives of the Good as a necessary distant moral ideal that continuously draws us towards its centre, Gleeson thinks of the necessary aspect of morality as disclosed primarily through the 'perniciousness of human life' (196). He argues that Murdoch's view of morality is 'mainly peaceful', because it is concerned with the cultivation of 'loving attention', and hence avoids the more dramatic situations of serious moral transgression. In contrast, Gleeson suggests that the necessary aspect of morality must appear through our moral reactions to strong prohibitions rather than to the (quiet) activity of moral progress: 'Moral necessities do not arise from cultivated attention to ideals, but from very basic inter-personal *reactive* attitudes (sympathy, remorse, indignation: partly innate, partly socialised) that are certainly definitive of human life in distinction from animal life' (203). Gleeson is thus unsatisfied with the lack of moral demand inherent in Murdoch's idea of the Good. I am not sure that Gleeson's reading of Murdoch is fully justified, but it offers a starting point for further reflections on what can be taken as the necessary element of human morality. For instance, it is true that Murdoch's primary focus is the continuous human activity of picturing our world, but this does not exclude the importance of moral reactions. One might suggest that her aim is rather to show how our picture of reality necessarily preconditions how we come to react to it, and how these pictures are related to our vision of the Good. This is for instance discussed in the chapter 'Comic and Tragic' that considers our moral reactions to severe suffering.

On examining these three contributions, one gains an impression of the intellectual breadth of Murdoch's project. I suggest that these three chapters indicate how art,

philosophy and religion each play an important part in Murdoch's ambitious attempt to provide a unified depiction of human morality in our time. For instance, we see how her insistence on the iconoclastic, value-laden and hence artistic nature of both philosophical and aesthetic depictions of the human situation connects with the critique of various philosophical attempts to conceive of the world as divided into an objective value-neutral scientific realm on the one hand, and subjective moral values on the other. This critique is again connected to Murdoch's ontological argument about the necessity of the Good, which functions as the unifying spiritual (religious) metaphor of all human striving, including both art and philosophy with their respective aims and abilities to illuminate reality. As Dooley emphasises, this aim of illuminating reality in light of the Good is, in both endeavours, fundamentally metaphorical in spite of profound stylistic differences (96). *MGM* thus does not 'solve' what is often referred to as the ancient quarrel between art and philosophy but provides a pertinent reconsideration of it through a revival of the Platonic idea of the Good as the spiritual unifier of all human depictions of reality. Thus, to conclude, it remains only to say that *Reading Iris Murdoch's Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* is an intellectually challenging read that offers many profound and detailed interpretations of Murdoch's important mature work, invaluable to all interested readers of Murdoch.

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

J. Robert Baker

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PETER CONRADI HAS WRITTEN A USEFUL, ENGAGING, EVEN ELEGANT BOOK. I AM not sure I have quite the publisher's temerity to call it 'a memoir'. Nor is it strictly a 'fairly eccentric sort of autobiography' as Conradi terms it (208). If anything, Conradi has given us three brief reflections – one of his growing up, a second about his family's 19th-century roots, and a third about his friendship with Iris Murdoch. Each of these is an act of mourning to hold the dead – members of his family and Iris Murdoch – among the living. So, *Family Business* is, in fact, an elegy for the important people, mostly women, in Conradi's life and perhaps also for the young man he was, growing up in the 1950s without good models for how to be gay or bisexual.

*Family Business* is held together by Conradi's solicitude for four women – first his American grandmother Florence, then his mother Dulcie Cohen, to a lesser extent his sister Prue, and certainly Iris Murdoch. Conradi's image for these relationships is that of the knight-errant; sometimes his chivalrous adventures are formative as with his love for his grandmother, sometimes quixotic as with his defence of his mother against his father, sometimes comradely as with Prue, and sometimes both poignantly intellectual and personal as in his friendship with Murdoch. Through all these relationships runs the question, as Conradi acknowledges, 'Who was I? ... a real question, albeit a teasing one, with no correct answer ...' (14). In attempting to answer this question, Conradi is also coming to grips with the past: 'Moreover writing about it, which looks like a way of owning it, turns out also to be a way of making peace with it, and letting it go' (14).

Each section has its delights and pleasures. Conradi's literary habit of mind gives him example after example in fiction and memoir for his own life. Truman Capote's 'Christmas Memory', with the boy narrator's affinity with his much older relative, provides a type for Conradi's relationship with his grandmother, who was his closest friend as he was growing up. The one moment for which there is no literary model is his asking her, when he is 20, about gay people. She intones the prejudice of her time that gay sex 'is disgusting', but she adds a codicil that offers Conradi some hope: 'But they all have perfect manners' (29).

In the story Conradi weaves about his American grandmother, Florence Alice Conradi, we see a woman deeply committed to a way of life that kept her sailing the Atlantic rather than switching to air travel. Genteel as it may have been to sit at the captain's table on those crossings, they were not always without their dangers. She and Conradi's grandfather decided not to take the *Lusitania* on the voyage which saw it sunk by U-boats off the coast of Ireland. There is Florence's astounding story of encountering Queen Mary in a broken-down car on Albermarle Street and giving the stranded consort a ride. Embellished or not, the story provides a precise insight into Conradi's grandmother and, perhaps, into him as well, for it is from her that he derived his appreciation of London's romance.

The first section recalls not only the world of the rich before passports; it also touches on the dilemma of being Jewish, however assimilated, in the early part of the 20th century. Conradi remembers that a great-aunt, Betty Phillips, 'regularly took her passport down to the Jewish Agency, which shipped it into Germany for Jewish girls, pretending to her identity, to use to get to safety in England'. Perhaps more importantly, Conradi also details the postwar difficulties of his parents' marriage and of his forays into their skirmishes on behalf of his mother. The tauntings of his father excruciatingly undercut Conradi's deep longing to be fathered into manhood, a manhood marked by his longing for other men. In allying himself with his mother, he denies himself the very attention and affection he wants and increases his sense of isolation as he becomes aware of his complicated, heterodox and, early on, illegal desires. Ironically, his belligerence toward his father is catalysed by his father's liaisons with other women; given that each had a sexuality that did not fit into prescribed modes, father and son might have offered each other solace and understanding; instead, they found themselves at loggerheads.

Nor did his time at Oundle School provide much relief for Conradi. The anti-Semitic bullying, the dreadful food and the prevailing military ethos were at odds with the sensitive, artistic young Conradi, so he took refuge in cleverness and art. Luckily for him, Oundle could be indulgent, and its strong musical pedagogy, field trips and movies nurtured Conradi's love of music, art and film. Best of all, the English master Pip Gaskell introduced him to the work of Iris Murdoch.

The real psychological work that Conradi faced at Oundle and in the years following was to become his own father, for no surrogate, neither uncle nor teachers, could help him with this task, which is the work of every man, no matter his sexuality, no matter his relationship with his own father. For Conradi, this self-discovering and nurturing came with his early tentative forays into the emerging gay scene in the heady days following the Sexual Offences Act 1967 and the Stonewall riots, which showed us the mutability of sexual mores. Conradi found the sight of men dancing and kissing in gay bars and saunas bracing; and in the arms of other men, he found his own masculinity confirmed, for as he says: 'It turned out to my surprise that the embrace of a male lover made me feel more manly than before, as if being desired by a man made one extra-male' (74).

The sixty or so pages on his association with Murdoch will be of most interest to readers of this *Review*. Conradi admits that in his version of Freud's Family romance he took Murdoch as an ideal mother, who, at first, he thought he had to protect as he did his mother. He also notes how much Murdoch's fiction attracted and buttressed him as he was joining the nascent gay rights movement in England. He was struck by Murdoch's treatment of Michael Meade's gayness as ordinary, an unremarkable fact except insofar as it ran him afoul of school and church. Indeed, Murdoch's writing about Michael's homosexuality was bold in 1958; it was after all some nine years before the partial legalisation of sex between men 21 and older. It was not just her novels that helped Conradi; her essays fed his spiritual life. His friendship with Murdoch came in his late thirties when he attended her 1982 Gifford lectures. He says: 'In Edinburgh, we started a long, continuing conversation' (88).

Conradi records touching details about Murdoch the person – her oversleeping and arriving late one morning for her Gifford lectures, her faulty hearing, her dislike of food that looked up at her from the plate. He also has a deft touch for the complexities of her marriage, noting John Bayley's practiced innocence of her affairs and Bayley's complicated reasons for writing his memoirs of Iris. Conradi does not judge Bayley, but he does note that Bayley's assertions about their housekeeping and about Murdoch's not having slept with women are patently false. In describing how he and his partner, Jim O'Neill, gradually began to help Bayley with Murdoch's care as her mind gave way, Conradi sketches the movement from friendship to intimacy, from disciple to caretaker, and from fantasy to reality. In this outline, he avoids mawkish details and lets the ailing Murdoch retain her privacy and dignity.

In fact, this last section of Conradi's book may be the most useful to Murdoch scholars, for in it Conradi reflects on matters that he could not detail in his biography of Murdoch. Many of us who read his book when it came out in 2001 were hungry for it: his substantial, informative biography was a way for us to hold on to Murdoch, the person behind the ample novels and the austere philosophy we had admired while she was alive. We all knew that Conradi's biography, good as it was, came too close upon Murdoch's death and with too many of her intimates still alive for it to tell everything. Twenty years on, with the deaths of some of the people close to Murdoch, Conradi is freer to offer details that he withheld out of respect to Murdoch's husband and friends.

Conradi details some of the emotional turbulence of the early days of the Bayley's marriage, but insists: 'That their marriage became in the end legendarily happy needs also to be emphasised' (162). Conradi gives up his effort to protect Murdoch from the incomprehensibility of her long attraction to Elias Canetti. His take on Canetti changes: 'I used to think him the more powerful – but now consider him only the more power-obsessed' (190). In reflecting on Murdoch's repeated assertion that she was a male homosexual and often played the part of the younger man, Conradi speculates that 'Canetti analogously took revenge on Iris by "using her as a boy"' (82).

Conradi writes thoughtfully and sympathetically about Philippa Foot's long friendship with Murdoch. He points out that part of the cost of this friendship to Foot was having to endure people who befriended her in order to know Murdoch. He goes on to observe shrewdly, 'It would have been odd had there been no love-hatred, no jealous or dark currents at flow between the two women' (180). At the same time, he notes Foot's faithfulness, particularly her visiting Murdoch after she was stricken with Alzheimer's disease.

Like others, Conradi meditates on Murdoch's practice of not dividing friendship, love and sex. He suggests it may have grown out of her sense of power. Conradi laments that Murdoch may be celebrated, like Burns and Byron, for her sexual proclivities, concluding, 'she now belongs, for better or for worse, to the nation' (202). In a way Conradi is right here, but the Murdoch who belongs to the public imagination is the historical woman who struggled with and enjoyed her sexuality, her *amitiés amoureuses*. Murdoch, the artist and philosopher, though, belongs to her readers and always has. We all have more distance now and can begin to sort out the person who is no longer with us and the artist and thinker whose work still holds our attention, animates our imaginations and inspires our own moral efforts. Still, we should be grateful to Conradi for his ongoing championing of Murdoch's work and thought, and for this felicitous book.

## Review of *Anglican Women Novelists: From Charlotte Brontë to P.D. James*, edited by Judith Maltby and Alison Shell (London: T&T Clark, 2019)

Frances White

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IT IS ALWAYS INTERESTING TO SEE THE COMPANY IN WHICH IRIS MURDOCH FINDS herself. She is grouped with otherwise all male philosophers in Bryan Magee's *Men of Ideas* (1978) and with female novelists in Olga Kenyon's *Women Writers Talk* (1985). Now, in this new collection of essays, she is placed alongside not only Charlotte Brontë and P.D. James but also Charlotte Maria Tucker, Margaret Oliphant, Charlotte M. Yonge, Evelyn Underhill, Dorothy L. Sayers, Rose Macaulay, Barbara Pym, Elizabeth Goudge, Noel Streatfeild and Monica Furlong – an eclectic group.

This anthology examines and celebrates what Judith Maltby and Alison Shell identify in their introduction as the 'remarkable literary heritage' of Anglicanism, a denominational culture that, they claim, has hitherto been less respected than Roman Catholicism (1). Maltby and Shell contend that, though practitioners of feminist history and literary criticism have previously tended to be hostile to organised religion, a 'religious turn' has latterly occurred which has created a more hospitable reception of this aspect of human experience (4). They further observe that a working knowledge of Anglican ideas and culture is needed to understand both British heritage and much of literature from the Reformation to the present. Despite acknowledging Jane Austen as 'perhaps the greatest Anglican woman novelist of them all' (4), Maltby and Shell choose to exclude her from their collection. They justify this on the grounds that she lived during the Georgian Anglican ascendancy, whereas the historical trajectory of this collection begins at the point during Brontë's time when the Church of England was in transit 'from a default position to a positive choice' (4) following the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828 and Catholic Emancipation in 1829. Notwithstanding the logic of their rationale, this seems to me a regrettable decision: I would have welcomed an opening essay on Austen and the Anglican church as manifested in her novels. Lack

of space precludes commentary here on all twelve essays, which are of a consistently high quality of scholarship. It is particularly pleasing to see Pym's and Goudge's work given serious critical attention and interesting to be introduced to Streatfeild's novels for adults, lesser known than her children's books.

Peter Hawkins, recently retired Professor of Religion and Literature at Yale Divinity School and the Yale Institute of Sacred Music, has contributed chapter 11, 'Iris Murdoch (1919–1999): Anglican Atheist' to this collection, having previously linked her with Flannery O'Connor and Walker Percy in his fine early study of theological elements in Murdoch's fiction, *The Language of Grace* (1983). He opens his new essay with the strong and justified claim: 'To an extent unmatched by any other British writer of her time, Iris Murdoch devoted her creative life to thinking about religion, and in particular the decline of Christianity within the UK in the post-war period' (161). He notes the prevalence of characters in her fiction who lose their faith and the importance accorded to the loss of religion in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, which closes with Psalm 139. Murdoch wants to preserve the stories and language of the Authorised Version of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer, both of which deeply marked her imagination. She also wants to retain the figure of Jesus Christ, but not as divine. She finds demythologising important and is influenced by John Robinson and Don Cupitt, and also by Buddhism and the religions of the East. Her religious inheritance is a mixed bag of Church of Ireland Anglicanism with influence from the Brethren, Presbyterians and Quakers in the background. Her mother taught her prayers and hymns, though her parents were not churchgoers. Experience of Revivalist meetings on holidays in Ireland led to her rejecting evangelicalism but retaining a love of singing choruses. During her time at Badminton School, Murdoch was confirmed in the Church of England. At Oxford, the Anglo-Catholic moral philosopher Donald MacKinnon had a strong spiritual influence on her and she took retreats at the Anglican Benedictine Malling Abbey. Later, while teaching at St Anne's College, Oxford, Murdoch was for some years linked to the 'Metaphysicals', a group of High-Anglican male theologians.

Having set this biographical background, Hawkins turns to analysis of *The Time of the Angels*, *A Word Child* and *The Bell*, in that unchronological order. Little, if anything, is added to his longer analyses of these novels in his earlier monograph, though this succinct account is a good introduction for readers of *Anglican Women Novelists* new to Murdoch's life and work. I am given to think by Hawkins's assertion that Anglican Murdoch's frequent choice of imagining the life of faith from a Roman Catholic perspective may be 'because the Established Church, with its Vicars, parish councils and jumble sales, was far removed from the heightened drama (and spiritual elitism) of English Catholicism' (165). It is true that Murdoch does not offer this Pymian environment but I think that it may simply have been that she did not experience it as Pym did, and she was clear in talking to Magee that she writes about what she knows. A more stringent quarrel with Hawkins's view is provoked by his contentious claim

(repeated from *The Language of Grace*) that Michael Meade in *The Bell* 'comes through the refining fires of his great tribulation bearing all the marks of one who has embraced Murdoch's notion of true religion' (172). Recent readings of this novel by other scholars, such as Pamela Osborn and Anne Rowe, would strongly repudiate this view of Michael. Hawkins concludes his essay by observing that the Abbey grows in strength despite Murdoch's loss of the idea of God and that the Abbess speaks with authority, implying that Murdoch does likewise. That may be true of this early novel, but I suspect that this optimistic view is called into question by later works such as *The Book and the Brotherhood* and *The Green Knight*. I would have liked Hawkins to have taken the opportunity to extend his previous excellent research into these troubling later novels.

The collection concludes with an engaging summation by Francis Spufford, drawing together threads and themes from these dozen disparate writers. He and the editors have done a fine job of their subject, though I could wish the editors had read the essay they commissioned from Hawkins carefully enough to avoid the erroneous statement in their introduction that Murdoch was brought up in the Church of Ireland! That howler aside, I warmly recommend this anthology to readers of any or all of these intriguing Anglican woman novelists.

## Review of *Brigid Brophy: Avant-Garde Writer, Critic, Activist*, edited by Richard Canning and Gerri Kimber (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020)

*Pamela Osborn*

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**B**RIGID BROPHY HAS UNDERGONE SOMETHING OF A RESURGENCE IN THE YEARS since the passionate and fruitful conference at the University of Northampton in 2015 on the 20th anniversary of her death. This is the second collection to emerge from that two-day event, the first being a special issue of the journal *Contemporary Women's Writing* in 2018. As Canning points out in his introduction, *Brigid Brophy: Avant-Garde Writer, Critic, Activist* is, shockingly, the first book ever dedicated entirely to her work. This necessary addition to Brophy scholarship examines her legacy 'both within and far beyond literary or cultural contexts' (2) and includes a previously unpublished 1980s contribution from Brophy herself, who seems very present in the collection as a whole. Chapters vary in length and style. Some take the form of memoir and offer recollections by people who encountered her. Others are scholarly pieces that reflect the diversity of Brophy's achievements and at times introduce emotional substance not often present in collections of this kind. While the focus remains on her singular brilliance, her bafflingly under-appreciated status is acknowledged. The collection as a whole begs the question whether Brophy has been marginalised because she was a woman, or because she was not considered the acceptable type of twentieth-century intellectual as, it is implied, her friend and one-time lover, Iris Murdoch, was.

Two chapters, by Gary Francione and Kim Stallwood, on Brophy the ground-breaking animal-rights activist reveal her position in stark contrast to those animal welfare campaigners who, she believed, fought 'for the welfare of animals we exploit' as opposed to 'the right of animals not to be exploited' (100). The critical part she played in winning the battle for Public Lending Right payments to authors is also given due prominence. For those more interested in the literary aspect, Patricia Highsmith, Ronald Firbank, George Bernard Shaw and, of course, Iris Murdoch are shadowy presences in several chapters,

with the latter coming to the fore (alongside Brophy) in Miles Leeson's impressive and detailed chapter 'Encoding Love: Hidden Correspondence in the Fiction of Brigid Brophy and Iris Murdoch', which makes the most of new archival material and includes an illustration depicting the cleverly personalised copy of *Flesh* given to Murdoch by Brophy. Leeson skilfully highlights the playfulness of their intellectual relationship, which often transmuted into sadomasochism, and suggests that, while their influence on each other's work was limited, their 'encoding of themselves within fiction' (145) holds potential for new ways of reading their work. For Murdoch enthusiasts, Brophy's own contribution, offering a writer's view of the novel, contains what reads suspiciously like a barb directed at Murdoch when she declares that:

many of the writers most honoured (CBE and upwards) in contemporary Britain are those with the knack of producing, once a year, over decades, a rewrite of their first novel. It's like plonk that's sold under a brand name. It saves you bothering with districts and vintages. (38)

Murdoch experienced Brophy's criticism of her work first-hand and perhaps absorbed it into Bradley Pearson's assessment of Arnold Biffin's work in *The Black Prince* (1973), of which these lines seem reminiscent. Brophy goes on to make the case for fantasy as the 'raw material' (44) of the creative arts, which seems the antithesis of Murdoch's view, except that their definitions of 'fantasy', like their personalities, are rather different. In his chapter, Jonathan Gibbs notes shared features in Brophy's and Murdoch's work such as 'ingenious role play, gender bending and gender blending, the intricate dance of fantasy' (120). He attributes the near absence of sex in Murdoch's novels to her perception of libido as 'a psychological, even an intellectual or spiritual mechanism, rather than a physiological one', while Brophy strives to offer her reader 'the feeling of the experience of sex' (120).

Rodney Hill's letter to Brigid Brophy details his experience of discovering Brophy's work as an undergraduate and becoming a collector of her books, and ends by evoking Gainsborough's 'The Painter's Daughters Chasing a Butterfly', coincidentally a feature of one of Murdoch's best-known set pieces in *The Bell* (1958), which reminds him that '[t]rying to recall the past and pin it down feels as elusive as the butterfly and as transitory as a butterfly's lifespan' (142). Jill Longmate's excellent piece concerns Brophy's and Maureen Duffy's critically acclaimed 1969 'Prop Art' project, which involved constructing exhibits from polystyrene heads (wig stands) and other theatrical artefacts. Illustrations included bring to mind the kind of work Murdoch attributed to Jessica in *The Nice and the Good* (1968) at around the same period – clever, unserious, playful, transient. Perhaps Murdoch would not approve, but I found the exhibits fascinating.

The final word is given to Brophy and Michael Levey's daughter, Kate Levey, who suggests that Brophy was actively rejected by the establishment she antagonised. She



writes of long illness and disability which resulted in her 'self-deprecating [...] socially vulnerable [...] nimble-witted and charmingly sardonic' mother collapsing into 'a bloody-minded version of her true self' (238). There is no revising of character into saintliness here and, on the evidence of this collection, the acknowledgement of Brophy as a dangerous dissident does not seem overstated. This is a fascinating, sometimes eccentric, eclectic and scholarly collection which succeeds in offering a well-rounded picture of a thinker whose legacy is far more extensive than has been recognised until now.

## Review of *British Literature in Transition, 1960-1980: Flower Power*, edited by Kate McLoughlin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019)

*Natasha Alden*

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**T**HIS EDITED COLLECTION, PART OF CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS'S FIVE-VOLUME series on twentieth-century British writing, *British Literature in Transition*, explores the tensions, fractures, continuities and reconfigurations in writing during the period 1960–1980. The volume is divided into five sections: the first offers chapters on formal experiments in poetry, drama and fiction; the second focuses on emergent identities in the period, covering race, gender, sexuality and class; the third looks at changes in social attitudes and ways of thinking about the environment, the past, psychedelic drugs, the Sexual Revolution and the Intelligence Service; the fourth section explores local and regional developments in Wales, Scotland, the north of England and Northern Ireland; and the fifth focuses on shifts in the work of Iris Murdoch, Philip Larkin, Harold Pinter, Ted Hughes and Caryl Churchill, and includes a chapter by James Clements titled 'Iris Murdoch: An Anatomy of Failure'.

The collection as a whole contextualises and foregrounds Murdoch's contribution to British literature at a time of significant social, political and literary change, and there is much here to interest Murdoch scholars. Julia Jordan's 'Error and Judgement in the 1960s British Novel' argues that failure was used as a creative starting point by experimental novelists interested in creating an 'open' form and provides some useful context for Clements's exploration of the same theme in Murdoch's work. Jordan does not mention Murdoch, but does touch on Brigid Brophy, and Brophy's work is discussed at more length in Alison Hennegan's extraordinarily wide-ranging blend of eyewitness account and literary criticism in 'Coming Out: The Emergence of Gay Literature'. Claire O'Callaghan's chapter "'Little Things': Writing the Sexual Revolution' discusses *A Severed Head* alongside novels by Martin Amis, Margaret Forster, Margaret Drabble and Bill Naughton, arguing that they 'suggest the hedonism of the sexual revolution to

be a deeply misleading myth' (200). Kate McLoughlin's introduction to the collection opens with a wonderful evocation of the 'Flower Power' demonstration in 1967, which it uses as the starting point of a detailed and suggestive unpacking of the concepts of 'flower' and 'power' in terms of the culture and politics of the time, with 'the natural, organic, delicate, ephemeral and cyclical contrasting with the man-made, mechanistic, monochrome, tough, durable and linear [...] "Flower", here, is shorthand not only for the hippy movement but also for the modish manifestations of anti-Establishment écart and doing-things-differently across the period' (2-3). McLoughlin deftly sketches a useful set of historical, cultural and attitudinal contexts, laying out the ground of the collection. The topic most of interest to Murdoch scholars, the novel, is described as 'like the orchid family: diverse, exotic, gorgeous, a classifier's nightmare' (17).

Murdoch's novels of the period are, Clements argues, altogether easier to classify. He suggests that the form Murdoch develops in the 1970s is a new way of negotiating the tension between journalistic and crystalline novel forms and, 'in tune with the literary climate of the period' (308), is more interested in failure than perfection, in this instance the failure of both the novelist and her characters to "see" the world without self' (311). Murdoch's goal in the 1970s novels is:

to tell two stories at once. The first is the story of her characters, struggling with preconceptions and the trappings of ego, in the hopes of seeing the world 'as it is'. The second is the story of the author, engaged in exactly the same task: trying, and failing, to see the world 'as it is'. (315)

Clements's essay outlines the way Murdoch's theory of the novel grew out of the ethical theory she developed in three key essays written over the course of the 1960s, 'The Idea of Perfection' (1962), 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts' (1967) and 'On "God" and "Good"' (1969), as well as her theory of the novel developed in three further key essays, 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited' (1959), 'Against Dryness' (1961) and 'Existentialists and Mystics' (1970). Clements provides a useful, clear overview of Murdoch's use of the Platonic idea of the ontological reality of goodness, her adaptation of the ethics of attention from Simone Weil, her projection of this into an ethical theory of the novel and the idea of perfection as an ideal which should be viewed pragmatically as 'infinitely perfectible' (309). He argues that Murdoch's view that any attempt at moral perfection was inevitably doomed (as outlined in 'The Idea of Perfection') lies at the heart of a series of experiments she carried out in four novels from the 1970s, *An Accidental Man* (1971), *The Black Prince* (1973), *A Word Child* (1975) and *The Sea, The Sea* (1978).

'[C]ritics', Clements says, have condemned Murdoch's novels for falling short of Eliot's and Tolstoy's in terms of the freedom they allow their characters: 'Seen this way, her novels appear an obvious failure: her prose was clearly more anxious and self-conscious,

her plots more contrived and her characters less free' (311). (It would be useful to know who these critics were; the chapter tends to gesture towards them rather than naming them, which is a pity. Strangely, there is no Murdoch scholarship in the chapter.) To criticise Murdoch for this it to miss the point, Clements suggests; Murdoch did not 'spen[d] the remainder of her career as many critics have contested, trying futilely to mimic Tolstoy in some perverse manifestation of artistic self-flagellation' (something that might bear more analysis, in the context of Murdoch's interest in the flaying of the self), but was 'doing something else entirely' (311). The 'something else' was to focus on the way human beings struggle, 'often admirably, always futilely' (311), towards perfection. Clements acknowledges that this theme is present throughout Murdoch's novels but argues that it is worked out in a different way as Murdoch experiments with a more self-referential narrative form which shows individuals' struggle to attain the good 'not only within her internal narrative, but also on the extradiegetic level' (311).

Clements identifies *An Accidental Man* as Murdoch's 'first overtly experimental novel, and, perhaps, her least successful work' (316). Murdoch's attempt to 'remove the controlling consciousness entirely' (316) by wrong-footing the reader through introducing numerous characters whose relationship to the main plot is either peripheral or non-existent, and by having whole chapters consisting only of dialogue or letters between people sometimes central to the plot, sometimes not, 'attempted to circumvent' the limitations of character and author, but, Clements thinks, at the expense of the 'humanity' of the novel (318). Murdoch varies her approach in *The Black Prince* and the novels that follow, choosing 'to embrace imperfection. [...] Rather than attempt to forge an impossible vision of reality "as it is" within the pages of a novel, or, conversely, exclude faltering humanity altogether, Murdoch, in *The Black Prince*, instead created her first "porous" novel' (318). The novel uses a first-person perspective that allows Murdoch to 'draw attention to the writer's struggling humanity without shattering the novel's internal verisimilitude' (318). By employing a highly unreliable narrator, a mysterious editor and a collection of postscripts by other characters, Murdoch throws the truth-claims the novel can make into question. Murdoch's interest in the tension between 'reconciling her moral interest in the world "as it is" with her suspicion of language and perception' (319) also animates *A Word Child*, her 'boldest and most interesting experiment in literary form' (319). Clements describes Hilary Burde as 'a philologist whose sense of language and meaning is a parody of the linguistic empiricist conception of language as a closed system' (319); unlike *The Black Prince*, where truth seemed just about attainable, 'the great innovation of *A Word Child* is that Burde, rather than being an unreliable narrator, is entirely correct in asserting that there is nothing 'behind' his assertions, as his (fictional) world is entirely constructed from language' (319).

In *The Sea, The Sea*, Murdoch finds 'the form most suited to her goals' (320), according to Clements. The form of the novel evolves as it progresses, beginning as an autobiography, then, as the present creeps in, becoming more of a diary. It 'harden[s]

(320) into a novel as Charles Arrowby becomes obsessed with Hartley: ‘Charles’s unreflexive impressions, hardened into (and by) the novel form, lead to catastrophic events (offering an indirect critique of the novel form itself)’ (320). What *The Sea, The Sea* embodies, Clements argues, is what Murdoch argues in ‘The Idea of Perfection’, that our understanding is in constant flux, depending on our situation and needs. Charles’s narrative demonstrates the impossibility of achieving a perfect view of oneself or the world, because the ego cannot be transcended. *The Sea, The Sea*, then, offers a form and a language which ‘we change as it changes us’; ‘imperfect, cracked, [a novel] will always fail to describe the world as it is’ (321). Clements’s reading of the novel is less convincing when he argues that James’s death at the moment of achieving enlightenment is meant to ‘mock the notion that we can ever escape the prison of self’ (321). Although, in her 1982 interview with Christopher Bigsby, Murdoch did say that James was a failure in certain respects, she is also clear that his death is not meant satirically, and that in ‘stepping off the wheel’ he has succeeded on his own terms. (It is also puzzling, of course, to see James referred to in this essay as Charles’s brother.)

Clements’s analysis of Murdoch’s experiments in creating new narrative forms to capture the impossibility of perfection here is convincing and moves deftly between the novels and the essays. It would have been useful to have had some engagement with Murdoch criticism, and it would perhaps have been interesting to see how his argument works in relation to the four novels published in the same decade that are not discussed, and Murdoch’s earlier and later works, but the essay is not an introduction to Murdoch’s work over the twenty-year period the collection as a whole focuses on, but rather a snapshot of one particular formal development, and in that context there is much to admire here. Clements’s overview of Murdoch’s ethical theory and theory of the novel is exceptionally clear and will be very useful for readers more familiar with Murdoch’s fiction than her philosophy, and the collection as a whole is full of wonderful things: McLoughlin’s erudite and entertaining introduction, O’Callaghan’s incisive skewering of the myth of the permissive, and the attention given to regional literature are particular highlights. As a whole, the collection opens up the period in new, surprising ways, showing us familiar writers in a new light, bringing less well-known voices to the fore, and inviting us to reconsider our critical sense of 20 years in which certain aspects of British society and literature underwent significant transformation.

## Report on the Iris Murdoch Centenary Conference, St Anne’s College, Oxford, 13–15 July 2019

*Miles Leeson*

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IT MAY COME AS NO SURPRISE TO READERS THAT THE PLANNING FOR THE CENTENARY Conference, and indeed all the activities that were organised or supported by the Research Centre at Chichester last year, were years in the making. When I took over the general organisation of the Society back in 2015, Iris Murdoch’s centenary was already on the radar – so much so that dates and locations had already been sketched out. I should say at the start that none of this would have been possible without the advice, support and months of hard work by many who will be familiar names and to whom I owe a huge debt of gratitude. As has been the case now for several years, my central supporter for this was Frances White, who joined me on a preparatory visit to St Anne’s College, Oxford in the summer of 2017 to arrange accommodation, catering, conference rooms and exhibition space. During our initial meeting with various staff from both St Anne’s and Somerville Colleges, it became clear that, even with two years’ notice, Somerville would be the junior partner in the events as their rooms were already allocated to a variety of summer schools who book years in advance. Thankfully they were able to loan us exhibition space in the New Council Room and the use of the Mary Somerville Room for the wine reception and book launch on the Saturday evening, as everyone believed it to be essential to honour Murdoch at both of her former colleges.

Months were then spent in discussion with the Kingston University Archive, the Bodleian Library, the Archive at Newnham College, Cambridge, and the archives and libraries of both the Oxford colleges. That the exhibition was a total success is very much down to Frances White and Dayna Miller – pictures of the exhibition, along with the pictures from the conference, can now be found online by searching ‘Flickr Iris Murdoch Society’. I was very much ‘hands off’ on this piece of the jigsaw, although helping to set up the exhibition the day before was a real treat as the rough sketches and floor plan came together, and items came in from the Bodleian in a locked case! It also needs to be noted that the Bodleian was kind enough to host Peter Garrard’s lecture on ‘Authorship, Language and Textual Pathology’ the day before the conference, which drew a large crowd from Oxford as well as many Murdoch devotees. The Bodleian also

arranged for a small exhibit of various items which then joined the major exhibition at Somerville. (For full details of the exhibitions see Dayna Miller's 'Update from the Archive 2020' on page 98 of this issue.)

As an organiser, most of the time during the conference was spent making sure that the next session or event was going to run as smoothly as possible. This meant that, unfortunately, I heard very few of the individual papers but (hopefully!) managed to speak to everyone who was there, albeit briefly. What struck me, aside from the good humour that was much in evidence throughout, was the range and diversity of approaches to Murdoch's work. Not only were there over a hundred delegates from over twenty countries present, but almost seventy papers that extended the scope of Murdoch studies: it was a particular joy to see so many early career scholars in attendance. Although an Oxford-based event, this was very much a University of Chichester affair with so many of my students and colleagues offering help and support. My thanks go to Donna Carpenter and Courtney Richardson for their constant support with administration and the bookstand; Lucy Oulton and Paula Scorrer for taking all the wonderful pictures of the conference and exhibition; and Anne Rowe for formally opening proceedings and being involved in all manner of tasks. I would also like to thank everyone who was a panel chair for giving their time and expertise.

Welcoming Miklós Vető as our first keynote speaker was a pleasure, having met him for the first time on a visit to Paris in October 2018 after a long correspondence. He explained to me then that he was suffering with illness and it would almost certainly be his last trip to the UK, 'to look around the old place one last time', as he put it. That he managed to get to Oxford under his own steam shows his devotion to his old teacher and I am very glad this edition of the *Review* carries such a wonderful tribute to him by Dávid Szőke; he will be much missed as a renowned scholar of German Idealism, and much more. Thanks are also due to Justin Broackes for his translation of Miklós's paper and for his assistance with its delivery on the day. The paper will be published in a collected work in due course, as will the plenary paper, 'How good?' by Valentine Cunningham, Murdoch's Oxford colleague and friend, which provoked lively discussion.

One element you can never be in control of when planning a conference is the health of the participants, and we were very sad that one of our keynote speakers, Steinunn Sigurðardóttir from Iceland, had to cancel her trip to Oxford just a few weeks before. We were very grateful to Gillian Dooley for agreeing at short notice to give an extended paper on singing in Murdoch's fiction. Fate certainly played its hand well here as her paper brought into sharp focus the concert later on that evening. This was a highlight, if not the highlight, of the entire weekend. Gillian had been in the UK for a while prior to the conference and had spent a good deal of time putting together the music, organising the choir and arranging everything with Errol Hui, the pianist: an enormous undertaking. To dispel any misunderstanding, Errol was not meant to be playing from within the recess, but it seemed to work very well, and with much humour

during the interval. My thanks to all who took part, readers and singers alike. I do hope we can arrange something similar at the University of Chichester next year. Another special event was our Sunday afternoon 'In Conversation' between Society President Anne Rowe and actress and Society Patron Annette Badland. Reflecting on her own career on stage and screen, Annette, who had a small role in the original production of 'The Three Arrows' (opposite Ian McKellan), discussed Murdoch's stagecraft, as well as reading sections from her favourite novels, especially *The Sea, The Sea*.

Frances tells me that a personal highlight for her was the wine reception and book launch in the Mary Somerville Room at Murdoch's *alma mater*. During this event she imagined the young undergraduate Murdoch being projected 80 years into the future and seeing the room she had known in her student days now full of people celebrating six new books about her life and work and discussing their love of her fiction and the importance of her philosophy. Murdoch would indeed have felt she had achieved her ambition of making her mark. The centenary dinner on the final evening, Murdoch's 100th birthday, was a fitting conclusion to the long weekend together. The catering was superb, and Peter Conradi's address brought together so much of what was spoken of in the previous days, as well as his own personal reflection on what had made Murdoch unique and vital: we were grateful to have him, and Audi Bayley, as our special guests that evening. A number of the party then continued the celebrations at the college bar, karaoke and dancing being the main forms of entertainment.

If you were able to join us last summer, a heartfelt thank you. You made the event what it was and, although I am relieved that next year's conference will be back at base in Chichester, I do not think any other conference I organise, or attend, will ever quite match this one. Looking back now at the images, memories re-emerge that make the years of preparation all worthwhile. For me, as I am sure for you, it will live long in the memory. I look forward to welcoming you all to Chichester in June 2021.

## Launch of the new Vintage Classics editions, The Second Shelf bookstore, 18 July 2019

Lucy Oulton

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JUST A FEW DAYS AFTER THE ROUSING COMMEMORATION OF IRIS MURDOCH'S LIFE and work at the Centenary Conference in Oxford, enthusiasts, scholars, literary agents, publishers and collectors gathered once more, this time filling all available space at the tiny new bookstore The Second Shelf, in London's Soho. Organised by Lucy Scholes, literary critic and managing editor of literary magazine *The Second Shelf: Rare Books and Words by Women*, the event was to celebrate the launch of the new Vintage Classics editions of six of Murdoch's most commercially popular novels and to listen to three of the contemporary writers who have contributed an introduction to these new editions. A review by Anne Rowe of all six of these introductions can be found in this edition of the *IMR* on page 52.

Located in Smith's Court, The Second Shelf is approached from the west from Brewer Street via Farrier's Passage or reached from a narrow alleyway off Great Windmill Street from the north. Originally built to accommodate a swelteringly hot smithy belonging to the local farrier, the rhythmic clamour of blacksmith's hammer on iron would have penetrated the brick-built courtyard. Today, the yard resembles a calm and secluded oasis, remarkable for its promise of book-browsing peace and quiet bibliophilic reflection, physically removed as it is by a couple of streets from the palpitating frenetic thrum of modern-day Soho and temporally separated by a couple of lifetimes from its original purpose.

On the sort of warm summer evening that might have culminated in an 'ecstatic moonlit swim' in the Thames if Jake Donoghue had been a part of our company, we sat listening to novelist and editor Charlotte Mendelson as she confessed to finding *Under the Net* (1954) 'surprisingly funny' as well as wholly compelling. She characterised its author as a remarkably accomplished 'engineer' of the novel, particularly admiring Murdoch for her 'extraordinary talent for depicting absurdity and acute embarrassment'.

Novelist Daisy Johnson was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize with *Everything Under* in 2018, and one might infer from this remarkable achievement an apparent qualification for writing the introduction to Murdoch's Booker prize-winning, and

arguably most famous, novel *The Sea, The Sea* (1978). Johnson had, by her own admission, never read a Murdoch novel before accepting the Vintage commission; nevertheless she was soon amusing her audience by enthusing as we all do about Charles Arrowby's cooking and reciting to us one of his many infamous food-related aphorisms, that 'meat is really just an excuse for eating vegetables'. Again, it was Murdoch's fine talent for humour that had captivated this new reader and Johnson's chief contribution to this event was, importantly, to remind her audience of Murdoch's comprehensive and enduring ability to captivate new readers.

*The Sandcastle* (1957), the early novel often considered an outlier in Murdoch's body of work, was assured its rightful place in this new six-novel collection by writer and broadcaster Bidisha's knowledgeable and engaging contribution to the event. Bidisha conveyed her great admiration for the power of Murdoch's storytelling art, explaining how challenging it can often be for novelists to write about the 'real in fiction without making it appear ridiculous'. She expressed particular admiration for Murdoch's consummate ability to always be 'alive to contingency'. Murdoch, she said, consistently pictures 'chance, choice and change' in her fiction in a way that simply resembles real life, something that represents a real struggle for many writers. Bidisha said she is intrigued by Murdoch's 'resistance to explanation' and elicited themes from *The Sandcastle* that will resonate with every kind of Murdoch reader: the rich portrayal of the cerebral attraction of Mor and Rain; Murdoch's equivocal use of water to represent both virtue and sensuality; her explicit rejection of a 'vengeful Old Testament God' in favour of a 'pantheistic interest' that in this novel embraces everything from tarot card readings and magic rites to Riley cars and Gothic tracery. Bidisha found herself, she told us, particularly impressed by Murdoch's success at writing men and the late novelist's evident sense of her own personal freedom in being able to do so.

Later, I found myself musing on what Murdoch might have made of this set of new editions, printed in specially commissioned matching floral covers, designed explicitly to appeal to one publisher's perception of who a new generation of Murdoch fans might be. I wondered, too, what Murdoch would have made of the launch of her new editions in a rare-book bookstore dedicated to 'increasing the visibility of writing by women and their contributions throughout history'. After all, Murdoch was known to object to the singling out of opportunities for women. She felt such occasions were in danger of being offered at the expense of simply opening up to women the more valuable and exciting opportunities at the heart of things. Nevertheless, that evening, I feel sure that she would have been proud of the three writers sharing, along with their new introductions, their belief in the enduring appeal and relevance of Murdoch's novels to the twenty-first-century reader. 'Iris Murdoch's novels are so full of love', declared Mendelson. And, after all, what can be more enduring than love?

## Report on ‘Iris Murdoch’s Relationship to Painting, in Philosophy and in Life’, National Portrait Gallery, 19 July 2019

*Daniel Read*

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**I**RIS MURDOCH WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY HAVE BEEN PLEASED BY LUCY BOLTON AND Rebecca Moden’s shared celebration of her enduring love of art and painting. Attended by a selection of new and devoted Murdoch enthusiasts and hosted in an auspicious venue where, just two floors above, her portrait by Tom Phillips awaited the audience’s gaze, the presentation was a fitting event to round off July’s centenary celebrations. Bolton began with a discussion of Murdoch’s philosophical views on art and moral vision; Moden followed with an exploration of visual representations of Murdoch by Phillips and Harry Weinberger, and a question-and-answer session concluded the evening. This report offers a brief reflection on the presentations and the ensuing discussion, both of which resonated with Murdoch’s interest in the artist’s complex role in portraying reality and highlighted her continuing relevance into the twenty-first century.

Bolton’s paper, rather than focusing on the novels that had already received much attention in the previous week’s academic conference, delineated the importance of Murdoch’s philosophical, and indeed creative, concern with moral vision. Art offers individuals a fundamental moral training in meditation and reflection, helping them to extend and deepen moments of attention. Bolton read from Murdoch’s ‘Art is the Imitation of Nature’ (1978) and ‘On “God” and “Good”’ (1969): art teaches us to ‘look at the world’ (*Existentialists and Mystics* 245, hereafter *EM*), to attend to ‘our world and not another one, with a clarity which startles and delights us’ (*EM* 352). By fixing their eyes on an artwork with a ‘just and loving gaze’ (*EM* 327), individuals awaken their imaginative faculties, which are fundamental to the creative search for ‘just’ judgement and moral truth.

Moden’s talk brought the issues explored in Bolton’s paper into focus by illustrating how Murdoch’s concern regarding her representation by Phillips and Weinberger foregrounds the challenges faced by artists in their search for truth and their aim to

‘capture’ and ‘fix’ reality. While Weinberger’s sketches candidly depict Murdoch’s vulnerability and humanity, Phillips’s authorised portrait offers a more commanding and flattering image of her. His ‘theatrical representation’, which apes ‘photographic realism’, alludes to the tropes of classical art so loved by Murdoch, drawing on ‘props’ such as the ginkgo tree and Titian’s *The Flaying of Marsyas*. For Moden, Murdoch’s preference for Phillips’s portrait represents a striking concern with self-representation and, seen in the context of Murdoch’s involvement in naming Phillips’s preparatory sketches as ‘Earth’, ‘Air’, ‘Fire’ and ‘Water’, reveals a self-mythologising preoccupation that would elsewhere warrant critique. Phillips’s portrayal of Murdoch as ‘a relatively youthful, dignified and commanding intellectual’ contrasts with Weinberger’s depiction of her as ‘not only wise, perceptive and loving but also vulnerable, ageing and mortal’. Each portrait thus ‘shields and reveals’ aspects of Murdoch’s identity: she was not only a Dame at the height of her creative powers but also a somewhat frail individual.

The audience’s response to these papers, which focused particularly on Bolton’s mention of the contemporary connections between Murdoch and the visual arts, resonated with Murdoch’s philosophical concerns about art and morality. Bolton had suggested, in her earlier paper, that Murdoch’s ‘lively online presence’ is enriched by Carol Sommer’s ongoing project ‘Will the real Iris Murdoch please stand up?’, a visual exploration of the construction of self-image and identity that juxtaposes selfie-posters with short quotations from Murdoch’s novels. For Bolton, Sommer’s project illustrates how Murdoch’s ‘wit and creative output’ can be presented online as ‘catchy lessons for our time’. The audience, however, pondered whether such fragmentations of artworks can evoke the same kind of moral discipline evinced by great art. There are times when excerpts can elicit frivolity, as in the case of Bolton’s quotation of Charles Arrowby’s belief that ‘One of the secrets to a happy life is continuous small treats’ (*The Sea, The Sea* 8). Alternatively, there are times when scrutinising excerpts of an artwork can, as in the case of Sommer’s project, allow it to take on a more kaleidoscopic, polyvocal ability to resonate with contemporary concerns. Such debates about interpreting art echo Murdoch’s argument that ‘great art’, which is inherently linked to the moral search for truth, can be ‘an educator and revealer’ to both artist and audience (*EM* 352–53). A similar argument could also be made in relation to the many fragmentary visual representations of Murdoch. While Phillips’s authorised portrait is the most celebrated image of Murdoch, Weinberger’s more candid representations, like Phillips’s less exhibited preparatory sketches, contribute to a more complex vision of Murdoch’s identity. The responses invited by Bolton and Moden’s presentation illustrate how Murdoch’s devoted readership can count itself happy that such revelations can be uncovered in the centenary of her birth and that – as Murdoch suggested of her writings in an interview with Susan Hill for BBC Radio 4 in 1982 – she can ‘go on beaming [her] message, [her] light, for some time’.

## Report on “A symphony of frozen inaudible sound”: Lithic Presence in Iris Murdoch’s *Nuns and Soldiers*, Université de Picardie Jules Verne, Amiens, 9 October 2019

*Lisa Lemoine*

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**T**O COMMEMORATE THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF ANGLO-IRISH WRITER Iris Murdoch and her legacy in the fields of literature and philosophy, Lucy Oulton and Frances White of the Iris Murdoch Research Centre, University of Chichester, gave a lecture at the Université de Picardie Jules Verne, Amiens. The lecture, looking at aspects of Murdoch’s environmental imagination, aligned with the theme of our CORPUS lecture series about places revisited (*‘lieux revisités’*) and examined the representation of landscapes in Murdoch’s work and how the landscape itself can also change the way we perceive nature in literary texts.

Oulton and White’s lecture was based on Murdoch’s novel *Nuns and Soldiers* (1980), which is partly set in the area of France where Murdoch and her husband used to spend their holidays. The French landscape presented in the novel is the Chaîne des Alpilles in Provence, where two characters, Gertrude and Tim, begin their affair, and where they are reunited. Murdoch sends her characters to France, a country she was passionate about. She takes different elements of the region and merges them to create a dramatic landscape, the place where Tim is supposed to change. The setting allows Tim to evolve and improve in order to deserve Gertrude. Being abroad is a means for the characters to escape their everyday environment so that they can evade their usual behaviour and try to become better, White asserted, thanks to the influence of the dramatic landscape. It has a powerful effect on Tim, who experiences a sort of rebirth that enables him to become artistically productive. This radically different environment will also bring about Tim and Gertrude’s eventual marriage.

Part of Murdoch’s decision to set her characters in this landscape suggests a desire to express her affection for the region and for the people who spent time with her there, White observed. From a literary perspective, the pastoral dimension, which turns the

Alpilles into a place of enchantment, out of life, is a well-known *topos* in literature. That is why we can find intertextuality with Shakespeare’s plays such as the Forest of Arden in *As You Like It* or the woods in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The enchanting aspect of the landscape manifests itself through Gertrude, who is a goddess in Tim’s eyes. All these elements serve to convey the impression that the place is more memorable than the people. And this is doubly interesting because while the Alpilles region can be interpreted symbolically, it can also signify itself.

Oulton went on to explain what could be gained from taking an ecocritical approach to Murdoch’s landscape in the novel. Ecocriticism engages with the idea that novels have the power to affect the way we see the natural world and the current ecological crisis leads us to reinterpret novels that might not previously have been considered for their environmental themes. Murdoch’s landscape provokes temporal and physical change in her characters, but it also asserts a nonhuman presence. She emphasises the lithic power of the mountain where she pictures the signifying force of nonhuman interacting with human. The powerful agency of the mountains intervenes in Tim’s progress. Tim begins to be obsessed by the rocks, particularly when he finds a vast intimidating rock, the Great Face, and scarcely believes it to be a work of nature. This is the application of what Murdoch explains in her philosophical work as the importance of perception; hence the emphasis on Tim’s perception in the novel and in particular on how he perceives the world through his body. Murdoch’s landscapes emphasise the seeming ability of inanimate things to act, to produce effects which can be dramatic and subtle, so that Tim becomes productive. Something in his vision becomes grander as he realises the fragile mortality of his own body. And Murdoch plays with the sense of time. She marks the seasons in the passing of a year in the novel and pictures the brevity of human life in Guy’s untimely death. Murdoch makes the fleeting nature of anthropocentric frames manifest when she declares that ‘[t]ime passed, there was always plenty of time’ but, now Guy is dying, ‘time had gone mad’. Yet, ‘possessed of its deep past and long futurity’, Oulton explained, ‘the ancient rocky landscape destabilises or subverts conceptions of time as its profoundly sensuous presence gives rise to Tim’s ordeal’. When reading Murdoch, she said, if we do not take account of these material elements, if we ‘ignore the landscape’s lithic and fluid power, [...] the tale loses meaning’.

The lecture offered vivid insight into the emphasis Murdoch places on topography in her novel. Murdoch’s philosophical views about the affective qualities of material elements on humankind teach us to try to see the world as it really is, despite our undeniable and ongoing human need for symbols. The lecture demonstrated the value of considering Murdoch’s landscapes as real, despite the anthropocentric literary tradition of seeking out their symbolic value. After all, if we readers analyse fictional characters as one might real people, then should we not scrutinise fictional landscapes in all their material reality?

## 'Art and Eros: A Dialogue about Art by Iris Murdoch', Oxford Brookes University, 4 February 2020

Maria Peacock

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A PERFORMANCE OF IRIS MURDOCH'S PLAY, *ART AND EROS: A DIALOGUE ABOUT Art*, was presented by Gary Browning as part of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences two-week Think Human Festival at Oxford Brookes University. The festival, rather presciently as it turns out, explored aspects of being alive in the challenges of the present time. The broad range of events included music, performance, art, comedy, film as well as debate, both on campus and across schools and other venues in Oxford. 'Art and Eros: A Dialogue about Art' is published as one of Murdoch's two Platonic dialogues in *Acastos* (1986), and it examines the relationship of art and humanity. The performance by Oxford Brookes drama students, under the direction of Carina Bartleet, brought Murdoch's dramatised dialogue to life.

In an author's note to the text of *Acastos*, Murdoch wrote that the dialogues were designed to be performed either in modern or period costume. This was a modern-dress performance with the action set at a post-theatre drinking party with four protagonists, renamed and cast as female roles. Under the gentle questioning of Socrates (played by Anna Samuels), the joyful Callista (Catherine Parker), the serious Acasta (Maria Baeva), the social realist Mantia (Georgia Casling) and the cynical Deuximenes (Phoebe Fogarty-Smith) debate the nature of art and love while drinking copious quantities of wine and throwing bread rolls. Aspects of the theatre – entertainment, escapism, political purpose, illusion and magic – are analysed in turn. Plato (Tristan Robinson), an ascetic and introverted young man, sits apart from the table for the first part of the conversation, typing intently on his laptop, until he stops to expound his belief that art is dangerous, because it creates illusions which mislead people into believing they are in the presence of something real without having to make the effort to explore the world and really know other people. It 'softens the demands of the gods' and 'puts an attractive veil over that final awful demand, that final transformation into goodness'. Socrates disputes this assertion and argues that human beings are all artists and storytellers; there is a difference between good art and bad art, and great art achieves what philosophy cannot do, which is to show us a glimpse of another world and a 'little bit of truth'. At

the end of the party, Socrates concludes that: 'In truly loving each other we learn more perhaps than in all our other studies', and it is Murdoch's voice we hear.

The dramatised dialogue is an unusual form for modern performance. Murdoch wrote the two Platonic dialogues in response to encouragement by Michael Kustov, then a director at the National Theatre, as a way of bringing her philosophy to a more general audience. In her essay *The Fire and the Sun* (1976) Murdoch examines Plato's attack on art because it reinforces illusions and encourages people to accept imitations. In writing a piece for theatre, the arguments are given a voice in the forum that Plato so distrusted. The National Theatre production of 'Art and Eros' in February 1980 was well received, and Peter Conradi notes in Murdoch's biography that '[n]owhere else are her ideas brought so alive as in these two dialogues'. It was, therefore, timely to revive this work and give it more attention as part of Murdoch's literary and philosophical *oeuvre*, and we were treated to the dramatisation of a dialogue which succinctly presents important areas of Murdoch's philosophy on love and art to a twenty-first-century audience.

The performance and the issues it raised were discussed by a panel, led by Browning, consisting of Bartleet, Anne Rowe, Sarah Lucas and Annette Badland. Rowe spoke of how the dialogue reveals the power art has to create magic and of its ambivalent relationship with the truth. Murdoch's Plato distrusts art: 'man is a ghost without Eros. But with Eros he can be – either a demon or – Socrates'. Socrates reminds us we are not gods and although good art gives us truth better than anything else, this is always imperfect. Lucas, a political theorist from the University of Exeter, brought a feminist reading to Murdoch's work. While her art does not have a political purpose, Murdoch shows us that it is essential for human beings to give attention and connect with each other. Badland, who performed in Murdoch's 1973 play *The Three Arrows*, recalled her encounter with the playwright. Murdoch had a strong desire to write for the theatre, and 'Art and Eros' both explores and expresses the human compulsion to create art at all levels. Bartleet discussed the challenges of directing this rather unsettling work for a twenty-first-century audience. Although it is set in the ancient past, it is also a work of the 1980s, written as it was in Thatcher's Britain. The Oxford Brookes production created a dynamic between past and present, drawing on Caryl Churchill's play *Top Girls* (1982). In Churchill's work the drama takes place at a dinner party to which the female protagonist has invited various female historical figures. Churchill's play is overtly feminist and political, and Bartleet's production of Murdoch's play seeks to subvert the male hegemony of Classical Greek philosophy by presenting discussion of philosophical concepts in female voices.

The performance and panel discussion were followed by contributions from members of the audience which raised questions about the nature of philosophy and art as well as experimental ways of presentation. Concurring with Plato, Browning concluded that there is some truth in all that had been experienced both in the play and the discussion.



This was a rare opportunity to see a performance of a Murdoch play and to experience her philosophical ideas expressed as spoken conversation. Murdoch's drama has too often been neglected but this event and the discussion that followed indicates that her plays provide another dimension and a greater insight into her imagination and thinking.

## My Reading Experience of Iris Murdoch as a Chinese Reader

*Liyan Zhou*

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FOR ME, READING AND UNDERTAKING RESEARCH ON IRIS MURDOCH IS SOMETHING both painstaking and rewarding. It has taken a considerable amount of time and effort to familiarise myself with her thoughts and themes which, throughout the years, have become more or less a part of my outlook on the world. I would say many of her arguments are new to a reader who lacks the common cultural environment and does not share the lived experience. But as time has gone by, much of the foreignness has dissolved; I recognise more elements that are common between the two cultures, British and Chinese, and realise that Murdoch's morality has a significance beyond individuated cultures.

My reading of Murdoch began with a short introduction to her life and an overview of *The Black Prince* which I came across in an introductory book to twentieth-century British literature. I was then a postgraduate student, majoring in contemporary English literature. The plot of the novel, its overall structure in particular, was sufficiently unique to catch my eye and I was curious to read it. The story is both sad and funny, but what is most impressive are the postscripts which overturn the sympathy with Bradley built up through his autobiographical narrative. In class, we were learning critical theories and what attracted me most were the postmodern narrative techniques. I thought that Murdoch was one of the postmodern writers who was just keen on metafiction, parody and bricolage. I wrote a thesis on *The Black Prince* referring to aesthetics of reception and thought I was done with the novel, and with Murdoch.

That was not to be the case. Later on, I picked her up again out of curiosity and a need for career-related material as I became a university teacher of English literature. When I began to do a more comprehensive reading of her, I found that Murdoch was much more than a writer in this mode. Her twin role of novelist and philosopher, offering serious arguments on morality, was appealing enough to lead me to undertake further research.

Reading her philosophy has been an enjoyable experience and I was amazed at the breadth and depth of her arguments. One element that is to be appreciated is that her language is plain and succinct, as well as persuasive. Her knowledge of earlier philosophy

is so comprehensive that one needs to be conscious of an outline of all the philosophers she mentions. Reading her is, in a way, something like an orientation in the history of philosophy. With her assistance, I became aware of the basic ideas of modern Western philosophers and, thanks to her as a guide, my interest and confidence in philosophy has slowly developed.

I also continued to read more of her fiction since I thought that I would find sensible answers to the best way of leading a good life in her work, but became disappointed and even frustrated when I did not know what she was trying to say. In one of my reading journals I jotted down this complaint: 'Frustrated. Don't know what she was saying. Again! Accidents, and death and pain. I expected this and I turned to the end first and I found I was right: death again.' Out of frustration, I thought I would give up on her and turn to some of my favourite poets just when I was supposed to come up with an idea for my PhD thesis. In 2012, I went to the University of Aberdeen for a teacher-training programme and paid a visit to Kingston University in the winter holiday. It was a tight holiday schedule and I was not quite resolute about the research. Again, I thought I would be done with Murdoch at this point, but, no not quite.

What drew me back was a single word in her philosophy and in some of her fiction. The word is 'mysticism', which was new to me but also a word that I was curious about. I was, at the time, reading some books on a history of philosophy and some comparative studies on Chinese and Western thinkers. So, I shifted my attention to any work that related to mysticism and I began to understand both this, and Murdoch, a little better. With this knowledge, my understanding of Murdochian morality deepened; or, put another way, I would say with the help of Murdoch, I began to understand mysticism better. I proposed a research project on her use of mysticism and was awarded a state-level grant in support of innovative studies. I then finished a thesis on the moral themes related to mysticism in her novels and thought about extending it to cover more of her philosophical thinking.

In 2018, I got in touch with the Iris Murdoch Research Centre and visited the University of Chichester in early 2019. Thanks to Miles Leeson, I had access to the library resources there and got in touch with the rest of the team. I talked with Miles on a regular basis, discussing some research ideas and thinking how Murdoch's thoughts on mysticism develop throughout her novels. Margaret Guise and I talked about the incongruity of high moral goals and the difficulties in reality as experienced by some of her characters. We discussed the people elements in Murdoch's novels, her extraordinary personal social style and her distinctive sincerity and enthusiasm in moral life. Thanks to Paula Scorrer's assistance, I visited the Iris Murdoch Archive at Kingston University in June and was warmly received by Dayna Miller, the archivist, and Frances White, who was also researching there. The next day, Dayna emailed the list of books from Murdoch's libraries held at the Archive and transcriptions of some of her later journals I was keen on reading. I also attended the Murdoch and Theology Symposium held at

Regent's Park College, Oxford in May organised by Andrew Taylor. There were speeches and talks with interesting and inspiring ideas in my own research area. I attended the Research Day activities organised by the Iris Murdoch Research Centre at the University of Chichester in January 2020, which welcomed a dozen or more participants from the UK and beyond. It was a pleasure to give a talk on her mysticism as I approached the end of my time here. Talking about Murdoch is something I am really fond of and it makes me feel connected. Every formal or informal talk sparks thoughts and aids my understanding.

My research has always been a shaping influence on my academic career. I am happy that I did not give up on the study because it helped me to build up a much better consciousness of, and interest in, a connective base between individuals and cultures. Murdoch's scope of the spiritual core of morality has echoes not only in various mystical traditions but also in the contemporary world, which is much in need of spirituality. The interpretation of mysticism is fundamental to Murdoch's morality, both explicitly and implicitly; her understanding and employment of mysticism in explicating moral ideas clarifies (or perhaps 'demythologises') them and can help people in a secular society to better understand mysticism. She makes us apprehend that mysticism is not as mystical as we may think. It is as much about morality, or, in her words, morality is just 'unesoteric mysticism'. With mysticism as the thread running through, I approached the basic notions of her morality, including 'the Good', love and attention, freedom and unselfing, her understanding of religion in general, mystical experiences as described in her novels, as well as her poetics of mysticism.

The visit to the Iris Murdoch Research Centre was a lovely, happy and helpful experience in every way and has led to a new phase in my reading and research. When I left the UK in late March 2020, COVID-19 was just about to spread on a worldwide scale. I felt so sorry about the pandemic and thought, on first response, of Murdochian morality and plotting. If there was to be something spreading through the air for every single person to breathe in, rather it be a sense of love and proper connection to an outside reality beyond oneself, as suggested by Iris Murdoch.

## Publications Update: Murdoch for the Next Generation

Pamela Osborn

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SCHOLARLY INTEREST IN MURDOCH CONTINUED APACE DURING THE FINAL MONTHS of her centenary year and during the early part of 2020. The sense that a new generation of scholars is now discovering her work was signified by the reprinting of Elizabeth Dipple's seminal 1982 study, *Iris Murdoch: Work for the Spirit*, and the publication of a paperback edition of Gillian Dooley and Graham Nerlich's edited letters collection, *Never Mind About the Bourgeoisie: The Correspondence between Iris Murdoch and Brian Medlin 1976–1995*, first published in 2014.<sup>1</sup> Miles Leeson's edited collection, *Incest in Contemporary Literature*, featuring in-depth discussion of Murdoch's work, has also recently gone into paperback.<sup>2</sup> Leeson was on the front cover of the *Times Literary Supplement* in June 2020, with his article that charts the long and close friendship between Murdoch and Brigid Brophy which, he says, also plays out in their literary work.<sup>3</sup>

New books which address Murdoch's legacy include Rhett Diessner's *Understanding the Beauty Appreciation Trait: Empirical Research on Seeking Beauty in all Things*, which scrutinises philosophers' thoughts on beauty and examines Murdoch's focus on the connection between attending to natural and artistic beauty and unselfing.<sup>4</sup> Murdoch's philosophy is also discussed in detail in Santiago Iñiguez's *In an Ideal Business: How the Ideas of 10 Female Philosophers Bring Value into the Workplace*, in which it is suggested that her work on attention and compassion could be valuable in the world of business management.<sup>5</sup>

Journal articles on Murdoch published since last year's edition of the *Iris Murdoch Review* include Gillian Dooley and Frances White's analysis of the influence of Yeats, in particular the poem 'Easter 1916', on Murdoch's *The Red and the Green* and the consequences of this influence on her status as an Irish novelist.<sup>6</sup> Mariángel Solás García's essay in the *Spanish Journal of English Studies* analyses the moral and psychological aspects of Bruno's end-of-life reminiscences in Murdoch's 1969 novel *Bruno's Dream* and connects these with her concept of unselfing.<sup>7</sup> Carol Sommer's recent article in the *Journal of Creative Writing Practice* outlines her research project, with which many readers have been involved, investigating 'expressions of feminine

subjectivity' within Murdoch's novels and attempting to redress the absence of these discourses in existing work on the texts.<sup>8</sup> Zeynep Yılmaz Kurt's piece in *Interactions* suggests Murdoch's creation of objects and animals in her later novels allies her work with the branch of philosophy known as 'deep ecology', which perceives nature as an 'interconnected entity' and grants no superiority to humans.<sup>9</sup> More recently, Hannah Marije Altorf has published research that engages closely with the In Parenthesis project on Murdoch's experience as a female philosopher and the insights this offers regarding diversity and inclusivity in the profession today.<sup>10</sup> *The European Journal of Philosophy* published a trio of essays on *The Sovereignty of Good* that were originally presented at the conference at Queen's University, Ontario, Canada in 2019: David Bakhurst writes of Murdoch's 'whole-hearted assault on mid-twentieth-century moral British philosophy'; Rachael Wiseman's piece examines Murdoch's 'serious and systematic' engagement with Wittgenstein's work, which 'illuminates links between the central themes of *Philosophical Investigations* and the project of virtue ethics that many interpreters of Wittgenstein have missed'; and Clare Mac Cumhaill analyses Murdoch's 'intransitive' concept of the Good.<sup>11</sup>

Further essays that demonstrate the breadth of current Murdoch scholarship have been, or are about to be, published this year. Lesley Jamieson challenges Stanley Cavell's reading of Murdoch's most famous philosophical example, the case of M and D, in a special issue of the *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, published in May this year.<sup>12</sup> Lucy Oulton explores how Murdoch's ethics of attention might inform contemporary ecological concerns and Frances White argues that Murdoch's ethical concern for ecology is totally antithetical to the 'nausea' of Sartre's Roquentin in essays appearing in *Études britanniques contemporaines* later in 2020.<sup>13</sup> Finally, in essays for *Studies in the Literary Imagination* appearing later this year, Rebecca Moden presents an analysis of Murdoch's colour-play in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, *The Sea*, *The Good Apprentice* and *The Green Knight*, and Margaret Guise suggests that, while Murdoch was fully aware of the limitations as well as the possibilities of phenomenology, a re-reading of her philosophical works is possible when viewed through the hermeneutical lens of the phenomenology of love presented within her novels.<sup>14</sup>

Significant forthcoming book publications include Rebecca Buxton and Lisa Whiting's *The Philosopher Queens: The lives and legacies of philosophy's unsung women* and Joseph Wiinikka-Lydon's philosophical exploration of how violence affects the subject's moral being and development, *Moral Injury and the Promise of Virtue*.<sup>15</sup>

1 Elizabeth Dipple, *Iris Murdoch: Work for the Spirit* (1982) (London: Routledge, 2020); *Never Mind About the Bourgeoisie: The Correspondence between Iris Murdoch and Brian Medlin 1976–1995*, ed. by Gillian Dooley

and Graham Nerlich (2014) (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019).  
2 *Incest in Contemporary Literature*, ed. by Miles Leeson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).

- 3 Miles Leeson, 'Love, in lines unmusical', *Times Literary Supplement*, 5 June 2020, 22-3. The full version of this essay appears in *Brigid Brophy: Avant-Garde Writer, Critic, Activist*, ed. by Richard Canning and Gerri Kimber (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020).
- 4 Rhett Diessner, *Understanding the Beauty Appreciation Trait: Empirical Research on Seeking Beauty in all Things* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).
- 5 Santiago Iríguéz, *In an Ideal Business: How the ideas of 10 female philosophers bring value into the workplace* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).
- 6 Gillian Dooley and Frances White, "'A Terrible Beauty": Iris Murdoch's Irish Novel, *The Red and the Green*', *English Studies* (2019), 997-1009.
- 7 Mariángel Soláns García, "'At my age you live in your mind": Reviewing the Past in *Bruno's Dream* by Iris Murdoch', *Spanish Journal of English Studies* (2019), 33-55.
- 8 Carol Sommer, 'The (Serious) Game of Classification: (I think I'm happy, she thought, but am I real?)', *Journal of Creative Writing Practice* (2020), 111-16.
- 9 Zeynep Yılmaz Kurt, "'Deep Ecology" and Representation of the Non-Human in Iris Murdoch's Late Fiction', *Interactions* (2020).
- 10 Hannah Marije Altorf, 'Iris Murdoch and Common Sense, Or, What it is Like to be a Woman in Philosophy', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements* (2020).
- 11 David Bakhurst, 'Analysis and Transcendence in the *Sovereignty of Good*', *European Journal of Philosophy* (2020), 214-23 (214); Rachael Wiseman, 'What if the Private Linguist Were a Poet? Iris Murdoch on Privacy and Ethics', *European Journal of Philosophy* (2020), 224-34 (225); Clare Mac Cumhaill, 'Getting the Measure of Murdoch's Good', *European Journal of Philosophy* (2020), 235-47 (245).
- 12 Lesley Jamieson, 'The Case of M and D in Context: Iris Murdoch, Stanley Cavell and Moral Teaching and Learning', *Journal of Philosophy of Education* (2020), 425-48.
- 13 Lucy Oulton, "'Loving by Instinct": Environmental Ethics in Iris Murdoch's *The Sovereignty of Good and Nuns and Soldiers*', *Études britanniques contemporaines* 59 (2020); Frances White, 'Anti-Nausea: Iris Murdoch and the Natural Goodness of the Natural World', *Études britanniques contemporaines* 59 (2020).
- 14 Rebecca Moden, 'Colours of Consciousness in the Novels of Iris Murdoch', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, special edition forthcoming; Margaret Guise, 'On the failure of philosophy to "think love": Iris Murdoch as phenomenologist', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, special edition forthcoming.
- 15 *The Philosopher Queens: The lives and legacies of philosophy's unsung women*, ed. by Rebecca Buxton and Lisa Whiting (London: Unbound, 2020); Joseph Wiinikka-Lydon, *Moral Injury and the Promise of Virtue* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

## Iris Murdoch in the Media

### Pamela Osborn

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SINCE THE LAST EDITION OF THE *IRIS MURDOCH REVIEW*, THE WORLD HAS CHANGED rapidly and all of us will have been affected by the global pandemic to an extent that we now think in terms of pre- and post-COVID-19. Prior to March 2020, Murdoch's name appeared regularly in newspaper and magazine articles and blogs such as Anna Iltner's beautiful piece about Shruff End in *The Sea, The Sea* with her follow-up interview with Miles Leeson.<sup>1</sup> Leeson was also interviewed for fivebooks.com, who ask leading experts about their five best books on, or by, their specialist subject. Murdoch, he asserts, is 'now being considered in light of her particular take on feminism, she's being thought of as an important female writer not just as somebody who deals with male narrators'.<sup>2</sup> More recently, Leeson published an article about Murdoch and Elizabeth Bowen in *Books Ireland* magazine.<sup>3</sup> Murdoch's name featured in promotional activity for Martin Amis's forthcoming semi-autobiographical novel, *Inside Story*, in which she features as a character.<sup>4</sup> The new location for the Murdoch Collections at Kingston University was also mentioned in the *Guardian's* review of the new Town House building.<sup>5</sup>

In the lockdown era, Murdoch's name has begun to feature even more frequently online in posts and articles by those who have found consolation in her work. Nicholas Lezard wrote of being on a 'Iris Murdoch/Graham Greene [reading] jag' for solace in self-isolation.<sup>6</sup> *Spectator USA* devoted part of day 29 of its daily quarantine reading recommendations to Murdoch and *The Bell*.<sup>7</sup> *Harper's Bazaar* recommended *Under the Net* as an 'uplifting lockdown read' and suggested that 'there's no better time to start [reading Murdoch's novels]'.<sup>8</sup> Alex Clark discussed *The Bell* in the 'shelf isolation' series on Radio 4's *Open Book*.<sup>9</sup> Rivka Isaacson recommended the audio recording of the 2011 'Iris Murdoch Revisited' event as part of the Royal Society of Literature's 'Only Connect' lockdown series, where she also shared a photo of her home-working space, complete with Iris Murdoch Society mug.<sup>10</sup> Murdoch's self-confessed lack of prowess as a Scrabble player provided an amusing aside in the instructions of Dwight Garner's lockdown-friendly 'Paperback Game', as shared in the *New York Times*.<sup>11</sup> Newly released audiobooks of four of Murdoch's novels, *The Sandcastle*, *The Bell*, *A Fairy Honourable Defeat* and *The Sea, The Sea*, have proved popular, in particular the last of the four, which was read by Richard E. Grant.<sup>12</sup>

The new *Iris Murdoch Society Podcast*, presented by Miles Leeson and streamed on Soundcloud.com, includes the episodes: ‘Under the Net’, ‘Murdochland’, ‘Sovereignty of Good’, ‘Iris Murdoch and the Moving Image’, ‘The Bell’ and ‘Brigid Brophy’, with contributions from Hannah Marije Altorf, Chris Boddington, Lucy Bolton, Justin Broackes, Jonathan Gibbs, Mark Patrick Hederman, Mark Hopwood, James Jefferies, Gerri Kimber, Kate Levey, James Marriott, Rebecca Moden, Lucy Oulton, Anne Rowe and Frances White.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, Murdoch’s status as a necessary writer in these strange times has been amplified by her enthusiastic and growing readership on social media. At the time of going to press, the Iris Murdoch Appreciation Society Facebook group has in the region of 1.5K members, @IrisMurdoch on Twitter has 6,889 followers and her more recent presence on Instagram has a growing base of enthusiastic followers, some of whom are discovering Murdoch for the first time and sharing reviews. One such review of *The Black Prince* by @bakingbookish commends the novel as an ‘unforgettable, glorious, sucker punch of a book, unlike anything I’ve ever read before’. Also on Instagram is artist Carol Sommer’s ‘Will The Real Iris Murdoch Please Stand Up?’ @cartography\_for\_girls. You can read more about this project in ‘Update from the Archive’ on page 98.

- 1 Anna Iltner, ‘Unreal Estate no.1: Shruff End’, *ELSEWHERE: A Journal of Place*, 27 November 2019 <<https://www.elsewhere-journal.com/blog/2019/11/27/unreal-estate-no01-shruff-end>> [accessed 28 April 2020]; Anna Iltner, ‘Shruff End ... an interview with Miles Leeson’, *ELSEWHERE: A Journal of Place*, 4 December 2019 <<https://www.elsewhere-journal.com/blog/2019/12/4/shruff-end>> [accessed 28 April 2020].
- 2 Stephanie Kelley, ‘The Best Iris Murdoch Books Recommended by Miles Leeson’, *Five Books* <<https://fivebooks.com/best-books/iris-murdoch-miles-leeson/>> [accessed 30 April 2020].
- 3 Miles Leeson, ‘Literary Motherhood: Elizabeth Bowen and Iris Murdoch’, *Books Ireland*, 28 April 2020 <<https://booksirelandmagazine.com/literary-motherhood-bowen-murdoch/>> [accessed 29 April 2020].
- 4 Alison Flood, ‘Martin Amis to publish novel inspired by death of Christopher Hitchens’, *Guardian*, 12 February 2020 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/feb/12/martin-amis-autobiographical-novel-inside-story-christopher-hitchens-9-11>> [accessed 22 April 2020]; Bookseller staff, ‘Cape to publish Martin Amis autobiographical novel’, *The Bookseller*, 12 February 2020 <<https://www.thebookseller.com/news/cape-publish-martin-amis-autobiographical-novel-1190541>> [accessed 20 April 2020].
- 5 Rowan Moore, ‘Town House, Kingston University Review – sociability on a grand scale’, *Guardian*, 25 January 2020 <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/jan/25/town-house-kingston-university-grafton-architects-review>> [accessed 17 March 2020].
- 6 Nicholas Lezard, ‘If anyone is prepared for self-isolation it’s me. I’ve been doing it for years’, *New Statesman*, 18 March 2020 <<https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/health/2020/03/if-anyone-prepared-self-isolation-it-s-me-i-ve-been-doing-it-years>> [accessed 3 May 2020].
- 7 ‘The lockdown list: books to read during quarantine’, *Spectator*, 18 March 2020 <<https://spectator.us/lockdown-list-books-quarantine/>> [accessed 12 June 2020].
- 8 Meg Honigmann, ‘#BazaarBookClub: uplifting books to read in lockdown’, *Harper’s Bazaar*, 20 April 2020 <<https://www.harpersbazaar.com/uk/culture/>

- entertainment/g32169500/best-uplifting-positive-books/> [accessed 20 April 2020].
- 9 ‘Open Book’ (Radio 4: BBC, 26 April 2020) <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000hmxl>> [accessed 30 April 2020].
- 10 RSLiterature, ‘Only Connect #15 Rivka Isaacson, RSL Member’, 29 April 2020 <<https://tinyletter.com/RSLiterature/archive>> [accessed 5 May 2020].
- 11 Dwight Garner, ‘Play This: The Paperback Game’, *New York Times*, 2 May 2020 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/02/>
- smarter-living/coronavirus-the-paperback-game.html> [accessed 2 May 2020].
- 12 *The Sea, The Sea* (Penguin Audio, 2020) <[https://www.audible.co.uk/search?keywords=iris+murdoch+&ref=a\\_hp\\_t1\\_header\\_search](https://www.audible.co.uk/search?keywords=iris+murdoch+&ref=a_hp_t1_header_search)> [accessed 6 May 2020].
- 13 The Iris Murdoch Society’s Soundcloud page <<https://soundcloud.com/user-548804258>> [accessed 17 June 2020].

## Update from the Archive

*Dayna Miller*

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FIRSTLY, I WOULD LIKE TO EXTEND A SINCERE THANK YOU TO EVERYONE FOR YOUR patience, understanding and unwavering support through the changes that have taken place in the Archive this year and, particularly, in light of the recent challenge and uncertainty we have all had to face. Kingston University Archive is very glad to be part of the Murdoch community, and the Collections team and I hope that in turn the Archive has been, and will continue to be, a place of comfort, enjoyment and distraction in both good and difficult times. With this in mind, and as a way to keep everyone involved remotely during the current closure, we have been posting contributions from transcribers and volunteers on our blog at [blogs.kingston.ac.uk/asc](https://blogs.kingston.ac.uk/asc). Do get in touch if you would like to share a story there as we hope to continue this even after we reopen.

In the spirit of sharing, we begin our update with a behind-the-scenes look at three exhibitions that the Archive curated with Frances White to celebrate Iris Murdoch's centenary. After all, why stop at just one? The largest and most complex was 'Iris Murdoch and Oxford', the exhibition which accompanied the Centenary Conference in July 2019. Though used to creating exhibitions within the University, we knew that this exhibition needed to be very special and unlike any Murdoch display we had featured in the past. Preparations began in January 2019 with a visit from Frances. Soon the Reading Room tables were covered end to end with items from the Iris Murdoch Collections: everything from books to beer mats, postcards to poems, costume jewellery to journals. While we could certainly have created an interesting and visually appealing exhibition with this material, we felt that the occasion of Murdoch's centenary demanded something deeper. We talked about the story we wanted to tell, and from that Frances began to narrow down the items. While doing so, different elements naturally began to reveal the tale of Murdoch's humble beginnings through to her academic achievements, her professional successes and her personal relationships, with Oxford ever-present.

We now had a good idea of the material we wanted to include and plans for the exhibition layout began in March after Frances visited the New Council Room at Somerville College, Oxford and returned with measurements and hand-drawn diagrams of the space. Trying to replicate this in the Archive was ... interesting! Planning an

exhibition with your display area on site is one thing, but to do it from 60 miles away was something completely new. We also had to get rather creative when considering how to display original documents without leaving them exposed or causing them damage – hence an afternoon spent mounting photographs and OU Irish and Labour Club posters without the aid of pins or adhesive and wrapping them in archival polyester. Another challenge was to consider how to transport our glass display cabinets safely, but having decided to use a colleague's suggestion to fill them with duvets, it led to one of my favourite emails from Frances, entitled 'A duvet thought':

*If the duvets are too big, it is fine to cut one in half and put half in each case [...]  
Did any archivist in the world ever receive such a message, I wonder?*

Despite a complete lack of evidence to support this, I still believe the answer is no.

Thus, after many more meetings, lists, revisions and mild panics we were finally ready so that on 10 July 2019, ten packages, two display cabinets and a suitcase were sent off to Oxford by courier. I arrived the following day to find Frances and Miles Leeson amidst the bubble wrap and realised that I may have been slightly overzealous with the packing. Still, once everything was finally unwrapped, we were delighted to find that it fitted along the table and in the cabinets just as we had planned. Seeing the exhibition come to life was fantastic and it is very rewarding to know that so many people enjoyed it. The opportunity to view material from our Archive in a setting such as the New Council Room, and alongside items from other Murdoch-related collections, was a unique event and it could not have been achieved without the support and co-operation of Somerville College, St Anne's College, the Bodleian Library and Newnham College, Cambridge.

However, before 'Iris Murdoch and Oxford' officially opened, we had also arranged a small but important display to accompany a talk to be given by Professor Peter Garrard, 'Authorship, Language and Textual Pathology: Linguistic Changes in Iris Murdoch's Informal Writings' in the Weston Library on 12 July. This exhibition was also a collaborative effort. It incorporated material from the Iris Murdoch Collections, Oxford Brookes University and documents loaned by Professor Garrard. Having first created a mock display in the Archive, Frances was on hand at the Weston Library to ensure that our arrangement was replicated. The exhibition ran chronologically, focusing on three periods in Murdoch's life: the start of her career as a novelist in the 1950s, her Booker prize-winning success in 1978, and her decline in her health during and after the writing of *Jackson's Dilemma*. Photographs of Murdoch alongside handwritten letters and planning notes from these periods demonstrated a change in her appearance and, of course, her writing over time. However, nothing showed the effect of Alzheimer's disease more profoundly than the transcription of Murdoch's observation of a drawing in which she described a tap as 'the thing where the water is running out'. At once medically

fascinating and incredibly sad, this condensed collection of material illustrated just what had been lost towards the end of a life lived so much through the written word.

So, with two Oxford exhibitions under our belts, in August we turned our attention closer to home with 'Iris Murdoch and Kingston'. Kingston Museum had kindly given us permission to use their Community Case and thus we decided that a celebration of Murdoch's links with Kingston University was in order. With that in mind we incorporated material relating to Murdoch's 1993 honorary degree and highlighted published works such as Avril Horner and Anne Rowe's *Living on Paper* and Frances White's *Becoming Iris Murdoch*, both of which had occasioned extensive use of the Iris Murdoch Collections. We had also planned to redisplay the Murdoch-inspired works created by Graphic Design students during the previous year. However, upon discovering that those students had since gone off into the world and taken their creations with them, we opted for plan B. Much cropping, printing and mounting of photographs of the students' work ensued, so that it could be displayed alongside the archival items that had inspired them.

On 1 August, Frances and Rachel Hirschler, a longstanding Murdoch transcriber, arrived to collect both me and the exhibition materials from the Archive and the three of us arrived at the Museum with 90 minutes to spare to install the display before the launch event. With some relief we realised that the original idea of exhibiting the students' work had been overly ambitious and that, in fact, the photographs, along with everything else we wanted to display, fitted very neatly into the Community Case. The launch was a very enjoyable event with a wonderful speech from Anne Rowe. It was a chance to celebrate and thank Rachel and fellow transcribers past and present for their invaluable contribution to the Archive, and to meet other Murdoch scholars and enthusiasts. With drinks and nibbles as well, a lovely evening was had by all. On 29 August Frances and I returned to the Museum to take down the exhibition. We were delighted to hear that it had been well received by the local community and 'Iris Murdoch and Kingston' felt like a fitting end to our centenary exhibition roadshow. I would like to say thank you to everyone involved in making these exhibitions possible and especially to Frances for her vision, knowledge and determination which, along with a large dose of enthusiasm and humour, carried us through a whirlwind eight months.

With autumn upon us it was time for the next project. As touched on in last year's update, the Archive planned to work with artist Carol Sommer on 'Will the Real Iris Murdoch Please Stand Up?', a project relating to self-identity and social media underpinned by Carol's book *Cartography for Girls: An A-Z of Orientations Identified Within the Novels of Iris Murdoch*. Between September and October 2019, the Archive hosted six workshops with Carol during which participants heard more about Carol's work, discussed their own feelings about social media and viewed a range of items from the Iris Murdoch Collections. These items included photographs of Murdoch, some posed, others more natural; poems entitled 'My Lost Self' and 'My Other Self'; journal

entries; and letters to Elias Canetti, Brigid Brophy, Rachel Fenner and others – all of which demonstrated different aspects of Murdoch's personality. The idea behind this selection of material was to prompt further debate about the contrasting ways in which Murdoch, and indeed all of us, present ourselves publicly, privately and to different people. Interestingly, discussions often came back to the novels, where it was suggested that the 'Real Iris Murdoch' might just be found.

Part two of the project saw all participants take a selfie and select a phrase, or orientation, which appealed to them from Carol's book. Then came the big reveal! Selfies were displayed on a large screen with their accompanying orientations. Though many of us were nervous and slightly embarrassed at seeing ourselves like this, everyone embraced the project wholeheartedly and without judgement. When explaining our choice of orientation and the stories behind our selfies it became clear that Murdoch's words, heard through her fictional female characters, still resonate sharply with real life and, strangely too, with the virtual world many of us now inhabit. With selfies, orientations and then hashtags at the ready, our images were uploaded one by one to Carol's Instagram page, @cartography\_for\_girls. This was a great project to be involved with and the good news is there is more to come! Once safely on the other side of COVID-19, we will be holding an exhibition where the Instagram images, now in poster form, will be displayed alongside the archival material used in the workshops. It promises to be a fantastic exhibition and will be the first Archive event in the University's new Town House building.

Indeed, as many of you have seen or may have read in local and national news, Town House opened in January 2020. The building is shared by Kingston University's Department of Performing Arts, the Library, Student Services and the community, with facilities including a performance space, a roof garden and two cafés. The Library is located across three of the six floors, with the Archive on the second. It has been great to welcome researchers and transcribers to the new Reading Room, though with building and environmental works ongoing, regrettably we have not yet been able to offer what we consider to be the fullest experience of the Archive. That said, despite the move, the disruption and an extended Christmas closure period, I am pleased to report that since our 2019 update the Archive has received 213 visits, with 142 of those using material from the Iris Murdoch Collections. We have welcomed 73 different researchers, hosted 15 groups and, in a new venture, the Reading Room has also been used for two teaching sessions, one of which focused on Dante's *Paradiso* using three copies that once belonged to Murdoch. The Iris Murdoch Collections have made up 61% of items consulted by researchers and have been the subject of 49% of enquiries received by the Archive.

The sustained usage and appeal of the Iris Murdoch Collections is due in no small part to the ongoing support of Mrs Audi Bayley, the Iris Murdoch Society and donors, who continue to offer material that enriches the Collections and contributes to current

scholarship. We are very grateful to have acquired several donations in the last year, which include:

- Items relating to the Iris Murdoch Centenary Conference, including visitors' books and publicity material. Kindly presented by Miles Leeson.
- *The Ship: Year Book of St Anne's College Association of Senior Members*, no. 91, 2001–2002. Loaned to us for the Somerville exhibition, this issue now has a permanent home in the Iris Murdoch Collections. Kindly donated by Clare White, St Anne's College, Oxford.
- Vintage Classic editions of Iris Murdoch novels: *Under the Net*, *The Sandcastle*, *The Bell*, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, *The Black Prince*, *The Sea, the Sea*. Published for the centenary year and also displayed in the Somerville College exhibition, these feature vibrant cover designs and introductions by contemporary writers. Kindly donated by Penguin Random House.
- Material relating to past Iris Murdoch Conferences, including papers which were not publicly presented. Kindly donated by Anne Rowe.
- Iris Murdoch's Montblanc fountain pen (likely to have been the pen used to compose many of the letters, journal entries and poems held in the Archive). Kindly donated by Audi Bayley and presented to the Archive by Anne Rowe.
- Photographs of John Bayley, taken at Charlbury Road, Oxford, 2005. Confirming the original home of one of the Archive's most striking items, five of the 15 photographs feature John Bayley in the garden alongside the bust of Iris Murdoch. Purchased from photographer Geraint Lewis with funds kindly donated by Audi Bayley.
- Copies of newspaper articles and essays relating to Iris Murdoch. Kindly presented by Frances White.
- *The Ship* (annual publication of the St Anne's Society, formerly known as the *Year Book of St Anne's College Association of Senior Members*), no. 108, 2018–2019, including 'Celebrating a Centenary: Iris Murdoch at St Anne's College' by Frances White. Kindly presented by Frances White.
- Programme for the Oxford Brookes production of Murdoch's 'Art and Eros', performed 4 February 2020. Kindly presented by Frances White.
- Postcards produced for the 'Philosophy by Postcard' initiative of the In Parenthesis project. Kindly donated by Clare Mac Cumhaill.
- Posters for the 'Iris Murdoch and the Ethical Imagination: Legacies and Innovations' conference held in Amiens, October 2019. Kindly presented by Lucy Oulton.
- A copy of *Existentialists and Mystics* (Birmingham: The Delos Press, 1993) inscribed by Murdoch. Kindly donated by Professor Gilli Bush-Bailey and presented to the Archive by Margaret Sampson.

Alongside these welcome additions, the Archive was privileged to receive a generous donation of material from Peter Conradi. Including further research gathered for *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (Harper Collins, 2001), this collection of letters, documents and previously unseen photographs will undoubtedly be of great interest to Murdoch scholars. Items such as Murdoch's childhood stamp album, meanwhile, will certainly appeal more widely to our researchers and students alike. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Peter Conradi for this donation and for his continued support of the Archive.

In this last year the Archive has also been fortunate to welcome two volunteers: Christine Wise, who has brought a wealth of knowledge in working with archives and special collections, and Vincente Canas, who is gathering experience to take forward to an archive apprenticeship. Both Christine and Vincente have helped us to prepare the Iris Murdoch Collections and others for the move to Town House. We are extremely grateful for the time and skill they have contributed to this immense task. Indeed, the move of the archive collections will again feature prominently in our plans over the coming year with stocktake and repacking activities set to continue. Changes are afoot, however, following a review of University support departments. The Collections and Academic Engagement teams will soon join together to become known collectively as Library and Learning Services. For the Archive this means the opportunity to work more closely with subject librarians and further our relationships with academics. It may also mean a few new faces supervising the Reading Room!

As I write this update, however, the University and therefore the Archive remain closed, but plans for what the archive service might look like when we reopen are currently underway and I have been advised that some outstanding building works are also being completed in our absence. We are very grateful to those who offered feedback on the new Archive before the closure and I want to reassure everyone that this will be considered alongside whatever changes may need to be implemented in response to COVID-19. While much remains uncertain, please know that the Archive will continue to support research and events involving the Iris Murdoch Collections and will strive to create the best and safest possible environment for both staff and visitors. We look forward to seeing you soon.

For enquiries and blog contributions please email [archives@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:archives@kingston.ac.uk). To search for documents and unpublished material please visit the archive catalogue at [adlib.kingston.ac.uk](http://adlib.kingston.ac.uk). To search for books and audio-visual collections please visit the main library catalogue at [icat.kingston.ac.uk](http://icat.kingston.ac.uk). To read the blog, please visit [blogs.kingston.ac.uk/asc](http://blogs.kingston.ac.uk/asc).



# Those Black Tights

*Kate Levey*

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I INHERITED TWO HEFTY BIN BAGS WHICH HAD BEEN IN MY FATHER'S ATTIC; EACH was bulging with papers. The contents had many years earlier been wrenched from meticulous filing cabinets and swept from neat in-trays as my parents made a precipitous removal from London, necessitated by my mother's advancing multiple sclerosis. In the jumble I discovered, among other literary treasures, about a thousand pieces of correspondence from Iris Murdoch to my mother, the writer Brigid Brophy.

In my childhood, Iris's letters were ubiquitous in our flat. Arriving sometimes twice a day, each was returned to its envelope, then it might be propped against the sugar bowl in the kitchen, slipped onto a bedside table or placed beside Brigid's ashtray as it travelled around the flat with her. So, when I plunged into the task of reading this prolific run of letters, Iris's blue-black ink and small grey envelopes were instantly evocative. But I found her cursive words accursedly hard to decipher; my mother, by contrast, had printed her characters in a crisp, controlled hand. For me, their distinct styles of penmanship became a visual metaphor for the greater differences between Iris and Brigid.

The two writers, both classicists, were taken with each other from their first meeting in 1954, and a closeness developed. The letters I had been handed down stretched over four decades of their enduring but mutating friendship. Perhaps the most piquant ones are from the 1960s, which is when I best remember Iris; while her name was ever-present, she was not in person a frequent visitor to us. From my pre-teen years the Iris I recollect is dressed in layers of wool and tweed in our impossibly warm drawing room, sitting upright and quiet, scotch in hand, exuding shy bemusement.

I have not forgotten a tiny incident from my very young days. I was puzzled to observe my mother answer the phone in a rare flustered, stuttering state. She spoke a few exotic words before conceding, 'Alas, I just *cannot* do it.' I was agog. Brigid told me, 'That was Iris; I was trying to warn her I wasn't free to talk.' She was exasperated that her rather ancient Ancient Greek had faltered. I did not give this *aperçu* a further thought.

Now, however, I was forced to consider the tenor of my mother's relationship with Iris. As well as letters, postcards and notes, I found Brigid had kept trivial bits of

ephemera such as a hotel bill and a florist's card. Shocked by a sudden realisation that the pair had possibly been lovers, my earlier perfunctory attitude to my task dissolved and I was gripped.

I approached the letters in random order. That made it hard to grasp the whole parabola of the pair's relationship, yet it made for entertaining discoveries. Their topics varied widely: famous philosophers popped up alongside the Rolling Stones, and Modesty Blaise, match boxes and Mozart jostled together. Amid the weighty points being discussed, I found relief in Iris's comments on quotidian matters. In fact, I was highly surprised to see clothes featuring in the chat of two of the most cerebral women of their era. I was charmed by Iris's excited exclamation in 1965: 'Darling, those black tights were wonderful.'

A new, playful, teasing and flirty Iris was revealed to me. Evidently, she adored my decade-younger mother with a sexually charged passion. Whether they had had a full, sexually active affair, I could not discern. My mother's side of these exchanges had been destroyed at Brigid's own request, but her character was vividly evoked by the tone of Iris's gambits, responses, ruminations and jokes. Brigid was reflected in vibrant colour, full of youthful vigour. That is a persona I was glad to retrieve after the blighted years of her illness.

I had to sieve Iris's scrawl for legible parts and was confounded by her phrases of Latin and Greek but, when I got a grip of her handwriting, Iris came across as charismatic and easy-going with a beguiling sense of humour; some of her envelopes contained notes so brief I almost wondered if she had invented the Irish haiku. But I mentally yelped at my misreadings. I thought one letter began with the astounding *mise-en-scène*: 'Those monks'; however, it turned out simply to say: 'Much thanks'. Some of these letters are truly intimate, and I was not spared the inward blushes of a daughter learning more than desired about her mother's private life; in the main these are passionate love letters to Brigid.

A personal fillip was that, by touching on incidents and people in Brigid's life, Iris had incidentally left me a chronicle of my happy childhood. I began to wonder about the wider significance of such a literary record only when I re-read the letters of Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf and noted the several parallels between the two pairs of lovers. Later, I was gratified when the Iris Murdoch Archive at the University of Kingston acquired my letters.

Brigid and Iris enjoyed a game of conceptual role-play, with a leitmotif of gender-switching; it makes for some most amusing insights. At one point, Iris styles the couple Raffles and Bunny; another time she is the Countess in *The Marriage of Figaro*, and Brigid becomes Mozart's Cherubino.

However, despite their love, Iris and Brigid's irreconcilable values are apparent. They had furious quarrels and joyous *rapprochements*, but fundamentally their two personalities were mismatched. They were unable to forge a mutually acceptable way

ahead. Iris was particularly wounded when my mother could not lie about disliking her books. My mother was bruised by Iris's evasiveness, finding it a form of mendacity.

In 1967 their most intense liaison came to an end. Iris insisted they stay in touch and a cooler but cordial friendship survived right up until my mother died in 1995. Iris had written to Brigid in a letter of 1960 that their attachment had 'survived shocks misadventures & time'; the truth of that is beautifully borne out by this epistolary record.

## Miklós Vető (1936–2020): Obituary

*Dávid Szőke*

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**M**IKLÓS VETŐ, WHO DIED ON 8 JANUARY 2020, WAS ONE OF THE MOST prominent thinkers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. A French philosopher of Hungarian origin, he was born in Budapest in 1936 and studied law at the University of Szeged in 1954. He was a founder member of Magyar Egyetemisták és Főiskolások Szövetsége (the Hungarian Federation of University and College Students' Associations) at a time when the government of the Hungarian People's Republic was very much under the influence of the Soviet political regime. Vető actively participated in the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, making a significant contribution to the turn of twentieth-century history in my country. In 2006, a monument to the Federation, which also carries Vető's portrait, was erected in the park belonging to the Study and Information Centre of the University of Szeged. During the period of retaliations, Vető had to escape Hungary because of his involvement in the Revolution. He studied philosophy at the University of Sorbonne in 1957 and then went up to Oxford, where he completed a PhD thesis on the religious metaphysics of Simone Weil under the supervision of Iris Murdoch. Vető's connection to Murdoch proved instrumental in establishing our own friendship and professional partnership.

Coming from Szeged myself, I am very much aware of the events of 1956, and had read Vető's account of his rescue from Szeged to Paris in the Hungarian collection *Mi, szegediek megtettük az első lépést...* ('We, the People from Szeged, Made the First Steps...') (2008). As a third-year undergraduate student in the Department of Comparative Literature and Culture at the University of Szeged, I was in search of some secondary material for a thesis on Murdoch to submit to a national students' competition when, by chance, I came across the Hungarian edition of *The Religious Metaphysics of Simone Weil* (2005), *Simone Weil vallásos metafizikája*, in which Vető acknowledges Murdoch's 'devoted supervision'. Not long afterwards, I read in Peter Conrad's biography of Murdoch (2001) about her Hungarian postgraduate student 'Nicolas Veto' (*sic*), to whom Murdoch admitted that '*Unicorn* is full of Simone Weil, tho' few (apparently) are those who spot that greater source of my "wisdom"'.

Chance brought us together again late afternoon on 24 April 2017 when, now a PhD student at Szeged, I learnt from the Department of Philosophy that Vető was holding a two-week guest lecture for undergraduate students. Writing my dissertation on the

Central European Jewish influence on Murdoch's early novels, I was hungry for some, as yet untold, personal recollections of Murdoch as teacher, colleague and friend from somebody who knew her. I am not sure whether I was excited or nervous to find Vető's name on the philosophy course timetable. I asked the receptionist what I should do. She replied: 'His class ends today at 6 pm. I think you should wait a bit!' And so I did. I waited for the students to disappear, and then I approached Vető and introduced myself: 'Good evening, Professor Vető! I am Dávid Szőke. I am writing my PhD dissertation about Iris Murdoch. I know that you were a PhD student of hers, and it would be so nice to talk to you!' I was quite surprised not only by my directness toward him but also by his modest and generous response: 'I am very touched. I haven't spoken about Iris for years! Would you like to come to my class tomorrow? After that, we can drink a cup of coffee somewhere in the city.'

That first encounter in the corridor of the university was the beginning of many exchanges of letters and opportunities to meet in Budapest whenever Vető was invited to hold further guest lectures and I was freed of my university obligations at Szeged to attend them. Each time we met, I would be fascinated by Vető's wisdom, his energy and his religious humility. We had invaluable conversations about Murdoch, whom he characterised as a 'delicious and a marvellously shy woman'; his time at Oxford and his aversion to the Oxford philosophy of the 1950s; contemporary Hungarian political issues; and his discovery of Christian spirituality, 'which was like a thunderbolt'. After one of our conversations, we went to a Catholic church and while we were both praying it occurred to me that, although Vető always spoke about his friendship with Murdoch as 'just a nice bypass in my academic life', they had so many things in common: both of them looked at goodness as the highest moral principle; both had a moral philosophy that they lived by; and both of them had a religious sensitivity to the things they cherished.

For this reason, when Vető asked me to prepare his collection of Murdoch's letters and to write an introduction for publication in the 2018 issue of the *Iris Murdoch Review*, I felt deeply honoured. These letters not only enhanced my knowledge of Murdoch as a philosopher, they are instrumental in my understanding of her as the teacher who inspired her students in much the same way as she was inspired by them. In one undated letter to Vető, Murdoch says that Weil's religious thinking 'practically converts me'. Reading through these letters, I was intrigued by the idea of how influential their friendship was even many decades after Vető's graduation, eventually only overshadowed by Murdoch's illness. He told me that while Murdoch never talked much about herself, she was quite curious about his participation in the Revolution of 1956 in Hungary, his flight to Paris, his marriage to Odile Vető and his life as a Hungarian émigré. Murdoch's letters to him have been instrumental to my research, since they demonstrate how warm and supportive Murdoch was with exiles fleeing political oppression. They reminded me of her encounters with Franz Steiner, Elias Canetti and Harry Weinberger.

This correspondence added an intimate layer to my research, for which I am eternally grateful to Vető.

In July 2019, I was honoured to give a talk about the intellectual encounter between Iris Murdoch and Franz Steiner at the Iris Murdoch Centenary Conference at St Anne's College, Oxford, where Vető gave the keynote speech, 'Selfhood, Attention, Love: Themes from Simone Weil in the Philosophy of Iris Murdoch'. During breaks between panels, he and I discussed some of the Oxford scholars he knew personally from his Oxford years, including E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Philippa Foot and Stuart Hampshire, and visited some of the places, including St Andrew's and Somerville Colleges, where he spent time as a young academic. I know, because he told me, how much it meant to him to come back to these places and how thankful he was to the Iris Murdoch Society for making it possible.

Miklós Vető was a great teacher and a wonderful scholar, with a passionate interest in the philosophy of religion, German idealism – especially Schelling, about whom he published a two-volume work, *From Kant to Schelling* (1998) – Simone Weil, Hannah Arendt and Jonathan Edwards. He was a teacher at Marquette and Yale Universities, the University of Abidjan in the Ivory Coast, as well as Rennes and Poitiers Universities in France. When asked in an interview in 2008 about his reason for turning to philosophy, he said: 'I started to teach philosophy, and I still do, so that I can better understand and explain to others with conceptual tools the existence of God, the Creator and the Redeemer, and the world which he created and redeemed.' His humanity, knowledge, his dedication to his profession and his humility will continue to inspire both students and his colleagues. His memory lives on in us.

## Notes on Contributors

NATASHA ALDEN is Senior Lecturer in Contemporary Fiction at Aberystwyth. Her monograph, *Reading Behind the Lines: Postmemory, History, Story* (MUP, 2014) explored postmemory as a lens through which to read innovation in fiction representing the World Wars. She has also written on Sarah Waters, Pat Barker, David Jones, Adam Thorpe, Ian McEwan and Emma Donoghue, and is currently working on the uses of the past in contemporary queer writing, and on grace in the works of Marilynne Robinson and Iris Murdoch. Her research interests include memory, ethics and empathy, the historical novel and queer writing.

ANNA BACKMAN ROGERS is Senior Lecturer in Feminist Philosophy and Visual Culture at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden and Co-editor-in chief of *MAI: Feminism and Visual Culture*. She is the author of *American Independent Cinema: Rites of Passage and The Crisis Image* (Edinburgh University Press, 2015) and *Sofia Coppola: The Politics of Visual Pleasure* (Berghahn, 2018). Anna is currently working on a monograph addressing the cinema of Lynne Ramsay through Simone de Beauvoir's *Ethics of Ambiguity* (Berghahn, 2021). Her monograph *Still Life: Notes on Barbara Loden's 'Wanda'* is forthcoming with Punctum Books (2020).

J. ROBERT BAKER is Professor of English, Senior Level, at Fairmont State University in West Virginia where he served as Director of the Honors Program. For the last five or six years, he has organised the Murdoch panel at the University of Louisville's 'Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture since 1900'.

ATHANASIOS DIMAKIS holds an MA with Distinction from Goldsmiths College, University of London (2006) and a PhD with Distinction from the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (2015) for his thesis, "In a Greek Light": Hellenic Moral Vision in the Philosophy and Fiction of Iris Murdoch'. He is currently working on 'Hotels and the Modern Subject: 1890-1940'. He has been awarded the 2020 William Godshalk Prize for New Durrell

Scholarship by the International Lawrence Durrell Society. Forthcoming publications include 'Making Love to Apollo: The Agalmatophilia of Iris Murdoch's Athenian Lovers in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*' in *Studies in the Literary Imagination*.

ANNE EGGERT STEVNS is a PhD student at Aarhus University, Denmark in the Department of Philosophy and History of Ideas. Her main interest is ethics within existential philosophy and phenomenology, and she is currently working on Iris Murdoch's critical reception of the work of Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre.

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

LISA LEMOINE is a third-year student at the Université de Picardie Jules Verne (UPJV), France. Following two years of *classes préparatoires* (for the competitive entrance exam to the École Normale Supérieure), which gave her a solid grounding in the humanities, she specialised in the study of British literature at UPJV. Inspired by the classes she attended on James Joyce and Colum McCann, her main interest is twentieth-century Irish literature, and this will be the focus of her forthcoming Masters dissertation.

KATE LEVEY is the daughter of Brigid Brophy and Michael Levey. She runs BrigidBrophy.com and writes about Brigid Brophy's work and personal relationships.

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

REBECCA MODEN is currently undertaking a PhD at the University of Chichester, titled 'Writer Meets Painter: Iris Murdoch and Harry Weinberger'. She contributed a chapter titled "Liberation through Art": Form and Transformation in Murdoch's Fiction' to the collection *Murdoch on Truth and Love* (2018). Her essay 'Colours of Consciousness in the Novels of Iris Murdoch' is to be published in *Studies in the Literary Imagination* this year. She is guest co-editing this edition of the *Iris Murdoch Review* with Lucy Oulton.

ROBERT MURPHY is a graduate student at Balliol College, Oxford. His current research ranges from prison writing to representations of financial crises in the late nineteenth century. He completed his undergraduate degree in English Studies at Durham University in 2019 and is now looking forward to a career in education.

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

LUCY OULTON is a PhD student at the University of Chichester's Iris Murdoch Research Centre. Her interests include ecocriticism and affect theory and she is currently preparing a case for Iris Murdoch's environmental imagination. With a professional background as producer, editor and teacher, she has very much enjoyed guest co-editing this edition of the *Iris Murdoch Review* with Rebecca Moden. Her essay 'Loving by Instinct: Environmental Ethics in Iris Murdoch's *The Sovereignty of Good* and *Nuns and Soldiers*' will be published in *Études britanniques contemporaines* later this year.

MARIA PEACOCK is studying for a PhD with the Iris Murdoch Research Centre at the University of Chichester, researching the aspects of displacement and uprootedness in Iris Murdoch's fiction. She completed an MA with the Open University in January 2017, with a dissertation on Iris Murdoch and the picaresque novel.

DANIEL READ recently completed his PhD at Kingston University, London with his thesis, 'The Problem of Evil and the Fiction and Philosophy of Iris Murdoch'. He has been an occasional assistant editor, and has contributed essays and reports, for the *Iris Murdoch Review*. His interests include psychopathy and the writings of William Blake. He is currently inspecting the unpublished materials in the Iris Murdoch Archives with the view to creating a new interview collection.

ANNE ROWE is Visiting Professor at the Iris Murdoch Research Centre, University of Chichester and Emeritus Research Fellow at the Iris Murdoch Archive Project, Kingston University, London. She was Director of the Iris Murdoch Archive Project between 2004 and 2016 and Lead Editor of the *Iris Murdoch Review* between 2008 and 2016. She now acts as advisor to both. She has published widely on Iris Murdoch, most recently, *Iris Murdoch: Writers and Their Work*, published by Liverpool University Press in 2019.

DÁVID SZŐKE is a PhD student at the University of Szeged, Hungary, where he researches the fields of English, Hungarian and German literatures, transculturalism, gender studies and minority studies. His most recent essay, 'Displacement and exile identity in Iris Murdoch's *The Flight from the Enchanter*', has been published in *Literature in a globalized context: Reflexionen des Gesellschaftlichen in Sprache und Literatur. Hallesche Beiträge*, Band 8 (2020). He is currently investigating the influence of the German-Jewish exile in Murdoch's early novels, with a special focus on the Holocaust, post-war trauma, the European memory culture and coming to terms with the past.

FRANCES WHITE is Visiting Research Fellow and Deputy Director of the Iris Murdoch Research Centre at the University of Chichester, an editor of the *Iris Murdoch Review* and Writer in Residence at Kingston University Writing School. She has published widely on Iris Murdoch and other writers. Her prize-winning biography *Becoming Iris Murdoch* was published in 2014. She is currently working on the sequel *Unbecoming Iris Murdoch* (forthcoming, 2022).

LIYAN (ELLEN) ZHOU is an Associate Professor at North Minzu University, Yinchuan, China. She has been researching Iris Murdoch since 2005 and completed her PhD with a thesis on 'Iris Murdoch's Poetics of Mysticism' at Shannxi Normal University, Xi'an, China in 2018. She was a visiting researcher to the Iris Murdoch Research Centre from 2019 to 2020.

## Matching Fund Announcement



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

Photographer: Robert Howard.

**T**HE IRIS MURDOCH SOCIETY, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH BARBARA STEVENS HEUSEL and her husband Dennis Moore, are delighted to announce the establishment of the Barbara Stevens Heusel Research Fund for Early-Career Scholars.

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

By donating £6000, Professor Dennis Moore, lifetime member and former officer of the Iris Murdoch Society, has already double-matched the first contributions (one from the Murdoch Estate and three from private donors), and has generously offered to match the next £5000 in further donations. Please consider making a contribution to this matching fund that will provide Barbara Stevens Heusel Research Grants to Early-Career Scholars.

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

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

## Call for Papers for *Iris Murdoch Review* 12, 2021

**T**HE *IRIS MURDOCH REVIEW* board invites essays relating to the life and work of Iris Murdoch and her circle for the twelfth edition of the *Review*, to be published in September 2021. The *Iris Murdoch Review* (Kingston University Press) is an annual, peer-reviewed journal publishing essays 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.

Essays must conform to the *Review's* formatting guidelines and should be approximately 7000 words in length. Essays may focus on her fiction, philosophy, theology, life, personal journals, letters or poetry, or on her engagement with other figures in her life or work.

The guidelines are available on the University of Chichester website, where you will also find past issues in open-access format: <https://www.chi.ac.uk/humanities/public-humanities/literary-and-cultural-narrative/iris-murdoch-research-centre/iris-murdoch-review>.

Deadline for essays: 15 December 2020. Informal enquiries to the *Review's* Lead Editor, Dr Miles Leeson, at [ims@chi.ac.uk](mailto:ims@chi.ac.uk).

## Tenth International Iris Murdoch Conference, University of Chichester, 25–27 June 2021: First Call for Papers

**F**OLLOWING A SUCCESSFUL CENTENARY CONFERENCE AT ST ANNE'S COLLEGE, Oxford in 2019, the tenth International Conference on Iris Murdoch studies will take place at the University of Chichester in 2021. The conference will showcase ongoing, and published, Murdoch scholarship with a particular focus on Place and Space.

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

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

Please forward abstracts of up to 300 words by 15 February 2021, and any enquiries relating to the conference itself, to organisers Dr Miles Leeson and Dr Frances White, at [ims@chi.ac.uk](mailto:ims@chi.ac.uk).

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

**T**HE IRIS MURDOCH REVIEW IS THE FOREMOST JOURNAL FOR IRIS MURDOCH scholars worldwide and provides a forum for peer-reviewed essays as well as book reviews, event reports and notices.

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

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

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

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