

The Iris Murdoch Review

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The Iris Murdoch Review

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Editorial Preface

This Special Edition of the Iris Murdoch Review marks both the tenth anniversary of the Iris Murdoch Archive Project and the occasion of the Seventh International Conference on Iris Murdoch to be organised by Kingston University. The eclectic mix of material within spans the years from the 1950s to the 1990s and moves beyond, to include Murdoch's

understanding of the friendship and the historical contexts that frame the letters from Iris Murdoch to Philippa Foot. We are delighted to publish the winning entries here.

is also witnessed in this issue, by the publication of Margarita Maurí's collection of essays in Spanish from the Iris Murdoch Seminar at Barcelona University, reviewed at an international conference on Iris Murdoch at Roma Tre University held in February 2014. This issue also highlights the individuals and institutions that have been forged over the past ten years, and that have strengthened and invigorated Iris Murdoch scholarship worldwide.

Anne Rowe, May 2014

Iris Murdoch

Raids on the Inarticulate: Poems for Wallace Robson

In Iris Murdoch's 1975 novel, *A Word Child*

expresses in poem nine. Three of the poems (six, seven and eight) are composed on a single day, 3 March 1954, and read as if written after a bitter quarrel: 'when all was wrenched / and set ashivering / Tinkling and broken - / the torn tongue quivering, The sad word spoken' (poem six). These poems have a passionate energy born of pain. In poem eight Murdoch achieves the considerable self-insight, that, for her, 'honesty is a hard thing'; 'dappled deception [...] natural and sweet'. Such occasional felicities of vocabulary as well as the poignancy of a failed love story told through poems, makes this small collection of greater weight than its apparent slightness.

Frances White

W.W.Robson (1923-1993)

who were associated in various ways with Oxford University in the mid-twentieth century. Robson had been a scholar at New College in the early 1940s where he was a pupil of Lord David Cecil; and it was either during this period, or, more likely, in the late 1940s and early 1950s when he was Fellow and Tutor in English at Lincoln College, that he came to know Iris Murdoch and to begin the relationship that ultimately led to their brief engagement.

Robson was a brilliant but eccentric young man. He read widely and voraciously and possessed an extremely powerful memory. These qualities, together with a sharp wit and great personal charm, must have made him attractive to many people. But in spite of his intellectual gifts, or perhaps partly because of them, he was anxious and emotionally vulnerable. There are hints in the letters of tensions of various kinds, which may have contributed to the breakdown of the relationship. We cannot know the full picture, but it seems likely that there was something in this combination of powerful, independent personalities which was not well suited to marriage; at any rate the affair ended, and Robson married Anne Moses in 1962, to whom he remained devoted until his death thirty years later.

The letters give a glimpse of what might have been an interesting literary partnership. Both Murdoch and Robson were writers as well as dons. Robson's only non-academic publication, however, was a volume of poems, *The Signs Among Us*, which received little attention. Although the letters hint at Robson's literary ambitions, in the end it was

will perhaps never be known; but any clever, bookish, intense young men who appear among the pages of her novels are well worth the attention of future scholars who may be interested in their relationship.

Hugh Robson, May 2014

Poem One (undated)

Tu es mon mal

You have searched my heart; and far down
The dark nets in the dark waters move.

This is but a sad image of love;
Unless from depth itself a strength can come.

Dazzling and electrical, a tension of the nerves,
Fear, and even hatred, turn to steel.
Is this the true tenderness I hoped to feel?
Or is violence itself a power that saves?

I can see no hope in your sex branded eyes.
Our extreme union is a lack of hope.

Kernel of lightning in collapsing skies?

You are the troubled and dark power counter
To which setting foot and knee I strain

And see in shock my soul's fragments founder.

Shot through the head into a diamond glory.
Promised not present – there is only a shiver
Along the nerves. The notion of never
Is an unformulated part of the story.

Crying with fear compelled from your embrace
You are the steep way that I slowly tread –
The gazing skull that entering my head
Aches with mortality upon my face.

You are the iron man with whom I dance
Where each step is original with life –
While truth is at our wrist like a blunt knife.
You are the wakening as you are the trance.

My hatred for you pierces you like love –
My secret moods come blooded from your heart.

Scattering worlds, in your cold orbit move.

There is no escaping the dimensions of space,
All other spaces are contained therein.
You are my necessity; although I run
My thinking feet imagine no new place.

Only the truth can hold our reeling galaxy –
To truth your power must bend its unkind laws.

The Power that holds us both upon our course
Is our unsteady love's only identity.

The darkness in me of untruth to you,
Your jealous force that weighs upon my neck,
Must in our new heaven and earth break
Into the singing of planets the night through.

Our poor love lifts a soiled and bleeding face,
And all the air is black with our offence.
My hand in the darkness touches yours once
And the tenderness I prayed for comes as a grace.

Tu es mon mal oh toi mon guérison,
Tu es la froide terre que reveillaient mes pleurs,
La mort qui me venait comblée de fleurs
Dont le parfum est enfin un bénison.

Poem Two (undated)

This open sea of monsters is my home
Covered with gentle ships all bearing west
The spices and the garments of the east
We are the kings who sit upon the prow
And look upon the mountains of the east
Here where the great waves bear us to our doom
Come take my hand and look upon the whale
The crystal eyes of great Leviathan
And every island swimming in the west.

Where are the sweet suns now
Dear doves that come into the dark
Into the dark dark room
Here we are sundered oh
My dear under the sea
Where the gold galleons lie

Not all the languages of weeping men
Are adequate to speak the word
That now breaks through.
This word that opens darkly in my heart
Its gaping mouth of seaweed
Poor sweet word –
How tenderly this dark mouth opens here
Child of a southern civilising speech

[The poem is clearly unfinished – the remainder lost]

Poem Three (undated)

Instead of a letter it eases
The heart more to write thus.
The great thing is to avoid fuss.
The deep impulse is to do what pleases,

Nervous and beady in the black cage,
(Words are described as winged),
Their crooked feet are ringed,

And high for the storm their courage.

They are braver than I –
They can reach a greater height,
They know their course in the night.
Some of them may die,

Though my tongue is still
And I am weak,
Perhaps they will know how to speak
When the grey wings and the red bill
Are come quietly to your windowsill.

And the Spring wind stirs the breast
That had climbed so far aloft,

Contour, as they stop their crest
Humbly, & come to rest.
They are better than I.
Their unpretentious wings
Speak of innocent things.
My poor messages may lie,
But not they.

I think they belong to you,
These gentle birds that so
They struggle in my heart to go.
Let that prison not have made them untrue
Or tarnished what they know.

Open your window & your door
To their crooked & humble feet.
Give them a little corn to eat.
Forgive them for being poor.

Over the barricaded hours
And the electric storm of time
Only these wings can climb.
I think they have these gracious powers
Because they are yours.

Poem Four (dated 1952)

Indifferently of autumn or spring –
I wish, as I look into your eyes.
Which are deep as the brook swollen

That we could understand the bird –
The hours pass, the roots
Of the primrose are as strong as a tree –
The insects of summer crawl

Upon us – your tears fall –
But listen. The bird sings –
Here is one one

[The poem appears to have been abandoned at this point]

Poem Six (March 3 1952)

Crystalline scattering
Powdering meaning
Into no mattering –
All is seeming
And faint of heartness.
The endless roadway
Flies in the darkness
A far ahead way,
The catseyes blinded,
The headlights quenched,
And no one minded
When all was wrenched
And set a shivering
Tinkling and broken –
The torn tongue quivering,
The sad word spoken.

Poem Seven (March 3 1952)

To receive relief I write,
Not looking at all
At the obvious places
Where nailed upon the wall
There are tortured faces.
Simply the courage to wait
And quietly to look
I lack. There is someone
Whose grief I make,
Who is for me cast down:
But this I will not know.
The earth of elsewhere

Is my wild garden –
Yet though I search there

Will never grow.

Poem Eight (March 3 1952)

But dappled deception is natural and sweet,
Simple, seductive & most discreet
In the weary grace of its surrendering.
When the sun shines the little birds sing,

But I hope that nevertheless
I may be most strongly chained and penned
So that although I run with wildness
The tugged at tether will cast me to the ground
Until I have learnt mildness,
Being truth's prisoner in the end.

Poem Nine (March 9 1954)

The tired wanderer in careful heaven
Oppressed by the perfume of hyacinths & Balkan Sobranie
Has on his head a cloud of very many
Memories, if he pauses even
For a moment, standing still
And looking at the attentive landscape
Assembling quickly into colour & shape,
To pin him between a river & a green hill.
These things like birds now twitter in my ears
And all their language is a sweet disdain;
What childhood knew I cannot understand.
The trees beneath our thundercloud of tears
Are tall & leafy with continual rain;
Eloquent in the silence of the land.

Poem Ten (March 12 1952)

You ask a hundred sonnets of me – you
That put pain not poetry upon my soul.
The icebergs know the pathway from the pole
That leads them to a mortal rendezvous.
The little ship is crushed & all its crew
Are black & tiny on the sculptured white,

Touches with treasuring that which is true.
Now the mast totters & the hulls crack
And a cold world enters forever in,
A universe of white that knows no black,
The nightmare strength of ice, the crushing din,
That moves with snowy silence on its track
And softly will obliterate our sin.

Poem Eleven (March 12 1954)

And no foliage at the bottom of the sea.

Is the consolation of our dying.
You are the question that escaped from me,
Finding no answer in our unity.
The cry went out a pilgrim through the earth,
But missed the habitation of the birth.
My heart went straying and returned a deer,
With horns of horror & with eyes of fear.
You, vulnerable to the hunters' darts,

**'The Guises of Love': The Friendship of Professor Philippa Foot and
Dame Iris Murdoch**

What follows is the transcript and notes for a talk given at Kingston University on Wednesday 15 May 2013 as part of the community project, *Iris Murdoch and Philippa Foot: An Arc of Friendship*, run by the Iris Murdoch Archive Project at Kingston University and funded by the National Lottery, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

This talk places on public record some background to the correspondence between Philippa Foot and Iris Murdoch, recently acquired by the Iris Murdoch Archive Project at Kingston University, and from sources such as Iris Murdoch's journals, and my own, and Philippa Foot's letters to me. One interest of these letters is that they are written

by these responsibilities she suggested wisely and wittily: 'Write the biography without curiosity'. She also said: 'Leave the philosophy to us: we can deal with that'.⁵

On 16 December 2000 I delivered the complete typescript of *Iris Murdoch: A Life to Philippa*. Alarmed about her possible response, I was greatly relieved when she rang me twice in Wales to enthuse about it: my journal shows that she said – gratifyingly – it was 'comical. Sad, gripping ... you don't know what you've done – don't understand how good it is – it's marvellous'. But she also had objections and concerns. Some of these appear within a letter to me now archived at Kingston University. But not all. Some she refused to commit to writing and would discuss only face-to-face. When I asked her what was missing, she mentioned John Bayley's importance, and Iris's goodness, topics Philippa herself addressed eloquently in her Somerville eulogy. (As it happened, John Bayley had encouraged me to cut some passages concerning Iris's love for him which I suspect he thought saccharine. In a similar spirit I had decided that if I asserted her goodness I risked hagiography: I had instead to evoke it and let the reader draw conclusions.)

Philippa had more serious anxieties. One was Elias Canetti's contention that Iris had laid out Franz Steiner's body, with the scandalous implication that love-making with her had killed him. My partner Jim O'Neill argued that it was important to show Iris as something more and other than a mere blue-stocking: that sentence stayed. But her greatest anxiety concerned Iris's Communist connections. In the summer of 1983 Iris's ex-colleague at St Anne's, Jennifer Hart, had been hounded by police and journalists after being named in print as a Soviet spy: Iris too had spied during the war for the Communist Party, copying Treasury papers then leaving these copies in a tree that was a dead-letter drop in Kensington Gardens. Philippa was alarmed at the possibility of a repeat scandal. To compound her fears about Iris as a Communist, Philippa's sister Marion,

as a place for Communist Party cell meetings, perhaps as late as 1945: she believed Iris herself to have absented herself during these meetings.⁶ Since the scribblings were

Then, in October 2001, the *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer of the biography, John Jones, took me to task for down-playing Murdoch's espionage.⁷ I had written that Iris probably copied only 'information of little moment about colleagues and Treasury doings', adding that she would probably not have hesitated to pass on information of greater moment too. But I had no entitlement to make such assumptions.⁸ Jones recalled, with much circumstantial detail, Murdoch telling him in a pub in the late 1940s of her war-time spying, mentioning a Captain who was her Communist Party 'minder'. This review, in-and-of-itself, licensed me in the paperback edition to re-insert the dead-letter

may in this connection be recalled that Canetti in *Party in the Blitz* alleges that Iris was involved in spying for the Communist Party abroad post-war.) In the event, what

⁵ For this reason, publication of *Iris Murdoch: Philosopher*, ed. by Justin Broackes's (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) is greatly to be welcomed. Typical of Foot's generosity that, invited to give a

obsessed the media and wholly overshadowed the news that she had once spied for the Communist Party were tales of Iris's Alzheimer's and of her love life.

I wonder whether there were elements of displacement – in the Freudian sense – in Philippa's fears. There is a parallel between the life of a spy and that of someone engaged in multiple love affairs: both risk being seen by others as cold-blooded, cruel, or traitorous.

in 1943, Iris stole Philippa's part-time lover Thomas Balogh, wounding Iris's other lover, M.R.D. Foot, whom Philippa in turn rescued and married.⁹ If there is one parallel between the spy and the unfaithful lover, another obtains between the spy and the novelist: both

Researching her biography did not change my view of the shape of Iris's career. I still think her best work to be found in those magical and extraordinary novels *Under the Net*, *The Bell*, *A Severed Head*, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, *The Black Prince* and *The Sea, the Sea*. But biographizing sometimes suggested reasons for success, when, for example, the work put down a deep tap-root into her own experience, as well as a radiation outwards from it. Her life started to seem quite as extraordinary as

I was astonished and disturbed by the immediacy and intensity of her journals and letters, as by the confusion of her early love life. (With hindsight I can now see that

on this; it concerned an archetypal heroine who 'conducts a number of emotional intimacies simultaneously and thus might be thought emotionally promiscuous'.¹⁰ Perhaps I understood more than I thought.) Iris created over thirty years a long series

Under the Net, moving through Antonia Lynch-Gibbon in *A Severed Head*, Hannah Crean-Smith in *The Unicorn* and Lady Millie Kinnard in *The Red and the Green* – who are often dealt with comic severity. Despite decades of feminism, a double-standard still obtains: men are forgiven their wild oats while women who sow the same are rebuked or punished. Lara Feigel in her recent *The Love-Charm of Bombs: Restless Lives in the Second World War* shows how tolerant war-time sexual morality was:¹¹ Graham Greene at one point ran three women as well as visiting prostitutes, but stays un-rebuked by critics.¹² The same charity is not extended to Iris Murdoch whom there is a fashion to diminish as Kali, goddess of destruction.

9 Establishing dates depended upon timing of the appointment of US war-time Ambassador to London, John Winant, known to Foot's parents; Foot had moved to Seaforth that same October and it seemed likely that Murdoch's theft of Balogh happened very soon after. Foot would admit only to one single night's sleeplessness and gave many reasons why this might have been the case; and she purported to mind Murdoch's treachery for M.R.D. Foot's sake, more than for her own. But it would be strange if jealousy had been restricted to one sleepless night: Balogh, Foot told me, fell in love with Murdoch as he had not been with her. And then, as she also told me, everyone fell for Iris. Foot's and Murdoch's reactions to these events both involved Donald MacKinnon but differed. For both women, his counsel counted immeasurably and it was McKinnon who introduced Murdoch

same time Foot later saw that McKinnon's idiosyncrasies – for all that Foot revered McKinnon as a model – made her hate Christianity and put her off religion for life as it were. 'Iris has a spiritual life', Foot once remarked to me, while she herself had a moral life. Religion for Foot was a closed book.

10 *English Literary History*, Vol.48, No.2, Summer 1981; it covered Forster, Woolf, Murdoch and Henry James.

11 Lara Feigel, *The Love-Charm of Bombs: Restless Lives in the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2013).

12 Graham Greene lied to his wife (Vivien) and long-term mistress (Dorothy, with whom his brother Hugh sometimes slept in his absence), about the great love of his life, Catherine Walston, who also had a husband. Catherine's other lovers included a Labour MP, an American general and an IRA chieftain.

A meditation from a later novel, *Bruno's Dream*, belongs here: 'How selective guilt is, and regret. People whom we just knocked down in passing are soon lost to memory. Yet their wounds may be as great. We regret only the frailty which the form of our life has made us own to'.¹³ The form of Iris's life – and in particular Philippa's proximity – provided her with reminders that she had wounded others.

Murdoch's and Foot's careers mirrored each other: in 1942 both were Bohemian leftish students. (Although never in the Communist Party, Foot once startled her pre-war country-house hosts by reading the *Daily Worker*.) Even during the cold war between them (1944-59), Murdoch lodged with the Foots at 16, Park Town for more than a year, starting July 1948, though this arrangement struck all of them as odd. *Bruno's Dream* echoes this episode when Lisa Watkins, the 'bird with a broken wing' – as Murdoch's was broken by Balogh and Hicks – is taken in as a lodger by Miles and Diana Green-sleave.¹⁴ Circumstances kept throwing them together. In Philippa's front room she, Iris, Elizabeth Anscombe, Mary Midgley (and others – but mainly women) campaigned against Oxford's sternly and restrictively linguistic regime in moral philosophy. This regime separated philosophy from any problems in real life, which were categorised as crude non-professional business – better left to amateurs like parsons.¹⁵ Philippa and Iris were rebels, reading heterodox thinkers such as Nikolai Berdyaev, and penning

marriage to Alan Cameron (who had died four years before, in 1952), provided Bowen with a secure base from which to make forays into the world, and, in doing so, have love affairs with Humphrey House, Sean O'Faolain, May Sarton, and Charles Ritchie.

Both Iris and Philippa were in later life Oxford-based grandees. Murdoch became Dame of the British Empire in 1987; Foot turned down a comparable honour when offered one. After Philippa's retirement from UCLA in 1991 they invented the tradition of Friday lunch together at 15, Walton Street. That continued into Iris's last illness;

John Bayley memorably and accurately evokes Philippa's 'quizzically precise, polite attention' on such occasions.¹⁷ I don't know exactly when Murdoch asked Foot (and John Simopoulos) to be her executors (but not literary executors), and they agreed. It indicates trust in their loyalty. Murdoch also gave Foot a signed copy of each of her novels: these are held in Somerville College Archives.

A well-known joke Foot liked to tell about Seaforth: they decided to tell each other of the men who had asked to marry them. Philippa's 'list' was soon done. As Iris's list went on and on, Philippa asked crossly whether it might not save time if Iris listed only those men who had not yet asked her to marry them. This joke shows them – however playfully – in competition. Both Balogh and MacKinnon, for example, fell in love with Murdoch, and

First, John Bayley has argued, 'this desire that each of her relationships should be with Iris [...] what she felt about each of them was totally genuine and without guile'.²² We will re-visit this topic of innocence. When things were going well it seems she did believe that what she felt about each lover was indeed genuine: and perhaps that she

wonderful phrase to describe the 'idle thoughtless happiness which was never to come [...] in my life again' while he is two-timing his wife Antonia with his mistress Georgie Hands: 'I was happy [...] with that particular quality of a degenerate innocence'.³⁰ The wonderfully paradoxical phrase 'degenerate innocence' bears contemplation: it proposes that innocence in and of itself can be guilty.

In a standard Romantic trope, Murdoch's novels often show how false innocence must be lost or gone beyond in order to be recuperated as understanding or wisdom. Thus Otto Narraway in *The Italian Girl* says, 'Sin is a sort of unconsciousness, a not knowing', and he instances the 'dreaming, swimming, dazed Eve of Ghislebertus at Autun' as an iconic depiction of this unconsciousness.³¹

memorably in *The Black Prince* where wickedness is often 'the product of a semi-deliberate inattention, a sort of swooning relationship to time [...] We ignore what we are doing until it is too late to alter it'.³² Like Martin, Otto and Bradley – and, if I may put it thus, like all who count ourselves moral seekers – Murdoch wanted to discover what lay beyond 'degenerate innocence'. From this standpoint, the myth of the Fall belongs critically within the spiritual quest; and the dramas of 1943-4 were seminal in her journey as a seeker and as a novelist. This is surely one reason that she compulsively re-invents and re-imagines new emotional and sexual imbroglios in one novel after another. Imbroglios

from the compulsive and blind life of the cave towards life in the sun. In the cave, Julius King tells us in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*

substitutes' and 'Anyone will do to play the roles'.³³ In the sun, by contrast, we might at last be properly and freely apprehensible to one another.

starts with the quadrilateral tale in 1943/4; the second with M.R.D Foot's desertion of

period coincided, until Iris's marriage in 1956, with maximum storm and stress in her private life, with the loss of Frank Thompson in 1944 and Franz Steiner in 1952, and a rapid sequence of so-called 'a-symmetrical' or uneven relationships. Philippa, evoking this period to me, wrote to me of Iris's bizarre 'tendency to fall in love with absolutely everybody'. Oxford is a small place, and Philippa observed much.

Iris paid many tributes to Philippa's remarkable strength of character. In April 1959 she recorded that she trusted Philippa's mind, knew herself safe in it, even when she thought she would never speak frankly to her again. She trusted Philippa never to traduce or diminish her. And on 1 February 1964 she noted that there was in her life 'eternally Philippa', who represented 'a great reserve of good' on which Iris had 'never really called'. Two years after that entry she was drafting *The Nice and the Good*. John Bayley was unsure whether Iris ever drew 'portraits from life'. When I 'recognised' Paula in *The Nice and the Good* as a portrait of Philippa – which happened unexpectedly but with an instant sense of conviction – this changed both our views of the novel. Paula has the same letters at the beginning and end of her name – P and A – as Philippa. 'Foxy-faced' is a good description of Philippa's appearance, both her long aristocratic face and also her air of high intelligence verging on shrewdness or craftiness. Paula's pronouncement, 'Everyone invites a divorced woman', is a recognisable echo of Philippa's own brave wit.³⁴ The account of her relationship to 'Mary' who has

30 Iris Murdoch, *A Severed Head* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), p.21.

31 Iris Murdoch, *The Italian Girl* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964), pp.41 and 45.

32 Iris Murdoch, *The Black Prince*, p.189.

33 Iris Murdoch, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), p.224.

34 Iris Murdoch, *The Nice and the Good* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1968), p.20.

some character traits and also physical traits of Iris, recalls Philippa's and Iris's friends since college. Moreover Paula is said to be an uncompromising person whom Mary experiences at times as an unconscious prig, while at the same time Paula's coolness, her detachment and peculiar virtue nevertheless soothe Mary's nerves. That recalls in a very direct and literal manner the way Iris often experienced Philippa.³⁵

Two 1967 journal entries suggest that, eight years after M.R.D. Foot left, it was Philippa

have a neurotic compulsion to act the tyrannical princess child where you are concerned." In a certain way, she curiously misunderstands my reactions. Fails for instance to see my rather specialized love for the tyrant'.

[Saturday] 18 May [1968]: 'Saw Philippa Thursday [16 May] and stayed night. Time and space problems. I am still a bit afraid of P, I think. She is numinous, taboo ..'.

20 May [1968] [After comparing Philippa to her other women-loves]: 'I think the quality of my admiration for her has altered too. Perhaps I admire her a little less & value her more'.⁴³ That might suggest that her desire to demythologise their relations had some limited success.

On 20 February 1969 there was dinner during a snow-storm with Philippa who was

secret – in psychotherapy; reinforced too, perhaps, when her marriage failed after 14 years, and she learnt – for the following half-century – to fend for herself. Philippa of course had lovers and could discuss these relationships in a relaxed way. Although she had an upper-class upbringing, riding to hounds, and a Nannie who meant more than her distant mother, it is wrong to see her just as a ‘lady’: her disclosures could be as striking as her reticences and she was always interesting and unexpected. It had been Philippa who in 1944 brought Iris the news of Frank Thompson’s death, and she astonished me at Frank’s grave in Bulgaria in 1998 by opening a bag she was carrying and handing me a single red carnation to place there, as if from Iris.⁵⁰ She enjoyed taking centre-stage. She destroyed most of her correspondence and yet prized Murdoch’s letters, keeping them safe and allowing me to make use of them. Having destroyed a suit-case full of Donald MacKinnon’s letters, she found a handful remaining and handed these to me on the day Murdoch died.⁵¹

to appear in print, she carefully absented herself from the book launch at the National Portrait Gallery in case, I suspect, she were to be cornered or quizzed by the inquisitive.

Philippa liked to perform; Iris only in her writing. Foot was amazed on reading *Under the Net* in 1954 by the sheer wit her friend had hidden from the world and revealed only in writing. She had never, in 12 years of friendship, intuited this side of Iris. (At a Somerville memorial evening for Iris Murdoch with Hermione Lee and me around 1999, Foot herself gave a very funny performance reading from *Under the Net* about Dave Gellman’s extramural classes. Each found the other mysterious and unaccountable.) I recently came across my notes of a memorable evocation she made to me in February 1998: ‘Iris is [like] a cat, head-strong, self-willed, passionate and totally her own woman – [there is] silence at the centre – she didn’t care what you thought or felt about her. People who are so reserved, yet so much there for others, affectionate, generous, a fascinating mix. Yet [there was] somehow something untouchable about her. One never got to the centre. Most people live in the sight of others. Iris, despite her intense involvement with others, did not. She is totally there yet totally for-herself’. Philippa had no sense of knowing Iris. And if Philippa saw Iris as sphinx-like, the compliment was returned. In 1968 she had noted in her journal: 5 October 1968: ‘Writing to Philippa. She is of course the Sphinx. The Sphinx knew every man’s secret, but did not always know that she knew. Hence P’s surprise at the kind of fear she inspires. She knows the answer to a question which no one else can answer for me. But what is the question?’

They resembled one another. Anna in *Under the Net* has ‘a calculated avoidance of self-surrender’ (p.33). Perhaps both had an element of this. It is no accident that Murdoch twice explored their real-life relationship by re-inventing them as sisters: Lisa and Diana in *Bruno’s Dream*, Hilda and Morgan in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. They were in

promiscuity which parodies its author’s. Yet at the end of the book Jake surrenders to a form of agnosticism that reminds me vividly – and movingly – of the struggles of Iris Murdoch and Philippa Foot over nearly 60 years to understand one another, and to

⁵⁰ I hope to lodge a CD in the Iris Murdoch Archives at Kingston University, of what would have

bin)0.586478(n)Frank Thomp04 00 Telg ETto QR98 ay. 122 0 07254 that to K Q 1 0 0 Ch BB T ai 8 1 0 1 5186(14 T

express their love for each other: 'When does one ever know a human being? Perhaps only after one has realised the impossibility of knowledge and renounced the desire for

knowledge, it is simply a kind of co-existence; and this too is one of the guises of love'.⁵²

I last visited Philippa in August 2010 when she was bed-ridden and had little time left.⁵³ She seemed at peace, enquiring repeatedly, 'How are you really?' She minded about the well-being of friends and was not to be fobbed off with shallow or polite replies. She also asked – referring to my *Life of Frank Thompson* – 'How is Frank really?' And then she started to speak, again and again and yet again, of the extraordinariness of Iris. She changed the topic for one brief moment to Iris's St Anne's lover, who nearly destroyed her marriage: how unfathomable that Iris Murdoch should have fallen for someone so (from memory) 'raucous'.⁵⁴ But then she moved back to Iris Murdoch herself. Almost her last words to me – and thus mine today – were: 'What an astonishing person Iris was ... Astonishing'.

⁵² Iris Murdoch, *Under the Net* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1954), p.238.



Prize-winning entries to the 'Letter to Iris Murdoch' Competition for Sixth Form Students who participated in the Community Project, Iris Murdoch and Philippa Foot: An Arc of Friendship run by the Iris Murdoch Archive Project between May 2012 and July 2013

Teddington
24 August 2013

Dear Iris Murdoch,

expansive of time between us, but I feel as if I know you. I've been part of a project you see, we've been reading the letters you sent to your friend Philippa and visiting all your old haunts: St James's Park, Seaforth Place and Somerville College to name a few. I

I thought it might interest you to know that my eyes are blue. They told us when we were looking at the portraits of you that you had a code about eyes. They said that if a character of yours has brown eyes then he is a practical sort and a reliable, salt of the earth type of person that everyone needs in their life, but if he has blue eyes then

Mischa Fox (you remember him don't you - he's from your book *The Flight from the Enchanter*?) so enigmatic and disarming to the victims of his charm; no one could quite decipher his identity with his one practical brown eye and his one thoughtful blue eye.

Anyway, as I was saying, my eyes are blue; I want to be a philosopher you see. I've read some of your philosophy books and my favourite is *The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists*. I think that people with blue eyes are just the kind of people that your beloved Plato spurned; they are exactly the kind of people who create things intended to deceive the onlooker. Although Plato claims it's sacrilegious and immoral to indulge in imitation, I think both you and I share a love of it. After I learnt all about you through the project, I pored over the thirty three portraits of you on the National Portrait Gallery website and I sat and stared at you and imagined what I'd tell you about

You must feel as though I'm a terrible peeping-tom; peering through the chink in the curtains of your public persona, at your letters to Philippa. That's how I know

you and write to you without you ever knowing. It's also how I know that you're a bit

It's nothing to be afraid of though Iris, honestly it's not. We still read all the greats and Wittgenstein and Heidegger and all their chums continue to prove a bit of a head sore for philosophy students. You're one of the greats too now, although whether you were born great, achieved greatness or had it simply thrust upon you is not entirely clear. I

created during the war and once you made it there you wouldn't move for anybody.

That's one thing our endless march of progress hasn't resolved. War. It's so easy to forget now though; a distant thing that happens to other people. I bet you'd have had something to say about that and quite a bit to say about modern ethics and religion. I never really understood what you meant by having a religion without a God until I saw Somerville's chapel. We went as a big group, all the girls that had been involved in the project; all the nosey parkers that had been reading your letters. I can understand why you loved it there, the food for one thing was marvellous but what sticks out most in my mind was that great white blank chapel. It was a nice, useful space with a piano for the music students to practise and was very well lit. I knew the minute I saw it that you'd have loved it.

But for all the things that haven't changed, there are just as many things that are starkly different to your world. For a start, and I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad news, Iris, there is the internet. It's like a drug that people can't bear to be without, but as drugs go it is quite a useful one. Think of it a bit like penicillin if it helps. It has rather been the death of the Royal Mail I'm afraid, though why use snail mail when

can hear your disapproval at my having typed this rather than write it and I am sorry but Iris, times do change. It does save such a great amount of time to keep up to date with such things and I feel sure that you of all people would understand that. They told us that you would spend hours and hours attending to your correspondence and just think of the extra time you could save with a little help from social networking!

On the subject of keeping up to date, I feel as if I ought to give you a quick run-down of the current affairs. We are currently under a coalition government and the current economic climate is not so very different from the one you recall in your letters – although we are yet to suffer widespread power cuts. Although you'll be dir56.69 iinvol0362It w3(ofdo

Dear Iris Murdoch,

After taking part in the Iris Murdoch and Philippa Foot: An Arc of Friendship project I feel like I know almost everything there is to know about you, yet as you do not know anything about me, it seems logical to begin by telling you a little about myself. I could tell you that I am in sixth form at the moment, that I was born in Slough and that my father is from Iraq. But does that really tell you anything about my identity? A word that translates to most, as basic information, sometimes etched into a card; simple and tedious.

Chuck Palahniuk, author of *Choke* provides a clear description of the way the word identity is manipulated: 'We can spend our lives letting the world tell us who we are. Sane or insane. Saints or sex addicts. Heroes or victims. Letting history tell us how good or bad we are. Letting our past decide our future. Or we can decide for ourselves. And maybe it's our job to invent something better'.¹ So to really enlighten you as to my identity would be impossible; as my identity is shaped by a compilation of personal experiences, beliefs and opinions; a description of my identity would be ruined by the company of the necessary pigeonholing. Yet perhaps over the course of this letter, by sharing some of the issues I care about most with you (and which I understand to be importa

Londoner, no one will say a word to another. What made my stuffy, silent carriage that afternoon different to any other on a normal day was the simple presence of a scruffy

changing position of the world. This move back to theology has opened up people's minds to new ideas, particularly concerning ethics and politics. It seems as though people are looking at ethics in a new light, which you, Iris, were evidently concerned with a long time ago, as your books have such a strong focus on philosophy. You manage to capture the heart of so many issues such as goodness, moral improvement and the concept of 'the self' while always maintaining a non-judgemental and objective tone.

Baggy Monsters Digest the 1980s: The Realism of the Later Iris Murdoch

I am going to assume that Iris Murdoch would on the whole have been pleased rather than vexed by the association of her work with the term 'baggy monsters' – Henry James's memorable coinage in connection with Tolstoy.¹ For one thing, it invites us to link Murdoch with what she herself would regard as the golden age of the novel; at any rate, she thinks 'the most obvious difference between nineteenth-century and twentieth-century novels is that the nineteenth-century ones are better'.² And for another it seems to license a rather exciting feast of literary misrule – a celebration of the kind of creativity for which, again, Murdoch speaks out when she says in a review of (the English text of) Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*: 'It is doubtless the case that writers of brief and meticulous articles will always look askance at writers of large, unrigorous, emotional volumes; but the latter, for better or worse, have the last word'.³

That was in 1957. Fast forward a quarter of a century, and having put the constraints of professional (analytical) philosophy well behind her, Murdoch is at the height

launched upon the decade-long project of converting her 1982 Gifford lectures into the philosophical 'baggy monster' that is *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, though I cannot

myself to the handful of massive novels she published in the 1980s, from *Nuns and Soldiers* to *The Message to the Planet*, and will ask: in what way can we think of this body of writing as paying homage to Murdoch's heroic nineteenth-century predecessors, and how effectively does it do so?

An obvious preliminary task is to clarify what that admiration entails – what sort of standard or ideal it sets before the practising writer. Some orientation is provided here, appropriately enough given Murdoch's reverence for Plato, by the idea of realism. The interviews in Gillian Dooley's collection drive home the authority of this idea for Murdoch not just as a philosopher but as a novelist also: 'I aim at being an ordinary writer', she says, 'a realistic writer in the tradition of the English novel'; 'a realistic novelist writing in the English tradition and the Russian tradition and the tradition of Proust'.⁴ Even where there is an element of fantasy, this should be organically connected with the realist quality of the work, not a distinct, detachable extra; indeed, even where the label 'realistic' seems scarcely to apply at all, there must still be a certain truthfulness at work, 'an intelligent just judgement in the portrayal of the story'.⁵

This is instructive so far as it goes. But then it is not obvious, either, what constitutes a 'realistic' mode of story-telling. As Bran Nicol reminds us in his contribution to Iris

1 See Leo Tolstoy: *A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Henry Gifford (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p.104.

2 Iris Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. by Peter J. Conradi (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997), p.221, hereafter EM.

3 *Ibid.*, p.150.

4 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), pp.54, 81; compare also p.72.

5 *Ibid.*, pp.7, 175.

Murdoch and Morality, different styles of writing can seem to have what it takes to capture the truth of individual experience at this or that historical moment.⁶ So is there

we can consider the achievement of Murdoch's 'baggy monsters'?

For some light on this question, I turned to Pam Morris's overview of the topic for literature students, and was struck in particular by her statement that the artistic

such locations is of any special interest to Murdoch. It is rather that the action of her novels, early or late, often seems to draw vitality from the evocation of a very precisely visualized material space in which it unfolds, especially – though not only – where her characters are pitted directly against hostile natural forces or inanimate objects: the freezing Thames mud that kills Kitty Jopling in *A Word Child*, or the school tower climbed by teenager Donald Mor in *The Sandcastle*. Murdoch's account of such settings naturally covers matters with a direct bearing on the experience of the relevant characters; but they are rich, too, in what John McDowell has called 'pointless knowable detail'¹⁶ – where 'pointless' is not a pejorative term, but rather indicates that the detail is of a kind that one would register in a spirit of disinterested curiosity, not because anything turned upon it. Nothing turns, for example, on the particular type of roses the Fosters have in their back garden ('Albertine', 'Little White Pet'), but the presence of these names tells¹⁷ – namely, that of a narrator who is not content just to say 'roses' but cares more precisely about the appearance of her imaginary garden walls. These, after all, are real strains of rose which we can look up in a reference book if we choose.

All dedicated readers of Murdoch will be aware by now of the ethics of attention that informs her writing: an approach captured in the statement that 'what we require is a

representation of present-day life as such. Attentiveness to the detail of current social reality, and openness to an intense personal perception of that reality, do not necessarily – though they may

Murdoch's 1980s novels follow the precedent set by James's own 'baggy monsters' in that they make a variety of different choices on this score. Taken as a group, they touch on a wide range of issues of an unsettling or challenging nature: Marxism and militant socialist politics, the future of democracy and of religion, the fate of the world, terrorism, women's liberation, abortion, the sex industry, women priests, ethnic diversity, illegal drugs, and even the nitty-gritty of unsatisfactory levels of foreign-language teaching in the state school system. But the operative words here are 'touch on'; and the touch is in the main a very light one. Thus, the life-crisis of Edward Baltram in *The Good Apprentice*

The Book and the Brotherhood we have the much more ambitious construction of an once common, though eventually divergent, political worldview. They are far from being reducible to that youthful political moment, but it is in varying degrees formative for all of them, and it is essential to the plot.

And we also have a show of determination by Murdoch to make these central characters engage in strenuous political debate, exchanging amongst themselves what their

living through the 1980s (since they correspond at many points to lines of thought she herself pursues in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*), but ideas which are nevertheless convincingly represented as those of 'real individuals' within the world of the novel: that is, we are not being subjected here to a mere bit of didactic writing with some proper

at a moment of crisis in relations between the 'brotherhood' of the title – a group of old friends who were at Oxford together in the 1950s – and the author of the putative 'book', another former Oxford contemporary by the name of Crimond, whom they have

or quasi-Marxist, theory. The crisis has been long in preparation:

Years passed during which Crimond continued to receive a salary which set him free to indulge in political activity which his 'supporters' increasingly disapproved of, and to write, or pretend to write, a book which, if it ever

to be thought of as a ridiculous, irrational, intolerable situation about which something must be done.²⁷

an old affair with Jean, the wife of one of the 'brothers'. Murdoch gives us a detailed

Does Crimond deserve a hearing, or should the group be trying to engineer a decisive break? One member, Jenkin, is open to the idea of Crimond as a genuine radical thinker capable of salvaging something of value from the Marxist tradition, and wants to re-establish 'communication' with him (p.242); Gerard is sceptical, and reacts badly to the charge that he is withdrawing into a social cocoon and disclaiming responsibility for the future ('Jenkin, you make me sick!' [p.244]). But we cannot dismiss Jenkin as a mere sentimental dreamer, since he is singled out for us early on as a classic 'good' character in Murdochian terms – one who 'doesn't need to get anywhere', who 'walks the path' and 'exists where he is' (p.22). If such a person is interested in the 'battle front [...] where religion and Marxism touch' (p.13), then perhaps we should be too.

And the meeting between Gerard and Crimond, when it duly takes place (pp.286-

the creator. Certainly it is Crimond who is able to speak with dignity and poise, while

more or less foolish queries about the book; Crimond occasionally declines to answer, but his performance overall is succinct and lucid, and he continues to insist on the originality and encyclopaedic ambition of his work in progress. 'You've felt superior all your life', Murdoch allows Crimond to tell Gerard, who has just declared an interest in the neo-Platonist philosopher Plotinus: 'You think you're saved by the Idea of the

them.²⁸ Rose's view is admittedly not a straightforward instance of political commentary,

'art is essentially selection', as James also says.³³ But then he goes on to add that 'it is a selection whose main care is to be typical, to be inclusive'. Murdoch evidently shares this ideal – hence the evolution of the baggy monster – yet alongside the wish to capture

decent but slightly boring career diplomat? Alternatively, what does it mean to her to

by a 'humanist contract with the reader based on the consensual belief that shared communication about material and subjective realities is possible [...] the belief that there is a shared material world external to textuality'.⁴² If there is such a contract,

existence to the status of text, or mental life to 'language speaking through us'; she writes much of the time as if insisting to herself 'Not I, not even we, but the world around us'. Less obvious, though, is what we should say about Murdoch's relation to

to consistently understand and represent character as the shifting location of multiple social forces'.⁴³ For the urgency with which, as a moralist, Murdoch seeks to warn us against deterministic thinking (the seductive feeling that one can make no difference, that choice is an illusion) cannot easily coexist with a relaxed, enquiring attitude to the action of 'multiple social forces' on characters who are, so to speak, her closest imaginary friends – the ones in whom she makes the biggest emotional investment. (This is why she deserves particular credit for allowing Crimond to attack Gerard and his friends as instances of a certain social type – even if it is hinted that these confrontations owe something to the pleasures of intellectual masochism.⁴⁴)

It would not have occurred to me to describe Iris Murdoch, quite generally or in the abstract, as a writer who takes character to be the 'shifting location of multiple social forces'.⁴⁵ That is, her practice as a story-teller does not seem to involve the even-

some insurmountable 'fastidiousness', under this latter heading. Still, we must credit the baggy monsters with a remarkable degree of success – given the unevenness of their grounding in social reality (the areas of suffocating profusion versus those of indifference or neglect) – in communicating that enduring desideratum of the novel: a 'personal, direct impression of life'.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ This paper is a lightly revised version of the lecture I gave at the Sixth International Iris Murdoch Conference at Kingston University in September 2012. Thanks to all who took part in discussion of it on that occasion, and to the organizers.

Introduction to The Green Knight

This Introduction to the Bedford Square Books edition of *The Green Knight* by Iris Murdoch's literary agent and friend, to whom she dedicated this novel, is reproduced here by kind permission of the Ed Victor Literary Agency.

I became Iris Murdoch's literary agent in 1984 ... against her will. When she began her *Under the Net*, was published in 1954), literary agents

world of those times. As was so often the case back then, her publisher, the legendary Norah Smallwood at Chatto & Windus, also acted as her agent, selling not just US and

arrangement went on for many years, but when Norah decided to retire, she advised Iris that I should represent her literary interests for the future. Iris was not best pleased.

Like many authors, Iris deplored all change, and was worried about putting her literary affairs – which had for so long been in what she regarded as the safe hands of her publishers – into mine, those of an upstart American literary agent. Norah hosted a lunch to introduce us to each other. I had been reading her novels since I was a high

This was not a rhetorical question. Iris came from a generation for whom politeness was ingrained, and she was genuinely seeking my consent. Would I mind? I was, of course, overwhelmed with gratitude and considered it an honour to have The Green Knight dedicated to me.

The Green Knight

Pamela Osborn

,

guides various characters away from remorse and grief and reconnects them with each other. As the grieving Tuan considers suicide, his doorbell rings and the scene ends with the reassuring words, 'Jackson came in' (JD, p.198). Jackson is able, though readers are never made aware how, to free Tuan from his crippling grief so that he may marry the woman he loves. As two marriages brought about by Jackson take place at the end (JD, p.245).

In presenting Jackson as a romanticised self-portrait Murdoch counterbalances the ways in which she would be assessed and re-assessed after her death. Yet Jackson is

able to see their subjects with their own eyes'.⁹ Such proximity, Tekcan argues, can not only be advantageous but also problematic because biographers may be too close to be reliable: 'The intention of writing the biography of someone one knows is never pure, unambiguous or wholly altruistic' (Tekcan, p.11). D.J. Taylor argues that both Bayley's and Wilson's memoirs are damaged by intimacy, and that, in Wilson's case, 'you wonder whether water samples of this kind wouldn't be better taken a mile or two further on from the river's source'.¹⁰

Conradi confronts the unique paradox of his situation: 'Closeness to one's subject is simultaneously a strength and a liability, and I wanted to [. . .] start the job of setting her work in the context of the cultural/intellectual life of the mid-twentieth century, of the generation who struggled to come to terms philosophically and emotionally and

Iris (2001).¹⁴ Alex Ramon notes that 'the younger Murdoch is never shown lecturing and is only shown in the act of writing once. Rather, she is presented throughout in terms of more obviously "dynamic" activity: swimming, bicycling, dancing, falling down stairs, singing, having sex and, more rarely, involved in intellectual argument'.¹⁵ Likewise, Ramon contends, 'considerable attention is given to the details of [Murdoch and Bayley's] domestic life' which 'locates Iris within a tradition of British cinematic realism' (IMTC, p.233). This low-key realist approach has been criticised for allowing
IMTC, p.234)

which demeans its subject.

Despite his criticism of Bayley's perspective, Wilson too seems intent on locating Murdoch in domestic and social spheres. He also seems more intent on destroying the

into focus again. Her? The Iris Murdoch I knew. At last, as far as I am concerned, she has come back to life' (Wilson, p.265). Morgan is absolutely aware of his need to 'stop her fading from me personally', and his ultimate failure to 'invoke her for myself – to see her staggering affectionately towards me again' (Morgan, p.28). Morgan's collection of memories also takes on the responsibility of alleviating Conradi's still raw grief by returning the living Murdoch to him. He tells Conradi in his 'opening letter' that he has exaggerated Murdoch's role in his life as a 'reformer' (Morgan, p.2) because 'I thought an

Freud refers to the desire to believe that words can resurrect the dead, as 'magical the world'.²⁴ Mourning theorist Jeffrey Berman suggests that 'nowhere is magical thinking more evident than in the belief that we can will ourselves into saving another person from death. Magical thinking can take many forms, including the denial that death has occurred and the belief in the possibility of "undoing" or reversing death'.²⁵ Freud connects 'magical thinking' and art when he argues that the 'omnipotence of thoughts' associated with magical thinking has been retained only in the arts: 'Only in art does it still happen that a man who is consumed by desires performs something resembling the accomplishment of those desires and that what he does in play produces emotional effects – thanks to artistic illusion – just as though it were something real'.²⁶ Morgan's literary portrayal succeeds in evoking, and invoking, Murdoch's voice by means of excerpts from letters and remembered conversations, drawing attention to the absence of Murdoch's voice in the books by Bayley and Wilson, either in the form of remembered speech or by reference to her own work. Even Jeffrey Berman, who is a devotee of Bayley's memoirs, notes that Murdoch's voice disappears almost completely in passages where Bayley records Murdoch's reaction to her diagnosis: 'Did she express sadness that their lives would never be the same? Was she angry at him for being healthy? Did she feel guilty that he was wearing himself out in caring for her? Did she express gratitude that he was so devoted to her? Bayley never raises any of these questions' (Berman, pp.81-2).

Instead Bayley presents her as a silent and saintly sufferer. Carol Sarler therefore argues that Bayley's Murdoch is not an individual but a generic Alzheimer's sufferer, claiming that 'each of us, stripped to our bare intimacies is stripped of those things that make us different from others, reduced from what we have that is special to that which is commonplace' (Sarler, p.27). Morgan's Murdoch, depicted largely in her own words, is more distinctive. He claims that writing about her has returned her voice to him 'as clear[ly] as if I was listening to a recording. It is only now, coinciding with a new period of uncertainty in my life, that I feel the hole she has left' (Morgan, p.28). This allusion to uncertainty in his own life is strongly connected to the intensity of his attempts to resurrect her. Anne Rowe suggests in her introduction to *With Love and Rage* that Morgan 'relives rather than recounts the past, allows us to encounter Murdoch in ways that more conventional accounts cannot. We hear her stammering voice; smell her face powder or the moist tweed of her coat in the rain, and feel our own frisson at being in

mother, as he faces 'uncertainty' (Morgan, p.28). His magical thinking illuminates a need to understand her as not absent, but an enduring and benevolent presence.

While Conradi and Wilson each attempt to re-encounter Murdoch, Morgan's memoir in particular illustrates new models of grief which emphasise the purpose of mourning as the maintenance of a relationship with the dead. New Wave mourning theorist William

ways to develop continuing bonds with the deceased'.²⁷ Thus, one of the main tasks of

on a new life' (Worden, p.50). This recent approach compels us to take a critical look at the Freudian model, which Margaret Stroebe suggests 'could be called a medical model of bereavement' and which is associated with 'a disease process'.²⁸ Morgan begins the task of maintaining a relationship with the dead Murdoch by reliving conversations in which he often plays an antagonistic role to which Murdoch remains impervious:

DM: I may do things that will shock you.

IM: You could surprise me but not shock me. (Morgan, p.43)

DM: I don't agree with your use of the word 'descry', it's archaic.

IM: It's a perfectly good word. (Morgan, p.47)

Morgan's protraction of their relationship includes imagined responses to the publication of his book ('if a shade can protest she will by calling me an ass for writing about her at all').²⁹

fully substantiated portrait that can be incorporated into the lives of her survivors, and thus mourned. There are certainly varying accounts of Murdoch's physical presence: in Bayley's memoirs the demented Murdoch is uppermost, and often sleeping beside him as he writes. Conradi recognises the 'discontinuity between the serene and Buddha-like stillness others increasingly saw in Iris, and the questing spirit within; reminding the reader that the young Murdoch 'was renowned at Oxford for her acting ability' (IMAL, IMAL, p.588). Wilson emphasises Murdoch's promiscuity, humble work ethic and 'her mystery – what was going on behind that face?' which, at the end of the book, still 'remains a mystery' (Wilson, p.265). Morgan's Murdoch is a scolding, authoritative but benevolent presence that continues to work on him 'as a constant voice of correction – a series of affectionate tickings-off – Come on David; Come off it David – which I half listen to and, now and again, half act on' (Morgan, p.119). Each work of life writing nourishes or engenders another, which contributes to a more complex and realistic picture of

accounts create a more realistic one. Conradi provides a deliberate antidote to Bayley's 'beautiful and terrible' Murdoch (IMAL, p.591), while Wilson attacks Bayley's focus on 'the twilight years, when IM was still alive but out of things' (Wilson, p.260). Morgan's memoir was inspired by conversations with Conradi, and is addressed to Conradi in the form of a letter. His narrative is aware that it is participating in a dialogue, often speaking to Conradi directly and commenting that remembered discussions with Murdoch 'go against the idea of "Saint Iris" as remembered in John Bayley's book and others' (Morgan, p.69). Each biography or memoir of Murdoch relates to previous ones in an on-going relocation of the dead subject as a continuing, even living, presence.

Life writing in the decade after Murdoch's death thus resembles the collective eulogising inherent in the funeral ceremony, the purpose of which in previous centuries was to entrust 'the memory of the dead person to the care of the community of others through the medium of biographical narration'.³³ Murdoch wanted no ritual associated with her death, 'at her own request, none attended her cremation; nor the scattering of

or 'historically distanced' (Tekcan, p.113). Murdoch's own writing, particularly her letters and working library acquired by the Iris Murdoch Archive Project at Kingston University, will form the most important contact that these future biographers have with her. These thousands of letters to many different recipients also constitute the only place where Murdoch can survive in her own terms and comprise the closest possible material to autobiography. Murdoch appears to have been aware of the dependence of her literary survival on her personal correspondence, particularly in her wartime letters. Conradi refers to the Second World War as 'a great age of letter-writing, providing a virtual chat-room for a generation'.³⁴ These letters trace the genesis of Murdoch as an author and as a character. As Conradi notes, she could be 'shy and inhibited', but on paper 'experienced freedom' (*A Writer at War*, p.87). Murdoch is clearly aware of this freedom, writing to Philippa Foot, 'I can live in letters'.³⁵

Murdoch's 1973 novel, *The Black Prince*, is her most consciously self-revelatory, and closest to autobiography in her oeuvre after her death.³⁶ Her awareness that the writer's life, expressed through his or her work, is of paramount interest to certain critics and readers is one of its themes. *The Black Prince*

before Alzheimer's took hold (Iris, p.157), and Conradi asks 'how does one write about someone who thought she had "no memory, no continuity, no identity?"' (IMAL, p.xxiv). He is especially anxious to connect Murdoch's enigmatic personality to her goodness, suggesting that she was not concerned with 'the quest for an authentic identity' (IMAL, Iris at 'summing Murdoch up', is in fact a form of preservation which keeps 'the most private, enigmatic and mysterious

**Review of Iris Murdoch and Elias Canetti: Intellectual Allies by
Elaine Morley (London: Legenda, 2013)**

oneself in entirely virgin territory. True, there have been numerous studies during the past often, as Elaine Morley notes, these have focused heavily on Canetti as the enchanter, the 'monster of Hampstead', with Murdoch cast as one of his numerous spellbound apprentices.

awkward phrasing that could have been smoothed a little. Morley makes her argument

**Review of Remembering Iris Murdoch: Letters and Interviews by
Jeffrey Meyers (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)**

In this volume Jeffrey Meyers presents a biographical sketch of Iris Murdoch, his personal collection of letters from her written between 1970 and 1995, the *Denver Quarterly* and *Paris Review* interviews he did with her, and a brief response to John Bayley's and A.N. Wilson's memoirs. Meyers met Murdoch at a seminar she gave at the University of Denver in 1978 after they had become correspondents. He contends that he and ¹ His description of their relationship reinforces Murdoch's chameleon-like ability, vividly exposed by David Morgan in *With Love and Rage*, to divine what her friends and correspondents needed her to project at any one time.² Meyers states that 'our relations were at once

on the work of civil servants is potentially enlightening in connection with her civil servant characters and her comments on Ireland reveal her huge distress about the effect of terrorism: 'how will they get out of this condition of hatred and acceptance of continually murderous activity? [...] I think terrorism is a great problem for civilized

memoir of Murdoch and A.N. Wilson's *Iris Murdoch As I Knew Her* and could perhaps have been incorporated into the initial biographical section. There is no doubt, however, that the letters in this collection will be of interest to Murdoch's readers and of use to scholars as noteworthy additions to the material which is already available.

Priscilla Martin

**Review of *Becoming Iris Murdoch* by Frances White
(Kingston-upon Thames: Kingston University Press, 2014)**

This biography, which won the Kingston University Press Short Biography Prize, is unusual in several ways. The biographical genre is now much discussed, theorized and problematized. Frances White acknowledges her debt to Catherine Neale Parke's *Biography: Writing Lives*. There are courses on biography and life writing in British universities. Oxford, to give only one example, offers under the aegis of Hermione Lee, a regular series of guest lectures by distinguished biographers. But the reader's angle, though inevitable, is not often admitted. Here it is foregrounded. The subtitle to the Introduction is 'How do I write a biography of Iris Murdoch as I know her?' White shares her own experience of Iris Murdoch from the point in her early teens when her father gave her a copy of *The Unicorn* to their only meeting, when, after learning that Iris had Alzheimer's, she impulsively hurried to Murdoch's North Oxford house and thrust a bunch of irises into the hands of the smiling but confused novelist. Throughout, White moves from her own response to the work, her sense of Murdoch as a teacher and her 'Tristram Shandy-esque' dilemmas of presentation (p.29). She offers 'a passionate book, not a dry detached assessment' (p.19), hopes 'to hand on to others the passion one feels for one's subject and her achievements' (p.107) and offers a notably fresh and responsive account of Iris Murdoch.

However, this is also a short scholarly book. White knows the secondary material and has made fruitful use of the Iris Murdoch Archives at Kingston University, which celebrates its tenth anniversary this year. In particular, her quotations from letters are immediate and illuminating. She 'wanted to let so much of the story be told by Iris Murdoch and John Bayley in their own words' (p.107), although recognizing that their words are open to the same questions and scepticism as the biographer's. However, these records do open windows into how the writers felt – or wanted to present themselves – at the time and White warns against the hindsight of the biographer and reader, who are aware of a future invisible to the author. Murdoch did not know during the period covered by White's book that she was going to be a very successful novelist. Indeed, she feared for some years that she might have no talent either as a novelist or a philosopher. It was a time 'of uncertainty, loneliness, and fear of failure in both work and relationships' (p.30).

White concentrates on just over a decade of Murdoch's life: from 1945, when the war ended and she was sent to Belgium and Austria to w06284(r)0..59gr494003(ersk0.5140(T)ook)504

it. Perhaps Murdoch's less obviously eventful life suggests contemplation rather than action but most people's middle and later years are less eventful, even if they are not sitting at their desks writing novels. In his biography Conradi solves the problem of how to address this period of Murdoch's life by writing about friendships. White surmises, interestingly, that John Bayley's creativity was inhibited by his wife's. He wrote novels before his marriage and after Murdoch's death. However, he did produce an impressive body of literary criticism in the meantime and helped himself cope with the grief and demands of Iris's illness by writing about it.

White's doubts about the genre of biography recur in her concluding section. Can one trust even the testimony of the subject about herself? This is a question that indeed

to the work and she conveys that candidly and vividly. This is an engaged and engaging account of a beloved novelist.

**Review of Never Mind about the Bourgeoisie: The Correspondence
between Iris Murdoch and Brian Medlin 1976-1995, edited by
Gillian Dooley and Graham Nerlich
(Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014)**

This rich and informative correspondence merits two reviews: one focused on the Australian moral philosopher and eco-activist Brian Medlin (1927-2005) from an Australian perspective, one focused on Iris Murdoch (1919-1999) from a British

kites. All hassling for a nest, a living, a place in the sun' (p.57). He tells Murdoch much about his beloved country, which she appreciates: 'Australia needs you to tell about her. Telling about Australia (by Australians) is really quite different [...] There is an Australian style' (p.68). Murdoch amusingly (and unsuccessfully) tries to learn Australian slang "drinking" but I have forgotten what it actually means – is it good or bad?' (p.111). He brings out Murdoch's often-submerged wit: 'People don't sing much in Oxford now. Except for the Warden of New College who is a talented pianist, and sings a lot of Cole Porter etc. if encouraged – and even if not' (p.144).

Furthermore, Murdoch offers Medlin a degree of intimacy rare to her usually reticent character: 'You ask about my parents. My father was born in New Zealand [...] I was born in Dublin, but my father, following the tradition, removed me at the age of one to London [...] He was a clever gentle bookish man, a good man. My darling mother, who had a wonderful soprano voice, was merry & witty & sweet. I was an only child. What luck. I had this wonderful pair all to myself. I miss them very much' (p.67).

write about myself, but you did ask' (p.67). His Australian directness startles her into you said – I believe somewhat surprised' (p.90).

Murdoch and Medlin argue, but never with anger, more with intrigued, respectful searching into their differing views. A case in point is the vexed word/concept *bourgeois*, pertinently chosen by Dooley and Nerlich as the title for this volume. They 'bandy the word backwards and forwards' until 1992 when Murdoch says, 'my heart is with you – never mind about the bourgeoisie' (p.xi) and Medlin responds in kind. She rises to his challenge: 'So you think my views on art are "bourgeois." I wonder what you mean by that?' (p.143). But it is in Murdoch's review of Medlin's book, *Human Nature, Human Survival* (1992) (also included in this volume), that she interrogates the word most closely: 'Here we must pause to consider the important concept of 'the bourgeois': the bourgeoisie, bourgeois values, bourgeois philosophers, the bourgeois way of human life. Medlin points out various senses of the word: a mode of production, a social class, a kind of society, a historical era, a system of ideas, an ideology' (pp.203-4). She then comments judiciously, 'I would think that the word "bourgeois" is not helpful here, it is too ambiguous and over-loaded' (p.205).

The prelude to the writing of the review engenders some of the most insightful letters some idea of how you cherish your time' (p.163), and indeed Murdoch's willingness to accede to his request is also the 'most striking proof of her regard for Medlin' (p.xii) that

They discuss both his monograph and *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, which she sends him in exchange: 'I am reading *H. Nature H. Survival* with greatest interest and pleasure. [...] If you receive a longish Book with a pretty cover from me don't feel you have to read it – it is (being based on lectures) all bits & pieces, there are some jokes, some

'I disagree with some of your main tenets – the root of which is your sort of Marxism-Leninism and your anti-bourgeois arguments' (p.177). Of her book Medlin writes: 'With respect to MGM

is a very complex book, at any rate in detail: so far I'm still seeing mainly trees' (p.182).

MGM a marvellously exciting book' (p.183), and 'I think you may be provoking me to write a book called *Morality as the basis of Metaphysics*' (p.184). Medlin was afraid that by cutting her over-long review he had 'lost the Iris Murdoch

Medlin loved Murdoch's novels and he loved her. This epistolary friendship reveals new aspects of Murdoch's personality. Dooley and Nerlich have edited impeccably and the volume is beautifully produced, with the inclusion of facsimiles of letters and photographs of the *dramatis personae*. Dooley's scholarly 'Introduction'¹⁸⁶⁷ 4 .

Review of *Ética y Literatura Cinco Novelas de Iris Murdoch* edited by Margarita Maurí (Barcelona: Kit-book, 2014)

Margarita Maurí, one of the leading experts on Iris Murdoch's work in Southern Europe, is responsible for much of the attention given in Spain to this British writer, not only through her own scholarly production, but also by organizing a seminar/research group on Iris Murdoch at the University of Barcelona since 2006. The Iris Murdoch Seminar focuses primarily on Murdoch's philosophical essays and on the ethical aspects of her literary endeavours. This new publication, edited by Maurí, is a direct result of the research group established through past seminars. In *Ética y Literatura Cinco Novelas de Iris Murdoch*

attention being given to ethical aspects: *Under the Net*, *The Bell*, *A Severed Head*, *The Black Prince* and *The Book and the Brotherhood*.

contributions share an explicit structure: plot summary, presentation of characters, and focus on a list of topics deemed pertinent at a philosophical, as well as narrative, level. The novels chosen range from 1954 to 1987. Ignasi Llobera reads *Under the Net* (1954), paying particular attention to the convention of *bildungsroman* in which Jake Donaghue evolves from character to narrator. Llobera presents a fascinating point concerning the links between Murdoch and Wittgenstein, in which he highlights ways in which Murdoch goes beyond the acknowledgment of the unspeakable, attempting to show through Art that which cannot be verbal and thus reaching for the purest form of Art. Margarita Maurí presents a study of *The Bell* (1958) in which religion, innocence, love, and the bell itself as a symbol, are analyzed in depth. Maurí provides an interesting contrast between the sermons of Michael Meade and James Tayruc0 1 56ba0.59amesal orgn the serm4.

Ética y Literatura Cinco Novelas de Iris Murdoch
on Iris Murdoch published in Spanish that is accessible to the general public outside
and Life. Together with the ongoing effort to translate Murdoch's novels into Spanish,
Portuguese and Italian, this new book will prove an extremely valuable contribution
impact of the Iris Murdoch Seminar itself.

Editorial Note

A review by Maria Antonaccio of *Language Lost and Found: On Iris Murdoch and the Limits of Philosophical Discourse* by Niklas Fosberg (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) will appear in due course on the Iris Murdoch Archive Project website. We apologize for being unable to include the review in this edition, which is being published ahead of schedule to coincide with the Seventh International Conference on Iris Murdoch at Kingston University. On the book's cover, Stephen Mulhall acknowledges it as 'one of the most philosophically sophisticated contributions to these interlinked issues that I have come across in the past decade; the care, clarity and ease with which Fosberg

Report on the Iris Murdoch Archives in Kingston University's Special Collections 2013-14

Since the last report in the Summer of 2013, the Archives have once again been incredibly busy. The community project, 'Iris Murdoch and Philippa Foot: An Arc of Friendship', based on the letters from Iris Murdoch to Philippa Foot and supported by the National

was a tremendous success and we hope to build upon the relationships formed with local community groups and schools in the future.

The period has also seen a number of additions to our collections. These are:

- Letters from Iris Murdoch to Brigid Brophy: Approximately 1000 letters from Iris Murdoch to her friend and fellow author Brigid Brophy, dating from the 1950s to the 1990s. Work is currently underway on organising and cataloguing the letters. Purchased with the assistance of the Iris Murdoch Archive Project (Kingston University), the Iris Murdoch Society, Kingston University Alumni Fund (Opportunities Fund), V&A Purchase Grant Fund, the Breslauer Foundation, and Friends of the National Libraries.
- A Copy of *The Lover's Manual of Ovid* by E. Phillips Barker owned by Iris Murdoch – a note by Iris Murdoch in the front reads 'Iris Murdoch Oxford Jan 1942'. Kindly donated by Anne Rowe.
- A set of 16 books formerly owned by Iris Murdoch – many of them have handwritten dedications from the authors to her, or Murdoch has written her name in the front. One text is partially annotated. Purchased by the Iris Murdoch Archive Project.
- Letters from Iris Murdoch to Stephen Gardiner. Gardiner was an architect and a friend of Iris Murdoch. Kindly donated by Joan Scotson.
- Copy of the publication *Black Paper 1975: The Fight for Education* which contains an article by Iris Murdoch. Kindly donated by an anonymous donor.
- Scripts for the Radio play adaptation of *The Sea, The Sea* from 1994. Kindly donated by Richard Crane.
- Letters from Iris Murdoch to her friend Leo Pliatzky: 50 letters in total, with the earliest dating from 1943. Purchased by the Iris Murdoch Archive Project.
- Letter and postcard from Iris Murdoch to Ludmilla Lasku. Kindly donated by Ludmilla Pineiro (nee Lasku).
- Thirteen books relating to Frank Thompson and his family. Kindly donated by Peter J. Conradi.
- Two letters from John Bayley and one postcard from Iris Murdoch to Michael Howard, to be added to the earlier donation of letters from John Bayley to Michael Howard. Kindly donated by Michael Howard.
- Two items relating to Iris Murdoch and theatre: a programme for *A Severed Head* at the Donovan Maule Theatre in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1968, and a copy of the magazine for Greenwich Theatre Cue from Sep 1970 with a piece by Iris Murdoch, 'A Note on Drama'. Donated by an anonymous donor.

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survey after your visit.

Looking ahead, the Archive will be undergoing an exciting change in the future. Kingston University recently announced plans to construct a new building at the Penrhyn Road Campus and, amongst other things, the building will contain a new home for the Archives and Special Collections. Planning is currently in the very early stages, but

<http://www.kingston.ac.uk/>

[campus-planning/new-town-house/](#)

Finally, just a reminder that we will share any news on the Archives and Special Collections (including details of new collections, exhibitions, and cataloguing updates) on our Archives Blog, which can be found at **<http://blogs.kingston.ac.uk/asc>**

Iris

**Murdoch and Virtue Ethics: Philosophy and the Novel, organized by
Dr Ester Monteleone, was held at Roma Tre University from
Thursday 20 February to Saturday 22 February 2014.**

A full programme of plenary and parallel sessions focussed on issues connected with the virtues. The international spread of Murdoch scholarship was evident, with speakers from Italy, Spain, the US and the UK. The strong cluster of plenary speakers included Luisa Muraro (University of Verona), who delivered a paper in Italian (with simultaneous translation) on Murdoch's only short story, 'Something Special'; Maria Antonaccio (Bucknell University), who extended her account of asceticism in Murdoch's philosophy; Anne Rowe (Kingston University), who outlined the moral challenges to Murdoch scholarship arising from thousands of Murdoch's letters now available for study; while Sabina Lovibond (Worcester College Oxford), and Alison Scott-Baumann (University of Derby), explored Murdoch's uneasy connection with rival traditions of existentialism, structuralism and phenomenology. Response from postgraduate students to a polished and strongly analytic paper, entitled 'Loving Gaze and Accurate Knowledge', by Margarita Mauri (University of Barcelona), indicated the impact of her work, which comprised a patient teasing out of problems associated with interpreting the case of 'M and D', in particular why a loving gaze is an intrinsic element of virtue rather than something to be thought of independently from virtue.

The conference marked three areas of development in terms of current responses

less insular and more connected to ongoing debates within the theory of virtue ethics. Symptomatic of this change was a range of papers examining Murdoch's latent neo-Aristotelian connection. This is a timely development. Attempts were made a decade ago to provide an account of Murdoch's governing approach to virtue, none of which was particularly successful, perhaps because all were written prior to the current more detailed examination of Murdoch's attitude towards particular virtues. There have, however, been several useful analyses of individual Murdochian virtues over the past

how her philosophy integrates with theories of virtue ethics.

Second, Murdoch's engagement with Heidegger and continental philosophy is receiving more detailed attention. Sabina Lovibond's plenary lecture, which examined the strengths and limitations in Murdoch's engagement with structuralism, was complemented by Gary Browning's informal address on Murdoch's Heidegger manuscript, *Heidegger: The Pursuit of Being*, held in the Iris Murdoch Archives at Kingston University. Murdoch's abandonment of the manuscript has always cast a question mark over its quality. However, Browning claims that there are pertinent insights in the latter manuscript and that the 'Introduction' (published in *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher*, edited by Justin Brookes, OUP, 2011), is not entirely representative of the text as a whole. These insights shed considerable light on Murdoch's distinctive conception of what it is to engage in philosophy.

Third, Murdoch's concept of love (which is far from transparent in all respects) is also receiving systematic attention. This theme is due to be explored further at the Seventh International Iris Murdoch Conference at Kingston University London, September 2013. See this session. See the

volumes, edited by Eemar Monntleone. See Coaxpublicationaltwi remakat welco isand sig

Iris Murdoch Online

Evidence of Murdoch's growing and evolving readership is increasingly manifest in her presence on social media sites. Several classic Murdoch quotations are widely retweeted (and sometimes corrupted) on Twitter every day ('we can only learn to love by loving', 'love of the secrets of a happy life is continuous small treats' are among the most-retweeted).

Recent and Forthcoming Publications

In the *International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, ed., Hugh LaFollette (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), these entries are of interest: 'Murdoch, Iris' by Brad Cokelet, and 'Attention, Moral' by Bridget Clarke, which concerns Iris Murdoch and Simone Weil.

Would You Kill the Fat Man?: The Trolley Problem and What Your Answer Tells Us about Right and Wrong by David Edmonds (Princeton University Press, 2013), contains an account of Iris Murdoch's friendship with Philippa Foot.

Iris Murdoch Connected, ed., Mark Luprecht (University of Tennessee Press, Tennessee Studies in Literature Series Volume 47, 2014)

Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1945-1995, eds., Anne Rowe and Avril Horner (London: Chatto & Windus, forthcoming 2015)

Notes on Contributors

Peter J. Conradi is Emeritus Professor of English at Kingston University and Honorary Research Fellow at University College London. His publications include: *Iris Murdoch: The Saint and the Artist* (1983: third edition 2001), *Iris Murdoch Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature* (ed. 1997), *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (2001) and *Iris Murdoch: A Writer at War: Letters & Diaries 1938-46* (ed. 2010). He is advisor to the *Iris Murdoch Review* to which he contributes articles and reviews. His *A Very English Hero: The Making of Frank Thompson* was published in 2012. He was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 2011.

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

Sukaina Kadhum

to study English at university. As well as literature, she also has a keen interest in photography.

Miles Leeson is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Chichester. His book *Iris Murdoch: Philosophical Novelist* was published in 2010 and his co-edited collection *Writing the Last Taboo: Incest in Contemporary Literature* will be published shortly.

Sabina Lovibond is an Emeritus Fellow of Worcester College, Oxford, where she taught philosophy from 1982 to 2011. Her recent publications include *Iris Murdoch, Gender*

55(n 107) and *Philosophy* 77(307) (2008) 497-517. (DOI: 10.1017/S0031819308001601)

Tony Milligan lectures in philosophy at the University of Hertfordshire and is the author of **Civil Disobedience: Protest, Justification and the Law** (Bloomsbury, 2013); **Love** (Acumen, 2011); **Beyond Animal Rights** (Continuum, 2010) and co-editor, along with Christian Maurer and Kamila Pacovska, of **Love and its Objects** (Palgrave, 2014). His most recent article on Iris Murdoch appeared in the March 2014 issue of **Religious Studies**.

Pamela Osborn is a Researcher with the Iris Murdoch Archive Project and Part-Time Lecturer at Kingston University. She achieved her PhD, 'Another Country: Bereavement, Mourning and Survival in the Novels of Iris Murdoch' in 2013. Most recently she has published 'Minding the Gap: Mourning in the Work of Murdoch and Derrida', in **Iris Murdoch: Texts and Contexts**, ed. by Anne Rowe and Avril Horner (Palgrave, 2012). An essay, 'The Myth of Hyacinth and Apollo in *The Bell*' will be published in

