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## Editorial Preface

This third edition of the Iris Murdoch Review offers fresh perspectives that will energise current

discussion on a topic that has vexed Murdoch criticism for decades – **the relationship between Murdoch's philosophy and art**. Paton Walsh examines three ways in which philosophy may be integrated into a novel and explores how and why Murdoch participates in each of them, giving a glimpse of the many authorial

Iris Murdoch

**A Postscript to 'On "God" and "Good":  
Introductory Note by Justin Broackes**

**At the start of the essay 'On "God" and "Good"', Iris Murdoch tells us 'We need a moral philosophy which can speak significantly of Freud and Marx, and out of which aesthetic and political views can be generated.'** The paper itself talks very significantly of Freud and of the aesthetic, arguing that beauty in art and nature are a guide—indeed an 'entry—into morality and the good life. But on Marx and on politics, the paper may seem curiously silent. **At the University of Iowa, however, there is a typescript of the essay, marked 'For circulation among participants in the August 1966 meeting of the Study Group on Foundations of Cultural Unity'. At the end of the main paper, the typescript contains a Postscript on Politics—and, among other important things, it does something to answer to the outstanding demand that Murdoch had so strongly announced at the start of her paper: the need also to speak of Marx and of the relation of morality to politics.**

**Murdoch's essay was a contribution to the 1966 meeting at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, of the 'Study Group on the Foundations of Cultural Unity'. The group had been founded by the philosophers Michael Polanyi, Edward Pols and Marjorie Grene to bring together people from the arts and sciences who were concerned to question the dominance of scientific reductionism and of projects to incorporate all of knowledge within a single system of 'unified science'. The group held its first meeting in August 1965 and a second meeting a year later, August 21st-27th, 1966. The twenty-six main participants, with a great range of distinctions, included the critic John Bayley, the ethologist M. R. A. Chance, the cell biologist (and**



ideology. The political thinker must constantly retire from his field to reflect upon human nature and human beings in a separated moral way, and then, with all possible realism, return again. Morality and politics can never quite form a single system. One characteristic of this type of thought which is, I think, especially important now is the finding of points of absolute non-toleration, the willingness to make absolute moral judgments on means to ends. No to torture, No to the war in Vietnam, No to the possession and testing of nuclear weapons. Moral thinking can now penetrate, and ought to penetrate, straight into politics without having to pass automatically through a testing area of Machiavellianism.

Iris Murdoch talks to James Mellen  
Interview commissioned by Radio New Zealand, first broadcast February  
1978

This text of this interview is reproduced here by kind permission of the **the Sound Archives/Ng Taonga Kero (SANTK) at Radio New Zealand, and of Gillian Dodey who transcribed the interview (July, 2010).**

Murdoch: I had been trained as a philosopher at Oxford, and the years after the war were very exciting years because of the renewal of contact with France and other European countries and existentialism was very much in the air and I got rather caught into that particular climate of discussion and decided I would come back and try to become a professional philosopher, to do teaching. I spent a year in Cambridge as a graduate student then doing philosophy, and then I came back to Oxford where I taught philosophy for a great many years.

Mellen: Did existentialism influence you as a writer?







Q.

characters may destroy the plot. I think plot is very important. This is entirely up to every individual writer to decide how he treats the question of plot and character and his guide is his own artistic inspiration and conscience. I have very strong plots and I sometimes feel that the plot is so strong that the characters are constrained. One wants to have the best of all worlds, as Shakespeare does, or as Dickens does, or as Henry James does, though James is already showing signs of falling over his own genius in a way. He is so good at certain things that I think he sometimes makes sacrifices of the freedom of his characters. I think this is a very very difficult question and something that is very very difficult to **do, to make one's characters free, and** to give them, to animate them with a life which really carries them outside the fiction, while at the same





Q. And Shakespeare, how important has he been?

A. Oh well, I wish he could be more important. I don't know, I mean I have increasingly felt that somehow or other that this is a great source for me. I mean certain plays I meditate upon as if they were sort of religious texts and endless things come out of these deep wells of poetry and human conflict and unconscious symbols I mean it's a great source of human drama.

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**Jill Paton Walsh**

## **Philosophy and Fiction**

**This text of the Plenary Lecture given at the 5th International Iris Murdoch Conference at Kingston University,  
Saturday 11**





shadows of reality, and a work of art, including narrative art, was merely a shadow of a shadow. The important counter claim made by Aristotle is that fiction (poetry in his terminology) is in fact truer than reality because it contains a more general truthfulness.

questions in philosophy – ‘What can we know?’ and ‘How should we live?’ it adds a crucial third, ‘What should we feel?’.

The effect of the inclusion of detail in the settings and characterisation of a novel is to enhance the reader’s power to envisage the scene; visual detail assists the vividness and dimensionality of the performance unrolling in the theatre of the reader’s mind. Detailed description of characters augments the impression we will get from the dialogue and actions of those characters in much the same way as our observations of those we meet in real life helps us to get them in focus. Detail claims for ‘a kind of thing that might happen’, the concrete and indisputable nature, the solidity, of something that has happened. The use of plentiful detail is characteristic of nineteenth-century writers, think of Balzac or Dickens, and of twentieth-century writers like Proust. Murdoch, I understand, said she would like to be a realistic writer, like a

**Both these passages demonstrate Murdoch's attentive and knowledgeable eye. But** there is a crucial difference. The first is describing what counts as reality in the novel; the second describes a dream. The specification of detail does not in fact guarantee that what we are reading is a description of reality – only consider a landscape in the Lord of the Rings.

So if the snowstorm of detail in a novel is not an index of realism, of what is it actually an index? The clouds of detail - imaginary facts - in which a novelist surrounds her characters embody an important truth - all human actions take place in specific circumstances. The ache for simple rules of action, for clear moral injunctions which can be carried out regardless of the details, regardless of the actual situation, whatever the consequences, is a natural one. But it is a childish one. It short-circuits the complexities of the world. I am tempted to say that I have learned from writing novels, as from reading them, that we have a moral duty to attend to the circumstances in which we find ourselves, although the fulfilment of that duty will rob us of most of our certainties.

The words I have just spoken embody a philosophical position – for speaking thus I have been called a **'consequentialist' and contrasted with one who believes in moral absolutes, as in 'torture is always and in all circumstances wrong, no matter what results from it'. I do not quite see why one could not be absolutist** about the wrongful nature of torture, while being consequentialist about remembering to have tea with **one's aunt; but the point I am after here** is that this is another example of a philosophical position getting into a novel unofficially, and sometimes unnoticed by either writer or reader. A writer who offers snowstorms of detail is surely indicating clearly a belief that the circumstances matter greatly, and that we **need to have them to join in the ethical judgements the novel is making. A tale which begins, 'there was once a poor woodcutter who had a beautiful daughter ...' and which is not going to tell us why the father is** poor, or in what way the daughter is beautiful, or exactly where they were living when one day the prince came riding by, is surely indicating that a narrative pattern matters without our having any need to know much about the circumstances; this is narration based on types. It is not in the least about Alcibiades; it is about what such and such a kind of girl will probably or necessarily say or do. Simply by story-telling in such a stripped down fashion it asserts that what it is about to tell us will be valid in almost any set of circumstances. And indeed such stories have very wide currency over both place and time. Novels in the literary canon vary quite a lot in the amount of reliance the narrative places on circumstance.

through the narrative cloud of detail. There is pleasure in doing that, as there is in correctly guessing the identity of the murderer in a detective story before the author reveals it.

I would like to sum up this description of the first way in which philosophy gets into novels by pointing out that in this unconsidered form, the philosophy (perhaps we should call it ethical thinking) is always unoriginal. It depends on the assumptions that are made at any time by writer and reader; only when the culture has radically changed do such assumptions break the surface and appear remarkable in any way, as the ancient Greek views of guilt now seem to us, or the attitude to women in Jane Austen.

We come now to the second way in which philosophy gets into novels – it can get there because the author puts it in. And of course, philosophical inserts into fiction do not tend to be the kind of elementary stuff that everybody knows about; there would be no need to insert open philosophical reasoning if it were pretty likely that the reader already knew such reasoning, or could assume it. It is more esoteric stuff which gets put in deliberately.

A good example would be *The Time of the Angels*, in which Marcus Fisher is writing a book about the possibility of ethics after the death of religion.<sup>9</sup> **Many of Murdoch's characters are writing books on philosophical topics; such writings offer good insertion points. Deliberately placed philosophical topics strongly indicate to the reader what the author thinks the discourse in the novel is about. They are self conscious and artful. And in this kind of philosophy Murdoch is a serial perpetrator. Murdoch's characters discuss philosophical ideas, as well as finding themselves in situations which raise philosophical questions. Allusions to the content of the books illuminate the meaning one might find in the dilemmas of the characters I am going to call this kind of thing 'placed philosophy'. There is so much placed philosophy in Murdoch that it seems very curious that she should have declared that she was not a philosophical novelist. I agree with her that she was not, and I will explain that view later.**

For the moment let us look at the status of stuff that gets into novels. I am sorry for the inelegance

in fiction is worth libraries of non-fiction, and I have not yet mentioned the biography of famous real people, Wolf Hall again, or



novelist I look for what was once called 'an objective correlative' – a fairly concrete visual image by which to explain it to you.<sup>20</sup>

The process of writing is like a river flowing in limestone country. It starts as a brook running along in the open air, in a high landscape, glass-clear and cool. Then it disappears into a sink-hole and enters a dark subterranean cave. Somewhere, later, it emerges as a fresh spring, a powerful river which begins to carve a route for **itself in the valley which grows green around it. A writer's mindscape is like limestone country** in that it can be difficult to be certain that the brook which vanished suddenly on the upland and the river roaring out of the cave are really the same water – the continuity and identity of the flow being deeply hidden below ground. And, to pursue the metaphor – the new river may have mingled in the cave the waters of the upland brook with immemorial and ancient water that fell as rain centuries ago.

Let me unpack that comparison for you. The upland brook is glass-clear and cool because novelists tend to be intellectuals, of a sort. Self-aware sort of people. But there is that underground cave in the middle of the process; an immense discontinuity.

There is a secret to authorship which many of us do not wish to reveal – but I am shameless in my old age; and that is that the process is not completely under control. Sometimes it seems almost fraudulent to claim credit for it. There is the input – a ream or so of white typewriting paper, and then there is a finished draft. Who wrote it? I feel simultaneously that it must have been me, and that it cannot have been me. I often feel that it must have been written by someone who is a better novelist than I am.

I have spent many hours of my life – I have written m









choice and circumstance – that turn up in human lives with such persistence that they must be regarded as our **possibilities**.

I asked rhetorically, earlier in this talk, what precisely we have lost, when we are lost in a book. It is of course ourselves we have lost; our full autonomy, our self-direction is compromised by something other. The author has to step down and let the characters be free, and then the reader has to step down and let the author show them things that they probably would have seen differently left in full charge of themselves.





of moral evaluation: the good and bad dispositions of the human will are to be assessed in a basically comparable way to assessing the goodness and badness of a tree's roots (or good and bad health). This book is an appropriate capstone to a wonderful career.

When it came out in 2001, her publisher joked that 'Wittgenstein once said that it was impossible to do philosophy slowly enough. But Philippa, by incubating her book for decades, had proved Wittgenstein wrong: and it went into several languages. She knew she was a world-class philosopher and was proud that she had a following in – for example – Sweden, Berlin and Bulgaria as well as the USA, to all of which she travelled in later years. Foot quotes Wittgenstein's 'Be crude and then we shall get on' and she helped us get on immeasurably, with exemplary tenacity and humanity. Her sister Marion survives her





suggestive: 'I don't think you should fall for "emotional fascists" -

The battle of Salamis is described in the History of Herodotus not, as Conradi clai

**Bran Nicol**  
**Review of**



David J. Gordon  
Review of

or may seek to demonstrate that, seen from a distance, any tale of our messy human (and typically erotic) doings is comic. Avril Horner focuses on the Gothic effects in three novels (*The Bell*, *The Unicorn*, *The Time of the Angels*), showing how Murdoch exploits these effects to expose the refinements of evil. Scott H. Moore **lets us see that Murdoch's fictional philosophers, even those who seem to be Platonists and who thus might** be expected to win her approval, are treated ironically. And Bran Nicol comes at the question of aesthetic **deformation from a broader perspective. His idea is that Murdoch's mode of realism is as distant from that** of the nineteenth century masters she admired as from a deliberately experimental novelist of her time like Robbe-Grillet. Her 'mannered' realism, which may include such devices as metafiction and self-reflexivity, is, in his view, similar to what we find in the work of other post-War English writers and reflects an aesthetic rather than a theoretical need.

the great metaphysician and scorn for some implications of his work as well as for the man he later became, **a man complicit with the Nazi regime. Murdoch faulted Heidegger in her manuscript 'for a kind of contempt for human existence.'** *The Holocaust, we know,* was always for her the iconic instance of evil in the world. White reminds us that Murdoch was dodging Heidegger throughout her career. White's detailed and valuable comments on the manuscript and Jackson's Dilemma (along with the forthcoming publication of an early part of the Heidegger manuscript) will help us round out the picture.<sup>4</sup>

I want in concluding to extend two interesting arguments put forward in these essays so as to









Of course, Murdoch was, in the early 1950s, immersed in French culture. One year before the appearance of *Under the Net* her study *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* (1953) appeared. Her early theoretical

Review of

(London: Continuum, 2010)

M.F. Simone Roberts

by Miles Leeson

The book is not, however, without flaws, which come in momentary lapses of meticulousness that weaken an orthodoxy-busting project of this kind. The most perplexing is that in the chapter on *A Severed Head*, we are offered a discussion of Freud and Nietzsche and the work Murdoch does in the novel to respond to them, but instead we get Freud and Foucault and Lacan with a dash of Nietzsche. Not only is this distracting but there is a larger problem. Foucault and Lacan would have fallen under the heading Structuralist for Murdoch, and may well therefore have fallen beneath her attention. Moreover, most of the philosophers with whom she argues in her novels get considerable attention in her philosophical work. She engaged deeply with them while or before writing novels that worked on their ideas. Foucault and Lacan get little or no mention in her philosophical work, and Leeson offers no reference to the archive that shows her **engaging with them 'off the books' as in the case of Heidegger**. *A Severed Head* was published in 1961; **Foucault's** *History of Sexuality I* was **published in French in 1976 and Lacan's** *Écrits* in 1966. It is possible that Murdoch read some of these works as they were published in journals or circulated informally, but without

Miles Leeson

Review of Roula Ikonomakis, *Post-War British Fiction as 'Metaphysical Ethography': Gods, Godgames and Goodness in John Fowles'*

psychology and other areas to create a heady mix of highly diverse ideas. Ikonomakis thus takes us on a journey through the entire gamut of influences on Fowles and Murdoch and scrutinises the metaphysical implications these have on their fiction. Both authors share a common passion for the underlying moral motives of their respective characters and a moral vision intended to provoke the reader to reconsider their

Cheryl K. Bove

Review of

by Julia Jordan (London: Continuum, 2010)



Further, as Jordan observes, if chance is allowed to become meaningful in the novel, 'then novels depicting this contingency are curtailed from conveying their own deepest meaning their meaninglessness' (p.33). Ultimately, she concludes, those modern writers who tried to avoid predetermining the outcome of their works through experimental methods failed to discover a satisfactory means of avoiding authorial manipulation because 'chance' happenings necessarily remain controlled by the author.

Jordan demonstrates that although Henry Green may have informed Murdoch's thinking, his treatment of the accidental as meaningless random happenings is bleaker than Murdoch's vision of life; and, furthermore, that Murdoch's aesthetics provide her characters, unlike Green's, with a means of accepting and living in their contingent world. Samuel Beckett also had a profound effect on Murdoch's aesthetics and







One photograph of the Murdoch family c. 1890s, donated by a member of the Murdoch family in Australia.

Copy of *A Time of Angels*, donated by Don Cupitt because of its interesting introduction.

Photograph of Iris Murdoch and John Bayley at an unknown event, c. 1970s, donated by Pamela Osborn.

Videos of *An Unofficial Rose* (Television Production), DVDs of *The Bell* (BBC TV Series) and the film of *A Severed Head* (1970, starring Lee Remick, Richard Attenborough, Ian Holm and Claire Bloom), donated by Anne Rowe.

**Signed copy of Murdoch's play**, *Joanna, Joanna*, donated by Anne Rowe

Copy of **Iris Murdoch and James Saunderson's play** *The Italian Girl*, donated by Pamela Osborn.

**Copy of 'Poet Venturers'**- booklet from 1938 by Bristol School Children in aid of China purchased by the Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies. The booklet was edited by Iris Murdoch and features four poems by her. Acquired for the Archives by the Iris Murdoch Society.

Various interviews and essays on Iris Murdoch, donated by Janine Canan.

Our thanks are hereby given to all donors and supporters.

The Iris Murdoch collections are increasingly attracting researchers from around the world; since



Janfarie Skinner

**Report of 'Dishevelled virtue: the good, the bad, and the chaotic in the novels of Iris Murdoch', Woodstock Literature Society**

On Wednesday, 16 March 2011, in the Woodstock Library, Oxfordshire, the Woodstock Literature Society

## Notes on Contributors

Anne Rowe is Reader in English Literature and Director of the Centre of Iris Murdoch Studies at Kingston University. She is Lead Editor of the Iris Murdoch Review and has published widely on Iris **Murdoch's work**. She is currently writing a volume on Iris Murdoch for *Writers and their Work* which will be published by Northcote House publishers in 2012. She is also editing *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1945-1995* with Avril Horner, to be published by Chatto & Windus in 2014.

Frances White is Assistant Editor of the Iris Murdoch Review and Assistant to the Director of the Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies at Kingston University. She has published widely on Iris **Murdoch's work**. Her monograph *Iris Murdoch and Remorse* is currently under consideration for publication and she is conducting research on **food in Iris Murdoch's work and on Iris Murdoch's early intellectual life**.

Cheryl K. Bove recently retired from Ball State University. She is co-author (with Anne Rowe) of *Sacred Space, Beloved City: Iris Murdoch's London* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008). Her *Understanding Iris Murdoch* (University of South Carolina Press) will be released in paperback, spring 2011.

Justin Broackes teaches in the Philosophy Department at Brown University. Besides Iris Murdoch, his interests include colour, substance, and Plato. He is the editor of the collection of essays *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

Peter J. Conradi is Emeritus Professor of English at Kingston University and Honorary Research Fellow at University College, London. He is author of *The Saint and the Artist: A Study of the Fiction of Iris Murdoch* (1986/2001) and *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (2001), and editor of *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature* (1997) and *A Writer at War: Iris Murdoch 1939-45* (2010). His *Life of Frank Thompson (1920-44)* is due out with Bloomsbury in 2012.

Gillian Dooley is Special Collections Librarian at Flinders University, South Australia and an Honorary Research Fellow in the Department of English. She is editor of *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction: Conversations with Iris Murdoch* (2003) and her latest book is *JM Coetzee and the Power of Narrative* (Cambria Press, 2010).



Priscilla Martin is

## Iris Murdoch on Twitter

Iris Murdoch (@IrisMurdoch) now has 830 followers on Twitter, many of whom joined on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2011, **during the 'Iris Murdoch Day' celebrations (the account was the 473<sup>d</sup> most followed in the UK that day).** People had been asked to prepared blogs, questions, favourite quotes, tributes, etc for the day. A poll was **taken to discover 'Twitter's favourite Murdoch novel', which attracted much interest and was won at the last minute by The Sea, The Sea.** The twitter account is an excellent way of measuring worldwide interest in Iris Murdoch and is also useful in raising awareness of the latest developments in Mu



## The Iris Murdoch Society and

|                  |  |
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ISSN 1756-7572 (Kingston University Press) publishes articles on the work and life 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 contexts of inquiry. Articles discussing relations between Murdoch and other novelists and philosophers are also welcome.

Articles are sent for review anonymously to a member of the editorial board and at least one other reader. Manuscripts should not be under consideration elsewhere or have been previously published. It is strongly advised that those submitting work to the publication be familiar with the Review's ~~content~~.

Articles are normally c 3000 words long, and book reviews c 1000 – 1500 words long. Among criteria on which evaluation of submissions depends are whether an article/book review demonstrates familiarity with scholarship already published in the field, whether the article/book review is written clearly and effectively, and whether it makes a genuine contribution to Murdoch studies. The editorial board reserves the right to refuse submissions that fail to meet these criteria, including articles and book reviews which have been requested.

All submissions should be formatted according to MHRA, and the IMR style-guide can be found on the IMS website: <[http://fass.kingston.ac.uk/research/Iris\\_Murdoch/index.shtml](http://fass.kingston.ac.uk/research/Iris_Murdoch/index.shtml)>

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# 'Baggy Monsters' – the Late Works of Iris Murdoch

International Conference

Kingston University, London UK,

14-15 September 2012

First Call for Papers

Kingston University is pleased to announce its sixth International Conference on Iris Murdoch in 2012. **While papers on all aspects of Murdoch's work will be considered, panels will focus primarily on Iris Murdoch's later works of fiction and philosophy (post 1980) which have received less critical attention than earlier works. They will also include papers on the relationship between Murdoch's early and late works and will also engage with interest in how her work has been renewed by changes in critical approaches.** Considerations of her work alongside that of other novelists and philosophers and/or studies of her contemporary significance in the fields of English Literature, Theology and Philosophy are also welcome. We would be particularly interested in papers informed by research in the Murdoch Archives in the Special Collections at Kingston University.

Plenary speakers will include Anne Chisholm, Chair of the Royal Society of Literature; others to be announced.

The conference will include an exhibition of new acquisitions to the Murdoch archives, most