





**For  
Peter J. Conradi FRSL**



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





# **e Iris Murdoch Review**

**Published by the Iris Murdoch Research Centre, University of Chichester  
in association with Kingston University Press  
Kingston University London, Penrhyn Road, Kingston Upon Thames, KT1 2EE  
<http://fass.kingston.ac.uk/kup/>**

**© e contributors, 2016**

**e views expressed in this Review are the views of the contributors and are not  
those of editors.**

**Printed by Lightning Source**

**e Iris Murdoch Society**

**President**



# Contents

Anne Rowe: Valete	9
Miles Leeson: Editorial Preface	11

## Essays

- Peter J. Conradi: Iris Murdoch and Lawrence Durrell: The Poetry of Transformation
- Peter J. Conradi: Canetti's Weakness



**Valete**

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

## Editorial Preface

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

I am very pleased that I am able to present, and indeed pay tribute to, the work of Professor Peter Conradi. No introduction is needed, of course, for such an eminent scholar whose work on Murdoch has been universally praised in the UK, the USA and beyond. When I began postgraduate work in the early 2000s I was grateful to have both *The Saint and the Artist* and *Iris Murdoch: A Life to draw on* and it is these two books in particular that will continue to have a major impact on the development of Murdoch studies. Of immense importance at the time of their publication, they remain so today.

The three new essays contained in this edition expand our knowledge of Murdoch in relation to Elias Canetti, Shakespeare and Lawrence Durrell – although all three were originally given as lectures they have been edited here to provide works of insight and clarity. The essay on Canetti, in particular, will be of interest for the extra richness it provides to Peter's previous discussion in *Iris*

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

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

My final word of thanks must go to Anne herself for her kindness and patience as she guided me through the process of taking over the Review. Her work on Murdoch is of enormous value to the community of scholars and her most recent publication in partnership with Avril Horner, *Living on Paper*, will, I am sure, be a mainstay of any Murdoch scholar's shelves. She has been unfailing in her support over the past few months and I am delighted that she has agreed to stay on as an advisor to the Review

## Iris Murdoch and Lawrence Durrell: The Poetry of Transformation

In his book *Lawrence Durrell, A Critical Study*, G. S. Fraser, a Scottish poet and critic (1915-1980), advanced a comparison betw





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

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

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

of Woolf's modernism towards narcissistic self-sufficiency. The poetry I have in mind differs from that offered by Durrell's work, too, because it is concerned not with the romance of 'elsewhere-and-abroad' but with the romance of 'here-and-now'. She had poetic gifts: the ability to use both language and story to startle us into fresh perception. It was not, in the end, England that was dull, but our perception of England that had become dulled. One of the functions of Murdoch's fiction was to remind us of what the Tibetan meditation master Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche once called

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

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

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

Plato of course importantly underwrites the significance of falling-in-love<sup>26</sup> 'Falling out of intense 'love' [...] and in love with the separate world and the separate people it contains: this is show

## Canetti's Weakness

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

Hanschek summarizes the Bayley/Conradi Canetti composite as follows: we had concocted the image of a jealous, cruel Chinese, a resentful (*missgünstig* can also connote envious or malevolent)



had – at last – been published. It is was less harmless – it was even ‘übel’: translatable as ‘bad’, ‘wicked’ or ‘evil’. On the other hand, advises Hanuschek, Steiner should have met this April Fool’s Day joke with composure ‘den Steiner gleichwohl mit Fassung getragen haben soll’ (p. 427). That is a strange judgement. Anne and Michael Hamburger, witnesses in Steiner’s tiny Notting Hill at that day and our only source for the story, reported that Steiner changed colour but ‘carried it off with courage’. Courage is surely predicated on, indeed a pre-requisite of, composure. What Hanuschek apparently wants is that we readers not be discountenanced by Canetti’s cruelty, that we take it in our stride with our composure intact.<sup>10</sup>

reviewing for the *New Statesman*, seeming to imply a salary-earning position that Canetti turned down.<sup>13</sup> This is not accurate. What actually happened was that around 1949 the new deputy literary editor Janet Adam Smith, invited Canetti to review a book on Hieronymus Bosch. Canetti had such



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

Though Canetti had confided to his diary his boredom with Motesiczky, he soon invented another ingenious Transformation: he tried to console her by claiming that he hated his second wife because she was a German, and that he summonsed his first wife's ghost from her grave to curse his second. Motesiczky was unimpressed. She dwells on her jealous hurt – heart-breakingly – in one letter

Canetti for twenty years.<sup>22</sup> He, too, convicts him of mythomania, vanity and self-importance.

Canetti's greatest British advocate was Murdoch. When his German publisher re-issued *Crowds and Power* in two volumes in 1973, Canetti, though hesitant about whether her name was sufficiently

to 1970. In *The Time of the Angels*, Card asks *'Suppose the truth were awful, suppose it was just a black pit, or like birds huddled in the dust in a dark cupboard? [my italics]. Suppose only evil were*



touched too, in an absurd way'.<sup>36</sup>

ough he represents their a air as entirely one-sided, Canetti recalled, even in Party in the Blitz

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

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

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

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

Max’s disquisition on Até in *The Unicorn* also develops Canetti’s idea of the sting: that suffering is passed on automatically (i.e. *call* *ing* *o*

## Iris Murdoch and 'Shakespeare the Novelist'

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

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

At the same autumn, I later discovered, she decided to re-read the whole of Shakespeare, and she studied the plays over four years, hoping they might help her improve as a writer. She recorded in her journal in October 1965: 'I've written ten novels and that's enough. If not a masterpiece

article uniquely on Shakespeare (unlike a very short one on Tolstoy). Her remarks about him are scattered within her best essays over nearly forty years, within interviews, in her journals, and asides within her novels. Creating a coherent account of her Shakespearian interest entails bricolage. At said, there is a remarkable consistency to her contemplation. And – before turning to her fiction





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

### 3: Simplicity

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

But the concept of poetic justice – that virtue should triumph – itself seemed to Murdoch scandalously false to life, and it was precisely in its challenge to poetic justice that she thought the play's greatness lay. She accordingly cordially endorsed Schopenhauer's scornful attack on Johnson: 'The true sense of tragedy is the deeper insight that it is not his own individual sins that the hero atones for but for original sin, i.e. the crime of existence itself' [my italics], Schopenhauer remarks, anticipating Kafka.<sup>27</sup> King Lear is great because it looks out on what she terms the Void.<sup>28</sup> The play

illustrate this. In the Sovereignty of Good



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

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

## 7: Universality

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

The novel makes a number of uses of Hamlet. The simplest is to continue Hamlet's metaphysical complaint about the contract of human life. Another is to licence a playful self-reflexiveness. The



both the rough magic of stage direction and also his lifelong and rapacious habit of manipulating friends and lovers. Many of those with whom he has unfinished business – or he has hurt – arrive to settle scores. Among these are Lizzie Scherer and Gilbert Opien. Lizzie loves Charles with a



## Memoir and Letters from Iris Murdoch

### Iris at the University of California, Santa Barbara

at I should meet, let alone later visit, Iris Murdoch was a very unlikely event indeed. A Severed Head was required reading in a college course in contemporary fiction and, though I was a philosophy major, her work in ethics was not a part of the curriculum. My earliest memory of her and John is





Cedar Lodge Steeple Aston Oxford  
19 April 1978

Dear Ray,

So many thanks to you for your great kindness to us in Santa Barbara (including your active concern about those suitcases, which you somehow magicked back from limbo) – we kept hoping we would arrive at Santa Barbara-by-the-sea, and looking forward to it so much, and under your generous care it was even more delightful than we expected,

---

Cedar Lodge Steeple Aston Oxford  
12 Oct 1978

Dear Ray,

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

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

Iris

Steeple Aston  
29 October 1979

Dear Ray,

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

Steeple Aston  
Tel. 0869.40229  
22 March 1980

Dear Ray,

Thanks so much for your letter. I'm not sure how to read it! You say evening of 16th is 'fixed' item. Do you mean with us, or have you another engagement then? I assume

Steeple Aston, Oxford  
22 May 1980

Dear Ray,

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

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

Iris

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

1980

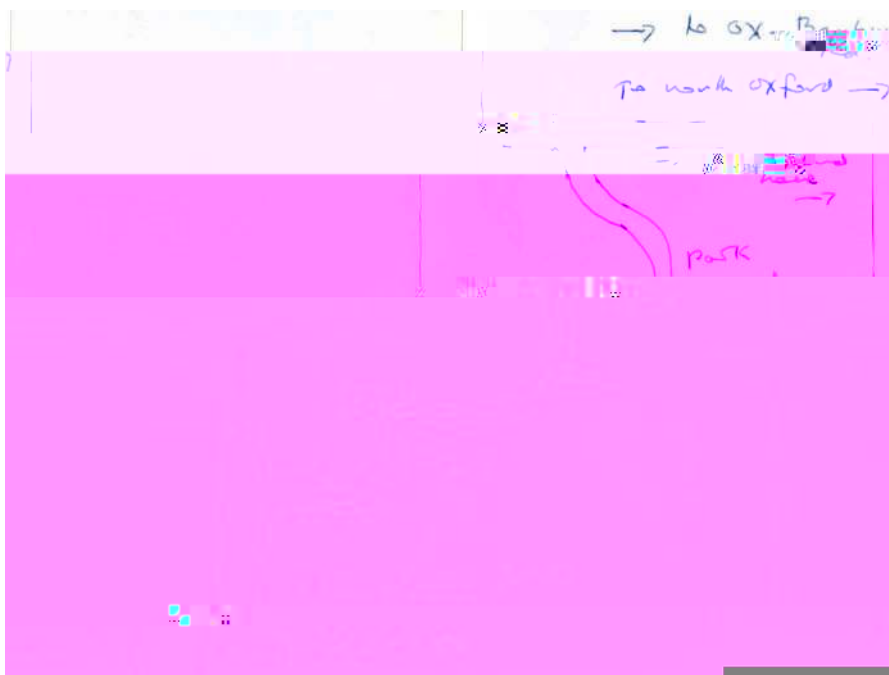
If you decide to stop in Ox on the way, do not try to park in the city centre. Best parking

---





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



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

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

Dear Ray,

Welcome to London! So glad you're here. I've cancelled St Giles hotel in accord with

Dear Ray,

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

Steeple Aston  
1 January 1982

Dear Ray,

Thank you so much for your letter and news. You seem to have got a very interesting job

**Pamela Osborn**

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

**the publication of Murdoch's selected letters was momentous for a great many reasons. Not least**



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

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

The negative judgement of Murdoch based on her sex life partially obscured that which is truly revelatory about that subject in her letters: the fact that she seriously and persistently identified as a male homosexual and that she was evidently what we now call polyamorous. John Mullan correctly surmises that 'readers of her novels [...] have long thought Murdoch the novelist a sage of sexual identity and its mutability'.<sup>19</sup>

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

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

But her real legacy may yet be her much neglected contribution to comic writing, more specifically to the concept of the letter as a comic device. Murdoch's mastery of the comic possibilities of the letter in her fiction is surely only possible because of the complexities of her letter-writing life. As Rivka Isaacson observes, Murdoch's humorousness is nowhere more evident than in her letters to

Lara Feigel

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

'Yes, I'm afraid I do rather dig dif used eroticisms that last forever,' Iris Murdoch wrote to the novelist Brigid Brophy in 1967, aged 47; 'I have a number of them' This is Murdoch at her most alluring and her most maddening: flirtatious, honest, self-knowing, unrepentant. The language – that brilliantly placed 'dig' – is typically precise and her whole emotional philosophy is here. What she wanted in relationships was usually eroticism rather than sex, and she wanted the eroticism to be dif use both in the sense of being drawn out slowly over months or years and in permeating every area of the relationship.







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

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

Forsberg's approach responds to this in two related ways. Firstly, he situates her non-fiction strongly in relation to a Wittgensteinian approach to a number of key philosophical issues. So, the philosophical authors she ties in with are people like Cora Diamond and Stanley Cavell. This



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

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

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

**J. Robert Baker**

**Review of**

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

**Frances White**

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

**'By a partial, prejudiced, & ignorant' reviewer, with apologies to Jane Austen.<sup>1</sup>**

**Donna Lazenby's meticulously structured study of the precise nature of the mystical in the work of Virginia Woolf and Iris Murdoch is based on a dialogical pendulum swing between cataphasis and apophasis. As this opening remark suggests, this work (by an ordained priest who is currently Tutor and Lecturer in Spirituality and Apologetics at the Anglican College of St Mellitus) has a theological**





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

Despite the somewhat 'curate's egg' nature of this review, *A Mystical Philosophy* is a fruitful contribution not only to contemporary theological thinking but also to the critical canon of both Woolf and Murdoch. Lazenby illuminates a neglected thread in Woolf's novels, and I particularly welcome her approach to Murdoch for two reasons: first, it is good to see Murdoch being read in juxtaposition with Woolf, a slant on her work to which I have attempted to draw attention;<sup>2</sup> second,

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

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

The introductory work is fast-paced and, although perhaps sympathetic to those coming from a literary perspective, sees its ideal reader as well-versed in contemporary Anglo-American ethics.

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

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

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

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

I was surprised that this work, although illuminated by a range of useful earlier theoreticians, does not pick up on the excellent work already done critiquing Nussbaum's ethical thought; specifically, the work done by Robert Eaglestone in *Ethical Criticism: Reading After Levinas*. This would snp ork wut TL -0.05(al4(o518(d02(i-)g-9.9125432(i)0.992839(c9898(, m)917(d b)1.00708(y a r d(o)-3





## Iris Murdoch's Broadening Influence

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

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

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

Critical work on Murdoch is flourishing and includes several collections of essays such as *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher* (Broackes), *Iris Murdoch: Texts and Contexts* (Rowe and Horner), *Iris Murdoch Connected* (Luprecht), *Iris Murdoch and her Work*

(Kynaston), *The 1970s: A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction* (Hubble, McLeod, and Tew) and *Gay Novels of Britain, Ireland and the Commonwealth, 1881-1981* (Gunn) in which it is suggested that '[b]ecause of her prestige she introduced more readers to gay men than any other author at the time'.<sup>4</sup> Murdoch's progression and development as a storyteller is traced in *Entranced by Story*:



- Ashdown, Ellen Abernethy,



## Iris Murdoch Archive Report 2016

It seems a very long time since our last update for the Iris Murdoch Review back in March 2014.

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

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

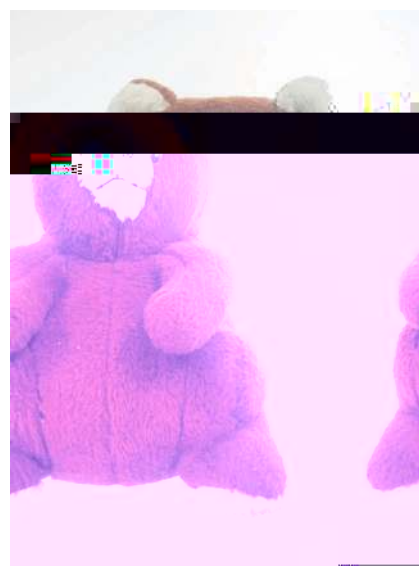
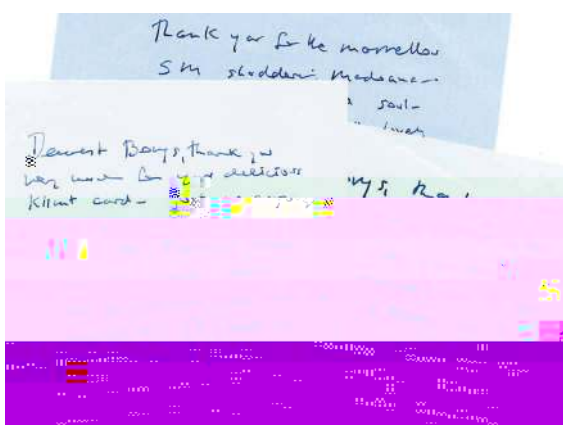
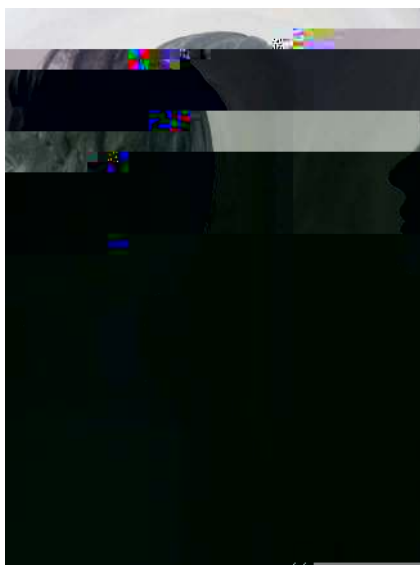
Since our last update we have added a large number of items to the Murdoch Collections here in the Archive. They include:

- Letters from Iris Murdoch to Brigid Brophy – this vast correspondence from Murdoch to a fellow author consists of over 1,000 letters and postcards. The letters were purchased for the Archives with assistance from Iris Murdoch Archives Project at Kingston University, the Iris Murdoch

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

- Original script for the play adaptation of Iris Murdoch's *The Sea, the Sea* with a covering letter. Kindly presented by the National Theatre.
- 6 photographs from the opening of the Iris Murdoch Archives Project and launch of the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University in 2004. Kindly donated by Janfarie Skinner.
- Two photographs of William Wallace Robson. Kindly donated by Anne Robson.
- Photograph of Iris Murdoch, John Bayley and Peter Conradi. Kindly donated by Peter Conradi.
- Copy of Charles Lamb, *Essays of Elia* (Everyman, 1932) previously owned by Iris Murdoch

We have also been promoting the Murdoch collections by including them in our exhibitions held here in the Archive – we created a display of our newest acquisitions in September 2014 to tie in with the Iris Murdoch Conference held then, and also featured items from the Murdoch collections in our two most recent Explore Your Archives campaign exhibitions – the first celebrating the tenth anniversary of the archives, and the second looking back at the Second World War. We also hope that many of you are following our series of blogposts ‘25 Objects for 25 Years’ – this series of posts is highlighting one item a month from our collections counting down to the 25th anniversary of



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

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



Gary Browning and Shauna Pitt

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

Gary Browning, Conference Organizer

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

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

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

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

Anne Rowe (Kingston University) talked of Murdoch's life, in the light of the recently published collection of Murdoch's letters *Living on Paper* which she co-edited with Avril Horner. Rowe brought Murdoch's life vividly before us, recognizing its power and truthfulness. Sabina Lovibond (Worcester College, Oxford) explored how Murdoch's moral philosophy lays stress on how one can become a better person by resisting the natural human tendency to self-absorption and turning one's attention outward, so as to register 'justly or lovingly' the value present in nature, art, and other persons. Miles Leeson (University of Chichester) offered a lively paper on Murdoch's fiction in which he celebrated the serious fun of her writing. Alison Denham (St. Anne's College, Oxford) examined the relationship between Murdoch's view of empathetic love and evidence provided by the discipline of psychology of the psycho-pathological dynamics of empathy. Sophie-Grace Chappell (Open University) re-examined Murdoch's treatment of the moral life, noting the puzzles that are generated by her en

O T097(al00602(.8117(al lif)15.z42(d b)1 th)-592(et)5.0089.992834 46t911(a)5.00







at discussing virtue than the virtuous but muddled quasi-intellectual, Tallis Browne. Tallis is seen as functioning as an equivalent of Tolstoy's 'virtuous peasant', Platon Karataev – a character who is

Rivka Isaacson

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

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

Much was made throughout the talk of Murdoch's luminous face of which we were treated to stunning views photographed by names such as Cecil Beaton, Lord Snowdon and Gisèle Freund, among others. Each photograph shed light on different aspects of Murdoch. Particularly evocative were two of her, in her Oxford room with its single bed, captured by Ida Kar. Far from T.S. Eliot's typist's life in a bedsit, Chamberlain explained that this modest room meant freedom – a modern woman whose life was her own, with her packet of cigarettes and the distinctive proof pages of her





## Forthcoming events

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

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

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

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

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

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

First Call for Papers

## Iris Murdoch Society

Join the Iris Murdoch Society and receive the Iris Murdoch Review.

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

Iris Murdoch Society Members will:

- Receive the Iris Murdoch Review on publication
- Keep up to date with scholarship, new publications, symposia and other information
- Be entitled to reduced rates for the biennial Iris Murdoch Conferences at University of Chichester

To become a member and for subscription rates please contact [ims@chi.ac.uk](mailto:ims@chi.ac.uk)

You can join online by searching for 'Iris Murdoch University Chichester'

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

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

ISSN 1756-7572



## Notes on Contributors

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

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

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

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

Lara Feigel is a literary critic and cultural historian, reviewer and Senior Lecturer in the English department at King's College(c)1u5.0024(i)0.996908(n)2.01009(o)1.01318(o)-.996908(n) Hor tust ec ntok eis

Pamela Osborn is a part-time lecturer at Kingston University. She is currently adapting her PhD thesis, 'Another Country: Bereavement, Mourning and Survival in the novels of Iris Murdoch', for





