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Preface

The Iris Murdoch Society and the *Iris Murdoch News Letter* alike are twenty years old. It is touching now to read the first issues, edited by John Burke in Alabama, which were partly minutes of the Modern Language Association meetings and abstracts of papers, together with John Fletcher's admirable researches into Murdoch juvenilia: work-in-progress for his and Cheryl Bove's massive, invaluable bibliography.

Queneau, his son assured me, knew Canetti only slightly. It was, however, striking to discover that Iris's awareness of Canetti pre-dated their meeting by five or so years. Perhaps her admirable and brilliant fellow-Somervillian friend Carol Stuart, whom Iris saw a little of during the war, had told Iris of Canetti. Stuart, who was to translate *Crowds and Power* into English in 1960, first met Canetti around 1943, I think at a party of William Empson's. In any case, whatever it was that Murdoch had been told clearly caught her imagination. Anne Rowe in this Review describes the August 1952 letter from Iris to Canetti, soliciting a meeting in Paris, where Canetti's brothers lived. Nissim, also known as Jacques, a musical impresario, backed Yves M945 Twat8 Twat8 Twa38odo wasiram 6.8(ba)-11.6(c)11e

The following interview between Stephanie de Pue and Iris Murdoch has not previously been published. To begin, de Pue describes the circumstances of the meeting, which took place in 1976.

I had contacted Iris Murdoch from the United States and then wrote again when I arrived in London. She was the only interviewee whom I had contacted who insisted that I write rather than telephone. I felt that I might have written too carelessly and flippantly, as Murdoch wrote back, second class postage, demanding further details. In my second letter I wrote more carefully and was rewarded with Murdoch's London telephone number, which I was to call at 8.50 a.m.

I called as requested but the rendezvous arrangements were bungled, probably because of my

Interview

Q: Because you think it has informed your moral viewpoint?

M: I think when one's ever been absolutely inside a religion, it is a permanent feature of your life, in a way. It's a sort of vehicle of the spirit, or something. It's a standard and a sort of reality touch to things, and I don't feel I've ever lost, broken that bond, really, with Christ. Although I don't believe the stuff.

Q: Non-religious Catholics who still get very upset at abortions.

M: Oh, yes, yes, well I think the tribal instinct's involved too, of course.

Q: [There is a] mention in the '69 interview that you see sex as a sort of dark force which 'enslaves' people. [This] struck me as an Irish outlook

M: I can't remember that remark, or what its context would have been. I know what I meant: I think sex is an absolutely sort of universal ubiquitous force. I think that one of the gloomy things about many present-day manifestations is that they tend to corner sex, and specialize in it, and so on. I think sex is to do with the whole of one's life, with one's ...

Q: You [also] said in the 1969 interview that you thought it made us do all sorts of things we might not otherwise do, that it was a very powerful force – you spoke of it as 'connected with the obsessional side of one's life which has got to be overcome'.

M: Well, yes, I don't think sex has got to be overcome. I think it's the energy of one's life, it's everything that you ... I not1.9men3c7s thadous10(one30(1f)1.1(ofg.3[6e-26w]9[y sorl1]TJ30-211(e) f is tha(

assume I'm Irish. I mean the whole thing is simply problematical to me. Somebody says what nationality are you, and I'm not sure.

Q: I've seen you described as a 'Victorian novelist dealing with decayed family life in the 20th century'. Would that strike you as accurate?

M: Well, I'd love to be a Victorian novelist - that would be a great label to have. No, I'm not up to being Victorian, I'm a sub-Victorian novelist. Well, decayed family life - family life is decayed everywhere, isn't it, all the time. I mean, family life is essentially a process of conflict, and decay. I think I'm mainly interested in conflict, but I'm interested in religion and society and art and thought and, you know, everything under the sun. But family life is of course the traditional subject of the novel, and I think it's very good. It often gives quite a good kind of pattern, after which you can, you know, hang on the force of things, the force of the argument, the story.

Q: [Do you work] out [the] structure of [the] novel at [the] beg[inning], before [you] go to paper? Where [do you] start?

Q: Well there seemed to be quite a bit of philosophy in *The Black Prince*. You could say that was basically a philosophical novel.

involves all the other things that one has, ordinary duties to do, duties to one's friends and relations and one's country, I mean, ideally all this works out in a natural kind of way. I mean, I don't feel as dramatic about life as perhaps I did once, or as existentialists tend to do. I don't think life is in that sense a drama. I think drama belongs to art. I think life is, different.

Q: Are you rejecting the currently popular American idea then of creating a beautiful life for oneself?

M: Oh, the Americans ... I think this is wonderful, this is excellent mystic (laughing). I must say, I love America, and I don't think this is peculiarly American, though is it? I mean, this seems to me to be an aspect of youth, and perhaps this aspect of youthfulness in your country. And of course, you are literally a newer country, with fewer bonds from the past, with more confidence about possible change, and with more ability for possible change, in a good sense, I think. No, I don't think it matters what form one's ideals take, so long as one has ideals, so long as one's also realistic. I think realism's very important, that one must realise the mechanism of change is quite frightfully complicated. And to change one's own personality, one's own self, is quite frightfully hard, all one can do is push away a few illusions. Well, I've got to go, I'm awfully sorry, but my husband didn't put that appointment back this far.

Stephanie du Pue

The Iris Murdoch Text Analysis Project and its Importance to the Study of Authorship and Alzheimer's Disease

In response to requests from IMS members for information about the highly publicised work of Dr Peter Garrard from University College London, which compares syntactical differences between Murdoch's early and late work, he has kindly provided a summary of his research for the Review.

Consider the following pair of descriptive passages:

The great brown eyes, which once opened so blandly upon the world, seemed narrowed, and where Anna had used to draw a dark line upward at their corners the years had sketched in a little sheaf of wrinkles.

He feared the currents, the wind, the grim force of the waves, more savage now, larger, louder, taller, curling over in great white arches, hurling themselves in deafening impact against the slithering wall of stones, and in destroying themselves, each wave in its demise receding, dragging clattering down a grinding mass of sand and stones.

One extract was written by a 34 year-old, newly appointed Oxford don, keen to write a novel but with no more than a handful of unfinished manuscripts to her name. The other is by a full-time writer who, in the course of a career spanning more than four decades, had published twenty-five novels, four plays, a collection of poetry, and five volumes of philosophical writing. Reading them, it is not at all obvious that the first is the work of the novice while the second originates from the more mature mind. Less obvious still, perhaps, is the fact that these two people are one and the same.

The first extract (from *Under the Net*, p.37) is lexically innovative, syntactically dense and stylistically accomplished. By contrast, it is the ordinariness, the almost Roget-like repetitiveness of the content-bearing words, together with the awkward grammatical structure, that are the most salient features of the second (*Jackson's Dilemma*, p.103).

Admittedly, there are striking differences in subject matter, and contrasting authorial points of view. Indeed, the stylistic effects of each passage seem well suited to, respectively, fascination tinged with *Schadenfreude* at the sight of an old flame, and raw fear. Considered in this light, therefore, the differences between two such randomly chosen passages may seem as unremarkable as those between an apple and an orange. There are, however, grounds for taking issue with such an analysis, and asking instead whether there is something fundamentally and pervasively different about Iris Murdoch's final novel and if so, what characterises this difference, and why it is there at all.

The first and most obvious cause for suspicion is that the experience of reading *Jackson's Dilemma* has been widely agreed to be unlike that produced by any one of Murdoch's 25 earlier novels. Although the characters of *Jackson's Dilemma* are familiarly untroubled by the inconveniences of life and, true to type, spend a lot of time sitting around discussing metaphysics before falling in love, the world in which they move s

friends. Most were either vague or respectful,¹ others fired arrows tinged with the venom of faint praise. Others criticised the novel in less oblique terms.²

John Bayley would say (later, and with hindsight) that he felt there had been something

caused by Alzheimer's will always predate the onset of intellectual difficulty. The length of this lead-time is almost certainly variable and, for obvious reasons, difficult to determine. Some investigators have argued that it may extend back over years, or even decades. More recently, evidence has begun to emerge that intellectual activity may help to lengthen the silent, early phase of the disease, and thus delay the devastating effects of neural degeneration on patients and their families (the 'cognitive reserve' hypothesis). A lifetime of thinking, teaching, and writing creatively about the most profound and difficult questions that can be asked concerning human existence must surely have qualified IM to have benefited from this sort of 'protective' effect.

All of which, one afternoon in 2003, made me start thinking again about that odd-ball novel *Jackson's Dilemma*.

The Puzzling Seriousness of Language: Introducing Spanish Philosophy Students to Iris Murdoch's Philosophy and Fiction

The following article, by Professor Alfonso López, is based on a paper presented at the Third International Iris Murdoch Conference, Morality and the Novel (Kingston University London, September 2006). Professor López teaches English language and Teaching Methodology in the Teacher Training faculty at CES Don Bosco College Madrid. He also holds seminars on Iris Murdoch's work in the Philosophy faculty at Complutense University, Madrid.

This essay offers a reflection on two years of discussing Iris Murdoch's work with Spanish philosophy students. It focuses on what the students' responses to Murdoch's texts have taught me about the possibilities of Murdoch's thought. I initially thought that the students' very slight knowledge of Murdoch, English society and the linguistic philosophy of the 1950s and 60s would prove a hindrance. Instead, it proved a great advantage in our exploration of Murdochian themes. To my average student, Murdoch appears not as an inescapably well-known philosophical writer whose extensive oeuvre has already been judged and labelled by the literary fads of each generation but, rather, as a brilliant, unclassifiable thinker. She is as alien to a Spanish philosophy student's intellectual scene as characters such as Willy Kost, Julius King, or Mischa Fox are alien to the society into which Murdoch places them.

Such a fresh viewpoint facilitates a shift in focus *away* from the thinker and her biographical and intellectual context and towards a serious and undivided consideration of perennial ethical problems which are regarded in a new light. Amongst these problems are the role of moral experience in ethical conceptualising, and the difficult question of how, if at all, literature can aid reflection on moral issues. I will address these two points in the context of my students' reactions, first, to Murdoch's philosophy, and, second, to one of her fictional works.

The Murdoch seminar forms one of six sections of a course entitled 'Main Currents in

overcome a major difficulty in order to understand it. The difficulty came in the form of my students'

In a broader sense, as Cora Diamond proposes in her essay, 'Having a Rough Story about What Moral Philosophy Is', the prevalent assumption in much contemporary moral philosophy is that literature may offer us interesting cases of moral argument, or, even more so, evidence 'bearing on issues and questions already there in moral philosophy'. (379) From this premise, novels provide us with countless moral stories which, like Murdoch's description of M and D, may serve to test philosophy by reference to a common object of attention. Valuable as this may be, the point still remains, as Diamond reminds us, that 'how' the story is told – its artistic quality – plays no role in its contribution to ethical thought.

This assumption has, of course, been contested. Martha Nussbaum has argued that thought is

novel form particularly suited for the exploration of important ethical themes such as power or erotic desire? Or, as Cora Diamond encapsulates the question, ‘how is it that *this* literary feature is so much more illuminating a way of writing about *that* feature of human life than are the familiar ways of moral philosophy?’ (Diamond, 379)

The significance of exploring ethical themes in a *comic* frame i01 Tc0.0832 T1.2()22(e)-1rka

Forgotten and Unknown? The Sandcastle Revisited

In Iris Murdoch's oeuvre, *The Sandcastle* (1957)¹² now occupies a rather humble position; indeed it is often spoken of as the 'forgotten' or 'unknown' Murdoch novel. Yet this has not always been the case. When the Fifties closed and Murdoch's contribution to the contemporary novel was evaluated, it was widely felt that this book had vindicated earlier critical praise and routed any reservations about her work. After the picaresque adventures in Soho and Paris of *Under the Net* (1954) and the cast of displaced persons of *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956), *The Sandcastle*, with its setting of a Home Counties public-school and its sober, intense study of a marital crisis, marked its author's deliberate entry into the traditional territory of the English novelist. The lucidity of its prose, so often evoking landscape and the effect of the natural world on people, reinforced this perception. Nor were the merits of *The Sandcastle* eclipsed by the more spectacular qualities of its ambitious successor, *The Bell* (1958). The novels appeared as evident siblings, not exactly advances on the two earlier books, but proofs that this lavishly gifted writer had once-and-for-all moved on from Bohemia, from society's seductive margins, to the centre-ground that a serious novelist was expected to occupy. This view did not quite disappear even as the Sixties progressed and Murdoch was associated with dazzlingly individual achievements ushered in by *A Severed Head* (1961). I remember Angus Wilson saying to me in 1965, 'With Iris Murdoch it's really *The Sandcastle* and *The Bell* that I admire'.

I propose here to look at *The Sandcastle* for the picture it gives of British (English) society, and therefore of a still developing major writer's complex attitude towards it. In doing so I am being entirely consonant with the spirit of the time itself, preoccupied as it was with Britain's irrevocable shifts in class and concomitant values, and when the writings of Kingsley Amis, John Wain and John Osborne were hailed as salvos against an exhausted status quo. Also, inspiration for further inquiry was supplied by Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) and Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society* (1958).

The novel emphatically and poetically juxtaposes the conventionality of school and estate with the sylvan. The principal representative of this last is, of course, Rain Carter herself, though Felicity, Mor's daughter, and the gypsy who stalks the neighbourhood also partake of its essence. They are indeed, on one level, and at Murdoch's own admission,¹³ extensions of Rain; the one her fledgling self, the other her 'shadow'. The woodland – especially the eruption into it of the river in which Rain swims and in the mud of which her beloved car gets stuck – is observed with lyrical fidelity. The epiphany of liberation it provides anticipates, even more than the Thames-diving of *Under the Net*, the powerful, cathartic episodes in Murdoch's finest later fiction, such as *Nuns and Soldiers* (1980). The appearances of the gypsy are hauntingly, convincingly done. Murdoch's American publisher and her early critics, notably A.S. Byatt, were troubled by them, questioning their actuality. I, who lived and went to school in a similar environment at precisely this period, could have reassured them. Gypsies camped openly in the woods and on the common-land near my public school. Their representative here offers a glimpse of the atavistic to a community intent on excluding it, just as his kinsfolk did to me in my teenage life.

The third important feature of the surroundings of St Bride's is the arterial road. Constantly throughout the novel we hear the noise of its ceaseless traffic, roaring towards London. There is no way of forgetting either its presence or its destination. St Bride's appears to be in, or very close to, Surrey, the county actually named during the description of a car-ride. Three stops down the railway line from this community lies Marsington, 'just inside the London area', a safe Labour seat apparently, and forming with St Bride's the novel's topographical/cultural axis. Here Mor gives WEA classes and enjoys the friendship of Tim Burke, jeweller and Goldsmith, Labour activist and the man determined that Mor should be the constituency's next parliamentary candidate. Tim is one of the novel's happiest creations. He is Irish, though as regards speech also Cockney/American, a touch shallow and flashy in his autodidact capacity but, as a friend and a craftsman, a man of true depth. His premises are in a row of old shops in the High Street of Marsington, of which Murdoch paints a recognisable picture:

Marsington was an old village with a fine broad main street with grassy cobbled edges. The fields about it had long ago been covered with the red-roofed houses between which the green Southern Region trains sped at frequent intervals bringing the inhabitants of Marsington and its neighbouring boroughs to and from their daily work in central London. The main street now carried one of the most important routes to the metropolis, and its most conspicuous features were the rival garages whose brightly lit petrol pumps, glowing upon ancient brick and stone, attracted the passing motorist. The traffic was incessant. For all that, in the warm twilight it had a remote and peaceful air, the long broad façades of its inns and spacious houses withdrawn and reassuring. (p.58)

This account is accurate and fair, spiritually as well as literally. Marsington has, in the post-war era, shed the sense of permanence inseparable from satisfactory living; new houses, new people have been imposed pell-mell on the old, so that it imparts a perpetual feeling of being in transit, of lying at the capital's beck-and-call. At the same time it still has charm, even if this is by now slightly ersatz, and it contains pockets not just of repose but of creativity, represented by Tim's richly realised shop. Here, in fact, Mor's son, Donald, another of the novel's triumphs of portraiture, will go after abandoning the chance of going to university, for which he was neither intellectually or temperamentally suited, to become Tim's enthusiastic apprentice. Marsington might suggest Mitcham, though in these years that

then (but not now) South Croydon; in the 1966 election this went to Labour by 81 votes! But even if we fail to find an exact counterpart for Marsington, and think that for Mor to be certain of victory he

solitude, a little too remote from the wear-and-tear of the prosaic world of the institutional edifice. After all as a lonely child by 'a melancholy sea' (the Mediterranean) she was never able to build a sandcastle. Whenever she tried to do so, 'the sand would just run away between [her] fingers' (p.73).

Not that we can regret Mor's turning his back on St Bride's. Reactionary Demoyte may have virtues that we can respect, even treasure, but he is essentially of the past, bound to an old-fashioned bachelor's life dependent on a self-parodying redoubtable housekeeper, and prone to sentimental fantasies about young girls (such as Rain herself). The wishy-washy religion of the Revvy Evvy has principally its mildness to commend it; but there is nothing there that couldn't be found, in stronger form, in humanist secularism, while for spirituality we would do better turning to Rain, Felicity and the nameless gypsy. And of course to the art-master, Bledyard, who, with his Etonian background, idiosyncratic speech-patterns and preoccupation with Byzantine art and its avoidance of direct human representation, stands at an oblique but commanding angle to the other characters just as the art school does geographically to the school and his subject to its academic curriculum. No, Murdoch could see only one satisfactory route from the social worlds she had been attempting to dwell in: the arterial road leading to London, where, indeed, Mor the MP will transfer his family. This inevitably means forsaking the sylvan, but we cannot doubt that it will always occupy, indeed call to, a major part of the psyche of those (Felicity, Mor himself) who learned release from it – learned release, we should add, mainly through the beha

Iris Murdoch and the Art of Dedication

In *The Human Province* (1985), Elias Canetti speaks of the ‘transformations and unmaskings’ of drama and of the creative artist as a sage who ‘lives in hearing, in listening [...] who can make a clean slate of himself for every man, but preserves in himself all the other full slates *without thinking of them* (my italics)’.¹⁴ As so often, Canetti gives an invaluable insight into the creative processes of Iris Murdoch. Anyone who studies her life alongside her work is bound to be struck by the transformations (Canetti’s ‘Verwandlungen’) that she makes of the former into the latter. She herself protested vehemently that this was not the case; throughout her career she argued consistently and insistently for the *impersonality* of art, attacking contemporary fiction (for example in ‘The Sublime and the Good’, ‘The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited’ and ‘Against Dryness’) for indulging in personal fantasy.

Murdoch’s own artistic credo was that of John Keats, that ‘the poetical Character [...] is not itself – it has no self – it is everything and nothing’ (*Letters*, 27 October 1818).¹⁵ She seems to have experienced a genuine sense of shock when readers nonetheless assumed that she fed directly from her own life and made simplistic jumps from fictional character to real person. Peter Conradi records a particularly clear

references in Murdoch's letters to David Hicks regarding her earlier attempts at novel-writing. From UNRRA in Vienna on 27 January 1946, she writes that her characters seem to her to be merely spoiled joyless intellectuals and she needs the influence of Queneau.²⁰ Only in her construction of the character of Jake Donaghue in *Under the Net* does she finally succeed in utilizing and anglicizing the French writer's twentieth-century picaresque. Queneau is a liberating, not a possessive, enchanter and

love.²² De Marchi's personality seems already to have been closely sketched in the cheerful, easy-going Danby in *Bruno's Dream* (1969), whose diffidence is encapsulated in his desultory pursuit of his sister-in-law, Diana: 'Naturally he'd have liked to go to bed with her. However she was married to Miles and though at first it seemed a jolly idea a more extended reflection suggested snags' (Penguin, 1970, p.143). Long after that novel's publication, Murdoch was still attempting to script de Marchi's life, asking Norah Smallwood (17 September 1975) to meet him to discuss the publishing scene.²³ Murdoch had dedicated *Bruno's Dream*, not to de Marchi, but to another young friend, S(n)-0.78 TD0.110.9(w0.8 0

giving egoism and rich self-satisfaction of Kate and her husband inspired Mary.
(p.22)

John Ducane, friend and colleague of Octavian, is the novel's centre of consciousness. He is initially attracted by Kate, and by the end of this Shakespearean comedy in a Dorset Arden the illusory pairings have faded away and the 'true lovers', John Ducane and Mary Clothier, stand revealed to each

The Bayleys stayed with the Stones frequently. Iris encouraged Janet to publish a book of her photographs, *Thinking Faces* (1972), and with Reynolds she produced *A Year of Birds* in 1978, in which his engravings were accompanied by her poems. After his sudden death in 1979 she gave the

The Time of the Angels
The Nice and the Good
Bruno's Dream
A Fairly Honourable Defeat

To Eduard Fraenkel
To Rachel and David Cecil
To Scott Dunbar
To Janet and Reynolds Stone

‘I embrace you with much love’: Letters from Iris Murdoch to Elias Canetti

The following article on Iris Murdoch’s letters to Elias Canetti held in the Conradi archive at the Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies continues the series of commentaries on material in the Special Collections at Kingston University London.

Even on Elias Canetti and Iris Murdoch’s first assignation on the evening of Christmas day in 1952, after they had drunk at the North Star pub in Hampstead and moved on to Canetti’s flat, they spoke about his idea of ‘transformation’ (*Verwandlung*), or how one divides oneself into many *personae* – a concept that was to become dominant in Canetti’s work and in his life.²⁹ The twenty-five letters from Iris Murdoch to Elias Canetti held in the Conradi Archive at the Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies suggest that Murdoch, during her subsequent relationship with Canetti, would herself be transformed - into a dependent, even predatory lover, living to a great extent under Canetti’s spell. Canetti was conducting extra-marital affairs long before he met Murdoch and was already involved in what was to be a life-long affair with the painter, Marie-Louise von Motesiczky. In her relationship with Canetti Murdoch appears to have become a willing co-conspirator in the covert machinations that sustained Canetti’s complicated life.

The letters from Murdoch to Canetti span some twenty three years – the earliest is written in 1952 and the last in 1975. A sense of furtiveness and intrigue characterize them even although a number were written many years after the affair itself, which lasted from 1953 to 1956. Most are brief and quickly scribbled (‘Dear Heart, just a note ...’), and Conradi has tentatively dated eleven of them. The earliest, written in 1952, before they became lovers, was sent when Murdoch had arrived in Paris and Canetti was staying at the Hotel des Vosges on the Boulevard St Germain: ‘Just to say that I am really here and would be very pleased to see you [...] It’s dreamlike to be in a place one has thought about so much when one wasn’t there. I still feel rather dazed. I hope all is truly well with you. Yours, Iris Murdoch’.

Although six of the letters provided (Iris Murdoch’s) have... (the way) in (ss0.3(r)1TD-0.)16.7(isk70.9(b)1.1(.) d)]TJ2T

I feel deeply convinced that the ordeal which you see ahead is some sort of dying into life - a good *verwandlung*, where one goes, as it were, open-eyed into what seems after darkness – and then finds one has entered some other and much better world. I am pleased the novel is there, bearing your company. Hold onto it and it will prove a guide.

[...] as for the other thing you spoke of, I think one must endure the visitations of the gods, being glad that one is visited, living into it with one's whole self and finding more life and more good can come to one and to the other person.

Here, her role appears one of friend and comforter, yet how far Canetti was appreciative of her concern is questionable, for one of this group of unsourced letters, as do a number of others, suggests a deliberate evasiveness on Canetti's part. Murdoch writes, 'I gather from Marie-Louise that you are in England after all! But she said you were very busy'. She appears indifferent to Marie-Louise's obvious ascendancy in the pecking order of Canetti's mistresses and continues, 'I asked her to find out if you'd like lunch with me Tuesday (Feb 2) and if I don't hear to the contrary I'll come along 12.30ish to Thurlow Rd. But don't mind saying no via M.L. (or postcard to me!) – in which case, I'll try later'.

Another seven undated notes are sent from Steeple Aston, where Murdoch moved with her husband, John Bayley, in 1956. Although the affair itself is reputed to have ended by this time, this group of letters largely comprises attempts to contact Canetti and suggestions for tentative assignations: 'You cannot write and I cannot telephone which makes communication always rather difficult! Do you think we could have lunch on Tuesday February 2nd?' Amongst them is one reference to a proposed visit to Thurlow Road: 'Cd I now suggest dinner on Tuesday Nov 11 – coming to Thurlow Rd between 7 & 7.30'. Canetti appears to treat her dismissively, even contemptuously; he does not tell her when he goes away or when he returns: 'My dear, John Simopoulos tells me you have gone abroad and will be away for some weeks. So I am assuming next Tues Feb 2 is not possible ... (I've tried to ring you a number of times ...)'. Canetti appears at best a reluctant, at worst a manipulative, participant in Murdoch's drama: 'cd not get any answer from your London number tho' tried a number of times', she writes, 'so I assume you are away. I do very much want to see you & will try again'. Murdoch's disappointment is plain: 'My dear, I don't even know if you are in England. I am paralysed about making arrangements because of the difficulty in getting in touch with you & because I'm always afraid of making dates & then having to cancel'.

Another letter from Steeple Aston records the pleasure in rare meetings with Canetti: 'It was very wonderful to see you' ... 'You always give me life, I love you deeply, deeply, as you know'. She appears to have had a habit of enclosing a stamped addressed envelope which he would post back to her if her suggestions for meeting were agreeable: 'no need to put communication inside (though of course I would like one!!!) – just seal up and send off and I will know if I receive it that Nov 11th is OK'. In this particular letter these instructions are repeated in the margin and the writing appears agitated and, counter-productively, barely legible. She was to be disappointed it seems on this occasion, for another letter, written in the same agitated hand, but with a more defeated tone, is dated Nov 9th: 'My dear, I have not had my envelope back by post and could not get any answer from your London number tho' I tried a number of times so I assume you are still away. I do very much want to see you and will try again ... Yours as always'.

Amongst these arrangements for what appear to be secretive meetings is an occasional invitation to a more formal soirée; there is no apparent attempt to divorce the covert and the public: from Steeple Aston Murdoch writes, 'My dear, just to remind, there will be a party at my flat 59, Harcourt Terrace next Wednesday June 9th between 5.30 and 8! And it would be very good to see you there. But I won't necessarily expect you'. A different invitation reveals a possible ulterior motive for inviting Canetti to these formal parties: 'will hope to dine with you afterwards (shd get rid of the

drinkers by 8)'.³¹ If the motive behind these public appearances together was indeed to provide a

‘Tear up this Letter’: Review of *Briefe An Georges*, the letters of Veza and Elias Canetti, edited by Karen Lauer and Kristian Wachinger (Munich: Hanser, 2006, ISBN 3 446 20760 0) by Jeremy Adler³³

Elias Canetti boasted about his ability to outwit death with his posthumous writings – the unpublished novels, the half-a-dozen plays, the second part of *Crowds and Power*. ‘When I’m dead’, he claimed, ‘my secret writing will take years to decipher’. The world would greet every new discovery with excitement: ‘A new Canetti!’ we were expected to exclaim. It has turned out otherwise. His code has proved to be a variant on a common shorthand; the literary cupboard was bare: those novels and plays never actually existed; and the acclaim has been less than universal. Yet the posthumous works have not entirely disappointed. Canetti’s unpublished aphorisms are proving to be a major part of his oeuvre, and his memoirs of the English years, *Party im Blitz* (2005), which came out without the censorship of an editor jealous of Canetti’s fame, succeeded in upsetting almost everyone. His scabrous remarks about his closest friends and admirers, above all the attack on Iris Murdoch, appeared to confirm John Bayley’s judgement on the ‘godmonster of Hampstead’. Yet for all their bile, Canetti’s posthumous utterances have the mark of a classic: brilliance, trenchancy and memorability.

The latest publication, a volume of correspondence between Canetti, his wife Veza and his brother Georges, is no exception, not least because it offers us a glimpse of the Canetti we were never meant to see. It spans the major part of his struggle for literary success, from 1933, before the publication of his novel, *Auto da Fe*

He began to laugh dreadfully, I grew terribly frightened, but he said, you laughed in the same way after the death of your mother, and so I thought it was a fit of nerves and that it would pass. He requested some tea, and I calmly handed him his cup. But I had to exchange it for my own, as he said his was poisoned. I have seen this for a full twelve years now, and it doesn't impress me in the least, even though his latest expression horrified me. I drank his poisoned tea and he lay down. His head was very red. He fantasized that he was in a madhouse [...]

He said that I was evil and that I had driven him into madness three weeks ago. I was so overcome with horror that I grew cold and called out for help in my misery. Then he explained to me in desperation and with tears in his eyes that I had poisoned myself with the tea which had been meant for him. I was ice-cold, so he mistook me for your dead mother. I don't know where I took the strength, but I suddenly turned hot and feverish, and so he calmed down [...] The attack was over.

On another occasion, Canetti called the police about a burglar in the middle of the night. Seven armed policemen arrived. They recognized that he was hallucinating, and it took all Veza's charm to assuage them. Perhaps we may now understand Canetti's original plan that *Auto da Fe* should inaugurate a *comédie humaine* about lunatics in the light of his anxieties, and its abandonment as, in part, a result of his growing ability to tame his demons. Yet it was Veza, not Canetti, who had to carry the burden. Those only familiar with her from her later years, after the war and emigration had taken their toll, will be appalled by what she had to bear from the outset. No doubt exaggerating her looks (she was not yet forty), she complains to Georges:

I am living under a delusion, too, for is it not a delusion if I, a much-celebrated and envied woman, have for years been able to see only one way out: suicide? I, who despite my age, my wizened appearance, and my white hair, am wooed by the most talented men? [...] if I began to tell you about the hell that is my life, you wouldn't believe it. You would weep, as I weep.

throbbing of an engine rather than the beating of a human heart. We also witness the birth of the aphorist, flexibly improving his 'combinatorial skill', and encompassing a host of fields from music to anthropology.

Beneath Canetti's duplicities, there is a moral will, the enduring humanity that Veza prized. Here, the early letters often legitimize the mature views. Canetti's hatred of the war seems affected in some of the published aphorisms; but the shattering letter about his journey through France in 1935 which reports on the effects of the First World War, witnessed not just on the battlefields, but above all in the fatuous houses erected on the ruins, expresses an outrage and moral sense that cannot but stir the reader to indignant compassion. By 1935, he is certain that the next war will come. Yet it is Veza once again who carries the emotional burden, as she reflects when the Second World War draws to an end:

I am very ill. As to my physical appearance, you wouldn't recognize me on the street, but as to my psychological disposition, it has worsened, and I had to visit a London hospital twice last month. The last six years have been too much for me and my mind is incapable of imagining gas chambers or similar inventions.

The thought of the people in Belsen never left her. In her grief, it is not Canetti but Georges who sustains her: 'Only the thought of you is my comfort, health, pride and warmth. It keeps me alive'. As the 'melancholy' migrates from Canetti to Veza, Georges increasingly assumes the role of her mentor. She addresses him variously as 'darling', 'beloved son', '*mon très mignon et charmant et très beau-frère*', 'delightful beau' and 'dear playboy'. She even becomes vicariously gay for his sake, signing off once with 'all my inverted love'.

Meanwhile, the Canettis' domestic arrangements had grown ever more complex. Following his infatuation with the sculptress, Anna Mahler, he formed a lifelong, increasingly fraught liaison with the painter, Marie-Louise von Motesiczky, and kept a room in her house until the end; yet as

The new volume illuminates countless details in the lives of Veza and Elias Canetti, making it essential, irresistible reading, even after Sven Hanschek's thorough biography (reviewed in the *TLS*, September 2, 2005). One striking twist concerns the relations between Canetti and his closest literary friend during the war, Franz Steiner. Canetti broke for some years with Steiner, accusing him of plagiarism; Iris Murdoch recalled that this rift was caused by Friedl Benedikt; yet from a letter printed here, one can perhaps sense Veza's presence. She may well have put Friedl up to the episode, to stop Canetti wasting his time in talking to Steiner for days on end - in fact, most profitably, as is evoked in *Party im Blitz*.

Kristian Wachinger, to whom we owe the discovery of these letters, and Karen Lauer are to be congratulated on making this such a splendidly approachable book. It comprises all the known

Ritchie Robertson: 'The Great Hater': Review of *Elias Canetti*, by Sven Hanauschek (Munich: Hanser, 2005, ISBN 3 446 20584 5)

Elias Canetti (1905-94) is among the most original, and the most variously talented, of German-language authors of the twentieth century. The fierce, grotesque satire of his one novel, *Die Blendung* (translated by Veronica Wedgwood as *Auto-da-Fe*), written when he was twenty-five, hits the reader like a fist. Some thirty-five years of thought and reading went into his treatise on crowd psychology, *Masse und Macht* (*Crowds and Power*). After its publication in 1960, and the reissue of *Die Blendung* in 1964, Canetti at last acquired fame, but it was his arrestingly vivid three-volume autobiography, appearing from 1977 onwards, that attracted world-wide attention and, in 1981, gained him the Nobel Prize for Literature.

The published work, however, represents only the peaks of a vast oeuvre preserved mainly in the City Library in Zurich. Its central massif, according to Canetti's biographer Sven Hanauschek, consists of notebooks. Sporadically from the mid 1920s, and systematically from 1942 to his death, Canetti wrote down his thoughts, usually spending one or two hours a day on this task. Since 2002 these notes have been accessible, though some more personal records are still barred until 2024. They include comments on day-to-day experiences, outbursts of emotion, aphorisms, reflections on crowds, power, and much else. The hand-picked selections which have appeared as volumes of aphorisms from *Die Provinz des Menschen* (1973; *The Human Province*) onwards represent, according to Hanauschek, only one-tenth of the whole. Hanauschek's extensive quotations from these notes enhance the value of his excellent, highly readable, consistently fascinating, and badly needed biography. Any biographer of Canetti has to negotiate some delicate and difficult matters. First, Canetti was married to another gifted writer. Venetiana Taubner Calderon, known as Veza, came, like Canetti, from the Jewish community of south-eastern Europe who spoke Ladino, a language descended from medieval Spanish. They met on April 17 1924 in Vienna, at a public reading by Karl Kraus, and married in 1934.

Veza had some fifteen stories published in newspapers, and soon after the Canettis' arrival as refugees in England in 1939 she wrote, but refused to publish, a short novel, *Die Schild-kroten* (*The Tortoises*). When it appeared fifty years later, it was immediately recognized as ranking among the masterpieces of the – astonishingly rich – literature produced by exiles from Germany and Austria. In the early 1940s, Veza wrote two plays and a novel in English, but these seem to have been destroyed in a state of depression, and increasingly she confined her literary activities to translation (she translated Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory* into German) and supporting Canetti's work by taking care of his correspondence (he was a notoriously erratic letter-writer) and pressing him to get on with *Crowds and Power*. Veza Canetti was among those literary wives who have subordinated their careers to their husbands', as Jane Welsh Carlyle took second place to Thomas, or as Willa Muir, the author of two spirited novels, concentrated on translation to enable her husband Edwin to devote himself to fiction and poetry. Eventually we shall need a joint biography of the Canettis, along the lines of Rosemary Ashton's *Thomas and Jane Carlyle: Portrait of a Marriage* (2001).

Another delicate matter, which makes Hanauschek's biography all the more timely, is Canetti's relationship with Iris Murdoch in the early 1950s. In John Bayley's memoir, *Iris* (1998), Canetti figures as 'the Dichter' who 'made love to Iris, possessing her as if he were a god', even while his wife, with her 'sweet face and air of patient welcoming reserve', was present in the same flat. Peter Conradi's biography of Murdoch has added unappetizing details. It is tempting to imagine Canetti as a monster of egoism, and to demonize him in relation to Veza rather as Ted Hughes has been pilloried for his alleged selfishness towards Sylvia Plath. Veza Canetti died (of an unidentified illness) in May 1963, a few months after Plath's suicide, and Canetti, who had recently got to know Hughes, felt like his brother in misfortune. Hanauschek fortunately presents a somewhat more rounded, though not uncritical, picture of Canetti.

A defining event in Canetti's life was his father's sudden death in 1912, which brought him under the exclusive control of his mother. Intending to move the family to Vienna, Mathilde Canetti taught her eldest son German in a month, spurring him on with exclamations of 'I've got an idiot for a son!'. This pedagogical method worked, in as much as German was the language in which Canetti wrote throughout his life. But it also gave him an experience of domestic tyranny. Later, around 1926, Mathilde Canetti, then living in France, did her utmost to separate him from her rival, Veza, by writing him furious letters denouncing Veza as an 'unscru

Despite the self-assured manner which astonished his acquaintances, Veza considered him

an incident recounted by Stendhal, one of Canetti's favourite authors, in *La Vie de Henri Brulard*. Later, Hanuschek valuably supplements Canetti's writings with details about interwar Vienna, but although Canetti was linked by antagonism or friendship to numerous important figures – Karl Kraus, Hermann Broch, and the Communist Ernst Fischer – he was not prominent on the literary scene. With Canetti's exile, this biography really comes into its own, and its wealth of information about London literary circles in the 1940s and 1950s makes an English translation highly desirable.

The wider significance of Canetti's residence in England has two main aspects. First, he

hatred and vanity are enacted so openly that any search for latent meaning is futile. *Crowds and Power* works not by argument but by 'thick description', especially of rituals (the rain-dance of the Pueblo Indians, the Muharram festival of Shi'a Islam, and many more), which makes explicit the emotions that Canetti takes to be animating them. Canetti's account is interspersed with apodictic statements which in turn link *Crowds and Power* to his favoured genre, the aphorism.

The collections of aphorisms Canetti published in his lifetime, which fill two volumes of his ten-volume collected works, have now been augmented by a group of texts of which Canetti wrote out a fair copy, probably for Marie- Louise von Motesiczky's birthday on October 24 1942. Jeremy Adler's edition includes a facsimile of Canetti's neat handwriting with a facing-page transcription and an afterword which provides an admirable introduction to the art of the aphorism as Canetti practised it. This genre is firmly established in German literature (Lichtenberg, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Kraus, Kafka), and Canetti went back further, poring over the hermetic dicta of the Presocratics. A single example, 'Man is the measure of all animals', illustrates how Canetti can vary a familiar truism and thus provoke new thoughts about our relation to the animal kingdom. There are also reflections, extending sometimes over two pages, on Chinese poetry, the Old Testament, and various forms of obsession, besides brief evocations of emotional states ('She lives in a desert of expectation') and counter-factual fantasies of how things might be: 'All weapons are abolished and in the next war only biting is allowed'.

The uniform edition of Canetti's works, symbolizing his acceptance as a canonical author, has now been enlarged by an assemblage of his occasional essays and speeches, along with a number of revealing dialogues and interviews that were originally often published in inaccessible places. Although this volume contains an index to the entire series, the edition is wisely called *Werke*, (Works), with no claim to completeness. Besides the two new volumes discussed here, we can be sure

Alison Scott-Baumann: Review of *Iris Murdoch: A Reassessment* edited by Anne Rowe (London: Palgrave, 2007, ISBN 0-230-00344-3)

This fine book is offered to us as a large hall of reflection, using Murdoch's own words to frame an interdisciplinary collection of essays. What does the book set out to do? Anne Rowe has brought together a strong cast to write about Murdoch and theology, philosophy and fiction. This, then, is an ambitious project and a much needed one, as Murdoch is famous for using different registers for different purposes; her philosophical writings are separate from her novels, and in interviews she often expressed herself more bluntly about feminism and gender, for example, than in her written texts. Her novels are rich embedded forms of debate on these subjects, yet with varied interpretations possible. These are some of the dilemmas to be faced, and here are some of the ways in which this anthology sets out to discuss them. Her narrative voices are male, so where does this place Murdoch as an emancipated female voice? Murdoch's thought inhabits a complex land where tension is created between philosophy, secular morality and religious belief, so how can we debate Murdoch's ideas such as unselfing? Murdoch denies the philosophical intentions of her novels, and yet they contain

daughter-in-law from Murdoch's essay *The Sovereignty of*

Alzheimer's disease, functions in the life of Hilary Burde as a repetition of mistakes with pathological

The Third International Conference on Iris Murdoch: Iris Murdoch:

panel dedicated to the reception of Murdoch's work in Spain yielded three cle

The Third Iris Murdoch Conference: A View from Japan

It was like a dream come true for me, to be able to attend an Internat

in *An Accidental Man*. Even stones and leaves reminded me of her novels. Cornwall Gardens, a little park in front of Murdoch's apartment, reminded me of a scene in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. While walking in the park we talked about personal matters, the previous lectures, books and Mark Patrick Hederman, who was as attractive as his speech. I remember a story I heard from a member about 'an episode with Iris': when her philosopher husband and she met at a restaurant for the first time, Iris's first words were 'Do you believe in God?' She said Iris was outstanding. After walking we had lunch at a restaurant near Gloucester Road station, where we celebrated the success of the conference and

Short Reviews and Notices

The following are short reviews of books tangentially related to Murdoch studies

Frances White on *A Life of H.L.A.Hart: The Nightmare and the Noble Dream* by Nicola Lacey (Oxford: OUP, 2004)

This biography of Herbert Hart (1907-1992) is of tangential interest to Murdoch scholars. Hart, who was Jewish, read Classics at New College, Oxford and, after practising as a Barrister (1932-40) and working with MI5, returned to New College to teach philosophy. In 1952 he was elected Professor of Jurisprudence at Oxford. Hart's wife, Jenifer (née Williams), was a colleague of Murdoch's at St Anne's College, but nothing merges from this connection in Lacey's biography. Murdoch is noted only twice in the index, as are Philippa Foot, Mary Warnock and Elizabeth Anscombe – John Bayley not at all.

Hart's complex character, self-doubt, and troubled sense of sexual identity, along with his Jewishness, offer similarities to many such characters in Murdoch's fiction, but nothing in this biography suggests any direct connection between Hart and Murdoch. The main point of interest from the Murdochian angle lies in the portrait Lacey paints of the Oxford 'Scene' during the era when Murdoch and her husband John Bayley were in their prime. This emerges clearly in Stefan Collins's review of *A Life of H.L.A.Hart*: 'we are dealing here with a prize example of an academic class at the apogee of its intellectual confidence and social standing, a case that cries out for exploration in historical and collective terms'. Collins finds 'the most interesting thought one may take away from the narrative is the empowering effect of an academic culture that was socially secure, politically liberal, and intellectually confident [...] a small group who set the pace in the subject that had the highest prestige in the university that took its pre-eminence for granted in a society that had an immense accumulation of self-confidence' (The Modern Law Review Limited, 2006, pp.108 & 112).

farewell gift to St Anne's on Murdoch's leaving the college in 1963. The painting shows Murdoch 'looking a little dishevelled with an absent, dreamy expression in front of a stormy sea, in which the bow of a ship can be seen'. Murdoch apparently saw the portrait before it was completed. She found it remarkably accurate, noting in her diary on 16 February 1964, 'I think it is wonderful, terrible, so sad and frightening, me with the demons. How did she know?'

Excerpt from 'The Man from Nowhere', by Peter J. Conradi, published in the *Guardian*, 3 February 2007

Concerning the writer H. E. Bates who lived in the same village, from around 1950, as John Bayley's parents in Kent

'When [H.E. Bates] was writing about Pop Larkin in *The Darling Buds of May* series, the youngest son of Bates's friends and neighbours the Bayleys, John, had married Iris Murdoch. The absurdly moth-eaten Brigadier in the Larkin chronicles is based on Murdoch's father-in-law Major Bayley, who liked watching cricket on HE's TV. There is even a dowdy blue-stocking named Iris Snow, "the oddest female [Pop] had ever seen in his life". This parody of Murdoch is painfully funny: she sports school-girl socks, a rough school-girl bob and an air of bloodless surprise, and is given to words like "ossuary" that Pop thinks *très* snob. She experiences difficulties aligning her breasts and is mad about relics, saints, and France itself. She alternates silence with sententious speeches. Bates rewards her francophilia with a French waiter. Murdoch had just won accolades, of a kind that now escaped him, for *The Bell*'.

Arin Fay has published a series of paintings on Writers & Texts which includes a piece depicting Iris Murdoch and Francis Marloe from *The Black Prince*. The work is accompanied by a short essay, both can be found on her website: <http://www.arinfay.ca/>, under Between the Lines.

Mariette Willensen has an essay, 'Impersonal Love: Murdoch and the Concept of Compassion' published in the forthcoming collection of essays *Mitleid (Passion and Compassion)* edited by Ingolf U. Dalferth (Tubingen: Mohr, 2007, ISBN 978-3-16-149430-7). This essay is based on the paper which Willemsen gave at the Third Iris Murdoch Conference (2006), and although some of the essays in this collection are in German, others, including Willemsen's, are in English. The publishers offer this description of the volume: 'Is compassion an emotion or a virtue? What characterizes a Christian understanding of compassion? What is its relation to the Passion of Christ, to mercy and to love for one's fellow human beings? The authors of this volume examine these issues from the perspective of cultural studies, philosophy and theology. In discussion with the Aristotelian definition of compassion, biblical traditions such as the story of the Good Samaritan and the views of Luther, Nietzsche, Bonhoeffer, Nussbaum, Murdoch, Roberts and Winch, among others, they attempt to delineate the complex landscape of the manifold uses of a controversial concept'.

Iris Murdoch's Holy Fool

The following letter was published in the New York Review of Books (12 April, 2007). It was written by Peter Conradi, in response to an article entitled 'Cracks in the House of Rove' by Jonathan Raban.

To the Editors:

In his recent fine review of Andrew Sullivan's *The Conservative Soul: How We Lost It, How to Get It Back* [NYR, 12 April] Jonathan Raban identifies the character of Hugo in Iris Murdoch's first published novel, *Under the Net* (1954), a holy fool, with Sullivan's mentor Michael Oakeshott. Murdoch herself thought she based Hugo on Wittgenstein's pupil Yorick Smythies (as I showed in *Iris Murdoch: A Life*, 2001). Her journals assert this; and when Smythies died in 1982 she even wrote this death into the novel she was then composing, *The Philosopher's Pupil*. Of course the character of Hugo could have composite origins, and the Oakeshott possibility is a novel one that would surely interest Murdoch admirers. Is Raban's source for this identification Sullivan himself?

Peter Conradi
London

Jonathan Raban replies:

I defer to Peter Conradi on this. My only source for suggesting that Hugo was based on Oakeshott is the Michael Oakeshott Association, on whose Web site an extract from *Under the Net* is published, along with the cautious speculation, 'Some of Oakeshott's friends and students believed the character of Hugo in this novel was based on Oakeshott'. Alerted by another reader, I checked the relevant pages of Conradi's biography of Murdoch, which convincingly show that Yorick Smythies is much the more likely candidate, although, as Conradi says, Hugo might be a 'composite', and firmly identifying fictional characters with real people is always a slippery business.

A Panel on Iris Murdoch

A Panel on Iris Murdoch entitled 'Reconstructing Space in Iris Murdoch's Novels' was held at the Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture since 1900, on Thursday 22 February, 2007. The panel was organized by Barbara Heusel, on behalf of the Iris Murdoch Society. The papers were: 'Murdoch's N-Game: Pointing Readers to Literary Analysis' (Barbara Heusel, Florida State University); 'Murdoch's Clastrum' (J.Robert Baker, Fairmont State University); 'London Landmarks in the Novels of Iris Murdoch' (Cheryl Bove, Ball State University) and "'An Area of Perpetual Seedy Brouhaha": Soho in *The Black Prince*' (Anne Rowe, Kingston University London).

Editorial

It is with great pleasure that the Iris Murdoch Society presents this first edition of the new *Iris Murdoch Review* which intends to build on the success of the former *Iris Murdoch News Letter*. The *News Letter* began in July 1987, and the first four issues were edited by Christine Ann Evans who was at Harvard and at Lesley College, Cambridge, Massachusetts. John Burke from the University of Alabama edited issues 5-8 which were published between 1991 and 1994, and Cheryl Bove took over as Editor for issue 9 in 1995. Peter Conradi joined the editorial team in 1996 as European Editor and Anne Rowe joined as Assistant Editor. In 1998 Peter Conradi became Consultant to the *News Letter* and Anne Rowe took over as European Editor with Cheryl Bove remaining as American Editor. In 2005 Professor Avril Horner joined as Consultant and Frances White became Assistant Editor. Cheryl Bove will now retire as American Editor but will remain on the Editorial Board of the *Iris Murdoch Review*. Peter Conradi and Avril Horner continue in their roles as Consultants, Anne Rowe as Editor and Frances White as Assistant Editor.

Thanks are due for the efforts of all those involved in the editing and production of all the past issues of the *News Letter*, but they should go particularly to Cheryl Bove, whose unstinting support and professionalism have been in no small measure

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http://fass.kingston.ac.uk/research/Iris_Murdoch/index.shtml