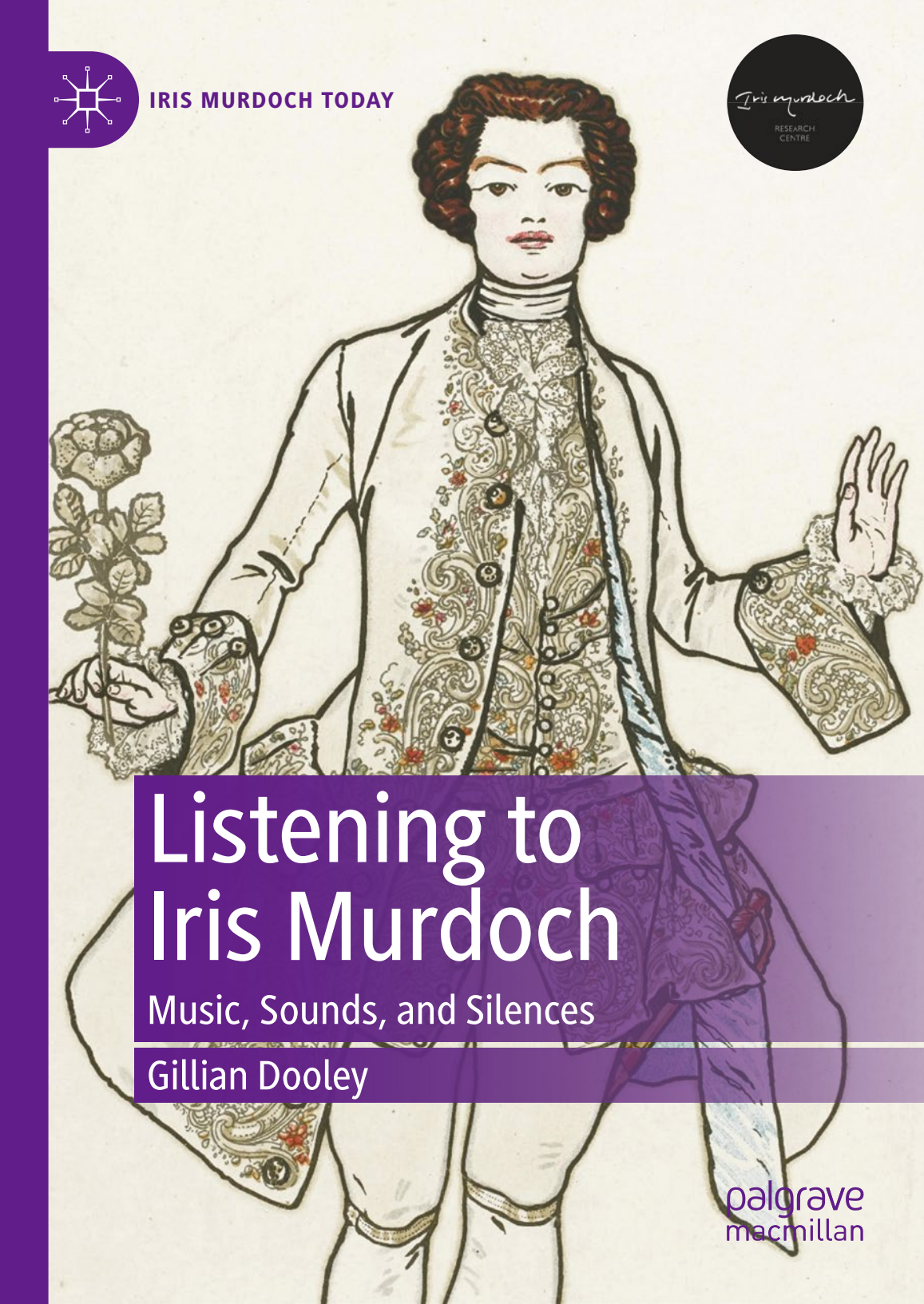
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RESEARCH CENTRE
Listening to
Iris Murdoch
Music, Sounds, and Silences
Gillian Dooley
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Iris Murdoch Today

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Gillian Dooley

Listening to Iris Murdoch

Music, Sounds, and Silences

palgrave
macmillan

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Foreword

The passion and pathos of orchestral music, the joys of communal singing and the power of the human voice itself, all so deeply embedded in Iris Murdoch's life and work, have been insufficiently remarked upon in Murdoch scholarship. Gillian Dooley's study of music, sounds and silences in Murdoch's novels remedies this loss, drawing the cacophony of sounds that haunts them out of the shadows onto centre stage. The result will delight not only seasoned Murdoch scholars but also more general readers with an interest in music.

Murdoch's inclusion of music to inform and expand the psychological scope of her novels must surely owe something to the emotional impact of music that was a defining feature of her childhood. Being the only child of a trained operatic singer, whose piano graced the family home at Eastbourne Road in Chiswick, her mother's beautiful soprano voice, singing the arias that she loved, would have echoed through the young Iris's early years. Her familiarity with music was enriched later in life through many friendships, in particular with the novelist and activist Brigid Brophy, with whom Murdoch discussed music ranging from the oratorios and operas of Mozart to the songs of the Rolling Stones and the Beatles. Her tastes were eclectic and music of all persuasion was to be enjoyed, devoured and debated.

Dooley casts her net wide here in the abundance of auditory influences she explores, not merely confining herself to musical allusion but also to the variety of other sounds—and silences—that saturate Murdoch's narratives. Some fascinating nuances of meaning occur on her journey, not least

her highlighting how the dynamics of musical performances shed fresh light on Murdoch's awareness of gender issues, pointing covertly towards divisive attitudes inherent in society. When Dooley's discussion deftly segues into formal concerns, she illustrates how evocations of sound contribute to the ways Murdoch's novels extend the formal boundaries of realist fiction, highlighting their still under-rated experimentation with the novel form.

As Dooley's discussions stretch out towards Murdoch's elicitation of accents, voice tones and silences in conversations between characters (even birdsong and animal noises are part of her repertoire), we learn how far auditory effects can work to provide more nuanced insights into the inner life of Murdoch's characters. As such, readers' subliminal dramatic and emotional engagements with the novels are intensified: 'If no sensory experience is present, no art is present', Murdoch has said. But Dooley is careful not to confine herself to rigid interpretations as she nudges the most seasoned Murdoch reader to be more curious about the role of sound and music in the novels, while inviting the ingenue reader to consider more closely what kind of novel they are reading. Her encouragement to *listen* more diligently to the acoustics within Murdoch's novels will entice readers, old and new, into reading Murdoch's novels quite differently, releasing them from the confines of conventional realism.

The lists of archival resources and appendices that conclude Dooley's book are inspirational in themselves as they reveal the range of Murdoch's impressive musicality and accomplishments: her work with established musicians, her role as a librettist and the musical enterprises her novels have inspired will surprise the most well-informed aficionado. However, it would be remiss not to pay tribute also here to the impressive strength of Gillian Dooley's own musicality and accomplishments which have enriched every page of this fine study.

Visiting Professor, University of Chichester
Emeritus Research Fellow with the Iris Murdoch
Archive Project, Kingston University

Anne Rowe

Acknowledgements

A project like this relies on the support, cooperation and generosity of many people. Much of this research has been presented at the regular Iris Murdoch conferences at Kingston University and more recently Chichester University, and the discussions, formal and informal, at those occasions have been invaluable. In particular, I have to thank Frances White, Miles Leeson and Anne Rowe for encouraging me to write this book. Miles and Frances have been warm and supportive as series editors, and Anne has been most kind in writing the Foreword, by which I am deeply honoured and flattered. I am grateful to Elin Svenneby, David Robjant and Melinda Graefe for detailed and expert commentary on specific parts of the book. The Iris Murdoch Appreciation Society (IMAS) on Facebook is a wonderful resource and meeting place, and IMAS member Caroline Meehan kindly alerted me to some material about the myth of Apollo and Marsyas and Murdoch's allusions to it.

I also must acknowledge the essential help of Kingston University archivists Katie Giles and Dayna Miller for their help in accessing the Iris Murdoch archives, including making me aware of various interesting items. They have supported me both on site and at a great distance when I was unable to travel from Australia to complete my research. Dayna has also helped me with permission to quote from unpublished sources. I would also like to thank my former colleagues at Flinders University Library who have obtained many publications for me via inter-library loan.

"Chapter 7: 'Just Bring Me the Composers': Musical Settings of Iris Murdoch's Words" chapter is largely about pieces of music which are not

publicly available in either recordings or scores, some of which I was initially unaware of. I am extremely grateful to Maria Peacock, who alerted me to Gary Carpenter's setting of *The one alone*. I was then able to get in contact with Gary. Similarly, Dayna Miller told me about Christopher Bochmann's cantata *The round horizon*. Both Gary and Christopher have been extraordinarily helpful, providing recordings and other information about their compositions.

Another fruitful line of enquiry came via David Cole, with whom I had discussed the difficulties I was having finding anything concrete about Malcolm Williamson's setting of *A year of birds*. David put me in touch with Oliver Soden, whose recent biography of Michael Tippett he had read, in case he could help me with contacts related to Williamson. Oliver kindly referred me to Paul Harris, the biographer of Williamson, and also Thomas Hyde, author of a forthcoming book on William Mathias, the composer of the opera *The servants*. Paul and Thomas in turn were extremely helpful and generous with their time and resources.

I had been in touch with Paul Crabtree at the time of the premiere of his work *Forgive me*, when he sent me a copy of the score. I contacted him again when I was writing about the musical settings. We have since had a series of fascinating email exchanges, not just about his setting of Murdoch's words, but more generally about choosing and setting texts for vocal works. These discussions have greatly enhanced my understanding of this difficult art and I am grateful for his detailed engagement with my sometimes incoherent queries.

The Iris Murdoch Centenary Conference at St Anne's College, Oxford, was an extraordinary three days of fellowship, discussion, words and music. The convenors, Miles Leeson and Frances White, indulged me, not for the first time, in my scheme to organise a concert of 'Words and Music for Iris'. Kent Wennman played two of his own powerful songs written in dialogue with Murdoch's philosophy and fiction, and he has kindly provided more background to his work so I can include it in my discussion of music inspired by Murdoch. And last but absolutely not least, Paul Hullah, the world expert on Murdoch's poetry and himself a wonderful poet and musician, has provided me with detailed background to the two poems he performed (with backing tracks) at our concert. Paul has allowed me to reprint one of his poems in full. He also sparked my interest in Murdoch's lesser-known works—poetry still unpublished, as well as his seminal collection of Murdoch's poems published in Japan in 1997, co-edited with the late Yozo Muroya.

Praise for *Listening to Iris Murdoch*

"In a study that fills a significant gap in Murdoch scholarship, Gillian Dooley explores music and sound in Iris Murdoch's novels by means of the symphonies, songs, sounds and settings that adorn them. This book will not only enrich the meaning of the novels, but also intensify the enjoyment of reading them. A pleasure to read."

—Anne Rowe, Visiting Professor, *University of Chichester*; Emeritus Research Fellow with the Iris Murdoch Archive Project, *Kingston University*

"With an impressive overview, Gillian Dooley in this highly readable and deeply interesting book picks out and shows her readers how different sounds have deeper meaning in Iris Murdoch's fiction, setting the tone for a situation, hinting to a character trait in a figure or creating a special atmosphere. We discover how music, sounds and silences are profound elements in Murdoch's endeavour to create and embody her characters. And yet, so far little critical attention has been devoted to what her novels *sound* like and the importance of the auditive aspects of her central concept of a 'just and loving attention.'

This book is firmly based in the author's deep and long personal interest in and experience with music, poetry, singing—and Iris Murdoch. Dooley gives fresh and often surprising comments on fictive characters in the novels from different decades in 'Murdoch-world', noticing the pleasure of music and other sounds as well as the pain of silenced voices. Readers once alerted and attuned to the sounds implied in Murdoch's novels, will not only come to understand more completely the complex effects of her narratives and the philosophy within them, but will find a new key to their own lifeworlds as well."

—Elin Svenneby, Former Associate Professor, *University of Tromsoe, Norway*

"*Listening to Iris Murdoch's* focus on the sonic, which in literary criticism is often treated like a poor relation to the visual, is most welcome. Through perceptive close readings, Gillian Dooley uses the lens of music, sound and silence to draw out gender, sexuality, Irish politics, domestic conflict and much more in Murdoch's novels. Her critical landscape is populated with fascinating unplayed pianos, nationalistic songs and operatic cross-dressing. This detailed and well-written book also discusses musical settings of Murdoch's words and includes a comprehensive inventory of allusions to music in her work. It will delight Murdoch fans but will also be of great interest to those who are attentive to sound studies and the relationship of music to literature."

—Hazel Smith, Author of *The Contemporary Literature-Music Relationship*, Emeritus Professor, *Writing and Society Research Centre, Western Sydney University*

"The centrality of art in many forms to Iris Murdoch's philosophy and fiction is striking and illuminating. For Murdoch herself, songs and singing were a major source of joy in her life. In this sensitive and insightful analysis of music and Iris Murdoch, Gillian Dooley certainly broadens the field of Murdoch scholarship but also demonstrates the rich and beautiful possibilities when one opens one's eyes, heart, mind and ears to the lyricism, musicality, and silences in Murdoch's work."

—Lucy Bolton, Author of *Contemporary Cinema and the Philosophy of Iris Murdoch* (2019)

"This book is an important contribution to Iris Murdoch studies. Murdoch is a truly musical writer, not only in the rhythms and textures of her novels, but the way music itself sounds within her narratives.

Gillian Dooley explores the fascinating relationship of sound, silence and music in Murdoch's output as well as her collaborations and relationships with composers. This book will be treasured by admirers of Murdoch's work and musicians alike."

—Thomas Hyde, Composer, *Worcester College, Oxford*

Contents

About the Author

Gillian Dooley is an honorary senior research fellow at Flinders University in South Australia. She has had her work published widely on Iris Murdoch, as well as other authors such as Jane Austen, V.S. Naipaul and J.M. Coetzee. She is the editor/co-editor of *From a tiny corner in the house of fiction: conversations with Iris Murdoch* (2003); *Never mind about the bourgeoisie: the correspondence between Iris Murdoch and Brian Medlin* (2014; pbk 2019) and *Reading Iris Murdoch's Metaphysics as a guide to morals* (Palgrave Macmillan 2019). She is also an active musician, and organised and performed in a musical evening for the Iris Murdoch Centenary Conference in Oxford in July 2019. Email: gillian.dooley@flinders.edu.au

Abbreviations—Fictional Works by Iris Murdoch[1]

AM	*An accidental man* (1971; Triad Grafton, 1979)
B	*The bell* (1958; Penguin Classics, 2001)
BB	*The book and the brotherhood* (1987; Chatto and Windus, 1987)
BD	*Bruno's dream* (1969; World Books by arrangement with Chatto and Windus, 1970)
BP	*The black prince* (1973; Book Club by arrangement with Chatto and Windus, 1974)
FE	*The flight from the enchanter* (1956; Penguin, 1962)
FHD	*A fairly honourable defeat* (1970; Penguin, 1972)
GA	*The good apprentice* (1985; Chatto and Windus, 1985)
GK	*The green knight* (1993; Penguin, 1994)
HC	*Henry and Cato* (1976; Penguin, 1977)
IG	*The Italian girl* (1964; Penguin, 1967)
JD	*Jackson's dilemma* (1995; Chatto and Windus, 1995)
MP	*The message to the planet* (1989; Penguin, 1990)
NG	*The nice and the good* (1968; Penguin, 1969)
NS	*Nuns and soldiers* (1980; Penguin, 1981)
PP	*The philosopher's pupil* (1983: Penguin, 1984)
RG	*The red and the green* (1965; Chatto and Windus, 1965)
S	*The sandcastle* (1957; The Reprint Society by arrangement with Chatto and Windus, 1959)

[1] This list gives the initials used for each work's in-text references; the title of the book; the year of first publication; the edition used in references in this book.

SPLM	*The sacred and profane love machine* (1974; Penguin, 1976)
SS	'Something special' (1957; *Winter's tales*, no. 3, 1957, 175–204)
SH	*A severed head* (1961; Penguin, 1963)
TA	*The time of the angels* (1966; Penguin, 1968)
TSTS	*The sea, the sea* (1978; Triad Granada, 1980)
U	*The unicorn* (1963; Penguin, 1966)
UN	*Under the net* (1954; The Reprint Society by arrangement with Chatto and Windus, 1955)
UR	*An unofficial rose* (1962; The Reprint Society by arrangement with Chatto and Windus, 1964)
WC	*A word child* (1976; Viking, 1975)

Chapter 1: Listening to Iris Murdoch

Introduction

Writing about music in the fiction of Iris Murdoch is often an exercise in noticing particulars, easily overlooked; of attending to glancing references or passing remarks, or of investigating narrative mysteries. In some cases, these hints and mysteries remain opaque—to me, at least—but in other cases, intriguing discoveries can be made by following these threads. Music is rarely foregrounded in Murdoch's novels, but there are several significant characters who are musicians or music-lovers—or distinctly unmusical. Asking oneself what music and musicianship means to these characters and those around them, and listening for the various resonances in the novels (be those express or implied), opens up new dimensions of understanding and appreciation for readers.

When I began this project, music itself—either heard, referred to or performed—was my focus. However, as I re-read the novels with this in mind, I found myself hearing their broader soundscapes, or sound-worlds, including the silences. In her book *Hearing things: The work of sound in literature*, Angela Leighton writes,

> The silent page may become a trove of riches or a Pandora's box, but either way, there is such a complex orchestration of noises in it, such a 'roar' within

G. Dooley, *Listening to Iris Murdoch*, Iris Murdoch Today,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-00860-3_1

> its silence, that to read without listening for those noises might be to miss much of what literature is about.[1]

What literature is 'about' might mean different things to different readers, but for her part, Murdoch said in an interview with Bryan Magee,

> Literature could be called a disciplined technique for arousing certain emotions. … The sensuous nature of art is involved here, the fact that it is concerned with visual and auditory sensations and bodily sensations. If nothing sensuous is present no art is present.[2]

She was concerned in that interview to clarify both the similarities and differences between philosophical writing and literature, both of which she practised extensively:

> Though they are so different, philosophy and literature are both truth-seeking and truth-revealing activities. They are cognitive activities, explanations. Literature, like other arts, involves exploration, classification, discrimination, organised vision. Of course good literature does not look like 'analysis' because what the imagination produces is sensuous, fused, reified, mysterious, ambiguous, particular. Art is cognition in another mode.[3]

As Nora Hämäläinen, points out, Murdoch's conception of the 'philosophical labour' of literature is 'explorative' rather than 'rhetorical':

> Literature is a lesson in how to picture and understand; it teaches us how to engage in the fundamental moral activity of making sense of the world, richly, at multiple levels, and yet aware of our own limitations. But it does not, primarily, give us philosophical answers or illustrate philosophical positions.[4]

Murdoch, while being a highly intellectual novelist, is also a great chronicler of the material textures of the world in which her characters

[1] Angela Leighton, *Hearing things: The work of sound in literature* (Cambridge [Mass.]: Belknap Press, 2018), 25.

[2] Iris Murdoch, 'Literature and philosophy: A conversation with Bryan Magee' in *Existentialists and mystics: writings on philosophy and literature* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997), 3–30; 10.

[3] Murdoch, 'Literature and philosophy', 10–11.

[4] Nora Hämäläinen, *Literature and moral theory* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 168.

exist. I suspect that Murdoch's deployment of sounds, which forms part of her poetics, adds to her enduring popularity with readers even though they might not be consciously listening while they read, or be aware that what they are reading is 'a lesson in how to picture and understand'.

Later in the Magee interview, Murdoch said: 'We have so many *kinds* of relation to a work of art. A literary work is an extremely heterogeneous object which demands an open-minded heterogeneous response.'[5] Her own novels offer so much, with their idiosyncratic blend of compelling plots, memorable characters and philosophical sophistication conveyed in supple, richly textured and sensuous prose, that there are many ways of reading them with enjoyment and appreciation. Her skill at plotting can make one read swiftly, but there is much to be gained from slowing down one's reading enough to notice the details.

Music and Sound in Fiction: A Review of the Field

There has only been one monograph to date that has considered the sonic elements of Murdoch's work in detail, and that is Darlene D. Mettler's *Sound and sense: musical allusion and imagery in the novels of Iris Murdoch* (1991). This book-length study of music in Murdoch's work does not consider other aspects of Murdoch's sound-worlds. Although it has some fine features, it contains several mistakes and what seem to me to be overly schematic interpretations. It was, however, a ground-breaking work in its time, and Peter Conradi writes, in his Foreword to Anne Rowe's book *The visual arts and the novels of Iris Murdoch*:

> It seems extraordinary that Darlene Mettler's study of musical allusion preceded Dr Anne Rowe's *Salvation by Art*: Dame Iris's love of the visual arts goes back into her youth, while her feeling for music developed late.[6]

I would say that a 'feeling for music' also went back into her youth, although a more intellectual grasp of music certainly came later in her life, as will be shown below.

In suggesting the importance of sound in Murdoch's fiction, I am not implying that she is unique. Literary soundscapes have a long history.

[5] Murdoch, 'Literature and philosophy', 24.

[6] Peter Conradi, 'Foreword' in Anne Rowe, *The visual arts and the novels of Iris Murdoch* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2002), vii-viii.

Murdoch was very conscious of being part of a tradition of novel-writing which she saw as beginning with Jane Austen, and including other writers such as Charles Dickens, Emily Brontë, Leo Tolstoy and Marcel Proust. Austen does not strike one as a particularly sensuous novelist: when her world becomes tangible, visible or audible it is usually something of a surprise. However, as the nineteenth-century novel developed, it became more audible. John Picker, in *Victorian soundscapes*, details the many ways in which Victorian novelists heard their world and conveyed the noises they heard to their readers. He dates a change from Dickens's 1840s novel *Dombey and son*, 'a novel dominated by and absorbed with the effects and intelligibility of sounds and voices'.[7] Picker notes the importance of the railways for Dickens: 'the train represents an expressive ideal. Its furious speed, sound and power allow for an immediacy and dynamism that Dickens the author longs to possess in language.'[8] Technological developments—railways, factories, mechanisation of all kinds—throughout the period were, of course, an important influence on all the arts. *Sounding modernism* deals with the new world emerging from the Victorian era. Its editor's introduction proposes:

> [F]ew would contest that 'representing' sound becomes a more complex process in the wake of the invention of 'modern things' such as the phonograph, the telephone, radio and the talkies; a process that means that it is impossible to separate the representation of sound from the mediation of sound.[9]

No-one could accuse Murdoch of a Modernist sensibility or approach to ethics. However, the technological trappings of Modernism listed above are very much of Murdoch's pre-digital world—the gramophone, the landline telephone, the wireless radio; even television scarcely makes its presence felt, and computers not at all. It is striking, though, that when music is heard in her novels, it is reproduced electronically as often as it is played or sung live.

What seems 'old-fashioned' to a current reader of Murdoch's novels is really the modernity of her youth and middle years—bearing in mind, of

[7] John Picker, *Victorian soundscapes* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 17.

[8] Picker, *Victorian soundscapes*, 27.

[9] *Sounding modernism: Rhythm and sonic mediation in modern literature and film*, ed. Julian Murphet, Helen Groth and Penelope Hone (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 9–10.

course, that the radical changes in technology which have engulfed us since her writing career drew to a close in the early 1990s make that era seem even further in the past. Murdoch often expressed her disapproval of Modernism and the 'art for art's sake' doctrine that the Modernists were thought to endorse, although it had arisen during the Romantic era of the early nineteenth century. Frances White argues convincingly that 'Murdoch's suspicion of [Virginia] Woolf derives from associating her with the unethical aesthetic which was at that time commonly thought prevalent in Modernism in general and Bloomsbury in particular'.[10]

Stephen Benson, in his book *Literary music: Writing music in contemporary fiction*, writes that 'the incorporation of music into the narrative text is everywhere a matter of tropes and figures: of voice, song, silence, absence', and goes on, 'Close reading of the language of literary music is thus a necessity, however much such a critical practice has fallen out of favour.'[11] I agree, but feel no need to apologise for continuing in that critical tradition. Close reading is one element of that 'open-minded heterogeneous response'[12] which Murdoch believed was demanded by a work of art: 'criticism must remain free to work at a level where it can judge truth in art.'[13] There is, of course, room for many critical and theoretical approaches in the study of literature and music. I concur with Murdoch that in undertaking criticism, I am 'better off without any close-knit systematic background theory, scientific or philosophical'.[14] As Hazel Smith writes, 'Post-Benson, I think we can afford to be more relaxed about the formalism-culturalism divide within musico-literary discourse and adopt a multifarious range of approaches.'[15]

[10] Frances White, '"Despite herself": The resisted influence of Virginia Woolf on Iris Murdoch's fiction' in *Iris Murdoch connected: Critical essays on her fiction and philosophy*, ed. Mark Luprecht (Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 2014), 12.

[11] Stephen Benson, *Literary music: Writing music in contemporary fiction* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 10.

[12] Murdoch, 'Literature and philosophy', 24.

[13] Murdoch, 'Literature and philosophy', 26.

[14] Murdoch, 'Literature and philosophy', 24.

[15] Hazel Smith, *The contemporary literature-music relationship: Intermedia, voice, technology, cross-cultural exchange* (Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 5.

Music in Murdoch's Life

This study is focused on music and sound in Murdoch's literary writing. However, music also occupied an important place in her life and her philosophical writings.

Composer Malcolm Williamson reports that, 'deny it though she may, Iris herself is a delightful mezzo-soprano'.[16] I am not aware of any recordings of her singing, although recordings of her speaking voice reveal that it is rich and musical, with the hint of an Irish lilt. Yozo Muroya writes, in his 'Biographical introduction' to *Poems by Iris Murdoch*, that music was 'something of a passion' for Murdoch,

> though she refers to it less often than to painting in her writing. … Murdoch is in fact a very musical person; her mother … had trained to be an opera singer before she married and her own fine singing voice would seem to indicate that she inherited her mother's musical talent.[17]

Murdoch recounts that when she first went to Oxford she assumed that she would be able to join the Bach Choir,

> but they asked if I could sight-read, and I said 'No', and they didn't even hear me sing! That caused me such rage! I moped about it for a very long time. I suppose I *might* have gone away and learned to sight-read.[18]

Murdoch's correspondence with her friend Brigid Brophy is an important source of information about her musical knowledge and interests. Her letter to Brophy of 17 February 1963 confirms that, despite her interest in and attraction to music, she had not received much systematic musical training as part of her otherwise excellent education. Murdoch wrote, in response to a letter that does not survive: 'thanks for your nice letter with educational suggestions. I possess a record of *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* but of course no score. I am not sure that I desire to know how to read a score, though it is just possible that I desire to desire to know how to read

[16] Malcolm Williamson, 'Sir Malcolm Williamson writes about his adaptation of *A year of birds*,' *Iris Murdoch news letter*, 9 [Autumn] (1995): 3.

[17] Yozo Muroya, 'Biographical introduction' in *Poems by Iris Murdoch*, ed. Yozo Muroya and Paul Hullah (Okayama: University Education Press, 1997), 22.

[18] Shena Mackay, 'When Shena met Iris,' *Independent Magazine* (11 September 1993): 42.

a score.'[19] Brophy was a particular devotee of the music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and in 1964 published *Mozart the dramatist: A new view of Mozart, his operas and his age*. Many of the references to music in Murdoch's correspondence are in her letters to Brophy. Her influence might be traced in the fact that Mozart is the most frequently mentioned composer in all of Murdoch's novels (see Appendix A). Two 1950s editions of the libretto of Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*, presumably acquired in the context of her friendship with Brophy, are among the music books in the Iris Murdoch Archive at Kingston University. Both are in Italian, and one also includes an English translation.

The sheet music collection in the Archive, listed in Appendix B, provides interesting (but inevitably inconclusive) evidence of Murdoch's own knowledge about music. A good deal of it consists of popular sentimental songs from the 1920s and 1930s. I suspect most of these belonged to her mother Irene, some of them being inscribed with her name. Murdoch often mentions in interviews that her mother was a singer. There are also a few volumes of part songs in the collection—the *Handel school song book* and *Eight madrigals by Elizabethan composers*, arranged for soprano and alto voices—presumably from girls' choral singing during Murdoch's school days. There are French songs from the 1940s, including four albums of songs by Charles Trenet (she spoke in 1990 about 'My Paris in the 1940s', which meant, among other things, Edith Piaf and the *Compagnons de la Chanson*[20]) and some other European folk music. There is a good deal of Irish music, too, from both sides of that divided society, including the songs of Percy French. One item that stands out is *The left song book*, published by the Workers' Music Association and the Left Book Club Musicians' Group. This book is inscribed 'Iris Murdoch Party Summer School July 1939'.

The most personal part of the music collection is a series of handwritten notebooks, titled *Make a joyful noise*, containing the words (and sometimes music) of a miscellany of favourite songs, often annotated with a friend's name. These notebooks show that Murdoch had an active interest in collecting songs and sharing them with friends. Many of these songs

[19] Iris Murdoch, 'Letter to Brigid Brophy, 17 February 1963' in *Living on paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934–1995*, ed. Avril Horner and Anne Rowe (London: Chatto and Windus, 2015), 239.

[20] John Russell, 'Under Iris Murdoch's exact, steady gaze,' *New York Times* (22 February 1990): 20. *Les Compagnons de la Chanson* was a French vocal group from Lyon founded during the Second World War.

stayed with her and some surface in the novels. *The little turtle dove* was copied during the immediate post-war years, and makes an appearance decades later in *The message to the planet*. The words of this song are in *Make a joyful noise II*, with four bars of music and a note reading 'Hal. Chez Janie Aug 17. 1947'.[21] The Percy French song *Whistling Phil McHugh*, the words of which are written on two pieces of paper headed 'Canadian Pacific—Empress of England', appears in both *The message to the planet* and *The green knight*.

Another manuscript notebook labelled 'Miscellaneous Songs—Songs Bolshevik and Otherwise from the Party Summer School, July 4–12th 1939' includes an Australian lyric, *The great Australian adjective*, which is a humorous poem by W.T. Goodge, annotated 'Comrade Weaver's Song'. Another two manuscripts caught my eye because they are Australian (like me): are the words to A.B. Paterson's *Waltzing Matilda*, which is not annotated with a friend's name but includes corrections in another hand,[22] and six verses of *The ballad of '91* ('The price of wool was falling / In 1891 …'), which is annotated at the end 'From Brian Medlin, March 1962, chez M'.[23] A love of singing was one thing that Murdoch and Medlin shared. Their correspondence is peppered with her memories of Medlin singing in Oxford, and her letters often close with the hope that he was writing poetry and singing, or that they could meet and sing together again. Regretfully, she wrote in the late 1980s, 'Singing seems to have gone out here.'[24]

In her 1989 interview with Shena Mackay, her favourite kinds of songs are listed: 'madrigals, folk songs, popular songs and hits from musicals of the Twenties and Thirties.'[25] In all, this miscellany of music confirms that she was a lover of singing, and she grew up in a home where singing was a natural part of family life. Most of it is vocal music of various kinds. It

[21] Kingston University Library, IML 1310 (notebook MS 'Make a Joyful Noise II'). 'Hal' is presumably Hal Lidderdale.

[22] Kingston University Library, IML 1118 (notebook MS 'Make a Joyful Noise I').

[23] Kingston University Library, IML 1310 (notebook MS 'Make a Joyful Noise II'). 'M' might possibly be Margaret Hubbard, another South Australian based in Oxford, as Brian Medlin was at that time. The words of this ballad were written by Helen Palmer in 1950, and it concerns the historic shearer's strike in Queensland in 1891.

[24] Iris Murdoch and Brian Medlin, *Never mind about the Bourgeoisie: The correspondence between Iris Murdoch and Brian Medlin 1976–1995* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2014), 75.

[25] Shena Mackay, 'A fabulous story-teller,' *Woman's Journal* (July 1989), 36–40; 38.

includes many of the songs which she mentions in the novels. She continued to acquire the occasional volume during her early adulthood, but there is no music published later than 1963. A catalogue of Murdoch's record collection is not publicly available, but she told Mackay that she typically spent the early evening 'listening to records or music on the radio, nothing post-Bartok, while John prepares the dinner'.[26] Her 'desert island disc' would be a late Beethoven string quartet.[27]

The silver swan is mentioned in four of Murdoch's novels. John Bayley relates a moving anecdote from her last years:

> [A]t a talk she was due to give in Oxford about her work, instead of discussing her novels Iris stood up and 'smiled sweetly and began to sing an Elizabethan madrigal by Orlando Gibbons called 'The Silver Swan'.[28]

With the purity of its melody, allied with the stark pessimism of the lyrics ('Farewell all joys, oh death come close mine eyes / More geese than swans now live, more fools than wise'), this celebrated song has unlimited capacity to convey melancholy and longing, as her decision to deploy it in novels from *The bell* to *The green knight* shows. But the song was obviously embedded in Murdoch's memory, no doubt from an early age, as it appears in the book of madrigals she kept in her music collection all her life.

Discussions of Music in Murdoch's Philosophy

Murdoch does not say a great deal about music in her philosophical works. When she does, it is often as part of a summary or discussion of the philosophy of other thinkers, usually either Plato or Schopenhauer. It seems likely that this is because music, for her, is not a puzzle to be solved: literature and painting were far more of a preoccupation in relation to her philosophical thought and writing.[29] In her 1978 essay 'Art is the imitation of nature' she writes, 'Music—and it has been said that all arts aspire to the condition of music (I am not sure whether they do or not)—music

[26] Shena Mackay, 'A fabulous story-teller,' 39.

[27] Shena Mackay, 'A fabulous story-teller,' 40.

[28] Tim Adams, 'Marriage made in heaven,' *The Guardian* (18 March 2001), https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/mar/18/biography.irismurdoch.

[29] I am indebted to David Robjant for this insight, and also for extensive and thoughtful feedback on this section of the Introduction.

doesn't seem to imitate nature except in some rather trivial sense.'[30] In the ensuing discussion she concentrates almost entirely on the representational arts—painting and especially literature—and proposes that 'the old-fashioned mimetic paradigm is still a good one whereby to understand the artist' (*EM* 255), without returning to consider the place of music in this paradigm.

In *Salvation by words* (1972), she includes Bach among her examples of the great artists—'If we wish to exhibit to ourselves the unpretentious, un-bogus, piercing lucidity of which art is capable we may think of certain pictures, certain music (Bach, Piero). Or we may think of a use of words by Homer or Shakespeare.' Following this concession, she goes on: 'But there is no doubt which art is the most practically important for our survival and our salvation, and that is literature' (EM 240–241). This is a continuing thread throughout her philosophy: in *Sublime and the good* (1959) she had written, 'The highest art is not music, as Schopenhauer, who was not very concerned with particular human beings, imagined, but as I said earlier, tragedy, because its subject-matter is the most important and individual that we know' (EM 218). As we will see below, she did return to consider Schopenhauer's ideas about music more fully in later years.

In *The sovereignty of good over other concepts* (1970), she writes,

> The good artist, in relation to his art, is brave, truthful, patient, humble; and even in non-representational art we may receive intuitions of these qualities. One may also suggest, more cautiously, that non-representational art does seem to express more positively something to do with virtue. The spiritual role of music has often been acknowledged, though theorists have been chary of analysing it. However that might be, the representational arts, which more evidently hold the mirror up to nature, seem to be concerned with morality in a way which is not simply an effect of our intuition of the artist's discipline.[31]

Her cautious nod in the direction of music's moral and spiritual worth is perhaps counteracted by the stronger claim of the other arts to a more manifest usefulness for the moral life of those who encounter them.

[30] Iris Murdoch, 'Art is the imitation of nature' in *Existentialists and mystics*, 243–244.

[31] Iris Murdoch, 'The sovereignty of good over other concepts' in *Existentialists and mystics*, 370–371.

However, in her 1976 book *The fire and the sun*, Murdoch wrote (paraphrasing Plato's *Laws*):

> For us, only play is 'serious' since we are playthings of the gods. Thus art (music) is valuable as an aid to divine grace (803). (These are deep words about the nature of play, religion, and art.) (EM 440)

Plato speaks of music and dance, and in paraphrasing it as 'art (music)', Murdoch comprehends it in the broader category of the arts in general, though this could be a shorthand way of indicating the ancient Greeks' broader and more integrated concepts of the arts, where 'music' might equate to *mousikē (technē)*—'(art) of the Muses'—rather than the composition and performance of music as we would understand it.

In *Metaphysics as a guide to morals*, Murdoch revisits Schopenhauer and for the first time writes about him at some length, showing a particular interest in his ideas about music in relation to the other arts: 'Music is the most powerful of the arts, not expressing Ideas, but acting directly upon the Will, that is the emotions of the hearer. … When the elements of the melody are disunited we feel uneasy, when they are reconciled we are at peace.' She comments that 'this account is of course delightful'[32] and talks several times about this idea of music 'coming home'. Similarly, she observes that 'Music which pleases by doing what we expect … may also please us by failing to do so',[33] although 'later twentieth-century music, it may be said, draws attention to our desire for satisfaction by refusing to give it' (60). She complains: 'Much modern music (post-Schoenberg) defeats our old-fashioned wish for the melody to "come home"' (87).

She also contrasts, in sympathy with Adorno, the 'golden age of bourgeois society which produced the great humanistic art of Beethoven' with late capitalism: 'Why no great novels now, why no great pictures, why no great music?' (*MGM* 372). But the great art of the past retains its power:

> Art too has traditionally been, for artist and client, a space opened for individuals; and when we are frightened by prophecies we may be reassured by the substantial being of works of art. Critics who dismiss the nineteenth-century novel and even sneer at Shakespeare do not yet abandon Mozart. Schopenhauer was right to treat music as a special case. (162)

[32] Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a guide to morals* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1992), 59–60.

[33] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 4.

One might note that Mozart has borne his share of contempt over the years, although his stocks are now high again. In any event, Murdoch seems to have come around to Schopenhauer's view of music 'as a special case', although this does not amount to a concession of music's pre-eminence. This might be partly explained by what she told Tom Sutcliffe in 1980:

> I understand music less than I understand literature and painting. I know what literature and painting are, and there's a kind of calmness in my relation to them as well as strong emotion. With music there's just emotion really. But just listening to music makes your body respond in a way to which there isn't quite a parallel in literature and painting … I would find it very difficult to discuss a complex musical piece and say just what it was and why I liked it.[34]

It is notable that in Murdoch's discussions of the arts, the two figures that recur are the creator and the 'client' who encounters the art work: in the case of music in the modern age, the composer and the listener. However, since at least the eighteenth century there is often a third figure involved, that of the performer of existing compositions. It seems odd that, as someone who enjoyed singing, Murdoch did not contemplate in her philosophical writing the effects of performing—embodying—music on the musician, while in her novels there are few characters who are composers, while several are performers. In "Chapter 2: 'The Music Is Too Painful': Music as Character and Atmosphere" chapter I include a discussion of the legend of Apollo and Marsyas, a famous and significant example of a musical performer who suffers for his art.

The Sound-Worlds in Murdoch's Fiction

Howard Moss concludes his wide-ranging appreciation of Murdoch's novels with a musical metaphor:

> [P]art of the effect of these books is their wild extensiveness, their overexpansion, as if a mind too inventive to stop, an imagination too replete with images to let go, an intelligence that still has something further to say on the

[34] Tom Sutcliffe, 'Iris Murdoch, philosopher and novelist, has now written a libretto of an opera. She talks to Tom Sutcliffe about the magic of music and theatre,' *The Guardian* (15 September 1980): 9.

> subject could not quite hear the end of the score, that resounding final chord that would let the whole tray of wonders slide off her lap.[35]

Despite the sensuality of Murdoch's writing that Moss implies, and her frequent close attention to the sonic details of the world her characters inhabit, Darlene Mettler's monograph mentioned above is the only detailed study of music in Murdoch's work until now, and there has been no attempt to study other aspects of her sound-world in any depth. I will draw on Murdoch's complete fictional oeuvre throughout this book, but the general discussion will be supported by close readings of selected works to show the various ways she deploys music, sounds and silence in her fiction.

"Chapter 2: 'The Music Is Too Painful': Music as Character and Atmosphere" concerns music in the most straightforward sense. I discuss how Murdoch uses music, musicianship and specific composers or musical works to evoke or intensify a particular atmosphere or to hint at narrative mysteries. Although this chapter does not try to be comprehensive—the four novels I have chosen were all written within a few years in the 1960s—each of these works shows a different aspect of Murdoch's engagement with music in her narrative practice. A song sits at the very centre of *The unicorn*, and I discuss the way it reverberates throughout the novel. In the tense and divided world of 1916 Dublin in *The red and the green*, music almost always has a potent political or religious meaning for the characters, while in *The time of the angels* the sinister Carel Fischer's love of Tchaikovsky pervades the novel, adding both texture and meaning. And in *The nice and the good*, several characters are partly defined by their attitudes to music, and music often plays a part in their interactions with each other.

"Chapter 3: 'The Point at Which Flesh and Spirit Most Joyfully Meet': Singers and Singing" looks specifically at singers and singing. Murdoch often mentioned her love of singing in interviews and letters, but few of her central characters are singers. Nevertheless, singing is often heard, described and remembered in the novels, and it can play a significant role in plots, characterisation and atmosphere. From Anna's heart-breaking contralto in *Under the net* to Lizzie's 'thin true tone' in *The sea, the sea*, male characters are drawn to female singers. In *The black prince*, Bradley finds the 'sound of women's voices singing' at Covent Garden

[35] Howard Moss, 'Narrow escapes: Iris Murdoch,' *Grand Street* 6, 1 [Autumn] (1986), 228–240; 240.

'vilely almost murderously gorgeous' and his reaction is literally visceral. In *The message to the planet*, the fact that the quartet of musical men 'didn't let the women sing' turns out to be surprisingly important, in a way perhaps not unrelated to Emmanuel Scarlett-Taylor's relations with his singing teacher in *The philosopher's pupil*. Singing is often potently linked with forces like nostalgia and sexuality. At other times, it appears to be a paradigm of childlike innocence or uncomplicated fellowship.

Music and gender is the focus in "Chapter 4: Musical Women and Unmusical Men" women (and sometimes men) being silenced for a moment or for a lifetime, by pressure applied by a lover, spouse, friend, or relative; casual assumptions about gender and music (and other arts) that result in suppression or denial of the artistic potential of other characters (usually women). There is a surprising number of pianos sitting silently in drawing rooms throughout the novels, and I attempt to excavate the significance of some of these mute instruments. I also follow up suggestive links between outward signs of androgyny and music-making, and the broader question of how music interacts with sexuality. Novels discussed in detail are *The good apprentice* and *A fairly honourable defeat*.

In the subsequent two chapters, I move away from music to other kinds of sounds in the novels. One striking feature of Murdoch's novels is the precise descriptions not only of characters' physical appearance—faces, hair and clothes—but also their voices, which are described in scrupulous detail. This is an aspect of realism that, when one is aware of her philosophy of art, becomes a clear sign of her ambition to visualise individual characters herself and to convey their particular individuality to her readers. Murdoch orchestrates her narratives, even those written in the first person, with varieties of voices. In "Chapter 5: 'Different Voices, Different Discourses': Voices and Other Human Sounds", accordingly, concerns not music but other human noises in Murdoch's sound-world, that is, noises belonging to or caused by specific characters in her fiction, as noticed or heard by themselves or others. When they talk, I am interested as much in how they speak as what they say, especially in the short story 'Something special' and the novel *The sandcastle*. I also look at the inarticulate sounds made by Murdoch's people—their characteristic laughs; their sighs and screams; their footsteps; their movements overheard by other characters, illustrated in particular by *Henry and Cato* and *The good apprentice*.

And in "Chapter 6: 'Like a Clarity Under a Mist': Ambient Noise and Silence, Dreamscapes and Atmosphere", I look at the other sounds and

silences which pervade Murdoch's novels. Murdoch's silences are surprisingly various, and, like all the elements in her sound-worlds, they are usually described in terms of their effect on a character's state of mind. I will look at some of the ways Murdoch uses silence both as a phenomenon and an idea in her novels, in particular *The sacred and profane love machine* and *Under the net*. Paradoxically, silence is sometimes intensified by ambient noise. One of the most common ambient noises, especially in the London novels like *Under the net* and *Bruno's dream*, is the hum of traffic and the Underground. In other novels, such as *Nuns and soldiers*, sounds of water and other natural features are essential to Murdoch's expression.

"Chapter 7: 'Just Bring Me the Composers': Musical Settings of Iris Murdoch's Words" goes beyond the pages of the novels and looks at a selection of music inspired by Iris Murdoch, bringing a literal dimension to 'listening' in this study. Fiction was not, for her, a suitable vehicle for political ideas: she told W.K. Rose in 1968 that she 'would like to write some propaganda plays, plays which were really pamphlets'.[36] She envisaged music as part of the action of the two plays she published in 1973, but it was not until 1980, with the opera *The servants* composed by William Mathias, based on her play *The servants and the snow*, that she collaborated with a composer on a full-scale work of musical drama. I trace the appearance of four significant musical settings of her poetry and dramatic works, and the process of collaboration with the four composers. More recently, works have been inspired by Murdoch's novels and other writings. These musical settings take her words to another plane (to use her own phrase) where the combination of the two arts, music and literature, 'acts directly upon the emotions', in Schopenhauer's phrase quoted above. Even though the music to which her words were set by late modernist composers was not always the tonal music she recognised and admired, she is reported in several instances as having been moved to tears by the experience of hearing her works transformed and enveloped in music.

Two appendices follow the discursive part of the book. In the first appendix, I list all the specific pieces of music that I have identified in the fiction, whether heard, played, sung or mentioned, including a brief quotation or other contextualisation. I preface this appendix with a short analysis of the range and variety of music and how it is distributed throughout the novels. Appendix B lists the content of Murdoch's music library from

[36] W.K. Rose, 'Iris Murdoch, informally' in *From a tiny corner*, 16–17.

her home in Oxford, now held in the Iris Murdoch Archive at Kingston University Library. I would like to thank the former archivist, Katie Giles, for providing me with this interesting list. The works are individually searchable on the library catalogue, but it is not possible to generate a list like this using the Library's public catalogue. These two resources provide an indication of the place of music in Murdoch's novelistic imagination and in her personal life.

Music and sound, as Murdoch herself said, is an essential element in literature: 'it is concerned with visual and auditory sensations and bodily sensations. If nothing sensuous is present no art is present.'[37] I hope my book will help readers to appreciate anew the sensuous nature of Murdoch's prose, and to listen for all kinds of sounds, songs, silences and symphonies in her novels.

[37] Iris Murdoch, 'Literature and philosophy', 3–30; 10.

PART I

Music

Chapter 2: 'The Music Is Too Painful': Music as Character and Atmosphere

Sometimes his life seemed to him to have been, not a progression of pictures, but noise, continuous noise, not music yet containing ever-elusive hints of musical form.
—John Robert Rozanov in *The philosopher's pupil* (Iris Murdoch, *The philosopher's pupil* [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983], 136)

Introduction

In *Henry and Cato* the solitary and rather pathetic Lucius Lamb finds solace in listening to the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. Bach has stayed with him while 'Mozart had left him long ago … He only cared for endless music now, formless all form, motionless all motion, innocent of drama and history and romance' (*HC* 26). His solitary love of Bach endows him, by association, with a vestige of the dignity that he has all but lost in every other part of his life. On the other hand, to Dora Greenfield in *The bell*, Bach is just 'hard patterns of sound which plucked at her emotions without satisfying them' (B 178). Dora feels excluded by the music that the Imber community, including her husband Paul, enjoys—she dislikes 'music in which she could not participate herself by singing or dancing' (B 178). Using the well-known music of J.S. Bach as a reference point, Murdoch provides a perspective on each of these characters and helps the reader place them both, intellectually, socially and emotionally. Gemma Moss writes,

G. Dooley, *Listening to Iris Murdoch*, Iris Murdoch Today,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-00860-3_2

> That musical forms can contain meaning and imply action provides an essential point of connection between musical form and literary narrative, offering starting ground for novelists interested in utilising musical devices or structures in their work.[1]

However, Murdoch rarely, if ever, uses music in such a structural way, which might have attracted her Modernist predecessors. Her allusions to music are usually at the level of theme and characterisation, rather than deep structure.

Gender and sexuality often feature in these musical interactions and power plays. In *The good apprentice*, Harry Cuno's mother had to give up playing the piano—one of a long line of Murdoch's women who deny a part of themselves to please or appease their husbands.[2] In *The sea, the sea*, his Aunt Estelle's love for the jazz standards of the 1920s haunts Charles Arrowby: his now-dead lover Clement Makin had loved Wagner, whom Charles admits he envies, despite his professed dislike of music.

Murdoch is well known as an intertextual writer. Bran Nicol writes of 'the many references in each of [Murdoch's] novels to other works of literature, to mythology and philosophy' which 'are used on an *ad hoc* basis to enrich its overall flavour'.[3] Murdoch's novels are enriched by many works of art in other forms: painting, sculpture and, of course, music. The legend of the musician-satyr Marsyas, especially its depiction by Titian in his great painting, is a frequent reference. Marsyas challenged the god Apollo to a musical contest. Although the idea of separating composition and performance, or even the idea of 'composing' music rather than discovering or giving expression to it, would not have made sense to the ancients, Marsyas is patently represented in Titian's painting as a performing musician, and it is in this capacity that he challenges and is vanquished by Apollo. This is Ovid's account of his merciless punishment at the hands of the god:

> 'Why do you tear me from myself?' he cried. 'Oh, I repent! Oh, a flute is not worth such price!' As he screams, his skin is stripped off the surface of his body, and he is all one wound: blood flows down on every side, the sinews

[1] Gemma Moss, 'Classical music and literature' in *Sound and literature*, ed. Anna Snaith (London: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 99.

[2] This situation is discussed in detail in "Chapter 4: Musical Women and Unmusical Men" chapter.

[3] Bran Nicol, *Iris Murdoch: The retrospective fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 9.

> lie bare, his veins throb and quiver with no skin to cover them: you could count the entrails as they palpitate, and the vitals showing clearly in his breast.[4]

Murdoch's attraction to Titian's graphic depiction of Marsyas's agony is evident from her recurrent allusions to the legend and the painting. Dan Piepenbring writes that the painting

> bears the same moral weight she brought to her fiction. 'A novelist is bound to express values,' she said in her *Paris Review* interview, 'and I think he should be conscious of the fact that he is, in a sense, a compulsory moralist.' And there's something compulsorily moral in Flaying, which demands that the viewer reckon with intense physical suffering, and to judge it as right or wrong.[5]

The embedded quotation is from the *Paris Review* interview with Jeffrey Meyers, where she later mentions the Titian painting: 'it gives me very much, though I have only referred to it indirectly.'[6] Elizabeth Dipple points out: 'Marsyas always loses, and yet the losing provides the *extasis*, the human achievement and the ultimate contact with divine "other" reality.'[7] The painting, and the legend, is referred to directly in three of her novels, *A fairly honourable defeat*, *The good apprentice* and *Jackson's dilemma*. In the second chapter of *A fairly honourable defeat*, Axel tells Simon that the painting is 'an image of love', although Simon counters that 'there's only blood and pain and no love' (*FHD* 41). The legend is also an important though somewhat obscure subtext of *The black prince*.[8]

[4] Ovid's *Metamophoses,* trans. Frank Justus Miller, quoted in David Rosand, '"Most musical of mourners, weep again!": Titian's triumph of Marsyas,' *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, 17, 3 [Winter] (2010): 17–43; 17.

[5] Dan Piepenbring, 'Iris Murdoch's favorite painting,' *Paris Review Daily* (8 July 2015), https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2015/07/15/iris-murdochs-favorite-painting.

[6] Jeffrey Meyers, 'Two interviews with Iris Murdoch' in *From a tiny corner in the house of fiction*, ed. Gillian Dooley (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 229. Meyers discusses this painting at length in an article for *The new criterion* (January 2013), including a long quotation from an unnamed '1985 interview'—actually a 1984 interview by Eric Robinson for the BBC Channel Four ('Revelations', 22 September 1984).

[7] Elizabeth Dipple, *Iris Murdoch: Work for the spirit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 110.

[8] This background is examined in detail by Elizabeth Dipple in her chapter on 'Art and theory' in *Iris Murdoch: Work for the spirit* and, more recently, by Mark Luprecht in 'Iris Murdoch and Theodor Reik: Sado-masochism in *The black prince*' in *Iris Murdoch: Texts and*

The enigmatic and powerful figure of 'P. Loxias', identifiable with Apollo, is 'known as a musician' (*BP* 363), and this seems to be the only context in which Murdoch explicitly linked this legend, so important to her thinking about religion, love and art, with music.

Anne Rowe writes, of Murdoch's use of the visual arts,

> Murdoch's cross-fertilization … essentially stems from a desire to use visual images as an extension of language, so that the innermost thoughts and feelings of her characters, inaccessible often to the characters themselves, can be *experientially* assimilated by readers through a purely instinctive sensual response, and not by means of sustained intellectual questioning.[9]

The same applies to music. Murdoch told Jeffrey Meyers: 'Painting appears more frequently than music [in the novels] … because I know far more about painting than about music. The only music which tends to appear is singing, which I know about because of my mother.'[10] Nevertheless, I have counted 175 separate pieces of music, including not only songs but also many other musical works, referred to specifically in Murdoch's novels (see Appendix A), as well as composers and musical genres which contribute in various ways to their 'overall flavour'. Sometimes named musical works, or genres, or composers, are connected with particular characters, and sometimes types of music form part of the description of a specific time and place. Music at funerals is variously described as 'senseless' (*The Italian girl*) or 'listless' (*The sea, the sea*) or 'dreary' (*An unofficial rose*). Dance music seduces in *Bruno's dream*, and is essential to the complicated and brilliant opening scene of *The book and the brotherhood*. Recorded or broadcast music is often heard or overheard, causing irritation, pleasure, comfort or unease. For Louise Anderson in *The green knight*, it is the music-making of her three daughters that disturbs her. Louise feels that it is part of their 'confederacy, not of course against her but excluding her' (*GK* 107).

These are just some examples of how, in Murdoch's novels, attitudes or reactions to music, and musical taste, can play a significant part in the construction of her people as individuals. The first half of this chapter

contexts, ed. Anne Rowe and Avril Horner (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 129–144.

[9] Rowe, *Visual arts*, 4.

[10] Jeffrey Meyers, 'Two interviews with Iris Murdoch' in *From a tiny corner in the house of fiction*, ed. Gillian Dooley (Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 229.

concerns Murdoch's only two novels set in Ireland. Born in Dublin in 1919, she moved with her parents to London when she was a small child. She continued to identify herself as Irish, though with increasing dismay at what was happening there as the Troubles raged through the late 1960s and onwards. Murdoch had several books of Irish songs in her music library, some no doubt inherited from her mother—*Ireland's best songster*; *The beauties of Erin; The songs of Percy French* and, significantly, the Anglo-Irish *Orange songster* as well as the Republican *Soldiers' songbook* (subtitled *Stirring, spirited songs of the soldiers who fought for the honour and the freedom of Ireland in every generation*).

These two novels, *The unicorn* and *The red and the green*, are very different books, though written within a couple of years of each other in the early 1960s. And in these two books, Murdoch invokes music in very different ways.

'Awaken, My Blackbird': Music in *The unicorn*

Murdoch's 1963 novel, *The unicorn*, is set implicitly on the west coast of Ireland, though the words 'Irish' and 'Ireland' are never used. It is a mythic, Gothic world out of the slipstream of twentieth-century time, with no telephones or electricity or even normal social institutions. Two characters from outside this world provide the novel's points of view. One, Effingham Cooper, has been a regular visitor to Riders, the home of his former classics tutor, for several years, while the other, Marian Taylor, arrives at Gaze Castle, the other 'big house' in the area, at the start of the novel, quite unprepared for what she finds. Murdoch's use of these two outsiders as the characters who share the point of view compounds the mystery of this novel: although they gather information from other characters about historical events, they both struggle to understand exactly what is going on, and to know the right thing to do. Some mysteries persist at the end of the book.

Absolutely at the physical centre of the novel—on page 138 of 276, in my edition—the enigmatic Denis Nolan sings an old Manx ballad called *The fuchsia tree*. This performance produces an extreme reaction in Hannah Crean-Smith: she cries out in pain and sobs hysterically, triggering an extraordinary sequence of events in the second half of the novel that results in the death of four characters. It is never made clear why the song produces this effect, but the words are given in full:

O what if the fowler my blackbird has taken?
The roses of dawn blossom over the sea;
Awaken, my blackbird, awaken, awaken,
And sing to me out of my red fuchsia tree.

O what if the fowler my blackbird has taken?
The sun lifts his head from the lap of the sea—
Awaken, my blackbird, awaken, awaken,
And sing to me out of my red fuchsia tree.

O what if the fowler my blackbird has taken?
The mountains grow white with the birds of the sea,
But down in the garden, forsaken, forsaken,
I'll weep all the day by my red fuchsia tree.

As far as I can discover, nobody has attempted to explain the significance of this song in *The unicorn*. Yet Murdoch constructs her novels very carefully and it is unlikely that its placement at the very heart of this novel is coincidental.

The occasion of Denis's performance is a musical evening at Gaze Castle. Hannah has been a captive for seven years at the behest of her absent husband, whom she is understood to have tried to kill. Seven years is of course a period that has a range of connotations in traditional stories: after seven years some dramatic change is likely to take place: some enchantment will be broken, or some intractable situation will come to an end. In this scene, Marian, who has been engaged as a kind of companion for Hannah, is the narrating observer. The room is divided into half a dozen 'gentry', who make up the audience. The rest, who are the performers, are an unspecified and undifferentiated numbers of 'black' maids—presumably 'black Irish'—at Gaze, and red-headed maids descended from the Normans, from Riders. And then there is Denis, who is a kind of upper servant—a chauffeur 'who didn't count as gentry' (*U* 135). Denis is also 'black Irish'. Other music is performed before Denis sings *The fuchsia tree*. There are some unspecified classical piano pieces, and two of the 'black maids' play something 'upon a sort of stringed instrument which Marian had not seen before … The noise was twangy and confused, but not unpleasant' (*U* 134); and two more of the black maids 'sang songs, one in English and two in their own language' (*U* 134)—presumably Irish.

Although it is through Marian's consciousness that the effects of the music are described, we are told that 'she did not understand music', so she is an unreliable witness. She does not know what the Irish instrument

is; she does not understand the words of the Irish songs. She is also preoccupied, pondering her plan to rescue Hannah, with the help of Effingham—to kidnap her and set her free from her captivity. Startled back into awareness by Denis's approach to the 'jet-black grand piano', she is prepared to be embarrassed by witnessing a mediocre performance by someone she likes. But when he starts singing, 'with a relieved surprise, with a strong shock of pleasure which drove all other thoughts from her mind, she realised that Denis had got an exceedingly beautiful tenor voice' (*U* 137). His first song was 'a local ballad sung to a sad monotonous little tune', followed by 'two Elizabethan songs full of grieving intervals and grave spondaic cadences' (*U* 137–138).

Marian thoroughly enjoys—is enchanted by—Denis's singing, and she exchanges approving looks with Hannah. She senses in the singing

> an elusive sense of drama, a mounting atmosphere, as if the audience were sitting forward in their chairs ready to participate in some marvellous transfiguration. Yet Denis himself seemed by now almost invisible, so much had he made sound sovereign over vision. (*U* 138)

Despite the inherent melancholy of Denis's first three songs, it is only the fourth, *The fuchsia tree*, that elicits an extreme reaction from Hannah. There must be, then, in this song, which is at the epicentre of the novel and which makes Hannah break down so spectacularly, some special significance.

The most likely explanation of Hannah's reaction is that *The fuchsia tree* has some relevance to her situation, and probably to her relationship with Denis. Almost everyone in the novel is in some way in thrall to Hannah, but it is not until near the end that Denis confesses to Marian that he loves Hannah so much that he has murdered her husband, Peter. In an enigmatic scene early in the novel, Denis cuts Hannah's hair while Marian is in the room. This is when she first notices that he is 'quite a good-looking man', with his blue-black hair and kingfisher blue eyes. She also observes Hannah's air of 'feudal indifference' about Marian's presence at this rather intimate occasion:

> 'I really don't know what I'd do without Denis.' Mrs Crean-Smith, her head immobile under the still-active scissors, reached a hand back and took hold of Nolan's tweed jacket. Her hand nuzzled into his pocket. (*U* 41)

After the haircut, he gathers the clippings from the floor and she 'caressed his shoulder with a light almost shy touch' (*U* 41). Later in this rather uncomfortable scene, Hannah says to Marian, 'Denis is very clever. … You should hear him play the piano and sing' (*U* 42). After he leaves the room, Marian remarks that Denis seems 'very devoted'. Hannah replies, 'I think he would let me kill him slowly.' 'There was a startling possessive savagery in the words which was oddly at variance with the accustomed *douceur*' (*U* 43). There is clearly something between Denis and Hannah—some history of attachment, though not a sexual relationship: we discover later that he, although over 30, is still a virgin. Denis is customarily reticent and not given to explaining all his secrets, as Marian has already found. So how can we interpret this song?

In the song, the singer has a blackbird which lives in a fuchsia tree in the garden. The blackbird is threatened and then apparently taken by a fowler. Who is the 'I' of this ballad? Who is the blackbird; who is the fowler?

Blackness recurs—the 'black Irish' characters with their blue-black hair, the black cliffs of the Scarren—Murdoch's fictional name for the Burren in County Clare; even the sea sometimes seems black. As Donna Carpenter notes, 'Murdoch's unnaturally dark shading evokes the supernatural and sublime.'[11] Denis is the only major character who is 'black Irish'. Is he then the blackbird? Is Hannah the blackbird's owner? That makes sense in a way, given their feudal relationship. But no-one is threatening to take Denis away. Or is Hannah the blackbird?

Marian and Effingham are planning to take Hannah away, though neither Hannah nor Denis knows that. Seven years earlier the son of the household at Riders, Pip Lejour, had an affair with Hannah, the cause of her husband's jealousy and her confinement. Pip watches Gaze Castle through his field-glasses, perhaps watching for his chance to take her away. And he hunts game on Hannah's land: in one scene, narrated through Effingham's point of view, members of both households meet and the enigmatic Gerald Scottow, who appears to be in charge at Gaze, remarks that Pip has 'two of Mrs Crean-Smith's fine birds' on him:

> Pip smiled. He turned towards Denis, and Denis, as at a pre-arranged signal, stood before him. He handed over the pheasants, and then began to walk away without haste in the direction of Riders. The little incident had the slow ease of a well-rehearsed ceremony, or something out of a ballet. (*U* 85)

[11] Donna Carpenter, 'Degrees of influence: Iris Murdoch and A.S. Byatt's fairy-tales', paper presented at *The Iris Murdoch centenary conference*, Oxford, July 2019. Unpublished.

Is Pip the fowler? He has 'taken' Hannah in one sense, and seems to threaten taking her away more literally. Before Gerald's remark about Hannah's 'fine birds' prompts Pip to hand over the game, Marion had exclaimed with pity at the sight of the dead birds. It is also notable that it is to Denis that he returns the captured birds, in a kind of ritual enactment of restoration, or restitution from a former lover to a current admirer.

The 'I' of the song 'weeps all the day by [the] red fuchsia tree'. There are literal fuchsia trees around Gaze Castle. They are mentioned several times and in fact when Effingham and Marian try to kidnap Hannah to set her free, shortly after the musical evening, they are driven off the road into a clump of fuchsias, and that is where their ill-fated attempt ends. Marian is the one who is left weeping by the fuchsia tree. The correspondences between the plot of the novel and the micro-story of the ballad are not literal or exact. The song, however, has, perhaps for the very reason of its elusive meaning, an emotional charge which resounds throughout the novel, echoing themes of captivity, capture, longing, deprivation, loss and absence. As Nicol writes, Murdoch 'uses mythic allusion to mystify rather than simplify'.[12] The importance of the ultimate mystery and unknowability of human beings in Murdoch's novels cannot be overstated. In making 'sound sovereign over vision', Murdoch, through Denis, has also made the mythic sovereign over the literal (*U* 138).

'Like a Breathless Enchanted Girl': Music in *The red and the green*

Murdoch's other Irish novel could hardly be more different from *The unicorn*. Published just two years later in 1965, *The red and the green* is an historical novel—Murdoch's only foray into the genre—set during the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin.

In 1986 Murdoch wrote a poem titled 'Music in Ireland':

> We are in Ireland.
> Murders are planned in time at certain hours
> In homely kitchens when the meal is finished
> By thoughtful men sitting beside turf fires
> Over a drink with comradeship and wit.

[12] Nicol, *Retrospective fiction*, 9.

The fallout from these bloodless planning sessions, for the victims and their families, is 'condemnation to unending pain, and tears / Which have nothing to do with Mozart'. What music and murder have in common is their abstractness: murder is 'something not imagined / In detail or defined as such'. Music, 'instant and imageless as angels are', is also 'not entirely human'. This parallel is startling. The murder is the 'hideous / schema of a hating mind'; the music is 'the matrix that we cannot fathom'. But

> It is our response that is human
> Our restless yearning in the day's event
> Our temporal desire for resolution
> Our confused sense of a before and after.

The Mozart played in the barn, near Strangford Lough in Northern Ireland, momentarily alleviates the 'secret cares' of the listeners', who are trying to banish 'the old / Sorrows of Ireland'. Pure abstract hatred meets pure angelic sound. Nothing is solved, but despite the incessant rain on the iron roof, the music of Mozart offers the hearers a chance to 'Cry out as it passes on, / When shall we be healed?'[13]

The music in *The red and the green* is not so abstract. It is clearly emblematic of one side or the other of this divided society; much of it is either religious, political or military. The characters, though related in various ways, are divided into the Irish Catholic Dumays and the Anglo-Irish Protestant Bellmans and Chase-Whites. Christopher Bellman, actually English, but an expert in 'the antiquities of Ireland', is said to keep 'aloof from politics and controversy' (*RG* 30). Early in the novel, he recounts a scene he had witnessed that day at Liberty Hall during the week before Easter, where the Irish flag was raised and volunteers drilled to the sound of bugles and pipes, bringing tears to the eyes of the assembled crowd. He claims that it means nothing, but his prospective son-in-law, visiting from England, is disturbed and feels that Christopher 'had perhaps been more interested than he pretended to be' (*RG* 47). The power of music had also been evident to Pat Dumay on St Patrick's Day 1916 when the Volunteers 'had taken the city over. They had marched straight from mass two thousand strong … disciplined and armed, to the sound of their

[13] Iris Murdoch, 'Music in Ireland' in *Poems by Iris Murdoch*, ed. Yozo Muroya and Paul Hullah (Okayama: University Education Press, 1997), 92–94.

pipe bands. Dublin stood and watched them like a breathless enchanted girl' (*RG* 96). Pat 'felt they could have taken Dublin that day' (*RG* 96). There is a telling and disturbing violence inherent in the juxtaposition of Dublin likened to a girl, and Dublin being 'taken'.

In one important scene between Pat and his younger brother, Cathal, the boy is singing Irish nationalist songs: *The red above the green* and *Bodenstown churchyard*, by the nineteenth-century Irish patriot Thomas Davis (1814–1845). Pat complains: 'If you sing that song you ought to sing it seriously' (*RG* 124). In the earlier passage about the St Patrick's Day march, another of Davis's songs, *Oh for a steed, a rushing steed*, had been mentioned. Pat had

> [no] illusions about either the difficulty or the sheer ugliness of the kind of struggle he was engaged in. … He would have liked a cleaner straighter fight, 'a steed, a rushing steed on the Curragh of Kildare, a hundred yards and English guards …' The sort of song that Cathal sang. As it was, his choice and his justification would be lonely and secret, and the killing he would do would look like murder. But that was how it had to be. (*RG* 96)

This argument between the brothers is about more than aesthetic taste. The killing that 'would look like murder' foreshadows Murdoch's lines, written two decades later, about the murders planned in prosaic domestic settings during the Troubles of the 1970s and 1980s. In 1988, she said:

> *The Red and the Green* was written before the IRA started up again, so that it was, as it were, an innocent, optimistic book which assumed the troubles were over. […] But now, of course, one's heart is broken over Ireland. I don't think we can go on talking about this because I have such strong emotions about it. The activity of the IRA exhibits the extreme of human wickedness.[14]

Murdoch could not have written with such sympathy about a rebel warrior like Pat by the time she wrote the poem, despite her understanding that

> It is our response that is human,
> Our restless yearning in the day's event

[14] Jeffrey Meyers, 'An interview with Iris Murdoch' in *From a tiny corner*, 233. This subject is discussed in detail in Gillian Dooley and Frances White, 'A terrible beauty: Iris Murdoch's Irish novel *The red and the green*,' *English Studies* 100, 8 (2019): 997–1009.

> Our temporal desire for resolution,
> Our confused sense of before and after.

The crucial and pressing problem for Pat is that his devotion to the nationalist cause is compromised by his protective love of his younger brother. Cathal is only 14, but desperate to join the fight, and Pat is just as desperate to prevent him. '*Sure 'twas for this Lord Edward died and Wolfe Tone sunk serene, Because they could not bear to leave the red above the green*', sings Cathal. Pat says, 'Dying isn't "sinking serene". Bad poetry is lies' (*RG* 124). Cathal's 'head … full of bad poetry' feeds his enthusiasm for the fight. Pat tries to dispel the myths these songs encourage, emphasising the brutal reality of the struggle, and will go to any lengths to stop his brother participating.

Later, Pat hears 'drunken men singing the Soldier's Song' in the Butt Bar. Immediately afterwards, he sees Cathal talking to one of the nationalist leader James Connolly's men, carrying Pat's own rifle, 'evidently purloined from his room' (*RG* 236). *The soldier's song*, composed a few years before the Easter Rising, later became Ireland's national anthem. Hearing this song sung drunkenly only heightens his alarm at seeing his brother in the act of committing himself to the fight.

Pat's cousin Andrew Chase-White is also a soldier, but he is in the British Army, fighting in the first world war. He is on leave, and visiting his mother and Irish relations in Dublin. His mother, Hilda, is Anglo-Irish but has lived all her life in London, only recently deciding to move to Dublin, 'much to Andrew's dismay', to escape the zeppelin raids. She is tactlessly opposed to Irish nationalism, horrified at relatives who have converted to Catholicism, and wonders out loud why Pat Dumay has not enlisted in the British Army. We hear that Hilda owns a grand piano, though there is little other reference to any interest in music on her part, apart from preferring Gilbert and Sullivan's *The yeomen of the guard* to a play by Yeats—'I don't think we feel strong enough for that, do we' (*RG* 33), she says. Hilda, though attached to her own peculiar and rather fanciful version of Ireland, is definitely on the 'Anglo' side in her tastes and preferences. Her son Andrew contemplates the Christian music he encounters with distaste: 'in Ireland religion was a matter of choosing between one appalling vulgarity and another' (*RG* 62), he thinks upon hearing protestant children singing enthusiastically, and later his depression is confirmed by hearing his mother singing the hymn 'When I survey the wondrous cross' (*RG* 201). Her brother, Barnabas, a Catholic convert, is both

oppressed and excited by the church music he hears—at Tenebrae the chanting is 'monotonous' but on Easter Day, 'the high exultation of the choir' contributes to 'a turmoil of emotions' (*RG* 257) in this troubled and vulnerable man.

Murdoch herself enjoyed singing and we can see by her correspondence that she knew more about music than she sometimes liked to admit, perhaps intimidated by the profound erudition of some of her Oxford contemporaries. Her collection of music includes several of the pieces mentioned in these two novels, including the Roger Quilter setting of *The fuchsia tree*. Perhaps it is surprising that this pivotal song in *The unicorn* is a Manx ballad, rather than an Irish one. 'Local' songs are mentioned but the locality is not specified: maybe because of the carefully non-explicit, though hardly hidden, Irishness of the book. In *The red and the green*, the music she mentions almost always indicates a political or religious affiliation to one side or the other of this conflicted society. In these two quite different novels, Murdoch takes for granted and exploits the power of song to influence emotions and behaviour.

The Swan Princess: Music in *The time of the angels*

The time of the angels (1966) is pervaded by the orchestral music of Tchaikovsky, which seeps out from Carel Fisher's room into the Rectory in the same way that the fog brings the London darkness in from outside: in Darlene Mettler's apt phrase, Tchaikovsky's music 'penetrat[es] the rectory in a ubiquitous hypnotic wave'.[15] His *Swan lake*, a ballet about a young woman under a sorcerer's curse which turns her into a swan until she is liberated by love, is the first piece of music that appears in the novel. It is heard, always distantly, by the coloured servant Pattie: 'A faint sound of music comes from above. Swan Lake. And for a second Pattie's body feels all feathery and light' (*TA* 8). Pattie's sexual relationship with Carel has ended years earlier, but 'the physical connection between them still cobwebbed the house with its electric silk. Carel who had once danced with her, danced alone now to the Swan music' (*TA* 32). Patty, unlike the

[15] Darlene Mettler, *Sound and sense: musical allusion and imagery in the novels of Iris Murdoch* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 48. In her chapter on *The time of the angels*, Mettler discusses the narrative and musical structure of Tchaikovsky's works at some length, and draws parallels with the events of the novel.

young woman in the story of *Swan lake*, feels Carel's power to turn her into a swan as something she yearns for, now that he no longer exercises it.

Like *The unicorn*, this novel is pervaded with folkloric tropes. However, *The time of the angels* has a distinctly Russian soundtrack, which is unusual for Murdoch, and the fairy-tale references are mediated through music. Although there are many Russian characters in her novels, and she reveres the great Russian novelists, the only other piece of Russian music mentioned in her novels is a flippant reference to 'Soviet Fatherland' in *A word child*. It is also remarkable that a whole world of Russian culture is embodied in the Rectory porter Eugene Peshkov, a Russian émigré, but Carel knows (and cares) so little about him that he refers to him as a Pole. Still, Carel's choice of music for listening is exclusively Tchaikovsky (although he can sometimes be heard singing the French nursery rhyme *Frère Jacques*, also concerning a sleeper who must wake up). Along with *Swan lake*, there are explicit references to the 1812 overture, the *Nutcracker* ballet, and the 'Pathetic Symphony'—Tchaikovsky's last completed symphony (more usually known by the French title *Symphonie Pathètique*). As with the references to Bach I noted at the beginning of this chapter, Murdoch probably chooses Russia's most celebrated composer because he is easily recognisable and a meaningful reference point for most readers. The anguish and yearning never far from the surface of Tchaikovsky's orchestral music also amplify the dark and overwrought atmosphere of this novel.

Oddly, Carel never seems to listen to the other Tchaikovsky ballet, *The sleeping beauty*, although the fairy tale on which it is based is continually evoked: as Mettler notes, 'this musical work is not mentioned by name.'[16] Carel's daughter Muriel sees Elizabeth, her cousin, as under a spell, sleeping, the 'kernel of innocence' in the household (*TA* 38), a 'supernatural princess' (*TA* 45); 'one day her prince would come' (*TA* 41). Their uncle Marcus, who has not seen Elizabeth for some years, thinks that 'she had been sleeping in him. Now she was waked' (*TA* 16), while the young Leo Peshkov tells Muriel (before he knows about Elizabeth's existence) that he imagines a girl who 'would be a sort of sleeping beauty and I'd have the task of setting her free and I'd be the first man she ever saw' (*TA* 67). Perhaps it would be unsubtle for Carel to listen to the recording of *The sleeping beauty*, given that he has cast himself as the sorcerer who has

[16] Mettler, *Sound and sense*, 46.

condemned her to sleep: he is already living in that world and he does not need to call it up. He tells Muriel,

> Elizabeth is a dreamer who weaves a web. That web is her life and her happiness. It is our duty, yours and mine, to assist and protect her, to weave ourselves into the web, to be with her and to bear her company as far as we can. (*TA* 132)

If Carel is the sorcerer, Muriel is perhaps the 'good fairy' who tries to ameliorate Elizabeth's captivity, although she is also uncomfortably aware of her complicity in having 'made with deliberate care … the bower in which Elizabeth now seemed so alarmingly drowsy and entranced' (*TA* 138).

Part of the power of this novel is in the juxtaposition of the supernatural themes in these sinister stories with brute reality: as Peter Conradi says, 'the book is a grim comedy of misproportion.'[17] The trickster Leo is like a fairy-tale character: by the river with Muriel, 'He had the bright provisional look of a diving duck or a water sprite which has just that minute broken the surface' (*TA* 63). Leo's father, Eugene, on the other hand, is solidly in the real world, with a history of brutal dispossession and a capacity for emotional depth. The theft of his icon (by Leo) upsets him deeply but he also feels that the painting, which was virtually all he had left from his early life in Russia, had shielded him from the essential knowledge that 'he was a man who had lost everything' (*TA* 111).

To try and console him for the loss, Muriel buys him 'a painted Russian box of the familiar traditional kind. The figures of Russlan and Ludmilla stood out in glossy red and blue against a very black background' (*TA* 117). This awakens a 'veiled memory with some content of unutterable pain and loss' in him, which he remembers only at the very end of the novel. *Russlan* (or *Ruslan*) *and Ludmilla* is a long narrative poem by Alexander Pushkin, based on fairy tales of bewildering complexity, including aborted marriages, abducted princesses, rival quests, magical resurrections and the obligatory though unlikely happy ending, which Pushkin dedicated to 'the sovereigns of my soul, fair ladies' in the hope that 'some young girl shall, furtively peruse' his poem, 'her mind intent on love'.[18]

[17] Peter Conradi, *The saint and the artist: A study of the fiction of Iris Murdoch*, 3rd ed. (London: Harper Collins, 2001), 169.

[18] Alexander Pushkin, *Ruslan and Ludmila*: Translated by A.S. Kline. Part I: Dedication. Online. *Poetry in Translation*, Accessed 29 December 2021, https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Russian/RuslanAndLudmilaI.php.

Ruslan and Ludmilla is perhaps better known in the English-speaking world as an 1842 opera by Mikhail Glinka, with an overture which has become a standard part of the classical repertoire.

Glinka's *Ruslan and Ludmilla* incidentally appears in an anecdote in the life of Tchaikovsky. He attended a performance of it in St Petersburg, a few days before he conducted the premiere of his own *Symphonie pathètique*. In turn, Tchaikovsky finished composing this symphony shortly after he returned from a visit to London in summer 1893 where he had been appalled and depressed by the city's characteristic thick fog: 'I could not have imagined one such as we had today at 12.30 in the afternoon: … I feel deep down as if I were sitting in a dark underground prison.'[19] The final movement of the symphony, as Michael Steen writes, 'expresses … deep despair'.[20] Within ten days of the performance of the symphony, Tchaikovsky died of cholera, which was believed by some to have been contracted at least recklessly and perhaps intentionally.[21]

The juxtaposition in Murdoch's novel of Tchaikovsky's symphony with London fog and Pushkin's violent folk tale seems unlikely to be random. The prevalent rumours in the middle of the twentieth century concerning Tchaikovsky's sexuality and death make these links all the more significant. As Mettler points out, the *Symphonie pathètique* is playing in the background during the scene when Carel is virtually hypnotising Muriel, insisting on the necessity of keeping Elizabeth cocooned and away from disturbance of any kind, implicitly asking her to descend with him 'into darkness and silence', as does the anguished last movement of the symphony.[22]

Conradi writes that Carel's 'romantic love' of Tchaikovsky is a sign that 'we are to take his humourless pretentions less than seriously'.[23] But I see no reason to believe that Murdoch wishes to negate the power of Tchaikovsky's extraordinary, passionate music, from the gaiety of *The nutcracker* and the bluster of the 1812 overture to the pathos of *Swan lake*

[19] Quoted in Michael Steen, *The lives of the great composers* (Cambridge: Icon Books, 2003), 685.

[20] Steen, *Great composers*, 685.

[21] 'Wild rumours circulated among his contemporaries concerning his possible suicide, which were revived in the late 20th century by some of his biographers, but these allegations cannot be supported by documentary evidence.' Alexander Poznansky, 'Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky,' *Britannica Online*, Accessed 30 August 2021.

[22] Mettler, *Sound and sense*, 51.

[23] Conradi, *The saint and artist*, 178.

and the despair of the *Symphonie pathètique*. Like a good film soundtrack, the music heightens and intensifies the drama of the novel.

The nutcracker ballet surfaces twice, and in both cases it is used by Carel to communicate with Patty. When the insistent Anthea Barlow finally manages to enter the Rectory, Patty is afraid Carel will be angry, but after she has manoeuvred Anthea out of the door, 'she listened and heard with relief from upstairs the distant strains of the Nutcracker Suite' (*TA* 87), Carel's message of approval. Later, in the disturbing scene when Carel, presumably aware of Patty's incipient romance with Eugene, 'reclaims' her, he first asks her to put on *The nutcracker* suite, then, later, tells her that she is his 'sugar-plum fairy'. And he adds, 'Lucky the man who has the sugar-plum fairy and the swan princess' (*TA* 158). Clearly Pattie is not both these things—in fact in the same conversation he calls her a goose—and the swan princess alludes to Elizabeth. The first-time reader is not in a position to realise that he does indeed 'have' both these fantasy figures of Tchaikovsky's romantic ballet world, and so may easily pass over this statement—at least until Muriel sees her father in bed with Elizabeth in the next chapter.

Shock follows shock until Muriel finds her father dying of an overdose of sleeping tablets, with *Swan lake* playing on the gramophone. As she grapples with the decision whether to save his life or let him die, 'the music continued, airy, substanceless, clear and mercilessly beautiful. The music continued cut off and far away in a beyond where nothing was sick or mortal' (*TA* 219). As she lets Carel die, the music ends and she, 'trance-like', puts the record on again from the beginning (*TA* 222). But Muriel is not privy to the secret meaning of the music. She finds a farewell letter from Pattie in Carel's hand, which leads her to assume that 'it was for Pattie's sake that he lay there' (*TA* 221), because she had left him: that it was Pattie he truly loved. But does the message of the music not contradict this? He chooses to die with *Swan lake* playing, rather than *The nutcracker*: that is, with Elizabeth's 'theme music' rather than Pattie's. There is no authoritative narrator to tell us either way and though the reader knows more than any one of the characters, the composite picture is still not complete. Conradi thinks that it is 'apt that he should die to the "Dance of the Cygnets" from *Swan Lake*'.[24] But though Murdoch has chosen this track for Carel's death, she has also made clear that it was *his*

[24] Conradi, *The saint and artist*, 178.

choice, without definitively explaining the significance. As with *The unicorn*, the message of the music is left deliberately unresolved.

'The Concourse of Sweet Sounds': Music in *The nice and the good*

Music is a constant presence in *The nice and the good* (1968): even though it may be rarely described in the narrative, it is often discussed or alluded to. Some of the characters (John Ducane, Mary Clothier) are radically unmusical; others, like Willy Kost and Theo Gray, appreciate and understand music; Barbara Gray plays the flute and her music variously causes pain and irritation to other characters, not because she plays badly but because of the associations it invokes. A particularly idiosyncratic enjoyment of music is a feature of Willy's character, while a distaste for music is a feature of John Ducane's.

Early on, we learn that Ducane's manservant irritates him 'by eating peppermint creams in the car and by singing Jacobite songs, rather drearily, as he went about his household tasks' (*NG* 32). This by itself does not imply that Ducane dislikes music. Dreary singing could irritate the most musical ear, and when Ducane finally snaps and tells him to shut up, he attributes it simply to his nerves being on edge (*NG* 186). But the narrator has by then built up a rounded picture of Ducane, including the following passage, describing his arrival at Willy Kost's cottage after a romantic scene in the woods with Kate Gray:

> Ducane … was unmusical to the point of positively disliking the concourse of sweet sounds. His mood as he approached the cottage had been elevated and intense … The music was now like an alien presence. (*NG* 50-1)

The phrase 'the concourse of sweet sounds' is an inexact reference to Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*:

> The man that hath no music in himself,
> Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
> Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils;
> The motions of his spirit are dull as night
> And his affections dark as Erebus:
> Let no such man be trusted. (*The merchant of Venice*, 5.1.91-7)

This condemnation of the unmusical, even if it were generalisable in Shakespeare, is not something Murdoch intends in this novel. Yes, John Ducane has allowed himself to get into a Murdochian muddle with two women, and is deceiving both, but he is hardly 'fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils': he is a deeply moral being. In the pivotal scene where he discusses his moral dilemma about Biranne with Mary (naturally in terms general enough to preserve anonymity) he finds that 'she assured him somehow of the existence of a permanent moral background. He thought, she is under the same orders as myself' (*NG* 281). If the merely 'nice' are to be distinguished from the good, as implied by the novel's title, there is little doubt that John Ducane falls into the latter camp, despite his unmusical nature.[25] In his aversion to music, as in his moral qualities, he has met his match in Mary:

> Mary … could now hear Barbara upstairs beginning to play something on the flute. The piercing husky hard-achieved beauty of the sound wrought on Mary's nerves. Her own utter inability to remember any tune gave music a special exasperating poignancy for her. Barbara's flute, although the child now played it well, was almost an instrument of torture to Mary. (*NG* 92)

Unlike Ducane, for whom no explanation is offered, Mary has a possible reason for being troubled by music. Her dead husband, Alistair, had been musical:

> Alistair had a beautiful baritone voice and they had often sung together, he playing the piano, she standing with her hands on his shoulders, head tossed back in an abandonment of song. This was a purely happy memory and she could recall even now that feeling of her face as it were dissolving into an immediate joy. (*NG* 143)

This happy memory is soon tempered, however, by the realisation that this and his other abilities—painting, poetry, writing, chess, tennis, fencing—when enumerated, became 'accomplishments', a word which 'belonged not to then', that is the time of their marriage, 'but to now, and that it was a sad and narrowing word' (*NG* 144). The marriage had been unfulfilling and disappointing, despite the 'accomplishments', and the horror of his

[25] Recent research establishes that 'musical anhedonia', or an inability to derive pleasure from music, occurs in 'totally normal people'. Rose Eveleth, 'Some totally normal people just don't like music that much,' *Smithsonianmag.com* (6 March 2014).

death in a road accident just outside their house was augmented by the petty quarrel which had preceded it. In such circumstances, music might bear a difficult emotional freight for Mary.

Willy Kost, on the other hand, loves music but cannot share it with anyone. Knowing Ducane's dislike of music, he always immediately switches off 'the slow movement of something' which, according to Ducane, is playing whenever he visits, although he does not know music well enough to recognise the piece. Theo Gray, unlike Ducane, identifies the music that is playing when he visits Willy as 'the slow movement from Opus 127' (he does not say by whom—it is understood). He asks Willy to turn it off—'I can't bear it … A consciousness in agony represented in slow motion' (*NG* 128). Opus 127 is a late string quartet of Beethoven. This is a little unusual, as Willy is more commonly associated with Mozart. Darlene Mettler observes that 'Willy surrounds himself with Mozart' and suggests that this reveals 'his quest for order'.[26] However, during the only scene when the narrative is focalised through his point of view—the closest we come to penetrating the mystery of Willy's state of mind—Kate's daughter Barbara, offers to play him the flute part of the Mozart quartet in D major. He refuses: he does not trust himself to listen to her because of his entirely unsuitable, and unacknowledged, passion for her. He tells her, 'The music is too painful' (*NG* 183). This implies the opposite of Mettler's assertion: that Mozart, at least in this context, makes severe emotional demands on him. He is not the only one who is tormented in this way: Mary's teenage son Pierce is also in love with Barbara and cannot bear to hear her play the flute. However, Mozart is more usually associated with Willy's gaiety: when Mary proposes to him, she observes a look on his face which she had seen when he was dancing to 'some music of Mozart': 'radiant, perky, puckish' (*NG* 169)—and Ducane later sees him dancing around the room to Mozart's piano concerto no 24, in C minor (K.491).[27] I assume he would be dancing to the first movement. I have never thought of this as a dance before: the music is dark and brooding, but it is in urgent triple tempo that compels movement.

Later, surprisingly, when Willy refuses Mary's marriage proposal, he says to her, 'I can't give you anything but love, baby' (*NG* 284), which is the first line of the refrain from the 1928 American popular song by Jimmy McHugh and Dorothy Fields. This intrusion of popular culture into

[26] Mettler, *Sound and sense,* 62.

[27] Mettler incorrectly identifies this as the C major concerto K415 (64).

Willy's dialogue is unexpected, but much about Willy is unexpected. The dancing that Ducane witnesses occurs (though Ducane does not know this) immediately after Willy's sexual encounter with his own lover Jessica—which he had described to her as 'sacrilege … a very important human activity' (*NG* 200).

For many of the characters in *The nice and the good* music is associated with the pleasure and pain of sexual love. It reminds Mary of her dead husband; Pierce cannot bear to hear the girl he is in love with play the flute, and neither can Willy. Barbara refuses to sing the 'bathing song' with the younger children and Pierce: 'I've forgotten it', says Barbara; 'I don't believe you', says Pierce (*NG* 57): the children's harmony is disturbed by the discords of adolescence. Singing together, here, as in the case of Mary Clothier and her husband, is an innocent pleasure belonging to a simpler, happier time. But Willy expresses happiness as well as experiencing pain through Mozart, though this is in the solitary activity of dancing. He cannot share his pleasure in music with the two people with whom he shares a knowledge and understanding of it. Theo makes him switch off the Beethoven string quartet—which they both know, without saying, is a Beethoven string quartet. This knowledge is shared between them, as is the knowledge that '*All* is vanity, Willy, and man walks in a vain shadow'. According to Theo, 'You and I are the only people here who know this, and that is why we are bad for each other' (*NG* 129). And Barbara wants to play for Willy but he will not let her, to her chagrin. Music is a far from uncomplicated pleasure in this novel.

* * *

Iris Murdoch herself loved singing—it is something mentioned continually in her correspondence with Brian Medlin—and enjoyed music in what she calls an untutored way. She told Harold Hobson in 1962:

> I know very little about [music]. I like to hear the few things I know over and over again. I have no intellectual grasp of music and it attacks my emotions directly. Tears will roll down my cheeks at practically any piece of music. It affects me with a sort of desolation. This shows I don't really understand it.[28]

[28] Harold Hobson, 'Lunch with Iris Murdoch' in *From a tiny corner*, 4.

That fact that she refers to Opus 127 in such a familiar manner in *The nice and the good* belies this—the late quartets of Beethoven practically epitomise esoteric music. Moreover, in an interview, Shena Mackay asked her for her 'desert island disc' and she nominated 'a late Beethoven quartet'[29]: an unlikely choice for someone who claims to be musically illiterate. Nevertheless, as Tom Sutcliffe points out, 'with such musical authorities as Isaiah Berlin numbered among her Oxford circle', she was unwilling to claim any special knowledge of music.[30]

One more readily associates the visual arts with Murdoch's novels. They are certainly more prominent, as is understandable, since she was interested in art history and might have followed that path rather than that of philosophy had not World War II and other circumstances intervened. In *The nice and the good*, the Bronzino 'Allegory of Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time' is central to the relationship between Paula Biranne and her husband Richard. But I suggest that music also plays an important role in this novel. It is incidental in the sense that it is overheard, or turned off when another character enters the room. Nevertheless, it is a constant presence in Willy's life, and a significant element in his character—it is hard to image Willy without it, while Ducane's unmusical nature is similarly inseparable from his character. Making music together, or playing for someone, is an innocent activity which cannot survive when there is disharmony or friction in the relationship—especially when caused by thwarted desire. Music's ability to affect or intensify people's emotional states is often described in the novel, but the deployment of music is at the level of characterisation rather than morality or theme. Musical taste is certainly not a reliable indicator of who is Nice and who is Good.

Conclusion

These four novels display Murdoch's sophisticated and careful use of various pieces of music in the structure of her narratives. In *The unicorn* a particular song mysteriously prompts a very dramatic reaction. In *The red and the green*, music has a more public face, emblematic of the political

[29] Shena Mackay, 'A fabulous story-teller,' *Women's Journal* (July 1980): 36–40.

[30] Tom Sutcliffe, 'Iris Murdoch, philosopher and novelist, has now written a libretto of an opera. She talks to Tom Sutcliffe about the magic of music and theatre,' *The Guardian* (15 September 1980): 9.

and religious affiliations of various characters. In *The time of the angels*, the highly charged music of one particular composer pervades the dark world of the fog-bound rectory, and in *The nice and the good* musical knowledge and taste become elements in the construction of several of the main characters.

In *The philosopher's pupil* Rozanov apprehends 'ever-elusive hints of musical form' amidst the noise of his life. This phrase, quoted in the epigraph to this chapter, is reminiscent of the various ways Murdoch uses music to point the way to mysteries that often remain insoluble and for that reason continue to intrigue. Like the connections between text and image that Anne Rowe discusses, her allusions to music 'form part of Murdoch's quest to portray non-verbal consciousness in art, and part of her quest to progress beyond the limits imposed on literature by language'.[31] Music, as Murdoch notes in Schopenhauer's 'delightful' account, 'does not express ideas' but acts 'directly upon the Will, that is the emotions of the hearer'.[32] This applies to all kinds of music, but vocal music is an especially potent example, and in the next chapter I will look more specifically at singers in the novels—and the power of the human voice to bewitch, excite or even alienate the listener.

[31] Rowe, *Visual arts*, 9.

[32] Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a guide to morals* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1992), 59–60.

Chapter 3: 'The Point at Which Flesh and Spirit Most Joyfully Meet': Singers and Singing

Introduction

Iris Murdoch sang without being 'a singer'. According to Rosemary Hartill, who interviewed her in 1989,

> she loves singing, and was once trained by a singing teacher. At home during her childhood, her mother would play the piano. 'We would sing all those marvellous popular songs of the 1930s, which are great songs compared with what's called popular song nowadays. … But when does one get a chance to sing now, unless one belongs to a choir? If one starts singing when you're with friends, they begin to look a bit shifty … and I think they'd rather you stopped—however charming one's voice may be, which in my case is getting rather rusty. People who don't like singing resent it very much.'[1]

Singing, then, brought with it wistful memories of her happy childhood and thoughts of her beloved mother, and carried with it a kind of mystique. When characters sing, or hear singing, in her novels, their responses are as varied as the characters themselves. In some, it can evoke nostalgia or regret for times of innocence past, while in others it stirs deep fears or longing, often linked, obscurely or not, with sexuality. In this chapter, I

[1] Rosemary Hartill, 'Flight to the enchantress' in *From a tiny corner in the house of fiction*, ed. Gillian Dooley (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 239.

G. Dooley, *Listening to Iris Murdoch*, Iris Murdoch Today,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-00860-3_3

will first glance at a few significant moments in various novels where singing appears, and then look in more detail at three novels in which singing plays a more major role—*The sea, the sea*, *The message to the planet* and *The philosopher's pupil*.

Murdoch's first novel, *Under the net*, features a singer, the elusive Anna Quentin: 'Anna had a contralto voice that would break your heart even over the radio. … She seems to throw the song into your heart, at least this was what she did to me the first time I heard her, and I never got over it' (*UN* 32). This is an erotic attraction: Jake is drawn to Anna by her song. He is dismayed and incredulous when Anna says she is giving up singing, and when he hears her on the radio towards the end of the book—'like a sea wave curling over me came Anna's voice' (*UN* 283)—he smiles 'with a smile which penetrated my whole being like a sun' (*UN* 284). Even though he realises that Anna is lost to him personally, the fact that she has resumed her singing career pleases him as much as the fact that he has seen a way forward for his own writing career. Right at the end of Murdoch's last novel, the enigmatic Jackson is puzzled to 'remember' that he could sing, among his many other talents (*UN* 248). Singing, then, though only occasionally in the foreground, appears at the beginning and right at the end of her long chain of remarkable novels.

Memories of her fellow nuns singing plainchant often come to Anne Cavidge in *Nuns and soldiers*. Anne could not sing herself, but often thinks of 'the beautiful thin constant plainsong of the nuns, so exquisitely disciplined, so frequent, so familiar, a chant of caged birds heard only by God' (*UN* 64). These memories often accompany thoughts of the convent—birdsong reminds her of the nuns singing, for example—and are often mentioned in passing, without much further comment, implying that Anne's decision to leave the enclosed order has not been without regret. On the other hand, when young Toby Gashe in *The bell* hears a nun chanting in the Abbey he is irritated, tantalised and excited by the proximity of these invisible and inaccessible females, and the 'hideous purity and austerity of the song [becomes] intolerable'. He stumbles out of the chapel feeling 'unutterably sick and disconsolate' (*B* 160).

Many of these elements are present in a pivotal moment in *The black prince*. Bradley Pearson, like the other first-person narrators of the big three 1970s novels, Charles Arrowby (*The sea, the sea*) and Hilary Burde (*A word child*), is not musical. He claims to dislike music, and he does not understand it. Murdoch told Harold Hobson in 1962 that she had 'no

intellectual grasp of music and it attacks my emotions directly'.[2] Bradley finds his emotions attacked directly when Julian Baffin, the young woman he has fallen in love with—his best friend Arnold's daughter, nearly 40 years his junior—takes him to Covent Garden to see Richard Strauss's opera *Der Rosenkavalier*:

> The sound of women's voices singing is one of the bitter-sweetest noises in the world, the most humanly piercing, the most terribly significant and yet contentless of all sounds: and a duet is more than twice as bad as a single voice … The two women were conversing in pure sound, their voices circling, replying, blending, creating a trembling silver cage of an almost obscene sweetness. I did not know what language they were singing in, and the words were inaudible anyway, there was no need of words, these were not words but the highest coinage of human speech melted down, become pure song, something vilely almost murderously gorgeous. No doubt she is crying for the inevitable loss of her young lover. The lovely boy protests but his heart is free. Only it has all been changed into a sort of plump luscious heart-piercing cascade of sugary agony. Oh God, not much more of this can be endured. (*BP* 219)

Bradley stumbles from the theatre and vomits. Reduced by the power of vocal music, especially music expressing the predicament of being in love with someone much younger, to this state of emotional nakedness, he confesses his love to Julian, despite his resolve not to, creating a state of crisis which neither he nor Arnold will survive. When Julian, intrigued and pleased at Bradley's behaviour and declaration, says, 'No one has ever been sick for me before', Bradley replies, feigning coldness: 'Don't flatter yourself. It was partly Strauss' (*BP* 227). That is, of course, true. The music has stripped him of his defences: it has attacked his emotions directly.

Apart from a couple of passing references to Arnold's wife Rachel and their daughter Julian happily singing (separately) in (different) kitchens, this is the only time human singing is mentioned in *The black prince*. Bradley does observe birds singing, however. Looking out at the Baffins's 'fussy garden', upset by the trouble between Arnold and Rachel early in the novel, he describes 'a great many birds singing competitive nonsense lyrics in small decorative suburban trees' (*BP* 19). A little later, when leaving their house, he hears 'the feathered songsters … still pouring forth their nonsense'. After what has happened, Bradley is on edge, 'very tired

[2] Harold Hobson, 'Lunch with Iris Murdoch' in *From a tiny corner*, 4.

and a little muzzy and weak at the knees with fear and shock' (*BP* 28) and his disdain for birdsong could spring from the agitation arising from his emotional state. But later he uses birdsong in one of his direct addresses to his 'dear friend' Loxias, discussing art and truth:

> Art … is the telling of truth, and is the only available method for the telling of certain truths. Yet how almost impossibly difficult it is not to let the marvels of the instrument itself interfere with the task to which it is dedicated. There are those who will only praise an absolute simplicity, and for whom the song-bird utterance of the so-called primitive is the measure of all, as if truth ceases to be when it is not stammered. (*BP* 55)

Bradley here equates the 'absolute simplicity' that can convey truth with birdsong, which he earlier dismissed as nonsense, perhaps prefiguring his reaction to the singers in *Der Rosenkavalier*, whose meaning he interprets without being able to understand their words. His ex-wife, Christian, excited at meeting him again after many years, babbles about retirement and writing: 'You should have got out years ago. … Birds can't sing in cages' (*BP* 69). Bradley is monosyllabic in response to her torrent of words. Bradley, in this context and more broadly as an artist, cannot 'sing' at all: perhaps he is in a cage of his own making.

'Che cosa e amor?': Singing in *The sea, the sea*

Charles Arrowby in *The sea, the sea*, claims, like Bradley, to dislike music. In the early part of the novel, written diary-style, he writes, 'I do not care greatly for music. Noise yes, music no. I admire the intricate and essentially silent musical drama of ballet, but opera I detest. … I admit I envy Wagner' (*TSTS* 34). Later we might come to question some of these assertions. Valerie Stivers notes that in Charles's pronouncements on food and wine, his

> fastidious and opinionated tone and self-gratifying habits are at odds with his stated intention to retire to the seashore and conduct his 'recollection[s] in tranquillity' and possibly even to 'repent of a life of egoism.' The cautious reader will note that it takes ego to elevate one country's cheeses over others', or to presume to tell all human beings not to mash their bananas.[3]

[3] Valerie Stivers, 'Cooking with Iris Murdoch,' *Paris Review* (1 February 2019), Accessed 24 November 2020, https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2019/02/01/cooking-with-iris-murdoch .

Charles Arrowby is the unreliable narrator *par excellence*—not necessarily *deliberately* deceitful but, as becomes clear to 'the cautious reader', equally prone to self-deception in love and friendship as in food and music.

Charles has some particularly stringent criticisms of singers: 'All singers are vain' (*TSTS* 278), he says, and further:

> Singing is of course a form of aggression. The wet open mouths and glistening teeth of singers are ardent to devour their victim-hearer. Singers crave hearers as animals crave their prey. (*TSTS* 311)

Naturally there is more going on here than a mild dislike of music. The situation Charles has got himself into is complicated and full of competing demands. He has imprisoned his first love, Hartley, in his house by the sea, Shruff End, while he tries to persuade her to abandon her husband and her home and run away with him. His old friend and admirer Gilbert has turned up and offered to act as a kind of unpaid servant, and Hartley's long-absent son, Titus, has also appeared. They—Gilbert and Titus—begin the singing craze. Later, one of Charles's former lovers, Rosina, and then her ex-husband, Peregrine, arrive and sing with them too. Charles clearly feels outnumbered, excluded and perhaps mocked by these skilful singers who are enjoying themselves so much, making 'the house ring with their noise' (*TSTS* 298). He orders them 'fiercely' to go outside. Looking back, he says, 'I think they became positively drunk with their music during this time; perhaps it was a natural reaction to the tension inside the house' (*TSTS* 298): he writes of their singing as 'a curious feature of the time and one which can still terribly bring it back to me' (*TSTS* 297). The aggression he attributes to them is more likely to be a combination of his feelings of defensiveness—however much he rationalises it, he knows that keeping Hartley incarcerated against her will is wrong—and the sheer inability of a sober non-singer to communicate with singers who are drunk with music and laughter.

But there are other singers, both past and present, in Charles's world. Another former lover, Lizzie, has also reappeared in his life. Charles believes that Lizzie is devotedly in love with him still, and in her case he feels no threat or exclusion, nor indeed any urgency—Lizzie would wait for him, he believes: she is as it were held in reserve for him. Lizzie has 'a pretty little singing voice' and had played Ariel to Charles's Prospero in his last substantial acting role, years earlier, before he abandoned acting for directing. 'I can still hear the thin, true tone of her *Full Fathom Five*', he

says (*TSTS* 50). Lizzie also played Cherubino 'in an amateur production of *Figaro*, and I think this tiny success was one of the things she valued most' (*TSTS* 51). The two roles he remembers her playing are both 'pants' roles—a woman playing a young man, or a boyish spirit.[4] Charles describes her voice as 'thin' and 'true', not aggressive and threatening. When she sings Mozart's *Voi che sapete* at Shruff End, she makes 'utterly still the group of men surrounding her' (*TSTS* 363).

Titus, Gilbert and the others sing all sorts of music: 'operas, musical comedies, madrigals, pop songs, folk songs, rounds, lewd ballads and love ditties in English, French and Italian' (*TSTS* 298). They sing a meaningless (and apparently fictitious) Italian round beginning *Eravamo tredeici* which Titus has taught them (*TSTS* 312): it is perhaps something like *Ten green bottles.* (We were thirteen, now we are twelve ….) A round has no natural ending—it takes coordination and will to stop singing it, endowing it with even greater scope to annoy an unwilling listener than a normal song with a beginning, middle and end. On the other hand, Lizzie's repertoire, as far as we hear, is made up of *Full fathom five* (from *The tempest)*, *Voi che sapete* (from *The marriage of Figaro*) and the sentimental *Roses of Picardy*, which she sings to the assembled multitude on the same momentous night when she sings Mozart. This song was one which Charles's Aunt Estelle had used to sing. 'Aunt Estelle had shone somehow upon my childhood' (*TSTS* 364). He had loved his noisy, vivacious, American aunt, who had died young. She seems to have been the only member of the family who sang. Even her son James, who also arrives at Shruff End, cannot sing. Aunt Estelle, like Lizzie, 'had a pretty little singing voice'—this sounds like Charles's patronising phrasing, but similar descriptions of female singers appear elsewhere in Murdoch's novels. It is almost like a Homeric epithet.[5] Aunt Estelle

> used to chant songs of the first world war and the latest romantic hits—*Roses of Picardy, Tiptoe through the tulips, Oh so blue, Me and Jane in a plane—'ain't no sense sitting on the fence, all by yourself in the moonlight … ain't no fun sitting 'neath the trees, giving yourself a hug and giving yourself a squeeze*'. (*TSTS* 60)

[4] I attempt to tease out the significance of this and other intimations of androgyny in Murdoch's work in the chapter on music, gender and sexuality.

[5] In *An unofficial rose* young Miranda has a 'pretty little voice' (UR 39), and in *The philosopher's pupil* Emmanuel's mother has a 'pretty soprano voice' (PP 127).

The young Charles had once sung this last song ('All by yourself in the moonlight') to his parents after a visit to his aunt, but they were serious people and not amused. 'My mother did not exactly dislike Aunt Estelle, nor violently disapprove of her, though she shuddered at the noise and the drink … she was just thoroughly depressed by her existence and cast into … gloom and irritation … by her visits' (*TSTS* 61). Charles speculates that it was 'probably in some way because of Aunt Estelle that the human voice singing has always upset me with deep and almost frightening emotion' (*TSTS* 60). As he remarks later, on hearing Lizzie singing *Roses of Picardy* and thinking then of both her and his aunt, '*che cosa e amor* indeed' (*TSTS* 364). These Italian words follow the first words of the aria *Voi che sapete*—'You who know what love is.' He had loved his undemonstrative parents, but could not help being enchanted by his vivacious aunt. He had loved Clement Makin, a famous, much older, actress, whose young lover he had been, and who, when it came time to die, 'wanted to die in a storm of noise and for days we had the hifi turned up playing Wagner' (*TSTS* 485): when Charles hears Wagner, he thinks of Clement dying (*TSTS* 493). When he sets out to write his memoirs—as the novel begins—he claims that Clement 'is the main theme. … I always loved her' (*TSTS* 68). Then Hartley, his teenage sweetheart whom he recalls singing in church, reappears as an elderly married woman, and his obsession with trying to reclaim her drives all thoughts of Clement, temporarily, from his mind.

Love, we know, was Iris Murdoch's main subject. Trying to find out what love is (*che cosa e amor*), in particular, is surely the deepest theme of *The sea, the sea*. Possibly Charles never really succeeds, though he puzzles over it until the end. 'Who is one's first love?' (*TSTS* 502). His ambivalence about music is deeply entwined with this mystery: music has the power to conjure complex and unresolved emotions from the past.

Singing as Exclusion in *The message to the planet*

The question of love appears in a rather different guise in *The message to the planet* (1987), but looking closely at singing provides some possible responses.

The first section of the novel introduces us to three male characters discussing two others. A group of four friends—Gildas, a musician; Patrick, a poet; Jack, a painter; and Ludens, a historian—meets regularly in Gildas's London flat. On this occasion, however, Patrick is absent because he has been struck by a serious but undiagnosed malady. The other three have

gathered as usual to sing, but they are distracted by talk of their former acquaintance, Marcus Vallar, who exerts a strange fascination over the group. He intrigues Jack, but Jack's ego is too solid to be seriously affected by any other person, no matter how charismatic. On the other hand, Marcus's criticism has supposedly made Gildas abandon his Church of England priesthood, and he believes that 'there's something evil' in Marcus (*MP* 14). Ludens is a devotee, desperate to understand the mystic message that he is convinced Marcus possesses. Patrick simply thinks that Marcus has cursed him, and being 'a wild man from the west of Ireland' he believes he is 'dying of the curse' (*MP* 3).

While the history of the group of friends and their dealings with Marcus are the focus of this early section of the book, there are references to music threaded through the action, the narration and the dialogue. The scene is framed by music. Gildas is sitting at the piano throughout, urging the others to stop talking and sing. 'Now do stop drinking whisky', he says, 'You won't be able to sing properly' (*MP* 4). Gildas's flat is described in detail and music is clearly central to his life. 'There was a deal cupboard containing sheet music, always untidy, always open;' and the flat is conveniently located at the top of an office building so nobody would be disturbed by 'piano playing and even lusty singing … until far into the night' (*MP* 4).

Marcus has first met the group of friends at Jack's art classes, where he came to learn painting after a precocious career as a mathematical genius. He was a 'talented' painter, but 'unfortunately lacked the deep understanding of music which many mathematicians are said to possess. If anything he disliked music' (*MP* 8). Gildas, who dislikes Marcus, says that Marcus has 'no music in his soul' (*MP* 18)—perhaps another glancing reference to the famous passage on music in *The merchant of Venice* which is (mis)quoted in *The nice and the good*. In this case, the original Shakespeare line is 'The man who has no music in himself'.[6]

Gildas, the musician, appears to be a minor character in the large sweeping scheme of this novel. He seems to hold himself back from the action in both the plot threads: the love triangle involving Jack, and Ludens's fruitless pursuit of Marcus. But this gives him a perspective that the others do not have. Even in this early part of the novel, a careful reading will show that he is the most perceptive of the characters:

[6] Act 5, Scene 1, line 91.

> Gildas could not be said to be a successful man. His musical aspiration had dwindled, he never became a composer, and he had lost his choir. … His ill-shaven face, textured like old brown faded paper, was wrinkled, often with suspicion or anxiety or quizzical doubt, or with sadness. … He was the one who stood in corners and watched. (*MP* 5)

Gildas undercuts the self-serving and superstitious fantasies of the two others. Neither he nor Ludens is convinced by Jack's pseudo-mystical views on women, but it is Gildas who is direct enough to say, 'You disgust me' (*MP* 21) when Jack talks with careless levity of the women in his life. At the end of the novel, there is a short coda in which the 'survivors' Franca, Jack, Ludens and Gildas are back at his flat:

> Marcus was dead, Irina disposed of, Ludens was back in London, back with his friends, his quest over, his obsession ended. Jack too … was, as he felt and declared, definitely *back home*. Gildas, the enlightened spectator, had never been away. (*MP* 551)

Gildas is glum and listless throughout most of the novel, and what might not be evident on a first reading is that he is in love with Ludens. His love is reticent but not mute, and Ludens takes him for granted. In his dejection at the end, all his illusions shattered, Ludens finally seeks reassurance from Gildas, though it is in the form of a statement, not a question: 'you won't abandon me, will you.' Gildas responds, 'Don't be silly, Ludens, you are buckled to my heart. I will come *con scarpe o senza scarpe*.[7] You must be feeling pretty feeble even to mention it' (*MP* 562). This is a line from an Italian folk song called 'Il testamento del capitano', where it is a declaration of loyalty: the captain's troops will follow him 'with or without boots'.

In the first section, Gildas speaks sometimes through music rather than words: 'Gildas who was sitting at the piano, played some melancholy chords' (1); and sometimes his music conveys the ironic intent of his words:

> 'Alison is certainly the goddess of good health,' said Gildas, playing a few more irritable chords, 'and Franca is famous for being an angel.'
>
> Franca was Jack's wife, Alison his mistress. (*MP* 3)

[7] See '*Canti degli Alpini*,' https://cantialpini.wordpress.com/2017/04/25/il-testamento-del-capitano.

Gildas may be irritable here because he is frustrated by the wilful blindness of the other two. The narrator's blunt assertion seems an extension of Gildas's irritation. Much is said between the lines of these two short paragraphs. But Gildas is certainly also impatient with their preoccupation with Patrick and Marcus: he wants to be singing, not talking. At the end of the section, they do finally sing together; as Gildas and Ludens do also at the end of the novel.[8] In a sense, the narrative keeps coming back to Gildas and to music.

This group of four men 'often sang together', but 'of course they never let the women sing' (*MP* 2). Iris Murdoch herself loved to sing, as we know, so the naturalness implied by '*Of course* they didn't let the women sing' cannot be taken at face value. This is certainly a 'Boy's Club'. The men have their regular meetings to drink and sing together, and although it seems that women, including Franca (*MP* 8), have been present at earlier meetings, the men are the core of 'a little "group"' (*MP* 5). It is implied this group of four men collectively deny the women access to this simple pleasure: '*they* didn't let the women sing.' Let us look at this implication more closely.

Jack enjoys singing, but for him painting is the primary art form. He does not so much exclude women from his preferred art form, as assume their absence: 'Painting is based on sex. Why are there no good women painters? After all they've had every chance to practise *that* art! It's because women don't have sexual fantasies' (*MP* 19). This is particularly ironic because his wife, Franca, had been a painter: she 'had studied dress design and more perfunctorily painting, at a polytechnic' (*MP* 11). At the beginning of the next section, told through Franca's perspective, we learn that Jack 'loved to see her sleeping' and 'also liked to see her sewing or cooking or doing anything quiet and rhythmical in the house' (*MP* 22-3). We learn that when she first met Jack and fell in love, 'suddenly she could do everything, dance, paint, sing, invent wonderful clothes, even write love poems' (*MP* 25). However, the brief narrative of her marriage that follows is one of contraction. She gave up her 'modest job' as a dressmaker and did some 'dress-making at home, and devoted her life to happy love. Jack soon gave

[8] Elin Svenneby points out that the two songs they sing at the end of the first chapter, 'Hearts of oak' and 'Abide with me', are addressed respectively as 'the powerful Man—and … the powerful God. … Quite a difference, from pride to subservience.' Elin Svenneby, 'What is *The message to the planet*?', Paper presented at the Iris Murdoch Conference, Kingston, UK (September 2012).

up teaching her painting' (*MP* 25). So much for women having 'every chance' to be painters, as Jack declares. However, though he enjoys singing and has an 'impressive bass' voice (*MP* 2)—and is heard singing to himself at significant moments by both Franca and Ludens—it is unlikely that he cares enough about music to exclude women from singing.

Patrick is 'what Gildas called, not always warmly, "an Irish tenor," meaning by this something more than that he was (which he was) both Irish and a tenor' (*MP* 2). The term 'Irish tenor' implies not only a light, high lyric voice but also, perhaps, an attitude to music which is more sentimental than serious—at least in the opinion of a 'serious' musician like Gildas.[9] When he is well, Patrick is cheerful and gregarious and encourages others to sing. He plans to go with Marcus and his daughter Irina to their new home in the country. 'And we'll sing there too, won't we?' he says to Irina, and then asks Ludens, 'Have you heard her sing? She sings like an angel' (*MP* 197). Patrick seems even more unlikely than Jack to have any part in the prohibition against women singing.

Ludens, who believes himself to be in love with Irina, is appalled and struck with jealousy at this evidence of Patrick's intimacy with Irina. Later he sees them singing together and walks away, refusing Patrick's smiling invitation to join them, and Irina's entreaty to 'stay and sing … help me to be happy, help me to be at peace' (*MP* 236). When talking to Marcus a little later, he has a rare moment of self-knowledge: 'Ludens had again the sensation he had had when he surprised the singers, that he was being some sort of pedagogic killjoy' (*MP* 239). Ludens's feelings about singing, in this context, are to do with his jealousy of Patrick, and envy of his carefree attitude to life, music and friendship with both women and men. He is disconcerted by hearing a happy group of singers from which he feels for some undefinable reason excluded. Ludens would go along with excluding the women from singing, perhaps, but his feelings are confused and he is swayed by the opinions of his older friends.

We are left with Gildas, 'the musical man' (*MP* 2). Gildas was an Anglican priest before Marcus supposedly shamed him into 'losing his faith' which also meant that 'he lost his choir' (*MP* 5). This is not explained further, but there is no requirement that a musician in the Church of England should be a priest, and the minister of a parish is rarely, if ever, also the choirmaster. It may be that when Gildas left the priesthood he

[9] The archetypal Irish tenor, John McCormack (1884–1945), was famous for singing popular ballads as well as the lighter end of the classical and operatic repertoire.

ruled himself out of participating in church services at all. But the Anglican tradition has stayed with him: English church choirs have traditionally been composed of men and boys. At the end of the novel he decides that he 'may even try to creep back into some cranny in the Anglican Church … I'd like to get hold of a choir again. I might try to organize my own.' Ludens is encouraging: 'I'll come and sing in it' (*MP* 561). This might, then, be a simple and obvious answer to why the women are not to sing. Gildas, the musician and intellectual leader of the group, prefers not to have women in 'his' choir.

Gildas is described early in the novel as 'almost … demoralized' (*MP* 4) and 'listless' (*MP* 43). Nevertheless, he 'remained someone, a slightly mysterious someone, whom they respected' (*MP* 4). He expresses his emotions through music, and there is one scene with Ludens where he seems to sing as a way of deflecting Ludens's questions. They are discussing Marcus and Patrick. Gildas 'suddenly began to sing' an evangelical hymn: 'Wide wide as the ocean, high as the heavens above, Deep deep as the deepest sea is my Saviour's love' (*MP* 46). Almost immediately afterwards, he tells Ludens that he has found out where Marcus is. Ludens, obsessed by Marcus, and heedless of and oblivious to Gildas's feelings, sets off to find Marcus, as Gildas knows he will. Having steeled himself by singing about religious love, Gildas thus propels the plot forward from the stalled state it has been in, although, he says, 'I fear that this may bring *no good* to Patrick or Jack or you or me—or other people of whom we still know nothing' (*MP* 48).

Music is a natural mode of expression for Gildas. For Franca, on the other hand, music is more ambiguous. After the drinking session with the friends at the beginning of the novel, Franca hears Jack singing as he comes home, but 'he fell silent as he mounted to where Franca slept now' (*MP* 22). His song is *The little turtle dove*, a folk song about lovers parting: one pledges to be faithful and to return, the other is sceptical. Later, Franca likens her relations with Alison, her husband's lover, and Irina, Marcus's daughter, to 'a musical trio. They could all three play together. The performance was banal, but there were not obvious discords' (*MP* 143). For Franca, music disguises true emotions, songs convey falsehoods. Franca sees only deceit and insincerity in music.

In *The message to the planet* music belongs to the men. For Patrick, music is a natural part of life; Gildas uses it almost as a second language. Jack, though painting is his preferred art form, often sings to himself. Ludens enjoys singing but only with his male friends. Only for a brief,

ecstatic moment at midsummer dawn does he find himself singing with the crowd: 'Ludens could not make out the words, but he felt he understood them. He thought, it's a definition of language, it's the language of something higher, the original voice of poetry, we are surrounded by spirits' (*MP* 465). This is the end of cosmic unity, however. Marcus dies, Irina escapes, and Ludens finds himself back with a quietly triumphant Gildas, singing 'The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended' (*MP* 563). Has anything changed? For the moment, Franca is reunited with Jack: 'She had fought rightly, and been perfectly defeated' (*MP* 539). She foresees bitter tears; it seems unlikely that she will take up painting again. And Gildas will have his Anglican male voice choir. 'Of course they never let the women sing' (*MP* 2).

This pattern of exclusion is to be found throughout Murdoch's fiction, and is treated in greater depth in "Chapter. 4: Musical Women and Unmusical Men".

'Never to Sing Again? Never?': Singing in *The philosopher's pupil* (1983)

In *The message to the planet*, the significance of singing is somewhat buried. In *The philosopher's pupil*, published four years earlier, we find singing featuring more prominently perhaps than in any of the other novels.

Emmanuel Scarlett-Taylor—known to his friends as Emma—is, I think, the only one of Murdoch's major characters who is a serious singer. Emma is a slightly older student friend of the carefree young Tom McCaffrey, and a much more serious person: before they became friends, Tom thought of him as 'a gloomy proud solitary sort of fellow' (*PP* 123). Their friendship began with a song. On a 'drunken evening in December' (*PP* 123), after a pub crawl, they somehow end up wandering by the Thames together, and Tom 'feeling the airy liberated bonhomie of the happily drunk man', begins to sing in his 'pleasant modest baritone'. The song is Philip Rosseter's 'If she forsake me I must die', a sprightly Elizabethan lament about unrequited love. Emma joins in on the second verse: 'Tom checked his own voice abruptly, stopped in his tracks and held onto a lamp post. Scarlett-Taylor possessed a marvellous counter-tenor voice' (*PP* 124). Tom 'was interested enough in singing to recognise an exceptional voice and to covet it' but instead of this becoming a barrier to their friendship, the warm-hearted Tom, 'making one of those moves of genuine sympathy by which we defend our egoism … embraced his rival and drew him into

himself, making that superb voice his own possession. … Ownership would preclude envy: this remarkable sound and its owner were now his' (*PP* 124). From Tom's point of view this is not a sexual bond. Emma, first regards Tom as a 'tactless nuisance' (*PP* 128), but grows to love him in silent, unrequited pain. 'If she forsake me I must die—shall I tell her so?' In this case, no, not in so many words. 'If I disclose my desperate state, she will but make sport thereat.'

This repressed homoerotic longing is not the only intractable situation in Emma's life. He (like Murdoch) comes from an Irish Protestant family: his mother, like her father, is descended from sheep farmers in County Down (*PP* 125). However, Emma 'hated, with all his heart and soul, Ireland, the Irish, and himself' (*PP* 125). Murdoch's 1986 poem *Music in Ireland* (discussed in "Chapter 2: 'The Music Is Too Painful': Music as Character and Atmosphere") revisits much the same emotional terrain as 'the close-up view of human wickedness' that confronted Emma when he visited the devastated Belfast:

> [I]n his very private confused self-rage he rejected his Irishness, he tore it to shreds in sick futile anger, sometimes scarcely knowing what it was he detested most in the stew of hatred for which he so despised himself. (*PP* 126)

In her poem, Murdoch makes an unexpected comparison between murder in Ireland, and music. Music, 'not entirely human', is

> Of necessity the aloof laughter,
> Of undeserved delight the avatar,
> Hinting the rhythm of the planet.[10]

The philosopher's pupil foreshadows this juxtaposition a few years earlier. 'Emma did not, even momentarily, hate music the way he hated Ireland, but he could not come to terms with it any more than he could with his sex life' (*PP* 128). He is a serious scholar, 'tipped to get a "first"' (*PP* 123) and is destined to be an historian. It follows (somewhat obscurely) that he must give up singing:

> Emma regarded the exercise of his gift rather in the light of a temptation. He knew, and part of him clearly loved, the remarkable unique personal sense of *power* which a good singer experiences, something more psychosomatically *personal*, perhaps, than the exercise of any other talent. His

[10] Iris Murdoch, 'Music in Ireland,' *Poems by Iris Murdoch*, ed. Yozo Muroya and Paul Hullah (Okayama: University Education Press, 1997), 93.

> pleasure in his vocal triumph at school seemed to him sinister, quite unlike the clean satisfaction of academic work. (*PP* 127)

This sense of power is the subjective experience of the phenomenon that occasions Charles Arrowby's outrageous (and no doubt envious) claim that 'all singers are vain' in *The sea, the sea*. Emma's pride in his instrument is such that 'if he ceased to keep his voice at its very best he would not want to use it at all' (*PP* 216). This realisation, or resolution, is a source of great anguish and sadness.

Though he routinely refuses, Emma is persuaded to sing aloud again twice (again when drunk) by Tom. He sings Parry's well-known setting of William Blake's *Jerusalem* on the eventful day of the McCaffrey family seaside excursion, but an even more remarkable and telling exercise of his musical power comes on the evening of the so-called Slipper House riot. He tames the heedless, drunken mob by singing Henry Purcell's aria 'Music for a While': 'The effect upon the revellers was indeed that of an enchantment. They became, of course, instantly silent. It would have been impossible to utter speech against the authority of that voice' (*PP* 386). Instantly made tractable by sheer force of the unaccompanied, unamplified voice, the previously unmanageable crowd is sent away, 'one after the other', and when they were all gone 'Tom and Emma stood alone in the garden. They put their arms round each other and silently laughed or perhaps cried' (*PP* 387). During this scene, although he had 'evidently forgotten' the fact, Emma 'was wearing one of Judy Osmore's cocktail dresses' (*PP* 386).

On an earlier occasion he sings with Tom, at Tom's urging: 'Let's sing that German round you taught me.' Tom has just told Emma that the potent sage John Robert Rozanov—the philosopher of the title—has instructed him to marry his grand-daughter Hattie. Tom is 'caught'. 'He was no longer free, he was even perhaps no longer innocent: no longer happy' (*PP* 282). Tom begins singing, and Emma joins in on the second round, 'not using his full voice but with a high clear pure whispering sound' (*PP* 282):

> Alles schweiget, Nachtigallen
> Locken mit süssen Melodien
> Tränen ins Auge
> Sehnsucht ins Herz.[11]

[11] Translation: 'All is quiet, nightingales sing with sweet melodies. Tears in my eyes, longing in my heart.'

'Although there were not positively tears in their eyes, there was a great deal of mournful yearning in their hearts' (*PP* 283).

We can understand easily enough, in one way, the 'mournful yearning' in Emma's heart. He is in love with his friend and knows it will not be requited, and he sees that this complication with Rozanov and Hattie is likely to weaken the close friendship between them. But the poignancy of the 'high clear pure whispering' voice in which Emma sings here is also, surely, connected to his agonising procrastination about giving up singing. This conflict between some kind of hard-headed common sense and his love of music is threaded through Emma's thoughts. 'He could not be an historian and a singer—but not to sing again? It was unthinkable' (*PP* 216); 'And shall I really *never sing again?*' (*PP* 334); 'Am I not irrevocably bound to music?' (*PP* 392); 'So … never to sing again? Never?' (*PP* 469). He thinks (for some reason which I admit is obscure to me) that 'he could not divide his life—he could not divide his time' between music and history (*PP* 394). Emma sees it as a choice between two careers rather than two complementary strands of a happy and fulfilled life. Coupled with most of these unspoken ponderings is guilt that he has not yet visited his singing teacher, Mr Hanway, and told him that he is giving it up. When he finally does, Mr Hanway will not accept his decision: 'You must not neglect what God has been pleased to give you—the voice for which Purcell wrote—the most perfect music by a century of geniuses', he says. They sing together: 'As soon as Emma began to sing he could not prevent himself from feeling very happy' (*PP* 396). It is left unresolved. He later tells his mother he is giving up, and she responds, 'You ought to sing more—You're happy when you sing.' The morose Emma replies, 'I hate happiness' (*PP* 512). He cannot accept the 'undeserved delight'[12] that music gives him—confused and conflicted as he is about this and the two other essential parts of his nature: being Irish and being gay.

It is surely no accident that, at least in Murdoch's view, the core repertoire for Emma's particular vocal range and talent is made up in a large part of beautiful but doleful songs of the Renaissance, bemoaning unsuccessful love in the Petrarchian tradition: three of Mr Hanway's favourites are named: 'Take, oh take those lips away', 'Woeful heart with grief

[12] Murdoch, 'Music in Ireland,' 93.

oppressed' and 'The Willow Song' (396).[13] Paradoxically, Emma is happy (despite himself) when singing about love and death and the impossibility of happiness. This deplorable problem abruptly solves itself when Mr Hanway runs 'off to Italy with one of his pupils':

> Emma received his apologetic letter with relief. (It appeared … that Mr Hanway imagined that Emma was deeply and inconsolably dependent on him; such are the misunderstandings which can exist between people who look into each other's eyes.) (*PP* 551)

Perhaps this means that Emma's belief that Mr Hanway was in love with him (and that he could not give up all prospect of a singing career without injuring his respected singing teacher) was also a misunderstanding. 'Sometimes, as it seemed, through the conventional gauze of their converse, Mr Hanway's eyes blazed momentarily at Emma with some involuntary sign of emotional need' (*PP* 214). Emma felt that when he 'sang to his teacher, or when they sang together, they were joined in a communion that was not only more spiritual than any alternative but more satisfying' (*PP* 215). So, bound up with his love of singing—his understanding that singing is perhaps 'the point at which flesh and spirit most joyfully meet' (*PP* 215)—is this complicated wordless bond with his teacher, creating in him a feeling of obligation to make singing his life. 'But it was beginning to seem, since he could not give his whole life to it, pointless to go on' (*PP* 215). Hence the dilemma that torments him. Fortunately, when Mr Hanway decamps, Emma the absolutist decides that 'perhaps he could just go on singing, without having to give his whole life to it'. In these last synoptic pages, though, the narrator makes sure to let us know that 'he still worries about this question' (*PP* 551). Emma settles into a 'reasonably happy' life, without having to give up music or friends.

Although the 'discreet and self-effacing narrator', 'N', describes them in forensic and sometimes gleeful detail, this novel is full of individuals

[13] Simon Ravens examines the history of 'countertenors' in great detail in his book *The supernatural voice: A history of high male singing* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2014), and concludes, with regard to the lute songs of the Renaissance, 'the evidence suggests that the lutenist composers were not writing for any particular vocal type, and certainly not for a falsettist' (88). Writing at this period in England, Murdoch would have equated what Ravens calls a 'falsettist' with the countertenor voice she envisaged for Emma.

isolated and living with their own pain. George McCaffrey, his mother Alex, and John Robert Rozanov are all solitary, with no-one to share their deepest thoughts and fears. However, their actions affect the lives of other characters. On the other hand, though Emma is also isolated, his difficulties are oddly sealed off from the rest of the novel. 'N' tells us that Emma is 'Horatio to our Hamlet', or sometimes the reverse (*PP* 123). Indeed, rather like Horatio in *Hamlet*, he is not really connected to any other major character apart from Tom, although towards the end of the novel he also befriends Pearl. He does not discuss his decision to stop singing with anyone, and most of the passages narrated from his point of view are internal monologue. His relationship with Mr Hanway perhaps provides an example of another kind of teacher-pupil relationship in contrast to the fraught and finally fatal contest between Rozanov and Tom's older brother George. In any case, whatever his role in the larger scheme of the novel, in Emma we have the most complete subjective view of the singer, I think, in Murdoch's work. And although he might not have much effect on the novel's plot, as Howard Moss points out in a discussion of this novel and *The sea, the sea*, 'Murdoch exploits music to give these operatic novels semblances of a score. … Those moments [Emma] lets go with song are like scenes in legends or myths when angels descend to dispel the darkness.'[14]

Conclusion

As a singer, one is one's own musical instrument. Murdoch understands what this means to the singer: it can mean terrible conflict if one might have to stop singing, yet sublime happiness when one feels one is singing well. She also understands what Charles Arrowby cruelly points out that being one's own instrument means that one longs for acknowledgement and praise: one needs a listener, and that can make one seem vain. For many other characters, singing is a less intense experience. It can be an uncomplicated joy, but then again it can evoke uncomfortable echoes from the past, as for Mary Clothier in *The nice and the good*, and Charles himself. Only, I think, in *The message to the planet* does it become an instrument of hidden power, wielded by Gildas Herne. (Think again when

[14] Howard Moss, 'Narrow escapes: Iris Murdoch,' *Grand Street* 6, 1 [Autumn] (1986), 228-240; 231-2.

you next meet a mild-mannered choral director. He or she may have more influence than you realise).

But, if singing is 'the point at which flesh and spirit most joyfully meet' (*PP* 215), it is an undeniably essential and fundamental human activity. This phrase, significantly, echoes an expression Murdoch used in her 1956 essay 'On the Cinema', where she wrote that

> the cinema is supremely concerned [with] … the human face. Here we can find tragedy and comedy made minutely concrete in the movement of a muscle, and human character on display at the *point where spirit and matter are most intensely fused*.[15]

In a discussion of this passage, Lucy Bolton writes that in the cinema the face is 'a means of affective and cognitive connection with the viewer, conveying far more than the story or even the reaction of a character, but rather their internal battles, responses and experiences'.[16] This is, of course, true outside the cinema as well, in our interactions with other people. The human face is a metonym for the relation between ourselves and the outside world, both as a verb, when we 'face' the world; as a noun, when we 'put on a brave face'; and as the literal site where each person encounters the being of another. A face is usually thought of as a surface to be looked at, where much is to be learned—mostly unconsciously—by instinct and experience.

The face is also an important part of a singer's instrument. Technically, various parts of the face—the lips, the jaw, the teeth, the nasal cavities—are important in vocal production, and a singer's facial expression is a reliable gauge of how well she is singing. More importantly, perhaps, a singer, unlike most musicians, almost always faces the audience. A pianist is usually seen in profile. String players look at their hands on the finger board, or at their music. They communicate with the audience mainly through pure sound: a visual element is present but it is not of the essence. But when one is singing to an audience, it is an act of direct and explicit communication. Spirit and matter, flesh and spirit, combine to express and

[15] Iris Murdoch, 'Vogue 100: Iris Murdoch on the cinema,' *Vogue Archive Online* (17 May 2016 [first pub. in *Vogue* in August 1956]), *https://www.vogue.co.uk/article/vogue-archive-article-iris-murdoch* . Emphasis mine.

[16] Lucy Bolton, 'Introduction' in *Contemporary cinema and the philosophy of Iris Murdoch* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 13.

communicate emotions and stories, sorrow and delight, love, pain, nostalgia and hope, with face and voice. Murdoch knows this, and when her characters sing, or hear others sing, they are participating in this human act of communication: often, sometimes unexpectedly, the singer, like Lizzie in *The sea, the sea* and Emma in *The philosopher's pupil*, becomes the centre of silent and rapt attention. It is not necessary to understand the words, as neither Bradley at Covent Garden in *The black prince* nor Ludens at the Stone in *The message to the planet* does, to hear the message. It may be accepted or rejected, enjoyed or deprecated, but it is rarely if ever insignificant.

Chapter 4: Musical Women and Unmusical Men

Introduction: 'Of Course They Never Let the Women Sing'

I have already broached the significance of this devastating throwaway line from *The message to the planet* in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I will look more broadly at the interaction of gender with music.

Murdoch mentioned her mother, Irene, in several interviews. In 1983 she said that her mother 'had a marvellous soprano voice—but she got married when she was eighteen which was silly of her from the point of view of a possible career! She had a professional teacher in Dublin and then again when they moved to London.'[1] She told Jeffrey Meyers in 1988 that Irene 'was training to be an opera singer and could have been very good indeed, but she gave up her ambitions when she married. She continued singing all her life in an amateur way, but she never realized the potential of that great voice.'[2] This very common pattern of a woman giving up her professional or artistic ambitions on marrying is often repeated in Murdoch's novels. At least Irene Murdoch seems to have been able to continue studying singing, and to sing 'in an amateur way' during her married life: as I mention in "Chapter 3: 'The Point at Which Flesh and Spirit Most Joyfully Meet': Singers and Singing" chapter, the family would

[1] John Haffenden, 'John Haffenden talks to Iris Murdoch' in *From a tiny corner in the house of fiction*, ed. Gillian Dooley (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 129.
[2] Jeffrey Meyers, 'Two interviews with Iris Murdoch' in *From a tiny corner*, 219.

G. Dooley, *Listening to Iris Murdoch*, Iris Murdoch Today,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-00860-3_4

often sing together, with her mother playing the piano. Even this enjoyment of music is denied to several of Murdoch's female characters—often mentioned only in passing: someone's mother, someone's wife, who cannot continue to play or sing because a husband disapproves of or dislikes music.

It is tempting to think that this is a tendency that we have left behind us in the twenty-first century, and that Irene's abandoned brilliant career would, a century later, have been given every chance to be realised. But as writer and musician Anna Goldsworthy notes in a recent essay,

> The majority of young pianists I teach are women; the majority of concert pianists are men. The majority of people who teach your children are women, the majority of people running our performing arts organisations and festivals and orchestras and music departments are men … Where do all my piano students go? Most of them slip into the ecosystem, where they quietly make everything work.[3]

Quiet, dutiful women like those often found in Murdoch's novels.

Quiet Women: *The good apprentice*

In the backstory of *The good apprentice*, Harry Cuno's mother had to give up her musical career when she married. His father, Casimir, had been 'a popular highbrow novelist' (*GA* 13). His mother, Romula, is described as 'a frail gentle pretty woman, daughter of a Cambridge don, who had sacrificed her talent as a pianist to the heavy task of being her husband's secretary'. In the passage where this wife and mother is introduced, Harry is looking at himself in the gilt mirror his father 'had bought for his wife as a wedding present', which he 'associated with his mother', hanging over the drawing room fireplace. The history of the drawing room and the mother is briefly recounted while Harry is contemplating himself in the mirror. The narrator tells us: 'She made the sacrifice gladly, convinced, as indeed Casimir was himself, that he was a genius' (*GA* 42). This may be impersonal third-person narrative, but it seems more likely that it is Harry's assessment. Caught up in his bitter and nostalgic train of regretful thought, Romula is conjured along with the two women Harry had

[3] Anna Goldsworthy, 'The glass curtain: classical music's problem with women,' *The Monthly* (December 2020), 51.

married: his first wife, Teresa, usually referred to only as 'the girl from far away', the mother of his son Stuart, 'a shy quiet girl, with timid gentle hazel eyes, from New Zealand' (*GA* 14) who died of leukaemia soon after giving birth; and the mother of his stepson Edward, the painter Chloe Warriston, who also died young.

Later, pondering these women from his past alongside his current frustratingly clandestine affair with Chloe's younger sister Midge McCaskerville, Harry thinks that his mother, Romula—'he always thought of her as Romula, had liked Teresa. They were quiet women' (*GA* 255). They are linked in his mind, and it is not until the end of the novel that he starts thinking more attentively about both of them. Firstly he asks himself a question that seems overdue:

> Had his mother resented all those sacrifices she made, becoming a typist instead of a pianist, to serve that blond handsome egomaniac? She thought he was a genius. … Of course the simple fact was that Casimir hated music. Harry hated it too. (*GA* 512)

This 'simple fact' is, of course, likely to be far from simple. Why would it be so natural for Harry's father to hate music? Is it perhaps because Casimir was jealous of his wife's former dedication to music, even though she, apparently willingly, surrendered it for his sake? Harry 'had an early memory of the sound of the piano in the drawing room, always sad, conveying pointlessness, annihilation, death. How pretty his mother was, with that gentle apologetic face' (*GA* 512). Harry has a childhood memory of lying under the piano—presumably a grand—watching 'the jerky irregular powerful movements of those little feet upon the pedals, and listen[ing] to the soft mechanical sounds which the pedals made, so much more exciting to him than the music of Bach or Mozart' (*GA* 512). This extraordinary passage reveals many layers of emotional history. There is Harry experiencing early sexual arousal at the sight of his mother's 'little feet in shining high-heeled shoes' on the piano pedals, while at the same time somehow comprehending the music she was playing as sad and pointless. This must surely have been the result of some tension, explicit or implicit, between his parents centring on the music. Romula clearly did not give up playing altogether, continuing despite her husband's hatred of music. 'After Casimir died the piano was heard again, but it had lost its heart. The music had no more authority.' What was the 'authority' which this music had possessed during his lifetime, despite being pointless and sad? Perhaps it

was the only means Romula had of asserting herself at all in her marriage, and that is why her face was 'apologetic'.

Then Harry's first wife, Teresa, is introduced into this picture. Earlier we have read that Romula and Teresa, these two 'quiet women', had liked each other. But now we learn that Teresa, joining the household after Casimir's death, 'had sat in that drawing-room on that sofa and Harry had watched his young wife watching his young mother' (*GA* 512). Although he repeats that 'they had got on well', he adds that 'Romula was jealous'. Romula moved out of the house that had been her home for many years, leaving it to the newly married couple, but 'the house rejected Teresa' (*GA* 512). This is a romantic notion, but it is really a way of saying that Teresa never felt comfortable there and was never able to make it her home. The drawing room, created by Harry's grandfather, had been added to 'a little' by Casimir and Romula, but 'Harry and Chloe and the girl from far away had left it almost entirely unaltered' (*GA* 42). Chloe was a strong woman with an established identity in the London art world: she could meet the house, and Harry, on her own terms. But Teresa was half a world away from her home and family. Was she given any scope to make the house her own, with Romula's mirror, and Romula's piano, and the accumulated weight of the Cuno family history ranged against her? We also read that 'Teresa had played the recorder' before she married Harry, 'but Romula's piano silenced her' (*GA* 512).

These hints invite us to question Romula's quiet and compliant nature, but also to realise the invidious situation both women had been in. Romula, making major sacrifices for her domineering and self-centred husband, reserves for herself a corner of her life where she could continue to play the piano, although she felt she had to apologise for doing so. Her husband dies and the music 'loses authority'. Then her only son, 'a disappointed spoilt child' (*GA* 13), brings home a young wife to share the house where she has spent her married life. Teresa, a New Zealander on the other side of the world, is not really made welcome by her mother-in-law. She is possibly made to feel unsophisticated and awkward, her recorder playing amateurish compared with Romula's mastery of the piano, and her music is silenced in turn. Romula moves out of the house—leaving her piano behind—but that does not make Teresa feel welcome. It is not long before Teresa dies, leaving Harry with a small son to look after. Stuart, this child, 'could scarcely remember her, his images of her hovered between memory and dream. Her mystic form had been a refuge from a thoughtless stepmother and a neglectful father and a brother preferred by both'

(*GA* 52). Although in Stuart's mind she exists 'between memory and dream', he is the only character who gives her full name and acknowledges her as other than 'the girl from far away': 'Her name was Teresa Maxton O'Neill, a Catholic, born in Dunedin of Irish immigrant parents' (*GA* 52). This seems like an incantation—an assertion of his mother's identity—that Stuart has carried with him through life. Romula does not survive her first daughter-in-law for long, as she dies before Harry marries Chloe, already pregnant with Edward—who is four years younger than Stuart.

This complicated situation is part of the background to the main action in *The good apprentice*. Howard Moss writes: 'In *The Good Apprentice* painting replaces music—so integral a part of both *The sea, the sea* and *The philosopher's pupil*.'[4] It is true that a central figure, Jesse Baltram, is an artist, and as we have seen these traces of music have been all but effaced. The name of Harry's first wife is hardly ever mentioned, and his mother's name appears even less often. Much of the history I have outlined is implicit, pieced together from passing references. Like the women in *The message to the planet* who are forbidden to sing, the women in this novel whose music is suppressed or silenced are barely visible—or perhaps I should say audible—in the background. However, retrieving their stories reveals hidden depths in the intricate family edifice that Murdoch has created. In "Chapter 5: 'Different Voices, Different Discourses': Voices and Other Human Sounds" chapter, I discuss a different aspect of sound in *The good apprentice*—the voices and other human sounds which are closer to the surface of this large novel.

Silent Pianos

Romula's piano remains, unused and silent, in 'the panelled drawing room of Harry Cuno's house, which had been his parents' and grandparents' house' (*GA* 15). 'Her piano, never played now, indeed untouched since Edward had strummed on it as a child, was in the drawing room, which was still the room which Harry's grandfather had created' (*GA* 42). Silent pianos are dotted throughout Murdoch's work, and are usually in one way or another associated with a woman's unfulfilled longings or unhappy life, or the memory of a woman from the past.

[4] Moss, 'Classical music and literature' in *Sound and literature*, ed. Anna Snaith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 238.

In *Bruno's dream*, the photo of Bruno's long dead daughter, Gwen, 'was still downstairs on the piano' in the house where Bruno is lying thinking about the past, and waiting to die. 'He could not bring himself to ask for it to be brought' upstairs to his bedroom (*BD* 9). Gwen was a 'strong serious girl', according to Bruno, and he does not understand what she saw in Danby, the man she married (*BD* 9). Later we read that Adelaide, the servant with whom Danby sleeps almost as a matter of course, and who is 'slavishly in love' with him, finds herself 'strangely moved by the legend of the dead wife' when she dusts her photograph on the piano in the drawing room:

> Big dark brooding eyes, heavy serrated dark hair, pale intense oval face, pouting finely shaped small mouth. Whenever Danby spoke of his wife, which he did quite often, the note of his voice changed and his eyes changed and there was something serious and almost alien about him, even if he was supposed to be laughing. Adelaide liked this. (*BD* 47–48)

Perhaps there is little significance in the photo being on the piano, which we never hear played during the novel—it may be just a hint to place the house as the kind of middle-class home where a piano is a standard item of furniture, whether or not any members of the household play. The house belongs not to Bruno, but his son-in-law Danby, who is taking care of him in his last illness. This house, in Stadium Street, is in a 'seedy' part of London on the north side of the Thames, near the Lots Road Power Station. Gwen's house—the house Danby had shared with her—was 'a neat pretty house in Notting Hill' that he 'fled from' when Gwen died (*BD* 24). Did the piano belong to Gwen, whom Danby regarded as 'intense and high and spiritual' (*BD* 21)? In that case, Danby must have taken it with him to the transitory lodgings he inhabited in the years between leaving Notting Hill and moving to Stadium Street—no trivial matter. Danby sings jocular music-hall songs, and is seduced by dance music. Perhaps he plays the piano too, though it is not mentioned. I may be reading far too much into these glancing references to a piano—it is possible that a piano came with the house when Danby bought it. But associating the memory of Gwen with a piano, even though there is no other suggestion that she was musical, adds a dimension of solidity and particularity to her memory.

Hilda Chase-White in *The red and the green* owns a grand piano which complicates her move from London to Dublin but is never referred to

again. There are no other hints that Hilda has a particular interest in music: the possession of a grand piano seems in her case little more than a status symbol. It is 'dismantled and perched on its side' in her entrance hall, awaiting the uncertain return of the removal men who dumped it there. Her son Andrew and friend Christopher are willing to move the other furniture, 'but the piano would need three or four men. Hilda's suggestion that Pat Dumay should be asked to come and help was received by Andrew with a silence so profound that even his mother quickly changed the subject' (*RG* 202). This is as telling a sentence as any in the novel, illustrating the huge rift in this family between the Anglo-Irish Chase-Whites and the Catholic Dumays, and Hilda's wilful obliviousness to these tensions.

Diane Sedleigh, in *The philosopher's pupil*, has a piano which, although usually silent, speaks volumes. Diane has recently spent all her time waiting for George McCaffrey, who pays her rent and visits her irregularly, though she 'knows in her heart' that she is not his 'mistress' (*PP* 72). Among the 'larger articles of furniture' cluttering her small flat there is

> an upright piano with an inlaid floral pattern and brass candle-holders. Diane, who could not play, had bought it cheap for the use of some hypothetical pianist client. She had pictured a tender scene, candle-lit. … But no piano player had come and the piano was, even to her ear when she idly strummed it, patently in need of tuning. The top of the piano was crowded with small objects, miniature dolls, bits of china, toy animals. 'These are your children,' one of her clients once told her, 'you express your frustrated maternal feeling by taking pity on these bits of junk in shops!' The speaker had a wife and four fine children … After he went away she cried for a long time. (*PP* 76–77)

Diane bought her piano before George appeared on the scene, and it was part of the fantasy life which she invented to make her life as 'the most genteel prostitute in Ennistone' bearable (*GA* 70). Her connection with the volatile and unbalanced George is clearly not going to lead her anywhere—in fact she is tethered to the small flat he rents for her. She seems destined for a sad and desolate end. But she turns out not to be a pathetic victim after all: at the end of the novel she escapes to Paris and finds a kind, rich patron. She 'lives in a pleasant airy apartment on the Quai aux Fleurs with a view of Notre Dame', and has 'invented a past for herself which is more in keeping with her present affluence' (*PP* 551). What happened to

the piano with the floral decoration and the brass candle-holders, or whether there is a piano in the new apartment, is not recorded.

Jackson's dilemma has no fewer than three female musicians who have married men who disliked music. Benet's mother Eleanor was 'training to be a singer. However Pat did not like music', and Eleanor 'died quite early' in a car accident (*JD* 8). Later we meet Anna Dunarven, whose 'mother had been a promising pianist, but had given up her ambitions when she married a totally unmusical man' (*JD* 95). Anna also gave up playing piano when she 'married another unmusical, though otherwise angelic, man' (*JD* 96). By now, musical surrender within a marriage begins to seem like shorthand for a common pattern of wives submitting, meekly or otherwise, to prevailing social expectations of a husband's right to dictate what his wife may and may not do.

In *Nuns and soldiers*, the significance of the habitually unplayed piano is a little different. Tim's father had been a barrister and an amateur musician, 'a good pianist but never achieved excellence'. He had dabbled in composition, and later abandoned his law practice and devoted himself to it, at first with modest success. 'He had a fine baritone voice, … knew every song', and 'could play anything on the piano. He was a concert in himself, whether comic or serious' (*NS* 79). But the marriage was an unhappy one: 'As a husband and father he had fewer talents.' Tim's parents separated … or rather, the father departed, and 'turned up in England at intervals to see the children' (Tim and his sister Rita) (*NS* 79). His mother was also a musician—a flautist who had played in the London Symphony Orchestra. However, the children were not given a musical education. Their mother, 'whose flute was heard no more, had no will to urge her unruly children to practise the art which had brought her only sad memories' (*NS* 80). The piano is only played during the father's occasional visits, when 'the children laughed and shouted with pleasure when the big handsome redheaded papa made his appearance and sat at the piano' (*NS* 80). In this case the silence or otherwise of the piano is an index of the mother's unhappiness, either reminding her of his absence or advertising his insensitive and unwelcome presence, and one cannot wonder that she was 'frail nervous irritable disappointed [and] impoverished'. Like so many of these musical women, she died early, and her ex-husband was killed in a motor accident, leaving Tim with no interest in music. Later, too late, he would regret his unkindness to his mother and 'had come round to loving his mother and hating his father' (*NS* 81). In his first important conversation with Gertrude, he tells her about his family.

His father was 'sort of' musical, he says, but 'I have no music in me' (*NS* 183). Then he tells her about the mother: '"I was so unkind to my mother, I see it now. She was musical too, you know—" He recalled suddenly the sound of his mother's flute, always such a sad sound, heard less and less as the years went by' (*NS* 184).

No Women Composers

The mediocre artist Tim Reede, in an argument with his lover Daisy (a writer and former painter), asserts 'there never have been any good women painters, and there never will be. No sex drive, no imagination. No women mathematicians, no women composers' (*NS* 135). Bracingly, Daisy responds in kind:

> Oh stop rubbishing, you know you're only doing it to hurt me. Ever since the bloody world bloody started bloody men have been sitting down and being waited on by women, and even when women get some education they can't concentrate because they have to jump up whenever little mannie arrives. (*NS* 135)

Daisy is a survivor: she does not die of TB or cancer, but leaves to forge a new life in America when she loses Tim to Gertrude. Gertrude herself had been persuaded by her late husband, the saintly Guy Openshaw, not to write the novel she had planned: 'Did the world need yet another mediocre novel?' (*NS* 27). Ironically, when Guy is dead and she is married to Tim, she decides that she might write a novel after all. 'I always thought I could', she tells Tim (*NS* 487). The tired misogynistic assumptions about women's lack of creativity that Tim spouts—probably without much thought—cannot touch the resilient Daisy, but they have been common currency for so long that it often takes an effort of will to counter them. Franca in *The message to the planet* is one of the most vividly portrayed victims of this belief, as I have shown in "Chapter 3: 'The Point at Which Flesh and Spirit Most Joyfully Meet': Singers and Singing". Her husband, Jack (a professional painter like Tim, but more successful) asserts: 'Painting is based on sex. Why are there no good women painters? After all they've had every chance to practise *that* art! It's because women don't have sexual fantasies' (*MP* 19). The fact that this is a self-fulfilling (not to mention self-interested) prophecy is made clear as we come to know his remarkable and repressed wife, Franca.

Beyond that passing taunt by Tim Reede, female composers do not feature in Murdoch's fictional world (nor do many male composers, for that matter). References to a professional career in musical performance, or the serious practice of music, occur more often in her novels: the practice of music is absorbing, time-consuming and, unlike literary writing, cannot be undertaken privately in a corner of the drawing room. A musician cannot practise silently, and those with whom she shares living space must indulge her if she is to continue to be a musician. Romula Cuno, perhaps, continued to play the piano although her husband 'hated music'. Perhaps she only played, furtively, when he was out of earshot.

Murdoch has always been aware of these pressures, and in 1958 she wrote an article on the subject of women's participation in male-dominated activities:

> The invariable technique is to greet our arrival with mockery and follow it up with patronising interest. When it has at last become clear that one has come to stay, one is classed as a woman lawyer, a woman writer, or whatever it may be, and encouraged by journalists to discuss 'the contribution of women' to the field in question. All this is of course a transparent attempt, which tries with regrettably frequent success to win the cooperation of woman themselves, to put off the day, still I fear far distant, when men are forced to admit that women are simply human beings, just as clever as they are and often cleverer.[5]

In Murdoch's 1962 interview with Harold Hobson, she demonstrated this neatly by setting him straight when he claimed that Simone de Beauvoir 'postulates the inferiority of women to men. … It must be admitted', he says, 'that the achievement of women in the arts is less than that of men.' She replied:

> But naturally it is. The emancipation of women is only just beginning—and there are signs of reaction against it already. Did you see all those letters in *The Times* recently saying that girls ought to be educated for marriage and the home? This is nonsense. Girls ought to have as tough an education,

[5] Iris Murdoch, 'A woman don's delight,' first published in *The compleat imbiber: An entertainment*, ed. Cyril Ray (London: Putnam, 1958), and reprinted in *Occasional essays by Iris Murdoch*, ed. Yozo Muroya and Paul Hullah (Okayama: University Education Press, 1998), 16–20; 16–17.

> academically speaking, as their talents will allow—otherwise, as human beings, they are being cheated, they are being made smaller and less free.[6]

The emancipation is, as her fiction so often shows, necessary on multiple fronts. There is the Aristotelian idea conflating masculine creative genius and sex drive, refuted in *Le Deuxième Sexe* by Simone de Beauvoir, who is in turn comprehensively misconstrued by Hobson in his interview question, neatly contradicted by Murdoch. There is the basic assumption in a patriarchal society that the needs and wishes of the male are always to be given preference: if the husband (Casimir Cuno, or Benet's father Pat) dislikes music, his wife (Romula Cuno, or Benet's mother Eleanor) must give it up; if the husband is a creative artist (Jack Sheerwater), the role of his wife (Franca Sheerwater) is to support him without expecting anything in return—not even fidelity. And of course there is the still prevalent division of labour which assumes that most domestic work is women's work, and that, despite absorbing large amounts of time and energy, it counts for nothing.

Opera, Intimacy, Sexuality and Androgyny in *A fairly honourable defeat*

Differing musical tastes in intimate relationships can cause difficulties, even if neither partner is a practising musician. In *A fairly honourable defeat* Simon Foster 'detest[s] opera' (*FHD* 39), while his lover Axel Nilsson is a connoisseur. The cynical Julius King exploits Simon and Axel's differences, drawing liberally on allusions to opera in his diabolical (though ultimately unsuccessful) plan to wreck their relationship.

One evening, Julius visits them at home. Julius, talking to his old friend Axel about Simon in his presence, remarks that he is 'such a feminine person' and it is therefore surprising that he does not like music, as 'most women are musical' (*FHD* 305). Simon would find this opinion particularly unnerving because he is aware of Axel's hatred 'of the least suggestion of "camp". He … would not tolerate upon Simon's lips the cant language of the homosexual world' (*FHD* 36), which at this period included equating homosexuality with various traits regarded as feminine. David Gordon writes,

[6] Harold Hobson, 'Lunch with Iris Murdoch' in *From a tiny corner*, 5.

> Simon is the younger, more feminine partner, more fun-loving, less intellectual, skilled in cooking, decorating, and choosing colorful clothing, whereas Axel is older, more masculine and worldly, more jealous and severe.[7]

Their relationship is in some ways more like that of adult and child. Simon is insecure, anxious to please, and in a constant state of worried watchfulness, heightened by Axel's professed refusal to 'believe that their relationship would last' (*FHD* 29).

Simon 'felt uneasy about some of his instincts which he now judged to be frivolous. He speculated endlessly about what Axel really thought about him' (*FHD* 37). Alert to their vast differences in tastes and ways of experiencing the world, 'Simon felt sure that Axel's delight in *Don Giovanni* was quite different in kind to his delight in Simon' (*FHD* 39). Despite his dislike of opera, Simon would know that Don Giovanni is an opera about a promiscuous sexual predator. Axel's 'delight in *Don Giovanni*' is intellectual and aesthetic, while his delight in Simon is intimate and personal. Simon is not disposed to make such distinctions: 'all his enjoyments were similar in kind though not in degree, whether he was stroking a cat or a Chippendale chair or drinking a dry martini or looking at a picture by Titian or getting into bed with Axel' (*FHD* 39), and his disapproval of the Don's behaviour might colour his reaction to the opera as work of art. Simon's opinion of opera is never explained, except that it was a secret wrung from him 'in a frenzy of excruciating boredom' after a year of pretence. Axel chided him 'not for his lack of taste but for his failure to be honest' (*FHD* 39). Leaving aesthetic taste aside, it may be that Simon perceives those who profess a passion for opera to be a little snobbish and scornful of those who are not 'in the know', and finds this both boring and alienating.

Peter Conradi writes that '[r]eferences to opera abound in *A fairly honourable defeat* and are carefully chosen'.[8] On the evening of Julius's visit, Axel and Julius are teasing Simon about opera. Axel says he has given up Simon's 'musical education', and the allusion to Simon as his wayward, unteachable pupil is typical. Axel and Julius are chatting about their favourite operas and their favourite cities, communicating in a knowing way

[7] David Gordon, *Iris Murdoch's fables of unselfing* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995), 144–145.

[8] Peter Conradi, *The saint and the artist: A study of the fiction of Iris Murdoch*, 3rd ed. (London: Harper Collins, 2001), 209. Conradi notes that Murdoch's drafts in the Iowa archive show her making careful choices of the operatic references.

which is designed to exclude Simon, who is (for good reason) 'feeling nervy, irritated and miserable' (*FHD* 304). Julius mentions the opera *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* and adds 'Eh, Simon?' Simon responds, 'I can't stand Mozart'—demonstrating that he knows, at least, that this is a Mozart opera, and also that he is in a mood 'when he wanted everything to be awkward, embarrassing and awful' (*FHD* 304). Julius refers to this comic opera about the rescue of a woman from captivity with a wink at Simon to hint at a shared secret. Axel then tells Julius that he heard Simon 'humming *Voi che sapete* only yesterday', to which Simon responds that he only likes 'what I can hum'. Simon's retort does nothing to puncture Julius's bland composure. 'That's not a bad principle', he responds condescendingly. 'At least it's honest' (*FHD* 305).

Voi che sapete is sung by Cherubino, a 'pants role' (that is, the character is a teenage boy, while the singer is a mezzo-soprano) in Mozart's opera *The marriage of Figaro*. The aria is a serenade, in which the young boy asks the women—'you who know what love is'—whether they think he is in love. Julius is clearly amused that Simon was humming this particular melody—'*Tiens!*' he exclaims. Stephen Benson points out that 'opera, especially prior to the nineteenth century, is a form in which gender is frequently and openly unstable', and this makes it a potentially fruitful source for analogy in the contemporary novel, where 'the conventional heterosexuality signified by the staged lesbianism of comic opera becomes part of a novelistic network of real homosexual relations'.[9]

With Julius in control, this beautifully composed scene builds towards a dramatic climax, much like a scene from one of Mozart's great operas. Axel is relaxed and enjoying the evening, chatting with his old friend and teasing Simon, until Julius, as he is about to leave, gleefully presents him with a birthday gift uniquely designed to offend: a large pink stuffed toy. The evening ends, after Julius has departed, with a bitter quarrel between Simon and Axel, whose suspicion and jealousy has now been aroused by Julius's parting hints and affectionate farewell words to Simon. Axel storms out, ordering Simon to 'get that blasted bear out of the house' (*FHD* 308). The secret shared by Julius and Simon concerns an encounter between Simon and Morgan at Julius's flat. Julius has summoned Simon to visit him, ordering him not to tell Axel. As Simon approaches the flat he is beset by various worries. Among these is the feeling that Julius despises

[9] Stephen Benson, *Literary music: writing music in contemporary fiction* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 114–115.

him: 'Did Julius see him as a flimsy effeminate *poseur*?', he worries. 'London felt idle and languid and wicked. I feel as if something were going to happen, he thought, and something not at all nice' (*FHD* 159).

When he arrives, he discovers not Julius but Morgan (his brother's wife's sister) dressed in nothing but a dishcloth. This is the sequel to a scene where Morgan has visited Julius in an attempt to rekindle their romance. Julius coolly rejects her and destroys the clothes she had been wearing. She persuades Simon to let her wear his clothes while she goes home to get her own. Morgan is transformed into 'a clever boy, not even raffish, not even a dandy, just hard and clever'. She says, 'I feel I look *terrific*. Your trousers fit me marvellously' (*FHD* 165). Morgan and Simon are close friends—there is the merest suggestion of a sexual attraction but it is a close, affectionate, confiding, almost familial, relationship. This is another thing which displeases Axel, who dislikes and mistrusts Morgan.

The reason Axel is not home on this evening, and that Simon need not tell him he has been to visit Julius, is that he has gone to the opera to see Beethoven's *Fidelio*. This is another opera featuring a cross-dressing principal role. Leonora, who is known in the opera as Fidelio, dresses as a man so that she can get access to the prison where her husband, Florestan, is being held as a political prisoner, and help him escape. Leonora is famous for her constancy and loyalty to her husband, and her bravery. *Fidelio* and Mozart's *Figaro* are both political operas in their ways, but *Figaro* is a comedy while *Fidelio* is deeply serious, though ultimately redemptive rather than tragic. Axel, when he arrives home that night, is 'very overwhelmed' by the opera and asks no questions about how Simon has spent the evening (*FHD* 203).

Conradi notes: 'The structure of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* comes from religious allegory, but it is an enabling, not a determining structure.'[10] Likewise, there are no exact correspondences with the scenarios of the operas that feature in these scenes, but suggestive links can be made: the parallels are 'enabling, not … determining'. Because this novel, like most comic operas, relies heavily on the conventions of farce, such as conversations overheard by characters in hiding, misunderstandings, surprise revelations and comic set-pieces, it is not necessary for a direct nexus to be established. Morgan (with her androgynous name) is a woman cross-dressing, like Fidelio (the character) and *Figaro*'s Cherubino (the singer). Cherubino, a young man played by a woman, also dresses in women's

[10] Conradi, *The saint and the artist*, 205.

clothes twice during the opera. Morgan is 'rescued' from Julius's flat by Simon, like Florestan in *Fidelio* and like the captives in *Entführung* who are rescued from the Turkish *seraglio* by the hero.

The three operas mentioned in this scene variously test the fidelity of female characters. In *Figaro* the libertine Count attempts to seduce Figaro's bride, his wife's maid Susanna, but she and the Countess between them outwit him (by switching their costumes, thereby crossing classes rather than genders). In *Entführung* it is not enough that the two women who are captive in the *seraglio* are rescued, but that they are rescued with their virtue intact: both reject sexual advances, in some cases verging on attempted rape. And even the high-minded *Fidelio*, cross-dressing to save her husband, is pursued by the gaoler's daughter.

Axel and Simon are a gay couple committed to a long-term relationship, and ultimately through Simon's honesty and bravery they overcome the threat that Julius malevolently poses to their future. Like the cross-dressing Fidelio, Simon saves his love. Like Figaro, Axel is finally convinced that his lover's infidelity was an illusion. When Simon finally summons the courage and maturity to explain what has happened, Axel asks him for reassurance: 'You didn't have any sort of love passage with either Morgan or Julius?'

They express their sexuality in different ways. When Simon first knows Axel as his brother's friend, he tells Morgan, 'I hadn't the faintest idea that he was queer' (*FHD* 198). Julius chooses to characterise Simon's gay persona as feminine, and make a link between femininity and musical taste, while Axel is a self-consciously male music-lover who claims that he knows no 'really musical women' (*FHD* 305). Murdoch is playing here with many layers of cultural suggestion, incorporating links between cross-dressing, androgyny, bravery, rescue and fidelity. The operatic references, though working at a level nearer the narrative surface than the deep theological myth Conradi refers to,[11] pull these all together into one glorious, terrifying and comic plot.

This novel also contains one of Murdoch's earliest implicit references to Titian's painting *The flaying of Marsyas*. In Chapter 2 of the novel, Simon,

[11] For a discussion of the theological framework of this novel, see Gillian Dooley, 'Good versus evil in *Mansfield park* and *A fairly honourable defeat*,' *Transnational Literature* 1, 2 (May 2009), http://dspace.flinders.edu.au/dspace/bitstream/2328/3346/1/FHD_MP.pdf.

who is an art historian and works at a gallery, first mentions the legend of the satyr flayed by Apollo for daring to challenge him to a musical contest, presumably referring to Titian's painting, as discussed in "Chapter 2: 'The Music Is Too Painful': Music as Character and Atmosphere". Titian had been mentioned in Simon's anxious ruminations about their differences, two pages earlier: 'You're Apollo and I'm Marsyas. You'll end by flaying me.' Axel responds that it is 'an image of love … the inevitable agony of the human soul in its desire to achieve God', although Simon counters that 'there's only blood and pain and no love' (*FHD* 41). Although the musical context of the legend is not mentioned, it is interesting that this discussion appears in the novel just after the description of Simon's anxiety about Axel, and his worries about their different modes of encountering the sensuous pleasures of art, music and love. A trace of that anxiety remains at the end of the novel, despite their reconciliation. Simon asks, 'You won't flay me in the end?' Axel, who cannot resist teasing him, responds, 'How do I know, child?' (*FHD* 434–435).

Links between cross-dressing and music, like Morgan's transformation into a 'clever boy' on the evening that Axel attends *Fidelio*, appear in several of Murdoch's novels. As I have noted in "Chapter 3: 'The Point at Which Flesh and Spirit Most Joyfully Meet': Singers and Singing", the two songs which Lizzie sings in *The sea, the sea*, are both from 'pants roles'. One is Cherubino's aria *Voi che sapete*—the same tune that Simon has been heard humming—and the other is the boyish spirit Ariel's song *Full fathom five* from Shakespeare's *Tempest*. Charles remembers her singing these songs years before, and she sings them again at Shruff End. (Ariel would have been played by a boy in Shakespeare's theatre but in later times was more usually played by a woman, as is the case when Lizzie played Ariel to Charles's Prospero.) In *The black prince*, one of the women's voices that cause Bradley such 'sugary agony' at Covent Garden is that of the singer playing the role of Octavian, the young lover of the Marschallin. 'The lovely boy protests but his heart is free' (*BP* 219), Bradley guesses, unable to hear the words but grasping the situation by being carried along by the music and the spectacle. Later, he is finally able (controversially) to consummate his desire for the androgynously named Julian only when she dresses as Hamlet.

And in the magical scene in *The philosopher's pupil* when Emma—also an ambiguous name, being both a woman's name and a diminutive form of his own full name Emmanuel—enchants the unruly crowd at the 'Slipper House riot' with his singing, he is dressed in women's clothing.

Earlier in the evening he had been experimenting with trying on his hostess's clothes, and in the confusion, 'with his glasses on and without his wig, he had evidently forgotten that he was wearing one of Judy Osmore's cocktail dresses' (*PP* 385–386). It is as if cross-dressing, or voicing the song of a being of the opposite sex, releases some inhibition, perhaps in the singer but also in the hearers, and adds an extra element of enchantment to the music, either as performed or remembered.

Conclusion

Murdoch was, of course, far from a stereotypical 'feminine', quiet, domesticated woman. In an interview with Sheila Hale, 'part of a feature on ten women writers', Murdoch resisted being 'associated with "the market in which women write consciously for other women"'.[12] She said, in another interview, 'I think I identify with men more than with women, because the ordinary human condition still seems to belong more to a man than to a woman.'[13] This does not mean, of course, that she failed to understand the predicaments many women found themselves in. She knew perfectly well how few women had been given the chance to attempt the high standard of education she had attained, and there are very few women in the novels who are, like her, professional creative artists or academics with successful careers. It is very clear from Murdoch's stories of women's stunted (sometimes tragic, sometimes frustrated) lives that she understood every possible nuance of the unequal power relationships which so often exist even in a relatively successful marriage. Although these stories are not always in the foreground of the novels, they are never far away from the surface, bubbling up in startling statements like 'they never let the women sing', or 'she married an unmusical man'. It requires attentive reading to piece together something of the thwarted lives of Harry Cuno's mother and first wife, or to notice what the pianos sitting silently in drawing rooms in many novels are actually saying. When a male character claims that there are 'no women composers' or that 'most women are musical', it is worth looking at what their real agenda might be, even if it is just to score points in an argument, or to make malicious insinuations about another character.

[12] Sheila Hale, 'Interview from "Women writers now: Their approach and their apprenticeship"' in *From a tiny corner*, 30.

[13] Jack Biles, 'An interview with Iris Murdoch' in *From a tiny corner*, 61.

Murdoch's views on sexuality have come to public notice through the publication of several volumes of personal letters, chiefly *Living on paper* edited by Anne Rowe and Avril Horner, biographical works by Peter Conradi and others, and the memoirs by her husband John Bayley. I will not draw on these sources here, but I will quote again from the 1976 interview with Sheila Hale. 'My own characters are often androgynous … because I believe that most people are androgynous: there is certainly no difference in terms of mental make-up. There are fewer women in public life, men are better educated; but there are not different kinds of mind.'[14] Although there is not a difference in 'mental make-up' (by which I assume Murdoch means biology of the brain or genetics), education and socialisation have nevertheless made the lives of many men and women vastly different, and this shows in her characters. As she said to Michael Bellamy, 'In fact, in a quiet way, there is a lot of social criticism in my novels',[15] and her quiet social criticism is often expressed in passing references to the repression of women's creativity and artistic practice for the sake of the more demanding men in their lives.

These very clearly gendered situations are sometimes undermined or complicated when characters appear with androgynous features, either temporary or permanent. Some have ambiguous names—Morgan, Julian, Emma. Each of these characters cross-dresses at some point. The two young women, Morgan (in *A fairly honourable defeat*) and Julian (in *The black prince*) are each linked in some way with female opera singers who appear on stage dressed as men. The operatic situations manifest themselves through parallels and echoes in the operas that appear in one form or another—experienced, or discussed. Neither of these women escapes unscathed from the highly charged tragi-comedic quasi-operatic world they find themselves in.

Lizzie, in *The sea, the sea*, would have cross-dressed in the past to play Shakespeare's Ariel and Mozart's Cherubino, and she sings their androgynous songs during a significant evening at Shruff End, enchanting the men present. Emma, the countertenor in *The philosopher's pupil*, himself cross-dresses and then sings the rowdy crowd at the Slipper House into docility with Purcell's sublime melody—'Music for a while shall all your

[14] Hale, 'Women writers now,' 30.
[15] Michael Bellamy, 'An interview with Iris Murdoch' in *From a tiny corner*, 48.

cares beguile.' Emma has liberated himself 'for a while' from his inhibited, serious, studious, 'masculine' persona, releasing all the power of his joyful 'flesh and spirit' to enact the enchantment necessary to restore order in Ennistone. Whether associated with androgyny, sexuality or gender differences, music is invoked regularly to provide a context, an analogy, a metaphor, a metonym or an illustration. Murdoch thus enriches, deepens and complicates these narratives of intimate relations between lovers, spouses, relatives and others whose lives intersect in the pages of her novels.

PART II

Silence and Sound

Chapter 5: 'Different Voices, Different Discourses': Voices and Other Human Sounds

Introduction: Serious Noticing

In *The sublime and the beautiful revisited*, Iris Murdoch talks of the importance of realising 'the vast and varied reality outside ourselves' by apprehending 'the sight not of physical nature, but of our surroundings as consisting of other individual men'.[1] Her cast of characters is indeed vast and varied, and these individuals are described and distinguished from each other in a myriad of ways. Critics have already noticed and discussed many of these characterisations, including what Murdoch's people *look* like. Little critical attention has been devoted to the noises that her people make, or what her novels *sound* like.

James Wood writes about writers who 'seriously notice the world':

> Perhaps they do nothing less than rescue the life of things from their death—from two deaths, one small and one large: from the 'death' which literary form always threatens to impose on life, and from actual death. … I mean the fading reality that besets details as they recede from us—the memories of our childhood, the almost-forgotten pungency of flavours, smells, textures: the slow death that we deal to the world by the sleep of our attention.[2]

[1] Iris Murdoch, 'The sublime and beautiful revisited' in *Existentialists and mystics*, ed. Peter Conradi (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997), 282. I take 'physical nature' to mean the non-human world, and 'individual men' as including all individual human beings.

[2] James Wood, 'Serious noticing' in *Serious noticing: Selected essays* (London: Vintage, 2019), 68.

G. Dooley, *Listening to Iris Murdoch*, Iris Murdoch Today,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-00860-3_5

Wood does not mention noises in this catalogue of sense data. He is discussing a Chekhov story, *The kiss*, but as a 'serious noticer' Murdoch is a disciple of writers like Chekhov, and her novels are full of this kind of detail. Wood, like Murdoch, uses the metaphor of vision: he talks about 'looking harder: … transfiguring the object'.[3] But the kind of attentiveness they both espouse must apply to all the senses, especially in imaginative literature.[4] Murdoch's noticing has an aural dimension which rewards the reader's serious attention.

As Wood writes, 'Detail is always *someone*'s detail.'[5] This chapter accordingly concerns not music but other human noises in Murdoch's soundworld, that is, noises belonging to or caused by particular characters in her fiction, as noticed or heard by themselves or others. When they speak, I am interested as much in how they speak as what they say. In some cases, accents and speaking voices are described, often in tandem with a character's physical appearance. Sometimes, an accent is implied by the speech rhythms in reported dialogue. A foreign accent can be endearing or menacing, or it might indicate an unusual depth of cultivation and education. It is never described merely for comic effect.

Given the importance of narrative *voice* in literary studies, it is ironic that the sound of characters' voices receives relatively little attention in the critical literature. Anna Snaith points out:

> Arnold Bennett's assertion that 'a book is just a man talking to you' in *Literary Taste and How to Form It* (1909) indicates not only the conflation of narrative and authorial voice but the onus on the literary critic to train attentive ears to pick up the 'right' kind of voice.[6]

Snaith goes on to trace the 'shifting understandings of voice and vocality' throughout twentieth-century literary studies.[7] The sounds implied in poetry—metre, rhyme and assonance—are arguably more obvious and

[3] Wood, 'Serious noticing', 73.

[4] For a critique of Murdoch's privileging of vision over the other senses in her philosophical work, see Christopher Cordner, 'Vision and encounter in moral thinking' in *Reading Iris Murdoch's metaphysics as a guide to morals*, ed. Nora Hämäläinen and Gillian Dooley (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 209–225.

[5] Wood, 'Serious noticing', 55.

[6] Anna Snaith, 'Introduction' in *Sound and literature*, ed. Anna Snaith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 14.

[7] Snaith, 'Introduction', 14.

therefore more readily available for study than the sounds implied in prose fiction. However, readers once alerted and attuned to the sounds implied in novels, as well as those explicitly described, can enhance their sensual experience of reading, and in the process come to understand more completely the complex effects of a narrative. 'Voice', as Stephen Benson points out, is a basic concept in narrative literary studies, which could be puzzling if reading literature is conceived as a silent activity:

> To think in any way of literary narrative as requiring, or involving, or predicated upon, voice, phantasmically or otherwise, involves the imagination of sound, of the *sound* of a voice. However metaphoric, this sound permeates Bakhtin's valorization of the novel as a multi-voiced genre.[8]

'Voice' in this sense belongs to the narrator—perhaps more exactly or literally characterised as style or tone—rather than the voices, implied or described, of characters in fiction: Chris Baldick calls it 'a rather vague metaphorical term by which some critics refer to distinctive features of a written work in terms of spoken utterance'.[9] If there is a first-person narrator, the voice of the novel will be, in essence, their voice. Although she does not mention the implied sound of their voices, Deborah Johnson begins her illuminating discussion of Murdoch's first-person narrators by pointing out that each of them is a 'childless male professional who is … articulate to the point of volubility'.[10] They wield this verbal power in support of

> their intense misogyny. … The male lover continually expresses his sense of superiority through his sheer powers of articulation, his marked tendency to cap and better or simply to interrupt the utterances of his 'mistress'. … Part of the reason why Iris Murdoch's male narrators fail to 'see' is precisely because they talk too much.[11]

This is true also of many of Murdoch's other male characters who are not first-person narrators: Austin Gibson Grey in *An accidental man* and Jack

[8] Stephen Benson, *Literary music: Writing music in contemporary fiction* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 9.

[9] Chris Baldick, 'Voice' in *The concise Oxford dictionary of literary terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 239.

[10] Deborah Johnson, *Iris Murdoch* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 4.

[11] Johnson, *Iris Murdoch*, 8–9.

Sheerwater in *The message to the planet* come to mind. However, as always, it is dangerous to generalise: in Murdoch's fiction there are examples, too, of men who are silenced or confounded by the voices of the women in their lives. Some of these relationships will feature in what follows here. At the same time, there are the partnerships in which the parties seem more evenly matched in this respect and which, for this reason, appear to have better prospects: Mary Clothier and John Ducane in *The nice and the good*, perhaps, or the two couples, Louise and Clement, Sefton and Harvey, who pair up at the end of *The green knight*. These relaxed conversations often come towards a novel's end when mysteries are cleared away, barriers come down and tongues become loosened; either between established couples who have re-established communication, like Simon and Axel in *A fairly honourable defeat*, or between newly united pairs, like Henry and Colette in *Henry and Cato*.

Charles Arrowby in *The sea, the sea* reminisces about his days in the theatre: 'How I enjoyed rending expectant silences with noise, noise as structure, noise as colour' (*TSTS* 34). Murdoch shares his sense of drama, and this device is as effective on the page as it would be on the stage. Sudden noises can be intrusive or shocking. Doorbells and telephones ringing, doors banging, the bead curtain rattling in *The sea, the sea*—these sounds can be comic, or terrifying or unsettling. In "Chapter 6: 'Like a Clarity Under a Mist': Ambient Noise and Silence, Dreamscapes and Atmosphere" chapter I will look at—or listen for—silence and ambient noise, but here I am concerned with the variety of sounds made by individuals as they interact with each other, or are perceived, unwittingly or otherwise, by others.

'The Long Search for Words': 'Something special'

Although Iris Murdoch's short story 'Something special'[12] was written around the time when *Under the net* was published, it is hard to imagine two more different narratives. In March 1954, Murdoch visited Ireland, and noted in her diary 'her only partly fabricated feeling of being at home there'.[13] On returning to Oxford she wrote her sole excursion into the

[12] 'Something special' was first published in *Winter's tales* 3 (1957): 175–204. It was not separately published until 1999, in an edition illustrated by Michael McCurdy (Chatto and Windus).

[13] Valerie Purton, *An Iris Murdoch chronology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 67.

short story form. It is possible to see—and hear—an imagined alternative life in this unhappy story, that would have made 'being at home' in Ireland a far from desirable state of affairs.

Although both these early works are infused with Irishness, they have hardly another thing in common. *Under the net* is set in London, narrated in the first person by the witty, footloose intellectual Jake Donaghue, who does not specifically admit to being Irish but has an Irish name and a distant Irish cousin. 'Something special' is set in Dublin, narrated in the third person through the point of view of a restless, trapped young Irish woman, Yvonne Geary. One thing Jake and Yvonne have in common is poverty, but Jake has limitless opportunities if only he will apply himself. Yvonne's choices amount to staying in the suburban stationery shop kept by her mother and uncle, or the spectre of marriage to Sam Goldman, who to her is 'nothing special' (*SS* 192). *Under the net* is a picaresque, fresh-air novel: Jake is adrift but he is free. 'Something special' is claustrophobic. 'Can't I live my life as I please … since it's the only thing I have?', Yvonne pleads with her mother (*SS* 176). The implied answer to her question, loud and clear, is 'No'. The story ends in the bed she shares with her mother, as she declares that she will marry Sam, burying her face 'deep in her pillow, so deep that her mother should not be able to hear that she was just starting to cry' (*SS* 204). Of all Murdoch's trapped and defeated female characters, Yvonne Geary is perhaps the most depressing and distressing. However, as Gonzalez writes, the story of 'Yvonne's painful capitulation in deciding to marry Sam Goldman' is 'engrossing and delightful for many reasons'.[14]

All Yvonne has to set against the living death of her suffocating world is her voice. The word 'special' resonates through the dialogue, the 'something special' she yearns for but which is out of her reach; the 'nothing special' she settles for in the end. Her mother and uncle nag her to accept Sam. 'Sensible people', her uncle tells her, 'marry because they want to be in the married state and not because of feelings they have in their breasts' (*SS* 178). In answer to these dreary platitudes, Yvonne can either say nothing, as she does at first, or utter ineffectual exclamations:

> 'She's cross again,' said her uncle, who was standing at the door of the inner room.
>
> 'Who's she? She's the cat!' said Yvonne. (*SS* 175)

[14] Alexander Gonzalez, 'Joyce's presence in Iris Murdoch's "Something special",' *Studies in Short Fiction* 35 (2011): 69–85; 70.

Exclamations marks pepper her speech, whether she's talking to her relatives or her suitor, but what she says carries little weight against the forces of convention and poverty that entrap her.

Accents define the characters in this mordant story. Yvonne, her mother and her uncle all speak with a Dublin lilt. The older characters—still talking about her, in her presence, in the third person—taunt her by reminding her of a former boyfriend:

> 'She's still stuck on the English lad,' said her mother, 'the tall fellow, Tony Thingummy was his name.'
>
> 'I am not!' said Yvonne. 'Good riddance to bad rubbish!'
>
> 'I could not abide his voice,' said her uncle. 'He had his mouth all prissed up when he talked, like a man was acting in a play.' (*SS* 178)

This Englishman, who had brought Yvonne flowers and even sang to her and who, according to the mother, 'was a jaunty boy … and a fine slim thing with some pretty ways to him' (*SS* 179), is not mentioned again, but the vehement defensiveness of Yvonne's response is perhaps a clue to her discontent.

Early in their eventful evening out, the unfortunate Sam has tried to woo Yvonne as they look out on the harbour and the mail boat leaving for England, by quoting from a romantic song, 'The moon hath raised her lamp above' (*SS* 186).[15] He elicits the unpromising response, delivered with 'a look of exaggerated scorn', that she has seen the boat leaving for England many times and will be on it one day, as would 'every Irish person with a soul in them' (*SS* 186). The Englishman may have been a lost chance for her to escape. She regards Sam as a poor substitute and lets him know it with the 'look of petulant intensity she always affected' for his 'benefit' (*SS* 185) and by her scornful responses to everything he says. He can do nothing right: he asks where she would like to go next and she responds impatiently and gracelessly:

> 'Don't be eternally asking me that question. … Just go somewhere yourself and I'll probably follow!' (*SS* 186)

This is the most encouraging thing she says to him all night, and anticipates her unhappy acquiescence in their future together. She contradicts

[15] The first line of a duet from the 1862 opera *The lily of Killarney* by Julius Benedict.

everything he says and undermines his attempts to please or compliment her, not with witty remarks but with hasty retorts or sullen silences. She embarrasses him by speaking loudly in a quiet saloon lounge. They go downstairs to the noisy basement bar where she is immediately happier. 'A man with a penetrating voice' insults her and Sam, goaded into defending her, shouts an inept insult back. But she is impervious:

> She stopped trying to hear [Sam's] voice and gave herself up to the pleasure of being part of such a noisy crowded drunken scene. By the time she had sipped half of her whisky she was perceptibly enjoying herself very much indeed. Upon the confused flood of noise and movement she was now afloat. (*SS* 192)

But she cannot remain simply an observer for long. The raucous cheerfulness of scene begins to unravel and the noises instead become threatening: 'The piano stopped abruptly and the sound of voices became suddenly jagged and harsh' (*SS* 192). Sam suggests they leave, but she says, 'Ah shut up! … looking past him with glowing eyes to where the drama was unfolding' (*SS* 193). Her enjoyment, although intense, is short-lived, since she is soon unwittingly caught up in an altercation between 'a tall thin young fellow', obviously very drunk, and 'a thick man with a Cork accent', who makes 'a continual sneering noise' (*SS* 193).

In this scene it hardly matters what is being said. The noises themselves chart the course of events, from cheerful conviviality to violent discord in a matter of minutes. Yvonne's elation outlasts the reader's for a few moments: Murdoch guides us through the scene with an orchestration of sounds that warn us of what is coming: the piano stopping; the voices becoming 'jagged and harsh'; the argument between the 'thick' man and the 'thin' man. Her mood changes suddenly only when she becomes the focus of attention first of the thin young man and then, through his clumsy, drunken homage to her, the rest of the crowd. As she is assaulted by various people in the bar, verbally and then physically, she reacts with a kind of paralysis of both body and voice: 'Yvonne was crimson. For a moment she leaned there rigid as if pinned to the tiles' (*SS* 194). Sam and Yvonne flee the bar, but the verbal attack continues: 'before the heavy doors were shut again, they heard the yell which followed them up into the street: "It's safer upstairs, mister!" screamed a woman's voice' (*SS* 194). But even then the tall young man, a self-proclaimed poet, pursues Yvonne and Sam outside where, unable to find his poem in his coat pocket,

he makes stumbling attempts to recite flowery verse in her honour, interrupting his inept rhapsodies with, 'If I could only find me bloody poem' (*SS* 195). The series of verbal buffetings that Yvonne has undergone from the beginning of the story finally renders her wordless. Flight is now her only recourse: she runs off, followed by Sam, who has extricated himself as politely as possible from the poet's insistent apologies. She will not answer his concerned questions about her welfare at first, at last snapping back at him, 'Oh be silent, I've enough of this, just come to the tram' (*SS* 197).

Much of this story is dialogue, often without any commentary. The mother and the uncle, their Dublin accents implied by their speech rhythms, reveal their prejudices and attitudes in dialogue. The uncle complains that Yvonne reads novels and magazines 'that are putting ideas in her head until she won't marry unless it's the Sheik of Araby' (*SS* 176). He invokes this ultra-romantic song (associated with Rudolph Valentino in *The sheik*) to underline his accusation that Yvonne has inflated ideas about herself.[16] Later, the mother responds to the unctuous Christmas card salesman's quotation from *Abide with me*—'Change and decay in all around we see. I'm told poor Mrs Taylor … has passed on since now a year ago'—with deflating matter-of-factness like Yvonne's: 'Yes, the poor old faggot. … but after seventy years you can't complain, can you? The good Lord's lending it to you after that' (*SS* 182).

Sam, polite and tentative, is the only character who speaks mainly in 'standard English'. Yvonne watches him in the lounge bar:

> For an instant she concentrated the glow of her imagination upon him; but could only notice that he leaned forward in an apologetic way to the barman, and how absurdly his small feet turned out as he stood there. He gave the order in a low voice, as if he were asking for something not quite nice at the chemist's. (*SS* 188)

Sam 'hated being looked at' (*SS* 190). Clearly he is dazzled by Yvonne, but the prospects for this marriage are dismal given their failure to communicate on even the simplest of levels. His shy awkwardness makes him faintly ridiculous but at the same time enlists the reader's sympathy. Unlike

[16] Gonzalez notes that this reference may also provide a clue to the influence of James Joyce's story 'Araby' on this story (73), which he sees as 'an unobtrusive tribute to Joyce' (70).

Yvonne, he is sensitive to beauty in the natural world. He notices the moon over the harbour, and later, trying to make up for the disastrous evening, he takes her to see a fallen tree by the lake in Stephen's Green. He finds the scene romantic; she is disgusted, disappointed and dismayed. Her idea of romance involves diamond rings, not dead trees. She runs to the tram, pursued by Sam whose pleading she rejects as 'whingeing' (*SS* 201). The dejected Sam is left at the tram stop, 'his two hands raised in the air in a gesture of dereliction' (*SS* 202).

When Yvonne gets home, she stands alone in the shop, listening and thinking:

> It was very still in the shop. The familiar smell of wood and old paper made itself quietly known. Behind her the last cars and trams were rumbling by, and in the dark space in front of her was to be heard the heavy breathing of her mother, already sleeping in the inner room. But in the shop it was very silent and all the objects upon the shelves were alert and quiet like little listening animals. Yvonne stood quite still there for ten minutes, for nearly fifteen minutes. She had never stood still for so long in her whole life. (*SS* 202)

This passage anticipates a later Murdochian style, with its animism, its wordless but eloquent silence infused with smells and distant noises; the noise of her mother's breathing underlining the unpalatable life Yvonne is desperate to escape and no doubt tipping her over into the defeated decision to marry Sam. She decides in silence, and she cannot tell her mother why. All she has is her voice, but she does not have the words to express herself.

'Something special' has a sound-world of voices nagging, ranting, pleading, accusing, apologising for themselves, yelling; of significant silences; of Sam's 'long search for words, for the simple words that would lead on to the more important ones' (*SS* 189) and Yvonne's abrupt impatient responses to his tentative advances and attempts at genuine conversation. Accents and tones of voice are particularly important in placing characters, as they will continue to be in the novels. Other sounds are muted or absent. There is the rattle of the tram, but no cars, no doorbells or telephones which become more significant in later novels. Music is not often heard in this world either—there's only the piano in the basement bar, 'felt rather than heard' inside the din (*SS* 190) and more noticeable when it stops. Natural sounds—birdsong, rivers, waves on the sea shore—are absent in this closed-in world.

'The Quiet Sound of Voices': *The sandcastle*

Murdoch's third novel *The sandcastle* is another narrative in which characters are trapped in a claustrophobic world. It is perhaps not surprising that these two works have some common elements. According to Valerie Purton, in September 1955 Murdoch 'has completed the first draft of *The Sandcastle* [and] … is at the same time still working on her short story, "Something Special"'.[17] The second draft of *The sandcastle* was completed in January 1956.[18] It concerns a marriage as small and constricted as the family home where school-teacher Bill Mor and his wife, Nan, live. Their dialogue betrays an enervating failure to communicate.

The novel opens with a conversation over lunch in their 'tiny' dining-room, on a hot day. Like Yvonne in 'Something special', Nan always speaks sharply or sarcastically to Mor and seems intent on needling him. He is alternately apologetic and defensive. The tone of their dialogue is established very early, in the third line of the first chapter, when she says, 'You could articulate more distinctly … if you took that rather damp-looking cigarette out of your mouth' (*S* 7). She mocks him by mimicking things he says, she criticises his friends, she flares up when he asks her not to nag their son. They clearly see eye to eye on nothing, and their disunity is demonstrated by their bickering. Nan's side of the dialogue is, again like Yvonne's, full of exclamation marks.

Anne Rowe and Avril Horner point out the importance of realising that for Murdoch 'the aesthetics and form of a story are as important as its content'.[19] This is the first of several novels that Murdoch begins with a chapter of mainly dialogue in which she introduces the situation and the main characters, while at the same time unfolding the nuances one of the most important relationships in the book.[20] In the first chapter of *The sandcastle*, Mor and Nan are discussing the arrival of the portrait painter Rain Carter, who will be at dinner with the headmaster Demoyte that evening:

[17] Valerie Purton, *An Iris Murdoch chronology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 71.

[18] She was hesitating about marrying John Bayley at this time, but they married in August 1956.

[19] Anne Rowe and Avril Horner, 'Introduction' in *Iris Murdoch: Texts and contexts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 2.

[20] Examples include *A fairly honourable defeat*; *An accidental man*; *Nuns and soldiers*; and *The message to the planet*.

> 'Still, if we have this girl at dinner we shall at least escape Miss Handforth, on whom you dote so!' Miss Handforth was Mr Demoyte's housekeeper, an old enemy of Nan.
>
> 'I don't dote on Handy,' said Mor, 'but at least she's cheerful, and she's good for Demoyte.'
>
> 'She isn't cheerful,' said Nan. 'She just has a loud voice.' (*S* 11)

As I have noted elsewhere, Nan is not a sympathetic character, and this is largely because the point of view is predominantly with Mor throughout the novel, with less than a fifth of the narrative divided between three other characters: Nan, their daughter Felicity and Rain Carter.[21]

A comparison of these two works shows very clearly the importance of the choice of focalising character. They are both third-person narratives but in 'Something special' the reader's sympathy is recruited on behalf of Yvonne, despite what appears, on reflection, to be her impatient and unfair treatment of Sam. In *The sandcastle*, by contrast, we see Mor on the receiving end of Nan's scorn and feel with him when he winces and 'suffers deeply from the discovery that his wife was the stronger. … He was continually offended' (*S* 10). In both cases we can also sympathise with the other character as we come to know them better, but the initial feeling of identification is more powerful. It is not merely a question of percentages, of course. The other character to whom we are most strongly drawn is perhaps Mor's daughter Felicity, and the novel ends with her relief at the restoration of normality in her family, hearing 'the quiet sound of voices as Mor and Donald were talking in the bedroom' (*S* 286).

Nan's voice is never described, nor is her accent. A strong sense of her personality emerges from the dialogue, and with it an idea of what she would sound like. Various aspects of the voices of other characters are explained as we meet them or learn about them. Miss Handforth, as Nan observes, 'has a loud voice', and is in general a loud person. She is a character with few inhibitions, making her presence felt in a most un-servantlike manner, as Nan complains, with her loud voice and her insistence on taking part in the dinner conversation. When she first appears she is described by the narrator, with relish, as 'a stout powerful middle-aged woman with a face like a lion and a foot like a rhino' who descends the stairs 'with a

[21] See Gillian Dooley, 'Iris Murdoch's novels of male adultery: *The sandcastle*, *An unofficial rose*, *The sacred and profane love machine*, and *The message to the planet*,' *English studies* 90, 4 (August 2009): 421–434.

vehemence which made the house shake'. She speaks 'in ringing tones', and 'coughed unrestrainedly as she spoke' (*S* 22). She answers Mor's 'ambiguous gesture of complicity' with 'another gesture and a resounding snort' (*S* 23). Later, when things are more complicated, Mor is discomforted by her 'brassy voice echoing through the darkness' when she discovers him lurking in the garden at night (*S* 112). Miss Handforth's voice is one of her most prominent characteristics, along with her general noisiness: Demoyte says, 'I wish you wouldn't enter rooms like a battering ram, Handy' (*S* 98).

Demoyte and 'Handy' together form a kind of comedy act. Both of them, we understand, embody a kind of eccentric, self-confident Englishness that makes no excuses for itself. Demoyte himself is a loud person, though perhaps less of a blunt instrument than his housekeeper. Mor appreciates his 'strong spicy talk' (*S* 17); 'for his tough honest obstinate personality and his savage tongue Mor rather loved him' (*S* 18). He is 'overbearing in conversation and rarely sacrificed wit to tact' (*S* 19–20) and has alienated Nan 'by outbursts on the subject of the married state' (*S* 20). Mor can only maintain his friendship with Demoyte by 'weakly concur[ring]' with Nan's 'bitter comments' about him to appease her (*S* 20).

Into this complex situation, fraught with tensions and contradictions, comes Rain Carter, a young portrait painter. Rain is small and slight and young. Mor perceives at first that she speaks 'in a slightly prim way' (*S* 25). Then he observes that she speaks 'with a pedantic solemnity that Mor found touching and absurd' (*S* 25). And then, 'although she had no accent, she spoke English as if it were not quite her native tongue. He remembered that her mother had been French' (*S* 26). It is clear that his awareness of her is deepening during this scene, as he listens to her voice and is drawn into apprehending her: first she is 'prim', then she is 'touching and absurd', then she has a voice which is inflected by her family background. She is becoming, already, an object of increasing interest to him. As this interest develops and deepens into love, their conversation becomes unreserved and natural. His conversation with Nan had not been like this since the 'early years' when they 'had talked about nothing but themselves', before 'this subject failed' and 'they had been unable to find another' (*S* 10).

Rain convinces him to drive her 'big green Riley' and the sexual connotations of his 'deep and intense joy' as he feels 'the big car purring quietly along under his control' are palpable (*S* 81). Later, the 'sinister

whirring sound' the back wheel makes when he accidentally backs the car too close to the river bank encapsulates his unease with the awkward situation he has got into (*S* 85), consummated by the 'grinding crash of buckling metal and subsiding earth' that accompanies the car's descent into the river (*S* 89). This pattern anticipates the passage when Rain visits Mor at home while Nan is away. The rain begins as she arrives, its 'drumming increased in an alarming crescendo', with thunder and lightning (*S* 160). They retire to separate beds: 'the rain was still falling steadily. The thunder had passed over.' But then Mor is 'awakened by a piercing and insistent sound' (*S* 165). The doorbell, rung (whether accidentally or on purpose) by the mysterious gipsy, gives them a fright from which they recover by sitting together quietly drinking brandy, his head on her knees, but this provides only a brief respite. 'The patter of the rain' prevents them hearing Nan arriving a short time later, with predictably shattering results.

There are also noises characteristic of the school: the bell marking out the school day, the characteristic sounds of a cricket match. 'Occasionally a soft murmur' from the crowd, otherwise 'complete silence except for the intermittent patter of applause' (*S* 145), or the 'ear-splitting screams … from the swimming pool' which 'sounded as if hell's gate had been opened' and which punctuate and intensify Bledyard's uncompromising and uninvited castigation of Mor for his involvement with Rain (*S* 195).

Then, in Chapter 16, the almost unbearable tension builds through a series of sounds. 'A violent and increasing din of high-pitched voices and clattering chairs' in which 'already the slightly hysterical note was to be heard' comes from the Gymnasium where Bledyard is to give his annual lecture (*S* 224). Although earlier he had shamed Mor by his moral seriousness and dignity, Bledyard is now seen at a disadvantage. 'Bledyard was in his way a good speaker and could have impressed almost any audience but an audience of school-boys' (*S* 226). The assembled school cannot restrain its mirth and the hysteria rises until 'a loud whispering' and 'a scraping of chairs' is heard at the back of the hall, heralding the terrifying scene in which the Mors's son Donald and his friend Jimmy Carde are discovered climbing the tower. Carde falls 'with a sudden and heart-rending cry', landing 'with a terrible sound somewhere upon the heap of blankets' (*S* 237). The chapter ends, after the rescue of Donald and his sudden flight, with 'the clanging bell of the fire-engine' approaching too late to help (*S* 245).

Full of drama in scenes like these, intensified by silences and sudden noises, *The sandcastle* is one of Murdoch's most sensuous and atmospheric

novels. The rich visual imagery is immediately striking in scenes like Mor's first meeting with Rain in the 'colour and beauty' of Demoyte's house (*S* 17). Silences and ambient sounds—traffic noise, running water, rain, garden sounds—also contribute to its rich texture. This is not atmosphere for its own sake. It is a profound element in Murdoch's most important endeavour, creating and embodying her characters: we perceive and feel with Bill Mor, whose strong sense of duty sits uneasily beside his openness to the beauty of the world around him, and to possibilities beyond the mundane.

'Intolerable with Menace': *Henry and Cato*

The soundscape of Murdoch's 1976 novel *Henry and Cato* is an intricate mixture of this kind of characterisation, in particular involving idiosyncratic sounds of people moving, or people observed unawares—sighing, screaming, laughing, sobbing. Sound becomes supreme when darkness reigns. The point of view in this novel is far more equally shared among different characters than in *The sandcastle* and thus there is a kind of jigsaw of portraits of each person to be assembled from their fellow characters' perceptions of them.

There are echoes of *The unicorn* in *Henry and Cato*'s traditional 'country-house novel' structure, although it is very English while the earlier novel is, of course, set in Ireland. But they both concern two rival households in a rural setting. Henry is the younger son of the Marshalsons of Laxlinden Hall, coming home from America on the death of his detested older brother Sandy to claim, and dismantle, his inheritance. Cato Forbes is the son of the other household, a Catholic convert who has entered the priesthood, to his father's horror and dismay.

Class is inevitably a factor in this scenario. Murdoch uses the dynamics of the interactions between the owners and their servants and other dependants implicit in this traditional literary framework in unexpected and startling ways. At the other extreme from the noisy Miss Handforth in *The sandcastle*, the servant in the oddly feudal establishment at Laxlinden Hall, referred to as 'bird-headed Rhoda', has a speech impairment which obstructs her communication with almost everyone except Gerda, Henry's mother. Her dialogue is rarely given: in conversation with Gerda her part of the exchange is rendered merely as 'Rhoda replied'. It is revealed at the end of the novel, when Henry and Colette are married, that Sandy, Henry's older brother, had had a sexual relationship with Rhoda, and

Henry then remembers that Sandy could understand what she said as well. Her incoherence beyond the very core of the family emphasises her status as a kind of vassal, unable to function outside the household. But the revelation of Sandy's relationship with Rhoda is elicited by a deliberate act of wordless communication with Henry: at his wedding to Cato's sister Colette, Rhoda displays on her finger the 'Marshalson Rose', a ring which had belonged to the family and was thought to have been stolen. Henry sees this as an act of guilty defiance, whereas Colette understands it as an assertion that she is 'sort of one of the family', because Sandy had given her the ring (*HC* 382).

Henry is often depicted as a kind of sprite, operating outside the normal social rules. The sound of his quick light footsteps is frequently overheard resounding through the house. He appears suddenly and disturbs the peace, or torpor, of his family home, where Gerda and her superannuated admirer, Lucius Lamb, spend their time bickering and speculating about what will happen now that Sandy is dead and Henry owns the house. Henry at one point appears when they are arguing:

> Like a wraith, light-footed Henry, entering from the front door, passed between them and flew up the stairs two at a time. His skipping footsteps could be heard receding along the landing. (*HC* 133)

Later, after a violent encounter with the sinister Beautiful Joe, he 'came in the front door like a whirlwind'; Gerda asks to speak to him, 'he whirled around' to face her; they have a frustrating and inconclusive conversation and 'he ran from her out of the door and she heard his light footsteps leaping up the stairs' (*HC* 281–282). Henry's light tread and swift movements add a kind of insult to the injury that he is bent on inflicting on his mother by selling the house and all its contents. He has the wilful imperviousness to her feelings of a fey creature from another world. Later, when Henry has decided against selling the Hall and he and Colette have married, Lucius, lying ill in bed, hears them: 'He and Colette ran about a lot and shouted like children. Lucius could hear the regular thud as they leapt the steps from the front door.' He thinks, 'Henry was an elf and would survive elvishly' (*HC* 386).

In counterpoint to this noisy exuberance is the deathly silence of Cato's appalling ordeal at the hands of Beautiful Joe. Suguna Ramanathan points out that the relationship between Cato and Joe was based on their easy communication from the beginning. Their 'chatter' makes Cato 'happy

and relaxed' and disarms him.[22] Joe understands his power, and Cato's ineffectual attempts to resist it enrage Joe. In retaliation, he decides to abduct Cato. Imprisoned in a dark cellar, confused by the darkness and exploring the space with his hands, Cato comes to the door: 'he had the weird feeling that someone was standing on the other side and listening. Listening to his movements' (*HC* 270). Cato's feeling of reflexive listening is a very powerful sign of his mental state. In the total blackness, he is disoriented and frightened. He hears 'a faint brief distant rumbling. … The distant sound brought no comfort. It suddenly brought home to him that he was *somewhere*, hidden, caught, somewhere in London, in some fantastic, perhaps huge and labyrinthine hide-out' (*HC* 271).

Henry, as Cato's friend, and Colette, his sister, are both drawn into this ghastly world by Joe's attempts to blackmail them. Murdoch's descriptions of these tense scenes are full of sounds and silences. Henry is silenced by terror when he brings the ransom money to Beautiful Joe: 'The silence seemed peopled, intolerable with menace. He … tried to whisper something, but could not speak. He uttered a tiny noise' (*HC* 274). Henry's otherworldly imperviousness fails him in this sinister place, and he loses his nerve.

Later, Colette, sitting next to Joe on his bed in the underground room, perceives '[t]he candle burning on the shelf, moving slightly in the draught, like an almost motionless dancer who quietly shifts one foot' (*HC* 319). Joe tries to persuade her to give herself to him willingly, and she attempts to bargain with him intelligently, to extract the greatest advantage she can from the seemingly inevitable fact that she will be raped. She perceives that

> [t]he motionless dancer was moving, the room was vibrating, soundlessly drumming. A sigh came from her out of a depth of physical being which she had never felt so poignantly before. She was repelled, disgusted, horrified, frightened, excited. (*HC* 321)

The vibration, which, like the rumbling heard by Cato, is probably the underground railway, becomes absorbed into the atmosphere of this taut scene.

Cato is meanwhile utterly enveloped in the blackness of his cell, in 'an emptiness that was not even space' (*HC* 325). The crisis comes when a

[22] Suguna Ramanathan, *Iris Murdoch* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990), 48–49.

sensation (which at first seems to be a flash of light) comes into this nothingness, 'only he knew instantly it was not light but sound. Somewhere, not very near but clearly audible, a woman was screaming. Without any act of recognition he knew that it was Colette' (*HC* 325). The instinctive knowledge that he must save his sister at last gives him the strength to force his way out of his prison. He is 'wailing with anxiety' as he breaks down the door. He is confused by the light and what it reveals: 'the light of the candle appalled his eyes', then he sees Colette and Joe. 'Someone was screaming, he was screaming' (*HC* 326). The tension is almost unbearable—the breaking of the darkness with sound, of silence with light. As Charles Arrowby would say, 'noise as structure, noise as colour' (*TSTS* 34): these scenes would lose much of their intense drama without their soundscapes.

From this abyss, Henry and Colette, though scarred (literally), re-emerge into the light and noise of the everyday world and come together, unexpectedly but inevitably, in the perfect formal symmetry of a marriage between neighbouring households, easily shedding their other attachments.[23] Cato, however, is still imprisoned inside himself after the horror of realising that he has killed Joe. When Henry visits, he hears him give 'a deep sigh, the sort of sigh which a man gives when he is alone' (*HC* 347). As Wood writes of Chekhov, 'what a *serious noticer*' Murdoch 'must be to write those lines'.[24] This is the work of a deeply attentive author engaging with the ungeneralisable specifics of this situation. Henry is moved, frightened and offended by Cato, and not only hears him sigh, but understands what that sigh means. When he leaves, he pauses on the stairs and hears 'again that awful lonely sigh, now prolonged into a kind of quiet moan' (*HC* 348).

Cato is impervious to Henry but his parting conversation with Father Brendan at the very end of the book leaves open the possibility of a reawakening. Ramanathan points out that 'Brendan's brief answers suggest something held in check, a disciplining of emotion'.[25] This farewell closely echoes the passage where, much earlier, Cato attempts to bid goodbye to Joe. It follows the same course: Cato is leaving, Joe asks him

[23] Ramanathan writes that 'at some deep level there is a reification of a class-structure which makes us glad to see Henry married to Colette. Or is there, here, an irony directed at the reader whose expectations are known and "satisfied"? Different possibilities are open.' *Iris Murdoch*, 8.

[24] Wood, 'Serious noticing', 51.

[25] Ramanathan, *Iris Murdoch*, 54.

whether he will see him again and whether he will write; Cato says it is not goodbye, that he will write (*HC* 156–157). Brendan is leaving, Cato asks him whether he will see him again and whether he will write; Brendan says, 'better not' and 'I doubt it' (*HC* 398–399). The scenes both end with crucifixes passed from one to another. There are silences and brief answers, as Ramanathan suggests, indicating emotions held in check. Joe leaves Cato's crucifix with him, suggesting that the connection has not been broken. Cato walks away with Brendan's crucifix, like a talisman of a love surrendered. Although there is pain in this ending, there is a hint of reconnection with the world of sights and sounds and self-awareness: the normality of behaving differently when in the presence of others.

'A Mechanical Litany': *The good apprentice*

Cato's suffering, following the silent hell of his imprisonment and its sudden and violent conclusion, is expressed in his 'awful lonely sigh' towards the end of *Henry and Cato*. The audible after-effects of trauma are revisited early in Murdoch's 1985 novel *The good apprentice*:

> Edward would repeat again and again, as the rhythmical moan with which the agonised sufferer tries to soothe unbearable pain, 'oh my dear, oh my darling, my poor lost one, my poor dead one, come to me, forgive me, I'm sorry, oh my love, my love, I'm so sorry, help me, help me, help me'. (*GA* 11)

This large novel contains many stories, and as I show in "Chapter 4: Musical Women and Unmusical Men" chapter, some of them are more hidden than others. Unlike the women related to Harry Cuno, whose lives are not so much marginal as submerged in the narrative, the ordeal of his stepson Edward Baltram is a main theme. On the very first page of *The good apprentice*, Edward has deceived his friend Mark into taking 'the magisterial drug which transports its initiates to heaven or to hell', with disastrous results: death for his friend, torment for himself. While tripping, Mark laughed 'continuously in a low undulating rhythmical giggle which sometimes sounded like a sob' (*GA* 2). This seems like a happy portent and deceives Edward into leaving him alone. Then, in his anguished, guilty and shocked state in the days following Mark's death,

> Edward heard these thoughts, endlessly repeated, ringing in his head, ringing out as if everyone could hear them, and sometimes he found himself, even when he was not alone, starting to recite them aloud as a mechanical litany. (*GA* 12)

These utterances are 'rhythmical' and repetitive and automatic. The word 'litany' is significant. Repetitive speech is a feature of mental agony, but it is also a feature of religious rituals. The first sentence of Part One of the book, titled 'The Prodigal Son', comes directly from that parable in the King James Version of the Bible, Luke Chapter 15: 'I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son' (*GA* 1).[26] Edward clearly identifies himself with the prodigal son, but the language of this first chapter includes other biblical and religious allusions: 'heaven' and 'hell'; 'Like Cain I have killed my brother whom I loved' (*GA* 12).

In marked contrast, Edward's stepfather Harry Cuno tries to communicate with Edward in the language of science and reason: 'Listen … You are having a *nervous breakdown*, you are *ill*, it is an *illness*, like pneumonia or scarlet fever, you will receive *help*, you will be given *treatment*, you will get *better*, you will *recover*' (*GA* 13). Edward ignores him: 'Harry's words did not, could not, reach him, had no connection with his sufferings, did not concern him in the least. He was having an imaginary conversation with Mark' (*GA* 15). Edward's head is full of conversations—relived, imagined, recalled. Speaking causes anxiety: in the conversation when he tells his father Jesse about Mark 'he felt a thrill of fright as if the words were actually little animals which had leapt out of his mouth and were now running about' (*GA* 234). He moans, pants and sobs: he changes his 'little cry of aversion' at Stuart's amusement when he visits Jesse's family at Seegard to a cough (*GA* 266). He is continually not only hearing but making noises, when alone or with other people.

Edward's half-brother Stuart is much quieter. He is often identified with silent solitary meditation and silent communication, both with his father Harry and with the young Meredith McCaskerville. Stuart is perhaps the most obvious candidate for the novel's title role. He has decided to give up his studies and his privileged way of life, and to find some way of helping the unfortunate. But Stuart's role in the novel, with his silence

[26] This passage is also used in *Henry and Cato* when Cato has left the priesthood and Joe has rejected him (HC 231).

and passivity, lacks drama, while Edward's ordeal is vividly present to the reader. Edward is also seeking a way to become good by finding a way to atone for Mark's death. It is possible to see them both as 'good apprentices'.

Edward's father Jesse surprises him by speaking with a midlands accent, from Stoke-on-Trent. 'This particularity seemed so surprising, so out of place, so very moving' (*GA* 192) in this debilitated and powerless father whom he is getting to know for the first time as an adult, whom he had believed to be such a potent and magical figure. This accent, along with his dependent state, engages Edward's affection and loyalty. The preachy prosiness of May, Jesse's wife, on the other hand, becomes suffocating and makes Edward suspicious. 'When she smiled he could hear the faint sound of a benevolent sigh' (*GA* 266). 'Mother May', although often described as beautiful, radiant and youthful, is reminiscent of Mrs. Mark in *The bell*: a self-righteous and unpleasant woman who would today be described as passive-aggressive. Unlike Jesse, however, she has no specific accent.

The other character who has an idiosyncratic accent is Thomas McCaskerville, Edward's uncle and one of the few sympathetically portrayed psychiatrists in Murdoch's work. Thomas is a Scot who speaks in a 'high fastidious Edinburgh voice' (*GA* 19). Harry calls his accent 'prissy' (*GA* 89). This kind of caricature would usually be used for a character who is not given an inner voice, but Thomas is one of several characters who share the point of view in this novel; the others being Harry, Stuart, Thomas's wife Midge, and, predominantly, Edward. Thomas's relationship with language is uneasy, a proxy for his fragmented family background. His father had been Catholic, his mother Jewish. 'His mother, whose Slav ancestors had long been Edinburgh merchants, spoke in her parents' home both Hebrew and Yiddish, tongues to which Thomas listened with silent anguish, well aware that it would not be his lot to learn them' (*GA* 80). Thomas's accent then becomes a part of the 'alienation of his being' caused by internalising the divisions in his family. At the end of the novel, however, Thomas, 'in an extraordinary state of mind … was allowing himself to feel happy, sometimes he wanted to shout with it' (*GA* 496–497).

Edward comes back to ordinariness: 'The mad black fit had passed, leaving ordinary misery behind' (*GA* 514). He thinks about his relationship with Mark's sister Brownie. 'We never got past the stage of using each other to placate Mark. The word "placate" brought with it the image of a sad envious ghost knocking at the doors of life to hold the dimming attention of those whom he loved' (*GA* 515). Hell appears again on the last

page, as it had on the first, but it is part of their good-humoured chatter about Henry's imminent visit to Italy—it is Hades, not the terrifying Christian Hell of the beginning: 'the world is full of signposts to hell', Harry says flippantly. (*GA* 522). Edward will recover, and as the novel ends he drinks with Stuart and Harry and talks about the future and 'good things in the world' (*GA* 522). Although there are many ways in which the stories are very different, perhaps we can see an echo in this ending of the prodigal son's return to his father, with the two sons and their father 'making merry'.[27] As Thomas has said early on, Harry is in important ways his real father, having brought him up (*GA* 75).

As I have noted, there are five characters who share the narrative perspective in this novel, with Edward's voice predominating. However, as is quite common in Murdoch's later novels, there are also whole chapters or sections of the novel which contain only dialogue with little or no internal monologue, and there are also letters written by characters who do not otherwise have a voice in the narrative. Thus even in a novel like *The good apprentice* which predominantly presents the points of view of male characters, she introduces the voices of other characters, male and female.

Conclusion

Deborah Johnson discusses the concept of Murdoch's 'hot' and 'cold' prose styles, which 'have different functions and … the clashes, the contradictions between different voices, different discourses, have ultimately the effect of emphasising the provisional, incomplete nature of the narrative'.[28] And the contrast between these discourses is an important element in Murdoch's consistent attempts to present us with a range of unique individuals in relation to each other, all of them listening to each other's voices and other noises, and being influenced and guided by them, for better or for worse.

Murdoch understood from the beginning the importance of creating the sound-worlds in which her characters exist. Their perceptions of the sounds made by other people, as well as their awareness of their own sounds and the effects they have on others, are essential in the dynamics of her fiction. Yvonne Geary and Nan Mor both speak impatiently to their

[27] 'It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.' Bible, King James Version, Luke 15:32.

[28] Deborah Johnson, *Iris Murdoch* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 55.

partners, but the difference in 'voice' and point of view in their respective narratives changes the relationship between reader and character, with the reader seeing Yvonne sympathetically and, typically, tending to dislike Nan. She herself identified the problem with Nan:

> I was unfair to Nan in *The Sandcastle*. I coerced Nan. And this is perfectly clear, it would have been a far better novel if I had spent more imaginative time detaching Nan from the story and not letting her just play the part of this rather tiresome wife but making her somebody with quite extraordinary ideas of her own, playing some quite different game perhaps, having some dream life of her own which is quite different from that of the other characters.[29]

As she sees it, her mistake in *The sandcastle* was to allow Bill Mor to take up the foreground of the novel, so that it is his consciousness through which the reader experiences the sights and sounds of the novel. Constantly assaulted by the voice of his unsympathetic spouse, he is justifiably unhappy. His relationship with Rain Carter seems inevitable and pardonable, and his eventual capitulation to Nan and the status quo feels like a defeat.

In later novels, even those written in the first person, she found ways for more voices to be heard. The drama of narrative, which is often provided by the contrasts and conflicts between characters, is what compels readers to keep reading: 'If it didn't attract attention and maintain attention people wouldn't enjoy art.'[30] Finding the balance between the strong, strident voice and the quiet, withdrawn, inward consciousness is her constant endeavour. These kinds of interpersonal sonic features are essential in the narrative dynamics that compel us to keep reading Murdoch's fiction. The next chapter concerns the absence of sounds: both the concept and the drama of silences that surround her characters; as well as more impersonal ambient sounds—all part of the atmosphere that attracts and maintains the attention of Murdoch's readers.

[29] Christopher Bigsby, 'Interview with Iris Murdoch' in *From a tiny corner*, 116.
[30] Bigsby, 'Interview with Iris Murdoch', 116.

Chapter 6: 'Like a Clarity Under a Mist': Ambient Noise and Silence, Dreamscapes and Atmosphere

Introduction

Every musician knows the importance of silence. Music could not exist without the silences surrounding it and embedded in it. Murdoch's novels, too, are full of silence of all kinds—often not just the absence of sound, but an almost palpable quality in itself. Her silences come in different qualities, moods and textures: they can be terrible, annihilating, brooding, horrible, intense, idiotic, accusing, sinister, profound, uncanny, fox-like, alarming, ominous, menacing, vast, immense, merciful, even happy.

In *The sandcastle* 'silence [hangs] like an odour' (*S* 122) in Demoyte's garden when Mor visits furtively at night. In Charles Arrowby's theatre (*The sea, the sea*) silence could be dramatic and exciting, but at Shruff End the mist brings with it 'a terrible blanketed silence' (*TSTS* 181). Louise Anderson, in *The green knight*, likewise projects her feelings into the 'intense opaque apprehensive silence' she encounters when visiting Clement's theatre (*GK* 436).

Silence is often, oddly, enhanced by other sounds: at Seegard, Edward (*The good apprentice*) could hear birdsong 'but these sounds scarcely disturbed, even accentuated, a deep warm silence which hung over the land and the house' (*GA* 472). Often a localised silence is somehow accentuated by external noise: in *The book and the brotherhood*, Gulliver perceives

G. Dooley, *Listening to Iris Murdoch*, Iris Murdoch Today,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-00860-3_6

King's Cross station as 'like a church': 'Underneath the sibilant hum of the trains and the loud announcements of departures and the clatter of luggage trolleys and the bird-like mutter of human talk and the purposive walking of many people there was a kind of silence like a clarity under a mist' (*BB* 430). Then he wonders what time the bar opens.

What can it mean, this kind of silence which coexists with sound? Logically, it makes no sense: the definition of silence, as a description of an environment or place, is absence of sound. It is partly a matter of a localised quietness, separated from noises which somehow do not intrude, although they are perceptible. This is the key: the attributes of silence, like music and other sounds, are necessarily perceived, consciously or unconsciously, by a listener or hearer, and a silence can exist in a character's foreground, while the sounds that co-exist with it are irrelevant, or at least are not distracting. In Murdoch's novels, a description of sounds or silences is rarely just a matter of setting a scene or noting a decibel level—it almost always provides insight into the state of mind of the character who is experiencing it.

The sacred and profane love machine: The Drama of Silence

Silence seems to have a special significance in Murdoch's 1974 novel *The sacred and profane love machine*. At the very beginning of this novel David Gavender, teenage son of Blaise and Harriet, looking out of his bedroom window, notices a small boy standing in the garden and watching the house. 'Why did none of the dogs bark?', David wonders (*SPLM* 7). Harriet has seen the boy too, and 'had noticed the silence of the dogs', and 'a great fear invaded her heart' (*SPLM* 10). Later we find out that the child is Luca, Blaise's other son from his long clandestine relationship with Emily McHugh. The fact that Harriet's seven 'neurotic' dogs did not bark, which makes Luca's presence seem other-worldly and sinister to both David and Harriet, is later explained by the fact that Luca 'saved his dinner and took it to the dogs' (*SPLM* 104). Nevertheless, Luca's silent appearance at the comfortable middle-class Hood House—'bourgeois' according to Emily—is both a portent and a catalyst for the dramatic events of the novel.

Silence—quietness—is also an attribute of Hood House and of Harriet, the home-maker and ministering angel of the house. Harriet comes out into the garden at the start of the novel to breathe 'the rich polleny

fragrance of the silent air' (*SPLM* 10), when she catches sight of Luca. 'How thick the silence was', Harriet thinks (*SPLM* 12). In turn, Harriet's husband Blaise is watching her from the house. 'Harriet's motionless figure seemed brimful of the stillness of the evening, her quietness made the garden more quiet' (*SPLM* 23).

In this opening part of the novel, we see these characters watching each other silently, pondering their feelings and revealing something of their own personal obsessions and fears. There is no conversation between them until nearly 20 pages into the novel. The first words spoken are from Tolstoy's *War and peace*, read aloud by Blaise to his wife and son in a regular family ritual which he and Harriet both cherished, while David had long outgrown it but could not resist 'the silent will of both parents beseeching him, compelling him to come' (*SPLM* 25). For Harriet, 'The presence of both the men [Blaise and David] in this sort of quietness filled her with a kind of happiness which was also anguish, was terror' (*SPLM* 25). These fears, though inexplicable to her at the time, are based on a sound intuition and are borne out by the events that follow.

Once Harriet and Blaise start to converse, after Blaise's reading, it is obvious that they are not communicating perfectly—irritations and insincerities are already showing up in their dialogue. David has returned to his bedroom to continue his indulgence in the silent misery of fastidious youth. Later, when told that his father has another family, he 'listened in silence' (*SPLM* 150) and subsequently becomes even more cut off from his parents.

The opening of this novel, with its emphasis on isolation and silence, contrasts with Murdoch's other novels of the period such as *A fairly honourable defeat* (1970) and *An accidental man* (1971), which both start with dialogue, and *The black prince* (1973), which begins with two forewords situating and framing the narrative. Each novel's beginning sets the tone for what is to come. The stillness and watchfulness of the characters in this first section of *The sacred and profane love machine* is appallingly matched at the climax in the airport at Hanover. Harriet, fleeing with Luca from the unbearable situation at home, notices police watching two young men standing alone 'in the midst of deadly quietness' before the shocking, deafening sound of gunfire (*SPLM* 334). In the opening, too, there is fearful silence, the calm before the storm, before the cataclysmic events set in train by Luca's silent vigil in the Hood House garden.

Silence comes in many varieties in Murdoch's novels. Sometimes, as in *The sacred and profane love machine*, silence contains and defines the novel's sound-world. One might also think of *The bell* (1958), where there are

many types of silence, created or imposed, or occurring naturally. In so many of Murdoch's novels, there are stretches of water or secret places where there is a special quality of silence. But these qualities are not quite ubiquitous. In *A severed head* (1961), there is barely anything you could call a 'sound-world'. In the urbane narrative voice of Martin Lynch-Gibbon, there is little allowance for listening. Only occasionally when in a tense situation does he notice ambient or intrusive sounds, and in the whole book there are just a few references, for example, to 'silent snow' (*SH* 45) and footsteps echoing in a 'hollow damp silence' (*SH* 112). This comparative absence of sounds and silences is as significant in its way as the presence of silence in the early chapters of *The sacred and profane love machine*.

The black prince and *Under the net*: Silence and Art

These ambient or atmospheric deployments of silence are, of course, just one side of the story. Silence can be an aesthetic choice (as in *The black prince*), or a philosophical position (as in *Under the net*). In *The black prince* (1973), we are invited to believe that reticence is essential to Bradley Pearson's self-image as an artist: he has published very little. 'Real thoughts come out of silence', he says (*BP* 25). And 'Art comes out of endless restraint and silence' (*BP* 26). This is in part an excuse for his failure as a writer, in part a pretentious pose, in part an implied criticism of his friend and rival Arnold Baffin, with his new book each year. Bradley claims to believe in the 'absolute spiritual necessity of silence', and the 'silence I have always valued included a determination to keep the mouth shut under blows' (*BP* 153). When he finds himself in love with Julian, he is certain that he will be able to 'dedicate his love in silence' (*BP* 176), and then is comically dismayed and appalled when his boasted reticence deserts him, and, disarmed by Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* at Covent Garden, he confesses his love. At the end of the novel the un-musical Bradley claims his cell-mate Loxias (*alias* Apollo, the ultimate musician) as his friend, as 'the crown of my quest':

> Art is a vain and hollow show, a toy of gross illusion, unless it points beyond itself and moves ever whither it points. You who are a musician have shown me this, in the wordless ultimate regions of your art, where form and substance hover upon the brink of silence. (*BP* 338)

This is extravagant and absurd homage, but with all its pomposity, it is Bradley's recognition of, and surrender to, the power of music and its associated silences. Bradley is not the first of Murdoch's artist-heroes to be intrigued by silence. In *Under the net* (1954), Jake Donaghue's book, published years before the novel begins, is called *The silencer*. It is a set of dialogues based on his discussions with Hugo Belfounder. The choice of title is never absolutely explained, although in these conversations, Jake says Hugo 'was completely without any sort of desire to score points, and although he often silenced me, he seemed unaware of having done so' (*UN* 68).

This is not the place to trace the philosophical antecedents of Murdoch's ideas in *Under the net*. Jean-Paul Sartre is important, and she herself says that it was influenced by Samuel Beckett and Raymond Queneau.[1] There are also surely traces of Ludwig Wittgenstein in this novel—like Wittgenstein, Jake the intellectual takes a job as a hospital porter. And Wittgenstein's famous statement, 'Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen'[2] seems to be echoed in one of the points Hugo makes in his conversations with Jake. They are discussing 'what it meant to describe a feeling or a state of mind':

> 'There's something fishy about describing people's feelings … all these descriptions are so dramatic.'
> 'What's wrong with that?'
> 'Only that it means that things are falsified from the start.' …
> 'But suppose I try hard to be accurate.' …
> 'One can't be … The only hope is to avoid saying it. As soon as I start to describe, I'm done for.' …
> 'In that case one oughtn't to talk.' …
> 'I think perhaps one oughtn't to. … Of course one does talk. But … one does make far too many concessions to the need to communicate.' …
> 'What would happen if one *were* to speak the truth? … Would it be possible?'
> 'I know myself … that when I really speak the truth the words fall from my mouth absolutely dead, and I see complete blankness on the face of the other person.' (*UN* 66–68)

[1] Jean-Louis Chevalier (ed.), 'Closing debate: Rencontres avec Iris Murdoch' in *From a tiny corner in the house of fiction*, ed. Gillian Dooley (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 75.

[2] 'Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.' Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 7.1.

To complicate this idea, the two of them laugh heartily about the fact that they have been talking incessantly for days. But in his published book, Jake refines and embellishes his memories of these conversations, producing pretentious statements like, 'It is in silence that the human spirit touches the divine' (*UN* 92). The impending existence of the book itself silences Jake: 'I would sometimes sit for hours in [Hugo's] presence, silent except for such brief responses as were needed to keep him talking' (*UN* 74).

Long after the book is published and Jake, in his belief that he has shamefully betrayed his trust, has broken off his friendship with Hugo—silenced their discussions completely—they meet again and Hugo reveals that he likes the book, reads it often, but doesn't recognise the ideas. When Jake protests, Hugo replies, 'Of course I could see that it was about some of the things we'd talked of. But it sounded so different. … So much better, I mean. … I learned an awful lot from it' (*UN* 248).

In her 1962 interview with Frank Kermode, Murdoch says that *Under the net*

> plays with a philosophical idea. … the problem of how far conceptualising and theorising, which from one point of view are absolutely essential, in fact divide you from the thing that is the object of theoretical attention. And Hugo is a sort of non-philosophical metaphysician who is supposed to be paralysed in a way by this problem.[3]

In the 1978 discussions at the University of Caen, she calls *Under the net* an 'immature, childish work'. However, she explains that 'the discussions which were in my head, at that time, in the 1950's, are very much the discussions that we're hearing now about silence, about language moving towards silence, and the difficulty of relating concepts to anything which lies behind them, or under them'.[4] I wonder whether she belittles her own first novel like this so she can bracket it with 'all the stuff that Barthes and Co. think they invented. I knew all about that in the 1930s', she said to Bigsby in 1979[5]—throwing her first baby out, as it were, with the Barthes-water.

So the concept of reticence, or philosophical silence, is clearly important. Anna Quentin's Mime Theatre, where the silence was 'oppressive', is

[3] Frank Kermode, 'Interview from "The house of fiction"' in *From a tiny corner*, 12.
[4] Chevalier, 'Closing debate', 75.
[5] Christopher Bigsby, 'Interview with Iris Murdoch' in *From a tiny corner*, 117.

intended to enact these ideas. Anna, too, has been silenced: she has given up singing, which upsets and exasperates Jake: 'The sort of singing I do is so … ostentatious', she says (*UN* 46). Her declaration that 'love is action, it is silence', which Jake finds 'very foolish talk', reminds him of something he can't identify at the time (*UN* 45). Later, when he comes upon Anna's copy of his own book, *The silencer*, he realises that these ideas 'were not her own. They were Hugo's. They were an echo, a travesty, of Hugo, just as my own words were an echo and a travesty of him' (*UN* 93). But Hugo later describes Anna's ideas as 'all that oriental junk, heaven knows where she got it from!' (*UN* 250). Are they really Hugo's ideas as interpreted by Anna, or her take on Jake's refinement of Hugo's ideas? Or are they something else? Given how comprehensively wrong Jake is about almost everything else, it is hard to know what to believe.

Is it possible that the idea of Hugo as 'silencer' is purely a creation of Jake's imagination? Hugo's production company, Bounty Belfounder, before moving into the mainstream, had made silent 'expressionist' films, Jake thinks (but does not actually know, and he is usually wrong), 'largely … inspired by Hugo himself' (*UN* 73). A silencer, of course, is most literally a device to mute the sound of guns, and Hugo had discontinued his father's business as an armaments manufacturer, retaining only a fireworks factory. Maybe this kind of pun is a stretch—there is enough significance in the title *The silencer* without needing to think of it as a metaphor for the guns that Hugo rendered non-existent and therefore silent. Hugo, according to Jake's recollection, wants to silence descriptions of feelings which falsify reality. The book then lives up to its name by silencing Jake in Hugo's presence, and then by separating them and thus silencing their conversations for years.

When Jake finally looks for Hugo again at the Bounty Belfounder studios, he is confronted by a massive and unnatural enactment of silence: 'Most strange of all, in the open arena in front of the city stood a crowd of nearly a thousand men in perfectly motionless silence.' They are listening 'enthralled to the vibrating voice of a single figure' (*UN* 159) who turns out to be the socialist activist Lefty Todd. Finally confronted with Hugo among the crowd, Jake is overcome by 'a deep distress. … After the dignity of silence and absence, the vulgarity of speech' (*UN* 161). But Hugo is not ready to speak to Jake properly yet: Lefty's eloquence has enthralled him too and he shushes Jake and 'the vulgarity of speech' has to wait for another occasion. Their silence is eventually broken when Hugo turns up as a patient in the hospital where Jake is working. 'Hospital servants' are

not supposed to speak to the patients, so Jake breaks in at night, in the 'uncanny stillness' and visits Hugo's room. In response to Hugo's sharp challenge, 'Who is it?', the first thing he says is 'Sssh!' (*UN* 246). But then the silence is broken and along with it the spell Hugo has unwittingly and unwillingly cast on Jake.

Bruno's dream: Synaesthesia and Perception

Bruno's dream (1969), in some ways, is Murdoch's oddest novel. It concerns dying and the final silence of death, but it also is very funny. In parallel with Bruno's painfully slow progress towards death and enlightenment, all kinds of life, human and other, go on in his house, creating various noises and silences. The other characters engage with each other in the complicated amorous encounters and negotiations that are characteristic of all Murdoch's novels, but which nevertheless exist within a unique ambience peculiar to this novel. The psychedelic overtones belong to its time and place—London in the late 1960s—and though the overall mood is sombre, and there are many tears, comic absurdity is never far beneath the surface.

'I choose titles carefully and the titles in some way indicate something deep in the theme of the book', Murdoch told Jeffrey Meyers.[6] Does the title 'Bruno's dream' give us a clue to the strange quality of this novel? It cannot be all literally dreamt by Bruno, as the narrative often strays well beyond his consciousness, but Bruno is the centre of the novel—all the characters connect through him: his son, his son-in-law, his housekeeper and his nurse, as well as the people from the past who haunt his memory, and outwards to their families and connections. Bruno's internal monologue often takes on a dreamlike quality, where space and time and sound relate to each other in absurd and unexpected ways: 'if he woke at night he moaned and made the time move on by moaning, dropping a moan into a little cup or sack of time which was then taken from him' (*BD* 276). What he most fears is 'the whimpering frailty of his being which so dreaded extinction. What moaned in the night was different and less terrible.' He perceives the past as 'moving pictures. It was not quite like remembering.' He keeps himself in control by looking 'at the slow movement of time and at the coloured pictures' (*BD* 277). This sort of confusion or mingling of

[6] Jeffrey Meyers, 'Two interviews with Iris Murdoch' in *From a tiny corner*, 221.

different senses, reminiscent of dreaming, is also experienced by other characters, especially Bruno's nurse, Nigel Boase.

Nigel carries around with him pockets and episodes of silence and ambient sound. Whether or not Nigel is a 'demon' as his cousin Adelaide thinks, or 'sweet and perfectly harmless' as her lover Danby asserts (*BD* 27), he has a kind of imperviousness that the other characters lack, especially in the early part of the novel. There are three sections of the novel which slip into the present tense, and they all involve Nigel. Chapter 3 is the first intimation of Nigel's strangeness. In these two pages we are taken into a bizarre world where if the right word doesn't exist it can be invented; where sensation and perception blend in a synaesthetic melange, beyond conventional ideas of point of view. Are we viewing Nigel from the outside, or are we perceiving with him, as he 'turns and turns, thin as a needle, thin as a straight line, narrow as a slitlet through which a steely blinding light attempts to issue forth into the fuzzy world' (*BD* 29)? The only light in the room is a candle, which 'glows palely from within and impulsates and breathes. Nigel has fallen upon his knees. Kneeling upright he sways to its noiseless rhythm song' (*BD* 29). In this room light hums, and 'screaming [swells] into a harmony, a dazzling circlet of visible sound'. Nigel is 'the all-seer, the priest, the slave of the god. … Love is death.' He undergoes an agonising ordeal: 'He gasps, he groans, he reels. … The presence is agony, punishment, stripes, the extended being tortured into a single point. Annihilation. *All is one*' (*BD* 30).

There are hints from other characters that Nigel is taking drugs but, despite the explanatory farewell letter he writes to Danby at the end of the novel, he remains an enigma in many ways. It is noticeable that these three present-tense sections are all juxtaposed with scenes involving Danby. Chapter 3 ends with Nigel lying 'on the floor of the world' and hearing Bruno calling and weeping 'far away in another world' (*BD* 30).[7] Chapter 4 then begins with Danby, singing the music-hall classic '*Our lodger's such a nice young man*' with a 'friendly smack' aimed 'at Nigel's backside'. Danby's prosaic encounters with Nigel, who in this case 'tossed his long dark hair and lowered his eyes and left the room with a spiritual smile' (*BD* 31), take place back in that other world, where events are recounted in the past tense. Bruno also briefly enters the present-tense world with Nigel at

[7] This echoes or parallels Bruno's own memory of the death of his wife: 'He had let Janie die alone. He could not bear it. He had heard her crying out, calling his name. He had not gone up' (*BD* 22).

the end of Chapter 7, when Danby heads off to the pub. Nigel cares for Bruno as no-one else does. 'Nigel flutters like a moth. … the tenderness is incredible. Tears are again in Bruno's eyes. … Nigel flutters like a moth, filling the room with a soft powdery susurrous of great wings' (*BD* 76). We feel that Nigel and Bruno inhabit this dreamscape together.

Once again, after the strange ambience in Bruno's sick room, the next chapter begins with Danby. He goes to visit Bruno's son Miles but instead meets Miles's wife, Diana, for the first time. Drawn to her by the 'awfully sexy music' she is playing on the gramophone, he dances with her (*BD* 80). This chapter also has a surreal sensuous quality, as they dance 'in silence, advancing, retreating, circling, their slow precise feet patterning the floor and their mingled shadow climbing over the furniture after them' (*BD* 80). The chapter ends in an odd, hypnotic litany. Danby asks Diana to go with him to a dance hall one afternoon. She says no.

> 'Danby, don't be silly.'
> 'Diana, slow foxtrot?'
> 'No.'
> 'Slow foxtrot?'
> 'No.'
> 'Slow fox?'
> 'No.' (*BD* 81)

This gently comic incantation leads into the bizarre mosaic that Nigel witnesses in Chapter 9, the last of the present-tense episodes. 'All through the holy city in the human-boxes the people utter prayers of love and hate. Unpersoned Nigel strides among them with long silent feet and the prayers rise up about him hissing faintly, like steam' (*BD* 82). We follow him as he 'strides noiselessly' around London spying on people in their homes (*BD* 83): ragged strangers living with squalor and appalling intimate violence, and others who we can identify as his brother Will persuading Adelaide to steal from Bruno, Lisa and Miles spouting Wittgenstein at each other, Danby admiring himself in the mirror. 'Nigel smiles … the tender, forgiving, infinitely sad smile of almighty God' (*BD* 85). Nigel is silent and invisible to everyone except the mysterious Russian 'Auntie' who sees him but does not let on to the others. This is the last of the present-tense sections. In them, Nigel is seen in a series of spiritual guises: as a supplicant priest of a savage love-god suffering a visitation; a moth-like angel ministering to the dying Bruno; and finally an omniscient and

impervious god-like being, looking mercifully upon the fallible human race. From this position of exaltation, he is brought down to earth in stages.

Chapter 10 recounts Danby's illicit dance date with Diana, who has somehow been unable to maintain her resistance. They are dancing the slow foxtrot and he is trying to seduce her, assisted by the music: 'It's something to do with movement, repetition', he says (*BD* 91). Then, in Chapter 11, Bruno summons Nigel in the middle of the night to help him recover from a bad dream. In low voices, Nigel and Bruno discuss the nature of love, of god, and of death. Bruno gives a detailed history of his own religious development, ending by saying that God 'was simply gone, He was nothing but an intellectual fiction, an old hypothesis, a piece of literature'. Nigel at first does not respond. 'There was silence in the room.' Nigel seems temporarily stunned. 'He looked like a slice of a human being. He groaned faintly to indicate understanding of what Bruno had said' (*BD* 97). They run through various possibilities for the nature of God: spiders, sex, suffering; and the nature of death, which Nigel thinks of as a 'jet black orgasm' (*BD* 98). Bruno disagrees. In this final discussion between them, although it is not an argument, Bruno prevails and has the last word: the chapter ends with Bruno proclaiming that although Nigel 'understand(s) almost everything', he doesn't 'understand about death. … God is Death' (*BD* 98).

This may be a sign that Nigel is losing his special relationship with time and spirituality. Chapter 11 is not in the present tense that we have come to associate with him. After this, he breaks his silence and starts to cause trouble by giving away the secrets he has accumulated—about love affairs, thefts, betrayals. He tortures his twin brother Will to make him shut up and listen to the truth about Danby's relationship with their cousin Adelaide, with whom Will is obsessed. Then Danby, enraged at finding Nigel spying on him, shakes him violently and knocks him over, 'the side of his head meeting the lamp post with an audible crack' (*BD* 191). Later, Diana asks Nigel what caused his bruises. He responds, 'I ran into a piece of the real world. It can hurt' (*BD* 223). But in this conversation with Diana he helps her though she doesn't understand why:

> 'You've just talked nonsense to me.'
> 'Of course, of course. I'm the nonsense priest of a nonsense god! A false doctor is not a kind of doctor, but a false god is a kind of god.' (*BD* 223)

Thus Nigel salvages something from the damage caused by the assaults he has sustained to his physical being and spiritual persona, preparing to start his new life in India.

Critics have identified various metaphors and doublings creating philosophical and ethical contrasts in this novel. William Hall, writing in 1969, regards the 'kind of patterning in what is essentially a poetic mode' he finds in her work as 'Miss Murdoch's most interesting and characteristic method'.[8] The characters of Lisa, Diana's sister, and Nigel, in particular, are variously attributed by Hall and others with a range of symbolic and moral qualities.[9] Is Nigel 'a kind of *Bodhisattva*' showing the way to other characters, as Hall believes, or a 'self-mythologizing enchanter', as Zahra Hussein Ali claims?[10] Perhaps he is both. Both Nigel and Lisa are accompanied in their progress towards their respective destinations by degrees of silence and reticence. Their decisions about when to keep quiet and when to break their silence are significant drivers in the plot. Tracing the parallels and echoes between characters is surely one of the pleasures of reading Iris Murdoch's novels—the 'kind of patterning' that Hall detects. But Murdoch herself warned against reading too much into her symbolism: 'this kind of pattern-making, although it may be connected with art in some genetic way is not just an effect of art; it is something one spots if one looks around at human beings.'[11] It is easy to be drawn into a hunt for significant similarities and contrasts, and sometimes one's findings are questionable. But, as Madelaine Marget says,

> Her artifice is so persuasive that the mysterious becomes immediate, though by its nature it's not fully intelligible … variously showing us disaster and death, the natural world and symbolism, modern-day quirks and quandaries, all smashed together into a whole that has the surprise of the complicated inevitable.[12]

[8] William Hall, '"Bruno's dream": Technique and meaning in the novels of Iris Murdoch,' *Modern Fiction Studies* 15, 3 [Autumn] (1969): 429–443; 434–35.

[9] See Hall, 'Bruno's dream,'; and Zahra A. Hussein Ali, 'A spectrum of image-making: Master metaphors and cognitive acts in Murdoch's *Bruno's dream*,' *Orbis Litterarum* 52 (1997): 259–79.

[10] Hall, 'Bruno's dream,' 438; Ali 'A spectrum of image-making,' 259.

[11] W.K. Rose, 'Iris Murdoch, informally' in *From a tiny corner*, 23.

[12] Madeline Marget, 'The water is deep,' *Commonweal* 118, 12 (14 June 1991): 399–402.

As the novel begins, Lisa is a silent, careful, dutiful single woman, old before her time; at the end she is rejuvenated, joyful, carefree, brimming with life and happiness, her cheerfulness barely suppressed in the presence of Bruno's approaching death. There is no exact parallel or balancing trajectory in Nigel's progress through the novel, but although Nigel has little directly to do with Lisa, they do exist in a kind of counterpoint. They are both silently in love with an impossible object. Once Nigel retreats from the sick room, Lisa starts visiting and talking to Bruno. And finally, unexpectedly, she takes up with the man Nigel loves while he goes to India to do the charity work that she had planned before she decided, in Miles' bitter words, to choose 'the world and the flesh' (*BD* 284). The parallels exist, but they are suggestive rather than schematic.

Along with the various types of silence and utterance in the novel, ambient sounds are used in various ways in *Bruno's dream*. Bruno had inherited his father's printing works:

> He had been born to it, for it, practically in it with the clack of monotype machines in his infant ears. But he had never felt at home with printers and their strange private language had always been for him a foreign tongue. (*BD* 11)

'Printers' with their 'strange private language' most likely means the people rather than the machines, but the 'clack of monotype machines' could also be imagined as a kind of language. And it is one that Danby, not born to the trade but coming to it when he married Bruno's daughter Gwen, had 'taken to … as if this were the most natural thing in the world' (*BD* 12). Danby 'loved the works, the clattering noise, the papery dust, the tribal independence of the printers' (*BD* 24). Here is a basic difference between Bruno, who has never felt at ease and whose life, now surveyed from near the end, is full of regrets, and Danby, whose 'life energy was cheerful stuff' (*BD* 22).

But Danby is stopped in his tracks when he meets Lisa, Diana's sister. He sits silently 'apparently unnoticed' in Bruno's bedroom 'while Lisa led Bruno through mazes of self-revelation in a kind of unfaltering converse such as Danby had never heard before and which he felt he scarcely comprehended' (*BD* 132). He loses interest in the 'usual round of small crises which he normally rather enjoyed' at the works (*BD* 131), and this habitual drinker does not bother to drink: 'Drunk or sober was much the same now' (*BD* 132). In Chapter 16 he is discovered in Brompton Cemetery,

waiting for Lisa to emerge from the tube station. The traffic along the Old Brompton Road 'was travelling, steadily, hypnotically', but inside the railings the cemetery is 'like a ruined city with its formal yet grassy streets and squares: Ostia, Pompeii, Mycenae' (*BD* 132). The contrast between the prosaic world of traffic and industry and the quiet abode of the dead is underlined by an un-glossed biblical quotation: '*Ye are come unto Mount Zion and the city of the living God*' (*BD* 132). Danby does not strike one as either a classicist or a biblical scholar: 'He went to a mediocre grammar school and spent a year at a provincial university', then 'went into insurance' (*BD* 22). So these allusions are not internal monologue so much as authorial signalling of the sacredness and separateness of this place, emphasising the fact that Danby is venturing into unfamiliar territory in his pursuit of Lisa. Not that it is altogether unprecedented. Lisa reminds him of his long-dead wife Gwen, Bruno's daughter. Their union was one of opposites, 'a visitation from outside … a pure celebration of the god of love, something almost arbitrary yet entirely necessary' (*BD* 133). When he intercepts Lisa and leads her back into the cemetery, their unsatisfactory, embarrassing and inconclusive conversation takes place in a quiet side avenue:

> Behind her were the graves of children, tiny pathetic stones half lost in the meadowy vegetation. The silent sleepers made a dome of quietness. The traffic and the people were elsewhere. (*BD* 138)

The quietness and separateness are propitious. Despite the apparently dismal failure of this interview, something has seeded in Lisa's mind. Near the end of the novel she arrives unheralded in Danby's bedroom one night, paralysing him with fear by knocking urgently on the window so as not to wake Bruno by ringing the doorbell.

When Lisa comes into Danby's room, it is raining and she is muddy and wet. ('Even for a Murdoch novel, *Bruno's dream* is extraordinarily wet', writes Marget.[13]) In this case it is a comic accompaniment to this unexpected happy outcome, but the sounds of gradually intensifying rain have heightened the human drama through the course of the novel's main action. At first the rain is gentle and makes a 'friendly pissing sound', heard by a drunk and complacent Danby, lying in bed with Adelaide (*BD* 23). Later, Adelaide, in her isolation, hears 'only rain' in the middle of the

[13] Marget, 'The water is deep,' 399–402; 402.

night when, 'driven beyond the bounds of her endurance' by Danby's neglect and Will's jealous anger, she comes upon Danby's love-letter to Lisa (*BD* 154–55). 'Rain pouring down' accompanies Danby as, in a reckless and desperate mood, he walks towards the house Miles and Diana share with her sister Lisa. The rain takes on a demonic quality as it appears 'suddenly in the lamplight, dense, sizzling, glittering like gramophone needles' (*BD* 179). Rain orchestrates the ridiculous scene that follows, when Diana, Miles and Lisa successively discover Danby lurking in their back garden. When Lisa appears, interrupting the argument between the two men, 'rain had begun to sizzle with renewed force'. She deflects Miles's peremptory command to go inside. 'A flurry of rain filled the silence with a sort of long sigh' (*BD* 189). The 'long sigh' seems to articulate Danby's tense longing as he waits to hear what she has to say.

In the unsettling, violent chapter when Adelaide is confronting the drunk and unresponsive Danby, having read his love-letter to Lisa, the rain has intensified even further:

> [I]t was raining violently, abandonedly. A strong gusty wind was driving the rain almost horizontally, bringing it in sharp pattering flurries up against the window, like the crack of handfuls of small pebbles hurled against the glass. (*BD* 201)

Nigel has disappeared, and Bruno is upset and fretful with nobody taking care of him. 'I can't sleep with that noise, with the wind rattling the windows. Is it rain or hail?', he asks when Danby eventually responds to his call (*BD* 203). The rain and wind become increasingly violent as the chapter reaches its ominous conclusion.

The rain ceases briefly during the duel Nigel has manoeuvred between Danby and Will. In this scene, the tension is embodied in 'quietness which seemed to be coming out of the mist' which 'held the scene poised, and Danby was startled by the sound of his own footsteps' (*BD* 230). The rain at the end of the scene is benign: a 'luminous curtain'. Danby has escaped death, disaster and injury and swims along the Thames in 'sudden peace and silence' (*BD* 235). But the rain soon returns in full force, and with it the flood which causes a power blackout and panic, and carries away Bruno's precious stamp collection. 'Continual violent rain' and 'beating drumming rain' batters the windows (*BD* 236, 237); 'a blast of violent rain screamed against her out of the darkness' when Adelaide opens the street door (*BD* 239). It 'hisses' and there is 'a strange awful roaring noise'

which she eventually realises is not just rain but the Thames flooding and 'filling the room with a chaotic hubbub' (*BD* 236–42). The weather here is beyond ambience and has become force beyond human control; a catalyst for change. Water can be, as Garcia writes, both 'a liberating and destructive force'.[14]

As a technique, this kind of deployment of weather and atmosphere is of course not unusual in Murdoch's novels, or in fiction more generally, but it is always revealing to attend to the particular ways the natural world manifests itself, very often through sound, and how these noises operate, in different contexts.

Nuns and soldiers

Bruno's dream ends with a death, and the anticipation of Bruno's passing permeates the novel. In *Nuns and soldiers* (1980) the process is reversed. Guy Openshaw is dying as the novel begins, and one of the novel's themes is the gradual departure of his shadow from the lives of those who survive him. Bruno is nearly ninety when he dies; Guy is forty-three.

It is snowing in London. 'It sounds different tonight' (*NS* 9), Guy tells his old friend Peter, known as 'the Count', who has already noticed 'large slow flakes moving densely, steadily, with visible silence, in the light of the street lamps' (*NS* 6). At the end of the novel, it is snowing again as Anne Cavidge prepares to embark on her new life as a 'camp follower' of the Poor Clares in America. The big snowflakes descend 'slowly in a great hypnotic silence which seemed to separate itself from the sounds of the street below' (*NS* 512). One function of these snowy observations is to mark the circular passing of time—the novel's action unfolds from one winter to the next. But the silence of the snowfall also marks a pause; something ending, something else about to begin.

In the eventful year between these London snowfalls, noises of the natural world recur with their attendant terrors, or consolations. The sea, which is so memorably omnipresent in Murdoch's previous novel *The sea, the sea*, and which crops up in so many of the novels, is here almost lethal, and its sounds add to its menace. It only appears in one episode, however. After Guy's death, his widow, Gertrude, spends a few days by the sea in

[14] Mariángel Soláns García, '"At my age, you live in your mind": Reviewing the past in *Bruno's dream* by Iris Murdoch,' *ES Review: Spanish Journal of English studies* 40 (2019): 33–55; 49.

Cumbria accompanied by her old friend Anne. On her emergence from an enclosed religious order after 15 years Anne has taken refuge with Gertrude in Guy's last days. During a beach walk, Anne rashly enters the surf, responding to Gertrude's half-joking dare, and all but drowns. As she struggles, becoming aware of 'the strength of the waves', she finds that 'their deafening noise, which she did not apprehend as sound, but as some deadly terrifying vibration, was overwhelming'. She is temporarily 'unable to decide to attempt the ordeal of return. She felt in her body, mingled with the chaotic roaring of the broken water, the tremendous force of the oncoming waves' (*NS* 116). In her efforts to reach the shore, she 'could also now discern, amid that unbridled complex of forces, the terrifying clatter of the grey stones as the receding waves drew them down and back into the sea' (*NS* 116–117). This clattering, or sieving, of pebbles on the seashore recurs in several novels, with slightly different connotations in each case, though always indicating the sheer inhuman power of the sea. Gertrude, despite her own terror of the sea and inability to swim, manages to save Anne from this deafening fate, demonstrating Murdoch's assertion that 'women can be heroes in the water as much as men'.[15]

According to Athanasios Dimakis,

> Murdoch's populated seascapes as lasting triggers of her humanist sublime are inextricably bonded with the moral illumination that they invariably host in scenes of perceptual enlightenment within the undulating waves. Without its literal convergence with the human in extremis, and deprived of its ontological considerations, the omnipresence of water in Murdoch would be rendered a merely aesthetic setting.[16]

While agreeing that immersion in water is often an enlightening ordeal, I would argue that 'moral illumination' is not always the result, and that there are possible alternative outcomes and meanings to these experiences. In this case, Anne certainly understands that she had been both 'stupid' and 'wicked' to go swimming just to impress Gertrude. But the 'ordeal of return' to the shore in this case is also perhaps a dramatic enactment of the larger ordeal Anne is undergoing on her return to the secular world, and

[15] Iris Murdoch, 'Taking the plunge: *Haunts of the black masseur: The swimmer as hero* by Charles Sprawson,' *New York review of books* (4 March 1993), accessed 16 July 2020.

[16] Athanasios Dimakis, *'In a Greek light': Hellenic moral vision in the philosophy and fiction of Iris Murdoch,* unpublished dissertation (Greece: National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, 2015).

the noise and turbulence of the waves may be analogous with the 'carnival, … maelstrom, … festival of popularity and personality and sex' that she had abandoned when she entered the convent (*NS* 60). Anne is finding the transition back to the secular world challenging. Although the flat where she is staying with Gertrude and Guy is quiet, Anne misses 'the special silence in which activity took place' in the convent (*NS* 58). At the end of the novel she knows 'she must seek solitude, innocence and the silence of being totally uninteresting' (*NS* 506). Noise is not her element.

As Cyrus Hoy notes, 'From the outset of her career as a novelist, water is an important image in Murdoch's fiction.'[17] There are two other significant bodies of water with their accompanying sound-worlds in this novel. Gertrude has a house in France, Les Grands Saules, 'in some little hills, not quite in Provence' (*NS* 144). The feckless painter Tim Reede goes there as a caretaker. He discovers a secluded rock pool, a

> body of contained translucent water [that] was very very faintly, throughout its entire extent, shuddering or quivering but with so small a vibration that the transparency of the medium was unaffected, while being as it were shot through by swift invisible almost motionless lines. (*NS* 159)

Tim rejects his initial idea of swimming in the pool because 'he could not sully that pure water with his sweat or with his gross splashing interrupt its sibylline vibration' (*NS* 160). Later, when Gertrude arrives, she announces that she is going to swim, and Tim hears, 'in the cicada loaded silence, the distant sound of splashing'. He thinks, 'if she swims there she will become a goddess or else give proof that she already is one' (*NS* 174). Tim is strangely affected by this place. He unexpectedly falls asleep on the grass, as if under a spell. Much later, lost among the rocks at night, he perceives them around him, rising up 'in tense quietness, like a symphony of frozen inaudible sound' (*NS* 420). In the state of dejection and despair caused by the apparent faithlessness of Gertrude, now his wife, he hates and fears the rocks. When he happens upon the pool, though, he forgets 'everything except the marvel that was before him' and, suddenly exhausted, he again lies down on the grass, where he 'instantly fell into a deep sleep' (*NS* 422). In the morning when he wakes, he looks at the pool again:

[17] Cyrus Hoy, 'Homage to Dame Iris Murdoch,' *Sewanee Review* 107, 4 [Fall] (1999): 595–599; 596.

> The faint quivering pulses or rays which seemed to be passing through it, though without ruffling its surface, were more marked and had a different more urgent rhythm. It was unclear to Tim exactly how these pulses made themselves visible, and as he stared he half thought that he imagined them. Perhaps there was only an illusion of movement. (*NS* 423)

He is thirsty but he will not drink this water; he has cut his hand and it is bleeding, but he will not wash it in this pool.

The combination of stillness and vibration resonates especially with Tim, although it is a special place for Gertrude too, because Guy had loved it. Both these episodes at the pool prefigure decisive stages in the history of Tim and Gertrude's relationship. The first occasion, when Tim has observed Gertrude turning into a goddess, is the day they fall in love. But before that happens, they visit the canal—a roaring artificial stream that becomes a waterfall and enters a long tunnel. 'Where does it go?', Tim asks. 'I don't know', replies Gertrude.

On the second occasion, Tim finds out. The first time, with Gertrude, they had been horrified to see the corpse of a dog carried away down the tunnel. This time, in the depth of Tim's misery, a live dog appears in this 'sparkling raging water' which surges noisily towards the waterfall and down into the tunnel (*NS* 426). Tim, trying to save the dog, slips 'head first into the stream' (*NS* 427), and as he undergoes this ordeal in the tunnel which 'deprived him of all sense of space and touch', he is also deprived of his other senses. Walking along the canal's edge before the dog appeared, he had observed that 'a jay cried and passed … Blue dragonflies zoomed over the water', but 'all these things which could have given him pleasure were metamorphosed into things of sadness because the world was cursed' (*NS* 427). The metamorphosis now works in the other direction and restores him to his senses, to Gertrude and to happiness. That evening, as 'the cicadas were rapidly finishing their last song in the motionless pines', he and Gertrude eat and exist in 'a long musical slow movement':

> Tim was trying to tell the whole story, but there were so many interconnecting parts to the story and so many parts that did not connect at all, so many events which were over-determined, so many that were purely accidental. (*NS* 439)

The incidents at the pool and the canal perhaps come into the 'over-determined' category, featuring as they do Murdoch's habitual tropes of rocks, pools, swimming, and even dogs. The attempted rescue of the dog,

along with Gertrude's rescue of Anne earlier in the novel, are examples of the rite of passage that a water ordeal often represents. 'Murdoch often employs water imagery to signify redemption', as Hampl points out.[18] Leo Robson makes the intriguing and wry observation, referring to her 1961 essay 'Against dryness', that 'Murdoch's fear of dry literary symbols led her increasingly to water as a setting … a resonant image that also embodies total contingency'.[19]

Their dinner conversation pauses briefly when Gertrude asks Tim if he still loves Daisy:

> The cicadas had stopped suddenly. Already the night crickets had begun their high miauw. A *hibou* made a low coughing *hibou* noise, quite unlike an English owl.
>
> Tim was silent, thinking. (*NS* 445)

At the end of the chapter, Tim says, 'I wish I could think of everything. … I still haven't, it's still not all fitted together, there are dark bits and fuzzy bits.' Gertrude responds, 'Probably it can't all be seen' (*NS* 447). This is such an accurate description of the difficulties of literary criticism that it is tempting to believe that it is a deliberate allusion. More likely, though, the difficulties Tim is having of creating a coherent and shapely narrative from the messy events of the past year resemble the novelist's challenge, as much as that of those of us who follow in her tracks.

The other natural sound in *Nuns and soldiers* which could easily become over-determined is the 'monotonous machine-like roar' of the mistral at Gertrude's French house, 'not very loud or piercing but pitched so as to set every nerve jangling' (*NS* 398), leaving a trail of destruction and irritation and pain in its wake. Usually the sound-world at Les Grands Saules is an overwhelming silence, accompanied by cicadas and frogs and sometimes bird calls, though on his first visit Tim finds it 'a sadly birdless land' (*NS* 155). The advent of the mistral disturbs the fragile equanimity of Gertrude and her visitors, Anne and the Count, a trio of unrequited lovers. When Tim arrives the following week the villagers tell him about the 'wicked mistral' the week before, 'but now all was quiet' (*NS* 411), in preparation for the restoration of Tim and Gertrude's marriage and the disposal of the other characters accordingly.

[18] W.S. Hampl, 'Desires deferred: Homosexual and queer representations in the novels of Iris Murdoch', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 47.3 (Fall 2001): 669.

[19] Leo Robson, 'Iris the insoluble,' *New Statesman* 12–18 (July 2019): 45.

Music itself in *Nuns and soldiers* is oddly both pervasive and peripheral. Guy invokes a Scottish ballad, the bitter, brutal 'Twa corbies', when telling Gertrude she must marry again after his death. But neither Guy nor Tim are musical, although they both come from musical families. Members of Guy's family circle around the edges of the narrative, gossiping about opera and the family *Stradivarius* violin. Gertrude 'professed to enjoy music' without going to concerts or, it seems, ever listening to it (*NS* 290). The Count listens to music on the radio: he 'loved music though he had little conception of what it was' (*NS* 39). When she hears birdsong, Anne is often reminded of plainsong in the convent, 'so exquisitely disciplined, so frequent, so familiar, a chant of caged birds heard only by God' (*NS* 64), but she could not sing herself. Music is sometimes remembered, brought to mind by natural sounds, or referred to, but never present: the soundscape of this novel is composed mainly of natural sounds and their attendant silences.

Conclusion

In her first novel, *Under the net*, we can see Murdoch already playing with the *idea* as much as with the experience of silence. Ideas about art, silence, and the impossibility of expression are given pretty thorough, and satirical, treatment in *The black prince*. But more pervasive throughout the fiction is Murdoch's deployment of silence as part of each novel's setting and atmosphere—silence between people, silences inside dwellings and outside in enchanted and isolated places, silence even as a separable element amid a collection of noises in a public place. Although the presence of silence and environmental noises is something that perhaps readers do not usually consciously notice, it is so much part of the texture of her novels that once you become aware of it, it is hard to imagine them without it. The examples used in this chapter are far from exhaustive: each novel has a sound-world of its own, in every case intensifying the emotional drama of the narrative.

The power of music and sound to heighten drama and to go beyond what words can express alone is the subject of the next chapter, in which I describe and discuss several musical works set to Murdoch's texts and inspired by her work, her philosophy and her life.

PART III

Settings

Chapter 7: 'Just Bring Me the Composers': Musical Settings of Iris Murdoch's Words

Introduction

At least five separate pieces of music have been written setting the words of Iris Murdoch. There may be more: some of these pieces are difficult to trace and have not been performed again since their premieres. I hope this will change and these interesting compositions will be given public performances again in the future. In this chapter I will attempt to describe the scope and nature of these works, and the way they enhance and transform Murdoch's words. There are also contemporary indie rock singer-songwriters who, though not setting her words to music, acknowledge that their work is profoundly influenced by Murdoch, and I will introduce their work briefly.

In a way it is surprising that Murdoch was keen to work with contemporary composers, given that her musical tastes ran to 'nothing later than Bartok'; given her opinion, expressed in *Metaphysics as a guide to morals*, that 'later twentieth-century music … draws attention to our desire for satisfaction by refusing to give it' (60); and given her complaint that 'Much modern music (post-Schoenberg) defeats our old-fashioned wish for the melody to "come home"' (87). Four of the musical works discussed here were written during her lifetime, with her willing consent and in some cases her active collaboration. Two of the composers initiated the collaboration, to her delight. On the other hand, she sought to add music to her dramatic work, *The one alone*, because she wanted to take it to another plane, beyond what words could express alone.

G. Dooley, *Listening to Iris Murdoch*, Iris Murdoch Today,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-00860-3_7

Her dramatic works were conceived for a different purpose than her novels (and also, by implication, her philosophy). She discussed this with Tom Sutcliffe in 1980:

> Magic is a key word in the Murdoch vocabulary. Music has it, and so has the theatre, about which Murdoch also considers herself a novice. She is intrigued by the directness with which ideas can be projected in the theatre where the structure and the role played by words is utterly different from those in a novel. … 'I don't write political novels, though there are plenty of politics in the novels. But I like the theatre because it's magic, and also because you can somehow do something with ideas in the theatre. It's more like propaganda in a sense.'[1]

She felt she could not readily explain why she liked opera. 'I think it's magic, like Shakespeare. Particularly Mozart is magic. … When I think of opera, I think of great moments, of great songs and great emotion.' Fiction was where she felt most at home, but the ideas expressed in a novel are 'diluted by the great ocean of the novel itself, which is so much bigger than a play'.[2] The ideas in her play *The servants and the snow* immediately struck composer William Mathias when he happened to hear it on the radio in 1974: 'even as I listened to it on the radio, musical ideas were coming into my head—something which had never happened before in quite the same way.'[3] Out of this chance encounter came the only full-length opera which has so far arisen directly from Murdoch's work.[4]

[1] Tom Sutcliffe, 'Iris Murdoch, philosopher and novelist, has now written a libretto of an opera. She talks to Tom Sutcliffe about the magic of music and theatre,' *The Guardian* (15 September 1980): 9.

[2] Sutcliffe, 'Iris Murdoch, philosopher and novelist,' 9.

[3] A.J. Heward Rees, 'Servants and masters,' *Welsh music* 6, 5 [Summer] (1980): 19. Quoted in Thomas Hyde, '*The servants*: On thinking about Mathias and opera,' unpublished manuscript, 95.

[4] Oliver Soden writes in his biography of Michael Tippett that when he was writing his opera *The knot garden*, 'the philosophical farces of Iris Murdoch such as *A Severed Head*' were in his mind, among several other influences, including John Fowles, Shakespeare, Christopher Fry, T.S. Eliot and Edward Albee. Oliver Soden, *Michael Tippett: The biography* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2019), 495.

The servants—Opera: Music by William Mathias, Libretto by Iris Murdoch

First performed in September 1980 by the Welsh National Opera.

William Mathias (1934–1992) was a Welsh composer who was, among other things, commissioned to write a piece of music for the wedding of Prince Charles and Princess Diana in 1981. He is probably best known as a choral composer, with several works in the standard repertoire, for example, 'A babe is born' and 'Ave Rex'. *The servants* was his only full-scale opera, in three acts, running for over two hours in performance.

In a review of the published score, Jane Birkhead writes, '*The Servants* is strong. The characters are clearly defined. The music fits the portrayal. It is a fine addition to contemporary opera literature.'[5] According to Geraint Lewis,

> the scenario blends philosophy with melodrama in a typical Murdochian brew combining the themes of freedom and servitude. Mathias's score achieves a glowering immediacy which brings the varied characters vividly to life against a striking choral backdrop.[6]

The chorus was particularly important to Murdoch in her conception of the opera, as she told Ruth Pitchford:

> It is crucial to make the audience aware of the powerful and potentially menacing force of the army of servants—'yet the servants hardly had anything to say in the play', she explained. 'I'd have liked to have a chorus then, but you're lucky if you can have six or seven people in theatre, because of the cost. It was one of the difficulties of the stage play, because you didn't really believe there were 100 servants in the house.'[7]

She and Mathias made the most of the opportunity to use a large chorus in the opera, and it appears to have had the desired effect. According to Birkhead,

[5] Jane Birkhead, 'Review of *The servants: Opera in 3 acts* by William Mathias and Iris Murdoch,' *Music library association* 39, 1 (September 1982): 222.

[6] Geraint Lewis, 'William Mathias,' *New Grove dictionary of music and musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 122.

[7] Ruth Pitchford, 'Iris Murdoch—Set to music' in *From a tiny corner in the house of fiction*, ed. Gillian Dooley (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 121.

> One of Mathias's most interesting devices is his handling of the servants chorus. This group of 'two hundred' (according to the script) is on stage, off stage, and behind a scrim. This mass of humanity acts as a principal and is as strong as any character. Like a Greek chorus, it philosophizes, bemoans, trembles, is angered, and is restless.[8]

Murdoch had 'always fancied the idea of turning her original stage play, *The servants and the snow*, into an opera', according to Ruth Pitchford. She approached Benjamin Britten but he politely refused, so she took it no further. The 'failure' of the play when it was first performed in 1970 had upset her considerably.[9] But when Mathias heard the play on the radio and approached her, she says, 'I accepted by return of post. I was absolutely thrilled.'[10]

Mathias spoke to Bruce Duffie about *The servants* in a 1985 interview:

> [T]his work interested me because it was a curiously modern problem of who was to be master and who was to be servant, and what the relationship between the two are. It's a kind of allegory set in Central Europe on the Hungarian-Austrian border about mastery, servitude, democracy and feudalism. They all come into this. It can be reflecting in almost every level of society.[11]

In a letter from Murdoch to Norah Smallwood at Chatto and Windus in February 1978 she mentions the copyright negotiations. 'I don't mind [OUP] having 40% and the marvellous composer deserves MUCH more, the main point is just to see that the original play receives my copyright.'[12] Mathias said that they worked on the opera together for two years before the production, but the whole process must have taken longer than that: the Welsh National Opera file on *The servants* contains material dating

[8] Birkhead, 'Review of *The servants*,' 222.

[9] See Peter Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A life* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), 531.

[10] Pitchford, 'Set to music', 120. I have been unable to find a reference to the radio broadcast of the play, which was performed in 1970 in Greenwich.

[11] Bruce Duffie, 'Composer William Mathias: An interview,' (Chicago: December 1985), http://www.kcstudio.com/Mathias.html .

[12] Iris Murdoch, 'Iris Murdoch to Norah Smallwood, 25 February 1978,' in *Living on paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995*, ed. Avril Horner and Anne Rowe (London: Chatto and Windus, 2015), 454.

from 1977 to 1983,[13] and Mathias's archive gives 1976 as the date of his first letter to her, and also lists a 'Typescript copy of the libretto' from 1976.[14] Mathias told Duffie about the process of creating the opera with Murdoch:

> BD: Were you in on the crafting of the libretto also?
> WM: Oh, yes! The libretto is by Iris Murdoch, but we actually did it both together. She herself is not a musician, although she's vastly interested in music and she's vastly interested in opera. But we had to work together; a composer has to do it. … When you're dealing with words like that, whether it's a short song or a large opera, what you're doing is using the words to create a large-scale musical structure and music always must take over. This is an awful phrase, but the music must almost eat the words up if it's going to work.[15]

Murdoch commented to Tom Sutcliffe that when they first discussed the project Mathias 'already had very clear ideas on what would have to go from the play', and that her 'role in the enterprise … was less a question of condensing the existing material … than of providing the poetry for the extended arias. "It was pretty obvious from the play itself where there should be long songs," she said.'[16]

In a chapter of his forthcoming book on William Mathias, Thomas Hyde discusses the opera in detail, including its evolution from the original stage play and the changes in the characters. In particular, he notes the way Marina is made into the central character and endowed with a kind of mystical power. In the Sutcliffe interview, Murdoch said that what Mathias did was 'to build up Marina into a very much more attractive and magical figure than she is in the play where she was more of a fallible human being and ordinary girl. He has quite rightly taken her more as a kind of priestess.' She said she approved of the change, though she initially had had 'some reservations about it'.[17] Hyde feels that this change caused an

[13] 'Finding aid,' *Welsh national opera records* (Wales: National Library of Wales), 82, https://archives.library.wales/index.php/welsh-national-opera-records .

[14] '*The servants*, op. 81,' Files 343-376, William Mathias Music Manuscripts and Papers, 1950–1994, National Library of Wales.

[15] Duffie, 'Composer William Mathias'.

[16] Sutcliffe, 'Iris Murdoch, philosopher and novelist,' 9.

[17] Sutcliffe, 'Iris Murdoch, philosopher and novelist,' 9.

uneasy dissonance between the realist register of much of the work and the mythic quality of the ending.[18]

Reviewer Ernest Bradbury wrote in the *Yorkshire post*: 'This is a splendid first opera … an absorbing night in the theatre … The strength of Mathias's score is its complete identification with the characters, its economy of means, its musical immediacy.'[19] Not all the critical reception was so positive. Hugo Cole wrote:

> I remain unconvinced that Mathias had chosen the subject that would best exploit his special gifts as a musical illustrator. The very readiness of his invention seems to handicap him in evolving the personal and highly specific language which this unconventional drama of ideas demands.[20]

The vocal score of the opera—that is, the vocal parts with the orchestral accompaniment arranged for piano—was published by Oxford University Press in 1981 and is available in many libraries, so although I have not heard a recording, I have had the opportunity to view the score. One feature that I noticed was an aria by the character Marina. This is one of the opportunities for 'long songs' that Murdoch talks of in her interview with Sutcliffe.

The short recitative leading into this aria draws on words from Marina's conversation with Peter Jack in Act One of the play: 'I don't want to be a different woman. I don't want to be safe. I want—oh—Listen.' [21] And she hears the gypsy, Patrice, playing his fiddle. In the opera, she sings, in angry, jarring intervals, 'I don't want to be different. I don't want to be safe. I want to be free!' The operatic form allows her to sing her thoughts in a way which is impossible in the play. The aria goes on:

A thought can mount on the rising day,
And is for ever free.
Hov'ring on wings it scans the way
The river flows to the sea.

[18] Hyde kindly shared with me the chapter on *The servants* of his forthcoming book on William Mathias, still in preparation.

[19] Quoted on Oxford University Press website https://global.oup.com/academic/product/the-servants-9780193374478?lang=en&cc=au# .

[20] Hugo Cole, 'The spirit of the age,' *Country life* 2 (October 1980), 1179.

[21] Iris Murdoch, *The three arrows and The servants and the snow* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1985), 39.

A servant can think on liberty
And know what freedom means,
As those who have never seen the sea
Can visit it in their dreams.

Though misery falls in a shower of rain
And sadness comes each day,
That wisdom can only be learned through pain
Is what all the wise men say.

The snow falls here and the snow falls there
And we suffer and hope to be
Better by far than our fathers were
Gentle and wise and free.[22]

These words are set to a hypnotic, lyrical melody over a haunting, discordant chordal accompaniment. The melody of this aria reappears later in the opera: it would be very effective in performance.

According to Mathias it was 'a fine production' and was broadcast on television.[23] Murdoch was also pleased with it, and according to Conradi it consoled her for the failure of the play.[24] Ruth Pitchford wrote that, during their interview, Murdoch 'had a little smile every time the voices of the chorus penetrated the floorboards of the upstairs office at the New Theatre in Cardiff, from the stage beneath'.[25] Murdoch said, 'you have only to hear the chorus singing, and you immediately have a sense of drama. William Mathias has a dramatist's sense of theatre. If he weren't a composer, I'm sure he could be a playwright.'[26] She wanted to keep writing for the theatre—'a musical next. As for more opera, "I'd love to. Just bring me the composers."' [27]

[22] William Mathias and Iris Murdoch, *The servants: Opera in 3 acts: Vocal score* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 63-65.

[23] Duffie, 'Composer William Mathias,' 5. A search of the BBC Archives has not revealed the availability of a recording.

[24] See Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A life*, 531.

[25] Pitchford, 'Set to music', 120.

[26] Pitchford, 'Set to music', 121.

[27] Pitchford, 'Set to music', 123.

The round horizon, Cantata in Five Parts: Music by Christopher Bochmann, Words by Iris Murdoch

First performed at Badminton School, 27 May 1983.

This cantata was Murdoch's next venture into musical collaboration, performed as part of Badminton School's 125th Anniversary Concert and 'to celebrate the opening of the new Music School.'[28] *The round horizon* is a cantata for a 'reciter' (a speaker), a mezzo-soprano, girls' choir and orchestra.

Christopher Bochmann studied music at Oxford during the late 1960s and 1970s before moving to Portugal where he has lived since 1980. His connection with Badminton School was through a relative who taught music there. The collaboration appears to have been arranged through the school, of which Murdoch was one of the most celebrated alumnae. Murdoch provided a range of poems of which Bochmann chose five for his cantata. He decided on the order and chose the title. He told me, 'I was very happy to write the piece and have been sorry that it has never been performed since! I think the girls at the school enjoyed doing it.'[29] He has very kindly shared the score and a recording of the 1983 performance with me.

Murdoch did not meet Bochmann before the work was performed in May 1983, although they corresponded. She wrote that she was 'so pleased at the way you made the verses your own and I like the title too. Only you c[oul]d decide how to order the thing and it sounds splendid to me!'[30] In an earlier letter to Richard Thorn, the music teacher at Badminton School, she had written 'I am afraid I cannot adequately read the music; but the whole structure and conception seems to me marvellous. I was interested (and v[ery] pleased) to see which words, and how, the composer fastened on.'[31]

The musical vocabulary of *The round horizon* is very different from *The servants* which, although using some unorthodox harmonies, is more traditional in its approach. At this period, Bochmann's website describes his music as belonging 'to a general category of post-serial modernism of

[28] Valerie Purton, *An Iris Murdoch chronology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 162.

[29] Christopher Bochmann, personal communication (email) (25 July 2021).

[30] *Letter from Iris Murdoch to Christopher Bochmann*, manuscript, private collection (19 January 1983).

[31] Iris Murdoch, *Letter to Richard Thorn*, manuscript, private collection (2 December 1982).

considerable complexity with frequent aleatoric elements'.[32] *The round horizon* is an effective choral piece in the modernist genre, using the full range of orchestral colours, particularly featuring wind instruments and percussion, to intensify and illustrate the lyrics. It runs for just over 18 minutes.

Bochmann has also shared his manuscript instructions for the performance of the work with me, in addition to the score. Some extracts will give an idea of the nature of piece:

> The first movement must be recorded on a small cassette tape-recorder from somewhere in the audience. The tape and recorder must then be passed to the reciter, for part of it will be played back over the loud-speaker in the last movement.

In the third movement, 'several of the wind instruments … play out the melody … and then stop (only to start again in mvt. IV). This creates a free counterpoint unrelated to what the conductor is doing.' An unusual clef notation used in some parts of the score is explained as representing 'approximately the vocal range of the singer/reciter. None of the notes have any defined pitch.'[33] At other times there are recurring motifs, expressive scraps of melody without a clear tonal centre.

The first part, 'Song I', begins:

> Find your voice, the truth-speaking one,
> The voice that is pure upon the tongue,
> Keep in the caves of your heart
> In the catacombs of the soul,
> The light that shines in the dark,
> The uncontaminated scroll.

These words are spoken, at first whispered, then at varied approximate pitches indicated in the score, by the reciter, with echoes from the choir and a range of percussion instruments. There is an element of the comic when they come to the words 'Reverence for truth is learnt / By looking words up / In dictionaries and by finishing / Problems.'

[32] Christopher Bochmann, *Biography*, https://www.christopherbochmann.com/. Accessed 27 July 2021.

[33] Christopher Bochmann, *Instructions for the performance of The round horizon*, manuscript, private collection.

Part 2, 'The Small Room 1', is a contemplative aria for the mezzo-soprano soloist, introduced by a four-note motif on the viola that recurs throughout the movement, and accompanied by the orchestra in a variety of colours—shimmering strings, percussion and wind:

> In the small room of attention
> In the confined space of the private soul
> In the small room
> The secret place where we experience
> The necessity of quietness
> We hear the sea ….[34]

Part 3, 'Song II', begins: 'Let our innocence secure the simple insight ….' The words, spoken by the reciter accompanied by (mostly) wordless choir and full orchestra, with woodwinds prominent, deal with many of Murdoch's recurrent themes, of the spiritual qualities of water and the power of the sea, of the importance of attention, and learning and using language. There is considerable rhythmic freedom in the score. The strongly rhythmic Molto Vivace of the fourth part, 'Water on the Land', provides a stunning contrast with the sparser texture of the previous part, giving the choir voice with a bustling orchestral accompaniment, ending with a broader monophonic choral section with the words 'And this and this and this see / And all this bless.'

The spoken phrase about dictionaries is repeated (replayed on the audio tape) in the final movement accompanied by manic laughter, embedded, however, into a texture of sometimes surprising lyricism. The work finishes with the mezzo-soprano soloist, escorted away by stratospheric flutes:

> Here the anchorite whose post
> Is to cherish all the lost
> And every last thing seek it out
> Purifies his lonely doubt.[35]

The tone is often poetic and allusive, but tends occasionally to a didacticism which is probably unintentionally comical. The varied

[34] In the printed words this line reads 'We can hear the sea'.

[35] Badminton School, '125th anniversary concert in the presence of Sir Michael Tippett to celebrate the opening of the new music school,' concert programme (27 May 1983).

textures—soloist, speaker, choirs both four-part and unison, orchestra—make for an engaging and entertaining work.

The title chosen by Bochmann, *The round horizon*, comes from lines in the fifth movement:

> With patience and impatience
> Doing our fine work
> The weaving of the future nothing less
> As it were made of nothingness
> The round horizon of the future is
> The view from our little room.
> Look, we can see the sea
> From our little room.

This piece would have been challenging for the music students at the school but the recording shows that they rose to the occasion—as young performers often do. There are varied levels of difficulty, with a unison choir for perhaps the younger students. Bochmann himself conducted the performance, expertly marshalling these large forces and producing a polished and convincing performance of a complex work. The Headmaster, C.J.T. Gould, in a letter to John Fletcher enclosing a copy of the programme, wrote, 'It was a most astonishing exercise for the audience, and Dame Iris wept copiously through both the performance and the repeat which we decided on immediately!'[36]

The one alone: Radio Play with Music by Gary Carpenter

Broadcast on BBC Radio, 13 February 1987.

The one alone was written in 1982 as a stage play intended to include some musical elements. Apparently Murdoch wrote it for the 1983 Badminton celebrations 'as something that could be set to music … but was never performed because … it didn't have a large enough cast'.[37] When this option fell through, Murdoch approached the BBC with the intention of offering it as 'a verse play but producer Glyn Dearman was quick to seize upon its musical potential and commissioned composer

[36] C.J.T. Gould, *Letter to John Fletcher*, Kingston University Archives KUA56/5/3 (26 June 1989).

[37] David Gillard, 'Musical Murdoch,' *Radio Times* (Friday, 13 February 1987): 16.

Gary Carpenter to set most of the text to music'.[38] The playscript from 1982 was adapted for the musical version: much of the dialogue follows the script closely, while the section for the 'People's Chorus' is thoroughly revised for the radio version. Carpenter suggested that some changes be made, and Murdoch provided an alternative text for him to draw on for this section.[39]

Gary Carpenter is a British composer who has written extensively for stage and screen, including music for the 1973 film *The wicker man* (when he was barely out of music college), as well as concert repertoire. At the time of this collaboration, in his mid-thirties, he had already written two operas and a musical, and this experience made him the ideal musical partner for this project. He and Murdoch did not know each other beforehand, and she had no part in selecting him to compose the music—it was all organised by the BBC. There are musical elements even in the original play script, but he told me that they did not discuss why she was keen for this to be a musical play. Possibly the experience she had with *The servants* opera gave her an idea of the powerful expressive possibilities of musical drama, particularly in conveying the kind of political message she was aiming for in this work. Carpenter told me that she was adamant that after the first, spoken section of the play, the rest should all be sung, as it was on a different plane.[40]

Carpenter very kindly shared the BBC recording of the play with me privately so I have been able to listen to it several times. It is a moving and powerful piece, falling roughly into four parts, without breaks, and it runs for a little under 50 minutes. The music is mostly atonal, using a modified serial technique which is remarkably flexible in creating a wide variety of dramatic moods.[41]

The play begins with a young political prisoner alone in her cell, pondering her fate. It is never clear how much of the action takes place in her head, as memories or imaginings. She is soon joined by a sinister Interrogator, somewhat reminiscent of O'Brien in Orwell's *Nineteen eighty-four*, who belittles her and scornfully disparages her, saying that she has ruined her life for nothing. The dialogue in this first part of the play is

[38] Gillard, 'Musical Murdoch,' 16.

[39] Gary Carpenter, personal communication (via Zoom), 4 August 2021.

[40] Gary Carpenter, personal communication (via Zoom), 4 August 2021.

[41] The recording is in the BBC archival collection held at the British Library, while the libretto was published in 1995 by Colophon Press in a limited edition.

entirely spoken, in free verse, accompanied by various sound effects, including birdsong. When the Interrogator leaves her, the Prisoner says she hears 'the sound of birds' and a children's chorus is heard singing a hypnotic snatch of a tune, accompanied by 'pima-poma'. Someone appears and she begins a sung conversation with him. The Prisoner is a mezzo-soprano, the visitor, whom she decides is an Angel although he denies it and calls himself 'a passer by', is a tenor. This section is largely in 'parlando'—basically recitative with occasional spoken phrases, against a shimmering atmospheric backdrop provided by strings and tuned percussion. She continues to ask him who he is, and eventually he replies, 'I am the voice of your certainty and your faith. I am the voice of your truth.'[42]

The choice of vocal ranges for the two principals is interesting. The Angel (sung by Bonaventura Bottone in the BBC recording) usually sings high in his tenor range, while the Prisoner (Fiona Kimm) sings mainly in the lower part of hers, so often they are singing at the same pitch, although the timbre of their voices is quite different—the Angel in his 'head voice'—more ethereal—while the Prisoner's voice is in the richer 'chest' register, perhaps more earth-bound. Both these singers, especially Kimm, demonstrate wonderful versatility in switching continually from spoken acting to singing.

The third part is the 'People's chorus', which according to the Angel is composed of the testimony of 'the people you wanted to save'.[43] It begins with a short chorus for unaccompanied choir, moving into a more strident and aggressive passage, accompanied by full orchestra. There are six separate solos—mini-arias—three men and three women, each with a personal story to tell about their misfortunes, and the accommodations and compromises they have made, set between chorus sections, both unaccompanied and with full orchestra. This section is full of drama and contrasting textures. Towards the end of this sequence, the People's chorus grows increasingly 'louder and more menacing': 'We did nothing, do not shame us, do not blame us.' The Prisoner responds that she does not blame them, but envies 'their quiet miserable lives'.[44] When the People disappear at the end of the third part, the fourth and final section begins with a passage of spoken dialogue and recitative set high in the Angel's tenor range.

[42] Iris Murdoch, *The one alone*, typed play script, Kingston University Archives KUA56/5/1/2 (14 January 1982), 12.

[43] Murdoch, *The one alone*.

[44] Murdoch, *The one alone*.

This exchange is followed by a song for the Angel, accompanied by harp, composed, he says, 'especially for you':

> In new springs the blackbird sings,
> The kestrel trembles on its wings,
> The galaxy rejoices as it swings,
> The clear high note rings out
> And the sun brings light to all things.[45]

Following this song, which continues for six verses—the closest thing to a substantial aria in the piece—the children's chorus reappears, singing wordlessly. The Angel tries to help the Prisoner understand the nature of her sacrifice and reconcile her to the unknowability of its value and utility. Then he is summoned away and dematerialises. The Prisoner cries out, and trumpets sound, ending the play. The trumpets are significant, because the Angel has said to her, 'Do not expect the trumpets to sound for you. They may sound, but don't expect it.'[46] The sound of trumpets survives from the original play script: they imply that the Prisoner has indeed not suffered and died in vain.

Murdoch told David Gillard,

> I have great sympathy and admiration for dissidents—they are the true heroes and heroines of our time. … They risk their lives and their sanity for their beliefs. The woman in my play is not a well-known dissident but an ordinary person. The inquisitor who mocks her points out that people will know nothing about her. But then you can't count on your protest being of use—and you can't *know* that it's not.[47]

According to Carpenter, Murdoch was not amenable to alterations of her script beyond what she explicitly provided, but she had no input into the musical side of the process. She told Gillard: 'He's taken great care that the words should be heard—a wonderful job.' For his part, Carpenter is quoted as saying it was a 'very happy collaboration',[48] and he confirmed this when I spoke to him in August 2021. He and Murdoch remained friends—they continued to exchange Christmas greetings, and he treasures

[45] Murdoch, *The one alone*.
[46] Murdoch, *The one alone*.
[47] Gillard, 'Musical Murdoch'.
[48] Gillard, 'Musical Murdoch'.

the cards she sent him each year. He said she was very affable and easy to work with, providing he didn't make changes to the script.[49]

A year of birds: Song Cycle for Soprano and Orchestra by Malcolm Williamson

First performed at the BBC Proms, 19 August 1995, with Alison Hagley (soprano).

Malcolm Williamson (1931–2003) was an Australian composer, trained at the Sydney Conservatorium, who made a career in the United Kingdom. In 1975 his appointment as Master of the Queen's Music surprised many people: he was the first non-Briton to hold the post, which was established in the early seventeenth century. William Walton is reported to have said that 'the wrong Malcolm' had been chosen—Williamson, instead of Arnold.[50] Williamson, according to Bruce Duffie,

> considered his music as being fundamentally Australian: 'Most of my music is Australian,' he said on one occasion, 'Not the bush or the deserts, but the brashness of the cities. The sort of brashness that makes Australians go through life pushing doors marked pull.'[51]

Williamson was a prolific composer in a variety of forms. He wrote ten operas, six ballets, 'cassations'—mini-operas with audience participation—major orchestral and choral works, song cycles and chamber music. His musical style was eclectic and he was not one to bend to current musical fashion. He told Duffie,

> [W]riting music is so difficult that you cannot falsify your personality. You have to write what you are, as you are. It's as much your own person as the color of your eyes and your spirituality, your sexuality, and everything else. You can't lie about those in music.[52]

His work is now not often performed, and scores and recordings of many of his later works, including *A year of birds*, are not readily available.

[49] Gary Carpenter, personal communication (via Zoom), 4 August 2021.

[50] 'Sir Malcolm Arnold (obituary),' *Telegraph* (25 September 2006).

[51] Bruce Duffie, 'Composer Malcolm Williamson: A conversation,' *Interviews by Bruce Duffie* (October 1996), Accessed 16 August 2021, http://www.bruceduffie.com/arts.html.

[52] Bruce Duffie, 'Composer Malcolm Williamson'.

Williamson wrote that he had known Murdoch and John Bayley for more than 30 years, when he received a commission from the BBC 'to compose a large work in any form that I chose' for the 1995 Proms.[53] According to his biographers, however, he and Murdoch had only really got to know each other well around the middle of the 1980s. He had been 'dazzled' by her 1984 novel *The philosopher's pupil* and started corresponding with her as a result.[54] He reveals that it had been his habit, 'when launching into a large-scale work' to take 'as companion one of Dame Iris Murdoch's masterly novels, pacing my reading to my composing'.[55] Apparently the idea of the song cycle had arisen in 1988. Williamson reports that when he asked Murdoch if he could set her poem sequence *A year of birds* to music, 'She replied: "Yes. In fact, yes in italics!"'[56] By 1989 he had begun work on it 'and was speaking every morning to Iris Murdoch about it' by phone.[57] The commission for the 1995 Proms seems to have provided him with the impetus needed to bring the work to completion.

Williamson describes the structure of his work:

> *A Year of Birds* is in three symphonic movements: *Winter to Spring, Spring to Summer* and *Autumn to Winter*, with four poems in each. Enfolded in the music which (if it matters) is monothematic, are a prologue, epilogue, and, between the November and December songs, the autumn hurricane for the orchestra as I experienced it in 1987 when caught in a plane between New York and London.[58]

He names his musical influences for the piece, rather unusually, not as any other musicians but as 'Hesiod, Pindar, Sappho, Vergil, Shakespeare and Murdoch herself, from whom I continue to learn about structure,

[53] Malcolm Williamson, 'Sir Malcolm Williamson writes about his adaptation of *A year of birds*,' *Iris Murdoch news letter* 9, [Autumn] (1995): 3. Williamson was not in fact knighted, but received a CBE in 1976.

[54] Anthony Meredith and Paul Harris, *Malcolm Williamson: A mischievous muse* (London: Omnibus, 2007), 400.

[55] Malcolm Williamson, 'Programme note for *A year of birds*', *Iris Murdoch news letter* 9, [Autumn] (1995): 3.

[56] Williamson, 'Sir Malcolm Williamson,' 3.

[57] Meredith and Harris, *A mischievous muse*, 483.

[58] Williamson, 'Programme note,' 4. Despite the fact that the *News Letter* announces that full orchestral scores and vocal scores of the sequence would be published and available for sale in 1996, I have been unable to locate a copy of a score, despite extensive online searches and enquiries.

rhythm and melodic imbalance—a subtler skill than balance, and one that mirrors Plato'.[59] At the premiere in August 1995, 'Murdoch made a now rare public appearance on stage with the composer himself'.[60]

Although no recording is publicly available, I have been lucky enough to hear a recording of the piece as performed at the Proms, provided by Williamson's biographer Paul Harris. It runs for a little over 30 minutes and is densely scored, with many birdsong references throughout, set against a rich array of orchestral sounds. The brass instruments are prominent, as well as the high woodwinds and tuned percussion one would expect to evoke birdsong.

The work begins with a delicate bird-like sounds in the orchestra, gradually increasing in intensity, and then the soprano sings a long melismatic passage with no words, before the first poem begins: 'Inland seagulls never cry, ai, ai, ai.' The words of each poem are set to music with little repetition, so the 'songs', like the poems, are mostly quite short, each providing a vivid, crystalline vignette against the orchestral texture, which becomes increasingly rich and dramatic as the year draws to an end, with the November owl preying on the shrewmice, and the sombre dark days of December brightened by the robin. The work ends as it began, with a melismatic passage by the soprano, and delicate bird sounds in the orchestra.

The description of the work as a 'song cycle' is perhaps somewhat misleading. The poems are set to music one after the other, with instrumental passages in between, but as Williamson writes, the music is 'monothematic' and the settings all share much the same melodic tone-world. The individual songs are not extractable from the whole piece in the way they are in Mahler's or Richard Strauss's orchestral song cycles. The vocal line is mostly legato and lyrical, in contrast to the often very intense sounds from the orchestra, which to my ears sometimes strongly recall Olivier Messiaen. In fact, the work was an 'act of homage to both Iris Murdoch and Olivier Messiaen (whose *Catalogue d'Oiseaux* he admired and regularly played)', according to his biographers.[61] Stephen Johnson, writing in the *Independent*, said:

[59] Malcolm Williamson, 'Programme note,' 4.

[60] Iris Murdoch, *Living on paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995*, ed. Avril Horner and Anne Rowe (London: Chatto and Windus, 2015), 557. This editorial statement by Horner and Rowe is the only time Williamson is mentioned in the *Letters*, and he does not feature at all in Peter Conradi's biography or other biographical works about Murdoch.

[61] Meredith and Harris, *A mischievous muse*, 483.

> The three parts were virtually identical in form: songs alternating with interludes. The orchestral interludes were often energetic and harmonically astringent, while the songs themselves were in Williamson's Puccinian vein: warmly, sweetly tonal and very much melody-led, though with a faintly clashing counterpoint of bird imitations. These two styles often sat uneasily together. Was that Williamson's intention? … The songs themselves could be quite gorgeous. Few composers today write singing, romantic lines as generously as Williamson. I couldn't help wishing that he'd surrendered completely to his lyrical side and allowed himself to forget that he's a late-20th century composer.[62]

Stephen Pettitt in the *Sunday Times* was even more appreciative of the melodic and lyrical nature of the piece, and its structure:

> The week's most pleasant surprise was the premiere … of Malcolm Williamson's *A Year of Birds*, a beautifully constructed, lavishly coloured orchestral song cycle … Alison Hagley … negotiated Williamson's naturally shaped lines and the changing moods and qualities of light with a subtle array of voice shades. In our pluralistic age, perhaps it is high time that we looked more generously upon Williamson's output, which has, in the past, often been derided for its conservatism.[63]

Meredith and Harris describe the work as

> Malcolm at his most characteristic, exemplifying all the various traits which combine to produce his unique sound: exciting rhythmic complexities; the drama of constant tensions between the tonal and the chromatic; vivid use of percussion; glorious outbursts of rich, post-Straussian chromatic harmonies; the arresting nature of unusual key changes and unexpected phrase endings; and the rich colouring which comes from his many-layered orchestral writing, most notably in the divided strings. It is the work of a composer who has carefully assimilated many of the major influences of his century—Messiaen, Stravinsky, Britten and Richard Strauss—on the way to achieving something truly memorable and original.[64]

[62] Stephen Johnson, 'Proms Benedict Mason, Malcolm Williamson: Premieres Royal Albert Hall, London,' *Independent* 20 (August, 1995), Accessed 30 April 2021.

[63] Stephen Pettitt, 'Mahler revisited: Proms,' *Sunday Times* 27 (August, 1995), Accessed 1 May 2021.

[64] Meredith and Harris, *A mischievous muse*, 486.

There is no record of Murdoch's opinion of the eventual composition: by August 1995 she was already well on the way to the 'very, very bad, quiet place' of Alzheimer's disease.[65] And it was Williamson's last major work. There had been talk between Williamson and Murdoch of a setting of her Platonic dialogues *Acastos* as a chamber opera, but nothing came of that.[66] And in his 1996 interview with Bruce Duffie, he foreshadowed another work based on Murdoch's poetry: 'My 8th Symphony, my next one, is called *Agamemnon*, is written on the only other poem that Iris has written.'[67] This symphony, intended for singer Teresa Cahill and the Brunel Ensemble, directed by Christopher Austin, was left uncompleted when Williamson died in 2003: he was still working on it two years after he had a major stroke, according to Austin, who accompanied him and his partner Simon Campion on holidays in 1999.[68]

Williamson was a huge fan of Murdoch as a writer and seems to have been proud to have her as a friend. He reported that Queen Elizabeth was excited about the *Year of Birds* project: 'It was not for nothing that the Queen made Iris a dame. Her Majesty is no fool.'[69]

Forgive me. In Memoriam Iris Murdoch, 1919–1999, for Unaccompanied Vocal Ensemble (SATB) by Paul Crabtree

First performed at the Portsmouth Festival by The Cardinall's Musick in 2019.

Paul Crabtree is another admirer of Murdoch's work, and his choral piece *Forgive me* demonstrates a deep affinity with and understanding of who she was, both as a writer and as a person, despite never having met her. Crabtree is a British composer who lives in San Francisco, having moved there in his early 20s. He had studied with Kenneth Leighton in Edinburgh, and later at the Musikhochschule in Cologne, Germany.

[65] Joanna Coles, 'The Joanna Coles interview: Duet in perfect harmony,' *From a tiny corner*, 246.

[66] Meredith and Harris, *A mischievous muse*, 483.

[67] Duffie, 'Composer Malcolm Williamson'. In fact, Murdoch wrote many other poems, but did not regard herself as a poet. According to Sutcliffe, 'she prefers to call herself a modern versifier'.

[68] Meredith and Harris, *A mischievous muse*, 500.

[69] Meredith and Harris, *A mischievous muse*, 483.

The Cardinall's Musick is an award-winning chamber ensemble that specialises in English Renaissance music, alongside works by contemporary composers. Crabtree's 2012 composition *Valley of delight* had been a successful addition to their repertoire and prompted them to commission him to write a new work. *Forgive me* was composed in commemoration of the centenary of Iris Murdoch's birth. According to the group's newsletter, 'This is Paul's way of expressing his gratitude to Iris for shaping his thinking on Art and Goodness.'[70] The work's second performance, postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, is now scheduled to take place in Manhattan in March 2022. There is no recording available of the first performance, but I have been able to study the score and I have heard the work as a midi file—unsatisfactory in many ways (not least because the words do not feature) but enough to give an idea of the tonality. I look forward to hearing a recording of the performance—and perhaps even attending a live performance one day.

The work is in three parts. Part 1, 'Sorry', sets a collection of phrases from Murdoch's personal correspondence, each one apologising or asking for forgiveness. The lyrics, as a found poem, are very moving even apart from their musical setting, which is contrapuntal and rhythmically complex, reflecting speech rhythms. Crabtree writes that this movement presents 'the theme of forgiveness in a great contrapuntal tangle that occasionally unifies into a homophonic cry of apology and (perhaps) repentance'.[71] Making his own selection of fragments from her letters would have given him scope to arrange the fragments in a way which best suited his musical purposes, which was not the case with the next part.

The lyrics of Part 2, 'Forgive', are drawn from the extraordinary passage in *A word child* when Hilary Burde has taken drugs, given to him by his lodger, Christopher. It begins with Hilary, the 'word child' of the title, reciting, in schoolchild fashion, the Latin conjugation of the verb 'to love': 'Amo, amas, amat, amamus, amatis, amant ….' Hilary is overcome by the revelation of a benign universe that had been obscure to him before. 'I could forgive. I could be forgiven. I could forgive. Perhaps that was the whole of it after all. Perhaps being forgiven was just forgiving only no one had ever told me.'[72] The music is more homophonic than the first movement, with a variety of moods. The opening recital of the Latin is given a

[70] *The cardinall's musick*, [Spring] (2019): 3.
[71] Paul Crabtree, personal communication (email), 22 August 2021.
[72] Iris Murdoch, *A word child* (New York: Viking, 1975), 298.

slow tempo marking (crotchet = 62) plus the instruction 'Like a gently sleeping animal'.

Crabtree no doubt chose this passage for the central movement in *Forgive me* because of its wonderful Murdochian quality of humour and depth, and its relevance to his theme, but it was not easy to set. He told me that Murdoch's

> metric poetry would be a happier source than any prose passage from the novels, as I found in working with *A Word Child*. But I personally find that her poetry inhibits her expression, and takes her out of the evocation of real life, at which she excels. Finding some deep rhythms in the hallucination passage took a long time.

For Part 3 he chose the heart-breaking passage from Act V Scene III of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, where Lear is addressing Cordelia:

> Come, let's away to prison:
> We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage:
> When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,
> And ask of thee forgiveness.

Crabtree writes that this 'is King Lear's epiphany as he heads to imprisonment, realizing at the end of his life the circular relationship of blessing and forgiveness'.[73] The movement begins with a chant-like passage in the alto section, which becomes a recurring motif. In the middle of the movement the choir divides into two SATB sections and the second choir, singing 'and we'll talk … as if we were God's spies', is directed at different times to 'chatter' and to 'squawk'—'like birds i' the cage'. Crabtree writes, 'The two-choir division is to symbolize Lear and Cordelia, blessing and forgiveness, and the final unifying resolution.'[74] The work ends, appropriately, with a quiet repetition of 'no, no, no'.

This particular passage from *King Lear* is quoted near the end of *A word child*, when Hilary is fantasising about living a happy and harmonious life with his sister Crystal—a fantasy which is soon destroyed when she marries her faithful suitor Arthur. These lines from Shakespeare, who is so

[73] Paul Crabtree, personal communication (email), 22 August 2021.
[74] Paul Crabtree, personal communication (email), 22 August 2021.

important and so frequently referenced in Murdoch's work, are the perfect choice for this work written in her honour.[75]

Inspired by Iris: Paul Hullah and Kent Wennman

At the Iris Murdoch Centenary Conference in July 2019 at St Anne's College, Oxford, a concert was presented of music inspired by Murdoch, or associated with her novels. Two artists, Paul Hullah and Kent Wennman, performed their own work at the concert.

Paul Hullah, All the names under the sun *and* Home

Paul Hullah is President of the Iris Murdoch Society of Japan. A native of Yorkshire, he spent a decade in Edinburgh in the 1980s, studying literature at Edinburgh University and taking an active part in the city's underground music scene. He has lived in Japan for nearly 30 years and is Associate Professor of British Literature (Poetry) at Meiji Gakuin University, Tokyo.[76] He co-edited the only collected volume of Murdoch's poems that has been published to date.[77] He continues to study and write about Murdoch's poetry, including 13 handwritten notebooks of poems that she left, most of it unpublished. In the concert programme for the 2019 conference concert, Hullah wrote,

> I first met Iris and John [Bayley] in Japan in 1993, accompanying them in the Kansai region, and subsequently spent some time with them in Oxford. I would like to think that we built a rapport and even became friends. John was certainly more than instrumental in my first poetry being published (in *Agenda*) in the UK in 1994 and 1996. A little poem I wrote for Iris shortly after our last meeting appeared in my second book *Let Me Sing My Song* (Dionysia, 2000).[78]

[75] In *Metaphysics as a guide to morals*, Murdoch discusses this passage from *Lear* in some detail. She writes, 'this visionary speech is perhaps its most frightful moment, the essence of its frightfulness, which is also so piercingly beautiful' (*MGM* 119).

[76] See Paul Hullah's Wikipedia page for more information. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Hullah.

[77] *Poems by Iris Murdoch* ed. Yozo Muroya and Paul Hullah (Okayama: University Education Press, 1997).

[78] 'Words and music for Iris' concert programme, Iris Murdoch Centenary Conference, 14 July 2019, St Anne's College, Oxford.

Hullah plays guitar and recites his poems with a backing rhythm track, sometimes including spoken word. He told me:

> My poetry's verbally and imagistically dense, layered and 'literary', I know, so I hope people will read it closely on the page, but, live, I hope they can be aware of the musicality of the poems (very important to me too) and I use backing music to kind of guide people towards that side of it: the music shouldn't be intrusive, but should accentuate the music and melodies and rhythms already there in the words and the pauses themselves. I hope it does that! Ideally, performing a poem with musical backing makes it a different text, special and dramatic.[79]

One of the poems he performed at the conference concert in 2019 is *All the names under the sun*.

All the Names under the Sun
for Iris

Things get worse. You start
Forgetting what it is you can't
Remember, all you're looking
For bleeds sea-changed into fragments

Of a whole you don't recall:
Same jigsaw puzzle, but the box
Lid's lost, some pieces have
Been trodden on, or fallen in the gap

Between that sofa and this wall.
And what of you and what you lost?
You scramble round old rooms,
Look under chairs, pull floorboards up

To no avail. You take a rest, a book,
A boiled egg or cup of tea, enjoy
The rhythms of the poetry in prose
And start and stop and wonder

What you're doing, why you're here.
You always did that, you were always good

[79] Paul Hullah, personal communication (email), 4 September 2021.

> At that. So it's all right. The missing piece?
> You won't recall where last you left it.
>
> You will forget that you have lost it,
> Thereby making it not truly lost at all.[80]

A recording of this work is available on YouTube.[81] It is moving and hypnotic, and the poetry, with its intricate network of rhythms and allusions, is clearly audible in a way which is unlikely to be achievable if the text were sung.

Another poem, 'Home', which is in Hullah's 2016 collection *Climbable*, was also partly inspired by Murdoch. Paul told me that

> 'Home' isn't specifically for or about Iris; it's about losing people but not losing yourself. Since Iris is one of the several most important people in my life that are no longer 'here' (in person), the poem is, of course, 'about' Iris—about being at peace ('at home' if you like) with the notion that they're at peace now and everything is okay. They are gone, but, in absence, with all the love and acts and words they left behind still present, they become the
>
> Muses gushing music much untouched
> By sadness, loss, and lonesome dusk
>
> that the poem mentions. Thinking like that, we can survive:
>
> We are the winners
> Here.[82]
>
> That's the best way forward, the best way home.[83]

Murdoch wrote that Hullah's poems have 'an enchantment that touches me deeply', and John Bayley wrote, 'Paul Hullah's poems are unlike any others today. They are not only very good but very direct and moving. And they possess a shapeliness and clarity that other poets today might envy. Their beauty is as enigmatic as it is straightforward.'[84] And these poems, when part of Hullah's unique musical performances, become more complete works of art than they would be in a conventional poetry reading.

[80] Quoted by permission.
[81] Paul Hullah, 'Iris', YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8q7BV6c2vUE
[82] Paul Hullah, 'Home' in *Climbable* (Singapore: Partridge, 2016), 68.
[83] Paul Hullah, personal communication (email), 4 September 2021.
[84] Quoted on the back cover of Hullah, *Climbable*.

Kent Wennman, A Jerusalem conversation *and* The thinker and the feeling one

Kent Wennman is a Swedish singer-songwriter who makes a specialty of (among other things) impersonating Elvis Presley. His genre might be described as indie rock with a hint of country.[85] The two songs Kent sang at the conference concert both appear on his 2013 album *Love is Calling*, available on Spotify and on CD, labelled 'Personal Philosophy' Part 1 and Part 2. On the album sleeve, at the top of his list of acknowledgements, Kent thanks 'Dame Iris Murdoch for intellectual inspiration'.[86]

Kent's songs are all tuneful and well-crafted, with thoughtful and often witty lyrics, but the two 'Personal Philosophy' songs have something more. They are longer, each with a clear narrative line—both love stories of a kind. Both the songs are about relationships, dealing with differences and difficulties between lovers and friends. In *A Jerusalem conversation* the lover of the singer leaves him behind to seek enlightenment somewhere 'far east / or India at least'. He meets her again many years later in Jerusalem and they have a puzzling conversation. The song concludes,

> So the one who is without sin
> Is welcome to begin
> You may be the first to throw a stone.

The ending is left open, but the message is fairly clear: one should not judge others. Kent tells me that the song was written in response to his early reading of Murdoch's philosophy, when he had reservations about her idea of the Good. 'But … the message in the song is ambiguous. I was not so convinced my answer was right either.'[87]

The thinker and the feeling one describes a series of encounters. In the first, a young man silences a woman who tells him 'the story of her life' by saying, 'you're the thinker / and I'm the feeling one', only to have the tables turned on him later by another woman he meets, and then by his 'old girlfriend'. The lines 'just let your heart speak / and the rest is done' occur in each iteration of the refrain. Once again, the ending is left open but in this song it is more ambiguous: the man ends by wanting to explain, like

[85] Wenmann's web page is at www.kentwennman.se .

[86] Kent Wennman, *Love is calling*, compact disc (Rootsy, 2013). All quotations from the lyrics in the following paragraphs are from the liner notes to the CD.

[87] Kent Wennman, personal communication (email), 2 September 2021.

the woman in the first verse, 'all the worries on his shoulders', but he in turn is silenced by the accusation of being 'the thinker', and the assertion of the primacy of heart over mind.

Conclusion: Iris Murdoch Set to Music

In our correspondence about the composition of his work *Forgive me*, Paul Crabtree shared with me many fascinating insights about the art of setting words to music. What makes a text suitable to be set to music is not a matter of whether a piece of poetry is better or more successful *as poetry*—much great poetry has been set to music, but on the other hand many great songs are based on poetry that is somewhat pedestrian. Paul told me,

> There is a specific quality to text for music that usually tends towards the poetic, because a calculated rhythm that is 'higher' than everyday speech achieves musical 'lift-off' in a way that the jumble of stresses in plain prose often defies. Poetry is fewer steps away from music than is unregulated prose, and so it's just easier to set.[88]

When William Mathias recognised an ideal source for his opera in *The servants and the snow*, he did not envisage setting Murdoch's text as it was. He knew that it would require a complete reworking from the spoken text, and indeed he did much of this rewriting himself, leaving Murdoch to write the song lyrics. As he said, the 'music must almost eat the words up if it's going to work'.[89] In opera especially, perhaps, the drama and the music combine to convey emotions and ideas almost regardless of whether the words can be clearly heard. They could be in an unfamiliar language, or be difficult for singers to pronounce clearly in certain parts of their vocal range, particularly when accompanied by a full orchestra. The emotional impact of Italian opera, for example, on an English-speaking audience does not rely on the easy availability of a translation of the words.

Christopher Bochmann and Gary Carpenter had less freedom to change Murdoch's words for their musical settings of her works. To some extent they were able to select and decide on the order of the poems or sections of her verse drama that they felt would best suit their settings, but they were required, as composers commissioned to set her existing work, to

[88] Paul Crabtree, personal communication (email), 23 August 2021.
[89] Duffie, 'Composer William Mathias'.

retain the rhythms and internal structure of verses that they were setting. Murdoch told Sutcliffe in the interview about *The servants*: 'I don't publish much of my verse. I don't think I'm really a poet, but I can occasionally write a poem.' Sutcliffe went on to say: 'She prefers to call herself a modern versifier, with everything that implies by way of half-rhymes and a kind of post-Auden rhythm, a colloquial freedom of diction but not free verse.'[90] Although the two works *The round horizon* and *The one alone* differ in many ways, both these composers made use of free speech rhythms in their works—spoken word, 'parlando' and relatively flexible tempi, with relatively few conventional song-like passages.

In the case of Malcolm Williamson, he was attracted to Murdoch's poem cycle and made the decision to set it without making any changes to the words. He said that from Murdoch he 'continue[d] to learn about structure, rhythm and melodic imbalance—a subtler skill than balance'.[91] In his setting of her poems, he made free use of melismas to spin out the words to achieve his characteristic style of 'melodic imbalance', while sometimes focusing on a couplet that lends itself more readily to regular metrical setting, such as:

> Blackbird digging in the warm mown grass
> Glancing about with an eye of glass ….[92]

Kent Wennman and Paul Hullah approach their interactions with Murdoch in quite different ways. Wennman is a more conventional singer-songwriter and writes narrative ballads with metrical, rhyming lyrics. Hullah's musical pieces are more atmospheric and experimental, and his words use more complex poetic techniques such as enjambment and internal rhythms which would be more difficult to set directly to music, but which are mesmerising and moving when spoken with a backing track.

Crabtree told me that the important questions for a composer to consider when choosing a text are: What is the point of the setting (and not of the poem)? Who is its audience (the setting, and not the poem)? And does the setting add to or alter the original meaning? If so, how and why?[93] The importance for him of setting Murdoch's own words challenged

[90] Tom Sutcliffe, 'Iris Murdoch, philosopher and novelist,' 9.

[91] Malcolm Williamson, 'Programme note,' 4.

[92] Iris Murdoch, 'July' in *A year of birds* (London: Chatto and Windus; Hogarth Press, 1984), n.p.

[93] Paul Crabtree, personal communication (email), 26 August 2021.

him to find a way to do justice to the rhythms of her prose, alongside the more regular metre of Shakespeare's dramatic verse. His work, a piece for unaccompanied choir intended to be sung in a classical concert setting, is clearly trying to achieve something different from the opera, which is different again from the radio play. One important distinction between the two dramatic forms is the amount of spoken dialogue in the radio play, and the removal of the visual element and the dramatic action. It exists on a different, more cerebral and intimate plane, while the opera is a more public occasion, intended for a live audience. *The round horizon*, written for a particular group of young performers and designed to be inclusive of various musical skill levels, is clearly different again in its intention and audience, and as Murdoch pointed out, Bochmann 'made the verses his own', implicitly commenting on and interpreting Murdoch's text in a sometimes humorous and always idiosyncratic way. Williamson's Proms song cycle is, of all the pieces discussed, perhaps the one that most envelops Murdoch's text, with long orchestral interludes. The poems act almost like epigrams for a large symphonic tone poem, establishing a mood and theme which the orchestra then elaborates.

Murdoch was in no doubt as to the power of music. Her involuntary smiles on hearing the chorus of *The servants* rehearsing, and her tears at the performance of *The round horizon* seem to support her statement to Harold Hobson that 'I have no intellectual grasp of music and it attacks my emotions directly. … This shows I don't really understand it.'[94] However, her novels and other literary works evoke and harness music in a way that any musician will understand. Bradley's extreme reaction to *Der Rosenkavalier* in *The black prince* and Charles's mixture of anger, resentment, nostalgia and enchantment on hearing various other characters singing in *The sea, the sea* is one side of the equation. With characters like Emma in *The philosopher's pupil* and Gildas in *The message to the planet*, she shows us musicians wielding their powers, though Gildas 'had never become a composer'.[95] She never included a composer among her characters, except Christopher in *A word child*, who writes pop songs. Composing remained for her a kind of magic, a miracle that could transform her words to another plane.

[94] Harold Hobson, 'Lunch with Iris Murdoch' in *From a tiny corner*, 4.
[95] Iris Murdoch, *Message to the planet* (London: Penguin, 1989), 5.

Coda: Sound, Music, Silence and Listening

There are many ways of approaching Murdoch's work through music and sound, and much remains to be explored. My main focus in this book is on her fiction, as well as the ways her work and her words have been transformed through music. I have not studied the place of music in Murdoch's personal life in any depth, or any possible links between her philosophy of art and her use of music in the novels. I think there could be fruitful ways of approaching the latter. Music, melody, rhythm and sound might make interesting contexts within which to study her aesthetics, for example.

Murdoch's frequent emphasis in her philosophical writings on the importance of the artist *seeing* clearly in order to create truthful artworks has eclipsed the subtle and varied use of other senses in her novels. One might want to say that vision is a matter of ethics, while sound is a matter of aesthetics. However, that is too neat a division. The visual often has its own drama, but listening, especially, is also an important part of attending to the world around us, and Murdoch continually illustrates this fact. It can even override the visual: in *The unicorn*, for example, when Denis Nolan is singing, he becomes 'almost invisible, so much had he made sound sovereign over vision' (*U* 138). Listening to the natural world, to other people, and being aware of sounds and silences in one's environment are important elements in the kind of openness to the world that might seem an unalloyed virtue, or at least a condition for a life well lived. However, there are cases where that becomes dangerous and distracting

G. Dooley, *Listening to Iris Murdoch*, Iris Murdoch Today,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-00860-3_8

from what could be seen as a character's duties and responsibilities. This is one area in which it is misleading to try and extract a moral from Murdoch's fiction—or perhaps from any literary work. As she said,

> the notion that one has got a philosophical position which is being propounded in the novel is, I think, an idea which many critics latch on to (about many novelists), where this is not so, where insofar as there is a philosophy it's something which is diffused into the whole object.[1]

Decades of reading Murdoch's novels have not left me with any more specific moral message than the general idea that one should do one's best to treat others with kindness and respect, if possible, and not be judgemental. But if all her characters did that there would be no story to tell. My personal belief is that reading literature allows us to see and understand other states of being. Murdoch saw this as a kind of love:

> Art and morals are, with certain provisos …, one. Their essence is the same. The essence of both of them is love. Love is the perception of individuals. Love is the extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real. Love, and so art and morals, is the discovery of reality.[2]

One of the best philosophers writing about literature today, Niklas Forsberg, writes that literature is

> accidentally philosophical in the sense that it challenges our philosophical conceptions and presuppositions the most when it shows us something about ourselves, our language, our culture, that we had not considered, seen or pondered.[3]

He follows up, in a more recent article, by saying that he has no theory about literature, and does not know 'what it would mean to have such a theory'.[4] I could not agree more. The particulars of each situation are the

[1] Richard Todd, 'Encounters with Iris Murdoch' in *From a tiny corner in the house of fiction*, ed. Gillian Dooley (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 173.

[2] Iris Murdoch, 'The sublime and the good' in *Existentialists and mystics* (Chatto and Windus, 1997), 215.

[3] Niklas Forsberg, *Language lost and found* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 13.

[4] Niklas Forsberg, 'Unintentional investigations: Truth in drama and "all that 'Ordinary' in the phrase 'Ordinary language philosophy' means,"' *Policy Futures in Education* (July 2021): 5, https://doi.org/10.1177/14782103211031412.

important thing: the individuality of characters, settings and situations. He talks about 'the author's task'—in Harold Pinter's phrase—which 'we need to see as a search for truth', as the 'effort to listen to words, hear them out, and make clear to ourselves what, exactly, follows from them'.[5] This was Murdoch's aim in all her fiction, and it is not an easy task, 'given that neither language nor people are static things, but changing, evolving, uncertain, hesitant, determined, in love, full of raging hatred …. But one thing remains true: It cannot be dictated.'[6] And it follows that there are no stable associations with any one attribute or activity or attitude.

Although she enjoyed music and was deeply moved by musical settings of her own words, I do not believe that Murdoch subscribed to the belief that music is a kind of pleasure accessible to all, or that it has the potential to be a kind of universal language. It is tempting to see, in the instances when individuals are denied the pleasures and rewards of music by more powerful figures in their lives, a message that the removal of those restraints will make all well. Music is certainly used to illustrate inequalities of power, especially within marriage. But although some parallels can be drawn between various fictional situations involving music within and between the novels, it does not of itself have a generalisable significance. The power of music is acknowledged, but in different situations and with different characters it operates in many and various ways.

I have deliberately not called this chapter a conclusion. The word 'coda' is a term for the ending of a piece of music, usually, in works in the classical tradition, a brief extension to the final cadence, perhaps briefly recapitulating a fragment of the melody, but not closing off the possibility of the subject being taken up again. The examples of music and sound I have chosen to write about are very selective and it is my hope that my work will suggest new lines of research into Murdoch's work. Within the novels, as can be seen from the list of musical allusions which follows in Appendix A, there is a rich vein of material that could be further explored. Why is it, for example, that musical allusions seem to occur more in the later novels—with the exception of *The good apprentice*, which mentions no specific music at all? Is it just because the novels are longer and richer, or is there some more intriguing reason? And why, when *The sacred and profane love machine*—like *The good apprentice*—is such a tense and atmospheric novel, are no specific pieces of music mentioned? On the other hand, why is there

[5] Forsberg, 'Unintentional investigations,' 8.
[6] Forsberg, 'Unintentional investigations,' 8.

so little allusion to atmospheric sound and silence in *A severed head*? Does this indicate something about the character of Martin Lynch-Gibbon, a narrator who in many ways is self-deceiving and perhaps, in a way, deaf to the world around him?

I have not paid any detailed attention in this book to the sounds of the natural world. Birdsong is a subject that deserves study. The capacity for the cries of birds and animals to prompt human beings to create stories and legends, and to embody and symbolise emotions, is infinite. Birds, particularly, bear a huge amount of cultural freight. Dogs and their barks and howls have their own range of significance. Murdoch uses these attributes to the full in several of her novels. Birds also appear often in her poetry, most notably, of course, in *A year of birds*. The rhythmic soundworld of her poetry is itself a large subject which scholars are beginning to explore, with Paul Hullah leading the way in revealing the significant body of unpublished poetry Murdoch left behind and that is now accessible in the Iris Murdoch Archive at Kingston University. The power of music, sound and silence is beautifully captured in an early poem, from 1938, where she describes hearing the organ in Winchester Cathedral:

> I stood in awe & wonder for a while,
> In dread of such a silence & such sound—
> Till swift & sudden sped
> A swallow from the vaultd [sic] dark, & passed
> above my head.[7]

This brief extract brings together sound, music, silence and listening, and a bird. It seems the perfect place to leave this subject, for the time being.

[7] Iris Murdoch, 'Reverie in Winchester Cathedral' in *Poems Jan 1938–Jul 1940* [poetry notebook]. Kingston University Archive. KUAS202/3/.

PART IV

The Music

Appendix A: Music Mentioned in Murdoch's Fiction

Classical Composers

Of the 200 or so musical references in Iris Murdoch's novels, there are some composers who stand out. Eight composers from the classical music canon are mentioned more than twice, some spread across several novels, others concentrated in just one.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is by far the most frequently invoked composer, with 16 references to his music in 11 different novels, from *The bell* to *The green knight*. Next comes Johann Sebastian Bach, with seven references in five novels from 1958 to 1987. Ludwig van Beethoven and Henry Purcell are each mentioned five times, in five and four novels, respectively.

The other four are each mentioned four times. The operas of Richard Wagner appear four times in four novels, as also do the operettas of W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan—*The Mikado* once and *The yeomen of the guard* three times. A single work of Orlando Gibbons, his song *The silver swan*, is mentioned by name in four separate novels, from *The bell* to *The green knight*. *The silver swan* is the most frequently occurring piece of music in the novels, edging out Mozart's *Voi che sapete*, which only appears three times.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky is counted four times within just one novel, *The time of the angels*, because four of his works are named. The figures are based on how many separate pieces of music (or unspecified works by specific composers) are referred to in each novel, so if the same piece is

G. Dooley, *Listening to Iris Murdoch*, Iris Murdoch Today,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-00860-3_9

mentioned more than once within a novel, it is only counted once. However, there are multiple references to each of his works. All the references to Tchaikovsky are concentrated in this one novel—he appears nowhere else in Murdoch's novels.

Vocal Music

Of all the music evoked in the novels, about half is vocal music of one kind or another. Various types of song appear across the novels, including hymns, folk songs from the British Isles and Europe, jazz songs, songs from Broadway musicals, nursery rhymes and madrigals. They are often sung by one of the characters—usually in the hearing of another—or remembered, or the lyrics quoted. There is a wide range of secular songs, the most frequent being *The silver swan*, discussed above, *Full fathom five*, from Shakespeare's *Tempest*—two of the four references are to the famous phrase 'suffered a sea change'—and *The road to Mandalay*, which appears three times.

Hymns are referred to about 25 times across the novels. Sometimes the words are quoted, or the hymn is remembered by one of the characters from their childhood. At other times, a hymn is heard or sung as part of the action of the novel. The hymn tune is never specified, and as most hymns have two or more alternative tunes, it is usually not possible to specify the composer of the music, only the author of the words. In the case of the two hymns that appear most frequently, the composers of the tunes to which they are traditionally sung are included. These are *Abide with me, fast falls the eventide*, which appears in quite different contexts in five different novels, and *The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended*, which appears three times.

Chronological List of Music Mentioned in Murdoch's Fiction

Under the net *(1954)*

Henry Aldrich (1647–1710), *Great Tom is cast* (round)
The General Post Office was spacious, cavernous, bureaucratic, sober and dim. We entered hilariously, disturbing the meditation of a few clerks and of the people who are always to be found there at late hours penning anonymous letters or suicide notes. While Lefty bought stamps and

despatched cables I organized the singing in round of *Great Tom is cast*, which continued, since I never have the presence of mind necessary to stop a round once it is started, until an official turned us out. (Ch. 8, 113–114)

The flight from the enchanter *(1956)*

***Gaudeamus igitur* (student song)**
After their capering and shouting, a profound sadness would seem to fall upon [the Lusiewicz brothers] and they would begin to sing, in lugubrious voices, their repertoire of Polish songs, concluding always with a rendering of *Gaudeamus igitur*, which they sang like a dirge, to a slow rhythm, swaying solemnly to and fro, shoulder to shoulder. (Ch. 4, 50)

['Gaudeamus igitur' is also sung by the brothers when they have told Rosa the story of their first sexual experience in their village, and the subsequent suicide of the woman. The Latin words are given in full.] (Ch. 6, 73)

Hermann E. Darewski, lyrics by Charles Wilmott, *In the twi-twi-twilight* (music hall song, 1907)
With surprising energy [Camilla Wingfield] swung her legs down and poured out some champagne, which she handed to Rosa. Then she swung her legs back into their original position and began to drone, '*In the twi—twi—twilight, out in the beau—ti—ful twilight*. I've never forgotten a song that I heard before 1910 and never remembered one that I heard since,' she explained to Rosa. (Ch. 9, 109)

Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901), *Il Trovatore* (Opera)
[Rosa Keepe and Camilla Wingfield discussing newspaper photographs of Camilla and Rosa's mother]: 'I remember one of her and you throwing leaflets about in a theatre.'

'That's right!' said Mrs Wingfield, her eyes kindling. 'It was Covent Garden. *Il Trovatore*. Royalty was present.' (Ch. 9, 114)

The sandcastle *(1957)*

***The fireship* (sea shanty)**
The lyrics of 'The fireship' are in Murdoch's handwriting in IML 1118—'Make a joyful noise I'.

'Have you seen Demoyter's glamour girl?' said Carde.
'No,' said Felicity, 'who's that?'
'Sleetie Carter,' said Carde. 'She's painting Demoyter's picture. Revvy Evvy wanted her in his house, but Demoyters pinched her instead. She's one of the rakish kind.' He burst into song. '*A nice girl, a day-cent gur-ril, but one of the rakish kind*.' (Ch. 8, 121)

As Carde crossed the field, he passed near to Donald. 'Your papa's poppet!' he said—and he went away down the pitch dancing and whistling 'a nice girl, a decent girl, but one of the rakish kind!' and tossing the ball rhythmically up and down. (Ch. 10, 148)

J. Goss (1800–1880), words by H.F. Lyte (1795–1847) from Psalm 103, *Praise my soul the king of heaven* (hymn)
[At school assembly] The organ began to pay the introduction to the final hymn. This hymn was a great favourite with the School. It had a jolly swinging tune and was good for singing loudly. …

Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
Who like me His praise should sing?
Praise Him! Praise Him!
Praise Him! Praise Him!
Praise the Everlasting King.

sang the School with abandon. (Ch. 13, 189)

British national anthem, *God save the queen*
[At Mr Bledyard's lecture] The next slide was a coloured photograph of the Queen, dressed in a blue coat and skirt, standing on the steps at Balmoral. A well-organized group at the side of the room immediately began to intone the national anthem. The audience rose automatically to its feet. A bedlam of laughter followed immediately. (Ch. 16, 230)

'Something special' (short story) (1957)

Ted Snyder, lyrics by Harry B. Smith and Francis Wheeler, *The sheik of Araby* (1921) (film song from *The sheik*)
'It's the women's magazines,' said her uncle, 'and the little novels she's for ever reading that are putting ideas in her head until she won't marry except it's the Sheik of Araby.' (176)

W.H. Monk (1823–1889), words by H.F. Lyte (1795–1847), *Abide with me, fast falls the eventide* (hymn)
'Good evening, Mrs. Geary,' said Mr Lynch, 'it's a blessing to see you looking so well, and Miss Geary and Mr. O'Brien still with you. Change and decay in all around we see. I'm told poor Mrs Taylor at the place in Monkstown has passed on since now a year ago.' (182)

Julius Benedict (1804–1885), 'The moon hath raised her lamp above' from the opera *The lily of Killarney* (1862)
A curly plume of black smoke gathered upon the metallic water, hid the ship for a moment, and then lifted to show it gliding away between the two lighthouses, whose beams were kindled at that very time, and into the open sea. Beyond it a large pale moon was rising over Howth Head.

'The moon hath raised her lamp above,' said Sam.

'I've seen the mail boat out a hundred times,' said Yvonne, 'and one day I'll be on it.' (186)

The bell *(1958)*

Orlando Gibbons (1583–1625), *The silver swan* (madrigal) *[IML 1234]*
They both stopped, taking a deep breath, and looked in silence, enjoying the great space and the warm expanse of air and colour. Then from across the lake came sharply and delicately the voices of the madrigal singers. The voices plied and wove, supporting and answering each other in the enchanting and slightly absurd precision of the madrigal. Most clearly heard was Catherine's thin triumphant soprano, retaining and reasserting the melody. It was too far away to catch the words, but Michael knew them well. [First four lines of lyrics quoted.] (Ch. 8, 117).

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), unspecified keyboard music
Quite clearly on the soft and quiet warm night air there came the sharp sound of a piano. Dora listened, puzzled. Surely there was no piano at Imber. Then she thought, of course, a gramophone record, the Bach recital. … Dora disliked any music in which she could not participate herself by singing or dancing. … She listened now with distaste to the hard patterns of sound which plucked at her emotions without satisfying them and which demanded in an arrogant way to be contemplated (Ch. 15, 177–178).

***Monk's march* (Morris dance tune)**
Father Bob smiled and nodded, and the fiddler who was standing at the back and reduced to a frenzy already by feeling that everyone was waiting for him immediately struck up with Monk's March. Some of the dancers began to try to dance, while others cried sssh! Father Bob frowned and shook his head and the fiddle music trailed away (Ch. 23, 252).

J.M. Neale (1818–1866), 'Lift it gently to the steeple' (hymn)
The choir broke into song. The more ambitious music was being reserved for the climax at the Abbey gate. Meanwhile, Father Bob's wishes had been overridden by local sentiment. [3 verses of hymn printed] (Ch. 23, 254–255).

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791), unspecified
Returning late from the chapel Michael would see the light blazing on the balcony and hear across the water the music of Mozart, played upon the gramophone by Dora who was showing a sudden new enthusiasm for classical music (Ch. 26, 281).

A severed head *(1961)*

The ousel cock* from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream
A blackbird on its way to roost moved suddenly in the lee of a bush, turned its head towards us, and then sped away noiselessly low over the snow. In the last twilight of the afternoon we saw its eye and its orange beak.

> 'The ousel-cock, so black of hue,
> With orange-tawny bill,'

Alexander murmured.

> 'You quote too aptly, brother.'
> '*Too* aptly?'
> 'You don't recall the rest?'
> 'No.'
>
> > 'The throstle with his note so true,
> > The wren with little quill,
> > The finch, the sparrow, and the lark,
> > The plain-song cuckoo grey,
> > Whose note full many a man doth mark,
> > And dare not answer nay.'

> Alexander was silent for a moment. Then he said, 'Have you been faithful to Antonia?' (Ch. 6, 45).

Henry Gauntlett (1805–1876), words by Cecil Frances Alexander (1818–1895), *Once in royal David's city* (carol)

At that moment we heard the tinkle of the piano. Rosemary was beginning to play a carol. It was *Once in Royal David's City.* I took a deep breath and turned away from the door. … Alexander … had turned the anglepoise back to shine upon his unfinished head. We contemplated it together to the distant sound of piano (Ch. 6, 46).

Shakespeare song (unspecified)

To lose somebody is to lose not only their person but all those modes and manifestations into which their person has flowed outwards; so that in losing a beloved one may find so many things, pictures, poems, melodies, places, lost too: Dante, Avignon, a song of Shakespeare's, the Cornish sea. The room *was* Antonia (Ch. 10, 69–70).

Richard Wagner (1813–1883), *Götterdämmerung* (opera)

> 'Where are they anyway?'
> 'At the opera,' said Honor. …
> 'At the opera,' I said. It occurred to me as scandalous that Palmer and Antonia, after the scene in which I had taken part in the drawing room, should have gone out to the opera. …
> 'What's on?' I said.
> '*Götterdämmerung.*'
> I laughed (Ch. 13, 94).

An unofficial rose *(1962)*

W.H. Monk (1823–1889), words by H.F. Lyte (1795–1847), *Abide with me, fast falls the eventide* (hymn)

Fanny had had few friends. Yet the gathering at the graveside, under its receding rows of black umbrellas, was a large one, and the family itself accounted for little of the throng. In the chapel, during the dreary singing of *Abide with me*, Hugh had been too dazed to note who was present and who was not (Ch. 1, 9).

***Auprès de ma blonde* (folk song)**
[Hugh] heard above his head Miranda bounding noisily about her room and singing in a tone that was mean to be heard *Auprès de ma blonde*. She had a pretty little voice (Ch. 3, 32).

Percy French (1854–1920), *Abdul the bulbul amir* (music hall song)

> *The sons of the Prophet*
> *Are hardy and bold*
> *And quite unaccustomed to FEAR!*

sang Penn, as he leaned out of the window of his room (Ch. 9, 81).
[Two further extracts printed on page 83.]

Frank Loesser (1910–1969), *Slow boat to China* (jazz song)
'My dear Mildred,' he said, 'how frightfully good of you to come! I felt very foolish after I'd telephoned you, but I did feel I needed to see you.'
'My dear Hugh,' said Mildred. 'I need to see you all the time. I'd like to have you on a slow boat to China!'
'Dear,' said Hugh vaguely (Ch. 19, 171).

The unicorn *(1963)*

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791), unspecified piano piece.
One or two of the handsome redheads from Riders were to be seen sitting in the group of servants near the piano, and one of these, a big girl called Carrie, had opened the programme by playing with little expression but great correctness a small piece of Mozart (Ch. 16, 134).

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827), *Moonlight* (piano Sonata in C sharp minor, opus 27, no. 2)
After that there was a pianola performance. Marian had not noticed that the grand piano had a pianola attachment. Operated by another maid, the pianola played, a little jerkily in places, the Moonlight Sonata of Beethoven (Ch. 16, 134–135).

Roger Quilter (1877–1953), *The fuchsia tree* (Manx ballad)
IML 1155—Quilter's setting of The fuchsia tree

> O what if the fowler my blackbird has taken?
> The roses of dawn blossom over the sea;
> Awaken, my blackbird, awaken, awaken,

And sing to me out of my red fuchsia tree.
[Two further verses printed]

As the last notes died away, in the breathless moment before the crack of the applause, there was a cry of pain. Hannah was sitting with her head thrown right forward in her lap. It looked for a moment as if she had been physically struck (Ch. 16, 138).

The Italian girl *(1964)*

Jean Sibelius (1865–1957), unspecified
Isabel's gramophone, turned down to an almost inaudible murmur, was playing Sibelius (Ch. 3, 28).

As I went I heard again, from Isabel's open window, the sad music of Sibelius. Isabel was wrapped in her 'wild cloak'. I wondered if she was watching us now (Ch. 5, 46).

Richard Wagner (1813–1883), unspecified.
The gramophone was playing Wagner, but so softly that the quiet parts were inaudible and the loud parts were a sort of crackling buzz (Ch. 9, 80).

Isabel locked the door behind me and turned the gramophone down a little. … 'What is it Edmund? You look rather mad too.' She stared at me. Intimations of Wagner rumbled in the background (Ch. 12, 105).

The red and the green *(1965)*

Arthur Sullivan and W.S. Gilbert, *The yeomen of the guard* (operetta)
[IML 1242]

'What's on at the Abbey?'

'Some stuff by W.B. Yeats.'

'The Countess Cathleen man? I don't think we feel strong enough for that do we. What about the Gaiety?'

'D'Oyley Carte. I believe it's *The Yeomen of the Guard*.' (Ch. 2, 33).

Herman Lohr and D. Eardley-Wilmot, *It's a long way to Tipperary* (music hall song)

'Well, I think it's very disloyal to talk in that way about the Germans, as if they could possibly win. After all, England and Ireland are really one country.'

'So the English soldiers evidently think when they sing "It's a long way to Tipperary". But it's always easy for the top dog to extend his sense of identity over his inferiors. It's a different matter for the inferiors to accept the identification.' (Ch. 2, 39).

Ballington Booth (1857–1940), ***Over and over like a mighty sea*** **(hymn)**
R. Hudson Pope (1879–1967), ***Once I was blind, now I can see*** **(hymn)**

> *Over and over, like a mighty sea,*
> *Comes the love of JESUS, rolling over me!*

Several hundred youthful voices pealed it forth enthusiastically as Andrew and his mother went with quickened step and stiffened gait past the big marquee. A large red banner above it read *Children's Special Service Mission*, and *Saved by the Blood of the Lamb*. Neither Andrew nor his mother referred to the phenomenon. …

'You really must fix things up properly with Frances, after all it's up to you,' said Hilda, as they began to pass out of range.

> *Once I was blind, now I can see,*
> *Once I was bound, but now I am free,*
> *And that's how I KNOW there's a Saviour for me—*
> *OH such a Saviour!*

Andrew reflected, as the horrible sounds died away, that in Ireland religion was a matter of choosing between one appalling vulgarity and another (Ch. 4, 62).

Thomas Davis (1814–1845), ***Oh for a steed, a rushing steed***
He would have liked a cleaner, straighter fight, 'a steed, a rushing steed, on the Curragh of Kildare, a hundred yards and English guards.' The sort of song Cathal sang (Ch. 6, 96).

Thomas Ravenscroft (c.1588–1635), ***We be soldiers three*** **(1609)**
Thomas Davis (1814–1845), ***Bodenstown churchyard***
Thomas Davis (1814–1845), ***The green above the red***

> *'Charge it again, boys, charge it again,*
> *Pardonnez moi je vous en prie,*
> *As long as you have any ink in your pen,*
> *With never a penny of money!'*

'Don't sing that song, Cathal.'
'Why not?'
'I don't like it.'
'Why don't you like it?'
'I don't like that sort of song.'
'Why don't you like that sort of song?'
'Do you want your ears boxed?'
'You're in a nice friendly mood today, I don't think. All right, I'll sing another sort of song.

> *'Sure 'twas for this Lord Edward fell, and Wolfe Tone sunk serene*
> *Because they could not bear to leave the red above the green.'*

'If you sing that song you ought to sing it seriously.'
'Sure I am singing it seriously. How does one sing a song seriously or not seriously? One just sings it. Anyway, you know I love Wolfe Tone and I wouldn't—'
'Your head is full of bad poetry. … Dying isn't "sinking serene". Bad poetry is lies.'
'Well it's better than no poetry at all and no one has told us about Lord Edward and Wolfe Tone in good poetry yet. …'

> '*As I lay on the sod that lay over Wolfe Tone*
> *And thought how he perished in prison alone.*

I did that, too.'
'Did what?'
'Lay on the sod.' (Ch. 8, 124–125).

Words by Isaac Watts (1674–1748), *When I survey the wondrous cross* (hymn)
Hilda bustled away into the kitchen, humming loudly. A moment later he heard her voice raised in rather self-conscious shrillness above the purr of the taps. '*When I survey the Wondrous Cross* …' (Ch. 15, 201).

Patrick Heeney (1881–1911), *The soldier's song* (now Ireland's national anthem)
IML 1132—In the soldier's song book *(Dublin)*
As Pat approached Beresford Place he saw the gaping doorway of the Butt Bar and heard the sound within of drunken men singing the Soldier's Song (Ch. 18, 236).

Percy French (1854–1920), *Emigrant's letter* (music hall song)
IML 1190—Songs of Percy French
[Letter from Kathleen to Frances] Well, I must stop this scrawl and do the laundry. Give my love to the family. And do come over this summer all of you to the Emerald Isle and 'we'll talk of old times till they put out the light' like it says in the song (Epilogue, 311).

The time of the angels *(1966)*

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893), *Swan lake* (ballet suite, opus 20).
A faint sound of music comes from above. Swan Lake. And for a second Pattie's body feels all feathery and light (Ch. 1, 8).

A soft voice above her sings '*Frère Jacques, Frère Jacques, dormez-vous?*' and an opening and closing door releases a momentary whisper of Swan Lake (Ch. 1, 10).

Carel, who had once danced with her, danced alone now to the Swan music, a shadowy figure moving in the darkness of his room, whose door for some protection he usually left a little open (Ch. 3, 32).

The sound of the music still continued. It was Swan Lake. Muriel recognized the Dance of the Cygnets. Surely all was well (Ch. 22, 217).

The Swan music came abruptly to an end. Moving trancelike, Muriel leaned to put the record back to the beginning again (Ch. 22, 222).

***Frère Jacques* (nursery rhyme)**
A dark figure at the top of the stairs murmurs approval and a paper dart takes the air and sweeps down to tap on Pattie's smock a little above the heart and fall to the ground at her feet. …

A soft voice above her sings '*Frère Jacques, Frère Jacques, dormez-vous?*' and an opening and closing door releases a momentary whisper of Swan Lake (Ch. 1, 10).

Pattie turned back into the dark hall. '*Frère Jacques, Frère Jacques, dormez-vous?*' (Ch. 3, 34).

Muriel stood up. She tried to say something, but now Carel had stood up too. A desire to get quickly out of the room took her as far as the door. She looked back into the darkness. How tall he was. She got herself through the door and half closed it.
Frère Jacques, Frère Jacques, dormez-vous? (Ch. 13, 133).

Carel continued his marching. Then he went to the window and peered through a slit in the curtain. The pink flamingo sunset slashed the gloom momentarily. '*Frère Jacques, Frère Jacques, dormez-vous?*' (Ch. 15, 155).

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893), *The nutcracker* (ballet suite, opus 71)

Pattie shut the door and bolted it. Then she listened and heard with relief from upstairs the distant strains of the Nutcracker Suite (Ch. 8, 87).

'You have been infinitely good. You are my sugar-plum fairy. Lucky the man who has the sugar-plum fairy and the swan princess.' (Ch. 15, 158).

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893), 1812 overture (opus 49)

She came down the stairs to the strains of the Eighteen Twelve Overture. A softly closing door cut them off (Ch. 10, 102).

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893), *Pathètique* (6th symphony, opus 74)

The Pathetic Symphony, loud enough a few minutes ago to reach her in her own room, had now been turned down to a husky whisper (Ch. 13, 128).

Her voice sounded harsh and raucous in the room, breaking through some tissue of murmurous noise which she became aware of as the Pathetic Symphony still whispering on (Ch. 13, 131).

The Pathetic Symphony came to its murmurous climax and the gramophone switched itself off. In the alarming silence Muriel said loudly, 'I don't agree.' (Ch. 13, 132).

The Pathetic Symphony began again from the beginning (Ch. 13, 133).

The nice and the good *(1968)*

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827), string quartet opus 127, slow movement

'What's the music?' said Theo.

'Slow movement of the twelfth quartet, opus 127.'

'I can't bear it.'

Willy switched the gramophone off.

'A consciousness in agony represented in slow motion.' (Ch. 15, 128).

***Bonny Charlie* (folk song)**
Fivey followed him down the narrow stairs droning *Bony Chairlie's noo away* half under his breath. ….

Fivey fell rather than stepped away from the doorway and with a murmur of *Weel ye noo come back again* faded in the direction of the kitchen (Ch. 20, 174).

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791), Flute quartet in D major, K. 285
'I've learnt the flute quartet in D major.'
'I know.'
'Oh, you've been listening! It was supposed to be a surprise.'
'I heard you the other day when I was walking by the house.'
'May I come up and play it to you?'
'No.'
'Why not? You used to let me come here and play to you.'
'The music is too painful, dearest Barbara.' (Ch. 21, 182–183).

***Bonnie Earl of Moray* (folk song)**

Ye highlands and ye lowlands,
Oh where hae ye been?
They hae slain the Earl of Murray
And hae laid him on the green.

'Oh shut up, Fivey!' Ducan shouted through the drawing-room door.

The kitchen door banged. The drawing room door banged (Ch. 22, 186).

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791), Piano concerto in C minor, K. 491
He had taken an early supper with Willy, who appeared to be in a curious state of euphoria. After supper Willy had switched on the wireless and Ducane had left him dancing round the drawing-room to the sound of Mozart's piano concerto in C minor (Ch. 24, 201–202).

Jimmy McHugh and Dorothy Fields, *I can't give you anything but love* (1928)
'Mary, I love you. Don't be hurt by me.'
'I can't help being hurt—' she said.

'Cheer up. I can't give you anything but love, baby, that's the only thing I've plenty of, baby.'

'Don't, Willy. I'm sorry I disturbed things as they were. I've been a fool.' (Ch. 32, 284).

Bruno's dream *(1969)*

Original Dixieland jazz band, *Tiger Rag* (1917)
Playing at domesticity with Maureen gave him a pleasure which he had never had in setting up house with Janie. … Maureen singing in her little Liverpool Irish voice *Hold that tiger, hold that tiger.* Maureen swaggering in the new short skirts. Maureen, dressed only in a blue necklace, dancing the charleston (Ch. 1, 16).

Billy Rose and Fred Fisher, *Happy days and lonely nights* (1928)
IML 1118—MS words in 'Make a Joyful Noise I'; print music IML 1175
Maureen's was the more febrile gaiety of a later and grimmer world. *At the parting of the ways, You took all my happy days, And left me lonely nights* (Ch. 1, 18).

Years later, after Janie was dead, he put an advertisement in *The Times: Maureen. At the parting of the ways. Please contact BG. Just to talk of long ago.* There was no answer (Ch. 4, 33).

***Genevieve, sweet Genevieve* (Barbershop song)**

> *'O Adelaide, sweet Adelaide,*
> *The years may come, the years may go …'*

'Sssh!'
Danby Odell was in bed with Adelaide the maidservant (Ch. 2, 28).

Fred Murray & Laurence Barclay, *Our lodger's such a nice young man* (1897)

> *Our lodger's such a nice young man*
> *Such a nice young man is he.*

Danby, singing, aimed a friendly smack at Nigel's backside. Nigel tossed his long dark hair and lowered his eyes and left the room with a spiritual smile (Ch. 4, 31).

George W. Meyer, lyrics by Jack Drislane, *You taught me how to love you* (1909)
Bruno looked over Maureen's bare shoulder into the eyes of Janie. Janie turned at once and disappeared among the shoppers. Bruno, for whom Maureen no longer existed, darted after her. … He glimpsed her ahead, hurrying, and then she was gone. He came back to the department and paid the assistant for the torn dress. Maureen had vanished too. *You taught me how to love you, Now teach me to forget* (Ch. 4, 33).

Georges Brassens (1921–1981), *Il est cocu le chef de gare*

Il est COCU le chef de gare!

Miles paused outside the house with irritation. He could hear Danby singing inside. Miles had been feeling all the morning as if he were going to a funeral. He was dressed for a funeral. He felt more than a little sick. He savoured the solemnity of his action in coming to see his father, and wished that solemnity to be recognised and respected by all concerned. He smoothed the frown from his face and rang the bell.

Il est COCU le chef de gare!

Danby opened the door still singing (Ch. 13, 106).

***Kyrie eleison* (from Latin mass) (unspecified setting)**
Kyrie eleison, Kyrie eleison, Kyrie eleison. The choir were singing again. It was like a bird's cry, piercing, repetitive, insistent, wearying God with petition. Or perhaps more like a kind of work, a close attentive intricate laborious toiling (Ch. 21, 175).

A fairly honourable defeat *(1970)*

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791), *Don Giovanni* (Opera)
Simon felt sure that Axel's delight in *Don Giovanni* was quite different in kind from his delight in Simon. Axel had secret lives and hidden utterly un-Simon modes of experience. He had a passion for opera. Simon, who detested opera, had pretended for nearly a year to like it until a frenzy of excruciating boredom had wrung the truth from him screaming at last (Part 1, Ch. 2, 39).

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827), *Fidelio* (Opera)
'I doubt if you'll get into *Fidelio*,' Axel was saying. 'I'm going on Friday and I booked ages ago and couldn't get a decent seat then.' (Part 1, Ch. 6, 81).

Axel was at *Fidelio*. Simon had not told Axel of Julius's extraordinary invitation (Ch. 13, 159).

Simon had felt unhappy, at moments very unhappy, about not having told Axel. But he had had little difficulty in not telling him. Axel, very overwhelmed by *Fidelio*, had made only the most cursory inquiries about Simon's evening (Ch. 16, Part 1, 203).

'It all started,' said Simon, 'on the day when Julius first came to dinner. Just as he was going he whispered to me that I should come round to see him the following Friday evening. That was the evening when you were going to *Fidelio*. He said, come round, but don't tell Axel (Part 2, Ch. 17, 390–391).

Henry Purcell (1659–1695), unspecified opera
'What's on at Glyndebourne?'
'They're doing Purcell.'
'How delicious! Could I get tickets? Let's go, all three!'
'I have some pull at Glyndebourne,' said Axel. 'I think I can get us in. Only Simon hates opera.' (Part 1, Ch. 6, 81).

'Full fathom five' (from Shakespeare's *Tempest*) *[IML 1231]*
'Well, nothing in the world,' said Peter, 'is intact and precious and absolutely beautiful. Everything is contaminated and muddled and nasty and slimed over and cracked'
'Something is good,' she said. 'Something is. This is.' She lifted up a feather-leaved stem covered with tiny vetch flowers. …
'Oh *nature*,' said Peter. 'I don't count that. That's just stuff. I mean *our* things. Find me one of those and I'll be impressed.'
'What about,' she said, 'what about, what about … What about this:

Full fathom five thy father lies,
Of his bones are coral made.
Those are pearls that were his eyes,
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea change
Into something rich and strange.

Mermaids hourly ring his knell.
Hark now I hear them
Ding dong bell.'

There was silence. …

'Yes,' said Peter very softly. 'Yes. That is—perfect.' (Part 1, Ch. 15, 189).

'And what you said in the railway cutting just isn't true. I know that now. *Full fathom five* proves nothing, nothing at all. Except that everything's rich and strange all right, rich and strange and foul. And the bells are ringing but they don't sound pretty any more, not any more at all.' (Part 2, Ch. 13, 364).

Noel Gay and Ralph Butler, *The Sun has got his hat on* (1932)
The Sikh's transistor set was now on, playing something rather old-fashioned which sounded like:

The sun has got his hat on,
Hip hooray,
The sun has got his hat on,
And he's coming out today (Part 2, Ch. 4, 279).

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791), *Cosi fan tutte* (Opera)
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791), *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (Opera)
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791), 'Voi che sapete' from *The marriage of Figaro* (Opera) *[IML 1131 and 1209]*

'I see they're doing Mozart at Sadlers Wells. Is that company any good this summer?'

'Not too bad. They did a very presentable *Cosi*. I forget what's on at the moment.'

'*Die Entführung aus dem Serail*. Eh, Simon?'

'What?' said Simon. He had been standing morosely at the window, looking out.

'*Die Entführung aus dem Serail*.'

'I can't stand Mozart,' said Simon.

'Really, Axel, you mustn't let him say things like that. It makes me feel quite faint!'

'You enjoy some Mozart, Simon. You were humming *Voi che sapete* only yesterday.'

'*Voi che sapete!*' cried Julius. *'Tiens!*' (Part 2, Ch. 7, 305).

Richard Wagner (1813–1883), *The ring cycle* (Opera cycle)

'Wagner was, of course, homosexual,' Julius was saying as Simon glided back into the room. Simon refilled his own glass and sat down by the window. Even this information could not make him interested in Wagner. Now they were off again on the boring old *Ring* (Part 2, Ch. 7, 306).

Claudio Monteverdi (1567–1643), *L'incoronazione di Poppeia* (Opera)

After leaving the Louvre he had procured a ticket for the opera *L'incoronazione di Poppeia*, a work to which he was devoted but which he had only seen performed once (Part 2, Ch. 24, 446).

An accidental man *(1971)*

***Begone dull care* (Anonymous eighteenth century song)**

'You know I'm glad I lost my job, it makes me feel free. Begone dull care. Oh I've had such awful news, you don't know what awful news I've had.'

'About Dorina?'

'No, not about Dorina, no such luck. I mean luck for *you*, dear …'

…

'Austin—'

'I'm not as drunk as you think. I'm just telling dull care to begone. Shall I tell you a story?' (66).

Vincent Youmans and Harold Adamson, *Time on my hands and you in my arms* (1930)

'Honey, don't tease.'

'"Time on my hands and you in my arms".'

'Gracie, stop it. Do you want me to insist, do you want me to get tough and bully you?' Was she capable of making him wait until the wedding day. Oh Christ. (118).

***I have a little husband no bigger than my thumb* (Nursery rhyme)**

'You don't know what awful trouble I'm in,' said Austin thickly. 'You don't know what an awful strain I'm under. You wouldn't be so beastly to me if you knew.'

'Little man, little man!'

'You're drunk, Mitzi.' …

'So are you. "I have a little husband no bigger than my thumb, I put him in a pint pot and there I let him drum"!'

'Shut up you bitch. Do you want to make me hate you?' (225).

A.J. Mills and Bennett Scott, *Ship ahoy! All the nice girls love a sailor* (Music hall song, 1909)

'What lovely flowers you've got. Rose, do you think we could have another vase, those ones are all bunched up?'

'You have them,' said Charlotte.

'No, no, they're yours. Rose is getting married next week, aren't you, Rose? She's marrying a petty officer in the navy. "Every nice girl loves a sailor." Look at her blushing.'

'Do have the flowers,' said Charlotte. (330–331).

The Black Prince *(1973)*

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971), *The firebird*

He waved me off and closed the door quickly. By the time I reached the front gate I could hear his gramophone. He must have hared straight back into the drawing-room and put on a record, like a man racing for his fix. It sounded like Stravinsky or something. The action and the sound set my teeth on edge. I am, I fear, one of those who, according to Shakespeare, are 'fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils' (Part 1, 27–28).

I then began to wonder what on earth was happening now back at the Baffins' house? Was Rachel still lying like a disfigured corpse staring at the ceiling, while Arnold sat in the drawing-room drinking whisky and listening to *The Firebird*? (Part 1, 29).

Richard Strauss (1864–1949), *Der Rosenkavalier* (Opera)

Julian said, 'Bradley, if I asked you, would you come to Covent Garden with me?'

'Yes, of course.' I would go to hell with her, and even to Covent Garden.

'It's *Rosenkavalier*. Next Wednesday. Meet in the foyer about half past six. I've got quite good tickets. Septimus Leech got us two, only now he can't come.' (Part 2, 203)

'Bradley, what's the matter?'
'Nothing.'
'You weren't listening.'
'Were you talking?'
'I was asking if you knew the story.'
'What story?'
'Of *Rosenkavalier*.'
'Of course I don't know the story of *Rosenkavalier*.' (Part 2, 216).

Silence. Darkness. Then a rush of wind and a flurry of sweet pulsating anguish has been set free to stream through the dark. I closed my eyes and bowed my head before it. Could I transform all this extraneous sweetness into a river of pure love? Or would I be somehow undone by it, choked, dismembered, disgraced? …

The sound of women's voices singing is one of the bitter-sweetest noises in the world, the most humanly piercing, the most terribly significant and yet contentless of all sounds: and a duet is more than twice as bad as a single voice … The two women were conversing in pure sound, their voices circling, replying, blending, creating a trembling silver cage of an almost obscene sweetness. I did not know what language they were singing in, and the words were inaudible anyway, there was no need of words, these were not words but the highest coinage of human speech melted down, become pure song, something vilely almost murderously gorgeous. No doubt she is crying for the inevitable loss of her young lover. The lovely boy protests but his heart is free. Only it has all been changed into a sort of plump luscious heart-piercing cascade of sugary agony. Oh God, not much more of this can be endured (Part 2, 218–219).

Towards evening he was much weaker and could hardly speak. 'My dear, tell me—' 'What?' 'That opera—' 'Which?'—'*Rosenkavalier*.' After that he was silent for a while. Then, 'How did it end?' (Part 3, 363).

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791), unspecified.
We listened to some Mozart on Bradley's transistor. (Part 3, 363).

The sacred and profane love machine *(1974)*

No references to specific music.

A word child *(1975)*

Edward Elgar and A.C. Benson, *Land of hope and glory* (1902)
I. Dunayevsky, Ben Blake, V. Lebedyev-Kumach, Louis Zellikoff, *Song of the fatherland* (Moscow, 1949)

'Hilary is so competitive and chauvinistic.'
'I love my country.'
'So old-fashioned.'
'If you sing *Land of Hope and Glory*, Freddie will sing *Soviet Fatherland*.'
'Patriotism used to be taught in schools,' said Clifford Larr.
'My school regarded patriotism as bad form.' (Thursday, 10).

Harry Fragson, Worton David and Bert Lee, *Hello, hello, who's your lady friend* (1913)
IML 1118—MS words in Make a joyful noise I

'Hilary's a mystery man, aren't you, Hilary?'
'He means it's his *lady* friend,' said Reggie. '"Hello, hello, who's your lady friend"'—
'That's no lady, that's my—'
'Do shut up, there's good darlings,' I said (Friday, 31).

Trad., arr. R. Vaughan Williams, words adapted from John Bunyan, *He who would valiant be* (Hymn)
The rites had been blessedly short. Crystal had wanted us to sing *He who would valiant be*, but with my last act of authority in her life I had vetoed it (Christmas Eve, 385).

Henry and Cato *(1976)*

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), *The Goldberg variations* BWV 988
Lucius moved to his record player and put on the Goldberg Variations softly, then a little more loudly, conscious of the emptiness of the room below (Part 1, 78).

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), *Partita for solo violin in B minor* BWV 1002
Lucius began to feel rather tired. He put on the Partita in B Minor and returned to writing haiku (Part 1, 101).

S. Taylor and Richard Rodgers, 'Look no further' from *No strings* (1962)

'Do you like tea or coffee for your breakfast?'

'You want to serve me as soon as you are conscious. Why not stay here and enjoy the view?'

'Stay with the one who loves you, look no further dear.'

'Is that a poem?'

'A song.'

'I like it. Isn't this fun, Stephanie, you and me. It is fun, isn't it? I feel happy. Do you feel happy?' (Part 1, 201).

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), *2nd Brandenburg concerto* BWV 1047

Lucius trotted upstairs to his room and poured himself out a little whisky and put on the second Brandenburg concerto. He began hastily to write out his poems again. He knew them all by heart (Part 1, 239).

The sea, the sea *(1978)*

'Full fathom five' (from Shakespeare's *Tempest*) *[IML 1231]*

A fly-by-night director called Isaiah Mommsen let me play Prospero. Lizzie was Ariel. She was the most spiritual, most curiously *accurate* Ariel I ever saw. Her love for me made her so, and in the midst of all that magic made me love her. … She had a pretty little singing voice and I can still hear the thin, true tone of her *Full Fathom Five*. How now, after all these years, my tricksy spirit ('Prehistory', 50).

Then at last I heard Lizzie's voice distantly singing *Full Fathom Five*. I listened carefully but could get no sense of direction, so loud was the accompaniment of the restless rushing sea. …

I could hear Lizzie's voice singing, calling me, over and over again. *Ding dong ding dong bell, ding dong ding dong bell* … ('History', 364).

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791), *The marriage of Figaro* (Opera) *[IML 1131 and 1209]*

I remember that [Lizzie] once played Cherubino in an amateur production of *Figaro*, and I think this tiny success was one of the things she valued most ('Prehistory', 51).

Haydn Wood and Frederick Weatherly, *Roses of Picardy* (1916) *[IML 1218]*

Al Dubin and Joe Burke, *Tiptoe through the tulips* (1929)

Lew Brown, B.G. DeSylva and Ray Henderson, *So blue* (1927)

IML 1118 MS words in Make a joyful noise I*; print music at 1179*

Edgar Leslie and Joseph George Gilbert, *Me and Jane in a plane* (1927)
IML 1118 MS words in Make a joyful noise I*; print music IML 1176*
Jay Wallis, *All by yourself in the moonlight* (1928)
IML 1197—20 Good old songs—also single song sheet at IML 1262
Aunt Estelle had a pretty little singing voice and used to chant the songs of the first war and the latest romantic song-hits. (*Roses of Picardy*, *Tiptoe through the Tulips*, *Oh So Blue*, *Me and Jane in a Plane*, and other classics of that sort.) I remember once when she came one night at Ramsdens to 'settle me down', her singing a song to the effect that *there ain't no sense sitting on the fence all by yourself in the moonlight*. I found this very droll and made the mistake of trying to amuse my parents by repeating it. (*It ain't no fun sitting 'neath the trees, giving yourself a hug and giving yourself a squeeze*.) It is probably in some way because of Aunt Estelle that the human voice singing has always upset me with a deep and almost frightening emotion ('Prehistory', 60).

***Come holy ghost our souls inspire* (Hymn)**
Come Holy Ghost our souls inspire, and lighten with celestial fire … We went up for confirmation together, to receive the diving blessing upon our love. I remember Hartley singing in church, her bright innocent lovely face raised up to the light, to God towards the joy which belonged to her and which she must have ('Prehistory', 79).

'I think I believe in Jesus Christ. You've got to believe in something and hold on to something. People would go mad without God, wouldn't they. We used to talk about that, didn't we.'

'I'm glad you haven't forgotten those talks. You remember when we were confirmed? It meant a lot, didn't it? *Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire …*' ('History', 301).

***Eravamo tredeici* (Round—fictional?)**
They sang in round, and showed no sign of stopping, an Italian catch whose words I can remember since Titus and Gilbert had been singing it obsessively in the preceding days. Titus taught it to Gilbert and now Rosina had got it too. It went *Eravamo tredeici, siamo rimasti dodici, sei facevano rima, e sei facevan' pima-poma-pima-poma*. God knows what it was supposed to be about ('History', 312).

Gilbert and Titus were now over by the tower, sitting in the shadow which it cast upon the grass. I could hear them singing *Eravamo tredeici* ('History', 356).

Last night I dreamt I heard a boy's voice singing *Eravamo tredeici*. When I awoke I still seemed to hear that ridiculous *pima-poma-pima-poma* chorus ringing in the flat ('Postscript', 500).

Charles Edward Horn (1786–1849), words by Robert Herrick (1591–1674), *Cherry ripe*

The front door bell rang again. Would it be Hartley now? Oh let it be.
'Telephone?'
'You wanted a telephone. I've come to install it.'
By the time I had settled where the telephone was to be the company in the kitchen were all singing *Cherry Ripe* ('History', 360).

W.H. Monk (1823–1889), words by H.F. Lyte (1795–1847), *Abide with me, fast falls the eventide* (Hymn)
Clement C. Scholefield (1839–1904), words by John Ellerton (1826–1893) *The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended* (Hymn)

I took some more wine. There was plenty of it, purchased by Gilbert at my expense. Then when it was getting dark, and they had moved on from *Abide with me* to *The day Thou gavest, Lord, is ended*, we all went out onto the lawn ('History', 360).

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791), 'Voi che sapete' from *The marriage of Figaro* (Opera) *[IML 1131 and 1209]*

'Lizzie, Lizzie, where are you?' The voice of Gilbert.

It had become almost dark, though there was still a little light over the sea …

'Lizzie, come back, we want you to sing *Voi che sapete*.'

She was away from me in a moment, a long bare leg stretched. …

What a weird uncanny simulacrum of happiness the evening was, like a masque put on by the spirit of melancholy. …

After a little while I came back towards Shruff End. … As I drew near to it Lizzie was still singing solo. Her true truthful small voice wandered in the air patterning it high up, making utterly still the group of men surrounding her ('History', 362–3).

I wanted to say something to [James], I was not sure what, about Aunt Estelle. She had shone somehow upon my childhood. *Che cosa è amor* indeed ('History', 364).

'Well, I'm sorry my misadventure spoilt the party. I can remember you singing *Voi che sapete*.'

'I hoped you'd be able to hear it. Oh Charles—' ('History', 370).

Haydn Wood and Frederick Weatherly, *Roses of Picardy* (1916)
Voi che sapete had been over for some time and Lizzie was now singing *Roses in Picardy*. This was a song which Aunt Estelle used to sing, accompanying herself on the piano in the drawing room at Ramsdens. There came to me, with the peculiar pain of that memory, the idea that James might have asked Lizzie to sing it. Then I remembered I had told Lizzie I liked it, but not why. Lizzie was singing it for me.

Roses in Picardy was a bit much ('History', 363).

And I heard the voice of Aunt Estelle, and not of Lizzie, singing *Roses in Picardy*, and I recalled the brilliant radiance of her presence and all the joy and all the pain she caused me once. God, how the young and beautiful vanish and are no more seen ('History', 427).

Thomas Morley (1557–1602), *Now is the month of Maying*
***Jock O'Hazeldean* (Sailor Jack)—Scottish folk song**
I could see the glowing whitenesses of the wave-crests out to sea. Gilbert's babbling baritone started up not far off. *Stay dainty nymphs and speak, shall we play barley-break, tra la?* Then later on, in another quarter, Titus also by himself could be heard rendering *Jock of Hazeldean*. There was something absurd and touching about the solipsistic self-absorption and self-satisfaction of these drunken singers ('History', 364).

***Greensleeves* (Traditional English song, sixteenth century)**
I came up as far as the house and stopped to get my breath … Then I heard something awful, horrible, which chilled my blood and made me gasp with emotion. Inside the house a treble recorder and an alto recorder were in unison playing *Greensleeves*.

It was not simply that a recorder duet was the last thing I now expected to hear. *Greensleeves* had been, for Hartley and me, in the old days, our signature tune ('History', 418).

And I thought of Hartley on her bicycle and of her pure truthful face as it was then, so strangely like and unlike her worn old face which had suffered and sinned away all those years when I was somewhere else with Clement and Rosina and Jeanne and Fritzie. *Alas, my love, you do me wrong to cast me off discourteously, for I have loved you so long, delighting in your company* ('History', 428).

Richard Wagner (1813–1883), unspecified.
Whenever I hear the music of Wagner I remember Clement dying and weeping over her own death. In hell or in purgatory there would be no need of other or more elaborate tortures ('Postscript', 493).

Nuns and soldiers *(1980)*

Giacomo Puccini (1858–1924), *Turandot* (Opera)

'Talking of elections, I've got a spare ticket for *Turandot*, anyone like it, Veronica?'

'Manfred is so kind, as always.'

'I know the Count doesn't want it, he hates music.'

'I don't—' (Chapter One, 32).

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791), unspecified
Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827), unspecified
Anton Bruckner (1824–1896), unspecified
Frederick Delius (1862–1934), unspecified
Oley Speaks, words by Rudyard Kipling, *The road to Mandalay*
Charles Gounod or Ethelbert Woodbridge Nevin, words by Charles Kingsley, *Oh that we two were Maying*

But he loved music although he had little conception of what it was … Ignorant though he was, he listened and was, like Caliban, enchanted. The terrible slow tenderness of some classical music seemed to him like the flowing of his own consciousness. He had his favourite composers too, he liked Mozart and Beethoven and Bruckner. He also got it into his head that he liked Delius because his music sounded English. (He was unwise enough to say this once to Guy, who asked him sarcastically what on earth he meant. The Count could not say, but went on thinking so all the same.) He liked songs too, rousing memorable ones like *The Road to Mandalay*, or else sentimental ones which brought tears to his eyes like *Oh That We Two Were Maying* (Chapter One, 39–40).

He closed his eyes and tried to go through one of his sleeping routines. … He was in a park, she was there, in a wood, she was there. The birds were singing and the sun was shining. *Oh that we two were maying* (Chapter Eight, 458).

Clement C. Scholefield (1839–1904), words by John Ellerton (1826–1893) *The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended* (Hymn)
Henry Purcell (1659–1695), words by Francis Quarles (1592–1644), *Close thine eyes and sleep secure* (Sacred song)

Anne's conversion had been a flight to innocence. Her Anglican Christianity though not deep, had come with her a long way. Later she remembered the unformed unmarked faces of girls at her boarding school, and kneeling on lisle-stockinged knees on a rough wooden floor for

evening prayers. The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended. Now close thine eyes in peace and sleep secure (Chapter One, 50).

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791), *The Magic Flute* (Opera)
They were Papagena and Papageno. He said this to Daisy who, although she hated opera, accepted the idea. Papageno had had to go through an ordeal to win his true mate; and like him, Tim would be saved at last in spite of himself (Chapter One, 92).

The great drama and passion of the world had already passed him by; and it occurred to him that the ordeal by which he was to win his Papagena would turn out to be simply this, that there was no ordeal, one simply soldiered on becoming older and balder and less talented (Chapter Two, 131).

'You remember about Papagena and Papageno?'
'Yes.'
'I think we've had our ordeal.'
'Sez you. You'll be off again at the next flicker of skirt. Gertie just got you started.' (Chapter Four, 278).

The 'form' of his experience was, he supposed, his resolution to leave Daisy. And he said to himself, it's like the *Magic Flute* after all, except that something has gone wrong and the music is being played differently and Papagena and Papageno are not to be saved after all, they have lost each other in the darkness of their ordeal and are never to be reunited ever in any paradise by any god (Chapter Seven, 393).

W.H. Monk (1823–1889), words by H.F. Lyte (1795–1847), *Abide with me, fast falls the eventide* (Hymn)
'I enjoyed talking to Anne.'
'I'm so glad.'
'It was a foretaste of heaven.'
'A—?'
'You recall some witty Frenchman said that his idea of heaven was *discuter les idées générales avec les femmes supérieures*. But don't worry, I haven't been converted. "Heaven's morning breaks and earth's vain shadows flee!" Do you remember Uncle Rudi singing that?'
'He knew all the Anglican hymns.' (Chapter One, 100).

***Twa corbies* (Scottish folk song)**
'Now, Gertrude, stop. You must try, for my sake, to have the will *now* to please me in the future. In that future when I won't exist any more.

There won't be any me any more and long grief will be stupid. People mourn because they think it does some good, it's a kind of tribute. But there's no recipient. "Many a one for him makes moan, but none shall know where he is gone!" Can you remember any more of it?'

'It's a Scottish ballad, but I can't remember—'

'"His lady's ta'en another mate"—'

'Oh—Guy—' (Chapter One, 101–102).

'Nobody knows that he lies there but his hawk and his hound and his lady fair. His hound is to be hunting gone, his hawk to fetch the wild fowl home, his lady's ta'en another mate … Many a one for him makes moan, but none shall know where he is gone. Over his bones when they are bare the wind shall blow forever more.' Yielding to what seemed almost like a vicious temptation, Gertrude had looked up the ballad which Guy had quoted it. Guy had quoted it when he was telling her to be happy after he was dead. But what a bitter terrible poem it was, and how could it have been other than bitter in the mouth, in the heart, of a dying man (Chapter Four, 262).

Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901), *Aida* (Opera)

'By the way, I've got a spare ticket for *Aida*. Anybody? Veronica?'

'I *hate Aida*.' (Chapter Five, 315).

***Let him go, let him tarry* (Irish folk song)**

IML 1117—Words in MS notebook with words with slight variations

'Daisy, you know I'm not doing this for Gertrude. This has nothing to do with Gertrude. It's something you and I are doing.'

'Our last action. Fuck Gertrude. I don't care why you're doing it, so long as you really are doing it.'

'No, but it's important.'

'Let him go, let him tarry, let him sink or let him swim, he doesn't care for me and I don't care for him—' (Chapter Seven, 390).

***For he's a jolly good fellow* (Traditional song)**

'Hooray, the new pope is Polish!'

'How absolutely marvellous! Count, have you heard?'

'Hooray for the Count, the Count for Pope!'

'A toast to the Count!'

'O just look at his face!'

'Hooray for Poland, hooray for the Count!'

'Three cheers—'

'For he's a jolly good fellow,
For he's a jolly good fellow,
For he's a jolly good fellow,
AND so say ALL OF US!' (Chapter Eight, 469).

The philosopher's pupil *(1983)*

Arthur Sullivan and W.S. Gilbert, *The Mikado*, 'There is beauty in the bellow of the blast'

'I miss you. I'm starved of love.'

'If that is so then derry down derry it's evident very our tastes are one.' (Events, 68).

Thomas Morley (1557–1602), words by Shakespeare, 'It was a lover and his lass'

'Would you like another drink?'

'Hey nonny nonny—no. You have one, dear daughter of the game. I'll walk about.' George rose and began to walk, across the room, out into the hall, into the kitchen, and back again to the window (Events, 70).

'Hello, kid.'
'Hello, darling. Long time no see.'
'Hey nonny nonny. No? OK?'
'OK.' (Events, 302).

***Hickory dickory dock* (Nursery rhyme)**

'When is Stella coming home?' she asked.
'Buzz buzz. Hickory Dickory Dock.'
'I suppose she is coming home?'
'You dream that one day she won't.' (Events, 75).

'Aren't you prepared to wait anyway?'
'Without hope? Oh—but do say—'
'Say what?'
'Oh—George—you know—'
'The clock struck one, the mouse ran down. It's nearly one.' (Events, 303).

***Three Blind Mice* (Nursery rhyme)**

There is also a pub called the Three Blind Mice. Diane's flat was not far from here in a quiet street of two-storey terraced houses, above a small

Irish-linen shop where an elderly man quietly unfolded large white towels for infrequent customers (Events, 76).

Philip Rosseter (1568–1623), ***If she forsake me I must die*** *[in IML 1208]*
Then Tom began, rather loudly, to sing. He had a pleasant modest baritone from which he derived considerable pleasure and which, when it did not seem too much like showing off, he liked to exhibit. He began to sing an Elizabethan song: *If she forsake me I must die. Shall I tell her so?* In the second verse Scarlett-Taylor joined in. Tom checked his own voice abruptly, stopped in his tracks and held on to a lamp post. Scarlett-Taylor possessed a marvellous counter-tenor voice (Events, 124).

Henry Longfellow (1807–1882), ***Tell me not in mournful numbers*** **(Hymn)**
She thought, I am nothing, I am a floating seed which a bird will soon eat. 'Lives of great men all remind us we must make our lives sublime, and departing leave behind us footprints in the sands of time.' So they sometimes sang in chapel, where Hattie had acquired some vague Anglicanism (Events, 172).

Harry D. Clarke (1888–1957), ***I will make you fishers of men if you follow me*** **(Hymn)**

'I am a fish not a fisher, a fish in search of a net.'

'I will make you fishers of men if you follow me. There was a little sect who used to sing that, in Burkestown, when I was a child.'

'They're still there, down beside the railway.'

'Simple faith. *They* think they are saved.' (Events, 190).

They came out together into the warm night where there was still light in the sky. Some drunks gathered on the pavement were softly singing, *I will make you fishers of men, fishers of men, fishers of men, I will make you fishers of men if you follow me*. Tom felt immediately giddy, rather drunk (Events, 373).

***Oh come, oh come Immanuel*—Latin text Veni, veni Emmanuel', translated by J.M. Neale (1818–1866) (Hymn)**

'Sing to me.'

'No.'

'Oh come, oh come, Emmanuel.'

'No.'

'Are you going to see your singing teacher?'

'I put him off.'

'Again?' (Events, 209).

Percy French (1854–1920), ***Phil the fluter's ball***
IML 1253—Songs of Percy French

'Why don't you drink? You annoy me sitting there with nothing to do.'
'Why don't you sing? Sing Phil the Fluter's Ball.'
'Yah.'
'Where's all that wild gaiety and smiling eyes and warm humorous charm?'
'Shut up.'
'You're just pretend Irish.'
'All Irish are pretend Irish.' (Events, 211).

It's only me **(fictional pop song)**

You don't know what to say, I know,
In a way you want to stay,
In a way you want to go.
…
I'll say good-bye, God bless you,
And don't be sad, darling—
It's only me.
[Full words given]

Tom was pleased with his pop song which had developed so quickly out of Adam's germinal idea about two snails. Later in the evening, after the conversation recorded above, he and Emma had got rather drunk together, and Tom had then retired to his bedroom to polish up his ode (Events, 211–213).

After a while, somewhere in Travancore Avenue, they stopped running and walked on panting. Tom let go of Hattie's hand. She was crying quietly, clearing her eyes with her knuckles from time to time. Tom kept glancing shyly at her.

'Hattie, don't cry, darling, what's the matter? It's only me.' (Events, 529).

Benjamin Britten, ***A midsummer night's dream*** **(Opera)**
He and Mr Hanway had combed the 'early music' offerings, and the formal love-banter of the eighteenth century had been for them a natural tongue. Now Mr Hanway was taking Emma through the part of Oberon in Britten's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, singing the other parts himself

with his remarkable voice which was able to become so many 'other voices', as his piano was able to become an orchestra (Events, p. 215–6).

Scott Joplin (1868–1917), various, including *Sugar cane* (491)
Father Bernard had been peacefully meditating to the sound of Scott Joplin when Rozanov's letter had arrived that morning, simply summoning him to the Rooms (225).

The priest, who had had his swim, was feeling exceptionally full of spiritual well-being. After mass that morning he had composed a suitably pompous letter to John Robert to the effect that he had examined Miss Meynell's capacities and found her, though immature, proficient in modern languages. He especially commended her careful attention to grammar. After that he had put on his longest tape of Scott Joplin and sat down opposite his long-eared Gandhara Buddha (Events, 288).

Father Bernard was sitting in his study in the St Paul's Clergy House meditating to the sound of Scott Joplin's *Sugar Cane* (Events, 491).

***Alles Schweiget, Nachtigallen* (Round)**
'Come, let's make up, let's sing, let's sing that German round you taught me. I'll begin.'
Tom began to sing softly,

> 'Alles schweiget, Nachtigallen
> Locken mit süssen Melodien
> Tränen ins Auge
> Sehnsucht ins Herz.'
> [Translation: 'All is quiet, nightingales sing with sweet melodies. Tears in my eyes, longing in my heart.']

When he had sung the round through and started again Emma joined in, not using his full voice but with a high clear pure whispering sound. And by the time they turned into Travancore Avenue, although there were not positively tears in their eyes, there was a great deal of mournful yearning in their hearts (Events, 283).

C.H.H. Parry (1848–1918), words by William Blake, *Jerusalem* (*And did those feet*) (Hymn)

> 'And did those feet in ancient time
> Walk upon England's mountains green?
> And was the holy Lamb of God
> On England's pleasant pastures seen?

And did the Countenance Divine
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?'

The four young people were together again in the wild garden. Tom, after his second defeat, as he felt it to be, at the hands of Hattie, had hastened, with her, to seek for Emma and Pearl. Then they had walked on together and climbed into the ruined shell of the manor house which was filled with grass and buttercups and daisies and white-flowering nettles. … In the grassy space which had been the great hall there was a curious echo, and Tom had persuaded Emma to sing, and Emma had sung Blake's beautiful anthem (Events, 341–342).

The funeral of William Eastcote took place late on Saturday afternoon … Afterwards, and quite spontaneously, (it is not known who started it) this large crowd sang *Jerusalem*, a favourite of William's and a song which, for some reason, everyone in Ennistone knows (Events, 472).

Arthur Sullivan (1842–1900), *Onward Christian soldiers* (parody version *Lloyd George knows my father*)
Then he cried out in a loud voice, 'George go home—oh George go home!' In the next second someone (it was Emma) took up Tom's cry, intoning it softly as a chant to the tune of 'Onward Christian Soldiers', better known to some as 'Lloyd George knows my father'. This latter song (as is well known to college deans) is irresistible to drunks and can be guaranteed to charm the savage breasts of troublesome students in their cups (Events, 384–385).

Henry Purcell (1659–1695), *Music for a while* and *Come away, do not stay*, incidental music from *Oedipus*, a version of Sophocles' play by John Dryden and Nathaniel Lee, published in 1679.
Emma stepped back with a movement like that of an athlete or dancer about to perform, with perfect confidence, a very difficult feat. He half turned, spread out his arms, and began to sing. He sang now with his full voice, with all its high weird slightly husky penetrating force, he sang as a fox might sing if foxes could sing. The sound of his voice filled the garden and made it resonate like a drum; waves of sound gathered the garden together into a great vibrating bubble of thrilling sound. And beyond the garden, Emma's voice was heard in the night in streets and houses far around, where people woke from sleep as if touched by an electric ray, and china in distant kitchens shuddered and rang in sympathy. It was claimed later that his singing could be heard as far away as Blanch Cottages and Druidsdale, though this no doubt was an exaggeration. What he sang was,

Music for a while
Shall all your cares beguile …
Come away, do not stay,
But obey, while we play,
For hell's broke up and ghosts have holiday.

The effect upon the revellers was indeed that of an enchantment. They became, of course, instantly silent. It would have been impossible to utter speech against the authority of that voice (Events, 386).

George Frederic Handel (1685–1759), *Messiah* (Oratorio)

'The BBC are interested and there is a possibility of making a record. And there is that flautist I told you of—you know how well your voice accords with the flute—'

'Oh, I don't think anything like that yet—I do occasionally perform after all. I've been asked to sing in the college *Messiah*—' Emma did not add that he had refused.

'You sound quite panic-stricken! You mustn't be so modest.' (Events, 393).

John Wilson (1595–1674), from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, 'Take, oh take those lips away' *[in IML 1231]*
John Dowland (1563–1626), *Woeful heart with grief oppressed* *[in IML 1208]*
'The Willow Song' (Traditional, appears in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*) *[in IML 1231]*
Henry Purcell (1659–1695), *Fie, nay prithee John* (Catch)
Orlando Gibbons (1583–1625), *The silver swan* (Madrigal) *[IML 1234]*
John Bennet (1575–after 1614), *Lure, falconers lure*
***The Agincourt song* (Mediaeval song)**
***The ash grove* (Folk song)**

Automatically Emma stood up. He blew his nose (an essential preliminary to singing). Mr Hanway touched the piano, suggesting several songs. He sang three of Mr Hanway's favourites, *Take, oh take those Lips Away*, *Woeful Heart with Grief Oppressed* and *Sing Willow*. (What a gloomy unsuccessful lot they were, to be sure! Said Mr Hanway.) After that they sang together. … The sang *Fie, nay, prithee John* in round, then *The Silver Swan* with Mr Hanway producing a remarkable soprano, the *Lure, Falconers, Lure*, then *The Agincourt Song*, then *The Ash Grove* in improvised parts. And as soon

as Emma began to sing he could not prevent himself from feeling very happy (Events, 396).

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), 'Esurientes' from *Magnificat* BWV 243

Mr Hanway's exhortations, often highly metaphorical, were always accompanied with elaborate mime. 'Now, dear boy, let us have special exercises and then on to the Bach *Magnificat*. I shall hear your beautiful *Esurientes*…' (Events, 396).

***Ding dong bell, pussy's in the well* (Nursery rhyme)**

'Give me another drink, kid. Ding dong bell. Debussy's in the well. We'll live yet and beat them all, we'll outlive them all. Do you know what day this is?' (Events, 448).

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791), Piano duet (unspecified)

'Shall we play the Mozart duet?'

'I'll do the piano.'

Emma removed the embroidered shawl and a lamp and the photograph of his young undefiled self and opened the piano. …

He drew up the second piano stool and sat down beside his mother. They smiled at each other and then suddenly, holding hands, began to laugh (Events, 512).

The good apprentice *(1985)*

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), unspecified keyboard music
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791), unspecified keyboard music

How pretty his mother was, with that gentle apologetic face and pale fluffy hair frizzed by the hairdresser, and the little feet in shining high-heeled shoes which gave Harry his first conscious erotic experience. Lying on the floor under the piano he had watched the jerky irregular powerful movements of those little feet upon the pedals, and listened to the soft mechanical sounds which the pedals made, so much more exciting to him than the music of Bach or Mozart (512).

The book and the brotherhood *(1987)*

Johann Strauss [II?] (1825–1899), Waltzes, unspecified
It was an evening for nostalgia. The college orchestra was playing Strauss. Rose inclined her head gently against Gerard's black-clad shoulder (Part One, 5).

Rose watched the acrobatics, then decided quickly. She said to Gerard, 'You dance with Lily.' Then she sped away at her own fastest pace in the direction of the base camp. A few moments later the music of Strauss transformed the scene (Part Two, 260).

Irving Berlin (1888–1989), ***Always***
IML 1184—Francis, Day and Hunter edition, 1925
The orchestra immediately began again, with the sugary strain of 'Always', and the floor was at once crowded with couples (Part One, 34).

Cole Porter (1891–1964), ***Night and day***
IML 1310—Lined page with words only in MS—not IM's writing?
At that moment Duncan heaved himself to his feet. He stood for a moment swaying slightly, then put his hand onto Tamar's thin bare arm to steady himself. 'Let's go and find that drink, shall we?'

They began to make their way towards one of the exits, passing as they did so the dance floor. The band was playing 'Night and Day'.

Duncan said, 'Night and day. Yes. Let's dance. You'll dance with me, won't you?'

He swept her onto the dance floor and, suddenly surrendered to the music, found that his legs had lost their stupidity and like well-trained beasts were able to perform the familiar routine. He danced well. Tamar let herself be led, letting the sulky sad rhythm enter her body, she was dancing, it was her first dance that evening. Some tears did now come into her eyes and she wiped them away on Duncan's black coat (Part One, 38–39).

John Woodcock Graves (1795–1886), ***D'ye ken John Peel***
As she walked she murmured 'Ranter and Ringwood, Bellman and True', an old charm of Sinclair's guaranteed to calm the nerves and alleviate the 'blues'. (Part Two, 240).
Pop goes the weasel **(Nursery rhyme)**
The Londonderry air **(Irish folk song)**
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), ***Jesu joy of man's desiring***

***Three blind mice* (Nursery rhyme)**
***Greensleeves* (Traditional song)**
The bird was a grey parrot and Gerard, divining his true name, called him 'Grey' … He could whistle more purely than any flute and dance as he whistled. His musical repertoire when he first arrived included 'Pop Goes the Weasel' and part of the 'Londonderry Air' and 'Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring'. Gerard soon taught him 'Three Blind Mice' and 'Greensleeves' (Part One, 57).

Gustav Mahler (1860–1911), *Symphony no. 1 in D major*
Gerard had wandered off to the billiard room, where the moth-eaten billiard table was hidden by a canvas cover, and had put on Mahler's first symphony on the record player. He liked the melancholy bereaved sound of the second movement (Part Two, 277).

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732–1809), unspecified
Gerard was now listening to some Haydn (Part Two, 278).

William Whiting (1825–1878), *Eternal father, strong to save* (Hymn)
They had sung 'For those in peril on the sea' which always brought tears to Rose's eyes (Part Two, 281).

Arthur Sullivan and W.S. Gilbert, *The yeomen of the guard* (Operetta)
[IML 1242]
Gideon's father (a refugee who had adopted the name of Fairfax out of a Gilbert and Sullivan Opera) had a junk shop in the New King's Road (Part Two, 318).

William Horsley (1774–1858), words by Cecil Frances Alexander (1818–1895), *There is a green hill far away* (Hymn)
Father McAlister was looking forward to Easter. He had given up alcohol for Lent and the smell of the tangerine cocktail was inflaming his senses. Also of course he dreaded Easter. I do not know, I cannot tell, what pains he had to bear, I only *know* it was *for me* he hung and suffered there. The terrible particularity, the empirical detail, of his religion bore down upon him then as at no other time (Part Three, 539).

The message to the planet *(1989)*

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827), Late string quartets
'Marcus had no music in his soul. Though I remember he once said he liked the late Beethoven quartets.' (Part One, 18).

Thomas Tallis (1505–1585), Motet (unspecified)
William Boyce (1711–1779), words by David Garrick, *Hearts of oak*
Oley Speaks, words by Rudyard Kipling, *The road to Mandalay*
Stephen Foster (1826–1864), *Jeanie with the light brown hair*
IML 1139—1940 edition published by Paxton, arr. King Palmer
Percy French (1854–1920), *Whistlin' Phil McHugh* (*Every girl's a fool and every man's a liar*)
IML 1310—On two pieces of notepaper headed 'Canadian Pacific—Empress of England'—MS of words with 'Lark in the Clear Air'. Also in Songs of Percy French at IML 1253.
Amy Woodforde-Finden, words by Laurence Hope (pseudonym of Violet Nicolson), Kashmiri song—*Pale hands I loved beside the Shalimar* (1902)
W.H. Monk (1823–1889), words by H.F. Lyte (1795–1847), *Abide with me, fast falls the eventide* (Hymn)
They came to the piano. The Tallis motet was voted to be too difficult. Various glees and madrigals were considered and rejected. In the end they sang their usual medley of favourites: 'Hearts of Oak', 'The Road to Mandalay', 'Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair', 'Whistling Phil McHugh', 'Pale Hands I Loved', and 'Abide with Me' (Part One, 22).

***The little turtle dove* (Folk song)**
IML 1310—Handwritten scrap with words and music—'O can you see the little turtle dove under the mulberry tree'; another MS with words only
Jack had come in, as she expected, late and drunk. He sang, very softly however, 'The Little Turtle Dove' as he came up the first flight of stairs. He fell silent as he mounted to where Franca slept now in the room next door to Patrick. Franca, who had put out her light, pretended to be asleep (Part One, 22).

Charles Austin Miles (1868–1946), *Wide, wide as the ocean* (Hymn)
Gildas did not answer. He suddenly began to sing. What he sang was:

> *Wide wide as the ocean, high as the heavens above,*
> *Deep deep as the deepest sea is my Saviour's love.*
> *I thou so unworthy still am a child in His care,*
> *For his love teaches me that His love reaches me*
> *Everywhere.*

Ludens knew this song, which had a fine tune, a relic from Gildas's evangelical childhood, but he did not join in, he listened to Gildas's beautiful voice, which seemed in the quiet of the night to be so full of thrilling meaning (Part One, 46).

Henry Purcell (1659–1695), *Nymphs and shepherds*

'But listen,' said Ludens to Jack, who was now condescending to put his clothes on, 'Marcus wants to leave today, *this morning*, and Irina's coming too—'

…

'We'll take you,' said Jack, stepping into his trousers, 'don't worry. All is well.' He began to sing in his loud ringing bass. 'Nymphs and shepherds come away, come away, in this grove we'll sport and play—'

'Shut up! Someone will hear you. Jack, listen to me, we can't go together—'

'There's room for five.'

'Yes, but I can't have you and Alison in the car with Marcus and Irina, it just *wouldn't do*.' (Part Two, 110).

Orlando Gibbons (1583–1625), *The silver swan* (Madrigal) *[in IML 1234]*

Sitting on the mown grass in front of Rodney were Irina, Patrick and Camilla. A checkered board with draughts tumbled upon it lay beside them, also a treble recorder. The trio, in full voice, were singing 'The Silver Swan', a madrigal well known to Ludens who had often sung it with Jack and Pat and Gildas and Christian (who was actually a counter-tenor). Camilla was providing a charming though insubstantial soprano, Irina a quite creditable mezzo, Patrick was at his most Neapolitan (Part Four, 236).

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791), 'Voi che sapete' from *The marriage of Figaro* (Opera) *[IML 1131 and 1209]*

Ludens, coming in at the open door, had at once heard Jack singing upstairs in the studio. The song Jack was singing was 'Voi che sapete'. Ludens listened as he mounted the stairs. *Voi che sapete che cosa è amor, Donne, vedete s'io l'ho nel cor …* (Part Six, 519).

Arthur Sullivan and W.S. Gilbert, 'Braid the raven hair' from *The Mikado* (Operetta)

Ludens now heard Jack ascending the stairs. His footsteps sounded ominous, until suddenly he began to hum and then to sing, 'Braid the raven hair', clinking two glasses against a bottle as he entered the room (Part Six, 522).

George Frederic Handel (1685–1759), 'I know that my redeemer liveth' from *Messiah* (Oratorio)

'I'd like to get hold of a choir again. I might try to organise my own.'

'I'll come and sing in it. I'm glad you're coming back into religion.'

'I never left it. I *know* that my Redeemer liveth.' (Part Seven, 561).

***Il Testimento del capitano* (Italian folk song)**

[In IML 1270—Canti di Montagna]

'Well, you won't abandon me, will you.'

'Don't be silly, Ludens, you are buckled to my heart. I will come *con scarpe o senza scarpe*. You must be feeling pretty feeble even to mention it.' (Part Seven, 562).

Clement C. Scholefield (1839–1904), words by John Ellerton (1826–1893) *The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended* (Hymn)

'Let's sing before you go. Let's sing our evening hymn, the one you like.'

They sang.

> *The day Thou gavest, Lord, is ended,*
> *The darkness falls at Thy behest* (Part Seven, 563).

The green knight *(1993)*

Percy French (1854–1920), *Whistlin' Phil McHugh* (*Every girl's a fool and every man's a liar*)

IML 1310—On two pieces of notepaper headed 'Canadian Pacific—Empress of England'—MS of words with 'Lark in the Clear Air'. Also in Songs of Percy French—IML 1253

'I heard them singing that song about every girl's a fool and every man's a liar. Well, perhaps they don't sing it so often now when they can see it's not a joke! Well may they weep over the wickedness of the men who will break their hearts!' (Pt. 1, Ideal Children, 10).

George W. Meyer, lyrics by Jack Drislane, *You taught me how to love you* (1909)

'"I feel your arms around me, your kisses linger yet. You taught me how to love you, now teach me to forget!"'

The singers were Aleph and Moy, Aleph seated at the piano, Moy standing behind her, leaning against her shoulder (Pt. 1, Ideal Children, 12).

'Dear Joan, don't talk nonsense, *please*, I just want to be with you in peace.'

'Peace! When do I ever have peace? My life is scratched to bits.'

'For God's sake it was one night, and—'

'So you say. And you'll say we were both drunk.'

'Yes. It was only one—'

'How long is one? Sentimentally and in the soul it went on for ages, it still goes on, it goes on and on. I feel your arms around me, your kisses linger yet, You taught me how to love you, now teach me to forget! I'll get the girls to sing that song, and I'll cry, and so will you.'

'I won't cry.' (Pt. 1, Ideal Children, 56).

Orlando Gibbons (1583–1625), ***The silver swan*** **(Madrigal)** *[IML 1234]*

'It's said unlucky love should last, when answered passions thin to air.'

'Who said that, Aleph?' said Sefton.

'A poet. I suppose there's a moral there. Shall we sing again? What about the "Silver Swan"?' (Pt. 1, Ideal Children, 19).

Al Goodhart, Al Hoffman and Maurice Sigler, 'I can do anything but nothing with you' from ***First a Girl*** **(1935)**

'I can do everything, but nothing with you.'

'That was a good song, I remember the girls used to sing it, there are no good songs now, nothing but repetitive shouting. How are the vestal virgins?'

'The same as ever. Beautiful and good.' (Pt. 1, Ideal Children, 49).

Foggy, foggy dew **(Folk song)**
IML 1117—Words in MS notebook 'From party summer school July 4–12 1939', page headed 'Songs for BROADER ELEMENTS'

'"And the many many times that I took her in my arms, just to save her from the foggy foggy dew!"'

'I like the descant,' said Clement to Louise. The girls were singing in the Aviary below.

'That's Aleph.' (Pt. 1, Ideal Children, 60).

Santa Lucia **(Italian folk song)**
IML 1192—Le canzoni di Napoli. Also appears in MS books, both tune and words

Giorgio Gaber, *Porta Romana* (Italian song, 1963)

'Oh damn it all. What are the girls singing now?'

'Santa Lucia.'

'It sounds so sad.'

'I forgot to say, they want you to teach them "Porta Romana".'

'I'll teach them "Porta Romana". I'll teach them anything.' (Pt. 1, Ideal Children, 63–64).

'Full fathom five' (from Shakespeare's *Tempest*) *[IML 1231]*

Louise was a jewel locked away; and after the first 'if only' period had passed and Clement had got used to 'Mrs Anderson', he felt that his love for her had not faded, but had suffered a sea change into something special and unique, causing a special and unique and much valued pain (Pt. 1, Ideal Children, 65).

Arthur Sullivan and W.S. Gilbert, *The yeomen of the guard*, 'When a maiden loves she sits and sighs, she wanders to and fro' (Operetta) *[IML 1242]*

Aleph was singing softly in the Aviary, occasionally touching the piano, producing a little note like that of a bird. He could not make out the song.

Louise was looking smart and neat … As she listened to Clement's solemn statement it seemed to him that she blushed a little and her eyes widened. Was she expecting something from him, something perhaps very different from what he was going to say? …

At that moment the words of Aleph's song became clear: 'When a maiden loves she sits and sighs, she wanders to and fro.' He thought, confused, but it is Moy who is wandering to and fro (Pt. 2, Justice, 138).

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791), *The magic flute* (Opera)

'There's the bell, I'm expecting Harvey, he rang up and we've invited him to lunch. By the way, when are you taking the girls to the *Magic Flute*?' (Pt. 2, Justice, 140).

How much longer could he continue to be young? And when was he going to take the girls to the *Magic Flute*? (Pt. 2, Justice, 150).

George M. Cohan (1878–1942), *The Yankee doodle boy* (Broadway song)

Louise began to play.

'Oh good—!'

'What's the music?'

'It's a song—'

'I know, it's that fourth of July thing.'
'Is it the *fourth* of July?'
'It's wonderful to dance to.'
'You can do anything to this tune.' (Pt. 2, Justice, 209).

Jerome Kern (1885–1945), words by Dorothy Fields (1904–1974), *A fine romance* (Broadway song)

'Why won't you come and see me at the grand flat? Come tonight. Oh never mind. A fine romance with no kisses.'
'Harvey, I have given you many many kisses, you have forgotten them.'
'In your dreams—or in mine. Children's kisses. Goodnight, dear sister. Kiss me now. Oh Aleph—'
'I know—I know—' (Pt. 2, Justice, 215).

Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901), *Rigoletto* (Opera)

'Moy had a spider she was very fond of in her room. … Then one night she saw another spider, rather like him but a bit larger, walking along the wall. … this was the female of the species. … Moy then got terribly upset when she told me about it the next morning, she cried. She ought to have understood and instantly captured the female in a glass and taken it away and let it go in some very distant place from which it would never be able to find its way back. As it was, she could just sit and look at the little house and could not stop herself from picturing what was happening inside. She said it was like something in a play, or perhaps it must have been an opera, like in *Rigoletto*, when the music plays loudly and the stage is darkened when a murder is going on behind a closed door. …' (Pt. 4, Eros, 378).

'O mistress mine' (from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*)

'Oh Sefton, we're here, we've arrived, this is it—trip no further, pretty sweeting—I'm so happy, I'm crazy with happiness, the world is brilliant, it's shining—' (Pt. 4, Eros, 391).

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847), *A midsummer night's dream* incidental music, Wedding March

Clement sat down at the piano and began to play Mendelssohn's wedding-march (Pt. 4, Eros, 445).

Jackson's dilemma *(1995)*

Stephen Foster (1826–1864), ***Jeanie with the light brown hair***
IML 1139—1940 edition published by Paxton, arr. King Palmer
Oley Speaks, words by Rudyard Kipling, ***The road to Mandalay***
There were numerous old armchairs with embroidered cushions, and a (not valuable) piano introduced into the house by Benet's sweet short-lived lovely mother, Eleanor Morton. Benet recalled the happy childhood evenings when she played and they all sang. She soon set her opera music aside. Tim and Pat and indeed Benet preferred '*Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair*', and (a song which brought tears to Tim's eyes) 'The Road to Mandalay' (Chapter One, 12).

'Full fathom five' (from Shakespeare's *Tempest*) *[IML 1231]*
Mildred found herself turning towards Jackson. She trembled, she shuddered, she thought he is different, he is more, even more, handsome, his dark eyes are larger, so calm and glowing, his lips are gentle, his expression is loving, he is secure because Benet has forgiven him, no no, *he* has forgiven *Benet*! But it isn't that, he has changed, like in suffering, like a sea-change, that is in Shakespeare isn't it, his skin is different, darker and more glowing … (Chapter Eleven, 232).

Appendix B: Items in Iris Murdoch's Oxford Music Collection Held at Kingston University Library

In this appendix I have grouped the contents of Murdoch's music collection—almost all vocal music—from her Oxford Library into rough categories. The categories are of course somewhat random: the difference between a 'classical' song and a 'popular' song is sometimes unclear, particularly with the songs of late Victorian and Edwardian times. However, it seemed easier to divide the collection up for ease of browsing than to list it by catalogue number or some other arbitrary order. This list is generated from the Kingston University Library catalogue, and all items can be searched individually there.[1]

The first group is Murdoch's own manuscript notebooks. I have discussed these notebooks in "Chapter 1: Listening to Iris Murdoch" under the subheading 'Music in Murdoch's life'. The second of the books titled *Make a joyful noise* was begun in 1944, but contains items entered as late as the 1960s. They appear to include a record of songs shared with friends—the name of a friend, plus the date of copying, often accompany the song lyrics.

The second group of items includes collections and anthologies of music, divided into classical, traditional or national, and popular (broadly defined). It includes opera scores, song cycles, single-composer collections and collections based on countries and themes. There is an extremely neat manuscript of some songs from the Elizabeth stage, with no clue as to the

[1] *Note*: they are on the Library catalogue, not the Archive catalogue.

G. Dooley, *Listening to Iris Murdoch*, Iris Murdoch Today,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-00860-3_10

writer. There is also a vocal exercise sheet which has Iris Murdoch's name inscribed on the cover and a date from the 1930s.

The third group is single items—mainly songs—grouped into 'classical' and 'popular'. The separately published popular songs are the most numerous items in the collection—about three times more of these than individual 'classical' songs.

I have noted some instances where particular pieces of music are referred to in Murdoch's novels. Details can be found in Appendix A, where I have also included cross-references to this collection.

There is a wealth of music in this collection, and the type of repertoire is very familiar from her novels. The most recent publication is the first volume of Geoffrey Brace's collection *Something to sing* from 1963, a songbook which includes a large range of accessible music for choirs and amateur singers, including arrangements of folk songs, the simpler operatic arias and theatre songs, for voice and piano. Other song anthologies are set or arranged for equal voices, so would most likely have dated from Murdoch's school days. Some books date from Murdoch's university student years, and there is a significant amount of material from Europe in the 1940s, particularly French songs of Charles Trenet and others. Quite a collection of Irish songs is included from both sides of the conflict. There are many stage songs from music hall, cabaret and vaudeville of the 1920s and 1930s, and also many sentimental songs from the decades before the First World War. Much of this music may have belonged to Murdoch's mother, Irene.

Iris Murdoch's Manuscript Notebooks of Songs

'Songs: Bolshevik and otherwise from the Party Summer School, July 4–12th 1939', 'exercise book with songs in I.M.'s hand', **IML 1117**

'Make a Joyful Noise 1, Iris Murdoch 5 Seaforth Place Buckingham Gate SW1', 'exercise book with words of various songs in I.M.'s hand; with duplicated sheets of songs from the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR inserted', c. 1940s, **IML 1118**

'Make a Joyful Noise 2, Iris Murdoch 5 Seaforth Place SW1, May 1944', 'exercise book with words of various songs in I.M.'s hand; with various loose inserts, also with words of songs'. 1944–, **IML 1310**

Anthologies, Collections, Scores Etc.

Classical

350 chansons anciennes, Éditions ouvrières, 1946, **IML 1129**

A book of French songs ed. Emile Stephan, Oxford University Press, 1929, **IML 1126**

Eight madrigals by Elizabethan composers: arranged for S.S.A. and S.S.A.A, Novello, c. 1900s, **IML 1234** [Appears in *The bell*, *The philosopher's pupil*, *The message to the planet* and *The green knight*.]

Elizabethan Love Songs, first set, ed. Frederick Keel, Boosey and Hawkes, c. 1909, **IML 1208**

French songs: with airs, tonic sol-fa and phonetic transcription ed. Violet Partington, Dent, 1923, **IML 1297**

Something to sing [1], piano edition ed. Geoffrey Brace, Cambridge University Press, 1963, **IML 1122**

Twenty-four Italian songs and arias of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: for medium high voice, Schirmer, 1948, **IML 1214**

Blunt, Dorothy, 'From the City of the Sun: Srinagar, Kashmir' [6 songs for voice and piano], Stainer and Bell, c. 1916, **IML 1261**

Cuvillier, Charles, 'Wild geese: selection', Ascherberg Hopwood and Crew, c. 1920, **IML 1181**

Gilbert, WS and Sullivan, Arthur, *The Gondoliers, or the King of Barataria*, Chappell, n.d., **IML 1236**

Gilbert, WS and Sullivan, Arthur, *The yeomen of the guard: or, The merryman and his maid*, Chappell, n.d., **IML 1242** [mentioned in *The red and the green*, *The book and the brotherhood* and *The green knight*]

Handel, George Frideric, *The Handel school song book: a collection of songs in unison and two parts*, Patersons, n.d., **IML 1124**

Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, Felix, *Elijah: an oratorio*, op. 70. The words selected from the Old Testament, Novello, c. 1890s, **IML 1127**

Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus, *Le nozze di Figaro: opera comica in quattro atti*, [libretto] Ricordi, 1951, **IML 1131**

Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus, *Le nozze di Figaro = The marriage of Figaro: opera in four acts*, [libretto] G. Schirmer, 1959, **IML 1209**

Pergolesi, Giovanni Batista, *Stabat Mater: for female voices and strings*, Oxford University Press, 1927, **IML 1203**

Reed, EMG, *Christmastide: a nativity play*, Novello, c. 1923, **IML 1239**

Schubert, Franz, *Schubert's songs translated*, Oxford University Press, 1925, **IML 1130**

Schubert, Franz, *Die Winterreise*, opus 89: poems by Wilhelm Müller…: original poems in German with English translations, Decca Record Company, c. 1950s, **IML 1200**

Stravinsky, Igor, *Rake's progress*: [extracts], n.p., n.d., **IML 1304**

White, Ernest George, 'Chart and guide for practising sinus tone production: in connection with Ernest G. White's vocal exercises', Winthrop Rogers, c. 1909 [inscribed 'Iris Murdoch, 20.5.37] **IML 1229**

Traditional and National

50 beauties of Erin, Mozart Allan, c. 1900s, **IML 1198**

Canti di montagna: per canto e fisarmonica (o pianoforte) ed. S. Dusti, Metron, c. 1944, **IML 1270**

Far-west: selection of cow-boy songs ed. George Martine, Ascherberg, Hopwood and Crew, c. 1939, **IML 1164**

I piu bei canti d'amore ed. Pompeo Fanenghi, Ricordi, 1947, **IML 1250**

Ireland's Best Song Book, Felix McGlennon, c. 1900s, **IML 1187**

La clé des chants: 100 chansons ed Marie-Rose Clouzot, Rouart, Lerolle & Cie, **1942, IML 1125**

Le canzoni di Napoli: raccolta di canzoni celebri per pianoforte e canto, Curci, 1937, **IML 1192**

Modern Soviet songs: (twelve popular Soviet songs of recent years in English and Russian … for voice and piano), Moscow News, 1967, **IML 1204**

Russian folk-songs: reprinted from Folk-songs of many peoples ed. Florence Hudson Botsford, Schirmer, **c. 1929, IML 1202**

Song sheet, Oxford University Labour Club, 1938, **IML 1199**

Songs of the people, University Labour Federation, n.d., **IML 1128**

The minstrelsy of Scotland: 200 Scottish songs, adapted to their traditional airs ed. Alfred Moffatt, Augener Ltd, 1895, **IML 1237**

The Orange songster: with pianoforte accompaniments ed. Neil Graham, James S Kerr, c. 1900s, **IML 1186**

The Scottish students' song book ed. Millar Patrick, Bayley and Ferguson, **1897, IML 1210**

The Soldiers' song book: stirring, spirited songs of the soldiers who fought for the honour and the freedom of Ireland in every generation, Irish Book Bureau, 1938, **IML 1132**

Third album of Russian songs ed Frederick Whishaw, Boosey, **1900, IML 1267**

[Songs: to words from Shakespeare and his times—manuscript in unidentified handwriting] Contents: Care-charming sleep [Robert Johnson]—Willow song [trad.]—Full fathom five [Robert Johnson]—O let us howl some heavy note [Robert Johnson]—How should I your true love know (melody only) [trad.]—Take o take those lips away [John Wilson]. **IML 1231**

Popular Music: Film, Cabaret, Theatre Etc.

Songs of Percy French, vol.1: 'Ach! I dunno'—'Are ye right there, Michael?'—'Drumcolliher'—'The Emigrant's letter' (Cutting the corn)—'Kitty Gallagher'—'The Mountains O'Mourne'—'The Night Miss Clooney eloped'—'Slattery's mounted fut', Keith Prowse, 1937, **IML 1190**

Songs of Percy French: 'Come back Paddy Reilly'—'Eileen Oge'—'Gortnamona'—'Larry Mick McGarry'—'Little Bridget Flynn'—'McBreen's heifer'—'Mat Hannigan's aunt'—'Mick's hotel'—'Phil the fluter's ball'—'Whistlin' Phil McHugh'. Keith Prowse, 1937, **IML 1253**

*Bing [Crosby] sings: a selection of his most popular hits, Campbell Connelly, c. 1941, **IML 1180***

Les chansons de Charles Trenet. 1er album, Raoul Breton, c. 1939, **IML 1249**

Les chansons de Charles Trenet. 2ème album, Raoul Breton, c. 1940s, **IML 1243**

Les chansons de Charles Trenet. 3e album, Raoul Breton, c. 1940s, **IML 1244**

Les chansons de Charles Trenet. 4me volume, Raoul Breton, 1945, **IML 1191**

Charles Trenet: deux récitals d'adieu avant son départ pour les Amériques, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Octobre 1945, [concert programme], 1945, **IML 1286**

Mes nouvelles chansons: un album by Charles Trenet, Salabert, 1943, **IML 1216**

Les grands succès des Compagnons de la Chanson, Raoul Breton, 1949, **IML 1188**

Album of French cabaret songs, Chappell, 1946, **IML 1252**

Dear old pals: a selection of old music-hall songs ed. Herman Finck, Ascherberg, Hopwood and Crew, c. 1937, **IML 1189**

20 good old songs: a collection of world famous radio successes suitable for community singing, camp concerts etc., complete words and music with tonic sol-fa, Campbell Connelly, c. 1930s, **IML 1197**

The Wright 10th selection: introducing all the popular "hits" of the day, Lawrence Wright, 1924, **IML 1205**

Campbell & Connelly's 5th song and dance album: containing words, music, tonic sol-fa & ukulele accomp'ts, Campbell Connelly, c. 1927, **IML 1136**

Feldman's 28th song annual: complete words and music with tonic sol-fa setting, Feldman, c. 1900s, **IML 1264**

Feldman's 29th song annual: complete words and music with tonic sol-fa setting, Feldman, c. 1900s, **IML 1141**

Francis & Day's 44th annual, Francis Day and Hunter, c. 1925, **IML 1266**

Francis & Day's 45th annual, Francis Day and Hunter, c. 1926, **IML 1169**

Popular music weekly. Vol.1, no.1, January 26th, 1924, Amalgamated Press, 1924, **IML 1194**

Popular music weekly. Vol.1, no.4, February 16th, 1924, Amalgamated Press, 1924, **IML 1221**

Popular music and dancing weekly. Vol.1, no.1, October 13th, 1934, Amalgamated Press, 1934, **IML 1251**

Single Works

Classical

Anon., 'Persuasion' (Charles Grobe? 1847); [and, 'Lilac and laburnum' (Celeste Baga, 1909?)] 'Detatched leaf containing two short piano pieces, composer unknown', Augener Ltd, n.d., **IML 1278**

Arrieu, Claude, 'Chanson de marin', Henry Lemoine, 1946, **IML 1246**

Bach, Johann Sebastian, 'Come, come, my voice', Curwen, c. 1939, **IML 1289**

Batten, Robert, 'Peace and Rest', Boosey, 1902, **IML 1232**

Coates, Eric, 'Bird songs at eventide: song', Chappell, 1926, **IML 1160**

Cowen, Frederic, 'The Swallows', Boosey, c. 1895, **IML 1162**

d'Hardelot, Guy [Helen Rhodes, née Guy (1858—1936)], 'Mignon', Ascherberg, Hopwood and Crew, c. 1893, **IML 1223**

Dowland, John, 'Awake Sweet Love', Stainer and Bell, 1925, **IML 1138/IML 1170**

Dowland, John, 'His Golden Locks', Stainer and Bell, 1925, **IML 1173**

Dowland, John, 'Sleep, wayward thoughts', Stainer and Bell, 1925, **IML 1140**
Handel, George Frideric, 'Love that's true will live for ever', 'Si tra i ceppi': from *Berenice*', Boosey, c. 1900s, **IML 1225**
Handel, George Frideric, 'Ombra mai fu: largo' [from] *Serse*, Edwin Ashdown, n.d., **IML 1282**
Lehar, Franz, 'You are my heart's delight: from *The land of smiles*', Chappell, c. 1931, **IML 1161**
MacDowell, Edward, 'To a wild rose', Elkin, c. 1928, **IML 1283**
MacMurrough, Dermot, 'Macushla: song', Boosey, 1910, **IML 1163**
Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus, 'Thou art, o God', Augener Ltd, c. 1926, **IML 1228**
Peel, Graham and Housmann, AE, 'In summertime on Bredon: song', Chappell, c. 1911, **IML 1193**
Puccini, Giacomo, 'One fine day = Un bel di vedremo: aria from the opera *Madam Butterfly*', Ricordi, c. 1909, **IML 1206**
Quilter, Roger, 'The fuchsia tree: song with piano accompaniment', Boosey and Hawkes, c. 1923, **IML 1155** [mentioned in *The unicorn*]
Read, Ezra, 'Darby and Joan: waltz' [for piano], London Music Publishing Scores, c. 1940s, **IML 1256**
Scott, Cyril, 'Lullaby': opus 57, no.2, Elkin, c. 1908, **IML 1195**
Shaw, Martin, 'Tides', Cramer, 1923, **IML 1230**
Thomson, David Cleghorn, 'Epitaph', Cramer, c. 1925, **IML 1215**
, Brindisi: drinking song from *La traviata*, Ricordi, 1938, **IML 1213**
Vaughan Williams, Ralph, 'Linden Lea: a Dorset song', [words by William Barnes] Boosey, 1912, **IML 1135**
Vaughan Williams, Ralph, 'Fantasia on Greensleeves: adapted from the opera *Sir John in Love*: arranged for pianoforte solo', Oxford University Press, 1936, **IML 1265**
Wood, Haydn, 'A brown bird singing: song', Chappell, 1922, **IML 1159**
Wood, Haydn, 'Roses of Picardy: song', Chappell, c. 1916, **IML 1218** [mentioned in *The sea, the sea*]

Popular Music: Film, Cabaret, Theatre Etc.

Abrahams, Maurice, 'High—high—high up in the hills: watching the clouds roll by', Campbell Connelly, c. 1927, **IML 1148**
Addinsell, Richard, 'Sing, sweet nightingale', Keith Prowse, c. 1947, **IML 1178**

Ager, Milton, 'Ain't that a grand and glorious feeling', Wright, c. 1927, **IML 1142**
Ager, Milton, 'Ain't she sweet?', Lawrence Wright, c. 1927, **IML 1177**
Ager, Milton, 'What good am I without you?', Lawrence Wright, c. 1930, **IML 1222**
Ager, Milton, 'She don't wanna', Lawrence Wright, c. 1927, **IML 1305**
Ball, Ernest, 'Till the sands of the desert grow cold: song', Feldman, 1911, **IML 1275**
Barry, Katharine, 'My happy garden: song', Metzler, c. 1915, **IML 1217**
Berlin, Irving, 'Always, I'll be loving you: Waltz song with [piano and] ukulele or banjulele banjo accompaniment', Francis Day and Hunter, 1925, **IML 1184** [mentioned in *The book and the brotherhood*]
Berlin, Irving, 'Because I love you', Francis Day and Hunter, c. 1926, **IML 1207**
Bessière, Serge, 'Le capitaine', Éditions Réunies, c. 1946, **IML 1276**
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