

The Intertextual Stardom of IRIS: Winslet, Dench, Murdoch, and Alzheimer's Disease

Lucy Bolton

The film *IRIS* (2001) was directed by Richard Eyre and is based on the memoirs of Iris Murdoch's husband, John Bayley, *Iris: A Memoir of Iris Murdoch* (1999) and *Elegy for Iris* (1999). It is a film about the endurance of the love between Murdoch and Bayley over forty years, from their meeting as young academics at Oxford University to their old age together, as she becomes more confused, forgetful, and unwell due to the onset of Alzheimer's disease. The film is called *IRIS* and so is ostensibly about Iris Murdoch, and it stars Dame Judi Dench as the older Iris and Kate Winslet as the younger. The iconographical attributes of Iris Murdoch's star persona, consisting of intelligence, wildness, and Britishness, are essentially borrowed by Dench and Winslet. This intertextuality succeeds because the actors themselves stand for differing combinations of these attributes. In turn, as the two most well-known English actresses of the day personify Iris, they imbue her image with their sexuality, humor, vulnerability, and contemporary relevance. The film's legacy, however, is that the name of Iris Murdoch has become inextricably linked with Alzheimer's disease, and the image of the older, unwell, and no longer capable Murdoch is the prevalent persona that emerges from the film.

Peter Conradi, close friend and authorized biographer of Murdoch, described the two faces presented in *IRIS* as either bonking or bonkers: "Both sensationalisms reduced her to gross physicality, by-passing and demeaning the one thing about her that was truly remarkable – the freedom of her mind."¹ Although not always "gross," the film does dwell on Murdoch's physicality, whether she is swimming naked in the river as a young woman or urinating on the carpet as an elderly one. It is of course, a challenge to depict the workings of the mind on screen. As A.N. Wilson writes in his personal memoir about the Murdoch he knew, "In spite of a few gallant scenes in which Dame Judi Dench sat at a desk with a pen in her hand, however, the film – any film – was bound to fail in depicting what goes on inside, what happens in a person's secret self, to make them a writer; to make them, moreover, not any writer, but that writer. To make

‘them’ Iris Murdoch.”² The perspectives of Wilson and Conradi indicate the intensity of the personal perspectives on Iris Murdoch that have been written since her death. The film *IRIS*, co-written by Richard Eyre and Charles Wood, is a further perspective on Murdoch, and it is the specifically cinematic elements of this representation that I will explore in this essay, in particular the way in which the film depicts her femininity and her aging, in relation to aspects of her celebrity and the cultural pariah of dementia.

Teasing out the Star Images

Dame Judi Dench is one of Britain’s most successful and internationally well-known actresses. With her background as a Shakespearean actress, stalwart of British television drama, and BAFTA and Olivier award winner many times over, her role as *grande dame* of British acting is beyond question. Having played both Queen Elizabeth and Queen Victoria, and James Bond’s boss “M,” Dench had developed a profile as embodying British institutions.

Kate Winslet may not have the same on-stage theatrical credentials, but her roles in the film versions of British literary classics such as *SENSE AND SENSIBILITY* (Ang Lee, 1995), *JUDE* (Michael Winterbottom, 1996), and *HAMLET* (Kenneth Branagh, 1996), together with her famously down-to-earth attitude, saw her positioned as Britain’s “English rose” actress in Hollywood. The phenomenal success of *TITANIC* (James Cameron, 1997) had ensured that Winslet’s star persona was internationally established, and the role of Rose, along with that of Julia in *HIDEOUS KINKY* (Gillies MacKinnon, 1998) and Ruth in *HOLY SMOKE* (Jane Campion, 1998) led to Winslet’s image being founded on British sexiness: fearless about nudity on screen, when not bound up in the costume of a heritage drama. Sean Redmond argues that Winslet subverts the idealized aspects of English rose-ness, such as whiteness and thinness, and offers up an array of contradictory and transgressive qualities.³ Redmond describes Winslet as having an “independent spirit and unruly body.”⁴ In 2001, at the time *IRIS* was made, both Winslet and Dench were household names in the UK, lauded for their acting abilities and quintessential – cinematically exportable – Englishness. Each of them, then, seemed perfectly cast for the roles of the younger and older Iris Murdoch, herself a Dame, a Booker-prize winning novelist, and a figure of the Oxford philosophy scene.

In Richard Dyer’s terminology, the casting of Winslet and Dench can be considered to be a kind of double “perfect fit” with Murdoch in that “all the aspects of a star’s image fit with all the traits of a character.”⁵ Dyer describes a star text as being a structured polysemy made up of circulating inter-texts that change over time, and we can see the star personas of Dench and Winslet intersecting with each other and with that of the famous writer and philosopher Iris Murdoch to form the persona of the film’s eponymous character, Iris. Murdoch’s reputa-

tion as a writer of many popular and successful novels had been founded on her particular brand of intellectual fiction, its evocation of a certain strata of society embroiled in moral and sexual conflicts and complexities. Although she had taken part in some televised interviews and discussion programs, her public profile was quite guarded and private, and she was renowned for her secrecy.⁶ The public persona of Iris Murdoch thus benefited from its personification by two high-profile actresses and the iconographical attributes they bring to their characterizations of her. In a tripartite web of reciprocity, the star personas of Winslet, Dench, and Murdoch exchange elements of each other's star images; while the actors benefit, Murdoch's intellectual and professional achievements suffer, alongside the individuality of a woman who lived a life of nearly eighty years. The young Murdoch is portrayed as fierce and robust, with a lust for life and experimental sexual appetites. Murdoch's youthful persona, then, is inhabited by Winslet's "ballsy and unruly" star persona,⁷ borrowing the elements of nudity, wildness, and transgression. (The first sight of Murdoch in the film is an underwater shot of the naked swimming Winslet.) Likewise, Murdoch's older persona is seen through the familiarity, intelligence, and sensitivity of Judi Dench, which in turn brings with it added pathos in her depiction of the afflicted, vulnerable Iris. The idea that Britain's national treasure could be so stricken adds to the film's emotional pull.

The film also links Dench and Winslet in a very particular way. Both were nominated for Academy awards for this film: Dench for best actress in a leading role and Winslet for best actress in supporting role. This reflects the fact that there are fewer scenes of the young Iris in the film than there are of the older, but it also suggests that Winslet is perhaps treading in the footsteps of Dench, and that she will become British acting's *grande dame* in due course. Also, perhaps, that Dench is Winslet's young firebrand all grown up, conveying the longevity of her acting career and harking back to the idea of Dench as a younger actress. In the "Behind the scenes" featurette about the making of *IRIS* on the DVD, sentimentally titled "Talent for Life," Dench wonders whether the "beautiful lithe young" Winslet will worry that she "is going to end up like me."⁸ In the same set of interviews, director Richard Eyre refers to Iris Murdoch as "a star" and talks about the ways in which Dench and Winslet "share the same spirit" as each other. The suggestion is that perhaps these three women share the same spirit, which Martin Amis also suggested in his review of the film: "It is as if Dame Judi and Dame Iris were always on a metaphysical collision course. Her performance has the rarest quality known to any art – that of apparent inevitability."⁹

There is a trinity of stardom in operation here: Murdoch the mother, Dench the daughter, and Winslet the wild spirit. In other words, a trio of star personas in a circulating, intertextual relationship, so that Dench benefits from the belief that she was a fiery young wild star like Winslet and possesses the cultural grav-

itas to embody the older Murdoch; Winslet benefits from the idea that she may grow into or fill the shoes of Dench, and that she possesses sufficient strength and intelligence to portray the unconventional young intellectual Murdoch; and Iris Murdoch benefits from the currency of Dench's and Winslet's public personas now, which make her appear relevant, interesting, and approachable. Certainly their performances inflect the film's recreations of Murdoch's televisual and public performances with a lightness and sense of humor that is less readily apparent in those digital recordings of Murdoch available on YouTube, where Murdoch can appear wary and guarded.¹⁰ The film performances were feted for their authenticity, particularly Dench as the older Iris and Hugh Bonneville and Jim Broadbent as younger and older Bayley. Philip French finds it impossible to separate his memory of the real Iris and John from Dench and Broadbent in the film, and finds Bonneville's likeness to be uncanny.¹¹ Martin Amis finds Dench as what he calls "the mature Iris" to be "transcendent." Amis writes, "I knew Iris. I have respectfully kissed that cunning, bashful, secretive smile."¹² The great and the good of Oxford-educated cultural criticism find Eyre's film to be an authentic cinematic depiction of Murdoch and Bayley; although both express reservations about Winslet. French finds she "has the mannerisms if not exactly the right appearance," and Amis finds that she "is slightly hampered by the conventionality of her good looks." Aside from Winslet's physical appearance, which might interrupt the complete assimilation of her into young Iris, the film is lauded for presenting performances that convince those who knew the couple of the likeness. The film *IRIS* carries the cultural weight of the intellectual and literary icon Iris Murdoch; the perceived veracity of the account as derived from its basis on her husband's memoir, and the dramatic credentials of ex-National Theatre director, Richard Eyre, as its co-writer and director. As Peter Bradshaw observes, however, the film should really be called "John," as the focus is unremittingly on Bayley's perceptions of Iris Murdoch. Whether he is observing her unselfconsciously sing an Irish ballad in an Oxford pub, making love to one of her many suitors, or struggling to form a word on her notepad, the film's perspective is overwhelmingly that of the bemused, stammering Bayley as he observes her with unwavering but perplexed devotion.

Celebrity, Professional, Performer, Stars

If thinking about the star performances in the film along the lines of Dyer's structured polysemy helps elucidate how the elements of Winslet, Dench, and Murdoch's personas interrelate, then Christine Geraghty's re-examination of stardom and celebrity sheds light on the contemporary discourses at play in the film, how the texts circulating around *IRIS* impact upon the persona of Iris Murdoch, and how these relate specifically to questions of aging women and celebrity. Geraghty examines contemporary stars as celebrities, professionals, and

performers; categories that, she proposes, “contribute to a paradigm of the different ways in which well-known individuals ‘appear’ in the media” and “better help us to understand what film stars have in common with and how they differ from other mass media public figures.”¹³ Geraghty’s definitions are pertinent to understanding IRIS, and they can also be seen to overlap in this particular case. Winslet and Dench are clearly performers, and playing a well-known public figure draws attention to their skills as such, including their physicality and the ability to capture the mannerisms or style of their non-fictional subject. Geraghty notes that the concentration on performance works particularly well for the aging star, as it places value on experience “well beyond the pin-up stage.”¹⁴ Murdoch, as a novelist and philosopher, might be expected to be considered a professional whose fame, according to Geraghty, “rests on their work in such a way that there is very little sense of a private life and the emphasis is on the seamlessness of the public persona.”¹⁵ The effect of the memoirs and biographies, however, is to bring Murdoch into the sphere of celebrity: “someone whose fame rests overwhelmingly on what happens outside the sphere of their work and who is famous for having a lifestyle.”¹⁶ IRIS foregrounds Murdoch’s lifestyle: her sexual relationships, her penchant for wild swimming, or the domestic squalor in which she and Bayley lived. The fate of the aging professional in this case is to be subsumed by the ironic celebrity that the diminishing of her mental capabilities bestowed upon her.

The Aging Female Star

Within the last decade, there has been a welcome development in the study of older and aging women in culture and the media. The UK-based, AHRC-funded Centre for Women, Ageing and Media (WAM) has seen the creation of a significant body of publications and events focused on the visibility and representation of older women in public life, and publications such as *Female Celebrity and Ageing: Back in the Spotlight*, edited by Deborah Jermyn, have established a body of work concerned with aging women from classical Hollywood to new media.¹⁷

Josephine Dolan, a founding member of WAM, discusses the notion of “successful aging” and the increased visibility of older female stars.¹⁸ Contrasting media responses to the bodies of Helen Mirren in a bikini and Madonna in “revealing” clothing, Dolan exposes how the body of the aging star can still be “rendered the object of a pathologizing gaze if it fails the injunctions of ‘chronological decorum.’”¹⁹ In other words, Mirren is deemed to be shapely, well-toned and natural, whereas Madonna is vilified for embarrassingly revealing too much muscly, sinewy, flesh. As Dolan concludes, Mirren is the acceptable face of senior sexiness, whereas Madonna exposes “the wrong kind of flesh” for her age.²⁰ These opposing “types” of aging female bodies are expressed in even more forceful terms by Sherryl Wilson (another WAM participant). Wilson contrasts the

representations of aging women in the media as being either “she who is young-looking, full of youthful vigour and conventionally attractive,” with the “older woman as ancient crone, enfeebled and vulnerable”: both enduring tropes eradicate experience and history and represent “the strenuous disavowal of the ageing process.”²¹ Judi Dench avoids these polarities: having kept to the same short hairstyle and loose-fitting clothes across the decades, her star image has never been founded on sexiness or glamour. Dench cannot escape the scrutiny of the aging police, however, as Sally Chivers demonstrates when she writes that “Even Dame Judi Dench, so frequently praised for her insistence on a natural ageing appearance and not being afraid to look old, reportedly admits that she has turned to Botox for a little help around the eyes.”²² This unavoidable commentary on how “well” a female star is aging, coupled with the prurient assessment of whether or not she has succumbed to the knife or needle (and if so how successful she has been at disguising the procedures), persistently foregrounds aging physicality. *IRIS* embraces the visibility of the aging female body to some extent in the scenes of Dench swimming (besuited, however, as opposed to the naked Winslet’s swimming scenes), and taking a shower with her friend Janet Stone (Penelope Wilton). As the film’s perspective on Iris in these scenes is that of the loving eyes of John, or her friend Janet, questions of Iris’s physical aging are softened and her personhood is more dominant. Rather than the more familiar revulsion at an aging female body as a crone or repulsive spectacle, the eyes of those who love her convey Iris as a older woman surrounded by other older people, and therefore age-appropriate and not extraordinary. The film turns its pathologizing gaze instead on the aging female mind in an acutely precise and unforgiving way.

The demented older woman has featured as a spectacle in several recent films, and stardom has been central to the construction of that spectacle in the high-profile cases of Julie Christie in *AWAY FROM HER* (Sarah Polley, 2006), Meryl Streep in *THE IRON LADY* (Phyllida Lloyd, 2011) and Dench as Iris. The return of the elusive Christie, famed for her beauty and independence, playing an Alzheimer’s patient proved a topic of fascination for journalists and critics alike.²³ Streep’s performance as Margaret Thatcher attracted a similar kind of discussion about inevitability and “perfect fit,” as did Dench’s as Murdoch. Public curiosity and the desire to have a glimpse at how the reclusive elderly Margaret Thatcher ended her days and to see just how accurately Streep could impersonate the eminently caricaturable politician imbued the film with a degree of cultural capital similar to that of *IRIS*. All three actresses were nominated for Academy Awards, with Streep winning the Oscar. It seems that playing roles associated with the horrors of pathologized aging is seen as worthy of particular approbation. These dynamics between stardom, aging, and the body are not exclusive to female stars, but there are clearly specific issues that affect women playing aging women on screen – not least that, as Sonia Haiduc points out, “the titles of biopics show an

interesting penchant for familiarity in connection with women writers, in an attempt to convey the intimate, personal relationship (female?) writers develop with their work, and, indirectly with their persona.”²⁴ Films such as *JULIA* (Fred Zinnemann, 1977), *STEVIE* (Robert Enders, 1978), *BECOMING JANE* (Julian Jarrold, 2007), *ENID* (James Hawes, 2009), and of course *IRIS* may be about female literary figures with public personas, but their titles suggest familiarity and intimacy with their private subject: in this way, “the woman writer sometimes seems to be defined more by her (ordinary) first name than by her (extraordinary) place in history.”²⁵

The Female Philosopher and Novelist as Young or Old

Martin Amis writes that “Iris Murdoch’s fall could not have been more marked.”²⁶ The fear of Alzheimer’s disease has become a dominant social preoccupation as the population ages and medical advances have begun to offer more hope to those who suffer the social terrors of heart disease, cancer, or stroke. Dementia is something that cannot be avoided, hidden, or beaten: as the doctor says to John Bayley, “it will win.” *IRIS* begins with scenes of young and old Iris and John swimming together in rivers, and Murdoch addressing a packed Oxford dining hall. Although Murdoch begins to speak authoritatively about the value of education, she unexpectedly launches into song, attracting some surprised but tolerant expressions. We see the young Iris telling John that she had just written her first novel, and the older Iris sighing with exasperation at her desk over the difficulty she is having forming her words. A scene in which the older Iris and John do their shopping at the supermarket shows them to be lively and nimble conversationalists, as they develop the linguistic and philosophical concept of wholegrain mustard. The film conveys the idea that the couple were always eccentric, speaking to each other in their own private language, and that people looked at the two of them oddly (perhaps unsurprisingly) when they went nude swimming. A young Iris is shown going to a party with the infatuated young Bayley, where she slips on a flight of stairs and slides down on her bottom laughing wildly. Over a quiet drink in the pub, older Iris and John swap literary quotes and jokes. Iris has begun to display signs of confusion, realizing that she has just repeated herself, or cannot remember how to spell words. Poignantly, Iris observes, “we all worry about going mad, don’t we; how would we know? Those of us who live in our minds anyway. Other people would tell us.”

The film is edited to exacerbate the contrast between the ferociously bright young Iris and the confused and childlike older Iris, frequently as she is observed by John. Young John watches Iris kissing another woman in a café, and another man in her window, then there is a cut to old John watching Iris struggling to form the word “puzzled” with her pen on her notepad. The film is concerned to show how sharp, forceful, and independent she was as a young person. For

Roger Ebert, *IRIS* cheats as an “Alzheimer’s movie” because there is too much about the young Murdoch.²⁷ The sharp cuts to the older Iris dominate the trajectory of the film, however, and are sometimes over-determined. A scene where the sexually confident Iris decides it is time that she and Bayley make love, and takes charge to ensure he loses his virginity, cuts with excruciating contrast to a distressed, screaming older Iris needing Bayley to hold and calm her. A scene showing the young, fiercely intelligent and linguistically nimble Iris challenging, questioning, and driving forward a debate is swiftly followed by scenes where she cannot remember the name of the prime minister. Her dementia is even played for laughs when the elderly Iris watches Tony Blair on television delivering his “education, education, education” speech and cannot understand his saying this over and over again.

The film focuses on small details that show Iris as an older woman falling rapidly into illness, being unable to answer her doctor’s questions or recognize the book that she has written. There are some particularly harrowing scenes of physical difficulty such as when Iris urinates on the floor (which we hear but do not see) or when she tries to get out of a moving car. These scenes serve to make the film less about Iris Murdoch as an individual and more about the effects of Alzheimer’s disease, and are usually shown from Bayley’s perspective on her starkly depicted decline. It is, after all, an adaptation of Bayley’s memoirs, and it is his voice – not Iris’s – which is being heard throughout the film as he watches with the star-struck loving eyes of the young Bayley, or the anxious and terribly sad eyes of the old Bayley. As Iris inevitably falls into the place where Bayley says he can no longer reach her, she falls away from us too, as readers, spectators, and experiencers of the film and of her character. She becomes more removed and distant, and without a voice. When young Bayley observes how much she loves words, young Iris replies; “if one doesn’t have words, how does one think?” The film’s parameters are clear: Iris is shown to have lost words, and so concomitantly has lost the ability to think.

Dolan, Gordon, and Tincknell link *IRIS* with *SYLVIA* (Christine Jeffs, 2003) and *THE HOURS* (Stephen Daldry, 2002) as films in which “the woman writer’s success is systematically occluded by her mental collapse, while the price she pays for her creativity is presented as a high one.”²⁸ While there is no direct correlation asserted in the film between her wild younger self and her later affliction, this approach to the film does highlight the concentration on the physical aspects of Murdoch and not the cerebral or creative. The state of Murdoch’s diseased brain is conveyed through images of MRI scans and skull X-rays, immediately contrasted with the smooth, open face of young Iris, the vibrantly provocative livewire. Haiduc observes, “as her formidable self is gradually eroded to a caricature, the biggest losses are shown to be her autonomy and her language.”²⁹ In fact, the erosion is not gradual, it is starkly polarized, with the film showing no concern for the prolific writer’s middle age. The binary opposition between

young Iris/Winslet and old Iris/Dench compels the viewer to confront the element of tragedy that the film is so keen to convey, eliminating any nuance or subtlety in Murdoch's own voice or personality. Of course, it can be argued that Murdoch's voice is most vividly heard through her novels and her philosophical works, but what the film creates is a persona of Murdoch for mainstream culture, and the operation of this is profoundly telling about the ways in which the female creative mind has been represented on screen. Vitally, the way in which the persona of Murdoch the writer is occupied by Winslet, the transgressive English Rose, and Dench, the national treasure, can be understood as an exceptionally effective constellation of stars of stage, screen, and page, in the telling of a story of an elderly couple coping with the reality of dementia. As if to drive home the contemporary relevance and clinical impetus behind the film, there is a message from actor David Hyde Pierce on the DVD extras about living with Alzheimer's disease and how to seek support as a carer.

This concentration on the physical and practical elements of the life Murdoch and Bayley shared ensures that *IRIS* is not a film about the work of Iris Murdoch. As if by way of apology, it is often said when discussing the film that to make a film about a thinker is not easy. Margarethe von Trotta attempted this task with the recent film *HANNAH ARENDT* (2012). Von Trotta focused on the period in Arendt's life when she reported for *The New Yorker* on the trial of Adolf Eichmann, which led her to formulate her famous position on what she termed "the banality of evil." The film records the philosopher's observation of Eichmann in the witness box, her reactions to his testimony, and the development of her thinking by showing her discussing the issues with friends and colleagues and with her students. The film conveys the scandal that Arendt's suggestions caused, and gives her the floor of a packed lecture theater to account for her position and explain herself. This is a film about a philosopher who had a biography that many filmmakers would have chosen to foreground but who in this film is portrayed as a woman with a trajectory of thought and intellectual development. *IRIS* affords Murdoch the opportunity to make the occasional pronouncement which is in line with her philosophical concerns, such as "nothing matters except loving what is good" (delivered as the couple are washing up the dinner dishes), and she is shown at a lectern speaking some lines from Psalm 139, which are cited in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*.³⁰ These glimpses of her philosophical thought, however, are tied in the film to her relationship to Bayley, as he responds with the question "Am I good?" and by cutting to Bayley's adoring face as Murdoch talks about how "thy right hand shall hold me."

Sally Chivers assesses *IRIS* as a film about Bayley's care for his afflicted wife and notes that institutional care is presented as offering what Iris needs "in order to die happy."³¹ A scene of young Bayley chasing after young Iris on their bicycles has John shouting that he cannot keep up with her, and Iris replying that she is like Proteus and he has to keep hold of her. The next scene shows a panic-strick-

en Bayley driving round the streets trying to find Iris as she has wandered out of the house while his attention was distracted. Chivers describes how the film presents Bayley as a “selfless but inadequate life partner and sole caregiver”³² and demonstrates how, by the end of the film, his inability to keep the house clean or to stop Iris from running away leads inexorably to her institutionalization: “The new focus on the distressing state of the couple’s home allows audience members to gently shift from wanting Iris to stay at home with John to seeing the apparent need for her to enter an institution.”³³ The faces of the nurses are benign and welcoming, and we see Iris gently dancing in a world of her own, looking happy and content. In the next scene she is dead and John is left to say “she was so quiet when she died.” The illness has won, and Iris is beaten. The film’s residue is one of tragedy in relation to the defeated Murdoch and pathos in relation to the deserted Bayley as he fondles the slip that clothed her naked body, and a stone is shown sinking down through the water to the riverbed.

The Final Word on IRIS

This analysis of *IRIS* as a tripartite star text enables the operation of celebrity, performance, and stardom to be exposed as infused with questions of how women age on screen and in popular culture more widely. In a striking conflation of the three women, one scene shows Dench as Murdoch as she is becoming aware of her dwindling grasp on language and thought, arriving at a television studio for an interview with broadcaster Joan Bakewell. She is confronted with a large screen on which her younger self, in the form of the telegenic Winslet, is shown speaking to an interviewer with an eloquence and command of which she is no longer capable. This interweaving of media appearances and performances presents a particularly acute demonstration of the ways in which stardom and celebrity are put into play in this film. The scene highlights the ways in which the actresses inhabit Iris Murdoch and the operation of a dual naming of the stars in each figure: both Winslet and Murdoch are visible on the television screen, and Dench and Murdoch are visible to the spectator of the interview.

The inhabiting of Iris Murdoch’s persona as a vehicle for star performances based on her loss of capacity and a clinical exposition of the traumas of living with Alzheimer’s disease prompts an assessment of the ways in which female thinkers and writers are portrayed in popular cinema. At the forefront of this is the matter of whose perspective is being shown and whose voice is being heard. Then there is the question of which elements of the woman’s life are foregrounded – biographical, psychological, or intellectual – and whether the camera’s gaze is a pathologizing one. *IRIS* grimly illustrates how a star persona can be hijacked by a social concern or cultural preoccupation. In the last couple of years, the discovery of Murdoch’s correspondence with Philippa Foot and Brigid Brophy has drawn her bisexuality and adventurous love life into the forefront of

her public image. Although Murdoch's novels and philosophical writings are the subject of a great deal of academic and scholarly work, her private life continues to dominate her public profile. Even her appearance has been effaced as photographs of Kate Winslet and Judi Dench now adorn the covers of later editions of John Bayley's memoirs. Murdoch continues to be seen as a character in a dramatic biography rather than a uniquely influential contributor to British intellectual history, and the film *IRIS* has provided the drama with a stellar cast and *mise-en-scène*.

