

and is in position in front of the diningroom. At that moment a car approaches, which Dora thinks must be the bishop's, but it is Noel Spens who alights from it. She wants him to leave at once, but he refuses, saying that he has come to cover the installation of the new bell for his newspaper. Dora is anxious for Paul not to see Noel, who says that she should either fight Paul or submit completely. Frantically Dora runs into Michael's office, where she interrupts a talk he is having with Toby. She wants him to get rid of Noel, but before he can do so, the bishop's arrival is announced. During the service the bell is given the name of Gabriel. When Dora takes out a handkerchief out of her pocket, an envelope containing a note for Toby falls onto the grass and is picked up by Noel, who thinks that the note is for Toby. Toby feels that on the one hand he cannot go on with the plan, but on the other hand he does not want to disappoint Dora. When he tries to talk to Michael about it, Dora bursts in, which is reason enough for Toby to leave. He walks back to the lodge, where Nick, who is obviously a little drunk, tells him he wants to have a long talk. He accuses Toby of loving both Dora and Michael. Toby attacks Nick, but Nick proves the better fighter. Keeping Toby down, he demands that Toby makes a full confession to James Tayper Pace, threatening to betray him if he does not. That night Dora waits for Toby in vain. Finally she walks to the lodge, but when she looks in, she sees Noel talking to Nick about publishing the story of the practical joke with the old bell. Dora goes back to the barn in a confused state of mind and pushes against the bell, which gives off a thunderous sound. Within minutes all the inhabitants of Imber Court have gathered in the barn. After the first remarks and questions Dora is taken back to her room and sleeps until seven, when she is woken up by the sounds of the procession. She sees over a hundred people gathered on the terrace first looking at the new bell and then starting to follow it towards the abbey gate. But in the middle of the causeway through the lake the trolley tips and the bell falls into the water. Dora hurries to the place where the bell disappeared, but she is pushed aside by Catherine, who has a strange look on her face. Catherine says that what happened was a sign to her and that she cannot go through the abbey gate because of her wicked heart. She then walks into the lake with the intention of drowning herself. Dora goes in after her, but instead of pulling Catherine out, she is dragged into the water and is in danger of drowning herself. Suddenly someone approaches, who Dora realizes must be one of the nuns, who rescues her and Catherine. When Catherine has regained consciousness, she runs to Michael and embraces him.

The next day Paul leaves for London. Dora remains behind to do the packing. Catherine is taken to London to a clinic, where she is to undergo tests to find out if she is schizophrenic. Toby also leaves for London. The old bell will be studied at the British Museum and the new bell will be recovered from the lake. It has been found out that sabotage to the causeway caused the accident. Michael suspects that Nick has been trying to prevent his sister's entry into the abbey. It comes as a shock when James tells him that Toby has revealed all that has passed between them and that he, James, has sent Toby to London. Michael has a strong sense of *Déjà Vu*, Toby playing the role once played by Nick. Suddenly they are warned that Nick's dog is making a strange howling noise. On investigation they find out that Nick has shot himself.

Four weeks later only Michael and Dora are left at the estate. Dora is gradually making herself indispensable to Michael, taking over more and more tasks as the others leave one by one. She discusses her marriage with Michael, and to her it is quite clear that it makes no sense to return to Paul before she can treat him as an equal. Michael also sees clearly that Paul is a violent and bullying man. He suggests that she return to her painting, a suggestion which Dora takes up and by chance she is invited to share a flat with a friend in Bath, where she will be able to pursue her studies on a small grant and take on a part-time teaching job.

One day Michael receives a letter from Toby, which makes it clear that for Toby the whole incident is closed. But to Michael the incident of Nick's death is not closed, because he feels that his love for Nick has only become stronger. He has even talked to the abbess about it. Only slowly does he become his own former self.

After some weeks Michael receives a letter from Mrs Mark, that Catherine is much better, so that he can visit her to tell her about Nick's death. When waiting for his train, he tells Dora that Imber Court will become part of the abbey. Dora does not care very much about it, because she realizes that for her Imber belongs to the past. Even the sound of the new bell seems to come from a different world.

III SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

The Philosopher's Pupil (1983)

The narrator in *The Philosopher's Pupil*, Iris Murdoch's twenty-first and most bulkiest novel so far, is a certain "N", an anonymous character, who says at the end of the novel: "It is my role in life to listen to stories. I also had the assistance of a certain lady." His story begins with a dramatic dialogue: a quarrel between husband and wife resulting in a fatal car accident. The place where the story is set is the fictitious southern English town of Ennistone (N's town), a town with many prehistoric remains. One of these is a hot water spring, which stands central in the novel. This spring, the water of which is believed to have healing properties, offers the possibility of innumerable philosophical, religious, literary or erotic speculations. We get to know part of the population of Ennistone, and especially the McCaffrey family. George McCaffrey had been the pupil of the philosopher John Robert Razonov, the only celebrity of Ennistone, until he became estranged from this man. Razonov has returned to Ennistone after a long life among his fellow philosophers, presumably with the intention to write his last and greatest book. During a large part of the story George McCaffrey tries to get into contact with the philosopher again mainly in order to be rescued from his 'demons'. In the eyes of his family and mistress George is indeed either obsessed or insane. The car accident is an example of George's extreme behaviour: drunk and furious he pushes his car into a canal with his wife Stella inside, but he immediately rescues her. When he finally meets his former teacher, he is rejected. In another fit of anger he drowns Razonov in his bath, only to be told later that Razonov would have died anyway because he had taken an overdose of poison. The main theme of the novel is redemption: George

McCaffrey is redeemed after a gruelling experience. He becomes a different man, no longer violent and dangerous, and faithful to his wife after a long affair with his mistress Diane, Enniston's only whore. Also Razonov is redeemed when he accepts the fact that his philosophical work is no longer making any progress and when he sacrifices earthly love.

The Good Apprentice (1986)

The title of this novel refers to 20-year-old Edward Baltram, a university student who travels a great distance between his two gods, his friend and fellow student Mark Wilsden and his father Jesse Baltram, an eccentric bohemian painter, who begat Edward upon a model and who had never shown any interest in the boy. One of the first scenes of the novel is the death of Mark Wilsden, for which Edward is responsible: before going off to visit a girl, he feeds Mark a sandwich laden with drugs. Mark's death initiates Edward's descent into a living hell reserved for people who destroy what they love most. Here we are introduced to other people who have committed similar crimes. Edward attends a séance in order to communicate with his friend, but he receives a message, which he interprets as a call for help from his father who lives in Segard, a place in the marshes near the English coast. Here he finds Jesse Baltram, once a man who held everyone in thrall, but who now lives in miserable circumstances and is probably senile. He is nursed by his wife, May, and Edward's half sisters, Bettina and Ilona, who do this out of self-interest. Here Edward falls in love with Mark's sister, Brownie, but she ends up marrying someone else. After the death of his father Edward has to come to terms with all his losses in order to save himself. It is a journey from hell to purgatory, but it is a cleansing process without false consolations or illusions. On the surface this novel is a social comedy, but underneath we find a negative theology both offering a complete libertinism and a complete puritanism in moral life.

The Book and the Brotherhood (1988)

In *The Book and the Brotherhood* Iris Murdoch describes the collective midlife crisis of six characters, who form the brotherhood of the title. The members of the group live all over London. They are surrounded by some minor characters, but, as in other novels by Iris Murdoch, this limited number of people constitutes a kind of micro-world. The first few chapters of the book are concerned with a reunion of old students at one of the colleges of Oxford University. Slowly it becomes clear that a group of these students, all financially well-off, have decided to furnish one of them with the money necessary to devote all his time to the writing of a book. They have adopted this unusual plan because they all felt incapable of starting something really new, in spite of early promises and expectations. The problem which arises during the writing of this book is that David Crimond, the writer, whom the others think an exceptionally intelligent man, becomes

increasingly left-wing in his political convictions, whereas those who are financing him all belong to the political centre. They are afraid of compromising themselves, when it becomes clear that in the book Crimond wants to destroy the society in which they feel at home. Apart from being a comedy of manners, the novel is pervaded by philosophical argument, which is usual in a Murdoch novel. The central question that is explored is: what sort of life can we live in a world divorced from all that is good? Gerard, one of the main characters, has the idea that ideals of mutual help and friendship will be enough. Or should we be content with just a 'decent' society.

The Message to the Planet (1989)

The central character in this philosophical novel is Alfred Ludens, a tiresome young don, whose preoccupation is genius. Not only is he working on a book about Leonardo da Vinci, he is also convinced of the brilliance as a mathematical genius and of the mysterious powers of professor Marcus Vallar, who, he believes, has an important message to mankind. At the age of twenty Marcus Vallar had made a very important contribution to the advancement of mathematics, but from then on he had wanted to do something else with his life. So he had become a painter, eventually surpassing his teacher. At the beginning of the novel we find ourselves among a group of friends who all more or less share Alfred's obsession with Marcus Vallar, although they both revere and hate him. They agree that there is more to Marcus than just cleverness. Some wonder whether he is mad, but they are all convinced that he has a great spiritual power like that of a magician. It has been his power that has been the cause of Gildas Herne, an Anglican priest, losing his faith and the Irish poet Pat Fenman believes Marcus responsible for the fatal illness he is suffering from. They all agree that only Marcus can cure him. But Alfred Ludens is alone in his belief that Marcus Vallar is a great thinker with an important message to mankind. In reality Marcus Vallar is a rather ambivalent figure. At one time he finds himself practically imprisoned in a sanatorium, where he has been taken by his daughter Irine, who knows that he is half crazy, and Alfred, who wants him to be able to work on his message to the planet. But Alfred has to find out the hard way that he has been deceiving himself: Marcus Vallar dies before any message has been extracted from him.