

HOW A SCULPTOR MIGHT FEEL ABOUT A LUMP OF STONE: CRAFTING A MURDOCHIAN WORLD

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Rebel Republic Films has optioned Iris Murdoch's *The Italian Girl* and I have been developing the screenplay with the director Garo Berberian. The novel's vivid characters, exciting twists, exquisite scene descriptions and challenging storylines about social issues are the perfect elements to turn into a filmic and visual form.

Iris Murdoch's worlds are meticulously constructed, like miniature dollhouses, with every detail in place. In her highly visual novels, she doesn't paint flat image but creates a multi-dimensional world, complete with colours, moods, sounds, smells and emotion.

"These were the old June smells, the wet midsummer night smells, the sound of the river and the distant waterfall. An owl hooted, slowly, deliberately, casting out one inside the other his expanding rings of sound. That too I remembered." With only a few sentences, the opening set is scene with so much rich detail – sounds, smells, light, memories, feelings – and for a filmmaker, her words are the perfect material to start crafting a film.

The protagonist Edmund talks about an intense loving emotion only once, when his looking at blocks of boxwood: *"I can imagine how a sculptor might feel about a lump of stone... But pieces of wood can quite send my imagination racing even in the handling of them"*. I feel the same when working with Murdoch's words, carefully and lovingly shaping her novel into a script, using the rich material she has gifted us.

The *Italian Girl's* precise, elegant structure of 21 chapters like a revolving theatrical set give a natural rhythm to the script. Every character inhabits their distinct space, like an extension of their personality: this demands the unusual solution of having a range of colour palettes for every character – as opposed to a singular one for the film. Her art references are key in painting not only a visual motif but also social and moral narratives.

The novel describes a myriad of objects, which Murdoch often uses to explain moods, personalities and their moral state – Isabel's trinkets, Maggie's red dress, the fern *'which never grew but never died either'*, the painting *'which might have been by Constable but wasn't which my father had got in a sale at a price for which my mother never forgave him'*, Otto's jug of water full of insects. One of the key aspects of the adaptation would be to translate it into the film.

Most importantly, the Murdochian characters – their backstories, feelings, dramas, secrets and traumas are the crucial elements to breathe life into this story which we hope to turn into a cinematic form soon.

(Producer and Writer, Rebel Republic Films)