研究発表要旨

**Truthful Lies and Fantasy Realism:
Iris Murdoch’s Under the Net
and Muriel Spark’s The Comforters**

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Iris Murdoch and Muriel Spark have shared a certain attitude to literature which strongly characterizes their works and also reflects the character of an age in which they have lived and written: the age of Liberalism, in which the glorious idea of individual freedom has become our torment rather than our emancipation. The two authors believed that fiction had lost its power to transform the lives of people and that it had to regain this power ? the power to influence the real lives of the real people through fictional narratives.

Both Spark and Murdoch have endeavoured to expound their ideas to the readers through their fiction, as well as through, respectively, a speech (Spark’s “Desegregation of Art”) and an essay (Murdoch’s “Against Dryness”). They experiment with their theories on life and literature in The Comforters (1957) and Under the Net (1954), both of which center around two important themes that modern fiction must face: the nature of narrative, and the representation of reality. “Stories deal in motive,” says Cheryl Mattingly, anthropologist and author of Healing Dramas and Clinical Plots: The Narrative Structure of Experience (1998). Mattingly’s book studies the activities of “occupational therapists”, who work in hospitals with patients whose bodies have been irrevocably damaged through diseases or accidents. Their task is to “locate desire” in these patients, who have lost their sense of “human time”, and become unable to see their lives as narratives. Curiously, this is more or less the same problem that challenges the protagonists of Murdoch’s and Spark’s novels. In the books’ respective openings, Jake (Murdoch’s hero) and Caroline (Spark’s heroine) both find themselves incapable of creating what Mattingly calls “a space of desire” for themselves. Instead, they are urged on through a series of adventures not by their own will, but, in Caroline’s case, by the intention of the invisible author, and, in Jake’s case, by the coincidental consequences of his own lack of motive and inability to take decisive action. In the end, however, they have hope of regaining control of their own lives, through the same vocation ? that is, through writing fiction.

Both novels ultimately tell us that our extraordinary ability to envision various destinations for ourselves and to construct and carry out narratives of our own lives also makes us vulnerable to regrets and uncertainties about our past actions. Faced with an infinite number of possibilities in every moment, we become overwhelmed by the multitude of potential narratives which constantly threaten to seduce us into the consoling but closed realm of myths and fantasies. If we are to make life endurable as well as meaningful, however, we must constantly create new spaces of desire for us to traverse