**Iris Murdoch Conference at Kingston,
15th～16th September, 2006**

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This year's international Iris Murdoch Society Conference was the most recent of the three which took place in Britain. The first in 2002 was held at St. Anne's College, Oxford, where Iris Murdoch had taught; the second, in 2004, at Kingston University, site of the Iris Murdoch Centre which stocks the Iris Murdoch Archives, the third in 2006 also at Kingston. Participants this time came not only from Britain and Ireland but also from several European countries - Spain, France, Holland, Sweden, as well as from North America, and one from Australia. I attended all three conferences, and this year gave a paper.

　My personal interest in Iris Murdoch's work dated from when I was an undergraduate at Somerville (Iris Murdoch's own college at Oxford) and reading her novels avidly as soon as they came out. Later, as lecturer in British literature and art at Paris 7 Denis Diderot University, I met Iris Murdoch personally at a colloquium in her honour, hosted by the University of Caen, France. This was in the mid-seventies and her novel, The Unicorn, was one of the set books for the French national top competitive exam, the Agregation, which I was then teaching. My interest in Iris Murdoch's work continued throughout my university career so I was happy to join the Iris Murdoch Society in 2002.

　The Iris Murdoch Society was formed at the Modern Language Association Convention in 1986 and publishes a Newsletter with Iris Murdoch's biographer, Peter Conradi as advisor. After our welcome by the representative of Kingston University and by Dr.Anne Rowe, chief organiser of the conference and European editor of the Newsletter, also at Kingston, Professor Conradi gave the first plenary lecture on "Laughing at pain." He usefully reminded us, at a conference on "Morality," that Iris Murdoch, however seriously committed both to philosophy and novel-writing, had always time for humour, especially a compassionate humour. By contrast, the second plenary, by Professor William Schweiker, University of Chicago, on "The Moral Fate of Fictive Persons: On Iris Murdoch's Humanism," made the elevated sphere of "theological ethics" understandable to non-specialists. Three panel sessions for participants later developed the theme of morality as linked to theological ethics: "Healing, Consolation and Grace," "The Faces of Love," and "Sacred Spaces: Iris Murdoch's London." There was also a special seminar for students doing research on Iris Murdoch.

　The afternoon started with a lecture by Professor Justin Broackes of Brown University: "Reading *The Sovereignty of Good,*" which attended to Iris Murdoch's main ideas as a moral philosopher interested in religion, thematically introducing panels on: "Religion, Morality and Buddhism" (chaired by Professor Conradi), "The Gothic, Stalking and Mysticism in *The Sea, The Sea,*" and "Murdoch's Moral Philosophy;" as well as a seminar on the moral issues of *Nuns and Soldiers,* (1980).

　The second day, Professor Richard Todd, University of Leiden, questioned: in his plenary: "What is Jackson's Dilemma?" This challenged the view that the author was already suffering acutely from Alzheimer's disease when writing her last novel. A lively discussion followed in which we heard about the clinical research being done on the language impairment of Alzheimer sufferers.

　Subsequent panels were on: "Murdoch and Masculinity; Male Dominance, Homosexuality and Adultery," "Murdoch, Morality and the Novel" (the panel of my own paper on the figure of the Pole in *Nuns and Soldiers*), "War, the Holocaust and the Moral Responsibility of the Writer." A "Teaching Panel," had teachers of Iris Murdoch discussing their experiences.

　The final session began with a plenary talk by Mark Patrick Hederman, Benedictine monk at Glenstal Abbey, Murroe, Limerick: "Iris Murdoch, Morality and the Novel." Then followed our last panels on: "Iris Murdoch's Reception in Spain," "Authorial Fingerprints and Narrative Devices," and "Philosophers, Preachers, Parables and Particulars." This last summed up the diversity of the conference, so successfully inter-disciplinary among academics, and with refreshing non-academic input from general readers.

　We left the conference well-pleased and intellectually stimulated, eager to continue research and teaching. To my mind this conference was in many ways the best of the three we have had in Britain.