**Current Scholarship on Iris Murdoch**

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I am delighted to have been invited to provide an overview of current Murdoch scholarship to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Iris Murdoch Society of Japan. The Japanese branch of Murdoch scholarship is integral to Murdoch's international status and is illustrated by the fact that an essay by Chiho Omichi on 'Netsuke in Iris Murdoch's Novels' will be included in the third "International" edition of the *Iris Murdoch Review*, to be published in 2009. The early twenty first century is, in fact, witnessing an expansion in Murdoch scholarship worldwide. The "Ethical Turn", or the centrality of the relationship between ethics and literature, which has become an established aspect of contemporary literary theory, is in part responsible for this revival. Murdoch voiced deep concern about the voguish theoretical trends that dominated the latter part of the twentieth century, greatly fearing that the over - theorization of literary texts would obscure their moral status. Against deconstructionism and post-structuralism she upheld steadfastly the idea that language, and thus literature, is soaked in the moral, and that the reading of literature is intrinsically related to the ethical awareness of her readers. Iris Murdoch is being cited as one of the Ethical Turn's central advocates because of her insistence that the serious study of literature brings moral benefit to readers; because she understands that the narrowness of philosophy needs the expansiveness of literature, and because she believes that in an age where religion no longer takes precedence in individual lives, that literature acts as a mirror through which readers can meditate upon the central dilemmas of human existence: the nature of freedom, of suffering, of goodness and love.

Significant new archival material was acquired for the Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies at Kingston University in the past year which will greatly enrich the Centre's existing archives, comprising the annotated libraries from Murdoch's Oxford home and her London flat, her unpublished book on Heidegger, her notebook on Sartre, the Conradi archives, and letter runs and other related materials acquired since 2004. More than 100 letters from Murdoch to the Canadian teacher and scholar, Scott Dunbar, were purchased by the Iris Murdoch Society and Kingston University. Many of these letters are of a personal nature, while others record educational, philosophical and theological discussions. The Centre was privileged to be gifted over 100 letters from Murdoch to the painter, Barbara Dorf, which pay testament to the two women's love of the visual arts and are accompanied by a short memoir of Murdoch written by Miss Dorf. Also, 180 letters from Murdoch to an Oxford contemporary and lifelong friend, Denis Paul, were purchased by the University and the Iris Murdoch Society, with the help of a grant from the Friends of the National Libraries. These letters span four decades and include Murdoch's responses to Paul's books, papers, plays and poems, offering advice, both practical and critical, as well as encouragement. The centre is currently bidding for funds to buy 168 letters from Murdoch to the French poet and novelist Raymond Queneau. We intend to launch an appeal to the Iris Murdoch Society to help purchase these crucially important letters for the archives. The Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies is now consulted by Murdoch scholars and researchers worldwide. The many diverse queries which come from many corners of the world pay testament to the richness and cosmopolitan nature of current Murdoch scholarship. The fourth international conference on Iris Murdoch, 'Intertextuality and Interdisciplinarity', held at Kingston University 12th & 13th September 2008, reflected this diversity in current Murdoch research. The conference was attended by 110 people and attracted an unprecedented number of papers - 48 in all - given by delegates from Britain, USA, France, Spain, Turkey, Norway, Sweden, Portugal, Georgia and Taiwan. The plenary speakers were Don Cupitt, Patricia Waugh, Heather Widdows and Anne Rowe, and panels covered such various topics as theology, gender, femininity, psychoanalysis, narrative techniques, linguistics, politics, links between Murdoch's life and work, teaching Murdoch and new readings of her novels. We were honoured to welcome representatives of the Iris Murdoch Society of Japan to the conference. The fifth international conference on Iris Murdoch at Kingston in 2010 will showcase research undertaken in the Murdoch archives at the Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies. Other European universities are also focusing on Murdoch's work: the University of Barcelona is hosting an exhibition and conference on Iris Murdoch between 17 November 2008 and 28 February 2009, and the 16th Metu British Novelists Conference will this year be on Iris Murdoch and her Work, and will be held in Ankara, Turkey, on 15-16 December 2008. Yet another international conference on Iris Murdoch will be held at the University of Porto in Portugal on 26 and 27 February 2009.

The first edition of the *Iris Murdoch Review*, which replaces the *Iris Murdoch News Letter* (1987 - 2007), was published in January 2008 by the newly-founded Kingston University Press. The Review is a more substantial publication than the former *News Letter* and will publish longer, peer reviewed essays. The second edition of the *Iris Murdoch Review*, which will be published early in 2009, will be a special edition comprising an unpublished memoir of Iris Murdoch by David Morgan, a student whom she taught at the Royal College of Art in the 1960s, and who became a life-long friend. One of the most significant recent publications on Murdoch is Valerie Purton's *Iris Murdoch: A Chronology* published by Palgrave in 2008, which provides an excellent counterpart to Peter Conradi's authorized biography. Purton has provided a most useful and illuminating contribution to Murdoch scholarship.

Other recent and forthcoming publications include Afaf Jamil Khogeer's *The Integration of Self: Women in the Fiction of Iris Murdoch and Margaret Drabble* (University Press of America, 2006); Megan Lafferty's *Iris Murdoch's Ethics*, published by Continuum in 2007, and the proceedings of the second international conference on Murdoch, *Iris Murdoch: A Reassessment*, edited by Anne Rowe, published by Palgrave in 2006. Palgrave will also publish the proceedings of the third conference, *Iris Murdoch and Morality*, to be edited by Anne Rowe and Avril Horner, and *Iris Murdoch: A Literary Life* by Priscilla Martin and Anne Rowe, in the summer of 2009. *Iris Murdoch's Scenes: An Anthology of Moral Imagination*, edited by Dr Simone Roberts, is to be published by McFarland Press, USA, also in spring/summer, 2009. Of particular interest to our Japanese colleagues might be *Sacred Space, Beloved City: Iris Murdoch's London* by Cheryl Bove and Anne Rowe, which will be published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing in December 2008. This book celebrates Iris Murdoch's love of London and contains essays, London walks, maps and illustrations of significant London landmarks from Murdoch's novels by Paul Lesau. All proceeds will be donated to the Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies.

This impressive level of research and publications indicates the richness of current Murdoch scholarship worldwide. The Iris Murdoch Society in the UK, Europe and the USA wish to congratulate the Iris Murdoch Society of Japan on ten years of contributing to Iris Murdoch's global significance. I hope that the future will forge closer links between the Japanese Society and its European and American counterparts.
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