研究発表要旨

**‘THE RIDERLESS HORSE MOVES ON’:  
EQUINE SYMBOLISM IN  
IRIS MURDOCH'S *JACKSON'S DILEMMA***

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In a previous paper, delivered at the Iris Murdoch Society of Japan annual conference in October 2000, I argued that Iris Murdoch's poetry is consistently informed by a humanistic desire to marry, or investigate the possibility of fusion of the real-physical and the spiritual unknowable in language and art. By identifying and considering animalistic images, animal symbolism, and, in particular, the motif of the horse which recurs repeatedly throughout the text, this new paper proposes, locates and discusses a remarkably similar source of creative nourishment in Murdoch’s last novel, Jackson’s Dilemma (1995).

Though its creator was deceptively skilled as an inventor of compelling plot, I wish to demonstrate that Murdoch’s fictional prose also relies upon a complicated and interwoven patterning of symbolism for its potent dramatic effects and energies. This symbolic accentuation and embroidering of plot events can offer a reader subtle, but essential hints as to the otherwise hidden ‘deeper’ implications of a modern ‘story’. Deftly drawn from various spheres, including mythology and the canon of literature itself, from ancient to modern, Murdoch’s animal symbols are carefully chosen, deliberately placed and, as I will show, often sagely reinvented to suit the purpose of the narrative passage hand.

This paper concentrates on the use of the horse as a mechanism in Jackson’s Dilemma through which the troubled human characters are able to achieve compassionate union with nature, make sense of the flux and contingency of the ordinary world and achieve self-knowledge and emotional expressiveness through interacting with the natural realm.

Beginning with a short poem of Murdoch’s, ‘The Brown Horse’ (1977), I attempt to rationalize Murdoch’s preoccupation with equine (and equestrian) imagery and its relation in her poetry to the worlds of man, nature and art. I then offer a reading of Jackson’s Dilemma using the placement of horses, both literal and symbolical, at regular junctures in the novel as points on a map to understanding what I believe to be one of this intriguing work’s fundamental concerns: the individual’s quest not for ‘God’ but for moral goodness which occupies so much of Murdoch’s writing.

It is my belief that Murdoch is supremely aware of the power of symbols and that her decision to use animal imagery, primarily the equine motif, so repeatedly and pointedly in Jackson’s Dilemma is not mere coincidence but reflects its author’s attitude towards moral philosophy, romanticism, ‘realism’ and ‘symbolism’(indeed ‘magic-realism’) and the relationships between all of these areas, and may be interpreted as an important clue as to how the author wishes this fascinating and enigmatic work of fiction to be read and understood.