研究発表要旨

**Characters and Characterization in  
Iris Murdoch's *The Good Apprentice***

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In 1987 the doyen of American literary criticism, Harold Bloom, delivered the following pronouncement on Iris Iris Murdoch’s new novel: ‘If **The Good Apprentice** marks the start of her strongest phase, and it may, then a great novel could yet come, rather surprisingly in the …form of the 19th-century realistic novel.’

A novelist whom Bloom considers to have achieved greatness is George Eliot and, in his book **The Western Canon**, Bloom enlightens us as to the nature of her achievement. He praises Eliot as a writer who, like the other ‘geniuses’ Bloom identifies ? Emily Dickinson, Blake and Shakespeare ? ‘rethought everything for herself,’ going on to identify Murdoch as a modern writer who is Eliot’s ‘descendant’ in possessing an ‘unallied directness that frees her from any excessive self-consciousness that would inhibit her willingness to judge her own characters, implicitly and explicitly.’ While Bloom observes that, as a twentieth-century writer, Murdoch could not hope to attain Eliot’s nineteenth-century possession of ‘moral certainty,’ he describes her elsewhere as the most traditional of modern novelists.

In this paper I analyze one point of dissimilarity between the two novelists, and that is in their notion of characterization. In all of George Eliot’s works and perhaps especially in her most satisfying work, **Middlemarch**, there is a tragic inevitability about each character’s fate. Ironically, this sense of inevitability co-exists with a persuasion of each character’s possessing free will. Even despite Eliot’s predilection for assuming the role of omniscient narrator, a nineteenth?century novelist’s habit which Murdoch successfully avoids, as we read Eliot’s novels, there is a level at which her characters seem curiously to exist as individuals freed from authorial restraint. It is as thought they can exist independently of their creator.

In my paper I discuss whether this is true of Murdoch’s characters, focusing on **The Good Apprentice**, the novel which had inspired Bloom to hope that Murdoch finally would achieve a ‘great’ novel. Although Bloom readily acceded Murdoch’s genius, at the same time, he conceded that a writer can be a ‘genius’ and yet fail to produce a ‘great novel’. My conclusion is that Murdoch failed to produce, in **The Good Apprentice**, the ‘rounded,’‘dynamic’ characters some critics insist must ‘people’ a ‘great’ novel. Rather, it is a novel marked by startling denouements and improbable coincidences, inhabited by ‘flat’ and ‘static’ characters whose animation derives from the gratuitous authorial ploys of Murdoch’s granting them exotic names and astonishing abilities. These people inhabit a solipsistic universe in which even their nearest and dearest are not privy to their thoughts and desires. Yet, beneath this surface of masks and secrets lies a world guided by an inscrutable wisdom manifesting in wondrous magic and beneficence, a world which one is tempted to identify as nearly allied to Murdoch’s own religious and philosophic beliefs.

It has often been observed that the novel form has flourished for the past two hundred years and continues to promise to flourish for the foreseeable future because of its amazing flexibility as a literary genre. Although Murdoch’s characters possibly fail to satisfy one’s expectations as ‘believable individuals,’ certainly **The Good Apprentice**, like all of Murdoch’s novels, is thought provoking and original ? not akin to such a nineteenth-century masterpiece as **Middlemarch** but one which might be thought of as a ‘romance’ or ‘fantasy’ rather than a conventional novel.. As Bloom observes, what one might identify as Murdoch’s ‘failures’ as a novelist are more interesting than most other novelists’ ‘victories’.