**“A Place of Wisdom to which we can remove ourselves”:  
The Center for Iris Murdoch Studies  
at Kingston University**

**Anne　Rowe**

Kingston University is delighted to have recently purchased two archives relating to Iris Murdoch. The archives compries Murdoch’s working library from her study at her Oxford home, and the collection of Peter Conradi, Iris Murdoch’s official biographer and Murdoch scholar. The Oxford library comprises over 1000 books, which are divided into Philosophy, Psychology, Theology, Poetry, Literature, History, Art, and Travel. The most significant factor of this collection is that Murdoch has annotated the texts on rear endpapers which often extend to a number of closely written pages; there are also detailed notes written in the margins of many of the books. Peter Conradi’s collection comprises correspondence (including a series of holograph letters), typescripts (including an unpublished book on Heidegger), interviews, transcripts and cassettes.

Funding for the Oxford archive was raised partly through a public appeal organised by the Iris Murdoch Society, on behalf of Kingston University. This appeal resulted in significant donations from the Iris Murdoch Society in Japan, The Iris Murdoch Society in America Europe, and the UK totalling more than ￡40,000, including a single donation of ￡30,000 generated by an item on the BBC Radio 4 PM programme. The appeal fund was thus able to contribute a substantial amount to the purchase of the archives. The smallest, anonymous, donation was ￡5, and a number of contributors wrote movingly to testify that their lives had been altered by reading Murdoch’s novels. The enormous support for the appeal demonstrated the importance of Murdoch’s writing to her individual readers, as well as their determination that the archives should be kept in Britain. Once they have been catalogued by Kingston University, scholars from all over the world will be able to access these important documents for research and teaching purposes. We look forward to meeting many of our Japanese friends who will wish to access the archive.

Kingston University is the natural home for the Murdoch archives for several reasons. The English Department at Kingston University publishes the annual Iris Murdoch Society News Letter and Peter Conradi is an Emeritus Professor here. The University already has a substantial library relating to Iris Murdoch since Dr Anne Rowe teaches a Special Study Module on Murdoch as part of the English Literature undergraduate programme. The University also hosted the second International Conference on Iris Murdoch on September 17th and 18th 2004. The conference attracted a number of important speakers of international acclaim, including Professor Peter Conradi, Dr Stephen Mulhall from New College Oxford, Professor Maria Antonaccio from Bucknell University and Dr Bran Nicol from Portsmouth University. There were 26 papers which generated an exciting and innovative intellectual platform for discussions of Murdoch’s philosophy and novels. Another Conference is planned for September 2006. We look forward to welcoming members of the Iris Murdoch Society Japan to what is sure to be another stimulating few days. John Bayley was present and spoke warmly about how Dame Iris would have loved to share in what was a remarkable and moving occasion.

The Iris Murdoch Centre at Kingston University will provide first-class research facilities, not only for Murdoch scholars but also for researchers working on issues of social, cultural, philosophical and theological importance in the twentieth century. As Murdoch scholarship becomes enriched by work on these archives, their significance will filter down into the analysis, and ultimately the teaching and reading of Murdoch’s twenty six novels and her philosophic writings. The establishing of a Center for Iris Murdoch Studies, has, however, a wider and more profound significance. Murdoch was deeply concerned about the loss of religious faith that had characterised the twentieth century, and although she herself did not believe in God, neither did she want the concept of the holy to be lost. She believed it to be crucial that we start to take in conceptions of religion without God and develop meditation as a religious exercise. For her, literature, philosophy and art offered an alternative place of sanctuary where goodness can be attempted; here, we can find “a place of wisdom to which we can remove ourselves” in order to search for truth, strive for knowledge and learn compassion and understanding. A Center for Iris Murdoch Studies will provide just such a place. The Iris Murdoch Society UK and Kingston University are grateful and indebted to our Japanese friends and fellow Murdoch scholars who gave so generously to our appeal. We look forward to extending you the warmest of welcomes.