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‘If people really care about something’: Reviving with Iris (IMSJ President’s Message)

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In the gorgeously-titled ‘Iris Murdoch Regrets That She Was Never A Teenager’ – a precious little piece in the humble collection of Murdoch’s *Occasional Essays*¹ co-edited by our society’s founder, the much missed Professor Yozo Muroya, and myself – Iris suggests that: ‘If people really care about something and enjoy something, their taste can become deeper and more refined’ (Murdoch 1998, 30). Anxiously marooned in an intellectual drought (no ‘annual’ (*sic*) IMSJ conference for 2 long, barren years) foisted on all by the prolonged, still unfinished COVID crisis, we Japan-based Murdochians felt sorely deprived of that unifying something we both ‘care about . . . and enjoy.’ Cautious, but determined to revive, we advertised a ‘comeback’ Zoom conference for Saturday 26 November 2022, and kept our fingers crossed all year.

But what a resounding, rewarding success the event was: the 22nd Conference of the Iris Murdoch Society of Japan. Our online debut: more attendees, from more countries, than *ever before*. To all who congregated, those who so generously presented (and chaired and listened to) research papers and storied emotional anecdotes, thank you. It all involved mountainous preparation – late night ‘rehearsals’, a surfeit of Zoom-related YouTube ‘How To . . .’ links, and many a rethink – acknowledgement is due here, nay overdue, to my indefatigable, patient colleagues on the IMSJ committee. Yet, despite pre-match nerves, it went so smoothly. A great day. A superb set of presentations, ably aided and abetted by some agile-minded meaningful questions and lively pertinent contributions from many an attendee.

It’s a magical thing to be chasing the Murdochian wave, and each of us in our own way seems, at some point, to need to explain what it is that brought us here and keeps us here. And our conferences are the places where that most usefully occurs. Via these communal catalysts to confession, we centre ourselves in, or through, Murdoch’s writings, and the multifarious perspectives of those who join us to elucidate and praise

her. Dr Frances White epitomizes this. Incisive of critical eye, yet always *human* in sensible discernment, she is a mainstay of Murdochian activity and research in the UK, inquisitively furthering Iris's reach in an always elegant, thoughtful, friendly manner. Few of us knew of her childhood links to Japan, and it was of those connections, and how they in turn connect to Murdoch, that she spoke to us in her keynote speech this year. Our gratitude is huge.

Work has already begun on next year's conference (to be 'in person', come hell or high water!). 2023 will be our 25th Anniversary, a fact as incredible as it is reassuring. We endure. We persist. We need new members. We need Murdoch on more curricula. We need to persevere in our well-founded faith that writers such as Murdoch are a necessary potent antidote to the tides of intellectual paucity, reckless short-sighted dumbing down, and lazily-embraced mediocrity that are battering the shores of academia worldwide: thinnest gruel of educational indolence and shirking of pedagogic responsibility smuggled into our lately absent-minded institutions via Trojan horses built of ill-conceived diversity, pat inclusion, and 'progress' for its own sake, regardless of consequence.

But . . . *breathe*. This year's conference more than confirmed that what we are doing is right and worthwhile. And thus, we survive. Survive we must . . . that our attentions to and appreciation of the author and her wonderful works that brought us together become 'deeper and more refined.'

Onward . . . Onward . . . Onward!

(President, The Iris Murdoch Society of Japan)