

Love Central: Another Year With Iris (IMSJ President's Message)

Paul Hullah

Predicable as Christmas, coming gradually then suddenly with its mix of pleasure and panic, post-November conference season, we brace ourselves for that perennial end-of-year IMSJ existential crisis. *Whither shall we go? We need new members. How to smuggle more Murdoch into our teaching? Can we survive . . . ?*

(We can. We will. We have the capability; need to keep kindled the desire. As Geoffrey counsels Marian in *The Unicorn*: 'Stop thinking that life is cheating you. Take what there *is* and use it.')

For, whatever relentless tragedies haunt our nightmarish newsfeeds, this has been a *good year* for the IMSJ and for Murdochian studies in general. Most eventfully, in our 25th year of existence, our 23rd conference took place at Aoyama Gakuin University's elegant Tokyo Shibuya Campus (against suitably invigorating background: their annual student festival, punk soundtrack, *yakitori* fragrance . . .) on Saturday 4 November. Our first 'in person' event (albeit simultaneously broadcast 'live' online) since 2019, with that venerable UK-based energetic engine of international Murdochian academic activities, Dr Miles Leeson, our charismatic guest keynote speaker. A quite splendid day of fruitful discussion: focused new takes on a range of texts, agile insightful ideas delivered with grace, gusto and good humour. Iris would have heartily approved. The spirit (of good

living via selfless attention) still moves within us, stronger, more useful and relevant, in these challenging times. And Dr Leeson's lecture, a revelatory assessment of the synergistic intellectual/academic relationship between Iris and John Bayley was superb: a hitherto largely overlooked open goal for Murdoch scholars seeing yet another reason to demonstrate her (and Bayley's) prescient fecund reach as thinker, reader, and writer. Iris's gift is the gift that keeps giving. And what a gift it is.

Thank you to *all* speakers and attendees. Always, I leave our conferences with a soaring spirit, a fizzing set of fresh ideas, and a lengthy new reading list. These precious academic endeavours summon my imposter syndrome from smug slumbers, but I've become accustomed to that and it's okay. We all need to strive to be better. Iris said stuff like that, and she was right, and, in our humble society's silver anniversary year, it is a pleasure to honour her work, her legacy, once more.

It was apt (and altogether wonderful) to have Miles with us to mark that quarter century of togetherness. He is one third of the 'triumvirate', the Murdoch *Übermenschen* (Rowe-White-Leeson: those most erudite, indefatigable vessels of Murdochian vim), all three of whom we've now been blessed to welcome as a keynote speaker. Alongside countless others in the Chichester Research Centre and Kingston Archive, they work ceaselessly to manage the U.K. Murdoch Society and promote Iris's profile, both scholarly and public-eye-wise. They are our role models, and it was reassuring to hear Dr Leeson's very positive assessment of Murdoch studies going forward, as his main talk on John and Iris's symbiotic artistic synergies morphed organically and usefully into a discussion of (to borrow Bowie, as I love to do) 'Where Are We Now?'

Answer: in a better place than we pessimistically suppose. Personally speaking, I have (at last!) a sabbatical year next year, much of which I will gladly devote to boosting our own society's profile and forging new and stronger links with Murdoch-related ventures elsewhere. Newly appointed Vice President Professor Chiho Omichi and I are making plans. (And I will be introducing more items from Iris's oeuvre into all my own classes in 2025, hopefully thereby ensuring an intake of new blood to quicken our society's pulse yearly.) Murdoch conferences, both literary and philosophical, dot the horizon like affirmative beacons, lighting us easily discouraged travellers' way out of this self-exaggerated rut into which, at the close of each year, we seem prone to sink. This notorious recurrent post-conference dysphoria is needless: something we can consciously work to overcome.

You protest: *but you wrote the same thing here last year!?* And, yes, you have a point. Because, well, it is so. We should be always trying to consolidate, expand, improve, widen our scope. As Iris wrote: '**we don't know the consequences of actions. But we don't know the consequences of inactions either, and inactions are actions.**'

So, let's go forth confidently caring. 'We need a moral philosophy in which the concept of love, so rarely mentioned now, can once again be made central', we learn in *The Sovereignty of Good*. Our conferences, our society, each new Murdochian we meet on our way, we would like proudly to say, all embody and persevere in promoting and propagating that glorious notion, a good and ongoing endeavour: the maintenance (in both

senses) of Murdoch's presence in a disorderly disharmonious world that needs the tonic of her curative moral philosophy and elegant use of language perhaps more than ever before.

Thanks, again, to everyone who shares my concerns. I hope you will share my confidence too, and I hope we will all meet again, regularly and soon. お疲れ様でした。

(President, The Iris Murdoch Society of Japan)

PS. We took Miles whistlestop sightseeing to Kamakura and Enoshima too, hence the *al fresco* images, as well as scene from Tokyo and the conference itself. He sends all IMSJ members his best wishes, and do listen out for a podcast on 'Iris and Japan' which he is hosting soon.


Haste ye back, Leeson sensei!




Dr Leeson visiting Enoshima, with IMSJ President Paul Hullah.



A splendid post-conference dinner, with IMSJ members.



23rd CONFERENCE OF THE IRIS MURDOCH SOCIETY OF JAPAN
 SATURDAY 4 NOVEMBER 2023 13:00-18:00 JAPAN TIME
 AOYAMA GAKUIN UNIVERSITY 15 号館 5 階 第 13 会議室
 Online participation FREE:
 Zoom Meeting ID: 835 0297 1718 Passcode: 687991
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83502971718>



1. 'Agamemnon Class 1939' 名読心
岡野浩史 (平成国際大学 名誉教授)
2. Mishima's Dog Blocking the Waterfall: Nuns and Soldiers and The Sea of Fertility
Fiona Tomkinson (名古屋大学 准教授)
3. Murdochian Engagements with Some Japanese Thought as Exemplified in 'Motorist And Dead Bird'
Paul Hullah (明治学院大学 准教授)
4. Colours in Literature: Iris Murdoch's The Sea, The Sea and Anita Brookner's Hotel du Lac
北村有紀子 (近畿大学 非常勤講師)

Followed by Special Keynote Presentation with Q&A afterwards:
What John Learnt from Iris, What Iris Learnt from John

Dr Miles Leeson
 (Reader in English Literature at the University of Chichester, UK,
 Visiting Research Fellow at Kingston University, UK,
 Director of the Iris Murdoch Research Centre, Editor of *The Iris Murdoch Review*,
 Author of *Iris Murdoch: Philosophical Novelist*, Series Editor of *Iris Murdoch Today*,
 Currently writing *Iris Murdoch: Feminist*, Host of *The Iris Murdoch Podcast*.)
(<https://www.chi.ac.uk/people/miles-leeson/>)



The IMSJ 2023 Poster.



Dr Leeson finally in Tokyo.



Dr Leeson's paper *What John Learned from Iris, What Iris Learned from John*, chaired by IMSJ President Paul Hullah.



Dr Leeson at Sensōji, on conference morning.