

## Notions of Patriotism in Mishima's *The Red and the Green* and Mishima's *Runaway Horses*

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This paper compares and contrasts two novels about patriotism by writers who were contemporaries and alike in producing a considerable body of literary work greeted by both popular and critical acclaim: Iris Murdoch (1919-1999) and Yukio Mishima (1925-1970).

The plot of Murdoch's *The Red and the Green*, published in 1965 and set in Dublin in the week leading up to the Easter Rising in 1916, revolves around the week-long armed rebellion against British rule in Ireland. Carried out by members of both the Irish Republican Brotherhood and the Irish Citizens Army, the Easter Rising was a patriotic movement launched in protest against foreign influence in the country.

Similarly, Isao Inuma, the protagonist of Yukio Mishima's *Runaway Horses* (the second book in his masterpiece the tetralogy *Sea of Fertility*) published in 1969 and set in the early 1930s, is obsessed with a group called 'The League of the Divine Wind' active in Japan in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century which was intent on expelling Western 'barbarians' and restoring the country's ancient samurai culture.

Murdoch and Mishima were both preoccupied by notions of national identity. Murdoch was born in Dublin but moved to London when she was a few weeks old, only visiting Ireland on holidays as a child. Despite living in England most of her life, Murdoch invariably thought of herself as Anglo-Irish. According to her biographer Peter Conradi, Murdoch invested heavily in her 'Irishness' as a 'source of reassurance, a reference-point, a credential, somewhere to start out from and return'.

Mishima also identified fiercely with his nationality, but in his case, it included not only pride in being Japanese but also his heritage as the descendent of samurai and distinguished scholars and government officials. His sense of belonging to a privileged lineage was undoubtedly reinforced by his being taken, as a child, to live with his grandmother, a descendant of Tokugawa Ieyasu, founder of the Tokugawa Shogunate.

*The Red and the Green* was Murdoch's only historical novel and one she engaged in considerable research to write. Andrew Chase-White, the main character of this, her ninth novel, resembles her in biographical details. Like Murdoch, he is the only child of doting Anglo-Irish parents, spending most of his life in England. A soldier, he has come to

Ireland to convalesce from an illness contracted shortly after his regiment's deployment to France during the first world war but, like Murdoch, he has ambivalent feelings about the country. It is at once 'intensely familiar and yet disturbingly alien'.

Similarly, Mishima extensively researched events described in *Runaway Horses* and its protagonist resembles him. Like the martyred heroes of the League who had attempted to reverse the Westernization of Japan, Isao has assembled a group of like-minded friends eager to join him in assassinating financial elites and corrupt government officials to restore the Emperor to his former dignity and reinstate ancient traditions. Isao kills himself after killing a wealthy businessman, his death foreshadowing Mishima's own, when he committed *seppuku* after his plea to the Self Defense Forces to stage a coup was ignored or mocked.

Both Murdoch's and Mishima's novels are paeans to cultures perceived to be in danger of being diluted, distorted or even destroyed by foreign influences.