

The Iris Murdoch Newsletter *of Japan*



No.24

March, 2025

Arriving in Kyoto

Wendy Jones Nakanishi

Arriving in Kyoto by bus on the morning of Saturday November 23rd, my spirits lifted at the prospect of listening to interesting presentations and meeting old friends. It helped that the weather was glorious, and this majestic ancient city was crowded with happy-looking people. So many of them, in fact, thronged the bus terminal in front of Kyoto station that I needed to force my way through rather aggressively (while making effusive apologies – it is Japan, after all) to get to a nearby hotel where I had arranged to meet two other attendees.

I briefly toyed with the idea that our President Paul Hullah's impressively designed poster for our annual meeting had attracted an audience greater than anticipated. It featured a moody-looking young Murdoch leaning against a brick wall, obviously pondering the meaning of life. Alas, the explanation for the crowds was more prosaic. First, there had been (such a rarity in Japan) nationwide disruption to the shinkansen bullet train schedule, with our President himself delayed by almost an hour in his arrival from Tokyo. Second, I heard that many people had come to Kyoto to enjoy the autumn foliage that weekend and would travel by bus to its various temples and shrines to see the red and gold leaves.

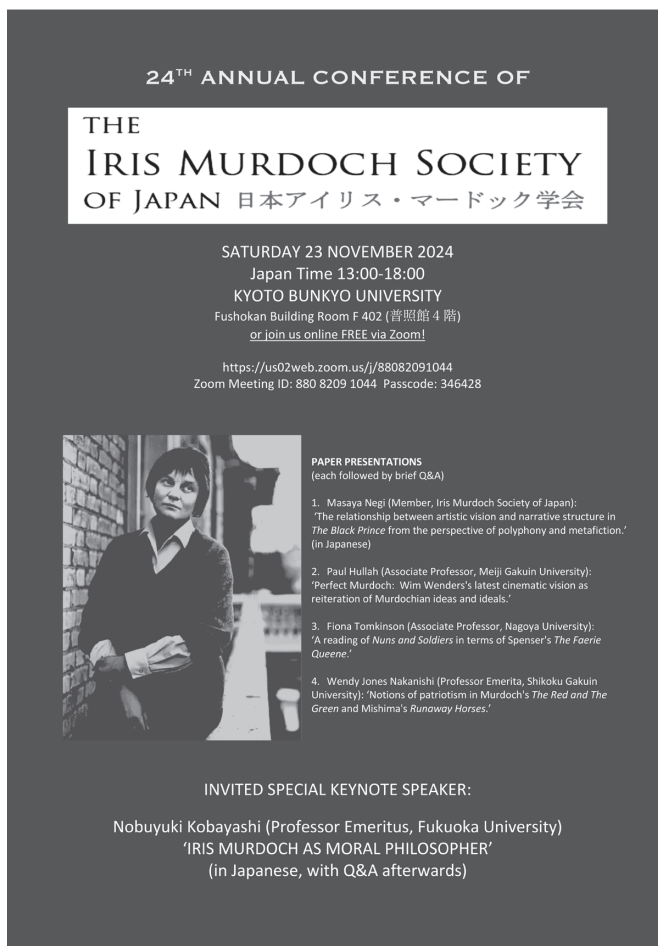
We made our way by local train to Kyoto Bunkyo University in Uji, on the outskirts of city, where our society's hardworking Secretariat Professor Yasushi Nakakubo, who has worked there for many years, had made all the requisite arrangements and preparations. Plenty of us were physically present for the one-day conference, and, despite a few technical issues with Wi-Fi and connectivity, a good number of people attended online, remotely offering some valuable input in the form of welcome comments and questions throughout the event. 'Hybrid' conferences are not ideal, but it's always preferable to have as many persons as possible enjoy our speakers' papers and the fruitful intellectual discussions thereafter.

After Professors Hullah and Nakakubo had delivered opening remarks and Professor

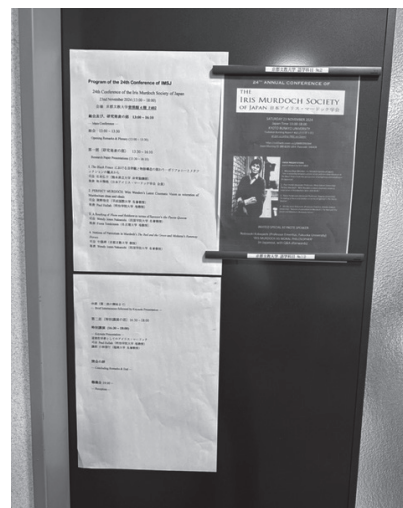
Koshi Okano succinctly outlined the state of our society's accounts (not unhealthy, though we need more new members!), the first presentation was delivered as a Zoom presentation by Masaya Negi, a graduate student of Hokusei Gakuen University in Hokkaido, in Japanese on 'The Relationship between Artistic Vision and Narrative Structure in *The Black Prince* from the Perspective of Polyphony and Metafiction', a fresh perspective on one of Murdoch's most popular and most intriguing fictions, from a young man we are glad to have as one of our society's newest members.

Three in-person presentations in English followed. Professor Hullah used video clips and his inimitable wit to argue that 'Wim Wenders's latest cinematic vision' is 'reiteration of Murdochian ideas and ideals'. The film in question, of course, is *Perfect Days*, which depicts how a man can live like a Buddhist monk in the midst of one of the world's largest and busiest cities. Professor Fiona Tomkinson followed with 'A Reading of *Nuns and Soldiers* in Terms of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*'. This expert in intertextuality also included a number of other sources Murdoch apparently drew upon in writing that novel. I gave the final presentation in English on the topic of 'Notions of Patriotism in Murdoch's *The Red and the Green* and Mishima's *Runaway Horses*'. I had come up with this subject on noticing odd similarities between these two writers who were contemporaries and astonishingly prolific, producing a considerable body of work to both popular and critical acclaim. Of course, Murdoch wrote books on philosophy as well as novels and plays, and Mishima also ventured beyond literature, composing essays and founding a private militia composed mainly of right-wing college students dedicated to traditional Japanese values and veneration of the emperor. They both had strong views on their own national identity.

The final presentation of the day was the keynote speech, given by Fukuoka University Emeritus Professor, Nobuyuki Kobayashi, on 'Murdoch as a Moral Philosopher'. Kobayashi studies and has written widely in the field of the history of thought, encompassing work on Justice, Democracy, Beauty, Plato, and, of course, Murdoch, moral philosophy, and virtue ethics. Among his major works are his 1992 translation of Iris Murdoch's *The Sovereignty of Good*, and his groundbreaking 1993 critical essay 「美と道徳—プラトン『饗宴』の場合」 (Beauty and Morality: The Case of Plato's *Feast*), in which he echoes and reinforces Murdoch's argument for the inadequacy and inappropriateness of analytical philosophy's versions of humanity and value, innovatively presenting 'old' Platonism in a way that is resoundingly modern, both seminal texts for Japanese Murdoch scholars. Following his reliably excellent and thought-provoking talk, a number of us made our way to a nearby restaurant for a post-conference party. Murdoch would have approved. We ate well and most of us imbibed in wine or beer. But alas, like all good things, it ended too soon, and we dispersed, going our separate ways, to meet again next year, when the conference will be held in November in Tokyo, at Meiji Gakuin University.



The poster of the 24th Conference of the Iris Murdoch Society of Japan.



The Conference Room at
Kyoto Bunkyo University.



Preparations making sure that the
Zoom link was functioning properly.



Listening to Masaya Negi's online presentation.



The Post-Conference Party お疲れ様！