**研究発表要旨**

**‘Calling All into Doubt’: Art, Life, and Identity in
Murdoch’s ‘Not Highly Regarded’ *The Italian Girl***

**Paul Hullah**

*The Italian Girl* (1964), Murdoch’s eighth work of fiction, is by far the shortest of her fictional works, and critics have been universally lacking in praise for this ‘below par’ work. It has been called the ‘weakest’ and ‘least successful’ of Murdoch’s novels. Some commentators have even suggested that *The Italian Girl* is so weak and out of synch with Murdoch’s development as a novelist that it must surely be a hasty rehash of an old manuscript written years earlier.

The case against *The Italian Girl* is based upon its being too short, too quick: characters and plot are condemned as underdeveloped and unbelievable, and the ‘fairy tale’ ending is mocked as ridiculous and unsatisfactory. Symbolism is criticized as too heavy handed, and the mixing of influences and genres decried as cloying and clumsily done.

I do not agree with the above objections, though I understand them to an extent and concur with the view that *The Italian Girl* is a difficult novel which can confuse a reader with its abrupt, condensed overdose of melodrama and musings about existence. But I do think that *The Italian Girl* is a compelling and affecting novel which conveys, albeit in abbreviated form, a world view present in other Murdochian fictions and certainly an important philosophical energy behind her poetry and prose.

The interpretation I present in this paper claims tat Edmund Narraway’s partially successful modern identity quest reflects what I have referred to elsewhere as Murdoch’s perennial fascination with post-Romantic juxtapositions of and attempts at conjunction of self and the world, man’s search for stability and predictable enduring goodness, and, most importantly the ultimate and inevitable failure to achieve this by forcing frozen ceremonial language (of art or religion) atop a real world of instability and flux. As the novel’s last lines imply, ‘all roads lead to Rome’, but we can discuss the route, the way we will arrive at where we all are going. Read in this way, I do not think *The Italian Girl* is a weak Murdochian novel at all.

In this paper, I thus argue and, hopefully, demonstrate that the feelings of bewilderment, dissatisfaction, and sensory overload a reader might experience at the end of *The Italian Girl* may conceivably be an important part of the novel’s explicit overall strategy if only we read the work openly, sensitively and, perhaps, in the manner in which its author intended it to be approached. What one critic referred to as Murdoch’s ‘calling all into doubt’ in the novel for ‘destabilizing effect’ is, in my opinion, wholly intentional and not due to sloppiness or laziness as was suggested by some reviewers when the novel first appeared.