

特別講演要旨

## What John Learnt from Iris, What Iris Leant from John

Miles Leeson

Much of our conception of the relationship between Iris Murdoch and John Bayley, happily married for over forty years, comes from Bayley's memoirs, and the Oscar-winning film adaptation of the first, *Iris* (2001). But what do we know of their life together outside of their public appearances and international travel? In this lecture I will explore their intellectual relationship from their first meeting in 1955, through to John resuming his novel writing with his 'Alice' trilogy in the 1990s. Murdoch's achievements are very well known, of course: John's stretched well beyond memoir and fiction writing; his first major publication, the poem 'Eldorado', won the Newdigate Prize in 1951, and he was acclaimed as a book reviewer and essayist for *The New York Times* and many other journals and newspapers: in total he wrote eighteen books of non-fiction during his lifetime. As an expert on Austen, Tolstoy, Shakespeare, Pushkin, Goethe and many others - indeed many of Iris's favourite writers - their mutually enriching conversations arguably created a synergy or minds in simpatico. For example, when he was writing his first major work of secondary criticism after their marriage, *The Characters of Love*, he says in *Iris: A Memoir of Iris Murdoch*: 'The real satisfaction I got from it at the time was Iris's wish to read it as it slowly proceeded, and what was for me the unexpected warmth of her reaction. This was not just automatic loyalty . . . she was really interested. We talked about it a lot . . . I was fascinated in my turn when I found later how much of what we had felt and spoken together had gone into Iris's landmark seminal essays. *Against Dryness* and *The Sovereignty of Good* . . . I recognised in them the things we used to talk about in our own way, which we had become conscious together by our own private and collective means'. I want to consider them to be as important an intellectual couple as Sartre and de Beauvoir, the Woolfs, and the Nabokovs to name but three. As Frances White pointed out in 2016, 'This most remarkable of twentieth century literary partnerships should be clearly seen as a marriage of equals, each partner encouraging and enabling the other to achieve their artistic and intellectual potential. Without Murdoch we would not have Bayley's remarkable moving memoirs of her - without him we might well not have had her highly prized novels. They form a synergic duo.' This lecture will attempt to trace these confluences and suggest ways of approaching their work in tandem.

(Director of the Iris Murdoch Research Centre, University of Chichester &  
Lead Editor of *The Iris Murdoch Review*)