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On Visiting Japan

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It was an honour for me to be invited to be the keynote speaker at the 23rd Conference of the Iris Murdoch Society of Japan, in their 25th year of foundation. I have known the President, Paul Hullah, for many years since we first met at a conference here in the UK, at the University of Kingston, and our friendship has grown through collaboration: both through the *Iris Murdoch Review* and more recently my co-edited collection *Iris Murdoch's Literary Imagination* (Palgrave, 2023). Alongside that we have regularly been in touch and Paul was kind enough to be a keynote speaker here, at my home institution the University of Chichester, in 2022. Of course, due to the pandemic my visit has been much delayed; I was originally due to be in Tokyo in the autumn of 2020 but nature conspired against us. In any event, it gave me time to reflect on my own work and also to read all of John Bayley's fiction, much of which I had never tried before, as well as a selection of his literary criticism.

Although a special edition of the *Iris Murdoch Review* was dedicated to John's memory in the aftermath of his death – and Frances White's superb short essay in *IMR 6* was the starting point for my lecture – nothing else had been written save a few negative reviews of the *Iris* trilogy and a little biographical work. Whilst my lecture, which will be worked up into a longer published work, tries to address this somewhat there is a wealth of material that still needs to be read and considered in terms of their intellectual partnership. Whilst Murdoch's archives rest at Kingston, Bayley's are still at his former home in Oxford in the state in which he left them: the archive team hope that they will be reunited at Kingston in the near future.

As well as my lecture at the conference, Paul was kind enough to invite me to talk to his students at Meiji Gakuin University the following week on British Music and Culture – a little outside of my usual teaching fare but I was delighted that over eighty students attended and asked a variety of questions that made the ninety minute session fly by. Two of Paul's students were my guides in the city the day after my arrival from



Britain, and Paul and his wife kindly took me to visit Kamakura and Enoshima the day after – to all of them my grateful thanks. I was also engaged to speak at Nanzan University in Nagoya, at the invitation of Dr Ve-Yin Tee, on Literature and Trauma, and my thanks go to him for the invite and to another member of the IMSJ, Dr Fiona Tomkinson, for putting us in touch. Fiona and Ve-Yin escorted me around Nagoya for which I am very grateful. The final two days I spent visiting Kyoto, most of which was walking for hours visiting all the ‘must see’ shrines, temples and gardens – a wonderful way to end my time in Japan.

I very much hope to be with the IMSJ again in the future, and I am especially pleased to be able to welcome Paul here, to Chichester, as a Visiting Fellow for his upcoming sabbatical. My thanks again to all the members of the IMSJ for making me so welcome and making my trip to Japan my highlight of 2024.

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Lead Editor of *The Iris Murdoch Review*)