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An Annotated Bibliography:
Iris Murdoch as a Writer and a Philosopher

**Introduction**

Iris Murdoch is described as a vigorous and energetic writer. She started to publish her novels at the age of thirty-five (1954), and continued to publish twenty-six long novels almost every year. Her novels, which were far different from other contemporary and experimental writers, have so complicated structure that readers sometimes have difficulties in following their plots. Her works are also regarded as the nineteenth-century’s heritage and her literary style is often compared with traditional British novelists such as Jane Austen, George Eliot and Charles Dickens. Her depictions of the intricate human relationship and of the imaginative human minds are often connected with Shakespeare or Tolstoy.

Murdoch was also well known as one of the British modern philosophers. With writing her literary works, she taught philosophy at Oxford and her first published book was a philosophical essay on Jean P. Sartre, who was the key person to evoke Murdoch’s interests in philosophy. She wrote five philosophical critiques and sought for the relationship between art and philosophy or between moral and evil, through the studies on Plato, Kant or Wittgenstein. Her critical studies and keen analysis on modern philosophy elicit various
responses, so the valuation of her philosophical aspects depends on each researcher.

This British intelligent, although there had not been anything sensational in her life, passed away at seventy-nine after four-year suffering from Alzheimer’s disease on February 8, 1999. Her husband, John Bayley, took care of her daily activities and came out her disease in public in 1997, which shocked people. Bayley published two essays, Elegy for Iris (1999) and Iris and her Friends: A Memoir of Memory and Desire (2000) which recollects her later years.

My aim in this project is to collect almost all of the materials both by Murdoch and on Murdoch’s literature and philosophy published in from 1997 to 2001. An annotated bibliography which covers Murdoch’s primary and secondary sources until the end of 1996 has already written by George Soule’s Four British Women Novelists: Anita Brookner, Margaret Drabble, Iris Murdoch, Barbara Pym (1998), which will be very helpful in the comprehensive understandings of Murdoch. The readers who need to consult materials of other languages than English should choose John Fletcher and Cheryl Bove’s Iris Murdoch: A Descriptive Primary and Annotated Secondary Bibliography (1994). It contains almost all of primary and secondary source of Murdoch until the fall of 1993, including translations of other languages than English.

This bibliography covers books, articles and essays dealing with Murdoch’s literature and philosophy emerged in journals, periodicals and magazines. Most of the materials are written in English, but I could add numbers of useful Japanese articles as many as possible thanks to the geographic
advantages. Especially, the writings by Dr. Yushiro Inouchi and Hisayasu Hirukawa, the two of the Murdoch’s authority in Japan, would be helpful for Murdoch’s interpretations in Japan. This also holds primary sources by Murdoch published or reprinted since 1997. The entry of the items is divided into two parts; primary sources and secondary sources, and the part two has three sections; books on Murdoch, articles and essays on Murdoch’s literature or philosophy, and the articles partly on Murdoch’s literature or philosophy. They are arranged in chronological order.

What is to be mentioned is that after her death in 1999, some kinds of literary materials such as her poems, dramas, and her only short story begin to be published continuously. Moreover, some of the obituaries or critical essays on Murdoch treat her biographical connections with her poems, which had not been adopted until she passed away. The secondary sources since her death have not collected yet, so I hope that this bibliography might be useful for Murdochean researchers. In this bibliography, I used the abbreviation IM for Iris Murdoch.

My research sources for this project were the MLA International Bibliography, OCLC SiteSearch Suite, Book Review Digest, COPAC, and other resources. I had excluded the materials which do not refer to Murdoch’s literary or philosophical aspects but only depict her biography. I had had to neglect some materials which Hokkaido University’s brilliant interlibrary loan’s system could not offer. However, I still continue to search for more materials useful for Murdoch’s study.
Part One
Primary Sources

Collects IM’s twenty-eight poems with biographical and critical introduction and four appendices; the chronology of poems paralleled with her novels, philosophical works and drama, the extracts of “A Year of Birds” from earlier version, the manuscript of “A Merciful Solution”, the original places and dates of publication. Especially in

Contains some essays, interviews, and four appendices including IM’s linocut named ‘The Prisoner’. This book notices IM’s positive and serious attitude to homosexuality and her deep affection to Ireland, necessity of women’s education ‘really’ equal to men, which offers some clues to her philosophical and literal interests.

Portrays a girl in Dublin who is tired of her daily life and seeks for “something special”. This story is the only short story written by IM.


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**Part Two**

**Secondary Sources**
Section I: Books on Murdoch

Mostly traces his experiences of nursing care for Alzheimer’s disease-tormented IM of her last moment.
Suffering from his wife’s everyday activities such as eating and sleeping, Bayley recollects his devotion to IM and his assistance for IM’s writings, which provides us the useful suggestion of her some novels such as *The Bell*.

Treats the strong power of past in the plots and the characters of IM’s novels. Showing how IM’s novels relate to the current ideas such as postmodernism, poststructuralism, modernism and psychoanalysis, Nicol states that past in IM’s fictions is influential in forming present in such various ways as guilt, nostalgia and the uncanny.

Philosophically examines the ethical idea in IM’s fiction. Demonstrating her fiction’s world, which contains various contingency of plots and characters, Jedrzejkiewicz analyzes Murdochean freedom and morality in relation to her concept of good and its influences from Plato,
Christian, Buddhist and Kant. This has an English synopsis for Polish book.


Bayley, John. *Iris and Her Friends: A Memoir of Memory and Desire*. New York: Norton. 2000. Mostly portrays Bayley’s memory of his life with Murdoch, of his own younger days, and of the friends around this married couple, but Bayley slightly traces Murdoch’s literary and philosophical themes and re-evaluates the combination of comic and tragedy in her novels and the treatment of love and human relationship.


Kimura, Masao. *Iris Murdoch to Zen. [Iris Murdoch and Zen Buddhism.]* Enlarged ed. Tokyo: Shohaku
Sha, 2000.
Connects IM’s ideas with Japanese ‘Zen Buddhism’. Kimura examines the elements of Zen Buddhism in IM’s novels and defines these elements as the concept of ‘innocence’. Kimura also compares IM’s literature and philosophy with Daisetsu Suzuki, a prominent zen scholar in Japan.

Section Ⅰ:
Articles and Essays on IM’s Literature or Philosophy


Burns, Elizabeth. “Iris Murdoch and the Nature of Good.” Religious Studies 33. 3 (1997): 303-313. Demonstrates IM’s general concept of the Good. The Good requires certain moral rules and imaginations to be understood and even those who can recognize the Good without any imaginations are unable to define literally their perception. Showing IM’s aspects of Good, Burns explains our ability to recognize goodness without any theistic religion.
Critically categorizes the good and bad characters in IM’s *Unofficial Rose* in a dialogue style and seeks for moral philosophy. Pointing out her artificial affinity for Dickens, Forster, and Austen, and her psychological approval to Freud, Byatt and Sodre successfully regard this novel as the realist narrative inhabited by mythic and fairytale narratives.

Focuses on the metaphors in *Bruno’s Dream* and relates them with Platonism. The metaphors in it reveal the difficulties of perceiving the reality; the reality of self or others’ identity and the reality of Good which is equal to God for IM. Hussein evaluates Murdochian ability to interweave her Platonism with the ordinary life by using these metaphors.


interprets IM’s 77-line poem, ‘Agamemnon Class 1939’ (1977) as the very rare emergence of her own experiences in her college days. As is often the case with IM’s novels, Inouchi remarks on the concrete and calm images and on the absence of romantic or sentimental elements in her poems.

gives the main points of IM’s lecture on literature held in Tokyo in 1993. Murdoch criticizes the contemporary philosophy, especially Jacques Derrida’s, because of its too esoteric theory to be understood by ordinary people. For Murdoch, the main theme of both literature and philosophy should discuss how human beings live, and her subject in her novels is the ‘remorse’ in human minds.


another, both Adorno and Murdoch deal with great art equal to moral.


Clarifies our destiny of lack of self-recognition, focusing on the lack of ‘reality’ in Black Prince. Nakamura explains IM shows the difficulty of erasing personal ego by presenting obviously in her novels the weakness in human minds.


Analyzes the treatment of evil in IM’s A Fairly Honourable Defeat and The Message to the Planet, and other novels by Margaret Atwood and Alice Walker. Painter defines their views of evil as the exploration of the depth of malevolent and victimized characters. DAI 59 (1998): 9831750.


Defines IM as a philosophical novelist, though Murdoch herself denies that. Characterizing IM’s standpoint against T.S. Eliot, Sartre, Marxism and the literary
deconstruction, and her approval for Jane Austen and Shakespeare, Watson presents IM’s own aspect of the world of no pattern in the context of traditional British philosophy.


Arnell, Carla Ann. “Medieval Illuminations: Patterns of Medievalism in the Fiction of Janette Winterson, Iris Murdoch, and John Fowles.” Diss. Northwestern U, 1999. Locates medievalism in IM’ *Green Knight* shows its influence on the late twentieth-century novels such as Winterson’s or Fowles’. Arnell explains that Murdoch, although showing the ethical and metaphysical usefulness of the medieval genre, employs the essence of medieval romance in order to make her characters recognize freshness and sacredness even in our ordinary life. *DAI* 60 (1999): 9932127.

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Analyze 'Agamemnon Class 1939', 'Music in Ireland', and 'A Christmas Carol'. Although giving some valuable comments on them in terms of war, death and love, Heptonstall asserts the importance of examining these poetry with her novels and philosophical theses.

Finds IM’s vacillations between portraying accidental events and describing mythologies in her long pieces of novel although, Hirukawa appreciates the profundities in IM’s artificial works.

Traces the series of almost all of IM’s novels from Under the Net to Jackson’s Dilemma, and categorizes them into the three types; comedy, character settings, and the reference to Shakespeare. Hoy pays special attentions to Under the Net, The Black Prince, and The Good Apprentice.

Analyzes IM’s poem, ‘Agamemnon Class 1939’ and her only
poem collection, 'A Year of Birds'. Inouchi points out the appearance of IM’s inspiration from Japanese haiku, and explains that such world of oriental harmony is derived from IM’s attempt to keep her mental balance with her severely intellectual novels.

Kennel, Vicki Renee Munro. "The Persistence of *Pygmalion*: Inscribed Selves in Twentieth-century British Narrative (George Bernard Shaw, John Fowles, Muriel Spark, Ford Madox Ford, Iris Murdoch).” Diss. Purdue U, 1998. DAI 59 (1999): 9900208. Partly treats IM’s literary works as one of the transformation of *Pygmalion* in terms of the sociological, aesthetical, and philosophical perceptions. Kennel regards some later British narratives including Murdoch’s as the identity creation which philosophically makes reality and real self.

McEwan, Neil. “Iris Murdoch and talk about Plato.” *Kenkyu Nenpou. [Annual Report of Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences]* (Nara, Jap. Narajoshidaigaku) 43 (1999): 93-105. Presents IM’s acceptance of the Platonism. The main characters in nearly all of her novels refer to Plato, and treat this philosopher as one of their circle members. Although this intellectual climate makes a distinction between her fiction and the actual world, McEwan regards this feature as IM’s reliance on Plato.

Discusses some Western writers in connection with Japan. In chapter 4, Okada summarizes the interview with IM in 1989, and explains IM’s thoughts of Zen Buddhism, religion and women, especially her approval of the doctrine for women’s rights such as Virginia Woolf’s but her severe criticism for narrowed feminism which exclude men.


Critically analyzes IM’s concepts of philosophy and aesthetics. Pointing out her appeal to metaphysics in relation to Plato, Kant and Simone Weil, and to transcendent as one kind of art, Wood slightly censures Murdoch, who regards art as an incarnation of the Good, for her quasi-philosophical aesthetics.


Critically reviews *Something Special* with a little bit comparison with James Joyce’s *The Dubliners*, but Amidon finds no merit of this short story.

Judgmentally compares IM’s philosophical atheism and Richard Swinburne’s theism. While Swinburne is overly-confident about theism, IM’s argument insists on the Good without God. Focusing on IM’s relationship with Plato, Augustine and Kant, Asiedu slightly criticizes Murdochean atheism because it seems like the latent nihilism.

Reviews IM’s last novel, Jackson’s Dilemma (1995) and discusses the remorse, loss and love in it. The characters are obsessed by the traumatic history, and these past only can be healed by accepting the power of goodness and love. Carter shows IM’s belief in goodness and her attempt to remove the miserable ego.

Examines the narratives of IM’s career and life course emerged in her obituaries. The authors indicate that Murdoch is described in the stereotype narratives as a patient of dementia and that these retrospective application of characteristics of dementia are traced with those of goodness and purity.
White, Roberta S. “Iris Murdoch: Mapping the Country of Desire.” *British Women Writing Fiction*. Ed. Abby H.P. Werlock. Tuscaloosa, AL: U of Alabama P, 2000. 23-41. Explains IM’s fictional styles in nearly twenty pieces of her novels, scrutinizing her character settings, the lack of chronology, the elements of comedy like Shakespeare’s dramas, the male viewpoints, and the complicated human sexual relation such as homosexual or incest. White regards these features as the connection with her central theme of love and desire.

Section II:

Articles Partly on IM’s Literature or Philosophy


Cohen, Richard. “Iris Murdoch: Half-believer.” *Tablet* 13 Feb. 1999: 208. Generally portrays his meetings with IM and his reminiscence about her novels such as *Under the Net*. In her interview, Murdoch remarks on her concept of religion without dogmas or any religious institutions and her location of religion of seeking for personal tranquility.
Mainly depicts IM’s personality and his memories with her. Showing some IM’s aspects such as her criticism of the structuralism and the semiotics, Meyers also mentions her struggles in writing her literary works.

Explains the features emerged in IM’s novels with a little introduction of her biography. Mentioning some of IM’s fictions ranged from Under the Net to The Book and the Brotherhood, Saga grasps the density or fertility of plots or characters.

Introduces IM’s life and her novels, especially The Black Prince and A Severed Head. Comparing her literary style with that of the mainstream from early 1950s, Wilson evaluates the well-constructed characters and significant moral thoughts in her novels.

Describes Feeney’s memory of his interview with IM. Slightly criticizing ‘the new novel’ writers such as John Fowles, IM insists the importance of learning the traditional backgrounds in reading good literature such as Dickens, Tolstoy, and Proust.