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Dame Iris Murdoch

continued from page 68

as she develops the outlines of the characters, the names become evident for them. Getting to know and like one's characters, letting them tell you who they are so that by the end of the novel you are very attracted to them is very important. she says. I asked about her inspirations and how much she draws from her personal life. She does keep a journal/diary that goes back before the war and she keeps meaning to destroy it before she dies(!). She is currently working on a new novel, but says it is in the first very rough stages. Her most important piece of advice to an author was to “give writing time.”

Finally, I asked Dame Murdoch about the past productions, or future possibility, of her works in forms other than novels. She has written “five or six” plays but does not particularly like doing them. She has done them mainly for actor friends who have convinced her to do them. She has trouble with plays because she doesn’t love the stage and this is a necessity for her in writing good drama. The one she did with J.B. Priestly (“A Severed Head”) she did enjoy, though. I had once seen an old paperback copy of A Severed Head that boasted “Now a Columbia Picture,” but had never found out anything more about it. I asked Dame Murdoch about it, but she did not remember distinctly any of her works being made into movies or television shows. She said they could have been, especially since she does not own a television. “This is one of the only households in England that does not, I am sure,” she said.

At this point I felt as if I had taken up enough time with this great author and said my thanks and goodbyes. It was only later, when I was talking with other literary people of Oxford, who told me that Dame Murdoch did not make many public appearances and very few in town, that I realized what a wonderful and unique experience this had been.