

## Posudek oponenta na bakalářskou práci

### Andreas Patenidis – „Metaphysics and Philosophy in Selected Novels of Iris Murdoch“

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Iris Jean Murdoch was an extremely prolific writer and a philosopher in her own right. She is the author of several works of philosophy and 26 novels written during a career that spanned over 40 years. There is little critical consensus regarding Murdoch – some critics highlight the fact that Murdoch advocated a return to realism and thought that the duty of the novel was to portray the world and to tell the ‘truth’ about it, others express different opinions, pointing out her tendency towards extravaganza, the predictability of her fiction, in which the plots are petrified into formulae (her novels compared to “family musical chairs”). In any case, Murdoch is an intellectual whose interest in depicting human lives and their environment is largely analytical, who combines ethics with aesthetics, passes judgements on human life but does not decide in advance on the answer. Among her favourite topics are love, death, the essence of life and the eternal question of good and evil. Apart from her highly symbolic structures, many critics agree on Murdoch’s intertextuality.

Rather than Murdoch as philosopher, it is the influence of philosophy on Murdoch’s writing, that has become the point of attention in this thesis. This seems like a good idea, not only because of the role of intertextuality (as mentioned above) but also because it is easy to detect that “some idea, which could be well called philosophical, provides much of the unifying framework for each of Miss Murdoch’s novels – from the conceptual net (Wittgenstein) in *Under the Net*, or the Simone Weil suffering in *The Unicorn*, via the conceptual idea of power in *The Flight from the Enchanter* and the religious approach to the philosophical Hegelian totality in *The Bell*,” writes A.S Byatt in her 1965 tract on Murdoch called *Degrees of Freedom*. By the way, this book is quoted in a book-length study by Milada Franková on Iris Murdoch. I find no mention of this analysis in the thesis. A pity, as Andreas Patenidis could certainly have been enlightened by the views expressed there and other available Czech sources on this writer (Murdoch criticizing Sartre, or her debt to Simone Weil, who is actually unmentioned in the thesis).

It must be said from the outset that the thesis could have benefited more careful editing, proofreading and revision. The best passages are devoted to detailed work with the individual texts of the novels. Had the perspective been converse, i.e. from the novels towards theories, the result would have been more enlightening and the discussion more fruitful (e.g. how do Murdoch’s metaphors and symbols work in her philosophical systems). The formal properties of the thesis are not without fault. Sometimes referencing is rather confusing, e.g. the first mention of Burnside on page 1, spelling, e.g. faineance (page 6), chapter 2.4. misnumbered 2.3.1. etc.

It is clear from the beginning of the thesis that Andreas Patenidis displays a great tendency towards high-fallutin language: what exactly is meant by such profound statements

as that “we must perceive the outside of the novel to understand the inside” (unpaginated introduction) – only later, in the conclusion on page 40, do we find out that all this means is that the plot of the story is a vehicle). What are the “philosophical anagrams” used by Murdoch (unpaginated introduction) we never really get to know.

The logical cohesion of argumentation is problematic. It is never made clear in what way the mid-1950s were so suffocating and what was the direct influence of Murdoch on novel writing at the time (Introduction). To mention only the opening paragraph (p.1): What is the relationship between the outside factors mentioned by Burnside and Murdoch’s work, what metaphysical concepts are rethought (and how) as a result of these factors, what are the odds mentioned, and what are the dreams that were subverted? Such illogicalities in the transitions colour the entire thesis.

Page 5 – What precisely are the issues that Murdoch shares with Sartre? How does she conceive of them? It is not enough to mention general and universal themes (which writer does not deal with “the individual within language, art, society, the world of politics, ideals and freedom”? What is the basis of the argument between Murdoch and Sartre?

Andreas Patenidis’ strategy in writing is to state and claim some general and rather vague truth (which in itself is hard to dispute because of its vagueness) but then merely illustrates it by a non-descript quotation. There is very little actual interpretation, explication and comparison of philosophies. Murdoch’s ideas are presented, illustrated by quotations from her novels but all remains rather on the level of observation. Patenidis shows how Wittgenstein becomes a theme to discuss and a model for some characters (Hugo in *Under the Net*, but we never get to know in what precise way Murdoch has adopted Wittgenstein for her own ideas about creativity and art.

Many comparisons are just presented as a kind of afterthought, as e.g. Charles compared to Prospero (in one paragraph). Such lists of intertexts could be thrown in for good measure, but shed little light on any coherent interpretation.

Finally, two questions about the concept of the entire thesis. Why have these four novels been selected? Is there anything that sets them apart from others? Then, on page 41, it is said, that Iris Murdoch offers “juxtapositions of ideas” and “her novels are fields ... for philosophical dialogues”. This seems to imply a radically disjunctive quality about Murdoch’s works?

“We are real people, unfinished and full of blankness and jumble,” said Iris Murdoch in her famous study *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*. The many jumbled worlds of fantasy created by this writer in her numerous novels hold the readers’ attention because they are philosophical and entertaining, pleasant and painful at once. But we get very little sense of this in Andreas Patenidis’ thesis, rather more of the senses of incomplete than we may desire of a critical study.

Formal, conceptual and practical questions arise from the reading of this thesis. I expect that these will be satisfactorily responded to during the defence. Consequently, I recommend the BA thesis for defence with the preliminary grade of good (**dobře**).

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