

UNIVERZITA KARLOVA V PRAZE - FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA
ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR
Metafyzika a filosofie ve vybraných románech Iris Murdochové
BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

vedoucí bakalářské práce (supervisor):
Prof. PhDr. Martin Hliský, CSc.

Praha, Červenec 2011

Zpracoval (author):

Andreas Patenidis

studijní obor (subject/s):

Anglistika a amerikanistika

Metaphysics and Philosophy in Selected Novels of Iris Murdoch

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracoval/a samostatně, že jsem řádně citoval všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného či stejného titulu.

V Praze dne 31. 07. 2011

I declare that the following BA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned, and that this thesis has not been used in the course of other university studies or in order to acquire the same or another type of diploma.

Prague, 31/07/2011

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the supervisor of my bachelor thesis at Charles University: Martin Hilský, for his patience regarding this paper and for reading and rereading it. Also to Anne Rowe, Kingston University, London, for hinting at passages that could be improved and for providing me with information and suggestions that were crucial for this paper. Thanks are due to my mother for her support.

To Filip Ptáček, whom the angels loved too dearly

Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům. I have no objections to the BA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.) **NB This page must be signed by the student.**

Summary

This paper is concerned with metaphysics and philosophy in selected novels of Iris Murdoch. It must be said that the term metaphysics is used throughout this paper in two different meanings. First, it is used in the original meaning, the literal meaning of the word, by which we mean everything, that is beyond the physical, such as philosophy. The second meaning, the one postulated by the author herself (and about which she talks in her book *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*), is the metaphysics in the sense of a single unified term covering religion and philosophy. Due to the modern usage of the word metaphysics, it is necessary to say that the term is often used to convey astrology and occult phenomenon.

The 50's and in fact the entire post-second world war era is not only a time of new political forms, forms which are beginning to shape the world, but it is also the era of a great shift in thinking of every individual. We have ceased to ask, 'what is a human being', and started to ask 'who am I', and this crucial question has shaken the very foundations of western philosophy.

In respect to the historical background, this paper is primarily concerned with philosophical currents, which influenced Iris Murdoch and which are reflected in her work. Among the priorities of this paper is to demonstrate to what extent was Murdoch inspired by philosophy of Gabriel Marcel, Jean Paul Sartre and Ludwig Wittgenstein. We are not interested only in the question of whether she was inspired or not, but more importantly, how are the concepts of these philosophers expressed in Murdoch's work. Since the author does not only accept these ideas (she juxtaposes them) this paper is dealing with her attitude to these concepts and with the methods of her adaptation.

Metaphysics and Philosophy in Selected Novels of Iris Murdoch

The most extensive chapter of this work deals the concept of an uprooted individual, which is present in her every novel. Here, we speak about ‘an uprooted individual’, a post modern human being, living outside of the traditional social forms, such as family. These traditional forms have been subverted in the western world and underwent a period of decay. On the one hand, we have acquired ‘freedom’. On the other hand, living outside of these traditional forms has triggered a crisis of identity – this is exactly Murdoch’s scope of interest.

Probably the most influential philosopher in the work of Iris Murdoch is Ludwig Wittgenstein, although he was unable to attend his lectures at University of Cambridge. Nonetheless, Wittgenstein (and his only published work *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*) was a crucial inspiration for Murdoch and her entire oeuvre contains features of Wittgenstein’s thoughts. This paper demonstrates Wittgenstein’s controversial influence on Murdoch and displays the whole process of development, which has started with an absolute fascination by Wittgenstein (*Under the Net*) and peaks in her later novels, in which Murdoch seems to express a revolt against his teaching (*Nuns and Soldiers*).

A great part of this paper is dedicated to the influence of Sartre. Murdoch, at first enchanted by Sartre, criticises the author, objects against his doomed character and attempts to provide a counterpart. In short, a character, who is always redeemed and often enlightened in the end.

Shrnutí

Tato práce se zabývá metafyzikou a filosofií v díle Iris Murdochové. Je nutno zmínit, že slovo metafyzika je v této práci použito dvojnásobem. Jednak se jedná o tradiční, původní slovní obrat, kterým se rozumí vše, co překračuje práh fyzického, jako například filosofie. Druhý význam je ten, který tomuto slovu přikládá sama autorka, která ve své knize „Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals” mluví o metafyzice, jako o výsledném produktu, který vznikl fúzí náboženství a filosofie do jednoho jediného celku. Je nutno přihlídnout k modernímu jazyku, a vymezit se proti dnes často zneužívanému užití tohoto slova, ve smyslu astrologie či dokonce zkoumání záhad a nadpozemských sil.

50. léta 20. století a v podstatě celá poválečná éra je nejen dobou, kdy dochází k novým politickým uskupením, novým celkům které utváří nový, poválečný svět, ale také dobou velkého posunu v myšlení jednotlivce. Člověk se přestal ptát, co je to člověk, a místo toho se začal ptát, kdo jsem já a tato zásadní otázka významným způsobem otřásla základy západního myšlení.

S ohledem na historický kontext se tato práce primárně zabývá filosofickými směry, které Iris Murdochovou ovlivnily a které se také promítly do její tvorby. Tato práce se snaží prokázat inspiraci, kterou autorka čerpala z filosofie Gabriela Marcela, Jean Paula Sartra, a Ludwiga Wittgensteina. Nezajímá nás ale jen zdali jsou tyto myšlenky v autorčině práci obsaženy, ale především jak se tyto koncepty a myšlenky projevují v jejím díle. Protože autorka tyto koncepty pouze nepřijímá, ale vypořádává se s nimi a často je staví do opozice, věnuje se tato práce samotnému postoji a způsobu adaptace Murdochové k těmto novým filosofickým směrům.

Nejdelší kapitola této práce poukazuje na koncept, který se vyskytuje pravděpodobně v každém románu Iris Murdochové. Řeč je o ‚vykořeněném jedinci‘, tedy o post-moderním

člověku, žijícím bez tradičních sociálních uskupení, jako je například rodina. Tradiční formy lidského soužití v Evropské a v podstatě v celém západním světě prošly jistou formou uvolnění a částečného rozkladu. Tato ‚svoboda‘ má ale katastrofální následky a to je právě jednou z hlavních oblastí zájmu autorky.

Pravděpodobně nejvlivnější inspirací pro Iris Murdochovou byl Ludwig Wittgenstein, i když se na Cambridgeské Univerzitě minuli. Nicméně Wittgenstein (a jeho jediné jím publikované dílo *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*) byl pro Murdochovou silnou inspirací a její tvorba nese prvky Wittgensteinových myšlenek až do konce autorčiných dnů. Tato esej ukazuje onen kontroverzní vliv a znázorňuje celý proces, který začal absolutní fascinací Wittgensteinem (*Under the Net*) a vrcholí v pozdějších románech, ve kterých se autorka snaží o dialog, místy až o revoltu vůči tomuto filosofovi (*Nuns and Soldiers*).

Nezanedbatelnou součástí je také vliv Jeana Paula Sartra. Murdochová, zprvu unešená setkáním se Sartrem přichází s kritikou, vymezuje se vůči jeho postavě zatraceného jedince a snaží se poskytnout protipól. Tedy jedince, který je většinou na konci příběhu osvícen a vykoupen.

Contents

- i. Introduction
- 1. Thesis
- 2. The Loss of the Metaphysical in the Historical Context of 1950's
 - 2.1 *Under the Net*
 - 2.2 *The Sea the Sea*
 - 2.3 *A Word Child* – A Salvation by Word
 - 2.4 *The Bell* - Existentialist hero vs. Mystical hero
- 3. Conclusion

i. Introduction

We need more concepts than our philosophies have furnished us with.

Iris Murdoch

Iris Murdoch, similarly to William Shakespeare, underwent a period of great comedies and tragedies. The light and humorous tones of *Under the Net* (1954), *The Sandcastle* (1957) and *The Severed Head* (1961) were, as the author became more mature, subsided by murkier and more obscure topics presented in *A Word Child* (1975). *Nuns and Soldiers* (1980), *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983) and *The Good Apprentice* (1985) are novels declaring this observation.

Apart from being a writer, poet and playwright, Murdoch was essentially much more of a thinker and philosopher. Nonetheless, her novels are not just retreats for the imposition of philosophical concepts she strived to introduce. On the contrary, they rather form a solid self-sufficient platform, a faithful imitation of reality where the ideas postulated by Socrates, Plato, Wittgenstein, Sartre, Camus, Buber and many others are *never* heard clearly. What we usually perceive is just a distant echo that resonates on the periphery of her novels touching only those whose ears are not deaf to its calling. Murdoch is scarcely lecturing, but alas, sometimes moralizing; her philosophical quarries are enrooted into her novels and create repetitive patterns. It is valid for the entire Murdoch's work that we must perceive the outside of a novel to understand the inside.

Metaphysics and Philosophy in Selected Novels of Iris Murdoch

Her novels are always multi-layered, offering an infinite number of readings, from religious to secular, presenting several moral, spiritual and philosophical anagrams that are usually gathered under the umbrella term: Metaphysics. By this synthesis Murdoch provided fresh air for the suffocating novel of the mid 50's and contributed largely to its recovery.

1. Thesis

The steppingstone of Iris Murdoch as a writer, thinker and philosopher was substantially marked by the contemporary historical climate – John Burnside says that the conditions were dominated by the end of the Second World War, the spiritual awakening both in Europe and America, the rediscovery of Buddhism, the ecology movement, the shift from the consumerist model towards compassion and right (morally correct) action, the hope of a new age and last but not least, the Reagan/Thatcher years.¹ Her entire oeuvre is essentially marked by progress and constant rethinking of metaphysical concepts. Against all odds, hers was an age when all that had been dreamed about was efficiently subverted.

The main ambition of this bachelor thesis is primarily to demonstrate, comment on and attempt to explain the use of the 20th century philosophy in Murdoch's novels and explain its role in the context of her work. Another aspect that this work will touch upon is the role of Buddhist philosophy rediscovered in the Western world and its influence on the new term: metaphysics.

Murdoch's novels are always based on a plurality of voices. Thus, this paper will attempt to prove that Murdoch juxtaposes philosophical concepts of various philosophers and shows that humanity has undergone a great moral and spiritual shift mainly in the 50's. After the horrid events of The Second World War, the entire society craved for pacifism and generally different ways of thinking. As a result of this, the whole world longed for its redefinition and also for reestablishment of its values. Among its objectives, this paper will deal with the philosophical concepts of Wittgenstein's philosophy and outline the climate of Murdoch's

¹ Iris Murdoch, *The Sea, the Sea* (Vintage, London 1999) ix

Metaphysics and Philosophy in Selected Novels of Iris Murdoch

writing. Lastly, the basic concepts Murdoch re-establishes – the metaphysics - will be discussed in terms of its influence on her novels.

1. Metaphysics, The Loss of the Metaphysical in the Historical Context of 1950's

Murdoch's application of the word metaphysical is germane to an umbrella term covering the junction of philosophy and religion. For the purpose of this chapter, let us use the word in its original meaning. Metaphysical, something beyond physical, in other words spiritual, soul-related. Secondly, it is crucial to see the issue in the historical context. After the Second World War, high expectations echoed virtually everywhere. The world, full of idealistic visions, was eager to witness its reconstruction. Alas, high expectations are usually met with profound disappointment: there were still racial troubles going on, problems of corruption started to arise and Britain was indebted and overburdened by economic difficulties.

Another characteristic feature of the post war period was that the 50's no longer belong to the elder generations. Their decisive role is over and the period of their mismanagement has been ceased by those aged from sixteen to thirty. These people were in the centre of attention and when Britain developed the hydrogen bomb, it was this generation who elevated a massive wave of pacifism.

Also, Britain had to lower her head and the USA was in the centre of the foreign policy. The New World grew up overshadowing its mother. On the top of that, the USA supported Britain financially due to the economic crises and inflation in Britain. In this period, Britain joined the entry market but it proved unprofitable, the inflation of Britain kept rising and Britain had to take a big loan to sustain its existence. There were more than three million people unemployed by that time.²

² Peter Mathias, Britain, *History of a Nation* (Methuen and co Ltd. London 2002) 157

Economy is closely related to a new phenomenon that occurred in the world – the continuation of the development of establishments that we cannot understand and control. The society realized that the police and even the government are too corrupted and it is not within the power of an individual to face and overcome these issues. Therefore it became the main objective of an individual to gather possession so as he could ensure that at least his or her surrounding is not corrupted. Here emerges a phenomenon of social isolation. This inevitably led to profound disillusionment, to the rise of materialism and to the loss of the metaphysical.

In *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992), Murdoch intentionally hints at a denominating feature of religion and art. To be more precise, metaphysics and religion are two spheres that touch directly our inner self. ‘The danger of metaphysics and religion, a danger long recognized by Platonists of all sorts, is that, like all ‘image play’, they can be used either to illuminate the deep truth about human life or to perpetuate consoling illusions.’³ In this way, the major approach, empiricism, developed. In other words, the approach stating that all knowledge originates from cognitive experience mediated via senses.

On the basis of behaviourist theory and from the philosophical point of view, we are the ultimate creatures; human beings successfully shattered and liberated themselves from instinctive behaviour. Thereby we gained our personal freedom and quite paradoxically, Donna Gerstenberger claims that ‘by attaining of our empirical world we have lost more complex world.’⁴ To follow on from that, we lost our natural background and became uprooted, and consequently, this led to the formulation of the term: an uprooted individual, a concept that will be attended to later in this paper.

³ Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (Penguin Books Ltd. 1993) 312

⁴ Donna Gerstenberger, *Iris Murdoch* (Bucknell University Press: New Jersey 1975) 18

2.1. *Under the Net*

Speaking about *Under the Net*, it is important to understand that there is a parallel between this novel, Raymond Queneau's *Pierrot mon Ami* and Sartre's *Nausea*. The main protagonists of the latter one and *Under the Net* experience disenchantment by words and by the power of language to grasp and reflect reality. Naturally, neither Sartre nor Murdoch claim that all communication is futile, but they both appear to come to the conclusion that language can never be the register of the objective world.

Sartre's *Nausea* shares several themes with Murdoch's *Under the Net*. A. S. Byatt says that both novels are concerned with the individual within language, art, society, the world of politics, ideals, and freedom.⁵ Nonetheless, Murdoch uses *Under the Net* to object to the moral message of Sartre's *Nausea*. Murdoch's character is never condemned; he is always redeemed and in some respect enlightened.

It was already said that there are several parallels that correspond to Sartre's *Nausea*:

‘And when Roquentin briefly turns his attention to the jazz musician whose impure existence has been transmuted into the gemlike hardness of the song, he immediately returns to himself with the realization that art could be his own pass to a perfected identity. While Roquentin thus aspires towards form or Being as a refuge from the formlessness of Becoming, Jake Donahue at the corresponding stage in his career does exactly the opposite. He accepts art as a humble activity in the realm of Becoming. At first of course he is self-centered and madly envious of the other artist. But he gradually settles down to a morally admirable receptivity.’⁶

We can see this in the following passage of the novel:

⁵ A.S. Byatt, *Iris Murdoch* (Longman group Ltd. Essex 1976) 16

⁶ Ben Obulsemu, *Iris Murdoch and Sartre*, (John Hopkins University Press, US 1975) 296

All that mattered to me was a vision which I had had of my own destiny and which imposed itself upon me as a command... There was a path which awaited me and which if I failed to take it would lie untrodden for ever.⁷

Murdoch seemed slightly reluctant to admit that she is practically dealing with the same issues as Sartre. In several interviews, she claimed not to be inspired by him, but there is a fundamental parallel between art and life that inspires both artists:

There's something which interests me which does appear, to some extent, in the novels in the form of a conflict, usually between two men, one an artist and the other a sort of religious figure-Tallis Browne and Julius King [A Fairly Honourable Defeat, 1970], for instance, and Ann and Randall Peronett [An Unofficial Rose, 1962], and Hugo Belfounder and Jake Donaghue [*Under the Net*, 1954], and so on. I'm not quite sure how this connects with what I'm going to say next, but I think art's a kind of temptation in a way. I mean, art is a harmless activity, but it represents a sort of temptation, a temptation to impose form where perhaps it isn't always appropriate.⁸

Under the Net deals with the risk Jake is running into by constantly postulating theories. He makes theories about everything, thoughts and actions on all possible levels. Contrary to that, Hugo Belfounder seems to awaken Jake Donaghue from his thwarted visions:

It was not that I always agreed with him. His failure to grasp certain kinds of ideas often filled me with annoyance. But it was as if his very mode of being revealed to me how hopelessly my own vision of the world was blurred by generality.

⁷ Iris Murdoch, *Under the Net* (Penguin Books Ltd., London 1982) 221

⁸ Michael Bellamy, 'An Interview with Iris Murdoch' (University of Wisconsin Press, US 1977) 8

What Jake confesses is that he hates contingency. For him, contingency is insufferable and therefore he keeps making theories which constantly blur his vision of the real world. This is the reason why his friend Hugo is successful in whatever he does. If Jake were not the narrator (unreliable narrator), it would surface that he, compared to Hugo, is a failure.

Apart from theories, *Under the Net* is an existential novel concerned with the relation of language and its reflection in reality. Since we no longer share the identical past and values (such as the belief in god), language suddenly ceases to mirror reality accurately. Murdoch calls this phenomenon a loss of ‘common purposes and values’⁹ In other words, Murdoch’s idea is that we can understand others and communicate with them only if we share some contexts. For her, art, or more precisely literature, is a vehicle that makes this conversation feasible and it is the task of a novelist to present reality as it really is, ‘in the perspectives of possible change.’¹⁰

For Murdoch, ‘the good artist helps us to see the place of necessity in human life, what must be endured, what makes and breaks, and to purify our imagination so as to contemplate the real world (usually veiled by anxiety and fantasy) including what is terrible and absurd.’¹¹

This is reflected in the dialogue between Hugo and Jake and I believe that this is Murdoch’s point of disagreement with Plato, who regarded artists as dangerous. She does not think that art is a form of ‘consolation which distorts reality.’¹² On the contrary, according to Murdoch, great art reveals some degree of truth. There is a consensus between her and Plato in that only few people will ever know truth; however, a greater level of morality can be achieved through a loving attention to art, which has the capacity to present the true nature of life.

⁹ Iris Murdoch, *Sartre Romantic Rationalist* (Vintage, London 1999) 78

¹⁰ *Sartre Romantic Rationalist* 90

¹¹ *Sartre Romantic Rationalist* 90

¹² Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (Routledge, London 2002) 88

Let us be more specific now and see how this works in the novel. Murdoch says that ‘obsession, prejudice, envy, anxiety, ignorance, greed, neurosis and so on ...veil reality’ (p 47)¹³ On Good and God. ‘Only by concentrated moral effort can one rid oneself of these illusion and move in the direction of moral perfection. It is precisely because these traits are consoling and act as a protection for the ego that individuals are so reluctant to let go of them’¹⁴

The character of Jake is a personification of this description. In his life, one obsession substitutes another and his greatest fear is that his ‘wild-goose-chaise’ will be brought to a halt. He is obsessed with the idea of talking to Hugo, nonetheless, once he finds him, he is disillusioned and doesn’t know why was he had been trying to reach him. To follow on from that, Jake is envious of his friend David, and ignorant towards whatever his friend Finn is saying: ‘It often happened that Finn made some unexpected suggestion which when I followed it up turned out to have been just the thing.’ Jake automatically dismisses the idea that Finn could have a good idea. The last but not least, Jack is greedy and selfish, concerned exclusively with himself.

Jake is a self-absorbed individual and the first person narration is used only to emphasize this fact. The very first pages of the novel reveal to us that Jake regards himself as the cynosure of the universe:

When I saw Fin,...[]... I knew at once something had gone wrong...[]...I had been delayed by the strike. I hate the journey back to England anyway; and until I have been able to bury my head so deep into London that I can forget that I have ever been away I am inconsolable....[]...On this occasion two the bottles I always smuggle had been taken from me by the Customs, so that when

¹³ The Sovereignty of Good 88

¹⁴ Cheryl Browning, Understanding Iris Murdoch (Uni. Of South Carolina, US 1999) 29

closing time came I was utterly abandoned to the torments of a morbid self-scrutiny.¹⁵

Jake is another of Murdoch's godless character. He positively killed his inner god and fraught the vacant space, the void, with himself. He hailed himself the centre of his microcosm and people around him are just extensions of himself, they all coexist in his private universe. This strongly reminds of Nietzsche or Kant, both of them inspired Iris Murdoch. The following quotations only support this claim:

[Finn] is a remote cousin of mine ...[]...and I never troubled to verify this.¹⁶

People often get the impression that he is my servant and I often have this impression too. When we are short of beds, it is always Finn who sleeps on the floor, and this seems thoroughly natural.¹⁷

This was what always happened. I would be at pains to put my universe in order and see it ticking, when suddenly it would burst again into a mess of the same poor pieces, and Finn and I be on the run, I say my universe, not ours, because I sometimes feel that Finn has very little inner life.¹⁸

It might be, though, that Finn misses his inner life, and that that is why he follows me about, as I have a complex one and highly differentiated. Anyhow, I count Finn as an inhabitant of my universe, and cannot conceive that he has one containing me; and this arrangement seems restful for both of us.¹⁹

These lines prove Jake's egocentrism and selfishness, but we may perceive a similar phenomenon in his relation to all characters that appear in the novel. He apparently does not care about Magdalen. 'Sometimes, Magdalen had boy friends, I didn't mind and I didn't inquire. I preferred it when she had, as then I had more time for work, ...' For him, Magdalen

¹⁵ *Under the Net* 7

¹⁶ *Under the Net* 7

¹⁷ *Under the Net* 7

¹⁸ *Under the Net* 9

¹⁹ *Under the Net* 9

is simply his provider of shelter. The same is valid for his friend Dave. Jake does not think of Dave as long as he does not need his apartment. He uses Saddle only to find out the address of his former love Anna. In fact, all characters that appear in the novel are described only as an extension of Jake's universe.

Murdoch claims that there are only few ways of attaining truth: 'great art... [and] humble people who serve others'.²⁰ It was already said that for Murdoch, great art has the potential to reveal some degree of truth, and a humble man, "because he sees himself as nothing, he can see other things as they are."²¹ 'The humble man perceives the distance between suffering and death.'²² This is the case of Finn.

On the contrary, Jake lives absolutely detached from the outer world. He is, disintegrated and has no links with the real world. For his faineance, he meets only those that he needs for his day to day survival and throughout the day, he is exclusively concerned with the maintenance of his own existence. From the very beginning of the novel, the reader can feel Jake's constant *méconstance* and he is literarily, rain or shine, pursuing *his* own needs.

Interestingly, whenever Jake achieves what he craved for, it is not reassuring and he invents other goals: 'The next day round about ten o'clock I was walking down Welbeck Street. I was in a bad temper. By daylight the whole project seemed very much less attractive.'²³

Probably the most striking example of an anti-climax, in the entire novel, is when Jake finally reaches Hugo, which was Jake's major objective:

I began thinking about Hugo. He towered in my mind like a monolith: an unshaped and undivided stone which men before history had set up for some human purpose which would remain forever obscure. His very otherness was to be sought not in himself but in myself or Anna. Yet, herein he recognized

²⁰ The Sovereignty of Good 103

²¹ The Sovereignty of Good 103

²² The Sovereignty of Good 104

²³ *Under the Net* 49

nothing of what he had made. Why had I pursued him? He had nothing to tell me. Yet no sooner had I thought this than I began to be curious again about him.²⁴

At last, Jake is cured, salvaged, redeemed from his 'existential misconduct' and finally ceases to see the world as it appeared to him, as an illusion, but as it really is:

I had no longer any picture of Anna. She faded like a sorcerer's apparition; and yet somehow her presence remained to me, more substantial than ever before. It seemed as if, for the first time, Anna really existed now as a separate being and not as a part of myself.²⁵

In this passage, we are the witnesses of the fall of ego. Even though Murdoch objected to Freud's concepts, she herself is concerned in her novels with the concept of ego. Her idea is that if we are ever to see the true nature of things, the ego must be defeated. In short, to be concerned with ourselves necessarily means to remain in a state of illusion. This is an idea which is used repeatedly in Murdoch's novels. This idea will be discussed into more detail in relation to her later work, *The Sea the Sea*. In *Under the Net*, Jake shatters his ego and for the first time, he can see the true nature of things. His passage also deliberately corresponds with Plato's analogy of the cave.

Probably the most prominent concept which is presented in the novel is the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. He influenced not only Iris Murdoch but also Western philosophy, and all spheres of humanities in general. This is obvious even from her journal, where she noted: 'How far has the fact that I have known *very well* certain people (Eliz [Anscombe], Yorick

²⁴ *Under the Net* 50

²⁵ *Under the Net* 219

[Smythies], Kreisel, Hijab) who were imprinted by Wittgenstein affected my work as a writer? ' And the influence of Wittgenstein's teaching, that Murdoch was not fortunate enough to experience directly, is apparent in her writing straight from the beginning: *Under the Net* and *The Flight from the Enchanter* are chiefly based on his philosophical work *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*.

The most obvious example of Murdoch's inspiration is the main character, Jake Donaghue in the novel *Under the Net*. Wittgenstein says: '*The limits of my language mean the limits of my world*'²⁶ and 'What we cannot think, that we cannot think; we cannot therefore *say* what we cannot think. This remark provides a key to the question, to what extent is solipsism true. In fact what solipsism *means*, is quite correct, only it cannot be *said*, but it shows itself...That the world is my world, shows itself in the fact that limits of the language (the language which only I understand) mean the limit of my world...The world and life are one. I am my world. (the microcosm)...The I in solipsism shrinks to an extensionless point and there remains reality coordinated with it'²⁷

Murdoch contemplated this idea and deeply influenced by Wittgenstein, she translates and projects this idea into her novel *Under the Net*:

'There is something fishy about describing people's feelings,' said Hugo. 'All these descriptions are so dramatic.'
'What's wrong with that?' I said.
'Only,' said Hugo, 'that it means that things are falsified from the start. If I say afterwards that I felt such and such, say that I felt "apprehensive" – well, this just isn't true.'
...
'I didn't feel this,' said Hugo. 'I didn't feel anything of that kind at the time at all. This is just something I say afterwards.'

²⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Major Works*, 'Tractatus Logico Philosophicus' (Harper Collins Publishers, US 2009) 63

²⁷ 'Tractatus Logico Philosophicus' 63 - 64

‘One cannot be [accurate]’ said Hugo. ‘The only hope is to avoid saying it. As soon as I start to describe, I am done for. Try describing anything, our conversation for instance, and see how absolutely instinctively you...’

‘Touch it up?’ I suggested?

‘It’s deeper than that,’ said Hugo. ‘The language just won’t let you present it as it really was.’

‘Suppose then,’ I said, ‘that one were offering the description at that time.’

‘But don’t you see,’ said Hugo, ‘that just gives the thing away. One couldn’t give such a description at that time without seeing that it was untrue. All one could say at the time would be perhaps something about one’s heart beating. But if one said one was apprehensive, this could only be to try to make an impression – it would be for effect, it would be a lie.’²⁸

This is also the explanation of the above mentioned Wittgenstein’s view of to what extent is solipsism true. Suppose you *say* that there is solipsism, you specify an area and immediately determine that there is the outside (everything beyond) of it. Once we think it, we can say it and see beyond it. In fact this inevitably undermines solipsism, since the scope of the term grows infinitely and thus abolishes its true meaning. Wittgenstein says that we can only say what we can think and suggests that we can make estimation or reproduce the reality by stating things which can be measured: such as the heart beat, meters, hours, yards. All else is untrue.

Murdoch silently obeys Wittgenstein’s logic and demonstrates its result towards the end of the novel. Jake attempts to reconstruct his conversation with Hugo in a book. Jake Donaghue, as it was already said, dares to interpret and publish Hugo’s concepts and philosophy (this obviously points to the fact that Wittgenstein did not allow his students to take notes during his lectures). Quite paradoxically, the idea of publishing *The Silencer* is irresistible and Jake thinks of this book as a major oeuvre of his time. It is not until he reads the book himself that he realizes that the content has lost much of its genius and appears almost mediocre. Jake gradually becomes confronted with another Wittgenstein’s concept – that words that

²⁸ *Under the Net* 59-60

paraphrase the reality are never sufficiently accurate and therefore they provide a thwarted copy of this reality. In short, the reality is irretrievable from the language.

Interestingly, when Jake opens the book (*The Silencer*) after a while, he realizes himself that the idea he presented is not dazzling at all:

I now found Hugo's arguments very much less impressive and there occurred to me instantly a variety of ways in which the position of Tamarus might be strengthened. There remained the fact that Annandine was but a broken-down caricature of Hugo. Hugo would never even have used words such as "theory" or "generality". I have not achieved more than just the most shadowy expression of Hugo's point of view.²⁹

Peter J. Conradi, a major biographer of Murdoch, says that: 'Iris saw Wittgenstein as both numinous and later as demonic. She dreamt of him all her life (never of Sartre) ...'³⁰ It is not only through his philosophy that Wittgenstein takes form in Murdoch's novels. He is often projected as a figure humiliating others and also 'imprints' them (this has clearly nothing to do with his philosophy). In a way, Murdoch must have feared that Wittgenstein could be dangerous and tend to deprive others of their inner self. He is not projected into Murdoch's debut novel entirely. There are only some elements of his character. One of the main protagonists, Hugo Belfounder, postulates several ideas that are undoubtedly Wittgenstein's, still Hugo lacks other characteristics that are so typical for the great philosopher.

The novel is saturated with Wittgenstein, his imprints are simply omnipresent. Hugo is the 'silent philosopher' of the novel. He speaks about Wittgenstein's net of language and introduces his theory. He also claims that we can only crawl under it. More importantly, he assumes that truth is unattainable for most of us. 'Only the greatest man can speak and remain

²⁹ *Under the Net* 92

³⁰ Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch/ A Life* (Harper Collins Publishers, London 2002) 263

still truthful.³¹ By saying the greatest man, Hugo presumably speaks of a philosopher or more precisely of a novelist. For Wittgenstein, philosophers should refrain from scrutinizing their inner self, and here he finds agreement with Murdoch.

Hugo, similarly to Wittgenstein, is presented with an imposing ego which imprints itself by its power into the others. When Jake meets Anna, he at once recognizes that the words she utters are not entirely her own. Towards the end of the novel, Jake recognizes the source of her inspiration at once: ‘...what the piece of dialogue had been trying to remind me of were the words which Anna had uttered at the Mime Theatre; the words which I had felt were not her own. They were Hugo’s.’³² The mime theatre is another symbol. Anne paraphrases Hugo and she appears to have no self of her own. Hugo, an existentialist is not a man of words, but a man of action. In the book, actions speak while words are only lies. The language is represented by Jake, who is making theories about life, paraphrasing it and turning language into a distorted mirror of the reality.

Towards the end of the story, Jake is taught another lesson. He ceases to live in the world of illusions and as a reward; he is allowed to see reality. In this respect he is liberated and finally free of all haunting illusions.

³¹ *Under the Net* 61

³² *Under the Net* 82

2.2. *The Sea, the Sea*

A very prominent feature of the main protagonist in *The Sea, the Sea* is the concept of an uprooted individual. This was originally a philosophical, rather than literary term. To fully grasp this phenomenon, it is crucial to discuss its causes. What gave birth to this concept is indisputably the confrontation of humanity with a stream of events taking place during the Second World War. The unprecedented terror of the war: concentration camps, massive destruction, the devaluation of human life brought into daylight that there is no limit to human cruelty. The side effect of this was the death of god (originally postulated by Nietzsche much earlier), his murderers being both Christians and non-Christians. In other words this era marked the end of the shattered remains of Christianity in the Western World.

According to Buber, there are three circles of thoughts that we could no longer unify: first, the creationistic idea of Adam and Eve, second, the antique Greek concept of Zoon Politicon and, lastly, Darwin's theory of species. We suffered from the impossibility to synthesise these concepts due to the variety of traditions that meet in thinking of every human. Therefore, philosophy attempted to unify this fragmented image.³³

Another characteristic feature of the post Second World War era was the cult of happiness. Happiness as the primary objective of our lives and the urge to give sense and purpose to our lives. Here, we speak about the crises of humankind, a relatively new phenomenon of our time. In a way, our society positively hailed happiness as the ultimate goal of our life from which consumerism and other related phenomena developed.

³³ Max Scheler, *Misto cloveka v kosmu*, trans. J. Grygar (Prague: Academia 1968) 44

The image of a human as a hideous, cruel being was in direct opposition with the philosophical approach of a human regarded as 'good by nature' and 'spiritually aspiring to good'. Quite paradoxically, we created a world that is no longer under our own control and we have no power over it. It seems as if we were a part of a stream of events that nobody wished for. We speak about social constructs such as politics, economy or even technology.

The political emancipation (which was enrooted in enlightenment and liberalism) and the loss of traditional forms of human co-existence resulted in feelings of alienation and solitariness. Simply speaking, we witnessed the decline of the importance of family, traditional values and attachment to a specific region— these values were hit hard particularly in the Western civilization. Philosophers draw attention to this saying that these tendencies have reached their peak: the massive deportations, displacement and concentration camps. These phenomena produced a new type of human – a human being completely uprooted from his traditional values, facing this phenomenon he questions himself 'who are we'? The answer that appears to be most relevant is: We are uprooted human beings. In the following chapters, the concept of an uprooted individual will be demonstrated in selected novels of Iris Murdoch.

A new phenomenon of unbridled wars appeared and human dignity was weakened dramatically. This all was taking place in the background of the optimistic image of a man as an enlightened being. Gabriel Marcel assumes that behind these tendencies there is a deeper crisis, modern human being ceases to be spiritually reconciled and balanced, the anchorage of the metaphysical is dying and this also leads to the death of God. It is a phenomenon of modern atheism – a massive phenomenon – atheism that was constructed by both atheists and theists. Naturally, this has far-reaching consequences – a human being was liberated from all bounds and in his consciousness he put himself into the position of the absolute. Thus, he shattered himself and ended up in something even lower than what he previously wanted to get rid of. During the First and the Second World Wars, human beings were exposed to

unprecedented extent of horror and violence and we could no longer recognize ourselves in the mirror of the 1950's.

In addition to that, the denial of humanity and the drastic confrontation with the consequences of the loss of the metaphysical leads to another phenomenon apparent in the western world – personalisation and individualization – a human being gradually turns more and more to himself. He is uprooted (see the chapter about the phenomenon of an uprooted individual) from his traditional environment and becomes what Gabriel Marcel defined and I here paraphrase: 'a man from a lager house.'

The main protagonist of the novel, Charles Arrowby is childless, and after a long career of a lionized playwright he retreats to the Shruff End to become a troglodyte. This is clearly an example of social detachment.

He points out himself that he is 'no gardener', in other words, he is not attached to any patch of land, which is in accord with the characteristic of the philosophical concept. In addition to that, Charles, similarly to other characters, has lost religion in the due course: 'We had both of us acquired the vague English Christianity which disappears in adolescence.'³⁴ He is godless and he never married; thus his being a social anchorite prevented him from becoming a part of the society. This, again, conveys the idea of up-rootedness, the idea of a wandering eremite living restrained of all traditional values.

Essentially, living as an existentialist – Charles also perceives the others as an extension of his private microcosm: 'I may add here that one of the secrets of my happy life is that I have never made the mistake of learning to drive a car. I have never lacked people, usually women, longing to drive a car. Why keep bitches and bark yourself?'³⁵ (This idea was discussed into

³⁴ *The Sea, the Sea* 64

³⁵ *The Sea, the Sea* 10

detail in the chapter concerned with *Under the Net*). The implication here is that Charles opportunistically uses many people only as his private means.

By present an uprooted individual, Murdoch attempts to contemplate the modern crisis and to hint at its consequences for the humanity. We might have gained more freedom but the price to pay is exile, loneliness. We are wandering individuals, strangers even to ourselves and in every society, there is a system of substitutes for the lost senses of belonging such as political parties or groups of people gathered under a common interest.

These are exactly the conditions in which *The Sea, the Sea* takes place. Speaking about the novel, the ambition of this paper is to cover the essential concepts of this book, largely based on the teaching of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Sigmund Freud, Martin Buber, Plato and Buddhism. Also, for the purpose of this paper, it is impossible to neglect numerous references to Shakespeare's 'Tempest', since Charles Arrowby is often rightly compared to Prospero, and his attempt to abandon life and power but at the same time, he doesn't want to sacrifice his power to manipulate others: 'Have I abjured that magic, drowned my book? [Is this] the surrender of power, the final change of magic into spirit?'³⁶

Similarly to *The Bell*, *The Sea the Sea* presents itself with an example of binary opposites, the saint (James Arrowby) and the artist (Charles Arrowby). It seems that Murdoch never got tired of this prototype, since they are engaged in several novels. The discussion and relationship between James and Charles are strikingly similar to Jake and Hugo in *Under the Net*. Both of them struggle to achieve renunciation by detaching themselves and they are obliged to enter the world they attempted to leave. In the novel, we are constantly given these two perspectives, James' and Charles'.

³⁶ *The Sea, the Sea* 39

Also, both characters are striving for virtuous life; James retreats to Buddhism while Charles to art, to the world of theatre. Here Murdoch introduces the idea of art as an illusion. In fact, the two key terms of the novel are illusion and detachment.

James is the mediator of Buddhism in the novel. In fact the question of religion, Christianity and Buddhism is something Murdoch is constantly preoccupied with. In fact, her idea of an ideal religion for the western cultures is not the one we know, a religion with a personal god. She thought that a religion with personal god is no longer possible for most people and they are not able to decode what is the significance of believing in personal god. She said: 'I know that I don't believe in one [god]. I don't want to use the word *god* in any other sense. I think it's a proper name. I don't believe in the divinity of Christ. I don't believe in life after death.'³⁷ From the very beginning, and her every novel is a proof of that, Murdoch was more inclined to a godless religion, to Buddhism. Also, in Buddhism, she sees the idea that a religion can not only do without god, it is much better without one: 'It [Buddhism] has to do with *now*, with every moment of one's life, how one thinks, what one is and does, about love and compassion and the overcoming of self, the difference between illusion and reality.'³⁸

Speaking about the former, Charles Arrowby has spent his life in the theatre, in the world of illusion. In the beginning of the novel, Murdoch presents a concept which was discussed in *Under the Net*, postulated by Wittgenstein. A concept concerning, art, truth and reality. Murdoch is obsessed with the idea that a perfect state is where truth, goodness and reality are one. In *Under the Net*, Murdoch introduced the idea that only the greatest artists can express truth via their art. This is a clear reference to Wittgenstein, who developed the idea that

³⁷ Jeffrey Mayers, Paris Review, *Iris Murdoch, The Art of Fiction* No. 117, (Paris Review, New York 1990) 2

³⁸ *Iris Murdoch, The Art of Fiction* 3

philosopher's rhetoric must be devoid of any artistic, metaphorical or aesthetic language, it must be devoid of the author's self:

Even a middling novelist can tell quite a lot of truth. His humble medium is on the side of truth. Whereas the theatre, even at its most 'realistic', is connected with the level at which, and the methods by which, we tell our everyday lies. This is the sense in which 'ordinary' theatre resembles life, and dramatists are disgraceful liar unless they are very good.³⁹

Murdoch attempts to enforce in all her novels that we have to get rid of the self in order to attain truth. This is the crucial aspect of her work; nearly all her characters that are close to death undergo some degree of truth, even if it does not change their life after all. For Murdoch 'The acceptance of death is an acceptance of our own nothingness which is an automatic spur to our concern with what is not ourselves.'⁴⁰ In *The Sea, the Sea* we can see this Charles almost drowned after Peregrine pushed him down from the rocks.

The Sea, the Sea is also a brilliant example of the irreproducibility of the reality. The method of using first person narration of Charles Arrowby's gives the impression of a journal.

Nonetheless, Charles numerously expresses his dissatisfaction with the way he recorded the past and often claims that the written version is rather thwarted: Charles never succeeds in writing what he intended. Simply speaking, he finds the reality irreproducible. He was also too much in his dreams and disregarded the reality: '...but what a 'fantasist' I have been myself. I was a dreamer, I the magician. How much, I see as I look back. I read into it all, reading my own dream text and not looking at the reality.'⁴¹

³⁹ *The Sea the Sea* 36

⁴⁰ *The Sea, the Sea* 103

⁴¹ *The Sea, The Sea* 493

It was already said that Charles sees the theatre as a contrast to its audience, to put it bluntly reality versus magic. Throughout the book, he is often misled and confused by the two and the gap is growing bigger.

When I was young I could never decide whether James was real and I was unreal, or vice versa. Somehow it was clear we could not be both real; one of us must inhabit the real world, the other one the world of shadows.⁴²

Charles cannot imagine the existence of the two, because he always regarded James as his rival and he was always vying for preeminence with him. He regarded their life as a constant ground of rivalry. He does not refrain from his personal interpretation of reality. Soon, it becomes clear that it is Charles who surrounds himself in falsehood and lies, which eventually leads to his thwarted perception of life and subsequently to constant misjudgments of situations:

People lie so, even we old men do. Though in a way, if there is art enough it doesn't matter, since there is another kind of truth in the art. Proust is our authority on French aristocrats. Who cares what they were really like?⁴³

This is what Murdoch wanted for Charles to represent in the novel. For him, it is more important what is being said than what the situation really is, as long as there is an artistic element in it. On the other hand, James is the binary opposite of Charles. He warns Charles

⁴² *The Sea, the Sea* 57

⁴³ *The Sea, the Sea* 31

against this perception and says that the heroes of Troy did not fight for Helen, but for the phantom of Helen. 'Vain wars for Phantom goods.'⁴⁴

'All right, [I love you] but in an unreal way, in a dream, in a might have been. Really, all this was over a long ago and we are dreaming it.'⁴⁵ Hartley's memory of Charles is natural. He was her childhood love that has never acquired the capacity to be anything more than that. She half forgot about Charles and started a real life, down to earth with her husband. But why is this not so in Charles' case? James makes an attempt to explain this to Charles:

Time can divorce us from reality of people; it can separate us from people and turn them into ghosts. Or rather it is we who turn them into ghosts or daemons. Some kind of fruitless pre-occupation with the past can create such simulacra, and they can exercise power, like those heroes at Troy fighting for a phantom Helen.

I am not calling her a ghost. She is real, as human creatures are, but what reality she has is elsewhere. She does not coincide with your dream figure. You were not able to transform her. You must admit you tried and failed.⁴⁶

In fact, this is one of the key passages of the novel. There is a parallel between James and Charles in their vanity and use of power they acquired. James misuses the power he has acquired in Tibet and this cost the life of his dear friend. Charles misuses his artistic powers and 'the payment for a fault is automatic.'⁴⁷ Titus, the adopted son of Hartley is found drowned.

The role of Titus in the story has an extraordinary significance. Coincidentally, Titus is in many respects like Charles. In the novel, he is described as a boy carrying physical appearance that harks back to Charles. Apart from that, similarly to young Charles, he dreams

⁴⁴ *The Sea, the Sea* 175

⁴⁵ *The Sea, the Sea* 329

⁴⁶ *The Sea, the Sea* 353

⁴⁷ *The Sea, the Sea* 447

of being an actor and he is determined to pursue his carrier. In this respect, Titus might be regarded as a dream child of Hartley and Charles. A son who never existed.

The death of Titus is also significant for the story. Children are the prospect of our future and for Charles; Titus might have been his new sense of life. But instead of supporting Titus, he decided to continue his 'wild goose chase' for Hartley determined to 'rescue her'. By losing Titus, Charles has lost his vision of the future and starts to understand his finality.

Before we proceed further, there is another aspect of the story which is to be discussed connected with James, Charles and the death of Titus:

White magic is black magic. And a less than perfect meddling in the spiritual can breed monsters for other people. Demons used for good can hang around and make mischief afterwards. The last achievement is the absolute surrender of magic itself, the end of what you call superstition. Yet how does it happen? Goodness is giving up power and acting upon the world negatively. The good are unimaginable.⁴⁸

It was already said that Charles almost drowned at sea. He was rescued by his cousin James and he claimed not to remember the actual process of being rescued. But after a while, when his memory recovers, he realizes that what he actually saw was that '[James] he was against the rock as if he were clinging onto it like a bat.'⁴⁹ Also, Charles recalls James standing on water while saving his life. In short, the whole event was miraculous and Charles survived. Here, we encounter another Buddhist concept which is described in the quotation above.

James, in order to save Charles, uses his acquired power and creates a good demon. A demon

⁴⁸ *The Sea, the Sea* 445

⁴⁹ *The Sea the Sea* 468

that prevents Charles from dying. But the demon is 'hanging around' and eventually 'makes mischief.' Before it becomes clear that Titus had died, James already seems to know what had happened.

Despite the death of Titus, he does not cease to live in the world of theatre, in an illusion. There are supernatural elements in the novel which make Charles' narration unreliable and contribute to the effect of illusion.

The best example of this may be Charles' vision of the sea monster. It loosely alludes to Rembrandt's painting Perseus rescuing Andromeda from the sea monster, given that the triangle correspond with the triangle of Charles in the role of Perseus, Andromeda, the victim in the role of Hartley and the sea serpent, Ben. This association is based on sheer egotism. Peregrine says to Charles: 'Fear is fundamental; you dig down in human nature and what's at the bottom? Mean spiteful cruel self-regarding fear, whether it makes you put the boot in or whether it makes you cower.'⁵⁰ After Charles falls down into the raging sea and is rescued, he realizes that he encountered the sea monster. In fact, he encountered a symbol of what is inside him. The serpent of jealousy: 'I let loose my own demons, not least the sea serpent of jealousy.'⁵¹ After he almost drowned at sea, he is able to see some degree of truth and instead of the sea monster encounters seals.

One of the facts that could be said about Charles is that he did not think of Hartley until he started to recollect his memories. The first reference to her does not come any earlier than at the moment when he begins to write his biography. Oddly enough, speaking about his lovers, he does not begin with Hartley, there are other women, but he admits that it's the most painful affair in his life.

⁵⁰ *The Sea, the Sea* 160

⁵¹ *The Sea, the Sea* 492

The reasons for detachment are well stated in the preface of the novel by John Burnside: ‘For many of us, the only sphere of authenticity is the personal: the public realm, the political and social, appears to have become corrupted beyond redemption.’⁵²

Murdoch attempted to incorporate some Buddhist concepts here and this is mediated through the character of James. He speaks of the wheel of reincarnation and explains that Charles is attached to this wheel because he has created a daemon in his mind that enslaves him. In this way, he should not detach himself from the society. This sort of detachment is viewed as gaining of superiority over the others, who are still involved in a situation, a sort of arrogant and selfish step. In other words, there is a discrepancy between the selfish and cowardly withdrawal and the meaning of the word detachment in the Buddhist sense. In the preface of *The Sea, the Sea*, John Burnside uses the example of Bodhisattvas or the Sufi masters: ‘What distinguishes the Bodhisattvas in the decision not to leave the circle until all sentient beings attain enlightenment; the saint who has shed the illusion of the world returns to that same world to assist others.’ However, what we see in the novels of Murdoch is merely a flight, a selfish or a desperate withdrawal. In *Under the Net*, the main character Jack Donaghue, having secretly kept a record of his and Hugo’s conversation, is unable to face Hugo again and withdraws. This according to the Buddhist teaching is wrong, because while achieving peace of mind the agent should take into account others. Should their mind be thus at peace, he is also permitted to withdraw:

I then returned to my room, gave in my notice, packed up my things and left immediately. About a week later a letter from Hugo was forwarded to me in which he inquired what had happened to me and asked me to get in touch with him. I left the letter unanswered.⁵³

⁵² *The Sea, the Sea* ix

⁵³ *Under the Net* 66

Charles Arrowby in *The Sea, the Sea* withdraws from his successful social life to live in a small village and write his journal/memoir/novel. He dreams of becoming a traditional Romantic hero, and as John Burnside says '[Charles is] confronting the wild forces of the natural world, in *his* pools, in *his* land, in *his* sea.'

At one point near to my house, the sea has actually composed an arched bridge of rock under which it roars into a deep open steep sided enclosure beyond. It affords me a curious pleasure to stand upon this bridge and watch the violent forces which the churning waves, advancing or retreating, generate within the confined space of the rocky hole.⁵⁴

Soon after, he is drastically brought back to reality, Titus, the adopted son of Hartley drowned and Charles nearly drowned in the sea. Towards the end of the novel, we can see that Charles Arrowby in no exception to the rule. His withdrawal from London is imperfect and impossible. It is impossible mainly because he is thus engaged in a selfish and pretentious struggle to find serenity far from his troubles. Charles is an idealist seeing himself as a Caspar David Friedrich's painting "Wandered above the Sea of Fog". Instead, he is roughly confronted with the real conditions and nearly drowned at sea. Finally, he returns back to London to live in his brother's apartment. Towards the end of the novel comes a sudden realization: 'She [Hartley] is gone, she is nothing, for me she no longer exists, and after all, I fought for a phantom Helen.'⁵⁵

Our lusts and attachments compose our god. And when one attachment is cast off another arrives by way of consolation. We never give up a pleasure absolutely; we

⁵⁴ *The Sea, the Sea* 5

⁵⁵ *The Sea, the Sea* 492

only barter it for another. All spirituality tends to degenerate into magic, and the use of magic has an automatic nemesis even when the mind has been purified of grosser habits.⁵⁶

This is another reference to Buddhism. James explains the wheel of reincarnation and the relation of our internal self. Since 'our lusts and attachment' are central to our inner self, we find it very hard to exist without them. There is a system of substitution, something that corresponds to Max Scheler's concept of *ordo amoris*. We all have our *ordo amoris*, and once we let go of one attachment, we immediately create another:

I accused Hartley of being a 'fantasist', or perhaps that was Titus's word, but what a 'fantasist' I have been myself. I was the dreamer, I the magician. How much, I see as I look back, I read into it all, reading my own dream text and not looking at the reality. Hartley had been right when she said of our love that it was not part of the real world. It had no place.⁵⁷

Having fought for Hartley, Charles realizes that James was right. He confesses Hartley was a phantom, he admits being a dreamer. Why should he fall in love with an old woman? Simply, because he was not in love with Hartley, but with his youth, and the whole affair was only a product of his egotism. Charles substitutes his desire of his first lover for another attachment. In fact, this is also valid for Charles' detachment from the world of theatre. Why did not he start looking for his first lover long ago, but only after he retired to Shruff End? Simply because he peopled his new world with demons and obsessions: and his obsession was Hartley. He did not let go of Hartley because the image of her was his unwillingness to do

⁵⁶ *The Sea, the Sea* 468

⁵⁷ *The Sea, the Sea* 499

part to his youth, he was unable to be reconciled with the fact that it is over and it can never be attained. Charles, in the role of Prospero, unwilling to surrender the books of magic.

2.3. *A Word Child*

At the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Murdoch delivered her lecture called ‘Salvation by Words’. She argued that literature is crucial for our survival and salvation:

‘words constitute the ultimate texture and stuff of our moral being, since they are the most refined and delicate and detailed, as well as the most universally used and understood, of the symbolism whereby we express ourselves into existence. We become spiritual animals when we become verbal animals. The *fundamental* distinction can only be made in words. Words are spirit.’⁵⁸

Murdoch appears to have projected these ideas into her novel which she named *A Word Child*.

In fact, this is something very typical of her. The main protagonist, Hilary is clearly speaking in support of her: ‘I discovered words and words were my salvation. I was not, except in some very broken-down sense of that ambiguous term, a love child. I was a word child.’⁵⁹

Hilary was put into orphanage and before he learned the art of words, he demonstrated himself with constant violence. Fortunately, he was salvaged by a good professor, Mr Osmand, who taught him the art of words and helped Hilary to be offered a place at Oxford.

Very early in the novel, we learn that Hilary is not successful in his life. He is frustrated and his only pleasure is browsing foreign dictionaries. In a way, Murdoch appears to contradict her theory of ‘Salvation by words.’ Henry is a frustrated person and even Hilary’s sister Crystal, who is not educated, who was not ‘salvaged by words’, appears to be doing better than him.

Furthermore, another Murdoch’s theme enters the novel. A theme that dominates her entire work: the loss of religion. Hilary is a godless character, Christianity was enforced into him and he has lost his faith soon after. In Murdoch’s work *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, she

⁵⁸ Iris Murdoch, *A Word Child* (Vintage, London 2002) 27

⁵⁹ *A Word Child* 28

argues that once religion collapsed, we should be guided by morals. Arthur, the suitor of Crystal, explains:

But I think one should try to stick to simplicity and truth. There may be no god, but there's decency and – there's truth and trying to stay there. I mean to stay in it, in its sort of light, and trying to do a good thing and to hold onto what you know to be a good thing.⁶⁰

And this is the point. Hilary has lost his moral guidance through his immoral relationships. He had an illicit love affair with Anne and he does not learn his lesson and repeats the same mistake again with Kitty. In the preface to *A Word Child*, Ray Monks says: 'Words are our salvation when used to describe reality; when mistaken for reality, they are our prison.'⁶¹

Hilary's another problem, except from the lack of morals, is that he uses his art of words out of context. His words do not reflect reality and lead him into a world of illusions, misinterpretations and misunderstandings. In short, words without substances are useless. It is via words that Hilary is separated from the trivial and it is the world of words that comes with more temptations, he is constantly misinterpreting the reality through words and this thwarted vision keeps him in the world of illusions. For instance, Hilary perceives his love for Kitty as redemptive, this misinterpretation results in Kitty's death.

Hilary is browsing foreign dictionaries, but his activity is futile, he does not use the words any further e.g. for reading or writing. His unbelievably persistent and faithful lover Tommy attempts to take Hilary back into reality. She refuses to take part in the play (Peter Pan) because she wants reality. She wants Hilary to enter this reality and give her a child.

⁶⁰ *A Word Child* 28

⁶¹ *A Word Child* X

On the top of that, once Kitty does and Hilary this repeats the same mistake again, he says: 'it was not a tragedy. I had not even the consolation of that way of picturing the matter. Tragedy belongs in art. Life has no tragedies.' In the novel, Murdoch reveals the blindness of Hilary, while we are watching this from somewhere above.

Letters and words are the source of Hilary's constant uncertainty. Since they are empty, they have no support in the real world. Hilary is falling and there is nothing he could clutch. The words he possesses are flying, a source of illusion:

I was feeling sick with anxiety and terror as if I might actually have to vomit in the gutter. I regretted terribly that I had destroyed Lady Kitty's letter as now doubts assailed me about the time and place of the meeting. Perhaps it was not today, perhaps it was not here. Perhaps it was all a sort of dream anyway. No one would come. I would never see Biscuit again; never hear again from Lady Kitty.

Indisputably, there are parallels between Hilary Burde and Charles Arrowby (*The Sea the Sea*). Charles Arrowby, similarly to Hilary Burde, admits that he would never succeed in his life if it was not for the tutors that salvaged them: for Charles, it is Mr McDowell who showed him the world of theatre and educated him largely. For Hilary, it is Mr Osmand, his tutor that helped him to study at Oxford University. Again, they both regard them rather as vehicles for their own self-realization rather than actual people. As for mister Osmand, he is presented as 'good' and according to Murdoch; goodness is the vehicle of truth.

Interestingly, Hilary Burde in *A Word Child* never knew his father and has little knowledge of his mother. He, similarly to Charles Arrowby never married and we can observe the same features of social uprooting.

Hilary's way of life reflects his mechanical perception of languages, as it was already illustrated on the example of dictionaries. He has acquired the mastery of communication but he doesn't use words to communicate with other people. Instead, he creates a hermetic world which is dominated by routine. The novel as such is divided into days and Hilary adheres to his strict schedule, for example he is meeting one of his friends only on Thursday. Instead of communicating with people, he closes himself in the inner circle of the London tube. His work is also subject to strict routine: 'I did not invent rules, I merely applied rules made by others. Sometimes the rules did not quite fit the cases, and there was a tiny occasion for thought. Usually no thought was necessary.'⁶² Also, Hilary admits:

I relied upon routine, had done so perhaps ever since I realize that grammatical rules were to be my salvation, and since I had despaired salvation, even more so. Routine, in my case at least, discouraged thought. Your exercise of free choice is a prodigious stirrer up of your reflection. The patterned sameness of the days of the week gave a comforting sense of absolute subjection to history and time, perhaps a comforting sense of morality.⁶³

The way Hilary uses to protect himself from thinking is not a solution of his inner crisis. In fact, he is constantly trying to postpone his reconciliation with events that took place in the past. Hilary is unable to see any division of time and he appears to be captured in his childhood. His routine provides him a form of escape. Gunnar Jopling makes a poignant remark about Peter Pan which is also valid for Hilary:

The fragmentation of spirit is the problem of our age ... Peter personifies a spirituality which is irrevocably caught in childhood and which yet cannot

⁶² *A Word Child* 28

⁶³ *A Word Child* 27

surrender its pretensions. Peter is essentially a being from elsewhere, the apotheosis of an immature spirituality.⁶⁴

In fact, there is a connection between Hilary's childhood, the suicide of Gunnar Jopling's son Tristram, the death of Anne's unborn child and the fact, that Kitty wants Hilary to give her a son. There is a potential phase in these characters that they never leave; the potential of Hilary, since he is a gifted linguist, and the potential of an unborn child which may give peace to Gunnar Jopling and bring reconciliation to his life. And naturally, there is a parallel between Gunnar Jopling's impotence and Hilary not releasing his sister Crystal from their common martyrdom. He prevents her from having a child with Arthur. On the top of that, Thomasina urges Hilary to have a child with her. Thus, it can be said, that the theme of a child and potential, future, unfulfilled hope and dreams is central to the novel. Hilary regards this as paradoxical:

It suddenly struck me as a comic...that I was now being badgered by three women in their thirties, two wanting me to present them with a child, the other wanting me to sanction her marriage. Child-hunger seemed to be the thing just now.⁶⁵

Hilary suffers from constant self punishment and he blames himself for having killed Gunnar Jopling's wife Anne in a car accident. During his years at Oxford, while he excelled in everything he took part in, his sister Crystal worked in a chocolate factory. It comes as a paradox that the smell of a basic good that gives people pleasure, chocolate, evokes horror in

⁶⁴ *A Word Child* 227

⁶⁵ *A Word Child* 351

Hilary. In fact, his constant self punishment and self pity prevents him from any possible pleasure or success.

In this novel, Murdoch seems to discuss a topic she presented in her philosophical book *Of Good and God*. In short, she suggests that god could be substituted by good, or let us say morality. The reason why Hilary fails repeatedly (firstly by succumbing to Anne, twenty years later by falling in love with Lady Kitty) is that he does not lack education, but will and morality, or moral strength.

2.3.1. *The Bell*, Jean Paul Sartre and Existentialism (Existentialist hero vs. Mystical hero)

'Every existing thing is born without reason, prolongs itself out of weakness, and dies by chance.'

Jean Paul Sartre

Murdoch's approach to Sartre was rather of a complicated nature. This is also evident from the following lines: "Iris's quarrel with Sartre goes back to her first encounter with him, and extends into her first novel. It was, she wrote to Queneau, as if Sartre were 'repeating a spell: Be like me, be like me. Almost ready to say: yes dammit, I am.' But she was not quite spellbound." Later she wrote: 'There is something demonic about Sartre which is part of his fascination.'⁶⁶

Indisputably, there are several points where Murdoch demonstrates her revolt against Sartre's existentialism. Sartre's hero is by nature godless, just as Murdoch's but she views Sartre's hero as a villain without any prospect of salvation.

In his work, Sartre appears not to have taken into account love (only sex) and also fails to demonstrate moral change. Essentially, Sartre's characters are hopeless, and beyond redemption. Murdoch's is, in a way, also an existentialist – still her vision of existentialism is much closer to Gabriel Marcel's rather than Sartre's. They start at the same stage but the major change is apparent towards the end of the novel. The main protagonist is always cured: by love, self-reflection or purely in a Platonic way.

Having said that, there are traces of Sartre in Murdoch's characters, most notably in Charles Arrowby in *The Sea, the Sea*. In this novel, Charles represents a self-absorbed egotist. Why is

⁶⁶ *Iris Murdoch/ A Life* 269

he longing for Hartley? She is old, “wrinkled” and not even “spirited”, she is neither a saint nor an artist, simply speaking, there is very little one could love Hartley for. Is Charles in fact unbalanced and not reconciled with the loss of his youth? Is he haunted by the idea that by marrying Hartley he would regain his youth? At the end, there is again the prospect of pursuing her, a new chance to find her a start a new ‘wild-goose-chase’, but Charles simply feels no urge to risk it against all odds. He is passive. He no longer desires it. But why is he all that sudden unable to succumb to the new temptations that arise? Unfortunately for Charles, even towards the end of the novel, he cannot tell. Charles was taught a lesson but did not understand its purpose; he is unable to give meaning to things and thus suffers the consequences just like a prototypical/stock existential hero of Sartre’s novels. In addition to that, the character of Charles Arrowby (similarly to the main protagonist of Sartre’s *Nausea*, Antoine Roquentin) is at last confronted with the harsh reality. He struggles to understand his actions until it becomes evident, that freedom means responsibility: every individual is free to make meaning of his own; otherwise, there is no meaning.

Murdoch later abandoned this concept and was more focused on the juxtaposition of the polarity of two prototypes of protagonists, heroes. The former personage of an existential hero is often contrasted with a ‘new’ phenomenon of a mystical hero. This major shift is almost tangible in Murdoch’s novel *The Bell*, in which we are presented with two leaders of the Abbey: Michael and James.

Michael and James are often contrasted in the novel, and it soon becomes apparent that between Michael and James there is a prevailing polarity in respect of truth, goodness and beauty and both characters view the issue of the moral and the spiritual in a different light:

Ideals are dreams. They come between us and the reality – when what we need most is just to see the reality. And that is something outside us. Where perfection is, reality is.⁶⁷

The character of James clearly suggests that our illusions, ideals and dreams are rarely fruitful. They usually make things opaque and obscure to us, they blur our vision and put a veil over the essential – reality. Another chief concept that James presents is not to study one's self. It is to think rather in terms of "it is enjoyable" and "it is forbidden" which means that we should refrain from thinking personally and selfishly of what we like and dislike but rather in general, almost altruistic terms. The decisive factor here is the direction from the inward towards the outward. Interestingly, Michael starts his "sermon" with a completely different view:

The chief requirement of a good life ... [] ... is that one should have some conception of one's capacities. One must know oneself sufficiently to know what is the next thing. One must study carefully how best to use such strength as one has.⁶⁸

Interestingly, Murdoch says something similar in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*:

We can only learn what we already know, what we can, as it were, remember. If we have ideas of good or perfection in an imperfect world these must be divided from a higher source. We have to find our certainties for ourselves, in ourselves, and we must believe in our duty and ability to discover and make our own truth with we first intuit or make out as shadows.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Iris Murdoch, *The Bell* (Vintage, London 2004) 143

⁶⁸ *The Bell* 200

⁶⁹ *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* 434

This is a typical Murdoch's view of interpreting the reality, the world and the rules that are imposed on us. Again, the main contrast between Michael's and James' "sermon" is that Michael advises not to refrain from self-scrutiny. Self-scrutiny does not always lead to egotism but to know yourself helps you to understand your actions and the true nature of things that surround us. This is in fact one of the chief concepts of the 20th century philosophy. One's conduct cannot be dominated by a set of rules but rather by self-assurance that the action comes from the inner self.

The existentialist hero is 'powerful and self-assertive'⁷⁰, while the mystical hero 'is an anxious man trying to discipline or purge himself.'⁷¹ A. S. Byatt paraphrases Murdoch saying that 'the chief temptation of the former is egoism, of the latter masochism.'⁷² Even the cognitive processes both characters use are different. Michael analyses the world through love whereas James via his view of truth and reality.

⁷⁰Iris Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics: "Writings on Philosophy and Literature"* (Penguin Publishers Ltd., London 1999) 226

⁷¹ "Existentialist and Mystics": *Writing on Philosophy and Literature* 226

⁷² *The Bell* viii

3. Conclusion

One of Murdoch's chief concepts is that the 'outside' reflects the 'inside' and this is valid for all her novels. The plot of the story is always a vehicle, just a means of penetrating and seeing the inside. Still the plot as such is usually strong enough to exist by its own, and other layers are present only to offer a different perspective. In this respect, Murdoch was often subject to sharp criticism, the critics stating that some of her plots have actually very little to recommend and were labelled too simplistic (most notably *The Sandcastle*). It must be said, that due to Murdoch's systems and concepts, which she hardly transcends or interrupts, most of the novels are debased by repetition and the ideas presented tend to amalgamate.

Under the Net remains after all Murdoch's best novel. It explores the net of languages, the incapability of words to reproduce the reality, Wittgenstein's theory presented in *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*. 'Wittgenstein also uses the image of the net, or mesh, the net, he says, represent the picture of reality we construct to describe the world.'⁷³ The danger of postulating theories about life, egotism, and last but not least, it plays a significant counterpart to Sartre's work *Nausea*.

Apart from her debut novel, the second best appears to be *The Sea, the Sea* mainly because it presents the escalation of her previously introduced philosophical concepts. It is a novel of a sudden alienation from reality, of peopling vacant space with daemons and illusions. Suddenly, what is being said becomes more important than what things really are like. In other words, illusions become more important than reality. In the milieu of the novel stands the ego of the main protagonist and its fall, unwillingness to grow old, to retire and to surrender. The idea that the youth is over and it can never be attained.

⁷³ Rubin Rabinovitz, *Iris Murdoch* (Columbia University Press, New York 1968) 11

The Sea the Sea foreshadows the direction of Murdoch's element of Buddhism, of her later thoughts on Buddhism and the fall of personal god. We may observe her growing fascination with this religion. It satiates her search for religion without god in its centre. The novel is equally a confrontation of the saint and the artist (an idea later developed into more detail in *The Bell*). Of truth and reality and how the two could be attained.

A Word Child speaks of the power of words and its reflection in reality. To what extent do words mirror the reality? Is aggression and violence demonstration of the incapacity to communicate and use language? The novel explores crime and punishment but also the themes of guilt, self punishment and reconciliation with the past.

In her novels, Philosophy is never peripheral, but always central. A more inquisitive reader might claim, where is Murdoch's share in the novel? Is she just a mediator of philosophy, developed by someone else? No and Yes. We might see Murdoch's genius in using philosophy and adding the aesthetics on the top of that. The philosophy is presented subtly; it is never imposed on the reader and it often touches all aspects of humanity questioning the eternal topics of art, religion and morality. Her concepts are not simply stated, but she rather offers juxtapositions of philosophical ideas and her novels are fields, grounds, platforms for philosophical dialogues. Having said that, it must be said, that since her novels represent these philosophical grounds, they are subject to them and there are no exceptions. Unfortunately, this makes her writing transparent and takes us back to rather moralistic writers where a set of rules was always granted.

Nonetheless, to truly understand the message of her novels it is essential not to be dazzled by the sun and see further, use the plot as a mediator that will show other, different, deeper layers where some concepts are presented in a clear light, better (paradoxically in even more

comprehensible form) than by philosophical texts, not losing anything from its value – regardless of the extent of philosophy, the aesthetics is still present.

Murdoch poses acute ethical issues for all of us (*Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*), we face the question whether we can reject the literal truth of the Gospels and yet still retain Christian morality? Can any moral values withstand the constant encroachments of technology? Are we on the brink of losing most of the qualities which make us truly human? Murdoch leads a dialogue with Schopenhauer, Derrida, Wittgenstein, Descartes, Kant, Buber and with many others to find poignant and satisfactory answers for these disturbing questions and it is where the mastery of her writing lies. To sum it up, the writer herself is the best advocate:

I'd like people to enjoy reading them [my novels]. A readable novel is a gift to humanity. It provides an innocent occupation. Any novel takes people away from their troubles and the television set; it may even stir them to reflect about human life, characters, morals. So I would like people to be able to read the stuff. I'd like it to be understood too; though some of the novels are not all that easy, I'd like them to be understood, and not grossly misunderstood. But literature is to be enjoyed, to be grasped by enjoyment.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Iris Murdoch, *The Art of Fiction* 4

Bibliography:

Byatt, A. S., *Iris Murdoch* (Longman group Ltd. Essex 1976)

Conradi, Peter J., *Iris Murdoch/ A Life* (Harper Collins Publishers, London 2002)

Gerstenberger, Donna, *Iris Murdoch* (Bucknell University Press: New Jersey 1975)

Obulsemu, Ben, *Iris Murdoch and Sartre*, (John Hopkins University Press, US 1975)

Mathias, Peter, *Britain, History of a Nation* (Methuen and co Ltd. London 2002)

Murdoch, Iris, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (USA: Penguin books Ltd. 2001)

Murdoch, Iris, *Existentialists and Mystics: "Writings on Philosophy and Literature"* (Penguin Publishers Ltd., London 1999)

Murdoch, Iris, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (Penguin Books Ltd. London 1993)

Murdoch, Iris, *Nuns and Soldiers* (Penguin Books Ltd., New York 2001)

Murdoch, Iris, *Under the Net* (Penguin Books Ltd., London 1998)

Murdoch, Iris, *The Sea, the Sea* (Vintage, London 1999)

Metaphysics and Philosophy in Selected Novels of Iris Murdoch

Scheler, Max, *Misto cloveka v kosmu*, trans. J. Grygar (Prague: Academia 1968)

Rabinovitz, Rubin, *Iris Murdoch* (Columbia University Press, New York 1968)

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, "Tractatus Logico Philosophicus" (Oxford University Press: London 2007)