

## COMBINATION OF ARTISTIC FEATURES WITH PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTS IN THE NOVEL “UNDER THE NET” BY IRIS MURDOCH

**Feruza Muzaffarovna Shapsanova**

Teacher, “Linguistic and English Literature” department, Uzbekistan State World Languages University

[shapsanovaferuza@gmail.com](mailto:shapsanovaferuza@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

This article is dedicated to literary analysis of the artistic features and the philosophical views derived in the novel “Under the Net” by prominent English writer, Iris Murdoch. “Under the Net” is her first masterpiece, published in 1954, which provides readers with amazing realistic quest of a writer whose name is Jake Donaghue, the main hero of the novel, and his philosophical or phenomenological awakening, and self-understanding.

The aim of this article is to analyze the novel “Under the Net” with the help of philosophical and literary approaches. In our research we used historical-cultural, empirical, analytical and comparative methods. We analyzed the novel “Under the Net” applying Iris Murdoch’s philosophical non-fiction works including articles and essays.

Iris Murdoch (1919-1999) is an English writer who is claimed to be a founder of philosophically coated novel in English literature. Murdoch was prolific writer who created more than thirty novels and some philosophical works dedicated to art, reality, truth and morals. In her very first novel “Under the Net” Murdoch shows existential crisis of an individual, at the same time opposing Jean Paul Sartre’s lonely individuum who condemned to freedom and isolation portrayed in his novel “La Nausee”. As the research results, we identified a philosophical attitude of the author about language ambiguity, egocentric nature, and opposition of reality and fantasy.

**Keywords:** philosophy, existentialism, freedom, morals, art, truth, reality, fantasy.

### INTRODUCTION

Interaction between philosophy and literature has been controversial and complex in many ways, yet they are very close because both of them produce one thing, morals. Even though, they are separated into two dimensional practices they have been keeping in touch with each other, indeed its philosophy that sometimes intrudes into

literature. The great example of a writer who was able to inculcate her philosophical views into the world of fiction was Iris Murdoch.

Iris Murdoch was born in 1919, in Dublin. She got an education in England, studied philosophy at the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford. Lately, conducted lectures about philosophy at Oxford University. Her first works actually were non-fictions dedicated to the branch of philosophy. She started her career as a writer of fiction with the novel “Under the Net”, which brought her a pretty much fame. Nevertheless, Murdoch didn’t prefer her novels to be called philosophical, arguing that two branches had different purpose and attitude. Although, she admitted that her novels contain some philosophical inclinations because as she stated, novels or generally art is slightly about self-expression. The author in her first novel clearly had been influenced from Jean Paul Sartre’s philosophical worldviews. We see criticism toward Sartre’s existentialism by Murdoch through the novel “Under the Net”.

### Main Part

“Under the Net” tells a story of a young man in his thirties who earns to live by translating French writer’s works. Jake Donaghue is a talented Englishman, who wishes to become a writer, at the same time, admits that he is quite lazy to be one. His adventures or philosophical quests begin after being driven out from his rent-free apartment. Jake Donaghue has many similarities and differences with Sartre’s Roquentin. Both of them need to experience existential crisis to find their places in the society, and finally, to become a potential writer. However, they approach their destination with dimensional knowledge of truth, where Murdoch gives her own ideas in her novel. Iris Murdoch says about Sartre: “It is no superficial or perverse dilemma into which this thinker has got himself. As a European socialist intellectual with an acute sense of the needs of his time, Sartre wishes to affirm the preciousness of the individual and the possibility of a society that is free and democratic in the traditional liberal sense of terms. This affirmation of him is the most profound concern and the key to all his thoughts. However, as a philosopher he finds himself without materials to construct a system which will hold and justify these values; Sartre believes neither in God, nor in Nature, nor in History. What he does believe in is Reason; and this is what chiefly differentiates him from the positivist, whose dislike of traditional speculative metaphysics is equally vehement”. [1] Sartre’s investigation to literature from Murdoch’s point of view is the case - literary work that reflects human nature can’t be created just by abstract formation. Despite of his efforts, Sartre couldn’t see the main purpose of the literary prose – “the creation of whole, not



partitioned image.” [2] Murdoch called his rationalism romantic, isolated from the sphere of real application. Sartre could penetrate into the psychology of lonely individual, and his analysis conduces self-awareness, but he can't lead the actions of his main heroes, therefore can't show the true way of living. [3]

Speaking about literature, Murdoch in one of her interviews says that imagination is a good quality, on the other hand, fantasy is a bad one. Imagining is about being creative, and creating fantasy works as private self-consolation. Also, she adds that literature needs to be close to real life, and an author must avoid to create illusions which are lies and far away from reality. Moreover, literature or activity of telling stories function as defeating formlessness of the absurd world. For writer its a challenge to expel fantasy and exhibit the world as itself. [4] Jake Donaghue is an individual who surrounded himself with fantasies about life, and even about other characters' life, which reveals his ego-centric nature. For instance, he doesn't care about Finn's life, ambitions, desires, about his past, even though, Finn is his best companion. Jake, in the novel says, “I am thinking perhaps about God, freedom, and immortality. What Finn would be thinking about I don't know.” [5] Jake tends to build up various misconceptions about the people around him including his beloved woman Anna, for whom he thinks that his old friend Hugo falls in love, or about Anna's sister Sddie, or Hugo himself.

In her philosophical work “Against Dryness”, Murdoch stated, “we are not isolated free choosers, monarchs of all we survey, but benighted creatures sunk in a reality whose nature we are constantly and overwhelmingly tempted to deform by fantasy”. [6] Jake's arrival in France in the novel represents escapism from the reality. However, Jake's point of visiting France is to see Magdalen, Jake's ex-renter and somewhat ex-girlfriend who offers him a good job with high amount of salary, he rejects the offer and chases after Anna, like a night enchanted by a princess in fairy tales. “What was Anna seeing, what filled her golden head at that moment, I wondered. What image of sadness or of promise blotted out for her the scene into the centre of which she kept moving with a dreamer's pace? Was she thinking perhaps about me? Was Paris as full of me for her as it was full of her for me?” [7] His illusions break up after meeting Hugo Belfounder, who personifies *a philosopher*, who is aware of truth.

Sartre's existentialist philosophy presents a naive optimism and a comforting idealized view of an individual. Murdoch didn't reject existentialism, but evaluated it by giving options to overcome existential problems. Murdoch suggests that, metamorphosis of ego-centric nature into the unselfishness and reality is embodied by virtue. By caring for



people, and being aware of beauty and the true art, an individual produces virtue that helps to overcome existential crisis.

Murdoch claimed in interviews with several reporters that the core of her fiction is the battle between *the saint* and *the artist*. Hugo Bellfounder as we mentioned above represents a philosopher, who is also a saint, because he doesn't manipulate reality, but gives truthful descriptions of life. On the other hand, Jake Donaghue is artist figure, who strives to escape reality and find consolation in fantasy. Jake holds off on sharing his story out of fear that he could tell Mrs. Tinckham the truth about being evicted by Magdalen. Jake implies that form is a form of deceit, an imposition of structure that falsifies reality. Hugo, on the other hand, is drawn to the ephemeral nature and lack of form in the fireworks he has made, and he abandons them when art critics start to categorize his work into styles. "The enjoyment of fireworks, according to Hugo, ought to be an education in the enjoyment of all worldly splendour. You pay your money, said Hugo, and you get an absolutely momentary pleasure with no nonsense about it. No one talks cant about fireworks." [8] Hugo's another quality of the saint is his selflessness. Murdoch considers that the greatest significant revelation a novel can make to its audience is that other individuals exist.

Iris Murdoch divided her novels into two categories, *open* and *closed* novels. *Open* novels are realistic, while *closed* ones are reflections of her subconscious where the characters have lost their hopes and cannot find a solution for certain situations, and unable to live their own lives.

Her novel "Under the Net" appeared following the novels by Kingsley Amis and J. Wayne, and firstly perceived as a part of the common trend *Angry Young Men*. The main young hero's actions, his comic escapades, inaptitude and disinclination about living among standards of bourgeois society, and lyric intonation of narrative which express worldview of the main hero, at the same time the narrator of the novel is the akin characterization of a writer of the 50<sup>th</sup>. However, Iris Murdoch's hero more seemed to be against, than to supplement the gallery of *Angry Young Man*, because the actions of the narrator don't lead by anger, rather by love, and in his way of seeking his beloved he passes the stages of self-awareness. Even though, he is faced with disillusion, he still remains a romantic, who waits for miracles. Jake Donaghue, a long-winded freeloader, tries to change his situation and make amends for past errors by reconnecting with his old friend Hugo Bellfounder, a mild mannered and soft-spoken philosopher, in this mildly satirical novel about employment, marriage, money, and fame. Jack Donaghue accepts his "transformation" as "one of the miracles of

our life”. Nevertheless, before the miracle happens, he finally sees in himself an artist – creator, who believes in his abilities, that he has his own path. In this novel, a lot of accidental, inexplicable and even fatal things has to happen. The fatality is one of the leader themes in the book. It is softened by the ironical narration that decrease the dark and mystic atmosphere.

The events of the novel cover a very short period of time, during which a decisive turning point occurs in the fate of the main characters, after which they enter a new phase of their lives. Jack gives up his job as a literary figure to devote himself to art. His loyal friend Finn returns to Ireland. Hugo Belfaunder, a weapon manufacturer who has become a toy manufacturer gives all his money and decides to take up the craft of a watchmaker. Murdoch’s dynamic story in which one unexpected adventure follows another, deliberately excludes any hint of the backstories of the heroes. Jack warns curious readers saying: “I’m not telling you the whole story of my life”. [9] Everything that is not directly related to the events, remains outside the scope of the narrative including the past of the heroes. This is the artistic principle of the novel showing only what is currently in the field of vision of the narrator, because we all know only pieces of other people’s lives and would be very surprised if we could see everything.

Murdoch’s concerns about language are similar to her reservations about form in both life and art. Its tendency to distort the facts and paint misleading representations of reality, were other issues raised by Murdoch in the novel “Under the Net”. Ambiguity of language is important motif of the novel, because through this phenomenon Jake Donaghue is forced to experience existential awakening. For Jake and Hugo language is mysterious and complicated, yet dangerous because it is irrelevance in the face of existential reality. In the novel Hugo says that people tend to exaggerate stories, thus language lies, and only actions prove truth. In the novel, the author expressing Mrs Tinckham’s life writes, “She just loves to know everybody’s business, or rather to know about their lives, since 'business' suggests an interest narrower and less humane than the one which I now felt, or imagined that I felt, focused with some intensity upon me. In fact the truth about her naiveté, or lack of it, may lie somewhere between the two, and she lives, perhaps, in a world of other people’s dramas, where fact and fiction are no longer clearly distinguished.” [10]

Jake Donaghue’s “The Silencer” includes the passage: "We must be ruled by the situation itself and this is unutterably particular here. Indeed, it is something to which we can never get close enough, however hard we may try as it were to crawl under the net." [11] The fundamental concepts,



scenarios, and characters that Murdoch will return to repeatedly are already present in her first novel, “Under the Net”.

### Conclusion

In conclusion we state that, Iris Murdoch is one of the greatest novelists of the XX century, who raised philosophical issues about life, art, truth and morals. Her first novel “Under the Net” can be read with the help of both aesthetic and philosophical approaches. In this novel Murdoch argues about ambiguity of language, and how it can lead to misconceptions. The author forces the main character, Jake Donaghue to go through the existential-awakening, thus opposing him to Sartre’s Roquentin in “La Nausee”. We see that the novel raises Sartrean issues but doesn't provide Sartrean solutions. The protagonist of Sartre's work of fiction laments and thinks in concisely grieved isolation. Iris Murdoch's imagination is a type of intentional interaction with the Sartrean world. Jake tries to delve into his illusions, but he finds that there are lots of other individuals out there with different perspectives than his own.

Iris Murdoch's moral philosophy intends to present a true portrait of man and demonstrate how he/she can become morally fitter. Almost in all her further novels we see the moral improvement of an individuum. Murdoch in her novel suggests that a person can overcome existential crisis by removing fantasies and accepting reality. Selfishness of a human nature needs to be fought with the help of awareness of others, love, nature and art. Murdoch demonstrates through her book that it is possible to be decent and to adore people. At last, we want to remark that the novel “Under the Net” is the long-running conflict between art and truth, fantasy and reality, illusions and morals.

### REFERENCES

1. Antonaccio, M. (2007). Reconsidering Iris Murdoch’s Moral Philosophy and Theology. In: Rowe, A. (eds) *Iris Murdoch: A Reassessment*. Palgrave Macmillan, London.
2. Conradi, P.J. (1986). *Iris Murdoch: the saint and the artist*. The Macmillan Press.
3. Jean Paul Sartre. *La Nausee*. 1938 (*Éditions Gallimard, in French*) 1949 (*in English*)
4. Murdoch Iris, “Vision and Choice in Morality.” *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, edited by Peter Conradi. London: Chatto & Windus, 1997.
5. Murdoch, I. (1954). *Under the Net*. London: Chatto&Windus.



6. Murdoch, I. (1959). *The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited*, *Yale Review*.
7. Murdoch, I. (1961). *Against Dryness*. Encounter.
8. Murdoch, I. (1989). *Sartre Romantic Rationalist*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
9. Philosophy & Literature – Iris Murdoch & Bryan Magee. Interviewed by Bryan Magee. (1978)

