

Summary

Iris Murdoch is probably considered the greatest British novelist of fiction in the late twentieth century both of the English literary world, as well as of the U.S. Throughout the eighties, the writer managed to publish no less than twenty-six novels, eight books of philosophy and eight plays, and on top of these all, a volume of poems. It seems unbelievable that the writer is capable of producing a novel a year, each being a success from the publication. Readers are amazed by the manner in which Murdoch juggles with her characters, by the way in which she makes reference to important figures of the English literature and not only, and sometimes her avid readers are taken aback by Murdoch's humility because in the freedom of writing, she requires a moral philosophy. Consequently her moral vision is tough and the intellectual horizon is high, bringing success to the novelist and Murdoch gets the Booker Prize for *The Sea*, *The Sea* and the Black Memorial Prize for *The Black Prince*.

It is definitely such an honour to have a Hollywood film which commemorates your life and also two monographs written by your husband, recording your life before and after your own marriage to him, the former being published anthumly and the latter posthumously. Putting into writing Murdoch's life, John Bayley entitled his book *Iris: A Memoir of Iris Murdoch* and as soon as it was published in 2001, this became a best-seller into its own right and constituted the basis for the film simply called "Iris" in which Kate Winslet played the "young Iris" and Judy Dench the "old" one.

Murdoch's novels typically have complicated plots in which innumerable characters, representing different social positions, which express philosophical concepts, undergo kaleidoscopic changes in the relationships among them. The realistic observations which have as target the middle-class professionals, in whom the author is interested, are interwoven with extraordinary incidents which bring forth the macabre, the grotesque and the comic. Murdoch's novels illustrate the belief that although human beings think they are free to exercise rational control over life and behavior, they are

actually marked either by their own unconsciousness or by the social impact in general, as well as other strengths.

In my thesis, I intended to refer to the challenge Murdoch proposes to the language of the British novel at end of the twentieth century. Postmodern writer, deeply rooted in heterogeneous and/or classic sources, she goes through a rich existence considering the socio-historical events of her own biography and the studies in classical and modern philosophy which she fulfilled in the prestigious institutions she attended.

Accordingly, Chapter one deals with the author's psychography at the beginning of her path. It evidences moments of Murdoch's early years, her happy childhood, the schools she attended, bits of friendships and their relevance to her later life, winding through the narrow paths of her mind, casting light on the transformation from a shy little girl into a daring, powerful woman, standing for her political views. Although she had a Bachelor of Arts degree obtained with first-class honors in the Classical Greats from Oxford University, it is striking that she chose to work as assistant principal in the British treasury and later for the UN Relief and Rehabilitation Center. Having dedicated a part of her life helping the others and understanding their needs, still she returned to her education as she had obtained a studentship in Philosophy at Cambridge University. Soon afterwards she became a tutor at St. Anne's College in Oxford, England; a position she held for the next 20 years.

Seeing all the struggle and efforts, it is almost impossible to believe that she had time for writing and studying. Reviewing and commenting on her first literary works, articles, essays and journals - which she published at the debut of her literary work- may indicate the complexity of the Murdochian writing. The searches signaled in the first scripts show that Murdoch is striving not only to find her own style, but also to design a strategy for novel composition. Murdoch therefore proves an attitude and an aesthetic awareness about the language, whilst she is building the artistic language (logos) of her own creation.

Chapter two brings to light literary figures who managed to influence the author, both in her way of thinking and in representing this artistically. May these be personae of Europe's cultural tradition: Plato, Wittgenstein, Simone Weil, Kant, Freud, Shakespeare, Hugo, or their contemporaries, such as Elias Canetti, each has their well-established role.

Each section of the chapter deals with a different figure and by adding his/her value and influence on Murdoch to the entire scheme, it helps the critics and the readers build a complete picture of Murdoch's personality and also understand a part of her genius.

Chapter three refers to the particular philosophy / theory of Ludwig Wittgenstein in terms of his conception of language and language games that influenced the philosophical component of the Murdochian work. Surprisingly Iris Murdoch did personally meet Wittgenstein going to see him at Oxford, Cambridge where he presented his vision of *language functionality*, relativity and text pragmatism.

Assuming that Wittgenstein's philosophy is a "battle against the bewitchment our intelligence by means of language" (*Philosophical Investigations*, 109), Murdoch is trying to build a personal strategy and style. The writer chooses to use what she herself called "many of the fundamental ideas and methods" of *Philosophical Investigations* and the solutions- presented in the cited work- which referred to the meaning of language and thought. But what Murdoch did was to analyze the philosopher's theory from her own perspective with a view to integrating the personal selection into the work of fiction. Wittgenstein's theory about language as a play on words / meanings becomes fundamental and influences Murdoch, the postmodern writer, in a double sense: a) a reconsideration of common communication language, created by the human brain b) a reinterpretation of the grammar / syntax of the text, become a formative framework that determines a person's thinking through language functionality. In the interviews given later, when Murdoch had become an award-winning writer acclaimed in the British and American cultural space, she publicly stated her appreciation and gratitude to Wittgenstein's theory, which led to her own views on the composition of fiction.

In her fiction Murdoch reconstructs the readers' habits through a slow and silent process; she makes use of aesthetics to focus on one object rather than some other, showing how one value functions in a particular social situation under certain contingencies and then how it functions differently in another. Each new Murdoch novel reveals that she is becoming progressively more at ease using the writing process to address issues she finds crucial. Murdoch's characters demonstrate the way people use language; she uses the aesthetic method in her novels to lay out ranges of social and antisocial behaviour.

From the pages of the third chapter, it can be understood that language games have their own rules, their own contexts and both the philosopher and the writer have to assemble all the perspectives in order to present the truth. Murdoch's choice is the aesthetic method which is meant to reveal more truth than the scientific one. So she chooses to present different contexts in different situations in order to understand the others, and in her opinion the ideal would be devoted attention to all of reality.

By inventing intermediate cases of language transactions in her novels she tries to conduct the reader to avoid comparing them but this can be distressing sometimes. Even so, it does instruct the reader and it provides an opportunity to help write the text. Supplying the reader with notations rather than explanations, Murdoch incorporates in the process complexity, inexplicableness and pathos. Her goal is to open up new perspectives, not to impose an arbitrary order on the microcosmos she creates.

The second part of my thesis focuses on the successful novel *The Black Prince*, for which the author received the Black Memorial Prize. In this novel, the narrator is a self-conscious writer, Bradley Pearson, obsessed with perfection and artistic achievement which he comes to consider a doom. A passionate love awakens the black Eros hidden in his being, discovering a new source of love and art. Finally the main character goes to jail for a crime he did not commit.

I chose *The Black Prince* for my thesis because it is a representative novel for the author, as well as for the public, or the world of literary criticism because of the conglomerate issues raised by this novel, because of the way the novel is structured, actually a novel in the novel, revealing both concentration, and suggestiveness in the compositional novelty Murdoch chooses in line with the pragmatism used in the language of the postmodern texts.

Bradley Pearson who is the main character states that "art is the telling truth, and it is the only available method for telling certain truths. Yet how almost impossibly difficult it is not to let the marvels of the instrument itself interfere with the task to which it is dedicated." As it can be seen, Murdoch refers to the impersonal aspect of the process of creation and it is telling the "only truth that matters"; so art becomes both an instrument and an aim.

The novel begins with a Foreword by the editor and one of the main character's, who is also the narrator, and finally, in a manner full of authorial mastery, Murdoch adds more postscripts. They are intended, apparently, not so much to enlighten the reader as to provide a hint of accuracy in the text, more precisely by contrasting viewpoints of each character with whom the narrator Bradley Pearson comes in contact along the action.

Shakespeare is a central landmark of inspiration / resonance for Iris Murdoch, because in almost all her works of fiction, Murdoch refers to characters from the plays of the master. A recursive and allusively involved Shakespearean character in *The Black Prince* is Hamlet. The writer chooses to send to the complexity of the Hamlet hero, or to use symbolism related to the tragic character.

Chapter four of the thesis addresses two distinctions in the novel in question: the first relates to the representation of Hamlet and Bradley Pearson, and the other one to that of Bradley and his friend, Arnold Baffin. While Hamlet's grief is just allusively presented, the author stresses the suffering undergone by the writer Pearson. Hamlet as prince of words is actually the real master of words, but in Murdoch's novel, the protagonist is transformed into a black prince. In the Murdochian text Pearson appears as manipulator of language, behind a mask of a destroyed Hamlet, actually a damaged version of Eros. Bradley Pearson, the writer is a *subversive version* of a postmodernist prince of words. Emphasizing the *sado-masochistic* approach on poetic language, present both in Shakespeare and the story writer in England in the late twentieth century, has generated the unanimous appreciation of critics for the novel *The Black Prince*, Murdoch's greatest artistic achievement.

Regarding the discussion between the two writers, Pearson and Baffin, of whom the first suggests the embodiment of the *real, deep, artist*, the eiron type and the second is the *shallow, false artist*, such as Alazon, archetypal designed by the Greek antiquity. The discussions arise criticism and self-criticism of the texts produced by the two types of authors, who are in danger of becoming fake writing, lacking consistency. Bradley Pearson is a conscious creator of works of value. Sensing that he needed a major change in his existence to rekindle his artistic spirit, Pearson, the authentic writer is involved in producing a serious work, his masterpiece.

Chapter five deals with topics like sex, sexuality, eros and charity. They are directly related to Iris Murdoch's conception of sexuality, twinned with emancipation and the freedoms that the postmodern British society had adhered to. The typology of characters imagined by the author is directly related to their sexuality, a component to which the writer dedicates whole pages debating on a multitude of issues and categories. In fact Murdoch deals with the libidinal identification seen from a Freudian perspective, without which a person cannot build his career and personality. Murdoch introduced a free sexuality that goes beyond the barriers of time and age; in the novel this appears like a physical and psychological one, a love like that of African rituals of life and death, of love and war. Murdoch chooses to compare the experiences of the main character, embodied by Bradley Pearson, with those of an African savage whose impulses are purely sexual. To be noted that Pearson can have this feeling only when Julian Baffin, the young woman who offers him a new experience and changes his life-course as an author, appears dressed in male clothes, playing the role of Hamlet at a rehearsal.

Chapter six attempts to highlight more of the dilemma related to the veracity of the views of others characters who appear in Bradley Pearson's life, each in turn deliberately spreading doubt on the action of this novel produced by Bradley. Murdoch offers not only the character of the thriller fiction from the novel, though means of which she herself laughs at the *carnavalesque space* created in her own work space, but also highlights the relativity of the writing / text, of the fictional truth in mimesis at the end of the century. Postscripts are subjective, being compiled by the editor and later annexed to the novel. It seems that each offers an individual vision, and if each is considered separately, we get a reading in six different ways from a multiple point of view (Julian, Rachel, Christian, Francis, editor and author- Pearson, of course).

Going through the work of Murdoch and exegesis and the related literary criticism, I reached the conclusion that she is primarily a writer who formed under the work of Plato (as Plato, she believes that people go through life with only a limited sense of truth, because our everyday world is full of illusion, but behind this reality, there is a world made of transcendental ideal forms). As a fiction writer, Iris Murdoch uses Freudian concepts integrated into her characters' lives, and an overwhelming influence marked by Shakespeare whom the author considered the biggest "novelist" of all times.

The osmosis of these elements contributed to an artistic masterpiece - *The Black Prince* – on which I focused my research / dissertation.

All in all, it appears that Murdoch selects heroes from the wealthy middle classes with whom she often came into contact and she manages “to turn accidental, ordinary, being into characters with depth,” (Murdoch, I. - Interviews), whom in her imagination of writer, she easily allows to develop their own problems. But the complexity of the Murdochian work constitutes for some people as a matter of perception. The author is so gently ironic that some readers fail to perceive the right meaning, because they are distracted by the *multigeneric approach*. Or worse, they just fail to understand that the middle class is naked in her novels (*The Myth of Marsyas* which Iris Murdoch always has in the subtext) in order to demonstrate in fiction the *neorealism* of the British contemporary society. With precision, the intellectuals’ skin is flayed in the author’s comedies.

It can be easily understood that the major goal is to create a fictional composition environment for all types of characters, regardless of sex or religion, because in a work of such magnitude, based on the challenge of language, *Everything is permitted*, as in the Dostoevsky classic statement. Hermeneutists consider that the critical act is still regarded as naive in interpreting all meanings of Murdoch’s novels. For her unusual talent, acquired through critical thinking and analytical studies in philosophy, for moral humility, a rare delicacy and complexity of the work which contributed to my elevation, I can firmly say that she is an outstanding cultural personality, a real Dame.