

Philosopher and Writer: Iris Murdoch's Long Journey From Existentialism to Neo-Platonism

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Abstract

Investigating the interconnection between literature and philosophy is significant in twentieth-century literary studies. The current research focuses on the philosophical and moral aspects in *Under the Net* (1954), *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956), *The Sandcastle* (1957), and *The Unicorn* (1963) by Booker Prize-winning English novelist and philosopher Iris Murdoch. Murdoch wrote extensively on philosophy, addressing topics such as existential egoism in *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* (Murdoch, 1953), morality and art in *The Sublime and the Good* (Murdoch, 1959), problems of contemporary literature in *Existentialists and Mystics* (Murdoch, 1997), and the importance of Platonic love in *The Sovereignty of Good* (Murdoch, 1970). In addition, scholars such as Maria Antonaccio (2000, 2012) and Peter Conradi (2010) have significantly contributed to Murdoch scholarship through their published works. These works have an essential role in interpreting her novels. The forms of love toward self and others, illusion and reality, human nature, and morality are her fiction's basis. In her novels, a reaction to Sartre's philosophy of the lonely and free individual is distinguished. By creating certain prototypes of pseudo-characters like artist, saint, philosopher, and enchanter, Murdoch prefers saint figure as her ideal, which can challenge Sartre's existential and outsider character in ethical questions. By typological character analysis of the above-mentioned novels, Murdoch's philosophical concepts can be revealed. The research question investigates the transition from Existentialism to Neo-Platonism through the inseparable interconnection between literature and philosophy. Murdoch employs a range of philosophical perspectives that can help analyze contemporary literature semantically.

Keywords: existentialism, Neo-Platonism, philosophy, literature

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Introduction

Dame Iris Murdoch is an English writer and philosopher, Booker Prize winner in 1978 for the novel *The Sea the Sea* (1999), receiver of Golden Pen Award in 1997, created many prominent novels that contain crucial philosophical debates. The purpose of this work is to reveal the moral philosophy of Iris Murdoch with the help of typological method of literary analysis. In her novels, we encounter definite characters with special traits that embody existentialists, including artists and enchanters, and also mystics who are saint types or philosophers.

Murdoch is known to be a researcher who introduced very fashionable French existentialist and writer of her time, Jean Paul-Sartre, to the British audience. Her first philosophical work is named *Sartre Romantic Rationalist* (Murdoch, 1999). The role of the philosophical movement Existentialism was phenomenal for her; thus, Murdoch (1999) stated, “existentialism was the new religion, the new salvation” (p. 9). Her early novels like *Under the Net*, *The Flight from the Enchanter* and many others were written under the influence of the latter. Her works of fiction functioned as a reaction to Sartre’s philosophy of the free individual. Murdoch’s position for the philosophy of existence overreached many views and ideas of philosophers and writers including Soren Kierkegaard, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Simone Weil, stopping at Plato and creating new or Neo-Platonic idea of Love. Murdoch (1997) later wrote, “when I was young I thought, as all young people do, that freedom was the thing. Later on I felt that virtue was the thing” (p. 190).

Literature Review

French existentialism, particularly the philosophy of Sartre, had a profound influence on Murdoch's thought, shaping the foundations of her ideological framework. Existentialists captured the atmosphere of postwar Europe and searched for treatment of nihilistic disease. That was the age of collapsed traditional values and beliefs, the first step into the godless, thus absurd world. Existentialism is generally categorized into two main branches: atheistic existentialism—represented by thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus—and religious existentialism, associated with figures like Søren Kierkegaard, Gabriel Marcel, and Karl Jaspers (Charlesworth, 1975, p. 5).

The next source of Murdoch’s inspiration, Platonic ideas in Neo-Platonism, progressed by the successor of Plato, Plotinus. The main Neoplatonic idea that impacted existential concepts is the depiction of *love* and its forms that are discussed in dialogues within *The Phaedrus* (Plato, 1995). The English writers who were inspired by French existentialism adopted the new form of Platonism, or the idea of *love*, to conquer the egocentric nature of the existential individual. Murdoch, in the same case, interpreted God as Good for goodness is the key concept to overcome the meaninglessness of life. Her final developed philosophy was formulated by Platonic concepts and Simone Weil’s theory of *just and loving gaze*. Plato himself associates the philosophy of love with Eros, the ancient Greek god of love. Socrates depicts Eros not precisely as a god, but more as a *daimon*.¹ Thus, his nature is very close to the human one. In contemporary literature, it is associated with *desire*. Humanity always possesses desire, and human nature that is similar to Eros pushes him/her toward it. Murdoch says in her book that Eros connects human desire with the highest morality. “He is a child of

¹ See also: Listener. (2023, October 28). The Role of Daimons in Greek Spirituality: Ancient Guides for Modern Times - Are We Listening. Are We Listening. Retrieved from <https://arewelisting.net/spirituality-consciousness/the-role-of-daimons-in-greek-spirituality-ancient-guides-for-modern-times/>

both poverty and plenty” (Murdoch, 1977, p. 33). Spiritual power represented by Eros tends to transform; hence, it can hunt for beauty, or it can be a source of wishes such as love of fame, love of wisdom, or intimacy. Low Eros can also be associated with ego-satisfaction that tractates *to love is to own*. That is why the soul is often in a sick state and can be healed by transforming the low Eros into the high Eros by the means of reality. From Murdoch’s (1977) perspective, Plato’s answer is that “the soul must be saved entire by the redirection of its energy away from selfish fantasy toward reality” (p. 38). Murdoch suggests transforming desire into high Eros by some secondary means, like appreciating beauty, learning languages, or by primary means, such as creating art and being in touch with people. The last one is highlighted by Murdoch as a treatment for existential neurosis. Its moral idea contradicts the doctrine of French existentialists, particularly Sartre’s. French existentialism is about marching toward self; Neo-Platonism is about retreating from self toward reality, society, people, faith, or values. In Plato’s *The Phaedrus*, it is said that Eros, or Love, is the search for an individual’s authentic half (Blumenthal & Markus, 1981, p. 14). Hence, it is found not by the love of self but by the love of others.

Novels of Murdoch are written in a traditional form that follows linear narrating, though the modern spirit of her era takes a greater place in them. In interviews, she stated that the functions of literature and philosophy are distinct; that is, literature is a mystification with an aesthetic role, and philosophy is a scientific field, a small-scale science that seeks answers to difficult questions in life and strives for spatial truth (Berezko, 2019). The literary and philosophical language of the writer also differs significantly from each other in this respect. Her purely philosophical works are monotonous, dry, clear, and fluent, while her artistic works are attractive, poetically detailed, rich in stylistic techniques, and artistic truth is often hidden and ambiguous. Murdoch in her novels used philosophical views only in the background, making them as complex and obscure as possible. The writer, refusing to call herself a philosophical novelist, insists that she is a realist writer and portrays life in a tragicomic way. Despite this, her novels are based on the philosophical idea of moral elevation and the achievement of perfection.

The main characters in Murdoch’s novels are often images of people in a state of existential crisis. As the events unfold, these characters experience a state of asceticism (*askesis*) with the help of intermediary images and achieve moral perfection. Sometimes it is vice versa; more in a moral way, a character may transfigure from a saint into a criminal. The main theme in Murdoch’s novels is the connection of art and truth that embodies illusion and reality, and often the entire novel depicts the adventure in search of the philosophical truth of life.

Murdoch creates both static and dynamic personages. Dynamic characters undergo a process of spiritual metamorphosis. This process can be both positive, in the form of the aforementioned state of *askesis*, and negative, in which the personage falls into an existential crisis and, unable to find a solution, ends tragically. Typically, the author’s novels combine two general types of a modern person:

1. An Existential character;
2. A Mystic character.

The existential hero is an image created directly upon the prototype of an existentialist; thus, he is a neurotic and a narcissistic individual who is alienated from the values of society, unable to adapt to a traditional way of life, and trapped in a cycle of fear and terror caused by the weight of responsibility for his actions and complete freedom. Such personages are

characterized by deceit and egotism. They are often indifferent to the existence of others, and they judge people for their own benefit. In this regard, they surround themselves with illusions, estranged from real life. The narrators in Murdoch's novels are mainly existential characters. This type also can be divided into two categories: *the artist* and *the magician*.

In other words, the basis of Murdoch's novels revolves around the conflict between characters embodying the images of the artist and the saint (Rowe & Horner, 2010, p. 3), as well as the relationship between the type of artist and magician. Consequently, the opposition of these images appears, both directly and indirectly, as key elements in revealing the core ideas.

The main conflict of the author's debut novel, *Under the Net* (Murdoch, 1954), is also formulated precisely between the artist character—Jake—and the saint—Hugo. Jake Donahue is, in the language of existentialists, a stranger to the environment surrounding him. "It is true that I am always giving Finn orders, but this is because Finn seems not to have many ideas of his own about how to employ his time" (Murdoch, 1954, p. 8). The psychological portrait of Jake is characterized by egotism and indifference to others.

In *The Unicorn* (Murdoch, 1963) the conflict is way more internal and embraces the relationship of an artist and a magician. Hedonistic and narcissistic features can clearly be detected through the portrayal of Effingham Cooper, an existential artist type.

He's not a lonely man. God keeps him company through the winter. ... He looked at himself with an amused ironical affection. He looked like a man; and he certainly passed, in the society which he frequented, as a clever successful enviable one. ... Damn, thought Effingham, now I shall get her cold. He kissed Alice on the lips. (Murdoch, 1963, pp. 35, 67, 78)

With the third-person narration, the author evaluates the story from the existential characters' point of views, Marian and Effingham, the outsiders who intruded into the compelling fairy-tale-like story. "By wrestling with Scottow she would make her way into the story" (Murdoch, 1963, p. 65). Marian, who is eager to experience some sort of adventure, desperately wants to be a part of this tale, and if possible, both of them wish to be the main character.

Furthermore, Annette, depicted in the novel *The Flight from the Enchanter* (Murdoch, 2010), which is also based on the conflict between artist and magician, wields quite similar characteristics. She aspires to an existential artist nature, a freedom-hungry, self-reliant, curious girl eager to acquire knowledge at the "school of life," about to turn nineteen, and under the influence of her brother Nicholas, who studies at Sorbonne. "She was admiring the extraordinary slimness of her ankles. ... She must be like a princess for whom all over her realm people toiled day and night to make her trousseau" (Murdoch, 2010, p. 70). Murdoch blends Alice's curiosity, the innocence of youth, the sensitivity of a young heart, and the confusion of a young soul in one character. The idea of love that Annette has is one of self-centeredness.

By analyzing the existential character based on Murdoch's discussions of *Plato's Allegory of the Cave*, we can penetrate into the core of her philosophical views. According to it, the existential character is one of the inhabitants of the cave presented by Plato. The fire in the cave and the reflection of the shadow in it are his ideas about the world that arose in his

imagination. As an existential artist figure, he cannot see the real world outside the cave, the reality that comes as a symbol of the sun. The existentialist is by nature withdrawn into his image of self, living under his own judgment, whether true or false.

For instance, the experienced, middle-aged Rosa from *The Flight from the Enchanter* is a character who is spiritually close to Jake and Marian. Her fairy-tale visions of people and dramatization of life prevent her from reality and create the sense of alienation from those who are really close to her. “She felt like the princess whose strong faith releases the prince from an enchanted sleep, or from the transfigured form of a beast” (Murdoch, 2010, p. 47). In the passage, Rosa likens herself to a pious princess who saves princes from a curse. In fact, Rosa’s later relationship with Lusiewicz siblings leads to a gross violation of moral boundaries. Rosa’s illusions ultimately cause the death of the innocent Nina.

The same nature of distorting reality is possessed by Marian from *The Unicorn*, and the center of all her fantasies is a mysterious lady in prison. “With a golden chain about her neck she looked, thought Marian, like some brave beleaguered lady in a legend or like some painter’s dream of ‘ages far ago’” (Murdoch, 1963, p. 50). Also, being non-directly rejected by attractive Gerald, Marian starts to liken him to a demon, formulating an antagonist for the story. “His slightly bloodshot brown eyes glowed reddish in the hazy light. ... It was the defeat of a man by a beast” (Murdoch, 1963, pp. 135, 225). However, at the end, Gerald becomes a tragic victim of Hannah.

The next feature of an existential artist that needs to be highlighted is isolation. Jake and Annette are spiritually lonely individuals, and their lack of a permanent home indicates their existential nature. “To the young women at Ringenhall Annette had said, ‘I have no homeland and no mother tongue’” (Murdoch, 2010, p. 54). The alienation of these characters leads them to exploration of their inner selves. According to existentialism, retreating into the self leads to existential awakening; on the contrary, Murdoch claims that this process creates egoism and permissiveness.

An existential character, despite being a typical egoist, is skillfully portrayed in bright colors. He/She is not devoid of courage, kindness, and courtesy; for example, Peter Crean-Smith in *The Unicorn*, who is believed to be cruel, also has a *charming* feature, as Denis points out, or Gerald is portrayed as being *polite, dignified, charming, and totally unapproachable* by Marian. Even the total egoist of the novel, Effingham, is loved by everyone. “She now turned her gaze upon Effingham. Dear Effingham. Dear, dear Effingham. Dear, dear dear Effingham” (Murdoch, 1963, p. 135). By a repetition of the word *dear*, Murdoch shows the magnetism and attractiveness of the hero. Parallely, Marian, who surrounded herself with illusions, is also praised by Effingham for “being of his own kind: a clever girl, a junior version of Elizabeth” (Murdoch, 1963, p. 84).

The image of an artist is further enhanced by Murdoch’s pathos in the novel *Under the Net*:

I looked down on Anna. She lay amid the coloured debris like a fairytale princess tumbled from her throne ... I could see Sadie’s face focused now into a look of intelligent venom. She looked like a beautiful snake; and the curious fantasy came to me that if I were to look under the drier at the real face and not at the reflexion I should see there some terrible old witch. (Murdoch, 1954, p. 47, 59)

Jake creates his own microcosm in his mind, in which Anna is a beautiful princess and a captive queen, and Sadie is an evil witch. Because of the boundless imagination, Jake avoids reality and is unable to understand people's true feelings. The same characteristic is relevant to the personages of *The Unicorn*. "Hannah had been for them an image of God; He thought of her now as a doomed figure, a Lilith, a pale death-dealing enchantress: anything but a human being" (Murdoch, 1963, p. 268). Hannah is described as a divine creature at first, but after killing Gerald and committing suicide, she appears to be devilish to Effingham. Effingham remains as an existentialist artist who is a rational romantic, egocentric, and faithless. Positive metamorphosis, which is Murdoch's early ideology, is mainly shown in her early novels, but in *The Unicorn* the character's transformation has never succeeded. Even the awareness of death that Effingham experienced in the bog cannot help him to reach askesis but temporarily turns him into the mystic saint.

The enchanting side of art is consolation, with the exception of rare works, says Murdoch. Considering existentialism to be a descendant of Romanticism, she thinks that only rare literature depicts real life and eliminates fantasies, protecting from the lies of Romanticism. Murdoch writes in her article that a human is not an isolated, free-willed being or master of his destiny, but rather immersed in the darkness away from reality, eager to deform their nature relentlessly and grossly with fantasies (Murdoch, 1961, pp. 16-20). Escapism mentioned above is relevant to both existential artist and magician – enchanter-type heroes.

Mischa Fox in the novel *The Flight from the Enchanter* and Hannah Crean-Smith in *The Unicorn* are perfect existential enchanter characters. In a philosophical novel, the main task of an enchanter is to lead people towards escapism, away from reality. They are like Mephistopheles in *Faust* or John Keats' *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, who, under the pretext of permissiveness and freedom, cover the soul tired of the ugliness of life with illusions. Their lives are full of mystery, abstraction, and drama; moreover, they wield power to attract by beauty. They are always shown alongside wealth and authority. In *The Sandcastle* (Murdoch, 1957), Rain Carter's dark green Riley makes her more attractive to Bill Mor; in *The Flight from the Enchanter*, John Rainborough only begins to see Agnes Casement as worthy of him and even comes along with a marriage proposal after she becomes the owner of a red M.G. A comical incident in the novel is that Marcia's black Mercedes makes John break his vow. Characters like John Rainborough and Bill Mor are ordinary personages who are thirsty for existential freedom but cannot escape Victorian values; in them, the trait of individuality is not noticeable.

In contrast, the portrayal of Mischa Fox, who is a mysterious and powerful king of the printing press, stands at the center of attention, revealing his enchanter nature. "He bore with him the signs of a great authority and carried in his indefinable foreignness a kind of oriental magic" (Murdoch, 2010, p. 127). Despite his popularity among Londoners and his magnetic attraction, the people know very little about him. "Who knows? said Rainborough. No one knows Mischa's age. ... No one knows where he came from either. Where was he born? What blood is in his veins?" (Murdoch, 2010, p. 33). These characteristics force existential heroes to weave all sorts of tales about them, and they become a source of fantasy for others (Woo, 1974, pp. 10-12).

In *The Unicorn* this theory is proven by Hannah's existential crisis. "A dream. Do you know what part I have been playing? That of God. And do you know what I have been really? Nothing, a legend" (Murdoch, 1963, p. 218). In the story, no one regards Hannah as real including herself (she refuses to step into the real world, rejecting Marian, Effingham, and

Pip's help), except Gerald, who is several times mentioned as having a close bond with her. And maybe that unbearable reality forces her to kill Gerald and herself afterwards. Hannah, is also depicted by other side characters, such as Denis Nolan (the saint who transfigures into an enchanter at the end of the novel): "She is a legend in this part of the country" (Murdoch, 1963, p. 64), Max Lejour (the philosopher who becomes illusioned and mysterious magician): "She may be just a sort of enchantress, a Circe, a spiritual Penelope keeping her suitors spellbound and enslaved" (Murdoch, 1963, p. 99), proving that Hannah's influence on them is immense and she wields the abilities of an enchanter. The enchanter character often ignites the illusions, drawing people into the hollow escapism. The heroes, tired of their boring reality, see some sort of adventure in enchanter figures that can fill their lives with meaning. Their falling into the enchanter's trap results in blindness, creating irresponsibility towards real life. This is the unbearable lightness of freedom, the place where permissiveness and morality collide. An enchanter possesses a sense of superiority and the ability to manipulate. The fragile and captivated passive Hannah says, "I think he would let me kill him slowly" (Murdoch, 2010, p. 43) regarding Nolan, one of her admirers. These heroes do not consciously realize, or refuse to realize, the sins they commit. Hannah can be interpreted not as a princess in a dungeon but as an evil sorceress who manipulates people by inducing pity and suffering.

Conversely, the mystic character prototypes in Iris Murdoch's novels reveal the author's approach to existential crisis. They are images of individuals who experienced an existential awakening in response to the nihilistic atmosphere of the twentieth century, yet were not satisfied with the idea of complete withdrawal into the self. Instead, they were able to rediscover the meaning of life by retreating from the ego-I while remaining open to others and the miracles that life offers. Wilson suggests that contingencies of life are the peak experiences by contrasting Sartre to a poet; hence, a poet faces the accidentality and the sublime with shock of delight, while Sartre with nausea (Wilson, 1966, p. 27). A mystic finds contingency as not only beautiful but even sublime. These character types divided into two typical groups: the saint and the philosopher.

Heroes who do not fall into the spell of enchanters and do not distort reality are mystic saints. "Mischa shook his head. 'Everybody has been going mad as usual!' he said. 'You make them mad,' said Peter. Mischa considered this. 'I don't make you mad,' he said" (Murdoch, 2010, p. 185). Faith is the primary attribute of mystic heroes. This faith could be philosophical rather than religious. This philosophy is one that Murdoch essentially appropriated from Neo-Platonism; it is a philosophy of virtue, self-denial, and compassion for others.

Peter Saward, who appears in her second novel, is a vivid example of the saint type based on the following characteristics. Saward lives a simple life without luxuries, and excellent features such as tolerance, enthusiasm, and loyalty are inherent in him. He accepts contingency as life's attribute and acknowledges death because of the tuberculosis he faced. In the novel he remarks, "When it is so cold I think often of those who sleep out of doors, ..." (Murdoch, 2010, p. 27). In Neoplatonism death is accepted not as ugly and evil, but rather glorious. Comprehending death as nothingness stimulates an individual to appreciate the present and to overthrow ego-nature. Moreover, Peter doesn't notice bad qualities in others. He is the only character in the novel who speaks positively about Calvin, and the most important thing is that he is appreciated by his friends and loved ones, and sometimes they look to him as a beacon of salvation. "It was some time now since he had ceased to think of Peter Saward as a master from whom he might learn important truths" (Murdoch, 2010, p. 26).

The image of the saint in Murdoch's first novel, *Under the Net* is Hugo Belfounder, who is the embodiment of truth and perfection. Hugo is presented to the reader mainly through Jake's internal monologues and memories. Jake encounters the saint only twice in the story which helps him to go through a mystical stage of existential awakening. The first proof that Hugo is a saint is his indifference to wealth. Just like Peter Saward, he lives a modest life and stands out for being truthful and unbiased. "He was the most purely objective and detached person I had ever met - only in him detachment showed less like a virtue and more like a sheer gift of nature, a thing of which he was quite unaware" (Murdoch, 1954, p. 64). Some critics describe Hugo's character as a saintly madman like Dostoevsky's Prince Myshkin. (Conradi, 2010, p. 30). In parallel, Peter Saward is also compared to a clown who never leaves his smile instead of being immersed in grief after being diagnosed with the disease.

In *Under the Net*, by contrasting the artist and the saint, Murdoch creates a rational existential hero who generalizes and a mystic character who scrutinizes (Rowe & Horner, 2010, p. 3). Jake is very rational and wants everything in his life to have a clear reason. Hugo, on the other hand, is skeptical of the validity of theories arguing that truth is achieved by understanding the details of life: "All theorizing is flight... God is detail. It all lies close to your hand" (Murdoch, 1954, p. 91). Murdoch's philosophy is reflected in Hugo's approach to truth; his personality represents the theory of *just and loving gaze* adopted by Simone Weil. Real people dispel mystification, and the contingency of life dispels fantasy that opens the door to imagination, argues Murdoch (Murdoch, 1961, p. 20). Jake's final conversation with Hugo encourages him to look at life from a different angle, to live in touch with reality in the present rather than chasing theories.

The next categorical type—the embodiment of the philosopher— is a more passive personage. Murdoch's philosophical voice is expressed through Elizabeth, the character who isn't involved in the storyline but only portrayed by letters and Effingham's thoughts in *The Unicorn*. In the letter, Elizabeth writes,

Art and psychoanalysis give shape and meaning to life and that is why we adore them, but life as it is lived has no shape and meaning, and that is what I am experiencing just now. ... The fairy tales never tell us, but it has always proved a mistake. (Murdoch, 1963, pp. 102-103)

Highlighting the existential absurdity, she gives the truthful objection of life and separates reality from fairy-tale illusion, calling Effingham back to the real life.

A philosopher figure is present in nearly all of Murdoch's novels. One of them is Dave Gelman in *Under the Net*. It is made openly clear throughout the work that Dave assumes the role of a philosopher. Jake portrays him as a genuine philosopher akin to Plato and Kant. Murdoch uses this type as an allegorical device for her scholarly work, *Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artist* (1977). In the passage, where Jake claims that "he blazes upon them (Dave's students) with the destructive fury of the sun" (Murdoch, 1954, p. 27), Dave embodies the sun as the one who speaks the truth. Throughout the story, he offers Jake counsel but fails in his attempt to alter his nature. Dave is a practical philosopher, but he doesn't wield a power of influence as a saint figure does. The saint's image carries greater moral guidance and impact; therefore, this type represents perfection in Murdoch's fictional world.

The following figure of a philosopher is Bledyard; he is shown as an art teacher in the novel *The Sandcastle*. “That is not true, Mr. Mor, said Bledyard. ... There is such a thing as respect for reality. You are living on dreams now, dreams of happiness, dreams of freedom. But in all this you consider only yourself” (Murdoch, 1957, p. 228). Bledyard’s words have a warning tone that puts forward the author’s philosophical idea of retreating from the self and breaking down illusions of an existentialist.

The philosopher images often appear in the positive view; however, in *The Flight from the Enchanter*, Calvin Blick is described as being the wicked and dark half of human nature. John Rainborough defines him as the evil side of Mischa. The characters openly see the devil in him, but in fact he is a philosopher who bitterly offers the truth. He is wise on the one hand and cruel on the other. He constantly appears in a negative image, though he cites the famous philosophers and psychologists like Freud and Wittgenstein. Sometimes, Murdoch portrays an enchanted philosopher like Max Lejour in *The Unicorn* who is a Platonist and a theory-based man, another captive soul of Hannah. Murdoch always plays with a reader’s psychology by creating complex characters. Though we can understand her novels more clearly with the help of typological analysis by framing characters according to her philosophy.

Conclusion

Murdoch’s contribution to English philosophy and literature cannot be ignored. The author of both literary and philosophical works has a strict criterion for creating them, as philosophy must be clear and direct while fiction is poetic and mysterious. Yet, in her novels, we can detect the philosophical views through the typological analysis of the characters. Murdoch divides the contemporary writers into two categories: existentialists and mystics. Hence, we can distinguish four types of major characters who represent the people of her era, mainly the layer of intelligentsia in the novels *Under the Net*, *The Flight from the Enchanter*, *The Sandcastle* and *The Unicorn*. They are an existential artist, an existential enchanter, a mystic saint, and a mystic philosopher. All of them have their unique characteristics detailed by the author, though Murdoch’s chosen one is a mystic saint type who represents an ego-free soul shown in the novels *Under the Net* and *The Flight from the Enchanter*. Nevertheless, the signs of saintly figures are obscurely transformed in the novel *The Unicorn* and the characteristics of perfection transit to one who is real and not corrupted with illusions. A mystic saint figure is portrayed as an influential static character that can be an inspiration for an existential character’s metamorphosis toward askesis. Murdoch’s philosophically coated novels offer very modern character interpretation that can help to analyze the contemporary outsider character from different angles.

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