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# PSYCHOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY OF EXISTENTIALISM IN THE EARLY NOVELS OF IRIS MURDOCH

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### ABSTRACT

*It is generally accepted in science that existential theory, naturally, largely transformed and became the basis of Murdoch's novels of the 50s – 60s. According to a number of scientists, the writer's passion for existentialism went through several phases and was replaced by the construction of her own ethical and aesthetic system based on Platonism.*

*The attitude of Iris Murdoch, philosopher and writer, to existentialism has always been dual. Already from the first works analyzing this problem, it is clear that Murdoch, enthusiastically exploring existentialism, paying due tribute to it, but at the same time criticized it.*

*Murdoch's novels are not psychological in the classical sense of the concept. The writer was so immersed in the inner world of man that the reality in her novels sometimes eluded the field of view of the author, did not exist outside the consciousness of the hero, dissolved in his experiences. In such statement of a question the crisis tendency was concealed. Even at the very beginning of creativity in search of some special inner, spiritual, psychological, and therefore universal truth Murdoch was fascinated by the study of dark, destructive principles and forces in the human psyche, focused on the analysis of painful aspirations and feelings.*

**Keywords:** *existentialism, creativity, Iris Murdoch, novel.*

It is generally accepted in science that the existential theory, which is largely transformed, became the basis of the novels of Murdoch of the 1950s and 1960s. According to a number of scientists, the existential passion for the writer went through several phases and was replaced by the construction of her own ethical and aesthetic system based on Platonism. With the general validity of this statement, it requires some explanation.

Murdoch published her first novel in 1954. It is difficult to separate the literary creativity of Murdoch from the philosophical essays of the previous few years. The essay “Sartre.

Romantic rationalist”, written in 1953 became the definite stage in her works. This work can be considered as the starting point in the gradual development of Murdoch who was an outstanding English author and thinker. The work on Sartre remains a program for Murdoch, and till now is key to understanding her creativity. It deals with modern literature, reflecting the various paths of development of philosophical thought in the 20th century. The author analyzed primarily works of Sartre, but she covered, in fact, the whole artistic culture of our time. Murdoch writes not only what a modern prose writer and a modern novel are, but also what she thinks should be, and in the subtext - what her own prose is supposed to be.

Murdoch demonstrates in her book a deep understanding of Sartre’s creativity and a brilliant analysis of his ideas, and also characterizes the ideological essence of existentialism. And here, in the prologue to her work, we are faced with an interesting and very intractable task. It is a question of how much the ideas of Murdoch, embodied in her novels, are genetically related to existentialism, how "existential" are the novels of Murdoch, how the philosophical postulates of this movement were transformed on English literary soil.

The attitude of Iris Murdoch, philosopher and writer, to existentialism has always been ambivalent. It is clear that Murdoch studied existentialism enthusiastically, from the first works analyzing this problem, on the one hand, paying it proper tribute, but from the other hand, criticized it.

The novels of Murdoch of the 50s are both philosophical and psychological works. The critics define them philosophical because the problems of the meaning of life initially predetermined the essence of the central conflict, and the construction of the plot. In 1961, Murdoch wrote that literature took on some of the tasks that philosophy had previously performed, defining the direction of her own creativity. This type of prose can be attributed to the tradition of fiction that formulates the search for truth in one of its tasks. The novel presents itself as a kind of testing ground for speculative ideas, an intellectual discussion. And the hero is always faced with the need to resolve a complex moral dilemma. In addition, he necessarily is the carrier of a certain life philosophy. It is a life philosophy that sometimes does not allow him to make the right decision, make the right and reasonable choice.

The author does not neglect the function of "entertaining", she uses it, and very vigorously. But at the same time, terrible phenomena for her, as well as for the great writers, were the object of psychological analysis, the experience of studying human nature and at the same time the condition and material of artistry (5, p. 121).

But the Murdoch novels are not psychological in the classical sense of the concept. The writer was so immersed in the inner world of man that the reality in her novels at times eluded the author’s vision, did not exist outside the hero’s consciousness, and was dissolved in his experiences. In this formulation of the question was hidden crisis trend. Even at the very beginning of the creativity in the search for some special inner, spiritual, psychological, and therefore universal truth, Murdoch was fascinated by the study of dark, destructive beginnings and forces in the human psyche, and focused attention on the analysis of painful aspirations and feelings. She did not accept conditionally the principles of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis, but under their influence she became interested in the neuroses and their causes, and plunged the heroes of some of the novels into a neurotic state. The complex of moral problems defined in the second novel, the collision of good and evil, the magic of evil, the decline of morality and the imperative need for it, the uniqueness of the personality, that can degenerate into pathology in its extreme manifestation can degenerate into pathology, was further developed in a number of works of the following years - “The Bell” (1958), “The Severed Head” (1961), “The Unicorn” (1963), “The Time of the Angels” (1966). They logically ended the line on the exclusion of a person from social reality.

In the work of Murdoch of these years, another tendency was born, pointing to the intention to avoid the total solipsism characterizing the modern novel, about the search for a

positive ethical platform and a more optimistic view of the world. This tendency is reflected in the novels "An Unofficial Rose" (1962), "The Red and The Green" (1965), "The Nice and Good" (1968). This trend ultimately proved to be leading. And it has become a leading trend in the creativity of writer.

In the first novels, Murdoch raised questions that are still the most important in her work. The problem of choice and responsibility, and sometimes guilt for the committed actions are always in the center. It is associated with another important issue - freedom and lack of freedom. The main conflict of the novels can be defined as follows: whether the choice is free, or it is a freedom of action at all, or it is only a fatal delusion of the human mind, a fantastic illusion. And if it exists - what is its essence.

Situations in which the heroes of Murdoch find themselves seem to be chaotic, intricate romance of being repeatedly forced to think that the author in general deprives her heroes of the right to choose, and the incomprehensible supreme power commands the complicated ups and downs of their destinies. It can be called differently - fate, a kind of logic or model of behavior, dictated by some philosophical or religious beliefs of the hero. Even the latest Murdoch's novels show that the problem of determinism in her work has not been completely resolved.

Gradually, the problems of interest to Murdoch acquired many additional aspects and nuances. The writer, prone to thinking about the meaning of life, has a ripe desire to raise the philosophical question in its pure form, making the situation and the heroes only bearers of ideas. It was necessary to leave the minimum amount of time in the novel, any random, non-existent attributes of modern life. Thus a complex, darkened for understanding work "The Unicorn" was appeared.

The reader can hardly answer the question of when strange events occurred in the house of Hannah Krin-Smith and where this house is located. It is surrounded by an artificially-symbolic landscape. On the one hand, there is an ominous cold sea, on the other - a desert plain without any trees, behind it are impassable swamps, emitting a green glow at night. There are few people in the vicinity, but they resemble heroes of romantic, even gothic prose. The text shows allusions to various classic works of the XIX century. There is a significant influence of Jane Austen (especially of *Northanger Abbey*), and Thomas Hardy, but most of all Emily Bronte, the author of the "Wuthering Heights".

"Unicorn" belongs to those Murdoch novels where demonic passions are raging, and imagery is defined by dark symbolism. Marian Taylor arrives at the home of Hannah Crin-Smith to teach her French and Italian. She is struck by the strange atmosphere of the house, the mystery of its few inhabitants. Gradually, she begins to perceive its secrets. It turns out that seven years ago, Hannah cheated on her husband and tried to kill him. He left, confining her to the house. But this is only the first discovery of Marian, which turned out to be false. Later, she learns that none of the "jailers" - namely, they surround the hostess of the house - in fact, do not condemn her. Everyone knows that Hannah's husband is a rude, perverted man, a monster who tormented Hannah, a woman of high culture and spirituality. But this is also a lie. Later, Marian will discover that Hannah is not afraid of her husband. Reveling in her own guilt and suffering, she imprisoned herself in the house, turned her life into voluntary torture. But the latest discovery shocks Marian - Hannah does not suffer at all, her life and imprisonment is a kind of game in which only guilt and torments of conscience are imitated, this is the theater of one actress for an uninformed audience. Hannah cultivates suffering, being a semblance of a false deity. The action culminates when Hannah kills her "guard" Gerald, who replaced her husband, to start the countdown of real suffering from that moment on. Who is this Hannah - a lonely woman with a lofty soul who abandoned the world, or a depraved being, absorbed in the dark, manic passion of annihilation? Everything is ambivalent and unclear in this novel, each idea is paradoxical, the course of action is unpredictable. The central motive is the sad thought

of the impossibility of freedom, and the mysteriously programmed being. "In the field of morality, we are all prisoners," says Max Lezhur, the philosopher who studies Plato, "but freedom cannot cure us ..." All attempts to save Hannah, to return to reality, to normal life, are unsuccessful. When the game is over, and the secret of Hannah is revealed, it remains only one thing - to die. She refuses to enter the normal, real world.

"... The selfish consciousness of most people is blind to the perception of the true nature of the world, the rights and demands of other people, even the very existence of the Other," in the letter V.V. Ivasheva Murdoch explained her concept of illusion, which formed the basis of "Bruno's Dreams" (2, p. 159). Later it became the concept that determined the idea of the book "La Mer, La Mer" a little later. Director Charles Arrowby, the protagonist of the novel "La Mer, La Mer" is blinded of purity and innocence, appearing from a distant youth, the loss of which supposedly ruined his life. In the power of an obsessive image, he acts like a madman and does not notice, the obvious inconsistency of the illusion and the striking truth. Murdoch comes up with such an incredible story of the life of a blinded and seeing consciousness, trying to open man's eyes, make him see the real world, free him from egocentrism, and his soul from arrogant of purity and innocence

The novel "Dreams of Bruno" was more artistic and intellectual experiment. But in the books written after it, despite the differences, constitute a certain integrity, a new trend has emerged. It is an explicit desire of the author to expand the content of her work, reflected in the deepening of interest in reality, in asserting the primary role of reality in human life.

A. Murdoch (born in 1919) made her debut with the novel "Under the Net" (1954), immediately showing herself as a talented master of the word, able to give narration both lyricism and elegant humorous coloring. The future distinctive features of the novelist were already reflected in this work - an interest in the subject of art, in depicting a creative personality and respect for moral and philosophical problems, interpretation of characters' behavior in the light of modern theories, in this case linguistic philosophy and existentialism. The originality of the artistic quest for Murdoch is directly related to her profession. For many years, the writer reads a course of philosophy, primarily of existentialism, at Oxford University. Teaching does not interfere with creativity: Murdoch is the author of more than thirty novels. She sets moral and philosophical problems on the stuff of private life, avoiding in the depiction of the characters' fate and their inner appearance of socio-historical concreteness. Sometimes only several details (heroes drive cars and fly planes) can determine that the action takes place in the 20th century. Socio-political reality is present in the Murdoch novels only in individual echoes, without being reflected in the central conflict of the novel. At the same time, the private life of the characters is inscribed in the general picture of philosophically interpreted being, the idea of which is based on the idea of human loneliness, dependence on fatal accidents, passions, on the idea of incomprehensibility of truth, people's lack of understanding, on the Freudian interpretation of the human psyche .

Till now "Under the Net" is perhaps Murdoch's clearest novel. It is permeated with a feeling of incompleteness of life, only emerging opportunities. It was written before the era of the "underground" and counterculture, the leftist convulsions of the youth riot, the "sexual revolution" and international terrorism. It feels the tradition of life on the British Isles and the charm of the old Europe, not yet affected by the newfangled obfuscations of thought and morality. And such a cute "antihero", like Jake, combining the features of a charming rogue from a roguish novel and a simpleton from a novel of the "high road", in Murdoch's prose will not happen again. Therefore, apparently, the comedy of life prevails here over its tragic beginnings and simple miracles still come with the characters, and those are able to distinguish them in the rotation of existence. For all that, the problem of Murdoch's creativity is already laid out and defined here, and here she stands equal to herself — unique.

Researchers R.P.Mikhalskaya and P.A.Anikin noted: “Murdoch’s worldview was determined by her mental turmoil, but at the same time it had the irony. Many circumstances and situations were just a game of fantasy, whimsical fantasy, revealing the magic of a writer's life. The irony in the context of real events is eccentric, and it was a way of introducing unusual elements. The genre originality of Murdoch’s novels was determined by the combination of the features of philosophical and roguish novels, comedy of intrigue and lyrical story” (1, p. 63).

Murdoch books are a bunch of keys, and everyone is able to unlock one small hiding place, but not the secret of the world, because it is unknowable. All of her novels are written about this knowableness and the tragicomedy of life. The name of the first one is ambiguous. You can decipher it so that Jake confused in himself - his feelings, aspirations, actions. But is it just one thing? “Bad people think time is discontinuous. They purposely dull their perception of natural causality. The virtuous perceive life as a comprehensive dense network of the smallest interweaving, ”it is said in the novel“ *The Black Prince* ” (4, p. 52). Jake is hard to regard as virtuous, although you can’t call him bad, and he, like the overwhelming majority of the writer's heroes, flounders under this network. In the understanding of Murdoch, the “network” itself is neither good nor bad, but there is an objective embodiment of the chaos of being in human life.

The irony of Murdoch is the fusion of the sublime, the beautiful, the sad, the terrible and the ridiculous, that takes many-sided and varied forms and is common to all spheres of human experience and existence. Such irony really does not allow comedy or tragedy in a “pure” form, but it turns the picture of existence arising from the writer's pen into a tragicomedy. According to Murdoch, sometimes the unnatural unity of the incompatible has, has not so much imperfections of human nature or social devices as its source, all ascending to the same chaos as the absolute, supreme paradox of being - the indivisibility of life and death. For Murdoch, the existence of death, and not simply existence, but inevitability and immutability, gives a qualitatively new dimension to existence, changes the very perception of life.

The presence of death in the artistic world created by Iris Murdoch is all-pervasive: “... the loneliness of the sea and that special feeling, now realized as a feeling of death, which it always seemed to inspire in me” (3, p. 76). To say that the taste of death gives the sharpness of life in the books of Murdoch would not be completely accurate, and this is not the case: it impacts particular tension and purity to the very experience of life with all its injustices and even abominations, tames chaos and somehow fills being. It is dual and dialectical, it is an experience, and it is impossible to understand whether the obsession with “dumb horror of mortal flesh, dull, soulless, irreversible” (4, p. 304) translates into a piercing feeling of “fragility of the human body, its fragility, or frailness, its complete dependence from extraneous causes” (“*La Mer, La Mer*”), or, on the contrary, awareness of the fragility and frailty of the flesh generates the fear of death.

For the writer and her characters it is not important a direct glimpse of death in life, but a careful piercing highlight that death casts on everything, and, primarily on love: “I looked at this face, once so familiar, and understood for the first time that its beauty is mortal, and felt that I had never loved it so much” (4, p. 42). Therefore, Murdoch's love, Eros, love craving and sex life are inexplicably directly connected with death, which is what her characters feel, such as the young lieutenant cavalryman from “*The Red and the Green*”: “Two ideas are strangely intertwined in his mind in connection with Francis - about the first acquaintance with sex and death. Both of these two events seemed to be rushing to him through the darkness like big red arrows...” (3, p. 127).

Eros, therefore, acts as a kind of link between life and death, and here Murdoch obviously follows Plato with his two-faced Eros - the love of body beauty and the love of spiritual beauty, the desire for beauty and the desire for good. This antinomicity penetrates even the name of the novels - “*The Nice and The Good*”, “*The Sacred and Profane Love machine*”

(1974). Therefore, in her lower incarnation, love is interpreted by the writer as a “network” - and in the Old Testament sense (“But she loved David ... Saul's daughter, Michal ... Saul thought: I will give her for him, and she will be his net ...” , 1 Kings, 18:19 - 20), and in the modern philosophical “key”, that is, as non-freedom, captivity: “... such is the manifestation of his love, inexhaustible, ruthless love, that kept her captive” (“The Bell”).

This love is doomed to death, connected with the flesh, although it is a piercing flesh-spiritual sacrament. Many of her looks, ups, downs, seductions, hopes and hopelessness, her festivals, sad triumph and extinction are depicted by the writer in each novel. Murdoch, by all appearances, owes Freud a lot of insight into its subtle mechanics, despite the fact that she does not accept the extremes of Freudianism, but she simply scoffs at the frantic psychoanalysis, as the interpretation of what is happening, in the novel “The Black Prince” by the half-trainer psychoanalyst Francis Marlowe. And there is another curious detail. Even puritan could reproach Murdoch in naturalism, critics often blamed her for the ideas, on the one hand excessive, commitment to romantic writing, too relaxed imagination, the improbability of some of the provisions and even characters. Meanwhile, the drawing of Murdoch is saturated with eroticism - her descriptions create a plastic feeling of love possibilities inherent in a person's abilities for full-fledged intensive sex life. Characteristics of one or another actor as a potential sexual partner arise in novels not in risky passages, which Murdoch does not have at all, but as if by itself, from some special selection and combination of appearance, portrait and gesture. For example, Julian (“Black Prince”), Lady Kitty (“A Word Child”), or young Toby Gash in “The Bell” are written out so tightly, “physically”.

The writer does not undertake to judge which love is “better” — terrestrial or heavenly; it only states that each has its own way. And if the love of bodily beauty is associated with the destructive beginning of death; because such beauty is finite, the love of spiritual beauty is aimed at achieving perfection and for this reason, for Murdoch, mates with the creative beginning of death, which, being the last and highest act of love and self-denial, releases perfection: “... with the death of a person, the world automatically turns into the object of perfect love” (“Unicorn”).

Probably, in this condensed-dark, according to the “Gothic” props, the novel first of all speaks about the meaning of the death-liberator - in the revelation of one of the heroes, which is given to him when he is drawn in by the swamp, and from considering himself dead, suddenly comprehends all the knowledge about death: “Why did Effingham never understand that this knowledge is the only matter of fact, and perhaps the only fact in general? I would have understood it in due time — I could have lived my whole life in the radiance of light” (24, p. 290). The final clarification brings the dialogue between the characters of another novel, “Henry Und Cato”: “Those who are able to live with death, are able to live by the truth, but man is almost not capable...” (3, p. 510).

The novels of Iris Murdoch, in essence, are exploring how it is unbearable and how few people - very few people - can bear this. At the height of the last truths, the air is discharged, it is impossible to breathe, and in most cases the author does not require such heights from her heroes. But as the path to the heights leads from the valleys, spiritual love grows out of carnal love, and the ambiguity of Death is made up of a multitude of very definite separate deaths. With great sympathy, understanding, compassion and forgiveness, the writer refers to the base, simplistic, everyday forms of existence of the great and the sublime, to the perishable, which is capable of absorbing eternity for a short moment, and penetrating it. Not earthly vanity is the subject of its irony, but an appetite for deceit, visibility (the oldest vice of the human race), a conscious or unconscious substitution by man of phenomena of a higher order by phenomena of a lower one. This is where the tragicomedy in her books begins and ends with a false dignity, unable to cope with the chaos of life, and capable only of bringing more confusion into it, often disastrous. Her characters willingly fall into self-deception, much less deceived so easily. It is

easy to accept lust for an unearthly love, curiosity for a sincere concern, and outward charm for genuine kindness. Here lies the source of tragicomedy. It all depends on the choice.

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