Anna Victoria Hallberg (b. 1973) studied at the universities of Oxford, Gothenburg and Stockholm before becoming a PhD student at Örebro University. This is her thesis in Comparative Literature.

Iris Murdoch (b. 1919) was a writer of twenty-six novels and a moral philosopher in Oxford during the heydays of British analytic philosophy. Her popular but peculiar literary writings and her unfashionable philosophic interests (metaphysics as a guide to morals rather than logic or linguistic analysis) have generated increasing academic attention since her death by Alzheimer’s disease in 1999.

This thesis seeks to discover issues that deal with the overlap between novel writing and moral philosophy. One distinctive point that is explored is how the concept of “philosophical novel” relates to Iris Murdoch’s literary practise. That there are visible patterns between her novels and her moral philosophy seems clear to anyone who reads works from both genres. However, Murdoch herself was not very comfortable with being called “philosophical novelist”. In fact, she denied being one. In the body of research on Murdoch this stance has caused puzzlement and debate.

One aim of the present study is to argue for a different approach to “philosophical novel” and acknowledge that the use of art for illustration lies at the opposite end of what Murdoch’s novels do. Instead – and this is the running argument of the thesis – Murdoch regards reflections on moral intuitions as inherent to art. She writes, Hallberg claims, hybrid novels where the construction aims to make reflections on moral matters visible within art’s own structure. In order to make a case for such a claim the book traces Murdoch’s aesthetic-philosophic writings, her views on art’s closeness to reality, and her specific observation that the novel is a moral medium. The study incorporates prior research material and uses examples from several novels but investigates two texts of fiction in particular – the debut novel Under the Net (1954) and The Sea, The Sea (1978). That Murdoch sees art as a “hybridisation” of aesthetics and ethics informs the starting point of the present thesis.