



**Novel Writing and Moral Philosophy as Aspects of a Single
Struggle: Iris Murdoch's Hybrid Novels**

av

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Abstract

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This investigation pursues a thesis, namely that moral philosopher and novelist Iris Murdoch was a writer of hybrid novels. Murdoch's novels are hybrid constructions where she tries to make reflections on moral intuitions discernible and experienced within the novels' own "system". The "philosophical novel" states ideas from an external point of view and uses art for illustration. A governing idea for this thesis is that Murdoch's literature makes ideas *visible*. In order to suggest, argue for, and develop such line of reasoning, the investigation is structured in the following way:

The first section presents the premises, the aim of the study, and which material and research questions that will guide us. We meet Murdoch's novels, ideas, and philosophic accent in four "encounters". It is suggested that we could look at Murdoch's novels from a double viewpoint that combines two levels: aesthetic appreciation and reflection.

Chapter one seeks to discuss Murdoch's interpretation of and debt to Plato. In particular, Plato's Cave metaphor is seen as a clue to Murdoch's view of moral life as a pilgrimage from appearance to reality. It is argued that Murdoch's broad approach to moral philosophy can be perceived in the hybrid novel form.

Chapter two outlines the research and comments on Murdoch as a philosophical novelist. This chapter presents the main disputes within the Murdoch-field and explores its background. The controversy is described with the intention to find a new position that focuses less on the influence of philosophical discourse on the novelistic practise and more on Murdoch's use of the two levels of aesthetic experience and ideas on the nature of vision in moral life.

In the third and fourth chapters the novels *Under the Net* (1954) and *The Sea, The Sea* (1978) are investigated. Motif, epiphany, plot, non-speech, and other functional devices that are meaningful for the detection and "confirmation" of the hybrid novel are given attention. Issues of how the protagonists of both novels progress from "fallible" to "seeing", is put in direct relation to Murdoch's idea of how the moral pilgrim moves from "appearance" to "reality". A look at compositional structures that signal the literary norm and how the texts prepare the reader to experience the pattern of "from fallible to seeing" leads to the conclusion that the hybrid novel exhibits a range of qualities that stir moral intuitions. These intuitions are what moral philosophy should be all about, from Murdoch's viewpoint. As help to reach these conclusions, ideas from both Wittgenstein and exponents of his philosophy are used.

The final chapter is also the epilogue: it deals with concluding reflections on what has been argued as well as potential new areas to investigate.

Keywords: Iris Murdoch, hybrid novel, philosophical novel, morality, viva-voce, epiphany, plot, Plato, Wittgenstein.