

# Ontology of the Art Phenomenon in Iris Murdoch's Fiction

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*This article explores the intermedial dialogue of the arts in the oeuvre of British writer and philosopher Iris Murdoch. The ontology of the phenomenon of art and its functional meaning in Murdoch's fiction, the specifics of the relationship between the arts in her philosophical essays and dialogues are considered from the perspective of intermediality. Based on the intermedial study methodology, Murdoch's theoretical and philosophical views on the multifunctional nature of art, the interaction of the artist and the artwork are revealed. Key techniques of interartistic discourse, including anthroponymic allusions, are considered as intermedial markers of Murdoch's texts, identified and explored at the level of imagological transformations. People of art: artists, artistic discourse partakers, as well as recipients of art constitute a particular kind of characters in Murdoch's novels. Accordingly, the importance of the recipient, who acts as an essential link in the receptive matrix of "author-text-recipient-artwork," is emphasized in the ontology of an artwork. The particular meeting point of Murdoch's characters is the artistic topos: a museum, an exhibition, an art gallery or an artist's house. In addition, the reader of her fiction repeatedly encounters various ekphrastic codes: the ekphrases of paintings are not only present in Murdoch's texts, but function as anthropomorphized characters, dramatis personae, have their own space (physical and mental places) and play a crucial role in the protagonists' lives. Consequently, we find that the use of intermedial components is one of the markers of Iris Murdoch's idiosyncrasy, which topicalizes important aspects of the philosophy of art and brings it into the realm of ontological questions.*

Keywords: English literature / Murdoch, Iris / philosophy of art / ontology / intermediality / narrative technique / ekphrasis

## Introduction: Art as a syncretic phenomenon

Throughout its development, literature has been characterized by productive contacts with other arts. These relationships showed up as bilateral or reversible. Not only painters, sculptors, musicians, and, ultimately, filmmakers drew plots for their masterpieces from literature, but literature also created artworks in the process of reception, reinterpretation, experience of what was heard (music) or seen (painting, sculpture, architecture). In particular, the natural attraction to visualization brought literature into close contact first with painting and music, and furthermore in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries with new types of arts: photography, cinema, digital art. In this way, literature detached from the original syncretic synthesis of arts gradually acquires new syncretic parameters within the limits of post-, meta-modernist aesthetics.

Since ancient times prominent philosophers, artists and scientists tried to reveal the mystery of fine art objects (Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, John Damascene, Augustine the Blessed, Pico della Mirandola, Botticelli, Shakespeare, Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux). The well-known texts *Controversy of the Painter with the Poet, Musician and Sculptor* by Leonardo da Vinci and *The Laocoon* by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing present the idea of the synthesis of arts, which has become productive for modern intermedia studies. Speaking about the rapport between literature and painting, in agreement with European thinkers, Ivan Franko noted the “immovable nature” of painting (Franko 102). In his fair opinion, the common feature of these arts is their aesthetic goal to “reproduce in the soul of the reader or listener” individual moments of life in various ways (103). As a poet and a literary theorist, he emphasized the superiority of poetry in terms of time and space (104), and emphasized that “the poet depicts dead nature—enlivening it, draws lines with the help of moving images” (109).

Studying the canvases of Rubens, Rembrandt, Titian or Caravaggio, researchers always at least briefly mention the literary basis of the plot in their works, while comparing one or another of their artistic images with its prototype. In addition to ancient plots, paintings could also be based on contemporary dramatic stories: Hogarth’s canvas “A Scene from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*” or the “scene” based on the plot of John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera*. Consequently, Kira Shakhova emphasizes the importance of the narrative moment, which is not typical for painting: “[T]he content of the scene can be read by the movements of the figures, the expression of the faces.” (Shakhova 99) In this case,

the artist Hogarth acts as a storyteller, a genre painter who not only mastered the brush brilliantly and masterfully, creating compositionally and colorfully wonderful paintings, but also wanted the viewer to read each of them like an exciting book. He invented “large-scale visual plots,” which gave rise to a series of paintings, the so-called pictorial “novels” (100). Actually, the tradition of graphic images with short explanatory texts, peculiar to so called *comics* of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, quite popular in England, originates from him (101). In this case, in terms of its narrative essence, the pictorial was almost adequate to the verbal. The picture-illustration became a visual representation of the plot, encouraged the viewer’s imagination, turning him into the reader.

Since then, researchers have repeatedly emphasized the relationship between the word and fine arts, performing arts, photography and cinema. It is especially interesting to trace such interaction on the example of multi-artists’ oeuvres, those who equally worked in their time or are nowadays working in the plane of several arts (Leonardo da Vinci, Taras Shevchenko, Bruno Schultz, Mykhailo Zhuk, Sviatoslav Gordynsky, Marcel Duchamp, Emma Andijewska).

### **The conversion of arts in the aspect of intermediality**

In the literary discourse the issue of interaction between literature and arts has occupied one of the key niches. Thus, the formalists, whose works became a thorough basis for such methodological studies as intertextuality and intermediality, recorded a fruitful inter-art dialogue, which was expressed in the interpenetration of various imagological narratives. In particular, Eikhenbaum noted that “the evolution of art, taken as a single thing, is expressed in constant fluctuations between personification (differentiation) and fusion” (Eikhenbaum 16). The indicated phenomenon is primarily explained by the syncretic genetic instruction of the arts in general: “In different epochs, this or that art seeks to become mass and is inspired by the pathos of syncretism, trying to absorb elements of other arts.” (16) Today, this is an axiomatic position in the theory, arising from the basic nature of arts.

Such a tendency towards multimedia conversion of arts is explained by the fact that “literary formulas of human behavior and passions expressed over the ages” (Shakhova 11) constantly aroused the interest of artists in various spheres. The organic nature of this multimedia through the prism of symbolism is explained by Lotman: “Verbal arts,

poetry, and later artistic prose seek to build a verbal image from the material of conventional signs,” at the same time, the opposite process occurs: “a picture, which by its symbolic nature is not created in order to serve as a means of narration, but a person constantly tries to tell.” (Lotman 15)

Regarding the reception of artistic syncretism by modern researchers, we should remember the words by Shakhova, who claimed that “the unity of the arts was not interrupted, although they separated from the syncretism of the consciousness of the cave age, they developed generic signs, their own specific language” (Shakhova 5). In his turn, Nalyvayko assured that literature stands out among all types of art precisely because it “combines the entire complex of its functions in a potentially complete expression” (Nalyvayko 8).

By analogy with intertextuality, intermedia allusion, ekphrasis, hypotyposis and literary phonography are distinguished in the system of modern inter-artistic relationships. In this way, the literary original source can be reproduced by means of painting with a great degree of approximation to the content and details of a verbal work of art or, on the contrary, radically reinterpreted. The poetics of ekphrasis deserves special mention as “any reproduction of one art by means of another” (Geller 8), which, according to Freidenberg, was “reproduction of a reproduction,” namely, “imaging of an image” (Freidenberg 320). Calling ekphrastic inclusions as the so-called “phantoms of the text,” Chervinska speaks of specific “codes of meaning and their systematic receptive recoding in the system of the whole” (Chervinska 149), which appears to be a rather productive cognitive and receptive phenomenon, since finding of an “ekphrastic key” appears as an original “way to visualize events at the expense of other specifics of the narrative” (161).

Accordingly, modern literary theory actively appeals to the practice of text research in the aspect of intermedia studies. As Clüver states: “Once ‘medium’ instead of ‘art’ has become accepted as the basic category for the interdisciplinary discourse, the interrelationship of the various media is conceived of as ‘intermediality’.” (Clüver 30) In this aspect, from the point of receptive poetics, a number of interesting connotations arise related to the specificity of decoding intermedia inclusions and the dependence of this process on reading competence. The concept of intermediality, accompanied by the hybridization of media, gives rise to new specific forms in all arts.

## The intermedia dialogue of arts in Iris Murdoch's fiction

The subject of arts has always appealed to the British moral philosopher and distinguished novelist, renowned author of essays, reviews and papers in ethics, aesthetics and history of thought Iris Murdoch (1919–1999); it appears throughout her oeuvre. Each of the arts, and literature in particular, she considered as a “moral medium”: “The highest pleasures of literature, and one might say, of art generally, are in this sense moral pleasures.” (Murdoch, *Existentialists* 257) Her theory that art and morals are connected with sense and form she applied to “all the arts not just the literary arts.” (218) She tried to find answers to the questions of the relationship and interaction of various art forms, reflecting on them in her essays: “Conceptions of Unity. Art,” “Literature and Philosophy,” “The Sublime and the Good,” “Art is the Imitation of Nature” (Murdoch, *Existentialists*); and in her philosophical dialogues: “The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists,” “Art and Eros: A Dialogue about Art” (Murdoch, *Metaphysics*). In addition, she actively raised the issue of the artist and art in her novels. The writer proves that a work of art opens a space for reflection, it also allows viewers to be artists thanks to their reception as a form of “experienced mental synthesis” (Murdoch, *Metaphysics* 3).

Hence, the aim of the study is to analyze the works by Iris Murdoch in terms of intermediality and art reception. Respectively, not only the artistic reception of fine arts in the writer's novels is taken into consideration, but also the author's theoretical and philosophical views on the problem of true art are surveyed.

Murdoch's reflections on arts are indicative from the standpoint of receptive aesthetics and her philosophical approach to the problem is also clearly uttered:

A work of art is of course not a material object, though some works of art are bodied forth by material objects. In the case of a statue the relation between the material object and the art object seems close, in the case of a picture less so. Poems and symphonies are clearly not material objects [...]. All art objects are ‘performed’ or imagined first by the artist and then by his clients, and these imaginative and intellectual activities or experiences may be said to be the point or essence of art [...]. Art, however, essentially (traditionally) involves the idea of a sustained *experienced* mental synthesis. (Murdoch, *Metaphysics* 2–3)

The writer carries on the idea of the communicative function of art: “Art makes places and opens spaces for reflection, it is a defense against materialism and against pseudo-scientific attitudes to life. It calms and

invigorates, it gives us energy by unifying, possibly by purifying, our feelings.” (8) Emphasizing the multi-functionality of art, the author focuses on the importance of catharsis, thanks to which art succeeds in realizing its key goal, emotional impact on the recipient.

The increased interest in the interaction of arts is due primarily to the wide manifestation of intermedia markers at the level of imagological transformations. Murdoch often expresses the reception of the work of outstanding artists with the “voices” of her characters. Many of Murdoch’s protagonists belong to or are competent in the field of art—they are actually artists, also those who study art, or simply are adept admirers of it. In particular, in her final novel *Jackson’s Dilemma* (1995), the attention of readers is drawn to an eccentric character—the painter Owen Silbery. The image of the artist is described in detail in the text:

Owen was a painter, in fact a distinguished and well-known painter. He announced himself sometimes as ‘in the style of Goya’, and moreover, it was said, painted horrific pornographic pictures which he sold secretly. He was in fact well known as a portrait painter, and one who could satisfy his clients. (18)

In this way, the writer tries to intrigue her reader, while at the same time shaping the horizons of his expectations. After all, later the recipient really learns that in these rumors, although they are far from the true things, there is a grain of the truth.

In this Murdoch’s novel, the reader’s consciousness repeatedly encounters various ekphrastic codes. Thus, Owen classifies his canvases into three groups: “ordinary” paintings, paintings of “*Frightfulnessism*” and so-called “*special*” paintings. Each group of paintings is anthropomorphized—“lives its own life” in a separate room and even on another floor of the eccentric Owen’s house-studio. In the former bedroom on the third floor, “showing only their colourless sides, were other innumerable undisposed of ordinary pictures” (Murdoch, *Jackson’s Dilemma* 50). On the fourth floor was Owen’s favorite “dark room,” or “chamber of horrors,” as Mildred called it. In addition to paintings, on the walls of this room there were “mild” scary photographs. Owen, who sometimes thought about suicide, was attracted by these “distorted creatures,” according to his words, he “lived by their dark passions” (176). As for the special paintings, they were located on the basement floor of the house, which “now contained correctly slotted special pictures” (50). Most of them were portraits of old friends. The artist considered them to be “real.”

The clear demarcation between the artist's works is, at first glance, quite transparent to the recipient. At the same time, the reader observes that the boundary between these artistic fictional worlds is often blurred and obscure. Especially when Owen reflects on art:

Owen himself had often contemplated suicide and possessed the requirements thereof. And did he not, he reflected, as a painter, imagine, create, and gaze upon what was degraded and vile? Of course, such things too became his art and thereby transformed, ha ha! He must remember to drink a toast to Otto Dix. He was real. Owen was sitting in his quiet studio looking at a half-painted abstract. He hated the picture. (Murdoch, *Jackson's Dilemma* 49–50)

The internal monologue of the character, his “stream of consciousness,” testifies to the blurring of the line between reality and the world of art in the narrative. The novel *Jackson's Dilemma* is full of anthropomorphic intermedia allusions. In particular, the mention of Otto Dix, a German painter, graphic artist and the author of paintings on military themes, even more blurs the line between the frightening and the real, the real and the ordinary.

The contradictory nature of the painter's understanding of art in the novel is indicated by certain oneiric moments emphasized by Owen's phantasmagoric dreams. Thus, before going to sleep Owen reflects on his craft admitting that he must invent, create, “must try to be worthy of being a painter”:

He dreamt that he was a slug crawling slowly along the ground, and Piero and Titian and Velazquez and Carpaccio and Turner were standing round him and looking down at him with faintly puzzled frowns, and he was shouting up at them, but his voice was so miserably tiny, he was sure they could not hear him, and when he tried to wave his horns at them, he suddenly realized that slugs do not have horns. Not even that, he thought in his dream. (Murdoch, *Jackson's Dilemma* 241)

Consciously and subconsciously comparing his paintings with the works of outstanding artists Owen thereby admits that his paintings are still far from great art whatever he calls them. At the same time, he appears to be a good portraitist, understands art well, but how a picture becomes great art remains a mystery to him.

Owen tries to find the answer to this difficult dilemma in the plots of his dreams. So, for instance, he dreams that he is sitting at a table in a room lit by candles. Opposite him is Caravaggio. There are only two of them. It is not by chance that Murdoch introduces the character

of such famous artists as Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1573–1610) into his dreams. This choice of the author allows perceptive readers to understand the image of her character much better. Let's recall that Caravaggio's painting style consisted in creating emotional tension, acute affectation of feelings. The best works of the Italian painter are based on contrasts: realistic details are combined with the theatrical pose; homoerotic image is combined with an intimate and psychological improvisation of a mythological theme as in his picture "Bacchus" (Cumming 38–39). These details, as well as Caravaggio's character traits (impulsive, unbalanced), make it possible to draw a parallel with the painter Owen Silbery, whose homosexuality and drunkenness only increase the outrageousness of the image created by Murdoch.

Owen, as a creative person, believes that artists are characterized by similar feelings: pain, dissatisfaction, remorse: "How Titian must have felt it, when he was very old, 'The Flaying of Marsyas'—the pain, the pain, the old man must have felt it deeply at the end" (Murdoch, *Jackson's Dilemma* 64). It should be noted that "Apollo and Marsyas" is a fairly popular leitmotif in European art. The initial stage of the struggle between the antagonistic deities Apollo and Dionysus was marked in the myth of the contest between Apollo and Marsyas. According to the myth, the Phrygian satyr Marsyas picked up the flute (aulos) left by Athena. In playing the flute he acquired extraordinary skill and, proud of himself, challenged Apollo on the terms that the winner could treat the defeated party any way he wanted. The audacity of the satyr led to the effect that Apollo playing the lyre not only defeated Marsyas but also flayed him (Kun 29–31).

Perhaps the writer was struck so much not by the mythologem which terrifies with its cruelty, but by the spiritual meaning put into his canvas by the painter of the late Italian Renaissance Titian Vecellio da Cadore (1489–1576). Titian depicted Marsyas hanging upside down from a tree as Apollo cuts the skin on his chest. Marsyas is barely alive from pain, but his blissful smile indicates that he sacrificed his life for the sake of art.

Furthermore, this painting by Titian is mentioned by Murdoch in her other novels as well. However, the writer deliberately avoids its unambiguous interpretation, as if inviting the reader to join the discussion, as a kind of artistic game. Thus, in the novel *A Fairly Honorable Defeat* (1970), the theme of this painting discussed by a homosexual couple is interpreted from a different perspective. Axel and Simon are people of different backgrounds: in terms of age, character, habits and type of activity. However, there is something that unites them; love, so



ruthless and incomprehensible to people around them, and so vulnerable at the same time:

“You’re Apollo and I’m Marsyas. You’ll end by flaying me.” “That’s an image of love, actually, Apollo and Marsyas.” “How do you mean?” “The agony of Marsyas is the inevitable agony of human soul in its desire to achieve God.” “The things you know.” “The things you failed to learn at the Courtauld.” “I don’t believe it though. Someone is flayed really.” (Murdoch, *Fairly Honorable Defeat* 33)

Although Simon had read history of art at the Courtauld Institute of Art (London’s Courtauld Gallery is famous for works by French Impressionists and Post-Impressionists, as well as having a school of painting at the Gallery), when it came to art, Axel, who had studied philosophy at Oxford, often aptly contradicted Simon and was often right (27). Like the time when in the Accademia he let Simon hold forth for some time about Titian’s “Pietà” (Mary Magdalene’s Lamentation on Christ) and then “pointed out that it had been finished by Palma Giovane, a fact which Simon ought to have known” (68). Thus, Murdoch seems to declare that it is not necessary to be a professional art critic in order to know and feel real art, to be able to read and perceive it. As she writes in her philosophical essay:

In enjoying great art, we experience a clarification and concentration and perfection of our own consciousness. Emotion and intellect are unified into a limited whole. In this sense art also *creates* its client; it inspires intuition of ideal formal and symbolic unity which enable us to co-operate with the artist and to be, as we enjoy the work, artists ourselves. (Murdoch, *Metaphysics* 8)

The writer’s emphasis on the importance of the client’s figure as the “consumer of art” in the essence of an artwork looks extremely symptomatic. Paradoxically, art was not only a topic that caused disputes between Axel and Simon, it really became a connecting link for them in the form of Greek *kouros*. It is about the statue of Apollo of the fifth century B.C. from the National Museum in Athens, “the tutelary deity of their love” (Murdoch, *Fairly Honorable Defeat* 78). They had known each other for a long time, but only there, in Greece, next to a “sacred kouros,” they suddenly realized that they were destined to be together. Their love passed some ordeals and, despite the intrigues of Julius King (the personification of evil in its sophisticated form), it turned out to be much more reliable than the marital relationship of Hilda and Rupert, the scrappy love of Morgan to Julius, the innocent love of Morgan and Peter.

However, Axel and Simon are not the only art connoisseurs in the novel. Murdoch's characters usually choose an artistic *topos* for their rendezvous, appointing them to museums, exhibitions, art and sculpture galleries. In particular, Julius and Morgan meet in the Tate Gallery at an exhibition of modern sculpture, but the crowd of visitors interferes with the conversation and they move to the next hall with great art, which, surprisingly, is almost completely unpeopled.

In an exchange of impressions about Turner's canvases, the writer juxtaposes the classical understanding of the paintings of this master of marines and landscapes bold in their color effects (Morgan's perception) with deliberately provocative, daring statements (Julius):

"How calm great pictures make one feel, said Morgan. I love these late Turners. Passionate turmoil held in perfect immobility. Elemental energy mysteriously constructed into space and light..." "Um." "Don't you care for Turner?" "Not much. A hopelessly derivative painter. Always copycatting somebody: Poussin, Rembrandt, Claude. Never finished a picture without ruining it. And he had far too high opinion of himself. He should have remained a minor genre painter, that's about his level. I'm afraid his painting resembles his poetry" (Murdoch, *Fairly Honorable Defeat* 220).

Such a critical opinion by Julius certainly cannot go unnoticed, it can even cause the indignation of "knowledgeable readers." Especially it concerns Julius King's criticism about Turner's "derivativeness" that is very subjective and unfair. Having passed the school of French and Dutch masters, in his mature years Turner acquires his own, uniquely original wet-on-wet Turnerian technique. It is well-known that such French artists as Claude Monet and Henri Matisse in their youth studied Turner's unusual technique of light and colors (Cumming 66). We are once again convinced that in relation to individual painters the words of Julius King (who, with an ingenuity worthy of Machiavelli, mercilessly experiments on his friends, playing with their destinies) help to reveal his own human nature.

Moreover, in her fiction Murdoch quite often reproduces the effect of suggestion on the consciousness of her characters at the moment of the reception act. Thus, the theater playwright and director Charles Arrowby from the novel *The Sea, The Sea* (1978) in his conversation with a hypothetical reader admits that he is "not very much knowledgeable about pictures," but they give him a certain "calm pleasure," he likes the atmosphere of galleries; Arrowby even confesses that he derives "a lot of sheer erotic satisfaction from pictures of women" (Murdoch, *Sea* 169).

Looking at the pictures in the Wallace Collection, Arrowby associates the women depicted there with the women having left a trace in his life:

Then it began to seem that so many of my women were there; only not Hartley ... Lizzie by Terborch, Jeanne by Nicolaes Maes, Rita by Domenichino, Rosina by Rubens, a perfectly delightful study by Greuze of Clement as she was when I first met her... There was even a picture of my mother by Reynolds, a bit flattering but a likeness. Yes, I looked for Hartley. Some could have rendered her, Campin perhaps, Memling or Van Eyck. But she was not there. (Murdoch, *Sea* 170).

Only knowing the artistic manner of these painters, the reader can imagine what each of the women was like according to the author's idea. However, the protagonist does not find exactly the one who captured his thoughts, his first love, the beloved of his adolescence, Hartley.

The desire to get his love back turns into an obsessive idea. Many years have passed and now Hartley is an elderly married woman, Mary Hartley Fitch. Nevertheless, Charles Arrowby wants to turn back his lost love; he does not realize that he loves only a fictional image inspired by the pictures and his reminiscence of events forty years ago. To enhance the created effect, the writer brings her protagonist to the gallery, where his father had taken him once as a boy. Arrowby finds himself facing Titian's picture "Perseus and Andromeda" and, "admiring the graceful naked figure of the girl," suddenly, although he has seen this picture many times, he notices "the terrible fanged open mouth of the sea dragon" (Murdoch, *Sea* 171). Charles is terrified; he realizes the similarity of the sea dragon seen in the picture with the sea monster from his hallucination. Just as in the Titian's picture sensual passion acquires an almost pantheistic character, merging with the elemental forces of nature, so the element of Charles's passion evokes "terrible demons" capable of destroying reality and inspiring love for his adolescence. Only the loss of the dearest people (the tragic deaths of cousin James and young Titus) and related events will help Charles Arrowby look at his life differently and finally understand that his love for Hartley was not a part of the real life, it belongs to the world of artistic reflection.

It is obvious that according to the author's idea, works of art play a decisive role in the life of her characters. Mainly they are the paintings by well-known Italian artists, like the picture by Titian's apprentice Tintoretto (Jacopo Robusti Tintoretto, 1518–1594) in the novel

*An Unofficial Rose* (1962). For Hugh Peronette, as the owner of the picture, it was just a “golden dream” of different life, but for his son Randle, it became a means to get his dream come true.

Most of all the Tintoretto glowed upon her with a jeweled beneficence. It lighted the room now, like a small sun. It was not a very large picture: it represented a naked woman and was almost certainly an earlier version of the figure of Susannah in the great Susannah Bathing in Vienna. Only it was no sketch, but a great picture in its own right and justly of some fame: a notable segment in the vast seemingly endless honeycomb of the master’s genius. (82)

Hugh Peronette, who never dared to break up his marriage and join his life with the woman of his dreams, Emma Sands, only after the death of his wife Fanny, decides to sell his most valuable thing, his treasure and consolation, a “priceless picture” to help his son start a new life. Hugh does not want a repetition of his own life and love story. Randle and his wife Ann are unhappy in marriage, and as the father he couldn’t but support his son’s love for the woman Randle loved with all his heart. He realized that “Randall’s thing is very serious. He’s really in love, the way it only happens once or twice in a lifetime. And with someone like him the mature love is the one to trust” (157). Hugh auctioned his favorite picture. It was sent promptly to Sotheby’s, and was purchased by the National Gallery. When Randle received a check from his father for a hefty sum, he was filled with confused feelings, among which the feeling of liberation prevailed.

In the novel *An Unofficial Rose*, the writer embodied the theory of two forms of beauty: physical and spiritual, which are usually manifested through the double essence of love (Platonic *eros*). According to Murdoch, love in its physical manifestation testifies to the lack of freedom associated with the destructive feature of human personality. And, on the contrary, the higher power of love is capable of awakening the best feelings in people, revealing high moral traits and qualities. Consequently, love is both physical and spiritual mystery that cannot be separated, so Murdoch sympathizes and understands the attempts of her characters to find out what ordinary love and sacred love mean not only in *An Unofficial Rose*, but in her other novels (*Under the Net*, *The Sea, the Sea*, *The Black Prince*, etc.). Moreover, in the novel *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* (1974) this theme appears in the title, which echoes the title of Titian’s painting “The Sacred and Profane Love” (1514). Regarding the plot of this picture, as well as Murdoch’s novels, some attempts were made to interpret it in terms of the Plato’s idea of love (Byatt; Conradi; Dipple; Islamova; Mizinina; Tracy), but, without

a doubt, both the novel and the picture are imbued with hedonism, the authoritative assertion of beauty and harmony in search of the truth.

According to Murdoch, the human soul seeks to know the truth, but only love and art can help in it. The writer deploys this thesis in her novel *The Black Prince* (1973): “Art tells the only truth that ultimately matters. It is the light by which human things can be mended. And after art there is, let me assure you all, nothing.” (416) Reflecting on the outlined issue, in the best traditions of Plato’s Socratic dialogues, Murdoch even dramatizes the idea in her own dialogue about art, in which Socrates, Plato and his disciples act as protagonists. By the mouth of Socrates, she assures that “good art tells us more truth about our lives and our world than any other kind of thinking or speculation—it certainly speaks to more people. And perhaps the language of art is the most universal and enduring kind of human thought” (Murdoch, *Existentialists* 493). Art, according to Murdoch, brings the recipients closer to knowing the truth. The Good appears as the highest meaning of art for her, because art is a powerful influence on a person, which helps to discover the true human nature. In this way, Iris Murdoch actualizes important aspects of the philosophy of art and brings them into the realm of ontology.

## **Conclusion**

The issue of intermedia dialogue of arts, actualized by modern literary studies, was one of the key problems in Iris Murdoch’s oeuvre. The British writer tried to find out the ontology of the art phenomenon, its multifunctional sense in the life of a person alongside with the specifics of the relationships between arts. Reflecting on art in her own philosophical essays and dialogues (“Conceptions of Unity. Art”; “Art and Eros: A Dialogue about Art”), Murdoch argued that a work of art opens up a space for reflection, it enables the recipients to be co-creators while experiencing art in its cognitive and aesthetic aspects.

The theoretical and philosophical views of the author on the problem of polyfunctionality of art, its communicative role, the problem of the artist and his work of art are also actively articulated by Murdoch in her novels. In the texts of her fiction, the writer accumulates the experience of various arts, which she implements through a number of literary techniques. In particular, in *Jackson’s Dilemma*, *The Black Prince*, *The Sea, the Sea* and some others we identified and explored the intermedia markers at the level of imagological transformations (by means

of anthroponymic and anthropomorphic allusions). The protagonists of her novels are painters, novelists, theater directors, art connoisseurs or in vast majority people somehow related to arts. Thus, the author emphasizes that it is not necessary to be a professional artist or an art critic in order to read and experience “true art.”

Another intermedia code of Murdoch’s novels is the perception of artworks created by great artists. In her literary texts such receptive versions are often uttered by the “voices” of her characters, both professionals and amateurs. Hence, the writer’s emphasis on the importance of the recipient (“client,” “consumer” of the art), who acts as an essential link of the receptive matrix “author-text-recipient-artwork.” In addition, quite often Murdoch reproduces the effect of suggestion on the consciousness of her characters at the moment of the reception act (*The Sea, The Sea*). The internal narratives of her characters, their “stream of consciousness,” at the same time testify to the blurring of the boundaries between the reality and the world of art.

The usual meeting place of Murdoch’s characters is an artistic *topos*, which appears as another intermedia marker. Museums, theaters, exhibitions, galleries of paintings and sculptures (*A Fairly Honorable Defeat*) appear as such demonstrative *topos*. Sometimes a function of the artistic *topos* is performed by a painter’s house, certain rooms of which appear in the reader’s reception as thematic collections in his private gallery (*Jackson’s Dilemma*).

Consequently, the reader’s consciousness repeatedly encounters various ekphrastic codes (the ekphrasis of paintings). In particular, the great paintings are not only described and discussed in Murdoch’s texts (ekphrastic writing), but function as separate characters—they anthropomorphize, “live their own life,” have their own space (*Jackson’s Dilemma, A Fairly Honorable Defeat*). In addition, according to the writer’s idea, works of art sometimes play a decisive role in the lives of her characters. (*An Unofficial Rose, Under the Net, The Sea, the Sea, The Black Prince*). So, we can state that the use of intermedia components is one of the markers of Iris Murdoch’s idiosyncrasy, which actualizes important aspects of the philosophy of art and brings them into the realm of ontological issues.

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## Ontologija umetniškega fenomena v delih Iris Murdoch

Ključne besede: angleška književnost / Murdoch, Iris / filozofija umetnosti / ontologija / intermedialnost / pripovedna tehnika / ekfraz

Članek obravnava intermedialni umetniški dialog v opusu britanske pisateljice in filozofinje Iris Murdoch. Ontologija umetniškega fenomena in njegov funkcionalni pomen v avtoričinih proznih besedilih, specifične medumetnostnega razmerja v njenih filozofskih esejih in dialogih so obravnavani z vidika intermedialnosti. Prispevek na osnovi intermedialne raziskovalne metodologije razkriva avtoričine teoretske in filozofske poglede na multifunkcionalnost umetnosti, interakcijo umetnika in umetniškega dela. Ključne tehnike medumetnostnega diskurza, skupaj z antroponimičnimi aluzijami, so obravnavane kot intermedialni označevalci besedil, identificirani in raziskani na ravni imagoških transformacij. Ljudje umetnosti: umetniki, udeleženci umetniškega diskurza, pa tudi prejemniki umetnosti predstavljajo poseben tip likov v romanih Iris Murdoch. Skladno s tem je v ontologiji umetniškega dela poudarjen pomen prejemnika, ki deluje kot bistveni člen receptivne matrice »avtor-besedilo-prejemnik-umetniško delo«. Posebno stičišče likov v avtoričinih delih so umetniški toposi: muzej, razstava, umetniška galerija ali umetnikova hiša. Poleg tega se bralec ali bralka njene proze vedno znova srečuje z različnimi ekfrastičnimi kodi: ekfrazne slike niso le prisotne v avtoričinih besedilih, ampak delujejo kot atropomorfizirani liki, *dramatis personae*, imajo svoj prostor (fizična in mentalna mesta) in igrajo odločilno vlogo v življenju protagonistov in protagonistk. Posledično ugotavljamo, da je uporaba intermedialnih komponent eden od označevalcev idiostila Iris Murdoch, ki aktualizira pomembne vidike filozofije umetnosti in jih postavlja v sfero ontološke problematike.

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