

SECTION 19. PHILOLOGY AND JOURNALISM

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RECEPTION VS CONVERGENCE: PHILOSOPHY IN LITERARY FICTION

Currently the world scientific community is increasingly facing the challenges of global information society, so the problem of the humanities interaction is becoming more acute from the standpoint of intercultural communication. In the context of these global integration trends, the convergence of literature and philosophy has to be analyzed at a qualitatively new level.

Accordingly, interdisciplinary convergence contributes to research and facilitates the understanding of ideas and concepts by combining theories and methodologies of different disciplines. In context of the interdisciplinary analysis the oeuvre of the English novelist and professional philosopher Iris Murdoch (1919-1999) should be relevantly mentioned with the respect to her influence both on moral philosophy and on the literary fiction in the 20th -21st centuries. Each of her novels presents essentially authentic style, a combination of literary fiction and reception of certain philosophical, ethical and aesthetic theories, or even more a polemic with them. Moreover, Murdoch herself admitted that also in attempt to discover the truth other peripheral to philosophy areas (psychology, political and social theory) also expanded as being involved [5; 337]. That is why her books draw attention of researchers of various humanities – literary and cultural studies, philosophy, psychology and linguistics. Dame Iris manifested herself both as a notably influential philosopher and a distinguished novelist, as a playwright and a literary critic. She is the author of twenty-six novels, more than twenty works on aesthetics, history of thought and moral philosophy and a number of critical essays and reviews.

As it has been noted in literary criticism [1; 2; 3; 4], the development of I. Murdoch's philosophical and aesthetic system went some stages in order of a reversion: from philosophy of existentialism, linguistic philosophy and neo-positivist ethics to Plato's philosophical legacy.

Respectively, in Iris Murdoch's literary fiction several periods can also be traced; in which the author reveals her apparently critical reception of certain philosophical ideas. Thus, in her early novels (“Under the Net”, 1954; “The Flight from the Enchanter”, 1956; “The Sandcastle”, 1957; “The Bell”, 1958) the most essential influences are Existentialism (from Sartre to Kierkegaard) and linguistic empiricism (Wittgenstein). In these novels within the ideological complex of existential ideas, the novelist quite confidently uses existential motives and the concepts as choice, freedom, fear and will. However, Murdoch expresses her ambiguous attitude towards the fundamentals of existentialism, set forth in her literary-critical essays of 1950s (“The Novelist as Metaphysician” [5; 101-107]; “The Existential Hero” [5; 108-115]; “Existentialist Bite” [5;151-153]) and her monograph “Sartre: Romantic Rationalist”, 1953. Iris Murdoch is impressed by the concept of unlimited freedom of each individual; however, she is concerned about the alienation of the man from the world (“solipsistic isolation” [5; 133]). She personally does not support the idea of loneliness (either ethical or logical) [5; 106-107], that man is plunged

into the absurd. On the contrary Murdoch argues that man is a social being, seeking communication and social coexistence as expressed in her novels.

The response to Ludwig Wittgenstein's theoretical system ("Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus", 1921) can be discerned in the title of her first novel "Under the Net" [2; 384]. According to Wittgenstein, who identified the relationship between language and reality as a network, human thinking is determined by the language structure that covers the reality. So, to grasp the reality, or at least get closer to understanding it, Murdoch's character Jake Donaghue needs to get rid of the 'net' of theories, responsibilities, love and illusions. Hence, she considers that linguistic philosophy, as well as existentialism, indicating absurd isolation of the individual, lead to solipsism, and they are incapable to approach the objective vision of the problem [5; 311]. That is why, in order to free himself from the 'net', her character goes through a series of ordeals and 'purifies' himself by performing a worthy act.

It seems a paradox but trying to overcome the subjectivism of Sartre and Wittgenstein, Murdoch turns to the origins of existentialism: the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard who, outlining the tragedy and absurdity of human life, considered existence as an ontological problem. In some way she also polemizes Friedrich Nietzsche's metaphysical voluntarism (will to power) and Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis, which undoubtedly affected her novels of the 1960s ("A Severed Head", 1961; "The Unicorn", 1963; "The Italian Girl", 1964; "The Time of the Angels", 1966). These novels are full of demons and destruction, and in almost every of them the relationship of the evil 'genius' with his 'victim' is depicted from different perspectives. Even Kant's belief in human beings' tendency to be evil can also be traced there. The leading idea of these novels is the desire to understand the evil of the human nature and to find the ways to overcome it.

So, Iris Murdoch offers her solution: to consider the categories of existentialism from the point of view of moral philosophy, "to connect modern psychological terminology with a terminology concerned with virtue" [5; 337]. She is impressed by the Plato's concept of the unity of beauty and goodness [5; 348-349]. The writer believes that the image of the Good is the least susceptible to distortion and is the most realistic, that is why it is the most convenient to be used concerning moral life.

Hence Plato's idea of Good is the major philosophical implication of Murdoch's novels of the late 1960s and 1970s, owing to which she advances her own concept of the Sovereignty of Good in the world that seeks perfection, in this way she frequently refers to such concepts as Art, Beauty and Love [5; 363-385]. Achieving the Good is the true path to understanding the virtue that her characters go through in an attempt to get rid of lies, empty illusions and selfishness, and true art often helps them in it. The theme of art in all its manifestations here appeals to the idea of the loneliness of human consciousness. Murdoch develops this theme in her philosophical writing "The Fire and the Sun. Why Plato Banished the Artists", 1977 [5; 386-463], reflecting on 'good' and 'bad' art. And continues her argument in another work, written in the form of a play – "Acastos: Two Platonic Dialogues", 1986, namely in one of them: "Art and Eros. Dialogue about Art" [5; 464-495]. The Good for Murdoch is the highest form of art, because art is a powerful influence on a person, and it can affect us both in a good and in a bad sense.

The idea of Good, as the pervasive philosophical idea of Murdoch's literary fiction, is not only inherent in her novels of the 1970s, it appears in the writer's early novels and is preserved in her later works of the 1980s and 1990s. However, this idea is mostly interpreted in the spirit of early Christianity, combined with some elements of Eastern philosophy, in particular Buddhism. Besides sticking to her own professional opinion and attempting to understand and explain the idiosyncrasy of the individual against the background of Western cultural tradition, in her critical reception Iris Murdoch referred to Hegel, I. Kant, S. Kierkegaard, J.-P. Sartre, L. Wittgenstein, M. Heidegger and other representatives of philosophical thought (convergence within philosophy different disciplines) in almost all periods of her fiction and professional life, thanks to it she

proved herself as an extraordinary eclectic thinker, as evidenced by her book “Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals”, 1992.

Consequently, the ideas and concepts of Murdoch’s moral philosophy reflected in her novels preserve their philosophical dimension only to the extent allowed by the imaginative framing of her literary fiction. However, her novels serve as a form and means of solving important worldview and moral problems, so there is no denying the fact that Dame Iris Murdoch – as a recognized novelist and moral philosopher – has had a huge impact on the philosophical thought, literary studies, as well as the development of intellectual prose in the world literature.

References:

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