RECONCEPTUALISATION OF REALISM IN BRITISH POSTWAR FICTION:
THE CASES OF IRIS MURDOCH, MURIEL SPARK AND JOHN FOWLES

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ABSTRACT

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This study is about British postwar fiction and its canonical reception according to a special categorisation of the novelists who were publishing in Britain during the two decades after the end of the Second World War. The study emphasises that mainstream literary criticism of 1950s and '60s Britain tended to catalogue the novelists of this period according to a well-established dichotomy between tradition and innovation in which the traditional realist novels, the neorealist works of C. P. Snow, Angus Wilson and Kingsley Amis, were privileged over any other fictional work having modernist innovative characteristics. Therefore, the first published novels of Iris Murdoch, Muriel Spark and John Fowles, novelists belonging to today's postmodern canon, were first critically recognised as social realist works in Britain. One of the objects of this study is to demonstrate the shortcomings of this classification. Moreover, the main argument of the study is that none of these three novelists should have been classified as a traditional realist novelist. All of these three

British postwar novelists were reconceptualising traditional realism by self-reflexively including the problem of representation as part of their conventional subject matters in their formal realist novels.

ÖZ

İKİNCİ DÜNYA SAVAŞI SONRASI İNGİLİZ EDEBİYATI'NDA
GERÇEKÇİLİĞİN YENİDEN KAVRAMSALLAŞTIRILMASI: IRIS MURDOCH,
MURIEL SPARK VE JOHN FOWLES ÖRNEKLERİ

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Bu çalışma, İkinci Dünya Savaşı'nın sona erişini takip eden ilk yirmi yıl içerisinde eserlerini İngiltere'de yayımlayan romancıların, özel bir eleştirel sınıflandırma sonucu o döneme ait romancılar arasında yerlerini alışları ile ilgilidir. Bu çalışmada, 1950 ve '60'lar İngiltere'sindeki genel eleştirel görüşün, bu dönemin ronamcılarını, C. P. Snow, Angus Wilson ve Kingsley Amis'in en önemli örneklerini oluşturduğu geleneksel gerçekçi roman türünün, deneysel öğeler içeren Modernist roman türü karşısında ayrıcalıklı tutulduğu bir karşıtlık içerisinde, geleneksel ve yenilikçi olarak sınıflandırdığı tezi vurgulanır. Bu nedenle, günümüzün postmodern romancıları içerisinde gösterilen Iris Murdoch, Muriel Spark ve John Fowles'ın ilk yayımlanan romanları, İngiltere'de sosyal gerçekçi romanlar olarak tanımlanmıştır. Bu çalışmanın amaçlarından bir tanesi, bu tür bir sınıflandırmanın yetersizliğini göstermektir. Bunula beraber, çalışmanın esas tartışması ise, bu romancılardan hiçbirinin bu tür bir sınıflandırma içerisinde geleneksel gerçekçi olarak tanımlanamayacağıdır. Bu üç savaş sonrası İngiliz romancısı da, edebiyatta betimleme sorununa kendi geleneksel

hikayelerinin bir parçası olarak romanlarında yer vererek, geleneksel gerçekçiliği yeniden kavramsallaştırmışlardır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Gerçekçilik, Gelenekselcilik, Deneyselcilik, Modernizm, Postmodernizm

To My Wife

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Dichotomy between Tradition and Innovation in Literary Criticism

> The critical mood in England has produced a climate in which traditional novels can flourish and anything out of the ordinary is given the denigrating label "experimental" and neglected. . . . The greatest fear of the English contemporary novelist is to commit a *faux pas*; every step taken is within prescribed limits; and the result is intelligent, but ultimately mediocre. When a novelist goes outside the set limits, he can expect no help from the critics, no matter how good his work. . . . The successful novelist in England becomes, too quickly, a part of the London literary establishment. . . . All too often, he uses his position as a critic to endorse the type of fiction he himself is writing and to attack those whose approach is different. (Rabinovitz 169-70)

By the 1960s, mainstream literary criticism in Britain had developed a strict convention in which it judged British postwar fiction as belonging to one of two precisely juxtaposed categories, the traditionalists and the experimentalists, and it observed no minor movement in between. What is more significant was that there was, in critical practice, until the final decades of the twentieth century, an unconcealed tendency to privilege the first category, the traditionalists, over the second one, the experimentalists. Accordingly, the established works of literary criticism of the period – the period covering the 1950s and '60s – generally concentrated on and documented certain postwar realist novelists' – such as C. P. Snow (1905-1980), Angus Wilson (1913-1991) and Kingsley Amis (1922-1995) – turning back to the Victorian and Edwardian fiction as their sole source of formal inspiration.

In one of the most influential and latest of these works, *The Novelist at the Crossroads*, for example, the British author and critic David Lodge overtly stated in 1971 that

> the English literary mind is peculiarly committed to realism, and resistant to non-realist literary modes to an extent that might be described as prejudice. . . . the 'modern' experimental novel, . . . which threatened to break up the stable synthesis of the realistic novel, was repudiated by two subsequent generations of English novelists. (7)

Lodge's commentary as a literary critic, part of which is quoted above, focuses on a division between what he calls traditional "realist" and experimental "non-realist" fictional works that were published in Britain during the two decades after the end of the Second World War.

In addition to Lodge's work, Rubin Rabinovitz, in his *The Reaction Against Experiment in the English Novel, 1950-1960* (1967) – one of the most detailed critical sources including many articles and letters of the period's renowned writers which would otherwise be very hard to access – meticulously documented miscellaneous writings of a number of British postwar realist novelists. As significantly affirmed in the preface to his work, Rabinovitz mostly identified a general change of mood in the literary taste of the British reading public from the experimental modernist mode of writing to the traditional realist one in the 1950s and '60s. According to him, for example,

> The English had begun, . . . to be more and more vehement in rejecting the experimental novelists of the 1910-1940 era, particularly James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. At the same time there was, after the war, a revival of enthusiasm for the Victorian novelists which was apparently shared by the novelists of the postwar period. (vii)

Other than witnessing a change in reading habits of the period, the end of the Second World War was said in the same source to have marked a general modification in life style as well. Writing with a generalising tendency, Rabinovitz intentionally limited his scope to the contemporary neorealist, antimodernist literature of the 1950s alone:[1]

> Though the English novelists of this period wrote about contemporary social problems, few of them experimented with the form and style of their novels; nor did they incorporate the techniques of Joyce, Virginia Woolf, or other experimental novelists into their own styles. (2)

According to him, it can be argued that a great majority of British postwar novelists rejected the experimental, avant-garde techniques of the novelists of the early twentieth century, the modernists; and they turned to the older realist writers:

> C. P. Snow and Angus Wilson . . . felt that the novelists of the nineteenth century had influenced them most. Others, like Kingsley Amis and John Wain, went back to the eighteenth-century novel and the fiction of the post-Victorian realists . . . All of these post-war novelists, . . . rejected the experimental novelists of the early twentieth century. (2)

Besides Rabinovitz's own observations of and comments on the postwar traditionalist reaction against modernist innovation in literature, it is recorded that postwar realist novelists themselves disclosed a dislike of modernist experiment in

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[1] The main weakness in Rabinovitz's commentary as one of the leading literary critics of the '60s from the point of view of this thesis is that his illustrations conventionally exclude a third group of postwar novelists whose works include both traditional realist and innovative nonrealist characteristics, and hence he limits his discussion only to the two factions: traditional realists and modernist experimentalists.

British fiction. For example, Kingsley Amis, who sought "a more direct and conventional style," saw experiment as an "obtruded oddity," and stated that

> The idea about experiment being the life-blood of the English novel is one that dies hard. 'Experiment,' in this context, boils down pretty regularly to 'obtruded oddity,' whether in construction – multiple viewpoints and such – or in style; it is not felt that adventurousness in subject matter or attitude or tone really counts. (qtd. in Rabinovitz 40-41)

Moreover, according to Amis in the same source, reading Joyce and Proust was nothing more than a waste of time. Analogous to this kind of reaction, Amis declared his antagonism towards other experimental works written outside Britain. For Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, for example, he even stated a personal dislike since he saw it as a work of art which was morally bad.

Compared with Amis's ferocious commentary which is particularly observable in his use of words in attacking the modernist experimental novelists, a more moderate reaction against literary innovation came from another postwar realist novelist, Angus Wilson. Appropriately, Wilson commented that

> Most of the English novelists . . . who have arrived since the war have reflected the predominant, politically detached, social concerns of the community. This has led to a revival of traditional, nineteenth-century forms. It has told against experiments in technique and against expression of personal sensitivity. I belong to this reaction myself. (qtd. in Rabinovitz 65)

As part of a general critical tendency in postwar Britain, Wilson maintained his attacks on the modernist experimental novel through establishing the same dichotomy between the traditional realist mode of writing and the innovative modernist aesthetic form. According to him, for example, neither the interior

monologue nor the "individuality" of the author should be present in the new mode of literary production. Contrary to these qualities, Wilson said that a traditional description of the character in his social environment was preferred. As a British conventionalist novelist, Wilson, in his commentary, restricted both the traditional realist and the experimental modernist novels to certain limited categories (in terms of two main categories: traditionalism and experimentalism) and allowed no other way.

It has become perceptible that the postwar traditionalist attack on modernist experiment in literature generally advanced as an admiration for the style of the Victorian novelists. In Wilson's case, the names that appeared as most prominent influences on him were Jane Austen and Charles Dickens, who, he said, were two particular stimuli to his writing fiction. Wilson believed that his admiration for Victorian fiction came from the "adult" quality of the realist works of the Victorian novelists which he also described as "worldliness." Nevertheless, especially after the appearance of new critical perspectives on British postwar fiction in the second half of the twentieth century, it has now been widely accepted that the Victorian novel, particularly the work of George Eliot, which was once recognised as the primary example of "classic realist text" in English literature, does include the question of representation in narrative fiction in an unexpectedly postmodernist-like self-conscious fashion.[2]

The postwar traditionalist revival in British fiction was assessed by the post-Second World War novelists by specially establishing it as in opposition to the techniques of early twentieth-century fiction, that is, the modernist novel. The two modernist novelists most frequently mentioned were James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Working with the same binary categorisation of works, another postwar novelist, C. P. Snow, explained how he saw "[the experimental novel]'s intake of human staff as so low," that "[it] died from starvation," and the experimental

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[2] See David Lodge's "*Middlemarch* and the Idea of the Classic Realist Text" published in John Peck's edition of George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1992). Lodge's contribution to this edition particularly focuses on Eliot's use of not only mimesis but also diegesis, and therefore the existence of her subjective meta-language in her text. Moreover, Lodge's discussion echoes Linda Hutcheon's definition of mimesis that includes diegesis. This is more fully described on page 14.

novel was "as dead as cold potatoes." Hence Snow, in 1955, named and praised certain postwar novelists for their lack of interest in experiment, in contrast to the modernist novelists:

> There are a dozen or more promising novelists in England – Doris Lessing, William Cooper, Emyr Humphreys, Francis King, Kingsley Amis, J. D. Scott, Bridgid Brophy, and John Wyllie are some of the best. Not one of these, in his practice, shows any interest in the sensibility novel or the *avant garde* of ten or twenty years ago. . . . None of them wants to shrink away from society; . . . (qtd. in Rabinovitz 116)

Over and above the observations of Rubin Rabinovitz and David Lodge, which particularly focused on antimodernist attack in the works and anti-avant-garde commentaries of certain postwar realist novelists, Brian W. Shaffer, in his *Reading the Novel in English 1950-2000* (2006), has carried on a similar commentary surprisingly recently. Like his predecessors Rabinovitz and Lodge, Shaffer differentiated between only two postwar factions in British fiction, the conventional and the innovatory. Talking about the traditionalist revival of the time, he alleged that "In the 1950s and early 1960s, the novel tended to reject literary modernist innovations, reacting *against* the modernist novel's conspicuous complexity" (4). According to Shaffer, this reaction came from the traditionalist and antimodernist novelists such as Kingsley Amis, John Braine (1922-1986), C. P. Snow, John Wain (1925-1994) and Angus Wilson

> who rejected both the narrative and stylistic experiments associated with Joyce and the refined literary aesthetics associated with Virginia Woolf, either on the grounds that these were arcane and mystifying or that they had been worthwhile experiments in a now-exhausted vein. (5)

Thus the conventional critical approach to the British postwar fiction, which was particularly well illustrated in the criticism of Bernard Bergonzi, Frederick R. Karl and Rubin Rabinovitz, introduced a well-preserved dichotomy between traditional realism and modernist experimentalism. Instead of giving equal significance to each group of writing, however, their criticism not only concentrated on the postwar traditionalist attack on modernist experimental literature but also noticeably marginalised what came outside the area of traditionalism. The question may now be why this was so important for these critics. Was there a particular reason? Could this specially be related to political background of the times? These issues are so large, but they must be borne in mind. Moreover, more specifically, this might have been due to the fact that

> Novel theory which has reified 'realism' and has limited mimesis to product alone has ignored the dialectical relationship that must exist between literature and criticism, a relationship that demands a reworking and possibly a transcending of the limits of any theoretical formulation which fails to come to terms with new literary forms. (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative* 47)

The works of these well-known critics and writers of the period, analogously, tended to maintain this critical tendency by recording the works and writings of the postwar realist novelists, which were further grouped under the name of the 'Movement.'

Nearly all the critical works of the period viewed postwar traditionalist writing as an attack on modernist experimentalism, and the individual conventionalist authors as members of the 'Movement,' a name coined by a literary journalist:

> On 1 October 1954, an . . . article entitled 'In the Movement' appeared in the London weekly periodical the *Spectator* . . . draw[ing] attention to the emergence of a group of writers who, . . .

represented something new in British literature and society. The 'modern Britain' of the 1950s was, the article argued, 'a changed place' . . . Now it was becoming clear that the 'literary scene' had also been transformed: the 'approved names' of the previous two decades belonged to an era that was 'all gone, utterly gone and vanished'. Literary 'Taste' . . . had begun to move in new directions . . . The emerging writers, or 'new movement', were presented by . . . the literary editor of the *Spectator*, J. D. Scott . . . as enemies of the old order, ... (Morrison 1-2)

The term the 'Movement' was originally applied to postwar poets such as Robert Conquest (b. 1917), Dennis J. Enright (1920-2002) and Philip Larkin (1922-1985); but it soon came to be associated also with Kingsley Amis and John Wain. Commensurate with the prevailing critical view, the 'Movement' was the most significant reactionary response to literary modernism; and it aimed at returning to the older concept of fiction in British literature.

This conventional categorisation of a group of postwar realist novelists as part of the long established traditionalism-experimentalism dichotomy, however, displays certain serious weaknesses. Linda Hutcheon, for example, defines the criticism of the '50s and '60s as frozen and fixed compared to the developing novel form of the same decades in Britain (*Narcissistic Narrative* 38). According to her, furthermore, "One of the reasons why [innovative] fiction has been refused entry to the ranks of the genre seems to be that the theoretical basis of "traditional realism" is what could be called a mimesis of *product*" (*Narcissistic Narrative* 38) instead of a mimesis of process. Correspondingly, one of the objects of this thesis is to prove the shortcomings of the prevailing critical view that insistently observed a dichotomy between traditionalism and experimentalism in British postwar fiction by displaying the existence of postwar novelists whose fiction characteristically include both realistic and nonrealistic features.

In addition to this, the 'Movement' was itself not a dependable categorisation of postwar traditionalist, antimodernist authors. According to Blake Morrison, "the poets themselves have frequently denied the validity of the group label that was affixed to them" (4). Morrison further argues that

Larkin has said that he had 'no sense at all' of belonging to a movement. Amis in a 1960 essay referred to 'the phantom "movement" '. Gunn comments: 'I found I was in it before I knew it existed … and I have a certain suspicion that it does *not* exist'. Enright remarks very similarly: 'I don't think there was a movement back in those days, or if there was I didn't know about it'. Jennings argued that 'it is the journalists, not the poets themselves, who have created the poetic movement of the fifties'. (4)

More significantly, for example, Iris Murdoch (1919-1999), two of whose novels will be analysed in this thesis as falling into neither of the groups, was perceived as one of the members of the 'Movement' in a number of critical works.[3] Only later did twentieth-century British criticism of fiction accept that Murdoch's works cannot be classified only within the borders of the 'Movement' at all. Although her novels were conventionally seen as displaying an antimodernist, anti-*avant-garde* "neorealism," Murdoch's classification within the 'Movement' aesthetics is revealingly, if not substantially, modified by one critic as "early in her career" (Shaffer 5).

All of these narrow perspectives on British postwar fiction, furthermore, brought about the famous contemporary declaration of the death of the novel in the 1950s and '60s. For example, the first chapter in Bernard Bergonzi's *The Situation of the Novel* (1970) and Malcolm Bradbury's fifth chapter in his *The Modern British Novel* (1993) – two well-known critical sources on postwar British fiction – are both entitled "The Novel No Longer Novel." The two critics significantly argued that the famous traditionalist revival in British postwar fiction was a turning back to an older mode of fiction. Consequently, it lacked what the term "novel" had connoted, "the new." Appropriate to this, it can be mentioned that Ian Watt, in one of the classical works of British literary criticism, *The Rise of*

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[3] Some of these works are, first of all, the American writer-critic William Van O'Connor's *The New University Wits and the End of Modernism* (1963), and the studies of George Watson, Randall Stevenson and Brian W. Shaffer.

the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding, in 1957, had emphasised the new genre's direct relation to everyday reality, and hence to the unique "individual experience:"

> Previous literary forms had reflected the general tendency of their cultures to make conformity to the traditional practice the major test of truth . . . This literary traditionalism was first and most fully challenged by the novel, whose primary criterion was truth to individual experience – individual experience which is always unique and therefore new. (13)[4]

In the postwar traditionalist renewal, however, it was implied that "the novel seems to have lost its newness, and to be no longer novel" (Bergonzi 25).

The tendency to restrict postwar literature (postwar fiction within the scope of this study) to discussions of works of the traditionalists and to attacks on modernist experimentalism seriously provoked disillusionment about the novel on the part of some literary critics; and the idea of the demise of the novel prevailed. According to Bergonzi in 1970,

> The situation of the Western novel during the past forty years has been precisely one in which a large amount of local movement has been evident, but no overall development . . . If the novel is truly no longer novel, then many of our critical procedures for discussing it will need revision; perhaps, even, we shall do well to think of another name for it. (32-34)

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[4] The individual experience always presents a unique experience and new material for literature in every new era. In the neorealist novel in postwar Britain, however, there was mostly a turning back to the Victorian novel. For that reason, for example, John Fowles, in his 1969 essay "Notes on an Unfinished Novel," declares "Remember the etymology of the word. A novel is something new. It must have relevance to the writer's now – so don't ever pretend you live in 1867; or make sure the reader knows it's a pretence." John Fowles, *Wormholes: Essays and Occasional Writings* (London, 1999), p. 17.

Furthermore, this argument was not peculiar to Britain, but it was heard in the United States as well. According to the American author and literary critic Lionel Trilling, in 1953,

> It is impossible to talk about the novel nowadays without having in our minds the question of whether or not the novel is still a living form. . . . This opinion is now heard on all sides. . . . the opinion is now an established one and has a very considerable authority. (245)

In 1956, papers from a symposium, "The Craft of Letters in England," were edited and published by John Lehmann in London. In his preface, Lehmann stated in a remarkably sombre tone that

> the past three decades have seen the gradual disappearance of most of the literary giants, and their work has already been assessed from many critical points of view, and in detail. No English author who is alive today, . . . can, I believe, claim the same formative power in contemporary literary activity. (1)

In addition to his comparison between the novelists of the 1930s and the novelists of the 1940s, Lehmann further argued that

> certain interesting points of general, or almost general agreement emerge, either explicitly or implicitly. That we are living in an age without giants is one of them, that the outstanding figures of 1956 in creative literature have not the same stature as their predecessors of 1926. (2)

Similar to Lehmann's reflections of the postwar novelist's situation, one of the contributors, Philip Toynbee, in his article "Experiment and the Future of the Novel" drew a pessimistic image of the postwar novelist:

> he is on his own, struggling in a collapsed tradition, uncertain of his intractable medium and uncertain of his constantly changing material. . . . The modern novelist is indeed supported by recent and magnificent examples, . . . But the last quarter of a century has transformed his society, transformed his language, transformed his intellectual and emotional climate. While he has been forced, as a human being, into a more intimate relationship with his society, as a writer he has been forced into greater isolation. There is no longer any obvious material or obvious method; there is no longer a fruitful form of plain talking or a fruitful body of accepted ideas. Each new novelist must now make every decision for himself, unlike the majority of past novelists for whom much had been decided without their knowledge. (72-73)

The hypothesis of the end of the novel was proclaimed particularly loudly when the postwar conventionalist literature was compared to that of the modernist period. It was postulated that the most significant modernist authors such as Flaubert, James, Proust and Joyce had already "finished off" the novel; therefore, the postwar novelist had to discover it from the beginning all over again. In a number of critical works of postwar literature, the British writer and literary critic Cyril V. Connolly's (1903-1974) cynicism was given as the most noteworthy example:

> It is disheartening to think that twenty years ago saw the first novels of Hemingway, Faulkner, Elizabeth Bowen, Rosamund Lehmann, Evelyn Waugh, Henry Green, Graham Greene … but no new crop of novelists has risen commensurate with them. (qtd. in Bradbury 277)

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However, the most important complication about postwar writing was assumed to be a significant lack of the "avant-garde" spirit of the Modernist novel. In consequence, Bradbury argued in 1993 that "the post-war situation continued through most of the Fifties; and it was certainly true that in austere post-war Britain the *avant-garde* spirit that flourished three decades earlier showed little sign of returning" (277).

Even though these literary critics articulated the traditionalist-experimentalist dichotomy in British postwar fiction, their criticism particularly focused on the works of the traditionalist authors. There was, however, an experimentalist opposition to the traditionalist works coming from a number of postwar promodernist novelists. Focusing on the failure – or even rejection – of critical recognition of postwar experimentalist writers, for example, Susana Onega specially underlines contemporary social and political reasons:

> it seemed appropriate to support and develop the one specific literary line which, by holding a concrete class viewpoint (that of the lower-middle class), could easily be identified with the 'coming' class and thus with a spirit of change in post-war English society. (2)[5]

Furthermore, among these experimental novelists, B. S. Johnson (1933-1973) was the most outspoken. In 1973, in his introduction to *Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?* Johnson announced that

> Literary forms do become exhausted, . . . Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth and Tennyson all wrote blank-verse, quasi-Elizabethan plays; and all of them, without exception, are resounding failures. They are so not because the men who wrote

[5] One of the protagonists of John Fowles's *The Collector*, Miranda Gray, openly revolts agains the postwar critical celebration of such lower-middle-class heroes. She especially complains about the characterisation of Arthur Seaton in Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* published in 1958. See pages 101-02.

them were inferior poets, but because the form was finished, worn out, exhausted, . . ." (167).

Moreover, Johnson devalued the postwar conventionalist attempt to turn back to the writing of the nineteenth century:

> That is what seems to have happened to the nineteenth century narrative novel, too, by the outbreak of the First World War. No matter how good the writers are who now attempt it, it cannot be made to work for our time, and the writing of it is anachronistic, invalid, irrelevant, and perverse" (167).

Johnson also warned the postwar realist novelist that the novel genre should continue to evolve from the point where the modernist novelist had left. He said that

> It is not a question of influence, of writing like Joyce. It is a matter of realising that the novel is an evolving form, not a static one, of accepting that for practical purposes where Joyce left off should ever since have been regarded as the starting point. (166)

The experimentalist argument was further taken to claims that the contemporary postwar novel was to investigate language, highlight its own linguistic status and therefore disclose the shortcomings of traditional realist works of literature. The target of the postwar experimentalist discussion was the conventionalist criticism of modernism and the modernist novel. Eva Figes (b. 1932), one of the experimentalist spokespersons, talking about her working methodology in a conversation with Alan Burns, and echoing Virginia Woolf, claimed that "I discovered that life was not continuous, that the novels of the past were portraying a false reality" (33). The "false reality" that Figes was talking

about was the conventional realist illusion of life created by traditional narrative fiction. Besides this, mostly influenced by Samuel Beckett and Ezra Pound, Christine Brooke-Rose (b. 1923), who considered herself an "auto-destruct artist," drew attention to the "fictionality of fiction," playing with language and the modes of narrative (qtd. in Gasiorek 3). However, among a number of drawbacks of British postwar fiction, the most symptomatic was insistently identified as the absence of novelists whose works had at least the same aesthetic quality as that of Modernist writing. According to Bradbury's belief,

> What was absent was the next generation; . . . It marked a return to an older concept of fiction, to realism, materialism, empiricism, linearity, against which the Modern movement had been in revolt. It reverted to humanism, rediscovered provinciality, . . . No longer a project for imaginative adventure and linguistic discovery, the British novel was "no longer novel." (277- 79)

In contradistinction to these and many other gloomy prognostications of the 1960s and '70s, this thesis attempts to demonstrate that among a number of British postwar novelists, who were writing at that time, Muriel Spark (1918-2006), Iris Murdoch (1919-1999) and John Fowles (1926-2005) can be evaluated as a new generation of writers whose works fulfilled the postwar need for the new "avant-garde." These novelists, this thesis particularly claims, displayed in their works a tendency which neither went back to an older era of traditionalist writing nor typified extreme experimental traits; and they achieved this principally by a reformulation of realist tradition in British literature. In other words, these novelists deliberately included what later became one of the major concerns of the late twentieth-century postmodern criticism, the problem of representation in literature, as part of their subject matter in their novels as earlier as 1950s (Gasiorek 13). This tendency, which was actually a turning back, for Linda

Hutcheon, to the Aristotelian concept of mimesis focusing also on diegesis as part of mimesis (*Narcissistic Narrative* 5),[6] was the result of the novelist's

> mature recognition of [the novel's] existence as *writing*, which can only ensure its continued viability in and relevance to a contemporary world which is similarly beginning to gain awareness of precisely how its values and practices are constructed and legitimized" (Waugh 19).

1.2 The Change in Literary Criticism towards Recognition of a New Form of Writing

Mainstream criticism of the postwar literature, which was introduced particularly by Frederick R. Karl's *A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel* (1961), Rubin Rabinovitz's *The Reaction Against Experiment in the English Novel, 1950-1960* (1967), and Bernard Bergonzi's *The Situation of the Novel* (1970), formulated an idea of tradition-innovation dichotomy in British postwar fiction and strongly emphasised the emergence of a minor key (as compared to modernist novel), the social realist and the 'Movement' novelists as hostile towards the modernist experimental writing of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Especially beginning from the 1970s, however, a change in the analytical perspective, which has seriously begun to question this older critical view, has been perceivable.

According to this more recent outlook, the older view deliberately produced limiting estimations of the period's writing. A great variety of perceptive approaches to the postwar novel has begun to replace the classical restraining critical judgement. Therefore, the problem was lack of contemporary literary

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[6] Hutcheon also claims that "Mimesis is transmutation, not reproduction, whether it be a mimesis of product or process. Diegesis is a part of mimesis, as Aristotle perceived, and so ought to be taken into account in definitions of what constitutes novelistic 'realism' . . . It would seem to be very difficult to keep the term 'realism' in a literary context and retain a fixed meaning free from epistemological or ideological connotations" (*Narcissistic Narrative* 43-44).

criticism that sufficiently recognised and dealt with modes of writing outside of the consciously introduced classifications. In other words,

> the criticism which read the contemporary English novel according to the lore of socio-moral realism was insufficient to deal with contemporary developments. . . . one of the disturbing features of the novel in England now[7] is the absence of a criticism responsive to its character and direction; . . . (Bradbury and Palmer 14)

Although the early critical assessment of the British postwar fiction misleadingly affirmed an antagonism between the traditionalist and the experimentalist form of postwar novel, the later commentary on the period's writing has acknowledged a divergence from the established conventions; and it began to be noticed in literary criticism in the final decades of the twentieth century that the long-inaugurated opposition between traditionalism and experimentalism in postwar British fiction was indeed ambiguous. From the end of the 1970s to the present day,[8] mainstream literary criticism has begun to recognise that postwar British fiction was not thoroughly characterised by the tradition-innovation dichotomy. Correspondingly, it has recently been accepted that postwar British fiction could not be limited to the most acclaimed neorealist revival, but other significant movements in fiction were observable.

Richard Todd unsurprisingly remarks in an essay published in 1988 that "We tend [even] now, in the mid 1980s, still to question the existence of a *prevailing* canon of postmodernist fiction in Britain, one that can be identified and discussed as such" (115) since British postmodern fiction has displayed many conventional characteristics besides its untraditional, postmodern features. Nevertheless, the beginnings of postmodernist theories in literary criticism in Britain must have sensitised the traditionalist critics mentioned above to the

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[7] Malcolm Bardbury and David Palmer published their *The Contemporary English Novel* in 1980. Therefore, what they meant by "now" might have been 1970s.
[8] The last published book addressing this dichotomy used in this thesis is Richard Bradford's 2007 book *The Novel Now: Contemporary British Fiction* (Malden).

importance of the new and untraditional aspects of some of postwar novelists. This had become possible through a reconsideration of the works of certain British postwar novelists, for example the works of Anita Brookner (b. 1928) and Margaret Drabble (b. 1939), and also, it can be maintained, the novels of Muriel Spark, Iris Murdoch, and John Fowles. These three novelists, this thesis especially claims, reconceptualised the traditional understanding of realism by including self-reflexive references to the fictional nature of their works in their conventional narratives, and hence created a rapprochement between traditional realism and modernist experimentalism. Therefore, it may be claimed for these novelists that

> What is important for them – what signals the presence of the postmodern – is the foregrounding of literary artifice . . . and above all the writer's self-conscious awareness of the fictionality of literature and its status as a construction of language. (Johnston 139)

By making the issue of representation evident in their fictional works, these novelists thus exemplified the prototypes of today's postmodern challenge to what Linda Hutcheon calls "our mimetic assumptions about representation . . . assumptions about its transparency and common sense naturalness" (*Politics of Postmodernism* 32) in postwar Britain. According to Andrzej Gasiorek, moreover,

> The novels of these writers suggest that distinctions between 'realist' and 'experimentalist' or between 'traditional' and 'innovative', which were of such significance to the modernists and the avant-garde in the earlier part of the century, are so irrelevant to the post-war period that they should be dropped altogether. (v)

In several other critical works, even at the same time as David Lodge and Malcolm Bradbury were writing, it is accentuated that the disjunction between tradition and innovation is no longer viable. Ronald Hayman's *The Novel Today:*

1967-1975 (1976) asserts that "To categorize novelists as either experimental or traditional is as simplistic as to treat realism and experiment as mutually exclusive" (13). Additionally, in their preface to *The Contemporary English Novel* (1980), Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer report that "What was becoming clear was that the criticism which read the contemporary English novel according to the lore of socio-moral realism was insufficient to deal with contemporary developments" (14). In addition to these comments, Bradbury, in his *The Modern British Novel* (1993), makes a self-criticism and reminds the readers of the fact that the earlier critical works of postwar fiction, which were mentioned in the first part of this introduction as a restriction on the avant-garde fiction, are "useful studies of the time," but "the argument was always too narrow, and is now long passed its sell-by date" (19). In *Contemporary Fiction* (2003), Jago Morrison observes the postwar situation from another but similar perspective and comments that "Looking back with the benefit of hindsight, therefore, it seems extraordinary just how misguided this 'death of the novel' thesis turned out to be" (4); and Richard Bradford's *The Novel Now: Contemporary British Fiction* (2007) demonstrates that "What had once been the stark contrast – often antagonistic conflict – between realism and modernism [of the '50s and '60s] had been sidelined; hybridity now occupied the centre ground" (3). From the end of the 1970s to the present day, these brief illustrations about the failure of the earlier observance of British postwar fiction in two juxtaposing categories and the critical emphasis on the postwar traditionalist fiction have helped develop a new perspective on the period's writing.

Related to this view, it can be contended that the conventional literary criticism installed a literary circle which included only the novelists of the postwar neorealist revival. That is to say that it was the works of Kingsley Amis, John Braine, Alan Sillitoe, John Wain and David Storey that "for many observers, came to represent the novel in the 1950s" (Bradbury and Palmer 12). It is, however, significantly maintained that

> in practice the scene was vastly more various, and writers of a quite different temper, . . . were bringing a much more fabulous and speculative mode into postwar English fiction: Muriel Spark, William Golding, Iris Murdoch, Doris Lessing, Anthony Burgess. (Bradbury and Palmer 12-13)

This list may include John Fowles as well as he is markedly described in the same book as "the most interesting and important talent to emerge in the 1960s" (13). It becomes remarkable that in Bradbury and Palmer's commentary, the tone and the focus of criticism has changed, and the argument now is about

> a writing, increasingly self-aware, much concerned with the nature of fictions, and the freedom of the imagination, which requires a quite different reading from that generally canvassed in the 1950s, when, . . . the temper of criticism . . . was much more devoted to interpreting the novel as a socio-moral form. (13)

Among her critical writings, A. S. Byatt's "People in Paper Houses: Attitudes to 'Realism' and 'Experiment' in English Post-war Fiction" (1980) also suggests that it is no longer effective to think of the postwar novel in terms of the antithesis of tradition and experiment. She says that the conventional mode of literary criticism in Britain lacks true perspective because

> These irritable territorial definitions have taken place against the background of a critical discussion of contemporary fiction which has been, in this country, decidedly thin; and against a critical lore which has been – and this is important – characteristically moral and prescriptive. (148)

Although the shortcomings of this critical tradition are obvious, it is encouragingly revealed that

> the portrait of post-war British fiction as generally devoted to sociological realism is far too simple, . . . British fiction in the later Forties and above all the Fifties was in fact passing through a significant revival; this is when most of the main post-war directions, many of the most important fictional careers, began. And, far from moving in one single direction, the novel was moving in many – toward realism, but also new forms of experiment; . . . In Britain as elsewhere, what was happening was the emergence of a period where no one movement dominated, no single style or aesthetic manner prevailed, ... (Bradbury 281-82)

Analogous to the comment above and in clear contrast to the gloomy postwar atmosphere, it is elsewhere declared in 1980 that "When, recently, *The New Review* encouraged fifty-six novelists or critics of fiction to reflect on the state of the novel, most noted the way in which a new flexibility and use of fantasy had entered the novel" (Bradbury and Palmer 15).

British fiction, contrary to the discussion of Bernard Bergonzi, Frederick R. Karl and Rubin Rabinovitz, in fact illustrated many other characteristics during the postwar years. A number of British novels, in these years, were constrained neither to classical realism nor to modernist experimentalism. These works instead made a synthesis of these aesthetic realms. Furthermore, this artistic synthesis coincides in many ways with Linda Hutcheon's 1980s postmodern critical inquiry into the nature of realist and modernist aesthetics:

> What postmodernism does is to denaturalize both realism's transparency and modernism's reflexive response . . . With the problematizing and 'de-doxifying' of both realist reference and modernist autonomy, postmodern representation opens up other possible relations between art and the world. (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 34)

Therefore, these novelists neither turned to classical realism and became a member of the 'Angry Young Men' nor rejected altogether the realist heritage of

British fiction. What these postwar novelists did in their works was to challenge the traditional arbitrary understanding of realism (that had been reduced to a mimesis without diegesis,)[9] in British literature; and among them were Murdoch, Spark and Fowles. The works of these three novelists, therefore, cannot be classified in the clear-cut postwar categorisation of tradition and innovation dichotomy. Today's literary criticism in Britain does not reject the continuance of the postwar traditionalist novel. It has, however, broadened the critical perspective and now views the postwar era as exhibiting more techniques, styles and new forms than what the conventional judgement inadequately offered. This thesis belongs to such a view of that time.

1.3 Current Critical Perspective and the Works of Murdoch, Spark and Fowles

As a result of this canonical categorisation, Murdoch and Fowles were quickly – and quite surprisingly in retrospect – labelled as Angry Young Men after the publication of their first novels, Murdoch's *Under the Net* in 1954 and Fowles's *The Collector* in 1963.[10] In a similar fashion, Spark was introduced into the literary canon as a Catholic novelist after she published her first novel, *The Comforters* in 1957. [11] Murdoch, Spark, and Fowles, therefore, were first identified as British novelists writing in the traditional realist mode.

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[9] David Lodge makes a simple differentiation between these two classical terms: according to him, mimesis is "showing," whereas diegesis is "telling." More precisely, mimesis is the narration through imitation; and diegesis is the narration in the poet's own voice. "The Classic Realist Text." *Middlemarch: George Eliot*. John Peck (ed.). London: MacMillan, 1992 p. 50.
[10] For Murdoch, see William Van O'Connor, *The New University Wits and the End of Modernism* (1963), and for Fowles, see Dianne L. Vipond *Conversations with John Fowles* (1999).
[11] See Ruth Whittaker, Rodney S. Edgecombe, Jennifer L. Randsi in Martin McQuillan, *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction* (2002).

According to Amy J. Elias, however, such a classification of the writers either in the traditional or in the experimental category seems "secure" only until one considers certain novels.[12] These novels, Elias accurately argues,

> seem different from 'straight' Realism – harder, more metafictional, *postmodern*. But these works also seem different from – i.e., more realistic than – that of the 'experimentalists.' Indeed, they actually seem to blur the boundaries between postmodern 'experiment' and 'Realism'. (9)

In addition to Elias, who especially concentrates on the emergence of a particular form of postwar novel which noticeably differentiates itself from realist and postmodern stereotypes acknowledged by the mainstream criticism, the American novelist and literary critic John Barth, in his well-known and much misread 1967 essay "The Literature of Exhaustion,"[13] specifically focuses on "the used-upness of certain forms or the felt exhaustion of certain possibilities," (64) which, although he sees no cause of despair in it for the reader or for the critic, draws attention to end of the conventional realist form in narrative fiction. In his complementary 1979 essay, "The Literature of Replenishment," he characterises the "ideal postmodernist novel" which would develop from the quarrel between the conventional realist and modern experimentalist factions in the literature and literary criticism of the postwar period. John Barth's definition of this new form distinctly characterises the analytical position of the three novelists to be studied in this thesis:

> My ideal postmodernist author neither merely repudiates nor merely imitates either his twentieth-century modernist parents or

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[12] This commentary, of course, implies only some of the postwar novels as opposed to classic realist and overtly experimental fiction.

[13] The publication date of Barth's essay illustrates the difference between the perspectives of British and American literary criticism. Fowles had especially complained about the unrewarding attitude of the British criticism compared to the American.

> his nineteenth-century premodernist grandparents. He has the first half of our century under his belt, but not on his back. (203)

Very much analogous to this view is David Lodge's commentary which particularly concentrates on

> a certain kind of avant-garde art which is said to be neither modernist nor antimodernist, but postmodernist; it continues the modernist critique of traditional mimetic art, and shares the modernist commitment to innovation, but pursues these aims by methods of its own. It . . . is often as critical of modernism as it is of antimodernism. (*The Modes of Modern Writing* 220)

Among these novels, which apparently reject such a clear-cut postwar categorisation by displaying for their own particular purposes both the traditional and the innovative characteristics at the same time, are the ones to be analysed in this study.[14] The main argument of this thesis is that although Murdoch, Spark and Fowles, especially in their earlier periods, were identified as conventional realist novelists, their notion of either tradition or innovation even in the '50s and '60s had little in common with what was introduced by postwar mainstream criticism. Murdoch's realism, for instance, was a Platonic formulation of the world which the artist was supposed to be unable to comprehend – James Donaghue in *Under the Net* – and represent – Bradley Pearson in *The Black Prince* – the phenomenal world. On the other hand, Spark's quasi-metafictional novels – represented by *The Comforters* and *Loitering with Intent* in this thesis – were certainly less the products of the novelist's reliance upon postmodernist philosophies than the outcomes of her enquiry as an artist into the very nature of fictional writing. Moreover, Fowles's early novels, which echoed the traces of his once guiding existential philosophy and his modern interpretation of the clash between the Few

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[14] It obviously means that all of the novels analysed in this thesis, *Under the Net* (1954), *The Black Prince* (1973), *The Comforters* (1957), *Loitering with Intent* (1981), *The Collector* (1963), and *The Magus: A Revised Version* (1977) display this in-between quality.

and the Many – especially in his *The Collector* – pictured a fictional world where the novelist-god, in one way or another, explicitly referred to his role as the sole creator of his fiction.

Therefore, this thesis is going to investigate the novels mostly from the points of their unconventional features, and examine the interactions between traditional realist elements in the novels and their innovative constituents. Although it may be seen that these innovations foreshadow the late twentieth-century postmodernist techniques, the novels do not subscribe thoroughly to the underlying philosophies or ideologies of postmodernism due to their strict adherence to Ian Watt's definition of formal realism. He defines formal realism as a set of narrative techniques that can principally be divided into three interrelated characteristics: a) the depiction of individualised characters, b) the use of a concrete setting, c) the presence of historical specificity. Ian Watt argues that

> The narrative method whereby the novel embodies this circumstantial view of life may be called its formal realism; formal, because the term realism does not here refer to any special literary doctrine or purpose, but only to a set of narrative procedures. . . with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the times and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language. (32)

Thus, although recent categorisation of twentieth-century literature has gone the other way and declared some of these works as part of the postmodernist canon (e.g. Linda Hutcheon and Patricia Waugh), they remain, as formal realist works, only marginally – or at least questionably – a "genuine" part of the later movement because of their authors' involvements in the problem of representation – which nevertheless coincides with the postmodern challenge to mimetic tradition – for their rather individual interests as British postwar novelists. Although their techniques can be considered postmodern (especially the metafictional framework of the novels except from Murdoch's *Under the Net*),

their messages are not quite postmodern. Textual message about reality that the novels have is still not the same as a fully developed postmodern text. Rather than exemplifying a postmodern challenge to any sources of extra-textual truth, these novels foreground the question of where the truth is. Following Williams-Wanquet's suggestion in "Towards Defining 'Postrealism' in British Literature" (2006), therefore, these works can more properly be called postrealist rather than postmodern due to their blurring the line between realism and postmodernism through their paradoxical coupling of fiction and metafiction, historical reference and self-reflexivity (389).

CHAPTER 2

IRIS MURDOCH

2.1 Introduction

Murdoch periodically proclaimed her admiration for some of the nineteenth-century realist novelists, particularly for George Eliot;[15] and her writing has been acknowledged as falling into the category of conventional realist literature. Contrary to this general classification, Murdoch's work clearly differentiates itself from the postwar mainstream prose and the social realism in which a great majority of novels were written in Britain at the time.

This postwar situation of novel writing is described by one of the major Murdoch critics, Elizabeth Dipple, as such:

> Unable to restore the power and largess of an earlier period in the history of the novel, the contemporary novelist is trapped by the theories and preoccupations of a milieu which encourages self-concentration from both writer and reader, and against this entrapment Murdoch's own fervent and prolific practice fights in open warfare. (4)

It is noticeable that Murdoch reacted against the Modernist literature of the early twentieth century in certain methods, yet she never became one of the reactionary social realist novelists of her time. This was because of the fact that "Her extensive achievement in radical thinking about the novel as a genre as well as in

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[15] In an interview conducted by Michael O. Bellamy, Murdoch says, "I'm attempting to be a realist . . . I aim at being an ordinary writer, a realistic writer in the tradition of the English novel." "An Interview with Iris Murdoch" *Contemporary Literature* 23 June 1977. 129-140. Print.

her use of it as a vehicle for those ideas . . . involved a participation in subtle and difficult ways with an oblique method of experimentation" (Dipple 4).

Although in her later novels it became less prominent, Murdoch was a Platonist who distrusted art in her earlier works, including her philosophical writings; and Murdoch's distrust of art makes itself remarkably clear in her rejection of the traditional notion of mimesis not only in her first published novel *Under the Net*, but also in one of her most celebrated works *The Black Prince* (1973). For example, Murdoch herself declares in terms of mimetic illustration that "art is always bad for us in so far as it is mimetic or imitative" (*The Fire and the Sun* 390). She builds this idea on Plato's statement about the unreal nature of all literary representation. According to Plato's explanation, moreover, "if his [the tragic poet] art is representation, is by nature at third remove from the throne of truth; and the same is true of all other representative artists" (425). To be more precise, as Lindsey Tucker observes, "mimesis is not involved in Murdoch's definition of realism; she is too much of a Platonist to trust mere imitation. Murdochean realism involves seeing not only what is in the text but what lies beyond it" (9), which indeed helped Murdoch reconceptualise literary realism through her rejection of the conventional notion of mimesis as mere copying of the phenomenal world, and which coincides with the postmodern questioning of conventional mimetic literature. Moreover, Murdoch's work is interestingly claimed to be both postmodern and liberal[16] as, according to Bran Nicol, these two terms should not be binarily opposed: postmodernism questions liberal humanist concepts, but it does not deny these concepts at all. Therefore, postmodern fiction is itself referential as opposed to anti-referential modernist fiction. Bran Nicol thus concludes saying, "The double logic of postmodernism applies in Murdoch's case: she is both liberal and postmodern" (*Iris Murdoch: The Retrospective Fiction* 24).

In order to comprehend Murdoch's experiment with the realist novel frame, it is productive to scrutinise her conception of reality as a Platonic philosopher

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[16] Liberal humanist as the most important reflections of classical realism.

who believes that all representative art is only a shadow, a copy of reality without actually "being" it: "So we shan't be surprised if the bed the carpenter makes is a shadowy thing compared to reality" (Plato 424). Therefore, Elizabeth Dipple interprets Murdoch's perception of Platonic reality as follows:

> This reality is a development of Platonic thinking, and is an idea alien to the conventional literary realism beside which Murdoch sets her theories of the novel. The representation of this radical idea as an adjunct to realism comprises Murdoch's most profound alteration or addition to what we normally understand as mimetic realism. In the nineteenth- and twentieth-century realist novel, reality generally resides in the historical trappings and reflections of the period . . . In Murdoch's work, the discovery of reality is both historical . . . and transcendent . . . The hopeless quest for reality, for knowledge, for the good, so informs the quotidian texture of her novels. (33-34)

According to Murdoch's philosophy, therefore, the knowledge of the world cannot be acquired immediately; but this knowledge can, as a result of a quest, be gained gradually for Plato says, "no craftsman could possibly make the form itself" (423). Relevantly, Murdoch's literary works sometimes portray a Platonic world which is crowded with questions through which, and through their experiences, the protagonists gain insight.

The image of such a world which is beyond immediate human comprehension[17] establishes the main argument in Murdoch's first published novel, *Under the Net*. Murdoch herself asserts in *The Fire and the Sun* (1977) that

> Plato pictures human life as a pilgrimage from appearance to reality. The intelligence, seeking satisfaction, moves from uncritical acceptance of sense experience and of conduct, to a more sophisticated and morally enlightened understanding. (387)

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[17] Although this phrase sounds to point to Plato's "ideal," it is, in Murdoch's words, more connected to earthly knowledge.

According to this assertion, the conventional realist claim that the world is knowable must be a misleading presumption, though not a totally false one. It must be misleading because the world is highly mysterious, and it needs an enterprise to perceive the truth about it.

2.2 *Under the Net*: The Novelist as Unable to Comprehend the Truth

Ingeniously playing upon the established realist view and creating a vivid image of Plato's cave myth, Murdoch, in *Under the Net*, designs a theatre-like space in order to signify that daily human life is a mere illusion. The first-person narrator and the protagonist of Murdoch's novel, James Donaghue, or Jake, has begun a search for an ex-girlfriend, a Blues singer, Anna Quentin, since he is still in love with her. He wants to learn where and with whom she is living, which will be his "discovery" about Anna. After visits to several places in London where, he thinks, Anna might have performed, Jake comes to a Georgian house converted into a theatre building. As the poster on the gate revealingly reads, it is the "Riverside Miming Theatre."

As the name itself denotes, it is a theatre where the performers do not talk but mime, which, of course, immediately symbolises one of the novel's main ideas, which is that it is up to the audience to interpret the performance as it is up to the artist to make sense of the world. In the theatre, therefore, Jake finds himself surrounded by silence. This theatre, the scene suggests, must be the world which is at first set as a puzzle for the human beings. Inside the building, in other words, Jake symbolises the situation of an ordinary man on earth who has to solve the mystery of the world. Passing through a hall, furthermore, Jake opens a door and finds himself looking into several eyes. He describes this highly symbolic situation saying,

> I was in the gallery of a tiny theatre. . . . and on the stage were a number of actors, moving silently to and fro, and wearing masks which they kept turned towards the auditorium. These masks were a little larger than life, and this fact accounted for the extraordinary impression of closeness which I had received when I had first opened the door. (35)[18]

In the novel, Murdoch deliberately pictures the performers in the gallery wearing masks, because she wants Jake, certainly in a Platonic consciousness as it is impossible to know the world at once, to be surprised and unable to know who is who and what is what in the theatre. He, therefore, has come to the theatre to find Anna, which, he presumes, is a simple task; but now it is notable that he even cannot differentiate between the masked players. Metaphorically, Jake will learn that the world is full of masks, and first impressions and beliefs prove to be false, which, for Murdoch herself, "in terms of the cave myth . . . is the condition of the prisoners who face the back wall and see only shadows cast by the fire" (*The Fire and the Sun* 389-90).

The traditional realist insistence on miming the world, according to Murdoch, is a problematic assertion. Though Murdoch did not abandon a conventional realist pattern in her novels including *Under the Net*, she intelligibly maintained her suspicion of the practice of mimetic realism in her protagonist's personal experiences. Hers is, for Linda Hutcheon, "a critique of both of the view of representation as reflective (rather than as constitutive) of reality and of the accepted idea of 'man' as the centered subject of representation" (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 18). As a result, as part of a mime act, there must be silence inside the theatre in the novel. Since entering the building, therefore, Jake has heard no voice at all: "An oppressive silence searched out of the place like a cloud . . . Now there was nothing but the silence . . . I walked slowly down the hall, planting my feet with care on a long black sound-absorbing rug . . . I could hear no sound"

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[18] All of the page references are to 1982 Penguin edition.

(34-35). Jake is an artist, a translator,[19] who is thus presumed to make – in a way – copies of copies of the world. He, nevertheless, has to interpret everything he sees in the theatre-like phenomenal world; in other words, therefore, Jake's occupation as protagonist must be to interpret and hence to "un-mask" the world (Conradi 31).

In the novel, it is observed that Jake lives in a circle of misapprehensions which prevent him from seeing the truth about people and events. Returning from France, for example, he finds out to his surprise that he and Finn, "a sort of remote cousin" (7) have to leave their old lodgings. Their landlady, Magdalen, wants them to go away because she is planning to marry. Jake confesses,

> Magdalen lived in one of those repulsive heavy-weight houses in Earls Court Road. . . . and there I had lived too for more than eighteen months, and Finn as well. . . . I had begun to feel that this was my home. Sometimes Magdalen had boy friends, I didn't mind and I didn't inquire. . . . We had lived there as snug as a pair of walnuts in their shells. We had also lived there practically rent-free, which was another point. (9-10)

Jake has very unreasonably taken it for granted that he will be tolerated forever. He has not been able to foresee the truth as a Murdochean character, and when he is now forced to leave the house he begins at least to acknowledge that he has got it wrong:

> I ought to have taken better care of the girl. This metamorphosis [Magdalen, for Jake, has never been a woman to marry] must have been a long time preparing, only I had been too dull to see it. A girl like Magdalen can't be transformed overnight. Someone had been hard at work. (12)

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[19] Although Jake is introduced mostly as a translator, the novel also provides the information that he has already attempted to write an epic poem. Furthermore, he will compose a book before the novel ends.

Disenchanted enough, Jake finally concludes that he and Finn have to leave the house; yet he wants to learn about the man whom Magdalen is going to marry: "'Who is this character, anyway?' I asked her. . . . 'His name,' she said, 'is Starfield. You may have heard of him.' . . . So it was Starfield, Samuel Starfield, Sacred Sammy, the diamond bookmaker" (13). Later, Jake will meet Sammy and it will be revealed that he has misinterpreted him as well. What Murdoch insistently repeats in Jake's characterisation is that the artist, the writer-translator in Jake's case, has to struggle to arrive at the truth. It is not a physical endeavour, it is almost a spiritual refinement in the artist's personality.

Another fallacy Jake is trapped in throughout the novel is his relationship with Anna. Beginning with his search for her and up to the end of the novel, it becomes perceptible that Jake fails to decipher Anna, and therefore nearly everything around him turns out to be a delusion. Jake begins his journey from ignorance to reality[20] to meet Anna, which is also taken as a play upon the realist picaresque novels of the time (Conradi 31). He locates her in a private room in the mime theatre where he has been surrounded by masked characters and is now mostly confused about the true identity of the performers. Jake wishes to learn the truth about the mime theatre and begins to question her. Although Anna answers his questions, Jake can not help formulating a misconception of what is going on in the mime theatre:

> 'What is this place, Anna?' I asked.
>
> 'That's one of the things that would be hard to explain, Jakie,' . . . 'It's a little experiment.'
>
> This phrase grated on me. It didn't sound like Anna at all. There was some other voice here. I thought I would pick my way round this.
>
> 'What about your singing?' I asked.
>
> 'Oh, I've given up singing,' said Anna. 'I shan't sing any more.' . . .

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[20] In Platonic terms in this case.

'Why in heaven's name not, Anna?'

'Well,' said Anna, and I could still sense the curious artificiality in her tone, 'I don't care for that way of earning a living. The sort of singing I do is so' – she searched for the word – 'ostentatious. There's no truth in it. One's just exploiting one's charm to seduce people.

I took her by the shoulders and shook her. 'You don't believe what you're saying!' I cried.

'I do, Jake!'

'How about the theatre?' I asked. 'How does that come in?'

'This is pure art,' said Anna. 'It's very simple and it's very pure.'

'Anna, who's been getting at you?' I asked her. (40-41)

Jake must postulate that there is someone else who is the main stimulus for Anna's being in the mime theatre. He cannot accept that Anna acts there as herself. Including the sentences Anna utters, Jake's theory, therefore, is that it all belongs to someone else. Later in the novel, Jake mistakenly concludes he has solved the mystery of both Anna and the mime theatre. According to him, it must be Hugo, someone with whom Jake earlier made friends. For Jake, everything Anna says echoes Hugo:

the words which Anna had uttered at the Mime Theatre; the words which I had felt were not her own. They were not her own. They were Hugo's. They were an echo, a travesty, of Hugo. . . . When I had heard Anna speak it had not occurred to me to connect what she said with the real Hugo; and when I had thought about Hugo I had not been reminded of Anna. . . . Anna too must have derived the principles which she spoke of, and of which the theatre itself was an expression. . . . There was no doubt about it. Anna's ideas were simply an expression of Hugo in a debased medium. . . . This also explained the Mime Theatre. This doubtless was some fantasy of Hugo's which he had recruited Anna, . . . That she had picked up in the process a crude version of his ideas was not surprising. Anna was sensitive and Hugo was impressive. Perhaps indeed the theatre was designed to catch Anna's interest and attention, and to be

ultimately the gilded cage which would imprison her. I was reminded of the silent expressionism of Hugo's early films. The speechless purity of the mime might well have become a genuine obsession for Hugo. But the beautiful theatre itself, this was a house for Anna, a house which Hugo had built and in which Anna would be queen. . . . Then I had another revelation. There came back to me with immense vividness the burly masked figure whom I had seen upon the stage in the tiny theatre, the figure that had once seemed to me strangely familiar; and it was clear to me then, without a shadow of doubt, that the figure had been Hugo himself. (82-84)

This long quotation is a very specific example of Jake's self-deception as a character who wrongly interprets the world he is living in. Although mimetic realism is a long-established concept, it has always been debatable, as both the interpretation and the description of the world have never ceased to be problematic for the artist. Murdoch's dealing with the problem was due to her confidence in the Platonic challenge to mimetic art. In other words, the artist's interpretation of the world is almost always inaccurate as the world is itself removed from the ideal in Platonic terms. Thus, the argument for Murdoch was that the artist gradually recognises his inability to portray the world accurately; or, in other words, "The pilgrim is thus seen as passing through different states of awareness whereby the higher reality is studied first in the form of shadows or images" (*The Fire and the Sun* 389).

Under the Net begins with Jake having just returned from France and constructing personal illusions about the people around him. These misunderstandings continue and develop through the whole novel which ends with Jake beginning to learn to discern the mysteries of his world. France, particularly Paris, plays a substantial role for Jake. When he is in London, Jake is described as absolutely blinded; when in Paris, he is enlightened. Jake, for example, receives a letter from Magdalen calling him back to Paris. With this second visit to the French city, he is forced to comprehend the truth about events he has been miscalculating so far. Among many other revelations, moreover, one of the most surprising for Jake is the truth about Anna. After returning from his

second visit to Paris, Jake gets a job as an orderly in a hospital in London. To his surprise, Hugo is brought in to the hospital because of a head injury, which gives him a chance to talk to Hugo in person and to acquire the truth about Anna. Jake is of course desperately looking for the truth itself: "I must get the facts; theories could come later. My mood of that moment was almost scientific" (225). He has discovered that the ordinary man – the artist as well – can only speculate about the truth of the world since an immediate achievement of the truth is never possible. However, Jake still assumes that Hugo loves Anna, and hence it is time to make him confess; and he begins to ask questions:

> 'She talked about you a lot,' said Hugo, 'and asked me questions about you.'
>
> . . . Nothing is more maddening than being questioned by the object of one's interest about the object of hers, should that object not be you.
>
> 'I was glad to be of service to her,' said Hugo, with a distinguishingly humble air.
>
> Was Hugo being frank with me? I suddenly wondered. 'When will you see her again?' I asked. 'Is she really going away?'
>
> 'I don't know,' said Hugo. 'I really don't know what she really plans to do. She's like the weather. One simply never knows with Sadie.'

Jake is confused to hear the name Sadie, Anna's sister:

> 'You mean Anna, yes,' I said.
>
> 'I mean *Sadie*!' said Hugo.
>
> The names of the two women rang out like the blasts of a horn which echo through a wood. A pattern in my mind was suddenly scattered and the pieces of it went flying about me like birds.
>
> . . . 'Who have we just been talking about?' I asked him.

'Sadie, of course,' said Hugo. 'Who else do you imagine?'

. . .

'Hugo,' I said, 'can we get this absolutely clear?' . . .

'Who is it that you're in love with?' I said. 'Which of them?'

'Sadie,' said Hugo.

'Are you sure?' I asked.

'Bloody hell!' he said. 'I ought to know! I've suffered more than a year of misery about that woman! But I thought you knew all this?'

'She told me,' I said. 'She *told* me! But, of course, I didn't believe her.' I sat back on to the floor and rocked my head in my hands. (225-26)

Hugo clearly explains what it is to invent stories about people and count on them, which Jake has been doing; it is meaninglessness: "'Jake, you're a fool. You know anyone can love anyone, or prefer anyone to anyone'" (226). Jake has been particularly portrayed as a type who fails to see the reality and looks for a false illustration of the world; but he will not be the same individual any more. He achieves this especially by recognising the truth about himself. Jake continues,

'I still don't understand,' I said at last. 'It isn't just that I thought the thing impossible but everything was pointing the other way. Why did you take all that trouble about the Mime Theatre?'

'I've told you,' said Hugo, 'it was to please Anna.'

'But why, why?' . . .

'Well, I don't know,' said Hugo impatiently. 'I probably oughtn't to have. Nothing can come of these concessions. One is just telling lies.'

His words entered dully and blankly into my mind. Then quite suddenly I realized the truth. I stood up. 'Anna loves you,' I said.

37

'Yes, of course,' said Hugo. 'She's as crazy about me as I am about Sadie. But I thought you were in on all this, Jake?'

'I was in on it,' I said. 'I knew everything. I got it all the wrong way round, that's all!' (227)

This is Jake's confession of the truth about himself. Nevertheless, his confessions also enlighten him in the sense that he starts to understand that the world is not easy to comprehend. Murdoch's own argument about the Platonic notion of the artist helps understand the development in Jake's perception of the world. She says, in accordance with Jake's personal development throughout the novel, that

> [the] levels of awareness have . . . objects with different degrees of reality; and to these awarenesses . . . correspond different parts of the soul. The lowest part of the soul is egoistic, irrational, and deluded, the central part is aggressive and ambitious, the highest part is rational and good and knows the truth which lies beyond all images and hypotheses. (*The Fire and the Sun* 389)

Moreover, Bran Nicol, from another perspective, points to the traces of postmodern character formation in Murdoch's work:

> While her notion of the subject is recognizably liberal as it is expressed in her non fiction (essential, unique, etc.) the treatment of character in her novel at times stretches the notion of subjectivity into postmodernism. Character in the classic realist text is a fundamentally stable entity . . . if the self is essential, then it can be known; if it can be known, it can be *placed* in a hierarchical social order. Postmodern characterization responds to the perceived falseness and immorality of this approach by presenting character . . . as a 'process' in which identity is constantly subject to change. (*Iris Murdoch: The Retrospective Fiction* 23)

Jake earns his living in the novel by translating the books of a French writer, Jean Pierre Breteuil. Not only does he translate Breteuil's books into English but also he supposes that all of Breteuil's books are not serious literature, but easy reading; they are, Jake assumes, "bad best-selling stuff like everything that Jean Pierre writes" (20).[21] In Paris, Jake is to be disillusioned about this judgement too, for Jean Pierre Breteuil's latest novel, *Nous Les Vainqueurs*, is the winner of the Prix Goncourt. Jake says, "Across the whole window, . . . I saw the name of Jean Pierre Breteuil; . . . I looked again at the notice which said PRIX GONCOURT. There could be no doubt about it" (170). It is not easy for Jake to learn the truth, as his illusions about people have been a trap in which he has been living in the comfort of ignorance. Therefore, he asserts that

> It was only then that it struck me as shocking that my predominant emotion was distress. It was a distress, too, which went so deep that I was at first at a loss to understand it. . . . I was of course very surprised to find Jean Pierre in the role of a Goncourt winner. The Goncourt jury, that constellation of glorious names, might sometimes err, but they would never make a crass or fantastic mistake. That their coronation of Jean Pierre represented a moment of sheer insanity was a theory which I could set aside. I had not read the book. The alternative remained open, and the more I reflected, the more it appeared to be the only alternative, that Jean Pierre had at last written a good novel. (170-71)

Jake's resolution is now a logical interpretation of his own situation. This is his discovery of the truth, or something approaching it, and how he now responds to a particular situation:

> Why was this absolutely unbearable? Why should it matter to me so much that Jean Pierre had pulled it off? . . . To say that I was jealous was to put it too simply. . . . I had classed Jean Pierre once and for all. That he should secretly have been changing his spots,

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[21] The novel neither says nor hints anything about Breteuil's earlier novels. Therefore, this is Jake's personal judgement of Breteuil as an artist.

secretly improving his style, ennobling his thought, purifying his emotions: . . . Jean Pierre had no right to turn himself surreptitiously into a good writer. . . . For years I had worked for this man, using my knowledge and sensibility to turn his junk into the sweet English tongue; and now, without warning me, he sets up shop as a good writer. . . . Why should I waste time transcribing his writings instead of producing my own? I would never translate *Nous Les Vainqueurs*. (171)

Very similar to how he has nourished illusions about Jean Pierre, Jake has always been sure that Finn, his closest companion, will never go anywhere, but stay with him forever. Jake's estimation about Finn is quite straightforward: "Finn is always saying he will go back to Ireland to be in a country which really has religion, but he never goes" (22). On the contrary, towards the end of the novel, when he is with Mrs Tinckham, Jake receives a letter from Finn briefly saying that he has gone back to Ireland. In his letter, Finn reminds Jake of the truth he has never taken seriously: "You know how I often thought of going back before" (247). The short conversation between Jake and Mrs Tinckham about Finn's leaving Jake ends with, once again, Jake's ascertaining the truth about himself:

This letter upset me extremely and I exclaimed to Mrs Tinckham, 'Finn's gone back to Ireland!'

'I know,' said Mrs Tinck.

'You *know*?' I cried. 'how?'

'He told me,' said Mrs Tinck.

The notion that Finn had made a confidant of Mrs Tinckham came to me for the first time and rushed in an instant from possibility to probability. 'He told you just before we went?' I asked.

'Yes,' said Mrs Tinckham, 'and earlier too. But he must have told you he wanted to go back?'

'He did, now I come to think of it,' I said, 'but I didn't believe him.' And somehow this phrase had a familiar ring. 'I'm a fool,' I said. (247)

Murdoch obviously dedicates *Under the Net* to Jake's chain of misreading. Jake is pictured as a character who constantly frames his own versions of clarification of the events. He does not regard much whether his clarification is true or not. Therefore, this must be the case with his relationship with Sadie as well. Sadie Quentin, who is an actress, is Anna's sister and Jake learns that she needs a caretaker for her flat as she is leaving for the United States for a time. Jake postulates that it will be a great chance for him both to have a place to live in and to keep in touch with Anna. In a hairdressing salon where he finds Sadie, she tells Jake the truth that Hugo is desperately in love with her, which has become a burden: "This fellow is quite madly in love with me. He keeps calling and trying to get in at all hours, and when he doesn't call he rings up, and I'm just a nervous wreck" (52). What follows is the dialogue between Sadie and Jake: "'Are you sure?' I said to Sadie. 'My sweet boy, I know my own boss,' said Sadie. 'I mean, sure that he loves you,' I said. 'He's absolutely demented about me,' said Sadie" (52). Although this is the truth revealed to him simply and clearly, Jake does not credit her, because he concludes that Sadie cannot be telling the truth:

> After a while, however, I began to feel calm enough to find the situation rather interesting; and then, as I reflected more and more upon it, it became clear to me that Sadie simply couldn't be telling the truth. . . . Also the sheer improbability of Hugo being in love with Sadie was, when I considered it, overwhelming. Hugo was never very forward with women, and tended anyway to admire the quiet home-keeping types. I just couldn't see him behaving in the way Sadie had described. (68)

Jake has to formulate his own version of the truth. He needs a "hypothesis" to believe. Finally, he is ironically allowed to succeed:

> That there was some stratagem going forward which involved
> Hugo was very possible; but a more likely explanation of it was
> that Sadie was up to some professional caper which Hugo was
> trying to circumvent. I knew nothing about the film world, but I
> imagined it to be in a continuous ferment of personal intrigue.
> Indeed it was even possible that it was Sadie who was in love with
> Hugo and was trying to entangle him in some way. This, when it
> occurred to me, seemed very plausible hypothesis indeed. (68)

This last remark particularly indicates why Jake makes up these scenarios, and what follows helps us to understand Jake clearly: "When I had come to this conclusion I felt better" (68).

Jake's representation as an individual who is living on false impressions may sometimes seem unbearable to the reader. This is done consciously in order to reveal that a conventionally drawn character with whom the reader is supposed to sympathise is unreliable, and through it Jake's portrait becomes parodical of traditional "realist" characterisation. Furthermore, it is discussed elsewhere that

> Anxieties about art have been recently much in the air again . . .
> *Under the Net* is decades ahead of its time in its concern with these
> anxieties and perhaps further ahead of its time in its relaxed and
> cheerful mediation between two extreme positions: that truth is
> simply and immediately knowable, or very distantly accessible . . .
> Murdoch submits neither to any grand reduction, but shows them
> engaged in playful warfare. (Conradi 33-34)

The heavy parody of standard realist affirmations in Jake's portrayal in the novel requires humour. Although there are many instances, one of the most entertaining scenes in *Under the Net* is Jake's running into a movie star. In Sammy's flat, Jake meets Mister Mars, an Alsatian who has played in several movies such as, Jake recalls, *Red Godfrey's Revenge*, *Five in a Flood*, *Stargazer's Farm*, and *Dabbling in the Dew*. Ironically, for Jake, "a film star in real life" (125) turns out to be a dog. And he steals Mister Mars in order to exchange him

for his missing typescript, which will be another disappointment for Jake when he later finds out that no one wants Mister Mars back because he is too old to perform in another movie.

With the introduction of Mister Mars, *Under the Net* begins to strengthen the Platonic impression that nothing is itself, but everything is what it is not. Nothing is in its ideal form, but everything is removed from the principal – the ideal. In other words, just as Mister Mars is not a celebrity in its true sense but an old Alsatian dog, Jake is not a writer who produces his own literary work, but a translator who paraphrases a text already composed by someone else.

> I translate Breteuil because it's easy and because it sells like hot cakes in any language. Also, in a perverse way, I just enjoy translating, it's like opening one's mouth and hearing someone else's voice emerge . . . I live by literary hack-work, and a little original writing, as little as possible, (20)

says Jake. He once endeavoured to be a writer and began an epic poem called "And Mr Oppenheim Shall Inherit the Earth,"[22] but he gave up writing because, he believes that

> At that time too it had not yet become clear to me that the present age was not one in which it was possible to write an epic. At that time I naively imagined that there was no reason why one should not attempt to write anything that one felt inclined to write. . . . At a certain point perhaps one ought simply to stop reflecting. I had contrived in fact to stop myself just short of the point at which it would have become clear to me that the present age was not one in which it was possible to write a novel. (19)

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[22] The title of his proposed work indicates that it may be connected to the Holocaust, and the statement that "the present age" is unsuited to epic may also be a reference to this. There are delicate allusions to Theodor Adorno's comment that "There can be no poetry after Auschwitz." *Cultural Criticism and Society* (1951).

As Jake's fallacies make a parody of the mode of character formation in conventional realist literature, Murdoch's Platonic realism allows her, in Jake's portrait, to play upon the idea of originality in literature and to articulate the major epistemological assertions of the postwar literary and philosophical circles as well. One of these demonstrations was the conception of the demise of the novel, and it was conjectured that the novel genre, like the classical epic, had come to an end. Similarly, Jake feels able to write neither an epic poem nor a novel as a postwar writer.

Turning back to the notion of originality in art, this topic is most consistently discussed in two scenes in *Under the Net*. One of them is the cold-cure clinic set of conversations between Jake and Hugo, for whom "as for Plato art is a special case of copying, and [who] shares Plato's typically puritan suspicion of mimetic art" (Conradi 37), and the other one is Jake's composing the book, *The Silencer*. After keeping silent for several days in the clinic due to Jake's amusing misunderstanding, Jake and Hugo start a conversation about language. Hugo is definitely under the impression that as language is a medium of communication, "things are falsified from the start" because, he adds, "The language just won't let you present it as it really [is]" (59). Hugo speculates that in order to be truthful, one must keep silent:

> The only hope is to avoid saying it" (59). Jake tries to comprehend what Hugo is talking about: "I was puzzled by this myself. I felt that there was something wrong in what Hugo said, and yet I couldn't see what it was. We discussed the matter a bit further, then I told him, 'But at this rate almost everything one says, . . . turns out to be a sort of lie'. (60)

Hugo concurs adding that

'All the time when I speak to you, even now, I'm saying not *precisely* what I think, but what will impress you and make you respond. That's so even between us – . . . In fact, one's so used to this one hardly sees it. The whole language is a machine for making falsehoods'. (60)

During their discussion, Jake takes notes of what he has been hearing from Hugo. Later on, when they have left the clinic, Jake begins to reassemble and add to these notes,

When I glanced at these notes again after a little while they looked very scrappy and inadequate, so I added them a bit, just to make them a better reminder. Then later still when I looked them up it struck me that the argument as it stood on paper didn't make sense. So I added some more, to make it look intelligible, still drawing on my memory. Then when I read the thing through it began to occur to me that it was rather good. . . . I ran through it again and made it look a bit more elegant. . . . So I polished it up quite a lot and then began to fill in the preliminary conversation as well. This conversation I found wasn't so clear in my memory, and in reconstructing it I drew on a number of different occasions. (62)

Jake remakes the notes without telling Hugo about it. However, what is especially symbolic in Jake's reassembly is that he reinvents conversations which are supposed to be authentic. In other words, Jake essentially fictionalises an original piece of conversation (which, according to Hugo, is an inefficient representation of their meanings) by turning both Hugo and himself into two literary characters and the conversation between them into an imaginary story. He reformulates, in a fictional medium, the inadequate formulation that happened in reality. Jake tells us how he fictionalises the truth:

the thing began to have for me the fascination of a secret sin. I worked on it constantly. I now expanded it to cover a large number of our conversations, which I presented not necessarily as I

remembered them to have occurred, but in a way which fitted in with the plan of the whole. A quite considerable book began to take shape. I kept it in the form of a dialogue between two characters called Tamarus and Annandine. (62)

Mostly to denote Hugo's theory of language, Jake deliberately entitles the book *The Silencer*. The book, therefore, argues in a post-structuralist fashion (that is, that the speaker is never fully present in a network of signification) that language does not connect but separates the speaker from the listener. The idea, therefore, is that in order to be truthful, one must keep silent. *The Silencer*, furthermore, is a figuratively entitled book as Jake significantly silences not only Hugo but also himself by textualising Hugo and himself in a book. Ironically, this is the only substantial work of authorship that Jake produces in *Under the Net*. In her descriptions of the genesis and receptions of *The Silencer*, Murdoch clearly demonstrates how mimetic realism is mistaken. Since nothing can be more than a copy of the ideal – Murdoch describes the "ideal" in *The Fire and the Sun*, as "changeless eternal non-sensible objects" (288) – she underlines the unreality of both Hugo and Jake, who are already unreal constructions.

What is principally perceived in *Under the Net* is a clear expression of Murdoch's Platonic realism which, for the most part, operates to subvert the conventional realist notion of character formation. In order to do this, Murdoch pictures a protagonist who invariably fails to read the true character of people and events around himself. The protagonist's misreading of his social environment particularly focuses on a few characters, namely his ex-girlfriend Anna and her sister Sadie, his landlady Magdalen and her boyfriend Sammy, his cold-cure-clinic-companion Hugo, and finally his closest friend Finn. His misreading of these characters, which is especially clear in his quoted monologues, never allows him to comprehend the real motives of these people. He is, therefore, a character who is formed according to the Platonic impression of physical reality which is already falsified from the beginning. Murdoch alludes to this quality in *Under the Net* through the portrayal of a mime theatre where, very much like the chained

prisoners in Plato's cave myth, the protagonist fails to see the truth about the world. Murdoch's portrayal of a world where the protagonist is never allowed to achieve the truth, which is itself already removed from its original, substantially subverts traditional realist character formation. This concealing of the truth from the protagonist has never been as systematic in Murdoch as it is in the characterisation of Jake in *Under the Net*.

2.3 *The Black Prince*: The Novelist as Unable to Represent the Truth

Thematically analogous to *Under the Net*, which presents an artist narrator who endeavours to discover reality, is disappointed and yet enlightened at the end by discerning that truth is impossible to attain at once, Murdoch's *The Black Prince* (1973), "Her most 'experimental' and postmodernist novel" (Nicol, "Postmodern Murdoch" 8), portrays another writer, Bradley Pearson, who undertakes to reveal the particular truth about his love for Julian Baffin, and thus to explain the murder of his friend Arnold Baffin. Murdoch's portrayal of Bradley as the protagonist of *The Black Prince* once more develops in accordance with her Platonic idea of the artist whose means both of interpretation and of articulation of reality are limited attributes as compared to the conventional mimetic notion of character development: "The art of representation is . . . a long way removed from truth, and it is able to reproduce everything because it has little grasp of anything, and that little is of a mere phenomenal appearance" (Plato 426). Correspondingly, Bradley's attempts to pronounce the truth through a fictional medium – his autobiographical novel in *The Black Prince* – evidently fail to achieve the desired end.

In order to recount to the reader the truth about these two particular events (his love for Julian and the murder of Arnold), therefore, Bradley adopts the form of an autobiographical novel which he entitles *The Black Prince: a Celebration of Love*. Bradley composes this autobiographical story because he postulates that art

is the only medium through which to tell the truth; in fact, according to him, art is the only truth:

> Good art speaks truth, indeed *is* truth, perhaps the only truth. I have endeavoured in what follows to be wisely artful and artfully wise, and to tell the truth as I understand it, not only concerning the superficial and 'exciting' aspects of this drama, but also concerning what lies deeper . . . I have always been a seeker. And my seeking has taken the form of that attempt to tell truth of which I have just spoken. (3-4)[23]

Further in his story, in a letter written to Julian, Bradley insistently underlines that

> Art is concerned not just primarily but absolutely with truth. It is another name for truth. The artist is learning a special language in which to reveal truth. If you write, write from the heart, yet carefully, objectively. Never pose. Write little things which you think are true. (56)

Contrary to Bradley's insistence on truth to be delivered to the reader through his fiction, Bran Nicol observes the whole issue as problematic enough to be suspicious of the truth itself:

> Bradley insists that 'truth is simple'. However, if the insights of . . . postmodernism have taught us anything, it is that truth is far from simple to determine. The concept of one truth, as all-governing *logos* or transcendental signified or metanarrative, is now regarded with suspicion. It is more sensible to talk of truths plural. (*Iris Murdoch: The Retrospective Fiction* 97)

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[23] All of the page references are to 2003 Penguin edition.

In addition to the similarity between Jake and Bradley in their desperate search for truth as two Murdochean artists, Bradley, like Hugo Belfounder (who consciously chose to keep silent in order to be truthful in *Under the Net*) presents himself in *The Black Prince* as almost adhering to silence; and as a writer he publishes very little. This peculiar situation is also underlined by a Murdoch critic, William Slaymaker, through a contrast between the two novelists in the story, Arnold and Bradley. He says,

> [Bradley] Pearson claims he desires [truth], and so he writes little, in contrast to [Arnold] Baffin, who writes voluminously but with little interest in good art or moral goodness. Pearson claims he has the will to hold out against such seductive invitations to write. (27)

Addressing the conceptual correlation between *Under the Net* and *The Black Prince*, Hilda D. Spear similarly acknowledges that

> Bradley Pearson's own 'Foreword' picks up these ideas and discusses in particular the relationship between art and truth, a theme which becomes a continuing dialog throughout the novel and which returns on several occasions to the Murdochian idea expressed originally in *Under the Net*, that 'Real thoughts come out of silence' and 'Art comes out of endless restraint and silence.' (81)

Such ideas are remarkably revealed in Bradley's discussion with Arnold about their notions of art and the nature of their writing:

> 'Art isn't chat plus fantasy. Art comes out of endless restraint and silence.'
>
> 'If the silence is endless there isn't any art! It's people without creative gifts who say that more means worse!'

'One should only complete something when one feels one's bloody privileged to have it at all. . . .

'Nonsense. I write whether I feel like it or not. I complete things whether I think they're perfect or not. Anything else is hypocrisy. I have no muse. That's what being a professional writer is.'

'Then thank God I'm not one.' (42)

Similarly, A. S. Byatt's discussion points to the paradoxical claim of fictional truth in realist literature. According to her,

> *The Black Prince*, like *Under the Net*, is best read as a fable about the difficulties of realism, or truth-telling. It contains, like *Under the Net*, two novelists, one prolific and bad, one silent and good – at least in his own opinion, since he is the narrator, . . . It raises the question of truth and lies, and offers an endless series of receding, unattainable, focused images of truth, but nothing believable, nothing habitable. Like *Under the Net*, it stands beside realism . . .. (34-36)

The main narrative in *The Black Prince*, which is composed of nine different texts, is Bradley's autobiographical novel, *The Black Prince: a Celebration of Love*. Among the narrative voices in Murdoch's novel, therefore, it is notable that the most compelling is Bradley's. Bradley writes this story not only to articulate his love for Julian but also to document his innocence of Arnold's murder. His motive is, it seems, to reveal the objective truth about these two particular events. He, nevertheless, obviously attempts to do this through a "fictional" instrument where the narrative, both for Bradley and for the reader, is not likely to represent the objective reality thoroughly. According to Linda Hutcheon, for example, the problem for Bradley as the narrator is that "Mimetic literature has always created illusions, not literal truths; it has always utilized conventions, no matter what it might choose to imitate – that is, to create" (*Narcissistic Narrative* 42). Moreover, Patricia Waugh finds the idea that language unproblematically reflects a

"coherent, meaningful and 'objective' world" (3) no longer tenable. According to her,

> Language is an independent, self-contained system which generates its own 'meanings'. Its relationship to the phenomenal world is highly complex, problematic and regulated by convention. . . . In fiction they are required in order to explore the relationship between the world *of* the fiction and the world *outside* the fiction. (3)

Bradley composes an autobiographical account which he assumes the reader will take as the impartial illustration of his past. Moreover, he tries to clear himself of accusations of Arnold's murder not only in his main text, but also in two extra narratives, his foreword and postscript. Contrary to this intention, however, his past activities are deliberately presented in the novel as not altogether coherent; "And this is where the self-reflexive, parodic art of the postmodern comes in, underlining in its ironic way the realization that all cultural forms of representation . . . are ideologically grounded" (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 3). At the very beginning of his story, therefore, Bradley opens the narration with an unveiled hesitation. He says,

> It might be most dramatically effective to begin the tale at the moment when Arnold Baffin rang me up and said, 'Bradley, could you come round here please, I think that I have just killed my wife.' A deeper pattern however suggests Francis Marloe as the first speaker, . . . who, some half an hour before Arnold's momentous telephone call, initiates the action. For the news which Francis brought me forms the frame, or counterpoint, or outward packaging of what happened then and later in the drama of Arnold Baffin. (13)

As Bradley's story is a textual representation of the past, he is to reassemble, in this narrative, what has caused him to loose Julian and to be charged with

Arnold's murder. His very sentences, however, instantly colour his supposed naivety or his honesty as the narrator[24] of *The Black Prince: a Celebration of Love*. Therefore, *The Black Prince*

> challenge[s] the humanist assumption of a unified self and an integrated consciousness by both installing coherent subjectivity and subverting it.. . . what is being contested by postmodernism [are] the notion[s] of authorial originality and authority" (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* xii).

As his story is a textual reproduction, furthermore, Bradley sometimes questions that it may not be a reliable portrayal of the past for the reader. Because of this apparent indecisiveness, he meaningfully inquires, "What sort of picture of me has my reader received? I fear it must lack definition, since as I have never had any strong sense of my own identity, how can I characterize sharply that which I can scarcely apprehend?" (135). Comparable to this comment, in another remark to the reader, Bradley tries to perceive the reader's response to reading how he suddenly fell in love with Julian. He says,

> The reader, . . . may feel impatient with the foregoing lyricism. . . . he will say 'the fellow protests too much and intoxicates himself with words. He admits to being a thoroughly repressed man, no longer young . . .' I will not pause to answer this reader back, but will go on as faithfully as I can to recount what happened next" (202).

In another illustrative address to the reader, Bradley offers his own answers to the questions to which the reader is supposed to respond:

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[24] If not otherwise specially given by the author (as in the case of "unreliable narrator"), the narrator is supposed to be telling the truth (although fictional) to the reader during the act of reading in realist convention.

The reader may think it was unconscionably stupid of me not to have foreseen that I could not continue simply to derive happiness from this situation [his falling in love with Julian]. But the reader, . . . has probably mercifully forgotten, if indeed he ever knew, what this state of mind is like" (235).

When found guilty by the jury and sentenced to life-imprisonment by the court, Bradley, who credits that art is truth, is significantly negotiating not only with his editor but also with the reader who is assumed to be convinced of Bradley's honesty. Bradley presumes that as he is able to reconstruct the actual "past" events in his story, a true perspective of the history is coming into existence. In other words, he believes that an artistic representation can outline the truth comprehensively. Sometimes in the story, nevertheless, Bradley himself finds a paradox in the depiction of objective reality in art. He remarks that art will eventually colour the truth itself, and says,

My book is about art. It is also, in its humble way, a work of art: an 'art object', . . . Art . . . is the telling of truth, and is the only available method for the telling of certain truths. Yet how almost impossibly difficult it is not to let the marvels of the instrument itself interfere with the task to which it is dedicated. . . . But though it may always be well to attempt simplification, it is not always possible to avoid at least an elegant complexity. And then one asks, how can this also be 'true'? Is the real like this, *is* it this? (72)

Although Bradley writes *The Black Prince: a Celebration of Love* as proof of his innocence, he has not attempted to conceal his own reservations about the reliability (objectivity) of artistic representation. He himself questions the ability of art to establish a concrete exposition of truth. In an appeal to the editor, for example, Bradley challenges the reliability of character-creation in narrative fiction: "characters in art can have unassailable dignity, whereas characters in life have none. Yet of course life, . . . pathetically and continually aspires to the condition of art" (116).

In order to add to the fragility of the relationship between art and reality, Bradley is personified as an uncertain writer who occasionally questions his own beliefs about artistic representation. In this case in the novel, Bradley cannot decide whether or not art can provide a true depiction of the world for the artist. His uncertainty about the dependability of artistic illustration becomes more comprehensible when he questions Arnold's notion of art. Arnold notably cannot figure out the love relationship between his daughter Julian and Bradley. This is true, Bradley suggestively thinks, because Arnold, who is a novelist, has never represented falling in love in his novels: "Now I come to think of it, Arnold, you've never in any of your books really described what it's like to be in love – '" (273). As it clearly appears in this scene, Bradley, a realist writer, attempts to provide a textual representation of a past truth. It is, however, a highly problematic undertaking as Bradley (as an artist himself) distrusts the reliability of such a relationship between the past truth and its textual reproduction throughout his narration.

Through the portrait of Bradley, *The Black Prince*, which is of course itself a textual artefact, is filled with equally fictional letters, another form of writing. The continuous flow of reading is broken by a number of letters which are spread out in the narration. The existence of these letters in Bradley's story already foregrounds the fictional quality of Bradley's artistic reconstruction of the historical past. Linda Hutcheon names such devices "paratexts" that signal the self-reflexive nature of the text they are situated in (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 83-84). Bradley's story is so crowded with these paratextual letters that fictionality – and therefore textuality – concretely overshadows any other peculiarity of his story. In *The Black Prince: a Celebration of Love*, in other words, writing letters is an instrument for communication among the characters, which becomes more effective than any other mode of conversation.[25]

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[25] By means of these letters that are abundantly inserted into the narrative, Murdoch foregrounds the actual textual nature of her novel. Although the usual flow of narration of events needs no letter-writing among the characters at all, she takes the reader's attention to a very explicit image of textuality (writing).

Bradley's first letter to Arnold about Christian and Francis, or Bradley's letter to Julian in which he advises her that she should first read all great works of world literature, display the activity of writing, in other words, the very textual status of his art. It is particularly significant that Bradley explains the "organic" relationship between art and truth in a letter to Julian. Another letter, significantly, brings about Bradley's catastrophe. This is the letter apparently written by Arnold explaining that "I hoped to see you on several occasions lately to try to explain, to *show* you, but perhaps a letter is better. Anyway, that's point one. I am *really* in love and it's a terrible experience. I don't think I've ever felt quite like this before" (245). Later in Bradley's story, Rachel is said to have seen this letter accidentally which, according to Bradley, leads to a quarrel between her and her husband and eventually to Arnold's death. During Bradley's trial, as he has already destroyed the letter in order to protect Rachel, Bradley offers no evidence of Rachel's hatred for himself and Arnold.

Towards the end of Bradley's *The Black Prince: a Celebration of Love*, the narration entirely takes the form of letters. It is claimed to be Bradley sending and receiving letters in his desperate search for Julian. The narration, therefore, provided by an editor called Loxias is supplied with a symbolic mode of narration – the act of writing letters – to create, for the reader, a concrete image of the textuality of what the author – or Loxias, or Bradley, or eventually Murdoch as the novelist – is constructing. The most important parts of Bradley's story are resolved through the letters the characters write to one another. Arnold confesses his love for Christian in a letter to Bradley; Christian discloses her real intentions in a letter to Bradley; Bradley receives a letter from Julian and tries to decipher it, believing that she has written it under duress. All these scenes of letter writing symbolise the fictional structure of *The Black Prince*.

The main narrative in the novel is Bradley's story, which establishes Bradley's narrative voice as the primary source of reference. *The Black Prince*, however, includes other texts besides Bradley's main story-telling since "*no* narrative can be a natural 'master' narrative: there are no natural hierarchies; there are only those we construct" (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 13). Among

these subsidiary texts, two are Bradley's foreword and postscript to his story. These maintain the same argument that art is truth, and affirm that Bradley's aim of writing *The Black Prince: a Celebration of Love* is to glorify his love for Julian and to make the reader believe that he is innocent of Arnold's murder. Bradley's foreword to his story is a clear-cut announcement that art is truth and that his persona, as the speaker, will be truthful. It is, therefore, a self-justification on the part of the fictional writer. The foreword, from another perspective, is a little summary of how Bradley's story came into being. Bradley, reflecting upon the textuality of his story, reminds the reader of the mechanisms of a literary work, hence his own narration. He says,

> I shall in telling it adopt the modern technique of narration, . . . aware of the past, unaware of what is to come. I shall, . . . inhabit my past self and, . . . speak only with the apprehensions of that time, . . . So for example I shall say, 'I am fifty-eight years old', as I then was. And I shall judge people, inadequately, perhaps even unjustly, as I then judged them, and not in the light of any later wisdom. (3)

Although carrying out the same perspective upon the historical past as the foreword does, Bradley's postscript reflects upon three phases of development in his personality: these are related to his personality before he falls in love with Julian, when in love with Julian, and when he is in prison. This three-way split in the narrator undermines the reliability of the narrative voice in the story. Bradley, who several times declares and celebrates that art is truth, appears to the reader with three successive personalities. He acknowledges this later in the novel as such:

> I had the experience of having, . . . a new character created on me, or to me, in a space of hours. . . . It was like going through a glass and finding oneself inside a picture by Goya. I even began to look different, older, hook-nosed, more grotesque. . . . I hardly

recognized photographs of myself. And I had to live the new being. (373)

Bradley's postscript sounds as if it is the product of another narrative voice. Although it is the creation of the same fictional psyche, it belongs to Bradley's third phase of maturity. The postscript, therefore, is very likely to subvert the central point of view established in his main text. Bradley, accordingly, asserts that

> I had been forcibly presented with a new mode of being and I was anxious to explore it. . . . This was not something to be wasted. I had never felt more alert and alive in my life, and from the vantage point of my new consciousness I looked back upon what I had been: a timid incomplete resentful man. (375)

One of the most noteworthy parts of Bradley's postscript is the scene in which he surprisingly declares that he has not, during the trial, reacted against the accusations as expected from one who is being wrongfully accused. Bradley's explanation is, very surprisingly, that he has assumed the role of a man who has actually killed Arnold, which, according to his own words, gives him aesthetic pleasure. In other words, Bradley has almost accepted the charge by not protesting enough: "Why?" Bradley asks, and then answers that:

> The notion of actually *assuming* Arnold's death (and 'confessing') did occur to me an aesthetic possibility. If I *had* killed him there would have been a certain beauty in it. . . . what could be prettier than to have the aesthetic satisfaction of having 'committed' murder, without actually having had to commit it?" (379-80)

Such fictionalisation, on the part of Bradley, of an "actual" event immediately − and effectively − undermines, on the part of the reader, the

reliability of his narrative voice in *The Black Prince: a Celebration of Love*. Bradley, who actually expects aesthetic pleasure from his condemnation, is thus not unlikely to play with the course of events in his narration. As a writer whose profession is based on textuality, Bradley may not be telling the truth in the story. The possibility of Bradley's narrative voice in *The Black Prince* being unreliable is, therefore, mentioned by several critics of the novel. In one of these analyses, for instance, William Slaymaker points out that "The effect of the narrative experiment is to throw the narrator's story into question and thus to examine the possibility of truth and knowledge in a work of art" (25). Moreover, "a truth is being told, with 'facts' to back it up, but a teller constructs that truth and chooses those facts" (Foley qtd. in Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 57).

In addition to this view, although Bradley says that he writes his story to refer to nothing but the past truth, there are a few instances in the story where Bradley, who is supposed to be truthful, seems egoistic enough to manipulate the narration. In one of these episodes, after many vivid descriptions of his sickness and after his leaving the Opera House, Bradley finally confesses to Julian that he is desperately in love with her. His confession, however, is accompanied by the absurd accusation that he finds Julian guilty of being unbearably young and uneducated. When Julian says "'I – Bradley, don't go – I must – oh help me – find the right words – This is important – And it concerns me – You talk as if there was nobody here but you,'" Bradley answers that "'There is nobody here but me, . . . You're just something in my dream'" (256). Even though Bradley believes that he loves Julian, this conversation undermines the self-portrait of Bradley as a lover. Julian, therefore, asks him "'Are you sure it's *me* you love?'" to demonstrate, once again, his egoism, and adds:

> 'So you're going away tomorrow? Where to?'
>
> 'Abroad.'
>
> 'And what am I supposed to do? Just lock this evening away and forget about it?'

'Yes.'

'You think that's possible?'

'You know perfectly well what I mean.'

. . .

'Suppose I say, you just want to go to bed with me?'

'Suppose you say it.'

'You mean you don't care what I think?'

'Not now.' (257-58)

In another scene, Bradley asks Christian in a letter "Have you now any idea where Julian is? Has Arnold taken her away somewhere? He must be keeping her hidden by force. If you can discover anything at all, however vague, let me know for God's sake" (344). He furthermore, and interestingly, continues in the same letter saying, "Please reply *at once* by telephone or letter. I do not want to see you" (344).

Although Bradley appears ridiculously egoistic in these two scenes, his egoism becomes more dramatic towards the end of his story. In a conversation with Rachel, he seems to have forgotten about the past. Rachel accuses him of being "absurd" saying that

> '. . . You're simply absurd, . . . A couple of weeks ago you were kissing me passionately and lying beside me in bed. Now you expect me to believe that you've developed a life-long passion for my daughter in the space of four days. You expect *me* to believe that, *and* to sympathize with you, . . . You do *remember* being in bed with me, don't you?' (349)

Bradley's answer to the reader, in a soliloquy, is a declaration of crude egoism:

> In a way, the truth was that I did not. I could attach no precise events to the idea of Rachel. Here memory was simply a cold cloud to be shuddered at. She was a familiar person and a familiar presence, but the notion that I had ever *done* anything in relation to her was utterly shadowy . . . (349)

Elizabeth Dipple refers to this quality of Bradley as "irritating egotism and self-revealing comedy" (275), and accordingly implies that it questions the reliability of the narrator's account. Lorna Sage, furthermore, finds the whole narrative "egocentric" (70).

What is more interesting in the novel is that Bradley's postscript further weakens the reliability of his own voice. His reliability, moreover, becomes increasingly questionable through his self-justification of the court's condemnation in a form of confession. He says, "I had not willed Arnold's death but I had envied him and (sometimes at least) detested him. I had failed Rachel and abandoned her. I had neglected Priscilla. Dreadful things had happened for which I was in part responsible" (380). It is, according to Bradley's story, true that he envied Arnold's literary productivity as a writer; and he definitely neglected both Rachel and his sister, Priscilla. Bradley's story and therefore his reliability, however, become even more questionable when he says in brackets in the postscript that "(At some moments, as the defence pointed out, the prosecution seemed to be accusing me of *two* murders)" (380). The notion of truth, therefore, is further complicated through his postscript. Bran Nicol points to the similarity between *The Black Prince* and the rhetoric of historiographic metafiction in terms of the problem of "how to write past truth" (*Iris Murdoch: The Retrospective Fiction* 96) in order to underline the problematic relationship between the past truth – what actually happened in terms of the relationship between Bradley and the other characters in *The Black Prince* in this case – and its textual reproduction – Bradley's autobiographical novel in *The Black Prince*. He refers to Bradley's position by saying that

> [Bradley] realizes it is one thing to know the truth, quite another to express it. . . . What he has been forced to recognize here is the fact that setting out clearly what happened is not as simple as it might seem, for the very act of expression changes the past. This conclusion is of course similar to the rhetoric of historiographic metafiction, which explores in a different way the same question as *The Black Prince*, how to write past truth. (95-96)

The representation of truth now fails to become objective as it is getting increasingly difficult to differentiate between fact and fiction. The representation of truth through art, a literary text in Bradley's case, is so problematic that the artist himself may not be sure enough to maintain the portrayal of "truth" through a single perspective since

> it is narrative – be it in literature, history, or theory – that has usually been the major focus of attention. Historiographic metafiction incorporates all three of these domains: that is, its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past.. . . it always works *within* conventions in order to subvert them. (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 5)

In addition to Bradley, Christian, Francis, Rachel and Julian provide postscripts ("mock textual accoutrements" in Patricia Waugh's terms) to Bradley's book upon Loxias the editor asking them if they wish to make any comments on *The Black Prince: a Celebration of Love*. Apart from Bradley's postscript (which maintains the same point of view, yet, at the same time, undermines the reliability of his narrative persona), the very existence of these other postscripts in *The Black Prince* effectively challenges the main narrative perspective by providing alternative narrative consciousnesses. Accordingly, it is maintained elsewhere that

Once more, then we are in the position of having a play unfold before us, a play in which the actors knowingly take on roles, yet for which we the reader/audience willingly suspend our disbelief until the play is played out, the last word is spoken and we are left with 'nothing' . . . Though both Loxias and Bradley Pearson make it clear that the story is being presented to the reader by the main protagonist, though Loxias himself has received the story from Bradley, though, until the postscripts at the end, the only point of view offered is that of Bradley, the staging of the plot encourages a willing suspension of disbelief. (Spear 78)

The reader, whom Bradley wants to rely on in his story, is thus provided with alternative points of view about the same past so that the main narrative persona can be significantly subverted. Moreover, the existence of the postscripts within *The Black Prince* points to "the polyphony and polysemy" of the text that

subtly but effectively work against the monologism of the classic realist text. The novel's layers of irony force us to recognize that asserting objective truth in a narrative is impossible . . . it is inaccessible to the reader. In deconstructing the classic realist method . . . For an author who has so often and so strongly affirmed a commitment to realism, this outcome is radical and unsettling. (Nicol, *Iris Murdoch: The retrospective Fiction* 107)

There is another challenge which is established through the four postscripts in *The Black Prince*: all these narrative voices, that is Christian, Francis, Rachel and Julian's postscripts, unusually refer to nothing but Bradley's story, *The Black Prince: a Celebration of Love*. In other words, these narrative pieces come into existence in order to refer to not to the "phenomenal" world outside the novel, but to another narrative (Bradley's novel), which demonstrates the textuality and thus unreliability of *The Black Prince*, comprehensively. All that is done here is to draw attention to the ontological status of the novel. Therefore, it is true that "The novel . . . contains peripheral jokes about its own status as an invention. The four postscripts are by characters who have read Bradley's novel and are critics and

interpreters" (Conradi 185). *The Black Prince*, thus, becomes a literary work which is composed of six different narrative voices. These subjective points of view about the past, on the one hand Loxias and Bradley talking about the representation of truth, and on the other Christian, Francis, Rachel and Julian each saying that Bradley was in love with him or her, provide the idea that the literary work, which traditional mimetic realism assumes to be a more or less proper copy of the world, is only a subjective product which is almost always coloured and manipulated by the consciousness of the narrative persona.

The Black Prince opens and ends with the foreword and the postscript of the editor, Loxias, who is the main source of appeal for Bradley throughout *The Black Prince: a Celebration of Love*. Loxias, who symbolises the Greek god Apollo as a divine figure of judgement, [26] appears to acknowledge, particularly in his postscript, the reliability of Bradley's narrative voice. In order to do this, Loxias chooses to prove the unreliability of the other narrative voices in *The Black Prince*. Talking about the writers of the other postscripts, Loxias says that

> These people are indeed on display. Each lady, . . . asserts . . . that Bradley was in love with her. Even the gentleman asserts it. . . . However this is a small matter and to be expected. Equally to be expected are the lies. Mrs Baffin lies to protect herself, Mrs Belling to protect Mrs Baffin. . . . 'Dr' Marloe, who told the truth at the trial, pusillanimously fails to repeat it now. I am told he has been threatened by Mrs Baffin's solicitors. 'Dr' Marloe is no hero. For this we must forgive him. (404)

Similar to the analysis of Loxias, Peter J. Conradi interestingly states that

> Bradley's account of events is finally ratified by the fact that all four of the postscripts are in precisely the self-centred characters that Bradley has throughout ascribed to their writers. They thus

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[26] See Cheryl K. Bove, A. S. Byatt, Peter J. Conradi, Bran Nicol, William Slaymaker, and Hilda D. Spear.

service our sense of plot more than they destabilise our grasp of it. While puritan Bradley inculpates himself throughout the story, presenting himself as a guilty man seeking redemption, the others all exculpate themselves. The covetous Christian has married Hartbourne, . . . Francis confirms Bradley's predictions, . . . that he will Freudinise the entire story; he advertises a Freudian pamphlet on Bradley's 'case'. Both Christian and the murderous, vengeful Rachel maintain that Bradley was in love with them and not the other way about, thus extending that style of egoism which his account of them . . . seems to predict. Loxias's verdict – that the postscripts are small-minded self-advertisements – is right. Gabriel Pearson has aptly termed *The Black Prince* an 'anti-anti-novel', built to explore but withstand 'the sporadic sense of its own self-invention'. (187)

According to Loxias,

Each piece is a self-advertisement, ranging from the vulgar to the subtle. Mrs Hartbourne advertises her salon, 'Dr' Marloe his pseudo-science, his 'consulting rooms', his book. Mrs Baffin polishes the already much publicized image of herself as a suffering widow. . . . Mrs Belling advertises herself as a writer. (405)

Nevertheless, although the unreliability of the other narrative voices is clearly discernable, Loxias's postscript fails to verify the reliability of Bradley's narrative. The dependability of Bradley's narrative voice is complicated so carefully that Loxias's justification of Bradley's story by saying "I feel that it speaks for itself" (405) fails to resolve the complication at all. Even in Loxias's postscript, the classic realist assumption of a literary work which only speaks of the outside world is further subverted by having Loxias refer to his own ontological status through a chain of literary allusions, including Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, and two objects that appeared in *The Black Prince: a Celebration of Love*:

As for my own identity: I can scarcely, . . . be an invention of Bradley's, since I have survived him. Falstaff, it is true, survived Shakespeare, but did not edit his plays. . . . I hear it has even been suggested that Bradley Pearson and myself are both simply fictions, the invention of a minor novelist. . . . No, no. I exist. . . . And Bradley existed. Here upon the desk as I write these words stands the little bronze of the buffalo lady. . . . Also a gilt snuff box inscribed *A Friend's Gift.* And Bradley Pearson's story, which I made him tell, remains too, a kind of thing more durable than these. (407-08)

Being a novelist working within the mode of formal realism, Murdoch followed, in her literary works, the great tradition of English realism. In her 1959 essay "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," for example, she declares that "A novel must be a house fit for free characters to live in; and to combine form with a respect for reality with all its odd contingent ways is the highest art of prose" (286). While her American and French contemporaries displayed strong thematic and formal experimentation, Murdoch, because of her Platonic background as a philosopher, questioned the notions of the real and truth within a realistic framework in her novels.

The Black Prince has several times been declared as Murdoch's most "experimental" novel, a novel which provides glimpses of a metafictional structure through its multi-textual form (Dipple, Nicol). As Murdoch once again questions the classic realist convention of mimetic representation, *The Black Prince* specially demonstrates how another novel comes into being. Murdoch's *The Black Prince*, in other words, is about the mechanisms of novel writing, which, at the same time, displays the shortcomings of the narrative voice(s) in the text. It demonstrates the textual nature of a literary work produced by a subjective narrative paradoxically aiming at reproducing the truth objectively, which Murdoch herself significantly calls a "realistic fallacy." It shows, after all, that a "realistic" literary work is a reproduction, as Elizabeth Dipple summarises,

> The enclosure of a realist tale . . . by an elaborate system of qualifying forewords and postscripts, as well as by intrusions into the narrative of what profess to be highly self-conscious truth-telling addresses to the editor, forces the reader into a world of multiple points of view. In this world . . . contradiction abounds and characters lose no opportunity to gainsay or diminish the most passionately expressed and convincing truths. The device of forewords and postscripts shatters the security of a highly-structured tale whose crafted design, even without these ironic addenda, is itself broken by intrusive apostrophes and the shifting nature of the narrative voice or persona. (110)

Through Bradley's persona, therefore, Murdoch challenges the object of the classic mimetic realist claim that art can represent reality as it is. The association between art and reality, for Murdoch, is problematic. She formulates a realistic framework in her literary works, yet clearly defies the claims of mimetic realism. Murdoch believes that art is a production which is necessarily subjective. It is, furthermore, an elevated and elaborated expression of recorded factual happenings. The world, contrary to this, is simple and objective. Art, therefore, cannot claim to be a true representation of truth.

As a result, in *The Black Prince*, Murdoch proves it difficult to establish a reliable correspondence between art and objective reality. In order to do so, she pictures a writer who constructs a textual narrative which displays its writer's own doubts about such an analogy. Murdoch's own words about Bradley's portrayal as a writer shed light on this through a commentary in which "it is made clear 'how you should interpret the wanderings and maunderings of a narrator and where you should believe him and where you should not believe him'" (Conradi 186). At the same time, Murdoch purposefully draws attention to the fictional structure of her own narrative in order to make the reader question the validity of any textual representation. However, she creates so carefully constructed a balance in *The Black Prince* that her writing rejects any attempt to identify it with any other explicitly metafictional mode of writing which self-consciously lays bare for the reader its own fictional status. Her direction is not to emphasise the fictional – or the textual, as in the aim of a modernist text – reality of the world, but to

undermine the conventions of a mimetic realism which tries to assert a correspondence between the text and the world.

What Murdoch foregrounds, therefore, is the actual fragile nature of the relationship between the literary work and the world. Playing upon Plato's banishment of the artist for the sake of truth itself, in Bradley's characterisation, Murdoch questions the reliability of textual representation of truth. Elizabeth Dipple, here, points to "art's difficulty in finding a method of telling the truth" and claims that

> because truth is so slippery and multiform and the human artist automatically limited by his own personality, irony exists both positively, as a just device in presenting our duality, and negatively, in our use of it to misuse others . . . Murdoch's technique nevertheless brings off successfully an illustration of the problems involved in presenting the world as it is, in practicing realism. (111)

In her *Art is the Imitation of Nature*, a paper presented in 1978, five years after she published *The Black Prince*, Murdoch goes back to Plato to trace the sources of what she calls the postwar philosophical and literary "malaise about language" (249). According to Murdoch, like the argument of contemporary formalism about language, "Plato too expressed a strong uneasiness about literature, which is based on a strong uneasiness about language" (249). Murdoch asserts, in particular, that "Plato saw that sign-using itself was the trouble" (249), which sums up the late twentieth-century postmodern rejection of the notion of "unity" between the writing subject and the text. Although Murdoch, in the same paper, declares that she is not herself a formalist, she underlines the great significance of the movement since she says, "I think the fundamental thing about formalism is that it expresses, in the form of a new attitude to language and literature, a sense of the loss of the unified self. It is, as one might put it, the disunified self which disunifies the object and the story" (251). If the object and the story are "disunified," then Bradley's story in *The Black Prince* may not

reflect on the narrative consciousness – Bradley the narrator; there is no necessary or natural link between him and the text he produces. In other words, according to Murdoch herself, Bradley is "disunified" from his own story.

2.4 Conclusion

Murdoch wrote in a mostly formal realist fashion as a British postwar novelist. She depicted individualised characters in a concrete setting with historical specificity. Although her literary works self-consciously refer to the problem of representation, they never take the form of the radical literary experimentalism found in those of Murdoch's American and French contemporaries. Bran Nicol, who has traced the postmodern elements of Murdoch's oeuvre, accentuates this in-between nature of Murdoch's fiction by simply announcing that she was "consistently yet not *radically* metafictional" (*Iris Murdoch: The Retrospective Fiction* 78). Yet Murdoch, as a philosopher and a novelist, celebrated Plato's distrust of art and the artist. According to her Platonic philosophy, art must tell the truth, which is also hard to obtain. Therefore, Murdoch was suspicious about the premises of classic realism, and she thus rejected the conventions of mimetic representation in her literary works. In *Under the Net*, Murdoch represents her doubts about verisimilitude by creating a very conventional setting in which the protagonist is shown to be entrapped in his own fallacies. This is because of the fact that as an artist, he is unable to interpret the world. In other words, for Murdoch, it is hardly conceivable to comprehend and then represent the world in art. In *The Black Prince*, a more unconventional novel compared to *Under the Net*, Murdoch mainly subverts the presumed correspondence between the literary work and the world once more through the agency of her Platonic mind. In order to do this Murdoch, whose aim is to pose the question of where the truth lies, forms a quasi-metafictional and multi-textual novel in which several different narratives, including that of her protagonist, are juxtaposed to subvert the reliability of each point of view. Therefore, Murdoch

blurs the idea of the conventional source of truth in a literary work. As Murdoch has already complicated the notion of reality in *Under the Net* by depicting a world where it is impossible to find the ideal truth, in *The Black Prince*, she further problematises the representation of reality in mimetic literature by framing a narrative voice which is first undermined by itself. However, although Murdoch's *The Black Prince* exemplifies the postmodern questioning of traditional mimetic literature that attempts to establish a reliable correspondence between the work and the world, her *Under the Net* complies with the techniques of formal realism thoroughly.

CHAPTER 3

MURIEL SPARK

3.1 Introduction

Mainstream criticism was still trying to establish a categorical opposition between tradition and innovation in literature where it insistently tended to define the literary works as falling into either the traditional realist or the experimental modernist mode of writing at the end of the 1950s. Because of this critical tendency, Muriel Spark was introduced into the British literary canon as a Catholic novelist, a sub-division within the broader classification of realist literature. Her fiction, which gradually abandoned Catholic themes, has been analysed as having a primary concern with Roman Catholic religious thought and practice. This critical cataloguing was mainly due to Spark's self-celebrated conversion to Catholicism in 1954 and the consequent publication of her first novel, *The Comforters*, in 1957 which also dealt with issues of Catholic conversion within the main argument of the process of the novelist's fictional "creation" as obviously juxtaposed to holy creation.

Almost all of the analytical works about Spark's fiction written within this quite limiting convention, therefore, take Spark's "My Conversion," which was published in 1961, as the primary manifestation of her Catholicism as a British novelist.[27] Spark, in this essay, declares, "And I became a Catholic in 1954. I think there is a connection between my writing and my conversion, but I don't want to be too dogmatic about it. Certainly all my best work has come since then" (25). These words, furthermore, are usually mentioned together with some other remarks which clearly underline the similarities between Spark's own situation

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[27] See R. C. Edgecombe and J. L. Randsi for a detailed list of the critics.

during her conversion and the position of her protagonist, Caroline Rose, in *The Comforters*. In other words, Spark's first published novel, *The Comforters*, is mostly accepted as an autobiographical work which reflects part of the real life of its author, particularly her conversion, in the fictional characterisation of its protagonist.

Spark further declares in the same essay, "I decided at least to become a Catholic, by which time I really became very ill" (25). Spark's painful personal experience during her conversion, according to these lines, can be clearly observed in Caroline's characterisation in *The Comforters* as well. Similar to Spark, Caroline is pictured as a Catholic convert who is unfortunately suffering from some physical and mental problems such as undernourishment and hearing hallucinatory voices, indeed the voice of the author-god. According to Spark, in her "My Conversion," "I suppose this first novel, *The Comforters*, really reflected my changed state. Its theme is really a convert and a kind of psychic upheaval" (25).

In contrast to the conventional interpretation of these lines in terms of Catholic fiction, Spark further utters sentences which could be taken as comprehensibly distinguishing between being a Catholic and being a novelist. From the same essay, it can also be asserted that Spark was a Catholic, but her fiction is not. She reveals that she preferred not to be "dogmatic" about her Catholicism to advocate it enthusiastically in her novels. She says, "The Catholic Church for me is just a formal declaration of what I believe in any case. It's something to measure from. But I never think of myself as anything else. It's all instinctive" (26). She further adds that "I'm quite sure that my conversion gave me something to work on as a satirist" (26) by distancing herself from the Catholic faith as a writer. According to Patricia Waugh, one can also depart from the traditional novel for a self-reflexive, metafictional form of writing: "Acceptance and simultaneous subversion of both her faith and the novel form provide [Spark's] metafictional base" (121). Moreover, Spark's approach to Catholicism in her fiction is that of a satirist. Because of this, she continues in the same essay as such:

No matter what kind of Catholic criticism I got, I wouldn't take any notice of it. . . . I would just treat it as a bit of a joke, . . . when I was a non-Catholic, if the Archbishop had preached a sermon against a book of mine, I would have been terribly upset. Now I wouldn't care very much" (26).

Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, therefore, Spark's traditional critical categorisation as a Catholic novelist has been questioned seriously and alternative critical models and explanations to her fiction have been offered. What these alternative versions have mostly focused on is Spark's use of Catholicism for satiric purposes. Among these unconventional critical interpretations, one of the most significant is Ann B. Dobie's 1970 essay, "Muriel Spark's Definition of Reality." Dobie particularly accentuates the close relation between religion and creativity in Spark's idea of literary productivity and the autobiographical quality of Spark's oeuvre. Besides this, however, Dobie classifies three interrelated qualities of Spark's fiction which hardly comply with Spark's categorisation as a Catholic novelist. First of all, according to Dobie, "it is doubtful that a reader who is not aware of her religious affiliation would know that she is a Roman Catholic. Muriel Spark is never didactic about her religion. Her purpose is to intrigue, not teach" (22). Secondly, "her presentation of the supernatural does not conform to traditional religious definitions. Her unusual depiction of the non-material is responsible for much of the confusion and much of the interest which surround her novels" (23). Finally, for Dobie, another quality of Spark as a novelist,

which makes the label "catholic novelist" unsuitable is her unfavourable descriptions of many of the Catholics in her fiction. They are frequently quite unpleasant people who create an objectionable image for their faith. As a convert to Catholicism the author was struck with the number of Catholics who misuse religious faith to achieve their own gain: money, social position, personal pride. (23)

In addition to these insights which are outside the mainstream, Ruth Whittaker, in *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark* adds to this discussion that "Even her early, most religious novels give the impression that she is closely and critically scrutinizing her faith before rejoicing in it, and her later novels scarcely mention Catholicism" (qtd. in Becker 11). Similarly, two other critical views particularly concentrate on the shortcomings of Spark's identification as a Catholic novelist. Frank Baldanza, in "Muriel Spark and the Occult," argues that

> she has not treated themes that make any direct confrontation with Roman Catholic dogma, . . . While many of her characters are Catholic, the larger number are not, and one or two of her leading characters are prejudiced against Catholicism. Her mordant, acidulous, sophisticated wit operates within a rather strongly secular context. (191)

Besides these critical arguments, in a comparison between Spark and Murdoch, "Two Contemporary Views on Fiction: Iris Murdoch and Muriel Spark," Patricia Stubbs notes that

> Exactly what form the connection between her writing and her Catholic belief takes is not easy to determine. . . . Nowhere in her novels is there a direct dramatization of what she would regard as the facts of her faith, no overt acting out of specifically religious and Catholic dilemmas, . . ." (107).

One of the most influential studies of alternative Spark criticism is *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction* (2002). In the opening chapter, "Introduction: 'I Don't Know Anything about Freud': Muriel Spark Meets Contemporary Criticism," the editor Martin McQuillan questions the meaning of the term "Catholic writer" misleadingly associated with Spark in critical practice. McQuillan playfully affirms that it is the claim of critical

orthodoxy that Spark is a Catholic writer. McQuillan compares the idea of a "Catholic writer" to that of the "English novel" in terms of the difficulty these phrases present to anyone attempting to define the borders of the terms, and then offers other names of British novelists who could be categorised as Catholic writers. According to him,

> The idea of 'the Catholic writer', so complacently invoked in conjunction with Spark's name, depends upon a corresponding idea of 'the English novel' and English society which is equally fixed and equally unreal. Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene might be thought of as Catholic writers . . . but it is equally impossible to understand the work of James Joyce, Edna O'Brien, . . . outside of an idea of Catholicism. What is Shakespeare if not a Catholic writer? (2)

McQuillan, furthermore, points to the dynamics of conventional criticism which tends to observe no other movement different from the traditionalist and the experimentalist dominants. As the traditionalist part of the canonical classification has been privileged over any other label, in Spark's situation "The uncanny, 'experimental', or postmodern effects of her writing are continually reduced by the power and authority of English canonical criticism to the safe domain of the properly 'Catholic'" (McQuillan 4). Contrary to older interpretation, Spark's and any other writer's identification as a Catholic novelist has a number of shortcomings such as,

> What does it mean to be a 'Catholic writer'? Surely, the term is an oxymoron. Writing is not a theological activity, it purposely undermines essential and stable meanings, which presuppose and seek a single and authoritative centre. Meaning is always plural, writing is always cut adrift from its source and origin. . . . Must one make reference to heaven, hell, death, and judgement . . . to be a 'Catholic writer'? In fact, in what way could a novelist writing in Europe in the last half of the twentieth century fail to be Catholic? (McQuillan 4-5)

These alternative opinions of Spark's fiction influentially subvert her previous identification as a realist Catholic novelist. These critics intentionally refrain from establishing another clear-cut identity for Spark's fiction since, they believe, all interpretation should be multiple and multicoloured (McQuillan).

In a 1963 conversation reported in "Muriel Spark's House of Fiction," Frank Kermode asked Spark the introductory question, "are novelists liars? If not, what kind of truth are they telling?" (29) In her reply, Spark made clear, at least for the time, her aim of fictional construction. She said,

> I don't claim that my novels are truth – I claim that they are fiction, out of which a kind of truth emerges. And I keep in my mind specifically that what I am writing is fiction because I am interested in truth – absolute truth – and I don't pretend that what I'm writing is more than an imaginative extension of the truth – something inventive. . . . it's not true, what I write is not true – it is a pack of lies. . . . if we are going to live in the world as reasonable beings, we must call it lies. But simply because one puts it out as a work of fiction, then one is not a liar. (30)

Spark's discussion of the relationship between a fictional work and the truth it attempts to reveal evidently touches on the primary question that Murdoch and Fowles were also all trying to analyse in their works. The question of fictional truth was so central to these three postwar novelists' notion of fictional creation that they developed their novels around the idea of the relationship between fact and fiction. According to Patricia Waugh,

> To the extent that this is a concern of all metafiction, its practitioners are Platonists. Telling stories may not . . . be telling lies, but until one has established the nature of 'truth' it will be impossible to know. So all metafictional novels have . . . to engage with this question of the 'truth' status of literary fiction. (89-90)

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More specifically, for this chapter, concerning Spark's first published novel, it is asserted that "*The Comforters* amply attests to the fact that she was extremely interested in the question of how a work of fiction, which is essentially a 'lie,' can be a vehicle for the truth" (Laffin 215).

3.2 *The Comforters*: The Novelist as Discomforted by the Fictional Truth

Spark's *The Comforters* revolves around a distressing mystery which its protagonist, Caroline Rose, has to solve in order to retain her sanity. Caroline is introduced as a literary critic who is writing a book on the form of the modern novel. Newly converted to Catholicism, she has been visiting a Catholic centre, St. Philumena's, in order to experience some Catholic practices. However, on the first night at her flat in London after her return, Caroline – of course as a fictional character – hears a narrating voice which coincides exactly with her thoughts. The voice, furthermore, is preceded by the sound of a typewriter, thus referring exactly to the position of Spark the novelist, typing this novel. It also refers to Caroline the novelist for we learn at the end of the book that it is Caroline who creates the fictional medium where all of the action takes place:

> . . . On the whole she did not think there would be any difficulty with Helena.
>
> Just then she heard the sound of a typewriter. It seemed to come through the wall on her left. It stopped, and was immediately followed by a voice remarking her own thoughts. It said: *On the whole she did not think there would be any difficulty with Helena.*

> There seemed, then, to have been more than one voice: it was a recitative, a chanting in unison. It was something like a concurrent series of echoes. (51)[28]

Through the introduction of this first hallucinatory voice in *The Comforters* – for it is not heard by anybody else – the novel clearly indicates that there is an omniscient author who can "read" or even write the mind of a fictional character, Caroline. Furthermore, the novel is also claimed to have an avant-garde tone through which it displays

> an 'aesthetic' dimension in its exploration of the novelist's relationship with her characters and with the story of their 'lives'. None of this . . . has much in common with the realistic and sociological traditions . . . dominant in English fiction . . . in the 1950s" (Page 14).

The scene above also follows a sequence which leads up to Caroline's discovery of her fictional identity. Immediately after the first "hallucination" scene, Caroline hears the voices again:

> A typewriter and a chorus of voices: "What on earth are they up to at this time of night?" Caroline wondered. But what worried her were the words they had used, coinciding so exactly with her own thoughts.
>
> Then it began again […] with these words exactly:
>
> *"What on earth are they up to at this time of night?" Caroline wondered. But what worried her were the words they had used, coinciding so exactly with her own thoughts.*
>
> And then the typewriter again: tap-tap-tap. (52-53)

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[28] All of the page references are to *A Muriel Spark Trio: The Comforters, The Ballad of Peckham Rye, Memento Mori*, 1962.

Caroline, unable to identify the true nature of the voices, must be terrified to hear them as, surprisingly, they repeat her exact thoughts. In a conversation with an old friend, Willi Stock, who is nicknamed the Baron, Caroline can try to figure out the possible sources of the voices. It is particularly significant not only for her but also for the reader that

> the clicking of the typewriter always preceded the voices, and sometimes accompanied their speech. How many voices there were, she could not say. Male or female? Both, she told him. . . . 'In fact,' she went on, wound-up and talking rapidly, 'it sounds like one person speaking in several tones at once'" (63).

And Caroline's conversation very symbolically continues with references to the conventional writing methods of novelists, thus implying Caroline's own profession. The Baron asks Caroline,

> "And always using the past tense?"
>
> "Yes. Mocking voices."
>
> "And you say this chorus comments on your thoughts and actions?"
>
> "Not always," said Caroline, "that's the strange thing. It says 'Caroline was thinking or doing this or that' – then sometimes it adds a remark of its own." (63)

In order to make the problem more comprehensible not only for herself but also for the Baron – and the reader – Caroline should further add that the voices she hears echo what has been in her mind:

> ' – and it drifted to my mind how you had remembered meeting Laurence's grandmother; . . . Next thing, I heard the typewriter and

the voices. They repeated my thought, something like, 'It came to her that the Baron, . . . – that the Baron had been extraordinarily interested in Laurence's grandmother.' That's what the voices said'. (63-64)

Although still feeling very "uncomfortable" due to the existence of the voices, ironically opposed to the title of the novel, Caroline has to solve this mystery for she believes she still maintains her sanity. As when she told the Baron, Caroline chooses to clarify the problem during a meeting with another old friend. She talks with Father Jerome, whose religious identity in the novel also symbolises the nature of the theological problem Spark felt as a novelist. This is the issue of setting oneself up as a creator, somehow rivalling holy creation. In this talk, Caroline gets closer to the truth about the essence of the voices: "'I think,' she said, 'that they are really different tones of one voice. I think they belong to one person'" (72). Caroline has come very close to the truth that there is an author writing a novel in which she participates as a fictional character (*The Comforters*). In other words, the ontological status of Caroline is gradually constructed in a text by the very voices she has been hearing in the novel:

'I think it is one person. It uses a typewriter. It uses the past tense. It's exactly as if someone were watching me closely, able to read my thoughts;' . . . 'But the typewriter and the voices – it is as if a writer on another plane of existence was writing a story about us.' As soon as she had said these words, Caroline knew that she had hit on the truth. (72-73)

Therefore, *The Comforters* "frustrates" traditional mimetic expectations of the reader by being a novel about itself: the novel

marks a radical break with the dominant fictional tradition, and . . . the author makes clear . . . the limitations of her interest in formal

realism, in psychological exploration of human character and behaviour, or in consistency of tone. (Page 14-15)

The Comforters opens with a scene in which Laurence Manders is visiting his grandmother and getting suspicious about her true identity after discovering some clues of an illegal organisation which he thinks his grandmother is involved in. The supernatural mystery about the voices Caroline hears is thus balanced with another baffling situation which is obviously more concrete and temporal. Laurence is pictured as a very inquisitive man who has been looking for any kind of discovery about people and events. Caroline was his fiancé before her conversion, and they remain close friends. Laurence suggests that they should assemble a recording device which Caroline is supposed to use whenever she hears the voices. Laurence thinks that if the machine records anything, then they can believe in the existence of such a phenomenon. Otherwise, he thinks, Caroline's mind has made them up. However, she says,

> "But the voices are voices. Of course they are symbols. But they are also voices. There's the typewriter too – that's a symbol, but it *is* a real typewriter. I hear it."
>
> . . .
>
> "Because now I know what they are. I'm on the alert now," Caroline said. "You see, I really am quite better. Only tired." . . . "And if anyone's listening, let them take note." (79)

This is the scene in which Caroline comes closest to the discovery of the true nature of the voices, which is that they belong to an author who is writing Caroline and the other characters into a novel, *The Comforters*.

The turning point not only for Caroline but also for the reader in terms of the mystery about the voices surprisingly comes in a direct speech delivered to the reader by the novel's narrator, the mysterious source of all the voices in the book.

After this, it becomes obvious that the voices which Caroline has been hearing belong to the narrator of the novel that we, the readers, are reading. The narrator clearly reveals that Caroline and all the other characters in *The Comforters* are mere fictional constructions. What is more significant is the fact that this revelation comes in terms of the very voices Caroline has been hearing as well. The narrator says, "At this point in the narrative, it might be as well to state that the characters in this novel are all fictitious, and do not refer to any living persons whatsoever. *Tap-tappity-tap. At this point in the narrative . . .*" (80).

From now on, Caroline's fear and distress have unexpectedly turned into an open revolt against the controlling power of the narrator over the novel's characters. Caroline has discovered the source of the voices, hence she must be willing to maintain her existence even as a fictional character in the novel. As a result, being suspicious that the machine Laurence has set up will not record anything, Caroline has already had her pencil and notebook ready to write down the voices to trace them back. Caroline is now sure about where the voices are coming from:

> 'I have discovered the truth of the matter;' the truth of the matter being, it transpired, this fabulous idea of themselves and their friends being used as characters in a novel. . . . 'The characters in this novel are all fictitious,' she quoted with a truly mad sort of laugh. (108)

However, to talk about free will is nothing more than an ironic remark for Caroline "for she is simultaneously a creator and a character, an artist and an emblem" (Bold 38).

As mentioned earlier, Caroline's hypothesis, as she is the only one who believes that they are all fictional creations who are being written down by an author, is limited by carefully maintaining Laurence's questioning approach to her explanation about the voices. At the same time, however, the very artificial nature of *The Comforters* as fiction is continuously displayed through Caroline's

tenacious attitude towards the true nature of the voices. Caroline assumes that Laurence's hypothesis about his grandmother – that she is leading a smugglers team – is due to the influence of the very author by whom she believes they are being written. She therefore says to Laurence,

> you are getting these ideas into your head through the influence of a novelist who is contriving some phoney plot. I can see clearly that your mind is working under the pressure of someone else's necessity, and under the suggestive power of some irresponsible writer you are allowing yourself to become an amateur sleuth in a cheap mystery piece. (117-18)

Caroline thinks this because she believes she is herself familiar with the writing methods of an author as well: "I haven't been studying novels for three years without knowing some of the technical tricks. In this case it seems to me there's an attempt being made to organise our lives into a convenient slick plot" (118).

Because the true origin of the voices has already been identified by Caroline as a narrator, it becomes possible to reveal how the narrator in *The Comforters* controls and manipulates the whole narrative, and obviously Caroline in it. A few days after an accident apparently caused by Laurence's meaningless race with another car, for example, Caroline has been lying unconscious in a hospital room. It can be asserted that this time of Caroline's unconsciousness and her absence from the narrative now become uncomfortable for the narrator who has been manipulating her ontological status. According to the narrator,

> It is not easy to dispense with Caroline Rose. At this point in the tale she is confined to a hospital bed, . . . Caroline among the sleepers turned her mind to the art of the novel, wondering and cogitating, those long hours, and exerting an undue, unreckoned,

influence on the narrative from which she is supposed to be absent for a time. (154)

As Caroline herself is a fictional character who has been constructed during the narration, she once again hears the voice of the narrator as well:

> *Tap-tick-click. Caroline among the sleepers turned her mind to the art of the novel, wondering and cogitating, those long hours, and exerting an undue, unreckoned, influence on the narrative from which she is supposed to be absent for a time.* (154)

Similarly, the narrator is also to display Caroline's thoughts about Georgina Hogg, the despicable Catholic figure whom Caroline meets at St. Philumena's. Caroline's immediate dislike of Hogg is because of her enormous bosoms visible through her blouse as she wears nothing underneath. Hogg's excuse, Caroline thinks, is that this is her appearance "'As God made me'" (156). The "hallucinatory" narrator's repetition, therefore, must be the same: "… *'As God made me,' she may have thought in justification*" (156). Upon Caroline's comment, "'Bad taste,' . . . 'Revolting taste,'" (156) the narrator very consciously asks the reader, "Wasn't it she in the first place who had noticed with revulsion the transparent blouse of Mrs. Hogg, that time at St. Philumena's? It was Caroline herself who introduced into the story the question of Mrs. Hogg's bosom" (156). Caroline is expected to hear these comments as well: "[*t*]*ap-tap. It was Caroline herself who introduced into the story the question of Mrs. Hogg's bosom*" (156).

The narrator's game with Caroline has turned into an intercourse which begins with Caroline's comprehending the existence of a novelist who controls the characters' life, including her own. The narrator, who must be disturbed by Caroline's disappearance from the narrative for a period of time, is likely to see Caroline's revolts against the narrating authority as an interference with the narration. Caroline's interference, according to the narrator, whom Caroline now

describes as "The Typing Ghost," is obviously due to Caroline's belief that – as she tells the Baron – "'The Typing Ghost has not recorded any lively details about this hospital ward. The reason is that the author doesn't know how to describe a hospital ward. This interlude in my life is not part of the book in consequence'" (180). The narrator, consequently, comments that "It was by making exasperating remarks like this that Caroline Rose continued to interfere with the book" (180).

Spark, as a Catholic, ontologically regarded herself as a character in the work of God. According to her faith, God is the true "novelist" who creates and shapes the universe. At the same time, however, Spark displayed that the novelist could be a liar who pretended to be God in his or her own literary creation. The novelist, hence, in a way rivals holy creativity. Spark deeply felt this theological problem during her conversion and tried to represent it in the characterisation of Caroline, who is, like Spark herself, a Catholic and a novelist who cannot figure out how she can maintain her literary profession alongside her Catholic faith. She believes that being a novelist is pretending to be God, which is problematic for her faith. Therefore, the only way, for Spark, to maintain faith and the profession together is to clearly display the very nature of her writing, the fictionality of the literary work itself through a self-reflexive metafictional fashion.

According to Patricia Waugh, although it can be asserted that in *The Comforters* "what is foregrounded is the writing of the text as the most fundamentally problematic aspect of that text" (22), Spark's display of the fictional nature of her novels, like Murdoch, is quite a limited demonstration as compared to overtly metafictional literary works. Her formal experiment, referring to David Lodge, can be described as "flights" to denote this rather controlled experimental tendency (qtd. in Waugh 17). Spark's notion of literary creation underlines that being a novelist is playing God. Any kind of fictional construction, therefore, is no more than telling lies. Caroline's first concrete reaction to the voices, "That's a damned lie" (88), after she sees where they have been coming from, significantly underlines this conviction of Spark.

Caroline, who represents Spark's notion of the novelist, echoes Spark in seeing writing fiction as pretending to be God, and thus telling systematic lies. It becomes, therefore, highly problematic for Caroline to maintain her conviction about the nature of the voices alongside with her Catholicism. It is important in this sense that, as is argued elsewhere,

> if the novelist, the creator of a work of art, is . . . a kind of God (the Creator); Caroline's awareness of the novel's coming into existence can be compared to her awareness of God's ordering of human affairs, including her own life. She has been seeking God and has also been studying the novel, and her hallucinations bring together the two preoccupations. They are also, of course, preoccupations of Muriel Spark herself. (Page 12)

In the novel, furthermore, Laurence becomes aware of this as well. He thinks that it must be absurd for a Catholic to believe that she is controlled by a novelist who pretends to be God. Although Laurence is a non-believer, he wishes he were a Catholic in order to convince Caroline to accept the absurdity of the situation she postulates. Laurence cannot figure out this position, and hence he says, "'From the Catholic point of view, I should have thought there were spiritual dangers in holding this conviction.' . . . He said then, 'Don't you think the idea of an invisible person tuning into your life might possibly upset your faith?'" (109). Nevertheless, Laurence might possibly be aware of the fact that his questions will not convince Caroline of the seriousness and the absurdity of this theological problem. Caroline is aware of this as well. She says, "The normal opinion is bound to distress me because it's a fact like the fact of the author and the facts of the Faith. They are all painful to me in different ways" (110).

It is "painful" for Caroline not only to be a fictional character but also to be a novelist for "the novelist, or any artist, as creator is [recalling very much Murdoch's Platonic philosophy] only a shadow or imitator of the Creator, and in some sense we are all 'characters' in a 'novel' plotted and written by God" (Page 14). Another reason why it is "painful" for Caroline is that

> Muriel Spark has assumed in her view of fiction . . . that a parallel exists between the creative powers of God on the one hand, and those of the novelist on the other . . . [she] has patterned this theme into much of her fiction. . . . it is most important and central in her work, colouring many of her ideas about plot and character. (Stubbs 108)

It is also the main concern of the novelist that

> while this parallel between God and author exists, the novelist, she believes, is yet in a sense dabbling in the devil's work, . . . there is a tension between the God-like function of the novelist and his arrogant presumption in taking such a role unto himself. (Stubbs 108)

Closely related to these ideas, Spark shares Murdoch's Platonist distrust of art and the artist, which is discernible in both *Under the Net* and *The Black Prince*, from another point of view in *The Comforters*. According to this point of view which in Spark's case is particularly based on the conflict between God's creation and the artist's fictional writing, it is similarly argued, now with a reference to Spark's Scottish background, that

> For generations of Scottish writers the created word has been caught in an inevitable conflict with the word of creation, and this profound awareness of the necessary evil of the work of art is one of the determining elements of the tradition of the Scottish novel. (Craig 201)

Spark's distrust of the artistic imagination, therefore, is the result of the arbitrary relationship between the novelistic enterprise and the reality it attempts to reveal. The only truth about fictional reconstruction, Spark thinks, is the very fictional

nature of a work of art which is to be displayed in the work of art itself. Accordingly, it is said that

> the artist, . . . is the diabolic antagonist of the Truth, denier and negator of the divine Word through the multiplication of human words. Novelists must therefore write in the consciousness of their own evil, must doubt the very products of the imagination by which they create and must turn back from within the novel to gesture to its own essential falsehood. (Craig 201)

In order to emphasise this "essential falsehood" about fictional writing, Spark, referring to the autobiographical quality of *The Comforters*, displays her own position as a novelist who feels that she is a character in the work of God. Related to this, Caroline, who has been suffering as a character, must turn out to be the author herself at the end of *The Comforters*, therefore the novel "makes a literary exhibition of itself through its modernist structure – its insistence on its existence as a literary end in itself – and poetic tone" (Bold 39). Caroline, who has just finished her work *Form in the Modern Novel* where she has been "having difficulty with the chapter on realism," (66) wants to write a novel. When Helena asks "What is the novel to be about?" (226) Caroline answers, "Characters in a novel" (226) and she continues, "Edwin himself had said, 'Make it a straight old-fashioned story, no modern mystifications. End with the death of the villain and the marriage of the heroine'" (226) as a parody of a tradition. Caroline significantly answers him: "'Yes, it would end that way'" (226). It is clear that Edwin's wish has been realised in *The Comforters* even though the reader may be surprised by the identities of the villain and heroine thus revealed. The novel ends not only with Georgina's death in the river but also with Louisa's marriage to Mr. Webster.

3.3 *Loitering With Intent*: The Novelist as Comforted by the Fictional Truth

Carrying out the autobiographical quality that *The Comforters* (1957) initiates in the portrayal of Caroline Rose as a "discomforted" Catholic artist due to the paradoxical nature of fictional creation, *Loitering with Intent* (1981) again reflects part of the real life story of its author in the depiction of another novelist, Fleur Talbot who has now unquestionably abandoned Spark's Catholic concerns for a more explicit reflexive inquiry into the nature of her fiction. Reflecting on Spark's work in the Poetry Society before she issued her first novel, Fleur is employed as a secretary in the Autobiographical Association, an organisation run by Sir Quentin Oliver to collect and publish posthumously the autobiographical writings of its distinguished members. Meanwhile she is writing a novel, *Warrender Chase*.

Loitering with Intent is an autobiographical narrative of Fleur who gives an exact record of her ten-month employment beginning in September 1949 and ending in June 1950. Fleur chooses autobiography as the mode of narration for she observes what the famous Italian writer Benevuto Cellini says in his autobiographical memoirs: "All men, whatever be their condition, who have done anything of merit, or which verily has a semblance of merit, if so be they are men of truth and good repute, should write the tale of their life with their own hand" (125)[29]. The "merit" that Cellini pronounces, Fleur believes, is the virtue of being an artist at the time in which she is living. Fleur, therefore, should celebrate this in more than one occasion in the novel by first asserting that

> The thought came to me in a most articulate way: 'How wonderful it feels to be an artist and a woman in the twentieth century.' That I was a woman and living in the twentieth century were plain facts. That I was an artist was a conviction so strong that I never thought of doubting it then or since, (26)

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[29] All of the page references are to 2001 New Directions Classic edition.

which is obviously quite a relaxed revelation compared to Caroline's "discomforted" situation. Fleur is a novelist who is about to announce her first novel *Warrender Chase*, parallel to Spark who produced *The Comforters* around the same years.

The Comforters, following the same line as Murdoch's Platonic enquiry in *Under the Net* and *The Black Prince*, dealt with the question of how dependable, for a Catholic novelist, the artificial nature of a fictional narrative was. Caroline's role, therefore, was to display the "reality" – the true nature – of the literary work she has been professing. *The Comforters*, in this sense, plainly suggested that the only fact about fictional creation was the artificial nature of a literary work of art itself. It was artificial, hence the most significant role of the artist – the novelist – was to publically disclose this character. In the case of *Loitering with Intent*, however, these principal artistic and theological concerns have been significantly modified by the novelist herself into the belief that the current position of the artist no longer requires justification of the untruth of fictional writing. It is now coherently argued that the artist is more sincere, and hence closer to the (artistic) truth than other people in general. In this case, furthermore, the literary work itself becomes the source of truth – whether fictional or factual – for the reader and the novelist. *Loitering with Intent*, consequently, becomes a reworking of the ideas dealt with in *The Comforters* from another point of view.

Critics point to the close relation between the two novels in terms of the disposition of fictional truth as well. Alan Bold, for example, claims that

> *Loitering with Intent*, [Spark's] most affirmative autobiographical novel, offers variations on some earlier themes. More precisely, the way the novel examines the nature of fictional truth makes *Loitering with Intent* a mature variant on *The Comforters*. (110)

Norman Page similarly argues that

the nature of fictional 'truth', the relationship of 'reality' to fiction, the connection between fictional characters and the real-life persons on whom they may be based, or who, alternatively, may be found to, or may come to, resemble them – these problems are again explored. (101)

in these two novels. Moreover, Patricia Waugh reads Spark's fiction as a "moral and religious enquiry into the nature of 'absolute truth'" (84). That is to say that after *The Comforters*, Spark had not ended her quest as a novelist; and she still questions the role of the artist, although not from a Catholic perspective, in terms of fictional truth in *Loitering with Intent*, which she does through the concept of autobiography.

An autobiographical narrative is supposed to be the first-hand record of the past experience. This is the case in *Loitering with Intent* where Fleur occasionally remarks that she is now describing a particular period of her own adventures in the past. She says, for example, "Now that I come to write this section of my autobiography I remember vividly, in those days . . ., thinking hard about my novel" (25-26). As the secretary for the Autobiographical Association, furthermore, Fleur is employed to type the autobiographical writings of the ten members whose manuscripts written so far are kept in a locked cabinet in Quentin's office. According to Linda Hutcheon, in terms of the members' role in the association and Fleur's ontological position in Spark's novel, postmodern autobiographical writing problematises the notion of the "centered self" in terms of "the doubleness of the self, as both narrator and narrated" (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 40), which addresses to the issue of representation as construction. This commentary is valid for both the Association members and Fleur herself. The members, who are supposed to write their autobiographies, are fictional constructions of Spark. These characters will be further fictionalised by Fleur who writes her autobiography. Moreover, Fleur is herself a fictional

construction of a novelist who is actually writing part of her autobiography in *Loitering with Intent*.

While writing her own novel *Warrender Chase*, Fleur uses and enlivens some parts of these first-hand records of the members of the Association. After a while, however, Quentin wants Fleur to correct "any lack or lapse in form, syntax, style" (24) in the documents. Although this can be regarded part of her employment in the Association, Quentin's wish will interestingly come to mean more than mere correction, and he will ask Fleur to "rectify characterization, invention, . . . description, dialogue," (24) which could suggest that Quentin actually wants Fleur to write her own versions of the autobiographies which are essentially supposed to be the original writings of the members. Although Fleur might accept to "rectify" the manuscripts to a certain extent, she is not willing to go any further in terms of corrections as this would be to corrupt the authenticity of the manuscripts by her own additions. Fleur, accordingly, remarks that

> I had gathered, even then, that he had plans for inducing me to write more compromising stuff into these memoirs, but I had no intention of writing anything beyond what cheered up the boring parts of the job for the time being . . . So that his purposes were quite different from mine, yet at the same time they coincided. (37)

Their purposes, according to Fleur, somehow correspond for she begins to see the fact that Quentin, similar to Fleur, has been actually acting as a novelist who is likely to organise a plot for the characters he is constructing. Quentin's characters, nevertheless, are the very members of the Association, who are, in truth, and not excluding Quentin himself, already the fictional characters in *Loitering with Intent*. What Quentin does not realise is that "while [he is] in the process of creating . . ., Muriel Spark is in the process of creating *them*, and creating an alternative world which refers . . . to the 'reality' of the novel as a work of art" (Waugh 114). On the other hand, although Fleur cannot be willing to go any further in terms of corrections in the manuscripts, she has already violated

the authenticity of the writings, which is of course in contrast to her celebration of Cellini's remarks. Any mode of interference from the outside certainly means that the accounts fail to be the original writings of the Association members. This reflects on Fleur's position that she is not only the novelist who creates fiction, but also, like any other character, a fictional entity in *Loitering with Intent*. Quentin, therefore, functions to mirror not only Fleur's profession but also her ontological position. Fleur herself is fiction. Just like Fleur's description of one of her "fictional" characters: "Marjorie is fiction, she doesn't exist. . . . Marjorie is only words" (72), she is herself is a sign on the page whether it is Spark's or Fleur's work. *Loitering with Intent*, therefore, becomes "a novel treating truth as a fictional form; [and] for Spark reality is rooted in the imagination of the artist, not in the physical facts of life" (Bold 112).

In one of their early meetings, Quentin, explicitly echoing the main issue not only in *Loitering with Intent* but also in *The Comforters*, explains to Fleur the particular principle behind the organisation of the Association. According to Quentin, it is "the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth" (20), which is also quite reminiscent of Murdoch's central concern in her novels. In other words, Quentin assures Fleur that the private accounts of the members will remain purely personal. In a fictional work like *Loitering with Intent*, however, to talk about the existence of absolute truth must be nothing more than an ironic remark. Quentin, therefore, pointing to the "true" nature of the literary work in which he is himself a verbal entity, clearly displays in the beginning the unreality of the novel itself.

In contrast to Quentin's assurance, however, Fleur, as a novelist who has been working on her first novel, fictionalises the members and writes them into her own stories through her own attachments to the autobiographies. Autobiographical accounts of the members, therefore, lose their authenticity and become the fictional constructions of Fleur the novelist. One of the members of the Association, for example, is Sir Eric Findlay, who, like the other members, has not gone further than, as Fleur says, "Chapter One: Nursery Days" (36). Fleur's addition to Sir Eric's autobiography, she herself says, is this: "The main character was Nanny. I had livened it up by putting Nanny and the butler on the nursery

rocking-horse together during the parents' absence, while little Eric was locked in the pantry to clean the silver" (36). Although this seems to be a naive change to the whole story, Sir Eric himself now becomes unsure about the difference between what actually happened in the past and what is now narrated in his own autobiography.

Sir Eric's position significantly reveals the status of Quentin in the Association. It must be clarified here that the "real" novelist, who is set against the positions of both Fleur and Spark, and who masterfully manipulates all the members of the Association to produce converted autobiographies, is Quentin himself. After reading Fleur's addition to his autobiography, Sir Eric informs Quentin that he is disturbed by the change made to his personal account. According to Sir Eric, at least, "It isn't the sort of thing Nanny would have done" (42). On the other hand, the other members of the Association who have read Sir Eric's modified account readily believe or like the new story. One of the responses is "I suggest you leave your memoir as Quentin has prepared it, Eric" (43), which reflects the fictional nature of all autobiographies including not only Fleur's but also Spark's accounts. In other words, therefore, all the connotations of the "real" are blurred in *Loitering with Intent*. But this is actually what should be done in the novel. The accounts of the members and the members themselves are to be fictionalised by the novelist who now celebrates the nature of her work. This happens at multiple levels of the narrative because not only Fleur's characters Warrender and Marjorie but also Fleur and Quentin are fictional entities within it.

Fleur's routine of writing as a novelist, she explains, is first creating a character and then inventing a historical background for this character. She therefore follows this order in writing *Warrender Chase*. In the case of the members of the Association, however, Fleur says, "the histories had been presented before the physical characters had appeared" (35). This obvious reversal of order, it can be argued, must be due to the fact that Quentin has manipulated the autobiographies so effectively that they are now Quentin's products instead of products of the members themselves.

What is more perplexing in the novel is the fact that Quentin's motives and actions have come to resemble those of Warrender Chase, the protagonist of Fleur in her novel. According to Fleur, however,

> The process by which I created my characters was instinctive, the sum of my whole experience of others and of my own potential self; and so it always has been. Sometimes I don't actually meet a character I have created in a novel until some time after the novel has been written and published. (25)

In the case of Quentin, moreover, she adds, "And as for my character Warrender Chase himself, I already had him outlined and fixed, long before I saw Sir Quentin" (25). Warrender the character, for Fleur, is by no means inspired by Quentin. Fleur had already formed Warrender before she met Quentin. Similar not only to the organisation of the Association but also to the role of Quentin in directing the personal accounts of the members for their autobiographies, Fleur, referring to her novel, claims that

> Warrender Chase . . . had gathered together a group of people specially selected for their weakness and folly, . . . As I wrote in the book, 'Warrender's private prayer meetings were of course known about, but only to the extent that they were considered too delicate a matter to be publicly discussed. Warrender had cultivated such a lofty myth of himself that nobody could pry into his life for fear of appearing vulgar.' (81-82)

Fleur's description of her fictional character Warrender and the group of people around him (which also reminds us of Hutcheon's notion of "paratextual" insertions) is exactly the same as the position of Spark's fictional character, Quentin, in the Association. Fleur's novel, therefore, creates the illusion that it does not reflect life, but it somehow creates it. Fleur, in other words, witnesses in her real life what she has already formed in a fictional (and in fact doubly

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fictional) realm. It is interesting for Fleur that "the story of *Warrender Chase* was in reality already formed and by no means influenced by the affairs of the Autobiographical Association" (60).

The above situation, however, "seemed rather the reverse" (60) as Fleur explains when she says,

> I saw before my eyes how Sir Quentin was revealing himself chapter by chapter to be the type and consummation of Warrender Chase, my character. I could see that the members of the Autobiographical Association were about to become his victims. (60)

Fleur's fiction, like Spark's, has its own fictional truth for the novelist. What is openly foregrounded here in *Loitering with Intent*, as opposed to the situation of the artist in *The Comforters*, is the fact that the artist is surprisingly at ease with this literary, if not literal, fact (Bold 113).

Contrary to the traditional realist mimetic practice which acknowledges the world as the source of truth for the artist, Fleur meets in her "real" life (in Spark's novel) what she has already fashioned in her own novel as fiction. In other words, in Fleur's case "The traditional assumptions of realist fiction, that the novel is a mirror or working model of life copied more or less faithfully from an original, is neatly reversed" (Page 102). This reversal of order is mostly evident in the characterisation of Quentin who now steals the only copy of *Warrender Chase* and begins to change the autobiographies of the members of his club according to the events outlined in this novel. The autobiographies which have already been remodelled by Fleur's corrections and additions are now further attached some parts taken from Fleur's novel by Quentin. According to Fleur,

> I thought how easy it was to steal, and I thought of Sir Quentin stealing my book, not only the physical copies, but the very words,

phrases, ideas. Even from the brief look I had taken I could see he had even stolen a letter I had invented, written from my Warrender Chase to my character Marjorie" (145).

The description of Quentin's peculiar situation is not limited to his additions to the autobiographies from Fleur's novel. He also begins to mime how Warrender acts in Fleur's novel. To her surprise, Fleur is to discover that even some parts of Quentin's diary, which has secretly been given to her by Quentin's mother Lady Edwina, consist of part of the story narrated in *Warrender Chase*. After reading Quentin's diary, Fleur is bewildered and says,

> Now what infuriated me more than anything in these scraps of Quentin Oliver's diary was this last entry, . . . It was straight out of *Warrender Chase*, where I make my character Proudie find the absurd letter to the Greek girl who thought it far from absurd" (186).

Therefore, it can be claimed that Quentin must be so motivated by Fleur's novel that he has lost his own independent existence and begun to live like the character in the novel, which actually suggests his true ontological position. Although Quentin is already a fictional figure who acts like a novelist, he begins to copy the life of a doubly fictional character, Warrender, which further complicates the multi-layered fictional structure of *Loitering with Intent*.

Fleur can anticipate what will happen next since the real life has begun to reflect on her novel, for example, one of the members' going mad and committing suicide, Quentin's death in a car-crash, and Edvina's inheriting the house. Both Quentin's ontological idiosyncrasy under the influence of *Warrender Chase* and Fleur's novel entering in her life point to the fact that Fleur's fiction, like Spark's, has its own artistic truth. *Loitering with Intent*, therefore, touches on the nature of fictional writing in order to emphasise the illusory nature of conventional realism.

The novel, as a result, unhesitatingly displays its true nature, that is the fictionality of the characters it portrays, as a passionate response to Spark's Catholic concerns as a novelist. The novelist, whether Caroline Rose or Fleur Talbot or Muriel Spark herself, is now comforted by being able to celebrate fictional truth for its own sake. In other words, Caroline's discomfort as a Catholic novelist who is likely to be a rival to holy creation in *The Comforters* is no longer necessary in *Loitering with Intent*. It disappears and the novelist no more needs to prove that writing fiction is telling lies. Instead the novelist, Spark believes, is the one who creates her own truth.

3.4 Conclusion

There is almost a quarter of a century between the publication dates of *The Comforters* (1957) and *Loitering with Intent* (1981). During such a long period of time, however, Spark's main interest as a postwar novelist remained more or less the same. Whatever the story her individual narrator is telling, it is always the process of the novelist's working mechanism in terms of fictional creation that is made explicit by the novelist herself as part of her subject matter in her formal realist work. Therefore, in *The Comforters*, Spark creates a fictional medium whose artificial nature as a work of art is deliberately laid bare by means of the voice of the novelist heard by the protagonist in order to avoid being a rival to holy creation. At the same time, Spark, as a newly converted Catholic, makes use of her own anxieties about her new religious identity through an autobiographical story; and she satirises some of the practices carried out by some Catholic figures. One of the most obvious unconventional characteristics of this novel is that her protagonist, who stands for the newly converted Spark herself, hears the voice of the speaker who is constructing herself as a fictional character, namely Spark's novelist-god. As this process was made explicit, Spark believed that she could produce her fiction as a Catholic who actually copied the process of holy creation. Contrary to her protagonist's "discomfort" in being a Catholic-novelist which also

contributes to the metafictional structure of her first published novel, Spark's *Loitering with Intent* pictures a novelist-protagonist who has already abandoned the earlier Catholic involvements and who now celebrates her art as construction and her position as an artist through the same display of the novel's fictional status, the only truth that she says she knows. Compared to *The Comforters* whose self-reflexive formal structure includes a conventional story, *Loitering with Intent* embodies the notion of artificiality within its conventional, formal realist form. Moreover, as Spark herself had abandoned her earlier Catholic interests, her protagonist, Fleur, now rejoices in what was once a worry for Caroline. This process of fictional creation is made explicit by constantly foregrounding the protagonist's ontological position as herself a novelist and a character in the novel.

CHAPTER 4

JOHN FOWLES

4.1 Introduction

Not only Murdoch's Platonic but also Spark's Catholic concerns are perceptible in the investigations of artistic reproduction that they include in their novels, as we have seen. Fowles's first published novel, *The Collector* (1963), is also concerned with this issue but he follows a different philosophical route in his investigation. This novel bears the mark of its writer's particular involvement both in the premises of existential philosophy and in the aesthetics of the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher, Heraclitus. While her philosophical background is observed, for example, as distrust in art and the artist in Murdoch's case, Fowles's personal observation of Heraclitus's beliefs makes itself visible (especially in his earlier fictional and non-fictional works, *The Collector* [1963] and *The Aristos: A Self-Portrait in Ideas* [1964]) as a moral concern, more particularly in the novelist's dissatisfaction with the socio-educational situation and literature of postwar Britain.

During the first half of the 1950s Fowles tended to combine contemporary social disturbance in Britain, which was mostly the result of the Second World War, with what he derived from Heraclitus, the clash between the Few and the Many. According to Fowles's "existentialist" interpretation of this particular philosophical notion in *The Aristos*, a collection of his own philosophical notes, following from Heraclitus he saw contemporary society as "divided into a moral and intellectual *élite* (the *aristoi*, the good ones, *not* – this is a later sense – the ones of noble birth) and an unthinking, confirming mass – *hoi polloi*, the many"

(9). This view, Fowles claims as an existentialist novelist,[30] had been a great influence on his life and literary works during the '60s.

Furthermore, although Heraclitus first identified the Few with the good, the intelligent and the independent, and the Many with the stupid and the ignorant, and he believed that one had the power to choose which group he belongs to, Fowles strongly argues in *The Aristos* that one's belonging to either of the groups is less a matter of choice than a matter of probability. In other words, Fowles actually claims that the formation of the groups is conditioned through biological and social elements ("John Fowles" 1). According to Fowles's understanding, however, every single step to goodness has come from individuals who belong to the Few, "the minority of existentially-conscious individuals whose moral integrity and critical awareness of the charade of received ideas is essential to human evolution at a moral and intellectual level" (Binns 27). On the contrary, the great majority of mankind, Fowles believes, have always been those who are not highly intelligent, moral or gifted. Of course Fowles does not argue in *The Aristos* that the Few and the Many are two clearly defined groups. It is only a general classification which always allows exceptions.

Recollecting the initiating argument of this thesis that mainstream criticism in postwar Britain privileges the traditional neo-realist novel against other modes of fiction, Fowles argues that in *The Collector* he from an existentialist point of view attacked celebrations of "inarticulate" heroes who were favoured by canonical reception and mainly represented in the works of Kingsley Amis (1922-1995), Philip Larkin (1922-1985) and John Wain (1925-1994). Although Fowles states his position as a formal realist novelist,[31] he particularly complains about the domination of postwar literary scene by

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[30] Fowles tells Roy Newquist that he sees writing in 1960s as a vital part of his existential view of life. According to him, writing is "an attempt to make [himself] wholly authentic." "John Fowles" *Counterpoint* 1964. 217-25.

[31] Fowles says, "Realism interests me increasingly in fiction–the problems of realistic technique." "An Interview with John Fowles" *Contemporary Literature* Autumn 1976. 455-69. He further states that "For *me* the obligation is to present my characters realistically. They must be credible human beings even if the circumstances they are in are 'incredible,' as they are in *The Collector* . .

James Dean and all his literary children and grandchildren, like
Salinger's [J. D. Salinger (1919-2010)] Holden Caulfield [in his
The Catcher in the Rye (1951)], and Sillitoe's [(1928-2010)] Arthur
Seaton (in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* [1958]). ("John
Fowles" 1)

In other words, he was not satisfied with these postwar neorealist novelists and the
portrayal of their characters even as a reader of British fiction.

The main reason behind Fowles's dissatisfaction with the contemporary
literary environment, moreover, is the fact that such a critical celebration of the
Movement hero was eventually a celebration of the Many as a socio-cultural (and
moral) formation in Britain. Moreover, Fowles, in contrast to the concerns of the
postwar realist revival and provincial mode of writing it championed, comments
that "I think the common man is the curse of civilization, not its crowning glory"
("John Fowles" 1) since, according to him, postwar realist novelists never allow in
depictions of their characters the use of Fowles's most frequently observed
existential notions of free-choice and authenticity. Therefore, as a novelist
dissatisfied with the literary environment into which he stepped in 1950s Britain,
Fowles openly reacted against the prevailing artistic discussions about the
pessimistically drawn future of the novel genre. This aesthetic reaction, which
began first with *The Collector* and is then found in *The Aristos*, particularly made
itself manifest with the 1965 publication of *The Magus*. Here Fowles, very much
parallel to the situation of Spark as a novelist during the composition of her
Loitering with Intent, celebrates the truth about the fictional medium in which not
only the created fictional characters but also he himself, as a novelist, operates.
Instead of complying with the contemporary idea of the death of the novel genre
during 1960s, Fowles as a novelist in *The Magus*, opened the form to new
horizons that would be the most apparent with the publication of *The French*

. Believability must dominate even the most outlandish situation." "John Fowles" *Counterpoint*
1964. 217-25.

Lieutenant's Woman in 1969, through his highly refined play with the realist and modernist aesthetics in which the novel operated as a work of art.[32]

4.2 *The Collector*: The Novelist as Confronted by the Character

The Collector can first be examined as a literary representation of the universal clash between the two diversely conditioned moral groups that Fowles was once interested in as an existentialist novelist,[33] the Few and the Many. The novel initially tells the story of the collector Frederick Clegg, who is a member of the lower-middle class, a clerk, one of the Many. In the story, Frederick wins a football lottery and kidnaps an art student, Miranda Grey, a representative of the Few and Fowles's existentialist heroine, who he has been watching secretly. He keeps her hostage in the cellar of an old cottage he has bought until her unexpected death – indeed his murder of her. Although it nearly seems to narrate quite a familiar and simple story for the critic and the reader in 1960s Britain,[34] *The Collector* unconventionally presents two narrators who give alternatives to the accounts of each other, which recollects the multi-narrator structure of Murdoch's later *The Black Prince* (1973).

In *The Black Prince*, Murdoch questions the reliability of the main narrator's account by juxtaposing it to a number of sub-narratives, especially the postscripts

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[32] Fowles's notion of realism, like that of Murdoch and Spark, includes both tradition and innovation at the same time: "I do love realism on the surface, but I also love the enormous artifice writing involves." *The Art of John Fowles*. Katherine Tarbox. 170-91.

[33] Fowles's existentialism which was obvious during the '60s in the characterisations of Miranda Grey (*The Collector*) and Nicholas Urfe (*The Magus*) gradually lost its significance for the novelist. He said in 1982, "I now think of existentialism as a kind of literary metaphor, a wish fulfilment. I long ago began to doubt whether it had any true philosophical value in many of its assertions about freedom." "John Fowles" *The Radical Imagination and the Liberal Tradition: Interviews with English and American Novelists*. Christopher Bigsby. 1982. 114-25.

[34] The first critical reception of *The Collector* in Britain as a thriller from an Angry Young Man ("A Sort of Exile in Lyme Regis" by Daniel Halpern [1971] in Dianne L. Vipond *Conversations with John Fowles* [1999] pp. 18, 21) and Fowles' consequent dissatisfaction of such barrenness of contemporary British critical circles particularly as compared to the American reception (Roy Newquist, ibid. p. 4) point to this familiarity. Furthermore, Malcolm Bradbury, as a literary critic, talks about Fowles's sophistication as a British postwar novelist confessing "though we have been slow to notice it." *Possibilities: Essays on the State of the Novel*, (1973), p. 258.

of the other four characters. It is due to her Platonic background that Murdoch, in the role of Bradley Pearson in *The Black Prince*, questions the classic realist notion of the hierarchical order of discourses (Salami 20) and the narrator whose account of both characters and events is accepted as the unique source of fictional truth. Contrary to Murdoch's principally literary concern, in *The Collector* Fowles attempts to offer an existentialist solution to what he believes to be mostly a moral problem. In this literary work, moreover, he significantly presents a narrator whose linear narration is deliberately interrupted in the middle by another narrator. In *The Collector*, in other words, the first-person narrator protagonist Frederick's narration of the events, which would lead up to Miranda's unexpected death, is abruptly cut off by his reading of her diary which he finds accidentally after her death, and only resumed after the diary comes to an end. In this way Miranda's narrative is captured and enclosed in Frederick's narrative, just as she was herself. Mahmoud Salami observes the existence of contradictory sub-texts in one narrative as one of the characteristics of postmodern fiction (25). Therefore, the clashing voices of Frederick and Miranda attributes to one of the experimental features of *The Collector*.

In *The Collector*, Frederick's account mostly focuses on a set of self-justifications of how he truly loved Miranda, and hence how he needed to be with her, which he thinks was the inevitable cause of Miranda's abduction. Frederick has already created a dream-world in which he believed. This is the illusion of living with a Miranda who, he thinks, is pleased to be with him. Although Frederick refers to this particular situation a number of times in the novel, these are the particular cases in which he clearly reveals his state of mind which was becoming more and more illusion-ridden. In the first example, Frederick refers to his daydreams saying,

> I used to have daydreams about her, I used to think of stories where I met her, did things she admired, married her and all that. . . . She drew pictures and I looked after my [butterfly] collection (in my

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dreams). It was always she loving me and my collection . . . working together in a beautiful modern house in a big room. (10)[35]

In the second example, the same illusion is maintained. Frederick says, "In my dreams it was always we looked into each other's eyes one day and then we kissed and nothing was said until after" (37). In the third example, moreover, Frederick points to the objects of his illusion which he had actually accomplished, one by one. According to him, "I dream myself collecting pictures, having a big house with famous pictures hanging on the walls, and people coming to see them. Miranda there, too, of course" (77).

Frederick has developed an illusion of Miranda for he regards her as a rarity far beyond his grasp, which is also in clear contrast to his own low status in society. Frederick, therefore, is very likely to interpret this social difference between himself and Miranda as an undeniable class difference between a clerk and an art student. Therefore, the struggle between the Few and the Many, Fowles's "the evolutionally over- and under-privileged" (Aristos 11) in his own words, opposites may also turn, in Frederick's characterisation, into a class difference between himself and Miranda. While Frederick earlier told the reader that with Miranda, "you didn't have any class feeling. She spoke like she walked" (18), he later says that

> She often went on about how she hated class distinction, but she never took me in. It's the way people speak that gives them away, not what they say. You only see her dainty ways to see how she was brought up. She wasn't la-di-da, like many, but it was there all the same. . . . There was always class between us. (41)

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[35] All of the page references are to 1998 Vintage edition.

Miranda is also described elsewhere by critics as "an unquestioning product of her class and background" (Acheson 11) just as Frederick's class preoccupations echo his own class and background.

In Frederick's narrative, the principal reason for his uneasiness appears to be the class feeling which he has never felt free from and which has further developed into an inferiority complex. The money he has won from the lottery, Frederick believes, will not change his social status especially as compared to that of Miranda. This feeling is, of course, what makes Frederick tell Miranda, "I want to know you very much. I wouldn't have a chance in London. I'm not clever and all that. Not your class. You wouldn't be seen dead with me in London" (39). Frederick is clearly unable to change himself into someone who would be socially equal to Miranda. Therefore, one of the triggers of the conflict between them is the envy that the Many feels for the Few. Susana Onega points to this class feeling, referring also to Frederick's habit of "collecting" rare species of butterflies, through an analogy to a characteristic which is visible in the low-key, social realist Movement hero,[36] the urge to rise socially. According to her,

> Frederick Clegg, like Dixon [Kingsley Amis' hero in his *Lucky Jim* (1954)], wants to better his social position by means of a woman: Miranda symbolizes for him all the remote and alluring appeal of a superior way of life. For Clegg, however, going upwards doesn't mean conforming to the criteria of the upper classes, as is the case with Dixon. It simply means possessing, exerting power, and finally destroying the thing he cherishes, as he has to kill the butterflies to own them. (31-32)

It is further argued by Pamela Cooper that *The Collector*, in its portrayal of the class conflict between the two characters, "reformulates, in the direction of the sinister and obsessive, that 1950s fictional convention of the fruitless encounter between an educated, class-privileged woman and a resentful, socially deprived

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[36] Particulary in Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* (1954) and Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958).

man" (22). The difference between Fowles's novel and its contemporary literary works published in Britain, however, is that

> Instead of imitating Sillitoe and making Clegg into a kind of Arthur Seaton, who tries to liberate his heroic vigour from the environmental torpidity that imprisons it, Fowles constructs a wholly negative working-class protagonist. Clegg does not embody any displaced or inchoate heroism, but himself partakes spiritually and metaphorically of the insect life which preoccupies him. Fowles deliberately questions a fictional concept of the anti-hero and his rebelliousness as misunderstood nobility by revealing in Clegg a quiet and meticulous capacity for evil. (Cooper 22)

Frederick's feeling of socio-economic inequality turns into a sexual exploitation of Miranda especially after the seduction scene where, according to his version of the event, she plays the temptress.

Two scenes in the novel particularly display Frederick's real motive which he concealed earlier. In the first one, Frederick allows Miranda a short walk in the garden at night. Miranda's hands are, as precaution, tied. Frederick describes their situation, saying

> I never had any nasty desire to take advantage of the situation, I was always perfectly respectful towards her . . . but perhaps it was the darkness, us walking there and feeling her arm through her sleeve, I really would have liked to take her in my arms and kiss her. (62)

After a while, however, he boasts that he did not do what, he assumes, many other men would do to her. He says, "I didn't like to boast, but I meant her to think for a moment of what other men might have done, if they'd had her in their power" (62). The second scene occurs after one of Miranda's unsuccessful attempts to escape from the cottage and the subsequent fight between them which results in a

wound to Frederick's head. He indeed thinks of the same nasty way of punishment and comments, "I know most men would only have thought of taking an unfair advantage and there were plenty of opportunities. I could have used the pad. Done what I liked" (95). And this next remark is ironical enough, since Miranda catches cold and dies soon after: "What she never understood was that with me it was having. Having her was enough. Nothing needed doing. I just wanted to have her, and safe at last" (95).

Although Frederick articulates that he does not do what many other men would do if they found themselves in a similar situation, he sexually exploits Miranda in other ways. One of these methods can be related to his fantasy of taking photographs of her posing half-nude for him, which must be related to his bizarre habit of secretly taking photographs of couples outside. Moreover, Pamela Cooper comments on a characteristic feature of Fowles's fiction that makes use of the woman as an "objet d'art." These photograph scenes between Frederick and Miranda in *The Collector* are read Miranda's presentation in terms of pictures: "Clegg assimilates her image to the inverted aesthetics of pornography, one of the metaphors in the Fowles corpus for the destructive potentialities of art" (12-13). The novel presents three scenes where Frederick photographs Miranda. In one of these scenes, Frederick actually forces Miranda to pose for him; otherwise, he menacingly says, he will no longer allow her to live in one of the rooms upstairs instead of the cellar. Miranda asks, "'You mean I'm to pose for obscene photographs so that if I escape I shan't dare tell the police about you'" (106), and Frederick answers her, "That's the idea, . . . Not obscene. Just photos you wouldn't want to be published. Art-photographs" (106). And this remark reveals Frederick's true identity as a member of the Many who endangers individual freedoms. He threatens to cancel everything he has allowed her to do, saying "Either you do it or you don't go out at all. No walking out there. No baths. No nothing" (106).

In another scene, Miranda causes a fire by kicking a burning log out of the hearth in order to attract the attention of a passing car. However, Frederick

immediately manages to give her chloroform and then to extinguish the fire. When Miranda lies unconscious, Frederick describes the situation,

> She was still out, on the bed. She looked a sight, the dress all off one shoulder. I don't know what it was, it got me excited, it gave me ideas, seeing her lying there right out. It was like I'd showed who was really the master. The dress was right off her shoulder, I could see the top of one stocking. (86-87)

After this, he begins to photograph her. He says,

> So I did that. I took off her dress and her stockings and left on certain articles, just the brassiére and the other so as not to go to the whole hog. . . . It was my chance I had been waiting for. I got the old camera and took some photos, . . . I started the developing and printing right away. They came out very nice. Not artistic, but interesting. (87)

The last photographs scene of the novel starts with a fight which was, according to Frederick's narrative, initiated by Miranda accusing him of not being a man. Feeling insulted, Frederick once more exerts his power over her sexually, the camera being a crude stand-in for rape. He confesses,

> I had had enough, most men would have had it long before. I went and pulled the bedclothes off . . . I said, all right, I'm going to teach you a lesson. I had the cords in my pocket . . . I got them on her and then the gag . . . I got her on a short rope tied to the bed and then I went and fetched the camera and flash equipment. . . . I got her garments off . . . So I got my pictures. I took her till I had no more bulbs left. (110)

The last sentence, especially, leaves the reader in no doubt as to the fully sexual nature of this abuse.

Miranda's narrative begins with Frederick's discovery of her diary and, according to Susana Onega, it "acts as an enormous retrospective anachrony" (16), for it tells the same story from the beginning, but from another perspective. This narrative primarily functions in the novel as an antithesis to most of the points made earlier by Frederick. In the diary, for example, Miranda reveals her distaste of the house Frederick has bought and decorated. The house and the interior, in Frederick's narrative, are described boastfully as expensive, and by implication, attractive:

> I had to give five hundred more than they asked in the advert, others were after it, everyone fleeced me. The surveyor, the builder, the decorators, the furniture people in Lewes I got to furnish it. I didn't care, why should I, money was no object. (22)

This one-way judgement of Frederick as the main narrator is very clearly challenged by Miranda's commentary. She says,

> A lovely old house really, done up in *the* most excruciating women's magazine 'good taste'. Ghastliest colour-clashes, mix-up of furniture styles, bits of suburban fuss, phoney antiques, awful brass ornaments. And the pictures! You wouldn't believe me if I described the awfulness of pictures. He told me some firm did all the furniture choosing and decorating. They must have got rid of all the junk they could find in their store-rooms. (125)

Miranda's dislike of all the ornaments in the house echoes her response to Frederick himself. She thinks, accordingly, that "He is ugliness. But you can't smash human ugliness" (130). This scene very simply displays the difference between the accounts of the two narrators of the same incident in the plot-line and

it questions the hierarchy of Frederick's narrative as the main speaker. Besides his envy of and threat to Miranda, Frederick may further be an improper narrator for the reader. Miranda's narrative, furthermore, functions to show the limits of Frederick's view as the central narrator. For example, she manages to send a message earlier in the novel in a little bottle, which is absolutely unknown to him – also to the reader, of course – and hence not reported by him in his narrative. She says, "I've seen a way to get a message out. I could put a message in a little bottle down the place. I could put a bright ribbon round it. Perhaps someone would see it somewhere some day" (126).

Yet the most straightforward difference between the two narrators' judgements in *The Collector* appears when Miranda gives an alternative explanation to what Frederick has described as a scene of seduction. In Frederick's narrative, Miranda played the role of a real temptress who indeed forced him to make love to her. According to Frederick, it was Miranda who initiated everything, not only by kissing him but also by undressing herself first. Frederick modestly says, according to his narrative, he only kissed the top of Miranda's head, to which, he reports the reader, she responded by kissing him passionately. In Miranda's narrative, she likewise mentions that she kissed Frederick first and forced him to kiss her. Contrary to Frederick's modest account of kissing her head, however, Miranda says, "He did kiss me back then, as if he wanted to press his wretched thin inhibited mouth right through my head" (241). Frederick's narrative further includes remarks attributed to Miranda to make her appear to be an immoral woman: "I don't care what it leads to. . . . Come on, then. Try. . . . Just relax. Don't be nervous, don't be ashamed. . . . There's nothing to be frightened of" (97-98). This is, in Frederick's words, "worse than with the prostitute" (99). Frederick, in this scene of his narrative, consciously reduces Miranda's position to a level at which, he tells the reader, "I never respected her again . . . she had killed all the romance, she had made herself like any other woman, I didn't respect her any more, there was nothing left to respect" (103-04).

Although neither of these accounts sounds convincing enough to prove either narrator's dependability since they continuously undermine each other's

statements, it is clear in the novel that this seduction scene alters Frederick's perception of Miranda thoroughly. And this change of feeling in Frederick is most probably due to Miranda's failure as a member of the Few to try to understand him truly. In Fowles's philosophy, it is the Few who is supposed to get rid of the contempt on the Many. Therefore, it can also be argued that

> She imagines that if she offers to go to bed with him, his undesirable characteristics will melt away magically, . . . What she fails to see is that Clegg has exercised sexual self-restraint – has behaved not as Caliban, but as Ferdinand or Prince Charming – only for as long as he has been able to respect her. When she seeks to seduce him, Miranda cheapens herself in his eyes by making herself as available as any prostitute. (Acheson 12-13)

The real function of Miranda's diary, however, appears to be as a narrative in which the clash between the Few and the Many and its reflections on contemporary literature in postwar Britain is represented. Beginning with her referring to Frederick as Caliban, in order to symbolically associate him with "his sex neurosis and his class neurosis and his uselessness and his emptiness" (195), Miranda's story focuses on the discrepancy between the Few and the Many. As a mouthpiece of Fowles himself,[37] Miranda definitely associates herself with the Few. She says,

> I'm one of them. I feel it and I've tried to prove it. I felt it during my last year in at Ladymont. There were the few of us who cared, and there were the silly ones, the snobbish ones, the would-be

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[37] At this point, two commentaries are relevant: the first one is Peter Wolfe's assertion that "Miranda voices Fowles's humanistic objections as well as his passion for educational reform. She probably carries her narrative burden less well than Clegg, though. Readers have complained that Fowles's liberal-humanist conception of her makes her merely a literary man's model of an ideal girl" (68). The second one, from another perspective, is Mahmoud Salami's discussion that "Miranda's diary has been manipulated as a vehicle for the author's ideas. Most of Fowles's ideas about society, the Few and the Many, the class struggle between the middle class and the lower class, and his philosophy about art and life are all conveyed through her text. . . . Miranda's subjectivity, then, is quite transparent; she is constructed as a 'male' in disguise" (50).

debutantes and the daddy's darlings and the horsophiles and the sex-cats. (206)

Miranda is, therefore, "one of the Few, for she is intelligent, cultivated and creative – she is an art student, and in a small way, a writer" (Acheson 6).

According to Miranda's interpretation, Frederick – now called Caliban in her narrative – illustrates the people who have become rich in the Welfare State after the war, yet are unable to spend their money for good. Miranda thinks that these people are representatives of "pettiness and selfishness and meanness of every kind" (206). The real problem, according to her, is not the existence of the Many but the social responsibility which can be carried by only the Few. These people, for Miranda, are "The doctors and the teachers and the artists – not that they haven't their traitors, but what hope there is, is with them – with us" (206).

Miranda associates herself with the Few and Frederick with the Many since, she thinks, her situation as a captive is characteristic of a more general situation of the Few, who are symbolically kept prisoner by the Many. Miranda thus says, "In this situation I'm a representative" (206) since she also believes that she is

A martyr. Imprisoned, unable to grow. . . . Because they all hate us, they hate us for being different, for not being them, for their own not being like us. They persecute us, they crowd us out, . . . they sneer at us, they yawn at us, they blindfold themselves and stuff up their ears. They do anything to avoid having to take notice of us and respect us. (206-07)

She believes that the Few is being suffocated by the Many to refer to her actual situation in the story. She would be a real existentialist who searches for her authenticity if she is allowed to live more. She is not allowed to live authentically and to teach the Many. Peculiar to Fowles the novelist, "The problematic relationship between the author as potential tyrant [Frederick] and the characters

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as questers [Miranda] after freedom . . . is more or less present in all the fictions he has published since *The Collector*" (Cooper 2). Miranda's diary, furthermore, presents a number of anecdotes which she recalls about George Paston, an older London painter whom she abbreviates as G.P. G.P. is a mentor figure from whom she has learned this social uneasiness. According to Miranda, G.P. calls the Many the New People. They are, Miranda recalls G.P. saying, "the new-class people with their cars and their money and their tellies and their stupid vulgarities and their stupid crawling imitation of the bourgeoisie" (207).

Miranda's identification of herself with the Few and Frederick with the Many, however, displays certain weaknesses. Her distinction between these two groups initially appears as too strict to allow for anything different from what she defines as the characteristics of the two circles. The truth, however, is likely to be that

> Forces like chance, heredity, and environment condition the split. Often, a person cannot choose to belong to the Few or the Many. Nor is the Few-Many division always clearly marked. Everybody has in him elements from both strains, even the Aristos, Fowles's most fully developed human. (Wolfe 55)

As a member of the Few, Miranda should remember the fact that she has had more opportunities in terms of family, friends and education than Frederick has ever had. Therefore, she has a number of "responsibilities" for Frederick.

In one of her most obvious classifications, however, Miranda specifies the Many according to her hatred of certain human weaknesses. She says, "I hate them" (207), and continues to state the objects of her hatred: "I hate the uneducated and the ignorant. I hate the pompous and the phoney. I hate the jealous and the resentful. I hate the crabbed and the mean and the petty. I hate all ordinary dull little people who aren't ashamed of being dull and little" (207). In contrast to the objects of her hatred, Miranda simply outlines herself as a member

of the Few through a juxtaposition. In other words, Miranda thinks that she embodies merely the opposite of what she dislikes: "I love honesty and freedom and giving. I love making, I love doing, I love being to the full, I love everything which is not sitting and watching and copying and dead at heart" (207). According to Mahmoud Salami, therefore, it can be asserted that

> If Clegg is a collector who collects and kills, then Miranda is a collector of another sort, who labels ideas . . ., as well as people such as the Few and the Many. Her narrative demonstrates this theme very clearly. Miranda sees herself as a member of the Few, imprisoned and tortured by a representative of the Many. (64)

Miranda's clear-cut classification between the two groups thus appears impracticable to maintain throughout her whole narrative of the novel. Human nature, Miranda still believes, has certain weaknesses, which has to be true for Frederick as well. It is argued, therefore, by Peter Wolfe that

> Clegg and Miranda, too, though they never switch roles, sometimes display traits more characteristic of their opposite than of themselves. The inconsistency is deliberate, for it both humanizes the clash between Clegg and Miranda and gives the action a realistic moral reference. (55)

Although what Frederick does can never be justifiable, there are some natural causes: he is an orphan whose social environment has never allowed him to have the same educational opportunity as Miranda has. In other words, "the blighted individual whose sense of liberty has been destroyed by social exploitation, miseducation, and the 'pressures-to-conform' is shown to be his own worst prisoner" (Pifer 4). Analogously, Frederick is "the neurotic product of a repressive, guilt laden upbringing" (Walker 55).

Although Miranda's hatred of the Many focuses on Frederick as the representative of the group he belongs to, she talks about a sort of "responsibility" for him. This sense of responsibility can be traced back, in the form of sympathy, to an earlier time in her diary than her open discussion of the Few and the Many. This scene is the one where Miranda prepares the reader for her main discussion by offering glimpses of what will be her main argument about these two groups. She makes fun of both Frederick and his aunt, who has sent a letter from Australia asking him to be careful with the money. After Frederick finishes reading the letter to Miranda, she comments, "She's made an absolute fool out of you" (186). And this dialogue between them is what immediately follows:

> C. Thank you very much.
>
> M. Well, she has!
>
> C. Oh, you're right. As per usual.
>
> M. Don't say that! . . .
>
> C. She never bossed me about half as much as you do.
>
> M. I don't boss you. I try to teach you.
>
> C. You teach me to despise her and think like you, and soon you'll leave me and I'll have no one at all.
>
> M. Now you're pitying yourself.
>
> C. It's the one thing you don't understand. You only got to walk into a room, people like you, and you can talk with anyone, you understand things, but when…
>
> M. *Do* shut up. You're ugly enough without starting to whine. (186)

Although Miranda believes that Frederick deserves her offensive remarks in the above quotation, she certainly feels sorry enough to try to apologise to him (186). The responsibility she feels for him, in other words, the responsibility the Few feels for the Many, according to her, is the destiny of both Miranda and Frederick, and hence the Few and the Many share. Miranda resembles their situation to that

of shipwrecked survivors who have to live together on an island. According to her, moreover,

> [Frederick] had more dignity than I did then and I felt small, mean. Always sneering at him, jabbing him, hating him and showing it. It was funny, we sat in silence facing each other and I had a feeling I've had once or twice before, of the most peculiar closeness to him – *not* love or attraction or sympathy in any way. But linked destiny. (187)

Through the conception of this "linked destiny," then, Fowles himself explains the roles of Miranda and Frederick in *The Collector*. According to Fowles,

> Clegg, the kidnapper, committed the evil; but I tried to show that his evil was largely, perhaps wholly, the result of a bad education, a mean environment, being orphaned: all factors over which he had no control. In short, I tried to establish the virtual *innocence* of the Many. Miranda, the girl he imprisoned, had very little more control than Clegg over what she was: she had well-to-do parents, good educational opportunity, inherited aptitude and intelligence. That does not mean that she was perfect. Far from it – she was arrogant in her ideas, a prig, a liberal-humanist snob, like so many university students. Yet if she had not died she might have become something better, the kind of being humanity so desperately needs. (*The Aristos* 10)

The idea in *The Collector*, therefore, is that the formation of the Few and the Many is linked to a number of factors which are beyond one's control. The most effective of these influences are the biological and socio-economic realities which constitute a framework in which one is born and brought up. Both of the representative members, Miranda and Frederick in this case, have qualities which can easily be associated with the other group. Susana Onega's commentary, furthermore, interprets Fowles's words about the two characters in *The Collector*

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so as to make the organic relationship between the Few and the Many above more obvious:

> The solution Fowles proposes to this confrontation between the Many and the Few implies the recognition by the Few that theirs is a privileged status they have got through mere good luck, luck in the family into which they are born and luck in the combination of genes which has given them a superior intelligence. For Fowles, then, being an 'aristos' means realizing that you are in a 'state of responsibility' . . . with respect to the masses: it is the task of the Few to educate the Many. (30)

Miranda's diary develops through three stages in the novel. The first one is Miranda's personal declaration of her distaste of Frederick (Caliban) whose desperate efforts to please her are rejected. In the second one, she focuses on a more general concept, the clash between the Few – herself and G.P. – and the Many – the New People. In the final stage, the diary chiefly focuses on the literature of the period, particularly the British postwar novel, the novels of the Angry Young Men. Linda Hutcheon observes this as an aspect of what she calls "a double ironic parody" (*Narcissistic Narrative* 33). According to her, Fowles structures *The Collector* on a parody of the fiction of the Angry Young Men and Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Moreover,

> as this structuring principle is also revealed thematically and explicitly (in the names of characters; in *their* realization of the literary parallels), it would seem best to categorize the parodic model as a generally overt form of narcissism, self-conscious as well as self-reflecting. (33-34)

Miranda believes that the contemporary novel, which is canonically represented by the Movement novelists, is a celebration of what the New People represent in society. Miranda says, for example, that she has just finished reading

Alan Sillitoe's (1928-2010) first novel, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (published in 1958). "It's shocked me. It's shocked me in itself and it's shocked me because of where I'm" (230) she declares. She thinks that "it must be wonderful to be able to write like Alan Sillitoe" (230) since, she believes, these novels are "very clever" (230) recalling the quotation which opens this thesis where Rubin Rabinovitz states the same. Postwar realist novels, according to him, were clever works in themselves; but they were still no more than mediocre works of literature. (Obviously stronger than Rubin Rabinovitz's commentary about contemporary realist novel) Miranda finds Alan Sillitoe's novel *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, an exemplary work of postwar realist revival in Britain, and its hero Arthur Seaton "disgusting."

Miranda states why she dislikes the novel and the hero. The real problem, according to her, is that "Alan Sillitoe doesn't show that he's disgusted by his young man. I think they think young men like that are really rather fine" (230). Miranda defines Arthur Seaton in similar terms to her description of Frederick, the Many and the New People. According to her, "Arthur Seaton just doesn't care about anything outside his own little life. He's mean, narrow, selfish, brutal. Because he's cheeky and hates his work and is successful with women, he's supposed to be vital" (230). In terms of the novelist himself, the problem, for Miranda, is that Alan Sillitoe becomes the victim of his own hero, of whom he cannot state his dislike. The reason, she explains, is that

> Perhaps Alan Sillitoe wanted to attack the society that produces such people. But he doesn't make it clear. I know what he's done, he's fallen in love with what he's painting. He started out to paint it as ugly as it is, but then its ugliness conquered him, and he started trying to cheat. To prettify. (230)

Miranda's severe criticism of this particular novelist reminds the reader of the contemporary literary convention where the traditionalist mode dominates. More

particularly, it is argued in terms of Fowles's motives for writing *The Collector* that

> By these direct allusions to such anti-heroes as Sillitoe's Arthur Seaton or Salinger's Holden Caulfield, Fowles consciously tries to situate his novel within the realistic tradition of English literature of the 1950s inaugurated by Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* [1954] and John Wain's *Hurry on Down* [1953]. (Onega 31)

Inside this "realistic tradition," it can then be asserted, *The Collector* fully explores the theme of class difference as a literary convention of the 1950s Britain within a mixture of Fowles's existentialist viewpoint and his modern interpretation of Heraclitus's ancient division between the *aristoi* and *hoi polloi*. The novel depicts a highly class-conscious lower-middle class protagonist who significantly confesses in the story that "[he] wanted what money couldn't buy. . . . You can't buy happiness" (277). This familiar traditional depiction of the underprivileged postwar hero gradually leads up in *The Collector* not only to Fowles's conscious subversion of the contemporary fictional convention of the "anti-hero," typically illustrated by a number of postwar novelists through a reformulation of the well-known encounter between a socio-economically superior woman and a socio-economically inferior man in the period's neo-realistic novels, but also to his main philosophical discussion, particularly in Miranda's narrative of *The Collector*, of the close interrelation between the Few and the Many, which fully partakes in the ideas expressed in his *The Aristos*. Besides these contemporary traditional components, moreover, Fowles's novel, quite unconventionally for its time,[38] presents a second narrator whose version of

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[38] He would, only six years later, publish the famous opening of the thirteenth-chapter of his *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) where he discloses his awareness of the impossibility of maintaining the traditional realist form in the age of the French philosopher and literary critic Roland Barthes (1915-1980) and the French *nouveau roman* writer Alain Robbe-Grillet (1922-

the same events dramatically subverts the reliability of the protagonist's explanation. This is a technique later used especially by Murdoch with the multi-narrator structure of *The Black Prince*, where she particularly underlines the conventional realist illusion of the story-telling mechanism. It can, therefore, be maintained that *The Collector* once more exemplifies, in Susana Onega's terms, the English and the French directions in terms of tradition and innovation in fiction writing.

4.3 *The Magus: A Revised Version*: The Character as Confronted by the Novelist

Although *The Collector* (1963) is Fowles's first published novel, *The Magus* (1965) was actually the first novel he wrote. Fowles began writing *The Magus* in the early 1950s,[39] and it was published in 1965 after the appearance of *The Collector* and *The Aristos*. However, Fowles had never been satisfied with the book; and he occasionally talked about the reasons for his dissatisfaction with the first edition saying, for instance, "I still think *The Magus* doesn't really work. In the first draft, it just didn't work at all; I didn't know what frame, what context to put it in or what style to adopt" ("A Sort of Exile in Lyme Regis" 15). He furthermore said, "One day I hope to rewrite it. Also, I don't think it's clear enough. It says so many different things and nothing really is concluded" ("An Interview with John Fowles" 35). He also stated elsewhere that "It always disappointed me technically. It was full of mistakes; stylistically irritated me. I missed a number of tricks and means of telling a story" ("An Encounter with John Fowles" 86). Fowles therefore published a revised edition of *The Magus* in 1977 on which the following analysis is based.

2008). Linda Hutcheon reads the same chapter of Fowles's novel as "the problem of the real *versus* the imaginary" ("The 'Real World[s]' of Fiction" 119).

[39] Fowles says in the foreword to the revised edition of *The Magus* that the novel's story "appeared in 1965, after two other books, but in every way exept that of mere publishing date, it is a first novel. I began writing it in the early 1950s."

The Magus, very much like the later *Loitering with Intent*, principally questions the confusing relationship between fiction and reality. The most important feature of the novel is that it purposefully installs a surrogate world, the novelist-magician Maurice Conchis's masque, where neither reality nor fictionality are clearly identified, and into which its protagonist is taken unwillingly. The novel therefore creates a juxtaposition between the fictional and the historical worlds particularly to remind the reader of the real function of the novelist himself, a god who has the power to create:

> The power of creativity intrigues Fowles. This is one reason for his commitment to metafiction, . . . For him the work of art is the index and vehicle of the artist's power; as a novelist, Fowles focuses especially on the text as artefact and the author as creative artist. (Cooper 8)

Although such an aesthetic device is observed in many other experimental fictional works of the period, it is, in the case of *The Magus*, done too revealingly to pose the novel simply as a work of art whose artistic style (which is sometimes found very tiring by the critics) underlines the craft of the novelist.

The main story of *The Magus* is the development of the protagonist, Nicholas Urfe, an Oxford English graduate, from the self-delusion of attributing to himself inaccurate characteristics to the comparatively more enlightened state of self-knowledge and a being. Although the end of the novel hints at no clear clue to Nicholas's new character, the first three chapters, including his pretended suicide, offer vital glimpses of his earlier personality. Nicholas is particularly depicted in the novel as a womaniser who has even developed a "technique" in order "to make a show of unpredictability, cynicism, and indifference" (21).[40] He uses this not only to seduce but also to get rid of women who, according to him, are sometimes "fundamentally silly" (21). Even his relationship with Alison Kelly, a young Australian woman, who will play one of the most important roles

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[40] All of the page references are to 1997 Vintage edition.

in his personal development, does not prove different from his previous love affairs. It is clear in the novel that for Nicholas these affairs have been based on nothing but sex. Therefore, he says, "[he] was always careful to make sure that the current victim knew, before she took her clothes off, the difference between coupling and marrying" (21). Similarly, although Alison is not a beautiful woman for him, she is always "feminine [not] betray[ing] her gender" (31). Nicholas, for example, very tastelessly regards her as "Cheaper than central heating" (36), and tries to "teach" her in terms of "anglicizing her accent, polishing off her roughness, her provincialisms" (35), yet he says that she teaches him in bed.

It is noticeable at the very beginning of *The Magus* that Nicholas's relationship with Alison is based on the same logic as that of his previous relationships with women. In other words, Nicholas's mistaken vision of individual freedom (Fowles's existentialist notion of free choice) as part of his inaccurate vision of himself, which is also clearly pronounced in his own confession that "I mistook the feeling of relief that dropping a girl always brought for a love of freedom" (21), ends his relationship with Alison as well. He leaves her for a teaching post at Lord Byron School in Greece in order to avoid what he assumes to be a potential threat to his freedom (Fowles's existentialist notion of authenticity) as an individual, which is a certainly misconception created by himself. According to Katherine Tarbox, in Nicholas's self-created fiction,

> The irony and the tyranny of his posture is that it is so convincing that he can ignore even the most patent truths, . . . His curious system of logic suggests that he should not love Alison; he believes, therefore, he does not love Alison. Always life must conform to his personal fiction. And that does not apply only to Alison. (17)

In addition to his abusive view of women, Nicholas is especially pictured as so bored with life that he sees everything around himself, including the students he once thought at a provincial university in England, as the outcome of mass

production. His boredom also highlights his state of mind that he postulates life has stopped offering him new experiences. Therefore, Nicholas is described elsewhere as "poetically pseudo-suicidal, monstrously manipulative of women, void of both human knowledge and introspective vision" (McDaniel 106). Nicholas is thus even unable to differentiate between reality and fiction; and he fails to see, in his own words, that

> the heroes, or anti-heroes, of the French existentialist novels we read were not supposed to be realistic. We tried to imitate them, mistaking metaphorical descriptions of complex modes of feeling for straightforward prescriptions of behaviour. (17)

This single example of Nicholas's inability to see the difference between truth and invention, which is the reason for not only his misapprehension of the relation between these concepts but also his consequent inauthentic perception of his identity (contrary to his desperate attempts at existentialist authenticity), foreshadows what he soon after experiences on the Greek island, Phraxos, where he is lured into a weird masque-like series of performances prepared by Maurice Conchis, the magus of the novel.[41]

Perhaps everything on the island begins with Nicholas's disillusionment in sexual relationships after he leaves Alison for a teaching post in Greece, and his consequent visit to a brothel in Athens which results in his learning that he has caught syphilis. Although this is the first fabrication of the masque-like series of experiences that Nicholas is at the time totally unaware of, he immediately thinks of committing suicide for, he says, "I re-evaluated myself. I saw that I was from now on, for ever, contemptible. I had been, and remained, intensely depressed, but I had also been, and always would be, intensely false; in existential terms,

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[41] The novel, towards the end, refers to the meaning of the Magus as a card in the Tarot pack. The meaning of the term, moreover, is either a magician or a conjurer, hence the role of Conchis through his masque.

inauthentic" (62). However, as an obvious part of his inauthentic self,[42] which he has based on the literary representation of contemporary French existential heroes, and which Susana Onega thus calls "existentialist bad faith" ("John Fowles" 144), Nicholas's attempt at suicide, not much different from his attempt at writing poetry on Phraxos, is a fictional (artistic/inauthentic) attempt that he views only aesthetically, and which he consequently fails in. In other words, Nicholas merely imagines himself as succeeding in both writing poetry and committing suicide.

In terms of poetry, it is clear in his words that his aspiration is literary success. He says, "I dreamt more and more of literary success. I spent hours staring at the wall of my room, imagining reviews, letters written to me by celebrated fellow-poets, fame and praise and still more fame" (57). In terms of his suicide, Nicholas again imagines fame, which would come from a sensational death. He says,

> more and more it crept through my mind with the chill spring night
> that I was trying to commit not a moral action, but a fundamentally
> aesthetic one; to do something that would end my life
> sensationally, significantly, consistently. It was a Mercutio death I
> was looking for, not a real one. A death to be remembered, not the
> true death of a true suicide. (62)

Particularly analogous to the situation of Jake in Murdoch's *Under the Net* who proves that that first impressions of people and events always fail to be true since it is hard to know the world, not only does Nicholas misinterpret but he also is continuously denied the meaning of the situations he faces on Phraxos. This also suggests that the deferral of meaning is one of the main themes of *The Magus*.[43] Nicholas's first analysis of Conchis after their earlier meetings directly

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[42] This inauthenticty should also be related to his fictional identity based on the French existential heroes and anti-heroes where his inability to differentiate fiction from real life leads to the invention of an improper meaning of freedom especially observed in his relationship with women, most particularly with Alison.

[43] Although *The Magus* never displays a clear reference to Jacques Derrida's 'différance,' the sub-texts in the ordeal Nicholas goes through continuously hide the meaning from him. In other words, Nicholas's desperate attempts to read these texts definitely fail in every occasion, which recalls the

reflects on his abrupt, simplistic and sexualised way of thinking. Conchis, for Nicholas, must be either "an old queer" or "a transvestite," which leads up to a ludicrous but symbolic explanation: Nicholas

> tried to make up [his] mind about Conchis too. I was far from sure that he was not just a homosexual; . . . The old man's nervous intensity, that jerking from one place to another, one subject to another, his jaunty walk, . . . the weird flinging-up of his arms when I left – all his mannerisms suggested, were calculated to suggest, that he wanted to seem younger and more vital than he was. (90)

Nicholas's oversimplified reading of Conchis as such turns into a more developed assessment after Conchis tells him his first story about the war years. Nicholas now believes that Conchis must be someone who is not easy to describe. He seems to be impressed particularly by Conchis's way of telling, which is surprisingly similar to that of a novelist. According to Nicholas, Conchis's story of himself and his fiancée, Lily, during World War I

> was tainted by what seemed like a lack of virginity in the telling. Calculating frankness is very different from the spontaneous variety; there was some fatal extra dimension in his objectivity, which was much more that of a novelist before a character than of even the oldest, most changed man before his own real past self. It was finally much more like biography than the autobiography it purported to be; patently more concealed lesson than true confession (133)

As Nicholas begins to see that Conchis might possibly be someone who is different from what his first interpretation indicated, he concludes by quoting

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deferral of meaning in a text. Mahmoud Salami reads *The Magus* as "a perfect example of the deferment of meaning, the impossibility of reaching the center of Fowles's fiction" (74). He makes a reference to Derrida within his discussion of the Chinese-box structure of the novel.

these lines which, it can be said, imply that his failure to see Conchis truly has now began to teach him as well:

> . . . the man in the mask
>
> Manipulates. I am the fool that falls
>
> And never learns to wait and watch, (95).

Although Conchis's true identity is never revealed in the novel, he has the role of the magus who puts Nicholas into a play in which he aims at teaching him many things, and particularly the difference between reality (love and authenticity/existential freedom) and fiction (Nicholas's mistaken conceptions of love and authenticity/existential freedom). In order to do this Conchis creates a masque as a series of performances, which he calls a "godgame," into which he invites Nicholas by intentionally leaving a book open on the beach of his estate, Bourani. The page of the book displays lines from T. S. Eliot's "Little Gidding," which reads,

> We shall not cease from exploration
>
> And the end of all our exploring
>
> Will be to arrive where we started
>
> And know the place for the first time. (69)

Eliot's lines here are most probably used to refer to the nature of the circular ordeal Nicholas has just been taken into by Conchis. Although the future is not totally clear in the beginning, the end of the novel presents a rather different Nicholas back in London, who seems to have learned that he truly loves Alison.

Beginning with Nicholas's first step into Conchis's masque in which he has become the central character for whose development all of the other characters

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(including Alison through her fake suicide report that strongly proves the fictionality of everything in the masque) perform in a number of roles, Conchis's estate Bourani becomes an alternative world to Nicholas's. Therefore,

> Fowles's use of an author-persona, a godgame player . . . accomplish[es] at least three things: the relation between existential authorship and the search for authenticity is given a new dimension; the eidetic 'falsehood' of the novel as genre is lessened; and the reader is forced to participate. (Eddins 41)

This means, in other words, that Conchis sets Bourani as a minor text within the "higher" text of Fowles's *The Magus* which is also set against the "superior" text of the historical world of the readers. Therefore, throughout the novel, "It is continually indicated that Bourani, like the novel itself and Conchis's masques, is explicitly an art-world, a metaphor" (Waugh 111). Conchis's text, the masque, functions to deny Nicholas the meanings of the situations he faces during its acting. Throughout the whole novel, the masque presents a number of weird performances none of which reveals to Nicholas its genuine explanation. Furthermore, not only is Nicholas presented with these performances but he is also forced to participate in some of them.

Conchis narrates to Nicholas a number of events related to his (Conchis's) forged past. The first is the story of his relationship with his now dead fiancée, Lily Montgomery, which is actually, not different from anything related to Conchis, and therefore presenting his situation as a story-teller, a reproduction. After Conchis ends his narration, Lily, who will appear in three other different roles in the novel (as a schizophrenic under Conchis's medical treatment, as Julie Holmes the movie star playing for Conchis the producer, and as a psychiatrist Dr Vanessa Maxwell working with Conchis the psychiatrist),[44] is strangely introduced by him as someone who is neither the real Lily nor someone

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[44] Similarly, Fowles's *Mantissa* (1982) presents the female character Erato in three other different roles: as Dr Delfie, as a Japanese geisha and as a punk girl. Therefore, she complains mostly about ontological exploitation of the author-character, Miles Green.

impersonating the real Lily. This playful and paradoxical introduction forces Nicholas to confirm that it is part of a performance and hence that he should now play his own role, which is also acknowledged, yet further blurred by Lily herself who says, "We are all actors and actresses, Mr Urfe. You included" (174). This scene has been interpreted elsewhere as "the entire story of Nicholas and Alison in microcosm, . . . The masque could end here if Nicholas were able to see himself in the fiction, but he is preoccupied by the astonishing events" (Tarbox 19). As if getting unconscious of reality, Nicholas's position in this scene is significant in referring to his perplexed consciousness: "I smelt the night air, I felt the hard concrete under my feet, I touched a piece of chalk in my pocket. But a strong feeling persisted, . . . that something was trying to slip between me and reality" (120).

Another story which has been specially invented by Conchis for Nicholas is the anecdote of his experience as a mayor during the German invasion of Greece in World War II.[45] Similar to the situation in which Lily appears after Conchis has ended her story, Nicholas, in this case, finds himself in a highly effective performance of the German invasion, a performance so realistic that he cannot be sure if it is being acted or if it is real. Recalling Conchis's dead fiancée Lily's coming back life, Nicholas finds himself in front of an acting whose verisimilitude is so persuasive that he becomes completely unsure of the fictionality of the situation. Nicholas knows that he is cast as a spectator in this performance, yet the realistic details of the presentation, such as the real torture of Greek rebels by German soldiers, makes him lose his sense of time and place. He says, "I knew it was acting, but it was magnificent acting. It came out harsh as fire, more a diabolical howl than anything else, but electrifying, right from the very inmost core" (380).

It is noticeable in the novel that Nicholas, who was totally unaware of what was awaiting for him in Bourani, has now begun at least to see the existence of

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[45] Fowles devotes a whole chapter to Conchis's story of World War II. Except for a few instances of Nicholas's interruption in the story in this chapter, Conchis is the only speaker. With his sub narratives, he stands for an alternative narrator of *The Magus*.

Conchis's masque. Although this can be considered a significant step into the nature of the masque, he is still far from making healthy conclusions about it. Yet it is an important first attempt, on the part of Nicholas, to try to decipher the masque by questioning its double nature; not only is the masque a didactic narration, but also it is an aesthetic performance: "I could discern two elements in his 'game' – one didactic, the other aesthetic" (162). In other words, the masque teaches Nicholas; it gives him lessons of love and freedom, which he will partly appreciate in London where he meets Alison at the end of the novel. In addition to this, the masque is filled with miscellaneous sub-narratives which are acted out impressively by several actors and actresses to give him the impression of reading a literary text.

These qualities, for Nicholas, all lead up to the true character, if not identity, of Conchis himself. He must be an artist, more particularly a novelist, who, in contrast to the nature of a fictional work, plays with real characters instead of verbal ones. Therefore, Nicholas says, "I saw Conchis as a sort of psychiatric novelist sans novel, creating with people, not words" (242). It is Conchis who invents all of the stories and their performances in the masque just like a novelist (who does exactly the same) in a work of literary art. Conchis becomes a novelist who teaches and delights, and hence Nicholas never wants to give up the ordeal he goes through, and he is eager to go to the end, although he questions if there is an end to this ordeal. It can be argued, therefore, that

> There can be no doubt that Nicholas, for all his frustrations, loves the game. Yet, as he is aware, it all seems designed to teach him a lesson. The main problem Nicholas has throughout is trying to understand what the lesson is and how the strange happenings relate to him. (Tarbox 16)

Nicholas, however, has not answered the most important question yet. He has to discover out the reason behind the preparation and staging of the masque. He has already discovered that all of the weird experiences he has had in Bourani

signal the existence of an unusual play, yet, according to him, it is also true that "Every truth in [Conchis's] world was a sort of lie; and every lie a sort of truth" (294). Furthermore, Nicholas has anticipated that he must be a character in the masque as well. However, his greatest discovery will be that he is the protagonist in this performance, which also signals his ontological status in *The Magus*. He is a character in a "meta-theatre" where, in Conchis's words, "There is no place for limits" (406). Throughout the masque, Conchis especially shows Nicholas his mistaken understanding of freedom and authenticity by imprisoning him in a nightmare that continuously reveals itself in other forms in every single part of the complex performance. Therefore, Nicholas is taught by Conchis that the meaning of freedom and authenticity cannot be reduced to being able successfully to get rid of a woman after a certain period of relationship: "That is the God-game, as played in the novel. It rests on the notion that a man can teach another man to be free by playing god to him and then revealing that he is not a god, that there is no god and that each man must be his own god" (Fleishman 79).

Besides Conchis, one of his characters in the masque – and, of course, one of Fowles's characters in *The Magus* as well – Julie, shows Nicholas his false conception of love, which has been reduced by him to mere sexual relationships, as he unconsciously betrays when he says, "all games, even the most literal, between a man and a woman are implicitly sexual" (202). She does this by constantly creating a comparison between herself and Alison. Nicholas, who has already left Alison due to his mistaken notion of existential freedom, foolishly falls in love with Julie, who successfully plays the role of an innocent maiden in the masque. Julie's well-managed play with Nicholas, which obviously includes, first of all, her physical attraction, and then her charm, her constant disappearance at the right moment, and her keeping herself away from him, makes him idolise her in terms of feminine beauty and chastity. Peter Wolfe makes the same comparison only adding that

> Alison's biddability and open, loving nature hurt her chances with Urfe by making her too easily available. Perhaps the true tension does not reside between presence and absence, but between Being and Nonbeing. Perhaps Urfe downgrades Alison's love, not because it comes easily, but because it comes at all. (91)

Peter Wolfe further states that "The familiar is not usually fine or beautiful to us; we crave the forbidden, the new, the unexplored" (91), which Julie successfully pretends to be. At the end of this play-in-a-play, however, another scene, in which Julie makes love to a man in front of the live spectators including Nicholas, shockingly takes him to the reality that both Alison and Julie have been no more than parts of his own misperceptions.

Nicholas's trial, therefore, ends with an unexpected, yet highly significant confession in which he questions his own past:

> what was I after all? Near enough what Conchis had had me told: nothing but the net sum of countless wrong turnings. . . . but all my life I had tried to turn life into fiction, to hold reality away; always I had acted as if a third person was watching and listening and giving me marks for good or bad behaviour – a god like a novelist, to whom I turned, like a character. (539)

Nicholas's inauthenticity as a person, therefore, can be related to his continuous misunderstanding of himself as a man who wrongfully assumes the role of the existential hero in 1960s French fiction. It can be maintained that "To be inauthentic in Fowles's terms is effectively to misunderstand art; in *The Magus* awareness of self and awareness of text are made inseparable" (Cooper 61).

During one of their earlier meetings, Conchis tells Nicholas how he has burnt all of the novels he had since he believes that the novel is a dead genre. This scene recalls the academic discussions of the future of the novel during the postwar period in Britain and the United States, which is also dealt with in the

first chapter of this thesis. This scene, where Conchis says, "'The novel is dead. As dead as alchemy. . . . I burnt every novel I possessed. Dickens. Cervantes. Dostoievsky. Flaubert. All the great and all the small" (96), can be considered Fowles's reply to the contemporary discussions about the future of the novel. In other words, *The Magus* can be read as the response of a novelist who had never believed that the novel genre had come to an end. *The Magus*, besides all the other qualities it has, is a display of Fowles's art of narration.

Fowles's method, furthermore, makes the reader become conscious of two novelists at the same time. It is noticeable that Fowles's experience with the novel genre in *The Magus* first manifests itself in the realistic characterisation of his surrogate novelist, Conchis, who is actually Fowles in disguise; therefore, the masque he has "written" is the actual novel, *The Magus* in disguise, which also means that the true magus as a novelist is Fowles himself instead of Conchis who is only a surrogate author in the novel. As a magician, Fowles conjures a novel which includes tradition and innovation at the same time. *The Magus*, very conventionally, begins as a Bildungsroman which would focus on the personal development of its protagonist Nicholas Urfe. The novel, moreover, includes a number of references to common contemporary existentialist questions in the early stages of Nicholas's portrayal together with a number of instances of very detailed descriptions of the outside world. The difference it establishes, however, comes from the very nature of the novelist himself. *The Magus* is a novel where Fowles continuously refers to his situation as an artist – a god – who creates his own world.

4.4 Conclusion

Fowles's analysed novels display a combination of the novelist's contemporary social and aesthetic concerns. His protagonists are both the conventional products of their time and the very means by which Fowles himself

questions the ontological positions of not only these characters but also himself as a novelist. Therefore, Fowles has been either placed in the traditional realist or in the avant-garde postmodernist canon by the critics, none of which is truly conclusive. Fowles novels are both traditional and experimental works in which he consciously makes use of fictional and metafictional, traditional and innovative elements. Fowles creates "real" characters whose reality is constantly foregrounded in the novels no matter how unreal (overtly fictional) the situations they are in. This quality can be observed in *The Collector*, but it is more obvious in *The Magus*, a novel mostly criticised for the excessive absurdity of the situations it puts its protagonist in. However, Fowles aim is to draw the reader's attention to the limits of the fictional world he creates as a novelist-god. Furthermore, Fowles's existential philosophy contributes to his portrayal of real characters in both of the novels studied. His protagonists, not only Nicolas, whose existential misunderstanding of his own personality helps lure him into the masque in *The Magus: A Revised Version*, but also Frederick and Miranda in *The Collector*, are forced to look inward by a novelist, teacher or magus figure. These existential characteristics are enforced in both of the novels by the characters' self-discovery of their true identities. This is mostly valid for Miranda, who, if she continued to live would be a true existentialist heroine, and for Nicolas whose trial ends with his discovery of his own identity.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This study has focused on British literature in the postwar period – the period historically known from the end of the Second World War in 1945 to the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989. What specially triggered this study of British postwar fiction were the records of earlier mainstream critical reception in Britain of a postwar British novelist, Iris Murdoch, when she published her *Under the Net* in 1954. Critics' assessment of Murdoch as an Angry Young Man who was supposed to be writing in the social realist mode of '50s Britain seems academically inappropriate in retrospect. When one goes deeper into the mechanisms of '50s and '60s literary criticism, this study has argued, it becomes clear that the first critical recognitions of Muriel Spark and John Fowles were not different from those of Murdoch either. The first published novels of these writers, Spark's *The Comforters* (1957) and Fowles's *The Collector* (1963), were indeed first seen as social realist novels.

The first part of the introduction chapter of this study primarily demonstrated that this critical peculiarity was mostly due to the fact that mainstream literary criticism in postwar Britain had been carefully establishing a special dichotomy between what were strictly defined as the traditionalist and experimentalist novels of the period. Any novel published at that time in Britain, in other words, had to be either a conventional realist or an innovative modernist work of literature in order to be accepted into the canon. Besides the introduction of such a clear-cut dichotomy among the works of the postwar novelists, it has further been asserted that these literary critics noticeably privileged and encouraged the postwar traditionalist works – the neorealist novels of Kingsley Amis, C. P. Snow, John Wain and Angus Wilson – over the innovative mode of fictional writing – that would particularly follow the technique and style of James

Joyce and Virginia Woolf. One of the aims of this study, consequently, has been first to display the shortcomings of the ideology of the mainstream literary criticism in postwar Britain that established an unreliable classification among the novelists.

Inconsistent with such an austere categorisation among the postwar critics in terms of their tradition-innovation dichotomy, this study has illustrated as its main argument the existence of other British postwar novelists whose works deliberately included the characteristics of both realist convention and modernist innovation in literature, and thus coinciding the postmodern aesthetics of the late twentieth century. Murdoch, Spark and Fowles, it has been suggested, can be considered among these novelists. Instead of limiting their works either to tradition or to innovation, these novelists made a synthesis of both aesthetic realms. Their notion of literary realism, which was in clear contrast to what had been defined as traditional realist by the mainstream literary criticism, allowed these novelists to include the problem of representation in literature as part of their novelistic subject matter.

It was further explained in the second part of the introduction that the mainstream critical tendency began to change in the final decades of the twentieth century through the appearance of different critical perspectives on British postwar fiction. This critical modification in Britain, it has been argued, became noticeable in the works of a number of literary critics, including Ronald Hayman, Jago Morrison and Richard Bradford, who acknowledged that the postwar British fiction could not be reduced to a single dichotomy as many other modes of fictional writing were observable in the period. Besides these literary critics whose works appeared after the end of the 1970s, moreover, many other scholars such as Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer, who had actually advocated the infamous dichotomy of the 1950s and '60s, redesigned their ideas and adopted the new critical view.

This change in critical perspective on British postwar fiction that has been illustrated in this study, has become particularly recognisable in the interpretations

of Amy J. Elias, John Barth and David Lodge who have suggested that the postwar mainstream critical cataloguing was misleading since it has never been easy to distinguish between the literary works in terms of traditionalism and experimentalism. There have been, these critics have argued, many examples of British and American fiction that seem both more innovative than traditionalist and more traditionalist than innovative literary works. In other words, these critics have pointed to the emergence of a new kind of fiction that is neither traditionalist, nor experimentalist, nor anti-experimentalist in the postwar period in Britain. The novels of Murdoch, Spark and Fowles, this study has suggested, belong to such a critical perspective as postrealist works.

When Murdoch, Spark and Fowles published their first novels in the years between 1954 and 1963, they were presented to academia as traditionalist, social realist novelists in accordance with mainstream critical direction. However, these novelists were questioning traditional realist conventions in literature in their first published works for their own purposes. Murdoch was a Platonist who was particularly challenging the conventional concepts of mimesis and mimetic representation in literature. The same concepts of realist literature, for Spark, were the patterns that she found in clear contrast to her Catholic belief, which she represented in terms of the mimesis of creation. Fowles, similarly, was dealing with the problem with contemporary social realist novels that would bring about in the postwar years the demise of the novel thesis. These qualities, this study has shown, are also applicable to the other later novels by these novelists analysed in this study. Murdoch had continued, throughout her oeuvre, to challenge the traditional concept of mimesis in the characterisations of her artist-protagonists. Spark even modified her Catholic concerns into a celebration of the position of the artist. Fowles, through what can be called an experimental game, underlined his position as the novelist who can be a god who creates, which has contributed to his later classification within the postmodern canon.

This study has revealed that the canonical interpretations of the novelists who were publishing in postwar Britain had to be formed according to a classification between the traditionalist and the experimentalist works. Let alone

modernist experiment, the term realist tradition, however, has always been debatable in literary criticism. Even the work of one of the most celebrated "realist" novelists in English literature, George Eliot, recent studies have demonstrated, includes the writer's references to the problem of representation in traditional realist literature in a self-reflexive fashion. Therefore, the future studies in terms of either postwar British fiction or, more generally, realist tradition in literature – or even in film studies – might be in one way or other related to how the writer himself or herself individually interprets traditionalism in his or her own terms since realism has always been a multi-faceted phrase in literature. Related to this, the concept of innovation in writing, future studies might demonstrate, is to be related to how the idea of experimentalism operates for the writer. Furthermore, having shown that the simple binary distinction between traditional form of realism and fully developed postmodernism does not work in the studied novels either, more work on this issue can be conducted.

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APPENDIX B

TURKISH SUMMARY

Giriş

İkinci Dünya Savaşı sonrası İngiliz edebiyat eleştirisinin en belirgin özelliği, bu dönemde – özellikle de savaşın sona erişini takip eden ilk yirmi yıl boyunca – eserlerini yayımlamaya başlayan romancıları, kendi oluşturduğu ve titizlikle de devamını sağlamaya çalıştığı yapay bir sınıflandırma içerisine almaya çalışmasıdır. Bu sınıflandırmanın en dikkat çekici özelliği ise, dönemin İngiliz romancılarını, gelenekselci ve yenilikçi olarak – aslında modernismin deneyselliği karşısında geleneksel gerçekçiliği savunarak – belirgin bir şekilde ikiye ayırıp, sürekli olarak gelenekselci ve gerçekçi olarak nitelendirdiği yazarları ön planda tutmasıdır.

Böyle bir durumun devamını sağlayan en önemli etken, bu dönemin önde gelen edebiyat eleştirmenlerinin (Rubin Rabinovitz, David Lodge ve Bernard Bergonzi gibi) kendi eleştiri kitaplarında, savaş sonrası İngiltere ve İngiliz toplumunu, yirminci yüzyılın başlarına rastlayan modernist edebiyat akımı karşıtı olarak göstermekle kalmayıp, bir yüzyıl öncesinin gerçekçi edebiyat geleneği ve yaşam tarzını da tekrar etmek ister göstermeleridir. Bunun yanı sıra, C. P. Snow, Angus Wilson ve Kingsley Amis gibi yine bu dönemin en çok tanınan gelenekselci romancıları da, söyleşi, mektup ve makale benzeri çeşitli yollar aracılığı ile kendi yenilikçi ve modernizm karşıtı görüşlerini bildirmekten geri durmamışlardır. Bu tutumun, her ne kadar 1950'ler ve '60'lardaki geçerliliğini kaybetse de, günümüzde dahi etkisini tam olarak yitirmediği, 2006 yılı gibi son derece yakın bir zamanda yayımlanmış ve aynı görüşleri içeren, Brian W. Shaffer'a ait bir eleştiri kitabının varlığı ile kanıtlanabilir.

Savaş sonrası dönemin geleneksel gerçekçi roman arayışı, bu romancıların İngiltere'de "Movement" adı altında anılmaya başlamasına da sebep olmuştur. Neredeyse dönemin bütün eleştiri kitaplarında, haftalık bir edebiyat dergisi yönetmeni tarafından ortaya konulan bu isim kullanılmıştır. Günümüzün özellikle de postmodern edebiyat eleştirisi, savaş sonrası dönemdeki bu tür gelişmeleri, eleştirinin o dönemde artık tıkanmış – ve hatta donmuş – bir durumda oluşuna bağlamaktadır (Hutcheon). Dönemin gerçekçi yazarlarına atfedilen "Movement" tanımlaması ise, bazen bu kavramın kendi içerisinde değerlendirmeye çalıştığı yazarlardan bazıları tarafından bile kabul edilmemiştir (örneğin Larkin, Gunn, Enright ve Jennings).

Sadece dönemin gerçekçi romancıları üzerine odaklanan bütün bu yaklaşımlar, 1950 ve '60'larda ortaya atılan ve etkili de olan roman türünün artık son bulduğu tezinin oldukça güçlenmesine sebep olmuştur. Daha önce kendilerinden bahsedilen edebiyat eleştirmenlerinden bazıları bile, içerisinde bulundukları dönemde yazılan geleneksel gerçekçi romanların, eskiye dönüşten başka bir anlam ifade etmediğini kabul etmişlerdir. Özellikle de Ian Watt, bu dönemin kabul gören gerçekçi romanlarının, roman türünün özünde yer alan "yenilik" kavramından yoksun olduğunu belirtmiştir. Bütün bunlara ek olarak, Philip Toynbee ve Cyrill V. Connolly gibi yazar ve eleştirmenler de, roman türünün James, Proust ve Joyce gibi modernist yazarlar ile birlikte yok olduğuna, bu nedenle de savaş sonrası dönemin romancılarının, bu edebiyat türünü yeniden yaratmak zorunda olduklarına inanmışlardır.

Her ne kadar eleştirel vurgu sürekli olarak geleneksel gerçekçi romancılar üzerinde ise de, bahsedilen dönemde B. S. Johnson ve Eva Figes gibi modernist yenilikçiliğe ilgi duyan, romanlarını 1920'lerin İngiliz romanı doğrultusunda yazan romancılar da vardır. Fakat, bu romancıların süregelen olaylara tepkisi de kendi yazım türlerini savunmak dışında fazla bir şey olmamıştır. Özellikle de Figes, yazınsal deneyselciliği ileri boyutlara taşımış, dünyayı da bir metin olarak algılamıştır. Bu nedenle de, dönemin en önemli eksikliklerinden bir tanesi de "avant-garde" edebiyat anlayışının yokluğu olarak kabul edilmiştir.

Bütün bu olumsuz gelişmelere rağmen, bu çalışmanın hedefi, Iris Murdoch, Muriel Spark ve John Fowles'ın, savaş sonrası dönemde yokluğu büyük ölçüde hissedilen "avant-garde" roman türünün yeni temsilcileri olduğunu ortaya koymaktır. Bu romancılar, ne geleneksel gerçekçi akım doğrultusunda bir yüzyıl öncesinin roman anlayışını benimsemişler, ne de eserlerinde ileri derecede deneysel özellikler sergilemişlerdir. Bu romancıların en belirgin özelliği, sonradan postmodern romanın belli başlı özelliklerinden biri haline gelecek olan, edebi metinlerde betimleme sorununu, romanlarında işledikleri konunun bir parçası haline getirerek, yani kendi romanlarının kurgusal yapısını da öne çıkararak, geleneksel gerçekçiliği yeniden kavramsallaştırmaları olmuştur.

Aslında 1970'lerden itibaren, daha önce bahsettiğimiz sınırlayıcı ve sınıflandırıcı edebiyat eleştirisi sorgulanmaya başlamış, bir dönem etkili olan geleneksel-yenilikçi ayrımının, eleştiride artık etkili olamayacağı görüşü öne sürülmüştür. Tam da bu dönemde İngiliz Edebiyatı'nda belirginleşmeye başlayan postmodern kuramlar, gelenekselci edebiyat eleştirmenlerinin dikkatini Murdoch, Spark ve Fowles gibi romancıların eserlerinde ortaya konan sıradışı özelliklere çekmiş olmalıdır. Bu yazarlar, romanlarının kurgusal yapısına da okuyucunun dikkatini çekmiş, betimledikleri kişiler ve olaylar kadar, metinlerinin gerçek durumunu da ortaya koymuşlardır. Bu nedenle de, geleneksel gerçekçi edebiyatın bir ürünü olan, doğal ve sorunsuz bir "mimesis," yani betimleme anlayışını, birer romancı olarak bu konudaki duyarlılıklarını açıkça ortaya koyarak, yeniden yorumlamışlardır. Bu durum ise, günümüzün postmodern edebiyat eleştirisi ile bir paralellik ortaya koymaktadır. Postmodernismin, geleneksel gerçekçiliğin varsayılan şeffaflığını, modernizmin ise metinsel ve kurgusala odaklanan bakış açısını sorgulaması (Hutcheon), Murdoch, Spark ve Fowles'ın roman anlayışı ile benzerlik göstermektedir.

Savaş sonrası İngiliz Romanı ve özellikle de bu çalışmada eserleri incelenen bu üç romancı hakkında günümüzde geçerli olması gereken anlayış ise, bu romancıların alışılagelidik sınıflandırmalar dışında yer aldığı, eserlerinin hem geleneksel gerçekçi, hem de yenilikçi modernist ve postmodernist unsurları birarada içerdiği gerçeğidir. Bu görüşü destekleyen en önemli çalışmalar ise, Elias

ve Amerika'lı romancı ve eleştirmen Barth tarafından ortaya konmuştur. Bu eleştirmenler, Murdoch, Spark ve Fowles'ın romanlarını özel bir şekilde sınıflandırmanın güçlüğünden, bu yazarların eserlerinin geleneksel fakat daha yenilikçi, yenilikçi fakat daha geleneksel gibi kendilerine özgü bir ayırdedici – aynı zamanda da tanımlamayı zorlaştırıcı – özelliğe sahip olduğundan bahsetmektedir. Sonuç olarak, bu çalışmanın temel amacı, her ne kadar Murdoch, Spark ve Fowles özellikle de erken dönemlerinde geleneksel gerçekçi romancılar olarak tanımlanmışlar ise de, bu yazarların ne "gelenek" ne de "yenilik" anlayışları, dönemin esas kabul gören edebiyat eleştirisi anlayışı ile örtüşmektedir.

Iris Murdoch

Murdoch'un George Eliot'a olan ilgisi de, geleneksel gerçekçi sınıflandırması içerisine dahil edilmesinde önemli oranda etkili olmuştur. Fakat, Murdoch'ın Eliot ilgisi ve modernist edebiyat eleştirisi, onu hiçbir zaman dönemin yeni gerçekçi romancıları arasına yerleştirmeye yetmemelidir. Aslında Murdoch, gerçekçi akımın geleneksel betimleme (mimesis) anlayışına karşı çıkan Platoncu bir düşünür ve romancıdır. Murdoch'a göre sanat, taklitçi olduğu ölçüde işe yaramazdır. Bu görüşün temeli ise, Platon'un sanatı, "doğru"nun kopyasının kopyası olarak nitelendirmiş olmasıdır. Dolayısı ile Murdoch'ın romanları, gerçekçi edebiyatta geleneksel betimleme anlayışının sorgulandığı eserler olmuştur.

Murdoch'ın romanlarının temel konusu, evrenin insan – ya da sanatçı – tarafından anlaşılması ve betimlenmesinin zorluğudur. Bu nedenle Murdoch, aslında Platon'un etkisi ile, insan yaşamını, gerçeği bulmak üzere çıkılmış bir kutsal yolculuğa benzetmektedir. İlk yayımladığı romanı *Under the Net*'te de, Murdoch'ın ana kahramanı Jake, tıpkı Platon'un mağara tasvirini andıran karanlık bir tiyatro salonu sahnesi ile, sonunda en azından doğrunun bir bölümüne ulaşacağı yolculuğuna başlar. Jake'in tasvirinin en dikkat çekici özelliği ise, bütün

bir roman boyunca, insanlar ve olaylar hakkında yaptığı değerlendirme ve ulaştığı sonuçların yanlış olmasıdır. Adeta bütün bir roman, Jake'in yaptığı yanlış değerlendirmelere adanmıştır.

Under the Net'te Murdoch, daha sonra da göreceğimiz gibi, geleneksel bir kurgulama yöntemi izlemektedir. Kahramanlarını ve olayları tasviri, yer ve zaman ilişkileri ve tarihsel vurgular tam olarak geleneksel gerçekçi edebiyat doğrultusundadır. Bununla beraber, Jake ile etrafında gelişen olaylar, Murdoch'ın edebi betimleme anlayışını takip etmektedir. Jake'in içerisinde bulunduğu bir yanlış değerlendirmeler zinciri, kendisinin kişiler ve olaylar hakkındaki gerçeğe ulaşmasını sürekli olarak engellemektedir. Romanın sonlarına doğru yazmayı başarabildiği kitabı dahi, kendisi ve Hugo arasında geçmiş olan gerçek konuşmaların sonradan bozulmuş bir kopyasından meydana gelmiştir. Platon'un ortaya koyduğu aslından uzak olan bu evrende, Jake'in yapması gereken de budur.

Murdoch'ın 1973 yılında yayımladığı *The Black Prince* de, hem doğruyu arayan hem de bu doğruyu kendi yazdığı bir roman aracılığı ile anlatmaya çalışan yazar bir kahramandan bahsetmektedir. Murdoch'ın söylemek istediği ise, yine Platoncu bir düşünür ve romancı olarak, geleneksel gerçekçi edebiyatın böyle bir amacı gerçekleştiremeyeceğidir. Evreni doğru olarak algılaması zaten imkansız olan sanatçının, bunu metinsel bir yolla başkalarına anlatması da olası değildir. Platon'a göre, edebi betimleme doğrunun kendisinden epeyce uzaktadır. Bu nedenle de Murdoch'ın kahramanı, aslında sanatın tek doğru olduğuna inanan Bradley, yazdığı romanın doğru ile olan ilişkisine kendisi de kuşkulu yaklaşan bir yazar olarak tarif edilmektedir. Fakat, günümüzün postmodern düşüncesi de doğrunun tarifinin zorluğundan ve mutlak bir doğru yerine doğruların varlığından bahsetmektedir.

The Black Prince, Murdoch'ın eserleri arasında en deneysel romanı olarak kabul edilmiştir (Dipple ve Nicol). Bu yoruma sebep olan başlıca etken ise, romanın sahip olduğu, günümüzün kendi kurgusal yapılarını öne çıkaran postmodern metinlerine olan benzerliğinde yatmaktadır. Fakat Murdoch'ın amacı, geleneksel roman yazım sürecini okuyucuya tarafsız olarak sunarak, romanda

kullandığı anlatıcının da doğruyu sorunsuz olarak okuyucuya aktarabilecek durumda olmadığını göstermektedir. Bunun yanı sıra, Murdoch'ın romanı, ana kahraman Bradley'nin kendi romanına yazdığı önsöz ve sonsöz dışında, diğer kahramanların yine Bradley'nin romanı için yazdıkları metinlerden oluşmaktadır. Böylece de, roman boyunca duyulan Bradley'nin anlatımı, bu metinlerle karşılaştırılıp, güvenilirliği sorgulanmaktadır. Bu metinsel vurgulama, romanın kendi kurgusal durumuna okuyucunun dikkatini çekmektedir. Çünkü hiçbir anlatım, kurgusal anlamda da olsa, mutlak doğru değildir. Üstelik Bradley'nin yaşamında ortaya çıkan üç ana değişiklik, kendi romanı üzerine de etki ediyor olmalıdır.

Muriel Spark

Muriel Spark'ın Katolik'liği benimsemesi ve hemen ardından da ilk romanını yayımlaması, kendisinin Katolik Romancılar arasına dahil edilmesine yol açmıştır. Aslında zaman içerisinde Katolik unsurları konu etmekten oldukça uzaklaşan romanları da, Roma Katolik inancını temsil eden edebi eserler olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Spark'ın romanları dışında yayımladığı yazılarında belirttiği gibi, ilk romanı ile yazarın 1950'lerdeki gerçek durumu arasında büyük benzerlikler vardır. Bu nedenle de, ilk romanının esas olarak kendi Katolik inancını anlatan, yazarın o dönemdeki tecrübelerine göndermelerde bulunan bir yapıt olduğu kabul edilmiştir.

Fakat özellikle de geçtiğimiz yüzyılın ikinci yarısından sonra, Spark ve Katoliklik sınıflandırılması sorgulanmaya başlamış, Katoliklik inancı ile ilgili konular da dahil romanlarında yer alan eleştirel unsurlar üzerinde durulmuştur. Bunlara ek olarak, Katolik romancı kavramı da genel olarak sorgulanmış, bunun da 1950'lerin eleştiri anlayışının bir sonucu olduğu vurgulanmıştır. Aslında Spark'ın ilk romanında ortaya koymak istediği düşünce Katolik odaklı olmaktan çok, kendisinin de bir romancı olarak yaratma yetenegine sahip olduğudur. Fakat

Spark'ın asıl endişesi, hem bir Katolik olarak Tanrı'ya bağlılığını ifade ediyor olması, hem de bir romancı olarak kendi evreni ve kişilerini yaratıyor olmasıdır.

Spark'ın *The Comforters*'da özellikle altını çizmek istediği, romanın gerçek kurgusal yapısıdır. Bu kurgusal yapı bütün bir roman boyunca ortaya konursa, yani romanın aslında gerçek olmadığı okuyucuya açık bir biçimde verilirse, kendi Katolik inancı ile ters düşecek herhangi bir şey kalmayacağını düşünmektedir. Bu yüzden de, Spark'ın yayımladığı ilk romanı, sürekli olarak kendisinin bir kurgu olduğunu, kahramanlarının ise bir yazar-tanrı tarafından yaratılan kurgusal kişiler olduğunu göstermektedir. Spark'ın ana kahramanı Caroline, sadece kendisinin duyduğu, düşüncelerini okuyabilen, diğer kahramanlar hakkında da doğru yorumlar yapabilen sesler/kelimeler/cümlelerden şikayetçidir. Romanın sonuna doğru, bu seslerin, kendisini de bir kahraman olarak romanda yazmakta olan yazara ait olduğunu anlamaktadır.

Spark'ın ilk romanında belirgin olarak gözlemlenen kaygı, *Loitering with Intent* ile tamamen ortadan kalkmıştır. Romanının kurgusal yapısını belirtmek zorunda olan ana kahraman Caroline, artık bu gerçeği tek doğru kabul edip, bununla mutlu olan Fleur olmuştur. Böylelikle de Spark'ın erken dönem eserlerinde belirgin olan Katoliklik vurgusu da yok olmuştur. Bu romanın da ısrarla altını çizdiği özelliği, kurgusal yapısına olan vurgudur. İçerisindeki kahramanlar, sadece bu romana özgü, bu roman ile birlikte hayatlarını sürdürebilen varlıklardır. Bunun da ötesinde, bazı kahramanlar ise yine bu roman içerisinde başka bir romanın kahramanlarıdır. Fakat Spark'a göre olması gereken de budur. Bir romancının "doğru" kavramı kendi romanının doğruluğundan, yani onun kurgusal yapısından ibarettir.

John Fowles

John Fowles'ın ilk dönemleri, özellikle de yayımladığı ilk romanı, daha sonra yazar için önemini kaybedecek olan varoluşçuluk akımının izlerini

taşımaktadır. Aslında Fowles, varoluşçuluk etkisi altında, Heraklitos'in "azınlık" ve "çoğunluk" kavramlarını işlemiştir. Buna sebep olan en önemli etken ise, dönemin yeni gerçekçi romanlarında yer alan ve Fowles'a göre de çoğunluk kavramını öne çıkaran kahraman tiplemesidir. Bu tür kahramanlar ise zaten savaş yorgunu İngiliz toplumu için olumlu bir gelişme değildir.

Fowles'ın ilk yayımlanan romanı *The Collector*, öncelikle yazarın vurguladığı azınlık ve çoğunluk arasındaki çekişmenin edebi bir betimlemesidir. Yazarın kahramanları Frederick ve Miranda, parçası oldukları bu iki grubun birer temsilcisidir. Frederick anne ve babasını kaybetmiş, yakınları tarafından büyütülmüş, yeterli eğitimi alamamış bir alt orta sınıf üyesidir. Miranda ise, Frederick'e göre oldukça daha iyi bir konumda olan bir sanat öğrencisidir. Roman, yazarın varoluşçu görüşleri doğrultusunda, bu iki kahraman arasında yer alan ve Miranda'nın ölümü ile sonuçlanan savaştan bahseder.

The Collector'ın sahip olduğu bir diğer özellik ise, tıpkı Murdoch'ın *The Black Prince*'inde olduğu gibi, birden çok anlatıcıya sahip olmasıdır. Böylelikle de Fowles, asıl anlatıcı olan ve geleneksel gerçekçi edebiyatta da böyle kabul edilen ana kahramanı Frederick'in hikayesinin doğruluğunun, okuyucu tarafından sorgulanmasına sebep olmaktadır. Roman kendi kurgusal yapısı yanı sıra, kahramanlarının da yine yazar tarafından kurgulanmış kelimelerden ibaret olan varlıklar olduğuna dikkat çekmektedir.

The Magus: A Revised Version'da ise, yine varoluşçu görüşlerinin doğrultusunda, romanın sonunda kendisi hakkındaki gerçeği bulmaya oldukça yaklaşan, en azından bugüne kadar olan yanlışlarını görebilen bir kahraman ve bu kahraman için özel olarak hazırlanan bir oyundan bahsedilir. Aslında bu oyun ve bu oyunu sahneye koyan kahraman, Fowles'ın bir romancı olarak kendi durumunun altını çizmesidir. Roman, içerisinde inanılması güç olaylar da içeren bir hikayeler zinciridir. Böylelikle okuyucunun ilgisi romanın asıl özelliğine, yani bir romancı tarafından oluşturulan kurgusal yapısına çekilmektedir.

Sonuç

Bu çalışma, İkinci Dünya Savaşı sonrası İngiliz romanı üzerine yoğunlaşmıştır. Özellikle de Iris Murdoch'ın, ilk romanı *Under the Net*'in yayımlanmasından sonra sosyal gerçekçi bir yazar olarak tanıtılması, bu çalışmanın başlangıç sebeplerinden biri olmuştur. Bu dönemin edebiyat eleştirisi hakkında daha da derine inildikçe, Muriel Spark ve John Fowles'ın ilk yayımlanan romanlarının da aynı şekilde değerlendirildiği görülmüştür. Fakat bu şekilde bir sınıflandırmanın geçersizliği, bu üç yazarın da romanlarında aslında çok daha farklı bir yol denemiş olmalarından, geleneksel gerçekçi unsurlarla yenilikçi ve deneysel özellikleri – yani gerçekçi hikayeler anlatan eserlerinin kurgusal yapısına da okuyucunun dikkatini çekmeleri – bir arada bulundurmuş olmalarından kaynaklandığı ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu nedenle de, bu romancıların, edebiyatta gerçekçilik kavramını, "mimesis" anlayışının geleneksel yorumu dışına çıkarak – anlattıkları hikayeler kadar, bu hikayelerin metinsel boyutunu da öne çıkararak – yeniden kavramsallaştırdıkları görülmüştür. Murdoch'ın Platoncu, Spark'ın Katolik ve Fowles'ın da varoluşçu kaygılarının, bu yazarların böyle bir yeniden kavramsallaştırma yoluna gitmelerinde etkili olduğu da anlaşılmıştır.