AN ANALYSIS OF THE TEXTUAL INDETERMINACIES IN IRIS MURDOCH'S *THE UNICORN* AND *THE SEA, THE SEA*

SOHEILA FARHANI NEJAD

UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

2019

AN ANALYSIS OF THE TEXTUAL INDETERMINACIES IN IRIS MURDOCH'S *THE UNICORN* AND *THE SEA, THE SEA*

by

SOHEILA FARHANI NEJAD

Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

July 2019

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank the members of the committee for their advice in preparation of this study and the time they devoted to the reading of this thesis. In addition, I am grateful to Dr. Muhammad Rashidi for reading the manuscript and offering his helpful suggestions. A very special thank you to Dr. Simon Peter Hull who over the course of two years inspired my thinking and made me feel that my devotion to literary studies and my love of literature can make a big difference. This dissertation could not have been realized without his encouragement and thoughtful critical appreciation. I also wish to express my gratitude to my beloved sisters who have always supported me and were there for me when I needed them most. And finally, I am indebted to my amazing friends for introducing me to joy and laughter.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT ii

TABLE OF CONTENTS iii

LIST OF FIGURES vi

ABSTRAK vii

ABSTRACT ix

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview 1

1.2 Statement of the Problem 9

1.3 Objectives of the Study 13

1.4 Significance of the Study 15

1.5 Scope and Limitations 17

1.6 Definition of Key Terms 19

1.7 Organization of the Study 25

CHAPTER 2 - REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction 28

2.2 Form and Characterization 29

2.3 Fabulation 37

2.4 Literary Conventions and Textual Strategies 41

2.5 Murdoch's Fiction and Reader Response 49

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Methodology 53

3.2 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework 57

3.2.1 Reception Theory 59
3.2.2 Iser: Aesthetic Response 63
3.2.3 The Reader 74
3.2.4 Literary Competence 78
3.2.5 Intertextuality and Parody 81
3.2.6 Gothic and Gender Stereotypes 87

CHAPTER 4 - ANALYSIS OF *THE UNICORN*

4.1 Introduction 93
4.2 Gaps 94
4.3 Narrative Structure 102
4.2 Generic Conventions And Parody in *The Unicorn* 108
4.2.1 *The Unicorn* as Chivalric Romance 112
4.2.2 *The Unicorn* as Fairy tale 119
4.3 Symbolism in *The Unicorn* 125
4.4 Gothic and Gender Stereotypes in *The Unicorn* 136

CHAPTER 5 - ANALYSIS OF *THE SEA, THE SEA*

5.1 Introduction 144
5.2 Interplay of Perspectives and Irony 145
5.3 Textual Repertoire: Intertextuality and Metafiction 151
5.3.1 The Myth of Perseus 154
5.3.2 The Fall of Icarus 157
5.3.3 Prospero 160
5.3.4 The Allegory of Cave 162
5.3.5 Narcissus and Peter Pan 165
5.4 Gothic Conventions: Gender Stereotypes and the Supernatural 176

CHAPTER 6 - IMLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Conclusion 195

6.2 Recommendations for Further Study 206

WORKS CITED 208

LIST OF FIGURES

		Page
Figure 3.1	Theoretical and conceptual framework.	58

ANALISIS KETIDAKTENTUAN TEKS DALAM "*THE UNICORN*" DAN "*THE SEA, THE SEA*" OLEH IRIS MURDOCH

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan mengkaji cara makna dapat dihasilkan dalam dua buah novel oleh Iris Murdoch, iaitu "The Unicorn" dan "The Sea, The Sea", dengan menekankan keperluan adanya interaksi antara pembaca dengan teks dalam proses pembacaan. Pendekatan teori utama yang akan digunakan dalam novel-novel ini ialah teori strukturalisme dan teori tindak balas pembaca, terutama konsep "tindak balas estetik" dan "kecekapan kesusasteraan" yang dicipta oleh Iser dan Culler. Hal ini termasuklah kajian terhadap fungsi ketidaktentuan tekstual serta pelbagai perspektif dalam novel-novel ini. Ini akan membuktikan bahawa keupayaan pembaca untuk menyusun semula dan menganalisis struktur teks dari segi "repertoir" dan "strategi" dapat memudahkan pembaca untuk memahami pelbagai perspektif dan ketidaktentuan dalam teks. Selain itu, analisis terhadap keupayaan pembaca untuk "menaturalisasikan" unsur-unsur tekstual yang berbeza dapat membantu mewujudkan fungsi "kecekapan kesusasteraan" dalam tindak balas pembaca terhadap novel-novel ini. Sehubungan dengan itu, tesis ini diharap merapatkan jurang dalam tindak balas kritikal terhadap karya fiksyen Murdoch dengan membuktikan bahawa gabungan beberapa konvensi dan strategi kesusasteraan tertentu dalam setiap novel serta "kecekapan kesusasteraan" pembaca dapat menyumbang kepada "pencapaian" makna. Sebab utama di sebalik pemilihan dua buah novel ini adalah cara novel-novel ini dikategorikan oleh pengkritik. Kedua-dua novel ini mencerminkan kesukaran dalam hal mengkategorikan amalan penulisan karya fiksyen Murdoch. Novel "The Unicorn" adalah novel misteri dan sensasi "Gothic", manakala novel "The Sea, The Sea" adalah

novel autobiografi mengenai keinginan pencerita untuk memahami dirinya secara lebih mendalam. Ciri-ciri "Gothic" dalam "The Unicorn" dicerminkan melalui suasananya yang menyeramkan dan peristiwa yang menggemparkan seperti keganasan, serta penggandaan dan pengulangan pola plot. Novel ini mengisahkan seorang watak wanita, Hannah, yang terperangkap di bawah kuasa penjahat lelaki yang manipulatif, di sebuah rumah agam berkonsepkan Gothik. Namun demikian, ketidaktentuan dalam ciri watak Hannah dipersembahkan mewujudkan pentafsiran yang berbeza tentang hubungan antara mangsa dengan pemangsa dari kebiasaannya. Kajian struktur tekstual "The Unicorn" akan menunjukkan bahawa teks ini secara umumnya terbuka kepada pelbagai pentafsiran, walaupun terdapat kecenderungan kritis yang mengatakan bahawa novel ini bersifat "tertutup". Novel "The Sea, The Sea" adalah novel yang lebih rumit dengan struktur yang berbeza. Ia menggunakan teori "narrative self-consciousness" dan alusi kesusasteraan bagi meneroka ketaksuban pencerita terhadap idea percintaan romantik dan kuasa artistik. Kajian ini membincangkan tentang pengetahuan penulis dalam mitos dalam novel menyebabkan terhasilnya struktur ironik yang membawa kepada proses "penyesuaian" dan "pengubahsuaian" perspektif yang dinamik dalam teks ini.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE TEXTUAL INDETERMINACIES IN IRIS MURDOCH'S *THE UNICORN* AND *THE SEA, THE SEA*

ABSTRACT

This study attempts to investigate the way meaning can be created in two novels by Iris Murdoch, *The Unicorn* and *The Sea, The Sea*, by emphasizing the necessity of interaction between the reader and the text in the reading process. The main theoretical approaches that will be applied to these novels are structuralism and reader response theory particularly the concepts of "aesthetic response" and "literary competence" as developed by Iser and Culler, respectively. This will include an investigation of the function of textual indeterminacies as well as various perspectives in these novels. It will be argued that the reader's ability to reorganize and synthesize the text's structure of "repertoire" and "strategies" can contribute to the process of making sense of various perspectives and indeterminacies in the text. Moreover, analyzing readers' ability to "naturalize" different textual elements can be helpful in establishing the function of "literary competence" in the reader's response to these novels. In this sense, this thesis hopes to bridge the gap in critical response to Murdoch's fiction by arguing that the combination of certain literary conventions and strategies in each novel as well as the reader's "literary competence" can contribute to the "actualization" of meaning. The main reason behind the selection of these two novels is the way they are categorized by the critics. Both novels reflect the difficulty of categorization in Murdoch's practice of writing fiction. *The Unicorn* is a novel of Gothic mystery and sensation, while *The Sea, The Sea* is an autobiographical novel dealing with the narrator's quest for self-discovery. The Gothic excess in *The Unicorn* is reflected in the morbidity of the atmosphere as well as sensational events including

acts of violence, doubling and repetition of plot patterns. Though the novel features a female character, Hannah, entrapped in the hands of manipulative male villains in a typical Gothic mansion, the indeterminacy in the characterization of Hannah disrupts the traditional boundaries of victims and victimizers. Examining *The Unicorn*'s textual structure will indicate that despite the critical tendency to refer to this novel as "closed", the text in general, resists a traditionally conclusive interpretation. *The Sea, The Sea* is a more complex novel with an ironic structure. It makes use of narrative self-consciousness and literary allusions to explore the narrator's obsession with the notions of romantic love and artistic power. This study argues that the narrator's self-conscious application of myth in this novel is instrumental in the creation of an ironic structure leading to a dynamic process of "adjustment" and "modification" of perspectives in the text.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

Iris Murdoch (1919-1999), the Irish-British novelist, moralist and philosopher, is an influential figure in the twentieth century European literature. Because her novels consistently intermingle art and ethical philosophy, Murdoch is often considered as one of the supporters of “philosophy’s turn to literature” (Ruokonen 77). According to Murdoch, writing fiction is essentially an ethical activity. Her philosophical writings are influenced by Simone Weil, from whom she borrows the concept of "attention", and by Plato, under whose "ethical theory" she claims to fight all that she considers to be the different forms of "moral nihilism" (Goodyer 217). Her Neo-Platonism has contributed to the development of her idea of "the Good" and the necessity of leading a moral life, capable of directing the individual from the world of shadows and illusions to a genuine perception of reality. Early in her career, Murdoch was affected by the Existential philosophy of Sartre. However, though she agrees with Heidegger and Sartre's view of the absurdity of man's condition, "thrown" into an alien "contingent" universe over which he/she has no control, she finds the solution in turning to Plato's idea of "ascesis" or "unselfing" as a way to build up a sense of connection with the world and with the other people.

Nonetheless, despite her faith in the possibility of achieving her own notion of "the Good", which can be fulfilled through selfless love and genuine attention to others and understanding them as separate selves, Murdoch's ethics exclude the transcendental certainty of a universe ruled by God. Exactly how it is possible to achieve this kind of moral perfection in the chaos of a modern world, stripped of its

earlier theological certitudes, seems to be one of the main concerns of her novels. *The Time of the Angels*, for example, reflects the sinister consequences of the loss of faith in the character of Carel Fisher, the diabolical priest, who with his egocentric manipulation of others, including his own daughter, transforms himself into some kind of demonic Deity. This loss of faith in a benevolent Deity, dangerous as it is, can be, nevertheless, channeled into "the Good" by directing the individual from a self-centered notion of life into a disinterested attention to reality. The alternative path would be a solipsistic homage to the self that can be fulfilled through the notion of power and enslavement as in the case of Carel fisher and other empowered figures who march through many of her novels. According to Murdoch, the same principle can be applied to art including the practice of the novelist who ought to be dedicated to the representation of reality. As a matter of fact, the moral approach that Murdoch has frequently emphasized as the essence of writing good novels can be fulfilled through this selfless attention.

Murdoch's status as a moralist and philosopher looms large in her fiction. Her position as a philosopher is highly accentuated in the minds of the readers and the critics; a fact that has rendered almost impossible any discussion of her works without referring to her ethical and philosophical ideas, and her theories about writing novel. Consequently, the reader can hardly help taking note of the fact that in most of her novels the characters are involved in circumstances that, in one way or another, reflect their author's preoccupation with the possibility of developing moral perfection, in the face of the psyche's natural disposition to egoism. It is interesting to note that despite the moral-philosophical basis of her literary works, many of Murdoch's novels are in the once best-sellers' list. One can even go further and, in Turner ’s words, call her "something of a celebrity" (“Saint Iris” 118). What has contributed to this publicity

appears to be her versatile application of different literary traditions along with a profusion of sensationalism which is appealing to the public taste.

Historically speaking, Murdoch belongs to the generation of writers who are called, rather tentatively one can say, the post-war British novelists. The era's literary ambiance can be characterized by a renewed desire to return to the realism of the nineteenth century as a way out of the maze of the traumatic present. This yearning is evident in Murdoch's nostalgic preference for nineteenth century classic realism of novelists such as George Eliot. Yet, by the twentieth century, the author-centered notion of realism guiding the perceptive reader toward a transcendent truth was no longer valid. On the other hand, regarding the realities of the age and the breakdown of faith, at this point of literary history, the practice of modernism involving the novelist's "retreat into subjectivism and self-reflexivity", did not hold for "tackling the problems of the post-atomic era" (Nicol *Retrospective* 3). Consequently, in the face of the break-down of trust in the power of language as a reliable means of communication and the loss of faith in the author's power of imagination, certainly there was no common ground to make sense of the chaos of the time. This has led many novelists of the late-twentieth century to some degrees of experimentation in the attempt to mirror the anxieties of the age.

In his comprehensive survey of the modern British novel, Bradbury describes the general ambience of the post-war era: "it was one of the implications of the post-war Modern movement that the Crisis of the Word and the Crisis of the World were intimately linked" (203). Bradbury's description associates the doubts regarding languages' ability to reflect reality with the unfortunate decline of faith in religious and humanistic values. In the literary scene particularly the novel, an awareness of the inadequacy of the project of modernism has already led the writers to look for "a new

literary accounting", to use Bradbury's phrase (209). With regards to the modernists' claim to depicting reality, the modern novelists' attention to the inner world of the characters has been proved insufficient as it propagates a sense of indifference to society in contrast to the nineteenth century novelists' concern with the social reality. It is often said that the novels written between 1940s and 60s were a reaction to the self-alienation of characters and authorial subjectivity of modern novels. The variety of styles in the period, however, shows the uncertainties of the post-war era. While some writers turned to experimentation before finally settling into the established techniques of post-modernism, a number of novelists believed that the key to the problem of the novel lay in a return to the realistic mode of the previous century. In short, the overall atmosphere of the post-war novel (40s to 60s) indicates an alternation between the traditional models of the past and the contemporary experimental writing.

It is important to note that the post-war return to classic realism does not indicate a complete revival of the old techniques. After all, the advent of new science including psychology and linguistics along with the horrors of the two wars demanded the working out of new ways of representation based on the older models. Thus, as Bradbury has explained, the realistic trend in post-war era "brought fiction back to questions of character and representation, continuity and cultural change toward more fantastic, self-examining, fabulatory and allegorical views of the novel" (333). Bradbury's view is in line with Scholes' idea of "fabulation". He uses the term "fabulators" to describe the post-war novelists such as Murdoch and Borges whose works blend a sense of pleasure in art and design with a desire to instruct. Neil McEwan has similarly argued that the return to the nineteenth century realist novel which happened in the post-war era, took place "with a creative- not archaeological-sense of the past" (5). No wonder for novelists such as Kingsley Amis, William

Golding and Iris Murdoch a simple copying of the style of the old masters was neither possible nor satisfactory.

Murdoch's novels are in general, a product of the age. For one thing, her concern with characterization and the moral condition of her characters speaks of the era's nostalgia for the novels of the past. The difficulty of attending to other people's reality in the face of natural human tendency to solipsism which is a recurrent theme in Murdoch's novels, is often attributed to her familiarity with Freud (Bove). Another important theme in her fiction is related to the relativity of human perception in a contingent world. As Gindin has pointed out, relativity is an important characteristic of the contemporary culture (9). The ambiguity of characterization which is often noted in many of her novels is in line with the contemporary realization that "a single view of man leads to pretentious oversimplification" (Gindin 8). The problematic nature of perception in the face of the decline of faith in an orderly universe guided by reason or a transcendental divinity has led to an obsessive desire for "self-definition". This self-defining tendency is all visible in Murdoch characters' encounters with others particularly in their obsession with mythico-cultural patterns as we will see in the analysis of a selection of her novels. Gindin believes that in Murdoch's fiction, the characters' search for identity which very often leads to a "comic multiplicity" of perspectives is a symptom of the anxieties of the age (10). It is a product of the twentieth century psychological scepticism regarding human's ability to understand themselves and the world. The comic perspective in Murdoch's fiction juxtaposed with the characters' soul-searching quest for meaning and purpose in love and life gives an added emphasis to the necessity of developing a moral philosophy of character in the novel as a compensation for the "general loss of concept, the loss of a moral and

political vocabulary". This according to Murdoch is the main problem of the age ("Against" 18).

Murdoch's novels frequently depict characters entangled in the web of messy relationships and the illusory pursuits of meaning in a world that can be best described by her favorite word "contingency". It is precisely due to the accidental nature of human life in this world that Murdoch rejects the practice of the contemporary novelists who constantly endeavor to cast elaborate forms over the essential formlessness of life as it is experienced by their fictional characters. This approach to fiction at times can lead to the danger of reducing the characters to the mouthpieces of an authorial philosophy and is considered, accordingly, a sign of egoism. This seems to be one of her major points of difference with Sartre who according to Murdoch pays more attention to the ideas advanced through his characters than the characters themselves.

One of the most significant areas of critical debate is Murdoch's attitude toward post-modernism. Her link to post-modernism is emphasized through her attention to the function of language, the problematic nature of subjectivity and of representing reality. While the inadequacy of language to relate the truth among people who have lost a common ground for perceiving reality is a theme that she explores time and again in her novels, Murdoch disapproves of the denial of "the referential function of art" the way it is practiced by radical post-modernism (Nicol "Murdoch's Mannered Realism"). Regarding the contemporary concern with the question of language and reality, she prefers to turn to Plato's view about the potentiality of language to both represent and misrepresent reality. Accordingly, as the novelists' medium for fictional creation, language and its referential reliability turns out to be debatable. This idea can be helpful in understanding Murdoch's partiality to the importance and the complexity

of characterization, the role of subjectivity and the significance of language in (mis)perceiving reality. The post-modernist's concern with the significance of subjectivity in shaping our perceptions seems to be more relevant to Murdoch's approach. That the traditional realist novelists' faith in the power of language and the possibility of creating knowable characters involved in an orderly social reality can no longer be applied to contemporary life is all discernible in Murdoch's complexity of characterization.

From a historical point of view, Murdoch started writing fiction at a time when the "positivism" of classic realism was giving way to the anxieties of modernism. She was well aware of the fact that her reader is not the submissive consumer of fiction guided step by step by the all-knowing narrator, all through the reading process. For this reason, it is not surprising that the moralizing tone in Murdoch's fiction is somehow dubious and inconclusive. Many times, in her nonfictional works, she expressed "her open hostility to totalizing accounts of the moral life" (Watson 499). Murdoch herself has emphasized that her own views about a novelist's duties do not serve to offer a "precise picture of 'the function of the writer'" ("Against" 16). In fact, our perceptions of reality are essentially "incomplete" and as the main duty of the novelist as an artist is depicting reality, he/she "must not be too much afraid of incompleteness" in art ("Against" 16).

Another controversial issue regarding Murdoch's place within the contemporary thought is her occasional use of some elements of metafiction such as narrative self-consciousness. According Waugh , metafiction can be described as the type of "fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (2). Murdoch has displayed some degrees of experimentation with this

technique in her novels, for example with the reappearance of a character from one novel in a later novel -Septimus Leech a character from *the Black Prince*, shows up in *The Sacred and the Profane Love Machine* - or her self-conscious adaptation of myth, fairy tale, literary allusions, and literary forms or genres that draw attention to themselves in the contribution they make to constructing a web of fantasy for the characters, similar to the condition experienced by Plato's chained prisoners in the cave unable to see the "Real". Plato's idea that the artist is able to deceive people by representing a shadow of the shadow of the "reality" is relevant here. As one of the many ways that people tend to be enchanted by the shadows of reality, this appears to be one of the dangers of excessive disposition to rationalization, which can lead the writer to the fallacy of attempting to bestow pre-established forms and theories on the "contingency" of life. In this way, Murdoch's use of metafiction borders on parody (of the novelists' partiality to form) rather than the denial of fiction's ability to refer to reality.

A major factor in the critical response to Murdoch's link to literary realism is the prevalence of elaborate formal patterns such as the Gothic form in her fiction. In most of her novels, there seems to be an ongoing tension between the necessity of form in fiction and "the shapelessness of reality" (Magie 206). Many critics have found her claim to realistic characterization incongruous with her use of Gothic romance elements such as stereotypical characters and sensational plot patterns. The inclusion of moral-philosophical ideas and Platonic arguments among her characters further contradicts the sensational appeal of her novels and thus complicates readers' attempt at interpretation. Lorna Sage , for example, considers Murdoch's novels "unsatisfying" both for the author and the reader (74). Bran Nicol refers to Murdoch practice of realism in fiction as "mannered", a type of "realism done to excess" ("Murdoch's

Mannered Realism" 25). This study is an attempt to address the question of form and character in her fiction from a different perspective. Rather than arguing for the priority of either form or characterization based on the author's moral philosophy, I will discuss the way each novel's structure including the combination of various literary conventions and techniques (repertoire and strategies) along with the reader's ability to "naturalize" different elements in the text can guide readers in the process of making sense of the text. The question of the reader will be investigated with regard to Iser's "implied reader".

1.2 Statement of the Problem

As we have seen in this overview, complexities in Murdoch's fiction particularly in her application of various generic conventions problematize the question of interpretation in her novels. The inclusion of the author's serious ethical concerns along with the profusion of sensationalism in her fiction has resulted in what Turner calls a "strange bifurcation in the novels" (*Post-War* 49). "Surrealism", "magic realism" "Postmodernism" and "realism" are among the series of epithets invariably used to describe Murdoch's literary practice. Critics such as Turner believe that while the "commercial" success of her novels is often regarded the consequence of her application of elements of popular fiction such as Gothic and melodrama, the complexity of her style including characterization and the "use of canonical models" has inspired much critical debate. Lorna Sage considers Murdoch's realism highly "polemical" (75). Scholes uses the term "allegorical fabulation" to refer to Murdoch's fiction; "romances that are rich in philosophical content" (*Fabulation* 28). Some critics go so far to call her fiction a "ravaged territory torn between the conflicting claims of the moral philosopher and the popular" entertainer (Yadav and Yadav 155). However,

despite and probably due to all these critical efforts to define Murdoch's literary style, most attempts at categorization have failed. It is thus, possible to argue that Murdoch's literary practice resists categorization. This idea has been confirmed by the critics. Mettler for instance, points out that as a novelist Murdoch cannot be "neatly categorized" (1). Grimshaw relates the difficulty of categorizing Murdoch's literary style to her "use of the Gothic and comic forms" (223). Even the author's association with the practice of nineteenth century classic realists fails to do justice to the complexities of her style. As Gerstenberger has suggested, this propensity to categorizing Murdoch' fictional practice is mainly due to the difficulty of interpreting each of her individual novels. Since reading Murdoch's fiction often leads to a "persistently unsettling effect on reader and critic alike", critics have turned to categorization to derive "some [sense of] comfort" (Gerstenberger 3-4). Interestingly, Murdoch has disclaimed involvement in such "theoretical stuff" which is after all, nothing but "critics' talk" (Bellamy 130).

In an early essay titled "Against Dryness: A Polemical Sketch", Murdoch claims that the novelist, in the search for "consolation", is often attracted to a type of "closed", "clean crystalline work" which ultimately poses a "danger to our sense of reality" in so far as it distorts our perception (15). In an interview with W. K. Rose, Murdoch confesses that despite her preference for "open" novels in which the novelist focuses on the creation of free, contingent characters, her own novels reveal "a kind of alternation" between these two types of fiction (22). Murdoch's statements about the primacy of characterization on the one hand, and the formal hybridity of her novels on the other, have led the critics to discuss her fiction in terms of the primacy of either plot or characterization. Linda Kuehl for instance, believes that the ambiguity of Murdoch's fiction is related to her division between her inherent fascination with the

"novel of ideas" and her devotion to the "novel of character" (359). Burke offers another interpretation of the notion of "closed" novel by arguing that the term "closed" refers to those novels in which readers are "locked or closed inside the consciousness of a single character" (488). However, this study proposes that such dichotomies, i.e. "open" or "closed", plot or character, are not sufficient in the process of making sense of formal and thematic ambiguities in Murdoch' fiction. Because in some of her novels which has been labelled as "closed", the reader is denied the certainty of an all-inclusive interpretation that the "crystalline", "closed" type of fiction simplistically promises. In *The Unicorn* for instance, which is considered one of Murdoch's "closed" novels, the author has appropriated cultural and religious symbolism in a way that the interpreting process turns out to be a challenging experience.

The critical reception of Murdoch's fiction further reveals a general tendency to refer to her moral philosophy to account for discrepancies in the author's approach to the questions of formal structure, genre and character. Murdoch's application of the elements of Gothic fiction, for instance, has been treated as an instance of the different ways the author has attempted to explore the notion of evil and the various forms it may take in human relationships. The moral-philosophical approach to formal and thematic complexities in Murdoch's fiction may imply that without familiarity with the author's moral philosophy it is impossible to make sense of her novels. Reader's familiarity with Murdoch's philosophy is often taken for granted. Critics generally believe that the most efficient way to understand Murdoch's characters is through her philosophy (Ekstam, Bove). It is the argument of this thesis that an exclusively moral-philosophical approach to Murdoch's fiction fails to take note of the literary value of her novels as well as the readers' ability to appreciate it. Therefore, instead of attending to the moral-philosophical reasons behind the author's use of Gothic sensationalism

for instance, the present study prefers to address the issue of textual complexities in a selection of Murdoch's novels with particular attention to reader-text interaction. In other words, it attempts to examine the way the novels' textual structures, for example the combination of literary and cultural models and implied reader's familiarity with these structures can affect the reading process. Another area of critical debate in Murdoch's fiction is her use of Gothic gender formulas. Due to the link between Gothic plot and gender, the question of gender in Murdoch's application of Gothic conventions has received much critical attention. This is mainly related to the fact that in her novels, Murdoch often applies the motif of female characters captivated in the hand of Gothic villains. In depicting the plight of these characters, Murdoch draws on gender stereotypes. Consequently, in investigating the impact of textual indeterminacies on readers, I have highlighted the question of Gothic and gender as an important part of textual "repertoire". The issue of Gothic gender stereotypes will be further examined with regards to literary and cultural models of "naturalization".

To sum up, the main questions examined in this study are not concerned with whether Murdoch is a Gothic or a realist novelist or what are the moral implications of her application of various generic conventions but how reading her novels in terms of these conventions may lead "the implied reader" to a particular interpretation. With regards to the problems stated above, the following questions will be investigated:

1. How are "indeterminacies" created in her novels?
2. What are the functions of textual gaps in the construction or destabilization of meaning in her fiction?
3. What is the impact of implied readers' familiarity with various conventions applied in the text on their ability (literary competence) to respond to the combination of "repertoire" and "strategies" in each novel?

4. How does Murdoch's particular application of certain literary conventions (repertoire) affect the reader's response to the text?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The central objective of this study is to investigate the way Murdoch's appropriation of different forms of cultural discourse as well as generic conventions such as Gothic form, chivalric romance and fairy tale affects the reader's response to the text. The notion of reader response will be examined through Culler's views about various models of "naturalization" and "literary competence" which emphasize readers' familiarity with the models and their ability to "naturalize" meaning based on those models. The type of reader addressed in this study is "the implied reader", the reader who has the potential to respond to the textual structure. Iser defines "the implied reader" as the type of reader who possesses "all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect" (34). To achieve this objective, it is necessary to investigate the process of reading in a selection of Murdoch's novels based on Iser's notion of "aesthetic response" which emphasizes reader-text interaction in literary texts. This involves close reading of the structure of "repertoire" and "strategies" applied in each novel. I will also illustrate the way textual "indeterminacies" lead to the creations of gaps and the way shift of perspectives in the reading process can both guide and frustrate the implied reader's attempt at "naturalization" (Culler) and "consistency building" (Iser).

To indicate the function of textual gaps and shift of perspectives in Murdoch's fiction, the following elements will be examined:

1. To examine the different modes of "naturalization" particularly religio-cultural models and their role in encouraging allegorical reading of the text based on Culler's view of reader's "competency".
2. To indicate the "repertoire" applied in each novel including allusive references to myths, art works and Platonic philosophy.
3. To examine the "strategies" applied in each text including irony and its role in the interplay of various perspectives in the text as well as parody in the sense of self-conscious experimentation with generic forms such as Gothic, fairy tale and chivalric romance.
4. To illustrate the application of Gothic gender stereotypes (as an important part of structure of textual "repertoire") and their effect on the implied reader's response to the text.

Another objective is to illustrate that the dichotomies of "open" or "closed" novel, "novel of character" or "novel of idea" which are sometimes used to argue for the primacy of plot, characterization or philosophy in Murdoch's fiction, are not sufficient to address the author's complex application of various literary forms and modes of cultural discourse. This will be illustrated through the analysis of two novels by Murdoch, *The Unicorn* and *The Sea, The Sea* which are considered "closed" and "open", respectively. A comparison of these two novel's structural complexities and their impact on implied readers aims at proving that such categories can be misleading as they fail to take note of the implied reader's aptitude for synthesizing various textual elements.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The majority of critical studies of Murdoch's fiction have focused on discovering the traces of her moral philosophy in her novels especially in terms of the dilemmas faced by characters and their complex relationships. A review of the critical reception of Murdoch's writings proves that over the last years critical the "interest in the literary side of Murdoch's writing career seems to be waning" (Jarzab 60). Murdoch's frequent nostalgic reference to the nineteenth century realist novelists such as George Eliot, another moralist-philosopher-novelist, has led the critics to investigate her novels with regard to the development of her ethical concerns such as the possibility of achieving her concept of "the Good", the idea of solipsism and the corrupting effect of power and love as embodied in tumultuous relationships among her fictional characters. Even her consistent use of coincidental events that seems to be integral to her plot patterns has been interpreted in terms of the Murdoch's idea of "contingency". However, despite the critical attempt to read her novels in terms of moral philosophy, Murdoch's literary practice resists categorization. Even her own view of aesthetics and theories of fiction as stated in some of her non-fictional works are proved to be inconsistent with regard to her novelistic practice. Some critics, for instance, have regarded Murdoch's tendency to use her characters as symbolic figures, promoting her favourite philosophical ideas, inconsistent with her statement that the practice of a novelist should be different from a philosopher.

It is interesting to note that many books and articles on Murdoch's fiction have undermined the notion of the reader. The question of readers' familiarity with the author's philosophy is often taken for granted. In cases of close reading of each individual novel, the primary purpose has often been the explication of traces of Murdoch's moral philosophy rather than addressing the question of the impact of the

novel's structural complexities on readers. At times, the novels which have been labelled as Gothic are apologetically dismissed by the critics as her lesser novels. The best example is *The Unicorn,* the only novel that has been acknowledged by the author to be cast in the Gothic form. As Conradi has stated, the novel is "undervalued" by the critics mainly because they have misunderstood its Gothic conventions (*Saint* n. p). *The Unicorn*'s amalgamation of different forms such as fairy tale, myth and Gothic fiction along with the character's efforts at philosophizing the events in the story problematizes the notion of consistency in reader's response to the text. This study however, hopes to address the questions of textual indeterminacy and generic hybridity in this novel as parts of its thematic structure intended to achieve certain effects on the implied reader. This will be achieved through a shift of focus from the traditional dichotomies of plot or character, sensationalism or novel of ideas to the significance of reader-text interaction.

The present study is significant in that it attempts to investigate the way meaning can be created in Murdoch's novels with particular attention to the interaction between the implied reader and the textual structure. This will be achieved through the analysis of two of her novels. The analysis of the novels aims at illustrating the necessity of interaction between the reader and the text in the process of reading these novels by reference to the notions of "aesthetic response" by Iser and "literary competence" by Culler. It will also investigate the function of indeterminacies in the text and the way they can affect reader's response to the text. In other words, instead of referring to the author's philosophical views, I will discuss how each novel's structure affects the reader's response to the text. The purpose however, is not to deny the relevance of philosophy in Murdoch's fiction but to take the various philosophical discussions among the characters as parts of each novel's internal structure or its

"repertoire". In this sense, this study hopes to bridge the gap in critical response to Murdoch's fiction by discussing the way the combination of various conventions (repertoire) and strategies in each novel helps the implied reader in the process of "actualization" of meaning in text. In this way, the reader's familiarity with these conventions and narrative techniques (literary competence) will be an essential part of the dynamics of reader-text interaction.

1.5 Scope and Limitations

The novels selected for analysis are *The Unicorn* and *The Sea, The Sea*. Both novels emphasize the ways individuals often apply myths to construct their own self-aggrandized notions of identity. That is to say that the application of various myths and literary traditions in both novels serves to thematize the characters' attempt at romanticizing their own preferred notion of self. The character's compulsive myth-making tendencies are emphasized through the use of various generic traditions. As we shall see in this study, in both these novels, elements of chivalric romance such as the motifs of quest and "damsels in distress" are blended ironically with the Platonic search for virtue.

The main reason behind the selection of these two novels is the way they are categorized by the critics. For one thing, both novels reflect the difficulty of categorization in Murdoch's practice of writing fiction. *The Unicorn* is a novel of Gothic mystery and sensation, while *The Sea, The Sea* is an autobiographical novel dealing with the narrator's quest for self-discovery. The Gothic excess in *The Unicorn* is reflected in the morbidity of the atmosphere as well as sensational events including acts of violence, doubling and repetition of plot patterns. It is regarded as one of Murdoch's most "haunting" novels (Burke 493). Though the novel features a female

character, Hannah, entrapped in the hands of manipulative male villains in a typical Gothic mansion, the indeterminacy in the characterization of Hannah disrupts the traditional boundaries of victims and victimizers. Examining *The Unicorn*'s textual structure will indicate that despite the critical tendency to refer to this novel as "closed", the text in general, resists a traditionally conclusive interpretation. *The Sea, the Sea* is a more complex novel with an ironic structure. It makes use of narrative self-consciousness and literary allusions to explore the narrator's obsession with the notions of romantic love and artistic power. The novel is also significant as it incorporates elements of the fantastic into its apparently realistic structure. The novel's ending resists closure in a traditional sense. However, my study argues that despite lack of traditional notion of closure in the novel's denouement, the interplay of various perspectives in this novel is instrumental in reorienting the reader's "wandering viewpoint" (Iser).

The main theoretical approaches that will be applied to these novels are structuralism and reader response theory particularly the concepts of "aesthetic response" and "literary competence" as developed by Iser and Culler, respectively. This will include an investigation of the roles of textual indeterminacies as well as various perspectives in these novels. It will be argued that the implied reader's ability to reorganize and synthesize the text's structure of "repertoire" and "strategies" can contribute to the process of making sense of various perspectives and indeterminacies in the text. Moreover, analyzing implied readers' ability to "naturalize" different textual elements can be helpful in establishing the function of "literary competence" in the reader's response to these novels.

It is important to mention that the method proposed in this study pays particular attention to the process of reading to answer the question of what happens as we read

and what are the effects of various models or “naturalization” applied in Murdoch’s fiction on reader’s response to the text. This method which is drawn from Culler’s view about reader’s competence and Iser’s notion of “aesthetic response”, takes note of the conflict of form and content in Murdoch’s novels and the tension it creates in the process of reading. This tension is evident in the critical debates about the questions of philosophy and realistic characterization in Murdoch’s fiction in the face of her novels’ application of fantastic elements and their excessive sensationalism. The novels selected for analysis serve to embody the effects of this tension. My study, however, represents a shift of focus away from the above-mentioned elements to the dynamic process of reading which involves both the implied reader and the text. Thus, the analysis of the selected novels aims at representing an instance of a more appropriate way to approach Murdoch’s novels in general without attending to the question of the writer’s preferences in terms of philosophy or realistic characterization exclusively.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

Gothic Fiction— Critics of Gothic fiction generally agree that *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole (1764) outlines the main characteristics of a new form of popular fiction that came to be called Gothic romance or Gothic fiction. In other words, Walpole's abundant use of supernatural elements, usurpation and obsessive pursuit of power, a Gothic castle, and transgression of family ties in the above-mentioned novel constitute what is regarded to be the standard plot of a Gothic novel. However, defining Gothic as a genre has been proved problematic; and as Delamotte has commented it often leads to "shopping-list approach" by attempting to make a prescriptive list of what a Gothic novel is supposed to be made of (6). The typical plot of a Gothic novel

commonly happens in a formidable setting; a dark castle with winding stairs and subterranean hideaways. The sensational events - generally defined by "excess" - feature mystery, murder, the breaking up of taboos such as incest, and spectral presences. The major mysteries that are chiefly the result of past events, often revolve around the question of identity especially that of missing mothers, entrapped females, the dubious acts of a Gothic villain or an aristocratic relative and property disputes. However, the Gothicists' sensational appeal to public taste has led to the dismissal of the form in a way that, though Gothic studies show the form's affinity to Romanticism, it has often been treated as the "black sheep of the [Romantic] family" (Williams 4). Gothic studies, however, underwent a change when after 1970s writers such as Ellen Moers , Gilbert and Gunbar evoked fresh sympathies regarding the link between the Gothic and the female writers and readers' position within patriarchy.

Chivalric Romance- A type of narrative prose and sometimes verse that was developed during the twelfth century in medieval Europe particularly France. Romance is often contrasted with epic in that instead of depicting the brave enterprises of epic heroes, it shows the adventures of knights following a specific code of honour. The adventures involve magic, enchantment and fights with dragons. The standard plot of chivalric romances is often in the form of a quest to obtain "a lady's favour" (Abrams et al. 48). The knight's relationship with the lady is mostly based on the philosophy of courtly love.

Courtly Love- The term courtly love is used to refer to an intricate code of relationship among aristocratic lovers. The conventions were developed and popularized by troubadour poets in southern France during the twelfth century. The "elaborate code of behaviour evolved around the tormented male lover's abject obedience to a disdainful, idealized lady, who was usually his social superior" (Baldick

53). The lady was the source of virtue and could not be approached in terms of physical attraction. The knight's ability to remain chaste and faithful was a test of his true love for the lady. The conventions which were used in chivalric romances and love poems of Petrarch were later popularized in England in Petrarchan love poems of Elizabethan sonneteers.

Fairy tale- A type of narrative often in the form of a short story which includes magic, spells and imaginary characters such as elves, dwarfs and wizards. Fairy tales belong to oral tradition. They are often written for children and are mostly of unknown authorship. Among the famous collections of fairy tales, we can refer to Grimm brother's collection and Hans Christian Anderson's *Fairy Tales.*

Literary Realism— An early nineteenth century movement in arts and literature, realism was a reaction against the excessive idealization of life as it was practiced by the Romantic writers. The proponents of realism in fiction believed that the main duty of the novelist is to present the reader with a truthful, objective picture of life. The characters, the plot and the setting-commonly reflecting the everyday experiences of the middle-class characters- should be presented objectively based on the law of probability in such a way that the reader comes to believe in them as real-life, actual people and occurrences. The most distinguishing feature of realist fiction is the use of a third person omniscient narrator who guides the reader all through the reading process. The main practitioner of realism in England was George Eliot who in her novels developed a type of narrative self-consciousness serving to involve the reader in contemplating the moral dilemmas of the characters and the novelists' ethical and artistic concerns in presenting reality. However, traditional realist novelists have been severely criticized for being "illusionists", i.e., creating the illusion of reality. The type of reality that they claim to represent is, in fact, "filtered and purged" (Wolfreys

86). Structuralist and Post-structuralist critics have questioned the realist writer's claim to reflecting reality since "narrative and language", as their dual medium of fictional creations are far from reflecting "any external reality". They are actually constructed systems of signs through which we can see reality (Habib 475).

Parody— Parody, as a literary technique, is often defined as an imitation of a text or a writer's style that distorts the original through mockery. It is also used to refer to an "incongruous" imitation of a genre or a literary form which serves to expose its shortcomings by problematizing its generic conventions. As such, it has an explicit critical function that is commonly recognized by a sophisticated reader familiarized with the parodied literary forms and conventions. Parody, however, is also regarded a useful strategic device for the practitioners of metafiction. Writers of metafiction have frequently used metafictional parody especially in the form of narrative self-consciousness to expose the fictionality of their artistic creations in contrast to the traditional novelists' insistence on creating the illusion of reality. Murdoch's parodic appropriation of the Gothic form that will be discussed in the present study, nonetheless, maintains the critical implications of the concept of parody by questioning the stereotypical gendered assumptions at the base of Gothic genre as well as challenging the different ways individuals form their own illusion of reality.

Intertextuality--- Intertextuality is a term first used by Julia Kristeva. Discussing Michael Bakhtin's concept of "heteroglossia", Kristeva contends that texts, in general "do not present clear and stable meanings; they embody society's dialogic conflict over the meaning of words" (Allen 36). The term is often used with regard to the texts that include references to previous texts. The use of intertextuality is particularly associated with modern writers such as T.S. Eliot and James Joyce whose

writings put a great demand on readers' understanding as they refer to a large range of literary, cultural and even linguistic works.

Metafiction- Any type of fictional work that is concerned with its own status as fiction. "The term is normally used for works that involve a significant degree of self-consciousness about themselves as fictions" (Baldick 151). Metafiction is usually used in opposition to realism in the sense that it uses different technical devices to remind readers that the text they are reading is "artifice" (Cuddon 431). *Tristram Shandy* (1760) by Laurence Stern and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) are notable examples of metafiction that target the conventions of writing fiction through narrative self-consciousness and parody.

Reception Theory- As the term suggests, the theory of reception is concerned with the ways readers receive literary texts. Reception theory was originally developed between 1960s and 1970s by a group of scholars in the University of Constance in Germany. Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser are often cited as the major theorists of the School of Constance. Jauss is more concerned with the readers' collective response to texts rather than each reader's individual reaction. His notion of "horizon of expectation" emphasizes the interplay of past and present expectations of readers in the reception of literary texts. It is an "intersubjective system or structure of expectations … that a hypothetical individual brings to a given text" (Selden et al. 323). While Jauss' approach to the question of the relation between text and reader was historically oriented, Iser was more concerned with the interaction between each individual text and reader. It is the text's structure including "gaps", "repertoire" and "strategies" which calls for the reader's participation in the "actualization" of meaning in the text. Textual structure however, does not have full control in this process. In

reading the text, the reader incorporates "the text into his own treasure-house of experience" (Iser 24).

Implied Reader- Iser introduced the term implied reader to "account for the reader's presence without having to deal with real or empirical reader" (Selden et al. 331). In the formulation of the term, Iser was affected by Wyane Booth's view about the "implied author". According to Iser, the implied reader has "all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect" (34). In this sense, the idea of the implied reader is a part of the textual structure.

Indeterminacy- The notion of indeterminacy was first used by Ingarden to describe the nature of literary objects. According to Ingarden, while an object in real life has "a particular determinant", literary objects "retain some degree of indeterminacy" (Holub 25). These indeterminacies lead to the creation of gaps or blanks in the texts. Iser used Ingarden's notion of indeterminacy to argue that it is in the process of filling in the gaps that meaning can be created.

Structuralism- Structuralism is a vast theory encompassing many fields of knowledge such as literary criticism, anthropology and history. From a theoretical point of view, it is based on linguistics specifically Saussure 's notion of signifier (word) and signified (concept). An important premise in structuralism in literature is the idea that literary texts are dominated by a system of signs. It is through this system that meaning is created in literary texts. In the analysis of literary texts, structuralist critics use different linguistic concepts to formulate the ways the system of codes dominates the production of meaning in literature.

Defamiliarization- The term "defamiliarization", estrangement, was first used by Shkolvsky to distinguish between the ordinary use of language and the language of literary works in terms of their effects on recipients. Literary language has the ability