

Crime, Truth and Morality in Iris Murdoch's Novel "A Severed Head"

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Abstract: *This paper consists on some interesting aspects of the novel "A Severed Head" by Dame Iris Murdoch. The author has written the novel in a very intriguing way making the readers feel astonished at her amazing style, full of symbols, philosophical and psychological traits. The characters are very dependent on each other, forming a chain of events which bring about truth revelations, reaction provocation, secrets exposure, confrontation, break-ups, new relations. Crime is not considered as a felony but as something wrong, as a misconduct or misbehavior toward somebody's life. Truth is something everybody longs for, but it is very difficult to be found. Morality is considered in contrast to immorality. The author does not provide ready-made recipes to solve the situations. The ending is left open and it invites for free interpretations of the readers. The novel is postmodernist in every direction.*

Keywords: *crime, truth, morality, symbols, postmodernist writer, secrets, etc.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The novel "A Severed Head" written in 1961 by Dame Iris Murdoch is a satirical novel about educated people who are involved in adultery, incest and divorce issues. On its cover, the book has the indication: "A novel about the frightfulness and ruthlessness of being in love". Starting from this indication, without further reading the book one gets the idea that something may have happened since love is frightful and ruthless. In everyday life everyone refers to love as the purest feeling, but here we encounter suspense. Even the title "A Severed Head" is thrilling and frightening. According to Webster's Dictionary, crime is defined as: 1- the doing of an act forbidden by law or the failure to do an act required by law 2- a serious offense especially against morality 3- criminal activity 4- something shameful, foolish or regrettable.

The novel deals with love which is very complex and causes trouble and intrigues. In this paper I would try to explain how deep are people's minds and souls and how they affect each other's lives. I have to analyze their behaviors and personalities. How do the characters think and act? What are their secrets, dreams and desires? How are they involved with crime issues? Does a secret contain a crime? What if a secret is revealed? Would then happen a crime if a person reveals somebody's truth?

All these questions have to do with morality. Morality has to be seen in all its dimensions not only as virtue and moral conduct but as the opposite of it, as immorality, too. It has to do with the norm, whether the characters stick to it or whether they surpass it, exaggerate it. It has to do with truth if it is hidden or revealed. Morality enters the freedom of characters. Do they search for their freedom? Do they feel free to act and think? Is freedom perceived within norm? The nature of good and evil is part of morality, since morality itself is a substantial part of society. Murdoch is concerned for mankind. She expresses her Christian ideas not in a dogmatic way, but she only wishes for the salvation of man. She wants to save him morally, to awaken him, to open his eyes, to make him turn to his moral values. As Murdoch herself said: "It is through an enriching and deepening of concepts that moral progress takes place." (Murdoch, 1977).

In the novel, the characters do not obey the moral standards. They break the norm. The breaking of the norm is a violation of law or better to say, the violation of people's principles and rules. The narrator, Martin Lynch-Gibbon, also the main character, faces many difficulties, because he violates the norm. But it is society, too, which affects his behavior; it is metaphysics which sends him to the ultimate causes and the underlying nature of things. "We need to return from the self-centered concept

of sincerity to the other-centered concept of truth. We are not isolated free choosers, monarchs of all we survey, but benighted creatures sunk in a reality whose nature we are constantly and overwhelmingly tempted to deform by fantasy” (Murdoch, 1977). He leads a life full of terror, full of perplexity, dark thoughts, quandaries, guessing and we always see him in motion. This is because he is not calm and stable. He puzzles at the discovery of truth he didn’t know before. He tries to find solutions to all the bewilderment he encounters. He tries to relate facts and events, he finds some evidence now and then, he makes hypothesis, discovers secrets. “Real people are destructive of myth; contingency is destructive of fantasy and opens the way for imagination....” (Murdoch, 1977). All these sound like the reminiscence of a case investigation by a private detective or police agent. Crime issues are undoubtedly part of an investigation.

It is hard to find solutions immediately and at each step Martin takes, he commits “crime” - offense to morality. Something else to be mentioned, which relates to “crime” or “the discovery of crime” is that the novel is very complex and very much detailed. You should not skip any detail because you cut the thread between events, which are very closely linked with each other.

The novel has the power to keep you in suspense and the ability to stupefy you. One could easily read between the lines the author’s striving to present reality as it is. But it is very difficult to reach that because the plot of the novel is complicated, sometimes exaggerated. The beauty of the novel stands in having an intricate plot by inviting you to read it. It looks like a mystery which has to be discovered. It resembles to those thrillers we watch on T.V, full of enigma and clues to follow in order to reach a conclusion. On each single page you find abundant facts which should be born in mind to solve the puzzle. The curiosity to know what happens next makes you read the book in a hurry but with a great pleasure.

2. MARTIN’S UNCONSCIOUSNESS ABOUT REALITY HIDES THE TRUTH

In “A Severed Head” Martin creeps under the net of love. He lived in an unconscious world and distorted the reality. He thought everything was going right with him. He believed he had a happy marriage with Antonia and a clandestine relationship with his mistress Georgie, which he considered ‘so utterly private’ (p.13). Nothing worried him and Antonia Byatt in her book ‘Degrees of Freedom’ refers to Martin as living an ‘egocentric drama’ (Murdoch, 62). He was an egotist. He did not want to disturb himself with a divorce. He did not evaluate Georgie’s devotion to him. He ‘had not had to pay’ because of ‘Georgie’s character, her toughness and the stoical nature of her devotion to me’ (p.13). She had an abortion and suffered in silence while Martin did not try to make any movement. When he spoke about their private relationship, it was Georgie with her straightforwardness who laid things as they really were: ‘If it were exposed to the daylight it would crumble to pieces’ (p.13). Martin mentioned the legend of Psyche: ‘Remember the legend of Psyche, whose child, if she told about her pregnancy, would be mortal, whereas if she kept silent it would be a god.’ (p.13)

But things gradually change due to contingency which changes his life. He had thought that everything would remain like that, his ‘clandestine relationship’ would never be discovered, but, as he himself narrates, it is Palmer Anderson, the psychoanalyst of Antonia, that changed his life. Antonia declared that she was going to marry Palmer and wanted the divorce. A crucial detail has to be mentioned. Antonia was older than Martin and tried to convince him it was better to divorce. Palmer himself emphasizes the fact that Martin was like a child to Antonia: “You have been a child to Antonia and she a mother to you and that has kept you both spiritually speaking at a standstill” (p. 29). The fact that he did not want to leave Antonia and accepts to be ‘enslaved’ (pg. 7) by both Palmer and Antonia, shows that he needed ‘a master’ (p.7) as Georgie told him.

3. MARTIN’S ENSLAVEMENT BY HIS WIFE AND THE PSYCHOANALYST

It is unperceivable, unimaginable and beyond every human senses to have such a relationship in real life. No one can ever live with his wife and her lover under the same roof! But as the book satirizes the high society living a boring and empty life, complaining about trifle things, having secret affairs, then we have to handle with some unbelievable events. Antonia, an aristocratic lady, a delicate figure, suffering from frequent headaches, needs Martin around to feel authoritative, possessive and admired. Having no child of her own, being older then her husband, she knows well how to act. Martin fulfills the role of her absent child and he has come to like his new role when the figure of a father represented by Palmer completes the trio of a family.

As Antonia Byatt in her book "Degrees of Freedom" suggests: "Here we have both a Freudian and a Sartrean enslavement; Antonia and Palmer play the part of his parents suppressing with 'love' his feelings of antagonism towards the male and desire towards the female; and in Sartre's sense they are taking away his freedom to act from himself" (Byatt, p.124).

Martin is left without any real powers. He cannot act; he thinks he is hurting his wife-mother figure. He is introduced as a numb man, without any desire to change. He doesn't even consider any action. At this very beginning readers can associate his inactivity with the Oedipal complex.

"In Freud's view the development of a child's sense of self is advanced through the Oedipal complex, the central Freudian childhood crisis. This crisis consists of sexual desire for the mother and a subsequent wish to do harm to the father because he has greater strength and power, however, the child fears being castrated for these inappropriate sexual desires and instead comes to identify with the father; development of the self then proceeds. Martin's eventual acceptance of the reality of his relationship with Antonia results from movement through a type of crisis not unlike the Oedipal complex (indeed, the novel, with Martin as its narrator, could be seen to be a variation on Freud's 'talking cure', psychoanalysis). Anderson's affair with his wife makes him a father figure for Martin, who already respects and likes the man. ... a fear for castration could be seen to be symbolic of this need for Anderson's respect (Wilson, Robert W, 1965).

In a way or another Antonia and Palmer have ruled over him. Believe it or not, Martin does not object to the relationship between the psychoanalyst and Antonia. Both Antonia and Palmer scorn him for having a clandestine affair, behaving as parents taking control of the child. He time and again pays visits to them and also accepts to take orders from Palmer. Here we can mention the cellar episode when Martin on purpose, after obeying to Palmer's orders, spills the wine in their bedroom. But this reaction is somewhat passive, hidden, covert; he needs to show his anger and hatred towards Palmer's father-like orders. Martin manifests the violence in other ways: he strikes Georgie for having told Honor about their relationship, and he beats Honor in the cellar for having told Palmer and Antonia about his private relationship. He represses his desires to do harm to Anderson, as a child who tries to gather himself when the father scorns him in front of the mother: 'I had been cheated of some fruitless movement of violence, of some special fruitless movement of will and power'. (p.34). His hidden drive of doing harm to Palmer in a father's figure is manifested in his sub-conscience, through the dream world. He can only exert his power by dreaming as if he is killing his own father. The dream in itself is perplexing and frustrating:

"He glided on towards me with increasing speed, his huge Jewish face growing like a great egg above the silken wings of his gown. I swung the sword in an arc before him but as it moved the blade came away and flew upwards into the winter darkness which had collected above us. Clinging in fear and guilt to what remained in my hand I recognized my father." (p.136).

"For Freud, dreams are to be interpreted for the clues they offer to our unconscious thoughts, and with Martin's real father long since having passed away, his desire to hurt the father figure represented in Anderson is certainly apparent". (Wilson, Robert W, 1965).

Dreaming about killing his father is a clue to tell us he needs to break free from Palmer Anderson's authority. He needs to get improved and do better in his life. He needs to become independent and feel like a real man, but still we cannot say that it is exactly this dream that really cures his soul and makes him totally conscious about the reality.

Leaving aside his drive to do harm to Palmer, we have to turn our attention to his mother. Martin and Alexander were very fond of their mother and suffered a lot during and after her death. 'When my mother had died Alexander had wanted to take a death mask, but my father had not let him. I recalled with a sudden vividness the scene in the bedroom with the still figure on the bed, its face covered with a sheet.' The title of the novel "A Severed Head" is symbolic in many ways. Iris Murdoch knows how to relate events and somehow confuses the readers with the head image. Martin's mother is mentioned because her head is covered. Alexander is remembered by him sculpting once Antonia's head. When Martin enters his studio he shows his disgust to Alexander's work by saying: 'I don't think I like a sculpted head alone,' I said. 'It seems to represent an unfair advantage, an illicit and incomplete relationship.' (p.44) Alexander's response is significant. It is somewhat difficult to understand his statement from the very beginning, but here we find clues of suggesting Antonia in the position of a mother for Martin: 'An illicit and incomplete relationship,' said Alexander. 'Yes. Perhaps an

obsession. Freud on Medusa. The head can represent the female genitals, feared, not desired.' (p.44). "Martin's symbolic fear of castration becomes entwined with the suggestion that he has no sexual desire for Antonia, and this is an important point. In Freud's Oedipal complex the child desires his mother sexually, and for much of the novel, after he learns of Antonia's infidelity, Martin believes that he is once again in love with his wife. These feelings, however, are not real, and Martin's final movement through the end of his version of the Oedipal complex only occurs with the intervention of Honor Klein". (Wilson, Robert. W, 1965).

But step by step, we realize that Martin does not desire Antonia sexually as in the Oedipal complex. It is Alexander, Martin's brother, who is sexually and sentimentally involved in a long-standing affair with Antonia. Martin learns about their secret relation, and feels somewhat liberated. He is gradually returning to his manhood. But his maturity comes from the introduction of Honor Klein, Palmer's half sister. He symbolically "grows up" by accepting contingency.

The striking symbol of the petrifying Medusa is interpreted by Freud as a castration fear (Collected Papers, vol. V). Sartre of course regards it as its basic sense our general fear of being observed (L'Être et le Néant, p. 502). It is interesting to speculate on how one would be about deciding which interpretation was 'correct'"

He thinks he loves his wife and identifies her with his lost mother: 'I recalled my mother clearly, with a sad shudder of memory, and with that particular painful, guilty, thrilling sense of being both stifled and protected with which a return to my old home always afflicted me; and now it was as if my pain for Antonia had become the same pain, so closely was it blended in quality, though more intense, with the obscure malaise of my homecomings. Perhaps indeed it had always been the same pain, a mingled shadow cast forward and backward across my destiny'. (p.40)

Martin needs a master but at the same time he needs a liberation from it. Alexander says while sculpting the head:

'...There is nothing between schematized symbols and caricature. What I want here is some sort of impossible liberation.' (p.44)

4. MARTIN'S SELF-PROGRESS

As Martin's self-improvement gradually takes place, we become more and more aware of the presence of a very important character in the novel. His liberation from the Oedipal complex, comes with the introduction of Honor Klein, described as a very simple woman with an almost Japanese look, with short hair and not at all attractive. No one could ever imagine that Martin could have any feelings towards her. He collects her at the train station and all the time she keeps her head out of the car's window by reinforcing the severed head image. Until now Martin has led a life of dreams; he has both a wife and a lover. Everything sounds perfect. He cannot separate himself from his wife, neither can he leave his mistress, Georgie. The former needs him around, the latter needs him in her life. He needs them both and does not make anything to change the situation. Antonia does not know anything about the existence of a mistress in her husband's life. Georgie keeps pushing him to divorce his wife and marry her. None of these has happened so far. Honor Klein comes abruptly and changes everything. She tells Antonia and Palmer about Martin's clandestine relationship with Georgie. Martin's life is smashed into pieces or better to say his illusionary world, is exposed to daylight. He is now in front of the facts and has to explain the reasons why he is not happy with his marriage. He also has to understand why he is not very much persevering in his relation with Georgie. Honor Klein, this goddess, this prophet as she herself accepts, awakens Martin, puts him in motion and makes him reconsider his life. She explains to Martin that: 'A severed head was used in primitive tribes and old alchemists, anointed it with oil and put a morsel of gold upon its tongue to make it utter prophecies.' (p.182).

Martin's life as in a dream is symbolically described with the fog image when he goes to the train station to wait for Honor. Her presence in the book thereafter becomes very vivid and strong. She drags him out of the dream, directing him to another route. He needs salvation. His soul is restless, and smoothly and calmly he realizes none of his women, Antonia and Georgie, are suitable for him. He needs a strong and stable relationship but first he has to find himself. The fact that Honor herself says: 'I am a terrible object of fascination to you. I am a severed head' (p.182), emphasizes the idea that first it is the mind that directs people in life to be sober-minded, determined, persevering and strong. The image of a severed head in Honor, her lack of sex appeal, her body 'like a headless sack'

(p. 57), establish a strong fear of petrification. Martin sees her like a Medusa, not like a human being. Medusa in Greek mythology was a Gorgon slain by Perseus, son of Zeus and Danae (Webster's Dictionary). She is Freud's Medusa, feared, not desired.

When she first encounters him she puts squarely the clash between 'civilization' and 'truth': 'Truth has been lost long ago in this situation,' she said. 'In such matters you cannot have both truth and what you call civilization. You are a violent man Mr. Lynch-Gibbon. You cannot get away with this intimacy of your wife's seducer.' (p. 64) Honor Klein is a 'vaster and vaguer and more general truth who combines in human form... respect for the individual... and that love we have discussed in terms of *The Bell*, and which is both inevitable and truth-seeking.' (Byatt, 1965).

Honor introduces the idea of retribution:

'Everything in this life has to be paid for, and love too has to be paid for... Without payment my brother's patients would be wretched. They would be captives... By gentleness you only spare yourself and prolong this enchantment of untruth which they have woven about themselves and about you, too. Sooner or later you will have to become a centaur and kick your way out.' (p.64-65). and 'if you want to let them steal your mind and organize you as if you were an infant, I suppose that is your affair. All I say is that only lies and evil come from letting people off.' (p.65)

Martin refers to Honor as a dark god, as a mysterious person with "something animal like and repellent in that glistening stare" (p.55). In fact she is demonic because she arranges everything by revealing Martin's affair with Georgie, by introducing Alexander to Georgie, by troubling Antonia when she learns of Alexander's engagement to Georgie, by making Alexander reveal that he is not in love with Georgie, but with Antonia - this induces Georgie to attempt suicide, and later by making possible for Palmer to know Georgie and leave together for New York. It is not that she does all these directly. In a certain way she is the cause for such happenings. Honor opens Martin's eyes to reality. He no longer wants Antonia. He says of her:

'I could not forgive her and I wanted her out of my sight. I too had become harder and more absolute... The talent for a gentler world which Palmer had remarked upon was precisely what had now died in me. It had been at best no very saintly talent; merely a quieter mode of selfishness' (pg. 195)

In the scene with the sword, having brought Martin's affair with Georgie into the open, Honor looks like a warrior. She says that the use of the sword is 'a spiritual exercise', and further defines her 'truth':

'Being a Christian you connect spirit with love. These people connect it with control, with power.'

'What do you connect it with?'

'I am a Jew.'

'But you believe in the dark gods.'

'I believe in people,' said Honor Klein. It was a rather unexpected reply (p.97).

Honor ignites in Martin a will to face things. If she had not appeared he would have continued to be a dreamer as Antonia tells him: 'You are such a dreamer Martin. You like to dream along without facing things.' (p.189)

5. MARTIN'S EMPOWERMENT OVER HONOR

Accepting reality and facing the truth were two things Martin feared. Honor overloads him with power to change. She made him fight for his wife. When she revealed his clandestine affair to Palmer and Antonia, Martin became violent because he did not want the truth to be revealed. When he learnt that Honor had introduced Georgie to Alexander, he was furious and stroke Georgie. He could not imagine how Honor had learnt about their relation. He describes her as a "ghost" (p.73) wandering everywhere, listening to peoples' secrets, knowing everything. As a result he was disturbed. When he encountered her in the cellar he beat her, but later apologized by writing a letter. This shows that he was ashamed and was tortured by turmoil. Honor caused Martin to move toward a greater acceptance of reality after their fight in the cellar. The letter, nonetheless, represents a significant movement towards an acceptance of reality. The fight with Honor symbolically represents fight with his own problems. After the cellar episode he cannot see Antonia and Georgie thereafter. He realizes he does

not desire any of them, because they cannot fulfill both functions at the same time: being sweet with motherly love and providing sexual pleasure. Antonia could not go beyond a mother image; Georgie was sexually attractive but could not make him be devoted to her.

In Honor he discovered a new love, 'an extreme love' as he called it. Maybe these women should be left to live their own lives. He should live his own with a new lover. He felt Honor was the person who would satisfy him morally and physically. He referred to her as 'nearly ugly' (p.95), but maybe he symbolically fell in love with her because he was hungry for truth and maybe she represents truth; truth is bitter, it may seem ugly for people because it does not suit them but, anyhow, people search for it.

Honor's shadow is everywhere and Martin fears to contact Antonia and Georgie. He feels Honor is observing him and he abandons their world. He worships Honor's demonic presence and intrusion in his life by thinking she is powerful, prophetic, super natural. He cannot equalize himself with her. He starts wandering in the streets without wanting to meet her, either. She was above his human strength. She was a goddess, a taboo.

So far, he feared this petrifying Medusa and tried to stay away from her, but contingency makes him discover a secret which equals his power with this diabolique figure. In fact he had started earlier to confront her strength in the cellar episode, fighting with her. After that, he realizes he cannot stay without her. He needed her and goes to Cambridge. There he finds Honor in bed with her half-brother. This incest is against every human morality. Honor, this honored woman as her name suggests, is not a goddess. She does not practice what she preaches. She is equally filthy and sinful as Martin was with his secret affair at the beginning. The woman who uttered prophecies was of flesh and bones. She is not a taboo, anymore. She looks so normal, so humane, and there is no flair of superiority in her. Martin likes this discovery. He has mystified her but now he can see her straight in the eye. He can now express his love to her. He was tortured and enslaved by his quest for love and finally it was there in Honor's bedroom. She was terrestrial and mortal. She was his salvation, his freedom and liberation. The incestuous intercourse between Palmer and Honor gave Martin power to enslave Palmer and become king himself. His turmoil and frustration are rewarded with Honor's getting back to his house, but this time as a human being, humble and normal. He laughs at her and asks whether a severed head can make love to a human being. This is significant. She is no more feared; she is desired. She is not 'a severed head' but a real human being. Her prophecy has come to an end. She now deserves to live her own life. 'We have lived in a dream up to now. When we awake will we find each other still?...Well, we must hold hands tightly and hope that we can keep hold of each other through the dream and out into the waking world.... Could we be happy?'

She said, 'this has nothing to do with happiness, nothing whatever.'

That was true. I took in the promise of her words. I said, 'I wonder if I shall survive it.'

She said, smiling splendidly, 'You must take your chance.' (p. 205)

Happiness is something hard to be found and their relationship is based on reality and not in dreams. They are taking their chance to face life together and not pretend to live in a dream world.

6. CRIME AND MORALITY ISSUES IN THE NOVEL

Crime in Murdoch's works is not ordinary, but offense to morality is considered a crime. Adultery is a crime: both Martin and his wife cheat each other. He keeps a clandestine relationship, she first leaves him for Palmer, later she brings to the open her constant affair with Alexander. Their marriage does not function because it lacks love and understanding. They do not want to accept this and prolong their living together - Martin did not give the divorce to his wife; Antonia allowed him to visit her everyday while she was living with Palmer. They lied to themselves.

Abortion is not a big issue in the novel but it is mentioned to fulfill a purpose. Martin is indifferent to Georgie's suffering after her abortion. They both decide on that and they are both guilty because abortion is prohibited by law. Society as well takes actions to protect unborn lives to be thrown away. It is the same as murder or even worse. However, Georgie suffers after the abortion. Her relationship with Martin is not the same. She was deprived of the right to become a mother and she sacrifices her unborn child for Martin's sake who needed peace and freedom. He could not become a responsible father, because he himself was immature and morally sick.

In a perfect world the unmarried couple may have kept the child and get married. But Martin did not have enough strength and power to face life as it comes and chooses the fastest and the most selfish way of getting rid of the child. The readers are offered a complicated story which reflects reality. Abortion happens, adultery happens, couples lack understanding, incest happens, violence is manifested.

A devastated Georgie, left without Martin's love, hopes to be loved by Alexander. He is worse than his brother because he seduces Georgie to make Antonia jealous. Alexander, as Martin, does not care about hurting her feelings. He wanted revenge towards Antonia because she betrayed him with Palmer. After using Georgie he desperately fights to win Antonia back. Georgie suffered a nervous breakdown. She tried to commit suicide because she felt disappointed when she learnt that even Alexander did not love her. She sent Martin her hair and a letter to Honor. She needed help or maybe she wanted to bid farewell to her dearest people.

Crime is derived from problems that arouse in life. The interaction and jamming of characters bear crime. Characters suffer. They want to achieve their goals but they realize that it is difficult to. They have to try hard to fulfill their desires. They hide truth. They plot against each other. When others reveal their truths, they become tough and violent. We have the case with Martin. He became hardened when Georgie revealed their relationship. He strokes her, thus abusing with her. Women discrimination is tackled somewhat indirectly. Men like Martin use women for their sexual impulses. They not only abuse with them physically, but they also exert psychological pressure on them. Martin not only hits Georgie, but he also hurts her morally. People protect their rights. Martin not only insulted Georgie by striking her but he also showed lack of respect. Where is the love he felt for her? He could not gather himself, but he was not the only person who suffered. Georgie had self-esteem. She revealed their relationship because Martin sent her away miserably.

Martin hit Palmer. How could Palmer withdraw without suing him? It is true that Palmer got Antonia from Martin, but he did not steal her. She left Martin with her initiative. Palmer is not to be blamed. He does not deserve corporal punishment. Even Antonia does not deserve to be beaten by her husband - something Martin would have never done. He loved her as a child loves his mother. It is his jealousy that provokes violence.

A sword may be symbolic. It represents power or execution. Honor has come to this world like a Medusa with the sword of Perseus to take revenge, to bring justice to this world. Honor's determination to convince Martin to fight for winning his wife over again, is both justified and unjust. Everyone would fight for his love, but violence may cause harm, damage, even death.

By 'enslaving' Martin, by using him as a child, Palmer and Antonia offend his moral values; make him powerless, unable to act, unable to 'grow up'. The violence against Georgie, by striking her, and against Honor by attacking her, shows that he is offended, cheated. He feels cheated even by Georgie who has confessed to Honor about their relationship. But Georgie tells him that it was he who offended her by sending her off when the door opened and they thought Honor to be Antonia. She felt inferior as if someone found him 'kissing the housemaid' (p. 83) In order to release her anger she needed to speak to someone. She chose Honor.

Incest is a violation of morality. It is committed by unscrupulous people, by those who are mentally unstable or by maniacs. It is not accepted by society. However it is present in everyday life.

Ruthlessness shows that people do not care for each other. Georgie is ruthless to Antonia when she meets her. Her youth and sincerity overpowers Antonia's vulnerability. When Martin sees her with Palmer and Honor at London Airport, his first impression is that she is 'enslaved' by Palmer, but no, she is not. She is saved and helped by her youth and intelligence. She deserves to be happy with someone who really loves her. Ruthlessness of his brother has reached the point of stealing away Martin's wife. He remarks that 'It was not that I judged him morally' (p.196). But he felt alone.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Iris Murdoch knows how to deal with life problems. She is considered a philosophical writer by many reviewers. Philosophy of life is treated with competence. Life is seen from every angle of vision. Every life aspect is mentioned in her novel. Her style is not complicated. She uses everyday language, because her issues derive from everyday life. In her novels action predominates characterization. That is why they are called melodramas. Her characters are inclined to self-love. Through action we understand their instability.

Life is seen with all its problems. Murdoch treats problematic issues. She deals with love, norm, freedom, truth, sex, family. She does not convey her ideas openly. She offers an open ending to the novel. It provides different interpretations by the reader. She not only tries to cure the spiritual blindness of her characters, but she also tries to make an appeal to the reader's conscience.

Love is considered as a source of life and power. It is also a source of destruction, a net full of intrigues. It is like a mirage in a desert. People think they have found their true love, but it results to be a falsity. People become thus, disillusioned and insulted.

Norm is always surpassed; people break the rules in order to achieve their goals. The crime issues are, as a result present.

Freedom is something to be searched. Characters lack freedom to act, to know reality, to 'grow up'. They are refrained by the distortion of reality, but there are always some good characters that help them to act freely in the waking world.

Truth is always being searched for. It is hidden in people's secrets. Sooner or later secrets are revealed and truth places itself among people.

Sex nowadays is the most discussed issue. It is treated frankly in terms of homosexuality, heterosexuality or incest. It is seen even as an abuse against women.

Family is the essence of society. If it is broken, debauchery is present in society. A happy marriage makes up a happy family. But Murdoch focuses on marriages in crisis. Divorce is treated. Childless couples are at the center of attention. Adultery is mentioned.

Byatt says that Murdoch's novels resemble those written by Shakespeare, because of the treatment of big issues. What I myself found similar to Shakespeare's style was the mastery to ease tension and to provide laughter. She has a good sense of humor. I would like to read other books written by her.

The story has a happy ending. The interruption of illusion, a postmodernist feature, creates confusion in the end. It puts the reader in a quandary, whether to believe that a new relationship had begun, or that Honor would leave him, or something bad would happen to Martin. Life is like this; it is contingent, unexpected, uncertain. We should live with our feet on the ground and should accept reality.

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AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY



Iris Klosi is a full time university lecturer at the State University of Tirana, Albania, Faculty of Foreign Languages, English Department since 2000. Her Graduation Degree Thesis was on Iris Murdoch's Novels. She finished her Master Degree Micro thesis in 2005 on Translation Aspects of *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller. In 2012 she won the academic degree Doctor of Sciences in Applied Linguistics, Translation Discipline.