

## GOTHIC ELEMENTS IN IRIS MURDOCH'S POSTMODERN NOVELS AFTER 1970

### *ELEMENTOS GÓTICOS EN LAS NOVELAS POSMODERNAS DE IRIS MURDOCH POSTERIORES A 1970*

Elena N. KORNILOVA 

ekornilova@mail.ru

*Lomonosov Moscow State University, Federación Rusa*

**ABSTRACT:** In her works, Iris Murdoch remained faithful to the traditions of English literature. A Gothic novel that used the archaic mythology of the British Isles: Celtic, Anglo-Saxon, medieval Christian mysticism in the literature of the second half of the twentieth century remained one of the few life-giving sources for the preservation and development of the novel genre, which the writer thought about in her essays. In the later novels *The Black Prince* (1973), *A Word Child* (1975) and *The Sea, the Sea* (1978), Murdoch widely uses Gothic elements to study the psychology the modern man and the problems facing him in society. The article examines in detail the spatio-temporal organization of the neo-Gothic Murdoch novels and the typology of the images of classical villains. Gothic makes Murdoch novels attractive to the general reader and allows her to preach her philosophical views.

**KEYWORDS:** Iris Murdoch; neo-Gothic; poetics of the gothic novel; spatitemporal organization; psychology of the modern man; gothic villain.

**RESUMEN:** En sus obras, Iris Murdoch siguió siendo fiel a las tradiciones de la literatura inglesa. La novela gótica, que usaba la mitología arcaica de las Islas Británicas junto a la mística céltica, anglosajona y cristiana, en la literatura de la segunda mitad del siglo XX, seguía siendo una de las pocas fuentes de la vida y del desarrollo del género de la novela, sobre lo que la escritora reflexionaba en sus ensayos. En sus novelas *El príncipe negro* (1973), *El hijo de las palabras*

(1975) y *El mar, el mar* (1978), usa ampliamente los elementos de la literatura gótica para la investigación de la psicología del hombre contemporáneo y de los problemas que le plantea la sociedad. En este capítulo se tratan detalladamente la organización del espacio-tiempo de las novelas neogóticas de Murdoch y la tipología de las imágenes de los malvados clásicos. Lo gótico hace a estas novelas atractivas para un gran número de lectores y un mercado de masas, al tiempo que permite a la autora señalar sus creencias filosóficas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Iris Murdoch; neo-gótico; poética de la novela gótica; organización espacio-temporal; psicología del hombre moderno; villano gótico.

## 1. Neogothic. The Insight of the Tradition

Iris Murdoch, according to the primal springhead of her creative works, is a truly English writer who maintains the fundamental traditions of English literature. The genre traits of Enlightenment, Gothic, Romanticist, Victorian, epistolary and picaresque novels could be easily found in her later texts. Let us however pay special attention to Gothic motifs that were popular among Romantic and Victorian writers Walter Scott, S.T. Coleridge, Lord Byron, Ch. Dickens, M. Shelley, O. Wilde, not to mention the adventure and picaresque novels of Stevenson, Haggard or Kipling on the turn of the 19-20 centuries.

The most important components of Murdoch's later novels are hallucinations, visions, temporary insanities, prophetic dreams, fears of poltergeists that influence the mood; they form the alarming state of the heroes and create gloomy forebodings... As is commonly cited (Kenyon O., Wolfe P.) this psychological coloring of novel's texts opens the door for entry mysticism, mythological elements and all kinds of Gothic motifs of her intellectual prose.

The central aesthetic category in the Gothic novel becomes frightening and terrible, fear. The representatives of the «Gothic» school have borrowed this interpretation from Edmund Burke's treatise *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). Burke writes, that the fear that causes horror and the terrible should have a special nature.

In all these cases, if the pain and terror are so modified as not to be actually noxious; if the pain is not carried to violence, and the terror is not conversant about the present destruction of the person, as these emotions clear the parts, whether fine, or gross, of a dangerous and troublesome incumbrance, they are

capable of producing delight; not pleasure, but a sort of delightful horror, a sort of tranquility tinged with terror; which as it belongs to self-preservation is one of the strongest of all the passions. Its object is the sublime (P. 129).

Though he specifies that pain and terror become the source of the sublime only in the case that they do not threaten with substantial violence. This standoffishness has hidden the truth of the delight that humans bear when coming in touch with the terrible. The end of the eighteenth century was a time of forming of British Gothic Literature. Europe was going through a paradigm crisis: the vestiges of feudalism were rapidly destroyed with the influence of bourgeois revolutions; the Enlightenment redounded to the crisis of traditional ideology; the world was turned upside down by the Napoleonic wars, etc. The Neo-Gothic novel that was closely related to the literature of the Postmodern era, also caused by a number of cataclysms such as memories of the horrors of World War II, the end of the colonial system, protests against the Vietnam War, student revolutions, hippie movements and, finally, the emergence of a consumerist society, which was not commended with the intellectual elite. Alvin Toffler wrote about this «destruction of the world»: «Change is the process by which the future invades our lives... This accelerative thrust has personal and psychological, as well as sociological, consequences... unless man quickly learns to control the rate of change in his personal affairs as well as in society at large, we are doomed to a massive adaptational breakdown» (7). The consternation of the intellectuals, that was reflected in twentieth-century literature, became not the sign of the unreal, eerie world, but the occurrence of the reality of existence. While eighteenth century authors described the horror of the underworld preferring the mystical world over reality, twentieth century ones did not try to deny the reality and escape from it to fantasies, more than that, in their novels the irrational become the basis of social realm, defining the thoughts and actions of the modern human being.

Besides the fact that the «Gothic» becomes the source of the «sanitation» of the dying novel genre (Bruhm), the death of which was openly announced by A. Rob-Griye, M. Bütör, N. Sarrot, the French structuralists and their followers (*Les étapes de nouveau roman*). The Gothic novel in the 20th century is enduring its recurrent renaissance due to the combination of entertainment form and depth of the posed questions. The Gothic's emphasis on the sensuous-susceptible, as in sentimentalism, it's appeal to the unconscious and

the subconscious in human beings is turning out to be actual for solving the existential problems of searching for self-identity, comprehending the limits of freedom, the overcoming of the dear of past and future and the experience of becoming a person through moral shocks.

The formalistic methods in Gothic prose allowed writers to punctuate the peculiarities of human psychology in extreme situations, to explore the essence of the entire nature to feel extreme fear, that is always attending the process of self-understanding of the character; to analyze the kernel of dominion and psychological violence as a way of perception and at the same time as a threat to liberty. The genre of the Gothic novel happened to be the suitable narrative form for exploring the philosophical and psychological problems of contemporary reality within the framework of a fascinating storyline. As well David Punter (220) was right to remark that the Gothic is not only an agglomerate of terrible and supernatural events, but the horror lies in the very psychology of the characters themselves.

Iris Murdoch's Neo-Gothic novels after 1970s usually include *The Black Prince* (1973), *A Word Child* (1975), and *The Sea, the Sea* (1978). Let us indicate the main elements of Neo-Gothic prose, those showing the loan of the inherent Gothic techniques, motifs and patterns:

1. Components bound to the mythological, fantastic and irrational: ghosts, frightening monsters, mystical phenomena, dreams (or visions because of drags or alcohol intoxication, illness, inadequate precipitation of consciousness); predictions, premonitions, double-gangers.
2. Violence and criminal wrongdoings. The narrative in the form of an investigation, the occurrence of detective elements in the text; the reader that becomes the main detective and has to collect all the contradictions into coherent unity.
3. Topos. The setting (in the parallel with the Gothic castle) — a remote island, an abandoned house, a mysterious cave — the place where the crime is committed or ready to be committed, where the *Gothic villain* triumphs.
4. The psychological line of sight —the method of «unreliable» narrator and «multiplied» finals; the reader does not know whether the event really happened or it was a hallucination, a product of the sick imagination of the hero. Diaries, letters, confessions, fragmentary chaos of multiplied and sometimes contradictory narrations.

5. The reliance of writers from the second half of the 20th century on the works of Z. Freud and K.G. Young encouraged «gothic» imagination, made the dualism of characters and their actions more diverse, ambivalent and polysemic, turned the appeal to the unconscious and the subconscious into the elements of plot — in contrast to their forerunners with the customary traits of character.

Thus, the Neo-Gothic adopts, stylizes and parodies the structural elements of the Gothic novel on different levels: this is the psychology of the Gothic, that reveals the inner world of the characters through the instrumentality of an irrational, unusual and sometimes excessively cruel experience; this is the transformation of the figures of the Gothic villains, whose characters resemble their classical progenitors, but the reasons of their actions are situated much deeper than the achievement of any selfish goals. At the same time, we can point out the transformation of the main «Gothic» motives, such as man's powerlessness before fate, the motive of escape and persecution, the motives of prophetic dreams and warnings, the motive of a mask and true face, the motive of mystery, the motive of duplicity and the motive of abnormal love in postmodern literary practice.

## 2. Temporal and Spatial Organization of Texts

Let us consider how the gothic chronotope is functionalized in the novels by Iris Murdoch, and how the relations in the triad «writer-character-reader» are changing. The «chronotope» is the term of M. M. Bakhtin (see 1,3. Topos), that specifies the interconnection of time and space, that characterizes certain genre forms (P. 232-314).

Time in the neo-Gothic novel has a special mythological value; it is indefinite in its essence and can be correlated with the Bergsonian *durée*, that is changeable, dynamic, and —most importantly— subjective, and, because of this, unmeasurable and intangible. This conventional past as a crushing burden falls on the shoulders of characters. So, in the novel *A Word Child*, the sister of the character Hillary Bird, who is power-loving and egocentric, wails that 'the past would destroy them', because something terrifying is getting 'out and swallowing them' (211). The characters of Murdoch are entitled to mourn over the past, because, from the occurrence in the past that intrudes

into their lives, arises the menace to their well-disposed subsistence, and from this moment tier rational life turned out to be managed with the irrational laws of Murdoch's imagination. In this novel, Hilary Bird and people around her becomes hostages to the death of his first love, Ann and her child, and time goes in a circle: again love for Ganner's pregnant wife and her death, this time in in the December waters of the Thames.

The time of external reality is replaced by the time of reminiscence in the novel *The Sea, the Sea* (1978), where Charles Arrowby starts to keep a diary for the reconstruction of the most valuable moments of his past. This «escape» into the past is an attempt to avoid the responsibility for taking false steps and betraying the feelings of Charles' nearest and dearest people. However, the time of Charles' diary is changing to the present, and in this present, he turns out to be surrounded only by those people with whom relations were not completed —an 'understatement': Mary Fitch, Lizzie Scherer and other guests of his lonely house. Charles begins to keep a diary for describing his love story, but he soon forgets about this intention, while he becomes involved against his will into a whirl of activity. That forces him to write about the present, while gradually realizing that his present is the result of the mistakes in his past.

The spectrum of temporal characteristics in the novel *The Sea, the Sea* is quite wide — this is the intentional slowing of time at the beginning, then jumps and dips in the narration, especially in particularly dramatic moments, also the interweaving of parallel storylines.

It is specifically the time, which forms the Topos, a special locality of the scene. Elisabeth McAndrew characterizes the «Gothic» topos as a special space, which keeps the mysteries of the past, and even recent past, and this can obsess the characters in a psychological and/or physical way (49). The castle becomes a real character in the novel, the center, which submits all the action. «The remote castle, with its antique courts and ruined turrets, deserted and haunted chambers where hang age-old tapestries; is grated windows that exclude the light; its dark... galleries amid whose mouldering gloom is heard the rustle of an unseen robe, a sight, a hurried football where no mortal step should tread... it's the Castle itself» writes P. D. Warma about *The Castle of Otranto* (57). G. E. Haggerty also marks that space in Gothic novels is always scary: rooms are too small and resembling a prison, the cloisters arouse claustrophobia, but the outlook is too grandiose. The space of the novel itself

becomes a source of intrusive state: the plot lines are disjuncted, fragmented, redundant or even forgotten (20).

The house stands out in Murdoch's Neo-Gothic novels under a variety of incarnations. It can be a prison for Hannah Crean-Smith (*The Unicorn*), a hermit's retreat for Arrowby (*The Sea, the Sea*). In these novels, the greater part of events takes place either in house or nearby. At the same time, the house — this should be underlined! — is always remote from other inhabited areas.

Isolation is the main pattern of the Gothic space. Gaze Castle in *The Unicorn* is located far from the city, the house that Charles Arrowby buys in the novel *The Sea, the Sea* also stands apart. Isolation and remoteness are directly associated with the motives of aspiration to forbidden knowledge or dangerous performances: Gaze turns the castle into a prison for Hannah Crean-Smith, Charles Arrowby is going to abduct Hartley. The house in the Gothic tradition is a space that always associates with danger, and this danger is more a feeling than a reality, it is important to get a presentiment of something terrible and irrecoverable tragic, this presentiment is only forced by different mysterious unhappy signs that appear on the first pages of narration (Bruhm S., MacAndrew El.): a fallen vase, a broken mirror, a petrified face in the window (22, 29). So when the character finds himself inside the house, it marks the beginning of the journey in his own subconscious — for Charles Arrowby, the lead character of the novel *The Sea, the Sea*, the house embraces all his past relationships with the main characters and requires a rethinking of his own actions.

The house as a capture for an inaccessible ladylove is a cross-cutting image of Murdoch's *The Sea, the Sea*. For Mary Fitch, for Mary Hartley in the distant past, or even Lizzie Scherer, for the Christel from the novel *A World Child* or Priscilla from the *The Black Prince*, home is a symbol of helplessness and loneliness. In this way is realized the traditional motive of the Gothic novel: female submission to male violence and dazzlement.

In the house, in which the character was looking for seclusion, he is persecuted with the «shadows of the past» in the people that are disturbing his solitude as if they came to terms to occupy his house, meddle in his life and claim for responsibility for the evil, that he cursed. The past falls upon Charles with the full heaviness of the evil he has done, demanding for report exactly at the time when he wants to revive the most innocent and sentimental part of his life.

However exactly this first unfulfilled, unrealized love, escapes from Arrowby, while all others persistently ask for the return to previous relationships. The pandemonium of characters from his past love stories, friends and fellows reduce the situation to an absurdity. The more Charles seeks for solitude, the more more numerous the circle of people he abandoned grows. They are voluntarily coming to his house and they all require attention.

The horizontal orientation of space dominates in the novel *The Sea, The Sea*. The house as the main topos is opposed to the sea. The closed space of the house and the open space of the sea interact throughout the plot. As the house ceases to be a place of solitude and silence, the sea runs higher. A warning of the dangers posed by an apparently calm sea will prove doom — Hartley's son would perish in it and Charles himself would also almost die. It would be the culmination of a conflict between heroes who found themselves inside the house.

Charles' attempt to reawaken his first love in this house leads to tragedy. When trying to save Hartley from the prison of her unhappy marriage, Charles does not realize that he wants to give her freedom against her will. The description of Hartley in Charles' house is one of the most emotional places of the novel.

Her face was red, wild with tears, her mouth dribbling. Her voice, raucous, piercing, shrieked out, like a terrified angry person shrieking an obscenity, a frenzied panic noise, a prolonged 'aaab', which turned into a sobbing wail of quick 'ob- ob-ob', with a long descending 'ooooo' sound ending almost softly, and then the scream again: this continuing mechanically, automatically, on and on as if the human creature were possessed by an alien demonic machine. I left horror, fear, a sort of disgusted shame, shame for myself, shame for her. I didn't want Titus and Gilbert to hear this ghastly rhythmical noise, this attack of aggressive mourning. I hoped they were far away on the rocks singing their songs. I *shouted*: 'Stop, stop, stop!' I felt I should go violently mad if it went on for another minute, I felt I wanted to silence her even if it meant killing her, I shook her again and yelled at her, ran to the door, ran back again. I shall never forget the awful image of that face, that mask, and the relentless cruel rhythmical quality of that sounds... (305-306)

The female lead of the novel stubbornly prefers her despot husband, and self-assuring Arrowby cannot understand that. As Olga Kenyon says



in her research, it's because he was able to love only the picture created by his imagination (40). The terrible vision, which appeared to Charles from the depths of the sea became the messenger of disaster in the novel. On the front pages of the novel «The Castle of Otranto» by H. Walpole, Manfred was frightened by a giant knight's glove; here in the same way, in the novel «The Sea, the Sea» the image of a supernatural monster haunts Charles. All explanations of this ugly snake-like monster, that emerged from the sea, turn out to be not very convincing (including the most seemingly reliable one — from Charles' point of view — the using of drug in the past). As the image of a giant glove was predicting punishment to Manfred, while performing the narrative function of warning about forfeit for past crimes, the image of a fantastic monster becomes a sign for Charles, who is not able to read this riddle. Charles himself would become a monster, which suddenly appears in the life of his first love Hartley and destroys her peaceful existence. She and her husband are forced to leave their home and move to Australia.

The horror caused by the vision of a sea monster rising from the waves would strive Charles throughout the story. «The shock and horror that they saw paralyzed me for a while» (19) he confesses. At the first time he saw the monster in the calm period of the life on the sea-side. And the second time would be he would be sinking in the sea and would escape death only due to his brother.

A house in *The Sea, the Sea* is mostly the space of chaos, in which a lot of predestinations are intertwined, and only a real tragedy is capable to undo this Gordian knot. In the threshold of the life-changing events, Charles, the main character of the novel, gets warning signs of danger. As it should be in a Gothic novel, supernatural things happen in the house. Charles says that his house, like any other building of such a respectable age, is full of rustles and squeaks (compare Mrs. Clennam's house in Charles Dickens's novel *Little Dorrit*). «So it is that I can imagine, as I lie in bed at night, that I hear soft footsteps in the attic above me or that the bead curtain on the landing is quietly clicking because someone has passed furtively through it» (19) However, the mysterious invasions of the house are not happening in the imagination of the main character, but in reality. Firstly, someone enters in the house and breaks an old mirror. Then Charles sees the face looking at him through the glass from the inner room, and what he sees «strikes him with horror». «Isn't there too much science fiction?» thinks Charles in his diary. «Dragons, poltergeist, faces in the

windows!» (29) After that, he saw something moving in one of the windows. Charles overcomes the trembling and gets into the house and again notices this figure, deciding that it is «the ghostly mistress of this house». But this is not a ghost, it's one of the fashionable women, actress Rosina, whom he abandoned in the past and who has now become a kind of demon haunting him.

In this novel, the reader observes the «house-sea» opposition. And if initially the calmness of the house is opposed to the irrepressible and even terrible elements of the sea, then gradually the house turns into a terrible and unstable world where the heroes blame each other, threaten, take revenge, not wanting to forgive mistakes in the past. And in the sea, which almost deprived Charles of his life, in the end, the hero gets a kind of cleansing ritual - the past recedes and ceases to dominate his present.

It's necessary to say about the ironic, carnival, «game» method of new «post-modern» relationships between the author and the reader, which is present in the Neo-Gothic novel. This game has many faces — from fun and entertaining to deadly dangerous. Charles Arrowby in the novel *The Sea, the Sea* stays in one step from death, when he no longer distinguishes the difference between reality and his own script. The role players in his performance are revolting against his intention — Hartley flees to Australia, and Peregrine dumps Charles into the sea.

The formal techniques of Gothic prose allow to accentuate the features of human psychology in extreme situations, to explore the essence of modern characters. The genre of the Gothic novel turns out to be an adequate narrative form for the research of the philosophical and psychological problems of modern reality within the framework of a fascinating storyline. Exactly as David Punter remarked, Gothic is not only a jumble of terrifying and supernatural events, the horror lays in the very psychology of the characters (220).

Reality in the novels by Iris Murdoch is a labyrinth, without exit. Rescuing the characters is not finding the thread of Ariadne, which miraculously helps to get out of it. The real rescue is the meeting with the Minotaur, however hard it could be. While passing through the labyrinth, the character perceives himself, revealing that he is in a real labyrinth of conflicting feelings, ambitions and fears himself. From this moment, reality is no longer terrible, but the characters are frightened by their own inner world. Sometimes this revelation occurs with the help of an evil genius, a demon like the *gothic villains* in Radcliffe and Lewis, and their evil is ultimately constructive.

### 3. The Gothic Villain

The gothic novel brought the demonic villain to the forefront of the narration. At the same time, the positive characters, whose formations are made according to the canons of Enlightenment prose, are turned into background characters in the Gothic novel. The mysterious past of the demonic villain, his super-strong vices, talents, insidious plans and fatal passions become the main driving force of the intrigue in the Gothic novel. The key function of the Gothic novel is to inspire the experience of fear and it is made with the help carrier of «evil», the terrifying deeds of villain-like characters.

The intricacy of the character of the demonic villain lies in its psychological ambivalence — he is not closed to goodness, although evil dominates his character. This psychological ambivalence of the demonic villain is its key feature and, therefore, the very definition of «demonic» couldn't be clearly interpreted. «This non-authority of the strict demonic classification is related to the fact that this at the same time frightens us and extremely worries», says Cavallaro (182).

«The Gothic villain is a mythical and symbolic figure. He cannot be called weak, but in his character the author shows the nature of moral shakiness. These villains symbolically are carriers of the devilish beginning and, along with ghosts and monsters in the novel, demonstrate the depth of evil, madness and torment in the human mind», says McEndrew, researcher of Gothic literature when characterizing the new type of hero (81). At the same time, evil as the destruction of the soul, immorality, anomalies of the psyche, violations and deviations are interesting for writers not as a hindrance to the happiness of noble characters, but as a subject of deep analysis. In contrast to the static positive of the Gothic novel, the demonic villain undergoes through the significant moral metamorphoses in plain view of the reader.

The Neo-Gothic novel of the 20th century inherits from the 19th century a hierarchy of characters, that is headed by a demonic hero. Murdoch, referring to Plato, writes in the essay *Art is an imitation of nature*, that the villain or a demonic hero, who always stays in nervous excitement, is always changeable, turns up to be much more interesting character than somebody virtuous, who is dull, modest, unobtrusive and always true to himself (246).

Two types of villains can be distinguished in the Neo-Gothic novels by Iris Murdoch. The first one, is already familiar to the reader from the classic Gothic

novel, this is the manic-passionate lover. These are Charles Arrowby from *The Sea, the Sea*, Hilary Bird in *The Child of Words* and Peter Crean-Smith in *The Unicorn* (1963). They are the bearers of the destructive passion that determines all their actions. In their egoistic desire to possess the object of their love at any cost, they are deprived of the slightest compassion to this object.

In contrast, the villains of the second type are impassive and cold-blooded. They act as producers of other people's fates. They also do not have compassion for the victims of their educational experiences, but believe that the evil that they cause has some healing power. By interfering in the fate of other people, Misha Fox in *The Flight from the Enchanter*, Max Lezhur in *The Unicorn* and Charles Arrowby in *The Sea, the Sea* are trying to play the role of Creator, to play the role of some kind of alternative god. The goal of the villains-jailers is to possess another person *for themselves*, and the goal of the alternative Creator is to give the other person the possibility to *possess himself*, that is, revealing the true 'me'.

It is interesting to explain why the main character of the novel *The Sea, the Sea* combines the features of two types of villains, being on one side playing in 'Creator' role and, on the other, the 'manic lover' one; so it is difficult to find out the main characteristic as a key. In the case of Charles, the maniacal pursuit of his beloved women is the result of his play. Arrowby directs his performance, meddling in the fates of other people and imposing on them the true (as it seems to him) understanding of freedom. But Hartley's «freedom» from her tyrannical husband is necessary for Charles as a condition of her return to him, her former lover. So, it is appropriate that he fails in transforming Hartley, because the way he chooses is self-deception by the fact that he is a successful theater director, that is able to make happy and even resuscitate another person as if he were God.

At last, the victims of the villains in Murdoch's novels are not highly moral. In accordance with the division of the functions of villains into «manic-tyrannical» and «educational and divine» these victims are also acting in two ways - scholars who are opening the way for self-understanding and freedom (Rosa Keepe in *The Flight from the Enchanter*) and prisoners who are forcibly deprived of their liberty (Hartley in *The Sea, the Sea*), or even their life (Hannah in *The Unicorn*).

It is evident that the concept of «evil» in a Neo-Gothic novel becomes blurred and requires reviewing the whole system of moral coordinates. Researcher Peter

Wolf focuses on the mindless selfishness of this type of characters, specifying that «in the novels of the writer, evil does not wear its traditional masks. Her “villains” themselves suffer and often hurt others without understanding the meaning of their actions. The novelist understands sin as an unwillingness to understand the needs and desires of others as distinctly as her own. Like Sartre, she is suspicious of absolute truths and imperatives» (75-76).

In the novel *The Flight from the Enchanter*, the mysterious Mischa Fox keeps in check the fates of all the heroes of the book and manipulates them like a puppeteer. In a paradoxical way, Murdoch combines in one character the ability to cry to a small butterfly or a lizard, that has lost its tail while being afraid, or to fishes that felled out of a broken aquarium and, at the same time to come out that he was killing animals. Misha's explanation is as paradoxical as he is himself: «I felt so sorry about them», he says. - They were so helpless. Everything could hurt them. And I could not bear it. One day someone gave me a kitten, and I killed him» (208).

The topic of compassion refers the reader to Nietzsche's line of reasoning that «compassion ... acts oppressively» and «compassion greatly increases the loss in strength». For Nietzsche, compassion is not a virtue but the source of evil (21). Mercifulness as the basis of Christianity is unacceptable for him because it prevents the development of human being. Mischa talks about the compassion of *some* gods, but he doesn't seem to identify himself with them (here we can remember that Murdoch is a worshipper of Kant's ideas, which Nietzsche denies).

There is another common peculiarity of these characters - nothing is known about them for certain. Peter Saward thinks that he knows Mischa best of all, but, in reality, he knows nothing about him.

He looked at Mischa, feeling again the puzzlement and tenderness with which these curious encounters always filled him. Mischa was a problem which, he felt, he would never solve — and this although he had got perhaps more data for its solution than any other living being. Yet it seemed that the more Mischa indulged his impulse to reveal himself in these unexpected ways to Peter, the more puzzling he seemed to become (206-207).

In the end, we cannot say with all certainty whether Mischa Fox was a magician or not— we still do not know enough about him. The «image» of

the wizard is created by the reader's imagination, but, throughout the whole novel, Mischa does not do anything supernatural.

The demonic villains that are playing gods in the novels by Murdoch, are adopting the role of Providence; they allow themselves to change human fates on their own opinion. However, it would be an exaggeration to say that they have the ethical indulgence for such actions. Murdoch herself in the novel «The Wild Rose» says through the main character of Emma Sands, that nobody should try to play the god role in the life of somebody else, and, in any case, nobody could really do that. The dingy goals of this demonic teacher are leading us to the understanding that his true purpose is not re-education, but power over other people. Erich Fromm in his work «Man for himself» calls this power «the sadistic impulse», whose purpose is to make man «the helpless object of stranger's will» (187). Enjoying the power over others is a common feature of both types of gothic villains, and more than that, the villains-jailers are always trying to substitute the essence of cruel acts with noble feelings.

In conclusion to the abovementioned, we can note that, while being the major writer and thinker, Iris Murdoch is turning the terrible phenomena that she noticed in reality into an object of psychological analysis, in the experience of human nature under study and, at the same time, into the condition and material of artistic experiment, often to illustrate philosophical formulas. The key «Gothic» motifs are actively borrowed, passing the significant transformation and acquiring a new philosophical, ethical and psychological content. While being ideological and plot-forming components of narration, the motifs are, on the one hand, evolving structural elements, and, on the other, they are connecting two distant literary epochs.

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