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***An Unofficial Rose* and Murdochian Existentialist Style**

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Abstract:

Thematically revolving around freedom, *An unofficial Rose* plays a crucial role in Iris Murdoch's literary oeuvre; it is a key to Murdochian concept of freedom and how it relates to the correspondent Sartrean notion. Sartre's freedom is believed to be the fount of his distinctive literary style in which the epidemic paralysis stimulated by modern man's concession to "bad faith" is accentuated through "simultaneous perspective." Examining the novelistic features of *An unofficial Rose* against the Sartrean style leaves no doubt that Murdoch is another existentialist whose "freedom" dictates other narrative techniques. This study intends to elaborate on "Murdochian existentialist style."

Keywords: Freedom, Contingency, Sartrean simultaneous perspective, Murdochian existentialist style, *An unofficial Rose*.

An unofficial Rose stands out of Iris Murdoch's fictional works; the sixth novel in her vast oeuvre, it, strictly speaking, centers around one major theme: man's free will and the consequent dilemma of choice. It is heavily stressed in the duplication of a framing plot into a group of subplots with parallel existential structures where almost all the characters from Miranda, the youngest one, to Hugh, the oldest, are shown entangled in their own dilemmas of choice. In no other novels, Murdoch interweaves such striking existential theme into the various strands of her narrative. Such particularity attaches a critical importance to the novel and turns it into a hotbed for the existentialist analysis with especially a Sartrean lens.

Iris Murdoch's novels are of such a quality and kaleidoscopic nature that it is really false to subsume them under any known category of fiction. Nevertheless, their existentialist trend has been touched on in the critical responses they aroused. R.J. Kaufmann in "The Progress of Iris Murdoch" regards Murdoch as an existentialist "along the humanistic lines of Camus" (255). Criticizing such an extreme view, Pondrom divides her fictional works into two traditional schemes while crediting her authenticity; those like *Under the Net*, *The Sandcastle*, and *An Unofficial Rose* that follow the "great tradition" of the English social novel. And the others such as *The Flight from the Enchanter*, *A Severed Head*, *The Unicorn*, *The Italian Girl*, and *The Time of the Angels* that are more in the tradition of gothic novel. Pondrom emphasizes that though these gothic novels share some mythic quality with Camus's *L'Étranger*, they have evolved out of a different scheme of thought (418). Encountered with the conspicuous centrality of man's freedom and choice in *An Unofficial Rose*, it is very difficult to resist the temptation of labeling it a descendent of Sartrean fiction. Suspicious of such a hasty conclusion, the following argument approaches the novel from a comparative outlook to show that Murdoch's affinity with existentialism is no more than her choice of themes and in other aspects of her style she is on her own. It postulates that the diverse handling of the same theme ends in the appearance of distinct fictions that authentically employs new and old stylistic devices.

Existentialism as its name indicates focus on man's existence and the meaning of life. It concerns man's freedom and choice as the condition of man's existence. In this sense it is more a tendency and attitude reappearing in varying intensity through the history of western thought and aesthetics. However, as a cultural and philosophical movement it gains popularity after World War II by Sartre's exclusive focus on man's subjectivity in both his philosophy and fiction. Within this perspective, Sartre upholds a new aim for philosophical investigations. Following Friedrich Nietzsche and Søren Kierkegaard who inadvertently started existentialism in the mid-nineteenth century by their reactions against the dominant systematic philosophies of the time, Sartre sets to bring the individual and the subjective experiences into the focus of philosophical queries. The aftermath of World War II made man disillusioned with reason's absolute power to pave the way for an ideal utopia. The existentialists such as Sartre sensed the post-war ethos of despair and disbelief in scientific salvation misting the horizon of the world. They realized that what has shattered the absolute confidence in rationalism is man's experience of terror intensified by the atomic bomb's threat of instant annihilation. In line with this general mistrust in reason, existentialists dethroned reason of its secure, glorified place in the western civilization. They severely criticized scientific rationalism and abstract philosophical thought for their reduction of man's existence to the faculty of reason.

For them, reason is imperfect in clarifying mysteries both in nature and man's existence. There are dark places of non-reason that can never be penetrated by reason. So, man can never be categorized and defined in his wholeness; everyman is an infinite universe, ambiguous, full of tension and contradictions. There is no common humanity as the previous philosophy of Hegel and Kant presupposes or what Kierkegaard believes Christendom aims to inculcate in people as a criterion for evaluating themselves. This exultation of existence first found in the writings of Kierkegaard reappears again in the thought of all existentialists and is summed up in the Sartrean dictum that "existence proceeds essence." Kierkegaard, a pessimist Christian and a critic of Christian Church, alleges the individual to be responsible for granting meaning to his life and living passionately even in the face of its many existential obstacles and distractions. Like Kierkegaard who believes in the subjectivity of human existence and the uniqueness of everyman because of his moral decisions and the consequent anguish they encounter in their lives, Sartre talks of freedom, choice and angst (anguish) as the major conditions of human existence.

Sartre glorifies absolute freedom as the only feature that attributes uniqueness to every individual's life; his statement that man is "condemned to freedom" indicates that although man is situated in a meaningless, purposeless universe of contingencies and accidents in which anything may happen to anybody whether good or bad, it is human beings' absolute freedom that enables them to create value and meaning for their otherwise absurd existence. For Sartre, instead of a predetermined "essence" that defines what it is to be human, people are the sum total of their responsible choices; they are their existence. In other words, human beings are not but become through the choice of their actions; they are not good or evil by nature but can become one due to what they choose to do. The freedom of will as man's fundamental defining feature eliminates the age-old reliance on a divine being to give purpose to the universe in general and to define man in particular. It makes people responsible for their own becoming. To reject the detractors' condemnation of existentialism as a negative philosophy that propagates nihilism, Sartre discusses, in "Existentialism is a Humanism," that "man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world—and define himself afterwards" (292).

The same kind of Kierkegaardian promotion of existence over essence and Sartrean attention to the contingencies and unstable nature of the world conceptualized in such existential catchwords as absurdity, freedom and angst which reverberates with different intensity and nuance in the intellectual scheme of other existentialist thinkers is discernible in *An Unofficial Rose* though with a new shade that differentiates Murdoch to be another existentialist as such. A contemporary philosopher of Jean-Paul Sartre, Iris Murdoch is so much involved with Sartrean philosophy that some critics like Richard Moran attack her as a Sartrean existentialist in disguise, one who not only has dishonestly concealed her Sartrean side in her pretentious rejection of his ideas in her writings and interviews but also has misrepresented Sartre's notion of freedom. While the extreme assimilation of Sartrean thought into Murdoch's philosophy is indispensably striking, it would be patently unfair to overlook her ingenuity.

A perusal of her intellectual enterprise fairly demonstrates how in her disgust with her Oxford philosophical colleagues' nurturing the analytic philosophy which ignores man's individuality and subjective existence, Murdoch turns to Sartre's philosophy and how she finally severs herself from it once discerning its banishment of "pure knowledge," a principle that makes his existentialism inconsiderate of the moral dimension of man's life. Murdoch's original thought explicated in her philosophical writings and questioned in her fiction comes out of her critical evaluation of these two poles of her contemporary philosophy. To rectify their faults and fill in their lacunae, she borrows some useful key concepts from other thinkers. Out of espousing Oxford analytic philosophy and Sartrean existentialism with many other theological and moral understanding of her era emerges her unique scheme of thought that can be truly called a new kind of existentialism, a moral existentialism which stands on a middle ground between Kierkegaard's theistic existentialism and Sartre's atheistic existentialism.

A body of evidence in *An Unofficial Rose* leaves no doubt that the novel is more than a conventional novel of manners treating comically the possible permutation of love in British society. The novel, according to Murdoch in *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, "is properly an art of image rather than of analysis, and its revelation is, to borrow Gabriel Marcel's terminology, a mystery rather than a problem" (113). The mystery she intertwines in *An Unofficial Rose* is that of human personality and human freedom. More particularly, she seems to be asking "what is the nature of freedom and what are its limits?" or in the words of Ann Peronett near the end of the novel, "can our acts be stolen from us?" (335) Glicksberg believes that such existential concern forced Sartre to create certain style suitable for his own end. The same is true of other existential writers. Camus resorted to "mythic story" with "quasi-religious revelation" of the absurdity of the world; Kafka ended creating a "metaphysical tale" which assigns the fate of man to a Prime Mover. As Pondrom judiciously comments about her fiction, Murdoch never duplicates the Camusian or Kafkaesque style. Nor does she copy the Sartrean fiction in which a central character "presents the various arguments about freedom in a concise or tortured dialectic" as we see in the case of Mathieu Delarue in *Les chemins de la liberté* (404). This deliberate divergence from the practiced existentialist artistic approaches, drastically conspicuous in *An Unofficial Rose*, specifies the Murdochian quality of her existentialism marked by her unique concept of freedom.

Instead of employing her art for the analysis of her intellectual concerns and description of her philosophical conclusions as the notable existential writers have done, Murdoch resorts to a more synthetic procedure or what she calls "art of image." She needs the "art of image" not

only to prove her ingenuity as an artist but to display her own interpretation of existential themes. Bound to the creation of “art of image,” she attempts to reveal her morals in a way that is, as Pondrom truly puts it, “neither explicit nor immediately implicit” (404). That is why *An Unofficial Rose* is shaped out of a steady accretion of key words such as “free” or “contingent,” “fantasy,” symbols like “rose,” “dagger,” “blue Mercedes” “death” and a series of seemingly unrelated events. She just creates a world, a setting and then permits several contingent elements to happen there. More than a theme, freedom is also the underlying basis of her aesthetic principle that prohibits any infringement on the freedom of either characters or readers. So, she allows her characters to proceed into impossible but not improbable situations and lets her novel end without a realistic denouement. The existential vein of her fiction including *An Unofficial Rose* is more palpable when she integrates certain mysterious incidents in the plot to reveal symbolically the “rich and complicated world” and “opacity of persons” as Pondrom suggests (404). Murdoch’s existentialism is best summarized in her own statements in “Against Dryness”: “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. Our current picture of freedom encourages a dream-like facility” (20). Her novels in all their variety are genuine attempts to delineate the ramifications of such an outlook.

To draw her own image of freedom, Murdoch is compelled to develop a new kind of fiction that applies the established novelistic techniques in a fresh framework. The Comparison of her fiction with that of Sartre reveals that apart from her own symbolism for freedom, Murdoch applies a different setting and subject (a series of romances) to explore the existential question of freedom. Here her fictional society may be specially contrasted with that of *Reprieve* or *Les chemins de la liberté*, the novels in which Sartre does seem to represent society as a whole rather than to reflect on the relationships between the individuals, what Murdoch intends in her fiction.

What Sartre does in these novels is to illustrate how historical moments including the world-shaking event of World War II are only “the sum total of the interaction of individuals” from different walks of society be they as Glicksberg concludes “Hitler or Mathieu” (15). To reflect on the existential status of history, he is forced to write his novels from a “simultaneous perspective,” a relatively new literary technique, according to Glicksberg, which yet inevitably led to “an intractable contradiction”; *Reprieve* appears to be the story of people’s desperate efforts to escape the threat of war rather than to expunge their own role in their ruin (13, 18). The reader gasps reading as too many faces are reflected upon in short discontinuous scenes after scenes. The camera-like perspective, finally enable him to take “multiple composite shots” yet at the expense of “the concentrated unity of mood and effect” (14). It proves ironically very fruitful. The subjective experience of those living in the same situation is exposed individually: what are their impressions of a single event and how their orientation to absolute freedom affects their response to that event. In *Reprieve*, the multiple slices of life help showing that people suffer alike not due to their singular fate but for their, in Glicksberg’s terms, “apathy,” “blindness,” “criminal selfishness and stupidity” (12), their failure to take responsibility for their own fate and transfer meaning or value to the otherwise uncontrollable, absurd world.

Murdoch is never interested in such mutual linkage of man and history; nowhere is in her fiction any evidence of the historical linkage with the fate of individuals, “their confusion, their demoralized state, their despair” as Glicksberg traces in *Reprieve* (13). For her, the world is “a

place in which the accidental is the rule” (Pondrom 407). Even in her sole historical novel she treats history as a contingent fact of life, a force that in spite of its effect on the fate of people, she believes, is easily ignored or even transformed in the eyes of individuals. *The Red and The Green* narrates how indifferent to and disbelieving of the surge of civil war people continue to live their fantasy-stricken existence even years after its occurrence. That is why she dispenses with Sartrean panoramic setting.

In *An Unofficial Rose*, her setting is confined to the domestic households of five families and their various possible romantic relations. Although at the risk of stating the cliché that the effort to love and to be loved is the most normal and central stimulus for social relations, the depiction of characters in their romances provides the opportunity for her to illuminate on some social institutions and forces besides the most serious possible challenges to her characters. The integration of a couple of romantic subplots in to the narrative of the novel indicates that, unlike Sartre, Murdoch is not so much interested in the subjective experience of a critical moment than in the way people cocooned in their own fantasy are ignorant of the opacity of others and the world they live in; in how each subjective experience is in fact a deliberate distortion of the objective reality that according to her is not easy to grasp. The intersection of these parallel layers on the extra-diegetic level turns them into the essential narrative technique required to alert readers to the illusive nature of absolute freedom.

Tracking almost all characters in their dilemma of choice and their subjective interpretation of events, all the identifiable strands of the narrative equally bent to contribute to the existential topic of the novel that freedom is limited; none of the six subplots dealing with a trio of characters is inferior to others in terms of its support of the focal theme since all are intended to work in collaboration as a dramatic irony so that the reader can comprehend what the characters cocooned in illusion and fantasy are blind to. Instead of Sartrean “simultaneous perspective,” Murdoch utilizes “multiple perspective,” a more feasible technique to display that people are most often imprisoned in their own “personal fables” and ignorant of the fact that all their petit worlds are inescapably interconnected in reality as each individual’s will affects the situation that others take as the objective reality subject only to their own will. The space between “multiple perspective” provides the essential matrix to display such realities without any need to express them.

To elaborate upon, “multiple perspective” furnishes Murdoch with the stylistic vehicle to express her conviction that man’s freedom is not as absolute as Sartre has claimed. To preserve their snug shells and feel free, people wittingly or even unwittingly influence others’ decisions and the meaning they bestow on the world. That is why as the narrative goes on more and more relations turn to be fundamentally similar and interlinked in *An Official Rose*. The graveyard scene which occupies the first chapter of the novel introduces the first set of characters and their relationship: Hugh Peronett, sixty-seven, notices the presence of Emma Sands, with whom he had love affair while married to Fanny, at Fanny’s funeral and desires the re-establishment of that old relationship but he cannot act upon his desire full-heartedly. Later, in an almost parallel situation, Randall, Hugh’s son married to Ann, is seen to desire Lindsay Rimmer, a woman living, surprisingly enough, with Emma as her amanuensis. He, moreover, encounters certain obstacles to the realization of his dreams. Accordingly, Colonel Felix Meecham, the brother of an old friend of Hugh, Mildred, falls in a conflict and dilly-dallies for a number of reasons to propose for the hand of Ann, with whom he has been chastely in love for years, when Randall’s

elopement with Lindsay offers him the opportunity. Similarly, Ann, aware of Felix's affection, cannot determine what to do in time. Besides, the actions of Miranda, a thirteen-year-old daughter of Ann and Randall, are effected by a medley of even contradictory causes: the growing affection of her fourteen-year-old cousin Peter for her during his visit to them for the summer vocation, her own hopeless love for Felix, her mother's suppressed love for Felix who desperately attends her, her own loving attachment to her father and Steve (her elder dead brother) and her father's scandalous love affair and ultimate elopement with Lindsay.

Analyzing each of these set pieces, with their depiction of the individuals stuck in an anxious uncertainty of what to do and how to do it, gives readers the chance to see the thematic jigsaw puzzle in its integrity. The access to the perspectives of all the cast gives readers the advantages to comprehend what the characters are unable to. A red line runs through the entire novel, connecting the parallel stories while leaving each its vitality, autonomy and identity. The result is a collage of disparate elements with a comic veneer as readers from their bird's eye view can notice the actual mechanism behind the characters' lives and the impulse for their specific response to life. In the intra-episodic space worked out in the narrative, the reader sees the trust in free will as the sole determiner and inscriber of meaning to life as a delusion since there are, Murdoch believes, the constant threats to human freedom, a fourfold challenge that Pondrom recognizes as: "the contingent situations," "character," "the opposing wills of others," "fantasy, illusion, belief" (403).

Death, undoubtedly the most contingent fact in human existence, looms large in Sartre's works as an inescapable existential force that through its sudden stop to life compels individuals to come to terms with their gloomy lives. Yet, in Murdoch's fiction it plays contradictory roles. In some occasions, in the shape of near-death experiences, it acts as an epiphanic penetration into the absurd aspect of life. In others such as the opening scene of *An Official Rose* it highlights man's vanity. Launching the narrative, it ironically magnifies how the illusion-weaving consciousness works. The initial scene in the graveyard is not so tragic and melodramatic as the nature of the event requires. Limited to Hugh's perspective, the narrative sheds light on his actual mental ongoing. It focuses on the details of banal ordinary conversations, the apparels of the participants and finally converges on Hugh's recognition of his old beloved Emma among the congregation. From then on, the narrative zooms on his thoughts wondering how to re-enter a relation with her; treating the sensitive topic of death with the frivolity of Hugh's mind bent to revive an old romantic relationship, Murdoch interweaves the elements of romance in an otherwise bland account of the benign, purposeless world. It helps not only keep readers interested in the concatenation of events but also reduces the repercussion of shock and anxiety in them when encountered with the major threats to their secure sense of control over their existence; the humorous dealing with death and social relations in romantic codes, however, retain their seriousness as they serve as an enlightening agent into the true conception of man's freedom. Hugh's nonchalant air at his wife's funeral accompanied by his ardent mental meanderings on a possible romantic tie with his ex-girlfriend that is now an old woman displays his psychic insistence on his resolute control over his surroundings. The farcical acceptance of his wife's death intensified by the immediate cherishing of his romantic feeling for another woman is the caricature of man's typical reaction to death. To feel free and in control of their life, human beings ignore the contingent aspect of life too easily and soon. Such farcical treatment of death produces another effect supported by all other accidents in the novel: a

revelation that man's moral improvement requires a constant affirmation of the decisive role of contingencies, symbolized by death, and of others in shaping one's experience.

Rain is actually a tricky element integrated into the funeral scene; it is there to intensify the thematic concern of the novel. Firstly, it highlights the romantic dimension of the scene and relates it to the whole tradition of romantic narrative which has established rain a symbol of union; one is reminded of the last scene in James Joyce's "The Death" though it is dominated by snow, the condensed form of rain. Secondly, it strikes one's mind as another symbol of contingency, a natural force vis-à-vis which man is weak and feeble. This double-sided symbol, an amalgam of traditional and novel connotations, is set at the outset of *An Unofficial Rose* to point to man's fantasy mechanism. The rain's association with both desire and death enables Murdoch to achieve two goals: firstly, to expose in a caricature the defensive strategy human beings have to control their world. Secondly, to reveal metafictionally how the moral value of death has been overwritten by its association with the fantasy-driven motifs of love and desire in narrative tradition. Thus, allowing rain to bewet the graveyard scene, Murdoch benefits from an old motif whose elements of death and rain (or snow) are coalesced in her hands into a powerful symbol of contingency that resonates in all the scenes of her narrative. This new coalition of conventional symbols as proves more revealing in terms of man's existence.

Murdoch's vision of freedom is not fully established until her comic treatment of the absurdity of life is spliced with her special concept of character which reshapes the existential characterization into a more appropriate device for her own end. As human beings and their status in the universe is the focal issue in existentialism, a comparative analysis of characterization in the works of Sartre who proclaimed himself an existentialist and those of Murdoch who is averse to any labels can be very illustrative in terms of their literary style and philosophical worldviews. Let us start with Sartre's fiction to establish a touchstone for existential character; In his novels, the central character is a *persona*, a Latin term meaning "mask"; he actually stands in for Sartre in the same way the characters in the works of other existentialist philosophers such as Simone de Beauvoir are masks of their own authors whose very existentialism rejecting the idea that one can understand another person's thoughts persuades them to indulge in introspection. That is, Sartre's philosophical evaluation of man and the world gets expressed through the central character's voice.

Placed in an irrational world of misery and agony, his characters suffer not because they are inherently puppet of determination but because they are hard to accept the burden of their freedom. Standing resolutely against the determinism of Naturalist fiction, as Peyre affirms, Sartre creates characters which "are not doomed by heredity nor conditioned by outward circumstance" (24). Nevertheless, since they shun acting according to "their will-to-power," they become inert individuals, with neither tense evil nor deified love, entangled in debased miseries. Conniving at the unjust, terrible situation, they even become accomplice with the absurd world in their own destruction. Still a ray of hope is flickering behind all the foul situations man surrenders to live in as Sartre attires his characterization with a new dimension that to use Peyre's terminology, distinguishes "human reality" from "material reality" (24). Although placed in a gloomy, suppressive setting, the characters are not depicted as unable to disengage themselves from the shackles of their restraining existence; their potentiality to set themselves free is highlighted in Sartre's special plot pattern where the sequence of actions is not logical. The Jamesian reliance on the interdependence of character and action ("what is character but the

determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?") provides Sartre with the basic platform to build his own literary technique: "I take the situation, and a liberty chained in situation The gain I make is that of unpredictability." The resultant "unpredictability" is an appropriate device to harbingering the possibility of change for a better future since any of his characters, "after having done anything whatever, may still do anything whatever," as Sartre himself suggests (qtd. in Peyre 24). They suffer, nevertheless, because of their lack of courage to trample the path of life alone, with no supporting god.

Murdoch's characters, including those in *An Official Rose*, on the other hand, are not primarily her mouthpiece; they are distinct individuals with a personalized life of their own. Although some critics like Glicksberg condemn the common critical practice of reading Sartre's novels in the light of his philosophical views in search of "the outcropping of the formal, metaphysical doctrine" and favors instead an attention to the artistic virtues of the novels (12, 13), it should be noted as well that the creative originality and the experimental daring of Sartre are inseparable from sustaining his philosophy. The same is true of Iris Murdoch's art though slightly in a different manner. In contrast to Sartre whose art expresses his existentialist evaluation of man and the world, Murdoch's fiction has a more indirect relation to her philosophy as it is more fictional.

A noticeable feature, "unpredictability" is fundamentally woven in the texture of Murdoch's fiction for a different aim. The course of the shifting criss-cross of relations can never be anticipated in *An Unofficial Rose*. Moreover, the novel's end is far from sure. It ends in "mystery" rather than "obscurity," a mystery that is rather "deliberate" and integral to her art as it underpins the novel implementation of the technique of "unpredictability" (Pondrom 404). In contrast to its Sartrean usage which highlights man's free will, unpredictability here serves two goals; it points to the inevitability of contingent aspect of life. Dispensing with the realistic reliance on the Aristotelian concept of plot as "the imitation of an action" that has beginning, middle and end, all Murdoch's plots are, indeed, built on contingency. Besides, it keeps Murdoch's readers interested in the flow of story as it points to mysterious entanglement of various narrative strands. It meets these two objectives by offering a clear space for the reader to enter into a more consciously active role; Pondrom believes that her fictional world is a field in which several important events happen and it remains for the reader to ask the meaning of the events (404).

Obsessed by the burden of their responsibility, Sartrean characters are portrayed in paralyzing anguish, a feeling, moreover, conceptualized in Kierkegaardian "dread" and Heideggerian "angst" and "sorge"; in Sartre's philosophy, anguish is the psychological status human beings are reduced to when they encounter the paradox of existence: the fact that such a rational being as man is cast into such a universe that baffles rationality. Its consequence is the alienation from nature. Mathieu, the central character in *Reprieve* is such a figure. Whereas Gomez gives up his painting as he has a clear idea of what he is fighting for, Mathieu is shown in dither and utter puzzlement. He neither approves nor disapproves of the war since for him war is, as Glicksberg states, "an illness" that should be "endured" (6). He is seen in an extreme state of anguish as his "struggle to bring some order and reason into this hysterical chaos" does not bring him any comprehension of its meaning (16). The simultaneous perspective dissolves him in the social background where he is one of the many "aimless, tormented, calamity-stricken puppets trying frantically to adjust themselves to the threat of war" (14). The subsequent "ironic

incongruity” inherent in the portrayal of diverse but simultaneous events, however, reveals that all such persona are actively participating in the war despite their desolate lonely groping in the dark (15, 16); all are trapped in the same huge trap of “bad faith.”

Faced with their unwanted, unfitted and absurd existence, Sartrean characters tend more to exorcise the awakened anxiety through praying (appeal) to a friendly presence to whom they can shift the burden than to become a new Prometheus, reiterating his defiance of his master: “I shall not return under your law; I am doomed to have no other law but mine. . . for I am a man, and every man must discover his own path. Nature abhors man, and you too, sovereign of the gods, you abhor men” (qtd.in Peyre 25). A common existentialist notion, anguish is diagnosed among Murdochian characters as well. In them, however, it is quite a symptom of a disease than a sign of an epiphany. The source of anxiety in Murdoch’s personae is not their inability to bear the burden of their absolute freedom, but their fateful encounter with the frailty of the will to respond solely and freely. They experience angst, the void underlying their existence, not at the moments of intuition about their lonely responsibility, but when they see the impotence of the will. In an attempt to redefine this existentialist concept in “The Idea of Perfection,” Murdoch emphasizes that angst is *only* a proper “condition of sober alarm” since it does not encompass “the awareness of the reality the will is drawn by” hence its distinction from Kant’s *Achtung*. In its extreme form it is the “disease” or the “addiction” of those modern individuals who are disillusioned of their conviction that “personality resides solely in the conscious omnipotent will.” So they become obsessed by their own impotency to choose freely and get stuck in their moral quest which should aim at a pure attention to others in Murdoch’s view (38).

Such a double-coded angst results in diverse characterizations in the novels of Sartre and Murdoch. Sartre’s characters are seen among others but basically alone entangled in an anxious struggle to solve the enigma of their existence and to define constantly their status in the extreme situations they get trapped in. This zoom on the individuality of characters and their insuppressible anxiety is achieved at the expense of an ordinary social life. The “extended, broadly-based relations” are a rarity in such novels as *La Nausée* and Camus’s *L’Étranger*, Pondrom states. Their absence bestows certain symbolic dimension to Sartre’s central figures and makes them move, as Pondrom truly asserts, “toward the flat characters, the mythic figures, or the didactic representation of an abstract principle” (406). The lack of any serious human relationship contributes in two ways to the resultant Sartrean style: on the one hand, it disrupts the causal/logical coherency of the traditional plot and produces instead an unharmonious composition in which, as Glicksberg stresses about *Reprieve*, various “violent discords, harshly accentuated contrasts and discontinuities” are homogenized only by the element of “time” (14). On the other hand, transformation of the characters into symbols, Sartrean fiction moves away from the realist tradition and turns into allegory.

The host of the solitary individuals in Sartre’s novels is, thus, the symbolic embodiment of his existentialist appraisal of modern man. Typical of modern man, they are very passive and inert in their encounter with the cruelty of life hence their flat characters. What they eventually achieve in their passive search for freedom is the existentialist resolution Mathieu arrives at: “I am my own freedom” (362). Since flat characterization cannot embody a dramatic change in characters’ view, whether those like Mathieu adopt a new course in life owing to their enlightenment does not concern the novel. What is highlighted within the novel is, instead, the inevitable experience of deep desolation and the consequent alienation that all facing their

striped subjectivity undergo, according to Sartre. Doing no ground-breaking actions, there is no protagonist among the anguish-stricken casts of his fiction. Yet, they are all anti-heroes: “a mass of frightened, indecisive, neurotic, impotent people” (Glicksberg 18).

Although similarly one cannot distinguish any protagonists among Murdochian casts, they are of a totally different quality. Caught in various moral dilemmas, they are depicted strikingly anxious to protect their fantasy-driven ego rather than directing their moral will to the reality of others. Such characters tend to be excessively active struggling to satisfy their self-interest by enhancing their sense of pleasure and freedom. This active nature propels each individual into relationship with more and more people and accounts for the abundance of sundry man-to-man relations in Murdoch’s fiction which get interlaced into astonishingly unexpected mesh as the novels progress. As the examination of the human relations in *An Unofficial Rose* reveals, such relations are maintained or created just to enable the characters to disperse their anguish and cherish their egoistic existence by practicing their freedom to extract more pleasure;

Except few good characters, almost all the personae in her fiction are involved in a set of relationships, sometimes even with the overtone of sexual perversity, just to remain in their comfort zone. As obvious in the case of the cast of *An Unofficial Rose*, the entanglement with the relationships of any kind makes the ego submerge more and more in a dream-like world. The multiplication and the permutation of relationships into new and strange pattern in almost all her novels is the consequence of characters’ indulgence in a life of fantasy. It is the vim of their fantasy that joins them with any other character irrespective of their age, sex and status and natural connection. That is why Murdoch’s novels are stuffed with a series of various possible fantasy-driven relationships such as adultery, incest, paedophilia, even sadomasochism which, under her special handling, get sometimes stripped of their common sexual element.

An Unofficial Rose relies particularly on a peculiar relationship out of which both the participants can derive a satisfactory sense of sheer pleasure and power. A frequent motif in Murdoch’s fiction, some characters restore to others and let them have a huge influence and control over their life. Mostly bereft of sexual involvement, the vital dependence on such influential characters who, as the title of her second novel, *The Flight from the Enchanter* suggests, are enchanters or enchantresses is not Sartrean. Having some sort of masochism to them, these attachments are more a parody of the Sartrean god-like figure to whom people are not so much attracted to shirk from their responsibility over their lives as to hide among the soothing illusions such relations produce. In *An Unofficial Rose*, Emma plays as the enchantress. As the plot unravels, Emma is seen not only the center of attraction for a couple of characters including Hugh, Randall, Lindsay, Mildred, Felix but the prime mover for the way things happen. Her unexpected appearance in the burial ceremony of Hugh’s late spouse recommences his infatuation in her that remains almost enduring no matter what happens to others. Throughout the novel, Hugh struggles to resume his amorous relationship with Emma who relentlessly refuses him; his obsession with the rosy phantoms of his future with Emma blinds him to the foul consequences his son’s imminent elopement with Lindsay, the woman who turns to be living with Emma, may bring to his daughter-in-law and granddaughter (Ann and Miranda); he fails to attend timely and properly to the issue as he feels his son’s elopement would atone for his own failure vis-à-vis Emma. Being consoled with such replacement, he even encouraged Randall to proceed in his decision firmly as he easily forgives him for stealing his valuable dear painting and selling it to compensate for his financial setback to elope with Lindsay.

The initial absence of Randall and his final departure leaves an open space for Felix to realize his desire to have Ann as his own wife; owing to his excessive mental conflict, however, he fails to propose to her properly and doggedly just the same as Ann fails to encourage him to divulge his true feeling. The eccentric quality of their remote relationship is zeroed in on to project another obstacle in the realization of Sartrean absolute freedom. Felix's Catholicism as well as his unfinished affair with Marie-Laure Auboyer, a French girl working for the French consulate in Singapore, along with Ann's unfruitful but faithful waiting for Randall's return embody a noteworthy aspect of human existence which Murdoch terms "rigid character." In contrast to Sartre who believes that past has no decisive role in man's choices, Murdoch shows in Felix's and Ann's paralysis to act according to their actual desires that once man's personality is shaped it is very difficult to escape from its restricting fixed principles. On the one hand, caught in an impasse caused by an abiding faith in the commandments, commitments to Marie-Laure, and an all-consuming love for Ann, Felix is unable to pull his fingers out and ask resolutely for Ann's hand. On the other hand, a true Catholic, Ann heartily believes in her marital duties; she reckons that in such a time of crisis, she has to wait for her husband to whom she vowed in wedlock to be always faithful. So the unrestrained obsession with the past and the blind practice of beliefs, as two aspects of "rigid character" are the shackles that constrain the free will of the Sartrean individual.

Here it should be noted that the integration the main challenges to freedom--fantasy, illusions and beliefs—in Murdoch's characterization does not imply that they are a rarity in Sartre's novels; much to the contrary, as Glicksberg maintains, one of Sartre's objectives is to shed light on people's "infinite capacity for deceiving themselves and for being deceived" and their enjoyment while living in "a world of opiate illusion" (12). Sartre calls this illusory world "bad faith" to which people resort to shun their freedom while for Murdoch it is the defensive mechanism of ego to ascertain its free will. Her fiction is propelled to its strange, amusing course since, for ego-protection, its fantasy-ridden populations indulge in more illusions and adhere to certain beliefs. A triple, inner obstacle to the perception of reality in Murdoch's worldview, they are three distinct devices of enhancing self-consolation in people. As Pondrom clearly differentiates them, fantasy is what the characters imagine they are doing; illusions are what they suppose is going around them and beliefs the ideas vis-à-vis "the world, social structure, transcendental Deity, and similar entities" they consider as true (414).

In *An Unofficial Rose* all the characters act according to their fantasies and illusions, but the dramatic irony implanted within the structure of the novel provides readers with the adequate data to decide that fantasies, instead of being a gateway to freedom, are in principle shackles to the actual, moral freedom that incorporates an awareness of others rather than a satisfaction of the ego. Living among fantasies and illusions, they are incapable of conceiving the external reality of others what the cautious readers on guard against their own egoistic drives are privileged to comprehend. Exposed to all the characters' mind and emotions, the reader realizes that the nature of each relation has more to it than what the individuals cherish in their mind. Throughout the novel, Hugh is constantly day-dreaming about the mutual romantic affection between Emma and himself. However, looking at the things from Emma's perspective reveals that she is the least in love with Hugh. Randall is sure that he would realize his desires and dreams once eloped with Lindsay. However, having in mind the steadfast, stubborn and frank nature of Lindsay, the reader easily excludes its possibility. Felix thinks there will always be time to court Ann properly now that Randall has left her, but he is mistaken about Ann's free

soul and cannot understand her sacrificing wait for Randall who could jilt her after over thirteen years of married life. Ann supposes that she is the sole determiner of the future of her relation with Felix; however, the confrontation with the shredded photos and letters of Felix in her daughter's room shatters this illusion. She feels that what has kept her tenuous relationship with Felix to become intimate and strong has been actually Miranda's will.

As the novel proceeds, each pair of relationship appears to be more influenced by others than the characters seem to be aware of. The projection of the complicated mesh of relationships not only indicates the unnoticed role of others in the specific status of each interaction but also accounts for the divergence of Murdoch's setting from the Sartrean. The fretful, useless efforts of individuals to keep the upper hand in their social interactions which in reality are under the inevitable, unpredictable influence of other people imparts a comic air to *An Unofficial Rose* through which it satirizes the existentialist judgment that human existence is presided by man alone. Entertaining and fascinating the readers to the last page, the unexpected turn of events places her fiction opposite to the gloomy, grey atmosphere of Sartrean novels.

Although Sartre's fiction is truly not a literature of despair as Peyre discusses, the world depicted in it as any other existentialist literature is not a rosy one. His literary works are bristled with certain dreadful themes that Peyre recognizes as recurring in existentialist literature: those such as "nausea (physical and metaphysical), absorption of hard drinks (d \acute{e} l \acute{a} m~ri-caine), homosexuality, abortion, even occasional scatology" (23). The attempt to reflect on the debasing or even embarrassing experience of man most of the time has a dampening effect on his art. Peyre assumes such depictions in *Le Mur* and *Les chemins de la libert \acute{e}* "repels his readers and harms his art" (23). Sartre's novels are not the mirror of a portion of external world but in their magnification of the existential problem of man, they are actually magnifiers which produce a grotesque reflection of the man in an absurd world. Instead of being a history of lonely, isolated individuals, *Repr \acute{e} ve* brimmed with the unrealistic and unconvincing descriptions of the world is the history of man in travail. And this is the problem of his whole oeuvre: it loses both of the fundamental elements found in any great fiction, namely, particularity and credibility which not only reduces his readership but convinces some critics to reject his works as immoral and pessimistic.

Pessimists, as Peyre elaborates on, are those who theoretically believe in this world as the worst possible worlds and turn in practice to the uglier or darker side of things. They may vent their anger to God or Fate or denounce human existence as miserable and painful. The threats hanging over Sartre's characters are not enough evidence to condemn him the follower of any of the dual branches of pessimism. Sartre is neither an escapist, one who refuges in a world of poetical fancy and humor. Nor is he an Epicurean hedonist who believes that as man has no power to improve the world he should let it has its own way while he wisely accepts to enjoy the few available benefits of life (22). Not a true pessimist, he is as much not a false optimist. Demonstrating the miseries of the post-war experience, he sets to oppose optimists' attempt to lull the youth into inaction and torpor by extending a lavishing praise on them and to contradict their verdict that no matter what man is doing the constant perfection of science and technique always fuel life's progress. Sartre tries to sharpen his audience's sensibility to their dire situation by awakening a universal responsibility in them to improve the world. In this regard, his fiction is not immoral in the sense of being against any system of values.

For Sartre, demoralizers are those poets and novelists who selfishly take advantage of the social order without being concerned about its malaise; those abstracting themselves from the anguish and miseries of the life pulsating around them remain bluntly aloof from the immediate issues of the age such as “social inequity, race prejudice, nationalism, unlimited greed” that requires quick attention (Peyre 32). Differentiating literature from any other form of art like poetry, painting, music, he contends in his *What is Literature?* that the prose-writers should be engaged in their society and at the service of any cause. He animadverts the French literature of the nineteen-twenties over wasting their energy and talent in producing, as Peyre asserts, polished words for posterity and rising “above their time and place to be universal and detached in appeal” instead of giving due attention to the gaping wounds of the modern world (29). There, he argues that the survival of democracy requires neither communism nor capitalism but is sure to be established in the presence of a more responsible literature which invokes courage in its readers to deal more freely and responsibility with life. To be effective, such literature should reestablish the dignity of language, rejuvenate or transform worn techniques, set against any sort of injustice and invent solutions suitable for new situations.

It is to actualize this kind of literature that Sartre embarks on his own vocation. A philosophical literature of freedom, his art cannot be pessimistic. As Pondrom postulates, it can best be defined as “art of analysis,” an art from very different both from the “art of metaphor” designating the works of other existentialists like Kafka and Camus and from Murdoch’s novels which intend to be what she herself calls the “art of image” (418). In such “art of analysis,” Sartre sets to advocate a unique ethics that though not compatible with Murdochian ethics has certain similarity to it: both are anti-Christian without being pessimistic; that is, both renounce the pessimist’s verdict which, according to Camus, regards that “all is well and nothing changes human nature” (qtd.in Peyre 28). Propagating a quasi-Christian doctrine that rejects the very premises of Christianity, they, each in a unique way, stress faith in man as the sole active agent in his/her own salvation.

Here it should be noted that the designation of “art of analysis” to Sartre’s fiction should never evoke a false expectation that his novels are a panel for strict analysis and theory. In his article in *Les Temps Modernes* June 1947, according to Peyre, Sartre implicitly invalidates such an inference while stressing on the metaphysical aspects of all existentialist writings: “metaphysics is not a barren discussion on abstract ideas which cannot be seized by experience, but a living effort to embrace man’s fate in its entirety and from the inside” (30). Sartre’s objective in *Reprise* as in his whole literary career is not just to lay bare his philosophical undertakings but to convince his contemporaries that neither time nor any power can bring them salvation from outside. It is only in the hands of their responsible actions and in their brave acceptance, in the face of the intricate difficulties and the nauseating, anguish experience, of their roles in their current situation and any possible future change. In his delineation of what Glicksberg calls a “sick civilization consented to its own dissolution” (12), he aims to inculcate in his readers that “[f]reedom and life have to be conquered anew every day” and to kindle an unceasing desire to do so day by day. In this way, as Peyre affirms, the negation underlying the whole load of intellectual anguish in his novels is not “cynical mockery” (32). A vista of unlimited hope indeed extends beyond depressive mood in his fiction as they encourage the public to be fearless and obstinate in their revolt for more secure foundations. Although the conspicuous oratory of Sartre’s “art of analysis” certainly excludes him from the circle of great novelists, it never allows anybody to overlook or devalue its unique artistic qualities. Far from

being a literature of despair with no sparkle of hope for any bright future, *Reprieve* is primarily, as Glicksberg emphasizes, “a work of art, a vast, complex, animated canvas, a series of stabbing pictures of *life between two wars*” (emphasis mine 17).

It is in a more vivid, Eden-like setting that Murdoch sets her characters in motion; besides a clear lively depiction of a rose garden belonging to Randall and Ann that appears off and on throughout the novel, there hangs a strange light, frivolous air over the story that soothes the reader in spite of its distressful personae. Murdoch achieves this effect through inhibiting the formation of any deep emotional ties between readers and any of her characters. A master at handling comic scenes, she sprinkles some comic overtones over the whole story. The moment there is a risk of the reader’s developing any deep-rooted emphatic relations with the characters and disappearance behind their masks, she lets their follies and vanity flash into the foreground. Unlike Sartre’s, Murdoch’s setting does not encompass society at large; it embodies the secluded worlds that characters isolated within their own anxiety-stricken consciousness secure for themselves. They are depicted busy in spinning sedative yarns to keep their anguish at bay by consoling their egoistic self.

Murdoch’s characters especially those in *An Unofficial Rose* are uneasy fearing that someone may transgress and possess their actions. They are, indeed, much more anxious about losing their authority over their lives than Sartre’s characters are dreadful of being assigned its sole authors. Their dread derives out of their desire to keep their fantasy world without any interference, of their wish to have everything under their own control. This explains their fundamental incongruity with Sartrean characters; the fact that they do not experience an epiphany proving the absolute nature of their freedom but are busy cherishing it as such. It is to reflect on the freedom-fueled apparatus of human consciousness that Murdoch develops a very distinct style from the Sartrean analytic art. In the resultant picturesque novels such as *An Unofficial Rose*, she succeeds in attracting the reader to the truth without failing to entertain them.

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