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Complexities Within the Net: Identity in Iris Murdoch's Novels *Under the Net* and *The Sea, the Sea*

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	4
1. Introduction	5
2. Philosophy and Feminism: A Melange of Theories	11
2.1 Identity and Being: The Philosophy of Complexities.....	11
2.2 Feminism and the Problem of Subjectivity of Women.....	18
3. Identity and Falsehood	21
3.1 Language and Bad Faith	21
3.2 Feminism and the Look.....	24
3.3 Love, Art and Reality.....	26
4. Identity and Theatricality.....	30
4.1 Art and the Artist	30
4.2 Love, Possession and Jealousy	32
4.3 The Self and the Good	35
4.4 Genre, Language, Theatre and Reality	37
5. Conclusions	42
6. References	44
7. Summary in Lithuanian	46

Abstract

This MA paper analyses two postmodern novels written by the 20th -century philosopher and novelist, Iris Murdoch, namely *Under the Net* (1954) and *The Sea, the Sea* (1978). The main focus of the thesis is the identity portrayal as well as its complexities of the characters of the two novels which are analysed with the aid of such notions as language, art, the good and love. The framework chosen for this analysis is a melange of philosophical and feminist ideas developed by such authors as Charles Taylor, Jean-Paul Sartre, Iris Murdoch and Simone de Beauvoir. The analysis, carried out by synthesising the ideas of the said authors, shows that such concepts as language, art, the good and love are indispensable in the unveiling of the complexities of character identity in the chosen texts. The interpretation of the two novels suggests that identity is closely related to the knowledge of reality and goodness. The study shows that language is used by the narrators of the two novels in order to misrepresent reality, meaning that the identities of the novels' characters are being misrepresented. The concept of love is presented differently in the selected books, in *Under the Net*, it is intertwined with art, and it can help the characters to unself themselves, in *The Sea, the Sea*, it is related to jealousy and the possession of other characters. Art in *The Sea, the Sea* is tied to the net of theatricality and the metaphor of the stage since the narrator portrays the characters as belonging to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, thus distorting their true selves. The idea of the good is prevalent in the novel *The Sea, the Sea* where it is seen as unattainable to the novel's narrator since he remains bound by the net of theatricality. The feminist reading of the novels shows that the female characters are seen either as the objects of beauty or that they are tied to their husbands' universe.

1. Introduction

The 20th century was marked by a complex attitude towards identity. This attitude was constituted by two philosophical and artistic movements that marked the century- modernism and postmodernism. The former prevailed in the first half of the century and it has been associated with the “twentieth-century reaction against realism and romanticism within the arts” (Yousef 2017, 34). The realism comes from one of the valued aspects of the 19th century literature which was sincerity. The writers of the 19th century would allow their inner selves to appear in their writings as an artistic strategy: “[l]iterature would seem to have been for the romanticists a part of the role-playing process by which in real life we establish identity” (Langbaum 1965, 571). Modernist literature continued with the 19th century exploration of identity. Since the movement espoused uniformity and the very notion of identity, as defined by Stan and Colipcă, carries the meaning of “*uniqueness* or *unity* of something within its own self” (Stan & Colipcă 2012, 326), it comes as no surprise to find the modernist focus on “the unitary self” (Glass 1993, 256). Such a view on identity is very different from what is proposed by postmodernism.

In postmodernism, the movement which gradually established itself in the second half of the 20th century, we find that identity was not deemed unitary. In the postmodern period, “identity is inherently decentered and fluid because constituted in unstable relations of difference” (Dunn 1998, 175). This view of identity is constructed by the movement *per se* since we can often find postmodernism defined as “a movement toward fragmentation, provisionality, performance, multiplicity and instability” (Yousef 2017, 36). Postmodernism “celebrates difference, change, transformation, and flux” (Glass 1993, 256) therefore it is natural that identity is understood differently by writers and other thinkers of postmodernism from how the notion was understood in modernism. As we can see, the attitude towards identity perfectly represented the essence of the two said movements that marked the 20th century. The said movements were not the only ones that occurred in that time, we can also see the literal movement of writers who either willingly or reluctantly decided to leave their native soil for a different country.

One of the authors who left their native land, even though not of her own free will, was the 20th -century philosopher and writer Iris Murdoch. The author’s work consists of five philosophical treatises, two poetry collections, six plays, one short story and 26 novels.

Dame Jean Iris Murdoch (1919-1999) was born in Dublin to Anglo–Irish parents, Irene Alice Richardson and Wills John Hughes Murdoch. Even though Murdoch was born in Dublin, she did not remain living there. Murdoch moved to London with her parents when she was very young but would return to the

native land frequently to visit relatives (Bove 1993, 1). The change of countries caused quite a few difficulties for Murdoch. Iris Murdoch called herself either Anglo-Irish or Irish (Rowe 2019, 96), but people were not willing to accept her identity. People sometimes said to her that she is not “real” Irish or “not Irish at all” (*ibid.*) and this caused Dame Iris a lot of pain. She always vacillated between her two favourite places, namely Ireland and Britain.

The vacillation between the countries is not the only one that we can find when we speak of Iris Murdoch. The author oscillated between what she called “closed” and “open” novels. Murdoch’s first two novels, *Under the Net* (1954) and *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956) are considered as closed and the following two, *The Sandcastle* (1957) and *The Bell* (1958) as open (Conradi 1986, 24-25). *The Sandcastle* is her “least successful novel to date”, whereas *The Bell* to this day is regarded as one of her finest creations (Rowe 2019, 14) and it considerably helped to establish Murdoch as “one of the most important novelists of her generation” (*ibid.*, 15). *The Bell* is not the sole novel that has received a lot of attention, her novel *The Black Prince* (1973) is her most critically acclaimed composition and it is also a winner of the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for fiction (Bove 1993, 74). The latter novel concerns the life of the artist whose work has been affected by Eros.

Art and Eros [love] are some of the main concerns of Murdoch’s novels and philosophical writings, for instance, *Under the Net* (1954), *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970) and *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992). The other concerns include religion, morality and language, for example, *Henry and Cato* (1976) and *The Sea, the Sea* (1978) as well as identity and nationality. According to Colette Charpentier, Murdoch is “obsessed” with identity-related issues and she is very concerned with “exiles with nationality problems” (1980, 92). It is likely that her concerns with identity and nationality stem from the author herself. As it was mentioned before, Murdoch oscillated between Ireland and Britain, and this is probably the reason why we can find her stories situated in Dublin or London.

As we can see, Dame Iris personally deals with some issues included in her writings, but what is interesting to know is how she discovered the issue of identity and decided to become a writer. It is possible that her father had some influence over Murdoch’s decision. Iris Murdoch’s father was a civil servant who read books together with his dear child and whom Murdoch describes as “a quiet, good man who loved books” (Meyers 1991, quoted in Bove 1993, 1-2), and that could be one of the reasons why Dame Iris Murdoch decided to become a writer. According to Anne Rowe, Murdoch began writing when she was just nine-years-old (2019, 9). It comes as no surprise that when Murdoch got accepted into Somerville College, her first thought was to read English (*ibid.*, 3), but soon she changed her mind and decided to focus on “Greats” (Latin and Greek languages, literature, history and philosophy). “After

receiving a first-class degree in 1942, she was conscripted into the civil service as an assistant principal in the Treasury” and later on she had an opportunity to work as “an administrative officer with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration in London, Belgium, and Austria from 1944 to 1946” (Bove 1993, 2). Her experiences in that work are depicted in some of her novels such as *The Flight from the Enchanter*, *The Time of the Angels*, and *Nuns and Soldiers*. When Murdoch was in Belgium after the war she became interested in existentialism and even managed to obtain some works by the famous existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre (*ibid.*). Soon she became friends with Raymond Queneau, a French novelist “whose linguistic experimentation with conventional form she greatly admired” (Rowe 2019, 94), and whom she copied “as hard as she could” (Chevalier 1978, quoted in Bove 1993, 36). Queneau was so influential to Murdoch that she even included his experimental narrative techniques in her first novel *Under the Net* (Rowe 2019, 12) and dedicated the book to him (Bove 1993, 3). The book is permeated with the inquiries of existentialism which is quite paradoxical when we consider the words by the husband of Dame Iris Murdoch who said that the question of identity had always confused Murdoch. Murdoch “thought she herself hardly possessed such a thing, whatever it was” (Bayley 1998, 51). Even if Dame Iris herself believed to be devoid of identity, her characters clearly possessed an identity and not just any identity but a complex one.

Complexities of identity could be seen in her novels, for instance, in *Under the Net* and *The Sea, the Sea*. Both novels represent the philosophical and artistic movement of postmodernism. The former centres around the struggling young writer of Irish descent, Jake Donaghue, and his work, love and relations. What is interesting here is that Jake has moved abroad and now lives in London, just like his own creator Iris Murdoch. What is also important to note when discussing the book is the significance of language and silence since the book acts as a philosophical treatise on the role of language and its absence or, to put it more precisely, the weakness of language and the strength of silence when it comes to evaluating truthfulness. Malcolm Bradbury describes the novel as “a novel about the relations of words to actions and about what makes for good and bad human intercourse” (Bradbury 1962, 47), which helps to illustrate the complexity of language-silence relation and brings to light the importance of actions. In 2005, the novel was chosen by TIME magazine as one of the one hundred best novels written in the English language from 1923 to present (Kelly *et al.* 2005). According to the Modern Library, *Under the Net* is one of the best English-language novels of the 20th century (The Modern Library n.d.). Another piece of art composed by Murdoch, *The Sea, the Sea*, revolves around a self-centred, self-satisfied playwright and director from London, Charles Arrowby. The man decides to retire and to travel to a tranquil place by the sea where he could write his memoirs and become a better man. Charles does not suspect what awaits him in this secluded place and how easily Charles’s striving for

becoming a better human being becomes compromised by his own actions. *The Sea, the Sea* is Murdoch's 19th novel and it was awarded the Booker Prize the same year it was published.

Both novels strike readers with the preoccupation with morality. Iris Murdoch is a follower of Plato and it should come as no surprise that morality is very important to her and that we can find some ethical issues in her said novels. According to Rowe, Murdoch wanted her readers to be able to empathise with her characters and become 'unselfed' (2019, 11). She wanted her readers to care about someone else than themselves. The idea of 'unselfing' is one of the most important aspects of Murdoch's philosophy since the author believes that resisting your own ego is a good choice because "[i]n the moral life the enemy is the fat relentless ego" (Murdoch 2013, 51) and if people want to build a strong connection with ethics they have to oppose their ego. Her prevailing philosophy is a signature of Iris Murdoch as most of her writings are marked by it and that is simply because she was trained as a philosopher and happens to know many philosophical ideas (Dooley 2003, quoted in Rowe 2019, 47). It is no wonder that some critics call her a "remarkable writer", "the kind of writer we ought to canonize" (Burke 1987, 494) and a "philosophical novelist", the title which Murdoch herself opposes (Watson 1998, 491). Besides the distinct Murdoch's philosophy there is something else that grasps her readers' attention. The readers are also fascinated by the characters that are depicted in Murdoch's novels. Each character is marked by the complexities that surround their identity, which sometimes is intertwined with the personality of some stronger or we could even say dominant characters. The characters of the novels and their personalities act as vessels through which a number of issues are highlighted in Iris Murdoch's writings and that is one of the reasons why I decided to make identity the focal point of this study.

Both novels have attracted the attention of literary scholars. *Under the Net* has been analysed through the lens of autonomy (Rössler 2002) which is very important for the present thesis since autonomy [self-determination] is closely related to the notion of identity. Rössler (2002) in her paper on autonomy discusses five novels of Iris Murdoch: *Nuns and Soldiers* (1980); *A Word Child* (1975); *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956); *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983); *Under the Net* (1954). In the part where the author discusses the novel of my interest, she focuses on the character named Hugo. She established the claim that "Hugo lives as a completely truthful man because he tries to be faithful to the particularity and uniqueness of people and of situations" (2002, 156). According to Rössler, only this kind of attempt can "illuminate an opaque reality", and "ensure the specific degree of freedom possible for him" (*ibid.*). *The Sea, the Sea* has been analysed by quite a number of scholars from a variety of different perspectives, for instance, Tucker (1986) explores how the main male characters of the novel, Charles and James, could be seen as Shakespeare's Prosperos. Charles "has devoted his life to Shakespeare" (1986, 380) and has played Prospero in his youth. James, Charles's cousin, is seen as Prospero because he, like

Prospero, has dedicated his life to “secret studies”, has experienced bad fortune and even has been exiled (*ibid.*, 383). Capitani (2003) also mentions Charles’s likeness to Prospero but her main concern is to see how the ideas of the Good are realised in *The Sea, the Sea*. There she focuses on Charles’s cousin James, who is a practicing Buddhist and who “tries to use his spiritual powers to achieve the good because of his training in Tibet” (2003, 104). Botero Camacho and Martinez Gonzalez (2017) focus on how the novel could be seen as a reconstruction of the Romantic subject; the authors claim that Charles is a Romantic character who “becomes his own beast, guided by wild instincts” (2017, 16). The authors compare Charles to Minotaur and declare that he victimises other characters. Only the arrival of James saves the situation since James can defeat Charles’s “primitive nature.” “James, acting like Theseus, will kill the beast side of Charles: the Minotaur inside” (*ibid.*). The authors also try to find the connection between Charles Arrowby and Edgar Allan Poe’s work by demonstrating that Charles’s unsettled state provoked by the emerging monster from the sea that he notices when he arrives in Shruff End is quite similar to the narrator’s state of Poe’s *The Sphinx*. In Poe’s story, the narrator is frightened by the sight of a monster that is going down the mountains, which is the reason why the authors draw a comparison between Arrowby and the narrator of Poe’s *The Sphinx*. Weese (2001) continues with the Gothic theme by focusing on how *The Sea, the Sea* could be viewed as a feminist refashioning of the Gothic. She claims that Murdoch “subverts the conventions of the female Gothic” (2001, 638) since in *The Sea, the Sea* it is not a female who becomes monstrous, but “the male self who casts woman as nothing other than the protagonist of a love story” (*ibid.*). Charles “fears women’s “inner beings” and projects monstrous qualities onto women that actually reflect his own interior qualities” (*ibid.*, 647).

So far, it seems that there are no papers that are focused on the topic of identity in Iris Murdoch’s two novels; the studies provided discuss issues rather divergent from the topic. Therefore the present thesis will analyse the complexities of identity in Iris Murdoch’s two novels *Under the Net* (1954) and *The Sea, the Sea* (1978) to highlight character-complexity and to see how identity and its complexities are portrayed in the said novels. Furthermore, the current paper will additionally employ such concepts as *feminism*, *bad faith* and *the look* in order to fully investigate the complex issue. The notion of *feminism* will assist in exploring the identity portrayal of the female characters of the two novels, the term *bad faith* will provide an understanding of why some characters seem to be denying their own freedom of choice and the notion of *the look* will be of importance when we explore the perception of self via the presence of the other.

The theoretical framework of the present study will consist of Charles Taylor’s study *Sources of the Self: the Making of the Modern Identity* (1989), Jean-Paul Sartre’s philosophical oeuvre *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology* (1978), Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*

(2011), and, most importantly, two key philosophical works published by Iris Murdoch: *The Sovereignty of Good* (2013) and *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1993) as well as her article *The Sublime and the Good* (1959).

The present study will be divided into two parts. The first one will be dedicated to *Under the Net* and the second one to *The Sea, the Sea*. The first part will analyse a complex relationship that involves such concepts as identity, language, art and love and the second one will additionally employ the idea of the good.

2. Philosophy and Feminism: A Melange of Theories

The present analysis of two philosophically-endowed novels written by Iris Murdoch, namely *Under the Net* and *The Sea, the Sea*, is conducted via the aid of philosophical and feminist framework. The philosophical part of the framework includes works by such authors as Charles Taylor, Jean-Paul Sartre and Iris Murdoch. The feminist part consists of Simone de Beauvoir's seminal work *The Second Sex* (1949/ 2011). The works are used in order to examine such complex concepts as identity, the good, art, love and language.

2.1 Identity and Being: The Philosophy of Complexities

In postmodern times, the notion of identity is quite exhaustively analysed by Charles Taylor. Taylor declares that “[t]he search for identity can be seen as the search for what I essentially am” (1989, 184) and “[t]o know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand” (*ibid.*, 27). Which emphasises the spatial element of one's standing. The space that he is talking about is moral. “[A] space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary” (*ibid.*, 28). He also adds that “[o]ur identity is what allows us to define what is important to us and what is not” (*ibid.*, 30). Instead of emphasising the importance of reason on identity, as did Rene Descartes with his *cogito ergo sum*, or the importance of consciousness, as it was done by John Locke, Taylor focuses on the good as the compass for identity. And that is because “[w]e have a sense of who we are through our sense of where we stand to the good” (*ibid.*, 105). The good is an essential part of our identity which allows us to understand our own selves.

Another philosopher who focuses on the good when discussing identity is Iris Murdoch. Iris Murdoch, Taylor's teacher, claims that the conception of individuals is “a conception inseparable from morality” (2013, 24), which, of course, is the good. Murdoch asserts that “[t]he idea of Good (goodness, virtue) crystallises out of our moral activity” (1993, 814). What she is saying is that the good is contained in and emerges from the goodness that is experienced in our everyday activities. What Murdoch is trying to convey is that the very transcendence of goodness arises from and is encouraged by moral experience and that is the reason why the good has to be crystallised out of moral activity. According to Murdoch, “[g]oodness is connected with the attempt to see the unself” (2013, 91). Unselfing can be explained as an attempt to get rid of the enemy of the moral life- “the fat relentless ego” (*ibid.*, 51). To unself is to turn one's attention to others from the self. Unselfing is an idea of seeing things as they are without the obfuscation provided by one's selfish concerns. To see the unself is “to see and to respond to the real

world in the light of a virtuous consciousness” (*ibid.*, 91). The idea of unselfing is closely related to the knowledge of reality and the good. Another thing that is closely related to the good is the idea of perfection. Murdoch calls perfection the “absolute good” (*ibid.*, 60). She says that “[w]e learn of perfection and imperfection through our ability to understand what we see as an image or shadow of something better which we cannot yet see” (1993, 774). We are capable of discerning perfection from what is not perfect by looking upon what is imperfect (*ibid.*, 816). The same can be applied to the good; we can distinguish what is good from what is not good just by looking upon what is not good. Moreover, Murdoch claims that “[w]e ordinarily conceive of and apprehend goodness in terms of virtues which belong to a continuous fabric of being” (2013, 29).

Being is an idea widely explored by Jean-Paul Sartre. According to Sartre, Being (*être*) is the “ever present foundation of the existent; it is everywhere in it and nowhere” (1978, lxii). In other words, being is what it is; it is itself. The notion of being includes Being-in-itself and Being-for-itself. Being-in-itself (*être-en-soi*) is a sort of phenomenon that does not require anything that would constitute it, meaning that it has no “within”, as Sartre explains, nor it is opposed to “without” (*ibid.*, lxvi). In a sense, we can regard Being-in-itself as a type of synthesis, this synthesis is only preoccupied with itself and nothing within or outside of it. Being-in-itself is a non-conscious being which is the opposite of Being-for-itself (*être-pour-soi*). The latter notion is defined as “being what it is not and not being what it is” (*ibid.*, lxv). Being-for-itself is active and dynamic, unlike Being-in-itself which is passive, Being-for-itself is seen as consciousness since it must be “wholly consciousness” (*ibid.*, 305) and it is responsible for bringing Nothingness into the world. Nothingness cannot be conceived outside of Being; it is also not a complementary notion to Being. Nothingness “must be given at the heart of Being” (*ibid.*, 22). This means that it is in some way supported by Being. Moreover, Sartre asserts that Being-for-itself has to be embodied; its obligation is to be “wholly body” (*ibid.*, 305) which brings us to the perception of self.

Sartre seems to focus on the role of the other in relation to our perception of self. One of the notions that Sartre uses is “the look”. “The look” is related to the way we perceive ourselves in the presence of another person. This perception is focused on the body; how we become aware of our bodies and how we perceive the body of the other. The body, for Sartre, constitutes “the totality of meaningful relations to the world” (*ibid.*, 344). He develops three dimensions of the body: 1) the body as Being-for-itself; 2) the body-for-others; 3) myself as a body known by the Other. When discussing the first dimension of the body, Sartre explains that

The body is what I nihilate. It is the in-itself which is surpassed by the nihilating for-itself and which reapprehends the for-itself in this very surpassing. It is the fact that I am my own motivation

without being my own foundation, the fact that I am nothing without having to be what I am and yet in so far as I have to be what I am, I am without having to be (ibid., 309).

Since the body cannot be regarded in-itself this means that one cannot see one's body as a physical object among other existing ones. One is one's own body since it is for-itself and one does not see it as an object *per se*. One can lose awareness of one's body when the body is engaging with surroundings. For instance, when one is writing, one is not conscious of one's hand that is writing, one can only apprehend the pen that one is using in order to write something; "I am not in relation to my hand in the same utilizing attitude as I am in relation to the pen; I am my hand" (*ibid.*, 323). This means that one fully identifies with one's body but one cannot perceive it. The body is always present no matter what we do but at the same time it is invisible, "for the act reveals the hammer and the nails, the brake and the change of speed, not the foot which brakes or the hand which hammers" (*ibid.*, 324). The body, as Sartre declares, is "lived and not known" (*ibid.*). From this we can say that the body as Being-for-itself is something that can be experienced but not comprehended.

The second dimension of the body as the body-for-others shifts an individual's perspective of one's own body from a mere "I am my body" to an understanding that one exists as an object for the other and the other exists as an object for that one.

This body of the Other is the pure fact of the Other's presence in my world as a being-there which is expressed by a being-as-this. Thus the Other's very existence as the Other-for-me implies that he is revealed as a tool possessing the property of knowing and that this property of knowing is bound to some objective existence (ibid., 343).

As we can see, the other by his presence in my space becomes an object, "a tool" for me that possesses a property of knowing. Since the other is equipped with this property this means that one can be known by the other. It does not mean that one does not have a property of knowing oneself, on the contrary, one does, but the way one knows oneself is different from the way the other perceives one. Sartre continues by saying that "[f]rom the moment that there is an Other, it must be concluded that he is an instrument provided with certain sense organs" (*ibid.*). What is important is that one understands that every other must have these organs but it does not mean that each person has exact same organs, nor does each person have the exact same face. What these features do is they allow the other's necessity to "exist himself as belonging to a race, a class, an environment" (*ibid.*), meaning that one perceives the other as existing among others who belong to different environments and at the same time one understands that the same could be applied to them; one is a body with certain features that can look dissimilar to another person's body features. One realises that one is a body among other bodies. Which brings us to the last dimension of the body- myself as a body known by the Other.

The third dimension combines the previous two dimensions of the body: I live and exist my own body and my body is known and used by the other and this means that “I exist for myself as a body known by the Other” (*ibid.*, 351). One comprehends the fact that one’s body is not only lived but becomes experienced by others. One is experienced by other’s perception and one becomes the perceived body. One’s awareness that someone perceives them can be disturbing since one understands that others judge one on the way one looks. For instance, we often speak of a shy person as if he were “embarrassed by his own body”, according to Sartre, this expression is incorrect since one cannot be embarrassed by the body that one exists. He says that “[i]t is my body as it is for the Other which may embarrass me” (*ibid.*, 353). This means that one is conscious of how one’s body appears to the other. In certain cases, we can adopt the other’s view of our body like when one sees one’s hands and they appear as objects among other objects; they are part of the environment. One can also perceive one’s hands as instruments, for example, “I hold an almond or walnut in my left fist and then pound it with my right hand” (*ibid.*, 357). In this case, one’s hand is integrated “with the infinite system of utensils” (*ibid.*) or seen as a tool.

This helps us to understand the concept of “the look” as proposed by Sartre. The important aspect of the concept is the other and his gaze. The other’s look is very effective and it triggers our awareness of the self. For instance, when one does something inappropriate like a vulgar gesture, “I neither judge it nor blame it. I simply live it.” (*ibid.*, 221). For one, this gesture does not provoke any strong or unpleasant feelings until one realises that their action was seen by the other. Then one realises how vulgar and inappropriate the gesture was and one starts being ashamed of oneself. One is ashamed of the way one appears to another person.

*By the mere appearance of the Other, I am put in the position of passing judgment on myself as on an object, for it is as an object that I appear to the Other. Yet this object which has appeared to the Other is not an empty image in the mind of another. Such an image in fact, would be imputable wholly to the Other and so could not "touch" me. I could feel irritation, or anger before it as before a bad portrait of myself which gives to my expression an ugliness or baseness which I do not have, but I could not be touched to the quick. Shame is by nature recognition. I recognize that I am as the Other sees me (*ibid.*, 222).*

One is ashamed of the image that the other created of what he saw. One perceives oneself differently from what the other observed in one’s action. The other’s observation of one’s inappropriate gesture revealed who that one was, he showed one’s new side which before this event remained unobserved. And through this observation, one gains knowledge about oneself. Being seen by the other triggers one’s self-awareness and one starts judging one’s own acts.

The other is not the only possessor of the gaze, one is also capable of looking at somebody and forming a judgement about them. Sartre provides an example of a man that one sees in a public park. “I apprehend him as an object and at the same time as a man” (*ibid.*, 254). This means that one, the subject in this situation, objectifies another human being. One recognises him as a man and perceives him as an animate object, but if one were to see him as a puppet, one would start regarding him in terms of “temporal-spatial things.” He would be apprehended as being beside the benches, one would see him in terms of the distance between him and some other object like the lawn and one would see him as putting a certain amount of pressure on the ground. Then “[h]is relation with other objects would be of the purely additive type” (*ibid.*). What Sartre is saying is that one, the subject, would be able to have him “disappear without the relations of the other objects around him being perceptibly changed” (*ibid.*). That would mean that no new relation would be able to appear through that object between “those things in my universe” (*ibid.*). Sartre explains that “grouped and synthesized from my point of view into instrumental complexes, they would from his disintegrate into multiplicities of indifferent relations” (*ibid.*). Seeing him as an animate being does not change the perception of him that much since he does not apprehend an additive relation between himself and another object. The distance between the man and the lawn still remains the same, what changes is that when one starts seeing him as a man, I “register an organization without distance of the things in my universe around that privileged object” (*ibid.*). The lawn then becomes bound to him in a relation which both transcends and contains the distance. The fact that remains the same is that whether one sees him as an animate being or as an inanimate thing, “the Other is still an object for me” (*ibid.*, 255). It is important to mention that the same can be applied to the subject; the way one perceives him and he perceives that one is identical, both are objects for one another.

Being an object for the other and objectifying the other does not circumscribe our reality. As Sartre asserts, “[w]e have to deal with human reality as a being which is what it is not and which is not what it is” (*ibid.*, 58). We can think of human reality in terms of what Sartre calls “bad faith”. This notion is often perceived in terms of falsehood. We say of a person that he shows some signs of bad faith or that he is lying to himself. What is important here is to distinguish a lie to oneself from a lie to others since the two are not equal and when discussing the notion of “bad faith” the focus is put on the lying to oneself.

One way of lying to oneself is by denying one’s own choice of freedom. Sartre illustrates this by speaking about a woman who goes out with her partner. He is explicitly making remarks of how attractive she is, but the woman is disarming the sexual background of his remarks. She is profoundly aware of the desire which she inspires in him, but since the desire is of humiliating and exploitative nature, she tries to deflect it. When the man takes her hand, she has to make a decision. She either has

to take it out of his grasp or leave it there. If the lady does not take her hand away from him, she agrees to flirt with him, to engage herself. What happens then is that she leaves her hand there, but she does not notice it. “And during this time the divorce of the body from the soul is accomplished; the hand rests inert between the warm hands of her companion-neither consenting nor resisting-a thing” (*ibid.*, 56). This woman is clearly in bad faith mainly because she has disarmed the actions of her partner by reducing them to their mere existence, in other words, “to existing in the mode of the in-itself” (*ibid.*). She even manages to distance herself from her own body by finding herself as not being her own body. She sees her hand as an object and suppresses all the signs that her intuition says about the intentions of her partner. She thinks of her body as a passive object and despite the fact that she knows that things may happen to her body, she acts as if she cannot avoid them; as if she has no freedom of choice that would allow her to save her body from unfortunate events that are likely to happen to her.

Another way of lying to oneself is by assuming to be what one is not. For instance, there is a waiter in a café. He does not seem to be acting authentically to himself. His movements are quick, a bit too precise and quite rapid. He comes towards the patrons with a step which is a bit too quick. The way the waiter bends is quite eager, his voice and eyes indicate an interest which is way too eager for the customers’ order. Sartre calls the waiter’s behaviour a game.

All his behavior seems to us a game. He applies himself to chaining his movements as if they were mechanisms, the one regulating the other; his gestures and even his voice seem to be mechanisms; he gives himself the quickness and pitiless rapidity of things. He is playing, he is amusing himself (ibid., 59).

According to Sartre, the waiter is playing a game and amusing himself. This begs the question of what is he playing. The answer to that is quite simple; the man is playing at being a waiter in a café. The problem with his playing is that “the waiter in the café cannot be immediately a café waiter in the sense that this inkwell is an inkwell, or the glass is a glass” (*ibid.*), that is, he cannot be someone else than himself. The waiter can only play at being a waiter, the man can only imagine being him, but being a waiter is not who he authentically is. The man is not just those mechanic movements that he performs, and certainly not just the eyes and voice that are eager to carry out someone’s order. He is deceiving himself into being someone who he is not.

A similar instance of “bad faith” to that of a waiter is an example of a homosexual who denies who he is. While this man is capable of recognising his homosexual inclinations and is capable of admitting all the deeds that he has done, he cannot admit that he is a homosexual. Sartre explains that that man “has an obscure but strong feeling that an homosexual is not an homosexual as this table is a table or as this

red-haired man is red-haired” (*ibid.*, 64). Sartre asserts that the man's denial is partially correct since “I am not what I am”, but the problem is that the homosexual does not accept that he is homosexual.

*[i]f he declared to himself, "To the extent that a pattern of conduct is defined as the conduct of 'a paederast and to the extent that I have adopted this conduct, I am a paederast. But to the extent that human reality can not be finally defined by patterns of conduct, I am not one." But instead he slides surreptitiously towards a different connotation of the word "being." He understands "not being" in the sense of "not-being-in-itself." He lays claim to "not being a paederast" in the sense in which this table is not an inkwell. He is in bad faith (*ibid.*).*

The homosexual would be correct if he were able to admit that he adopted a pattern of conduct typically assigned to homosexuals. Unfortunately, the man does not do that and denies the very being of his identity. By denying the fact that he is a homosexual, the man is not being authentically himself, he is just merely deceiving himself in pretending not to be who he really is. The man is insincere to himself. Speaking of sincerity, the essential structure of sincerity does not deviate from that of bad faith as “the sincere man constitutes himself as what he is in order not to be it” (*ibid.*, 65). Both sincerity and bad faith have similar goals. The aim of sincerity is to make one confess to oneself what one is in order for one to finally coincide with one’s authentic being, in other words, “to cause myself to be, in the mode of the in-itself, what I am in the mode of “not being what I am:”” (*ibid.*, 66). The goal of bad faith is to cause one to be who one is authentically, “in the mode of “not being what one is,”” or not to be what I am in the mode of “being what one is”” (*ibid.*). In this sense, we can say that sincerity and bad faith not only have similar aims but act as each other’s reflections. From what we can see, the Sartrean concept of identity is quite complicated since it is based on paradox. As he claims, I am not what I am, this means that one is and is not one’s past.

Going back to goodness, we can speak of it in terms of art, which is another idea important to Murdoch. Murdoch disagrees with Plato that all art is bad as it is a representation of real things, the representer is “two generations away from reality” (Plato 2008, 348), meaning that the representer knows nothing of the value of what he represents. Instead Murdoch claims that there are two types of art: the bad one and the good one. Bad art is damaging to us since it prompts “false egoistic fantasy” (1993, 49). Great art is very beneficial to us since in enjoying it we can experience “clarification and concentration and perfection of our own consciousness” (*ibid.*, 29). It also inspires us because it is for itself, this type of art is “an image of virtue” (*ibid.*). Murdoch also says that the greatest art is “impersonal” (2013, 63), which reminds us of the idea of unselfing. When speaking of a great artist she claims that such an artist sees his objects “in a light of justice and mercy”, meaning that the direction of attention is focused outwards, away from the self (*ibid.*, 65). Murdoch also adds that good art is capable of inspiring love in the highest part of the soul. Good art is capable of doing this “partly by virtue of something which it

shares with nature: a perfection of form which invites unpossessive contemplation and resists absorption into the selfish dream life of the consciousness” (*ibid.*, 83).

Speaking of love, Murdoch claims that “Good is sovereign over Love” (*ibid.*, 99). She defines love as

the general name of the quality of attachment and it is capable of infinite degradation and is the source of our greatest errors; but when it is even partially refined it is the energy and passion of the soul in its search for Good, the force that joins us to Good and joins us to the world through Good. Its existence is the unmistakable sign that we are spiritual creatures, attracted by excellence and made for the Good. It is a reflection of the warmth and light of the sun (ibid., 100).

Murdoch equates love to the perception of individuals (1959, 51) and says that “[l]ove is the extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real. Love, and so art and morals, is the discovery of reality” (*ibid.*). This shows that the three conceptions, love, art and the good, are intertwined and cannot be spoken of separately. They are the key parts of one’s being.

Another key part of one’s being is language. Taylor claims that “[t]here is no way we could be inducted into personhood except by being initiated into a language” (1989, 35). Language is crucial when defining the self:

I am a self only in relation to certain interlocutors: in one way in relation to those conversation partners who were essential to my achieving self-definition; in another in relation to those who are now crucial to my continuing grasp of languages of self-understanding-and, of course, these classes may overlap. A self exists only within what I call ‘webs of interlocution’ (ibid., 36).

This shows that language allows us to be our own selves and be situated among other selves. Taylor also adds that language is important when building an “adequate picture of things” (*ibid.*, 197), but we have to be careful with the words we use since through them we can lose contact with reality, if they are not “properly anchored in experience through definitions” (*ibid.*, 197-198). Overall, language is indispensable in defining who we are and where we are placed together with other selves and things.

2.2 Feminism and the Problem of Subjectivity of Women

Having discussed the central concepts that are found in the analysed novels, we can now discuss another important issue which is feminism. Simone de Beauvoir, one of the central figures of the feminist movement, in her work *The Second Sex* (1949) speaks of the injustice oriented towards women, she discusses the fact that women were not allowed to be in control of their lives. As de Beauvoir claims,

“[h]e is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other” (2011, 26). Since woman is the other, she is deprived of her subjectivity. de Beauvoir does not support such mistreatment of women, on the contrary, she is against it. “Man is a socially autonomous and complete individual” (*ibid.*, 503), which is good, but so should be woman. Women cannot be mere objects governed by men. The life of women should not be based on the Balzackian phrase “A wife is what her husband makes her”, a wife should be able to make herself. de Beauvoir is very disappointed that today there is not yet real equality between the two sexes, even though there have been some promising moments recorded in history, i.e., women were given the right to vote. de Beauvoir, in her work, provides an account of the history of the woman which helps to explain the mistreatment of women.

From the very beginning women have been denied their own space. “[W]omen have never formed an autonomous and closed society; they are integrated into the group governed by males” (*ibid.*, 724). Women inhabit the universe that is masculine and they are seen as inferior and dependent. They are not seen as free selves. But why is that? The answer lies in the child’s upbringing. When growing up, children are instructed how they should act and what they should do. de Beauvoir provides us with an example of a boy learning that he does not belong with women. The boy’s father pronounces: “We are men; let’s leave these women” (*ibid.*, 333). The child is being persuaded that more is expected and demanded of boys because they are superior beings; “the pride of his virility is breathed into him in order to encourage him in this difficult path” (*ibid.*). Of course, if the boy were not instructed to leave the women and if he were not introduced to what is expected of him, the boy would not know of his “superiority”. The child would most likely see himself as no different from women, but because of his upbringing and the introduction to his “superiority”, the boy follows what is deemed accepted in the masculine universe.

If the boy learns about his “superiority”, the girl learns about her inferiority and dependency. She has always been convinced of male superiority; this male prestige is not an illusion; “it has economic and social foundations” (*ibid.*, 395). The girl knows that men are “the masters of the world” (*ibid.*), and the girl is waiting for her master to come and marry her. She learns of her responsibilities and chores; she is always required to stay home and her outside activities are supervised. The girl is never encouraged to “organize her own fun and pleasure” (*ibid.*, 401). She is seen as insufficient in herself and the inability to be self-sufficient brings on a shyness that extends over her life and even affects her work. Nowadays, women are not as suppressed as they were before. Women are allowed to do pretty much what they want. Woman, “when she is productive and active, she regains her transcendence; she affirms herself concretely as subject in her projects” (*ibid.*, 813). This does sound good, but it does not mean that she

has acquired freedom and that now her condition is the same as man's. There is still a lot of work that needs to be done, but at least we are on the right track.

This MA thesis will use feminism in both its usual and unusual manner since the narrators of the novels present the world in their own way, meaning that the way they portray women may not be accurate and certain oppressions that they say that the female characters of the books have to experience may not even exist. Also the thesis will employ feminism in order to show how women's identities are perceived and misrepresented in the novels.

3. Identity and Falsehood

This part of the present MA paper explores how the identities of the novel's characters are portrayed in *Under the Net* and how such notions as language, art and love help to unveil the complexities that surround each character's identity. This part of the analysis is based on the way the ideas are represented in such works as Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self: the Making of the Modern Identity*, Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, and Iris Murdoch's *The Sovereignty of Good, Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* as well as Murdoch's article *The Sublime and the Good*.

3.1 Language and Bad Faith

Under the Net is a story told through first-person narrative which is provided by the main character of the novel, Jake Donaghue. Jake is a struggling artist, who lives "by literary hack-work, and a little original writing, as little as possible" (Murdoch 1955, 23). Jake opts for a translator's job as "it's easy and because it sells like hot cakes in any language" (*ibid.*, 22), which emphasises the fact that he does enjoy the financial benefits provided by the job that he has no real passion for. The narrator also likes translating because "it's like opening one's mouth and hearing someone else's voice emerge" (*ibid.*), which seems to imply that Jake does not feel comfortable enunciating his own words. The reason for that could be attributed to his acquaintance Hugo. As Jake reveals, "my acquaintance with Hugo is the central theme of this book" (*ibid.*, 60). And this acquaintance had a lot to do with the way Jake perceives language. Hugo, one of the main characters of the book, claims that reality cannot be represented by language: "[t]he language just won't let you present it as it really was" (*ibid.*, 67). This paints Hugo as a Wittgenstein-like figure since he echoes Wittgenstein's shared uncertainties related to language. Wittgenstein says that "[t]he picture is a model of reality" and "[t]he picture is a fact" (1922, 28). This means that the picture represents reality. Following that, Wittgenstein adds that "[w]hat *can* be shown *cannot* be said" (*ibid.*, 45), which means that reality cannot be told, it must be only shown and ergo "[w]hereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" (*ibid.*, 90). This means that the truth lies in silence. According to Hugo, "[t]he whole language is a machine for making falsehoods" (Murdoch 1955, 68). The machine for making falsehoods is a metaphor that depicts the inability of language to convey reality. The doubt that language is unable to convey reality presents *Under the Net* as a postmodern composition since, according to Tawfiq Yousef, postmodern texts can reveal scepticism about "the ability of language to convey reality" (2017, 35). And what we see in the novel is that this sceptical idea leads the narrator to start theorising about language and become bound in the net of language theory,

another metaphor signifying that he takes language theorising too seriously and becomes restrained in its bounds.

The concerns with language can be seen as alluding to Sartre's novel *La Nausée* since one of the philosophical concerns found in Sartre's novel, according to Vickery, is language (1971, 69). Vickery also says that *Under the Net* can be read as a commentary on *La Nausée*, "as a comic anatomy miming in shadow-like fashion the inadequacies of Sartre's fictive argument about the nature of existence and the individual" (*ibid.*, 70), in other words, we can say that *Under the Net* is a parody of *La Nausée*. This also emphasises the fact that *Under the Net* is a postmodern text since one of the features of a postmodern novel is an employment of parody. According to Linda Hutcheon, "[p]arody is a perfect postmodern form, in some senses, for it paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies" (1988, 11) and we can see some of Sartre's ideas incorporated in *Under the Net*, especially language.

Language, in *Under the Net*, can be seen as a tool for mistreating one's identity. This happens because Jake describes characters from his point of view without knowing the truth, meaning that his own self overtakes reality and the true identity of other characters. For instance, he says about his partner Finn that his actual name is Peter O'Finney, "but you needn't mind about that, as he is always called Finn" (1955, 7). He also adds that "people do get the impression that he is my servant, and I often have this impression too" (*ibid.*, 8). This shows that Jake regards Finn as inferior. Jake always gives orders to his friend, but "this is because Finn seems not to have many ideas of his own about how to employ his time" (*ibid.*), all this brings us to Sartre's idea of the look. Sartre perceiving a man comprehends him as "an object and at the same time as a man" (1978, 254) so does Jake. Not only Jake sees Finn as an object and a man, but he sees him as a servant working for Jake. Jake goes as far as to claim that Finn is an inhabitant of his universe:

I say my universe, not ours, because I sometimes feel that Finn has very little inner life. I mean no disrespect to him in saying; some have and some haven't. [...] It may be, though, that Finn misses his inner life, and that that is why he follows me about, as I have a complex one and highly differentiated (1955, 9).

Through such language Jake deprives Finn of his subjectivity. Jake sees Finn as part of his own identity. He completely disregards Finn's true identity, meaning the fact that he is a separate being from Jake and his friend who is here for him. Finn's humble nature and loyalty to Jake is portrayed by the narrator as non-existence of his identity, as if Finn is not an individual, not a separate being only an instrument or an actual fin, an appendage to Jake in order to fulfil Jake's wishes, hence the nickname. This leads us to Taylor's idea about words where he claims that we need to be mindful of the words we use since through

them we can lose contact with reality, if they are not “properly anchored in experience through definitions” (1989, 197-198). And in Jake’s description of Finn we can see the disconnection with reality; Jake’s language does not reveal Finn’s true self. It only reveals the fact that Jake views Finn as part of his own self, as an appendage that allows him to successfully achieve what he wants.

Another way that language is used to mistreat one’s identity could be viewed through Hugo’s idea that “[t]he whole language is a machine for making falsehoods” (Murdoch 1955, 68) which then causes Jake to become a victim of bad reasoning and bad faith. Jake claims that “I have to keep on writing if I’m to make ends meet, and when I am homeless I can settle down to nothing” (*ibid.*, 29). In reality, he does not have to write if he does not want to, there are other ways of earning money. Jake portrays writing as the only means of sustaining himself which is bad reasoning since it is not the only way of earning money. What Jake forgets to mention is the fact that writing, an artistic activity, is his vocation but since he gets remarks that he needs to find “a proper job” (*ibid.*), Jake feels that what he does is not a real work which is bad faith since he denies his own freedom of choice. When it comes to freedom, Jake is of the opinion that “freedom is only an idea” (*ibid.*, 30), this presupposes that freedom is not real, it is an abstract entity that is sought-after but never achieved. Freedom is non-existent, which is, of course, not true if we view freedom in Sartre’s terms. According to Sartre,

my freedom is perpetually in question in my being; it is not a quality added on or a property of my nature. It is very exactly the stuff of my being; and as in my being, my being is in question, I must necessarily possess a certain comprehension of freedom (1978, 439).

Following Sartre’s reasoning, freedom cannot be “only an idea”. Freedom is the very being of the For-itself and it is obliged to remain free, it has to choose for itself and constitutes itself. Sartre asserts that “freedom is existence, and in its existence precedes essence” (*ibid.*, 567-568). He also emphasises the fact that “I am condemned to exist forever beyond my essence, beyond the causes and motives of my act. I am condemned to be free” (*ibid.*, 439) which means that every person is forced to have freedom of choice no matter the situation. One is condemned to be free whether one likes it or not. Jake too, according to this logic, is obliged to be free and he should not be saying that freedom is only an idea since it is bad faith.

Jake is not alone having to deal with bad faith. Another character, a singer named Anna, also feels that she has no freedom of choice. For example, when receiving an offer that she did not want, Anna is unable to say no. In a letter to Jake Anna states: “I have had an offer which although I don’t like I feel I have to accept” (Murdoch 1955, 125). Anna’s usage of the word “feel” emphasises the fact that she is a victim of bad faith since bad faith is based on the belief that one does not possess freedom of choice when it

comes to one's own actions. She acts as if the only thing that she is allowed to do is to accept the offer that does not appeal to her. Another aspect that ties her to Jake is that she also believes that "language is a machine for making falsehoods" (*ibid.*, 68). This causes her to abandon her singing. In an episode where she meets Jake after not seeing him for a long time she explains to him: "I shan't sing any more. [...] There is no truth in it. One is just exploiting one's charm to seduce people" (*ibid.*, 46), which means that she puts unnecessary restrictions on singing and at the same time deprives herself of an activity that brings her joy and is her vocation.

3.2 Feminism and the Look

Under the Net asks for an exploration of the identity of the female characters through the lens of feminism. The reason for that is the way Jake projects what the feminists call "the male gaze" upon his female counterparts. For instance, Jake's landlord Magdalen is a typist, but according to Jake, "[h]er real employment is to be herself, and to this she devotes a tremendous zeal and artistry" (*ibid.*, 10). These words portray Magdalen as a being focused on the way she looks. Jake continues by saying that

[h]er exertions are directed along the lines suggested to her by women's magazines and the cinema, and it is due simply to some spring of native and incorruptible vitality in her that she has not succeeded in rendering herself quite featureless in spite of having made the prevailing conventions of seduction her constant study (ibid., 10-11).

Jake's description depicts Magdalen as a woman who is on the verge of losing her own identity due to influence that comes from various magazines and the cinema. According to Jake, "[s]he makes a lot of money from time to time, not by tapping on the typewriter, but by being a photographer's model; she is everyone's idea of a pretty girl" (*ibid.*, 11), which means that the key characteristic that defines Magdalen is her prettiness and Jake sees her as an object of beauty, as a body that possesses charm. In Simone de Beauvoir's terms, it could be said that her body escapes her and no longer acts as "the clear expression of her individuality" (2011, 369) as it is consumed by the other- the narrator, Jake. Jake continues to describe Magdalen's appearance by saying that "[h]er prettiness lies in her regular features and fine complexion, which she covers over with a peach-like mask of make-up until all is as smooth and inexpressive as alabaster" (Murdoch 1955, 11), his words designate her as a sculpture that exists in order to be admired for its delicate features. Jake, by thinking of her as a statue, deprives Magdalen of her identity as a subject and emphasises her passivity. Female passivity is a topic discussed by Simone de Beauvoir. According to de Beauvoir, this passivity is naturally acquired by young girls since in some way it could be viewed as a consent to femininity (2011, 403). Girls understand "the charm of passivity"

(*ibid.*, 403) and they know that the girl's body could be seen as "endowed with magic virtues; it is a treasure, a weapon" (*ibid.*, 404). And the passivity that de Beauvoir discusses is the focal point of Magdalen's identity. She is not perceived as a subject, but as a passive object that is to be admired for her beauty by a male subject, in this case, the narrator.

The narrator is not the only one that is fascinated by Magdalen's pretty looks, Magdalen's fiancé, Sammy, admits that Magdalen's beauty has a lot to do with his decision to marry her. When Jake asks him "are you really going to marry Madge?", Sammy replies by saying: "Why not? [...] Isn't she a beautiful girl? Isn't she a turn up for the book? She hasn't got a wooden leg, has she?" (Murdoch 1955, 81). Here again we see that all that matters about Magdalen is her attractiveness. What strikes as bizarre in Murdoch's novel is when a bit later in the novel Jake starts describing a statue as if it were an actual human being. He says:

I stood there for a long time, leaning against a marble urn and meditating upon a curve of her thigh. How her right leg is drawn under her, and her naked left leg outstretched in that pure undulation which can lift contemplation and desire almost together to the highest point of awareness, the curve of a reclining woman's thigh (ibid., 208-209).

Jake here personifies the statue and puts focus on its attractiveness. The statue that he calls "she" becomes to him an embodiment of a female figure. Jake cannot take his eyes from the curve of her thigh and he is fascinated by the statue's naked leg that arouses curiosity. What we can see here is how unjust he is towards Magdalen, he posits her as an object of passivity and depicts her in a language that would normally be used when speaking of an object and when it comes to describing an actual object, in this case, a statue, he personifies it, but maintains the focus on attractiveness.

The statue is not the last victim of Jake's gaze, another female character, Anna, is also a victim of the possessive gaze who arouses Jake's curiosity. As with Magdalen, Jake focuses on Anna's appearance and says "[s]he was plumper and had not defended herself against time" (*ibid.*, 42), meaning that she did not remain the same as the last time they saw each other. Jake goes as far as to compare her with "a great doll" (*ibid.*, 44). The image of a doll is quite important in this episode and it requires a feminist reading of the symbol. As Simone de Beauvoir remarks, a little girl, unlike her male counterpart, "cannot incarnate herself in any part of her own body" (2011, 340) and in order to make her feel better and to act as her alter ego, she is given a doll. The doll here represents the whole body, but unlike a human body it is a passive thing; it is inanimate. "As such, the little girl will be encouraged to alienate herself in her person as a whole and to consider it an inert given" (*ibid.*). What is even more striking is that the

girl starts perceiving herself as “a marvellous doll” (*ibid.*) and even compares herself to princesses and fairies which is reminiscent of Jake’s description of Anna where he portrays her as laying

amid the coloured debris like a fairytale princess tumbled from her throne. The silks were at the hip and breast. A long tress of hair has escaped. She lay still for a moment, receiving my gaze, her foot arching with consciousness of it (Murdoch 1955, 47).

This demonstrates not only the traditional fairy-tale-like image that girls are typically predestined to, but it also shows that Anna is aware of the powerful gaze and of the fact that she is, when speaking in Sartre’s terms, the body-for-others or, in this case, for Jake. She realises that she is being perceived by the possessor of a powerful male gaze, Jake.

Even though it seems like Jake is the only person who avoids being gazed at, in reality it is not the case. In the comic episode where Jake is sitting on the steps by Sadie’s, who is Anna’s sister, door without any movement or sound, neighbours start speculating that Jake is “deaf and dumb” or maybe “he’s hungry” (*ibid.*, 132) or that he might be mad, maybe even dangerous, and one woman says to her husband to “dial nine nine nine” (*ibid.*, 134). This makes Jake feel embarrassed and uncomfortable and he regards the neighbours as tormentors who “were standing all together in the laneway” (*ibid.*, 135), which shows that Jake is not immune to being looked at, in effect, Jake is a victim of ‘the look’ which calls for a reading of the situation from Sartre’s perspective. In Sartre’s terms, when one does something inappropriate like a vulgar gesture, one does not pay that much attention to it. One just simply lives it (1978, 221). But when one recognises that someone saw one’s inadequate behaviour, one begins to be ashamed of oneself and that happens because “[s]hame is by nature recognition. I recognize that I am as the Other sees me” (*ibid.*, 222). One perceives oneself differently from what the other observed in one’s action, thus one becomes aware of one’s inappropriate behaviour and starts judging one’s own actions. Sartre’s description of the said situation is very similar to what happens to Jake. Jake understands that his behaviour appeared as strange and inadequate to the neighbours. Jake comprehends that he was perceived differently from how he sees himself and he does not want to be perceived in such a way since it is not an accurate representation of his identity.

3.3 Love, Art and Reality

In *Under the Net*, love and art are two ideas that are intertwined in a complex manner and they also are responsible for revealing some complexities related to character identity. When speaking of love, Jake

feels an attachment to Anna as they once were in a romantic relationship, but seems a bit lost in his feelings for her, as he explains,

I cannot think what it is about her that would justify me in calling her mysterious, and yet she always seemed to me to be an unfathomable being. Dave once said to me that to find a person inexhaustible is simply the definition of love, so perhaps I loved Anna (Murdoch 1955, 31).

According to his reasoning, he should love Anna, curiously enough, Anna does not love Jake but loves Hugo and Hugo is infatuated with Sadie. What we see in the novel is that Hugo is far more important to Jake than Anna. Jake, inspired by Hugo, decides to write a book called *The Silencer*. *The Silencer* is a dialogic composition featuring two characters Tamarus [who stands for Jake] and Annadine [who stands for Hugo] influenced by Jake's conversations with Hugo. The chosen form of the book is reminiscent of Socratic dialogues and the main conversation of this composition is the philosophising related to language. Unfortunately, Jake did not produce an authentic record of their discussions, as he explains:

I polished it up quite a lot and then began to fill in the preliminary conversation as well. [...] I worked on it constantly. I now expanded it to cover a large number of our conversations, which I presented not necessarily as I remembered them to have occurred, but in a way which fitted in the plan of the whole (ibid., 70).

This means that what Jake produced was not even near authentic, everything was misconstrued and put on paper the way it pleased the author of *The Silencer*. Jake admits that "it was a travesty and falsification" of their discussions (*ibid.*). Jake wrote the book for himself and he also adds that "it was clearly written for effect, written to impress" (*ibid.*). This, following Murdoch's ideas on good and bad art, makes him a bad artist. His creation prompts what Murdoch calls "false egoistic fantasy" (1993, 49), meaning that his piece of writing brings out Jake's egotistical fantasies and it aims at bettering neither the author nor his readers. This occurs because of Jake's inability to accept authenticity both in terms of reality and his own self, as he says, "Hugo's personality could very easily swallow mine up completely" (Murdoch 1955, 69) and it seems like Jake is not against it. It could be possible that the reason why Jake does not resist his identity being swallowed is the fondness he feels for Hugo.

Love has a power to affect one's identity in such a way that it can make one to refrain from one's own self. Jake is not alone having such tender feelings for Hugo Anna, too, feels fondness for Hugo and this fondness establishes itself in love. This love establishes in the fact that Anna becomes unselfed to such a degree that she in a way becomes a vessel for Hugo's self. This is achieved with the help of *The Silencer*. Anna feels inspired by Annadine's words that "truth can be attained, if at all, only in silence" (*ibid.*, 92), which is reminiscent of how Hugo discusses the truth. She even starts applying these words

when discussing love with Jake: “[l]ove is action, it is silence” (*ibid.*, 45). Jake is able to notice such similarities and even says that some of her phrases “didn’t sound like Anna at all” (*ibid.*, 46) and that is because she unselfed herself or, as Murdoch prefers to call it, she resisted “the fat relentless ego” (2013, 51), which, in my opinion, Anna managed to overdo. Anna truly believes that the image that she finds in *The Silencer* is of the real Hugo and of his ideas, unfortunately, that image is corrupt. According to Jake, “Annadine was but a broken-down caricature of Hugo” (Murdoch 1955, 92), this means that Annadine is not an accurate representation of Hugo’s identity and his ideas. Jake points out that Anna’s words which were supposed to be based on Hugo’s thoughts were actually “an echo, a travesty, of Hugo, just as my own words were an echo and a travesty of him” (*ibid.*, 93). This means that Anna never really knew the real Hugo, she was only familiar with his caricature and she loved the caricature of Hugo. This is proved by Hugo when Jake says to him “[i]t was you reflected in Anna, just as that dialogue was you reflected in me” (*ibid.*, 257) to which Hugo replies by saying “I don’t recognize the reflexions” (*ibid.*, 258), meaning that Hugo found no similarities between what was written in *The Silencer* and his original ideas.

All of this would not have been revealed if not for Hugo. By the end of the novel, we realise that it is Jake who took over Murdoch’s role and wrote *Under the Net* and what made him do it is the knowledge and acceptance of reality with which he has always struggled. And all this was achieved with some aid coming from Hugo. Jake used to say “I hate contingency. I want everything in my life to have a sufficient reason” (*ibid.*, 26). Since language, according to Hugo’s reasoning, was not meant to reveal the truth- it had no sufficient reason, thus Jake abstained from it as best as he could. The problem with Hugo’s reasoning is that Hugo himself admits that telling the truth is not necessarily his true intention, for instance, when he says to Jake that “[a]ll the time when I speak to you, even now, I’m saying not *precisely* what I think, but what will impress you and make you respond” (*ibid.*, 67-68), which shows that language *per se* should not be blamed for inaccurate representation of reality since language can be manipulated in order to convey the message that one wants to send to somebody. Jake did not realise that since he became too addicted to language theory and therefore became bound in the net of language theorising. His main trap was Hugo’s words and his main problem was, according to Hugo, “[y]ou were far too impressed by me” (*ibid.*, 249). As Hugo rightly states, “[t]hings don’t matter as much as you think” (*ibid.*) and this theorising of language should not either. Hugo never bothered about theories, “[f]or Hugo each thing was astonishing, delightful, complicated and mysterious” (*ibid.*, 66) and he never tried to theorise anything or fight with reality. And Hugo, Jake’s “destiny” (*ibid.*, 101), allowed Jake to accept reality and encouraged him to follow his dream, he said “[y]ou’re always *expecting* something, Jake” (*ibid.*, 258), which alludes to Jake’s expectation of contingency of life and everything in his life

having a sufficient reason, Hugo also said that “[e]very man must have a trade. Yours is writing” (*ibid.*) and that is how he became the author of *Under the Net*.

Jake also manages to see someone other than himself and show that he still has feelings for Anna. When Anna leaves Jake for good he says “[i]t seemed as if, for the first time, Anna really existed now as a separate being and not as a part of myself” (*ibid.*, 268) which is reminiscent of what Murdoch says about love. As Murdoch explains, “[l]ove is the extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real” (1959, 51) which means that Jake, after such a long time of perceiving Anna as part of his own self, has finally managed to let her be her own true being. It also shows that he still has not completely forgotten his old feelings for Anna, but he manages to see her as a separate and real being and allows her to live her own life.

With the help from Hugo, Jake accepts and understands reality, but it also makes him feel ashamed of the things that he has misconceived. Finn, after being seen as part of Jake’s own self for a very long time, leaves for Ireland. When Jake learns about this news, he feels terrible: “I felt ashamed, ashamed of being parted from Finn, of having known so little about Finn, of having conceived things as I pleased and not as they were” (1955, 279). This makes him a good artist and his book *Under the Net* an example of good art. In order to show that *Under the Net* is worthy of being called an instance of good art we need to think of the composition in Murdoch’s terms. Murdoch claims that “great art teaches us how real things can be looked at and loved without being seized and used, without being appropriated into the greedy organism of the self” (2013, 64) and this is what happens with *Under the Net* as it shows Jake’s acceptance and knowledge of reality, ability to recognise that someone else is real and his growth as a human being and an artist.

4. Identity and Theatricality

Similarly to *Under the Net*, *The Sea, the Sea* is concerned with identity and its complexities. The complexities are explored with the aid of complex notions such as art, love, the good and language. In this chapter, the ideas borrowed from the works of Taylor, de Beauvoir and Murdoch, which were mentioned in the previous part, are utilised in order to investigate the complex topic of identity.

4.1 Art and the Artist

The Sea, the Sea is the first-person written account by Charles Arrowby, a retired actor, playwright and stage director who, while telling us the story, gets a bit overenthusiastic and infuses the tale with too many theatrical elements which can cause him and his story to be bound by the net of theatricality. From this theatricality we can see the emergence of the main metaphor of the book- the stage since everything that he writes resembles an artistic performance on stage. Also, the book contains quite a few intertextual relations which allow us to see the significance of postmodern intertextuality in this novel. As Hutcheon claims, “[p]ostmodern intertextuality is a formal manifestation of both a desire to close the gap between past and present of the reader and a desire to rewrite the past in a new context” (1988, 118). And this context pertains to the significance of art in the novel. Art plays part of identity creation in the book. The narrator of the novel is an artist who spent the majority of his life in theatre and who struggles with grasping his identity since he claims that he has “very little sense of identity” (Murdoch 1999, 3). The reason why he feels the lack of understanding his identity might come from the fact that he is too engrossed in Shakespeare. As Charles says, “I owe my whole life to Shakespeare” (*ibid.*, 30) and it comes as no surprise when he admits that he went into the theatre because of the Bard of Avon (*ibid.*, 32). Charles feels that Shakespeare guided him through all the artistic endeavours that he has ever encountered: “Those who knew me in later years as a Shakespeare director often did not realize how absolutely this god had directed me from the very first” (*ibid.*). By describing Shakespeare as a “god” Charles posits the bard in the religious domain and establishes him as a deity who directs all of his choices.

What we see here is that Charles idolises Shakespeare way too much and that leads him to a desire to become one of his characters- Prospero. Charles played Prospero when he was younger and, as he says, “[t]hat was my last great part, and now so long ago” (*ibid.*, 42). Here he claims that the role of Prospero that he played was just an act and he no longer interprets this powerful figure of Shakespeare’s *The*

Tempest. This is not quite true, he might not take the role of Prospero for money in theatre, but he does it in real life for free because, as it was mentioned earlier, he has very little sense of his personal identity and he owes his life to the Bard of Avon. Prospero to Charles is a link that ties him to Shakespeare, Prospero is the dream figure that possesses everything that Charles wants and who he strives to be. As we know, Shakespeare's Prospero is the main character of the play who gives orders to the rest of the play's characters. Prospero cannot be controlled as he is the one who possesses the sublime power and directs everyone. In Murdoch's novel, we see that Charles, similarly to Prospero, is incapable of taking a humbler part in life and work, as he says, "I failed as an actor, I ceased as a playwright. Only my fame as a director has covered up these facts" (*ibid.*, 40). A stage director has control over actors, he has power and sometimes this power does not morally benefit the person of such a profession: "A theatre director is a dictator. (If he is not, he is not doing his job.)" (*ibid.*). According to his reasoning, in order to become a successful director, one has to construct one's identity in such a way that would resemble an autocrat, such a person would insist on complete obedience from others and the people whom he governs should expect to be tormented by such a human being and that is exactly what happened to his actors, as Charles says, "[a]ctors expected tears and nervous prostration when I was around" (*ibid.*). Charles also admits that he "liked that handy picture of myself as a 'tartar'" (*ibid.*) and I believe that the reason why he enjoys this picture is because it helps to portray him as a real life Prospero, the sorcerer that he aspires to be. And his insistence on being Prospero is what bounds him in the net of theatricality, meaning that his imagination overtook reality.

Charles's role as a director and artist could be seen from Murdoch's point of view. If we accept Murdoch's thinking about art and the good artist, "[a]rt is a human product and virtues as well as talents are required of the artist. The good artist, in relation to his art, is brave, truthful, patient, humble" (2013, 84), thus we can say that neither Charles himself as an artist nor his art can be called good since, from what Charles says about his art and his role as a director, we know that there are no virtues in his art and there is no humbleness in him as an artist.

In the novel, we see that art is not limited to the construction of Charles's identity. Another character, Charles's childhood love Hartley, is also constructed via art. The narrator of the novel says that Hartley played a very important role in his life: "She became my Beatrice" (Murdoch 1999, 91). Beatrice is, of course, taken from Dante Alighieri's *La Vita Nuova* and *The Divine Comedy*. In the former, Beatrice is a character who "embodies love and also represents, or prefigures, divinity" (Gerber 2017, 268) in the latter, she is Dante's guide through Paradise. According to Joy Hambuechen Potter, Dante aims at making Beatrice asexual (1990, 62) and we can see the same attempt being made in Murdoch's *The Sea, the Sea* where her character Hartley is portrayed by the narrator as demure, innocent and chaste. Charles

describes Hartley's face as "bright innocent lovely" (Murdoch 1999, 85) and describes their love as chaste: "we were chaste, and respected each other absolutely and worshipped each other chastely" (*ibid.*, 86). The preoccupation with chastity links to another image found in Murdoch's novel- the image of the phantom of Helen. What was important for the heroine of Euripides's play was to keep herself faithful and chaste since her chastity was threatened (Wolff 1973, 64). Her husband was gone for many years and she had an opportunity to be married to another man but she never took it. She swore "by the head of Menelaus to die and never take a new husband should he be killed" (Torrance 2009, 2) and she held her promise. Charles, being a theatre person who is familiar with the aforementioned art pieces, applies the characteristics of the said heroines to Hartley and creates the unrealistic image of her identity. This image starts to dissipate when Charles starts contemplating the possibility that Ben, Hartley's husband, and Hartley had come together "through *sexual attraction*" (Murdoch 1999, 468) and when it dawns upon him that his worshiped Hartley sleeps with her husband (*ibid.*, 162).

Theatre, in the novel, becomes a place of fiction which does not bring anything good to mankind. As Charles dramatically declares,

*The theatre is an attack on mankind carried on by magic: to victimize an audience every night, to make them laugh and cry and suffer and miss their trains. Of course actors regard audiences as enemies, to be deceived, drugged, incarcerated, stupefied. This is partly because the audience is also a court against which there is no appeal. Art's relation with its client is here at its closest and most immediate. In other arts we can blame the client: he is stupid, unsophisticated, inattentive, dull. But the theatre must, if need be, stoop- and stoop- until it attains that direct, that universal communication which other artists can afford to seek more deviously and at their ease (*ibid.*, 36).*

What Charles is trying to say here is that the theatre is not a place where one can feel morally elevated. The theatre is not destined for spiritual growth, on the contrary, it is created to deceive audiences. Audiences are being constantly under attack because of the feigning activity of the theatre. Charles also adds that "[t]he theatre is a place of obsession" (*ibid.*, 37) and this obsession leads us to the theme of love in the novel.

4.2 Love, Possession and Jealousy

The theme of love is one of the most complex themes of this novel. The book makes us question what is love? Can one say that they truly love somebody when, in effect, that person confesses love to almost anyone? What is the relation between love and possession? And how jealousy and desire are related? The reason why I pose these questions is because Charles seems to be confused in his emotions, he

seems to be bound by the net of perfect love. But what is perfection? When discussing perfection, Iris Murdoch asserts that “[w]e know of perfection as we look upon what is imperfect” (1993, 816). In this novel, I would argue, Charles is looking for perfect love, but the problem with his search for such type of love is that it does not exist. And how could it exist when Charles is not sure whom he truly loves and declares his love to almost every woman that he knows. First, he says that Hartley is “my end and my beginning, she is alpha and omega. [...] My first love, and also my only love” (1999, 83), which establishes Hartley as the only woman who he has ever loved. But how can we trust Charles when he admits loving other people, for instance, Lizzie. Charles explains that “I began to love Lizzie after I realized how much she loved me. As does sometimes happen, her love impressed me, then attracted me” (*ibid.*, 53). Not only does he admit loving other people, but he contradicts himself, for example, when he says that he loved Lizzie only “in a way”: “I say ‘in a way’ not only because I have only really loved once (and Lizzie was not it), but also because I found it surprisingly easy to leave her when the time came” (*ibid.*, 44). Another contradiction arises when Charles speaks about another female character, an actress named Rosina. In this episode, he seems to discredit his own words about love: “I was never ‘in love’ with Rosina. I would like to reserve that phrase to describe the one single occasion when I loved a woman absolutely” (*ibid.*, 78). In another episode he confesses that another woman, Clement,

was the reality of my life, its bread and its wine. She made me, she invented me, she created me, she was my university, my partner, my teacher, my mother, later my child, my soul’s mate, my absolute mistress. She, and not Hartley, was the reason why I never married (ibid., 520).

From what we can see, Charles definitely seems to be confused by the word love and unable to accurately place it in the context of his romantic affairs. I would venture to say that love for him is closer to the meaning of the word possession, which is a topic in itself.

In the novel, possession plays an important part and it allows us to understand Charles’s position towards love. For example, we see Charles as possessive when he says to Hartley: “Oh Hartley, my darling, my own” (*ibid.*, 284) since here he portrays her as part of his own self and erases her identity as a separate being. Another example would be when in a letter to Hartley Charles declares: “You belong to me and I am not going to give you up. So you will be seeing me again soon!” (*ibid.*, 407). This demonstrates Charles’s stance towards Hartley, she is an object to him that has no choice but to be possessed by Charles, she is part of his own self. This does not show that Charles loves Hartley because if we remember what Murdoch has to say about love, “[l]ove is the perception of individuals. Love is the extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real” (1959, 51). From what we can see, Charles does not seem to realise that Hartley is a separate human being with her own identity, he

only sees himself and Hartley as part of his own being. Charles's preoccupation with Hartley can come from jealousy that he continuously experiences throughout the novel.

Jealousy is the culprit of the desire as well as the constant preoccupation with possession of someone. For instance, in one episode Charles claims that "Hartley destroyed my innocence, she and the demon of jealousy" (1999, 91). This "demon of jealousy", in my opinion, is the main reason why he detests Hartley's husband. Charles always speaks of Ben as of a villainous being: "Hartley... slept ... with that brutal ageing schoolboy. [...] Ben was just as I had- feared- and hoped. He was a hateful tyrant. He was a thoroughly nasty man" (*ibid.*, 164). What we can see here is the employment of the metaphor of the stage. Charles attempts to incarnate Shakespeare and to portray himself as Prospero and Ben as Caliban. This happens because Charles wants Hartley to be with him, he desires her and Ben stands in his way and that is why Charles tries to depict Hartley as Ben's slave and even the slave of his time (*ibid.*, 292). In one episode when Ben and Hartley disclose to Charles that they are planning to leave for Australia, Charles decides that it was Ben's decision to change countries and Hartley had no say in the matter (*ibid.*, 457). What Charles's statement evokes here is the feminist image of a married woman's life where "[s]he takes his name; she joins his religion, integrates into his class, his world; she belongs to his family, she becomes his other "half." [...] she is annexed to her husband's universe" (de Beauvoir 2011, 506). Following this logic, Hartley should be completely annexed to her husband's universe and do whatever he wants, but not what she would like to do. The problem with this reasoning is the fact that Charles misinterprets the situation and that is because it is difficult for the narrator to realise and to accept that Ben does not try to possess and control his wife. Hartley stays with Ben not because of some sort of coercion or force accompanied by untameable desire. She is with him of her own free will. Desire brings an interesting flavour to this beguiling romance occupying almost the entire novel. Desire in itself is not simple, it is rather complex. For instance, Charles ponders to himself: "I remember Rosina saying to me that her desire for me was made of jealousy, resentment, anger, not love. Was the same true of my desire for Hartley?" (Murdoch 1999, 527). Charles himself does not provide an answer to such a question, but it is possible to speculate that deep inside he felt resentful and angry at Hartley for leaving him years ago. They were planning to get married when they were very young, but then Hartley told him: "You wouldn't stay with me, you'd go away, you wouldn't be faithful" (*ibid.*, 88). It seems as if Hartley knew that Charles would not be loyal to her, but would seek multiple women. The way Charles treats women does not depict him in a good light and the theme of goodness is another topic that can be seen in the novel.

4.3 The Self and the Good

Goodness is quite a complex theme of the novel. Here we need to answer the following questions: How does one become identified as a good person? Can one speak of himself as a good man and that would make him a good person or should one's actions show that one is a good man? And most importantly, what is the good? The complexity of goodness is closely related to the narrator of the story. Charles Arrowby is a man who has made a decision to "abjure magic and become a hermit: put myself in a situation where I can honestly say that I have nothing else to do but to learn to be good" (*ibid.*, 2). The magic that he is talking about is, of course, theatre since he portrays it as a place of some kind of evil. Charles strives to leave his past behind and he aspires to learn to be a good person. The fact that he aims to learn to be good is very important when analysing his identity and who he is. Here we can think of Charles Taylor who provides some interesting observations related to identity:

To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary (1989, 28).

According to Taylor, "[w]e have a sense of who we are through our sense of where we stand to the good" (*ibid.*, 105). The good is a crucial part of our identity and it allows us to comprehend who we are. The idea of the good is associated with Iris Murdoch who says that the good can be seen as "transcendent reality" which means that "virtue is the attempt to pierce the veil of selfish consciousness and join the world as it really is" (2013, 91). Since Charles speaks of learning how to be good it means that Charles does not identify as a good man but he finds himself oriented in moral space and he also seems to have difficulties comprehending reality. He thinks that his identity is corrupted by magic, or theatre, and to become good Charles must escape such a negative environment.

The change of environment does not really help Charles to become a better man. Even though he no longer lives surrounded by the theatricality of the London's stage, he does not seem to be making much progress. Charles moves to Shruff End that he likes to call his "cave" (Murdoch 1999, 4) which reminds us of Plato's allegory of the cave since, just like in the allegory, Charles seems to be living in the shadows of reality and is unable to gain knowledge of the real world. As it was mentioned before, he views women as objects that could be possessed or as parts of his own self, which does not show any betterment of his own self. Moreover, Charles aims at destroying Hartley and Ben's marriage, which is not a good deed either, and it is not the first marriage that he desires to destroy, as Rosina says, "[y]ou broke up my marriage deliberately, industriously, zealously, you worked at it. Then you walk off and leave me with nothing, with less than nothing, with that horrible crime which I had to commit by myself [the abortion

of Charles's baby], I cried for months- for years- about that- I've never stopped crying" (*ibid.*, 340). As we can see, Charles has not learnt from his past mistakes and continues to harm people, as with Hartley and Ben's marriage, he insists that Hartley leave Ben under the pretext that their marriage is "unhappy", but Charles's view on Hartley and Ben's marriage is questionable. Hartley opposes his judgment by posing a question: "But what makes you think my marriage is so bad, how can you judge? You can't see, you can't understand-" and Charles interrupts her by saying: "I can judge. I *know*" (*ibid.*, 327), which makes us question his answer. How can he know what is happening behind closed doors, he does not live with the couple, so what does he know? Moreover, Charles has never been married and as Hartley explains, "you don't understand about marriage, you've just lived with women, it's different, you haven't any evidence" (*ibid.*, 327- 328). Charles has no clue about marriage, he does not understand that married people have to go not only through good times but through bad ones, too such as an argument that he accidentally was a witness to. Marriage is never perfect nor it is based on perfect love and what he seeks is perfect love and this is impossible. It seems like Charles is focused on banishing Ben from Hartley's thoughts and even seeks to "make him unreal, but he is real" (*ibid.*, 325). Hartley instead of acting how Charles expects from her says that their "love wasn't real, it was childish, it was like a game, we were like brother and sister, we didn't know what love was then" (*ibid.*). This means that their love was false. If we consider what Murdoch says about false love, "[f]alse love moves to false good" (2013, 100), and this is exactly what happens to Charles. His goodness becomes false.

False good can be seen in Charles's belief that by forcing Hartley to divorce Ben he is doing the right thing, he is acting good. After the divorce, Charles would like to be with Hartley and Hartley's son Titus. He already regards Titus as his child and says "[w]e're a family now. What I've never had since I left my parents' home" (Murdoch 1999, 331). What we can see here is that Charles longs for the lost time, his childhood when he was the happiest and, thus he tries to attain the unattainable- to reproduce the image that was painted in his childhood by his family. Charles describes his father as a good man, he even felt that "no one else ever knew how *good* my father was" (*ibid.*, 31). He remembers with joy how close they were, how "all three loved and comforted each other" (*ibid.*, 26). And that is what he thinks he can achieve together with Titus and Hartley, but the problem is that such a relationship is based on false love, and establishes itself in desire, especially on Charles's desire to possess Hartley, or as he tries to present it, to "make her happy" (*ibid.*, 282). Such a desire prohibits Charles from committing good deeds and he traps her in his own abode. For this he uses Titus, who correctly identifies his unfortunate role in this ill-fated situation: "I'm to be a lure- a kind of- hostage-" (*ibid.*, 280). Charles thinks that with some help from Titus he will manage to persuade Hartley to leave Ben, but Titus warns him that she never would do such a thing (*ibid.*). Since Hartley would not agree to leave Ben of her own free will, Charles writes a letter to Ben informing him of Hartley's sojourn at Charles's. When Hartley expresses

her desire to go home to Ben, Charles, instead of acting like a good man and letting her go, replies: “I’m not going to let you go, Hartley. Not tonight, not ever” (*ibid.*, 297). He makes Hartley drunk on wine and orders Titus to lock the door. The way he acts with Hartley cannot be said to be good, he treats her even worse than it was depicted in the feminist image of a married woman’s life. And this makes us question who is the real daemon in the story? Here it is important to think of good and bad ideas and to remember what Murdoch has to say on the idea of the good. According to Murdoch, “[t]he idea of Good (goodness, virtue) crystallises out of our moral activity” (1993, 814), which means that the opposite idea, the idea of the bad, crystallises out of our immoral activity, which is exactly what Charles experiences. Even though he leaves England in order to become a good man, his activities do not show any attempt to become such a type of man. The activities that he performs result in the idea of the bad but not the good. One cannot become a good man by committing immoral acts. Such acts will bring a person closer to resemble a daemon than a god-like figure.

To answer the question of what is good, we must acknowledge the fact that “[t]here is no good in us” (Murdoch 2013, 91) and we must agree that the good is “somewhere beyond” (*ibid.*). As Murdoch explains, “[t]he self, the place where we live, is a place of illusion. Goodness is connected with the attempt to see the unself, to see and to respond to the real world in the light of a virtuous consciousness” (*ibid.*). The issue that we find with Charles and his attempt to become good is that he still lives in a place of illusion or, as it was mentioned previously, in the shadows of reality. The idea of unselfing is the key notion in becoming good, but Charles does not try to see the unself, what he sees is the self and becomes more and more selfish. He aims at possession instead of dispossession. And this becomes his biggest obstacle in the road of becoming good. And Charles shows his selfishness in the diary/ memoir/ novel that he writes which leads us to the problem of the book’s genre and its language.

4.4 Genre, Language, Theatre and Reality

The genre of this book is responsible for some of the complexities that we have encountered. The narrator, Charles, intends to write a memoir but he also feels uncertain about his intention: “Is that what this chronicle will prove to be? Time will show. At this moment, a page old, it feels more like a diary than a memoir” (1999, 1-2). This already creates a confusion since we do not know if the book that we are reading is based on the narrator’s memories or it is a private record of everyday events, feelings and other observations. What is more, we can notice some intricacies of the language-use which are seen from the very beginning of Charles’s writing. For instance, Charles writes: “I might now introduce myself- to myself, first and foremost, it occurs to me. What an odd discipline autobiography turns out to

be” (*ibid.*, 3). Why would Charles need to introduce himself to himself if he is writing a text that shall not be read by others? He aims to write a diary and then starts complaining about the oddities of the genre of autobiography. How does autobiography come into play? We see that Charles starts writing not knowing what exactly he is writing, but we soon learn that the book that he is composing can be called the most important of all his work:

I can say without regret that my plays belong to the past and I bequeath them to no one. They were magical delusions, fireworks. Only this which I write now is, or foreshadows, what I wish to leave behind me as a lasting memorial (ibid., 38).

With such a theatrical declaration he promises to no longer mislead people with his work. Well, his promise is short-lived as he quickly changes his mind and admits that he has “been less than frank with his diary” (*ibid.*, 44), with the constant confusion of genres we have no clue how to perceive Charles’s writing but soon it becomes clear that, in effect, Charles does not imbue this book with facts but continues to allow it to be from the world of magical delusions:

So I am writing my life, after all, as a novel! Why not? It was a matter of finding a form, and somehow history, my history, has found the form for me. There will be plenty of time to reflect and remember as I go along, to digress and philosophize, to inhabit the far past or depict the scarcely formulated present; so my novel can still be a sort of memoir and a sort of diary (ibid., 165).

This finding of a form makes the story more complex since one has to work hard in order to distinguish what is real and what is false in Charles’s account. Charles knows that the reader has no clue who Charles really is and would be unable to fact-check everything that is stated in his composition therefore Charles says that he “could write all sorts of fantastic nonsense about my life in these memoirs and everybody would believe it!” (*ibid.*, 82). Charles declares that what he writes can be a total nonsense and the way he manipulates language can make people believe in falsehood.

Probably the biggest lie that he tells is that “[t]his novelistic memoir, as it has now become, is however, as far as its facts are concerned [...], accurate and truthful” (*ibid.*, 257). He tries to show here that he is a good artist, but how can he even think of proving that if he portrays Ben as “a hateful tyrant” (*ibid.*, 164). If we follow Murdoch’s reasoning, “[t]he great artist sees his objects (and this is true whether they are sad, absurd, repulsive or even evil) in a light of justice and mercy” (2013, 65). This proves that Charles is not a good artist, he is unable to see people in a light of justice and mercy. And no wonder his statement is followed by another claim that “[m]y account is curtailed, but omits nothing of substance and faithfully narrates the actual words spoken” (1999, 257). This curtailed account, in effect, omits what Charles deems unimportant or what would counter the view that he projects upon us.

What is striking in the novel is the look that Charles directs upon women. A postmodern novel features the technique of magical realism¹ (Yousef 2017, 35) and magical realism can be seen in the look that is directed upon Rosina. Rosina is seen either as a “black, black witch” with a snarling mouth (Murdoch 1999, 370) or as a hole through which Charles is able to see a snake-like head (*ibid.*, 112). Both descriptions portray her as a powerful villainous being and even a cavern that shelters a dangerous creature. The latter is reminiscent of what Weese writes in her article about interiors. Weese’s claims that Charles has a problematic relation with interiors: “on the one hand, he is trapped in a cave [Shruff End], chained to the world of shadows and images, without access to the world of reality outside the cave, on the other hand, he fears women's "inner beings" and projects monstrous qualities onto women that actually reflect his own interior qualities” (2001, 646-647), which, in my opinion, is a very accurate description of what is happening to Charles in the novel.

The look projected upon Hartley is completely different. Charles says “[w]hat I had seen was a shell, a husk, a dead woman, a dead thing. Yet this was just the thing which I had so dearly wished to inhabit, to reanimate, to cherish” (1999, 495). Charles sees her as an empty case that can be filled. Hartley’s sense of identity, according to Charles’s description, is non-existent. She needs to be inhabited by Charles’s identity. The problem which occurs here is that Charles himself has “very little sense of identity” (*ibid.*, 3) and for him to perceive Hartley as a husk and say that he wishes to inhabit that husk is too ambitious. “A dead thing” cannot be inhabited by a thing that is even more dead than the previous one and that lives in a world of fantasy.

Charles may be able to use language to depict a world of imagination but he cannot change his identity. He lives under the shadow of Shakespeare, he portrays himself as Prospero and then decides to abjure magic. How can he abjure magic if he is not ready to leave the magical world of fiction? He decides to write a diary / memoir which then turns out to be a novel and, we may even say, his consolation. This novel is his story and all stories, as Murdoch’s character James says, are false (*ibid.*, 361). This echoes the idea proposed by Annadine, *The Silencer’s* character: “I know that nothing consoles and nothing justifies except a story- but that doesn’t stop all stories from being lies” (Murdoch 1955, 91). Which again emphasises the idea that “language is a machine for making falsehoods” (*ibid.*, 68) and this shows that despite his attempt to manipulate language in order to present his own self as superior and Prospero-

¹ “‘Magical realism’ [...], relies most of all upon the matter- of- fact, realist tone of its narrative when presenting magical happenings” (Bowers 2004, 3).

“In magic realist and magical realist works of art ‘magic’ can be a synonym for mystery, an extraordinary happening, or the supernatural [...]” (*ibid.*, 4).

like figure, Charles is incapable of changing his true identity, meaning that in real life he is a bad artist. Both of his creative activities, directing and writing, prompt what Murdoch calls “false egoistic fantasy” (1993, 49).

What is more, language as a mechanism of falsehood is cleverly coded in the chapter titles of the novel. The chapters of this novel are “Prehistory”, “History” and “Postscript: LIFE GOES ON”, which implies that the first chapter could be seen as an account of events that actually happened since it goes before history; “History”, of course, stands for “his story”, meaning the story that is created by Charles and the last chapter denotes the fact that no matter what the life still goes on. The last chapter also shows that the truth cannot be covered by the veil of falsehood for a long time, it must be revealed at some point. As Hartley says, “[r]eal things become unreal when you enter into the truth” (1999, 325) which applies to Charles’s depiction of supposedly real events and real portrayals of characters that occur in the three chapters of the book.

“Postscript”, the last chapter written in a loose diary form, reveals the complexities of identity and the lies that Charles writes in the previous ones. The first lie that is revealed is related to the portrayal of characters in the novel. As Charles writes,

[j]udgments on people are never final, they emerge from summings up which at once suggest the need of a reconsideration. Human arrangements are nothing but loose ends and hazy reckoning, whatever art may otherwise pretend in order to console us (ibid., 512).

The ideas above proposed by Charles emphasise the fact that nothing can be deemed as finite when it comes to someone’s description. Someone’s identity is not easily definable and every time when someone wants to tell something in relation to another human being, they need to reconsider what they think they know. Identity, or “human arrangements” as Charles theatrically describes it, is in a constant flux and when given into the hands of such a character as Charles, can be easily misrepresented. This means that we still cannot be certain about the true identity of each character of the novel. Another lie that is revealed is the purpose of his diary:

Of course this chattering diary is a façade, the literary equivalent of the everyday smiling face which hides the inward ravages of jealousy, remorse, fear and the consciousness of irretrievable moral failure. Yet such pretences are not only consolations but may even be productive of a little ersatz courage (ibid., 519).

The reason why Charles writes this diary is not necessarily for it to serve as a memorial of some kind but to simply demonstrate his fall as a human being and the pain that he experiences. I would venture to

say that this “ersatz courage” (*ibid.*) relates to the fact about Charles’s true identity that he eventually acknowledges and that is related to moral change.

Can one change oneself? I doubt it. Or if there is any change it must be measured as the millionth part of a millimetre. When the poor ghosts have gone, what remains are ordinary obligations and ordinary interests. One can live quietly and try to do tiny good things and harm no one. I cannot think of any tiny good thing to do at the moment, but perhaps I shall think of one tomorrow (ibid., 537).

The fact that Charles says that he shall think of doing something good the next day shows that goodness is sought-after by many but cannot be attained by all. For Charles it is impossible to attain it because, as it is demonstrated in the story, everything revolves around him: “my Beatrice”, “my Hartley”, “my fame”, “my life”. What Charles needs to do is to unself since, as Murdoch explains, “[g]oodness is connected with the attempt to see the unself, to see and to respond to the real world in the light of a virtuous consciousness” (2013, 91). Charles’s striving for goodness is nil since he has not changed a bit throughout the novel. He was a bad artist bound by the net of theatricality who used others for his own needs and he still remains one.

5. Conclusions

Iris Murdoch's novels *Under the Net* and *The Sea, the Sea* are two postmodern texts that show a strongly philosophical take on identity. Identity in the novels is closely related to the knowledge of reality and goodness. In *Under the Net*, the notions of language, art and love help to demonstrate the complexities that surround the identities of the novel's characters and in *The Sea, the Sea*, the said concepts' co-influence together with the notion of the good in order to show the complexities of character identity as well as the complexities that surround the notions themselves.

Both novels share a metaphor of the net. In *Under the Net*, we find the net of language theorising in which we find trapped the narrator of the book, Jake Donaghue. In *The Sea, the Sea* we see the net of theatricality which traps the narrator of the story, Charles Arrowby, and which functions together with another metaphor- the stage.

Under the Net shares the scepticism of many postmodern texts related to the ability of language to convey reality. In the novel, it is seen that this problem mainly arises from the way the narrator, Jake, uses language. With the aid of language he manages to misportray some of the characters by either depicting them as part of his own self, for instance, his friend Finn, meaning that he completely erases their true identity or by depicting them as objects of beauty, like the women in the novel. Language is also used in order to show how some of the characters by closely following the idea that language is a machine for making falsehoods deny their own freedom and become the victims of what Sartre calls bad faith. *The Sea, the Sea* also shows a problematic side of language. The narrator of the novel, Charles, uses language in order to depict the events and people the way he wants. And this is closely related to the genre confusion of the novel. The constant mix up of such genres as a memoir, a diary and a novel results in the confusion of what is real and what is not.

Love and art show an interesting take on identity, in both novels. In *Under the Net*, love and art function together in order to allow for an ability to see someone other than the self which means that the characters are able to become unselfed and see the reality of which they are part. Art also allows to show the growth of Jake as an artist. From the bad one he successfully becomes the good one and this shows the change in his identity. In *The Sea, the Sea*, love shows a close and complex connection with possession and jealousy since the narrator is not quite capable of understanding the concept of love and what he thinks of as love is actually possession. Thus we find Charles aiming to possess Hartley, the woman whom he supposedly loves, and seeing her as part of his own self, which means that he completely disregards her identity as a subject and as a married woman and only sees her as an object to be possessed by his own

self. Art, in *The Sea, the Sea*, highlights the metaphor of the stage and emphasises some intertextual novel's relations to other works. Via this metaphor Charles attempts to incarnate Shakespeare and even portray himself as Prospero, which could not be further from his true self since in real life he is a retired actor, playwright, stage director and a bad artist. Art also shows how the narrator misportrays other characters' identities, for instance, he portrays Ben as if he were Caliban and he depicts Hartley as Dante's Beatrice and Euripides's Helen.

The good, in *The Sea, the Sea*, is depicted in a complex manner. The narrator strives for goodness, but, unfortunately, his goodness is false. The good proves to be unattainable for Charles as he is unable to see outside his own self and unable to escape the bounds of the net of theatricality.

The feminist reading of *Under the Net* shows how the narrator perceives women. Jake projects upon them what the feminists call "the male gaze" which allows him to misrepresent the true identity of women since he views them as objects endowed with beauty and not as individuals with their own lives and careers. The narrator, whilst depicting women, emphasises their objectivity and passivity. The latter is something that each girl is too familiar with, meaning that it is part of a woman's identity. In *The Sea, the Sea*, the narrator tries to project upon Hartley the image of a married woman's life by which he tries to depict Hartley as being annexed to her husband's universe.

The future study might look at identity and how it is portrayed in other novels of Iris Murdoch and maybe examine the novels using a different theoretical framework to the one used in this paper.

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7. Summary in Lithuanian

Painiavos tinkle: tapatybė Iris Murdoch romanuose „Tinkle“ ir „Jūra, jūra...“

Šiame magistro darbe yra nagrinėjami du XX amžiaus filosofės ir rašytojos Iris Murdoch romanai *Tinkle* (1954) ir *Jūra, jūra...* (1978). Pagrindinis šio darbo tikslas yra išanalizuoti veikėjų tapatybės ir jos painumo vaizdavimą pasirinktuose romanuose remiantis tokiais konceptais kaip kalba, menas, gėris ir meilė. Šiame darbe yra remiamasi Charles Taylor, Jean-Paul Sartre, Iris Murdoch ir Simone de Beauvoir idėjomis apie anksčiau minėtus konceptus. Analizė, kuri buvo atlikta anksčiau minėtų filosofų idėjų sintezės metu, parodė, kad kalba, menas, gėris ir meilė yra neatskiriamos idėjos nuo tapatybės sąvokos pasirinktuose nagrinėti kūrinuose. Abiejų romanų interpretacija siūlo, kad tapatybė yra sietina su tiesos žinojimu ir gerumu. Analizė parodė, kad, kai realybė nėra atskleidžiama pasirinktuose romanuose, tai paveikia moterų ir vyrų tapatybės vaizdavimą, nes tada tapatybė yra iškreipiama. Šis magistro darbas atskleidė, jog gerumas yra sietinas su Iris Murdoch nusišavinimo [unselfing] idėja, kadangi nusišavinimas [unselfing] padeda suvokti tiesą ir padeda nukreipti žvilgsnį nuo savęs į realybę.

Analizuojant abu romanus buvo pastebėta, kad romanų pasakotojai kalbą naudoja tam, kad iškreiptų realybę ir nuo to nukenčia veikėjų tapatybės vaizdavimas. Meilė kūrinuose analizuojama skirtingai, pirmame-ji sietina su meno sąvoka ir ji gali padėti veikėjams nusišavinti [unself], antrame- ji neatsiejama nuo pavydo ir nuo noro užvaldyti kitą veikėją. Menas romane *Jūra, jūra...* yra sietinas su teatrališkumo tinklu ir scenos metafora, nes pasakotojas vaizduoja veikėjus tarsi jie priklausytų Šekspyro kūrybai taip iškraipydamas veikėjų tapatybę. Gėrio idėja yra ryški romane *Jūra, jūra...*, ten yra matoma, kaip gėris yra nepasiekiamas romano pasakotojui, nes jis lieka įkalintas teatrališkumo tinkle. Feministinė kūrinių interpretacija parodė, jog moterys yra matomos kaip grožio objektai arba, kad jos gali tapti neatsietina jų vyrų pasaulio dalimi. Atetyje būtų galima analizuoti tapatybę kituose Murdoch kūrinuose, pasitelkus kitas analizės teorijas.