

РЕЦЕПТИВНІСТУДІЇ

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RECEPTION FRAME OF IRIS MURDOCH'S CRITICAL STUDIES

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Abstract. The article analyzes the enrichment of the reception frame of I. Murdoch's oeuvre due to the complementation of different discourses (fiction, philosophy, culture study, criticism and theory of literature). In this context the rethinking of post-structuralism and deconstruction theories as a conceptual basis of literary postmodernism for revealing specific features of the writer's literary text is shown. Murdoch's theoretical views regarding the role of criticism in the contemporary literary process are considered, in particular her categorical rejection of deconstruction. The literature of postmodernism is a phenomenon that unites different discourses; in this perspective Murdoch's oeuvre fits the outlined framework. Readers know Iris Murdoch both as a writer, theorist and critic of her own works, as well as works of other writers; and also as a moral philosopher, that resorts to an artistic, poetic way of thought verbalization. However, concerning Murdoch's works, postmodernism is related only as a specific way of world perception, world outlook, and not as a concept of postmodern fiction or literary criticism. Approximation of the writer's literary manner to postmodernism is not defined as a theoretical philosophical reflection; it is rather a semi-conscious emotional reaction to the crisis of the modern world, crisis of faith in established values. In Murdoch's novels, the echo of the signs of postmodern consciousness is realized through manifestations of philosophical pluralism and genre metamorphism.

Key words: Iris Murdoch, reception, literary criticism, postmodernism, deconstruction, philosophical reflection.

Considering the English literary tradition on the example of Iris Murdoch's writings, it should be noted that the writer conveyed the general character of English culture from the point of view of a highly educated person, who carried on the tradition in her peculiar manner. The writer evinced herself as a philosopher, novelist, poet, playwright and literary theorist. Murdoch set the relationship between the literary tradition and philosophy, noting the undeniable influence of philosophical ideas on literature, as well as the reciprocal enrichment of philosophy by literary means.

It is a fact that in the history of the novel, as well as in the history of English literature in general, the symbiosis of literature and philosophy is rather rare in contrast to, for example, French or German literatures, that's why Iris Murdoch's oeuvre is perceived quite individually. She outlined her theoretical views on the search for moral criteria of human existence in both literary and critical essays, as well as in her philosophical writings, e.g. her classical article "Against Dryness", 1961 [10] is equally devoted to the philosophical concept of personality (she analyzes Anglo-Saxon and French philosophical traditions), moral perfection of the artist and the theory of the novel.

According to aesthetical reception concepts, the dialogue of the literary work with the reader is the approaching of the recipient's life experience with the author's life experience mediated by the text. In this context, apart from the text, scientists point out another mediator – namely literary criticism. Literary criticism as a medium in the author-text and text-reader relationships produces a "paradigm of the text reading" [2, p. 41–44], which contributes to the formation of a new reception framework. In particular, Roland Barthes spoke of the principle of relativity in the relationship between the scriptor, the reader and the observer (critic) [1, p. 414].

Manfred Naumann emphasized that the number of literary texts recipients was not limited to the literary texts authors and their readership; it also covers the sphere of public perception of literature of both past and present. In his opinion, criticism does not only help the reader to pave the way to literature, but also develops aesthetic taste [4, p. 151].

However, the complex study of the reception phenomenon is based on the fact that the concept of literature is ambiguous in nature. It is not a

coincidence that all writings relating to the system of artistic values until recently were called “primary” (original) literature, while critical considerations represented “secondary” (interpretive) literature [2, p. 23]. So, as Roland Barthes notices, at the present stage literary criticism as secondary language, or metalanguage is superposed on the original language (language-object) [1, p. 131]; in its activity it is related to its object in two ways, firstly, it is related to the language of the author, and secondly, it takes into consideration the involvement of the language-object to the world, therefore, as a metalanguage, criticism is engaged in the establishment of ‘validities’, not ‘truths’ [1, p. 272]; literary criticism tries to “adapt the language of the epoch (existentialism, Marxism, psychoanalysis) to another language, that is, the formal system of logical constraints, which the author himself develops in accordance with his own epoch” [1, p. 273]. That is why Barthes considers that criticism, recognizing itself as a metaphor, “can combine subjectivity and objectivity, historicity and existentialism, totalitarianism and liberalism” [1, p. 274].

Consequently, the classical, traditional differentiation between literature and criticism, literature and philosophy is now losing its preliminary distinction, since writers are increasingly the authors of various literary and critical articles, they participate in literary and philosophical debates, give their own interpretation and evaluation of the literary process, producing a large number of “texts about literature” (M. Naumann), sometimes even within the scope of their fiction. In this context, I. P. Ilyin recalls the novelists Alain Robbe-Grillet and John Barth as the authors of popular theoretical postmodernist books, as well as the theorists Maurice Blanchot and Umberto Eco as the authors of fiction [5, p. 262].

The most striking example of such convergence in English literature is the oeuvre of Iris Murdoch, who tried to discuss literary and philosophical works of both predecessors and contemporaries not only in her numerous critical essays, but even in her novels. Murdoch's fiction is an example of active genre synthesis. Her novels are characterized by features of major genre varieties: detective, gothic, romance, parable, social, etc., although critiques in general refer her novels to philosophical (i.e. moral philosophical) and psychological fiction.

The purpose of the article is to find out the role of criticism in the modern literary process, which involves the following tasks: on the material of Iris Murdoch's writings to explore the enrichment of modern fiction reception frame, due to the complementarities of various discourses: fiction and philosophy, culture study, ethics and aesthetics, criticism and theory of literature, etc.; as well as to trace Murdoch's rethinking of post-structuralism and deconstruction theories as a conceptual basis of literary postmodernism for revealing specific features of the writer's fiction text.

In the aspect of reception theory, Murdoch believes that literature “involves many different motives in the creator and the client. It makes us happy... It shows us the world and much pleasure in art is a pleasure of recognition of what we vaguely knew was there but never saw before” [13, p. 12]. Therefore, in this context, the writer regards criticism as extremely important part of literary process.

She was convinced that “the ‘old’ good, proper, literary critic approaches a literary work in an open-minded manner and is interested in it in *all sorts of ways*” [12, p. 189]. Contrary to the theses of the deconstructivists, the position of such criticism does not exclude the perception of the fiction as a “window into another world”, the characters as real people; it justifies the identification of their sympathy for them, or emphasizes the author's attitude, etc. Murdoch partially supported the psychoanalytic approach to perceiving a work of art, agreeing with Sigmund Freud that “art is the fantasy life of the artist stimulating the fantasy life of the client” [11, p. 20]. At the same time, Murdoch expressed a rejection of contemporary deconstruction criticism, which, in her opinion, is a “radical form of present-day demythologization” [11, p. 6], which has nothing in common with the traditional criticism.

In Murdoch's opinion the representative of deconstruction criticism considers a literary object as a “pure phenomenon”, below which lies something quite different from the intentions of the ‘naive’ author, or from the perceptions of a ‘naive’ reader. For such a critic, she believes, the real product is only what the critic produces. In her critical essay “Derrida and Structuralism” [12] the writer believes that due to this approach we seem to be losing the “concept of an individual”. She wrote:

Literature is full of values, and we the clients receive it as such and consider it in the light of our values. The consumption of literature involves continual (usually instinctive) evaluation of characters in stories, content and quality of poems, skill and intentions of authors, etc. [12, p. 190].

However, in deconstructivists' work value and morality are eliminated; in the end there is a "reevaluation of all values", which actually conceals the metaphysical concept of the "vast superhuman area of control". As examples, Murdoch recalled the concept of Being by Heidegger and the theory of language by Derrida, which she regarded as the representation of "new forms of determinism" [12, p. 187–190].

Murdoch notes that the word 'text' as a technical term allows deconstructive critic to bracket himself with the imaginative writer, since the novel and its criticism are regarded as "texts," and the latter is considered by deconstruction criticism to be potentially the true one [12, p. 206]. Hence, the "writer is required by deconstructionists to 'deploy' the language, using it to construct a meaningful text out of which the reader or critic construct his own meanings" [12, p. 205]. A thorough study of the texture of a fiction product is the focus of criticism, according to which literature is more likely to be regarded as a network of meanings, valued only by its "ability to disturb". Therefore, Murdoch remarks, that in order to please structuralist critics, literature is becoming more involuted and obscure, because its purpose now is to use the language, "playing with it in a stirring, suggestive, puzzling, exciting manner". That is why, in her opinion, postmodern literature is full of novelties, obstacles and obscurities, "aspiring to the condition of *rhetoric* or arcane poetry" [12, p. 206].

It is evident, that postmodern literature is a phenomenon that combines different types of discourse: fiction, literary criticism, philosophy, culture study, linguistics, etc.; in this perspective, the Murdoch's oeuvre (fiction, critical and philosophical essays) perfectly fit the theoretical framework. Because, she is known to her readers both as a novelist of international reputation and as a theorist and critic of her own works and works of others; as well as a moral philosopher who resorted to an artistic, poetic way of thought verbalization, for fifteen years being a tutor in philosophy at Oxford University. At the same time, it is

important to note that postmodernism can be related to Murdoch just as a particular mentality, a specific way of world perception, a worldview, but not as a concept of contemporary literature, or literary criticism. It is well known, that Murdoch's formation as a novelist took place at the turn of two epochs: modernism and postmodernism, which certainly inspired her art (in the early novels there was a transparent influence of existentialism, as in the latest – some aesthesia of postmodernism). By the way, theorists (U. Eco [7], I. Hasan [8], D. Lodge [9]) recognize postmodernism as a phenomenon that arises in art throughout the history of mankind during the periods of spiritual crises of society. Hence, the proximity of Murdoch's writing manner to postmodernism does not manifest itself through purely theoretical philosophical reflection; it is rather semi-consciousness of the writer's sensitive and emotional reaction to the crisis of the modern world (the crisis of faith in moral values), which postmodernists call “epistemological uncertainty” [5, p. 290–293]. In particular, in her novels, the postmodern consciousness is realized through manifestations of philosophical pluralism and genre metamorphism.

Iris Murdoch makes her novels intellectually multi-layered, elevated to the level of Hegel's Absolute, which requires a fundamental diversity of artistic embodiments of her philosophical ideas. The writer repeatedly emphasized that philosophical ideas were a structural part of her novels, but denied the fact that her works were simply the “novels of ideas” [13, p. 18–21], since the transformed into fiction philosophical ideas were not longer presented in the form of stiff scientific concepts, but as reflections of her characters. The unique immanent structure of Murdoch's novels with additional levels of composition (*The Black Prince*, 1973; *A Word Child*, 1975; *The Sea, the Sea*, 1978; *The Philosopher's Pupil*, 1983, etc.) really involves the study of their genetic intertextual sources. Her characters freely discuss philosophical issues, argue on moral values, mentioning the names of Kant, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Plato and Aristotle, Sartre, Spinoza, Jung and Freud, Wittgenstein and others (for a meaningful proof, we can cite her last novel *Jackson's Dilemma*, 1995 which refers to almost all of these thinkers). These names represent the numerous philosophical concepts that shaped the writer's vision, and as diverse elements of her own worldview became a structural part of her novels. Of course, this gives

grounds to speak about a certain philosophical eclecticism, or pluralism, inherent in the genre peculiarity of Murdoch's novels; and this is perceived not as a disadvantage, but as inherent genre dominant of her fiction polymorphic form determined by philosophy.

Murdoch really did not avoid intertextuality and associative, metaphoric intuitive thinking. In particular, the intertextuality of her novels is partially immanent (the unconscious presence of one text in another (Barthes's and Kristeva's views), partially intentional (conscious use of other texts (Eco's vision)). Her novels are equally full of explicit and implicit reminiscences, allusions to other fiction (Shakespeare, Dickens, Austin, Elliot...) and philosophical texts; in the writer's novels they appear as 'prototexts' and 'architexts' (genetic intertextuality). Besides, she often used stylization techniques, in particular, characteristic of Gothic and Victorian novels. In the broad sense, Murdoch's intertextuality, besides her fiction (twenty six novels) also covers works of philosophy and literary-critical essays, which in fact serve as a kind of meta-text of her literary activity, reflecting a complex world-view of the writer. In addition to intertextuality, her works are characterized by discreteness, fragmentation of the narration, shifts of chronotopical realities, resting on the principle of 'play', irony (even self-irony), and other 'branded' features of the so-called 'postmodern novel'.

However, with respect to the structure of her novels, it would be a great exaggeration or even a fault to consider Iris Murdoch as a postmodernist. In contrast to the "rhizomatic" postmodernist fiction, Murdoch's novels belong to the 'arborescent' (hierarchic or tree-like) type (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari), that is, they have a clear structure with a semantic center, are based on mimetic principles and are similar to the classical patterns. While postmodernists' novels do not reflect reality, they create simulacra and new independent of each other hyper-realities [6, p. 229].

Regarding theoretical reflection Iris Murdoch, like postmodern writers, often inserts philosophical and theoretical passages into the texture of her novels. She is disturbed by the perceived view of the world as chaos without cause and effect relationships, 'decentralized', deprived of moral values orientation. However, unlike postmodernists who claim "the impossibility of writing in the old way under new modern

conditions” [14, p. 262], the writer is convinced that the traditional realistic style surpasses the innovations of the “neurotic modern novel” [15, p. 217]. Instead of it, Murdoch proposed to return to the ‘true novel’ of the nineteenth century, a novel with ordinary heroes and plots. Interestingly, she did not seek the identical imitation of the values of the past, only accentuated cautious quest for a new understanding of traditions.

As a philosopher in her novels Murdoch tried to solve the problems of the modern world with the help of moral philosophy that is why her writings resemble a kind of symbiosis of philosophical reflection, literary theorizing and fiction. As an apologist for classical literature and traditional criticism, Murdoch assured that the postmodern (deconstruction) criticism leads not only from the ‘old’ novel, but also from the “ordinary lucid expository prose”. By the way, this vision, in her opinion, is also significant for all humanities and for philosophy in particular [12, p. 206]. Regarding contemporary criticism, she expressed her frankly ironic attitude to attempts to consider the literary critic as a thinker far more aware and experienced than the reader, but even than the “naive or prejudiced writer”, since in this case the work of criticism, rather than a literary work, is presented as a “real work of art”. So far as, she thinks, the ‘soul’ of the work is not in the portrayals of life, or in lively description or profound understanding of moral dilemmas, but in the appropriateness of using the ‘meaning-structure’, as recognized and presented to the reader by the expert critic [12, p. 205]. That is why, in her opinion, modern authors in their fiction are trying to avoid the traditional narrative with a simple reference to the use of language and moral reflection in general.

Of course, Murdoch presumes that the ‘value’ of a work of art is not always adequate to the author's assessment, although it also must be taken into consideration, since the work “is open to interpretation as well as to misinterpretation” [12, p. 213]. In this regard, the attitude of the writer is close to the views of her opponents, supporters of postmodernism and their literary methodology (deconstruction and post-structuralism). In particular R. Barthes is also convinced that the work of art is never completely incomprehensible or completely understandable, it seems to be fecundated with meanings, “infinitely open to new decryptions” [1, p. 274].

Hence, fruitful convergence between literary, linguistic, philosophical and artistic discourses in the writings of Iris Murdoch directly affected the formation of the reception frame of her fiction. Literary criticism and author's comments, as a form of reception, played an essential role in understanding the meaning and recognition of the genre specificity of her novels. The theoretical and critical views of the writer regarding deconstruction and post-structuralism made it possible to identify certain referring to postmodernism elements and figures in her own novels. Consequently, as a writer, Iris Murdoch remained on the threshold of literary postmodernism despite some views resembling postmodernist.

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РЕЦЕПТИВНЫЙ ФРЕЙМ КРИТИЧЕСКИХ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЙ АЙРИС МЕРДОК

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Аннотация. На материале творчества А. Мердок исследовано обогащение рецептивного фрейма художественных произведений писательницы благодаря взаимодействию дискурсов разных типов: художественного, философского, культурологического, критики и теории литературы. Показано переосмысление писательницей постструктуралистских и деконструктивистских теорий как концептуальной основы литературного постмодернизма для выявления специфических особенностей художественного текста самой Мердок. Рассмотрены теоретические воззрения Мердок относительно роли критики в современном литературном процессе, в частности категорическое неприятие писательницей деконструктивизма. Литература постмодернизма совмещает разные дискурсы; в таком ракурсе творчество Мердок частично вписывается в очерченные рамки. Мердок предстает перед читателями как писательница, теоретик и критик собственных произведений, произведений других писателей; как философ, что прибегает к художественному, поэтическому способу трансляции мысли.

Однако в контексте романов Мердок идёт речь о постмодернизме только как о специфическом способе мировосприятия, мироощущения, а не как о направлении современной литературы или литературной критики. Аппроксимация художественной манеры писательницы к постмодернизму определяется не как теоретическая философская рефлексия; это скорее полусознательная чувственно-эмоциональная реакция на кризис современного мира, кризис веры в устоявшиеся ценности. В произведениях Мердок отзвук постмодернистского сознания реализуется через проявления философского плюрализма и жанрового метаморфизма.

Ключевые слова: Айрис Мердок, рецепция, литературная критика, постмодернизм, деконструктивизм, философская рефлексия.

РЕЦЕПТИВНИЙ ФРЕЙМ КРИТИЧНИХ ДОСЛІДЖЕНЬ АЙРІС МЕРДОК

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Анотація. На матеріалі творчості А. Мердок досліджено збагачення рецептивного фрейма художніх творів завдяки взаємодоповненню дискурсів різних типів: художнього, філософського, культурологічного, критики та теорії літератури. Показано переосмислення письменницею постструктуралістських та деконструктивістських теорій як концептуальної основи літературного постмодернізму для виявлення специфічних ознак художнього тексту самої письменниці. З'ясовано теоретичні переконання Мердок щодо ролі критики в сучасному літературному процесі, зокрема категоричне неприйняття письменницею деконструктивізму. Література постмодернізму об'єднує різні типи дискурсу; в такому ракурсі творчість Мердок частково вписується в окреслені рамки. Мердок постає перед читачами як письменниця, теоретик і критик власних творів, творів інших письменників; як філософ, що вдається до художнього, поетичного способу трансляції думки. Проте в контексті творчості Мердок йдеться про постмодернізм лише як характеристику певного менталітету, специфічного способу світосприйняття, світовідчуття, а не як про напрям сучасної літератури, або літературної критики. Апроксимація художньої манери письменниці до постмодернізму виявляється не через суто теоретичну філософську рефлексію; це радше напівсвідома чуттєво-емоційна реакція на кризу сучасного світу, кризу віри в усталені

цінності. В романах Мердок відголос постмодерністської свідомості реалізується через прояви філософського плюралізму та жанрового метаморфізму.

Ключові слова: Айріс Мердок, рецепція, літературна критика, постмодернізм, деконструктивізм, філософська рефлексія.

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