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Trauma and Memory in Iris Murdoch's *The Italian Girl*

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ABSTRACT

The core of this paper is to provide a critical analysis on Iris Murdoch's *The Italian Girl* in the light of post-Holocaust studies. This paper's aim is to identify how the concepts of memory and trauma emerge in Murdoch's narrative, and how the post-war Jewish guilt and mourning for the dead constitutes a central element of her early novels. Through an extended analysis of *The Italian Girl*'s two exile characters, this work wishes to connect Murdoch's ethical concerns on the Holocaust to the problem of the Jewish exile identity, explaining how the notions of survival and memory as well as the dilemma of the acceptance versus rejection of minority identity constitute a central problem in her fiction. In this essay, I also address such concepts as the Freudian ideas of the uncanny and homecoming, demonstrating how the Freudian psychoanalysis and the style of the Gothic novel serve as helpful guides for Murdoch to draw up the psychosis of a post-war world that was shaken by Hitler's terror and the Holocaust.

Keywords: Holocaust, Iris Murdoch, the Freudian psychoanalysis, Jewish identity, coming to terms with the past.

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1.0 Introduction

A complex critical inquiry on the processing of the Holocaust in the English and American literature and culture has started in the past two or three decades. The sources for this research were countless memoirs, diaries, biographies, novels and testimonies written by survivors or their relatives, all of which has enriched our understanding of the Shoah. The importance of the recent years' research has made

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possible for a number of works by previously unknown authors to come to the fore on the one hand, and that it offered new approaches to and theories of the post-war English and American literature on the other. Some of the results of this research were the publication of a collection of Arnold Daghani's paintings and diaries written in English, the English translation of H.G. Adler's novels and the Holocaust-related approaches to the novels of Esther Freud, Martin Amis, Rachel Seiffert and Iris Murdoch.

The present paper wishes to join this research with an extensive analysis on Iris Murdoch's *The Italian Girl* (1964). The central issue of this work is to unfold those concepts in Murdoch's novel, along which the ideas of trauma and memory appear, and to demonstrate how the post-war Jewish guilt emerges in the moral scenery of her fiction. One of the striking aspects of Murdoch's writing is that as a post-war non-Jewish novelist, she discusses the Holocaust in her novels and philosophy as one of the greatest moral disasters in human history, and that from her second novel *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956), the Hitlerian terror and the trauma of the Holocaust appear as dark shadows in the moral lives of her characters. In this work, I intend to unfold those theoretical levels, on which the Holocaust trauma and memory, the realization of the past and survival appear in Murdoch's narrative.

The bases of this work are those theories within the Murdoch scholarship that tend to approach her novels as 'Post-Holocaust texts' (White 2011, p.99), that bind the concepts of loss, the expression of mourning and the condition of outliving in her narrative to those of post-structuralism, the Freudian psychoanalysis and Elias Canetti's theory of survival (Osborn 2012; Osborn 2013), and that grasp Murdoch's employment of the Gothic novel and the Freudian psychoanalysis as a possibility on her part to raise the post-war dilemma – that is, whether it is possible to make sense of the past in 'the changed post-war climate' (Nicol 2004, p. 4). As Murdoch's ethical engagement with the Holocaust in her early novels has not yet been a subject of an extended study, the present paper aims to be a prelude to a larger research that would focus on her concerns of the Holocaust through her personal and professional relations with two Central European Jewish figures, Elias Canetti and Franz Baermann Steiner, both of whom were touched by the Holocaust in slightly different ways, and both of whom approach the problem of trauma, memory and representation from different, yet somewhat unified perspectives. This paper, which identifies the concepts of trauma and memory in Murdoch's novel as especially complex, aims to serve as a contribution to Holocaust and trauma studies, demonstrating how her vision on trauma, survival and memory might be placed within the contemporary post-Holocaust debates.

Although many of Murdoch's scholars, including Deborah Johnson (1987) or Peter J. Conradi (2011) consider *The Italian Girl* as a lesser piece among Murdoch's other novels, the present work intends to approach this novel as a major overture to her later work. Here, the comical tone of her earlier novels is replaced by a much darker post-war world view, and the issues of the Jewish identity and the Jewish minority existence as well as the need to overcome trauma and regain identity by making sense of the past are displayed in a more complex way. In view of that, this essay wishes to discuss Murdoch's employment of the Freudian ideas on the uncanny and homecoming combined with the style of the Gothic novel, explaining how homecoming as a symbolic conflict with the past appears in the novel in the hero's desire to return to the dominant mother and the scenery of his childhood, and as a state of rootlessness and the yearning for a home as they are represented by the novel's Russian refugee twins. It is followed by brief look at Murdoch's biography and a comparative analysis discussing her engagement with Elias Canetti's and Franz Steiner's ideas of outliving and memory as well as her approach to survival as an obsessive reinforcement of power that requires a denial of the traumatic past and an endless transfer of guilt to generations. Reflecting Steiner and Canetti's notions of these concepts along with the dilemma of the acceptance versus rejection of the Jewish minority identity on the novel's exile characters David and Elsa Levkin, this essay argues that the concept of homecoming encompasses both the recognition of minority existence and an unending conflict with the past. This work also sheds light on how Murdoch's view on literature as an integral vehicle for processing trauma is articulated in *The Italian Girl*, concluding that although memory in this novel carries the danger of reviving trauma, it also contains the possibility of coming to terms with the past through speaking.

2.0 The Dilemma of Trauma and Memory – Literature review

Some of the most relevant literary background sources for this paper include Frances White's '*Jackson's Dilemma* and "The Responsible Life of Imagination"' (2010) and 'Murdoch's Dilemma: Philosophy, Literature and the Holocaust' (2011), Pamela Osborn's unpublished PhD-dissertation *Another country: bereavement, mourning and survival in the novels of Iris Murdoch* (2013) as well as Bran Nicol's *Iris Murdoch: The Retrospective Fiction* (2004).

In '*Jackson's Dilemma* and "The Responsible Life of the Imagination"' White provides an extensive illustration of how the moral dilemmas about the nature of evil enhanced Murdoch's fiction by comparing her last manuscript on Heidegger to her last novel. In this comparative reading White revisits Murdoch's concerns on the effect of philosophy on the moral life of humankind shaded by the tragedies of the twentieth century as well as on her struggles with how imagination can be used responsibly by writers, and what purposes may imagination serve at all after the general loss of confidence in liberal humanism, culture and the idea of European civilization.

In 'Murdoch's Dilemma: Philosophy, Literature and the Holocaust' (2011) White draws the attention to Murdoch's inclusion of victims and survivors of the Hitlerian power in her fiction, defending her prose as an eloquent refutation of Theodor Adorno's statement that to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. In this work White gives a thorough account on how the responsibility of using imagination might get its relevance in Murdoch's novels placing the role of Art in her fiction as a social commentary of the Holocaust and its devastating effects.

Grief, remorse and survival guilt are essential elements of Murdoch's fiction. Pamela Osborn's dissertation focuses on the ethical concerns and theories of mourning and survival in Murdoch's novels and biography, her employment of some of the components of post-structuralism associated with mourning as well as her approaches to the expression of bereavement and the inability to grieve. In this work, Osborn undertakes a dialogue with the theories of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Derrida on mourning, Elias Canetti's ideas on survival and guilt, and places them on the theoretical level of the complex philosophical problems in Murdoch's novels.

One of the primary concerns of Bran Nicol's *Iris Murdoch: The Retrospective Fiction* (2004) is how Murdoch's engagement with some of the main schools of twentieth century thinking – including postmodernism, post-structuralism, psychoanalysis and modernism - developed with regard to her approach to making sense of the past. Through an analysis of *The Italian Girl* and *The Sea, the Sea*, two Murdoch's novels with a first-person narrator, Nicol discusses the ways the past has a haunting presence in through nostalgia and the uncanny. In this analysis, Nicol gives a clear explanation of how Freud's idea of the uncanny should be understood as a form of homecoming, 'a familiar yet unfamiliar experience', and how the ambivalence in the hero's relationship with the past, his efforts to escape from it and his constant adherence to it represent the dilemma of nostalgia, namely the longing for an idealized past of innocence and the realization of and the escape from the traumatic experiences of the past. One of the interesting aspects of Nicol's approach is that although he does not approach Murdoch's novel as a post-Holocaust narrative, he establishes some of the basic ideas for the theories of Osborn and White, proposing the dilemma of trauma and memory – namely, that whether it is meaningful to return to the past if it is loaded with so many suffering and pain that we must fear and run away from.

3.0 Methodology

In their works White, Osborn and Nicol superimpose some of the most important questions of post-war and post-Holocaust literary theory related on Murdoch's philosophy and fiction. These questions among others are: What task literature and art might serve in the process of coming to terms with the past and overcoming trauma and guilt? What dangers might one encounter in the course of represent-

ing the Holocaust in the world of fiction? To what extent may art and literature serve as a therapy to overcome the terrible memories of the past by the process of telling? May forgiveness be possible if the horror of the past is re-told from time to time? How might literature and art be used to have a truer picture on our past experiences and on our human condition?

In order to answer these questions, this work wishes to shed light on the ways the Holocaust informed and inspired Murdoch's novels as well as to unravel the links between her ethical assessment and her personal encounters with the Holocaust trauma. Thus, I would use Peter J. Conradi's biography on Murdoch here as a point of departure. According to Conradi, Murdoch's theory on the Holocaust, her views on religion, guilt and ethics as well as her understanding of 'the evil of the world' were strongly influenced by both her experiences at the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Office (U.N.R.R.A.) and her personal relationships with Elias Canetti and Franz Baermann Steiner (Conradi *IMAL*, p. 342). In 'The Idea of Perfection' (1962) Murdoch describes literature as 'an education in how to picture and understand human situations' (Murdoch 1997, p. 326). For her, it is this educative nature of literature that might be a supportive medium of making sense of the past and processing trauma, and the following section intends to demonstrate how this view gains relevance in *The Italian Girl*.

4.0 The two kind of Jews in *The Italian Girl*

Iris Murdoch's *The Italian Girl* is often classified by her critics as one of her least successful novels. According to her biographer Peter J. Conradi, this novel is a testimony of her way of renouncing the same formula as well as her aspiration to convert her Platonic ideas, her vision of goodness, love, human passion, and her views on the ethical role of art into a rhetoric that might be accessible for a wider audience (Conradi *IMAL*, p. 459). A significant part of Murdoch's critics accuses her of being unable to step out of her system of repeating herself, and as a result, a majority of her novels can be read as constant resonances of the previous ones. In this respect, *The Italian Girl* has been interpreted by many, including Deborah Johnson (1987) and Bran Nicol (2004), as a frail imitation of *A Severed Head* (1961), one of Murdoch's most remarkable early novels. This comparison stands not without grounds in case we tend to read both works, through their portrayal erotic complexities and adulterous relationships, as post-war representatives of the restoration comedy, and in case we consider the Freudian Oedipal-myth and Medusa-legend as leading symbols in the moral sphere of both novels. However, as Nicol puts it, whereas in *A Severed Head* these Freudian symbols served as cornerstones for a clearly developed philosophical problem, in *The Italian Girl* they can be seen as weak reflections to the previous novel (Nicol, p. 132). Furthermore, according to Nicol while Murdoch effectively combines some of her complex philosophical ideas in *A Severed Head* through its plot and characters, including her notion of contingency as well as her theories on the pursuit of goodness and on erotic love, these problems in *The Italian Girl* remain on the surface of the novel's narrative and some of the statements of its characters (Nicol, p. 132).

Although in terms of coherence and development *The Italian Girl* is definitely a lesser novel, in view of Murdoch's oeuvre, it can still be seen as a major overture to her later novels. On the one hand, this novel might be considered as a significant break with the ease and playfulness that characterized her novels of the '50s. On the other hand, in comparison to her earlier novels the problem of identity, including that of the Jewish identity appears here for the first time in a more specific way. In this respect, it might be more appropriate to examine this novel not primarily in itself, but rather as an important stage of her literary works, where the grief and the guilt over the past as well as the search for identity in a shaken, morally lost and godless world emerge in a much darker picture.²

² On this basis, many of Murdoch's scholars tend to grasp her moral vision as a kind of criticism of Nietzsche's moral ideas. As Peter J. Conradi puts it in his study on Murdoch: 'Her foes are Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida and a collective hydra-headed monster she terms „structuralism”, all hostile to „transcendence”' (Conradi *S&A*, 356).

This novel opens with the melancholic description of grief and homecoming and ends with the image of journey. Following a long absence, Edmund Narraway, the novel's hero and first-person narrator returns home at her mother's funeral to the scene of his childhood. Like in Daphne Du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938), the mysterious house and its garden emerging from the moonlight in the opening chapter of *The Italian Girl* are just as the symbols of the hero's identity crisis as the dead mother. Indeed, as in the case of Du Maurier's novel, the dead woman in *The Italian Girl* comes to life in the hero's repressed fears and his smothering anxieties and apprehensions based on maternal love (Nicol, p. 131). These repressed psychological symptoms get depicted in the scene of the first chapter, in which the corpse of the mother seems to come to life for the returning Edmund, evoking Freud's concept of the 'uncanny'. Standing by her mother's dead body, Edmund gets possessed by the same eerie feeling as the heroine of *Rebecca*, namely the doubt that whether the female figure perceived by him is dead or not, whether there is life in her body or not. His scepticism filled with anxiety is illustrated by the lively description of Lydia, the mother's dead body, her hair appearing 'vital still, as if the terrible news had not come to it. It seemed even to move a little at my entrance, perhaps in a slight draught from the door' (Murdoch, p. 15). In addition, the Freudian notion of the 'uncanny' also lies in those psychological moments permeating the entirety of the novel, in which the figure of the dead woman as an evil spirit of the traumatic past dominates the lives and relationships of the characters. In this regard, Murdoch flawlessly applies the Freudian concept as she similarly aims to explore the pathology of a post-war world with the help of psychoanalysis and the style of the Gothic novel, in which the post-war trauma fundamentally transforms the characters' visions on death, and where the binary of the sexual and ego instincts gets replaced by the life instincts and the death instincts, and where the past haunts all her characters as a dark ghost.

This constant presence of the past can be paralleled with a symbolic representation of homecoming that is also a particular feature of the Gothic novels. Homecoming embodied by the house and the garden, which also expresses a conflict with the spirit of the past and the desperate attempt to flee from it, can be perceived in *The Italian Girl* on two levels. On the one hand, it appears in Edmund's erratic desires, his desire to return to mother or, in a Freudian sense, the mother's womb, that can be related to his yearning for recovering his lost innocence, and it is also incorporated in his desire to escape from the dominant mother and the past it stands for. On the other hand, the state of homelessness, the search for a home and desire of homecoming is embodied by the two Russian refugee figures David and Elsa Levkin. The Central and Eastern European as well as the Eurasian exile figure, barred from their native countries, traumatized by the Holocaust and the Nazi genocide, but still holding a mysterious charisma based on their identity, is a frequently reappearing character in Murdoch's fiction. These characters are usually magician-like figures who have a demonic power to pass on their traumatic experiences that includes suffering and the various faces of oppression of a higher power, directing each of their steps and relationships as puppeteers. As Murdoch puts it in a 1968 interview with W.K. Rose on the Russian siblings in *The Italian Girl*:

One could look on them as sort of demon children. The notion of the demon child is one that interests me – the sort of changeling that suddenly appears and alters the destiny of the people round about. But I don't think there's anything quite close-knit there. I needed some kind of outsiders, and these two presented themselves. I was thinking about, well, I'm always thinking about Russia – but I mean something to do with the homeless emigré Russian, the counterforce to the very deep-rooted hominess of the rest of the scene. It is a story about home and mother, coming back to mother and settling down with mother and so on, and these homeless people passing through, and then something tragic happening: they are not really children and this is not their home, and they are banished. (Dooley, p. 24)

Murdoch's statement here implies that the Jewish refugee characters in some of her novels, and particularly in *The Italian Girl*, are not far from any references to life, but in fact, they can be seen as the literary reflections of some real characters in Murdoch's biography. From a broader historical perspective, however, these characters also served as symbols for a Jewish community whose members hoped to find a new home in England from the war and the inferno of the Holocaust. As it might be read in the

1998 edition of the *Marbacher Magazine*, between 1933 and 1948 a number of Central European Jewish intellectuals escaped to England, and only a small part of these exiles was able to strengthen their status as political refugee (Atze, p. 17). A considerable part of them were artists and academics whose existence was significantly burdened by the strict laws of the British government. Although, their situation seemed to improve through the involvement public support and of a variety of relief organizations by 1940, a vast majority of them had to spend their lives subjected to the British welfare system and without any hope for a secure position (Atze, p. 17). The fortresses of these Jewish intellectuals were London and Oxford, and through them an intricate combination can be observed in the areas of philosophy, psychology, literature and art (Atze, p. 12-17). This includes the new wave of psychoanalysis in the English novel from the 50s, an insertion of the German literature and culture in the post-war British drama as well as the transmittance of the German poetry to the narrative of the English novel.

As it is revealed in Murdoch's biography, in her student years at Oxford, and later on, during her time at the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Office (U.N.R.R.A.), she held a variety of personal and professional relationships with several Central European refugees. From these, some of the enquiries on Murdoch pay a particular attention to her love affairs with the anthropologist and poet Franz Baermann Steiner and the essayist Elias Canetti, both of whom had a considerable influence on Murdoch's novels and served as major inspirations for a number of Central European exile figures in her novels. Steiner and Canetti were typical embodiments of that peculiar Central European Jewish spirit that Murdoch describes as 'the two kinds of Jew' in *The Italian Girl*. Being artists and scholars from the Czech Republic and Bulgaria, both of them were members of the London circle of German-speaking poets that gained its inspirations from the lived experiences of its members about the Hitlerian terror. The friendship between Steiner and Canetti began in Vienna, not long before the war broke out, and it continued during their years in exile in London and Oxford. Through their unsystematic friendly dialogues held in various libraries and in Canetti's apartment, those dialogues that served as the basis of Canetti's *Crowds and Power* (2014), they sought to respond to some of the social and political problems of their age in complex and sometimes contradictory ways. As Jewish intellectuals detached from their homeland, Canetti and Steiner stood for that segment of the Jewish minority existence, a vital part for which was the devastating feeling of rootlessness, a revulsion of England and an insatiable desire of homecoming. In his letter to Canetti, Steiner holds a complaint against the elitism and arrogance of the British intellectual circles calling it a 'mixture of moral insanity and secularised puritanism, killing any ideas, but "better", "more moral" than anyone else' (Conradi *IMAL*, pp. 324). For Canetti, as it is proved from his memoirs on Iris Murdoch, Oxford and England in general meant to be a totally isolated world that, on the basis of its separateness, was also unable to provide a true picture on the ordinary human condition' (Conradi *IMAL*, pp. 583-585).

The lived experience of the Holocaust touched their lives in different and contradictory ways. For Steiner, the Holocaust and speaking about the Holocaust went along with the trauma that can be linked to the loss of his parents in the Treblinka concentration camp. Taking on the pain, the suffering and the sense of guilt through a constant reflection on the past constitutes the main idea of Steiner's 1947 poem *Gebet im Garten. Am Geburtstag meines Vaters*, in which Steiner also talks about the futility of poetry and the impossibility of survival. In contrast, the Holocaust for Canetti provided the opportunity to expand his views on the hierarchical orders of the individual and society, the mass and the various power systems. In *Crowds and Power*, Canetti links the spread of the Hitlerian power to the hyperinflation in 1920, and although he does not refer implicitly to the Holocaust, his work is often seen as a response to this moral catastrophe of the twentieth century. On the one hand, he understands Nazism as a result of mass psychosis, in which the mass is always ready to join a voluntary slavery under an oppressive tyrannical regime in a certain historical situation (Canetti, pp. 315-316). On the other hand, in his theory of survival Canetti puts an emphasis on the character of the ruler who, through his lack of guilt, triumphs everything and everybody. For him, only the tyrants are capable of survival through the sacrifice of others, conquering the world without the pressure of remembering. Thus, survival becomes a means of power, and by this the Holocaust can be seen as a result of a social process, through which the mass voluntarily carries out the orders of a ruling power.

In case we tend to make a comparative analysis on the writings of Steiner, Canetti and Murdoch, we might observe several overlaps in their responses to the Holocaust and the theories of survival. Steiner's short life following the war was greatly haunted by the survivor guilt and an endless mourning over the death of his parents. Due to stress and poverty, his health deteriorated, and after a nervous breakdown and a coronary thrombosis, he died from a heart attack in 1952, at the age of 43. In a 1988 interview with Sue Summers, Iris Murdoch refers to Steiner as 'a victim of Hitler', attributing his death to the traumatic experiences of the war and the Holocaust (Summers 1988: 20). As his poetry proves it, survival for Steiner stood in parallel with the powerlessness and guilt that connects the survivor to the victim. Contrary to this notion, as Pamela Osborn notes it, Canetti's survival-related anxiety 'centres on the megalomania he perceives as a consequence of power derived from survival which he examines through case studies of, often ancient, tribal behaviour' (Osborn, 109). Murdoch's novels provide a complex combination of these two views as both the power-mad tyrants and the survivor victim torn by his own guilt, are the core of some of the moral philosophical problems in her novels. Accordingly, even if Osborn gives a remarkable explanation on the ways Murdoch fills the gaps in some of Canetti's theories, including the theory of the survivor guilt that is completely omitted from Canetti's works, she never mentions Steiner's impact on Murdoch's novels, the traumatized exile figures, the literary representatives of Steiner, or the philosophical background behind these characters. Although the shadows of Canetti and Steiner can be tracked down on two figures in Murdoch's second novel *The Flight from the Enchanter*, the anthropologist Peter Saward initially intended to research the Jewish past, and the Cipolla-like magician Mischa Fox, as well as on one of the central meditations of the novel on the vulnerability of monsters.

These two character types, the hero traumatized by war and the powerful magician figure are abstract patterns of Murdoch's theory, according to which survival cannot be circumscribed on the exclusive definitions of survivor guilt versus power, but rather as a combination of the two terms. In this respect, as Osborn puts it, while in Canetti's theories survival is a form of power that requires the sacrifice of others, for Murdoch survival involves both the compulsive strengthening of power and with it the denial of the traumatic past, and the inheritance of guilt to generations (Osborn, 114). This approach gets particularly embodied by David and Elsa in *The Italian Girl* who also continue the line of those exile characters inspired by Canetti and Steiner. After he discovers the affair between Otto and Elsa, Edmund gets confronted by David with the term of the 'two kinds of Jew', a notion that '[t]here are the Jews that suffer and the Jews that succeed, the dark Jews and the light Jews. She is a dark Jew. I am a light Jew' (Murdoch, p. 68). For David, this kind of duality serves as an evidence to the theory that survival is provided only for those who are able to float in a world of light with the absence of survivor guilt, without the pressure of remembering, passing on their mourning over the past to those who did not have a direct experience on terror. Elsa is a counterpart to this aspect of survival as struggling in the custody of inherited guilt she 'is all memory – she remembers so much, she remembers the memories that are not hers' (Murdoch, p. 68). Owing to her impulse to revitalize trauma, she is the representative of the survivor who is unable to fit into society, and whose fate is suffering and early death.

In this respect, two alternatives of survival appear in this novel. Firstly, the memory of the Holocaust can rather be seen as a revival of trauma than a reference point to the development of processing. From this perspective, the survivor can be similarly declared as a victim, a victim of a morally twisted world, above which the Nietzschean dead god reigns. This view is articulated in Edmund's description of Elsa: 'I recalled the waxen face and the staring eyes. Yes, a little mad perhaps. Another victim of a wicked world' (Murdoch, p. 68). Elsa's character can be therefore interpreted as a fictional alter ego of Franz Steiner, another "victim of Hitler", for whom memory and trauma were totally inseparable from one another. However, the sinless survivor's character as a representative of power also has a special emphasis in the novel, whereby tyranny is determined as a victim of its own inherent compulsion to rule. This makes David's instinct of survival a basis for that lifelong denial that can come about through his rejection of memory and trauma along with it, their settlement to Elsa. And although David attempts to compensate for his survivor guilt coming along with his minority existence through his con-

stant denial of his Russian roots ('... for I am as British as you are...' ³), his lies get finally unveiled by Elsa's death. As he confesses to Edmund by the end of the novel:

" Why did I lie. Well, why should I tell the truth, such a truth, to anyone who asks? Why should I wear such a story always round my neck and be such a figure of the world? And oh, there were worse things, worse than she said. I did not want to be a tragic man, to be the suffering one. I wanted to be light, to be new, to be free –" (Murdoch, p. 150)

The allegory of homecoming can therefore be strictly associated with the feeling of rootlessness, one of the basic constituents of minority identity, and freedom with the solipsistic self-deception and the desire of understanding the world in its otherness. David's struggle can this way be paralleled to Edmund's; on the one hand they both try desperately to escape from the dark spirits of their past, on the other they strive for holding to the past through their constant recollections of it. The experience of marginality related to exile being involves for David both a rejection of his own Judaism and the traumatic lived experiences coming from it, and his inability of integrating himself to the dominant culture as well as a deep attachment to his own Jewishness. This ambivalence gets dissolved at the end of the novel by the picture of travelling that also implicates for Edmund the possibility for a new life with his substitute mother, the older and wiser Maggie, the 'Italian girl' of the novel, and from David's part a final return to his roots. For David, coming to terms with his past is coupled with the recognition of his own minority identity as well as his acknowledgement of grief, pain, and guilt that manifests itself in his reckoning of rootlessness and his return to the motherland. The Freudian term of returning to mother or going back to the mother's womb might be grasped as a destination point of minority existence. Thus, the motherland denotes the return to an inorganic state that supersedes the binaries of life and death through the arrival to a de-energised state of non-existence, and that dissolves the statelessness and past traumas associated with the Jewish minority form of life through the confrontation with the past.

In this novel, the trauma and the memory of the Holocaust as well as the instinct of survival is closely tied to the dilemma of the Jewish minority existence, the affection for roots and at the same time the past, and the urge to escape from the shadows of the past in a godless world of moral turmoil. The merit of this novel is that through its dramatic description of mourning and survivor guilt as well as the hopeless struggle against them, it presents the psychotic disorder of the last century that was greatly influenced by Hitler's power and the trauma of the war. In 'Against Dryness' (1961), Murdoch gives a touching critique of this post-war period when she talks about it as 'a scientific and anti-metaphysical age in which dogmas, images, and precepts of religion have lost much of their power' (Murdoch 1997, p. 287). In this world of moral crisis, the concepts of man as a moral agent as well as those of identity and the relations between the minorities and the mainstream get reformulated. And although the Holocaust serves in Murdoch's fiction as a mere instrument to grasp the post-war ordinary human condition, in her novels – including *The Italian Girl* – she clearly opts for speaking about it as a historical and cultural trauma. Her endeavour might be brought into agreement with her idea that literature and art can be educative forces, and that the task of literature is to offer a true portrait of the prevailing human situation through rescuing humankind through the post-war moral chaos. Accordingly, the memory through speaking becomes to be an essential element for literature in Murdoch's later novels, including *The Message to the Planet* (1989) and *Jackson's Dilemma* (1995) as it eliminates the traumatic experience of the Holocaust through the commanding force of art and the reliable and careful use of literary imagination.

³ Murdoch, p. 67.

5.0 Conclusion

This study was aimed to discuss the representation of the Holocaust trauma and memory in Iris Murdoch's *The Italian Girl*. This work wished to analyse that on what levels does the post-war survivor guilt appear in Murdoch's narrative, and the ways it might be compatible with the lived experiences of the Jewish intellectual exiles that can be found in both her biography and her novels.

In my view, compared to Murdoch's other novels, the trauma of the Holocaust and the problems of Jewish identity get problematized in the most complex way in *The Italian Girl* through the novel's two exile characters David and Elsa Levkin. In this study, I wished to demonstrate the ways some of the Jewish refugee individuals in Murdoch's biography (Steiner and Canetti), their minority existence as well as their notions of survival and memory constitute an integral part in Murdoch's novel, and the many aspects the dilemma of the acceptance versus rejection of minority identity get realized through these characters. In this approach, a central subject of *The Italian Girl* is homecoming that altogether involves the realization of minority identity and with it, the confrontation with the trauma of the past including survivor guilt and suffering, and that also involves the possibility of processing trauma through memory and the endeavour of coming to terms with the past. And although in its end, *The Italian Girl* is a lesser piece in Murdoch's oeuvre, it can still be seen in its vision and ideas as a forerunner of her later novels including *The Time of the Angels* (1966), *Bruno's Dream* (1969) and *Jackson's Dilemma* (1995), in which the tradition of the Gothic novel serves as an instrument to portray a post-war Nietzschean world where the ghost of the past haunts all the actions, relationships and personalities of their characters.

In my understanding, Murdoch's novels strictly follow that post-Holocaust literary and philosophical discourse as they offer a true image on the post-war human condition wherein the shock of the war has transformed our ideas on moral and identity. A continuation of this essay would be a comparative analysis that would parallel Murdoch's novels with the writings of those Central European Jewish intellectuals (Franz Steiner, Elias Canetti and H.G. Adler) that went to exile in England during the war, their ideas on mourning, trauma, survival and memory, and their theories on morals in a fallen world. With the present work, I also wish to contribute to the research on post-war English literature in connection to the Holocaust and the post-Holocaust theories.

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