

## IRIS MURDOCH'S STRUCTURALISM: DISBELIEF IN LANGUAGE

Bariş METE<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Iris Murdoch published *Under the Net* amid the structuralist discussions about meaning and language. As Murdoch was a philosopher, she published philosophical writings as well as literary works. Murdoch distrusted language, her main characters in *Under the Net* thus attend to the same concept. While her protagonist James Donaghue plagiarises from Hugo Belfounder in order to compose his book *The Silencer*, Hugo believes that it is silence instead of language where meaning is conveyed. James silences Hugo for he erases Hugo's identity during the process of the composition of *The Silencer* as the speaker of the text. However, it is at the same time because of his approach to language that Hugo keeps silent in order to be meaningful. Besides being silenced by James, Hugo intentionally silences himself. This study, therefore, explores the traces of Murdoch's involvement in the structuralist questions of meaning and language in her debut novel.

**Keywords:** meaning, language, structuralism, silence, speech

## IRIS MURDOCH'IN YAPISALCILIĞI: DİLE OLAN GÜVENSİZLİK

### Öz

Iris Murdoch *Under the Net*'i anlam ve dil hakkındaki yapısalcı tartışmaların arasında yayımlamıştır. Murdoch bir filozof olduğundan, edebi eserlerin yanında felsefi metinler de yayımlamıştır. Murdoch dile güvenmemekteydi, *Under the Net*'teki belli başlı kahramanları da bu nedenle bu konu ile meşgul olmaktadır. Ana kahramanı James Donaghue, kitabı olan *The Silencer*'ı yazmak için Hugo Belfounder'dan izinsiz alıntılar yaparken, Hugo anlamın dilde değil suskunlukta ifade edilebileceğine inanmaktadır. *The Silencer*'ın yazılması sırasında Hugo'nun kimliğini ortadan kaldırdığı için, James Hugo'yu sessizleştirmektedir. Fakat aynı zamanda dile olan yaklaşımından dolayı Hugo, anlamlı hâle gelebilmek için kendisini sessizleştirmektedir. James tarafından susturulmasının yanında, Hugo kasıtlı olarak kendisini susturmaktadır. Bu çalışma bu nedenle, Murdoch'ın ilk romanında yer alan anlam ve dil hakkındaki yapısalcı sorulara olan ilgisinin izlerini araştırmaktadır.

<sup>1</sup> Assist. Prof. Dr., Selçuk University, Department of English Language and Literature, [bm@selcuk.edu.tr](mailto:bm@selcuk.edu.tr), ORCID: 0000-0001-7471-5058

*Anahtar Sözcükler:* anlam, dil, yapısalcılık, suskunluk, konuşma

### Introduction

Iris Murdoch (1919-1999) made her professional literary debut with what some of her critics have principally called a Bildungsroman whose protagonist is said to be “seeking a way to encounter the world and find himself” (Porter, 1969, p. 379) and “inhabit[ing] the shadowy, classless world of London Bohemia” (Hague, 1986, p. 213) throughout, as this special term particularly suggests, his moral and psychological formation, or, to be more precise, “the hero’s gradual progression to a certain degree of enlightenment” (Nicol, 2004, p. 72). Murdoch’s *Under the Net* was published in 1954 when she, not only as a novelist but also as a philosopher, had already been familiar with and contributing to most of the contemporary theoretical discussions about literary studies in Europe and the Americas. Although Murdoch was particularly a Platonist philosopher who had studied Plato’s thought at Cambridge and, after having her degree, taught the ancient Greek philosopher at Oxford until 1963, she was by no means stranger to the popular arguments of the mainstream literary theories of her time. It was so much so that “we should recognise that ... Murdoch’s literary theory recalls a range of theories of authorship from romanticism (e.g. Schiller, Coleridge, Keats) to modernism (Eliot and Joyce) and poststructuralism (Barthes, perhaps even Bakhtin)” (Nicol, 2006, p. 150). It is distinctly perceptible in many of the essays on philosophy and literature Murdoch had written exactly between 1950 and 1986 that she was, for the most part, unquestionably well informed about what had specially regulated the contemporary thinking – the late nineteenth-century existentialist philosophies of not only Kierkegaard and Nietzsche but also Dostoevsky and Sartre. Although Murdoch was not “a Sartrean or any other kind of existentialist” (Sturrock, 1988, pp. 144-45), she was “inoculate[d] ... against the genteel assumption of other British philosophers that philosophy was a technical matter best kept out of reach” (Sturrock, 1988, p. 145). It is because of this that *Under the Net* is said to be thematically “related to Murdoch’s interest in Sartre, to the dedicatee Raymond Queneau, and to Beckett” (Conradi, 1990, p. 27). Accordingly, Murdoch’s early essays on philosophy and literature were devoted primarily to her attempts to comprehend existentialism as a philosophical and a literary study. As it is pertinently commented elsewhere, it was even her “approach to morality [that had] shown the seeds for the self-responsible, value-creating and fundamentally alienated individual that Miss Murdoch [found] at the centre of existentialist thought” (Mulhall, 1997, p. 223). Therefore, Murdoch had nearly been associated with existentialism, yet “she distanced herself from existentialism early in her career” (Bove, 1993,

p. 3). In addition to this, Murdoch's philosophical-literary essays composed between 1950 and 1959 mostly discuss the special relationship between the novelist and the contemporary literary theory which the novelist had been considered by critics as part of. By way of illustration, in Murdoch's "The Novelist as Metaphysician" – one of her essays on philosophy and literature where especially her interpretation of the early twentieth-century structuralism is most noticeable – she asserts that the subject of her discussion in this particular essay is "what some French critics have called 'the phenomenological novel'" (1999, p. 101). Murdoch herself clarifies what this specific statement in the quotation truly refers to by expressing that "there is to it a very special flavour which is due to a definite theory held by the novelist" (1999, p. 101). In other words, as Murdoch argues in this essay, her discussion about the contemporary theory particularly focuses on the novelists who, besides being the authors of fictional narratives, were philosophers. These novelist-philosophers, as Murdoch cites, were particularly Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus who "[had] also produced books on philosophy which they regard as related to their work in literature" (1999, p. 101) since these names, as Murdoch claims, were "doing philosophy as well as writing novels" (1999, p. 101).

This particular situation is surely comparable to what Murdoch herself had been doing as a novelist and a philosopher, which she specifically calls the "*rapprochement* of literature and philosophy" (1999, p. 101). Murdoch was among those writers whose novels "embrace a variety of philosophical issues, but the most significant are the philosophizing activity itself, the nature of human nature, and the redefinition of language" (Vickery, 1971, p. 70). She published her most acclaimed examples of narrative fiction (e.g. *The Black Prince* [1973], winner of the James Tait Black Memorial Prize; *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* [1974], winner of the Whitbread Literary Award; *The Sea, the Sea* [1978] winner of the Booker Prize) during the second half of the twentieth century when structuralism (French in origin) as a theory had especially been prevailing over literary studies of the time. Murdoch was definitely not unaware of this, and she, therefore, made specifically the key discussions of structuralism – such as language, meaning, narrative structure and intertextual connections – part of the themes of her fictional narratives published in that period. Murdoch, for example, asserts, "I think we are all structuralists now. This is a fashionable name for a trend of thought which has been going on for a long time" (Bellamy & Murdoch, 1977, p. 136). Besides all these, Murdoch reminds her reader of a recent example of the above-mentioned *rapprochement* between literature and philosophy. According to Murdoch's discussion, the Romantic movement in (English) literature was an exemplary case for such a reconciliation

between the two areas of study. In other words, as it is in the case of Sartre, Beauvoir and Camus (not excluding Murdoch herself), the leading figures of the Romantic movement – at least Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley in English Romanticism – had been philosophers who, according to Murdoch, had published philosophical writings as well as their metrical compositions.

Murdoch's discussion about her thesis on the rapprochement between literature and philosophy deepens through her attentiveness to a distinct literary and philosophical issue – the theory of meaning. And this is exactly where Murdoch's illustration of mostly the structuralist literary theory takes its unique shape. One of the most principal contentions of structuralism as a way of studying literature is the assertion that "things [e.g. fictional or non-fictional narratives] cannot be understood in isolation – they have to be seen in the context of the larger structures they are part of" (Barry, 1995, p. 39). What characteristically follows from this particular statement is that things which cannot be understood in isolation are meaningless by themselves since meaning is believed by structuralist literary critics to be not inside things but outside. As a result of this resolution, it is pointed out that "Meaning is always an attribute of things, in the literal sense that meanings are *attributed* to the things by the human mind, not contained within them" (Barry, 1995, p. 39). Therefore, what is primarily observable here in this discussion is the significant position which meaning as a special term occupies in the structuralist theory of literature. Murdoch's analytical discussions – as it would perhaps be expected – specially concentrate on the structuralist theory of meaning as well. Murdoch specially defines phenomenology as "an *a priori* theory of meaning" (1999, p. 102) through which she draws attention to the theoretical (structuralist) background of what she herself has called the phenomenological novels – including her own narratives in this category. Meaning, Murdoch asserts, is the key concept to the thought and fiction, for example, of Sartre who, together with de Beauvoir and Camus, brought about the harmonisation of literary and theoretical writings.

Murdoch states that the theory of meaning in English-language literary studies has evolved into its contemporary standard mainly from the same structuralist enquiry into the relationship between the phenomena and their meanings. It is because of this that Murdoch illustrates the connotations of meaning in theory within the same structuralist context. As it has already been established, structuralist interpretations of meaning had originally emerged from the linguistic theories of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. Comparable to this historical fact, the research on the study of meaning in literary criticism in England, Murdoch

asserts, had been carried out by linguistic philosophers. Structuralist critics discover meaning not inside things (i.e. phenomena), but outside. In other words, meaning is to be unearthed in a wider and broader structure – thus the name structuralism. Murdoch's corresponding illustration of this issue becomes observable in her assertion that "Meaning is explained in terms of the position of words in the language and their relation to that more or less conventional framework of behaviour which ekes out the language" (1999, p. 102). In addition to his, Murdoch claims that phenomenology itself is a theory of meaning which categorises the contemporary fiction making use of the theory as phenomenological narratives. Parallel to this assertion, Murdoch's phenomenological novels, which combine theoretical discussions with fictional narratives, make overt enquiries into the connotations of meaning as a special term.

Murdoch participates as a novelist-philosopher in the same theoretical interpretation. In other words, she shares the same notion of meaning with the structuralist perception. According to Murdoch, meaning is neither "inherent in things themselves" (1999, p. 102) nor "residing in a transcendent intelligible world" (1999, p. 102). Furthermore, relying on the structuralist emphasis on the subjectivity of all knowledge and judgement, Murdoch considers meaning as "dependent upon the activity of the subject" (1999, p. 102). Therefore, her discussion mirrors the most fundamental thoughts of structuralist theory. However, what principally surfaces from Murdoch's discussion about the notion of meaning here is that she relates the existentialist idea of the absurd to the structuralist notion of meaning. In other words, at the end of the structuralist assertion that meaning is outside is the existentialist conflict to seek meaning and the impracticability of finding any. Murdoch thus comments that "Meaning is suddenly seen as withdrawn not from a world of objective values, but from physical objects themselves. This is a plunge into the absurd" (1999, p. 107). Structuralism and existentialism share so common a concern for meaning that Murdoch's structuralism effectively becomes an echo of the late nineteenth-century existentialist absurdism. The notion of meaning covers perhaps the broadest argument and analysis not only in the existentialist but also in the structuralist thought. It is true as Murdoch asserts here that "we confer meaning, not only upon ethical and religious systems, but upon the physical world too, in that we see it as the correlative of our needs and intentions" (1999, p. 107). The question, however, is the fact that "this meaning could in principle vanish, leaving us face to face with a brute and nameless nature" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 107). This situation principally refers to the existentialist idea of meaninglessness as well as the structuralist notion of the subjectivity of

meaning. It is, as Murdoch states, "The same vanishing of meaning" (1999, p. 107) that Sartre, de Beauvoir and Camus had exemplified in their fictional narratives.

### **Language and Silence**

Murdoch's literary practice in the discussions of structuralism – as well as existentialism – becomes noticeable mostly through the illustrations of her distrust of language as a medium to convey meaning. For Murdoch, language has "the potential to lie, to distort reality, and to create false pictures and situations" (Hague, 1984, pp. 64-65). According to another relevant comment, Murdoch's inquisitorial approach to language is due to "The postmodern world" (Antonaccio, 2004, p. 273) in which "meaning is seen as a function of the differential play of signifiers rather than of signs pointing beyond themselves" (Antonaccio, 2004, p. 273). The significance of language in Murdoch's fictional narratives is also due to the fact that "the dilemmas of language emerge as the controlling existential and aesthetic problem in ... Murdoch" (Vickery, 1971, p. 70). If language cannot be trusted to ensure the expression of meaning, it has necessarily to be replaced with silence (i.e. lack of language). This particular conclusion is one of the clearest messages of Murdoch's *Under the Net* which is claimed to have been designated as a "highly instructive example [of] the contemporary philosophical novel" (Vickery, 1971, p. 69) whose "central image is drawn from Wittgenstein, who uses it to refer to the incapacity of language and theory fully to represent contingent reality, just as a net cannot fully contain whatever it is cast over" (Nicol, 2004, p. 14). The suggestion that language should be replaced with silence is first addressed to the reader in *Under the Net* in one of the most figuratively depicted scenes, in the miming theatre scene where the prevailing idea is that what generates meaning is silence instead of language. As it is meaningfully asserted here, "[Murdoch's] first novel notably expresses her preoccupation with the theatre, with theatrical imagery, with the springs of cunningly contrived illusion" (Johnson, 1987, p. 20). The description of the theatre in this scene is so symbolic of the idea of silence that it conclusively initiates in the reader's mind the image of the situation of an entire lack of sound and language. In addition to this, Murdoch's depiction of the scene is particularly characterised by the use of some special vocabulary which forcefully echoes silence. It is, for example, a "miming theatre" (1982, p. 34, emphasis my own) where "The audience is requested to laugh *softly* and *not to applaud*" (1982, p. 34, emphasis my own). The protagonist of the novel, James Donaghue, who is said to be "a dropout from pure thought and a refugee also from Parisian existentialism" (Sturrock, 1988, p. 149), "did not look for a bell, but tried the handle at once" (1982, p. 34). James describes the

atmosphere asserting “The door opened *quietly* and I stepped on *tiptoe* into the hall. An oppressive *silence* surged out of the place like a cloud. I closed the door and shut out all the little noises of the river front. Now there was nothing but the *silence*” (1982, pp. 34-35, emphasis my own). It is, furthermore, here in this verbal description that the inside of the theatre building – the darkness and the silence – evidently suggests Plato’s Allegory of the Cave (i.e. Murdoch’s Platonist background) where James is metaphorically portrayed as one of the cave dwellers who are only able to see the shadows cast by the fire upon the walls of the cave. Murdoch establishes the impression of silence in the miming theatre scene so powerfully that James “walked slowly ... planting [his] feet with care on a long black sound-absorbing rug” (1982, p. 35). He could hear “no sound” (1982, p. 35). The mime actors of the theatre are part of the silence as well. More particularly, the actors “were continuing to execute their movements in the extraordinary silence ... wearing soft close-fitting slippers” (1982, p. 36).

Murdoch takes part as a novelist-philosopher especially in the structuralist assumption that meaning is arbitrary. It is also the result of this approach of the novelist to the contemporary literary theory that her characters in *Under the Net*, where “Murdoch involves us in questioning the nature of truth, and language itself is seen to be artifice; it can be used to display or conceal; it is itself theatre; it puts on a show which may or may not represent the speaker’s true thoughts” (Spear, 1995, p. 23), seek meaning not in language but in silence. It is particularly Hugo Belfounder, who theorises about the lack of meaning in language as “the central theme of this book” (1982, p. 53), as James describes him to the reader. Hugo is a German-origin man who has from his father inherited an armaments factory. However, Hugo’s theories of fireworks and thus his business have failed particularly when “the newspapers [have] began to talk, and to refer to them as works of art, and to classify them into styles” (1982, p. 55), which has “so much disgusted Hugo that it [has] paralysed his work” (1982, p. 55). It is because of this failure at doing a project on fireworks that James, who has agreed to let his body to be experimented in a medical clinic in exchange for free accommodation and as “part of a psychological healing process” (Hague, 1986, p. 216), first meets Hugo. James welcomes solitude during the experiment in the clinic for he would dislike it particularly when he has been accompanied by talkative men who he specially calls “garrulous” (1982, p. 55). This situation (i.e. lack of language) becomes even more comprehensible when James asserts, “The limited and protected isolation which such an institution offers in fact suits me quite well” (1982, p. 55), which apparently reminds the reader of an earlier scene in the novel – the scene of the miming theatre where James has met

the same privacy and aloneness. This is, in other words, silence. Nevertheless, it is Hugo in the novel instead of James who truly articulates his distrust in language. Although James is first irritated by Hugo's presence in the room where he has so far been enjoying loneliness, Hugo has unexpectedly kept silent as James asserts that "Two days passed during which we did not exchange a single word. He seemed, indeed, absolutely unaware of my presence. He neither read nor wrote but spent most of his time sitting at the table looking out of the window" (1982, p. 56). This situation – the complete lack of language – has gradually become intolerable; and James has to inaugurate a conversation during whose topics he has noticed that Hugo "was not only not mentally deficient, but was highly intelligent ... He was the most purely objective and detached person" (1982, p. 56-57).

Hugo's theory of language could be summarised in James's interpretation of Hugo's assumption that "He was ... interested in the theory of everything ... Everything had a theory, and yet there was no master theory" (1982, p. 58). This clarification of Hugo's thought on the nature of language becomes more intelligible when Hugo questions how meaning is conveyed particularly in case of a translation, which, of course, relates to what James had been doing; he had been translating the French writer Jean Pierre Breteuil's *Le Rossignol de Bois* (*Wooden Nightingale*) into English. According to Hugo's theory, meaning is so problematic a concept that it would become even more questionable to perceive meaning in a translated text (or in translated speech). It is because of this that Hugo had first been making enquiries about the issue through these questions: "What do you mean when you say that you think the meaning in French? How do you know you're thinking it in French? If you see a picture in your mind how do you know it's a French picture" (1982, p. 58)?

Nevertheless, what becomes more baffling here in this scene is the fact that the target of this enquiry, James, was unable to provide a successful resolution to the question pointed out by Hugo. The way James answered Hugo, "What seemed to me to be the simplest utterance soon became ... a dark and confused saying of which I no longer myself knew the meaning" (1982, p. 58), establishes the idea that even the speaker himself is incapable of comprehending the meaning of speech. As a consequence of this, it is claimed that "[James] also learns from Hugo that no language can ultimately express truth" (Rice, 1992, p. 77). Furthermore, James argues that he had simply been translating, which was plain enough for him not to feel ever anxious about the condition of meaning in language. Hugo's enquiries, however, had inaugurated in James' mind a new perspective on the relationship between

language and meaning. It is absolutely because of this that James asserts, "During these conversations I began to see the whole world anew" (1982, p. 58).

Hugo's discussions about the theories of language and meaning are the illustrations of what has already been designated earlier as Murdoch's rapprochement between literature and philosophy – her perception, as a novelist and a philosopher, of the principal arguments of the structuralist movement. Murdoch agrees with the structuralist assertion that language fails in transferring the meaning from the speaker to the listener. As a result of this, it is Hugo in Murdoch's narrative who decisively believes that "things are falsified from the start" (1982, p. 59). In addition to this, it is foregrounded in *Under the Net* that language is by no means dependable to guarantee meaning for "the language just won't let you present it as it really was" (1982, p. 59). What particularly follows from this is the fact that language – either in oral or in written form – becomes a pack of lies for it is not meaning but impression that the speaker could subsequently achieve. Hugo asserts, "All the time when I speak to you" (1982, p. 60), and he continues saying, "I'm saying not *precisely* what I think, but what will impress you and make you respond" (1982, p. 60). In other words, the idea is that language is surely manipulated by the speaker; and as a result of this, all meaning becomes subjective. It is at the same time the idea that "Language ... can all too easily be used to conceal rather than to expose. Both speaker and listener place their own interpretations on what is said, understanding what they want to believe, creating through their use of words a wall of misunderstanding" (Spear, 1995, p. 21). As long as it is subjectivity that prevails over a conversation, it means that meaning has disappeared from the language as the only medium of human communication. It is precisely because of this that Hugo conclusively believes that "The whole language is a machine for making falsehoods" (1982, p. 60). That is to say, Hugo's suspicion of language can be paraphrased as the assertion that it is impossible to express the truth through language. Hugo thus claims, "when I really speak the truth the words fall from my mouth absolutely dead, and I see complete blankness in the face of the other person" (1982, p. 60). It becomes noticeable here that it is not language but silence that Hugo trusts more to enunciate meaning. A similar notion of a preference for silence has already been suggested in the miming theatre scene where James, although he has been uninvited, accidentally watches a mime performance characterised by absolute silence. Analogous to the implications of this scene, Hugo, unknowingly referring to the special movements of the mime performers, says, "*actions* don't lie" (1982, p. 60).

### **The Speaker Silenced**

The discussion about language and meaning (lack of meaning) between James and Hugo in *Under the Net*, which is “quite sceptical about the ability of language itself to capture the truth of other persons” (Gordon, 1995, p. 73), has grown into a book figuratively entitled *The Silencer*. It is some time after the cold cure treatment that James has begun working on some notes that he has furtively taken during the conversations. James yet justifies himself saying “The conversation ... had interested me so much that I had made a few notes of it just to remind myself” (1982, p. 62). Although it has covertly been done, James’ note-taking could perhaps be acceptable. However, what sounds to be questionable in this move is the fact that James has no longer remained faithful to the initial source of the theories. It is, in other words, Hugo’s thoughts on the impossibility of conveying meaning through language. It is once again in this particular case that the speaker disappears from the (written) language into a setting of anonymity. Although it is originally Hugo who articulated the ideas for and opinions about the absence of meaning in language, James has become the author of the book on such theories. However, James’ authorship of *The Silencer* has been built not on an authentic analysis performed by him but on an interpretation of remarks made by Hugo on the idea of the impossibility of maintaining meaning in language. James thus asserts, “The conversation ... had interested me so much that I had made a few notes of it just to remind myself” (1982, p. 62). Such arrangements for and modifications of the original speech has become so routine that James has turned it into an incessant process. As a result of this, it is James who confesses to having damaged the credibility of the argument in the text. James says, “When I glanced at these notes again after a little while they looked very scrappy and inadequate, so I added to them a bit, just to make them a better reminder. Then later still when I looked them up it struck me that the argument as it stood on paper didn’t make sense. So I added some more ... So I polished it up quite a lot” (1982, p. 62).

Although it is Hugo who suggests the idea of the lack of meaning in language, the role played by James in this theory cannot be claimed to be inconsequential. This is because of the fact that while Hugo propounds the theory, James puts Hugo’s personal proposals into practice. It thus becomes indisputable that what James has done is committing plagiarism for he has completely falsified the speech originally made by Hugo. However, James does not deny this. He perfectly acknowledges what he has done for he says, “I knew in my heart that the creation of this record was a sort of betrayal of everything which I imagined myself to have learnt from Hugo. But this didn’t stop me. Indeed, the thing began to have for me the

fascination of a secret sin" (1982, p. 62). It is thus asserted elsewhere that "although [James] had first used Hugo as a whetstone for his own articulation, he finally recognizes Hugo's otherness ... Hugo represents inarticulate intelligence which exists as a catalyst but does not participate in language" (Dipple, 1982, p. 54). James' acknowledgement precisely reveals how the speaker has disappeared from a text for Hugo, as the possessor of the dialogue in *The Silencer*, has been silenced by James. Although the speaker who has articulated the ideas is Hugo, it is not only his significance but also his presence, which is categorically absent from the text. In contrast to his "early fear that Hugo Belfounder's personality could easily 'swallow' him up" (Hague, 1986, p. 218), James' involvement in the text as the manipulator of Hugo's ideas has erased whatever is related to Hugo in terms of his relationship to the text. When the speaker is silenced, the meaning in language necessarily disappears. In addition to this, *The Silencer* has become a book in the form of a dialogue between the two fictional characters, Tamarus and Annandine, which especially points out the dialogue between James and Hugo at the cold-cure clinic. As it is Hugo who has theorised about meaning through the questions asked by James, it is in *The Silencer* Annandine who resounds Hugo's rationale for his particular set of thoughts. Annandine recalls what Hugo has proposed when he says "For most of us, for almost all of us, truth can be attained, if at all, only in silence. It is in silence that the human spirit touches the divine" (1982, p. 81). It is notable here that Murdoch extends the subject even to classical philosophy for she traces the discussions about meaning and silence back to Greek mythology. Silence has been associated with wisdom; it has been correlated to the divine. The Greek goddess of the soul Psyche, Annandine accordingly says, "was told that if she spoke about her pregnancy her child would be a mortal; if she kept silent it would be a god" (1982, p. 81).

The above reference to the notion of meaning (truth) in Greek mythology may perhaps be better comprehended when an earlier scene of the novel is recalled. This is the scene in which James has realised that although he is conscious of the presence of a book in his hands, the way he has composed *The Silencer* is bizarre enough to call it a book (his book) in the literal sense. James believes that this is particularly due to the fact that "The curious thing was that I could see quite clearly that this book was from the start to finish an objective justification of Hugo's attitude. That is, it *was* a travesty and falsification of our conversations. Compared with them it was a pretentious falsehood" (1982, p. 62). It is here in this conclusion that James distinctly depicts the true character of *The Silencer* in two explicitly clear-cut terms. This book, according to James, is, first of all, a travesty. In other words, it is a book in the form of a burlesque; it is a mockery which apparently lacks perhaps

the most fundamental aspect of the concept, the authenticity. It is because of this that *The Silencer* necessarily fails to represent Hugo's ideas upon which it has indeed been structured. Besides this, *The Silencer*, as James asserts, is the falsification of Hugo's attitude towards the question of meaning in language. Therefore, it could be argued that the book is a literary forgery; it is a deception and a falsehood. It is at least a misrepresentation of the truth. Therefore, James' illustrations of *The Silencer*, particularly as travesty and falsification, have effectively silenced Hugo, who has provided the thoughts on and opinions for the enquiries made by James into the question of meaning in language. Although Hugo is the speaker who has articulated the theory behind *The Silencer*, he has, as the speaker, been silenced by James' distortion of the authenticity of the dialogue between them. James accordingly asserts, "Even though I wrote it only for myself, it was clearly written for effect, written to impress ... I was constantly supplying just that bit of shape, that hint of relation, which the original had lacked. Yet though I saw the thing quite plainly as a travesty I didn't like it any the less for that" (1982, pp. 62-63).

Besides being silenced by James, Hugo has further been silenced by his own device. This is the idea of the miming theatre itself. When James has first met Anna in The Riverside Miming Theatre, one of the questions he has asked her the identity of the one behind that art project. According to James, there must be someone other than Anna, who has projected the idea. Anna has been reluctant to give details of how the theatre has been designed; yet she has revealed that "'It's a little experiment' ... 'This is pure art'" (1982, p. 41). The theatre has, as an idea, been so exceptional that James has never been contented with so superficial an explanation of both the aesthetic and the imaginative background of the theatre. Hence, he says, "I could believe that this theatre was Anna's creation; and yet clearly there was some other mind at work as well, and some of the things which Anna had said were certainly not her own" (1982, p. 47). What happens here in this particular scene is the same as what has occurred in terms of the process of the composition of *The Silencer*. In other words, as it is Hugo who has been silenced by James, it is in the case of the theatre again, Hugo has silenced himself. The words uttered by Anna in the theatre, James assumes, cannot be Anna's words. Instead, "They were Hugo's. They were an echo, a travesty, of Hugo, just as my own words were an echo, a travesty of him" (1982, p. 82). The explanation James provides for the theatre is the same expression of how he has composed *The Silencer*. Therefore, this is a comparison James makes between how he has plagiarised from Hugo's ideas and how he thinks Anna has paraphrased Hugo's theories. James asserts, "It was my own wretched copy of Hugo's attitude which suddenly made clear to me the source from which Anna too must have derived the

principles which she spoke of" (1982, p. 82). This comparison depicts Hugo as the speaker (the articulator) who has been silenced first by Anna and then by James. It is both Anna and James who speak out Hugo's language. However, especially when it comes to the theory of the miming theatre, it is Hugo who has intentionally silenced himself by camouflaging his indispensable presence in the project. James illustrates this saying, "Anna's ideas were simply an expression of Hugo in a debased medium, just as my own ideas were such an expression in yet another medium; and the two expressions, in a curious way, had striking points of resemblance to each other rather than to the original" (1982, p. 82).

### **Conclusion**

Murdoch published the most renowned narratives of her literary oeuvre during a period of time in which especially the structuralist challenges to the traditional notions of meaning and language were still being explored in literary studies as intellectual debates. Seeing that Murdoch was a novelist and a philosopher who published both literary and philosophical texts, and who, like Sartre, Beauvoir and Camus, combined literature and philosophy particularly in her fictional works, she addressed the same structuralist issues as meaning and language among the recurring themes of her fiction. It is notably in her first published novel *Under the Net* that Murdoch illustrates how she participated in the structuralist discussion, which was the outcome of her distrust of language as a medium of conveying meaning conventionally considered as part of language or speech. Murdoch apparently concludes that it is silence instead of language (or speech) where meaning is truly expressed. This message is first delivered in *Under the Net* in the mime theatre scene where Murdoch's protagonist, James, encounters absolute silence. It is not only the inside of the theatre but also the performances of the players that deliver to the reader the idea of the lack of sound and language. The corridor James walks in has been covered with sound-absorbing material so that his footsteps could be unheard. The performance James accidentally sees is without speech; it is mostly the movements of the body and expressions on the player's faces. In addition to this, James' publishing *The Silencer* is another example for the idea of silence, an example for how he has silenced the speaker, Hugo, who has literally articulated whatever James needs to compose the book. Murdoch illustrates her involvement in structuralist questions through Hugo, who believes that language has been manipulated by the speaker, and, therefore, it is silence instead of language where the speaker and the listener can communicate. Although it seems that James has silenced Hugo, Hugo has already silenced himself when he has projected the mime theatre. Similar to what happens when James has

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composed and published *The Silencer*, Hugo has silenced himself when he has imagined and designed the theatre. The idea of the theatre, as well as *The Silencer*, originally belongs to Hugo. However, Hugo has always been in the background for he considers that meaning is generated through silence.

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