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A Comparative Analysis of Existentialism and Mysticism in Line with Jungian Individuation in Virginia Woolf's and Iris Murdoch's Selected Works

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of transitions that were witnessed throughout the era, the twentieth century was marked by social unrest and existential concerns. In an era identified as a rupture from the linearity of history, modernist writers sought to communicate and compensate for the loss of meaning that was immanent, attempting to address the multifaceted and intricate nature of the human condition. There emerged the exploration of the individual standing for the community, the dynamic of which can be traced in most of Virginia Woolf's novels in the first part of the twentieth century. It is in the following wave of literary works where this existentialist viewpoint the individual was grappling with branches out into the mystical, a recurrent theme in Iris Murdoch's works. The comparative analysis of these writers' selected works, notably Woolf's *Between the Acts* and Murdoch's *The Bell*, thus, explores the themes of the process of self-exploration and integration against the prevailing sense of angst and chaos. With an interdisciplinary comparative analysis combining psychology, philosophy, and literature, the article seeks to shed light on Woolf's and Murdoch's explorations of human existence and their projections in the modernist scheme. Murdoch's philosophical framework, her insights into the mystical aspects of existence, Woolf's narrative techniques, and the tracing of certain imageries existent in the novels lay the groundwork for tracing the "night sea journey" of the hero: a process of transformation of the individual from solipsistic standpoint to a broader, Platonic understanding of the world, the modern hero's journey from existential fragmentation to mystical integration.

Keywords:

20th-century British novel, Existentialism, Mysticism, Virginia Woolf, Irish Murdoch

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Virginia Woolf'un ve Iris Murdoch'un Seçili Eserlerinde Jungcu Bireyleşme Süreci Bağlamında Varoluşçuluk ve Mistisizmin Karşılaştırmalı Analizi

Öz: Dönem boyunca tanık olunan geçiş süreçlerinin arka planında, toplumsal huzursuzluk ve varoluşsal kaygılar yirminci yüzyıla damgasını vurmuştur. Tarihin doğrusallığından bir kopuş olarak tanımlanan bu dönemde, modernist yazarlar, insanlığın içinde bulunduğu halin çok katmanlı ve karmaşık doğasını ele almaya çalışarak, içkin olan anlam kaybını ifade etmeye ve bu kaybı telafi etmeye çalışmışlardır. Yirminci yüzyılın ilk yarısında Virginia Woolf'un pek çok romanında dinamiği izlenebilen, toplumu temsil eden bireyin keşfi bu dönemde ortaya çıkmıştır. Bireyin mücadele

Anahtar Sözcükler:

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ettiği bu varoluşçu bakış açısının Iris Murdoch'un eserlerinde tekrar eden bir tema olan mistik olana doğru dallanıp budaklandığı nokta ise bir sonraki edebî eser dalgasıdır. Woolf'un *Perde Arası* ve Murdoch'un *Çan* adlı eserleri başta olmak üzere, bu yazarların seçilmiş eserlerinin karşılaştırmalı analizi, yaygın olan kaygı ve karmaşa duygusuna karşı bireyin kendini keşfetme ve bütünleşme süreci temalarını ele almaktadır. Psikoloji, felsefe ve edebiyatı birleştiren disiplinler arası karşılaştırmalı bir analizle, bu makale Woolf ve Murdoch'ın insan varlığına ilişkin keşiflerine ve bunların modernist şemadaki izdüşümlerine ışık tutmayı amaçlamaktadır. Murdoch'un felsefi çerçevesi, varoluşun mistik boyutlarına dair içgörüleri, Woolf'un anlatım teknikleri, romanlarda var olan çeşitli imgelerin keşfi, kahramanın "gece deniz yolculuğu"nun izini sürmek için uygun bir zemin sağlamaktadır: bu, bireyin solipsistik bakış açısından daha geniş, Platonik dünya anlayışına doğru bir dönüşüm süreci, modern kahramanın varoluşsal parçalanmadan mistik bütünleşmeye doğru yolculuğudur.

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Introduction

The twentieth century was an era of expediated social, economic, political change and innovations, some of which were heralded from the previous century, while others were simply unforeseen ones. The medium of literary modernism mirrored the playground for experimentations and multidisciplinary explorations in psychology, philosophy, sociology as it came to be emblematic of the time. Modernist writers, under the influence of war as well as the lost national and individual identity that was deeply rooted in the previous century, sought to portray this sense of a world and history of meaning gone missing. Mentioning the modern individual's search for meaning, Jung states that

> the values and strivings of those past worlds no longer interest him save from the historical standpoint. Thus he has become "unhistorical" in the deepest sense and has estranged himself from the mass of men who live entirely within the bounds of tradition. Indeed, he is completely modern only when he has come to the very edge of the world, leaving behind him all that has been discarded and outgrown, and acknowledging that he stands before a void out of which all things may grow. (*Modern Man* 197)

Opposed to the traditional paths and tools not applicable to the novel condition, modern individuals refused to shoulder the burden of the past, relics of the past; instead, they were engaged in other, newer, and more authentic ways that were unfamiliar to the past and that could render the complexities of the reality and the human experience somewhat

comprehendible in the face of prevailing chaos and despair. The modern stage is characterised, in Iris Murdoch's (1919–1999) words, by a reigning "anxious modern consciousness" succeeded by "deep confidence" in religion and society (*Existentialists* 234). In this regard, Virginia Woolf's (1882–1941) *Between the Acts* (1941) and Murdoch's *The Bell* (1958), among others, probe into the theme of integrated, unitary identity very much like the discovery of a long-lost pearl in the twentieth century. Even though the main argument of the article will be supported with other works of fiction and nonfiction by the same authors along with the exploration of certain imageries as baselines, the aforementioned novels stand as ultimate testimonies to the fabric of narrative that explores the intricate and profound themes such as post-war existentialism. Woolf's stream-of-consciousness technique reveals the thread-like nature that is the existential experience of individual in a community, or *vice versa*, expounding on each component of the reality that it manifests in great detail. Murdoch, on the other hand, creates a universe where the mystical and the existential come together with the adoption of her background in philosophy that offers deeper insights and readings into the main challenges that stand at the nexus of self-discovery and the mystery of the cosmos. Murdoch's fiction possesses Woolfian echoes in its structure, narrative, and style. The common vantage point of the Jungian individuation that the characters from both writers' works are confronted with will be supported by relevant theoretical analysis of the solipsistic existential anxieties of the individual, both spatial and temporal. This study will also attempt to unveil the rich tapestry of these works by analysing the imagery of the net. Combining these two authors' writings, there emerges a world that is not content with the surface reality and conventional stories told about the human experience but digs deeper at the meaning of the human soul. The call of the bell and the quest for individuation are then explored in a modernist framework, from existential outbursts of a missing creator to a panoramic integration and inter-connectedness with the external world.

Woolf's writing falls roughly under the early twentieth century while Murdoch's covers the mid-twentieth century and can be classified as post-war fiction. Even though Murdoch started publishing in the 1950s, a few years after Woolf's passing away, there is a connection between the two writers, where the former can be observed to continue a modernist tradition which can be evidenced by the common usage of certain experimental, thematic, and stylistic parallels across their writings. Both authors found themselves drawn to the subjective realities of their characters, the intricate details of interpersonal relations, as well as the scrutinising of philosophical concepts. Citing Erich Auerbach, Peter Edgerly Firchow traces the portrayal of consciousness or subjectivity in fiction and concludes that its initiation dates back to the writings in early nineteenth-century France, and that this legacy was carried onwards by novelists such as Henry James (1843–1916), James Joyce (1882–1941), and Woolf in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (160). Connecting this tradition with Murdoch, he further remarks, "that Murdoch wants her readers to be aware that she too is writing in this tradition is

evident from her playful allusion near the beginning of *The Bell* to Woolf's classic essay on the 'new' way to depict character in fiction" (160). Building on the analogies that will be expounded on in the following sections of this analysis, he draws style similarities. At the beginning of the novel, Dora gets on a train and enters into a compartment with a bundle of people of different ages and genders, and Firchow, tracing the modernist writer's influence, states that the situation is symbolic of a "'Woolfian' experience of others" (160).

The backbone for the argument of this paper is obtained from Murdoch's 1997 collection of philosophical and literary essays, *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, where she makes revolutionary contributions at the intersection of literary and philosophical scenes. On the solipsistic worldview of what she calls the existential and the mystical, she deftly explores how the mystical self fits into the shifting landscape and evolving ideologies of the modern age, offering insight into how the protagonist's journey mirrors Murdoch's own philosophical shift from harbouring an existential angst to a Platonist welcoming of connectivity, and eventually standing by the mystical texture of existence needed for the integration the individual self. In her article "Existentialists and Mystics," she states:

> Whereas the existentialist hero is an anxious man trying to impose or assert or find himself, the mystical hero is an anxious man trying to discipline or purge or diminish himself. The chief temptation of the former is egoism, of the latter masochism. . . . the existentialist thought that what was valuable was freedom, thought of as will-power. The mystic thought that what was valuable was spirit, magnetic and remote. (*Existentialists* 236–40)

This contrast of the existential and mystical standpoints for the self and its wider resonance in the greater scheme, *i.e.* the universe, offers a road map where the existentialist that asserts his sense of self in a state of anguish, anxiety, and self-interest finds his way to the mystic who, beyond the bounds of the ego, seeks to transcend it as well as gain spiritual insight, in connection and integration with something larger. In another essay titled "Against Dryness," she reiterates the "return from the self-centered concept of sincerity to the other-centered concept of truth" (*Existentialists* 300). She highlights the pursuit of freedom and truth in a world devoid of any intrinsic meaning or purpose that the existentialists have taken on to decipher, in a matter that is self-absorbed, and replaces it with all-encompassing attention and intention, the mystical unification achieved through the transcending of the mundane, along with the loss of the self as one is cognizant of it.

Answering the Call in Murdoch's Selected Works

Within this framework, archetypal and mythical tracing provides insights into the deeper and complex dynamics of the journeys taken by the characters in *The Bell* and *Under the Net* (1954). In *The Bell*, answering the call of the bell takes place as the narration points to the changes in the landscape, the surrounding world, and the autumnal decay (*TB* 175), hinting at the disclosure of the dark recesses of the resident members' psyches. As the

days advance, the narrator states that "the dusty illusions of late summer were giving place to the golden beauties of autumn, sharper and more poignantly ephemeral" (*TB* 292), all the same, heralding the treasures that are to be excavated from the bottom of a lake that had gone too long without stirring of some sort, and without a probing or in-depth inquiry into the internal workings of one's own inner landscape. The portrayal of the atmosphere and setting continues as the days are reported to be colder and accompanied by fog, with a "perpetual haze" (*TB* 311) lingering upon the surface of the lake. Deserted by all members belonging to society, a rather "curious, dream-like peace" (*TB* 312) descents on Imber Court, establishing the proper space for inquisition that, this time, is stripped of its dogmatic religious connotations and solely points to the personal responsibility of the individual. Peter Conradi mentions that the Court is a "*hortus conclusus*" that "is a Platonic map of degrees of unselfing" (147). Contributing to this process of unselfing, to be alluded to within the analysis of the hero's "night sea journey" from existential to a mystical framework, this environment offers the necessary space for the character's internal awakenings as well as the eventual integration.

In the novel, there is a tripartite journey of self-integration taking place at varying degrees through the narration of characters such as Dora, Toby, and Michael. Firchow touches on the novel's Bildungsroman aspect; on account of Dora and Toby, he puts forward that "both characters are young, attractive, and unformed; both are looking for answers . . . as to how to live their lives, which is why a good deal of the novel . . . reads like a Bildungsroman" (167). The multiplicity of voices in the novel calls for a common tracing of subjectivities and perspectives of otherwise distinct individuals. Firchow further traces an analogue to Mrs Ramsay in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and citing Auerbach, he states that the fundamental feature of the approach conveyed by Woolf is that instead of focusing on a single individual whose consciousness is voiced, we are presented with a multitude of characters, whose consciousnesses tend to be switched; this wide range of people indicates that, ultimately, we are faced with an attempt to investigate an objective reality and Dora is, in a sense, surrounded by the content of all the different consciousnesses that are centred around her (qtd. in Firchow 165). Through these narratives and discourses around the diverse forms of maturation occurring in the novel, the foundation for Michael's perspective is laid, and from a novelistic perspective, these two characters' function is to pave the way for the reader's encounter with Michael's consciousness (167–68). Thus, building up to the events that unravel in two-thirds of the novel, Michael's and Dora's journeys, especially that of the former, are singled out and analysed within the provided framework.

After losing Toby and bearing witness to Nick's suicide, Michael's timeline, the depth as well as the sincerity of his self-introspection escalate and unfold on another level. On the journey for self-maturation, the very call for self-knowledge, Jung underlines the importance of confession (*Modern Man* 35) and expands on the concept as a gateway through which the individual can become one with his/her shadow. In *The Bell*, after the old bell has been resurfaced and the community disbands due to a scandal that is

reflective of society, another scandal is yet to be disclosed until Michael talks to the Abbess finally and confesses. Joseph Campbell draws attention to the image of the bell stating that

> This is a supreme statement of the great paradox by which the wall of the pairs of opposites is shattered and the candidate admitted to the vision of the God, who when he created man in his own image created him male and female. In the male's right hand is held a thunderbolt that is the counterpart of himself, while in his left *he holds a bell, symbolizing the goddess*. The thunderbolt is both the method and eternity, *whereas the bell is "illumined mind*"; its note is the beautiful sound of eternity that is heard by the pure mind throughout creation, and therefore within itself. (158; italics added)

The individual is on trial for spiritual growth and expansion, eventually paving the way for one's individuation through the pursuit of harmony and balance between the feminine and masculine. The symbolic reading of the bell in line with the resurfacing of the old one promises the elimination of the social corruption that insidiously crept into Imber as well and the reconciliation with one's own internal compass. Characters like Dora and Michael in the novel deal with tensions arising from material aspirations as well as the call of the self. The symbol of the bell, then, can be read as a harbinger of a quest for deeper insight and truth mirroring Campbell's individuation journey of illumination. From this point on, Michael's quest, though side-by-side in narration with Dora's, is revealed to be more intricate than her evidently upscaling and flourishing journey. Quite contrary to what he would suggest to Dora on the account of her marriage with Paul in society, Michael finds his opinion in solitude and glimpses at the disastrous nature of the match: "his present views were perhaps heterodox, his vision distorted and his powers of judgement diseased" (*TB* 313–14). In another article titled "On God and Good" which deals with the authentically instructive influence of great art, Murdoch states that it

> teaches us how real things can be looked at and loved without being seized and used, without being appropriated into the greedy organism of the self. This exercise of detachment is difficult and valuable whether the thing contemplated is a human being or the root of a tree or the vibration of a colour or a sound. Unsentimental contemplation of nature exhibits the same quality of detachment: selfish concerns vanish, nothing exists except the things which are seen. (*Existentialists* 355)

Addressing the instructive nature of great art, Murdoch also draws attention to the level of detachment one experiences in the face of it; that detachment takes one away from self-serving intentions of greed and possession, and it places the focus on what is seen and therefore can be appreciated under unconditional terms and in connection with the outside world. Michael's situation in this particular instance is not different in terms of the level of detachment he attains in his journey; he goes through days of introspection and silence and eventually comes out on the other side: "it was indeed as if there was very little of him left now. He need not have feared to grow, to thrive upon disaster. He was diminished. Reflection, which justifies, which fabricates hopes, could not do so now for him" (*TB* 321). It is due to this newly acquired detachment and self-inquiry that he gets to review his life as a work of art, "almost as a spectator" (*TB* 322).

In relation to the hero's journey, Campbell underlines the importance of the concept of separation from one's familiar environment as well: "The first step, detachment or withdrawal, consists in a radical transfer of emphasis from the external to the internal world, macro- to microcosm, a retreat from the desperations of the waste land to the peace of the everlasting realm that is within" (16). The novel is rich in philosophical groundwork, and the Sartrean influence in Murdoch's writing often peeks through. Mirroring his basic tenet of existentialism, 'subjectivity,' the voices of the two philosophers, Sartre and Murdoch, are combined when the assertion is put forward that "the good man, therefore, is not the man who unthinkingly obeys the rules but the fallen, flawed man who uncertainly gropes his way toward acting rightly" (Firchow 175). It is the subjective account of Michael's journey and the transfiguration of the universal ideal into this very individuality that paves the way for his own evolution of consciousness into one that is integrated with the world around him (quite similar to the adoption of a Platonic panoramic view). The transition is affirmed by Jung in his *Man and His Symbols* as he states: "Every transformation demands as its precondition 'the ending of a world'—the collapse of an old philosophy of life" (295), and as it is expressed in Campbell's words in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, "one by one the resistances are broken. He must put aside his pride, his virtue, beauty and life and bow or submit to the absolutely intolerable" (99). The realisations and repentance of Michael ignite the flames of his old identity and end the world as he knows it, making his transition into the mystical hero that promises freedom and virtue over the allure of a robust, highly-esteemed religious identity in a community.

Tracing the same journey from the standpoint of the existential in Murdoch's fiction, the character of Jake Donaghue is an exemplary protagonist of her first novel *Under the Net.* Full of rather self-absorbed ideas, his perception of the things he encounters around himself resembles that of a peephole. Coming out of a series of events, the most influential of which could be his philosophical discussions with the character Hugo, Raymond J. Porter underlines that "Donaghue comes to realize, what he thought he understood, he did not understand at all. He discovers he really has not known his friends but has projected upon them his own inaccurate, subjective vision of reality" as objective reality as well as pointing to the "picaresque elements, the initiation theme, and the 'philosophies' of the various characters in their relation to" the protagonist's development (379–81). This development and change he goes through from the beginning to the end of the novel, as hinted, comes with an opening of his subjective perception to take in those on the peripheries. Furthermore, Porter draws on the water symbolism and connects the places where Jake spends time with elements that are catalysts of this awakening in the novel: "Water, with its associations of life and *renewal, and breaking and re-forming patterns are suitable elements for a novel of initiation*" (383; italics added). Jake starts the novel with hatred and detestation of contingency but soon develops into a man ready to face the chances and wonders that life might bring upon him. In a way, this water image

is an undercurrent tool that prepares the individual for the fluidity of life and the eternal renewal the self goes through in journeying it.

Familiar to Michael's process in *The Bell*, in *Under the Net,* during one of the Socratic dialogues taking place between Jake and Hugo, the latter states: "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" (87). It is in this new state of being that Michael, too, can truly become the leader of a spiritual awakening, as he observes and guides Dora's own awakening and coming out of her cave of illusion into the light. In *Under the Net,* coming out on the other side of a realisation similar to Dora's, Jake makes the following remark:

> Events stream past us like these crowds and the face of each is seen only for a minute. What is urgent is not urgent forever but only ephemerally. All work and all love, the search for wealth and fame, the search for truth, like itself, are made up of moments which pass and become nothing. Yet through this shaft of nothings we drive onward with that miraculous vitality that creates our precarious habitations in the past and the future. So we live; a spirit that broods and hovers over the continual death of time, the lost meaning, the unrecaptured moment, the unremembered face, until the final chop that ends all our moments and plunges that spirit back into the void from which it came. (242)

Fittingly, resembling Woolf's *Moments of Being* (1976), the quotation above serves as a connecting link with the next part of the reading, with themes of transience and the ephemeral nature of moments in the face of the passing time. The reverberations of this point spotted by Murdoch are elaborated further in Woolf's aforementioned collection of essays:

> From this I reach what l might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we—I mean all human beings—are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. Hamlet or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself. (20–21)

At the junction of Woolf's statement of underlying patterns hidden in moments, which in Murdoch's case is mentioned as fleeting, there lies an analysis of how these two writers address the challenges that life presents, their reflections upon their art, and the pursuit of meaning in a world characterised by passing moments.

Peeking through the Net as an Enigma

Furthermore, there is a common imagery of the net scattered around the novels under study. In Campbell's aforementioned book, within the narration of a Hindu tale, the net is mentioned as the trap of the ego consciousness (181); the material and the worldly perspective that leads the protagonist to a solipsistic perception of reality. In Murdoch's fiction, the net is often a metaphor referring to something that ensnares or constricts the individual, often under the guise of religion and language. In *The Bell*, Dora encounters

Catherine and hears that she is soon to become a nun in Imber Court, and they converse and exchange smiles through a net. After the scene, it is mentioned that "Dora turned to take one last look at the figure under the net. At the news which she had just heard she felt a horrified surprise, a curious sort of relief, and a more obscure pain, compounded perhaps of pity and of some terror, as if something within herself were menaced with destruction" (*TB* 68). The net that has ensnared Catherine in tune with her complacent demeanour invokes horror and pity in Dora as it foretells a threat, an alarming dissolution of the self. In *Under the Net*, the seeking of truth is in the foreground of the novel and thus, the illusion is traced within the tool of language. An excerpt from "The Silencer," a novel written by Jake, recounting his philosophical dialogues with Hugo, is as follows: "We must be ruled by the situation itself and this is unutterably particular. Indeed it is something to which we can never get close enough, however hard we may try as it were to crawl under the net" (*UTN* 91). In "Iris Murdoch and the Net of Theory," very much in a manner of summarising the situation, George Watson states:

> The net of theory is to be escaped; and we can get out from under language, and its lust to conceptualize and theorize, if we try. We are only the slaves of theory if we choose to be so. After all, we learn other languages, so it cannot really be true to say that we are by necessity imprisoned by one. The world is known by looking as well as listening, in any case, and by a process in which language plays only one part among many; and Deconstruction and other post-structuralist notions were false dogma if only because they were hopelessly word-centered. (499)

Unless it is preceded or even embodied by silence, the truth cannot be obtained in the form of words, and the grim realisation of that leads to a sense of perplexity and ambivalence.

In *Between the Acts* by Virginia Woolf, the image of the net takes on a more literal reading, following a latent context often attributed to animals such as fish and butterflies caught under the net. In one of the evocations of the imagery under study, the nets are full of fish; the ordinary and practical aspects of life are contrasted by Isa's contemplations on the admiration of her natural environment: "They were bringing up nets full of fish from the sea; but Isa was seeing—the garden, variable as the forecast said, in the light breeze. Again, the children passed, and she tapped on the window and blew them a kiss. In the drone of the garden it went unheeded" (*BTA* 23). The latter usage of the imagery of the net as a tool for catching butterflies within the narrative implies an exploration and attainment of deeper insight into the natural world. In *The Waves* (1931), for instance, the discourse of the netted fin circulates throughout the novel. In the introduction of the novel, David Bradshaw touches on the autobiographical elements in Woolf's works and recounts one of the entries in her diaries dated February 1931, when she finished her final draft of the novel that she had netted that fin in the waste of waters that she experienced writing *To the Lighthouse* (xxxvii). Bradshaw continues to explain that with the novel, so much was thrown off balance; standards were turned around; ideas were blown out of proportion; a vast body of knowledge was blasted and was full of lethal holes; and there

was no authority to turn to for the guidance on even the most fundamental of questions (xxxviii). Thus, the net imagery within the framework of *The Waves* is symbolic of Woolf's writing process of the novel. In a novel with such great playfulness of experimentation, she felt like she had captured the key component or rather the essence of what she wanted to convey. Blurring the lines, breaking free from the established traditional structures within the literary realm, and playing with both play and poem together, there is an implication of plumbing into the depths of her unconscious through the reference to waves and the sea, and capturing something of core value that is deep and that breeds connectivity. The fin that was the call for expression was netted, thus it rings not with a constricting tune but with a liberating one involving the individual's journey of self-introspection.

Tracing the Hero: One and Many in Woolf's Fiction

To further highlight the interlacing nature of these writings, it seems fitting to include Jung's following words on the emerging of consciousness, or rather, the awakening within the framework of Woolf's novels:

> In order to characterize it, I must take for comparison the daily course of the sun—but a sun that is endowed with human feeling and man's limited consciousness. In the morning it arises from the nocturnal sea of unconsciousness and looks upon the wide, bright world which lies before it in an expanse that steadily widens the higher it climbs in the firmament. (*Modern Man* 106)

Campbell, too, points to the same reference point of nature as the mark for growth and traces this concept from Sigmund Freud to Jung stating:

> Freud stresses in his writings the passages and difficulties of the first half of the human cycle of life—those of our infancy and adolescence, when our sun is mounting toward its zenith. C. G. Jung, on the other hand, has emphasized the crises of the second portion—when, in order to advance, the shining sphere must submit to descend and disappear, at last, into the night-womb of the grave. (11)

The phases of human existence unfold as the challenges that one faces during the first half of one's life turn to internal confrontations and changes, the former emphasising a physical growth, the latter a spiritual one. The eternal awakening that is implied echoes Woolf's *The Waves* that traces six protagonists from childhood to maturation and the interludes that wrap the novel as a constant and imminent reminder of this potent image of the rising of the sun, as well as the eventual dusk that gives birth to dawn. In Bernard's last soliloquy, he too comes to the unsettling realisation that coming from the complex and many, all that remains is the fact of his "unselfing," the non-existent self, and the "eternal renewal, the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again" (*TW* 177). In *Between the Acts*, the journey is presented as rather all-inclusive as with the thread of the-stream-of-consciousness narrative, one becomes all, and the compact form of plays that follow one another mimics the history and the ages that come to pass until the contemporary

period. In this case, the existential presents itself in fragments. After the performance of the play, questioning voices from the audience are heard:

> ". . . To return to the meaning—Are machines the devil, or do they introduce a discord … Ding dong, ding … by means of which we reach the final . . . Here's the car with the monkey … Hop in … And good-bye, Mrs. Parker … Ring us up. Next time we're down don't forget … Next time … Next time …"
>
> The wheels scrurred on the gravel. The cars drove off'. (*BTA* 144)

As audiences to Miss La Trobe's plays, individuals are prompted to search for a meaning, to remember the pursuit that seeps into their life, which when they later get distracted is shelved for another time.

The playwright, Miss La Trobe, is an interesting character indeed; she acts as a prompter, a stimulant for the collective awakening. La Trobe writes a historical play, not devoid of its anachronisms or inconsistencies per se, designates actors and décor, setting up the stage for the contemporary audience, and she watches their reactions that get more and more personal as the ages rapidly move onwards. The character herself displays one of the most crucial of roles which is the mirroring of reality in both literal and figurative senses for the audience to witness, the call to seek the truth of one's self in relation to others, even though she is on her knees, behind the bushes while doing so. Campbell claims that the "herald or announcer of the adventure, therefore, is often dark, loathly, or terrifying, judged evil by the world" and continues to state that the herald often takes the form of a beast "representative of the repressed instinctual fecundity within ourselves, or again a veiled mysterious figure—the unknown" (92–93). Here the analogy is figurative and in the twentieth-century pastoral landscape where the story takes place, the "theatre-fiction" with which Woolf once again blurs the lines of literary genres, the condemnation is of a more "civilized" one, often expressed in the form of otherisation and exclusion from society.

Following the same thread, Miss La Trobe's analysis of individual responsibility and society as a collective follows. By holding the mirror up in front of the audience, she challenges her own attempts to put criticism and judgment past her with the acknowledgement that, despite her protestations and ambitions for rebellion, she still conforms to social norms. It is the mirror that is held up to their faces, parts of their body that they are in dire need of integrating, after which the realisation follows that:

> We're all the same. Take myself now. Do I escape my own reprobation, simulating indignation, in the bush, among the leaves? . . . Look at ourselves, ladies and gentlemen! Then at the wall; and ask how's this wall, the great wall, which we call, perhaps miscall, civilization, to be built by (here the mirrors flicked and flashed) *orts, scraps and fragments* like ourselves? (*BTA* 135; italics added)

There the mystical hero, in its communal form, can come in and connect the past with the present, the other with the self in the pastoral setting of the novel. A possible interpretation of the play in the novel could follow, for example, as a ceremonial

performance that takes place outside of the surrounding world. Woolf weaves mystical themes through her reflection on time and the characters' thought processes regarding their history, current state, and their future. In her article "'Dispersed Are We': Mirroring and National Identity in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*," Galia Benziman claims that in the novel "both individuals and society are on a quest for a sense of self" and goes on to state that "they keep telling and retelling themselves stories about the past that incorporate either a sense of unity (the prehistoric) or of separation (the historic)" (59). She further draws attention to the ongoing play, asserting that "the role of the pageant, its acts, and whatever happens between these acts, is a momentous one, supplying the site and the instrument for this collective process of forming the communal self" (59). Emblematic of Barry Stocker's remark that "the novel reaches a limit of some kind in the early twentieth century in works which take the absolute, that is the unity of history, ideas, experience, subjectivity and transcendence" (15), the pageant within the novel acts as a catalyst that dissolves the existential concerns of the fragmented individuals, transcending solipsistic spatial and temporal anxieties and faces them with their spiritual journeys of self-introspection and realisation.

Conclusion

In light of Iris Murdoch's philosophy, notably her collection of essays *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, the tracing of the modern hero from the existential and the fragmented to the mystical and the integrated has been explored within the Jungian framework of individuation. Murdoch's philosophical insight taken from her various works provided the foundation for what Jung calls the "night sea journey" of the hero and the exploration of change and transfiguration, the tracing of these characters' existential journeys as well as the completion of their journey where the descent into the unknown occurs and where they have fended off the challenges with resilience, integrated darker aspects of themselves that had previously been left in the shadows which are now the wings that provide agency for them in the new, integrated chapter of their experience. This leads the individual from solipsistic concerns and focalisation to a Platonic, broader range of understanding of the world. This understanding entails a spiritual or mystical epiphany that transcends egocentric concerns, beyond their intellectual grasp and points to being in a state of harmony with the fundamental truths in life, and existence with others. Murdoch's novels *Under the Net* and *The Bell* both include the weaving of this theme; in the former, it takes place through the character of Jake; whereas in the latter it is through Michael and Dora. As stated by Jung previously, the modern man must become "unhistorical" and must confront the emptiness at the edge of the known world, the void out of which all potential arises if he is to be genuinely modern. The similarities this evokes in Michael's journey aside, Dora, too, goes through an intense existential crisis of identity and meaning upon getting away from the constraints of Imber Court; her existential standpoint by these encounters with the mystical in the form of realisations and introspection is subverted, and she comes to

embrace a broader perspective of existence that goes beyond her own self. Through the characters explored, Murdoch skilfully interweaves mystical components with existentialist themes through symbolism, anchoring philosophical concepts into the narrative, and emphasising the intricate connection between these expounded concepts of existentialism and mysticism when navigating the complexity of human existence.

The expansion and the application of this scheme to Woolf's fiction, and the tracing of the journey of the modern individual as well as of the community, offer a more extensive understanding of the characterisations in her novels such as *The Waves* and *Between the Acts*. For Woolf, the fragmented orbs and pieces come together to make up the whole, as supported by her handling of consciousness through the usage of the stream-of-consciousness technique, where the account of the individual and the subjective comes to form the universal reality, an element common in Murdoch's writing as well. The exploration of the imagery of the net across the works of both novelists, often depicting the constricting experience emblematic of modern consciousness similar to the middle-aged man in T. S. Eliot's (1888–1965) "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1917) who feels like he is pinned down and squirming on the wall. Scrutinised by the eyes of the others, Prufrock is the epitome of society in full command of the modern individual. Woolf's use of this imagery, however, offers a sense of solace implying that in the face of these oppressive structures, through an experimental and nonconforming spirit, the individual can find some accomplishment, however obscure it may be. In Woolf's fiction this motif of becoming "unhistorical" can be observed as extending from the existential, individualistic unit to an acceptance of a communal body that lies in the unknown, the very edge of the world, the involuntary move towards a new unknown in the face of extreme global events, as a prompter into passing that threshold to the new. It points away from the estrangement of the communities that are stuck in the conventions of the past, of the complexities of the present to the potential that exists in the void, the negation, and the leap of faith from the extinguishing fire of the old to the new. Thus, through the exploration of these works, it is concluded that the modern individual can only exist on the other edge of the destruction of the past, of the history of self. This destruction is the only way for the existential individual with solipsistic anxieties to confront the void that awaits him, and away from the individual's limited perceptions and burden of the constraints of the past, it opens up a journey where the characters integrate their darker sides, gain insight through introspection and are in harmony with their surroundings. With the transition to the mystical, their consciousnesses evolve into one integrated with the world, and while they are probing into the meaning of the human soul, there emerges the call of the bell and the quest for individuation in a modernist framework.

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