Chapter 2

UNDER THE NET

After the publication of her first novel *Under the Net* Iris Murdoch was christened as one of the pioneers of realistic fiction along with her contemporaries Kingsley Amis, John Wain, William Golding, Philip Larkin and John Osborne by J.D.Scott in October 1954 issue of *Spectator Weekly*. He coined the term ‘Angry Young Men’ for them as the new English novel’s temper was ‘skeptical, robust and ironic’. The novel of the fifties was dominated by story and narrative; a revival of the 18th century novel. They returned to the techniques and realism of Smollet, Defoe and Fielding. To “a blow on behalf of the ordinary universe, not just what the writer is thinking, but what a huge segment of the world is thinking.”(Watson 5-16, 1987). The new novel is comic, radical, impudent and audacious but technically perfect. The major skill of these writers lay in getting it right; an inheritance from Shakespeare. The new novel is also about the quest for goodness, which involves an attack on fake intellectualism. The hero of this new fiction may start as a wanderer both physically and mentally but eventually settles down. Jake, the hero of Murdoch’s first novel *Under the Net* (1954) fulfills these conditions. He is a translator of French novels, is pushed out of his world of comfort, and in a series of misadventures, tries to piece together his relationships with various people. He seems to be a failed existentialist, is impulsive and lazy but has a particular charm about him due to novel’s first person narrative. He can be called Jack of all trades, for he seems to know everything; unlocking a lock, films, politics, philosophy and even Judo, but he is master of none.
He is struggling to do well in life and finds out with a jolt at the end that he needs to write an original masterpiece; a book which is entirely his own and not of borrowed ideas, like his earlier *The Silencer*.

As the story progresses Jake matures and it is interesting to watch his transformation. He is an aspiring writer and a translator in the beginning. He is an easy-going fellow for whom money is not a priority even as he seems always to be short of cash. Money and its absence is central to the novel, though Jake does not need much of it. He does not have a place to sleep the first night, as his current girlfriend has thrown him out. He goes to a philosopher friend who sends him to an old girlfriend, Anna, whose sister Sadie (a film star) would not mind having him around. Sadie leads Jake to another old forgotten acquaintance, Hugo Belfounder. Hugo and Jake used to have grand philosophical discussions and Jake used this material in his ‘paltry journal’ *Silencer*. Jake cuts all ties with Hugo out of guilt and shame but now they meet again.

*Under the Net* has a bit of everything: philosophy, art, Hollywood, politics, romance, love, adventure which makes it interesting to read though there are places where she becomes extremely detailed and it seems as if she is showing off her knowledge. Unrequited love is one of the prominent themes. Jake loves Anna, who loves Hugo, who loves Sadie, who loves Jake. It is not a love triangle, but a love rectangle which she has borrowed from Chekhov (A loves B who loves C who loves D) where each
character yearns for the inaccessible. There are different ways in which ‘Silence’ is reflected in this novel. Hugo’s philosophy has a bit of Wittgenstein to it. Communication, he feels, is practically impossible: ‘The whole language is a machine for making falsehoods’ and ‘All theorizing is flight’. Wittgenstein said that language is unable to express our deepest thoughts and desires, and this is what Jake also writes in *The Silencer*. The character Anandine a ‘broken down caricature’ of Hugo says:

I know nothing consoles and nothing justifies except a story—but that doesn’t stop all stories from being lies. Only the greatest men can speak and still be truthful. Any artist knows this obscurely; he knows that a theory is death, and all expression is weighed with theory. Only the strongest can rise against that weight. 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 (UTN, 92).

Both Wittgenstein and Murdoch believed in necessity of humility to understand life’s mysteries. When Murdoch wants to say the unsayable she uses stylistic devices like juxtaposition, contingency and paradox; the reason many readers find her melodramatic and complex. She believes that “in order to tell the truth, especially about anything complicated, we need a conceptual apparatus which partly has the effect of concealing what it attempts to reveal” (Murdoch, 1997, 169). Contingency plays a pivotal role in Murdoch’s writings; it describes what is random, accidental and most immediate about things and people, and not part of any formal plan or pattern. Although Jake the hero of *Under the Net* doesn’t go beyond surveying the contingency of his existence(which the later Murdochian heroes will) he at least...
comprehends a Wittgenstein reality; if a philosopher wants to find answers, he/she must perceive particular details by getting under ‘the net of theorizing’. In an interview Murdoch agrees that Under the Net “plays with a philosophical idea. The problem which is mentioned in the title is the problem of how far conceptualizing and theorizing, which from one point of view are absolutely essential, in fact divide you from the thing that is the object of theoretical attention.” (Kermode, 1978, 65). She thinks of theory as a net. Grand theory or ideology is the enemy of thought and she is deeply suspicious of a ‘given whole’ or ‘total solution’. Realism in fiction is what can get us out from under theory. A realistic novelist is such an artist who tells complicated truths in such a manner that it doesn’t seem a lie. Murdoch tells her novels through stories because they are variously interpretable and they proffer truth people need to live by. Under the Net is her open attack at the totalizing ideas of the contemporary age. Jake comes closer to being free when he realizes that the world is too varied to be explained by a single picture.

The central theme which runs consistently in all her novels is movement from illusion to reality. Jake is constantly trying to define himself un成功. His wanderings about London and Paris are living in a constant illusory world trying to find a competent way of life. Jake faces innumerable illusionary nets ranging from logical – positivist philosophy, left wing politics, mime theatres to film scripts and refined blackmarks. These are all planned nets, intricately woven but none of these really work for him. Jake’s imperfections, his comic approach and hesitant commitment reminds one of eighteenth century realistic literary world of Tom Jones
and Joseph Andrews. Iris Murdoch suggested that the tradition of realism in English fiction “might be more philosophical than the real philosophical writings.” (Watson, 1987, 5-16). Murdoch sees a big gap between literature and life as the contemporary 20th century literature evades the need to show the contingent or the particular in life. This idea is central to Under the Net her first novel which is a critique on the contemporary fiction. Its epigraph is taken from Dryden's Secular Masque:

All, all of a piece throughout;  
They Chase had a Beast in view:  
Thy Wars brought nothing about;  
Thy, Lovers were all untrue.  
‘Tis well an old Age is out,  
And time to begin a New.

‘To begin a new’ suggests Under the Net to be different from other literature of its time and the onset of a new kind of fiction. She believes literature to be the portrait of real life; an external expression of the internal recesses of the mind- a powerful expression of the suppressed sighs of the human heart. This was something new to English fiction. She firmly believed that art has a moral base and its underlying purpose is revelation of truth other than entertainment and enjoyment. She writes about the sham ‘sophisticated bourgeois society’ which makes many readers draw back after looking at the horror of the world they know so well. Murdoch’s revelation of the world is brave and bold; she moves into the interstices of human mind; the area which most of us avoid. Murdoch’s fiction is deeply ambivalent. It is
a mixed bag of contradictions, confusions and juxtapositions. On one hand her oeuvre elucidates her commitment to reality; on the other hand her tricks and ironies indicate her acceptance of the artificiality and unreality of the form of the world. As Elizabeth Dipple conforms:

Much of Murdoch’s work can be seen as an exposure of luxuria and decadence, but the sense of its hidden beauty, the problems of eternity and transience, the statements of lack of quality and duration in human activity, love or recognition of truth, are all part of the power of her endlessly complex accomplishment (Dipple, 1982, 4).

For her philosophy is a completely rational activity whereas fiction has the right to draw on both unconscious and rational aspects. Her novels depict minds contemplating and reflecting on inner as well as outer experiences. She also firmly believes that everything is comic. She says she sees herself essentially as a ‘comic novelist’. In an interview with Michael Bellamy (129-140) she expounds her admiration for Raymond Queneau and Samuel Beckett and says that while writing Under the Net she “was deliberately trying to write something which was sort of funny, sort of absurd and touching”. She thinks that Jake Donahue resembles Beckett's Murphy and Raymond Queneau's Pierrot who is a small, ineffectual man for whom nothing ever works. He is always ready for adversity and has a fine sense of humour; Jake is very like Pierrot. The characters in Pierrot Mon Ami (1943) learn to live with and enjoy the world of particulars. Under the Net is full of confusion and insanity. Its world is similar to Sartre's but a little more complicated, imbued by a
sense of the unaccountable and the ridiculous. Jake is a Post-Sartrean man thinking about the contingency of his existence. Sartre according to Murdoch has done much with the problem of self and the others but depicts it in an antagonistic relationship. The real challenge is to keep away from going deeper into the consciousness; it is to go out from it which is completely non-Sartrean.

Murdoch's novels show the conflicts between myth and ‘the loosely contingent man’, and a self-conscious person battling against the ‘other’ for supremacy or for separation of the ‘other’ from him. Jake is made to look outside himself; to see the other as a separate entity. It is very important for Jake to fall out of love with Anna ‘the metaphysical hostess’ as Conradi (1981) calls her “an upper middle class matron whose creative impulse is unsatisfied. Hence she has a quixotic belief in personal relations and makes a cult of them” (428). Jake describes her as an ‘emotionally promiscuous’ person who cannot deny any offer of love which leads to “her existence as one long act of disloyalty and when I first meet her she was constantly involved in secrecy and lying in order to conceal from each of her friends the fact that she was so closely bound to all the others” (UTN 31). So it is of primary importance that Jake should learn to let go of Anna, the first step towards his freedom. His chasing Anna in Tuileries, Paris is a ‘phantasmagoric sequence’ and the lady in question is not even Anna; is an illusion for him. This is his ‘anagnorisis’. This understanding of ‘otherness’ is another major theme of Under the Net which Jake feels sharply at the end:
It seemed as if, for the first time, Anna really existed now as a separate being and not as part of myself. To experience this was extremely painful. Yet as I tried to keep my eyes fixed upon where she was I felt towards her a sense of initiative which was perhaps after all one of the guises of love. Anna was something which had to be learned afresh. When does one ever know a human being? Perhaps only after one has realized the impossibility of knowledge and renounced the desire for it (UTN, 238).

What Jake experiences now is ‘tragic freedom’ - he was in conflict with each and everything and everybody in his life. He realizes love when he recognizes otherness and starts to respect the contingency and individuality of others.

Hugo is first of those characters of Murdoch who are unaware of their goodness and the vital role that they play in the lives of others. He is the ‘unconscious good’. He represents unspoken intelligence which exists as an agent that provokes but never participates in language. He is a famous maker of fireworks and films (fame and money come automatically to him against his will). The shining Hugo goes into oblivion in the end, he withdraws from participation and drowns himself in the simple watch making trade ‘concentrating on the detailed, real and subtle workings of the instruments of time’. But Jake cannot get him out of his mind and there was an urgent need in him to see Hugo. He goes to his flat, but he has left to be an apprentice watchmaker in Nottingham. Jake wants to write a note for him but finds himself without words. “In the end, I just drew a curving line across the page, and signed my name at the bottom of it, adding the address of Mrs. Tinckham's shop’
Hugo who worked as a catalyst for Jake's Silencer - the book of words and theory; never believed that he theorizes and gives extreme importance to the minor details of this world. He stimulates creativity in others. Anna instantly falls in love with him but her love for Hugo remains unrequited which is “the symbolic longing of the plaintive human soul for the unattainable good.” (Dipple 1982,54). Initially Jake recognizes Hugo as a force against which he could hone his own theoretical intelligence but in the end he finally recognizes Hugo's otherness with:

I began thinking about Hugo. He towered in my mind like a monolith: an unshaped and undivided stone which men before history had set up for some human purpose which would remain forever obscure. His very otherness was to be sought not in himself but in myself or Anna...He was a man without claims and reflexions. Why had I pursued him? He had nothing to tell me.(UTN, 268)

Iris Murdoch’s world is full of layers of meanings; capturing the mystery of creation, which she brings about by multiple usages of metaphors, myths and illusions. She is a ‘magician novelist’ who does not expect her creation to change the world; but is more interested in the process of writing; on the ‘shifting of the veils’ of illusion. Jake and other characters of Under the Net are under illusion or obsession due to lack of maturity or some sentimental need which leads them to ‘reading signs in accordance with their deepest wishes’. Murdoch sees maturity as living in an illusion free world; a temptation to be resisted consistently. Jake is an intelligent but irreverent young man living in his personal illusions. His failure to see others as
separate is his biggest sin. He is mistaken about almost everything. He is wrong about Finn, Anna, Jean Pierre Breteuil, Sammy, and even Hugo. Jake thinks that Hugo is a philosopher, but Hugo disowns philosophy. He never sees Finn his constant companion as an individual and thinks that he has no internal life. Finn had talked about going back to Ireland but Jake never took his words seriously. He always took Finn’s words lightly as he was silent most of the times. When in the end Finn leaves Jake for good then he realizes his separate identity.

The main issue of *Under the Net* is the strain between theory and situation which is quite evident from the title itself. Jake consistently wants to run away from this ‘net of theory’ by changing his behaviour, he wants to remain *en situation* by being true to himself and escaping this theoretical trap. Anandine speaks in his *The Silencer* “all theorizing is flight. 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 to crawl under the net” (UTN, 91). This net is verbal and theoretical. Hugo who seems to be a patron of theoretical roles; a film producer, maker of armaments, miming theatre etc. has failed to content him and as the novel ends he has planned to become an apprentice to a watch maker in Nottingham. Jake also in the end, after all his theoretical schemes fail tells Mrs Tinckham about his decision to take a job as a hospital orderly. Any meaningful human experience is personal, tangible and active restricted to a particular situation and both of them here are trying in their own personal ways to achieve independent value by attending to the particular.
The net of the novel is the societal net which comes down to catch us. Political net of Lefty and Philosophical net as expressed by Hugo but Murdoch tells that she has taken the idea of net from Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*; ‘network of language, logic or theory that thinkers must get under in order to touch the particulars of reality’ and resist generalizations. Wittgenstein says:

Let us imagine a white surface with irregular black spots. We now say: Whatever kind of picture these make I can always get as near as I like to its description, if I cover the surface with a sufficiently fine square network and now say of every square that it is white or black. In this way I shall have brought the description of the surface to a unified form. This form is arbitrary, because I could have applied with equal success a net with a triangular or hexagonal mesh. It can happen that the description would have been simpler with the aid of a triangular mesh; that is to say we might have described the surface more accurately with a triangular, and coarser, than with the finer square mesh, or vice-versa, and so on(Byatt,1965,11).

This is the reason why Murdoch the ‘Wittgensteinian neo-Platonist’ uses multiple patterns to avoid the blunder of looking at reality through an insufficient number of grids. She creates multitudinous patterns to achieve several views and each perspective throws light on a small piece of reality. She looks for new patterns and juxtaposes different genres to show the contingent reality she experiences daily. The fine patterns of different shapes generate different meanings in different contexts which is the essence of her literary theory and hence fiction. This is precisely what Jake realizes in the end of the novel when he sees the mixed litter of kittens and Mrs Tinckham asks:
“What puzzles me is why those two should be pure Siamese and the other ones quite different, instead of all being half tabby and half Siamese”
“Oh, but that’s how it always is. It’s quite simple,” I said
“Why is it then?” said Mrs Tinck.
“Well,” I said, “it’s just a matter of…” I stopped. I had no idea what it was a matter of. I laughed and Mrs Tinckham laughed.
“I don’t know why it is,” I said. “It’s just one of the wonders of the world.” (UTN 286)

He realizes that the feeling of reverence and awe, tolerance and humility is what one requires to understand the mystery of the world. The puzzling most important question is coming from Mrs Tinckham; the character of insight and wisdom, the ‘god figure’ of the novel. Murdoch wants to show that even the wise are perplexed by the mystery and “You will never know the truth and you will read the signs in accordance with your deepest wishes. That is what we humans always have to do. Reality is a cipher with many solutions, all of them the right ones” (TFE 304-05). We have to be humble enough to comprehend that.

Murdoch has mixed many genres in Under the Net to present the ‘wonders of the world’. It has Picaresque elements, it is a Bildungsroman, has a Menippean and an epistemophilian aspect to it. It is self-referential, self-begetting, self-conscious, is comic, a parody and philosophical too. Let’s look at all these with a little depth focusing on their intertextuality; a deconstruction device.
A picaresque novel is always in first person narrative and so is *Under the Net*. The hero Jake is an ‘outsider’ he doesn't belong anywhere, it is a ‘pseudo-autobiography' of Jake (another important Picaresque technique) which simultaneously conceals and reveals. The nature of Picaro is philosophical. He is an ‘ongoing philosopher’ who wants to solve the mystery but doubts everything. The Picaro Jake is involved in trickery and deceit also like his predecessors. He dwells in the London Bohemia, often making jokes about his hidden social class, which he vaguely defines as "one that makes being paid off but does not preclude the theft of a movie star dog or stealing food and money from a friend's apartment". (Hague, 1986, 213-14) The picaresque hero Jake has chosen to be in a marginal position with regards to society. He rejects committance to politics, work, art and relationships. Jake has never mentioned anything about his familial or social experiences in the novel. He just referred once to his parents as his ‘elders'. The earlier Picaroes used to be orphans and Jake here is no less. The typical picaro's identity crisis is because of his break from the past. In the initial pages of *Under the Net*, Jake Donahue says that he is ‘trying to work out’ who he is. He fears that Hugo's persona will ‘swallow’ him up. He changes his personality at the drop of a hat. A Picaro's protean personality is due to ‘internal chaos’ but Jake uses his protean personality as a mode of protection, keeping an inner core of individual consciousness while doing his different roles in the novel in order to meet ends - practical and aesthetical. Like all Picaroes Jake never trusts a woman (except old Mrs. Tinkerham who is his confidant). There is very little emotional or sexual dealings with women who are generally objects of an unorganized search. He never believes in Sadie and chases Anna Quentin to France.
but in vain. The women in a Picaro’s life always belong to men more powerful than him. Anna also belongs to Hugo who is wealthy and powerful. Fate plays a great role in the Picaresque technique. Jake's staunch belief in his destiny and a lack of free will posits its importance in 20th century also.

There is a deep friendship between Jack the young hero and Hugo an older wiser man which was build during their enduring cold sessions leading to extended discussions on philosophical topics. Murdoch might have taken this template from her childhood readings of R.L. Stevenson particularly Kidnapped notes Skinner (2012, 219)

Neil Mc Ewan connects the latter half of twentieth century British fiction to Bakhtin’s menippea. It is a seriocomic genre of writing which sees the world as ‘a carnival’; a mixed, disjointed form of writing that draws upon distinct, multiple conventions. This type of fiction is filled with fantasy, scandals, humour, unconventional forms of life, philosophical and intellectual comedy. He thinks Under the Net to be a fine specimen of this form with “its surrealist sequences, its bohemian worlds poised between fantasy and realism, its socially mobile intellectual adventurer hero Jake, its constant debating of basic financial, political and social problems, its carnivalised atmosphere—it is thoroughly menippean”(Mc Ewan,1981,19).The moral sense and honesty which Jake shows in the end is also a prominent menippean feature.
Self-conscious fiction is a fiction which is only concerned with its own experiences and does not seek anything outside itself. Its only concern is revealing the inner mechanisms and processes of characters. The characters in this type are always scheming and plotting to manipulate others according to their personal fancies. Jake is a very good example here along with Sadie and Sammy. A self-reflexive fiction is one step ahead of self-conscious fiction; it reflects only itself; it is its own subject matter. Sometimes both these types are used as synonyms. The only pattern that materializes in this fiction is the sudden collapse of the fantastic plots of the characters even though first they seem to succeed. For instance when Jake kidnaps an old dog; a Hollywood star who is caged and he and Finn have to go through a lot of farcical struggle to release him, he feels proud of his catch. But once he has Mars, he realizes that nobody wants him and no one intended to keep his manuscript (which he wanted in exchange for the dog). Jake can seldom do anything according to his conscious decision.

Steven G. Kellman calls Under the Net a self begetting novel which “displays a distinctive circular moment in both structure and theme, it projects the illusion of art creating itself... it is an account, usually first person, of the development of a character to the point at which he is able to take up his pen and composes the novel we have just been reading” (Nicol, 2004, 77) A self-begetting novel defines it as ‘at the same time an account of its own birth and of the rebirth of its principal protagonist as novelist’ and its original model is Proust's A la recherché du temps perdu. This definition can also be applied to Comforters by Muriel spark. Both
protagonists Jake and Caroline are writers by profession, both are introspective in nature and theorize and both find out at the end that they are born to write fiction. Both Jake and Caroline end up writing their respective novels. Kellman compares Under the Net with Sartre's Nausea. Jake is a typical self-begetting protagonist, a baseless private intellectual, looking for a meaning in life which his own novel will ultimately provide. Jake feels a change in him as he listens to Anna's song at Mrs. Tinckham's shop near the end of the novel - it's a realization for him which many critics have recognized similar to the importance of Negress's song at the end of Nausea - which makes him realize 'The potential power of art'. Now, Jake will not run, away from 'the stuff of human life' similar to Roquentin. Now, he is able to accept contingency and mystery of life unlike the earlier 'everything in my life to have sufficient reason'.

Under the Net is a Bildungsroman too. In this type of novel there is an emotional loss which makes the protagonist start on his journey. In a Bildungsroman, the goal is maturity, and the protagonist achieves it gradually and with difficulty. The genre often features a main conflict between the main character and society. Typically, the values of society are gradually accepted by the protagonist and he is ultimately accepted into society – the protagonist's mistakes and disappointments are over. The Bildungsroman is a genre of the novel which focuses on the psychological and moral growth of the protagonist. Jake the hero is in quest of moral maturity. His journey is a search for his own independent identity, trying to understand who he is; a quest to
find happiness and is struggling to find his true identity like all other protagonists of Iris Murdoch.

Bran Nicol (2004) calls *Under the Net* a ‘sustained example of the epistemological quest in Murdoch's fiction’. He has studied Under the Net in yet another context – epistemophilic; knowledge of what is going on around the main character. Jake constantly urges to understand the world around him with anxiety. Jake is a person who is unable to understand a simple person called Finn (who is his constant companion) as he does not look at other characters with enough care. Whatever he thinks is overturned. The turning point in his epistemophilia comes at the end when he is talking with Hugo and he says "Some situations can't be unraveled…… they just have to be dropped. The trouble with you, Jake, is that you want to understand everything sympathetically. It can't be done. One must just blunder on. Truth lies in blundering on " (UTN, 257).When he sees Anna and the kittens as other and multifarious respectively; understands tolerance and acceptance towards life which makes one think that he has finally conquered his epistemophilia.

Murdoch’s novels are basically funny whose comedy ranges from simple verbal jokes to farcical elements to ‘complete projections of entirely bizarre and incongruous worlds’. She is aware of man’s heterogeneous experience and comprehends well that a single view of man leads to ‘pretentious oversimplification’. There are a lot of comic situations in *Under the Net*. The destruction of the Bounty
Belfounder studio by a sudden riot; the United Nationalists break up, the meeting of the
NISP (The New Independent Socialist Party) and how Jake is followed by police
when he is finally going to meet Hugo is a funny situation. Hugo sets off a
Belfounder domestic detonator to escape, which breaks the entire Rome city's
structure. Another funny situation is when Hugo and Lefty escape the studio after the
blast but Jake is left behind with Mister Mars and how eventually he escapes the
police with the help of Mr. Mars who plays dead. Jake exclaims:

Imagine my dismay when I saw between me and the railway line across the
piece of waste ground from one side to the other, there now stretched a thin
but regular cordon of police… I addressed Mars "you got me in to this"…
‘You can get me out” … "Sham dead" I said. "Dead! Dead dog!" …As I
approached the main gate I came into a focus of attention... The police barred
my way. They had their orders to let no one out… I strode resolutely on…”
The dog's hurt! I must find a vet! There's one just down the road". I walked
through the gates. The crowd parted with respectful and sympathetic remarks.
As soon as I was deal of them... I could bear it no longer. "Wake up! Live
dog!" I said to Mars; as I knelt down he sprang from my shoulder, and
together we set off down the road at full pelt. Behind us, diminishing now in
the distance, there arose an immense roar of laughter (UTN, 170-171).

These comic situations remind us of other novels of the time: Wain’s *Hurry On
Down* and Amis's *Lucky Jim*. Jim's accident at the Welches, his attempt to cheat Mrs.
Welch and her son Bertrand on phone and his drunken lecture are few of examples
from *Lucky Jim*. Wain's *Hurry on Down* also have some similar funny situations like
the displeasing interview between the hero and Edith and Robert Tharkles and the
tricks Charles plays on George Hutchins in Sussex and his outrageous attempt to
work as window-cleaner at his old headmaster's school. These are called ‘Lucky
Jimmish' situations. One more example of this is when Finn rescues Jake from Sadie's apartment. The comic world of Jake with its diverse experiences represents many facts without any clear formula with the help of which he can organize his understanding. This is the reason why Byatt (1965) calls Murdochian fiction “comic metaphysical adventures of a high order”.

R.L. Widmann (1968) suggests that *Under the Net* parodies most of the conventions of English fiction like 'father quest, the search for a love-mate, the noble hero'. Also the basic model of boy wants girl, boy pursues girl is parodied with boy gets dog. Murdoch plays with serious ethical problems while parodying. She is making fun of conventional morality and the entire middle class structure. Jake is not entirely settled at the end but he is got a hope to settle into a bourgeois middle class life with steady job of a writer and hopefully Sadie by his side. She attacks Jake's middle class values by dismissing Jake; he is an immoral person who is living as a parasite on others for years. Magdalene her girlfriend throws him off- the parasite when he becomes too unbearable. He steals cracker tins and *pate de foie gras* from his friend’s apartments as well as the coveted Mister Mars. Most of his unethical deeds harm him (he has to pay for Mister Mars). His treatment of Finn shows his self-centeredness. He refuses to acknowledge the existence of other people. He treats them as a part of his universe and never understands their individuality. Another thing that she parodies is intellectual jargon in *Under the Net*. She satirizes Jake the bohemian, Dave - the rigid and rightist philosopher, Sadie-the Hollywood possessor of éclat, the leftist Lefty, the vague Mrs. Tinckham. She satirizes them all with
gentleness. The use of first person narrative has got a lot of praise for her from the critics though she is parodying the stream of consciousness technique of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce here. Murdoch here and in all her fiction through its excesses and *chutney* technique does not take the reader away from reality. In fact, it forces the reader to be aware of what it means to be trapped in their own fantasy world and illusions.

Richard Todd (1984) has mentioned that *Under the Net* was also excessively compared to Cocteau, the Marx brothers, the Crazy Gang, Joyce Cary, Henry Green, E.M. Forster, Kafka and Dostoevsky on its arrival. Jake's prototype is protagonist of Camus' *L'Etranger* who is though not as meditative as Jake but has suffered derangement of desire. “He exemplifies, in an extreme form, the apathetic state of mind into which an individual must eventually be led by the excruciating sense of total individual freedom.”(Nakagami, 2004, 11-19)

*Under the Net* reminds of *Cinderella*, when Jake is chasing a woman whom he thinks is Anna. He picks up her shoes and holds onto them while allowing her to walk on ahead of him. It is only at the end that his delusion is broken by Hugo and, he starts seeing Anna as ‘other’. The scene at Tuileries is like the fairy tale. Jake is the prince holding not one but both shoes and searching for his beloved, whereas the real prince gets his lady love Jake is left wandering in search of Anna at the end of this scene. This scene alludes to James Joyce *Finnegan’s Wake* when the trees during
his search metamorphose into a pair of lovers it reminds of Anna Livia Plurabelle section of Joyce’s novel. Also the net of Under the Net reminds of the nets from which Stephen of A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man has to get rid off in the end.

The ending of Under the Net is ‘self-deconstructive'. The ending is presented in a manner that questions the entire narrative and even negates it. This is one of the theories of narratives called indeterminist theory. The ambiguous ending of the novel leads us to think that “life in time is a place of possibility: it is this structure which narrative imitates. For narrative does not tell us that what happened was necessary but that it was possible, displaying a reality in which things might have been otherwise.” (Mattingly,1998 ,96)

Jake is also a Flaneur - a term originally used by Baudelaire, for a vagabond. The term Flaneur in dictionary means an aimless and usually self-centered and superficial person or an intellectual trifler. A Flaneur always moves in big cities and does flanerie; observes people, tries to understand the city and its people and reads the written texts and he also produces distinctive types of texts. He not only deciphers but produces literary texts."The Flaneur, a symbol of spectacular authority, is a masculine artist who reaches aesthetic meaning while wandering and watching the environments of big cities, a kind of existential and artistic space for him"(Erkan,2010,92). The flaneur is a man who comes out in the public for his own
search of meaning, is free of family responsibilities, belongs to café life, is fascinated by women but not sexually inclined. Jake nicely fits into this form; we never hear in the novel of his family, he has no sexual relationships with anybody except for a kiss with Anna. He moves around in the pubs of London. And most of all he is on a quest which really begins at the end of the novel. A Flaneur ‘loved solitude, but he wanted it in a crowd’. Jake also thinks on the same lines “I hate solitude, but I am afraid of intimacy… The company which I need is the company which a pub or a café will provide” (UTN 31). He lives in two big cities London and Paris. He gives a detailed reading of the cities just like a typical Flaneur. He provides the reader with both geographical and cultural topographies of both cities. Jake is a Flaneur who has metaphysical inclinations but is a confused muddler. His flanerie is as mentioned above geographical - related to ‘public spaces and spectacles’ as well as a ‘means to access the truth’ - his own quest the search for meaning. His understanding of the truth is “like a palimpsest as intermittently constructed and deconstructed” (Erkan, 2010, 102) Jack says "The substance of my life is a private conversation with myself which to turn into a dialogue would be equivalent to self-destruction" (UTN ,31) and again “Like a fish which swims calmly in deep water, I felt about me the secure supporting pressure of my own life. Ragged, inglorious and apparently purposeless, but my own” (UTN, 250).

Another context in which Under the Net can be read is existential; man is lonely, sad and merely existing in a meaningless world until he makes a decisive choice for his
future. Murdoch was deeply influenced by existentialism in her initial years. Jake exclaims:

All work and all love, the search for wealth and fame 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. (UTN, 275)

This is a clear sign of existentialism. Jake Donahue is shown a confused muddler from beginning and even at the end he cannot understand much. He confesses in the end that his ascribing simple meanings to diversity around him is a mistake. Throughout the novel he is struggling to comprehend, ‘the full multiplicity of life' and his failure shows the novel to be existential in character. Goksen Aras(2010) notes that one of the tools that help us come out of existentialism - to achieve kind of order from the chaos of the world is language. We know that in practice language fails as its users do not handle it properly. Language itself is complete. As Tamarus or Jake says “Any sentence can state a falsehood. But words themselves don't tell lies. A concept may have limitations, but these won’t mislead if I expose them in my use of it”(UTN 90). Though Jake speaks French fluently his inability to communicate in French after he sees the poster of Jean Paul whose mediocre books he used to translate getting a coveted prize shows the importance of silence as complete truth can only be understood in silence.
Deconstruction proposes literary texts both mystify and demystify simultaneously. We are equally mystified and demystified by *Under the Net*. Jake's ability to understand at the end the otherness of Anna and getting mystified by the variety of kittens but accepting that he does not know why the Kittens were such explains deconstruction which believes in the impossibility of our knowing the world as the meaning is always postponed or deferred, our understanding and limitations of our finite selves come into play in lack of doing so.

Derrida uses the picture of a web to understand or mystify the structure of a novel and tries to tell how conflicting messages are woven together. *Under the Net* is Jake's web. He is the centre of the story; the narrative voice who links everything and everybody. He is in search of many things - a place to live, Hugo, Anna, his purpose in life and its meaning also. Anna and Sadie are sisters who display conflicting message. One is sober, singer and theatrical and the other vivacious, glamorous movie actor. Then there is the philosopher Dave who proclaims importance of speech and Finn who seldom speaks. Mrs. Tinckham is a mystery in herself. She is like an earth goddess. A *devi* sitting amidst her disciple cats. She is a Know all but whom one can ask nothing as she is always silent. Silence is given a lot of place in *Under the Net*. The name of Jake's amateur book is also *The Silencer* which held the ideas of Hugo- the theory maker. When Hugo says that he learnt a lot from Jake's book, Jake was shocked and speechless. The idea was Hugo’s but the words were
different and used in different context by Jake in his writing i.e. there was repetitability of words in different contexts with which its meaning changed. This is Derrida’s ‘dynamic process of differentiation’. Dave’s belief in importance of oral speech like structuralism and Saussure is also taken care of in *Under the Net*. Philosophy has always reduced the world to explain it. Structuralists have reduced language as fixed in time whereas Derrida says structure of language is always changing (Differance). Murdoch also believed the same that meaning of life is always changing by giving importance to contingency.

Both Murdoch and Derrida want to tell through their work that text's and life's purpose is to both mystify and demystify simultaneously and we should solve all our puzzles with the acceptance that ‘it's just one of the wonders of the world’ and continue on our journey of life.

Binary oppositions are another way of looking at the novel through the eyes of deconstruction in which two opposite terms relationship is seen closely and thwarted. Artist/Saint is a binary opposition which is represented by Jake/Hugo Belfounder. The role of the artist is to represent the ideas in some kind of form, which Jake Donahue does in his *The Silencer*. The saint, on the other hand, is contemplative, and saints are the medium through which ideas are born. Jake transcribes the ideas of Hugo into his only published book. Hugo’s concepts flow without an awareness. He is always changing his profession. He has a fireworks factory and at the end of the
novel he wants to learn watch making. These are perhaps different kinds of
meditation techniques for him. *Under the Net* is Jake Donahue, the artist’s journey
towards the beginning of his self-realization through Hugo’s saint like behaviour. So,
the ‘privilege’ that is given to Jake originally belongs to Hugo, the saint. Jake is
searching for Hugo almost all the time, Hugo, though physically absent in most part
of the novel, is hovering all the time in Jake’s mind and the novel like ‘a monolith’.

Another important binary opposition is words/silence. There are various incidents,
people and situations in the novel which deal with silence. First, there is Finn, Jake’s
constant companion of years who speaks very little and Jake says that is what has
kept them together and Anna, a singer by profession who falls in love with Hugo.
Words are important for her instead she gets so inspired by Hugo that she opens up a
mime theatre where silence rules, and the audience is not allowed to applaud. The
entire performance takes place in silence. When Jake sees her after years and she
says, “Love is action, it is silence. It’s not the emotional straining and scheming for
possession that you used to think it was” (*UTN*, 45). The word ‘silence’ attracts
Jake’s attention, for he has been getting hints from beginning that the mystery lies in
silence. When Hugo tells him during their philosophical discussion that ‘The whole
language is a machine for making falsehoods’, because it can never depict things
exactly as they are, we are reminded of Derrida’s ‘Representation’. Derrida suggests
that we as human beings are in constant state of representation. We put up pretence
in dealing with people and we do it to maintain relationships, by impressing others.
We never show our true selves to others. Every time we speak, we lie and only in silence or in action can we come close to telling the truth.

The next binary opposition is necessity/contingency. Jake divides London, into ‘Contingent London’ and ‘Necessary London’: “Everywhere west of Earls Count is contingent except for a few places along the river.”(UTN, 26) He does not know at this time the importance of accepting contingency. Dave, who represents society, impresses upon Jake the importance of ‘Necessity’. Human life is governed by necessities. We want to know why we exist, we want to understand the world and its secrets, and we want to know our place in the world. Jake is seen searching for his own identity and for a theory which is able to explain the world throughout the novel, and experiences a change of attitude towards contingency in the end. He understands by the end of the novel that “Our actual lived experience has no form or unity in itself, but is full of contingent rubble, accident and unsystematized detail which may resist our attempts at unity”(Antonaccio, 111). So whereas it seems as if, necessity is privileged over contingency it is contingency which is important. It is something which cannot be justified. If we accept this, then life becomes easy, although less comprehensive but tardy. Here when the novel ends, another journey begins that of ‘self realization’.
END NOTES


