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Tradition and Innovation:
Self-Reflexivity in Iris Murdoch's
The Black Prince

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To Anna Carolina,

Américo and

Diego.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyzes Iris Murdoch's novel **The Black Prince** in order to provide an insight into its innovative elements that were neglected or underestimated by the majority of critics when analysing that work. We propose to demonstrate how a consideration of those elements can provide a better understanding of Murdoch as a twentieth century novelist and how Murdoch, by mingling innovation and tradition in the same novel, produces a hybrid that is neither old-fashioned nor too radical in innovation. Conversely, **The Black Prince** is a novel that challenges the reader into an active role during the act of reading while providing him with a plot he can follow and characters he can identify with.

In the introductory chapter, besides standing the objectives, we provide a brief survey of the author's critics which have mistakenly labelled her as a parochial and old-fashioned writer. We also present brief considerations on metafiction.

Chapter two presents a deeper review on metafiction and traces its presence in other novels and other art forms. A series of techniques that can be found in works considered metafictional is provided at the end of that chapter.

Frames, as a relevant feature in *The Black Prince*, and the role the reader has to play, in order to fully enjoy the complexity of the work, are analyzed in chapter three. The analysis considers definitions of frames provided by theorists like Ervin GOFFMAN, Mary Ann CAWS and Boris USPENSKI. In a sub-section the effect of the alternation of frame and frame-break that can be considered as an intrinsic part of metafiction is examined.

Chapter four discusses all the implications of characterization; the device of the author/narrator is discussed shedding light on the very process of writing, which provides a questioning of the relationship between fiction and reality.

The fact that Murdoch acknowledges that play is intimately linked with art led to an analysis of the games she plays with the reader and the innovative aspects in those games. Chapter five then, speculates on the enigma, narrative roles and allusions, including parody and quotation, as forms of literary games.

Finally, the conclusion sums up all the innovative aspects analyzed within *The Black Prince* and demonstrates how Murdoch, by employing experimental devices, can be placed among the great postmodernist writers, thus contradicting the idea that British fiction is attached to an old-fashioned mode of writing.

RESUMO

Esta dissertação analisa o romance **The Black Prince**, de Iris Murdoch, através de seus elementos inovativos, que foram negligenciados ou ainda subestimados pela maioria dos críticos, para demonstrar como, através de uma consideração daqueles elementos, poderíamos compreender melhor Murdoch enquanto romancista do século XX.

Ao juntar, concomitantemente, inovação e tradição, Iris Murdoch produziu um híbrido que não é ultrapassado, nem tampouco exageradamente radical dentro da inovação. Pelo contrário, **The Black Prince** é um romance que desafia o leitor a uma maior participação no ato de ler, pois entrega a ele um enredo fácil de seguir e personagens com os quais ele pode se identificar.

No capítulo introdutório, além de estabelecermos nossos objetivos, apresentamos uma breve revisão dos críticos da autora, que erroneamente a consideraram apenas como uma escritora paroquial e ultrapassada. Traçamos também sucintas considerações em torno da metaficção.

No capítulo dois, uma revisão crítica mais aprofundada sobre a metaficção visa mostrar sua onipresença na literatura e arte contemporâneas. Uma série de técnicas que podem

estar presentes em obras de cunho metaficcional são apresentadas ao final desse capítulo.

As molduras ou "frames", como técnica metaficcional relevante em **The Black Prince**, e o papel que o leitor deve desempenhar para poder usufruir da complexidade da obra, são estudados no capítulo três. A análise considera as definições de molduras concebidas por Ervin GOFFMAN, Mary Ann CAWS e Boris USPENSKY. Na subsecção desse capítulo examinamos o efeito de alternância e rompimento de molduras, que pode ser considerado parte intrínseca da metaficção.

O capítulo quatro discute as implicações da caracterização; o uso do autor/narrador é analisado em relação ao próprio processo da escritura, proporcionando assim um questionamento da relação entre ficção e realidade.

O fato de que Murdoch reconhece que a atividade lúdica está intimamente ligada com a arte conduziu-nos à análise dos jogos literários que ela apresenta ao leitor, cujos aspectos inovativos despertam seu interesse. O capítulo cinco, então, investiga a respeito do enigma, dos papéis narrativos e das alusões, incluindo a paródia e citação, como formas de jogos literários.

Finalmente, todos os aspectos inovativos analisados dentro do romance **The Black Prince** são avaliados para demonstrar que Iris Murdoch, ao empregar mecanismos experimentais, pode ser colocada entre os grandes escritores pós-modernistas, contradizendo assim a idéia de que a ficção britânica está ligada a uma forma ultrapassada de narrativa.

1 INTRODUCTION

Since her first novel *Under the Net*, published in 1954, Iris Murdoch has largely increased her body of work: twenty-three novels and numerous critical and philosophical essays. Many of her critics have resorted to a number of traditional, yet often contradictory, labels to categorize her. Murdoch is recognizably prolific, at times she is considered both "entertaining and also serious and important";¹ she has been labelled an "allegorical novelist",² a "realistic novelist",³ an "original theorist of fiction",⁴ "the most intelligent novelist since George Eliot";⁵ or has been accused that her work is "plagued by contradiction",⁶ thus, her novels have been considered "artistic failures".⁷ Yet all these statements isolately do not present the whole scope of Murdoch as a twentieth-century novelist.

Murdoch has been mistakenly placed in the tradition of the nineteenth-century realistic novel. The innovative use of narrative devices (known as metafictional), employed abundantly by postmodernist writers, especially the Americans and the French ones, that are present with different degrees of innovation inside her oeuvre have not been taken into account.

Most critics, while analysing and discussing post-modernist novels base their analysis upon the works of American writers and tend to underestimate or even deny the innovative aspects in the works of British authors such as Iris Murdoch among others.

While failing to judge properly the experimental techniques in Iris Murdoch's novels, the critics at the same time argue that postmodernist metafiction is in itself an anti-mimetic mode of writing, asserting that the text, while self-consciously reflecting its own existence as an artifact, denies its right to act as a mirror to the world. However, this view is now discredited by modern literary theory that sees that view as a naïve theory of realism.

Albeit metafiction cannot be considered an exclusive postmodernist phenomenon, because it has been present in a latent form since the genesis of the fictional narrative occurred; nevertheless it has been exploited with more and more degrees of innovation by twentieth-century writers.

The term metafiction has been related to those novels that question the relationship between fiction and reality. The authors who employ metafictional devices within their works allow the reader to criticize and question the writing process itself, while at the same time they analyze the fundamental structures of the fictional narrative and explore the fictionality of the world outside the literary text. The text self-reflexively shows its own making.

Iris Murdoch's novel **The Black Prince**, winner of the James Tait Black Memorial prize in 1973, presents clearly

the stylistic and structural dichotomy between a realistic frame (at the level of content) and a metafictional one (at the level of form) which are made evident throughout the book, since she provides examples of her inventiveness, and at the same time, shows her fidelity to the traditional mode of narrative. The ingenuity of mimicking manner and matter of the realistic tradition, while superimposing various framing devices and introducing the most diverse metafictional devices seems to be Murdoch's answer to those who have accused her of being parochial and old fashioned. She lays bare this dichotomy tradition/innovation by the blending of different narrative styles, through the main narrator or through the other 'dramatis personae' that act as characters in the inner framed story entitled **The Black Prince: a Celebration of Love**, and act as narrators in the outer framed story which is the novel itself **The Black Prince**; or through the narrative itself, sometimes realistic, sometimes metafictional, that reflects upon itself, upon the fictionality of the world described on those pages and, more than anything else, upon the nature of art just "as Narcissus knells to gaze into the water".⁸

However, even in her first novel, **Under the Net** (1954), Murdoch deals with the question about art, presenting a writer that deals with the problem of fiction making. Innovative framing techniques again will be overtly present in **The Philosopher's Pupil** (1983), where there are different points of view and the self-reflexive narrator, who calls

himself "N" (no one? nil? anybody?), and who presents himself as the creator of the novel. He ironically mentions that:

The end of any tale is arbitrarily determined. As I now end this one, somebody may say: but how on earth do you know all these things about all these people? Well, where does one person end and another person begin? It is my role in life to listen to stories. I also had the assistance of a certain lady.⁹

In *The Black Prince* this questioning will become much more evident and the very process of writing a book will be shown in its technical self-consciousness, the way it challenges its own text and reliability, and speculates on fictionality and questions the characters' own existence as real beings outside the text. According to Richard TODD, *The Black Prince*, is Murdoch's closest approach to post-modernism.¹⁰

By juxtaposing realistic content and innovative form, Murdoch acknowledges the fragmentation and relativity of contemporary life, while holding on to the illusion of the shared human experience, which allows both the average and the academic reader to a full enjoyment and participation in the reading process. For the former can find characters with whom he can identify with, a plot he can follow, and a theme he can understand;¹¹ while the latter may find an investigation of process and form, a self-questioning attitude toward the nature of art, the fiction making processes and also an awareness of the limitations of language in the attempt to present the literary world of fabulation.

Even though some critics¹² have pointed out the innovative aspects of Murdoch's work, there are no critical studies or dissertations dealing with these specifically in **The Black Prince**. Likewise, none of them has engaged in an exhaustive analysis in order to show all the implications that the use of metafictional devices in that novel bring to the general understanding of it. Patricia WAUGH¹³ spends a few lines mentioning the self-referential status of **The Black Prince**; Peter CONRADI¹⁴ is more concerned with scattered references to the novel as a whole; and Elizabeth DIPPLE¹⁵ is more worried about the Appolo/Marsyas relationship within the novel. Richard TODD,¹⁶ one of Murdoch's ardent fans, mentions, in his analysis of **The Black Prince**, that the novel "is virtuoso in its technical self-consciousness",¹⁷ but his attempt at a further analysis following this assertion ends just where it has begun.

The particular focus in this study will be on metafiction which is seen as a general trend that has crept into all arts today: the omnipresence of meta-art is to be detected not only in literature, but also in film and television, in music and in the visual arts.¹⁸ Metafiction in the literary arts makes use of several innovative techniques that in spite of having been called innovative show likeness to many techniques already employed by novelists in the eighteenth century. This affinity between the fiction of the 18th and the 20th centuries has been pointed out by BERGONZI. He claims that both centuries were interested in "craft and convention".¹⁹

This study will focus on the innovative metafictional aspects embodied in **The Black Prince**, and proposes to show how they are used by Iris Murdoch to blend tradition and innovation in the same work, thus, revealing the novel itself as a work of relevancy for the study of British fiction. Likewise, the aim of this study is to show that Murdoch is not parochial, but can be included among the major post-modernist writers.

To accomplish what this study proposes it becomes necessary to provide a survey on metafiction, in order to determine what the major trends on criticism offer when dealing with innovative techniques, and also to clarify what tools have been provided by the critics on the self-reflexive mode of writing. Thus, chapter two briefly refers to some of the main tendencies in modern criticism; several definitions of metafiction or the self-reflexive novel are discussed and a series of techniques, that according to some critics, the contemporary experimental novel exhibits, are given insight into. These techniques are outlined within the analysis of **The Black Prince** and although at first, the tendency is to analyze each of them separately, the final result proved that an overlapping is the most desirable procedure. Similarly, there is not a single theorist who is followed throughout the development of this study, but several of them will be quoted since none has a complete theory on innovative devices employed in the contemporary novel. Therefore, specific theorists will be mentioned whenever it is necessary

to understand concepts and to enlighten topics dealt within the analysis.

However, it remains to be mentioned that Patricia WAUGH's book **Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction** is the work which remains as the basic critical tool for the analysis of **The Black Prince**.

As the complexity of the novel represents a challenge, it led to a critical study of **The Black Prince** in depth. Therefore, instead of dealing with Murdoch's work as a whole or even comparing her to other writers, this dissertation focuses on the aspects that prove Murdoch's innovation as an answer to those who accused her of being old-fashioned.

The Black Prince has within it another book entitled **The Black Prince: a Celebration of Love**, thus the novel becomes a novel-within-a-novel. The analysis of the use of frames within frames then, proved to be one of the most ingenious innovative devices in this novel. Although it is considered to be one of the techniques employed by most postmodernist writers, this dissertation devotes a whole chapter to the topic because of the variation of the form that it provides. In chapter three, the way in which Iris Murdoch employs the frames within frames, and how the reader must take an active part in the process of reading them and at the same time reading what is framed, is analyzed. That chapter also provides theoretical concepts on frames based on works by Ervin GOFFMAN, Mary Ann Boris USPENSKY.²⁰

Likewise, the frame produced by the interaction of readers within a text is dealt with taking into consideration Peter

RABINOWITZ's model of audiences.

The first person male narration is analyzed in chapter four taking into account mainly the triadic structure of characters represented by Bradley Pearson, P. Loxias and Arnold Baffin. Since Bradley is the main character, a whole section is devoted to the analysis of the several functions he assumes, thus becoming the very prototype of the metafictional character.

Finally, in chapter five the games which Iris Murdoch plays with the reader are analyzed, and as a main guiding thread Peter HUTCHINSON's concept of literary games is used. That chapter traces the main games employed by Murdoch: the enigma, narrative roles, and allusions, which encompass parody and quotation. The intertextual aspect that links *The Black Prince* to Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* is also discussed.

NOTES

¹ CONRADI, P.J. *Iris Murdoch : The Saint and the Artist*. London: MacMillan, 1986. p. 3.

² SCHOLLES, R. *Elements of Fiction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981. p. 30.

³ WHITESIDE, G. The Novels of Iris Murdoch. *Critique*, v. 7, n.1, p. 27-47, 1964. p. 27

⁴ TOOD, R. *Iris Murdoch*. London : Methuen, 1984. p. 13.

⁵ CONRADI, p. 5.

⁶ DIPPLE, E. *Iris Murdoch : Work for the Spirit*. London: Methuen. 1982. p.5.

⁷ JEFERSON, D.W. Iris Murdoch and the Structures of Character. *Critical Quarterly*, v. 26, n. 4, p. 47-58. Winter 1984. p. 53

⁸ MURDOCH, I. *The Black Prince*. Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1973. All subsequent references to the text are from this edition. The abbreviation BP followed by page numbers appears in parentheses after the quote.

⁹ MURDOCH, I. **The Philosopher's Pupil**. Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1983. p. 558.

¹⁰ TODD. p. 75.

¹¹ It seems that achieving this is a characteristic of the great writers and Murdoch is in this sense following Shakespeare's paths.

¹² See the works by Patricia WAUGH, Peter CONRADI, Elizabeth DIPPLE and Richard TODD.

¹³ WAUGH, P. **Metafiction** : The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction. London : Methuen, 1984. p. 118.

¹⁴ CONRADI, p. 184-209.

¹⁵ DIPPLE, p. 84-92.

¹⁶ TODD, p. 74-78.

¹⁷ TODD, p. 75.

¹⁸ For a further discussion on this topic see HUTCHEON, L. **A Poetics of Postmodernism**. London : Routledge, 1988.

¹⁹ BERGONZI, B. **The Situation of the Novel**. London : Methuen, 1972. p. 26.

²⁰ GOFFMAN, E. **Frame Analysis** : An Essay on the Organization of Experience. Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1974. CAWS, M.A. **Reading Frames in Modern Fiction**. Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1985. USPENSKY, B. **A Poetics of Composition**. Berkeley : University of California Press, 1973.

2 METAFICTION AS ONE OF THE MANIFESTATIONS OF POST-MODERNISM

Indeed, many of the so-called antinovels are really meta-fictions. William Gass.

Much of contemporary fiction does not relate the reader directly to the external world (reality), nor does it provide the reader with a sense of lived experience (truth), but instead, contemporary fiction dwells on the circumstances of its own possibilities, on the conventions of narrative, and on the openness of language to multiple meanings, to contradiction, irony, paradox. Raymond Federman.

The novel as a genre has never been a static form. It has been continuously undergoing changes in its form, function and techniques, in order to accommodate and reflect the altered world view outside the text. That is to say that works of fiction, in a sense, have always tried to accomplish what the 'real' world demanded, and there have been several controversies on how innovative a work of fiction could be, without losing its right to be considered 'good fiction'.

According to Robert ALTER, some authors tend to push too far their willingness to produce something innovative or contemporary, so that they end up by producing "fictions in which nothing seems particularly credible and everything finally becomes tedious through the sheer proliferation of directionless narrative invention".¹ Hence, opines ALTER,

the new literary tendency of much contemporary fiction has "turned out to mean license, not liberty, for the novelist".²

Albeit authors have ever been trying new experiments within the novel genre since its very beginning, it has never achieved such high degrees of experimentation that have been going on little by little since the beginning of this century. The works of writers, diversely separated in time and space, like those of Lawrence Sterne, Miguel de Cervantes, James Joyce and Jorge Luis Borges act as layers of a pyramid where at its utmost top lie the latest examples of innovative fiction written by such diverse writers as Claude Mauriac, John Barth, Vladimir Nabokov, Julio Cortazar, John Fowles, David Lodge, and Iris Murdoch,³ just to mention a few. Each of them writes employing different degrees of innovation.

Nevertheless, there is a tendency to consider the British novelists to be attached to a fairly traditional and bourgeois mode of writing.⁴ Where this bias persists, there is a failure to judge properly much of British fiction, which leads to several misinterpretations on the real innovative status of that fiction.

Thus, E. DIPPLE argues in *The Unresolvable Plot*, that the questions between realism and experimentalism continue to be at stake. Conversely, so many remarkable things have happened within experimentalism that "it ill behooves anyone to avert their eyes from it".⁵ Realism itself, continues DIPPLE, "has also produced great talents that must be taken

into consideration, if we want to have the panorama of our literary historical period".⁶

It is perhaps apropos to mention Raymond FEDERMAN who argues that the controversy about innovative versus traditional fiction contains at its center the problem of representation - "the relationship of fiction to reality and life: MIMESIS".⁷ It was Realism in the 19th century that dealt with representation. The view of the novel then was of a representation of the 'real' world which it mirrored.⁸ There was this notion that fiction should only express an objective reality, life and man. It could be argued that all literature consists of just that, an interdependence of factualness (either by direct mimesis or indirectly, by a reversal of the ordinary conditions of life) and arbitrary fabrication.

However, as the lights on the representational status of the novel faded, the baring of literary artifice has come to be more and more a basic procedure. In **Fabulation and Metafiction**, Robert SCHOLLES notes that the so-called 'realist' trend within the novels was replaced in the 60's by a new kind of fictional writing, for the younger writers sensed that "the positivistic basis for traditional realism had been eroded, and that reality, if it could be caught at all, would require a whole new set of fictional skills".⁹ Experimental fiction - or 'metafiction', continues SCHOLLES, developed and succeeded out of works from Borges and Nabokov and spread into other writers to become one dimension of modern fabulation.¹⁰

It seems that the controversy between realism and the new fictional modes, or between tradition and innovation is as old as the coined terms. The same issues have been posed by ELIOT in his famous essay **Tradition and the Individual Talent**, and Robert ALTER refers to the endless discussions that predicted the death of the novel. He notes that "the old question of the death of the novel, which seems as doggedly persistent as the novel itself, is in the air again".¹¹ Likewise, John FOWLES argues that "if the novel is dead, the corpse still remains oddly fertile",¹² while literary critics such as Susan SONTAG, George STEINER and Ihab HASSAN have generally agreed that what is happening in our literary scene is the death of our traditional western concept of art and literature.

In conjunction with this strain in the literary fields, Gerald GRAFF presents another view, which claims not the death but "the resurrection of the new sensibility out of the ruins of the old civilization".¹³ GRAFF asserts that the more positive strain signifies not only a disruption with the past but also an attempt to make a revolution in future. However, he confirms that post-modernism should not be viewed as breaking with previous currents in the literary field but as "a logical culmination of the premises of these earlier movements".¹⁴

Conversely, we could not totally agree with GRAFF that in metafiction the question of the link between life and art has been totally disrupted or is inexistent. Our aim is not to define narrow boundaries for something called

metafiction, or self-conscious writing, or any other term in an endless list, or to say that this is a new mode of writing and that everything that has come before is already 'dead'. What we want to present is a certain contemporary tendency and provide an insight into its interpretation in **The Black Prince**, considering the use of a series of techniques that point toward the reflexive voice within that literary work.

Unlike the term, which is a fairly recent one, metafiction as a form of literature has a much older tradition. It is not a new mode of writing in the sense that it forgets what came before, or that it presents a radical change. It is new in the sense that contemporary authors and critics are more aware of its presence, as one of the manifestations of much postmodernist fiction, and there has been a much greater concern about this tendency since the 1960's. Moreover, we can consider it new only when it concerns the degrees of metafictional devices being used, which are much more extensively present up to the point reached by a book like John Fowles's **The French Lieutenant's Woman**, where there is the laying bare of the fictitious status of the novel, where the narrator parodies the conventions of the 19th century writing, and at the same time questions the creation of fiction *qua* work of fiction.

Actually, the phenomenon of self-consciousness in fiction, in greater or lesser degree has been long perceived in different authors, from Sterne's autonomous narrator in **Tristram Shandy** to Lawrence Durrell's experiments with rel-

ativistic narration in **The Alexandria Quartet**, Iris Murdoch's self-conscious treatment of the writer in **Under the Net**, passing through well known realist writers such as Somerset Maugham's awareness of the intricate relationship between fiction and reality in **The Razor's Edge**, or the Brazilian author Machado de Assis's narrator consciously addressing the reader in **Dom Casmurro**; they all to some extent focused on the narrator, who in turn acknowledged the presence of the reader and the fictionality of the work he was narrating, probing the individual consciousness as the final arbiter of reality.

Thus, as Linda HUTCHEON puts it, and which merely agrees with the ideas of John BARTH, Gerald GRAFF and Robert ALTER, instead of a disruption with the past, what the post-modernist mode of writing achieves is a certain continuity of concern between contemporary self-reflexive texts and those of the earlier periods, since not only the modernist writers, but also much literature of the 18th and 17th century presented the mode of self-conscious narration. We cannot but agree with CHRISTENSEN,¹⁵ that sees many similar aspects between much of 18th and 20th century metafiction. The clear example that he states is that of **Tristram Shandy**, which in its particular way was a unique novel at its time. Conversely, nowadays it is seen as one of the first examples of self-conscious fiction. In that book one can already find the autonomy of the narrator, that acknowledges at the same time the autonomy of the structure of fiction itself:

— No doubt, Sir, there is a whole chapter wanting here — and a chasm of ten pages made in the book by it — but the bookbinder is neither a fool, or a knave, or a puppy — nor is the book a jot more imperfect (at least upon that score) — but, on the contrary, the book is more perfect and complete by wanting the chapter, than having it, as I shall demonstrate to your reverences in this manner. (...) But before I begin my demonstration, let me only tell you, that the chapter which I have torn out, and which otherwise you would all have been reading just now, instead of this — (...) ¹⁶

Furthermore, the relevant innovation in some fiction of the 18th and the 20th centuries is that they acknowledged the reader's participation in the reading process and directly addressed him. However, many devices employed by the forerunners of metafiction have been reshaped and complemented by the contemporary writers since the early 50's.

It is apropos to mention that meta-art, which turns its attention self-consciously upon the work of art itself is not an exclusive device of the literary world; it can be found in all media and art forms. For instance, in painting, meta-art is well represented by Velasquez's 'Las Meninas', in drama it is well represented by Pirandello and Beckett and in the seventh art, the cinema, it is present in the well-known self-conscious films of Fellini¹⁷ and Godard, and more recent examples are Woody Allen's **The Purple Rose of Cairo** and Mel Brooks's parodic **Spaceballs**.

Robert ALTER refers to the close relationship between two specific media that of film making and fiction writing.

He argues that

The close parallels between what is happening now in the two media suggest that the self-consciousness of both may reflect a heightened new stage of modern culture's general commitment to knowing all that can be known about its own components and dynamics. Our culture, a kind of Faust at the mirror of Narcissus, is more and more driven to uncover the roots of what it lives with most basically-language and its origins, human sexuality, the workings of the psyche, the inherited structures of the mind, the underlying patterns of social organization, the sources of value and belief, and, of course, the nature of art.¹⁸

It is agreed by several authors,¹⁹ that the term metafiction, was coined by William GASS in his essay "Philosophy and the Form of Fiction", where he mentions the works of Barth and Borges. In a much broader sense, the adjective metafiction or the self-conscious novel, or the self-reflexive novel, surfiction, and many other terms, has been used to define the fiction about fiction — "that is, fiction which includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity".²⁰

Although critics disagree on terminology, they share a common premise; each critical argument begins and ends with the assertion that during the 1950's, the novel form, once again, entered a period of flux and change. This experimental period in the writing of novels has continued in the present decade, affecting writers from different parts of the globe: Americans, British, South Americans, French, Germans and so on.

Yet, as mentioned before, British novelists are seen as traditional and old fashioned even though they share similarities, for instance, fragmented and chaotic world views, a distrust in the concept of reality, and a heightened reflexivity, as found in authors from other countries. Most of the critics, including Ihab HASSAN, Raymond FEDERMAN, Gerald GRAFF and Linda HUTCHEON, have ignored British novels completely, thus, limiting their discussions of the experimental novel to the fiction produced in the United States during the 60's, 70's and 80's. This question is especially true when we think of Murdoch's oeuvre which has been thoroughly analysed only as being 'realistic', not containing any experimental devices and being linked forever with the past authors of realism in the 19th century.

However, contemporary British fiction, shares both the vision and the techniques of its American counterpart, although it embeds these elements within a realistic framework, so that it is capable of representing man's experience of the modern world, as well as to show the author's fictional activity in creating a work about the contemporary experience.

Unlike the American novelists, such as John Barth, Thomas Pynchon, Donald Barthelme and others, who reflect and depict the disintegration process occurring in the society at large, by minimizing the elements of character, plot, setting and so forth, because they did not avert the possibility of learning to live in such a society; the

British authors, such as John Fowles, Iris Murdoch and David Lodge, to mention but a few, acknowledge the fragmentation and relativity of contemporary life, while maintaining the illusion of the shared human experience.

In short, the British novelists hold on to a realistic frame and employ innovative techniques integrating them into their works, which perhaps explains why some critics do not recognize the postmodern dimensions of their works and this is especially true concerning Murdoch's novels.

It is not our aim to start reviving the debate about modernism or postmodernism or any other 'ism' in literary movements.²¹ However, we do think it is relevant to the issue of understanding metafiction, which is one of the instances of postmodernism, to discuss several definitions that somewhat include within their boundaries definitions on metafictional techniques themselves.

Several different definitions of metafiction have been coined as authors and theorists alike endeavoured to come to terms with the 'new' novel in the postmodernist era. We ought to start with a definition of modern fabulation by Robert SCHOLES:

Fabulation means not a turning away from reality, but an attempt to find more subtle correspondences between the reality which is fiction and the fiction which is reality.²²

SCHOLES definition, first introduced in 1967 in **The Fabulators**, is perhaps one of the first attempts to plunge

into the postmodernist debate concerning the relationship between fiction and reality. SCHOLLES believes that at that time an important movement in contemporary literature was being neglected and misinterpreted because it did not have a label. Moreover, argues SCHOLLES, critics, readers and teachers still believed exclusively in the notions of fictional representation, that came into being during the realist movement, and so they failed to acknowledge a new kind of fiction that had much to teach us.²³

Likewise, Gerald GRAFF in his essay entitled "The Myth of the Postmodernist Breakthrough", sees postmodernism as "that movement within contemporary literature and criticism which calls into question the claims of literature and art to truth and human value".²⁴

Furthermore, Robert ALTER defines the process of the self-conscious novel "in which it is the writer who tries to regulate the reader's credulity, challenging him to active participation in pondering the status of fictional things, forcing him as he reads on to examine again and again the validity of his ordinary discriminations between art and life and how they interact".²⁵

Once again the main point that emerges from these definitions and which all of them circle around is the eternal question of fiction X reality. Within the meta-fictional devices, then, one would find, according to Linda HUTCHEON, the demands upon the reader that "is forced to acknowledge the artifice, the 'art', of what he is reading" and at the same time he has to work as a co-creator,

responding intellectually and affectively to the text and "these responses are shown to be part of his life experience".²⁶ However, Linda HUTCHEON suggests that in this respect metafiction is much akin to the mimetic novelist tradition than a reworking of it.

It seems that during the 1980's, definitions of metafiction abounded for there are several authors that theorized on the subject. Raymond FEDERMAN states that it is the fiction that "exposes the fictionality of reality".²⁷ Similarly, Christine BROOKE-ROSE sees metafiction as a narration that has as its main concern the fictional systems themselves. It calls attention to itself, acknowledging its own fictitious status "and its main counter-techniques are flat characterization, contrived plots, antilinear sequences of events, all fore-grounded as part of an extravagant overtotalization, a parody of interpretation which shows up the multiplicity of the real and the naïvete of trying to reach a total synthesis of life within narrative".²⁸ In the same manner, the Norwish professor Inger CHRISTENSEN, in his book entitled **The Meaning of Metafiction** (1981), sees metafiction as a "fiction whose primary concern is to express the novelist's vision of experience by exploring the process of its own making".²⁹

However, the most conclusive and clear definition of metafiction can be found in Patricia WAUGH's book **Metafiction** (1984), where she sums up all definitions given before and where all of them are aligned:

Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text.³⁰

Albeit this 'new' mode of writing has been named differently by diverse critics, yet all of them agree that the contemporary experimental novel exhibits one or more of a number of innovative techniques that could be called metafictional devices. These devices would then be present in different degrees within literary works, and the more a writer makes use of them, the more his novel could be considered a metafictional one. In other words, there are a series of devices such as: a narrative voice whose narration describes the writing process; the self-conscious acceptance of the artificiality of form, structure, beginnings and endings; the laying bare of the mechanisms which allowed the reader to believe in the credibility of the story; the use of parody, intertextuality and allusions; the awareness of the metafictional character, because of the impossibility of representing the relativity of human perception; the self-conscious knowledge of the existence of multiple and relative realities; the use of frames within frames; the investigation of the questionable relationship between fiction and reality; the delicate network of relationships between the writer and the text, the writer and the

reader; the questioning of the role of the reader acknowledged as a participant of the reading process; and finally, the recognition that literature is language,³¹ not reality.

Many of these techniques are found in the work of Iris Murdoch, and the elements mentioned above will be used as a guiding thread to analyse the metafictional devices employed by her in **The Black Prince**, allied to a strong demand upon the reader that has a constitutive role to play. The metafictional elements in a work of art are closely linked together, thus, when analysing **The Black Prince** an overlapping is unavoidable and desirable, since those elements are intertwined in this novel. For Murdoch has created a curious hybrid which exposes and questions the nature of fiction, while simultaneously maintaining a strong story-illusion, complete with recognizable characters, decipherable plot, and most importantly, clear purpose. She uses the traditional and at the same time she innovates in the act of writing.

Iris Murdoch's **The Black Prince** challenges the contemporary critical bias, which has mistakenly applied to her novel such misleading epithets as old-fashionable, parochial, and archaic. In her novels, especially **The Black Prince**, she does not deny experimentation, but uses with subtlety many of the innovative techniques which have evolved in the form of the novel during the last three decades. In an interview, she herself has acknowledged that

there is a great deal of experimentation
in the work [**The Black Prince**], but I

don't want it to be too evident. I am happy in the tradition.³²

She even postulates that she anticipated much of the post-modernist doubts about the status of language:

All the stuff that Barthes and Co. think they invented. I knew all about that in the 1930s.³³

Her work illustrates that the novel genre should not or cannot be defined by either its realism or its reflexivity, its 'traditional' or its 'experimental' techniques. Conversely, the old and the new elements of the genre can work together to produce a fiction which is a challenge and at the same time an entertainment to the reader.

NOTES

¹ ALTER, R. The Self-Conscious Moment : Reflections on the Aftermath of Modernism. **TriQuarterly**, v. 33, p. 209-229, Spring 1975. p. 214.

² ALTER, p. 214.

³ We have in mind specific novels, respectively **The Marquise Went Out at Five**, **Lost in the Funhouse**, **Hopscotch**, **The French Lieutenant's woman**, **How far can you go** and **The Black Prince**.

⁴ DIPPLE, E. **The Unresolvable Plot**. London : Routledge, 1988. p. 11.

⁵ DIPPLE, p. 7.

⁶ DIPPLE, p. 8.

⁷ FEDERMAN, R. **Surfiction, Fiction Now and Tomorrow**. Chicago : Swallow Press, 1975. p. 292.

⁸ According to Robert SCHOLLES' view "Realism is a matter of perception. The realist presents his impressions of the world of experience. (...) The realistic writer seeks always to give the reader a sense of the way things are, but he feels that a made-up structure of character and event can do better justice to the way things are than any attempt to copy reality directly". In: SCHOLLES, R. **Elements of Fiction**. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1981. p. 7.

⁹ SCHOLLES, R. **Fabulation and Metafiction**. Chicago : University of Illinois Press, 1979. p. 4.

¹⁰ SCHOLLES, **Fabulation and Metafiction**, p. 4.

¹¹ ALTER, p. 215.

¹² FOWLES, J. Notes on Writing a Novel. **Harper's Magazine**, p. 97, July 1968.

¹³ GRAFF, G. The Myth of the Postmodernist Breakthrough. **TriQuarterly**, v. 26, p. 383-417. p. 384.

¹⁴ GRAFF, p. 385.

¹⁵ CHRISTENSEN, I. **The Meaning of Metafiction**. Bergen : Universitet Sporlaget, 1981. p. 10.

¹⁶ STERNE, L. **Tristram Shandy**. Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1971. p. 230.

¹⁷ This is well marked in FELLINI's narrator in the film 'Amarcord'.

¹⁸ ALTER, p. 210.

¹⁹ Inger CHRISTENSEN, Patricia WAUGH and Robert SCHOLLES.

²⁰ HUTCHEON, L. **Narcissistic Narrative : The Metafictional Paradox**. London : Methuen, 1984. p. 1.

²¹ BARTH himself agrees on the difficulty of defining modernism or postmodernism. See: The Literature of Replenishment : Post-Modernist Fiction. **The Atlantic**, v. 245, n. 1, p. 65-71, 1980. p. 66-67.

²² SCHOLLES, **Fabulation and Metafiction**, p. 8.

²³ SCHOLLES, **Fabulation and Metafiction**, p. 1.

²⁴ GRAFF, p. 385.

²⁵ ALTER, p. 214.

²⁶ HUTCHEON, p. 5.

²⁷ FEDERMAN, p. 7.

²⁸ BROOKE-ROSE, C. Where do we go from here? **Granta**, v. 3, p. 161-188, 1980. p. 162.

²⁹ CHRISTENSEN, p. 11.

³⁰ WAUGH, P. **Metafiction : The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction**. London : Methuen, 1984. p. 2.

³¹ See WAUGH, p. 97-98. "Metafictional writers come up against the problem that, even if the text is purely a linguistic construct which does not 'hook on to' the real world, language in literature is at a secondary level of signification, words carry their everyday significances into fictional texts, and readers cannot be prevented from constructing imaginative worlds from these words based on their own 'everyday' experiences".

³² BELLAMY, M. An Interview with Iris Murdoch. **Contemporary Literature**, v. 18, n. 2, p. 129-139, Spring 1977, p. 132.

³³ ZIEGLER, H., BIGSBY, C. **The Radical Imagination and the Liberal Tradition**. London : Junction Books, 1982. p. 229.

3 READING FRAMES: THE ROLE OF THE READER

[Shakespeare] has performed a supreme creative feat, a work endlessly reflecting upon itself, not discursively but in its very substance, a Chinese box of words. Iris Murdoch, **The Black Prince**.

Bradley Pearson's soliloquy refers to **Hamlet** as a self-reflexive play containing frames within frames generated by words. It is an affirmation that can be read double meaningly, because it also applies to the novel **The Black Prince** itself, which presents Iris Murdoch's most inventive and involuted literary exercise. The novel as a whole is a story that tells the story of a writer retelling his story to the most profound demonstration of the function of art. Iris Murdoch implies an ironic use of this idea and sets the frames so as to cast doubt on the fictional status of the novel and the reality status of the real world. What is really real within the frames in **The Black Prince**?

In order to show that art is artifice and reality is construct, Murdoch creates a Chinese-box *mise en abyme* structure; she superimposes various framing devices in the novel while laying them bare. There are several frames within **The Black Prince**, but above all there is a main outer frame and a main inner frame. The opening of the outer frame

intends to elevate the novel to the autobiography status; it has a list of contents followed by an editor's foreword, which is in turn followed by the author's own foreword, where he explains the reasons for writing the story and describes the techniques chosen for telling it:

Although several years have now passed since the events recorded in this fable, I shall in telling it adopt the modern technique of narration, allowing the narrating consciousness to pass like a light along its series of present moments, aware of the past, unaware of what is to come. (BP 11)

The beginning of the inner frame displays an artfully distracted narrative technique, where Bradley self-consciously questions the way in which he could start the story:

It might be most dramatically effective to begin the tale at the moment when Arnold Baffin rang me up. (...) A deeper pattern however suggests Francis Marloe as the first speaker (...) There are indeed many places where I could start. (BP 21)

Finally, the closure disrupts the illusion of reality by calling the authors of the postscripts *dramatis personae*, acknowledging in this way that they are merely characters in the drama which Bradley Pearson has told. Moreover, the lack of chapter divisions and the complex relationship within the outer frames seem designated to accomodate a larger illusion of formlessness.¹

The Black Prince is constructed with shifts of frame. Murdoch explores the theme of fictionality through a dual

construction based on the alternation of framing and breaking the frames. In breaking the frames which she constructs, Murdoch lays bare the relative reality status of truth and fiction, and by exposing the illusion of reality, she suggests that these two dimensions, reality and fiction, also interpenetrate in real life.

The sociologist Ervin GOFFMANN conceives frames as structures through which we perceive and organize experience.² According to GOFFMAN, our mind has frames of reference to operate with and these interfere with our personal response to the world and help us make sense out of events, including the inevitable question about framing itself. Therefore, all the information we get from the technological media is assimilated and ordered in experiences, "a structure of representation, which tends to rival fictional art".³

In her study on frames in literature, Mary Ann CAWS states that the word frame as a concept is "too elastic in definition, it would enclose too much; too narrow, it would exclude any richness of content".⁴ However, she does present an idea of frames as texts standing in and out, or as several scenes inserted in a picture and also the crossings of genres inside a single text.

In a similar manner, Boris USPENSKY⁵ refers to frames within frames as microtexts which would contain metafiction, that is, representations within representations, intertextual references, plays within plays with transformations from the internal to the external point of view and vice versa. The frames would then represent the representa-

tion of reality. A drawing of a horse would be a different thing than a picture of a statue of a horse. The first would be the representation of something when it is drawn and the second would be the representation within a representation.⁶

Mary Ann CAWS also exemplifies the study of interior framing, when "the imagined spectacle about which the audience hears is at odds with the actual or seen spectacle",⁷ and this would bring the same impression as one would see in a painting containing one foreground and another background scene, framed by an inset window. In **The Black Prince** this idea of being inside a picture is presented to the reader by Bradley himself when he felt "like going through a glass and finding oneself inside a picture by Goya" (BP 381).

A work of fiction presents to us a special world, with its own space and time, alien to the reader's world. The framing devices in it, then, would ask for the reader's competence in order to recognize the overall picture and to detect the whole stock of devices and techniques that would allow him the full enjoyment and understanding of the literary work. In **The Black Prince** Murdoch skilfully presents the readers with frames which question the whole relationship of a reader to the work he is reading. She creates a role for the reader and the demands upon him are that he has to become a member of the audience. Thus, Murdoch creates an author-reader intimacy at all levels trying to set a bridge between the two worlds.

Boris USPENSKY postulates that "the transition from the real world to the world of the representation is particularly significant as one of the phenomena in the creation of the frame of the artistic representation".⁸ Thus, our reading of the text and its frames is the model of not just reading, but of what, while reading, we reconstruct as reality (which is undoubtedly constantly in process). The everlasting question of the relationship of fiction and reality (fiction X truth) is after all, what matters. Or as Bradley Pearson finally understands that "the world is, in reality, all outside, all inside" (BP 391) and we must learn to read the frames which separate those fluid boundaries.

Iris Murdoch uses framing devices in **The Black Prince** to question this relationship. She does not offer us any ready made solution, but questions what fiction is and what truth may be by positing the relativity of any solution. Murdoch innovates in the outer frames and at the same time maintains a traditional technique in the inner framed story although she uses parody as the dominant discourse of the whole novel.

In **The Black Prince**, the outer frame is the novel **The Black Prince** written by Iris Murdoch, which is the framework for the inner frame which in turn is the frame for the novel written by Bradley Pearson. If in the inner framed structure there is the suggestion of a badly written story, in the outer framed one there is always present the doubt that questions Bradley's and Loxia's existences as real beings and consequently the authorship of the novel.

At the same, in the postscripts there is the constant laying bare of the conventions of creating fictional characters.

Bradley's account of his great love for Julian Baffin, ostensibly transmuted into art in his novel **The Black Prince: a Celebration of Love**, is framed by an editor's and narrator's forewords as well as by six postscripts written by the editor, the narrator, and four of the main characters. Set outside these forewords and postscripts there is Murdoch's novel entitled **The Black Prince**. Such are the frames in which Iris Murdoch sets the subtle intricate and complex structure of her novel **The Black Prince**.

Furthermore, the use of two author-narrators calls attention to the fact that there is a story within a story: **The Black Prince** tells the story of an author who is telling his own story in **The Black Prince: a Celebration of Love**. There is a real author whose voice is unquestionably present, though masked, and there is the fictional author/narrator whose voice claims its unfictionality,⁹ by pretending to be a 'real person' and at the same time forcing the reader to believe in this 'reality' and forcing him to play this role of acceptance: "The reader will recognize the voice of truth when he hears it. If he does not, so much the worse for him" (BP 412). There is a game being played between Murdoch and the reader and the latter has to accept to learn playing this game of literacy and to conform himself to the text he is reading. Ironically, P.

Loxias acknowledges the existence of this game of make believe that the characters exist in the real world and that the novel is a non-fictional work:

I hear it has even been suggested that Bradley Pearson and myself are both simply fictions, the invention of a minor novelist. Fear will inspire any hypothesis. No, no. I exist. Perhaps Mrs Baffin, though her ideas are quite implausibly crude, is nearer to the truth. And Bradley existed. (BP 415)

Murdoch paradoxically presents to the reader two different narratives, Bradley's autobiography which is centered structurally on traditional realism that, according to Linda HUTCHEON,¹⁰ has as a theoretical basis the 'mimesis of product', i.e., the reader recognizes characters, settings and so forth by their similarity with those in empirical reality and the act of reading becomes passive.

On the other hand, the outer frames present an innovative structure, disrupt codes and bare conventions, and what occurs is then a 'mimesis of process',¹¹ or what Linda HUTCHEON describes as the thematizing of the work's own fictional making, and here the reader has to take an active part in the process:

The reader must accept responsibility for the act of decoding, the act of reading. Disturbed, defied, forced out of his complacency, he must self-consciously establish new codes in order to come to terms with new literary phenomena.¹²

Murdoch's innovative metafictional technique achieves this extreme of casting doubt on any possible solution

the reader may try: Is Bradley the author and has he invented all characters? Is Loxias the author who invents an author and all other characters? The novel's closure entitled "four postscripts by *Dramatis Personae*" does not seem to clarify, but to raise more questions, since the reader for sure knows only that the entities in the novel are being created for him by the author.¹³

By making use of two main structural frames, the novel reflects the double development taking place at the same time for a double text-in-process, the text self-reflexively mirrors its own fictionality. Therefore, we read what is framed and at the same time we are reading the frames as well. Moreover, some characters of the inner story become readers and even co-authors and narrators of the outer story. Bradley's novel is framed by Loxias' which are both in turn framed by Murdoch. It is as if in a painting Bradley's story is the picture inside, Loxias' is the frame for that picture and Murdoch's is the framework that encloses both of them. Hence, there would be a relation of the real author Murdoch, who creates an author Loxias, who in turn creates another author Bradley who tells his tale: here the Chinese box structure¹⁴ becomes apparent in this complex and difficult novel. Moreover, as John BARTH mentions "when the characters in a work of fiction become readers or authors of the fiction they're in, we're reminded of the fictitious aspect of our own existence".¹⁵ In this respect **The Black Prince** achieves the status of its self-reflexivity, positing the everlasting relation of "narrator-story-reader [that] is expanded in the fictional situation

to encompass: author-narrator-story-fictional reader (audience)-actual reader".¹⁶

The interaction of readers within the text on different levels has been dealt with in works by Walker GIBSON, Walter J. ONG and Peter RABINOWITZ. According to the latter, the first two are "more concerned with the distinction between fictional and nonfictional modes of address, or with the related distinction between speaker (or narrator) and implied author",¹⁷ while RABINOWITZ himself provides a model where there are present at least four audiences, which the duality of events portrayed as true and untrue generates: first, the Actual Audience, that is, the people who read and purchase the book; second, the Authorial Audience, which would be the author's hypothetical audience; third, the Narrative Audience to whom the narrator of the novel is writing, and finally the Ideal Narrative Audience, that "believes the narrator, accepts his judgments, sympathizes with his plight, laughs at his jokes even when they are bad".¹⁸ According to RABINOWITZ this audience is ideal from the narrator's point of view.

Following then RABINOWITZ's model of audiences, we could say that the actual audience in **The Black Prince** knows that Murdoch has created two fictional personae (Bradley and Loxias), that are the narrators of the story, but who claim that the events narrated are true. Similarly, the authorial audience knows that this novel is by Murdoch, and therefore knows that its violation of convention is intentional. The narrative audience, on the

other hand, pretends to believe that Bradley, Loxias and all the other personae are 'real' beings, and that the events really took place. Finally, Bradley and Loxias have written for an ideal narrative audience that will believe and not even question the authorship of the novel, its contents or even its quality as a work of art. Furthermore, this ideal narrative audience does not question as the authorial audience may do, if Loxias has invented Bradley or vice versa, or even if both are "the invention of a minor novelist". (BP 415)

Following Rabinowitz's model, there are then four levels according to which we have to consider this novel: the level of the actual world where the book **The Black Prince**, Iris Murdoch and the readers exist [actual audience], the level where the author's hypothetical audience exists [authorial audience]; the world of fiction where there is an author/narrator, Bradley Pearson, and where there is a text: **The Black Prince: a Celebration of Love** written for an imitation audience [the narrative audience], and finally the character/readers who come in contact with that text and the characters/readers/co-writers in the post-scripts section of the novel [ideal narrative audience]. There is a net of characters being linked and related both to fictional and non fictional worlds. Or as Elizabeth DIPPLE has wisely stated:

Not only are human beings endlessly intertwined, but characters in fiction are also creations of the narrator who is in turn the creation of the

author, and it is indeed difficult to see where one of these personae ends and another begins; the reader is also an active persona who enters the scene as (s)he both tries to conform to the created text and to withdraw skeptically from its dominant power. (...) At the furthest extreme of potential unreality in the process of fiction are the characters, the *dramatis personae* of the tale that is told; at the opposite extreme of palpable reality is the reader in the time-bound act of reading the text and then pronouncing his/her own narrative account of it.¹⁹

There is always present the reflexive voice that reminds the reader that all art must to some extent be false to reality. The form that art takes by its very nature, must distort and misrepresent the irrelevance and messiness of life, and **The Black Prince** calls attention to itself as a work of art in order to expose to the reader this paradox of art/false to reality. To illustrate this point the narrator, Bradley, when describing **Hamlet** considers it as

a meditation upon the bottomless trickery of consciousness and the redemptive role of words in the lives of those without identity, that is human beings. **Hamlet** is words and so is Hamlet. (BP 199)

And so is **The Black Prince**. Bradley Pearson calls the reader's attention that the text is made up of words, thus, acknowledging its own fictionality and in this process of showing the fictionality of the fictional world, it unmasks the illusion of novelistic realism. Bradley, in his novel, tries to convince the readers of the basic verisimilitude of his fiction. The forewords and postscripts also serve this

purpose, although in the "four postscripts by Dramatis Personae" the general title given to it acts as a device to beware the reader's suspicion.

Bradley Pearson is the author/narrator, but Murdoch as the real author lurks behind him, she is the one who master-minds the creation of the frames and manipulates the author/narrator figure. By being the link between the actual audience and the authorial audience she mingles the world of fiction with the real world, the world of the representation with the world being represented.

It is perhaps apropos to mention that in the postscripts Christian is then Christian Hartbourne, because she married the obscure and seldom referred to Hartbourne, friend and workmate of Bradley; while Julian is then Mrs. Belling, married to a character hardly mentioned at all. Therefore, the author chose among the fictional characters present in the novel to relate them to the two women because there were no other names available in that diegetic universe. This reinforces the fictional world where words create worlds, create characters; they are not necessarily counters to any extraliterary reality. Moreover, the narrator explains the reason for having such a few characters to relate with: "The unconscious mind delights in identifying people with each other. It has only a few characters to play with" (BP 195) and so has Bradley Pearson or may we say Iris Murdoch?

3.1 ALTERNATION OF FRAME AND FRAME-BREAK: THE METHOD OF METAFICTION

Albeit the narrator and the whole structure of the novel are directed to create an illusion of reality, there are breaks in the frames of the reality depicted right from the beginning. Some of these breaks, consist of the intrusions of the narrator addressing either his 'dear friend' or the reader, yet the results achieved by these two kinds of breaks are alien to each other. When Bradley addresses his dear friend, it is to P. Loxias he is referring (Loxias himself confirms that "I am also the dear friend who is referred to and at times addressed in the book" (BP 09)), and although Loxias is not "an actor in the drama which Pearson recounts" (BP 09), he is, nevertheless, a persona/narrator in the outer framed story, a character on the the Ideal Narrative Audience plane, a character to whom, it is suggested, the book is dedicated

It remains to record a dedication. There is of course one for whom this book was written whom I cannot name here. With a full heart, to witness duty, not to show my wit, I dedicate the work which you inspired and made possible to you, my dearest friend, my comrade and my teacher, with a gratitude which only you can measure. (BP 19)

On the other hand, when Bradley addresses the reader, he is actually addressing at the same time the four audiences on four different levels, for if he addresses the readers within his fictional world [the narrative and the

ideal narrative audience], he [implicitly] also addresses the readers in the non-fictional world [the authorial and the actual audience]. By using the device of addresssing the audience, the effect achieved in **The Black Prince** is manifold: first, Murdoch parodies all great authors that have done this before, like Henry Fielding, Somerset Maugham, Andre Gide, Daniel Defoe, Lawrence Sterne and Machado de Assis just to mention a few; second, at the same time she mingles both real and fictional worlds, the illusion of reality that is created "is not that of a self-contained world, a fictional microcosm intact and autonomous, but a world contiguous with the real world, the factual macrocosm";²⁰ and finally she presents a point of view external to the narrative by the intrusion of a second person (the reader) in a first person point of view narration which is in itself a frame for the story.²¹ Albeit the shift between the internal and external authorial positions is what creates the frame, the breaking of the frame will come to fruition the moment the narrator/author addresses the reader, thus, disrupting the illusion between the fictional and the real world.

The author links the two worlds and there are no clear bounds that separate real and fictional, the edges are blurred, and the first person narrators allow us an easy transition from one world to the other. USPENSKY states that these transitions, by violating the borders through the breaking of frames, are "motivated by an understandable desire to bring together, as closely as possible, the

represented world and the real world, in order to achieve the greatest degree of verisimilitude — of realism — in the representation".²²

In **The Black Prince** the phenomenon of framing may be observed not only in the work as a whole, but also in the microparts which the novel encloses. These parts have each their own internal composition and its own frame, for instance Bradley's foreword can itself be divided into minor instances where there are small frames and also disruptions of them, so are each different parts in **The Black Prince: a Celebration of Love**, and it is recurrent in the postscripts as well, each with its own narrator and narratorial frame. In this sense it is apropos to note that P. Loxias's foreword and postscript function as a frame for **The Black Prince**. Moreover, Loxias as a character only appears in the foreword, and then in the postscript and does not figure as a character in Bradley's story: "I am not however an actor in the drama which Pearson recounts" (BP 09). His point of view is replaced by Bradley's, who tells his story, then by the four postscripts by the characters, who give each their own version of the events in a first person point of view narration, and Loxias will only reappear at the closing moment, writing the editor's postscript:

There is after all little for me to say. I had thought, as editor, to have written a long essay, criticizing and drawing morals. I had looked forward with some pleasure to having the last word. (BP 412)

Hence we can observe the formation of frames within frames at the authorial level. The objective in presenting different points of view from different authors within the same story just warrants the reader's participation in the process of reading and decoding the story. The reader has to face multiple realities provided by an indeterminate text, which foregrounds the arbitrary and illusory nature of all interpretative constructs.

3.2 THE MULTIFARIOUS FACETS OF TRUTH: RELATIVE REALITIES

As we have previously seen, Iris Murdoch's use of frames and frame-breaks lays bare the relative reality status of truth and fiction. It presents the reader with different points of view in order to show that truth is relative and that all depends on who is telling the story, since all of us tend to recontextualize what we tell, and tend to add our own personal experiences and world view to what we tell. Murdoch emphatically presents her point when the reader comes to the end of Bradley's story, and has to face the postscripts added to it, where different author-characters try to explain their points of view of the events narrated.

After the end of Bradley's story there follows his postscript which takes the form of an epilogue, where Bradley tries to explain what happened to him after he was

arrested. He also tries to give his own account of the events and acknowledges that the book he has just written is not

the frame which she [Julian] came to fill, nor was she the frame which the book filled. She somehow was and is the book, the story of herself. (BP 389)

Bradley has told his story by adopting the role of the writer, he tries to make sense out of his experience and in doing so he is recontextualizing reality, which then becomes a different reality. The information with which he provides the reader is in itself a re-creation of the events, although he tries to convince the reader of the reality of his fictive world during the reading act. As Linda HUTCHEON wisely states, we "tell stories to escape, to remake, to alter our past and our future",²³ and this is what Bradley Pearson and the other character/authors present to the reader in **The Black Prince**.

However, if the reader is to conform himself to the information provided by Bradley, he will be shaken out of his complacency in the postscripts by the *dramatis personae* and the one by P. Loxias.

As seen previously, the postscripts have the function of breaking the frames and showing that the pretense of reality within the novel is broken. Similarly, they also contribute to demonstrate the existence of multiple realities as depending on point of view. They undermine any claim of veracity of Bradley's own narrative, and in

addition, all undermine each other, which shows the relativity of truth as depending exclusively on each person's point of view of the events narrated. The reader is prompted to ponder on the process of selecting all the information and try to separate truth from distortion of the truth within the limits of the constructed world of the text. Unlike literary realism, which tends to reinforce the idea of a commonsense world with general truths related to the world outside the text, some writers in the innovative fiction trend may recognize that reality exists beyond the text, but that it might only be reached through text.

Fiction, for Patricia WAUGH, would be "a means of explaining a reality which is distinct from it".²⁴ Likewise, Linda HUTCHEON says that we must always keep in mind that "fiction is not a way of viewing reality but a reality in its own right".²⁵ Therefore, the fact that Iris Murdoch presents each postscript with a distinct narratorial frame indicates that she does not want the reader to accept the fictitious world and the information given by its characters without questioning, but urges the reader to speculate under what circumstances we accept things as true, and in a similar manner to scrutinize the possible multiple realities of the same fact or about the same person, in short, she thematizes the relativity of truth.

For instance, the same would happen if we tried to organize a biography of a famous person by interviewing different people who had come into contact with him and then analysing all the facts that had occurred in that person's

life. In the end we undoubtedly would conclude that truth is relative and that reality as a reconstruction of events cannot be achieved as an ultimate and final answer.

There are present in *The Black Prince's* postscripts the multiple interpretations of the same event, and about the same person as seen through different perspectives and according each person's own interest. Hence, Christian claims that Bradley was in love with her and hates her because she has left him; Francis provides a Freudian analysis of Bradley's fictional work, thus confirming Bradley's prediction that he would Freudianise the entire story;²⁶ he also affirms, that Bradley was in love with him and adds "I would not, use his ill-concealed love for me as evidence of his perverted tendencies" (BP 401); Rachel maintains that Bradley was in love with her and that he is the murderer of her husband, regarding P. Loxias as "a notorious rapist and murderer"²⁷ (BP 407); Julian denies having written a letter that Bradley quotes and suggests that she is not "a very convincing character" (BP 408) in his novel, thus, considering Bradley's book a "literary failure" (BP 411) and giving herself the status of a good novelist and advertising her own work. Moreover, Julian states that she knows who Loxias is and asks "What does truth mean to him, I wonder?" (BP 411).

Finally, P. Loxias in his final verdict states that the postscripts are small-minded self-advertisements and that "the reader will recognize the voice of truth when he hears it" (BP 412). Likewise, he reassures his existence as

real being and denies that himself and Bradley are "the invention of a minor novelist" (BP 415), and endorses Rachel's version of his identity as a rapist, murderer and musical virtuoso: "known as a musician, I am in fact interested in all the arts" (BP 414).

In this reference the link with the myth Apollo/Marsyas, which was referred to by different critics²⁸ becomes greatly significant. The myth of Apollo and Marsyas is a tale about a competition between a virtuoso god musician and a mortal man who tries, in the competition, to outwin the god with the flaying to death of Marsyas by the infuriated Apollo as the final result. According to Peter CONRADI, Murdoch uses the myth ironically, so as to warn us against any reading of the novel as simple poetic justice and that Bradley/Marsyas "can be seen as a minor artist whom the god rewards and comforts for his patient zeal and longing".²⁹ Moreover, CONRADI suggests, the name P. Loxias would be a soubriquet for Apollo. This parallel with the myth also echoes in the main plot relating Bradley to Arnold since the former is a writer (artist) condemned for murdering by a peculiarly horrible method, the latter, a successful fellow-writer.

The parallel between Apollo/Marsyas and Loxias/Bradley or Bradley/Arnold, as characters on the mythic level, is in itself another of the micro-frames employed by Iris Murdoch, which results as part of a main puzzle, when the reader tries to answer simple questions raised by a text full of irony, parody and double entendres.

When Murdoch allows her characters to play with the reader, and to undermine any possible 'right' answer to the questions raised in the novel, leaving the end completely open to any conjectures, she is actually saying that we can never be absolutely sure about anything, thus, exploring the problematic relationship between reality and fiction. What is really real? What is fictional? The story is presented as if it were an autobiography and the reader may believe in it up to the moment when he reaches the postscripts entitled 'Four Postscripts by Dramatis Personae', which then cast doubt upon the reader about the authenticity of the story he has just read, and upon the reliability that may be credited on Bradley Pearson. The use of several frames embodies, more than anything else in this novel, the question of reality as a set of interchangeable frames, since the real is also subject to manipulation and hence not really any truer than fiction. Furthermore, Murdoch tends to create an awareness that "literary fiction simply demonstrates the existence of multiple realities".³⁰

NOTES

¹ When discussing the relationship of Bradley to his work of art, Loxias affirms that "the creator of form must suffer formlessness. Even risk dying of it" (BP 414).

² GOFFMAN, E. **Frame Analysis** : An Essay on the Organization of Experience. Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1974. p. 10.

³ CAMATI, A.S. **The Seriocomic Theatre of Tom Stoppard** : Parodic Theatricality in Travesties. Doctorship Thesis - University of São Paulo, 1987. p. 83.

⁴ CAWS, M.A. **Reading Frames in Modern Fiction**. Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1985. p. 4.

⁵ USPENSKY, B. **A Poetics of Composition**. Berkeley : University of California Press, 1973.

⁶ I am much indebted to Boris USPENSKY for this idea and concrete example. See USPENSKY, p. 158.

⁷ CAWS, p. 17.

⁸ USPENSKY, p. 137.

⁹ Bradley says: "I have already by implication described this 'reportage' as a work of art. I do not of course by this mean a work of fantasy" (BP 11).

¹⁰ HUTCHEON, L. **Narcissistic Narrative : The Metafictional Paradox**. London : Methuen, 1984. p. 38.

¹¹ HUTCHEON, p. 39.

¹² HUTCHEON, p. 39.

¹³ According to Patricia WAUGH, when this occurs the novel is considered to be at the furthest metafictional extreme (WAUGH, P. **Metafiction : The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction**. London : Methuen, 1984. p. 119.)

¹⁴ Quoting Susan STEWART, Anna CAMATI refers to the Chinese box phenomenon: "a box that contains within it another box, and within that box lies another box, and so on. Thus, the possibility of infinity is suggested, while the reality of each box is contested. Plays within plays, stories within stories, any discourse within another discourse, thus, may be seen as an exploration of the nature of textuality and a reminder of the text's linguistic condition. In: CAMATI, p. 84.

¹⁵ BARTH, J. The Literature of Exhaustion. **The Atlantic Monthly**, v. 220, n. 2, p. 29-34, 1967.

¹⁶ CHRISTENSEN, I. **The Meaning of Metafiction**. Bergen : Universitet Sporlaget, 1981. p. 13.

¹⁷ RABINOWITZ, P.J. Truth in Fiction : A Reexamination of Audiences. **Critical Inquiry**, v. 4, p. 121-141, 1977. p. 124.

¹⁸ RABINOWITZ, p. 134.

¹⁹ DIPPLE, E. **The Unresolvable Plot**. London : Routledge, 1988. p. 191.

²⁰ BOOTH, W.C. **The Rhetoric of Fiction**. Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 1961. p. 214.

²¹ USPENSKY, p. 14.

²² USPENSKY, p. 139.

²³ HUTCHEON, p. 89.

²⁴ WAUGH, p. 89.

²⁵ HUTCHEON, p. 90.

²⁶ See in this respect Bradley's Foreword (In BP 11-19).

²⁷ Rachel's words implicitly suggest that Bradley and Loxias may be the same person, thus, corroborating with Julian's words that suggest this link as well. See also this dissertation chapter four.

²⁸ See in this respect: DIPPLE, E. **Iris Murdoch** : Work for the Spirit. London : Methuen, 1982; and CONRADI, P. **Iris Murdoch** : The Saint and the Artist. London : MacMillan, 1986.

²⁹ CONRADI, p. 190.

³⁰ WAUGH, p. 89.

4 SOME CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF A READER

We are tissues and tissues of different personae and yet we are nothing at all. What redeems us is that speech is ultimately divine. Iris Murdoch, **The Black Prince**.

Characters in art can have unassailable dignity, whereas characters in life have none. Iris Murdoch, **The Black Prince**.

Usually, in most of the traditional novels, what appears to be expected from the reader is that he accepts the text he is reading, and that he conforms himself to the situation presented to him as a counterpart of the 'real' world; writers refer the reader to the content of everyday reality. In philosophical terms, for most people the world of everyday experience is the only 'real' world and literary realism, argues Patricia WAUGH, "appears to be a continuation or extension of this commonsense world".¹

Characters in the literary world tend to be created as truthful as possible to mirror the 'real' beings in the world outside the text. The reader and the characters in those novels seem to belong to the same world which reinforces the illusion of reality. It implies that the reader, because of a suspension of disbelief, is willing to

accept the conventions created by the author that the words are telling the story of real human beings.

Conversely, much of the innovative fiction, or meta-fiction, has acknowledged that fiction is made of words and that

all literary fiction has to construct a context at the same time that it constructs a text, through entirely verbal processes. Descriptions of objects in fiction are simultaneously creations of that object.²

In this manner, there are novels where the author asks the reader not to forget the fictive nature of the *dramatis personae* by creating situations which may be more demanding intellectually and confusing emotionally, but which ultimately are truer to the conception of the novel as creating a special world made of words than the conventional absorption in illusion. Novels in the past had already done it before, but not frequently, whereas the contemporary novel presents it more and more often.

In previous chapters, the way Iris Murdoch presents the dichotomy between reality and fiction has already been demonstrated: her use of frames that separate reality from fiction; the self-conscious knowledge of the existence of multiple and relative realities, the recontextualization of events and so forth. Correspondingly it is apropos to observe how her portrayal of characters may reinforce the exploration of the relationship between 'fiction' and 'real-

ity', which tends to be one of the main concerns in innovative writing.

Hence, it is of utmost importance to understand, at the level of character creation, how Iris Murdoch uses the innovative, or rehandles the traditional devices of meta-fiction. For she has to face the paradoxal question of the identity of the *dramatis personae*:

a fictional character both exists and does not exist; he or she is a non-entity who is a somebody.³

Accordingly, at the level of character, Murdoch, using Bradley's voice, recognizes that fictional characters are beings made of words, and in doing so she recognizes that words are what create characters and create worlds.⁴

The study of the main character/author/narrator in **The Black Prince** and his relationship to his alter ego, the author/narrator P. Loxias, may shed light into the problematizing of creating fictional characters.

Moreover, it is important to notice how often, by insisting that Bradley is real and at the same time acknowledging that he is a fictional character, Iris Murdoch is sustaining the dialectic which exists between reality and illusion not only in the novel's structure, as seen in the use of frames, but also in the portrayal of characters. What Murdoch seems to imply is that reality, although it exists beyond the text, would only be reached through the text.

What seems to pervade this novel is the dichotomy between the artist and the saint, artifice and art, Marsyas

and Apollo; embodied in the figures of Bradley and Loxias and to some extent Arnold Baffin.⁵ These dichotomies relate to the reality/appearance dichotomy in the theory of literary texts: the simultaneous separation and coalescence of reality and illusion and a heightened awareness of the fact that the two dimensions, the real and the fictive, exist in both the world of the novel and the world of the reader. Bradley as a metafictional character, then,

goes beyond the traditional role of the character, maintaining its pretense of reality yet vigorously asserting its own fictive existence, and in its duality serving as a metaphor for the compelling concerns of the modern artist.⁶

On the other hand, due to the fact that the world of fiction exists as words in a book, which are real, and at the same time exists in consciousness as worlds, fiction is always incomplete and in search of a reader to complete it. This is specially true for fictional characters since "as part of an imaginary world they are always ontologically indeterminate, always uncertainly awaiting completion".⁷

4.1 BRADLEY PEARSON AS A METAFICTIONAL CHARACTER

There are present in *The Black Prince* the entanglements of fact and fiction, reality and fantasy, artifice and art. Bradley Pearson is the narrator who narrates his own story, but serious problems exist in verifying

the facts of his narrative, due to his solipsistic character and to the closed, circular nature of the story he tells. In this sense, we may consider not only Bradley's story, which achieves its circularity by Bradley's suggestion (BP 21) to begin the story with Arnold telephoning him and telling him that he might have killed his wife, and the novel ending up with the events set on motion by Rachel's phone call, telling Bradley that she has killed her husband, but also the outer framed story with the contents' page of the book followed by P. Loxia's and Bradley's forewords and then the postscripts by some of the *dramatis personae* in the story, which respectively begin and end the novel.

Moreover, these problems suggest a view of Pearson as an artist who fails in his attempt to write a great work of art, until he comes through his ordeal and can mingle love and art, yet there are serious contradictions if at the end we accept that he has achieved writing his great masterpiece. For **The Black Prince: A Celebration of Love** must not be confused with **The Black Prince**. In the former there is exclusively the tale told by Bradley, and concerning his style the novel may be judged as having literary flaws which a real piece of great art would not present.

Just to mention a few that are pretty obvious — take for instance, when Bradley is talking to Priscilla about Roger: she mentions that she "would like to stick — a red-hot knitting needle — into his liver" (BP 224). Later on Bradley mentions that his jealousy

felt like a red-hot knitting needle thrust into the liver. (Where had I picked up that appalling simile?) (BP 247)

Similarly, there is a copy of Arnold's letter to Bradley and it runs thus,

I have lately got myself into the most terrible mess and I feel that I must lay the whole matter before you. (BP 253)

and just three pages further, there is Bradley thinking about writing a letter to Julian that starts with the same sentence transcribed above. Therefore, copying sentences from a letter he has received, suggests Bradley's lack of inventiveness and shows that he is unashamedly stealing other people's ideas. Moreover, there is an excessive number of phone calls and door bells ringing: all the events are set in motion either after a phone call or after the door bell rings. The characters come into Bradley's life and he is always the passive one, not the agent of the action; he passively awaits and accepts his role.

While in **The Black Prince: a Celebration of Love**, Bradley is at the same time narrator and character, in **The Black Prince** he is narrator/author sharing part of the authorship with Loxias and other four characters who posit in themselves the relativity of truth and contradict several of Bradley's accounts as narrator/character.

Similarly, Bradley is utterly at the centre of his own narrative, and at the centre of the editor's foreword and postscript, and of the postscripts from four of the

dramatis personae, yet the Bradley who fails as an artist and in his attempt to have a lasting love story must not be confused with the Bradley who narrates the novel. There are two selves: the past and the present ones. As the narrator himself puts it before starting the tale:

I shall, that is inhabit my past self and, for the ordinary purposes of story-telling, speak only with the apprehensions of that time, a time in many ways so different from the present. (BP 11)

As a narrator, Bradley is seemingly only superficially believable. His words cannot be trusted, for instance, he lies about his age to Julian, he is capable of reproducing the exact words of a letter Arnold has sent him, although he had already destroyed it when he comes to write his book. As long as the novel is seen as an autobiography, as Bradley recounting his life as it happened, Bradley's reality as protagonist and the truthfulness of all his statements as narrator remain forever unverifiable and problematic. However, Bradley, the narrator of the events of Bradley the character's life, is an artist engaged in the creation of a work of art centered in his own being, but existing outside the realm of fact by its nature as art.

Therefore, it is of paramount importance not to forget that the Bradley who performs the actions of the novel, along with the other *dramatis personae* must be read as fictions created by a second Bradley, that is the narrator and author, and perhaps he is altogether a

fictitious being created by P. Loxias, himself a fictitious being in Murdoch's portraits of characters. Hence, the structure of the Chinese box⁸ is again suggested, here on the level of interconnection among narrators and authors, either fictional or non-fictional ones.

According to Elizabeth Dipple,⁹ we are left in a state of confusion with the authorial voice having a double persona — that of the past as opposed to the wiser one of the present, and these two voices are never neatly separated because one interferes with the other:

The secondary voice frequently breaks the form, as does Apollo-Loxias himself in his forewords and postscripts, because formlessness delivers truth even while it here coexists at first so confusing and finally so fruitfully with form.¹⁰

The primary voice tries to tell the story as it happened at the time of the action, however, the secondary voice interrupts the narrative by the constant breaks addressing his dear friend or the reader:

At this point it is necessary for me to give some account of my sister Priscilla, who is about to appear upon the scene. (BP 68)

Perhaps at this point in my story, my dear friend, I may be allowed to pause and speak to you directly. Of course the whole of what I write here, and perhaps somehow unconsciously my whole oeuvre, has been a communication addressed to you. (BP 79)

So now in writing for you, and now in offering that writing to you, my penetrating critic, I feel a calmness (...)

The luxury of addressing you directly is the fulfilment of a desire which is itself one of the subjects of the book (...) My book is about art. (BP 80)

Bradley has created his life's story as art, acting as character and then writer in his self created existence, but if, as there is also a suggestion¹¹ he has also created P. Loxias, the editor and his dear friend, then he has distanced himself as yet another character lurking behind his construct as 'author', and so imitating Murdoch herself, who is correspondingly even more distant from her creation specially being the narrator a male one. On the other hand, there is the possibility that all the characters in **The Black Prince** are actually created by Loxias, since there are the four postscripts by *dramatis personae* which remind us that they were written by characters and not 'human beings' and there is Loxias affirming in his final comments:

As for my own identity: I can scarcely,
'Dr' Marloe, be an invention of Bradley's
since I have survived him. (BP 415)

Thus, there is the paradoxal suggestion that Loxias could have invented everything. If we consider Loxias the author and Bradley a mere persona, we would then have three authors framed: Murdoch writing a book and all the characters are inside her mind; this is the factual statement, and we real readers, purchasers of the book, know that it is 'true', however, this truth must itself be thought of more carefully.¹² Then we have P. Loxias as an editor or author writing a story that comes from his mind

and creating an author and characters whom he pretends really existed, and finally we have Bradley Pearson, who is the narrator and author of the inner story, who in turn, affirms that the characters really existed and are real beings transformed by him into characters in his novel:

... that I have, in my own sequestered happiness, somehow forgotten the real being of those who have figured as my characters. (BP 392)

This paradox remains in the postscripts written by *dramatis personae*, which undoubtedly affirm the fictitious status of those who have written them. By the fact that Loxias has written the foreword and added the postscripts, the book really begins and finishes with him. It is apropos to remember that it is he who publishes the book and Bradley has never seen it published, neither has he read the postscripts.¹³ Thus, there is a suggestion that Loxias is the sole author, and this suggestion is axiomatic through Julian's words in the post-script:

As for Mr Loxias, about whom there has been speculation: I think I know who he is. He will understand when I say that I have mixed feelings about him. (BP 411)

Julian's words suggest two things: either Loxias is Bradley and this would explain why she has "mixed feelings about him" (BP 411), or he is the author with whom logically the character will have a relationship. Altogether, what really matters is that the contradictions that the novel presents demand a major effort of mind from the reader in trying to resolve them, and most remain forever unverifiable.

NOTES

¹ WAUGH, P. **Metafiction** : The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction. London : Methuen, 1984. p. 87.

² WAUGH, p. 88.

³ WAUGH, p. 91.

⁴ It is important to note that P. WAUGH in her study on metafiction discusses the reality of the fictional world. For her "this world is as 'real' as the everyday world" and that the literary texts reveal a duality that "all fiction exists as words on the page which are materially real, and also exists in consciousness as worlds created through these words" (WAUGH, p. 104).

⁵ The three characters will also interrelate in the name games played by Murdoch, which will be discussed in chapter 5 in this dissertation.

⁶ SCHLUETER, J. **Metafictional Characters in Drama**. New York : Columbia University Press, 1979. p. 14.

⁷ WAUGH, p. 105.

⁸ As Patricia WAUGH puts it "the conception of frame includes Chinese-box structures which contest the reality of each individual "box" through a nesting of narrators" (WAUGH, p. 30). See also on this respect chapter 3 of this dissertation.

⁹ See DIPPLE, E. **Iris Murdoch** : Work for the Spirit. London : Methuen, 1982.

¹⁰ DIPPLE, p. 115.

¹¹ As Marloe refers to Bradley, "Bradley invents Mr Loxias so as to present himself to the world with a flourish of alleged objectivity. He says of P. Loxias 'I could have invented him'. In fact he did!" (BP 401) or as Bradley puts it "I should have had to invent you [Loxias], and by the power which you yourself bestow I should have been able to" (BP 391).

¹² Until one has established the nature of truth, the ultimate answer will be a question mark.

¹³ "... since the foregoing documents were collected my dear friend Bradley Pearson has died. He died in prison ..." (BP 412).

5 PLAYING GAMES WITH THE READER

True art can only spring from the intimate linking of the serious and the playful. Johann Wolfgang Goethe.
Art is to do with joy and play and the absurd. Iris Murdoch, *The Black Prince*.

Since in the world of the written text there are two prominent figures, the author and the reader, it follows that in their intimate relationship the former is bound to draw the latter into a "closer essentially enquiring, or speculative relationship with a text".¹

It is through literary games² that the text can be seen in terms of a competition between two parties. According to Peter HUTCHINSON,

There is a conflict between the parties in that one of them wishes to know the outcome of a situation and the other is determined that he shall not know until the other, considers it appropriate.³

Correspondingly, the author knows the game and he warrants the reader's attention to all clues interspersed within the work of fiction, yet being aware that not everything which "seems to be a clue will finally prove to have been one".⁴

In this sense many of the techniques employed by much postmodernist fiction can be seen as part of this game

played between author and reader. Moreover, it could be argued that literary fiction is in itself a form of play;⁵ a game of pretending and making believe. However, the difference in postmodernist fiction is that as a metafictional technique, playing games with the reader has become a form of carrying the explicit message that the very text is make believe.

The importance of play in life and in literature has been the object of study of a number of critics,⁶ among them Patricia WAUGH who suggests that

play is a relatively autonomous activity but has a definite value in the real world. Play is facilitated by rules and roles, and metafiction operates by exploring fictional rules to discover the role of fictions in life. It aims to discover how we each play our own realities.⁷

In *The Black Prince* the elements of play are present *ad ovo usque ad mala*. Iris Murdoch, herself, in an interview, has acknowledged the fact that play is part of a fictional work and she mentions that:

an author may leave certain things puzzling deliberately. These things are play, just play.⁸

Therefore, it should not be surprising that several sorts of literary games pervade the whole novel, beginning with the narrator's unreliability which serves to disorient the reader; then the nesting of narrators⁹ in the postscripts generating a conflict of different information which the reader must try to select and make sense of; the

fact that the book is presented as an autobiography and the reader knows it is fiction; that it is also a thriller¹⁰ that brings no final answer as to who the murderer is, and finally, by denying information to the reader the narrator plays with his expectations.

Peter HUTCHINSON asserts that games with the reader may take three distinct forms. The first one he calls the enigma, or open question, puzzle or mystery. It is when the author may conceal information in the text or even suppress it. The second form would occur when a writer employs a parallel, or series of parallels. Here he includes the *roman à clef* and all forms of allusions. Finally, the third form of game would be played through the use of certain narrative devices.¹¹

In order to analyze the games employed by Murdoch in *The Black Prince*, we shall adopt HUTCHINSON's suggestion, although the analysis will not proceed in the order he proposes. We will discuss the form of game which he calls enigma, then we shall move to the third one, different narrative devices, and finally, the second one, that deals with parallels/allusions will be dealt with specifically.

5.1 THE ENIGMA

The enigma form of game is present in *The Black Prince's* whole structure, as a novel which from the very beginning casts doubts on the reader. The fact that it

presents the table of contents and a foreword by the editor and by the author warrants the reader's attention to what he should expect from the story. It arouses the reader's expectations towards what will happen next. When Bradley starts his tale, it does not shed any more light but arouses more questions marks. For instance he suggests that the outcome will not be a happy one "there is much shedding of tears in this story" (BP 21). Moreover, at the end the reader knows that there was a murder and he is forced to speculate as to who the culprit is. The reader may try to read the book again, searching for clues he might have skipped to finally come to the conclusion that a final and definite answer does not exist in this novel.

Murdoch constructs a remarkable intellectual thriller, reversing the traditional outcome of the thriller stories, for here the reader is defeated and finds no solution for the enigma that is being posed. A form of puzzle that Murdoch presents is when she plays with the names of the characters. Although it is not a very open form of game in **The Black Prince**, nevertheless it helps to understand relationships and offer clues which the reader must interpret. The game lies principally in the process of reader conjecture and speculation on links that the names may provide concerning the plot development and other works of fiction or even characters outside the fictional world.

One enigma concerning names relates to the three male characters which interrelate: Arnold Baffin, Bradley Pearson and P. Loxias. Correspondingly their initials are

A.B., B.P., P.L.: the second initial in Arnold's name and the first in Loxias' provide the two initials in Bradley's name: B.P. Bradley, the main character and narrator would embody in his name half of the initials from Arnold and Loxias. Likewise, Baffin and Loxias would stand for half of Bradley each. The initials linked together could be reduced to only A.B.P.L. which would then bring the three characters together. In this sense, the references in the story are clear: Arnold Baffin is said to be Bradley's alter ego; it is suggested that Bradley envied Arnold's success, he was prolific and mediocre at writing, had fame and fortune. However, his ideas on art and writing differed *in toto* from Bradley's, who makes conjectures about the meaning and value of art throughout the whole novel:

Vague romantic myth isn't art either. Art is imagination. Imagination changes, fuses. Without imagination you have stupid details on one side and empty dreams on the other. (BP 50)

Arnold, on the other hand, is not troubled by such questions, he says that:

I write whether I feel like it or not. I complete things whether I think they're perfect or not. Anything else is hypocrisy. I have no muse. That's what being a professional writer is. (BP 50)

It has been suggested that by the link Murdoch establishes between these two characters, that are writers themselves, she is actually portraying the two sides of her own fictional dilemma.¹²

As for the second link which the initials bring together, it can be scarcely denied that the final solution is out of reach for the reader. Bradley acknowledges P. Loxias as his alter ego as well as his fool, and there are manifold suggestions in the story as to Loxias' identity.¹³ To Francis Marloe, Loxias is an invention of Bradley's mind "so as to present himself to the world with a flourish of alleged objectivity" (BP 401). Rachel's words establish the parallel with Loxias and Apollo, murderer of a fellow musician.¹⁴ All the narrators cast doubt as to who Loxias really is; as for the reader the only truth he knows is that Bradley and Loxias interrelate in the story as well as in their initials, and that Iris Murdoch has set the clues and lurks behind them as the author/god who knows the game and smiles at the reader's struggle in trying to decipher the enigma.

Another relationship between initials which is pretty obvious remains to be mentioned: those of Bradley Pearson's and of the title of the novel **The Black Prince**. The suggestion seems to be clear that the black prince is Bradley, but serious problems exist when the reader tries to establish the link with **Hamlet** and all the possible parallels.¹⁵

We would not say that all the names in **The Black Prince** bear some significance, but the majority certainly are meta-significant. Take for instance Bradley's ex-wife: as the story unfolds we are told that she is Jewish, but surprisingly her name is Christian; Julian has her name

connected to that of Julian of Norwich¹⁶ whom Murdoch admires; Francis Marloe could be related to Marlowe, an Elizabethan fellow-playwright just like Shakespeare, and finally Bradley Pearson could suggest a link with the famous Shakespearean critic A.C. Bradley.¹⁷ It does not concern us to find an answer to what all these names really stand for, but merely to recognize that each of these names arises a strong suspicion that the author is offering the reader a particular bait, and that the latter has to scrutinize each example carefully to detect relevance where it is not immediately apparent. The problem with the game concerning names, is that the reader can never be sure how the name in question could be interpreted: whether he must interpret the printed word or whether he is being prompted to seek references elsewhere. The result, ironically, may be that the objective of the game is really to force him to search for meaning where none actually exists.

5.2 NARRATIVE ROLES

According to Peter HUTCHINSON, the third kind of literary games that the author may employ comes from the form a writer adopts to present his story. When he chooses certain types of narrative roles, they are responsible for the creation of various types of game. He considers three main different narrative roles that can be used "in order to involve, to intrigue or to confuse the reader".¹⁸ These are as follows:

the use of a narrator who is either obviously — or not quite so obviously — 'unreliable'; second, a narrator who is self-conscious, one who deliberately flouts the conventions of discursive narrative in a whimsical manner; and third, an author can use different forms of narrative within a single work.¹⁹

In *The Black Prince* we can find the mingling of the first two forms mentioned above. However, to analyze the way in which Murdoch uses the different forms of narrative roles it is apropos to separate them into two parts.

First, there is a narrator, Bradley Pearson whose information and judgements about his life story we cannot accept unconditionally. We are made suspicious because of his flawed narrative style, since he is capable of reproducing the words *ipsis litteris* of letters he has written and received, although he had torn them up long before the novel was written. Moreover, the postscripts undermine any of his claims to veracity, for each of their authors present a different view of the events retold in Bradley's story; they all somehow suggest that Bradley is not telling the truth:

Bradley has a way of seeing everything in his own way and making it all fit together in his own picture... Because he is quite witty sometimes in the book and makes things funny (sometimes he makes things funny which are not really) a reader might think that he was an amusing person to be with, but this is not so, even when he was young. (Christian, BP 393)

He did not believe in himself and so could hardly expect the judge and jury to lend him credence. (...) why indeed is

the whole story oddly unconvincing as if it were somehow hollow? Why do we feel that something is missing from it? (Francis, BP 399)

His general picture of himself really could not have been more false. (...) He pretends he wrote things and tore them up, and he goes on and on about how he waited and waited and was a perfectionist. I am sure he never tore anything up in his life. (...) I bear him no malice and, in so far as he must be regarded as seriously unbalanced if not actually mad... (Rachel, BP 404-406)

A letter for instance is quoted. Did I write this letter? (Did he keep it?) It seems inconceivable. And the things that I said. (Supposedly). Surely they are the invention of another mind. (Julian, BP 408)

So when the reader comes to the end of Bradley's story he has to refilter all the information received throughout the novel, he must select and try to understand the distorted vision of the characters and the situation Bradley presented. However, when the reader is prepared for a recontextualization of the events, he comes to P. Loxias' postscript which now casts doubts and alerts the reader to the questionable nature of what the other authors have told him in the same postscripts:

How little the postscript-writers have been able to avail themselves of this decency. (...) Equally to be expected are the lies. Mrs Baffin lies to protect herself, Mrs Belling to protect Mrs Baffin (...) Dr Marloe, who told the truth at the trial, pusilanimously fails to repeat it now. Each lady, asserts (or implies) that Bradley was in love with her. (Loxias, BP 412)

The game may then become a challenge not only to discover the true nature of the narrator, or what he is trying to conceal and the motives for this, but also to discover the nature of all the narrators and what their side of the events narrated may add to the main story. To employ a narrator who fails to prove a reliable story-teller and to undermine his claims of veracity with different versions of the same event, leaves the reader at a considerable disadvantage. He is forced to discriminate between the various items of the information and judgement that all the narrators supply him with, and at the end he has to accept the impossibility for rendering truth or to reach a final and ultimate answer. Murdoch, by playing this game, employs a degree of innovation common to most postmodernist meta-fictional writers.

Second, more specifically in **The Black Prince: a Celebration of Love**, we can find Bradley, the self-conscious narrator, in an opposite extreme from Bradley, the unreliable narrator in **The Black Prince**, seen previously.²⁰ In the inner story, Bradley Pearson seems prepared to confide almost everything to the reader. He exposes himself and shares with the reader information on the form he will write the novel, on characters, and he even jokes with the reader about the relationship of real life and art:

What it was that had happened the per-
 cipient reader will not need to be
 told. (Doubtless he saw it coming a mile
 off. I did not. This is art, but I was
 out there in life.) (BP 205)

One of the many respects, dear friend, in which life is unlike art is this: characters in art can have unassailable dignity, whereas characters in life have none. (BP 124)

I am writing these words and others whom I do not know will read them. With and by this paradox I have lived, dear friend, in our sequestered peace. (BP 391)

This book has been in some way the story of my life. (...) And I would not wish it to seem at the end that I have somehow forgotten the real being of those who have figured as my characters. (...) [Julian] I do not, my darling girl, (...) really imagine that I invented you. (BP 392)

Bradley Pearson, as a self conscious narrator, plays what may seem a self-indulgent game: he seems to be amusing himself in the first instance, although the reader obviously is satisfied in recognizing the narrator's self amusement, his mockery of reality, his parody of the autobiographic novel, of the traditions of novel-writing. The author/narrator is concerned with the innovative possibilities of novel-writing, but above all his concern is directed upon the eternal relationship of the world of the text with the real world outside it.

Actually, Iris Murdoch employs the self-conscious narrator, and at the same time she presents his unreliability and that of the other narrators at the end of the story. She plays a game and forces the reader to play the role of a detective who is supposed to check clues, to detect allusions however spurious sometimes, in this way going through the many different levels and forms of

consciousness which may be articulated. In this sense, the reader in both games seems basically invited to collect each piece of information which will help him form a patchwork at the end, or, in other words, he has to select the information in order to solve the enigma which these kind of games posit.²¹

5.3 ALLUSION AS A FORM OF GAME: PARODY AND QUOTATION

When an author employs allusions he is in fact linking two worlds and asking the reader to compare them. Depending on how obvious the allusion, or parallel, is present in the work, the reader is tempted towards seeking those parallels either at the level of character creation, plot structure or even at the level of thematology and symbolism. 'Allusion' is considered a playful strategy by Peter HUTCHINSON. For instance, he sees quotation, parody, myth, pictures and names as examples of allusions. He states that "in most cases the author is establishing a form of parallel, and he may in addition do so in an enigmatic way".²²

The study of allusions in this section will only consider parody and quotation,²³ for they are the two most relevant aspects of playing games in the form of establishing parallels in *The Black Prince*.

Parody as a form of allusion includes features of both the parallel and the self consciousness for it es-

establishes a parallel and at the same time exploits it in a self-conscious manner. It is seen as a subtle game, for it constantly challenges the reader's perception and even knowledge of the works or authors or styles being parodied.

It is apropos, before analysing how parody acts in **The Black Prince**, to present some different views on parody.

Patricia WAUGH sees parody as a strategy which operates as a frame-break and as seen previously, the alternation between frame and frame-breaks "provides the essential deconstructive method of metafiction".²⁴

Parody, then, is seen not only as a form of game but as a form of metafiction. In the light of this assumption, it is relevant to study the way parody is present in **The Black Prince**, since it is related with the framing effect present in metafictional works. Conversely, it is apropos to remember that Linda HUTCHEON sees irony as the rhetorical strategy used by parody and that it is irony which allows the reader to interpret and evaluate the text.²⁵ She agrees with the theory that holds that the parodist imitates a text in order to write in the style of that text, being motivated by sympathy with the text. In this respect Iris Murdoch is more than motivated, since she has repeatedly acknowledged her admiration for Shakespeare's works in many of her public interviews

Shakespeare is the king of this whole business, I mean he is the king of the novel, he is the greatest writer that ever wrote.²⁶

Moreover, for Linda HUTCHEON, when an author uses parody it is to "remind us that he did not intend to copy, but to recontextualize, to synthesize, to rework conventions — in a respectful manner".²⁷ Thus, by using parody the writer rearranges the original text, rewriting it, but also offering the new text in itself as one out of many possible versions. Again the reader is called to play a constitutive role in construing incongruities²⁸ which the text presents, embodied in the use of parody/irony. Similarly, Margaret ROSE mentions that

the reception of the parody by the reader will depend on his reading of the signals in the text for the parodistic relationship between the parodist's imitation of the original text.²⁹

Therefore, the condition *sine qua non* for the reader to understand the parody, and take an active part in the game is that he must have had access to the work which is parodied, thus, being in a position to compare the original work to its new form in the parody.

The reference to the Shakespearean tragedy **Hamlet** seems to be obvious even in the title of **The Black Prince**, but although there are direct quotations and direct mentioned relationship to that play, serious problems exist in verifying the intertextual references and to what extent Murdoch is parodying Shakespeare or any other author.

In an interview with Michael O. Bellamy, Murdoch herself recognizes that

The Black Prince isn't **Hamlet**, of course, but that's by the way. I'm not a Shakespeare critic, but I do feel the presence of Shakespeare in that play as a kind of trembling emotional excitement, something that makes it, in fact, a rather dicey play. It could have all gone wrong in some way, but it hasn't.³⁰

Murdoch's ironic rehandling of **Hamlet** in **The Black Prince** can be seen as signaling distance and difference between the audience and times to which the former was addressed in opposition to the latter.

Parody as a game is signalled to the reader from the title of the novel, and this may arouse the reader's expectation of a parallel which will excite speculation on which aspects of the model will be drawn into the new work, and what new form they will take. Moreover, the reader will tend to compare the characters with reference to the main text, recognizing their actions and trying to follow the parallel.

In **The Black Prince**, Iris Murdoch presents the structure of **Hamlet** that concerns the subplots. In **Hamlet**, Hamlet's father was killed and Claudius married his mother. Laertes had his father killed, his sister dies and he seeks for revenge. There is also a play within a play which directly relates to the main plot, as in **The Black Prince** there is the parallel to the opera **Der Rosenkavalier**. It relates and somehow foreshadows Bradley's love affair with Julian. Just like the Marschallin in **Der Rosenkavalier**, he is much older than his love object and is left alone in the end.

In this sense **The Black Prince** can be seen as a *roman à clef*, for its key to interpretation must be sought in Shakespeare. However, the reader will have difficulty in recognizing affinities. Just as in **Hamlet**, Murdoch uses the subplots and there are the love triangles: Arnold Baffin, Rachel and Bradley; Bradley, Julian and Rachel; Arnold, Rachel and Christian; Roger, Priscilla and Marigold and in the play within the novel, **Der Rosenkavalier**: the Marschallin, Octavian and the young girl. All relationships could than be reduced to that of the lovers and the victim. In **Hamlet**, they also could be reduced to the lovers and the victim: Claudius, Gertrude and Hamlet; Hamlet's father, Gertrude and Claudius; Ophelia, Polonius and Hamlet. Still, it seems that Murdoch is deliberately avoiding any direct parallel and forcing the reader to speculate.

Hamlet is referred to strongly and directly, when Murdoch employs quotations from Shakespeare's tragedy which come to serve a parodistic as well as a structural function. The use of quotation challenges the reader to recognize it and also to try to establish a relationship to its new context. In **The Black Prince** the quotations are directly from **Hamlet**, and the reader must try to relate the Shakespearean world to the one of Murdoch. They are interspersed within the novel, but are outstandingly present when Bradley gives tutorials to Julian:

— Words are Hamlet's being as they were Shakespeare's.

— Words, words, words. [**Hamlet**, 11,2]³¹

- What work of literature has more quotable lines?

- Oh what a noble mind is here o' er-thrown. [**Hamlet**, iii,1]

- How all occasions do inform against me. [and spur my dull revenge! **Hamlet**, iv, 4]

- Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice. [and could of men distinguish. **Hamlet**, iii,2]

- Oh what a rogue and peasant slave am I. [**Hamlet**, ii,2]

- Absent thee from felicity awhile. [**Hamlet**, v,2]

- Something too much of this [**Hamlet**, ii,2]. As I was saying. The thing is a monument of words, it is Shakespeare's most rhetorical play, it is his longest play, it is the most inventive and invioluted literary exercise. See how casually, with what a lucid easy grace he lays down the origins of modern English prose -

- What a piece of work is a man - [how noble in reason! How infinite in faculty. **Hamlet**, ii,2] (BP 199)

Albeit the substance of the quotations are likely to fit the passage transcribed above, its original sense will probably not.

Hamlet bears some resemblance to **The Black Prince** as already seen, but the quotations directly taken from **Hamlet** seem to be employed in an ironic way for they link the play to the novel, and in a sense, link Hamlet to Bradley for he was also a thinker who was in love with Ophelia/Julian, and was not a man of action. Just like Hamlet, he had to be forced to move which only occurs in the novel when the telephone or the door bell ring. If the reader links Bradley to Hamlet, then Baffin could be Polonius, killed by

Bradley/Hamlet. However, the clues that could lead the reader to this conclusion cannot be confirmed as safe ones. For instance, when Julian and Bradley are at the beach house, she dresses up as Hamlet. Thus, if she is Hamlet, then her father, (if Bradley is the killer), was killed by Bradley/Claudius. Nevertheless, this is a very tenuous link and could in some ways seem far-fetched. Furthermore, the quotations are a form of ironic play, as if to beware the reader to possible interpretations but to no final solution. Perhaps Murdoch wants to say to the reader what Bradley says to Julian: "I'm teasing you" (BP 161).

More clearly expressed is the parody that Murdoch makes of much criticism on **Hamlet**. The best example of her parody, using irony as the preferred strategy, is present in the tutorials Bradley gives Julian. In her tutorials with Bradley, Julian questions him on the criticism of **Hamlet**. Bradley provides her with ironic explanations which parody Shakespeare's critics, that have seen many Freudian relationships among his characters. For instance Bradley's reference to the theory of a Freudian approach to **Hamlet**, presents such typical explanations:

There's a theory that they were in love, Gertrude killed her husband because he was having a love affair with Claudius. Hamlet knew of course. No wonder he was neurotic. There are lots of veiled references to buggery. "A mildewed ear blasting his wholesome brother." Ear is phallic and wholesome is a pun. (BP 160)

Here the text can be read on two levels. First, on the level of a parodic rehandling of Shakespearean criticism and second as a direct reference to the novel, for if Rachel has killed her husband, there are plenty of suggestions that Bradley was in love with Arnold Baffin.³²

During the second tutorial appointment that Julian and Bradley have, there is again present the Freudian analysis of **Hamlet**. When asked about Hamlet's problems Bradley explains:

- He identifies Claudius with his father.
- Oh really? So that makes him hesitate because he loves his father and so can't touch Claudius?
- No. He hates his father.
- Well, wouldn't that make him murder Claudius at once?
- No. After all he didn't murder his father.
- Well, I don't see how identifying Claudius with his father makes him not kill Claudius.
- He doesn't enjoy hating his father. It makes him feel guilty.
- So he's paralysed with guilt? But he never says so, He's fearfully priggish and censorious. Think how nasty he is to Ophelia.
- That's part of the same thing.
- How do you mean?
- He identifies Ophelia with his mother.
- But I thought he loved his mother.
- That's the point.
- How do you mean that's the point?
- He condemns his mother for committing adultery with his father.
- Wait a minute, Bradley, I'm getting mixed.

- Claudius is just a continuation of his brother on the unconscious level.
- But you can't commit adultery with your husband, it isn't logical.
- The unconscious mind knows nothing of logic.
- You mean Hamlet is jealous, you mean he is in love with his mother?
- That's the general idea. A tediously familiar one I should have thought. (BP 195)

Here again the text has two readings: the one that parodies the criticism on *Hamlet*, and the other that foreshadows the situation in the novel. For Bradley falling in love with Julian brings to surface Arnold's anger, which seems to be not only the love of a father for his daughter, but the same relationship Hamlet is suggested to have with his mother in Freudian criticism.

It seems that what Iris Murdoch wants from the reader is what Bradley tells Julian: "a sophisticated reader takes such things [the analysis] in his stride" (BP 197). The suggestion is, the reader should deal with the text and all the clues it provides, calmly and sensibly, without considering them to be a problem.

Murdoch is not only constantly making allusions to Shakespeare's works, but she also plays the game of allusions by referring to common criticism that finds an explanation for everything by using the psychological approach more likely the Freudian one.

This kind of parallel to Freudian criticism is perfectly embodied in Francis Marloe's postscript, although

the analysis in the postscript was already foregrounded by Bradley when he mentions his affection towards his mother "I loved her" and ironically completes: "be quiet Francis Marloe" (BP 15). Even for the attentive reader, at this part of the novel it will be difficult to understand why this reference to Marloe is important. However, in the postscript it is made completely clear. When analyzing the story Marloe freudianises everything and suggests that Bradley suffered from the Oedipus complex.³³ Moreover, he directs the reader's comprehension of the text by explaining, in the light of psychology, Bradley's homosexuality. In a piece of 'virtuosity', Marloe presents the reader with this analysis:

Bradley himself gives all the clues that we are in need of. When he first (in the story) catches sight of his young lady he mistakes her for a boy. He falls in love with her when he imagines her as a man. He achieves sexual intercourse with her when she has dressed up as a prince. (And who incidentally is Bradley Pearson's favourite author? The greatest homosexual of them all. What sends Bradley Pearson's fantasy soaring as high as the post Office tower? The idea of boys pretending to be girls pretending to be boys!) Further: who in reality is this girl? (father-fixated of course and taking Bradley as a father-substitute, no mystery here.) The daughter of Bradley's protégé, rival, idol, gadfly, friend, enemy, alter ego, Arnold Baffin. (BP 398)

Through Marloe's words Murdoch is at the same time, parodying and ironically showing that many times the analysis providing a psychological approach just tends to vulgarize Freud.³⁴ If this is not enough for Murdoch to prove her ironic voice on criticism, and perhaps fore-

grounding the way her own oeuvre would be analyzed, through Marloe she also suggests that Bradley was in love with Arnold Baffin, thus, paralleling here, Bradley's comments on Freudian analysis of *Hamlet*, when he mentions that Hamlet's father was in love with Claudius.

Furthermore, in the postscript, it is suggestive enough that Marloe advertises his paper entitled: "Further to Freud's Experience on the Acropolis" (BP 400) and his forthcoming work, "Bradley Pearson, The Paranoiac from the Paper Shop" (BP 401).

Moreover, Marloe makes an interesting case opposing the relationship of the critics as scientists to that of the artists:

That Bradley is a masochist is here a banality of criticism. (That all artists are is a further truism). How readily recognizable to the expert eye is obsession in literature! Even the greatest cannot cover their tracks, conceal their little vices, altogether moderate the note of glee! For this the artist labours, to get this scene in, to savour this secret symbol of his secret love. But let him be never so cunning, he cannot evade the eye of science. (This is one reason why **artists always fear and denigrate scientists.**)³⁵ (BP 399)

All the allusions inside *The Black Prince* tend to form a major link, and there are no clear marks where the blending occurs. In *The Black Prince*, Murdoch parodies Shakespeare as well as some critical analysis of his works; she parodies the autobiographic novel, criticism on writer's works, specially on her own oeuvre, and the

popular use of Freudianism through Marloe's postscript. In a major scale Murdoch parodies the many different genres and modes like myth, the heroic quest (Bradley has to go through ordeals to finally being able to write his masterpiece), detective fiction (isn't there a murder and the culprit is unknown?), romance, social satire, feminism (embodied in the treatment she gives her female characters)³⁶, the ways critics analyze works of art and her own relationship with criticism, especially with her being accused of prolific writing so much as Arnold Baffin himself.

However, Murdoch parodically subverts the claims of these forms to render experience intelligible using such devices as paradox, irony, randomness and flawed characters. But above all what the games with allusions achieve is a major parody on the act of writing a novel, a parody on the novel genre itself, on the nature of art, on the dichotomy between the saint and the artist. The role of the reader then is like that of a detective, although the "final summing up pointing out discrepancies, making inferences, drawing conclusions" (BP 412) is hard to achieve in **The Black Prince**. Altogether what Murdoch produces is a kind of Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* reminding the reader once more that what he is reading is fiction, that words are only words, but that they are the only thing we have to rely upon.³⁷

NOTES

¹ HUTCHINSON, P. **Games Authors Play**. London: Methuen, 1983. p. 1.

² Peter HUTCHINSON defines literary games as "any playful, self-conscious and extended means by which an author stimulates his reader to deduce or to speculate, by which he encourages him to see a relationship between different parts of the text, or between the text and something extraneous to it. A narrower form of game is represented by the more precise modes in which the author can stimulate reader reaction, by allusions, puns, quotations, etc., which present a specific form of challenge to the intellect". (In: HUTCHINSON, p. 14-15.)

³ HUTCHINSON, p. 1.

⁴ HUTCHINSON, p. 2.

⁵ HUTCHINSON, p. 15, acknowledges that play can be present in all writers in different degrees "as with all instincts, that to play is far stronger in some authors than in others. It is subdued in figures like George Eliot and D.H. Lawrence; far more active in Shakespeare and Marvell; intense in Joyce and Nabokov".

⁶ For further information on this topic see: HUIZINGA, J. **Homo Ludens** : A Study of the Play Element in Culture. Boston : Beacon Press, 1955; STEWART, S. **Nonsense** : Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature. London : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979; BERNE, E.L. **Games People Play**. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1968.

⁷ WAUGH, P. **Metafiction** : The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction. London : Methuen, 1984. p. 35.

⁸ See ZIEGLER, H., BIGSBY, A. **The Radical Imagination and the Liberal Tradition** : Interviews with English and American Novelists. London : Junction Books, 1982. p. 217.

⁹ The nesting, not only at the level of narrators, but at the level of the structure of the novel itself with its frames presenting the Chinese box phenomenon is seen as a kind of play, play with infinity. (See in this respect STEWART, S. **Nonsense** : Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature. London : John Hopkins University Press, 1981.) See also this dissertation chapter 3.

¹⁰ HUTCHINSON sees a confirmation in the suggestion of a contest between author and reader in any work which contains a mystery which is to be solved.

¹¹ HUTCHINSON, p. 23.

¹² WAUGH, p. 118.

¹³ Julian suggests that he might be Bradley: "I think I know who he is. He will understand when I say that I have mixed feelings about him". (BP 411)

¹⁴ See in this respect the myth of Apollo/Marsyas dealt within this dissertation. (Also see DIPPLE, E. **Iris Murdoch : Work for the Spirit**. London : Methuen, 1982.)

¹⁵ We shall return to this topic when we deal specifically with the parallel sort of game in the last section of the chapter.

¹⁶ See BP 55.

¹⁷ A.C. Bradley was the most famous Shakespearean critic of his time, who followed the tendency of finding an explanation for everything in Shakespeare's plays, by using a psychological approach.

¹⁸ HUTCHINSON, p. 31.

¹⁹ HUTCHINSON, p. 31.

²⁰ The reader will confirm Bradley's unreliability only when he comes to the outer framed story.

²¹ See in this respect HUTCHINSON, p. 24.

²² HUTCHINSON, p. 57.

²³ Names have already been discussed in the previous part of this chapter and the analysis of the Apollo/Marsyas myth has been dealt with specifically in chapter 3 in this dissertation. Thus, we recognize name game and myth as forms of allusion but they are not as relevant to this chapter as they were for the previous ones.

²⁴ WAUGH, p. 31.

²⁵ HUTCHEON, L. **A Theory of Parody : The Teachings of Twentieth Century Art Forms.** London : Methuen, 1985. p. 31.

²⁶ ZIEGLER, H., BIGSBY, C., p. 214.

²⁷ HUTCHEON, p. 33.

²⁸ BENNET, D. Parody, Postmodernism, and the Politics of Reading. **Critical Quarterly**, v. 27, n. 4, p. 27-43, Winter, 1985. p. 29. BENNET mentions that "the incongruities in question may be contextual or intrinsic; an example of the former might be a conflict between our informed preconceptions of an author's style or concerns and those of a text which appears in his or her name, while intrinsic incongruities might be those between manner and matter, style and reference, as in mock epic, or incongruous combinations at the stylistic level alone".

²⁹ ROSE, M. **Parody/Metafiction : An Analysis of Parody as a Critical Mirror to the Writing and Reception of Fiction.** London : Croom Helm, 1979. p. 27.

³⁰ BELLAMY, M. An Interview with Iris Murdoch. **Contemporary Literature**, v. 18, n. 2, p. 120-140, Spring 1977. p. 132.

³¹ SHAKESPEARE, W. **Hamlet.** London : Crown Publishers, 1977. Hereafter, all the information within the brackets is mine and comes from this edition.

³² See in this respect Francis Marloe's postscript.

³³ JONES, E. **Hamlet and Oedipus.** New York : Norton, 1954. p. 20. Ernest JONES presents a Freudian analysis trying to explain Hamlet's attitudes as if he was a living person suffering from the Oedipus' complex.

³⁴ In a likely manner John DRAKAKIS opines that when critics used psychological approach to support critical arguments, in the analysis of Shakespeare's plays, they tended to vulgarize Freud. (In: DRAKAKIS, J. **Alternative Shakespeares.** London : Methuen, 1985. p. 9-10.)

³⁵ Italics are mine.

³⁶ See KENYON, O. **Women Novelists Today**, Sussex : The Harvester Press, 1988.

³⁷ "Words, words, they're all we've got to go on" (STOPPARD, T. **Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead**. London : Faber, 1980. p. 31). This is the way Tom Stoppard in his reworking of Shakespeare's **Hamlet**, defines the ambiguous character of human experience, which is projected by means of discourse, that in turn is subject to several interpretations. Murdoch, through Bradley's speech, just confirms that "words are Hamlet's being as they were Shakespeare's (BP 199). Hence, artists ever after have understood that one of the ways in which we grasp the world is through words, that can express and show the way we are and the way we see the others we come in contact with. Moreover, the only way we may try to verify experience is through words that represent an enigma which requires the act of decoding and the interpretation of which is changed with ambiguity.

6 CONCLUSION

The fact that Iris Murdoch is a prolific writer might have led the critics to underestimate her and misplace her in the tradition of the realistic novel without having the time to digest and deeply analyze her work. However, *The Black Prince's* textual and formal innovative devices show that Murdoch although retaining a strong commitment to tradition, simultaneously exploits mimetic techniques to "expose the artificiality of conventional realistic illusion".¹

When Murdoch employs different points of view to show different interpretations to the same event, she forges a middle ground between internal and external view of reality, and what she seems to present is the basic thematic concern of many modern works: the impossibility of rendering character and the difficulties of interpreting the world. Bradley summarizes this concern in his internal monologue:

Beauty is present when truth has found an apt form. It is impossible finally to separate these ideas. Yet there are points at which by a sort of momentary artificiality we can offer a diagnosis. This again is, that which amuses logicians, something which is a case of itself. How can one describe a human being 'justly'? How can one describe oneself? With what an air of false coy humility, with what an assumed confiding simplicity one sets about it! 'I am a

puritan' and so on. Faugh! How can these statements not be false? Even 'I am tall' has a context. How the angels must laugh and sigh. Yet what can one do but try to lodge one's vision somehow inside this layered stuff of ironic sensibility, which, if I were a fictitious character, would be that much deeper and denser? How prejudiced is this image of Arnold, how superficial this picture of Priscilla! (BP 81)

The different points of view, with their multiple perspectives, thus reflect the real-life problem of getting to know someone, of knowing truth as a sole or ultimate answer, which forces the reader to constantly revise his judgement whenever a different perspective shows a different view of plot and characters. Reality then, is a construct of each individual mind, and the reflexivity of **The Black Prince** self-consciously reveals this fact.

Thus, Murdoch uses reflexive and metafictional techniques in this novel to depict the existence of relative realities, and at the same time she reveals the artifice of her fiction so that the reader will be made aware of his part in the fictional transaction.

The reader, in **The Black Prince**, is entreated to play a major role. Robert SCHOLLES has aptly put that the reader "is probably much like a good chess player, who is always thinking ahead many moves and holding alternative possibilities in mind as structures which the game may actually assume".²

No matter whether the novel conforms to tradition or whether it is innovative, the reader will always be one of

the partners in the relationship established between him and the author. Nevertheless, what makes his role different in a novel that employs innovative techniques is that his presence is acknowledged and his participation is demanded in order to intimately enjoy the act of reading. This act becomes then a challenge created through words and the only solution, if there may be one, is to play the role. It is apropos to mention that not only the reader but also the writer has a role to play. For both share a partnership and both, the one who writes and the one who reads, depends on words. It is when Bradley Pearson recognizes that "words are Hamlet's being as they were Shakespeare's" (BP 199) that the reader is reminded that his intimacy with the writer is made by means of words. Thus, Iris Murdoch deals in this novel with the modern concern of the relationship author/reader expressed through language workings. She confesses that she has dealt with it long before Roland Barthes.³

The fact that Murdoch employs an unreliable and self-conscious narrator does not constitutes any radical innovation because other writers have already done this before. However, what allows her to be among the major post-modernist writers is the use she makes of the framing devices allied to an ironic rehandling of different genres within the same work.

The complex framing devices, the use of irony and parody, the use of self-reflexive techniques expose and explore the tension existing in **The Black Prince** between form and content: form must never supersede the reality of

Murdoch's characterization. Thus, she self-consciously reveals the structure of the novel, parodies the conventions of the traditional novel and the detective story (whodunnit), while disrupting the reader's expectations of what is "real", in order to prevent the structure of the novel from embedding the reader in the illusion of the fictional world, thus, breaking Coleridge's willing suspension of disbelief.

Iris Murdoch simultaneously constructs and breaks frames. In doing so there is a clear intention, in **The Black Prince**, of crossing the boundaries between the world of everyday experience and the world which has special semantic significance, the world of fiction. Although the intrusion of art into life, through the breaking of frames, may change the borders, the destruction of them is impossible. Citing P. Loxias: "Art tells the only truth that ultimately matters. (...) And after art there is, let me assure you all nothing" (BP 419).

The innovative metafictional aspects in **The Black Prince** make the reader aware of the analogous relationship between art and life: one must never allow the self-constructed patterns of either to inhibit the expression of individuality and personal freedom, whether a character in a text or another human being in one's experience of life beyond the text. One of the main concerns discussed by Bradley throughout the novel is basically this dual relationship between art and life. His intention of writing a book and finally achieving his goal becomes viable only

after he has gone through a series of ordeals, which shows that the artist must undergo a process of suffering and of knowledge, "pulling the self from the self",⁴ if he is to create a superior work of art capable of rendering the multiplicity and relativity of contemporary experience.

The Black Prince seems to have been written as Murdoch's response to the critics who labelled her as parochial and old fashioned. She demonstrates that she can play the game as well as or even better than those who have criticized her. However, she seems to maintain that a certain amount of realism is desirable in order to engage the reader in the game and not to leave him entirely frustrated.

When using innovative techniques in the novel, Murdoch does not deny realism, for she created life-like characters engaged in the struggle to survive the fragmentation and chaos of contemporary society. However, she uses metafictional narrative techniques as a means to an end: to more accurately reflect and describe the human experience in this century. She has managed to melt realism and reflexivity, fiction and metafiction, tradition and innovation. In doing so, **The Black Prince** becomes a novel that interests the academician at the same time that it retains a general readership because it continues to give a common ground for the average reader to follow.

In **The Black Prince**, while denying the reader a final summing up and presenting him with different points of view, Murdoch establishes that there are no ultimate truths, no

absolute values in today's world. She created a novel which while not denying the formlessness and fragmentation of the twentieth-century experience, constructs meaning through a freedom within form. In this novel the reader has an essential role to play for if the characters are beings made of words, so is the reader when he enters the fictional world, since everything he learns is through words. The reader, just as the narrator, divides himself in the literary space, becoming the double of himself.

By the fact that Iris Murdoch does not deny the use of realism she is in this sense also showing her innovation because according to Patricia WAUGH

Metafiction, then, does not abandon the real 'world' for the narcissistic pleasures of the imagination. What it does is to re-examine the conventions of realism in order to discover - through its own self-reflection - a fictional form that is culturally relevant and comprehensible to contemporary readers. In showing us how literary fiction creates its imaginary worlds, metafiction helps us to understand how the reality we live day by day is similarly constructed, similarly 'written'.⁵

Murdoch presents herself not as a parochial novelist, attached to a nineteenth century mode of writing, but as a metafictional novelist that according to Patricia WAUGH is a term that would encompass a wide range of authors from one end of a spectrum, which take fictionality as a theme to be explored, to the other, depending on how much innovation they employ in their works.⁶

Albeit Iris Murdoch does not use radical innovation, yet, to consider her work as a mere paradigm for the work of the traditional British novelists of the nineteenth century is to forget and deny her presence at the middle ground of that spectrum linking her to the most important literary personages in the second half of this century.

The Black Prince provides fertile ground upon which the reader's imagination can flourish. Murdoch creates strong realistic characters, enriches them with philosophical complexity, and presents them in a form which endlessly reflects upon itself. Content and structure merge to form a fiction which is realistic and reflexive, traditional and innovative. Contradictions are employed in this novel and there can be no final certainty, no ultimate answers, there is not a general truth and as Julian Belling says: "words are for concealment, art is concealment. Truth emerges from secrecy and laconic discipline" (BP 410).

NOTES

¹ LODGE, D. **The Novelist at the Crossroads**. London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971. p. 22.

² SCHOLLES, R. **Fabulation and Metafiction**. Chicago : University of Illinois Press, 1979. p. 75.

³ See in this respect Iris Murdoch's interview in: ZIEGLER, H., BIGSBY, C. **The Radical Imagination and the Liberal Tradition**. London : Junction Books, 1982. p. 228.

⁴ DIPPLE, E. **Work for the Spirit**. London : Methuen, 1982. p. 107.

⁵ WAUGH, p. **Metafiction : The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction**. London : Methuen, 1984. p. 18.

⁶ WAUGH, p. 18.

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