

# Under the Net Study Guide

## Under the Net by Iris Murdoch

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



# Contents

<a href="#">Under the Net Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Introduction.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Author Biography.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 1.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 2.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 3.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 4.....</a>	<a href="#">17</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 5.....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 6.....</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 7.....</a>	<a href="#">22</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 8.....</a>	<a href="#">23</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 9.....</a>	<a href="#">24</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 10.....</a>	<a href="#">25</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 11.....</a>	<a href="#">27</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 12.....</a>	<a href="#">29</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 13.....</a>	<a href="#">31</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 14.....</a>	<a href="#">32</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 15.....</a>	<a href="#">34</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 16.....</a>	<a href="#">35</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 17.....</a>	<a href="#">36</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 18.....</a>	<a href="#">37</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 19.....</a>	<a href="#">38</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 20.....</a>	<a href="#">39</a>



[Characters..... 40](#)

[Themes..... 44](#)

[Style..... 46](#)

[Historical Context..... 48](#)

[Critical Overview..... 50](#)

[Criticism..... 51](#)

[Critical Essay #1..... 52](#)

[Critical Essay #2..... 56](#)

[Critical Essay #3..... 59](#)

[Topics for Further Study..... 64](#)

[Compare and Contrast..... 65](#)

[What Do I Read Next?..... 66](#)

[Further Study..... 68](#)

[Bibliography..... 69](#)

[Copyright Information..... 70](#)

# Introduction

*Under the Net*, published in 1954 in London, was Iris Murdoch's first published novel. It relates the humorous adventures of Jake Donahue, a male protagonist who many critics believe is closely based on the author herself. Jake is described by Cheryl K. Bove in *Understanding Iris Murdoch* as a "failed artist and picaresque hero," a sentiment that Murdoch attributed to herself at the time she wrote this book. Although Murdoch was later embarrassed by *Under the Net* because she felt the writing was immature, other critics have hailed it as one of her best works. It is rated ninety-fifth on Random House's top 100 novels of the twentieth century, and it marked the beginning of a long and distinguished career for Murdoch, who went on to write twenty-five additional works of fiction, as well as several books on moral philosophy, one of her favorite topics. *Under the Net* can be read simply as a fascinating story of a crazy artist who loves serendipity or on a deeper level as an existential, absurd reflection on life.

## Author Biography

Iris Murdoch was one of the "most productive and influential British novelists of her generation," writes Richard Todd in his book *Iris Murdoch*, and a "powerfully intellectual and original theorist of fiction." In other words, she could write a good story and also thoroughly understood the underlying concepts of her craft.

Although Murdoch was born July 15, 1919, in Dublin, Ireland, to a family with a long history of Irish descent, she grew up in London and only returned to her homeland for holidays in her childhood. Her binational identity not only affected her personality it was also often reflected in her novels, which are known for their strong sense of place.

Murdoch was an only child. She has referred to her relationship with her parents and her memories of her youth as being very happy. Her father, Wills John Hughes, was a civil servant who was a cavalry officer in World War I. Her mother, Irene Alice Richardson, was a trained opera singer. In the 1930s, Murdoch attended Somerville College in Oxford and upon graduation worked in the Treasury Department as a civil servant. During this time, she wrote five novels, none of which were published.

During World War II, Murdoch left the Treasury and joined the United National Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. She was transferred to Belgium and then Austria, where she worked with war refugees. While in Belgium, she became fascinated with the existentialist movement, especially as professed by Jean Paul Sartre, the French philosopher and novelist. Sartre believed that the novel was, as Todd states, "a mode of human enquiry"; Murdoch's first published work, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, is a study of Sartre's philosophy. Other writers who influenced Murdoch include Samuel Beckett and Raymond Queneau, who is fictionalized in Murdoch's novel *Under the Net* (1954).

At one time in her youth Murdoch was a member of the Communist Party and thus was refused a visa to visit the United States. She had earned a scholarship from Vassar and planned to study there, but instead she furthered her studies in London and eventually found a job teaching her favorite subject, moral philosophy. She taught first at St. Ann's College in Oxford and later at the Royal College of Art and at University College, both in London. In 1956 she married author and literary critic John Bayley whose own writing is said to have had an influence on her writing. Bayley taught English at Oxford and wrote a memoir, *Elegy for Iris* (1998), on which the movie *Iris* (2001) is based.

Murdoch's parents have claimed that Murdoch was a prolific writer as early as age nine. By the time of her death, she had produced twenty-six novels, the last of which was written in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease, which eventually took her life. *Under the Net* was her first published novel.

Murdoch won several awards in her lifetime. Her book *The Black Prince* (1973) won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize; *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* (1974) was awarded the Whitbread Literary Award; and in 1978 *The Sea, The Sea*, which most critics agree is her best work, won the famed Booker Prize. In 1987, Murdoch was

honored with the British title of dame. She was also made a Companion of Literature by the Royal Society of Literature in 1987, and awarded the National Arts Clubs (New York) Medal of Honor for literature in 1990. She died February 8, 1999, in Oxford.



# Plot Summary

## Chapters 1-5

*Under the Net* begins with protagonist James "Jake" Donahue returning to England to find his friend and almost constant companion Peter "Finn" O'Finney waiting to tell him the sad news that the two of them have been asked by Jake's current girl-friend, Magdalen "Madge" Casement, to leave their apartment. The two men have been living there for free. Madge has found a new boyfriend, Samuel "Sacred Sammy" Starfield, who has promised to make her famous.

Jake protests to Madge, but she insists that not only do they have to move, they must take everything with them that day. When Jake asks where he is supposed to go, Madge suggests he contact Dave Gellman, a philosopher friend of Jake's. The two men begrudgingly depart, taking almost every article they possess with them and wandering through the streets of London in search of a roof and a bed.

While Finn meanders over to Dave's place, Jake visits Mrs. Tinckham, the owner of a newspaper shop he often visits, seeking consolation from Mrs. Tinckham's straightforward statements; her willingness to listen and keep secrets; her watchful eye on Jake's meager possessions, which he often stows at her shop when he is between residences; and a shared drink of whiskey or brandy, which Jake provides and Mrs. Tinckham stores behind her counter. "People and money, Mrs. Tinck," Jake tells her. "What a happy place the world would be without them." Mrs. Tinckham concurs, adding, "And sex."

In chapter 2, Jake makes it to Dave's house, where he is reunited with Finn. Dave has told Finn that he can stay, but he tells Jake he must find someplace else to stay. "We must not be two nervous wrecks living together," Dave explains. Then he suggests that Jake find Anna Quentin, Jake's only admitted love. The thought throws Jake off guard. Once she has entered his mind, he cannot think of anything but Anna, and he is determined to find her though he has not seen her for several years.

In chapter 3, Jake encounters Anna at the Riverside Miming Theatre. She is the director of the theatre, and they share intimacies in her office before she abruptly leaves, informing Jake not to try to find her again. She says she will contact him when she is ready to see him again. She suggests that Jake contact her sister Sadie, who is in need of someone to house-sit her apartment. Jake spends the night in Anna's office.

Sadie is introduced in the next chapter. She is a successful actress and lives in a plush, third-floor flat. She tells Jake that she not only needs someone to stay in her home, she also needs a bodyguard to protect her from Hugo Belfounder, the head of the movie studio that employs Sadie. Hugo is a former friend of Jake's. At the mention of Hugo, Jake remembers the first time he met Hugo at a medical research laboratory, where he and Hugo were participants in a test for a new cold medicine. They spent several days



there discussing philosophy. It was from these discussions that Jake wrote his one and only published book. He felt so ashamed for never asking Hugo's permission that he ultimately avoided contact with Hugo. Hugo, according to Sadie, has fallen madly in love with her.

Jake returns to Madge's house in chapter 5 to retrieve his remaining belongings. While there, Sacred Sammy appears and suggests that he give Jake some money to better balance the situation, since Sammy feels Jake has been injured by Sammy taking Madge away from Jake. Jake, knowing that Sammy is a bookie, suggests Sammy place the offered money on a winning horse in that day's races. Sammy wins Jake quite a bit of money.

## Chapters 6-10

In chapter 6, Jake sets himself up in Sadie's apartment. While she is out, he enjoys the luxurious food and drink he finds in her cabinets. While relaxing, he discovers a copy of his book *The Silencer* on Sadie's bookshelf. He has not seen a copy in years and is rather impressed with the writing, although he thinks about revising it. The book also stirs memories of Hugo, who coincidentally calls Sadie's apartment, but hangs up when Jake identifies himself and asks if they can get together. This puts Jake in a frenzy, and he decides to go over to Hugo's house and confront him in person. He wants to finally confess to Hugo that he wrote a book about their shared thoughts and dialogues without asking his permission. However, he discovers to his dismay that Sadie has locked him inside the apartment, so he cannot get out. Finn and Dave show up at this time; Finn jimmies the lock, and the three men take a taxi to Hugo's place.

In chapter 7, the threesome arrives at Hugo's only to discover Hugo is not there. They go in search of him, basing their search on a note Hugo left to some unknown person that says he has gone to a pub. The men drink their way around a whole neighborhood of pubs without finding Hugo. They do, however, come across Lefty Todd, Dave's friend, who is active in a labor movement.

Chapter 8 includes Lefty's philosophy. Lefty invites Jake to write a political play that will help people understand labor-union issues. By the end of the chapter, the four men are very drunk, and they end up stripping and jumping into a river for a late-night swim.

In the morning, Dave remembers a letter he has for Jake. It is from Anna, who writes that she desperately needs to see Jake. When Jake arrives at the theatre, where she tells him she will meet him, he discovers that the theatre troupe is moving out and Anna is nowhere to be seen. She has left a small note, which tells him she could not wait any longer, having decided to take up some offer she does not define.

Chapter 10 begins with Jake wanting the copy of his book *The Silencer*, which he saw in Sadie's apartment. He returns to Sadie's place and as he climbs the back stairs, he overhears Sadie talking to Sacred Sammy. They are setting up a scheme that involves a manuscript, which turns out to be Jake's translation of Jean Pierre Breteuil's *The*





*Wooden Nightingale*. Madge had given it to Sammy, and he and Sadie are preparing to ask another producer if he is interested in making a movie deal, something that Hugo was planning on doing. So in essence, Sadie and Sammy are scheming behind Hugo's back, wanting to make money in the deal.

## Chapters 11-14

Jake learns from the conversation he overhears between Sadie and Sammy that the manuscript they are discussing is back at Sammy's place. Jake calls Finn, and the two of them break into Sammy's apartment. They cannot find the translation, but they do find Mister Mars, a German shepherd who is also a movie star. Jake refuses to leave Sammy's place empty-handed, so he decides to take the dog; however, he cannot figure out how to get the dog out of its locked cage. Finn and Jake carry the whole contraption, with the dog inside, downstairs and hail a cab.

In chapter 12, Jake decides to warn Hugo about Sammy and Sadie's plot. He goes to the movie studio and tricks a guard into letting him inside. Jake finds Hugo on a huge set that looks like a Roman amphitheater. In the center is Lefty Todd, rousing a huge crowd of people with his talk of unionization. Jake takes Hugo down to the floor in a wrestling move, in order to get his attention. As they begin to talk, a huge police squad enters the studio and mayhem breaks out. In the process, Jake is separated from Hugo but still has Mister Mars with him. In order to get past the police barricade without getting arrested, Jake tells Mister Mars to play dead, then carries him out, telling the police that his dog has been injured and he must get him to a vet. Once they are on the other side of the gates, Jake commands, "Wake up! Live dog!" to which Mister Mars responds, and a group of onlookers lets out a cheer.

In chapter 13, Dave, Finn, and Jake discuss what to do with Mister Mars. Jake wants to use the dog as ransom in exchange for his stolen manuscript. Dave points out that Sadie and Sammy have not really done anything illegal, whereas Jake has, by stealing Mister Mars. Jake feels hopeless until a telegram arrives. It is from Madge, who is in Paris and who offers Jake a free trip there if he will come immediately. She has a plan that involves him. Jake decides to go because he is curious about Madge's new plot, and because he has a feeling that Anna is in Paris and he hopes to see her.

Jake arrives in Paris in chapter 14. As he passes a bookstore window, he sees that Jean Pierre Breteuil, the French author for whom Jake has translated many books, has won a literary prize. This surprises Jake, who has always believed that Breteuil is not a very good writer. He feels betrayed in some odd way, as if Breteuil turned into a good writer behind Jake's back. He begins to think of Breteuil as a rival: "Why should I waste time transcribing his writings instead of producing my own?" He then promises himself that even if asked, he will not translate Breteuil's new novel.

When Jake finally arrives at Madge's hotel room, he is struck by how different Madge looks, more refined. She makes a proposal that will pay Jake a great deal of money for scripts for a shipping mogul, who wants to invest in the movie-making industry. As it



turns out, Breteuil will be on the board of directors, and the first film will be an adaptation of his latest book. The job turns out to not really be a job, but what Jake refers to as a "sinecure," in which a person receives "money for doing nothing."

Madge tells Jake the new film company will be the demise of Hugo's studio. The new film studio has already purchased the rights to Breteuil's works, so Sadie and Sammy's plot is doomed to failure. Madge adds that Mister Mars has been retired, so his worth has been diminished to that of a household pet. Then Madge confesses that her whole scheme is just to get Jake back. In essence, she would be the one who is paying Jake, while she is being kept by the movie mogul.

## Chapters 15-20

Jake thinks he sees Anna in a park while he is still in Paris, but the person turns out to be a stranger. Jake returns to London in chapter 16, and falls into depression. He spends many days in bed at Dave's place. In chapter 17, Jake decides to take a job as an orderly at the hospital located next to Dave's apartment. The routine helps get him out of his despair. While working one night, he sees a man brought in on a stretcher. It turns out to be Hugo, who has suffered a concussion after being hit over the head during a labor rally.

Jake is compelled to talk to Hugo. In chapter 18 he creates a plan. He will sneak back into the hospital after work and visit with Hugo after hours. Jake has questions only Hugo can answer. Once in his room, Jake asks questions about Anna, but Hugo instead talks about Jake's book. He tells Jake that he liked it. When Jake tells Hugo that he got most of the material from Hugo, Hugo has a hard time believing it. When they finally get around to the topic of Anna, Jake is terribly disappointed. It turns out that Anna is in love with Hugo. Hugo, on the other hand, is in love with Sadie, while Sadie is in love with Jake. Jake helps Hugo escape from the hospital.

Hugo told Jake that Anna had sent him letters, so Jake goes back to Hugo's apartment in chapter 19 and steals them. In the last chapter, Jake is with Mister Mars, heading back to Mrs. Tinckham's newspaper shop. He has a lot of mail to read, including a copy of Breteuil's new book and a request that Jake translate it. There is also a note from Finn telling Jake that he has gone back to Ireland. In a letter from Sadie, Jake discovers Sammy does not want Mister Mars back and says Jake can have the dog for seven hundred pounds. Jake writes out the check so Mister Mars can retire. Then he tells Mrs. Tinckham that he is going to find a part-time job. He also decides he is not going to translate other people's work. He is going to write his own.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

This is a story about James Donaghue, a 30-something writer who writes a little bit of original work, but mostly translates French novels into English to make his living. He lives mostly in London with occasional stints in France, and when the novel begins his aide, Finn, has informed him that they have been kicked out of the house where they had been staying. The house belonged to Magdalen, a young woman who has had some sort of romantic intentions with James, but has now agreed to marry another man. James and Finn are out on the street again. If the truth be told, they had long ago worn out their welcome, as they paid no rent; there is nothing James hates more than paying rent.

James now heads to the newspaper shop of Mrs. Tinckham, who sells papers and magazines and other assorted treats like ice cream. James is comfortable with this chain-smoking old woman, surrounded by cigarette smoke and way too many cats. She is, however, the model of discretion, and listens to his laments and never reveals anything you can be sure. She has never even taken a drop of the whisky he keeps behind her counter for such occasions, and that is the true mark of propriety in his eyes.

James opens his portfolio just to make sure that Magdalen has not forgotten to pack any when she removed his things from her house. He recalls the time she destroyed a manuscript of his poetry that might well have turned into an epic.

However, he is not mad at Magdalen for her past indiscretions or for her kicking him out of her house today. He feels she is a bright, sensual person who is warm-hearted and who would help anyone she could. Now she was about to marry Sammy Starfield, a major bookie. This revelation is a little unsettling to James but she has made up her mind and she warns him not to come around the house after next week, because Sammy will be there and will break his neck.

Therefore, James needs to find a place to stay. He considers his friend, Dave, and although Dave is a religious zealot, there is no concept that he hates more than charity. They do have things to talk about and he's fond of him; and right now James needs a little comfort and indulgence, so he packs up his things, leaves them behind the counter at Mrs. Tinckham's and heads to his friend's house.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

James Donaghue's story, as told to us by his reflections, proves to be amusing and entertaining. He is quite articulate and funny and seems to be in a bit of a bind but not desperate so he keeps his sense of who he is, as well as those around him. Finn, who is neither his servant nor his employee, fills a subservient role, which seems to fit the both of them. And although we can see that James is very intelligent, we sense that he

is lazy, content to live under the roofs of others and even let slip away a pretty girl who gave him her attentions as well as a place to stay.



# Chapter 2

## Chapter 2 Summary

James arrives at Dave's house where he can hear a hum of many voices. Dave knows too many people. He is on intimate terms with artists, politicians, students, friends of students, whoever. It seems as if anyone who has ever met him remains that way. That makes James a bit uncomfortable. Dave thinks James' problem is that he is an incorrigible artist and that if he would just get a regular job, most of his angst would disappear.

When Dave lets him into the house, he can see right away that it is filled with many young men, all sipping tea and all too deep in their discussions to notice him. However, he does see Finn, who is sitting on the floor, removed from the rest. Dave pokes at James that he would not be in this pickle if he would just find a regular job. And, when James is taking a tour of Dave's house, Dave can see him lingering in the guest room and tells him flatly, no, don't even think about it; that the house won't stand the two of them who are neurotic messes.

They talk for a while about his predicament and suddenly Finn suggests James contact Anna Quentin. The name stuck him like a dart. James has no idea where she might be but leaves his suitcase at Dave's and strikes out to find her.

As he walks, he muses about Anna. He had found her to be deep, an unfathomable being. He wonders if maybe he loved her at one time. She is six years older than he is and he remembers meeting her when she had a singing act with her sister, Sadie. Anna had the singing talent but Sadie had the flash, went on to become a celebrity, while Anna stayed behind and sang ballads in coffee houses.

He thinks about Anna's kindness. She has a talent for personal relations and yearns for love as a poet yearns for an audience. In addition, he admits to himself that he did think about marrying her once. However, marriage for James remains an idea of reason, a concept that may regulate his life but not constitute it. He had no doubt that Anna would have said yes, and that was probably why he drifted from her in the end. James hates solitude though he fears intimacy. A café is more to his liking than a communion of souls.

However, there is something that drives him tonight, he ends up in Soho at a club and the owner just happens to have a card with her last known address. He takes it and heads out again into the streets of London filled with more excitement than he has known for quite some time.



## Chapter 2 Analysis

James is in a predicament. He needs a place to stay but his friend, Dave, is unable to offer any other solution than he needs to get a job. Dave is a philosopher but also a realist. He knows that the two of them together, with their ideologies would be a combustible combination and sends James to seek out Anna. James' heart lifts with the prospect of seeing her again and we sense that he is truly, down deep looking for more than a place to sleep. His soul is restless and maybe it is more than Dave's impatience that sets him on his path to her again on this night.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

When James arrived at the address that had been provided on the card, he read a sign that said it was a miming company. He pushed open the gate, walked up to the house, and entered slowly. The silence surged out of the place like a cloud. He stood still for a few moments to get his bearings and to let his eyes adjust to the dark. He started to explore a bit and came to a door at a landing. He opened it and got a shock that sent chills head to toe.

He was looking into seven or eight pairs of staring eyes, which seemed to hover just a few feet from his face. He quickly closed the door and regained his composure. When he opened it again, he realized that the faces had been masks used by actors on a stage: the masks being larger than life, altering his perspective to think that they had been closer to him just a few minutes before. After watching them on the stage for a few minutes, James left to continue his exploration of the house and came upon a sign that said *Props Room, Miss Quentin*.

He knocked on the door; she said come in and he stood there looking at her back as she was seated in a chair. She turned to see who it was, they both froze for a few long moments and then she got up to greet him. She was plumper and her hair was a little bit grayer but she was still beautiful. She was the first to break the spell and asked him what he was doing there and he told her simply that he wanted to see her.

He could not help but notice all the clutter and objects that surrounded her, up to the ceiling in some places. It was almost like a toyshop where a bomb had exploded. He wanted to know what kind of place this was; what had she been doing? She responded but avoided his eyes. He felt that in a few moments, they would be conversing just like two old acquaintances and he was not going to stand for that. Therefore, he seized her, threw her down into a pile of cushions, silks and satins and kissed her. They both laughed and began to relax and the old familiar feelings started to come back.

She said she was terribly glad to see him but rebuffed his attempts at discussing love. Therefore, he began to question her about the house and the company. She told him that it was an amateur acting company but was very evasive about it all. He let it drop for the moment and came to his more pressing issue of needing a place to stay. She told him that Sadie was going to the States for a while and needed someone to look after her flat; in the meantime, he could sleep there tonight if he promised to not go poking about or disturb anything.

She told him she had to leave but she would be in contact with him soon. He was not to contact her; she had Dave's address if she needed to find him. With that, he was alone in the eerily quiet building. He tucked himself into a bearskin rug and went to sleep.



## Chapter 3 Analysis

Seeing Anna again has been good for James. However, there is something mysterious going on. Not all is what it seems, as hinted at by the oversized masks worn by mime actors. In addition, Anna refuses to discuss what is really going on with the theatre company. Her evasiveness and discomfort with it, hint that she is uncomfortable with it; or she lacks the guile to lie persuasively. At any rate, it seems James is about to delve into something he does not suspect, in a world where faces are not revealed and voices are silent.





# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

James was not in a good mood as he set out to see Sadie the next morning; somehow, the proposition of seeing her did not seem so attractive in the light of day. However, the lure of living in her luxurious flat drove him on. He told the housekeeper that he was her cousin and learned that Sadie was at the hair salon. James bought a new tie in a shop on Oxford Street before reaching the salon and thought that he cut rather a dashing figure.

He did not see her at first, but way in the back of the salon, tucked under a huge hairdryer sat Sadie. He came up behind her, put his hands on her shoulders and looked at her in the mirror. When their eyes met, she did not recognize him at first, but then squealed her delight to see him after all this time. Sadie flirted, James followed suit, and ultimately he had the invitation he wanted—to move into her flat and watch over it while she was away. She would especially like it if he could move in a bit sooner as her boss, Belfounder, was stalking her.

James knew right away, who Belfounder was. His name was Hugo and Belfounder was not his original name. His parents were German and Hugo had inherited a floundering armaments factory, but Hugo was a pacifist and the business was reduced to a fireworks company. However, he was hugely successful and the business thrived and allowed Hugo time for his eccentricities and creative pursuits.

James first met Hugo at an experimental cold clinic where James went to earn some extra cash; Hugo went just for the experience. They shared time as roommates while they were alternately infected with the cold virus and then potential cure treatments. During their time together, they became such good friends that when one term of the cold clinic had ended, they immediately enrolled in the next. It never occurred to them that they could continue their friendship on the outside. However, eventually the clinic authorities asked them to leave to avoid any potential long-term damage caused from all the testing.

They did continue their friendship and met at regularly scheduled times and discussed everything with much animation and passion. James was under Hugo's spell for sure. Their talks continued for some time and James made notes so as not to lose the thoughts. When he went back to the notes, they seemed rough, so he polished them a bit; and polished them yet again until they were in the form of a book. To James' surprise and pleasure, a publisher approached him and soon the book that was really all of Hugo's thinking was on the shelves with James as the author. James' guilt over the unintentional deceit drove him from Hugo, they never spoke again and his memory had all but faded until Sadie mentioned his name this morning.



## Chapter 4 Analysis

James is quite a bright fellow, and we learn, a good writer. However, he is lazy and waits for stories, and the world, to come to him. He is also not above capitalizing on old relationships to further his situation at any given moment. He is proud, but not too proud, to keep up this lifestyle of neediness and reliance on others. Of what is he really afraid?



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

James was not sure that taking on the role of Sadie's bodyguard was such a good idea. His immediate impulse this morning was simply to run away but then he calmed down to reconsider. He concluded that Sadie simply had to be lying; she always had a tendency to do that anyway. The sheer improbability of Hugo being in love with her was very high. He always went for the quiet, home loving girls. Therefore, James decided to go through with the arrangement and decided to stop by Magdalen's to pick up the last of his belongings.

There was no answer when he called Magdalen's house so he thought it safe to let himself in with his key. He was surprised, then, to see a man standing on the other side of the main room with a bottle in his hand. This must be Sammy Starfield. James immediately took off his belt in a motion to fight him, as he was sure Starfield would be ready for a duel of some sort. Nothing could have been further from the truth. In fact, Starfield offered James 200 pounds for the insult of stealing Magdalen away from him. Not sure what Magdalen must have told him, but James had never offered marriage to her. He was in a twist again—he was not insulted but he did need the money.

Therefore, he did the first thing that came to his mind. Since Starfield was a notorious bookie, he challenged him to put the 200 pounds on the races that afternoon and Starfield was delighted with the game. James came away with 600 pounds, three times the amount initially offered and a new friend in Sammy Starfield.

James made his way to Dave's house, told Dave and Finn about his profitable afternoon and fell into another drunken sleep.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

James has dismissed Sadie's claim that Hugo is in love with her and is now looking forward to taking the position of her temporary bodyguard and flat mate. However, even more, he is looking forward to the possibility of seeing Hugo again. He has missed the intellectual stimulation they shared. James' character continues to reveal itself as he accepts the money from Sammy Starfield in exchange for Magdalen, on whom he never really had any claim. He is only slightly uncomfortable with the deception and not only takes Starfield's initial offer, but also suggests that the money be wagered to make even more. He is lucky once again but it makes you wonder why he is willing to gamble for everything—a place to stay, a girlfriend, his friendship with Hugo.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

Therefore, the day arrived for James to move into Sadie's flat. When he arrived, she told him that she was dreadfully late for the studio and that she wanted him to stay there all day and not to leave; there was plenty of wonderful food, drink and anything else he would require. He was to select one of the guest rooms as his own, not wait up for her; and with that, she was gone!

James wandered around the flat for a while, reveling in the fine furnishings and appointments. He then settled in the sitting room, poured himself a drink and lit a cigarette, soaking in his new surroundings. After awhile he began working on his manuscripts and soon drifted off to sleep. When he awoke, his gaze fixed on a bookcase on the other side of the room, and there in the middle of the top shelf was the book he had written, the one that had separated him and Hugo.

It did not seem the kind of book that Sadie would have, and when he looked at the cover page, he saw that it was Anna's name written inside. Suddenly, many things started to make sense. Some of the things that Anna had said to him at the Mime Theatre had been Hugo's words, not Anna's. Anna's ideas about the theatre were really Hugo's. Clearly, it was Anna that Hugo loved, not Sadie. It made sense that he had built the house for her for the Mime Theatre. In addition, when he remembered meeting her there, he recalled her uneasiness. Then he had remembered an immense burly figure that had been one of the masked actors on the stage that night. It must have been Hugo.

At that very minute, the telephone rang and it was Hugo's voice asking for Miss Quentin. James took the opportunity to tell Hugo that it was he and that he wanted to see him; but just as quickly as the call had come, Hugo hung up. James found his home number in a directory and called but no one answered. He was determined to contact him in some way and decided that he would find him at his studio or at his home.

Leaving the flat was another matter as he was soon to find out. Sadie had locked him inside and he tried all his lock picking skills and was unable to open any of the doors. The only available exit to him was a fire escape through a kitchen window and he was too terrified even to try it. He decided, immediately, that Sadie had dark intentions for him and that he would leave as soon as she came back. In the meantime, he fixed a gourmet meal, washed the dishes and sat at the kitchen window drinking a brandy.

As his luck would have it, he saw Dave and Finn walking down the sidewalk. They asked him to go for a drink with them, but he humbly told them that he was locked in. They collapsed in laughter repeatedly at his ridiculous plight until finally Finn offered to find a hairpin and work his magic on the kitchen lock. James gathered his things, escaped out the kitchen door and the three of them jumped into a cab and headed off to



find Hugo. James did not know what he would say to him, he just knew that he had to see him. Hugo was his destiny.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

Just when James thinks he has life made with all the wonderful comforts available at Sadie's flat, he realizes that nothing is free. She has tried to imprison him, to hold him for her purposes, and nothing is worth that to him. In his typical style, he enjoys the things available to him but determines that his freedom is worth more in the end and decides not to stay long term. It seems, though, that fate has brought him here so that he could be reminded of the book he has written; he has seen Anna's name in it and has made a connection between her and Hugo. Then, hearing Hugo's voice on the phone, is all the incentive he needs to reconnect with him.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

The taxi stopped at Hugo's address and the three men emerged and found themselves facing a set of office buildings and shops. They located the name Belfounder on a sign and made their way up a steep set of steps. At about the fourth level, they started to hear a deafening high-pitched chattering sound. They were excited to think that Hugo was having a party with lots of girls! However, when they arrived at Hugo's door, they found it ajar and James tentatively went inside. The noise they had heard had been hundreds of birds; starlings flying about in a deep angled roof.

Clearly, Hugo was not at home but James looked around a bit and found the simple bedroom furnishings in the style like the old Hugo he used to know. However, the other rooms were furnished with Turkish rugs and original art including two small Renoirs, a Minton and a Miro. He marveled that Hugo would leave the door open to these treasures. Dave called out that there was a note saying that Hugo had gone to the pub. Which pub, they did not know but they set out in search of Hugo. After many attempts, but not finding him, they met up with a man named Lefty Todd, an eccentric leader of the New Independent Socialists.

Lefty had heard of James and told him that he had been told that he was a talented man who is too lazy to work and that he held left-wing opinions but took no part in politics. James could not argue with any of what he said and did the only natural thing: sat down to a drink with Lefty.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

James is determined to find Hugo and it is intriguing to find out more about what this strange pull is for this man. He drags his other friends from pub to pub to try to find him as if he is driven by some magnetic pull. But, as the evening is ending uneventfully, he is pulled into a political conversation with Lefty because Hugo has eluded him this long; and he does enjoy talking about his opinions.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

Lefty spends the evening drilling James on his political views as Dave and Finn hover at the bar unwilling to participate in the spirited debate. Lefty and James come to realize that they are both socialists and have more in common than originally thought when the evening began. After awhile they are even enjoying their debate and find to their dismay that it is closing time for the bar. They buy four bottles of brandy and head out to continue their talks with Dave and Finn in tow.

First Lefty has to make a stop at the Post Office and they follow him in, take advantage of the cavernous building and launch into song before being asked to leave by the authorities. James cannot leave before he sends a letter to Anna, telling her that she is beautiful and that he loves her. Then the foursome is off again, up, over a wall, and into a yard where they lie and look up at the stars and it is agreed that James has the ability to help the Socialist party with his writing. He simply needs to write a play that will reach more people than a novel would. He and Lefty agree to meet about the idea the following week.

Then Finn said that it was a fine night for swimming. After eliminating the Serpentine and other parks because of the tight security, they decide that the Thames is the only solution. One by one, they strip down, enter the freezing water and glide in its dark depths. After they had climbed out, dried off and dressed, James shared the biscuits and tins of goodies that he had taken from Sadie's flat. They all finished the evening as they finished the last bottle of brandy.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

The pull to find Hugo is still strong for James but again, fate steps in and puts Lefty Todd in his way. They agree to disagree on many points but by the end of the evening they realize that they are both strong Socialists and that there is some advantage in their new friendship. There is a sense, though, that James is about to enter another important phase of his life... almost as if the swim in the Thames is his baptism into a new way of life. It is unclear what role Dave and Finn will play but they are always at his side for support and protection if necessary.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

The next morning, James finds himself with Dave, drinking coffee in Covent Garden Market. They seemed to be in the part of the market devoted to flowers and he decided he would take some to Anna. He picked out roses that were white, pink and saffron and Dave added an armful of peonies to them to make a wondrous bouquet. Then Dave remembered that he had a letter that had come for James a couple days earlier. It was from Anna and all it said was *I want to see you urgently. Please come to the Theatre.*

James took a taxi at once and was amazed to find that the Theatre had gone; movers and demolition crews were gutting the interior that had seemed so intriguing and mysterious just a few nights ago. He went inside and could find no sign of Anna and left the building dejected. Looking around he saw a truck on the street below filled with the things that had been in Anna's office... all the silks, and trims and adornments. He made the leap, flowers and all, and landed in the truck's bed and stayed even as the truck pulled away. As he was sifting through the things, he saw a note addressed to him that said *I'm sorry I couldn't wait any longer. I have had an offer which although I don't like it I feel I have to accept. Anna.*

James' mind raced with the questions of what that could mean. What was the offer? Did it have something to do with Hugo? Why had he not come earlier? However, he would not find out in the back of that truck, so he took one last look at Anna's things, jumped from the moving truck, walked into Hyde Park and almost immediately fell asleep on the grass.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

James' love for Anna seems to be flourishing as symbolized by the masses of fresh, dewy flowers in the market that morning as he is working off another hangover. However, why did Dave wait until now to give him the letter from her? Did he just forget in all the activities of the previous night or is there some other reason? Is Anna destined to be just beyond his grasp as he always arrives just a little bit too late?





# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

James awoke in the park and took a few minutes to get his bearings. It was only half past eleven but seemed as if days had passed. He went to the chemist to get something for his headache and then drank lots of black coffee and sat on a bench to determine his next course of action.

It was clear to him that his previous life was gone forever. Fate was giving him huge hints and although he did not understand what was to come next, he knew that there were certain problems that would give him no rest until he tried to fix them. He still wanted to find Hugo but determined that he would probably not be home during the day; and even worse, he did not want to find Anna with him.

Therefore, his next thought was to return to Sadie's where he could retrieve his book that he had left without the night before. Therefore, he set off for her flat after stopping off at Woolworth's to buy a packet of hairpins to pick the lock. As he approached her door, he could hear voices, which at first he thought belonged to the cleaning woman and a friend. However, the mention of Hugo's name stopped him and he settled in to listen.

Sadie's voice was one of them and the other belonged to none other than Sam Starfield... what an odd couple! He heard Sadie say that they must catch him as soon as he reaches London... he's the sort of person who likes to be presented with a fait accompli... it is just a matter of seizing the initiative.

They laughed and agreed that Belfounder would be no trouble. James was glad he had decided to eavesdrop. Whom were they talking about who had to be caught in London? What was clear to James though is that Sadie was engaged in double crossing Hugo, probably because she was jealous of his affections for Anna.

The two continued as James listened. Sammy was saying that as a script it certainly had everything. They were laughing and agreeing that Magdalen sure could pick a winner; too bad she could not back him too! Sammy seemed concerned that whomever they were talking about could not make a case. Not a clear one, Sadie assured him; he probably has nothing in writing, and if he ever did, he will have lost it. All they needed the thing for was to get H.K. to sign on the dotted line. James was more intrigued than ever. Who was H.K.? What thing were they talking about?

Sadie asked Sammy about what he was so nervous. All they had to do was present him with the star, the script, and the contracts and they have a flying start. Belfounder did not have anything on them legally; and if he started making complaints, Sadie said she could make plenty of counter-complaints about the way she had been treated. As for



James, they could buy him any day of the week. James, of course, took offense to this but could not tear himself away from his precarious spot.

James heard Sammy tell Sadie that he would let the issue involving James up to her. He did not understand why she wanted to employ an ass, like James, but Sadie said that she really likes him and that there was nothing to worry about. "One translation's just like another. If he won't let us use his we can buy another translation overnight. All we need is to let H.K. see it now in English. As for the Frenchman, he'd sell us his grandmother for dollars."

This set James reeling and Sammy answered his question almost as if he had put it to him directly. "It makes a nice little title, doesn't it?" *The Wooden Nightingale*. James thought he should take his leave before his luck ran out and he was discovered, so he jumped down into the alley and disappeared into the street.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

Even in his hazy state, James still wants to find Hugo; however, the prospect of finding Anna with him is more than he can take this morning. However, he must take some course of action to make the day at least a bit worthwhile. His decision to go to Sadie's flat is fortunate as he overhears a plot between Sadie and Sammy. What is the basis of this relationship? How did they know each other? Was Magdalen in on it or were they using her too? Who was H.K.? He only knew that his name was mentioned as being a part of the plot and he knew he was about to be drawn in, and he was probably more right than he knew when he said this morning that his life as he had known it was now over.



# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

James sat for a while in a quiet place to collect his thoughts. His translation of Breteuil's *Rossignol de Bois*, which he had left with Magdalen, could have been stolen by Sammy. He debated this for some time and concluded that his transcript had been stolen and that was that.

It seemed to James that Magdalen was being double-crossed by Sammy, who has probably ditched her for Sadie. Sammy uses Magdalen; and Sadie uses Sammy to get her revenge on Hugo and make a fortune at the same time. James was beginning to see the whole picture now. What was so maddening was that *The Wooden Nightingale* would really make a great film.

Well, James was not about to take this sitting down. His only course of action was to get his manuscript back as soon as possible. He needed to defend his own interests; to defend Hugo's; and to thwart Sadie and Sammy. And it would be striking a blow for Magdalen too. So, he headed for the most logical place to find the manuscript: Sammy's flat.

James realized that he would need Finn for this endeavor and they met, equipped with their handmade Master Key, which they used in situations such as this. They telephoned Sammy's number and when no one answered, they proceeded to break in and take stock of their surroundings. When James entered the living room, he was shocked at what he saw. Right in the middle of the room was a shining aluminum cage; inside which was a very large black and tan Alsatian dog.

He and Finn surveyed the animal from all angles, and by its demeanor, determined that it was not a watchdog. Then it dawned on James; this dog was Mister Mars, the star of many motion pictures. He must be the star that Sammy had mentioned in Sadie's flat. Looking closer at the cage, James saw the little metal plate, which indeed read *Marvellous Mister Mars—property of Plantasifilms Ltd.*

That is when the inspiration took hold. Since James and Finn could not find the manuscript, they would take the next best thing: Mr. Mars. He could only imagine the look on Sammy's face when he discovered the dog missing. They struggled for a time, trying to get the cage to fit through the doorway but finally made it out onto the street and into a cab that Finn had hailed.

Their getaway was relatively unnoticed and they stopped at an ironmonger's shop to buy a file so they could free the dog from his cage. The driver then took them to a quiet street where they set to work on their task. It took them half an hour to free Mr. Mars, after which the driver walked up to them, flipped a spring on the underside of the cage and the door sprung open. James and Finn were amazed at the driver but said nothing.



Finn took the cab on back to Dave's for more sleep and James took Mr. Mars for a walk and some supper. He picked up an evening paper and suddenly the H.K. mystery was solved in an article in the entertainment section. Homer K. Pringsheim, Hollywood film magnate, was on his way to Britain aboard the luxury liner *Queen Elizabeth*. The article went on to state that H.K., as he was affectionately termed, was on the lookout for new stars and new ideas.

That all made sense to James now. He wondered how Sadie would get access to him and how long it would take her to get him to sign on the dotted line. James was perusing the rest of the section when he came upon a headline that stopped him cold: *Anna Quentin for Hollywood?* Apparently, Anna was headed for America, with a brief stop first in Paris. It said that she refused to confirm or deny that she had signed a long-term contract for work in America and that she would be sailing very soon aboard the *Liberte*.

Overall, James was relieved. He would rather lose Anna to Hollywood than to Hugo; at least there was some chance that she would come back from there. In addition, after he thought about it, he felt sure that she would soon send for him. In the meantime, he felt compelled to warn Hugo about Sadie's plan and set out for his studio to find him.

## Chapter 11 Analysis

Even though he has no legal claims to the stolen manuscript, James feels violated, especially so because he thought he could trust Magdalen. His instincts are to strike back and thwart the plan as best he can so he can realize some personal vindication. Little did he know the twist this would take as he discovers the celebrity dog, Mr. Mars, instead of the manuscript. However, James figures this is better than nothing and takes whatever he can to exact his revenge. Fortunately, he is able to determine who the mystery man H.K. is and finds out Anna's proposed destination. He seems to be getting into this deeper and deeper, yet his personal code of ethics and righteous anger propel him forward. Just what will he find next?



# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary

James and Mr. Mars take a cab and then a bus to arrive at Hugo's film studio. It is clear that he will not be granted admission through the front gates so he nonchalantly walks around trying to discover another way. When he saw Hugo's car parked in front of one of the buildings, he was spurred on, and amazingly one of the guards let him in when he told him he was his friend.

James and the dog walk through the back lots of the studio, following the din of voices, which James believes will lead him to Hugo. He turned a corner and came upon an astonishing scene. He came face to face with ancient Rome complete with brick walls, arches, pillars and columns. All around this setting were the scaffolds and cranes with lights and cameras. However, what was even more amazing was the scene of a thousand costumed men standing in motionless silence. Suddenly one voice boomed over the scene, and to James' amazement, he looked to see Lefty Todd as the orator in the scene. He was pouring his heart into his speech about the evils of capitalism and how they must work to make a socialist society.

As James surveyed the scene before him, his eyes finally landed on Hugo. They were now only 15 feet apart and he was not sure what to say. Hugo must have felt his stare and turned in James' direction and they acknowledged each other with nods and smiles. James started to speak and Hugo silenced him. James protested that he needed to talk to him at once but Hugo was intent on hearing Lefty's speech. Intent on getting his undivided attention, James floored Hugo in a judo movement, which left nothing injured but Hugo's dignity.

James explained Sadie's plot and Hugo was unaffected; she was always doing something like that. Despair overtook James. Hugo did not seem interested in what he had just told him; Anna was going to America; Sadie and Sammy were doing whatever they pleased; and Magdalen had been deceived. Luckily, he seemed to have a friend in Mr. Mars.

Lefty spoke for at least another hour and then they heard a huge rumble behind them. Hugo said that the United Nationalists had warned that they were going to break up the meeting and that was probably them arriving. When they turned around, mad chaos had begun to break out all around them. Since there was no way of distinguishing the Socialists from the Nationalists, James did not know where to enter the fight. However, he did know Lefty and headed in his direction to rescue him. Both he and Hugo were surprised to find that the other knew Lefty but had no time to think about it as the police came storming in.

In all the chaos and madness, the sets of Rome were destroyed, Hugo escaped into the night and Lefty was lost to his sight. James clearly did not want to be arrested but the



police were not letting anyone leave the premises. Therefore, he took advantage of Mr. Mars' consummate acting ability and told him to play dead. With the limp dog on his shoulders, James convinced the gatekeepers that the dog needed medical attention and the two of them walked out into the street.

## Chapter 12 Analysis

It is clear to James now that Hugo's film studio is a forum for the Socialist party. He has even taken it so far as to construct the scenery to mimic ancient Rome, the birthplace of modern government. Yet when he sees Hugo on the steps of the pseudo forum, he appears more like an emperor than a Socialist party fanatic. Does Hugo have other plans in the guise of the party meetings? Moreover, did he send Lefty Todd to meet James at the bar that night under the guise of Socialist reform so that the two men could reconnect? At any rate, their structure has been destroyed along with the plastic wall of the Roman scene and James walks out to his next episode.



# Chapter 13

## Chapter 13 Summary

After James and Mr. Mars escaped from the film studio riots, they wandered to a park and spent the night sleeping on a bench until they were urged to move on by the police. They made it to Mrs. Tinckham's shop where they got a bit to eat and finally found their way back to Dave's where the two of them slept for hours.

When he was finally awake sometime in the afternoon, James was presented with some letters that Finn had held for him. There was none from Anna but the one from Sammy Starfield held a check for the 600 pounds he had won in their afternoon of gambling in exchange for Magdalen. Dave and Finn had notified Sammy that the dog was safe and with them so that the police would not be notified; and the trio sat down to discuss their next plan of action.

They determined that Sadie and Sammy might need the dog at once for their plan; that they may be worried about its welfare; and would be willing to make an offer to get it back quickly. They were contemplating this outcome when there came a knock on the door. A telegraph messenger had two telegrams for James: one a message from Magdalen saying to come to Paris right away, all expenses paid; and the other was 30 pounds for the trip. Intrigued, they all decided that Mr. Mars should stay behind with Dave and Finn and that James would indeed go to Paris to meet her.

Then it dawned on James that in light of his taking Mr. Mars from Sammy's flat, Sammy may well have stopped payment on the check. That is when Dave remembered the comment from Sammy when they had called to inform him of the dog's whereabouts: tell James he can have the girl and I am keeping the cash.

They all could have wept for none of them had ever seen that much money on a check before. Therefore, they decided their only recourse was to send a letter over James' signature to Sadie proposing an exchange of Mars for a formal recognition of his status in the matter of the translation and an adequate compensation for the use that had been made of it. They settled on the amount of 100 pounds and Dave left for the night ferry and Magdalen.

## Chapter 13 Analysis

So far, James is simply unable to be a success. He thinks that he has so craftily stolen the dog, which will secure some sort of monetary reward, only to find out that the gains from the afternoon of gambling have been rescinded. It becomes more difficult for the reader to learn of his mistakes as his redeeming features are hard to overlook. The note from Magdalen is intriguing, and the reader is again taunted with the notion that what she will give him all he needs to know to complete his plan.



# Chapter 14

## Chapter 14 Summary

James arrived in Paris with the feeling that he always got there: expectation upon arrival and leaving with disappointment. Yet he did enjoy the sights and sounds of the city in the morning and was in no hurry to get to Magdalen's hotel. What she had to tell him could wait just a while longer. He sat in a café to have his breakfast when his attention was diverted to a sudden crowd at a bookshop. He had forgotten that this was the day of the announcement of the *Prix Goncourt*, the annual book-writing award.

While he drank his coffee, a truck pulled up and dropped stacks of the newly awarded book and to his huge surprise, its author was Jean Pierre Breteuil, his sometime employer whose manuscripts he translated. How could it be that this chimpanzee of a man had pulled off such a feat as to win this national award? Could it be that he had miraculously become a good writer?

James shook off his dismay and headed to the Hotel Prince de Cleves to see Magdalen. He gained entrance to her room where she reclined on a chaise lounge and he simply fell on her, she was that lovely.

A while later, Magdalen revealed the secret that had lured James to Paris. There was a man who was willing to offer James an immediate 300 pounds and then 150 pounds per month indefinitely to be a scriptwriter for a new Anglo-French film company. In addition, apparently, Jean Pierre was on the board of directors and he would certainly confirm James as the scriptwriter. The film was to be, of course, Pierre's newly awarded book. This would almost be getting paid for doing nothing but James resisted. His nose was out of joint and he was pouting.

He was being offered a great deal of money and he was not quite sure why he was refusing it. Even more, he was being offered a key to a world where he once wanted to reside but now it did not seem so appealing.

Madge did tell James that someone had told Jean Pierre about Sadie and Sam's plan for his *Wooden Nightingale* and the new film company had simply bought out all the rights to all his books. Madge also revealed that Mr. Mars was very old and Sammy had bought a dog that would no longer be able to perform, so the devious duo had lost out all the way around. The reality of Mr. Mars' short life brought James up short and he flatly refused the offer proposed by Magdalen.

She begged him to reconsider and stay with her; she loved him. However, James did not want to be a pawn in any games she might come up with in the future. He loved her very much but left her crying in her expensive hotel room.





## Chapter 14 Analysis

James seems to have some foreshadowing of his visit to Paris when he says he always arrives expectant, but most of the time he leaves disappointed. This time would be no different. He is overwhelmed with disbelief and jealousy when he sees that his no-talent employer has won the national book prize and declares that their association is over. Then when Magdalen pitches an offer that seems too good to be true, and he finds that Jean Pierre is behind it, it is more than he can take and he flatly turns it down. Perhaps he is finally finding himself and his own worth and that he and his talents have a price, yet he will not be bought.



# Chapter 15

## Chapter 15 Summary

Almost as soon as he had left Magdalen's hotel, James began feeling ill about what he had done in refusing the job offer. Money was the most important thing in the world. He had longed for it. Craved it. Now he had turned it away. What had he been thinking? He sat at a café, drinking Pernod trying to dull his pain and then sent a telegram to Dave and Finn telling them what he had done. His need to share his grief was overwhelming. Then he walked and walked the streets of Paris on that July day. If he had lost the money, maybe he could find Anna. Maybe she was still there and not on her way to America. He called old friends but no one knew where she was. He called hotels but she was not at any of those. Therefore, he walked and walked some more, visiting the places they used to go, in hopes that he would see her there.

As night approached, the city became more festive with dancing and reveling and he noticed the French flag flying from so many buildings. Then it occurred to him; it was July 14, French Independence Day. His wandering took him down to the river where the fireworks were beginning. The crowds were intense and he was uncomfortable but unable to break free from where he stood. That is when he saw her. Anna was on the bank on the other side of the river. He tried frantically to get her attention but nothing worked. His only recourse was to wait until the end of the fireworks and find his way to her then. Therefore, that was his plan. The crowd pushed him along but he was able to keep her in his sight, followed her until he came up very close and then called her name and the woman turned around but it was not Anna. He was shocked and wounded all at once. How could this be? He had been so sure that it was she.

His only recourse, as usual, was to find a café for some drinks. Drowning his sorrow, the waiter called out his name and a telegram was delivered to him. Dave took the chance that he would be at that café as it was one of his favorites. It turned out that a horse they had bet on that day had won so that not all was lost during his day in Paris. That pleased him for sure but all he could think about now was where was Anna tonight?

## Chapter 15 Analysis

James' sudden code of ethics in refusing the job offer has literally made him ill. Wasn't money all he ever sought? Wasn't it the thing that eluded him the most? So why was he turning it down now? Why this sudden surge of propriety? Maybe he does not realize it yet, but he is earning his own independence on the French holiday of the same name. It is very symbolic also, that he thinks he sees Anna, yet he is separated from her by a river and he follows a woman who turns out to be someone else entirely. Did he really see her or just imagine that it was she? Sometimes you can want something so badly but you are ultimately better off without it, whether that may be money or a woman.



# Chapter 16

## Chapter 16 Summary

James had been back at Dave's flat for several days and had stayed in bed the entire time. He would hear Dave going in and out with Mr. Mars, and he would acknowledge Dave when he brought him meals twice a day, but for the most part he slept. On the day that he returned from Paris, he learned that Finn had taken his share of their racetrack winnings and he had not been heard from since. James assumed he was drinking and hoped that he would turn up again soon. He knew of one other time when he had disappeared like this and it had lasted for three days and Finn was finally brought home in an ambulance.

James passed more days in his fog, and no calls came and no letters arrived; so the only thing to do was to get dressed and go out walking. He walked and walked, and Mr. Mars got exercise while he ruminated. Then he took Mr. Mars home, went back out again and stopped in front of the hospital next door. He watched it for a while and then crossed the road, went in the front door and asked for a job.

## Chapter 16 Analysis

James' depression over losing the money and losing Anna has incapacitated him. Finn has taken off on a drunken spree and Dave is the only one left who is responsible to keep the two of them and Mr. Mars fed. He is so desolate and his pain is almost palpable so when he goes out to walk and stands in front of the hospital, we are not sure what he is thinking. Is he going to check himself in for a nervous breakdown? Is he an alcoholic who needs treatment? However, when we find that he has applied for a job, there is a huge sense of relief that finally he will get some structure and stability in his life and that maybe the clouds will lift.



# Chapter 17

## Chapter 17 Summary

To James' amazement, he immediately secured a job as an orderly at the hospital. This was something that was new to him, and when he had always heard his friends talk about the process, it had always been slow and agonizing. Even more amazing, he found that he liked it. He worked in the head injury ward from eight to six every day, with one day off each week.

His tasks were simple. He mopped the corridors and two flights of stairs; washed the dishes from the patients' meals; and helped occasionally with preparing their food. He got along well with the young nurses but the nuns, who were older than he, were still a bit skeptical of him.

At lunchtime, he would get Mr. Mars and the two of them would spend a little time under a tree where he would think about his life and the benefits of having performed some manual labor. All his life he had pursued intellectual endeavors and it was so gratifying actually to accomplish something every day. During his breaks, he would retire to a little cubicle and read the daily papers. That had become his life.

He found that his depression was lifting and felt the urge again to try to contact Hugo. He was also concerned because Finn had not yet surfaced from the night he left with his gambling winnings. Dave thought that they should contact the police but James hesitated because if Finn wanted to drink himself to death, he felt it was his last gesture as a friend to let him do just that.

It was about 6 o'clock one evening, time for him to go home when a man was brought in with a serious head wound. As James caught a glimpse of the shape on the cart, he realized that it was Hugo. He was able to pry out of one of the nuns that he had been hit in the head with a brick at some political meeting and would be there for five days. James was scheduled to be off the next day and did not want to wait to see him so he devised a plan to get into the hospital at night to see Hugo. He found an out of the way window in the kitchen and unlatched it so that he could get in later tonight and went home for some dinner.

## Chapter 17 Analysis

At last, James has some structure to his life and he seems to be very comfortable with helping and accomplishing something every day. His old life has not left him totally, as he scans the daily papers for news of his old contacts but finds nothing but a few articles about Lefty Todd. He is still haunted about his relationship with Hugo and wishes that he could have fixed that. Almost as if on cue, Hugo appears in the very place James is, so that fate has stepped in once again. There is a flicker of hope that they may reunite yet.



# Chapter 18

## Chapter 18 Summary

James' plan to sneak into the hospital went off without a hitch and he eased himself into Hugo's room unnoticed. Hugo was awake when he came in and was more than a little annoyed at the intrusion and wanted to know why James had been following him around all the time. James told him that he had just wanted to speak with him again, that he had felt awful about the book and wanted to let him know. Actually, Hugo had thought it was good work and had taken no offense. Hugo admitted to James that it was really Sadie that he had been in love with, not Anna, even though she was in love with him, and Sadie was not. They both agreed that it was an ironic twist that they each loved the other sister who did not really care for them. However, life could be like that.

Hugo admitted that he was simplifying his life. He had sold the fireworks business and was getting rid of his money; most of it was going to Lefty, maybe James would get some if he wanted it. Hugo told him that he was now going to be a watch repairman and he was already apprenticed to a man in Nottingham. The two men talked a while longer in the dark and then James needed to leave. When he told Hugo that they would probably keep him there for five days or so, Hugo bolted and James helped him find his clothes and the two men escaped from the hospital the same way James had gotten in just a little while earlier. They talked for a few minutes on the street and both of them knew that this may be the end of their relationship, and while neither of them knew what to say, they just looked at each other for a few long moments and then parted on the sidewalk.

## Chapter 18 Analysis

At last, James is able to meet Hugo face to face and tell him what has been on his mind. Their conversation has revealed that Hugo has indeed been in love with Sadie and that she had been quite right to be afraid of him because of his obsessive behavior. In addition, he comes to find out that Anna had loved Hugo, not himself, so all the illusions of the past year have been shattered. However, there is some good in that he can help Hugo on his way out of the hospital and on to his new life. James is feeling a bit melancholy but his self worth is rising little by little.



# Chapter 19

## Chapter 19 Summary

After James and Hugo parted, James just walked the streets of London thinking about all the things Hugo had told him. Mostly he thought about Anna, and how his memories of her had been transformed now. She seemed to exist as a separate being now, not a part of himself and that was particularly painful to him. Of course, he thought about Hugo. The man had been a monolith to him, he tried to picture him in some tiny watch shop in Nottingham and he wondered if they would ever meet again.

His wanderings led him to Hugo's flat where he was shocked to find that birds had all but taken over now and everything was covered in their white droppings. He went through his desk drawers, found a copy of his book and stuck it into his pocket. There were also a few small fireworks left and James eyed them just before his gaze fell upon a safe in the wall behind a bookcase. Immediately he knew what he had to do, positioned the fireworks at the safe, and lit the fuses. He stood back; there was a bright flash and a crack and the safe was open. Inside were stacks of money, some old papers and letters from both Sadie and Anna.

Just then, James heard a car pull up and he looked out to find Anna and Lefty Todd emerging. James hurriedly grabbed the largest stack of money, left the flat through a kitchen window and escaped out onto the street where he could already see workers removing the Renoirs from Hugo's apartment.

## Chapter 19 Analysis

Reality has set in for James as he tries to process what Hugo has told him. He realizes that his affections for Anna have been misplaced, especially when he sees her arrive at Hugo's flat with Lefty Todd. He feels no remorse at grabbing a stack of money because Hugo had as much as given it to him a few hours ago and he escapes one more time, just in time, before he is discovered. He wonders about the connection between Anna and Lefty and we are left to think only that the two of them have used this gentle giant for their own purposes; and James, in his sentimentality has been the only true-intentioned character in the book.



# Chapter 20

## Chapter 20 Summary

James heads back to Dave's flat, packs his things, leaves a thank you note, and he and Mr. Mars head out for Mrs. Tinckham's shop. There he retrieves all his manuscripts and reads the letters that had been forwarded to him there. There was a letter from Lefty thanking him for his friendship and support; a letter from Finn telling him that he had gone home to Ireland; and a letter from Sadie telling him that she and Sammy were no longer interested in the dog and that he could buy him and all the rights to him for a mere 700 pounds.

Of course, he will buy Mr. Mars; they have become the best of friends. He is a bit unsettled that Finn has gone but he really knew that he would go home someday. Mrs. Tinckham points him to a notice of a room for rent and he hopes that the owner will accept dogs. Anna's voice singing on the radio silences the pair for a few minutes and then she is gone, just as she is gone from his life. That is just the way life can be.

## Chapter 20 Analysis

It is almost a relief for this novel to end. James' angst is so palpable and his life is on such shifting sands that it makes the reader uncomfortable. However, that is what the author intended. No matter what plans we have, there is always something to interrupt them, good and bad. The key is to live your life as an independent spirit, to enjoy what comes, and try not to control people or things because they are not within your grasp. Life is just like that.



# Characters

## Hugo Belfounder

Hugo Belfounder is a gentle soul who represents all that is good about people. He is a deep and profound thinker. He once worked in his parents' fireworks factory, where he made intricate displays that earned good money for his father's business. He could make the fireworks do fantastic things no one else could replicate. However, he tires of this profession and, upon inheriting the business, sells it and invests in a movie studio.

Hugo befriends the protagonist Jake while the two men are volunteering for medical research. They spend several days together in intense dialogue, which Jake transcribes and turns into a published book. Hugo falls in love with Sadie Quentin, Anna's sister. It is Anna, however, who falls in love with Hugo. Hugo allows Lefty to use his studio to talk to a crowd of people about labor unions. During one such talk, Hugo is hit over the head and is taken to the hospital where Jake works. It is in the hospital that Hugo answers many of Jake's questions.

Critics have noted that Hugo represents Murdoch's interpretation of either Ludwig Wittgenstein or his pupil Yorick Smythies. It is through Hugo that Murdoch expresses some of Wittgenstein's philosophical theories.

## Jean Pierre Breteuil

Jean Pierre Breteuil is a French author who writes mediocre stories, which Jake gets paid to translate. Toward the end of the novel, Breteuil writes his best work and wins a literary prize. This prompts Jake to want to compete with Breteuil to prove that he is more than just a good translator; he is a good writer too.

## Magdalen Casement

Magdalen (known as Madge) is living with Jake at the beginning of the novel, but she tells him he has to move out because Sammy is about to move in. Madge is in love with Jake, but Jake has refused to marry her. Madge later moves to France with a movie mogul with whom she has become involved. She finds that she has more money than she needs, so she offers to pay Jake a living wage without him needing to do much in return. She just wants Jake to be close to her.

## James Donahue

James (known as Jake) is the protagonist of the story. He spends his life doing as little work as possible, living in other people's houses for free, and staying as clear of personal relationships as possible. He says his nerves are shattered. The closest he





comes to being in love is his relationship with Anna, who has affection for him but is not in love with him; but her sister Sadie is in love with him. Jake temporarily moves in with Sadie to act as her bodyguard. It is through Sadie that Jake meets up with Hugo again after a long absence.

Jake is in many ways the antithesis of Hugo. Whereas Hugo is quiet and meditative, Jake hops around from situation to situation as quickly as one thought changes to another. His actions are completely spontaneous; he cannot have a concept in his mind without physically playing it out to see where it will lead him. When Dave mentions Anna, for example, Jake acts on impulse and goes in search of her immediately. Jake's buddies Finn and Dave like to follow him around as they know there will be adventure involved in whatever Jake does.

Jake also reflects many attributes of the author, leading many critics to believe that Murdoch chose a male first-person narrator both to remove herself from the character and as a vehicle through which she could present many personal details of her own life.

Jake shies away from jobs and makes a very basic living wage by translating books. He feels he is a writer and carries around several half-completed manuscripts but, until the end of the novel, does not sit down and take the time to work on them. He is shiftless all through the novel, flitting from one adventure to the next, never finding that which he is seeking. At the climax of the story, he finally has some issues resolved and is able to make a commitment to settle down, get a job, and find out if he is really as smart and capable as he thinks he is.

## **Finn**

See Peter O'Finney

## **Dave Gellman**

Dave Gellman is Jake's friend. He is not a close friend because he is in many ways too much like Jake, and they tend to get on one another's nerves. Dave teaches philosophy, but he is not so much the pure philosopher as Hugo is. Dave follows Jake around, seeking adventure, and provides some rationality and stability to Jake's life.

## **Jake**

See James Donahue

## **Madge**

See Magdalen Casement



## Mister Mars

Mister Mars is a dog who just happens to have a movie contract. He has appeared in several films, and Jake steals him from Sammy's apartment in an attempt to persuade Sammy to give back a transcript Sammy has stolen from Jake. Mister Mars is getting old, however, and, unbeknownst by Jake, is about to be forced into retirement. Jake becomes attached to Mister Mars and in the end buys out his contract so that the dog can enjoy his final years as a non performer. Jake's attachment to Mister Mars marks the beginning of Jake's settling down.

## Peter O'Finney

Peter (known as Finn) is Jake's friend. He does not say much, a quality that Jake likes. Finn follows Jake around and often gets Jake out of trouble. There is not much known about Finn, except that he is from Ireland (in the end, he returns to his homeland) and that he has lived with Jake for a long time.

## Anna Quentin

Anna is Sadie's sister, but the two sisters never encounter one another in the story. Anna was a folk singer when Jake first met her. She represents the closest relationship in which Jake has been involved. She flits around almost as much as Jake, often changing her mind about which profession she wants to follow and engaging in frequent relationships with a variety of men. Her actual presence in the story is only one chapter long, when Jake bumps into her at the mime theatre. They have a brief encounter, and Anna promises to get back to him, but their paths never again cross. At the end of the story, Jake learns that Anna has fallen in love with Hugo. Some critics compare Anna to Murdoch, who also was very flighty in her early relationships and who was at one time a singer.

## Sadie Quentin

Sadie is an actress and, according to Hugo, more intelligent than her sister Anna. She is a famous movie star in London, and she engages Jake to guard her from Hugo, who has become obsessed with Sadie. Sadie turns what little affection she has toward Jake. She does not trust Jake, however, or else she knows him too well, because when she leaves him at her apartment, she locks the door from the outside, so Jake cannot get out.

## Sacred Sammy

See Samuel Starfield



## Samuel Starfield

Sammy is a bookie who has made a lot of money. He is also a schemer. He becomes involved with Madge but drops her after Madge gives him a transcript that promises to make Sammy some more money. Sammy and Sadie plot against Hugo to gain a movie contract with another moviemaker. Their plot fails and Sammy drops out of the story.

## Mrs. Tinckham

Mrs. Tinckham is probably the most stable person in this novel. She is a kind of earth-mother figure to whom everyone comes to be consoled. She is a great listener and never reveals the secrets with which people trust her. She owns an old, dusty newspaper shop that Jake often uses as a storage space whenever he is between residences. It is to her place that Jake goes both at the beginning of the story and at the conclusion.

Lefty is a socialist dedicated to unionizing workers. He probably represents Murdoch's involvement with the Communist Party, a party active in the promotion of unions. Lefty attempts to persuade Jake to write plays with a socialist theme, a proposition that Jake only momentarily considers.



# Themes

## Unrequited Love

Jake loves Anna, who loves Hugo, who loves Sadie, who loves Jake. Like a Shakespearian drama, unrequited love weaves through Murdoch's first novel. Jake, who claims that he does not like people and would rather stay clear of relationships, accidentally falls for Anna, and though she gives into him from time to time, she is forever elusive. Anna instead becomes enthralled with Hugo, whose mind is like a drug for Anna. His thoughts liberate and inspire her. She gives up singing (one of the skills for which Jake loves her the most) for Hugo, who then invests in creating a theatre dedicated to mime. In return, Anna loves Hugo, but Hugo finds Anna's sister Sadie more to his liking. Sadie is more intelligent, and Hugo becomes obsessed with capturing her. While he is aloof with Anna, he is clumsy with Sadie, to the point where Sadie fears for her safety. Sadie asks Jake to protect her from Hugo.

## Silence

There are several allusions to silence. The name of the only book that Jake has published is called *The Silencer*, and it is based mostly on Hugo's thoughts and philosophy (who in turn reflects the concepts of Austrian philosopher Ludwig Josef Johann Wittgenstein, who professed the inability of language to express the deepest and most significant thoughts). The theme of silence is also apparent in Anna's mime theatre, where the actors do not speak and the audience is asked not to applaud. Jake likes his steady companion Finn because Finn hardly ever speaks. Even Mister Mars, the movie-star dog, never barks, not even when Jake and Finn are stealing him.

Jake, who makes a living translating French novels into English, finds himself unable to communicate when he goes to Paris, putting him into yet another form of silence. The value of silence is summed up in a conversation between Hugo and Jake when Hugo says, "For most of us, for almost all of us, truth can be attained, if at all, only in silence."

There is also the role that Jake plays out as a writer. Throughout the novel, he never speaks with his own voice in his work. Instead he translates the novels of another author, a man Jake criticizes for being a mediocre writer. Jake's only published work is another type of translation, as he all but transcribes conversations he had with Hugo. Jake is embarrassed about having published this book. He feels as if he has stolen the work from Hugo, since the basic tenets of the book are not his own. It is not until the end of the novel, after Jake has been challenged by the award that the French author Breteuil has won, that Jake attempts to create a voice of his own.



## Artist versus Saint

Several critics have pictured the relationship between Jake and Hugo as one of artist versus saint. The role of the artist is to communicate ideas, to put them into some kind of form. The saint, on the other hand, is contemplative. Saints are the medium through which ideas are born. Jake and Hugo's most intimate relationship occurs while they are allowing themselves to be used as guinea pigs in medical experiments comparing new cold medicines. During this time they spend their days lost in theorizing and philosophizing. Hugo's concepts are stronger than Jake's. Hugo is the contemplative one. His concepts flow almost without an awareness that he is speaking, a point emphasized toward the end of the novel when Hugo does not even recognize his own thoughts when Jake asks him what he thinks about the book Jake wrote based on Hugo's ideas. When Hugo reads the book, he compliments Jake on his originality. He also states that some of the thoughts expressed in the book were a bit too deep for him.

Jake took Hugo's thoughts, rearranged them, and made them more accessible, much like the work he did for the French author Breteuil. Jake claims that Breteuil's work is clumsy, making it necessary for Jake to re-form it as he translates it from French into English. Jake even takes credit for improving Breteuil's work. Although he criticizes Breteuil's work, Jake himself does not sit down to create an original work until the end of the novel. However, whereas Jake is compelled to put his thoughts on paper, Hugo has no aspiration to do so. At the end of the book, Hugo aspires only to learn how to make watches, possibly another form of meditation.

# Style

## First Person Narrative

Murdoch uses a first person narrator for *Under the Net*, but, rather than using a female voice, she relies on a male's perspective. Some critics believe that in so doing, she is able to write less self-consciously. The protagonist Jake is spontaneous, offering a quick pace to the story, as he hops from one thought and one reaction to another. Also, in using a first person narrator, Murdoch is able to develop the inner life of her protagonist by allowing readers to be privy to Jake's thoughts. This limits the scope of the other characters in the story, however, because everything that happens is seen through the eyes of only one person. Even the dialogue of the other characters is interpreted through Jake.

## Setting

Setting always plays a large role in Murdoch's novels. *Under the Net* is no exception. Throughout the story, readers are aware that the characters are either in London or Paris, as Murdoch provides the precise names of streets. Jake even criticizes different parts of the city, stating that he prefers certain neighborhoods or sections of the city to others. The names of actual rivers and bridges, as well as the names of pubs, are often mentioned.

## The Great Quest

From the opening lines of the first chapter, Murdoch sets up *Under the Net* as a great quest. Her protagonist is pushed out of his comfortable abode and must search for a new place to live. It is this initial action that leads to all the following actions, as Jake bumbles his way first to find a home, then to find an old lover, and then to locate an old book and, later, a stolen transcript. In the process, questions mount around him, questions that are not fully answered until the end of the book. This technique keeps the reader engaged in the story, curious about what might happen next. There are twists and secrets that beguile Jake, and, in turn, readers find they are pulled into the story, also wanting to find the answers.

## Traditional Realism

After World War II, many artists wanted to break away from the confines of realism and move into abstraction and experimentation, as they tore old artistic forms into pieces and attempted to put them back together in new ways. Murdoch stood out in a group of her contemporaries for her determination to stay a realist. She preferred to look back to nineteenth-century English literature, which contained the traditional form of plot and rational point-of-view narration. Her novels are based in the real world, as opposed to



fantasy. She is also exact in the naming of things and places. If she mentions that Hugo once worked in a fireworks factory, she provides the details of such an environment. She includes the riots between police and labor unions with a historic reference. Her work compares favorably to novelists like Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Sir Walter Scott.

## Preliminary Writing

Murdoch was known to plot everything out before she began writing. She knew exactly what would happen and when, before she put pen to paper. She controlled her characters because she knew what they were supposed to do and why. She knew when the tension must rise at just the right place in the novel, as her protagonist becomes engulfed in emotions. Then the climax is reached at a precise moment, and everything is resolved. She was said to write preliminary notes, which usually included summaries of each chapter. The notes consisted of a variety of details, such as bits and pieces of dialogue she might use, descriptions of the characters, and possible beginnings and endings for each chapter. This outline was often revised several times before she actually sat down to write the book. Her outlines were written longhand, as was the actual writing of the full work, which was inked in notebooks, with writing on only one side of each page. The blank side of each page was left open for later revisions.

# Historical Context

## Philosophical and Literary Influences

Ludwig Josef Johann Wittgenstein (1889-1951) influenced many writers and philosophers at the turn of the twentieth century. Some people believe that he was possessed by the concept of moral and philosophical perfection. His most famous work is *Tractatus* (1921), which he himself later referred to as meaningless. In 1953 he totally rejected the concepts he had originally published in *Tractatus*. As a matter of fact, he eventually stated that what most philosophers have to say about life is nonsense, because language always imposes limitations on thought. What is most purely true cannot be put into words. He also suggested that the philosopher's role is to express what is possible, not what is conceivable. His philosophy is said to have affected Murdoch's attempts to put particulars into words, avoiding references to abstractions. Murdoch also believed, through Wittgenstein's influence, that life can only be shown, not explained.

Raymond Queneau (1903-1976) was a French author and precursor of the literary theory of post-modernism. His works are said to have been a link between the surrealists and the existentialists. He was very interested in language, and some of his novels were written phonetically rather than with proper spelling. Murdoch tried to translate one of his novels into English, but his use of colloquial language presented a challenge that she could not proficiently surmount. Some critics believe that Queneau's *Pierrot Mon Ami* (1942) was an inspiration for Murdoch's *Under the Net*. It is Queneau's book that Murdoch's narrator Jake takes with him when he must vacate his apartment at the opening of *Under the Net*. *Under the Net* is also dedicated to Queneau.

Jake is often referred to as a Sartre hero, in reference to France's philosopher and author Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980). Sartre was a proponent of existentialism, which stresses concrete individual experience as the source of all knowledge. This philosophy emphasizes the loneliness and isolation felt by individuals in a world of absurdities, a world in which there is no proof that a spiritual world exists beyond this one reality. Sartre's play *No Exit* is one of his most anthologized works. It tells the story of three people trapped in hell, and its message is that life can be controlled by a person's choices, a theme that Murdoch's narrator Jake plays out.

Another comparison that is made to Jake is the protagonist in Samuel Beckett's *Murphy*, a story about an alienated young man who cannot hold down a job except for a temporary position as a male nurse in a mental hospital. Like Jake, Murphy also has trouble involving himself in personal relationships. Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) is probably best known for his play *Waiting for Godot* (1953). Language in Beckett's work is somewhat useless, as most of his characters try in vain to express what is inexpressible, reminiscent of the thoughts of Wittgenstein. This concept is expressed throughout Murdoch's work.





## Youths in Postwar Britain

Before World War II, Britain was a major world power, having gained riches from its policy of colonization. World War II, however, left the British government bankrupt. Shortly after the war, Winston Churchill lost his bid to remain prime minister, as the Labor Party gained strength. Harold MacMillan became the new prime minister in 1957, and he believed in change, which was interpreted as a dismantling of the old British Empire. Some historians believe that by changing the focus from an international one to a domestic one he appeased much of the population that was busy fending for themselves, recuperating from the war, and trying to create new definitions of themselves.

British youths in the 1950s were not as free as their counterparts in the United States. The war had left them with very few pleasures or dreams. They listened to music from the States, which spoke more directly to them than the music being produced in Britain. They could not afford expensive instruments, so their basement musical productions seemed pithy in comparison to the music they were importing. Then in the mid-1950s, a British youth named Lonnie Donegan began a trend. With one official musical instrument, a guitar, and some form of a rhythm base, which often was no more than a washboard, Donegan caught the imagination of British teenagers. This musical trend gained momentum and soon there were many bands either copying Donegan or experimenting with their own forms of music.

By the 1960s, young people in Britain had a little more cash at hand than in the previous decade, and new bands seemed to appear everywhere. The most popular British bands in the United States were the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. Suddenly, youths in the States were looking to Britain for musical inspiration. London became the center of pop music and pop fashion, as Mary Quant, a designer whose mini skirts and model Twiggy (an extremely thin model) shocked the fashion world.

Youth gangs developed in the early 1960s in the seaside towns of southern England. The two most recognizable were the Mods, who favored stylish clothes and motorcycles and listened to American Motown music, and the Rockers, who liked to wear leather and listen to rock and roll.

Taboos on sexuality as ensconced by the Victorian era began to fall away in the 1950s and 1960s in Britain. This was first signified by a ruling by the courts that D. H. Lawrence's 1930 novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* could finally be legally published. The ruling was so popular that over 2 million copies were eventually printed. Movies followed suit with more sexually revealing scenes; and musical lyrics became more sexually explicit as well. The women's movement also grew in strength around this same period.



## Critical Overview

*Under the Net* was Murdoch's first published novel. She later felt somewhat embarrassed by this book, claiming it was juvenile. However, as Cheryl K. Bove in her study *Understanding Iris Murdoch* points out: "*Under the Net* foreshadows [Murdoch's] mature works with its fast-paced plot, closely detailed settings, fully developed characters, and attention to moral issues."

*Under the Net* marked the beginning of a long writing career for Murdoch, who also taught philosophy but only to the point it did not interfere with her writing schedule. Each of Murdoch's twenty-six novels was written longhand and, as John Russell explains in a *New York Times* article, she took each manuscript "to her publishers in London in a capacious paper bag." Her editors were never allowed to make any changes.

Peter J. Conradi, in his biography and study *Iris Murdoch: A Life*, takes great lengths to compare the life of Murdoch to the characters in her books. "It is no accident," Conradi writes, "that each of her first-person male narrators is the same age as Iris at the time of the novel's composition." It is her "first-person novels," Conradi states, that "are often among her best work" and it was through a male narrator that Murdoch was able to "liberate" her writing. Conradi, who notes that upon the publication of *Under the Net*, the *Times Literary Supplement* hailed Murdoch as a "brilliant talent that, despite a lack of 'fit' between characters and plot, promised great things." Conradi writes that author Kingsley Amis in the *Spectator* "admired her 'complete control of her material; [she was] a distinguished novelist of a rare kind.'" Conradi also observes that Asa Briggs, a noted British historian, "was struck by [Murdoch's] ability to turn common experience into poetry."

In a collection of critical reviews of Murdoch's works titled *Iris Murdoch*, Steven G. Kellman notes that a few critics find *Under the Net* to be Murdoch's best work: "Such critics tend to see *Under the Net* as her most successful work, as well as her most original, and her painstaking efforts at creating a fuller and more realistic world in her later books as an aberration, or a retreat into English bourgeois complacencies."

# Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3



# Critical Essay #1

*Hart has degrees in English literature and creative writing and writes primarily on literary themes. In this essay, Hart explores the influence of Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of truth on Murdoch's first novel.*

Although she was never a student of the turn-of-the-century Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein, Murdoch did once meet the philosopher and befriended Wittgenstein's star pupil, Yorich Smythies. Murdoch was also influenced by Wittgenstein's concepts, as many critics have noted, especially in her first novel, *Under the Net*. This influence begins with the title and carries through the story, in particular through her protagonist Jake Donahue.

*Tractatus* (1921) is that the deepest truths, although people might conceive of them, can never be fully verbalized. Truths, he believed, become diminished by the limitations of language. Any attempt to talk about, to explain, or to write a truth is similar to placing a net over the truth, which in essence is to blur the image, to make the truth less than perfect, or, in other words, to hinder it. In choosing her title, Murdoch thus signals that she is incorporating the Wittgenstein theory into her work. To know this allows the reader to look for other ways in which Murdoch explores Wittgenstein's concepts. How might Murdoch have created her protagonist, for instance, to demonstrate Wittgenstein's ideas? How would this affect the rest of her characters? What would be the consequences? How might she symbolize the theory in her characters' actions?

Jake is introduced as he is walking down the street toward the house where he has been living with his close companion Finn (a man who seldom ever talks), and Jake's on-again, off-again girlfriend Madge. Finn greets Jake with the news that Madge has kicked them out. Jake and Finn are to pack their belongings and vacate the house that very day. Finn is disheartened, and Jake is a bit put-off by the sudden change of heart by Madge, but he is not totally surprised. He knows that Madge has wanted to get married. He had even considered it at one point, but he could not commit to such a relationship. Madge, on the other hand, just wants to get married. If she cannot have Jake, she will find someone else, like Sacred Sammy, the bookie. With this first scene, Murdoch demonstrates, on a somewhat simplistic level, the various layers of lies that are spoken in an attempt to express a truth. Wittgenstein believed that in verbalizing truths, only lies come forth. Madge, for instance, really does not want to marry Sammy. She wants to marry Jake. Jake, on the other hand, does not want to leave Madge, but he does not want to marry her either. The character Finn here represents silence. Only in silence can one remain in truth, according to Wittgenstein.

Jake packs his bags, and his next stop is Mrs. Tinckham's newspaper shop. Mrs. Tinckham is the kind of woman with whom everyone likes to talk. She is a good listener. People come to her and tell her all kinds of personal stories, and they can count on her to keep all their secrets. This draws them to her. At one point, one of her customers becomes so frustrated with her unwillingness to share a secret about someone else that he shouts, "You are pathologically discreet!" In other words, Mrs. Tinckham, like Finn,



represents silence. Therefore she can be trusted. Mrs. Tinckham, with her gift of silence and thus trust, represents truth. "I suspect," states the narrator, "that this is the secret of Mrs. Tinckham's success." Then Jake tries to further describe Mrs. Tinckham, but he cannot quite figure her out. Is she very intelligent or very naïve? He has trouble defining her, just as one would have trouble defining truth. He concludes his observations of Mrs. Tinckham with the statement: "Whatever may be the truth, one thing is certain, that no one will ever know it." To know truth is to translate it, to put it into words. Truth is beyond knowing, according to Wittgenstein.

Jake travels on to Dave's house next, looking for a bed and a roof over his head. Dave is a philosopher, "a real one," Jake says. He also says that he used to like to talk to Dave about philosophy. "I thought that he might tell me some important truths." No matter how much Jake talks to Dave, he finds that they never get anywhere. Jake would present various philosophical concepts, say from Hegel or Spinoza, things that Jake did not fully understand. However, after Jake would submit his thoughts, Dave would tell him that he did not understand him. So Jake would repeat himself. "It took me some time," Jake says, "to realize that when Dave said he didn't understand, what he meant was that what I said was nonsense." This statement is very similar to one that Wittgenstein was known to make. He believed that all philosophers, including himself, could at best only write nonsense. Jake then offers one of Hegel's concepts, "Truth is a great word and the thing is greater still." This is another way of stating Wittgenstein's theory about the limitation of language. Jake finally concedes to Dave, or at least gives up trying to talk philosophy with him, because "Dave could never get past the word."

Jake must next find Anna. After Dave mentions Anna's name, Jake goes into a frenzy. He has not been with her for a while, but suddenly he has an uncontrollable impulse to see her. She is, he describes, someone who is "deep." She is also very elusive and the exact opposite of her sister Sadie. As he continues to describe her, Jake says that he has found her to be "an unfathomable being." The word *unfathomable* can mean either "mysterious" or "incomprehensible." Anna thus also symbolizes truth. Her sister Sadie, to further emphasize this fact, is an actress, someone who pretends. She is flashy and dazzling but not very real. She is a good con artist, and later in the story she actually becomes involved in a deceitful scheme with Sammy, as the two of them weave a web of lies in order to make some money. Jake ponders why Anna never became an actress. He feels that she could have been a good one. Then he concludes that it is because she has a lack of "definiteness": she could not be defined. All these statements about Anna (and her opposite, her sister Sadie) reinforce the idea that Anna represents truth as defined by Wittgenstein.

When Jake finds Anna, she is directing a theatre of mime. She works with performers who move on the stage in silence in order to portray their story. To exaggerate the silence, the audience is requested not to applaud. This silence is too heavy for Jake, which he says falls upon him like a "great bell." When he finally comes face to face with Anna, his first impulse is to turn away from her. He needs to collect his wits, he says. However, as soon as she speaks, Jake declares, "The spell was broken." This could imply that Jake is a seeker of truth, but the truth frightens him. He runs after it, but it is as elusive as Anna, who always seems to be slightly out of his reach. He runs after her



until he catches her, and then he is afraid to confront her. When she speaks, she defines herself, and as Wittgenstein stated, this imposes a limitation; and as Jake discovers, when she speaks, the spell is broken. However, he is forever drawn to her "like the warm breeze that blows from a longed-for island bringing to the seafarer the scent of flowers and fruit."

Jake seems caught in a paradox. He appreciates silence, and that is why he likes to have Finn around him, a man who seldom speaks. But Jake abhors solitude. It makes him nervous. For him, silence is best found in a noisy pub, where he does not have to speak to anyone but also does not have to contemplate any of his own truths. He likes the distraction of busy sounds, even though he recognizes that words can break the spell, that one can become entrapped in words, like his friend Dave.

He has the desire to search for truth, but when he draws near it, he is afraid of it.

After Jake's encounter with Anna, he reminisces about Hugo, whom many critics believe represents Wittgenstein himself. Hugo used to work in his parents' fireworks factory, a place that fascinated him. He at one point tells Jake that what he likes most about fireworks is their impermanence and honesty. They were "an ephemeral spurt of beauty." Hugo also says in reference to fireworks: "You get an absolutely momentary pleasure with no nonsense about it. No one talks cant about fireworks." In other words, you do not have to define what you see. You do not have to talk about it. You just enjoy it, like Wittgenstein might have wanted to enjoy truth. Hugo's love of fireworks, however, is destroyed once they are shipped to the United States, where people begin to "talk" about them, to refer to them as pieces of art, to "classify them into styles."

Jake meets Hugo at a medical research hospital, where the two of them give themselves up as guinea pigs for a new cold remedy. They are roommates, and at first Jake fears that Hugo will bore him with endless chatter; but Hugo is completely silent for the first few days. When he does speak, Jake is fascinated by his intelligence. As with Anna, Jake is drawn to Hugo. Jake is always searching for something. He senses that Hugo might have some answers. With Hugo, Jake is comfortable enough to be "frank." Jake becomes so engrossed in their conversations that he enlists for a second medical experiment, and so does Hugo.

Jake describes Hugo as the most objective and "detached" person he has ever met. Hugo has little concept of self: this was not a condition to which Hugo aspired, but rather it was as if he had been born with it. He also has no general theories. Rather, he has separate theories of everything; when Jake tries to tie him down to something specific, he could not. In other words, Jake could not define Hugo. Then one night, Jake and Hugo begin a discussion of truth. "What if I try to be accurate?" Jake asks. "One can't be," Hugo responds. "The only hope is to avoid saying it." They are referring to emotions at the time of this conversation—the truth of one's feelings. The discussion is about defining feelings, which Hugo says is impossible. "Language just won't let you present it as it really was."



Jake goes on to record his conversations with Hugo. He edits them, changing them around, making some things clearer. Then he publishes them in a book he calls *The Silencer*, an ironic little twist, seeing that the book is a conversation about truth, which Wittgenstein stated could only be known in silence, and yet here Jake is trying to capture truth in words, only to call his creation *The Silencer*.

Of all Murdoch's characters in *Under the Net*, Hugo best represents truth. He does not like definitions, and when he finally reads Jake's book, he does not recognize the thoughts contained in the book as his own. He even congratulates Jake for his originality. He neither says anything about Jake having written down truths nor does he attempt to write his own book about them. It is understood that he believes this task to be impossible.

When Wittgenstein looked back on his own earlier writings about truth, he referred to the work as nonsense. Wittgenstein had tried to define truth, to explain it, or better yet, to explain that one cannot explain it. But he found that even that was ridiculous. Murdoch too, when she looked back at her first novel from the distance of several years, thought that *Under the Net* was a bit foolish. She, in her own way, had tried to explain what Wittgenstein believed could never be made clear.

**Source:** Joyce Hart, Critical Essay on *Under the Net*, in *Novels for Students*, Gale, 2003.





## Critical Essay #2

*In the following essay excerpt, German identifies and discusses the relevance of allusion in Under the Net.*

In one of her essays, Irish Murdoch expresses her belief in the importance of details in the novel by citing a remark of Tolstoi's: "Strip the best novels of our time of their details and what will remain?" Miss Murdoch is convinced that the best novels are not neat symbolic works but those written in the manner of Sir Walter Scott, George Eliot and Tolstoi, novels which, while avoiding the purely journalistic, are still richly endowed with details. Her reason for praising this type of novel is not simply that such works can operate more powerfully upon the reader's imagination, but primarily that they are in accord with the nature of the world—contingent, messy, full of disorderly particulars. Consequently, Miss Murdoch's own novels are copiously endowed with details; however, these details are not selected solely to satisfy the demands of realism. For example, while eschewing the symbolic novel, she does use symbols, as the two bells in *The Bell* demonstrate. Moreover, her fiction is rich in details that serve as allusions: incorporated in each of her works is a background of material selected from earlier literary classics, myths, biographies, and so forth. Since her novels seldom display an *extended* parallel with an earlier work, her practice is perhaps closer to that of Eliot in *The Waste Land* than to that of Joyce in *Ulysses*. In any case, perhaps because of her frequently expressed preference for realistic novels, these allusions have remained almost completely undetected. Since critical discussions of Eliot, Joyce and others have long since shown the value of such allusions in enabling a writer to achieve greater depth in a work or to provide a framework for judgment without entering into the novel in his own voice, my purpose here is not to defend the practice but rather to show the existence of some of the allusive material in Miss Murdoch's first five novels and to suggest the particular relevance of these details in each of the works.

The narrator of *Under The Net*, Jake Donaghue, states that his acquaintance with Hugo Belfounder is "the central theme" of the book: consequently, he spends considerable time in the novel describing Hugo's background, personality and ideas. The reader learns of Hugo's German ancestry; his prosperous family whose wealth came from armaments manufacture; his interest in music, films, and mechanical instruments; his plans for giving away all his wealth; and his powerful personality, which influences not only Jake but others, like Anna. Hugo impresses Jake not only by his honesty about himself but also by the novelty of his ideas. While interested in theories about everything, Hugo has a great distrust of generalities and of language, in particular of the use of language to describe one's emotions: for him, "the whole language is a machine for making falsehoods." Jake's book, *The Silencer*, a dialogue based upon his conversations with Hugo, supports Hugo's ideas. Inspired by Hugo's theories, Anna abandons her singing career and turns to pantomime, an art form uncorrupted by the distortions of language. Readers of Norman Malcolm's *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir* (London, 1958) will find that many details of Wittgenstein's life and personality are quite similar to those of Hugo described above. (Other less important resemblances such as a simplicity of dress and a passion for personal cleanliness might be noted.) The





similarities in their ideas are also obvious. Wittgenstein, whose early work was a source of inspiration for the logical positivists (like David Gellman in the novel), was constantly striving for precision in language: his attitude can be summarized by a frequently quoted statement from the second paragraph of the Preface to the *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* (London, 1961): "What can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must consign to silence."

Clearly, *Under The Net* is not a *roman a clef* which provides intimate details about one of the twentieth century's most influential philosophers. The correspondence between Hugo and Wittgenstein is far from exact; indeed at the end of the novel, in describing Jake's ascetic living quarters and his career as a hospital orderly, Miss Murdoch is attributing elements from Wittgenstein's life to Jake, not Hugo. The justification for the allusions to Wittgenstein's life and ideas lies in their thematic appropriateness in a novel which is greatly concerned with the way in which life is inevitably distorted when reduced to a formula, when it is placed "under the net." Perhaps the best illustration in the novel of the way this falsification occurs can be seen in the fact that Hugo fails to recognize either himself or his ideas in Jake's book about him.

Another source of allusion for *Under The Net* is the *Aeneid*. Here are a few of the more obvious counterparts: Finn is Jake's *fides* Achates, the birds that defile Hugo's apartment are the equivalent of the Harpies, Miss Tinckham's store is the cave of the Cumaean Sibyl, Jake's refusal of Madge's offer is Aeneas' rejection of Dido, his search for Anna during the crowded Paris carnival is Aeneas' search for Creusa during the sacking of Troy, the fight on the Roman set in the film studio is the battle within the walls of Troy. That episodes in the novel are considerably modified from the originals in the *Aeneid* can be seen by examining the story of the Trojan horse. In Book II, lines 13-245, Laocoon is described warning the Trojans against the wooden horse while they are debating what to do with it; he throws his spear into the side of the horse, causing an ominous rumble from the hollow interior. But Laocoon is destroyed by the snakes; and Sinon, ragged and beaten, makes his appearance to dupe the Trojans into moving the horse within the walls. In the novel Jake appears at the theatre in a bloody shirt and muddy clothes after a night's revelry; outside the theatre he notices a large wooden board being carried away by some men, then jumps into a moving van where he finds a rocking horse, a stuffed snake, and a thundersheet. He rides "in the belly of the vehicle" for a while until he finds a note for him pinned on the side of the horse. Before jumping from the van, he strikes the thunder-sheet and produces an "uncanny sound" which astonishes the people in the street.

This example suggests the distance between the *Aeneid* and this novel and makes clear that the value of the allusions does not lie in detecting specific parallels such as these. Perhaps one of Miss Murdoch's reasons for using an archetype is heuristic; the search for modern equivalents may help to provide her with the mass of detail which she believes gives the novel its special merit. For the reader the value in this particular set of allusions lies in recognizing the parallel between Jake and Aeneas. Throughout the epic Aeneas is governed by his sense of destiny; when he occasionally forgets his goal, the gods remind him of his role as the founder of the Roman State. While Jake's acts parallel those of various figures in the *Aeneid*—in the van scene described above,

his appearance and behavior follow that of Sinon, Laocoon, and the Greek warriors inside the horse—in general he is a counterpart to Aeneas. During the fight and the fire at the film studio, for example, he leads Mars around on a leash and then carries him off on his shoulder just as Aeneas leaves the burning city of Troy leading Ascanius by the hand and carrying Anchises on his shoulders. Jake, like Aeneas, is guided by an idea of fate, of inevitable acts and destiny; a romantic, he is always "expecting something," finding patterns in his life and declaring that events are written in heaven. The weaknesses in such a belief are seen as Jake succumbs to the temptation to publish his book without telling Hugo about it: "my only consolation lay in a dreadful fatalism—and the notion that I was still a free agent, and that the crime could still be avoided, was too intensely painful to entertain." Although disagreeing with Vergil's emphasis upon a grand design for an individual, Miss Murdoch seems to have found the *Aeneid* an appropriate source for allusions.

**Source:** Howard German, "Allusions in the Early Novels of Iris Murdoch," in *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. XV, No. 3, Autumn 1969, pp. 361-77.



## Critical Essay #3

*In the following essay, Porter examines Murdoch's use of leitmotiv—the recurring blending of certain words, images, and symbols to convey a deeper, cohesive meaning—in Under the Net.*

Iris Murdoch, like many other twentieth-century novelists, began her literary career with a *Bildungsroman*. While commenting on *Under the Net* (1954), Miss Murdoch's first novel, a number of critics have pointed out that Jake Donaghue, the protagonist of the novel, is seeking a way to encounter the world and find himself. Jacques Souvage sees Jake striving for "self-fulfillment based upon self-knowledge"; Frederick Hoffman comments that Jake is constantly revising his conduct "to guarantee its freedom from theory"; and Malcolm Bradbury feels that Donaghue is "a writer or intellectual who is not sure how much one owes to the aesthetic and the social, with their contesting claims."

When we first meet Jake, he is in no way involved with life: he lives with friends, but wants no entangling relationships; he translates novels, but does no original work of his own. The root of his problem is hatred of "contingency"; at the beginning of the novel Jake states, "I want everything in my life to have a sufficient reason." As Hugo Belfounder says toward the end of the book, "The trouble with you, Jake, is that you want to understand everything sympathetically." As Donaghue comes to realize, what he thought he understood, he did not understand at all. He discovers he really has not known his friends but has projected upon them as objective reality his own inaccurate, subjective vision of reality.

During the week which the action of *Under the Net* covers, Jake comes to recognize his misjudgments of Peter O'Finney (Finn), Jean Pierre Breteuil, Anna Quentin, and Hugo Belfounder. Jake had always taken Finn for granted and had never taken seriously his plans to return to Ireland. When Finn does go, Jake "felt ashamed, ashamed of being parted from Finn, of having conceived things as I pleased and not as they were." Jake had translated several of Breteuil's novels, which he considered trash. When Jean Pierre produces a really good novel (it wins the *Prix Goncourt*), "It wrenched me, like the changing of a fundamental category. A man I had taken on as a business partner had turned out to be a rival in love . . . Why should I waste time transcribing his writings instead of producing my own?"

But it is Jake's change of attitude toward Anna Quentin and Hugo Belfounder which is more important. In the big "recognition scene" of the novel (a midnight conversation between Donaghue and Belfounder in an unlighted hospital room), Jake discovers that his interpretation of events has been completely wrong: Hugo is not disgusted with him; Hugo does not love Anna, but Sadie, Anna's sister; the Mime Theatre was not Hugo's idea, but Anna's. Hugo also tells how Anna had developed a grand passion for him and pursued him around London. This really jars Jake: "I was struggling to recognize in this frenzied Maenad the Anna that I knew, the coolly tender Anna who was forever balancing the claims of her admirers one against the other with the gentle impartiality of a mother." The next day he thinks, "It seemed as if, for the first time, Anna really existed



now as a separate being, and not as a part of myself." No longer suffering under the delusion that Anna is a sort of fairy-godmother to whom he can run for protection, Jake can begin to realize himself.

Most important, Jake frees himself from the influence of Hugo, an influence for which Jake, not Hugo, is responsible. In a flashback, we learn that a few years previous Jake had met Belfounder at a "cold-cure" institution and become fascinated with his ideas, particularly those on human communication. Hugo felt that one can not describe anything accurately: "The language just won't let you present it as it really was." During and after their stay at the institution, the two have long discussions on this topic, and Jake, "completely under Hugo's spell," begins to jot down and re-arrange the material. The result is a book in dialogue form, *The Silencer*. Jake recognizes that it was "from start to finish an objective justification of Hugo's attitude. That is, it was a travesty and falsification of our conversations." At this time, he stops seeing Hugo because he feels that his book is a betrayal of Belfounder. As mentioned above, Jake later discovers that Hugo had not recognized his ideas in *The Silencer*, just as he did not recognize his ideas as reflected in Anna Quentin's Mime Theatre.

Of course, this early experience with Hugo was what led Jake to stop creative writing and confine himself to translating: ". . . it's like opening one's mouth and hearing someone else's voice emerge"; and to refrain from encountering things and people outside himself: "The substance of my life is a private conversation with myself and to turn it into a dialogue would be equivalent to self-destruction." But, as A. S. Byatt observes, this state of affairs is the product of an "obsession with Hugo's precise vision as an end in itself, the only permissible way of seeing." In the "recognition scene" referred to above, Hugo, himself, observes, "You think far too well of me, Jake." And by the end of *Under the Net*, Jake sees this too, and he slips "under the net" of theory, particularity, projected subjective vision, and is open to the "wonders" of life.

The critical commentaries that have been written on *Under the Net* have stressed the picaresque elements, the initiation theme, and the "philosophies" of the various characters in their relation to Jake Donaghue's development. Miss Murdoch's use of *leitmotiv* has not been explored. A close reading reveals that both the initial attitude Jake has toward life and the change he undergoes are not only dramatized through conversation and action but also woven into the very texture of the novel through the author's use of diction, image and symbol. The recurrence of particular words, phrases, images, and symbols throughout the book gives depth and imaginative force to the surface story of initiation and merges content with form.

Let us first consider Miss Murdoch's use of the motifs of "enchantment" and "reflection" to present Jake's earlier attitude toward people. As related above, Jake's hatred of contingency, his demand that everything in his life have a sufficient reason, leads him to project on others as objective reality his own inaccurate, subjective vision. This tendency is illustrated by the language and metaphors Jake uses to describe his reactions to and feelings for Anna Quentin and Hugo Belfounder. In Chapter Three, he encounters Anna for the first time in several years. They look at each other in silence before "The spell was broken." Shortly after, Jake describes Anna as lying in the prop-



room of the Mime Theatre "amid the coloured debris like a fairytale princess." When the meeting ends, Anna says, ". . . don't come back here unless I summon you," and Jake stands "as one enchanted. . . ." This "enchantment" theme, associated with the fairytale, dominates the scene in which Jake pursues Anna through the Tuileries gardens (Chap. 15). She is described as having a "golden head," walking with a "dreamer's pace," and as "outlined against the forest like a lonely girl in a story." The Tuileries at night has the "dangerous charm of an enchanted garden," is an "unnatural garden" containing flowers "quiet as dream flowers." Jake picks up the shoes which Anna discards, and follows her; but the girl he encounters is not his Cinderella, and he leaves the spot in a nightmare-like flight, bumping into and recoiling from trees, statues, and whispering lovers.

"Enchantment" is also associated with Hugo. Commenting on his relationship with Belfounder, Jake says, "I was completely under Hugo's spell"; and in several places he comments that Hugo is his "destiny." Before breaking into the hospital during the night to visit his former friend, Donaghue reveals that his mind "was simply dominated by Hugo. It was as if from his bed in the hospital Hugo were holding the end of a cord to which I was attached, and from time to time I could feel it twitching." And as he touches the hospital room door, "It opened like a dream door. . . ." What follows is the all important conversation with Hugo which puts an end to Jake's fairy-tales and enchantments and opens his eyes to reality.

Miss Murdoch also makes use of images of "reflection" to underline the inaccuracy of Jake's subjective view of reality. The notion that there is a difference between a real thing and its reflected image is introduced in a scene in Chapter Four. Jake is in a beauty parlour talking with Sadie Quentin while looking at her through a mirror, when the thought occurs to him that ". . . if I were to look under the drier at the real face and not at the reflection, I should see there some terrible witch." Later in the book, the same image is used twice more; on these occasions the reflecting medium is water. After unsuccessfully attempting to find Anna in Paris, Jake walks toward Notre-Dame until he can see "mirrored beneath it in the unflecked river a diabolic Notre-Dame, sketched there but never quite motionless, like a skull which appears in a glass as the reflection of a head." Shortly after, during the Bastille Day fireworks display, Jake spots Anna in the crowd on the opposite bank of the Seine. He tries to attract her attention by throwing a fragment from a Belfounder rocket into her image as he sees it reflected in the river. But, of course, he fails, since Anna from her location does not see what Jake sees from his. Here the image of "reflection" becomes part of a symbolic scene which embodies and gives expression to the principal problem of the novel—Jake's inability to view and accept things as they are.

One other prominent use of this image occurs during the night hospital conversation between Belfounder and Donaghue. Jake discovers that Hugo does not recognize his ideas as they were expressed in *The Silencer* and in Anna Quentin's Mime Theatre. Concerning the Theatre, Jake says:

"That was just what was yours," I said. "It was you reflected in Anna, just as that dialogue [*The Silencer*] was you reflected in me."



"I don't recognize the reflections," said Hugo. "The point is that people must just do what they can do...."

Now let us return to a consideration of *leitmotiv* in relation to Jake's change. Miss Murdoch employs water symbolism and references to patterns and images breaking and reforming in such fashion that they seem to be, in the words of one reviewer, ". . . only the precise details that enrich a scene, a mood, yet which undeniably work upon the reader, preparing him for a future development which then seems inevitable. . . ." Water, with its associations of life and renewal, and breaking and reforming patterns are suitable elements for a novel of initiation.

Jake, a city dweller—though he frequently travels the waters between London and Paris—spends a good part of his time near the Thames and the Seine. After leaving the "old-cure" institution, he regularly met Hugo on Chelsea Bridge; and these two often carried on their conversations while pacing Chelsea embankment. In chapter Eight, he indulges in a night-swim in the Thames with Lefty Todd and Finn. In Paris, after refusing Madge's offer of a script-writing job, he seeks the Seine; then after unsuccessfully searching for Anna throughout the city, he again turns to the river. Later in London, before sneaking into the hospital to see Hugo, he goes to the Thames and, while standing on Hammersmith Bridge, gathers his thoughts.

However, it is during the night-swim episode that water is associated directly with Jake's problem and its eventual solution. The symbolism of this scene is emphasized in a heavy-handed manner when Jake, after emerging from the Thames,

says, "A tension had been released, a ritual performed." But the significant statement of the episode is his observation that swimming depends upon "one's willingness to surrender a rigid and nervous attachment to the upright position." Already good at swimming, Jake later becomes good at living by applying the same principle to life and surrendering his demand for necessity.

This episode, with its obvious overtones of renewal, is preceded and followed by scenes which also suggest rebirth. Before going to the Thames, Jake, Finn and Dave Gellman are led into a small enclosed garden, formerly the nave of St. Leonard Foster. This Eden-like enclosure, with its fig tree, high grass and Orion overhead, suggests a retracing of steps, a going back in order to begin again. After swimming, the group partakes "joyously" of what can be taken as a Eucharistic meal of *pâté de foie gras*, biscuits and brandy, the last of which goes down "like divine fire."

After Jake refuses Madge's offer in Chapter Fourteen, water is again used in a passage which also contains the *motifs* of "reflection" and "pattern": "As I looked about me Paris recomposed itself like a reflection that ceases to waver as the water becomes still. At last it was as still as glass. What *had* I done?" Toward the end of the novel, when Jake takes one last trip to Hugo's now-deserted apartment, an act which he considers the last of his old life, he says: "London passed before me like the life of a drowning man. . . ." Finally, as Jake touches the manuscripts of his earlier attempts at creative writing, his hands tremble "like the hands of a water diviner."





Water, symbolizing life and renewal, is employed artfully in *Under the Net*. It is present in many important scenes of the book, and referred to in a number of the key statements made by Jake Donaghue. This is equally true of the image of breaking and reforming patterns.

On two occasions Jake mentions his "pattern of life" is changing. Toward the end of the flashback which tells of his break with Belfounder, Jake mentions that "gradually my life took on a new pattern and the powerful image of Hugo began to fade." Later, after rushing to the Mime Theatre to meet Anna only to find her gone, he says, "It was perfectly clear to me that my previous pattern of life was gone forever . . . What new pattern would in due course emerge I had no means of telling."

In three other passages, we find allusions to breaking and re-forming images and patterns. Two of them were cited above in reference to other *motifs*: the scene in which Jake, having refused a job as a script-writer, sees Paris recomposing itself; and the scene in which he throws the fragment from one of Belfounder's rockets into Anna's image reflected in the Seine. The third passage is part of the "recognition scene" in the hospital. When Jake finally realizes that it is Sadie Hugo loves, not Anna, he comments: "A pattern in my mind was suddenly scattered, and the pieces of it went flying about me like birds."

During the course of *Under the Net*, Jake Donaghue undergoes a change. When we first meet him, he hates contingency and has such a need for necessity that he unknowingly weaves false theories to explain situations and people. But even at the beginning of the novel Jake is aware that things are shifting. In Chapter Two, when he is forced to leave Madge's apartment, he observes: ". . . the Earls Court Road phase of my life was over, . . . Madge had forced a crisis on me; well, I would explore it, I would even exploit it. Who can tell what day may not inaugurate a new era?" At the end of the novel Jake inaugurates that new era. No longer attempting to impose false theories on things, he accepts the contingency of existence, the mystery and variety of life. "It was the morning of the first day," and the mixed breed of Maggie's newly-born litter of kittens cannot be explained—"It's just one of the wonders of the world."

In the process of developing and presenting this initiation, Iris Murdoch introduces us to stimulating characters and exposes us to thought-provoking, and sometimes highly amusing, situations. But what gives distinction to *Under the Net* is Miss Murdoch's effective use of *leitmotiv*.

**Source:** Raymond J. Porter, "Leitmotiv in Iris Murdoch's *Under the Net*," in *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. XV, No. 3, Autumn 1969, pp. 379-85.

## Topics for Further Study

Iris Murdoch is said to have been influenced by both Jean-Paul Sartre and Ludwig Josef Johann Wittgenstein. Choose one of these philosophers and analyze Murdoch's *Under the Net* in relation to his basic tenets. How does Murdoch demonstrate the philosopher's beliefs through her protagonist?

What was the literary atmosphere in Europe and in the United States during the middle of the twentieth century? Which authors were winning literary prizes? What were the literary critics saying about the works contemporary to their times? What major literary movements were developing? Write a research paper that concludes with a reading list of novels prominent at the time.

Research the activities of the Communist Party in London from the 1940s through the 1960s.

How did the Communist Party affect politics in England? How involved was it in the labor movement? Are there any remaining effects of the Communist Party on politics and social issues in London today?

Research Alzheimer's disease and explain what it is, how it affects a person, what current research of the disease has revealed, and whether a cure is available.

Read John Bayley's memoirs *Elegy for Iris* and *Iris and Her Friends: A Memoir of Memory and Desire*, and then write your own biography of Iris Murdoch for an audience of elementary-school children. Keep your language simple and the story interesting but uncomplicated. What elements of Murdoch's life do you think might most interest children of this age? Most inspire them?





## Compare and Contrast

**1950s:** Elizabeth II is crowned queen of England, and Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden, and Harold MacMillan, consecutively, are elected prime minister.

**Today:** Elizabeth II continues as queen of England. Her reign has outlasted ten prime ministers, with Tony Blair serving in the post in the early twenty-first century.

**1950s:** Existentialism, as espoused by Søren Kierkegaard and Martin Heidegger, is developed in France by Jean-Paul Sartre through his essays and novels.

**Today:** Jacques Derrida, a Frenchman whose philosophical essays have inspired and influenced literary criticism all over the world, espouses deconstruction and postmodern theories.

**1950s:** Forgetfulness in old age is often referred to as a natural state of aging. Generic terms such as dementia or senility are applied to older people who display these symptoms.

**Today:** After many years of research, Alois Alzheimer's theories have been accepted, and doctors and researchers have come to recognize the disease that is now referred to as Alzheimer's, an illness that affects over 4 million people in the United States alone.

## What Do I Read Next?

Often acclaimed as Murdoch's best work *The Sea, The Sea* (1978), a Booker Prize-winning novel, tells the story of Charles Arrowby, a tyrannical director-playwright, who decides to retire after a forty-year-long career in the theatre. He moves to a home by the sea and plans to write his memoirs about an old love affair. Things do not go as he had thought, as he is visited by people from his past (some of them no longer alive) and he learns a lot more about himself than he thought he wanted to know.

*The Black Prince* (1973) is another of Murdoch's more reputed works. It is an experimental novel, and the story is told by Bradley Pearson, a self-conscious writer who is a perfectionist. He ends up in jail for a crime he did not commit.

Jean-Paul Sartre introduced Murdoch to the philosophy of existentialism. She was most fond of his *Being and Nothingness* (1956), which began the existentialist movement and consists of essays on the topic of consciousness and free will. To live authentically, Sartre believed, one needs to be conscious of one's own acts. Existentialism was said to have heavily influenced *Under the Net*.

Albert Camus, a contemporary and fellow existentialist of Sartre, wrote *The Stranger* (1946), considered one of the most widely read novels of the twentieth century. It tells the story of Meursault, a disaffected, amoral man who is alienated from society. Meursault, a young Algerian, ends up killing a man. His trial, however, reflects less on his crime than on his so-called deficient character.

One of Murdoch's favorite authors was George Eliot, whose *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) relates the ordeals of a young woman, Maggie Tulliver, who has great difficulty adapting to her provincial world. Her intelligence is denied by all, except for one friend, whom her older brother eventually forbids her to see.

Leo Tolstoy was another author whom Murdoch praised. His novel *The Death of Ivan Ilych* (first published in Russian in 1886) is a classic work, presenting Tolstoy's concerns about life, death, and religion. A mortal disease suddenly strikes down Tolstoy's protagonist, a man who has invested little emotion in his life, his family, and other people around him. His family soon tires of his complaints, and he is left to die with only one farmhand assisting him in his needs.

The final novel of Fyodor Dostoevsky, another novelist whose writing Murdoch admired, is *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879), which is considered his masterpiece. It is the story of a love-hate relationship that exhibits Dostoevsky's astute understanding of psychology and spirituality. The story unfolds through a dramatic search for faith, which Ivan, one of the brothers, finally discovers is found not through the mind but through the heart.

A good place to start examining Murdoch's philosophical ideas might be her *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, first published in the

United States in 1998. This work is a collection of her thoughts on the connection between art and philosophy.



## Further Study

Antonaccio, Maria, *Picturing the Human: The Moral Thought of Iris Murdoch*, Oxford University Press, 2000.

So much attention has been spent on Murdoch as a novelist that her philosophical contributions are often overlooked. This is one of the first books that has tried to fill that gap. Antonaccio explores the contributions to moral and religious philosophy that Murdoch fervently studied and presented.

Bayley, John, *Elegy for Iris*, St. Martin's Press, 1999.

Bayley wrote this book before his wife Iris Murdoch died. She was suffering from Alzheimer's disease at the time, and he recounts his memories of her and of their relationship together. The movie

*Iris: A Memoir of Iris Murdoch* was taken from this book. Both the movie and the book received rave reviews.

—, *Iris and Her Friends: A Memoir of Memory and Desire*, W. W. Norton, 1999.

This is the second memoir written by Bayley about his wife. This one was written after her death, and many critics have highly recommended this book for its disclosure of a wonderfully warmhearted story of love.

Byatt, A. S., *Degrees of Freedom: The Novels of Iris Murdoch*, Chatto and Windus, 1965.

The philosophical ideas that influenced Murdoch's early novels are explored in this book, as Byatt examines how those ideas are used in her novels.

Kaufmann, Walter Arnold, ed., *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky to Sartre*, Meridian Books, 1984.

This has been hailed as an excellent introduction to the philosophy of existentialism. It includes a discussion of purely philosophical essays as well as the influence of existentialism on literary works. Such works discussed include Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground*, Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and Sartre's short story "The Wall." Philosophers include Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, among others.



# Bibliography

Bove, Cheryl K., *Understanding Iris Murdoch*, University of South Carolina Press, 1993, p. 36.

Conradi, Peter J., *Iris Murdoch: A Life*, W. W. Norton, 2001, pp. 380, 385.

Kellman, Steven, "Shakespearean Plot in the Novels of Iris Murdoch," in *Iris Murdoch*, edited by Harold Bloom, Modern Critical Views series, Chelsea House Publishers, 1986, p. 89.

Russell, John, "Under Iris Murdoch's Exact, Steady Gaze," in the *New York Times*, February 22, 1990.

Todd, Richard, *Iris Murdoch*, Methuen, 1984, pp. 13, 16.



# Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Novels for Students*.

## **Project Editor**

David Galens

## **Editorial**

Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

## **Research**

Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

## **Data Capture**

Beverly Jendrowski

## **Permissions**

Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

## **Imaging and Multimedia**

Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

## **Product Design**

Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

## **Manufacturing**

Stacy Melson

©1997-2002; ©2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc.

Gale and Design® and Thomson Learning™ are trademarks used herein under license.

*For more information, contact*

The Gale Group, Inc

27500 Drake Rd.

Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535

Or you can visit our Internet site at

<http://www.gale.com>

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any



form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems—without the written permission of the publisher.

For permission to use material from this product, submit your request via Web at <http://www.gale-edit.com/permissions>, or you may download our Permissions Request form and submit your request by fax or mail to:

*Permissions Department*

The Gale Group, Inc  
27500 Drake Rd.  
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535

Permissions Hotline:  
248-699-8006 or 800-877-4253, ext. 8006  
Fax: 248-699-8074 or 800-762-4058

Since this page cannot legibly accommodate all copyright notices, the acknowledgments constitute an extension of the copyright notice.

While every effort has been made to secure permission to reprint material and to ensure the reliability of the information presented in this publication, The Gale Group, Inc. does not guarantee the accuracy of the data contained herein. The Gale Group, Inc. accepts no payment for listing; and inclusion in the publication of any organization, agency, institution, publication, service, or individual does not imply endorsement of the editors or publisher. Errors brought to the attention of the publisher and verified to the satisfaction of the publisher will be corrected in future editions.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". © 1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". © 1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

## **Introduction**

### **Purpose of the Book**

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's □For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels



frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

### Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel; and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals—helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

### How Each Entry Is Organized





Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- **Introduction:** a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- **Author Biography:** this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- **Plot Summary:** a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- **Characters:** an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in *Invisible Man*—the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- **Themes:** a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- **Style:** this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- **Historical Context:** This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- **Critical Overview:** this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- **Criticism:** an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).



- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an "at-a-glance" comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

### Other Features

NfS includes "The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature," a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.



Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

### Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

### We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: [ForStudentsEditors@gale.com](mailto:ForStudentsEditors@gale.com). Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Novels for Students  
Gale Group  
27500 Drake Road  
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535