

“A Remote Relation of Virginia Woolf”: The Literary Relationship Between Iris Murdoch and Virginia Woolf

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There is a complex literary relationship between Iris Murdoch and Virginia Woolf. In her novel writing, although Murdoch weaves her literary connection with Woolf in *A Severed Head*, *Nuns and Soldiers* and *The Book and the Brotherhood* by her repeated references and allusions to Woolf, she distances herself from Virginia Woolf at the very same time by characterizing her female characters' mothers as remote relations of Woolf. Murdoch's distance from Woolf can be more clearly seen in her philosophy, letters, writings on literature and speaking in which Woolf's characterization and views on gender have been targeted by Murdoch compared with her novel writing. A review of Woolf's novel writing reveals that Murdoch's criticism of Woolf result from her misunderstanding of Woolf, particularly Woolf's characterization which also aims to present whole and real characters as Murdoch strives to achieve in her novel writing. Despite the fact that Murdoch's understanding of Woolf undergoes changes, her ambiguous relationship with Woolf goes throughout her whole career. Contrast to her early distance from and criticism on Woolf, Murdoch tends to identify with Woolf in a more direct way in her later novels. However, her distance from Woolf remains intact. This ambiguous relationship between Woolf and Murdoch can be attributed to Murdoch's preference for 19th century realist literature and her disputes with Woolf over gender and feminism.

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