



# Contingency in Iris Murdoch's *Under the Net*

*Saskia Bachner*

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Seminar paper from the year 2008 in the subject English Language and Literature Studies - Literature, grade: 1,3, University of Mannheim, course: British Literature of the 50's, 22 entries in the bibliography, language: English, abstract: All human beings have a deep need for necessity in their lives. We want to know why we exist, we want to understand the world and its secrets, and we want to know our place in the world. Concepts like religion and philosophy are concerned with those questions and try to provide answers to them. Nevertheless, there are still no satisfying explanations. This is due to the fact that "our actual lived experience has no form or unity in itself, but is full of contingent rubble, accident, and unsystematized detail which may resist our attempts at unity" (Antonaccio & Schweiker, Human Goodness 111). As our world is contingent, it cannot be completely understood. Consequently, we should accept its contingency instead of denying it by trying to find an explanation to everything. The stress ratio between contingency and necessity is also the theme of Iris Murdoch's first novel Under the Net. Throughout the novel, the protagonist Jake Donaghue searches for his own identity and for a master theory which is able to explain the world (cf. Porter, Leitmotiv 379). In the end, he realizes that he has to change his attitude towards contingency. In the following, I will try to find reasons for the change of Jake's attitude, and I will describe the consequences of this change. In order to be able to do this, I will first provide a definition of the term 'contingency' and place it in the context of philosophy in chapter 2. Afterwards, I will explain some essential aspects of contingency in the novel in chapter 3. In chapter 4, I will have a look at Jake's changing attitude towards contingency in the course of the novel in order to, finally, be able to find reasons for the change and to describe its consequences in chapter 5 and 6.

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