

LOVE AND FREEDOM
IN
IRIS MURDOCH'S NOVELS

By

SASHIKANTA PANIGRAHI

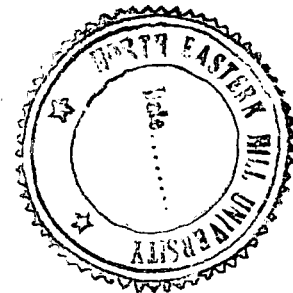
Dissertation

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To



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1988

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C E R T I F I C A T E

I certify that the Dissertation entitled "Love and Freedom in Iris Murdoch's Novels", submitted by Shri Sashikanta Panigrahi in part-fulfilment of the requirement of the Degree of the Master of Philosophy of the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, embodies the record of original investigation carried out by him under my supervision.

He has been duly registered and the dissertation presented is worthy of being considered for the award of the M.Phil Degree. This work has not been submitted for any degree in any other University.

Dated: December 28, 1988

Place: Shillong.

Noorul Hasan
(Noorul Hasan)

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Sashikanta Panigrahi

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Chapter I

Introduction

It is a worthwhile critical exercise to work out the Murdochian vision which is not a conclusive but an expanding one. The vision is not conclusive because it concerns 'love' which is indefinable and indefinite, mad, blind and boisterous. For Iris Murdoch love means freedom in love, thought and actions. That is to say, Murdochian love knows no obligations, is not bound by any emotional or sentimental shackles - it is not transcendental in character, nor Platonic in its philosophical implications. It is a detached and ironic view of life that freely flows down like a fountain. To Iris Murdoch love is not 'a red red rose', nor is it the journey's end - it is the thorn that awakens, pricks, and prepares one for a journey into one's own inner self.

Love hangs and pierces like a sword, blossoms like a flower, consumes like fire and eludes like Time. It destroys and creates, chains and sets free. While in love Murdochian characters do not grow like vegetables. They achieve their own perfection, at least constantly yearn for it; they must have all the consciousness, the understanding of a God and, what is most important, an exact balancing of each other. Such a vision may appear to sound Lawrentian, because for both Miss Murdoch and D.H. Lawrence, love is the guiding force that brings an individual to his fullness of being. To both love is not just the mutual mixing and

mingling; it is not a complete fusion. It is a bridge that connects two points, or two extremes, while each maintains its respective separateness. Like two planets or heavenly bodies revolve round each other or remain separate by a secret understanding and law, the Murdochian and Lawrentian lovers maintain a perfect balance. While the sudden fusion leads to catastrophe and cosmic disaster the balance guarantees existence and freedom. Therefore, as we see, for both of them, love is the liberty of mind, freedom of choice and sovereignty of soul. Both stress freedom in love, but Miss Murdoch departs from the ethos of Lawrentian world in so far as she deals with the concepts like 'morality', 'evil', etc. and thus achieves a uniquely personal approach.

Always in Miss Murdoch's writing, there is the insistence on 'morality' as a technique for discovering more about what is real, with the warning that unless great care is taken we may fail to see the individual because we are completely enclosed in a fantasy world of our own into which we try to draw things from outside, not grasping their reality and independence, making them into dream objects of our own. It is this topic of 'fantasy' meaning 'bad imagining' - (The Darkness of Practical Reason) that is central to all Iris Murdoch's works. To live morally and valuably a man must, Miss Murdoch feels, be always on his

guard against the state of 'bad imagining', he must respect the unique otherness; and he must undertake "the constant quiet work of attention and imagination".¹ This is the reason, why most of them contradict their own sayings and feelings, change their judgements and shift their positions. This is the main lesson of her writings, and in each of her novels, at least one character is made to learn it.

For Iris Murdoch everything is empty, if it is superficial. She is not concerned with the facile evil and any kind of value judgement on it is redundant - "it's all just conventions and feelings". The judgement outside the context is improper and the evaluation outside the purview is untimely. In the course of a constant search for one's own self while respecting the "otherness", the concepts like evil become quite confusing and misleading. In a world where incest is committed and justified, murder becomes a logical necessity for freedom, and deception a habit; concepts like evil become empty and meaningless.

To understand 'evil' in Iris Murdoch's novel one has to examine characters like Julius King in A Fairly Honourable Defeat. The man breaks up his relationship with Morgan, destroys the happy, unique comradeship between Simon and Axel, undermines happily married Hilary and Rupert and yet no one can really bear a grudge against him. His evil designs cannot

be called malignant - he destroys but is not disgusting. He is an artist who schemes and designs, his dance of destruction has a rhythm and harmony. But one can safely say that Iris Murdoch's 'evil' is unnameable like her understanding of 'reality'. In other words, 'evil' has various manifestations which shall be discussed in the later chapters.

In all her novels, love unites and unfolds the human personality which is constantly in search of its identity. All kinds of literature participate in this timeless enquiry, probes into the fundamental question of self-discovery. Such questioning leads to alienation, distances an individual, makes him an island and even in a deep human relationship Murdoch considers such probings as freedom emanating from love. The free agents in her novels do not fuse themselves and the more they indulge in sexual acts and intellectual arguments, the more vigorously they pursue their own, independent courses. In the cosmos of love, Murdoch's characters are the dances of several forms of energies who do not mix and mingle, but neutralise and balance each other.

She defines love variously and cogently as "the imaginative recognition of, that is respect of otherness", or the "non-violent apprehension of difference". Implicit in this definition is her idea of "opacity of persons" or

as she terms it in her work on Sartre, the "volcanic otherness of people". Murdoch can see no moral progress towards a reconceptualization of personality without the recognition and deepening of her view of love as the acknowledgement that others exist, exist separate from each other, exist independently.

Both 'love' and 'freedom' are equally important to her concept of personality and the ideas of character creation. As Murdoch's definition goes, it is very difficult to make a clear distinction between 'love' and 'freedom'. She says "Freedom is knowing and understanding and respecting things quite other than ourselves."²

This definition is very close to her definition of love, but there is a difference suggested by her emphasis on "imaginative" regarding love and "knowing" regarding freedom. One might infer from this differentiation that love is to be associated with the contemplation and apprehension of others, while freedom is to be associated with the knowledge of the 'other'. She says:

To be free is something like this: to exist sanely and without fear and to perceive what is real.³

To live is to love in Iris Murdoch's novel. The love keeps on creating numerous ripples, chains and cycles

and very confusing networks. They swirl and swivel and yet reach the shore. They get puzzled, exhilarated and exhausted, and yet have enough left for finding out the 'pointer' - their ultimate love. Murdochian characters believe, witness and wait for a sign - the strange, spiritual, miraculous and sometimes inscrutable:

It was an aspect of Michael's belief in God, and one which although he knew it to be dangerous, he could never altogether reject that he expected the emergence in his life of patterns and signs. He has always felt himself to be a man with a definite destiny, a man waiting for a call.⁴

Eventhough they terminate an affair, cancel the present love and find out an alternative, they cannot leave the past, they need all their past and all of their present for a preparation for the future. The fixed, determined, future sign is their inevitable destiny.

Iris Murdoch acts within a specific network. The existential man once sure of his shore, must sail towards it relentlessly. Once they get the unmistakable call of destiny: their 'love', they rush forward with unimaginable speed. And from that point onward all kinds of pressures, such as, guilt, morality, social establishments and responsibilities break down. The 'lovers' become liberated. It is like heading for heaven. From the ashes of the dead and bygone relationships they pick up the squibs and they understand it in a flash. But what is more interesting, the

reader knows it, all along their wanderings. The characters themselves also have it in their subconscious, like a fire burning all the time; they have felt its heat, only they did not see the light.

To say that Murdochian characters only pursue the inevitable destiny would be an oversimplification. Murdochian Destiny like Hardy's Fate is the ever elusive, mysterious mirage that baffles all the time and never does permit the seekers the exact recognition. This is not to say that such a destiny is gloomy and cloudy and dark like Hardy's, it is rather ironic, contradictory and hence, real. Catastrophes in intense love affairs (ranging from homo-sexual to hetero-sexual to incest) not only lead to a heart break, involving common reactions like despair, dejection, jealousy, revenge, etc. but also to the emergence of confused intellect that has moments of self-recognition. Such states are momentary and transitory because the realizer soon contradicts or seems to forget his earlier moments of rejuvenation. Michael in The Bell loved both Nick and Toby with the fullness of his being. Nick had overwhelmed and fulfilled him but afterwards despised and betrayed him. Toby was another fate, another pointer - a wrong, 'misunderstood' dangerous sign:

Nick had forced Toby to play exactly the part which Nick himself had played thirteen years earlier. Toby had been his understudy indeed. Michael had hoped to save Nick. But Nick had merely ruined him a second time and in precisely the same way.⁵

Everything is true in its proper aspect, everything is false outside its proper moment. The confusion, the understanding, that is, the ultimate sign lives in them and yet it is for ever eluding them - the ultimate revelation has to wait for its turn. And in the meanwhile life goes on, relationships are made and broken, the Present and Now stretches itself on. They all live in the present, with all their past consciousness turned into present experiences - they live eternally. In the churning of various relationships they perceive the moments of awakening, experience freedom and these consummating moments set them free, lead them to one profound experience after another and finally prepare for the Ultimate.

Danby in Bruno's Dream has flirted with Diana and Adelaide like a machine with occasional moments of self-realization. There were times when Diana and Danby yearned and longed for melting into each other and sway with the harmony of slow music:

Slow foxtort
with eyes half-closed Danby and Diana
were rotating dreamily in each other's arms.⁶

But once Danby sees the flash, perceives his 'Destiny' in Lisa the emancipation becomes complete and natural. The smoke curtain vanishes, the clearer horizon reveals itself and Danby is swept off his feet. The enchantment begins, the mad, stupefied ghost walks out:

You may find this incomprehensible. I've only seen you a few times. But oh God Lisa, please believe it's serious, it's terrible. I love you ... I feel a sense of destiny here ... I'm a frivolous person, but not about you ... I dare to say respect the fact that I love you ... you have got to ... I love you Lisa, and everything else is utterly blotted out.

Your slave Danby.⁷

Indeed, for Danby everything else is blotted out - all the past, all those so called precious, unique, fulfilling moments with Adelaide and Diana simply come to nothing and are forgotten, no more of looking back with guilt and remorse - it is a forward journey and a conscious drive at his destiny.

They follow their lovers wherever they go. Denial or refusal is simply not taken into account. Come hell, fire or brimstone, like ghosts they pursue. In the dead of the night, even in driving rain, they enter into their lovers' compounds like thieves. And when everything fails, including all kinds of pursuit, the last resort is violence. Violence to them is the last method of communication and the capacity for committing violence is like self-liberation. The violence has to be learnt as a form of communication.

One of them is made ready by the other in order to properly neutralise and balance. In A Severed Head it is the woman Honor who understands its necessity first and prepares Martin step by step:

I believe you love my brother.
But you do no good by letting him off.
He wants, he needs, your harshness, your
criticism, even your violence. Because
they are both persons with great capacity
for self-deception.⁸

This gives Martin a clue, a clue to love and communicate. When Honor's snake-like eyes and the hideous Jewish face bowls Martin over, Martin settles down to the last resort: Violence.

'we're not likely to meet in the future', said Honor Klein. 'I'm going back to Cambridge almost at once' ...

Now the frustration builds up in Martin, the despondency simmers not because he is bothered about Honor not seeing him in the future, rather he feels wretched that his love will remain uncommunicated, unheard and untold

what happened next may seem a little improbable,⁹
but reader must believe me that it did occur ...

they indulge in a violent, macabre fight.

Honor had already understood and received the communication and several pages after when Martin asks

'when did you know I loved you?'
It was a lover's question
'when you attacked me in the cellar'.¹⁰

If with D.H. Lawrence women are in love, with Miss Murdoch, it is men in love. In her novels the most intense focus is on the flawed, culpable and questing - learning male. In the matters of relationships, not just the initiative, but the madness and an impatient yearning usually catches up the Murdochian male first. It is Tim (Nuns and Soldiers) who has got to hold Gertrude's hand and when with an evident ~~and when with an evident~~ and relentless attention Honor waited for Martin to speak, he says at last "I suppose you realize that I'm in love with you?" And Honor, of course, replied back in affirmative. She has realized, no doubt, but it is Martin who first speaks out.

But this is not to say that the women are always at the receiving end. While the world of form, convention, in practically all her novels is largely male, that of contingency is ruled by women. The Bell is the clearest example, in which the religious lay community at Imber Court led by Michael is set up against the community of nuns under the governorship of Abess.

But in this context, both D.H. Lawrence and Iris Murdoch, meet at one point, which we should explore here in the introduction. Like Lawrentian characters, Murdoch's lovers constantly desire to achieve the best of both worlds:

a perfect male bonding and a fulfilling hetero-sexual-mental relationship. Almost all the novels of Miss Murdoch resort to a very unintelligible male-bonding and homo-sexuality. Unintelligible, because it is not manifested, it shows and presents itself, but never convinces as it does in D.H. Lawrence's novels, in Women in Love in particular. In short, a healthy, profound and essential male-male relationship is necessary in case of D.H. Lawrence but Iris Murdoch has not been quite convincing in showing its inevitable occurrence in a very conscious intellectual which some of her characters are. But the fact remains that both the novelists have grappled with this problem.

The constant attempt of Lawrentian characters is to find in each possible pair a final, almost extra-human relationship. Only Birkin and Ursula manage to succeed "a new consummation of my being and of her being in a new one, a new paradisaal unit regained from duality". Birkin, who understands how the perversion distorts the living mysteries brought upon by Gerald and Gudrun, watches the snow-God, the 'Industrial Magnate' and is suddenly illuminated: "He should have loved me".

And let us compare all these with Martin's letters to Honor Klein:

My feelings for Palmer are of normal intensity. I've never been in the accepted sense, a homo-sexual, but certainly my attachment to Palmer has something of this colour ... Palmer's liaison with my wife has increased rather than diminished my affection for him.¹¹

And the third letter reads:

I hope we shall meet again and this incident may serve as a stepping stone to an understanding of each other which has so far been, on both sides, conspicuously lacking.¹²

Not only Martin, most of the 'flawed and culpable' Murdochian male characters, want to understand the pull and magic of both the worlds. D.H. Lawrence cannot have the best of both the worlds, not that he does not want it, but it is 'impossible', concludes Ursula. Even Miss Murdoch cannot. The understanding is not the reality. Iris Murdoch in The Darkness of Political Reason writes: "I would be prepared to imply that one who perceives what is real, will also act rightly".¹³ But reality is always baffling, it subtly escapes human comprehension, it never manifests itself with a calculable certainty, may be, it just leaves its shadow, its footprints. Therefore, "Reality is not a given whole" ...¹⁴ she says in her critical writings and many of her novels echo such expression.

And to impose this aspect of absence of reality or truth on a form which ignores the contingencies of life is to endanger the rich conceptual background from which

imagination can take sustenance. As she advocates more concepts with which to picture the substance of being, so also she demands acceptance of the accidental, the unlikely and the improbable. Contingency, supplies characters with aspects not of ambiguity, but of mystery.

This, then, is the broad base of Iris Murdoch's vision and theory of personality. The individual is unique, "unutterably particular", and opaque. He is composed of fact, myth and unknowableness. He exists, and he must learn through the exercise of love and freedom that others exist independently of himself. He can apprehend "this volcanic otherness" only when his moral concepts are transformed and once again there is a background against which he may picture the transcendent realities of his being. Miss Murdoch cites Camus as a novelist who writes in an attempt to speak the truth that human being is substantial, impenetrable, individual, indefinite and valuable.

Miss Murdoch is her own best critic. In one of her recent interviews, she said to Ruth Lake Heyd that she is "objective about any flaws that her work may have, and is particularly sensitive to weaknesses in character delineation". She "attempts in each new novel to create stranger characters, who will seem realistic and valid".¹⁵ She cites Hannah of The Unicorn as a character who eluded the pattern

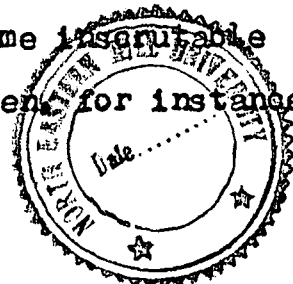
laid down by her creator.

It is apparent that Miss Murdoch's solution to these problems hinges on the matters of authorial tolerance, i.e. the exercise of love and freedom that will establish the balance between character and story. That she is not always successfully tolerant in creating her people Miss Murdoch attributes to "imperfect love" or imperfect apprehension of otherness. Professor Heyd found that Miss Murdoch's attitude toward love is summed up in the Abess's admonition to Michael in The Bell:

Good is an overflow ... Remember that all our failures are ultimately failures of love. Imperfect love must not be condemned and rejected but made perfect. The way is always forward, never back.¹⁶

In addition to these problems of ideas and characterization, there is the problem of the contingent. Besides mystery, chance and opinion there is also the aspect that Murdoch calls "eccentricity". For example, her characters often argue with themselves at great length (usually narrated as an interior monologue), a given action is justified and then they abruptly act in opposition to the preceding detailed reasoning. They are "Accidental Men" and they are "philosopher's pupils". Austin, George, "the word child", Martin, Danby and the whole lot carry some insupportable hideous aura around them. Even some women, for instance,

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Honor and Hannah assume symbols like the 'severed head' and 'the unicorn'. Primarily, to my mind, two important causes are responsible for this impregnable and unintelligible eccentricity about them, i.e. the accidental love or the contingencies and the philosophical biases. If the former is an enchanting irrational attraction, the latter leads to all sorts of chaos, confusions and intellectual wanderings. When asked by Heyd why so many of her characters exhibit eccentric patterns of thought and behaviour, Miss Murdoch 'laughed rather ominously' and suggested:

when one has the privilege of knowing one's friends more intimately, one learns that people are eccentric.¹⁷

This study also explores the responsibilities of typical Murdochian characters. As pointed out earlier, an individual's idea of morality is influenced by his understanding of evil. And this morality is connected with the "knowing" aspect of freedom. Murdochian characters are bound till the end and the novels one after another record their passionate desire to break the bond, to tear it apart and at the same time their moral considerations and their personal inner conflicts constantly wrangle with each other. Modern literature, ethics and philosophy that are bereft of moral referents do not even care to go deeper than the facile evil. But she creates a world of demonic, all

pervading, almighty evil which enchants and attracts the characters with a predetermined and predictable precision and the enchanted ones like the sleep-walkers have no other alternative but to go to the end of it.

Therefore, my contention is that different manifestations of evil with its amorous, romantic and magical powers are as powerful and magnetic as that of the love and the divine. A Murdochian character falls in love with such evil, becomes overwhelmed, chases a mirage, then tries to fly to the clearer horizon of freedom by cutting the hideous threads, misunderstands the trap, gets more entangled and baffled and finally revolts. And for Miss Murdoch morality begins with this. Morality begins with the revolt against society, its norms, its defined evils that restrict one from going into his own inner self and respecting 'otherness'. That Patriotism is divine, that incest is immoral, that Satan is an evil incarnate, prevents one from dabbling and corresponding with the evil and such taboos encourage fanciful preoccupations. To perceive what is real amidst the intense human relationship (that is love) and to perceive it on one's own in relation to 'other' (that is independence or freedom) becomes a moral responsibility for every Murdochian character.

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Chapter II

Love, Enchantment and Muddle

While Iris Murdoch has for a long time insisted that love is her primary subject, she says in her interview with Mr. Rose that she was more strongly preoccupied in her earlier works with freedom; now, however, she says:

What I am concerned about really is love ... the kind of opening out of love as a world where we really can see other people and are not simply dominated by our own slavish impulses and obsessions, this is something which I would want very much to explore and which I think is very difficult.¹

And the 'opening out' which usually happens in a flash brings in a sudden permutation and combination of relationships which produce indefinite number of chemical reactions in individuals. The Murdochian characters sometimes see the chain reactions, and sometimes fail to notice the changes. The ideas associated with love and the illusioned lovers; the old sentimental family tree, half-baked intellectual convictions, strange forms of invisible and unnameable guilt and many more complexities create the typical murdochian 'muddle'. Even after much deliberations and explanations, it will be very difficult to comprehend that cobweb, because in the first place, everything is connected and undecipherable; and secondly because, an invasion by one single thing changes the whole atmospheric balance:

The cosmic explosion of falling in love with Julius interrupted Morgan's converse with Hilda as it interrupted everything else in his life.²

In the process of 'opening out of love as a world where we really can see other people', we meet two groups of characters - those who enchant and those who are enchanted, in an intricate network of flight and pursuit. The enchanters are mysterious, magical figures who represent the forces at work in an 'ambiguous universe', while the enchanted ones suffer from ignorance and impotence and so regard these figures sometimes with fascination and at other times with loathing. The enchanters and their subjects are engaged in a futile symbolic struggle between knowledge and illusion.

The theme of love contains in itself the theme of violence and shock. Everything is stunning, bizarre and stupendous in Miss Murdoch's novel - almost everything. Every act that sounds stupid and farcical has some purpose and it contributes to the main vortex. The acts are stunning, because they are violent; but the nature of the violence and the way they are executed are really comic in a way no less than the scenes from a farce. When the love is incommunicable or when there is a deadlock, when the desire to possess is thwarted, or when the chances of reconciliation recede, violence becomes a terrible necessity, like a ritual.

In A Fairly Honourable Defeat Morgan's desperate bid to get reunited with Julius does not create any interest in the latter. When Morgan's emotional appeals do not yield any result she settles down to a stupid insistence which provokes Julius:

'Are you trying to provoke me to violence,' said Julius, 'in the hope that if I touch you I shall find your charms irresistible? I might even be tempted to disillusion you.'

'Yes, yes, touch me Julius, seize me, be rough to me. Hold me and subdue me. Come, let us start it all again at the beginning. Let us cut up the paper again.'³

Morgan's desire to establish communication through violence is much more pressing than Julius's preparedness for it - it is Morgan who provides the clue and makes Julius ready - the suggestion of cutting the paper makes everything clear. Julius, then, cuts up Morgan's dress, turns the key in the lock and leaves for the weekend and from an 'excited, swaggering, happily naked' state of mind Morgan falls into a state of shocking, miserable trauma:

Morgan was quite stunned. She stood in the middle of the room in a state of shock, one arm outstretched, surrounded by a sudden silence behind which, outside the double-glazed windows, murmured the interminable traffic of Brook Street.⁴

This shows how Iris Murdoch shares the Lawrentian penchant for staging a shock-treatment. The capability to commit violence is not automatic and arbitrary, it needs

ignition and provocation or just a symbolic suggestion. Both have to be ready: the desire to commit violence and the wish to be violated both emanates from a dark violent energy.

Violence in Murdoch often appears farcical, however, such events are symbolic, conventional and misleading as the techniques of shock-treatment. Cutting up of Morgan's undergarments is symbolic of an indifferent sexual abuse that amounts to a passionless rape. But such comic and symbolic acts of violence are misunderstood by Morgan herself who cannot comprehend the entire situation:

What gave her hope was his assault on her clothes. This act of violence did not belong to the conduct of a man who did not care. Julius cared. It was such a deeply characteristic action, and indifference does not produce such actions.⁵

But the reader knows that to remain cipher, indifferent and to inflict unintentional injury to the end are the basic qualities of Julius.

Like almost everything is stunning in her novels, almost everything is a 'muddle'. There are strange coincidences that relieve us from one shock, but lead us to further surprises. Simon comes to Morgan's rescue, Morgan runs away with Simon's dress, the latter was dreaming a strange, weird dream when Julius, who was supposed to be away for the weekend, suddenly appears and exclaims: 'this is certainly a

day of surprises ... I leave a naked girl and I return to find a naked boy.⁶

One form of naked reality gives way to another and the story of bewilderment continues without end. The hidden surprises continue with occasional moments of apparent comprehension and in the endless chain of unintelligible incidents and predicaments the Murdochian muddles go on expanding.

The misunderstanding, the inability to judge or see things in a poor, gloomy light and sometimes their own obstinate refusal to comprehend the situation make everything deplorable and precarious. But we should always remember about the curious Murdochian Destiny that brings everyone's intellect, emotion and sensibility within its own fold. They are destined to misunderstand and be blind to the obvious, possible and simple. In their moments of suffering, they sometimes become sentimental and do not see the obvious. In their state of anxiety and hyper-tension they make everything a muddle. In an emotionally surcharged episode:

Anne and Peter looked at each other. How muddled and strange emotion is, thought Anne. I love Peter, Peter pities Tim, I start imagining Tim - oh how I wish all the secrecy and muddle could be swept away and that all hearts could be opened and cleansed.⁷

But this is not to be - it cannot be 'opened' and 'cleansed'. The horizon is impregnable, unclear and

ambiguous, always a muddled confusion, strange and shocking. All of them, barring very few, in each novel cry out of shock and horror, of unpredictable and unknown and sometimes of precise, pre-determined doom.

Things have to happen - even the unimaginable and inconceivable take birth from the womb of mind. Not just floating in time and space, the 'unexpected' lie like coiled serpents in the minds of the character. This is the play of the unconscious, the dark store-house of unknown truths. Like D.H. Lawrence, Iris Murdoch believes in the play of the unconscious which is another great enchanter. Both of them reveal certain awfully startling revelations which result in a total intellectual and perceptual black-out.

Simon's dream is weird, no doubt, but it is a fitting example of the typical Murdochian forecast. We have observed in the introduction that many things happen here with a predictable precision. Some clue, some sign, some insight can most of the times be taken for granted before any real show, and the experience of such insights is grotesque and diabolic. In his dream Simon "dreaded to uncover the face which his digging fingers were now touching. He brushed the ash aside. The dead face was that of Rupert".⁸

That Rupert will die, there is no doubt now. Here is an example of the technique of an undiluted and sincere

projection of the unconscious. Miss Murdoch wants to convey that anyone with some iota of sensibility sees it or at least gets a glimpse of it; but deliberately avoids to name it and analyse it, for it is a cruel, unacceptable and stark exhibition of truth. Simon in his dreams, while dreaming, probably knew what he wanted to find, and yet 'dreaded to uncover the face which his digging fingers were now touching'. We, most of the times dread to uncover the unconscious.

In Nuns and Soldiers Anne's dream of Christ is of similar nature - it establishes the fact that the idea of a personal god is possible, can be reinforced and worked out. And the analysis of Anne's dream presupposes that Anne, though terribly in love with Peter, has to leave this world of muddle; eventhough it is not her liking, she will fly for ever to the clearer world of isolated suffering with 'that love' on her heart like a cross. Once a nun always a nun, does not matter whether she is confined or free.

'There is so much pain in the world, Peter, but one can love pain if nothing's lost. It's the endings that are so terrible. That one can lose someone forever. That one has to decide. There're eternal partings, Peter, nothing would be more important than that. We live with death. Oh with pain, yes - but really - with death'.⁹

So everything is in their mind. It only needs a slight pull and jerk and the whole thing explodes. And

usually there is a ringmaster, an enchanter, in each of her novels - the one who pulls everyone by their nose. An omnipotent person, who, as Prof. Rozanov says in The Philosopher's Pupil can make people do things. These characters survey the entire scenario, take part, play harmless roles, dissociate themselves at any time easily. They are grand designers and rare artists who act like god and make others puppets in their hands. For an example, let us take up Julius King's statements in A Fairly Honourable Defeat:

I could divide anybody from anybody. Even you could. Play sufficiently on a person's vanity, sow a little mistrust, hint at the contempt which every human being deeply, secretly feels for every other one. Everyman loves himself so astronomically more than he loves his neighbour. Anyone can be made to drop anyone.¹⁰

Everyone knows at some stage or other that Julius mystifies people and make them do parts and yet it is a strange pursuit for him on their parts. If Iago is a villain, he is also a gifted psychiatrist, so far as his understanding of people's minds goes. Like Iago dissects and analyses people, exploits their weaknesses and secrets, Julius understands the vanity, emotion and love of the middle-class English people and makes them act parts. Julius is the designer who plans and programmes the proceedings - he says:

I must say, they have behaved predictably to an extent which is quite staggering. Indeed if any of them had been less than predictable the whole enterprise would have collapsed at an early stage. They really are puppets, puppets.¹¹

And Julius is conscious of it, conscious of his abilities to exploit and manipulate people and the situations available to him. He recognises that Morgan, Rupert, Simon, Axel and Peter behave like people with guilty secrets, that theirs is simply the mutual delusion of each other's love. And once he knows this he shuffles the love letters written to him by Morgan and the letters written by Rupert to Hilda, sends them to Morgan and Rupert with accurate timing, after a masterly assessment of their emotion for each other. And then life becomes 'anxious, uncomfortable and unpredictable' for both Rupert and Morgan. Suddenly Morgan declares her love for Rupert. The quiet, happy world, the happily married Rupert and Hilda - everything is disturbed, a situation already chaotic becomes more chaotic and confusing.

The impetuous girl Morgan has brought all to their consciousness and landed them all with a really frightful problem, and all because of Julius. But never does he call him an evil - 'It was just my instinct as an artist', he says. That he is exclusively an 'artist' in practical life and not a villain in the conventional sense is evident from

his harmless intentions. Several times, repeatedly, he has assured Morgan and Simon that no one shall be hurt. And here he talks to Tallis everything, for the first time, about his designs and schemes:

And I didn't really intend things to proceed quite so far. It all got rather out of hand. I expect you have this sort of experience too. And honestly I'm getting a bit tired of it and I don't know what to do next.¹²

Even the master-artist fails and falters - for the enchanted ones it is a defeat all the way, but for the enchanter, it is a 'fairly honourable defeat'. There is no other way out, the defeat must befall, otherwise, the dark, Murdochian fate, indifferent and cruel like Hardy's cannot spell the final disaster. When Julius cannot know 'what to do next', he tells everything to Tallis who acts promptly, drags Julius to a telephone booth, where the latter explains and clarifies to Hilda about every muddle. But when Hilda tries to inform 'the practical joke' of Julius to her husband Rupert, the telephone tumbles down to the floor broken into pieces and then that 'damned motorcar' roars but refuses to start off. Rupert cannot be communicated ~~with~~ in time and he dies either by committing suicide or by an accident.

Well, that is another question and not an important one. But the point is, Julius's plans might have gone out of hand and the artist might have lost control over his

scheme, but the understanding remains intact. No guilt, no secret guilt, sans sentimental pity and emotion he reviews the whole situation and the whole lot. He is not so down in the mouth, for he rationalises that it is not his fault about anything.

Human beings put each other off so. Put three emotional fairly clever people in a fix and instead of trying quietly to communicate with each other they'll dream up some piece of communal violence ... And sex - they get so agitated, they crave and muddle so. I must say; it's always seemed to me a very over-rated phenomenon.¹³

Like Julius, Professor Robert Rozanov of The Philosopher's Pupil is the private double of many Ennistonians, and of McCaffreys in particular. Alex was madly in love with him with her whole being, sacrificed herself to the titan. In Iris Murdoch it is a peculiar story of 'flight and pursuit', everyone eternally belongs to someone in a haunting, obsessive sense, permanently identifies himself/herself with another with such a sense of surrender and bond that either ceases to remain separate or different. When love becomes paramount, the only emotion and passion, it loses its morality and respectability - it becomes a story of enchantment and of 'craving' and hence, a muddle.

In 'The Philosopher's Pupil' George knew how terribly wrong, though no fault of his own as he so often agonizingly thought, his relations with Rozanov had gone. It

was not just that John Robert had 'ruined George's life' by discouraging him from Philosophy and thus somehow in effect from an academic career. John Robert had also mortally wounded George's soul, setting at the same time therein the eternal need to be justified, to be healed, to be saved by the executioner himself. It is like surrendering oneself at the feet of God, of destiny:

He and only he who had dealt the wound could heal it. What it was, and how and even when it had happened, was now unclear to George ... at a later time, he had to, had to follow Rozanov to America and once more haunt him, waiting around under palm trees on hot dusty roads in California. It was almost as if anything, a gesture of the hand that recognised his existence, could cure him, so great was his need, so humble his expectation.¹⁴

And Robert Rozanov is one of those characters, who like God, rule out the possibility of understanding and approach. He blinds, confuses and remains a mysterious phenomenon; at times grotesque and ghostly, while benign and beautiful in the next encounter. As Mr. Rozanov and Father Bernard walk on into the town the latter asks himself: 'do I like him, do I hate him, is he mad?' The philosopher does not remain inscrutable, unestimable and unreviewable to Father only, he remains bewildering to the readers, critics and fellow characters. He destroys and creates and yet, majestically remains untouched and misunderstood.

Rozanov is an ism, an infection, a virus and a disease. Anyone who comes closer to him gets seriously affected by the radiation emitted by him. Like an evil spirit he possesses people, but he does very little for it. A brief talk here, a discussion there, an argument while he walks and an order while he travels do the trick and keep the entire drama moving. George, inspite of his abject hatred, accusations and aggressions, crawls before him, and beseeches 'I want to be justified, you can justify me, I want to be saved, you can save me.' Therefore, everyone is connected with and captivated by him either through 'imperfect love' as he calls it or through 'abject hatred'; everyone terribly wants to possess him and realize the aura around the master artist - the 'charlatan' as George called him once.

Rozanov establishes a contact and when the other party is committed, he abruptly terminates it without a preface or fore-warning. He did it with George but he truly does it with Father Bernard. John Robert was there inside his mind, like a virus, something that cannot be cured.

When he owns or belongs to someone, he puts him on the cauldron, and when he disowns, he throws him into the abysmal pit of madness. He has made George demonic, has confused Father Bernard, Alex desperate, Pearl hopeful, and

now, he slowly crouches towards Hattie and Tom. This is not to say that he is evil or satanic; rather like Julius, he is an artist, a philosopher, a strange enchanting energy which pierces into the minds of others, changes their forms, metamorphoses the mechanisms and works miracles:

Tom took in the emphasis. 'Whatever do you want then?'

'I want you to marry her.'

'But why, what is this, why me, what about her, she's a child, she won't want to marry, and if she does she won't want, to marry me. I mean things aren't like that.'

'Oftner than we think' said the philosopher, 'we can make things be the way we desire'...¹⁵

And a few pages after, Tom doubts if he can control people like this, - to which his answer is 'I can attempt to'.

Very few things or situations can be taken for granted in Iris Murdoch's novels, but here, at least one thing is clear: Robert Rozanov deliberately controls the minds, convictions and principles of people. In order to protect the happiness and innocence of his grand daughter he goes to the extent of murdering Tom's happiness and freedom, and he allures him like a magician. Tom knows he is being hypnotized, knows that he is obeying the dictates of the philosopher like an impotent under spell. He wants to resist, but cannot because he does not want 'to be

separated from him.' Rozanov, like an octopus, spreads his long hands and consumes anything that comes within his reach. The powerful beam of Rozanovism like a search-tower leaves nothing unfocussed, and anything once detected is thrown behind the Rozanov-bars from where one does not stand a fair chance to escape.

Similarly, once caught, Tom's curiosity, vanity, a dotty sense of adventure, and a sense of fate urges him on. It is as if he is metamorphosed to a new Tom by Robert Rozanov. The prohibition of Emma and his conscious advice "you cannot intend to marry a seventeen-year-old girl you've never seen before ... make a horrible painful muddles, a horrible moral muddle" was enough to "set him on".¹⁶ And if he refuses, he can never be what he was. Some uncanny magic is already at work. He might indeed regret having tried, but he would even more, and bitterly, regret having funk'd the challenge. If he refuses he would 'lose' Rozanov: Rozanov whom even till that morning he had cared nothing about, had lived contentedly without, and who now represents some sort of necessity like his fate. He is no longer free, he is even perhaps no longer innocent, no longer happy.

But one thing remains clear: it is the pursuit of the enchanted: Georges, Morgans and the like, the voyeur's art for intrigue through their imaginings about the

enchanters, through which Miss Murdoch stimulates the reader's curiosity. As we have examined in detail Robert Rozanov, Julius King are bizarre extensions of their subjects' most profound wishes. More enchanters like Mischa Fox of Flight From the Enchanter, Honor Klein of A Severed Head, and Hannah Crean Smith of The Unicorn cannot be left undiscussed. The fact that they act according to the imagined wishes of their prisoners is exhibited by Marian Taylor in The Unicorn when she arrives at Gaze Castle after fleeing from an unrequited love affair and the post of school-mistress. In the author's words:

She had wanted always, as she obscurely knew, some kind of colourful, uplifting, steady ceremony, somekind of distinction of life which had so far eluded her.¹⁷

Their own disguises vary with the erratic impressions of the enchanted who enfold them in mystery through allusions to their suspect reputations and legendary parts, exotic and menacing compartments, mythic dimensions and curious accomplices.

The public reputation of Mischa Fox, the first of the enchanters, is that of international press lord and rogue. He is threatening because his methods are so devious. Mischa's more though equally awesome counterpart in A Severed Head is Honor Klein, a don of anthropology, who

frequently leaves Cambridge to visit her barbarous tribes. Inspiring more romantic love is Hannah Crean Smith, the sleeping beauty enchantress in The Unicorn. Local legend has it that she is imprisoned in Gaze Castle for the duration of a seven year curse that will end in disaster. Like Mischa and Honor, Hannah's fame is self-proliferating. She possesses such magnetism that others automatically cluster round her.

As we have seen, usually in each successive novel there emerges a pattern of predictable and predetermined types. Besides being damaged by predetermined roles and ambivalent detachment, her characters are additionally dehumanized by the mechanical parts they are forced to play in the labyrinths of intrigue. Here again the private personality is sacrificed to the overall pattern. Miss Murdoch's Gothic-and-Fairly-tale people are designed not to break out of the fantastic into the concrete world beyond, but are ordained to remain within her dream-prisons. Were she really interested in dramatizing the flight from enchantment, she would have focussed upon the struggle against illusion. Instead, however, it is enchantment itself that fascinates her, and consequently she prefers to entangle rather than to disentangle her characters.

For an example, although The Unicorn concludes with various melodramatic events, its structure is also circular in the sense that the characters have not progressed beyond their initial benighted outlooks. When Marian Taylor and Effingham Cooper arrive at Gaze Castle, they are filled with sentimental expectations concerning Hannah; when they depart, they hold proportionately apocryphal views. Marian still misunderstands the heroine's suffering and Effingham now distorts her "as a doomed figure, a lilit, a pale death-dealing enchantress, anything but a human being".

Therefore, we find, the observer's obscure internal terror is indicated by a prevailing notion of being spellbound. Futile attempts are made to break the spell that would enable one to awaken from the numbing paralysis and cross into one's own variable world. But lethargy is inescapable, an automatic response to higher powers, and the enchanted feel trapped into enchanting dramas which they neither understand nor control. Like sleep-walkers, they move along predestined paths, bewildered by the arbitrary and incomprehensible game.

Not only the enchanted ones, even the allurers are bewildered and impotent in the face of that arbitrary, impregnable game of destiny. The master-artists always fail

in different manners, the 'gods' cannot control, the design goes out of their clutches. Like Julius cannot keep the things within a limit so as not to harm anyone, Rozanov cannot control the passions and fantasies of people which he so deliberately and sometimes unwittingly inspired. His agonised and helpless cry to Hattie "I'm a helpless victim - I'm pinned down and screaming", shows the irony of the schemes and contrivances of the grand-designer. Everyone is a helpless victim of that terrible destiny and is 'pinned down' by it.

So now, back to the square one, the Murdochian Destiny that comes in a moment, automatic, shaking the whole being, tearing and breaking every bone, and as if convalescent, they all come to their exact senses, to the point, to the precise realisation of that 'pointer'. It is inclusive of everything; muddles, evil, enchantment, delirium, chances of freedom - everything. The ideas are many, the sufferings are manifold, the muddles are like episodes from a thriller full of suspense, the contingencies of eccentricity and monomania surpass any lunatic assylum, and novel after novel the grotesque and ghastly glances of an ever-growing Murdochian Destiny becomes clearer and more piercing. To be more exact, it is the invasion of one single thing, one single incident, one single contact and discharge that spells the cosmic disaster and a universal turmoil.

And that single invasion, the Destiny, is love, which, the use D.H. Lawrence's phrase is the 'quick' of the Murdochian universe. And it happens quickly also. It strikes like lightning and changes the whole atmosphere with a spell so strong and acute that everyone is taken aback. And the confusing, muddled chain-reactions start immediately after that happening. To begin with a documentation of exactly what happens, I quote a few sentences from D.H. Lawrence's 'Morality and Novel':

Each time we strive to a new (unexpected)* relation, with anyone or anything, it is bound to hurt (shock)* somewhat. Because it means the struggle with and the displacing of old connexions, and this is never pleasant. And moreover, between living things at least, an adjustment means also a fight, for each party, inevitably, must 'seek its own' in the other, and be denied - when in the two parties, each of them seek his own, her own absolutely, then it is a fight to death. And this is true of the things "passion". On the other hand, when, of the two parties, one yields utterly to the other, this is called sacrifice, and it also means death.¹⁸

Well, something like this at least happens here. There is the 'unexpected', 'shocking' relationship which sparks off a passionate and mad, ravenous involvement that threateningly borders on self-annihilation. And then the terrible fight to seek one's own is always there which usually remains abstract and like a mirage.

*brackets mine

Let us begin with the "passion," the eros, the mere physical contact which is not to say THE beginning; but it could well mark the beginning, if we study this aspect minutely. A meaningful physical contact even sometimes in the form of violence is mostly there at the root of it. As mentioned earlier, somewhere in the introduction, they fall in love almost at the very first sight and if they do not feel it acutely outrightly, then it is because they immediately push it to the subconscious. But they have, with them, the strange dark awareness and the 'fear to find it'. They cannot keep it there for long. The actions that follow become matters of necessity, mechanical, like that of a gentle automation. The energy that prompts and propels them forward is a cosmic energy on which all their beings concentrate and revolve. The 'crash' or the 'cataclysm' comes in a flash 'like a fast approaching comet' that suddenly fills up the whole sky as Tim experiences in ~~the~~ Nuns and Soldiers. Like a blunt knife it stabs and he suddenly gasps and cries out in agony, in ecstasy that amounts to madness and mindlessness.

In a moment there would be somekind of crash or cataclysm, the end of the world. The thought or event was that he had got to, he had simply got to, reach out his hand across the table and take hold of Gertrude's hand. Some vast cosmic force was compelling him ... Gertrude looked with surprise at her hand which lay like a small captive animal in Tim's firm grasp. She looked at the brilliant

lovely red hairs on the back of Tim's hand ... His substance was changed, he had become something else. At least it won't go away, because it is eternal. Gertrude thought I have to act, I have to move. I must touch him ... Tim seized her hand and began to kiss it - He kissed it humbly, gently, reverently, avidly, hungrily, as if He were eating some holy manna. He said, 'I love you'.
'I think I love you too' said Gertrude. ¹⁹

But as I said, most of it is there, deep down, in the innermost and unnameable chamber of one's mind - it sleeps and needs to be called upon and changed chemically by the intrusion of some catalyst. It is an electric charge of a very high potency, hitherto unknown and unfelt; because it had not yet got an outlet for the completion of its circuit. True, they see the inevitable in a flash, but the preparation for it is a regular, continuous climb. The deeper their ponderings, the clearer becomes the layers of their mind. The sensuous backdrop, the flowers, the plants, the swans, the blue sky, the dense mysterious woods, even the forbidden railway line heighten the yoga of that discovery and helps them to 'open out'. Suddenly they feel panicky and get frightened to their bones. The virgin, indefinite nature is a charmer which allures, attracts and then frightens like a wonderful mysterious forbidden church. They enter into its charm; the beauty and charm lies in everything they come across and yet it is incomplete, monstrous and hazardous -

Underlining mine.

it is fragmented and frightening. Beauty in its absolute form and manifestations is awful and shocking to the point of sickness.

The flowers were beginning to quiver in front of her eyes. How extra-ordinary flowers are, she thought (but few moments later) the great ray from afar was pinning her between the shoulder blades and trying to force her down again. Was it giddiness she was feeling now, a dazzled sensation ... or was it something else, disgust, fear, horror as at some dreadfulness, some unspeakable filth of the universe.²⁰

But in such circumstances a revelation is a must. The combination of enchantment, bafflement, fear and sickness produces some worldly realization that does not get limited within the cerebrum but beats upon the pulses, pervades the whole physique like a sexual orgy. It is not just the thought, feeling or consciousness - it is all these plus and irresistible, voluntary action:

Morgan took off her glasses. The next moment she and Peter were locked in each other's arms. Morgan shifted her knees ... Their lips met and remained joined.²¹

Not just the beginning of a loveless love-making. Here aunt Morgan and nephew Peter simultaneously and spontaneously recognise their 'free innocent love' for each other. The 'enchanted place' plays the part of the catalyst and brings out the lava of passion.

And Freud, who to certain extent, still influences the entire scenario of modern novels cannot remain far behind. Iris Murdoch herself, being a teacher of philosophy employs him in her own way. She makes Oedipus walk out of Peter in an assertive, brave and convincing manner:

'Well, why not? I'm mad about you, Morgan,'
 'You mustn't be.'
 'Whyever not? You are not so much older than me, and even if you were - you're my mother's sister, but that's what's so marvellous. You are like my mother and yet you are quite different. That makes you perfect'.²²

Morgan is like Peter's mother and yet quite another body and this is precisely the reason that makes her such a 'perfect' possibility for love or love-making. Where society would have definitely grumbled and labelled it as incest, immoral and evil, Morgan calls it 'freedom', 'happiness' and 'life':

This isn't nightmares or excitement, it's real, it's something free ... Happiness is free innocent love ... the rest remains tangled, awful ... This is felicity, blessing, luck, sheer wonderful utterly undeserved luck. It can come to me after all. Oh good!²³

The same thing happens to Tim and Gertrude in 'The Nuns and Soldiers'. The moment, the act, the place and everything becomes real, amazing, extreme and as Tim calls it: 'mythological'. Tim takes the decisive and final

step of holding Gertrude's hand and the catalytic agents responsible for this automatic decision are the frighteningly silent rock faces, the pool, the vision of naked Gertrude swimming in the pool like a fish and that weird but fateful dream:

'that day when you swam in the pool - it seems a hundred years ago - I fell asleep in such an old way and I dreamed and I forget the dream - and what I dreamt was that I was holding you in my arms. That proves it.'

'proves what?'

'That it's just something to do with here, with this place, this landscape, we're under a spell' ...²⁴

Indubitable and authoritative is the Eros in Iris Murdoch: the unmistakable seismic shock, the concentration of everything into one necessary being, mysterious, uncanny, unique and one of the strangest phenomena of the world. The happening itself is something like a vow, and to this reality they are bound like a new innocence. And when they are under such a spell, the spell that flashes before their eyes and pierces into their bodies, they shiver, get startled and then hum with passion, tenderness, with laughter, tears and sex. Therefore, this is a kind of love that grows out of sex, and transcends it without, however, abolishing it in the process. If brute sex, as Miss Murdoch herself admits, leads to the fairly mechanical round of couplings that distinguished many of the closed novels like

A Severed Head, then the open novels have this aim:

Sex is a very great mystifier, it's a very great dark force. It makes us do all kinds of things we don't understand and very often don't want to do ... This is something which I would want very much to explore and which I think is very difficult. All these demons and so on are connected with the obsessional side of one's life, which in a sense has got to be overcome.²⁵

The unmistakable eros, the indestructible desire and physical yearning, the erotic pity and the seeking of the fierce embrace confuse their understanding and make them oblivious of everything: their environment, their circle of friends and their social and personal standing. Tim now does not care for the fact that Gertrude was like his mother (since Guy was always a father figure to him). Peter chiefly likes Morgan because she is like his mother, and Mr. Hilary Burde, the Word Child, who never had a woman before in his life is infatuated with Anne, the wife of his professor and Robert Rozanov, in his ardent desire to secure Hattie's innocence and chastity, indulges in a sort of monstrous, possessive love for Hattie. And the stories of incest continue novel after novel with such alarming vividness and justifications that a reader is totally confused.

The ravenous hunger for the lover's body, the sweet kisses, the tangible and concrete need for each other

solve and settle everything. It blots everything out, pushes everything back - it is so real and necessary. When rationality fails, minds are lost and self-justifying arguments cannot proceed further; the bodies dance and express. Probably this will provide an answer to the question that how someone can profoundly love diametrically opposite characters, like Gertrude who cannot dispel the shadow of Guy, is so totally taken over by Tim, a stupid liar and blacksheep -

She could scarcely prevent herself from scuttling about like a mad animal. She had never really said to herself, 'it's just physical, it's lust, shock-lust, a flight from grief', and she didn't say it now. But she felt her physical longing for Tim as something detached and strange, as a sort of emanation, a second body, her *longing for his thin red-haired hands and his smooth sweet skin and his kisses that solved all problems and answered all questions.*²⁶

Probably there is a tendency to transcend, to take a flight above from the physical that it just might not be the 'shock-lust', but a second look confirms the tender, soft bliss of the physique - 'smooth sweet skin and kisses'. No doubt, it is there, in the wilderness of their sub-conscious minds, and they see it in a flash, but as we have seen, the sub-conscious unfolds it also in a flash, after which, the feverish need for a physical contact beats in their pulses, solves the miracle and sets them in a

rhythmic motion. Like Tim has 'got to hold' Gertrude's hand for the cosmos to run and the universe to operate, Hilary and Anne in The Word Child have got to kiss each other: "we knew that it was the only possible ground of our proceeding".²⁷ This also is the only spark that drags them to their inevitable destiny. This is the 'cosmic explosion'. Therefore, when the impossibility of a normal physical contact maddens and blinds them, ~~the~~ violence becomes a terrible necessity. The contact has to be established either by decency or by force.

And a few lines about the intricate Murdochian love-net that occurs in each and every novel and heightens the 'muddle'. Manfred loves Anne who loves Count who loves Gertrude who is happily married to Tim for the time being. The net-work is more complex and complicated in A Severed Head and The Philosopher's Pupil. And as we have seen in A Fairly Honourable Defeat many things contribute to such confusing muddled love-circles. The possessive self-pity, the guilty secrets, the impossibilities to understand and finally the masterly roles played by the characters create such muddles. It is because of these networks, the sincere lovers like Anne and Count cannot come to terms, convince each other and throw a light of apparent understanding. Not to say that Iris Murdoch cancels the possibilities of true love, but I mean to say that such terms are vague,

ambiguous and unrealistic, the emphasis is rather given on the explosion. A prolonged contemplation and expectation is bound to hinge on illusions, the flashy lightning movement is what really matters.

Gertrude had said it could take four seconds to change the world, but Anne is quite incapable of bringing about that catastrophe. Anne could do it in two, she had only to cross the space that divided Count and her and everything in the universe would be different. But both Count and Anne are failures as soldier and nun respectively, the former does not have the dashing forward drive of a soldier and the latter does not possess the utter surrender and an ability to confess, the two most important virtues of a nun.

The Count was in love with Gertrude for years but it was the love of a subdued heart, not demanding, not pressing. It was indirect, peaceful and undemanding, like Gabriel Oak's love for Bathsheba Everdene. It was remorseful and painful because of its promise of existence for ever with him and yet his secret knowledge of its uselessness. There are hopes, sufferings and painful thoughts that one greedily stores up to keep his love living and thriving for ever. Count is very much like Gabriel Oak who burns his heart, suffers inside and waits. But Tim is somewhat like Captain Troy who flourishingly expresses and

then demands. The Count "had not been able to stop himself from thinking: My time will come".

The Count lives in terrible agony, in jealousy, in deprivation and in a strange clinical depression. Even Anne lives the same way. Their hearts are crying, weeping and lamenting invisible to each other. They are pining separately. Anne wants Count to seek her, to turn to her on his own accord, but the Count cannot see Anne as a lover, the one who would kneel down and kiss his coat-sleeve. Anne sees Count becoming suicidal because of his love for Gertrude and the Count sees Anne always as a nun incapable of love and sex. We have to examine this particular relationship, or network extensively, in order to focus the point that Murdochian love is not silent, it cannot blossom in isolation and in lamentings, it has to be explicit, vocal and demanding. Crying and lamenting at the back will not help, if possible, one has to fly at other's neck and make the other see, recognise and subdued. It is the mutual apprehension of each other and the understanding of the volcano that threatens to erupt in both, it is not the cool, hidden sub-current that flows within.

We may observe just another case of desperate and unfulfilled love but not without sufficient reasons for becoming so. Pearl, the caretaker of Hattie, Rozanov's

grand daughter is also in love with the shambling eccentric, the Philosopher. Her heart was also involved. She wants to disguise her obsession from Hattie and has so far succeeded. The philosopher was always 'elsewhere', had mainly remained unseen, like God, and the great man's orders were like god's intricate ways of various bizarre manifestations to Pearl. It did not occur to her to console herself by taking a heroic stance; her situation was without choice, her course the only possible one - "she lived inside a love so improper and so hopeless that she fell sometimes almost free to enjoy herself therein. Love without hope was a joyful energy".

But as we see later, she is mistaken - her desperate bid to communicate with and finally being frustrated by Rozanov, she indulges in a passionless sexual intercourse with Tom. The love is 'so improper' because the other is viewed as a god, as something completely unattainable and hence hopeless. But 'love without hope' is not a permanent attitude, where there is love, there is hope and hence, the cancellation of hope is bound to produce suffering. Pearl should have been violent, should have demanded and treated Rozanov like her equal. Once she gives him a mystery and attributes to him a higher position above her, the 'philosopher' does not have the sense of regard and respect for

Pearl. Everything after that becomes hopeless for Pearl.

Now then, this is how love is and should be in Iris Murdoch. This is how it begins, then continues like a disease affecting everyone, everything, taking different turns enchanting people and making everything a muddle, reducing everything into shambles. In The Sandcastle Mor and Miss Carter have just been introduced to each other. Miss Carter goes out into the garden to fetch some roses for Mor's wife, Nan. Mor follows in the dark:

'Here, come this way', she said from above him, 'this way'. She kept her voice soft, compelled to by the garden. Then she came back down the steps and he realized that she was reaching out her hand. Mor took her hand in his and let her guide him up the steps. Her grip was firm. They passed between the black holly bushes, and released each other. Mor felt a strong shock within him, as if very distantly something had subsided or given way. He had a confused feeling of surprise. The moon came out of the clouds for a moment and suddenly the sky was seen in motion.²³

And now onwards the entire universe begins to operate at a terrific speed, though always with a 'confused feeling of surprise' and 'a strong shock within'. Some days after, Mor comes out with Miss Carter after a cold lunch and absurd philosophical discourses with Bledyard for a drive to the country-side. Like other novels, the woods, the primitive silence, the sourceless rocky river and finally the sudden

disastrous event of the poor gorgeous car upside down in the middle of the river, its black and sinister lower parts exposed to the declining sun and not to forget the deliberate lies to his wife - somehow completely and suddenly insulates Mor in the strange atmosphere of that other, Mad world: "It was only a few hours ago that he had risen from Evvy's lunch table, what world had he entered in between"?²⁹

But as mentioned, the thing has begun with a fatal physical contact that has set everything in 'motion'. But the recognition is not complete as yet. It comes in a flash several pages after:

Mor stood there, arrested by some obscure feeling of pleasure ... there were many many things to be glad about. He waited. Then from the very depths of his being the knowledge came to him, suddenly and with devastating certainty. He was in love with Miss Carter.³⁰

This is usually the way (with minor deviations) along which they come to their realisation. And from this point, the sheer frenzy and craze lead them to an unknown destiny and situation over which they have absolutely no control. They do not feel their own elements, their own double or apparition seems to act things out. The routined, day-to-day normalcy and a certain usualness gives way to a bizarre and unknown destiny - the common ordinary persons

are suddenly pushed into a nightmarish and foggy destiny. They are all a bit of Robinson Crusoe who understands and recognizes the immorality in his voyages, promises against further ventures into the sea and yet headlong rushes forward.

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Chapter III

Philosophers, Eccentrics and Self-Seekers

Iris Murdoch's usual fictional technique is to set up a group of characters around some abstract theme, generally of a rather philosophical nature. The novels, if viewed only from this angle, seem to be concerned not so much with people and their relationships, as with a central theme or many abstract concepts, the characters being chosen to illustrate this and their movements determined by its dictates. Therefore, Nick in The Bell, George in Philosopher's Pupil, Austin in Accidental Man and the like refuse love and friendship, avoid family and are duty-bound to act hysterically and obstinately. In place of contingency, necessity has been imposed. The shapelessness of life and eccentricity is here arranged into a pattern, one which leaves so little freedom for the characters caught up in it, that the books become at once a product and a symptom of what its author designates as "fantasy".

There are so many contingencies in Murdoch's novels, but only one necessity: an incessant inward reflection, the deep inner ponderings. In the previous chapter we observed that the deeper they plunge into the pits of their minds the clearer becomes the horizon, but now we shall see how muddled they all become in getting at ~~it~~ the understanding. The novels thus become strange commentaries on various

philosophical and psychological theories. Myths are philosophically interpreted, actions are given psychological labels and at moments novel after novel character after character, sound the same hackneyed didactic notes. The sensational happenings, the Macabre nightmares, and the rushing, flowing heads all cease to flow and the place is taken up by what sounds like a heated lecture in an open-air university, or a sombre discussion in a soporific dim drawing-room. If 'love' is the food of Murdochian people, philosophical rumination is their very cup of tea. Barbara Everett, while reviewing A Severed Head comments:

Their mixture of emotional violence and intellectual sport, of private fantasy and social comedy, is as likely to repel as to attract. The precise drawing-room comedy of their game of 'All Change' is charged with a content of the mythological, the philosophical, and the Freudian that converts the whole into a legend of self-discovery and awakening.¹

But if it surely takes the intensity away from the novels, it gives them a purpose and bond, 'purpose', because all these philosophical arguments and meditations are pointed at achieving the most cherished goal 'freedom' and a 'bond' because, the entire philosophical scenario of Murdoch is found more or less in any of her works and runs through all her works. This is more than to say that the novels reveal a fertile and generous imagination, and interest in the way things happen, and an ironic sympathy that at once invokes a response and gives it balance. The philosophical

ideas - if they can be called so that give a continuity to all the novels, are simple ones, they suggest that a vision of precise objective reality is possible, and is gained by the loss of generalizing subjective illusion; that a part of this reality is human identity, which is accomplished by recognising the free identity of others, that this recognition at once destroys and gives life. So her protagonist sets off on the romantic quest for himself, through the alleys of London and Paris (these are the two important places where, or between which Murdoch's people live, cry or die), through the convolutions of desire, or through the twists and turns of the plot.

In the introductory chapter it was shown that 'love' prepares them for a journey into their own inner self, and in the process every human relationship poses the challenge of self-discovery by apprehending the "volcanic otherness". Both self-identity and the 'other' free identity depend on each other; the failure to recognise the 'other' blocks the road to one's own inner self. And this needs continuous, conscious and deliberate analysis of others and one's own actions, behaviours and attitudes. Even in their highly lunatic states they take some time off and contemplate like the sanest and calmest souls. 'Let me

'think', 'only if I could think', 'we must try to think' are the kind of expressions, that usually figure in every chapter of her novels.

But it is not the monologues ^{that} strike one so much as the dialogues. There are nightmarish self-confrontations, but they remain too vague and personal to be understood, but it is the dialogues that really are striking and extra-ordinary. Such conversations change life, alter hope, alter present, past and all time—whether for better or for worse, no one can judge. But it changes them, affecting their routes and relationships. They want to teach, to be taught, to understand, to know. The more bizarre and absurd the nature of conversation, the more are the chances that anyone could be true, thereby leading to serious muddles, difficulty in knowing truth and hence defeating the very purpose: freedom from a tumultuous emotional violence and to settle down to a 'free, innocent love'. For one must always remember that most of their philosophical arguments or discussions are carried on as symbols of their various involvements; physical, emotional and sometimes professional, all leading to their inner self.

During such discussions one truly is at a loss to determine, to fix, to hold or to approve. Even the participants, at least one of them finds out the absurdity, the ambiguity, the unintelligibility and the mistake of it all.

With all its coherent logic, forceful presentations and learned dispositions the things sound like distorted, mysterious nightmares.

Miss Murdoch herself says "Freedom is knowing and understanding and respecting things quite other than ourselves". So this is the "knowing and understanding" aspect of the greater vision that we are trying to examine. But is it possible, to know the truth about others, to raise the veil that conceals an already foggy horizon - can it ever be possible to rationalize all human actions both physical and mental - a question she herself answers in the negative and most of her fictional characters come to the same realization!

You will never know the truth, and you will read the signs in accordance with your deepest wishes. That is what we humans always have to do. Reality is a cipher with many solutions, all of them right ones.²

Now we can see why we cannot take it or leave it, approve it or discard it, every angle of the discussions seems convincing and yet somehow all wrong. And we find a paradox in Calvin Blick's admonition above. While accepting the unknowability of truth he speaks for an aspect of human psychology when he says that we all see our wishes, desires, guilts, goodness in others' eyes, in leaves, in the sea and sky. Neither the sky, nor the ocean is blue,

it is the blueness of our eyes that makes them so. It is the change of the iris that changes the colour outward, it is the tremor within that brings out the cosmic violence. They even go a step further. Not only that their wishes are reflected by an 'other', they make someone the storehouse of their own virtues and goodness, the citadel of moral values and the fortress of high, lofty ideals. They obviously care for the good or bad opinion of that storehouse which acts like a mirror reflecting their glory or their ugliness. And like they make someone the storehouse of their virtues and goodness, they collectively view someone as a sinner where they deposit all the debris of their mind and soul, their stinking, immoral, vile intentions. Here they watch the absorption of their own dark faculties and the passing on of their stigmata. Anne and Count have realized this aspect correctly while discussing Tim:

'He's against himself. But, yes. We like to have a sinner whom we can cast out and drive away into the wilderness. We pass on our pain by thinking of other people as evil.'

'Yes, it's like that, isn't it. People enjoy the misfortunes and sins of others. He has carried all the blame.'

And this is because the ideas constituting Miss Murdoch's literary theory are based on her moral philosophy which should be reviewed prior to an examination of her statements concerning fictional portrayal of character,

since her method of characterization is derived from her philosophical concept of personality. Regarding this she thinks:

We no longer use a spread-out substantial picture of the manifold virtues of man and society. We no longer see man against a background of values, of realities which transcend him. We picture man as a brave naked will surrounded by an easily comprehended empirical world. For the hard idea of truth we've substituted a facile idea of sincerity ... we've bought the liberal theory (of personality) as it stands, because we wished to encourage people to think of themselves as free, at the cost of surrendering the background.⁴

And the background of a 'philosophical concept of Murdochian personality' is a hazy one because of the impenetrable wall of Reality and is darkened further because of the eccentric, discordant behaviour of man. When Reality is unknowable, shifting and shapeless, Truth is nowhere to be found and the acceptance of accidental and unlikely becomes natural, unavoidable and demanding, the 'background' of the horizon is bound to be a mystery, a meaningful dilemma. Julius strongly argues with Rupert in A Fairly Honourable Defeat:

'No buts, my dear fellow. Kant showed us conclusively that we cannot know reality - yet we go on obstinately imagining that we can.'⁵

One should go through the entire argument in order to know the 'facile evil', the 'dull truth', the 'seen-through-goodness' and the 'opaque evil'. Probably there was somekind of Reality, with virtue and moralities well

well defined when small children naturally used to accept the doctrine of Trinity, which is after all one of the most peculiar of all human conceptual inventions. There were times when grown up men showed an equal facility for making completely absurd metaphysical assumptions which they felt instinctively to be comforting for instance the assumption that good is bright and beautiful and evil is shabby, dreary or at least dark. Even there have been saints. But at present we cannot ever imagine the possibility of a saint's existence with the knowledge which modern psychology, social and economic doctrines have put at our disposal! Julius says:

"Of course people have sacrificed themselves, but that has nothing to do with goodness. Most so called saints interest us because they are artists, or because they have been portrayed by artists, or else because they are men of power.⁶

So we are exhausted of creating gods after gods, new faiths, religions and virtues. The process of the death of various gods has started: 'To be really gentle and selfless with moral impurity one would have to be God, and we know He isn't there'. This idea of 'death of God' and impossibility of a saint is established with Websterian treatment and portrayal in The Time of the Angels.

In this novel, the Reverend Carel Fisher, an unsettling Nietzsche like figure who refuses all visitors, makes paper darts and lives in a darkened room playing

records of Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake and 'Frere Jacques, dormez-vous ...' is discovered in bed with his ward Elizabeth, who is ostensibly his niece but is in fact his daughter by his brother's wife. Elizabeth an enigmatic girl, with the long fair hair of a princess in a fairy-tale, is an invalid who wears a surgical corset because there is something wrong with her back. The pair are seen reflected in a mirror by Carel's other daughter, Muriel, when she peeps into Elizabeth's room through a crack in the wall.

Miss Murdoch's bizarre sexual 'figure in the carpet' is associated on this occasion with Carel Fisher's role as the tortured victim of lost faith. 'The death of God', he says, 'has set the angels free. And they are terrible'. Since he had earlier taken as his mistress ~~his mistress~~ his illegitimate, half-Irish, half west-Indian servant, Pattie O'Driscoll, a gentle, bewildered but resilient person, it appears that Elizabeth and Pattie stand in some way for the different forces pulling him apart. He commits suicide with Muriel's stolen sleeping pills when Pattie, who has hitherto felt herself as closely identified with Carel (as Cathie with the demonic Heathcliff of Wuthering Heights), finally leaves him because she cannot endure his betrayal of her with Elizabeth. Again 'in some way', a Russian icon showing the Trinity represented as sorrowing angels has a bearing on the novel's statement

about the consequences of the death of God. The icon is the last precious possession of the porter at the Rectory.

And this sort of thing happens in all her novels with slight variations, but the message is clear: the modern man has lost all values, morality, love and faith. 'Ah, but we are faithless'⁷ is the kind of expression that is not muttered by Denis alone in The Unicorn but is the reverberating palpitation pervading every sphere of human activity and relationship. Most of the Murdochian characters bask under the glory of 'free, innocent love', 'feel we are like children together' and sing loudly 'love rules and changes the world' - only they are faithless. But in an age when everything is permitted, because everything is true in its proper aspect, when values are relative concepts and philosophical truths are double-edged swords, one is bound to be confused and bewildered. ^{Today} ~~then~~ reality is shapeless and truth nowhere to be found, faith becomes unnecessary and the 'death of God' obvious. This is a vicious, paradoxical circle. And when Julius says "that has nothing to do with goodness", he precisely means that the demarcation between good and evil is relative. We must but always remember that Julius is the latest in what is becoming a long line of enchanters. Julius takes a reductive view of human nature, and seeks to prove that

People are puppets by manipulating them himself. He aims to expose the well-meaning idealism of Rupert's philosophy by demonstrating that Rupert's trust in the power and sensible clarity of love is an illusion. He makes Rupert fall in love with Morgan, and then alters and prepares Hilda to the situation. He is evil, but not for sure, because human inadequacy being what it is - his arguments are to some extent justified, or at least borne out, by the results of his experiments.

But 'the question' again keeps hovering on the horizon. Yes, radiant with excessive energy the enchanters and the enchanted continue the strange act of pursuit and flight employing all kinds of techniques. The national and "civilized" devices cohabit farcically with the violent and 'primitive' impulses: "only with a person so eminently sensible could I have deceived my wife", says Martin the hero in the opening (The Severed Head). All Miss Murdoch's characters have a comparable habit of reflecting soberly, even delicately and idealistically, even when they're engaged in ludicrous physical processes; while retrieving drowned bells (The Bell) and cars (The Philosopher's Pupil, and the Sandcastle), clambering over high walls (Danby in Bruno's Dream), breaking into and out of houses (a common project that is undertaken in most of her novels).

And whatever does it mean - the diabolic, mysterious acts that leaves even the actor confused and stumbling over while a fine, delicate and similarly confusing mental activity cohabits or follows just after the accidents. It is a sheer bombardment that shows an aura of unintelligibility bordering an eccentricity. The flowing technique, that binds the strange actions, thoughts and contradictions at the same time, puts everything down the stream and then, while resisting the forceful current of the shapeless life the bundled up things disintegrate and assume their own weird eccentric ways.

If 'Love, Enchantment and Muddle' are the canvas, Eccentric Philosophers, Bodhisatvas and impenetrable volcanos are the paintings, George, Rozanov, Nick are all 'Accidental Men' - they revolt, strongly defy and adopt a path that leads to lunatic asylums of various degrees and order. And one is forced to think that all except some in some of her novels who can be compared with Buddha the Wisdom (which at least Miss Murdoch herself unmistakably tries to project) are eccentrics to some degree.

Thus in Chapter 3 of Bruno's Dream Nigel's mystic vision is described in terms of one version of the Hindu creation - myth that involves the symbol AUM (OM ?), a form at once of God and of the cycle of consciousness. In

chapter 9, Nigel alone at night progresses through the stages passed through by Buddha (in the tale of his "Great Struggle") the night before his enlightenment ... "He experienced perfect enlightenment at the break of day. Then for seven days ... the Enlightened sat motionless in bliss" (Campbell, p.32). And so Nigel from this point on in the novel is characterized for most part by his smile of ineffable bliss, a perfect example of what is known as the "man of realization". Chapter 9 ends:

Danby gazes at himself in the mirror. Danby smiles at himself admiring ... kneeling close to him, unseen, Nigel smiles too, the tender, forgiving infinitely sad smile of almighty God.⁸

This passage is related to the later conversation between Bruno and Nigel (in Chapter 11) in which Nigel defines God and in the process remarks that he loves God because "He makes me suffer". He expresses all these ideas again in Chapter 26, where given the context, and the fact, that he states the ideas, he appears to be raving and half mad, although it is his ravings that Diana remembers and sees as making sense when, at the end of the novel, she reaches a new level of understanding

One isn't anything and yet one loves people ... Her resentment against Miles, against Liza, against Danby had utterly gone away. They will flourish and you will watch them kindly as if you were watching children. Who had said that to her? ... Relax. Let them walk on you. Love them. Let love like a huge vault open out overhead.⁹

Nigel - as well as being a quite recognisable and credible hippie figure from the world of contemporary fact, (Tallis in A Fairly Honourable Defeat, the 'word child', Emma in The Philosopher's Pupil, Anne in Nuns and Soldiers etc. can be cited as extended examples or characters falling into the category) - is a living example and extreme exponent of the two major related notions of the myth that are of particular significance for understanding the novel: that God manifests himself in the infinite individual forms of existence and that if one accepts that notion as fact then it is clear that "lover, beloved and love are one, for in the world of unity all can be one". (Campbell, p.162).

This clearly is a new sense, a new final awareness on the part of Miss Murdoch's characters quite different from that in the earlier novels. Formerly their awareness was of the total difference of the other from the self and this led to what she called "tolerance". In this novel the new awareness is of the separateness but at the same time of a recognition of the self in the other, which leads to what she now calls "love". And as I said earlier all the roads lead to or begin from this crucial square.

The significance that Miss Murdoch assigns to Nigel in the novel then seems clear enough: he is a kind

of Bodhisattva indicating the path that Lisa, Diana and even Danby in his casual way, are to follow as the action develops. This is not merely an acceptance on her part of the current self-evaluation of the flower children but rather an interesting example both of how an individual convinced of such doctrine might feel and behave and how far in his contact with others he might exert an influence.

If one accepts this significance of Nigel (and if one does one is irresistibly reminded of E.M. Forster's image of the Untouchable, "the beautiful naked God", at the end of the court scene in A Passage to India) then events and characters form themselves into patterns that make a great deal of sense. If one ignores Nigel or dismisses him as merely a bizarre minor character then the focus of the novel is single; it is Bruno - the old spider, sitting at the centre of his web, along the threads of which all the characters move. But the web of the novel is then strangely chaotic, broken and shapeless. But once it is understood that Bruno and Nigel are to this novel as were Quasar and the icon to The Time of Angels, the pattern that then comes into focus is anything but chaotic, it is in fact one of ingenious and successful symmetry.

At one pole of the novel stands, as I have been suggesting, Nigel, eastern consciousness quiescent, self-abnegating; at the other Bruno-western ego consciousness

(that is significantly dying). And there are always two opposing poles present wherever an approach to the study of the characters and various themes is made. This maintains a continuous tension in the novels and a persistent wanderings of the characters with the result that they are off their guards, losing their balance. The eccentricity and the genius, the wise and the bizarre absurdity, the understanding^{and} the confoundings all combine to produce a unique situation of the most unintelligible kind.

Now a few words on these eccentrics whom Iris Murdoch calls narcissists. They love themselves absolutely - they love their desperate image in the mirror, they love their hurt pride and never do they like it to be repaired. They like to live in an eternal spleen, darkness and doom and do not allow anykind of development of the situation. Even if wounded they refuse the cure, they lick their wounds and feel at ease. They feel themselves lonely, closed and left out, isolated from the entire world - they react astoundingly radiating a certain amount of unanticipated terror around them. They are all as pure and solitary as an anointed king awaiting coronation or a sad victim awaiting the knife. This was the loneliness which Diana had sensed about George, in The Philosopher's Pupil and which he himself felt rather as a frightful agonizing state of grace. These

types, like George, all become anointed kings in their suffering, frustration and isolation. They spring surprises but are never startled, they are wonderful, wild creatures living in the wilderness creating muddles for others.

George simply does not come or depart from a scene of gathering, he appears like an irregular comet from the blue, sending tremors of disturbances by his puzzling behaviour and then fades away. Like an ominous apparition he lands unwarranted and then melts away into cosmos leaving a smoky jet behind him. During the meetings between George and his mother Axel, rage and hate mounting emotions, subtle, undercurrent oedopal and possessive self-pity are let loose. To Alex, George always wears a 'conceited look', being like that of a 'tragic actor registering indecision together with some deep emotion, then clearing and becoming round and benign'.

The point I am trying to make here is ~~the~~ the 'shapelessness of life and eccentricity' which is mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. And George, the Philosopher's Pupil has been taken up as a case-study out of many shapeless eccentrics that we come across in Iris Murdoch's novels. As we have seen George lives on resentment, remorse and hate and his soul is full of frightful

fantasies. In his state of self-imposed, intentional and imaginative suffering he needs sympathisers and onlookers. Demonic and diabolic, disgusted with the whole world and with his own self he needs admirers of his suffering; observers who would be perplexed and at the same time will care. His misery is present to him as an occupation, as a part of the 'weird duty' which increasingly and horribly presents itself. The remembrance of Rufus in the form of Adam is not an unwelcome grief to him 'since it absolutely licensed him to hate the world' with 'typical George' as Brian says, 'anything was possible'.¹⁰ After saving Zed from the hostile, cold, wavy sea, he becomes the hero of the day and while everyone is still admiring his niceties and concern, unwarranted he flies off with the Rover, alone.

George is ardently thinking of committing a bloody sin a "real crime" since he is suffering the torments of nonexistent ones. He has seen his own double stepping out of his own body, walking in the gardens, crossing his own ways and jumping from high scaffolding. And when he thinks of the crime, Rozanov and his own double-everything become clear, predictable and this clarity of processions makes Murdoch's visions more horrible than the surprising shocks that one receives sometimes. Calculated, well contrived crimes are more grotesque than accidental mishaps

in Iris Murdoch's novels - calculated, cold-blooded, pre-meditated crimes with a purpose, a cause and a philosophy becomes a 'sign', a faith and a liberator:
 "There were meanings in the world. He had seen the number fourtyfour chalked on the wall."

As we see now, George's is an imaginary edifice of illusion. Vanity rules him and guides him as Julius King in A Fairly Honourable Defeat comments about the middle class English people. George even thinks to an unimaginable extent so far as his relation with Rozanov goes. Without considering how much and how extensively the philosopher has mellowed, ripened or 'simply changed'. George remembers his lectures and insists on the explanations; he sees himself as the 'Caliban, who must be saved too'. But Rozanov as mentioned earlier makes people mad, crazy and accuses them of their frenzied madness at the same time:

If I was kind to you now and encouraged you to come and see me I would be lying to you. I don't want to discuss your soul and your imagined sins. I am not interested, I haven't any wisdom or any help to give you. You have an entirely illusory view of our relationship. And do stop worrying about philosophy - in your case philosophy is just a nervous craving.¹¹

And so is it indeed in case of George - 'a nervous craving'. But nothing in this world is going to stop him, not even Rozanov's forbiddings. He has already imagined

him in the role of 'philosopher's pupil', has already assumed and convinced him of the 'relationship'. He has come now too far on the basis of that imagined connection and cannot break it now. To do it will be to undermine his vanity, to wipe off the connection with this great man and the tantrums that he has thrown so far will be without a cause, a connection.

Hurt vanity and a desperate bid to maintain the image brings with it the resentment, that demands revenge to reassert one's value by passing on the hurt. George had been attempting for years to attract John Robert's attention, to provoke a 'happening' which would establish a 'bond' between them. George had wanted to occupy John Robert's mind; he had been as the Philosopher was vaguely aware, hurt and maddened by John Robert's calm coldness, by the evident fact that John Robert not only did not care about him, but did not think about him. But when George finally gets the letter from Robert Rozanov, it appears that he has won. John Robert is now as obsessed with George as George is with Rozanov. The fatal connection, now running through Hattie, had tied them together at last.

The contents of the letter are not important, the communication itself is a sign - a provocation for the grand happening that would prove the relation and at the

same time will liberate George (one should always remember that the desire to establish the connection and the desire for 'freedom' both are simultaneously present within George. He must ascertain the first and once he is assured of the connection he will undertake the journey to crossing the limit, and 'then break' it. He has, after all this, been able to get past his teacher's indifference and coldness, his sarcasm and irritation. His relation with Rozanov had always been unhappy right from the start, poisoned by jealousy and humiliation and fear and unfulfilled desire. Now it becomes meaningful. The fact that the colossal man has written to him establishes that he has for one moment at least, been able to penetrate into the mind of John Robert:

This was surely a significant climax ... George believed in signs. The letter was a sign. Love and death were interchangeable. The letter signalled that his relation with John Robert had reached a final orgasm.¹²

Therefore, George, the Philosopher's Pupil, Austin, the accidental man, Nick and the type live by an idea of themselves which is in some ways significantly at odds with reality. Let's examine this point by picking up a few lines from The Philosopher's Pupil, George and Rozanov argue:

'You flayed me, you took away my life-illusions, you killed my self-love',

'I doubt that', said John Robert, 'but if I did kill your self-love I am very much to be congratulated and so are you'.

'You know what I mean. Without self-love there is nothing but evil ... (and in the next page) George asks 'my mind is full of such strange trash. Jingles and-spells- I can't explain. Do you think I am mad?' 13

To say they're mad, eccentrics and narcissists is to say little. We are mostly narcissists, and only in a few, not always with felicitous results, is narcissism overcome by religious discipline or psychoanalysis. They are all accomplished narcissists, experts and dedicated lovers of double-life, and this in a way which is not always to their discredit. That is, they are in some respects, though not in others, not as bad as they pretend to be, or as they really believe themselves to be. Herein perhaps they intuitively practise that sort of protective coloration which consists in sincerely giving one's faults prejorative names which conceal the yet more awful nature of what is named. All of which goes to show that it is difficult to analyse human frailty, and certainly difficult to analyse these strangely jingled and spelled minds.

And this contributes to the unintelligibility of Iris Murdoch's novels. The eccentrics and the Bodhisattvas act both as the form and the contingency in her novels and they intermingle with each other. And there are instances when a single person embodies both these characteristics:

the lone suffering and realization of the Buddha and an obsessive monomania.

But why do most of them become so violent, aggressive and unpredictable is the unresolved question. But an attempt can be made to understand it. As I earlier mentioned, both the ideas of love and freedom, connection and opening out go simultaneously. But it is only momentary. This striking of the balance between the two, pinpointing the exact point that demarcates the two is an extremely tricky thing, it is like exercising 'Pranayam' - a unique spiritual exercise that if done properly acts miracles and if taken lightly can prove to be self-rainous. And it is a pity that most of them understand this 'fourth-dimensional quality of eternity and perfection' as D.H. Lawrence puts it in 'Morality and the Novel', strive for 'this achieving of a pure relationship' and when they fail the result is despair, illusive self-love, self-pity and horrible sentimentality of the worst kind.

Most of them are obsessed with the idea of self-love and ^{are} quite wrapt up in it. I have earlier mentioned that most of them proclaim themselves as different gods and it is a pity that they become obsessed with it. They always find readymade allegorical figures and immediately want to step into their shoes forgetting the fact that one's

individual fancies, eccentricities or even goodness cannot be imitated. George wants to become a God, Kirillov-style in The Possessed who killed himself. George certainly takes the cue from him and does it in a different way. He becomes (or at least aspires to become) a God by killing Rozanov. He argues 'wouldn't it be a better way to become God to kill someone else? That is harder than killing yourself'. Nick in The Bell commits suicide for different reasons and under a completely different circumstance, but the point is certainly common: to assert and at the same time to deny the bond with Michael. In a sense one can say they take revenge but what a strange way to take revenge or get liberated when one's own life is involved.

All these things (that I have discussed in this chapter) happen because they think in terms of absolute possession and total freedom - these puzzled meniacs think everything is possible. And Miss Murdoch herself believes this is not possible.

We need to be enabled to think in terms of degrees of freedom, and to picture, in a non-metaphysical, non-totalitarian, and non-religious sense, the transcendence of reality ... We need to return from the self-centred concept of sincerity to the other-centred concept of truth. We are not isolated free choosers, monarchs of all we survey, but benighted creatures sunk in a reality whose nature we are constantly and overwhelmingly tempted to deform by fantasy ... we need more concepts in terms of which to picture the substance of our being ... we need a new vocabulary of attention.¹⁴

In fact, the statement above solves many puzzles that crop up in her works regarding characterization - what she calls 'philosophical concept of personality'. That they cannot discover the truth about themselves or about what D.H. Lawrence calls 'circumambient universe' when they think of them as 'monarchs' and they cannot have their 'self' pictured or reflected or realized unless they have more concepts. But as we have seen this raises serious problems ... the more they use the concepts the more the muddles, more diversified their eccentricity and the more difficult it becomes to pinpoint the truth. True, the Murdochian vision lacks the Humanism of Hemingway, is too much concerned with the 'self-centred concept of sincerity', but then Santiago with all his feelings of brotherhood for the fish could not bring the truth (the fish in its entire beauty) ashore.

Philosophy is not life. Even the preachers and the teachers do not live up to their own convictions. Life is not a raw material that can be ennobled by a mechanical touch, nor can it be moulded into an assured pattern - it will take its own arbitrary turns and twists much beyond the expectations of most. And eccentricity starts from this - when a person cannot live up to his designs and programmes he observes a vast gap between his aspiration and his

achievement, he ponders over it all over again, sees the mistake of it all, but terribly obsessed with his own image, his self (or what Murdochian characters call 'self-love'), he desperately yearns for a clue, a cause that will license him to hate the world or to pursue his own way. This is what roughly happens to the self-styled Murdochian philosophers who later become confused lunatics. And this happens to both the enchanters and the enchanted ones. After a while the exorcists cannot control the network and the ring around which they throw magnetic charm loses its influence and the enchanted ones one after another realizing the weakening of the sickness want to be liberated and free.

'To picture the substance of our being' we need a different plane other than ourselves. And Murdoch thinks it is 'more concepts' that should serve as a plane. But her novels show a growing insufficiency of explanation. She earnestly believes that the universe was not created for our interpretation, even though we could try. In a world where there is no clear distinction between 'love' and 'freedom', no clear demarcation between wisdom and folly, all we can ask for as she indeed does is only 'a new vocabulary of attention', the need of what she herself states could well be the concluding remarks for this chapter:

We live in a scientific and anti-metaphysical age in which the dogmas, images, and precepts of religion have lost much of their power. We have not recovered from two wars and the experience of Hitler. We are also the heirs of Enlightenment, Romanticism and the Liberal Tradition. These are the elements of our dilemma; whose chief feature, in my view, is that we have been left with far too shallow and flimsy an idea of human personality.¹⁵

As a way of illustration, her first book Under the Net was brought under the net of 'dilemma'; in fact it was the first of a long and developing sequence of symbolist-philosophical novels dealing with the problems of language, meaning and myth-making. Jake Danaghue in this novel may seem a typical fifties Picaresque; but he is a novelist, facing the problem of the possible collapse into contingency of language and he "finally reaches a sense of the 'unutterable particularity' of things ... Her work is concerned with the specifics of relationships, but her real power is to structure the world of force lying behind."¹⁶

Her works, therefore, maintain a constant tension between the 'unutterable particularities' and the 'specifics of relationships', which obviously causes the confusions of various kinds. Some critics argue that the author's symbolic intentions do not seem to be contrived. Otherwise, despite excellent passages, the 'mysteriousness' of Iris Murdoch's fiction, even if it is regarded 'deep' in some quarters, is no more than meretricious trickery. And this is the way

Martin Seymoure-Smith reacts:

What has happened to this talented writer by now is that she cannot see her people as people, and so in her despair she has become increasingly reckless, using every modish cliché - spying, sex, incest, mythological allusion, the Gothic, whips - to distort her and her reader's attention from her inability to imagine situation.¹⁶

But one could perhaps argue that the point of all this unresolved mystery about Iris Murdoch is not her inability or incapability to look at life and its predicaments - but that genuine art in any period has certain characteristics, and the great novelists have always known how to tell a story. Literary conventions come and go. We tend to find George Eliot's authorial intrusion rather painful - but we admit that her knowledge of human characteristics greatly surpasses Virginia Wolfe's or E. Hemingway's. In reading her we eventually suppress our annoyance, and say, yes, her insight into human psychology, however heavyhanded is indeed penetrating.

It is particularly difficult to discern a central tendency in the novel that may be natural enough to the nature of fiction, for the novel is a highly various species that can live by particularization and can spare itself an abstract aesthetics. But since the war the variety of this 'various species' or 'the elements of our dilemma' seem to have increased, while the self-conscious formalistic argument seems in the whole to have declined. It will hardly do to

argue that the novel has grown less important and less sure, after all it has sought in many directions a new character and new forms.

So, as Iris Murdoch, herself has said, it has tended to find itself strangely placed between the 'journalistic', which is documentary and open to experience, and the 'crystalline' which moves from contingency towards patterning, towards the highly composed artefact. The result is, she has suggested that writing has lost something of its traditional centre in an awareness of the relation between individual and public experience; it has tended to dichotomize the universe into separate, inner and outer worlds. The writer no longer grapples with reality; and one consequence of this has been that the modern novel tends to retreat into the self, finding the world large, strange and phantasmagoric and the self a lonely, imprisoned place; it has tended in short to see the human situation as farcical, absurd and incomprehensible.

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Chapter IV

Conclusion

E.M. Forster's Aspects of the Novel, proposes 'Expansion, not completion, which is uniquely true of Iris Murdoch's entire vision. As mentioned in the beginning of the introduction, the expanding vision keeps on stretching and continuing because it involves 'love', which is endless and permeating, creating new worlds and opening out new vistas. There is no summing up of love, no fixed pattern in which it can subside, every instance is unique and novel and as the Abess admonishes Michael in The Bell: "the way is always forward, never back". It might not always be forward, but one thing is certain - it is always diverse, different and distinct.

Linda Kuehl's remarks point up the difficulties of summing up Iris Murdoch's fiction:

This genre is stamped by a combination of pyrotechnics and philosophy, a design of bizarre effects intended to convey reality as contingent and eccentric. It employs stock fairy tale, mythic and gothic devices and transforms them into literary correlates of the author's philosophical vision.¹

The quotation describes the magician with her rod but not the stage on which she operates. The stage consists of what we have called, the 'pursuit and flight', the connection and opening out; that is 'love and freedom'.

Therefore, the stage, the magician and the effects of the rod all combined, produce the baffling complexity of vision that we come across in her novels.

The fact remains that most of her novels are indigestible, in the sense that after finishing a book one still gazes at the ceiling with a blank head and a big question mark in the front. The more one tries to solve it, the larger it grows. But this is true of all great works and immortal arts, because they try to picture a life which is essentially mysterious and baffling. The meaning of life lies in the aura of darkness that surrounds it.- But this does not deter the Murdochian characters from going deep into the very roots and pits of this unnameable mystery and enchantment. After all, for Miss Murdoch, Life and Love are the prime enchanters that attract the Murdochian lunatics, lovers and philosophers. Miss Murdoch's attitude towards life, love and the scope of her works are summed up in the Abess's admonition to Michael in The Bell:

... where we generously and sincerely intend it, we are engaged in a work of creation which may be mysterious even to ourselves - and because it's mysterious, we may be afraid of it. But this should not make us draw back.²

And this did not make Captain Ahab, Santiago or Miersault draw back. Murdochian characters are a bit of

Ahabs and Santiagos (in their own ways) who never mind to have 'come too far' down the road - beyond their limitations. Here what matters is the journey, the search and the timeless enquiry, the results become unimportant. Instead, the 'pointer' or the eternal quest for the destination assumes paramount importance.

So much for the philosophy behind the indigestible unintelligibility. Now let us try to understand the magician who contributes to this mystery in the form of different techniques that she employs. To quote a review on her in the T.L.S.:

One persistent source of trouble for the reader is her uneasy wedding of fable and realism - although when she dropped the yeast of fable and laboriously manufactured the 1916 Easter Rebellion background in 'The Red and the Green' (1965) the book did not really rise at all and became in some parts nearly indigestible.³

Indeed, the intercourse and intermingling of 'fable and realism' is really 'uneasy'; because, the reader hardly knows the line that can differentiate these two. For an example, in 'A Severed Head' the Japanese Samurai sword which Honor flashes with immense hypnotizing speed serves as a fable while symbolising a terrible unintelligible reality. At least Martin takes a fair amount of time after the incident to understand the

implications of that unique phenomenon. As a fable, these swords in Japan are considered practically as religious objects. They are forged not only with great care but with great reverence. And the use of them is not merely an art but a spiritual exercise. Honor said to Martin:

'Being a christian, you connect spirit with love. These people connect it with control, with power'

'What do you connect it with?'
She shrugged her shoulders. 'I'm a Jew'.⁴

Martin is unable to understand this irony. Even the reader is bound to be confused. They tend to forget the hints given by Honor earlier because of the extraordinary impact made by the Samurai sword. That the sword defines and describes the 'control and power' of 'Love' is completely missed, and like Martin, the reader is mesmerized by the exquisite display of the sword by Honor that cuts the napkins into various parts. But here is a display and communication of the perfect 'control and power' of Honor's love towards Martin, a violent simmering fire that is disposed through the utter control over the sword. And this 'control and power' should not be mistaken for chauvinism or dominance, it's rather the

apprehension and knowing of the 'other', the perfect act of 'balancing and neutralizing' (see Introduction) that is symbolized by cleanly cut, decapitated napkins into two halves. The perfect dissection of napkins into even halves symbolizes the balance and control and the neutrality. And the 'hideously sharp' implications of the act like the cutting edge of the sword are naturally missed by the wandering hero - Martin, for he is not ready and yet. The apprehension of 'other' is an unpremeditated, spontaneous realization; it is what D.H. Lawrence calls 'the quick of life' and this has not electrified Martin as yet:

I put my hand on the blade, moving it up towards the hilt and feeling the cutting edge. It was hideously sharp. My hand stopped. The blade felt as if it were charged with electricity and I had to let go ...⁵

So as we see neither Martin, nor the readers, for the time being can demarcate the line between the fable and the reality implied by the sword. Martin cannot neutralize and tolerate the force of 'electricity' discharged by the sword. But we should always remember that it is not the sword that reserves the charge, rather it is charged with the 'control and power' of Honor's love. The reality of control and power associated with the fable; the Samurai sword and the individual exhibition in its near perfection, are all fused in such a surprising manner that one misses the

entire meaning of this particular act. And this is the basic problem that contributes to the indigestibility of Miss Murdoch's vision. Even the title of the book A Severed Head is a terrible object of fascination, a fable. As Honor herself comments:

I'm a severed head such as primitive tribes and old alchemists used to use, anointing it with oil and putting a morsel of gold upon its tongue to make it utter prophecies. and who knows but that long acquaintance with a severed head might not lead to strange knowledge. For such knowledge one would have paid enough ...⁶

And Honor in fact belongs to the primitive Jewish tribe, with a fugitive and slumberous look which Martin cannot decipher. It might have been sheer weariness, it might have been resignation. Martin always tries in vain to detect and interpret Honor's face with her narrow dark eyes and the slightly oriental appearance peculiar to certain Jewish women. There was something animal-like and repellent in the glistening stare, which Martin cannot resist; for the fact was that Palmer was beautiful while she was very ugly with her sallow cheek which shone dully like wax, and the black gleaming hair, oily, straight and brutally short. 'She was a subject for Goya'. And Martin has paid and sacrificed enough and has learnt a horrible lot because of this 'subject for Goya'. Martin has lost his wife Antonia to Alexander, his brother, his mistress Georgie deserts him and flies away with Palmer to America and to top it all, Martin

witnesses the macabre and dazzling scene of naked Palmer and his naked sister Honor embracing each other. His acquaintance with the severed head has led him to the nightmarish visions of knowledge and the horrible secret twists that life can take and the dark, unknown corridors that individuals pass through.

My intention was to show the doubleness of the vision, the unclear, hazy horizon consisting of fable and fact. Dr. Honor Klein as a severed head with the Samu~~el~~ sword not only does utter the prophecies and lead people to the awful brinks of realizations, but as an individual, expresses her own emotions and passions through the symbols that act also as fables. ⁶ She is an exciting exorcist, representing the primitive tribes with all their devastating ugliness, but if one sees properly and can penetrate deep into that black, bald head, then one sees the beauty of it. And Martin sees it for the first time:

I had prevented myself so far from looking especially at Honor. I looked at her now ... she looked to my eyes of farewell touchingly mortal, as she had looked then, her demon splendour quenched. Only now I could see, in her ugliness, her beauty. It was almost too much.⁷

Therefore, the interaction within and between these two patterns is in a very real sense the pattern and interaction between individual characters, between different kinds of society, between the sexes and between different

forces and symbols, conscious and unconscious within the individual. Thus in the first pattern, that of A Severed Head, a character such as Martin Lynch-Gibbon moves or attempts to move out of the world of form, pattern and convention into one of contingency. His shift of reading habits alone, from military history to the Golden Bough after he witnesses the extraordinary scene of incest between Palmer and Honor, suggests the kind of movement this is. His relationships with the three women Antonia, Georgie and Honor, clearly represent the various stages of his entry and penetration into the nightmare, as it appears to him of that world.


But suffering is there, at the root of it, creating all the muddles. The restless souls enchanted by the abysmal pit of suffering, wander aimlessly, act hysterically and think in terms of abstract, confusing and contradictory philosophy. Sometimes it seems that they literally pursue the suffering and once caught in it, they enjoy their physical torture and their mental turmoil. They are just cut out for it. Once they plunge into the sea of suffering they lose the rudder and direction because the suffering is chiefly imaginary - it is in their mind sleeping like the gigantic white whale that rests in the miⁿd of Captain Ahab. It acts as the myth, the mystery and the symbol at the same time, and the confounded chasers are left with no option but to be devoured by their own imaginary muddles

and enchantments.

As pointed out in the Introduction, the moral responsibilities of the Murdochian characters begin with their revolt against society, its norms, fixed decorums and defined values. They take nothing for granted. One should not forget the fact that theirs is a constant journey into their own inner self, a journey that is endless; because the 'inner' is a never-ending mystery. The greater the bewilderment and shock that they receive from their experiences, the more determined and deeper their search becomes. Like all other modern characters, Murdochian people are existentialists - the never-say-end torch-bearers into the mines of their own inner dark tunnel. There is no escaping the project. Some of them take it up actively and fearlessly while others watch them from a distance. In every novel, thus, there are two sets of characters, the active ones who act either like Bodhisattvas or narcissists and the passive ones, who try to receive the wisdom from their various undertakings, while labelling it with various philosophical convictions. And the problem or the unintelligible muddle probably starts from this very point. Because no one can share some one else's experience, one may at best apprehend it. One of the Murdochian characters somewhere states that 'no one is wise from others' woes'.

The extensively used metaphorical setting in Miss Murdoch's novels is either the driving rain or the sulphurous fog. Whenever her characters start for an important venture it usually rains or a black, sulphurous fog blurs their vision which symbolises the failure that envelopes the project and its outcome. The actions of man, like his mind and heart are beyond anyone's interpretations. Incest, adultery, homo-sexual relationships, murder, revenge, lies and so forth occur in her novels like routined affairs. And the active characters indulge in such pervasions because they consciously want to dabble in acts regarded by society as immoral and unethical. They want to test its impact on their reasoning, imagination and soul. It is like testing and experimenting with their own being on the laboratory table, applying it with various chemicals and then observing the reactions and the changes that it undergoes. This is chiefly the reason why most of them believe one thing, say another and then act differently. Because for them, morality does not lie in dissociating themselves from the so-called facile evil, but in undertaking the prescribed evils on their own and experiencing it first-hand, in order to be able to apprehend and appreciate the 'other' and thereby to reach the 'inner'.

But it is easier said than done. Because they are extremely conscious of violating the established norms



and orders, they are limited and bound by the lines drawn by the society; otherwise, they will not carry on the arguments on 'nice and good', on to be or not to be so extensively as they usually do. Rupert in A Fairly Honourable Defeat argues:

We experience the difference between good and evil, the dreariness of wickedness the life-givingness of good. We experience the pure joys of art and nature ... All right, we are without guarantees, but we do know somethings for certain.

But does he know really, if one considers what he really does? When his affection towards Morgan is dubiously manipulated by Julius King, he goes to the extent of lying to Hilda, who hitherto had been a solid support and anchor for Rupert. Rupert and Hilda, the certain couple are divided and everything that went in to make the tree erect and solid is defeated.

Yes, they are not sure and they cannot escape the pricks of their conscience. Everything about the existence of goodness or badness, right or wrong, vice and virtue may be a matter of subjective illusion or a relative concept, but the more they argue about its vague existence, the more prominently it occupies their minds. For an example, Martin and Georgie in A Severed Head get rid of their illegal child, and though Georgie's stoic acceptance and lofty spirit consoles Martin a bit, still he is left with a sense

of not having suffered enough: "only sometimes in dreams did I experience certain horrors, glimpses of a punishment which would perhaps yet find its hour".⁹

The statement above refers to both the points that contribute to the riddles in Miss Murdoch's novels: The search for the suffering and the muddles about the age-old questions on good and bad. Once they get the pricks, they do not repent, they search for an immediate suffering or wait for it with a sense of ever-readiness with the belief that the fire of suffering will redeem the wrong-doings.

But this was not my point. My attention was on an active involvement in such actions of which they are not sure. To get rid of an illegal child may be a sin, may amount to killing the soul of an innocent who cannot even protect itself and the act itself may be considered sinister; but they themselves have to experience it with all its horrible pricks of conscience. As Hilary Burde in A Word Child believes:

For a desparate man, any set back can tap a deep base of nightmare, every sin represents the original one, indeed is part of it, every crime is the Crime.¹⁰

It would be a total injustice to Miss Murdoch's works if one of the most important aspects concerning the habit of the characters is not taken up here. And that's

alcohol. Very few characters can say no to drinks - and they drink a lot. Before the start of any conversation, after the deliberations, before taking up a nocturnal adventure and after it, before apprehending a disastrous revelation and after its realization, drinking becomes a terrible necessity. They usually get up with a splitting headache, a confused intellect and a cloudy reasoning. And they indulge in it to such an extent that one is forced to think of them as alcoholics and of their wanderings like that of average sentimental drunkards. Whatever it is, this certainly heightens their eccentric behaviours and makes the entire scenario quite puzzling. And this is probably the reason why many of them so readily can come to a conclusion, drink a toast only to forget it afterwards. They hit the bottles and then they spit out the mad, jarring things, but they do not sleep on it. With the break of another day, it is another venture, a different life, another bottle and another zigzag sojourn.

It seems that Miss Murdoch's valiant characters who throb with excessive energy and spirit and perform immense heroics are really not all that. At heart, they probably are quite nervous and shaken at everything that happens to them. One should always remember that they have a penchant for realizing and seeing things a second before the average humanity sees. And they see it vividly with such clarity

that it becomes a terrible difficulty to communicate or interpret it. The way they visualise things, compartmentalise every aspect of it and scan it can be felt only when one surrenders oneself to the rhythm of her novels.

We expect, but rarely find, characters that live in the memory. E.M. Forster says plot and story might be set aside in favour of some other units, but one wants characters 'to seem alive'. Murdochian character lives long after the novel is read over, he/she represents a principle, a force, a condition, an essence and what is most important - a dilemma. There is, as mentioned earlier, something mysterious, simple and fateful about them.

Murdochian characters remain as distractions, unsolved puzzles and questionable contradictions. They are the fallen beings, the wounded, bleeding and crying victims - victims of their own doings and their own inner confusions. But the peculiar and unique aspect of her novels is that they all end with a happy, reconciled note. In spite of so much of sufferings, 'muddles', 'enchantments' and philosophical dabbings, they hurry on to the closure, that sometimes sounds stage-managed like 'Far From The Madding Crowd'. As one critic has pointed out.

Generally the fundamental pairing off of patterns at the end of the work is common to most of her novels. Either they manage to stay in their static marital relationship, or they find their physical sexual maturity accomplished and hence indispensable.¹¹

They wander, they freak out, suffer and yet they manage to come to a hurriedly managed normal conclusion. Yes, life is incomprehensible, relationships are bizarre, philosophical realizations are incomplete and jarring. But as T.S. Eliot says 'human kind cannot bear too much of reality'. Even these eccentrics, enchanters and Bodhisatvas cannot. Even the most accomplished enchanter Julius King admits, 'I didn't know what to do next'.

But in spite of a normal conclusion, she leaves us with the impression that she does not complete her true attitude towards life, but instead must hurry on to the next novel. I have pointed out that Murdoch herself, in an interview has clarified that she really wanted to write one big novel. And this is what probably she is doing. Therefore as long as she continues to write we should not expect a finality or an ultimate message from her.

And one should always remember that she is a teacher of philosophy by profession, and her own philosophy gives a useful indication of her fictional intentions. Though philosophy has never been a satisfactory *raison d'etre* for the creative writer, still it may explain some of the

problems that crop up in understanding her works. The muddles associated with 'morality' from which her concepts of 'love' and 'freedom' emanate have made her novels more baffling and indigestible. Because, as a philosopher, if she cannot achieve the distinction of defining it, then, it is expected that as a novelist she would make them more 'unutterable'.

The emphasis upon looking at some kind of objective background to morality instead of fixing the source of moral value ultimately in individual decision-making has been transformed by Iris Murdoch in a highly significant work, The Sovereignty of Good, into an extremely metaphysical thesis. She sees great works of art as something which will wean us away from particularity and prejudice in our moral judgements, and which will provide a universal dimension as a background for moral life. She assents that this cannot be found in human nature itself: that man has to look for the transcendent if he is to live morally.

Concepts like virtue and vice, which I have dealt with extensively earlier, further cloud our and her characters' understanding about the 'apprehension' and 'knowledge' of the 'other' that is, the demarcation between 'love' and 'freedom' becomes an extremely difficult task. In an arena of undefined attitude towards life, shapeless realities and shifting values, where the characters regularly oscillate between wisdom and folly, some fixed pattern and

code is necessary to hold things together. But she would not grant that.

Virtues and vices, she maintains, are connected with human flourishing, a notion which in turn is connected with needs and wants. Only in so far as the powers of the human mind are specified in the philosophy of mind shall we know what would contribute to human flourishing. The philosophy of mind would almost provide a transcendental deduction of virtues and vices. Such a view, despite its initial plausibility, shows a great lack of sociological sophistication. Morality cannot be derived from a specification of human needs, for what a man is regarded as needing is basically defined by the moral context in which he lives, moves and has his being.

And the 'philosophy of mind' is a vast roaring space, an ever continuing process and the specification of human needs and relationships will go on multiplying and breeding for ever. And so shall be the life and its incomprehensible, unprecedented aspects. Therefore, ^{no} research on Iris Murdoch can reach a conclusion. Like her characters, the critics are the fated seekers of the 'pointer' that would continue to elude and recede.

Yes, most of her novels end with marriage, or with a happy reunion or just with a great feeling. For examples

I quote here the concluding lines of A Word Child

'Happy Christmas, Tommy'.
 'I'm going to marry you, Hilary'.
 'Are you, Thomas?'
 'Yes, I'm going to marry you.'
 'Are you, Thomasina'? (p.391)

A Fairly Honourable Defeat ends with the note:

The sun was warm upon his back.
 Life was good. (p.447)

But her real attitude towards life is evident from the way she chooses to end her novels like The Philosopher's Pupil or The Unicorn.

I share the general view that the marriage will be a happy one ... the end of any tale is arbitrarily determined. As I now end this one, somebody may say: but how on earth do you know all these things about all these people? Well, where does one person end and another person begin? It is my role in life to listen to stories ... ('The End', The Philosopher's Pupil).

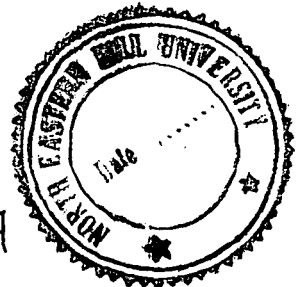
And in The Unicorn at the end, inside the train:

Effingham sighed and crumpled the newspaper in his hand ... they would talk the whole thing over as the express carried them away across the central plain.

Therefore, where does Iris Murdoch end? Every end seems to be a great beginning.

Emphases mine

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