In the process of following the ‘master’ – which is an extension of our thirst for meaning – we allow ourselves to undertake a meaningless and potentially harmful journey. Our inability to look within, coupled with our aggressive need for meaning, drives us outward to seek answers, fashion a ‘master’, and believe that it holds all the answers. This constant engagement continually pulls us outward and away from ourselves. It creates duality, pulling us into a vicious circle where we forget that all that we create is merely a reflection of ourselves. Do we realise that it is we who are responsible for keeping ourselves from the truth? The finale of this journey culminates in this realisation – when we meet the ‘devil’ who helps break this cycle of deceit. Interestingly, perhaps, this is also an expression of our unknowing need to face the ‘devil.’

The ‘devil’ changes the status quo which we seek to establish by venturing into the outside/unknown, creating a haven of false security and an illusion of happiness and fulfilment and, thereby, authorising our existence in the outside. The ‘devil’, the ‘dispeller’ of false notions, is termed thus because, as opposed to the master whose presence allows us to retreat nonchalantly into a spell of delusional
fantasy, he makes us realise that it is we who are keeping ourselves from the truth about ourselves.

Following the ‘master’ concurrently leads us, or rather, enables us to run away from ourselves, to run away from taking responsibility for ourselves. Instead of owning responsibility for who we are or have become, we depend on a ‘master’ who may take that accountability on himself. ‘Running away’ endorses the instinct to run away from anything that we deem undesirable. The two novels, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* and *A Word Child*, portray how the characters constantly try to run away from the devil, the seemingly undesirable thing, but are forced by the circumstances to face him.

In an attempt to use narratology, the chapter identifies certain ‘actants’ and ‘functions’ (in the novels) which define the narrative system. There are recurrent motifs in these novels that directly and indirectly suggest that Julius King is ‘the enchanter’. Therefore, the chapter considers ‘the enchanter’ as Actant one. Since, the other characters in the novels make constant efforts to flee away from him, but are forced to face him, the chapter acknowledges ‘facing’ the enchanter or the d(evil) as the other Actant. Some of the ‘functions’ that directly and subtly support these ‘actants’ are: Dialogues (Hilary wonders, “What monster had been there all these years of which I knew nothing and which was yet a part of my being?”); Narration (Tallis closes the drawer and sits down facing Julius); Character-portrayal (the devil or enchanter characters are described as ‘supernatural’, ‘mask’, ‘demonic’, ‘darkness’, ‘monster’); Images, Symbols and Allusions (‘puppets’, ‘underground pathway’, ‘trapped-bird’, characters’ nightmares and phobias, house interiors of Julius, references to ‘Christ’, ‘Satan’, ‘Peter Pan’); Archetypes (‘Shadow’, ‘puer aeternus’,
The chapter, in the course of analysis and discussion, elaborates on these varied motifs and their contribution in comprehending the theme.

The novels dealing with the idea of the (d)evil, present to the readers the lives of characters who refuse to look within and face the evil. Jung, who calls this evil within as Shadow, says, “By Shadow I mean the “negative” side of the personality, the sum of all those unpleasant qualities we like to hide, together with the insufficiently developed functions and the contents of the personal unconscious” (qtd. in Storr 87).

This need to hide the undesirable, drives the characters to flee away from the shadow/d(evil). Hilary Burde tries to run away from his personal obsessions, his alter ego, and finds that it comes chasing him wherever he goes. When he tells Clifford about his resignation, Clifford advises him, “‘. . . I don’t think you should run away.’” Hilary replies, “‘Run is exactly what I’m going to do, run’” (Murdoch, A Word Child 141). Therefore, a critic, Jackson Rice says, “. . . one of the enchanters that the reader must flee is his own “obsessive ego,” with its “facile merging tendencies” that shrink “reality into a single pattern” (Tucker 75).

This introduces an intriguing question – Why do we run away? A Word Child begins with the description of Hilary’s flatlet (symbolic of his inner being) which he describes as,

. . . dust upon the discarded debris of my struggle with the world…. I instinctively denigrate my flat: it was doubtless my own life which was small and nasty. The flat was certainly cramped and dark, looking out onto a maze of fire escapes in a sunless well. . . . The flat was simply a machine à dormir as far as I was concerned. (Murdoch, WC 2)

Our struggle with the world is essentially a struggle to find meaning in existence or ‘living.’ This struggle drains us, physically and emotionally, causing our
being to be infested with insecurities and doubts. Can we ever fulfil this elusive search for meaning in existence? These insecurities and misgivings create a dark place within our being which is extremely vulnerable to the antics of the imagination/ego. This alter ego/illusory self (an instrument of sleep), in turn, triggers a desire to escape from this dark place into another darkness ("sunless well") which is outside. We, therefore, begin to believe that we are the dark place, and relate this to anything that is dark. In the process of associating with that instinct or that darkness, we welcome the negative or the undesirable. Referring to Rupert’s reaction to Morgan’s letter, the narrator observes that Rupert is portrayed as a man with a confident sense of moral direction, on receiving Morgan’s letter, when he investigates his feelings, he realises “that his first feeling had been one of mad elation”. The narrator remarks how “Human beings crave for novelty and welcome even wars”, (Murdoch, A Fairly Honourable Defeat 224) that reflects an appetite for chaos.

Rupert’s reaction showcases man’s silent desire for darkness and disorder. But it raises an important question – Is our search for meaning in existence or in ‘living’ misguided? Yes, because it disallows us to find meaning in ‘life.’ Our initial premise that life is riddled with ‘doing,’ and that, therefore, it is defined by achievement, is erroneous. When Hilary asks Clifford to leave his Indian miniatures in the will, Clifford says, “‘You only like pictures that tell stories. You only like music with tunes. . .’” (Murdoch, WC 80). Clifford’s remarks highlight Hilary’s appreciation of both the pictures and the music because of their functional aspect. He likes them because they serve some purpose. In the same way, man often attaches a lot of meaning to action.
On the other hand, life is riddled with ‘being’ (as against ‘doing’) that perhaps only a wise man understands. A wise man or saint lives in the present – represented by the moment NOW – where there is no doing but just being. This is in contrast with running away as a primary means to escape reality. It authenticates an ignorant person’s attempt to hide from the present, the ultimate token of truth. Hilary says, in the beginning of the novel, “I really did once upon a time run round the park every morning. . . . Running was a method of death, of life in death, not the saint’s marvel of living in the present, but a desperate man’s little version” (26). Hilary’s desire to run subtly hints at his intent to escape, and contrasts this escape to being in the present. Running is referred to as death because running away from the reality makes life stagnant.

Man has many false assumptions about the meaning of life, especially in the beginning of his journey towards truth when he encounters the quintessential question that plagues all minds – What are we doing? What are we trying to achieve? These questions stem from ignorance as we try to validate our search for the meaning of ‘living’ through them. On the other hand, a person who has understood that these questions are fallacious, would probably ask, Why are we doing what we are doing? The answer to this may not emerge effortlessly and instantaneously, but at least asking the question ‘why’ will lead us towards the right answer. How did the wise man discover this question? He was, undoubtedly, ignorant once upon a time. He arrived at this question after asking himself a series of wrong questions and taking many faltering steps.

First of all, in contrast to the wise man, the ignorant person may be understood as an amateur/beginner who has just begun to understand the need for undertaking the
journey to find the importance of existence. At this point, our primary claim has to be refuted. It is not that he hasn’t looked within for answers. As a matter of fact, he has. But because he is an amateur, he can access that dark place very easily, as a reaction to ‘living’ life. Hence, whenever he looks within, there are chances that he might confuse the authority of this dark place, the ego, with his real self. The ego, thereby, perpetuates the notion of living. Referring to Rupert’s response to the malicious plan, the narrator says, “. . . He might have been, if not wiser at least luckier, if he had decided at once to laugh it off” (Murdoch, FHD 225). Here, ‘laugh it off’ does not suggest indifference or apathy. It is only a warning against giving undue importance to insignificant and illusory episodes of life. On the contrary, the reaction of Rupert is quite different. Taking the situation seriously, Rupert plunges into weighing the causes and consequences of an episode which he misconstrues as real. This leads him away from the solution because, in truth, the problem he imagines is non-existent. If only Rupert had chosen to respond to the demands of the present and not reacted to the attractions of the past or the future, the plan or the problem would have ceased to exist. Hence, the lines suggest that not reading meaning into things and not associating them with one’s own imagination and prejudices would make one luckier, if not wiser. Instead, what the readers find is that Rupert studies the situation, pities Morgan, and becomes anxious about the uncomfortable consequences that might follow.

The question here is, “. . . Could he do it here, latch himself onto the machinery of virtue and decent decision, and simply slide past the warm treacherous area of confusing attachment?” (226). Rupert’s failure is caused by his hidden desire to escape from the ‘treacherous area’ of darkness. The narrator aptly raises the rhetorical question as to whether it is ever possible to ‘simply slide past’ the darkness.
The novel makes it evident that “Rupert was clearly struggling with himself – and equally clearly it was the wild impetuous Rupert, the deep hidden Rupert, that was winning” (279). One cannot escape the darkness because it is within one’s own self. Rupert’s drowning body is rightly perceived by Morgan as “Something dark, like a huge dangling spider. A great bundle, some immense animal. . . ” (380). The description is symbolic of the darkness within. Hence, any attempt to run away from the darkness is futile. Moreover, when we run away, the ‘darkness’ gets a winning power.

Fundamentally, man fears to look within, and acknowledge the shadow/ evil/ devil within him. This fear to turn within and face the evil gives rise to a growing need to look at darkness or evil as an entity independent of him. This misconception pulls man even more outward, away from meaning or solution. When Simon reprimands Julius for deceiving others, Julius, the enchanter, talks to him about how the characters deceive themselves. Julius believes that man is full of illusions. He is far too egoistic to love. Julius adds, “‘Oh, I have done very little. They will do the rest’” (236). Apart from emphasising on man’s indulgence in self-deceit, Julius’s proclamation, ‘I have done very little,’ highlights the insignificance of the devil. The devil is perceived to be important by the characters. They attribute to him the consequences of their acts.

But how do human beings deceive themselves? Referring to the characters’ response to the plan, Julius explains, “‘. . . each of them imagines that he has inspired a grand passion in the other. Each thinks the other is madly in love! Thus each will take the initiative instead of drawing back. Each will chivalrously imagine that he protects and elevates the other! Thus chivalry and vanity will lead them deeper
When imagination interferes with the act, reality is stifled. When one indulges in creating contexts, the act loses its purity. This is precisely how Julius’s plan turns successful. Instead of looking at the situation as it is and trying to ask each other some sensible questions, Rupert and Morgan imagine the other side of the story, confusing foolishness with chivalry and virtue. Later, in the novel, Julius indirectly proclaims the mission or role of the devil when he says, “‘I can’t stand that sort of facile optimistic High Church Platonism. These sensitive people are so terribly absorbed in their own reactions’” (205). Needless to say, by the end of the novel, the readers find that the devil achieves his mission of extricating the characters from an illusory notion of themselves.

One negative experience with the world is enough to cause doubt. Doubt results in our reaction to it by a show of desperation to seek for someone who can take us to that meaning. But this again propels us backward to where we began. At one point, Morgan thinks that happiness with Julius has not vanished yet because –

. . . . Julius is in me. I haven’t solved Julius. All my moods have been modes of consciousness of him. First ecstasy, then misery, then cynicism. Now this new sense of a possible enlargement. In which he must help me. This can only be done with him. We shall never be finished with each other, never. This is only the beginning of a drama which will last the whole of our lives. (207)

This highlights the fact that, like the master, even the devil is one’s own creation. In truth, he is within one’s own self. Morgan’s revelation that Julius is in her validates this. Though Morgan’s words are the outcome of her overt attachment to Julius, they, nevertheless, reveal the profound truth that the oscillating sensations and reactions in life are the result of our belief in and proximity with the idea of the devil.

Man vacillates many times. While in momentum, he is suspended in a flash of that temporary clarity where he understands the futility of resistance, and begins to
question, why do we do what we do? When Morgan visits Tallis to collect her things, Tallis offers her help to clear the muddle in the store room. Morgan’s instant rejection of his help is highly symbolic. Throughout the novel, the readers get to observe how Morgan insists on making life complicated. When Tallis appeals to her to forget the past, she first says that she doesn’t understand him, and then that –

. . . I am not only vile, I’m vulgar. Of course I understand him. He is talking beautiful plain sense and, suddenly, it could be simple. But I won’t let it be. I must act a part, play a scene, to preserve myself, I’ve got to. I ought to show some genuine emotion now, I feel sick enough. I ought to cry. But I won’t. God, I’m a hollow thing. (108)

Morgan’s cry, ‘I’m a hollow thing’ reveals the fact that she is aware of the reason for the hollowness but is unwilling to help herself. Why do we feel the need to act a part? It could be because we are apprehensive of nothingness. We are apprehensive of a life devoid of imagination. The danger is that these fantasies form a vicious circle. They propel us into a torrent of reaction. And, then, it becomes very tough to dissociate ourselves from this chain of reactions. It is this whirlpool that the characters are caught up in.

Since the characters refuse to be truthful to themselves and insist on playing a part, in the scheme of things, their meeting with the ‘devil’ is inevitable. It is important at this juncture to reflect on the initial reaction to this type of tryst. In the novel, Morgan is introduced as someone who tries to run away from the devil, Julius King. Later, unexpectedly, when she encounters Julius at her house, she tells Hilda, “‘. . . When I got onto that aeroplane I thought I was going away from Julius, away, away, away. And now here he is at the other end. Perhaps it’s fate’ ” (43). She is not sure if she left Julius or he left her. She says that the question has been much canvassed. “‘Well, literally I left Julius, but spiritually he left me. It was complicated and – awful’ ” (43). Further, when Hilda asks, “‘. . . Do you think Julius will try to
see you?’ Morgan says, ‘No, he won’t. But he won’t try not to either. He’ll do what he’d do anyway’ ” (44).

This is the point where a meeting becomes unavoidable because, like Morgan, one eagerly absconds from reality. As a result, life presents its machinery in the form of the devil who chases one back to reality. However, this entire process, of either meeting or escaping the devil, is a matter of extreme complication. The devil is just a sort of reminder to us to return to reality. Perhaps, what we learn and understand in his presence is ‘what he’d do anyway.’

This entire discussion points to the glaring contrast between the existence of two kinds of people; one kind that attempts to live in the present, and the other kind, the majority, that doesn’t. For the ordinary sort of people who belong to the latter category, Morgan’s predicament is very real and relatable. This is because, like her, they are also amateurs who believe that the devil is a hindrance to their progress – a belief which is a result of their perception. Their encounter with the devil is filled with disdain, for the most part, since they resist such a meeting. Acknowledging the difficulties in facing the Shadow (the devil), Jung says, “To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge, and it therefore, as a rule, meets with considerable resistance” (qtd. in Storr 91).

It is, indeed, for the similar reasons that Hilary resists meeting Gunnar. In fact he doesn’t even expect Gunnar to come. Hilary tells Clifford about Gunnar, “‘It’s such a fantastic chance. Why should he come here of all places? I thought I’d never see him again, I prayed I’d never see him again. I hoped he’d die. I thought of him as dead’ ” (Murdoch, WC 93). About meeting him, Hilary says: “‘I can’t endure
it. If we meet we’ll – faint with – hatred or something’ ” (94). He looks upon the devil as an object of hatred and, thus, attempts to flee the place. However, one finds that in both these novels, Hilary and Morgan, in their vain attempts to escape the devil, involuntarily walk into him.

On the other hand, Tallis, the wise man, understands and realises the futility of such resistance. After the spell is broken, when Julius visits Tallis, Tallis is seen mending the string beads which are symbolic of the lives he has mended. Tallis closes the drawer and sits down ‘facing’ Julius. Tallis doesn’t seem shocked at Julius’s arrival. In fact, when Julius asks Tallis if he was being expected to arrive, Tallis casually responds saying that he knew Julius would turn up sometime. Towards the end of the novel, before Julius leaves Tallis, he says, “‘. . . . Goodbye. I suppose in the nature of things we shall meet again.’ ” (Murdoch, FHD 387). The interesting fact is that both Hilary and Tallis are aware of the inevitability of the meeting. The difference is Hilary resists it and Tallis doesn’t. Moreover, while all the other characters react to the pain caused by Julius, it is only Tallis who ‘absorbs’ it (Conradi 214). Another important message that these lines reveal is that Tallis has not accomplished anything significant. He has only gained some degree of wisdom or awareness that his meeting with Julius, his alter ego, was in the nature of things.

Tallis’s approach can be truly appreciated when we understand the nature of the ‘devil,’ whose need should be realised. With the devil, such a pattern should be readily accepted. It will unknowingly enable us to break away from the cycle with his help. The Bell also endorses the idea of acknowledging the Id or the alter ego within. Referring to fate of the two sets of twins in the novel (old bell and new bell; Catherine and Nick), Dorothy A Winsor, a critic, remarks:

As the new bell, then, has in the old bell a twin associated with passion, Catherine, who has been compared to the new bell, has a twin in Nick. The
denial of this element in her, which the Court encourages, has serious consequences, as her attempted suicide and subsequent dementia attest. (Bloom 123)

Like the master, the devil exists only as an impassive component of the machinery which life employs as part of its mysterious design. Both the master and the devil, in this light, cease to exist as entities that possess motives independent of this process. No doubt the master and devil characters of Murdoch’s novels are also referred to as “the positive demons” (Conradi 88) and “the evil spiritual agents” (137). The wise man understands this essential difference. It, thus, enables him to quicken his pace automatically. He is drawn effortlessly and unconsciously towards finding the meaning of life, the ultimate reality. The amateur who resists this truth delays his own journey.

This introduces another dimension of the devil. He is but an instrument of order. After all the confusion is settled, and Rupert meets his death, the readers are transported to an uneventful and mundane scene where Julius is seen cleaning the utensils in Tallis’s house. Julius defends this act saying, “‘It does me no credit. I just have a passion for cleanliness and order’ ” (Murdoch, WC 382). The description of Julius’s flat also hints at his nature:

. . . . The flat was small but richly furnished. A tiny bedroom and bathroom, a rather larger sitting room, a well appointed kitchen with a huge refrigerator. The sitting room had a very thick dark yellow Indian carpet. Low fitted bookshelves on either side of the electric fire supported a pair of greeny yellowy Chinese horses which looked as if they were genuine T’ang. Sofa and chairs were covered in fine light-brown velvet and scattered with petit-point rose-embroidered cushions. Modern abstract painting of orange shapes adorned the walls. A glass-topped table with a green marble cigarette box and a neat pile of scientific periodicals. The sun glowed in a veil of white nylon at the window between great looped back folds of darker stuff. Double glazing muted the roar of Brook Street. (Murdoch, FHD 123)
Even a glance at the room makes it clear that Julius lived in an extremely neat and orderly environment. Further, the description of his flat provides an insight into his mysterious nature and obscure character. On the outside, while the small yet richly furnished flat establishes the ordinariness of Julius, the Indian carpet and abstract paintings suggest the foreignness and abstractness of his personality. The perception that the devil, when concretised, is real seems as authentic as the furnished flat. But, at close quarters, its interiors look like the T’ang in the flat, that is, look genuine and real but in reality are a figment of the imagination.

Needless to say, it is difficult for man to understand the truth that the devil is a creation or perception of his mind. Describing the curtains in Julius’s house, the narrator remarks, “It is practically impossible to cut through thick velvet curtains stiffly embroidered with gold thread with a bluntish carving knife . . . they were so very stiff and thick, and would be extremely difficult to sew. . .” (137). This suggests that the nature of the devil and his dealings are difficult to see through.

In fact, the novel reveals in the beginning itself that Julius “‘wouldn’t bare his soul to the press’” (5). He does not publicise what he believes and thinks. Nobody in the novel knows why he does what he does. Many claim friendship with him, yet fail to comprehend him. In fact, Rupert and Axel, who were Julius’s friends at Oxford, recall that their fellow students considered Julius an ‘exotic foreign object’ (7). Axel tells Simon, “‘. . . I’ve never really known Julius’” (20). When Julius pays a visit to Hilda’s house, the narrator says:

Julius was sipping his lemonade, smiling at her with an air almost of ecstasy, and his face looked like a mask. What pale hair and dark eyes he has, thought Hilda. He really is a very odd-looking man. His hair has a strange faded look, like old hair, yet his face is young. He’s not exactly blond at all, and his eyes must be dark grey, or are they dark brown with a sort of tinge of blue? And
how extremely long and curly his mouth is, like two mouths blurred into one. (260)

Undeniably, the above lines suggest that the real face of the devil is often masked from the characters. The contradictory description of the devil’s profile hints at the oddity of his existence. Referring to Julius, Conradi says, “He is a brilliant success within the book – a disturbing, uncanny creation, with his colourless hair and violet-brown eyes – exactly because his ‘myth’, to employ the term persistently used of him, is combined with just enough ‘psychology’ to tease curiosity” (qtd. in Tucker 92). It raises the question – Can he be real?

Even Morgan’s description of Julius hints at his strangeness. Morgan says, “‘... everything with Julius was so high – it was higher than anything like marriage. It was a heroic world. It was like living in ancient Greece or something. The light was so clear and everything was larger than life. . . . Julius is extraordinary. He is wonderful and awful’ ” (Murdoch, FHD 46-47). All these views put together strongly suggest that, like Marcus, the master, even Julius, the devil, is strange, extraordinary, obscure, apparently unfamiliar and a mere creation or symbol. Apart from all the other claims on the character of the devil, the above lines highlight how in the company of the devil one is reminded of life in ancient Greece. This means that the devil is a part of the primitive remnants of our psyche. That is why he is considered unfamiliar and foreign. He is both wonderful and awful. ‘Awful,’ perhaps, because of the evident contempt he displays, and ‘wonderful,’ certainly, because he alone can break the mesh of fantasies and lead man back to reality. It is important to note, here, that while the master is associated with blindness, the devil is associated with light. The paradox highlights the difference between our skewed perceptions of both the entities and their realities.
Mysterious and disguised (in the sense of playing a part), Julius poses as an instrument with no motives of his own. When Morgan asks for friendship, support and understanding, Julius says, “‘... How can you so misconceive my character? I thought then that you knew me.’” Despite Morgan’s persistence in persuading him, Julius refuses to help, saying “‘It is pointless. You admit to being sick. And I certainly cannot cure you since I am the cause of the sickness’” (88). The devil is misconceived as being either a sinister or redemptive force. But Julius’s confession disproves both the notions. Perhaps, the truth is that the devil just ‘is’ and it is we who interpret him one way or the other when we respond or react to him. A tryst with the devil is mysterious because, in a sense, he both causes and eliminates suffering.

The devil plans to achieve order depending on the understanding of the person he confronts. For the amateur, who shows a great deal of resistance, his method is confrontationist. (It is worth emphasising here that it is not Julius’s reaction to the characters but the characters’ reaction to Julius which defines Julius.) For the wise man, he does his bidding without resistance. In the beginning of the novel, when Hilda expresses her disapproval of the engagement in a profession as warfare games, Rupert defends Julius, “‘You have to investigate the stuff in order to find the antidotes’” (4). The reference to antidotes implies that the devil is going to save us.

Julius calls the entire event a malicious plan, a ‘midsummer enchantment’ (233). An objective observation makes it clear that the plan is seemingly malicious but, in truth, it is helpful since it is a part of the process. However significant it may seem, it is also short-lived. That is why, perhaps, Julius tells Simon to call it ‘magic,’ if he likes. When Simon hastens Julius to stop it, Julius says, “‘Don’t worry. I will undo the enchantment later. No one will be seriously hurt. Two very conceited
persons will be sadder and wiser, that’s all’ ” (237). Undoing the enchantment might result in restoring events to normalcy. Most times, a tryst with the devil makes people ‘wiser,’ and, if ‘sadder,’ possibly because one is not yet ready for the wisdom.

In the novel, the devil employs a seemingly spiteful plan/trick to convince the characters that they ought to turn back. He names the malicious plan he designs ‘a capital puppet show’ (235). Simon calls the plan a ‘demon thing.’ Julius consoles him saying, “‘... no one would really suffer. ... I’d do it in the most angelic manner’ ” (209). His manner is angelic because he has come to bring order and not disaster, though it may seem so. To set their lives in order, he studies people, designs situations, experiments with their reactions, and investigates into their natures to prescribe antidotes. Of course, this involves a kind of painful destruction which makes them ‘sadder’. And, Julius, on a lighter note, gives a reason for this. He says, “‘I have no general respect for the human race. They are a loathsome crew and don’t deserve to survive. But they are destroying themselves quite fast enough without my assistance’ ” (194). Nevertheless, one of Murdoch’s critics calls our attention to the importance of Julius’s plan saying, “. . . for the reader it is a brief insight into the workings of evil” (Spear 69).

Julius King’s character also represents ‘the trickster’, another Jungian archetype. The trickster deity is a magician or an alchemist whose role is to play tricks/games that raise awareness. This character archetype generally takes God’s law into his hands and deals with people sometimes maliciously but generally with positive consequences (though one cannot vouch for his intentions).

The trickster/devil has customised plans for the different characters: Julius, in the novel, coaxes Hilda to be quiet and not react because that would solve the
problem. He inflates her vanity by telling her that she is suffering and keeping the family happy. Julius tells Hilda that he is her ‘very devoted servant’ (Murdoch, *FHD* 305). But the plot unravels the truth behind Hilda becoming a slave to the idea of the devil. Julius kicks Simon into the water and says, “‘You are my prisoner, little one’” (332). Simon fears that Julius has this extraordinary power of making him do things. Simon tells Axel, “‘. . . it’s getting so awful and Julius – I feel he’s taking me over – I mean just sort of controlling me . . .’” (350). The characters feel that they are being enslaved or victimised by the devil. However, Simon also confesses that he is to blame about the disasters that happened because, as he says, “‘. . . I simply let Julius enslave me’” (389). The characters are ensnared and victimised because they choose to be. They allow themselves to be enslaved by the idea of the devil. As a result, they act the roles he allots. Axel says, “‘. . . I knew Julius do something like this once before, mystify people and make them act parts. . .’” (356). Actually, it works both ways. Initially, it is they who make him act a part, but later he takes over and makes them act parts.

Both the novels are mostly about how the characters are ensnared by the devil and begin to dance to his tunes. Even Hilary cries out in despair, “‘. . . God! We’re glove puppets’” (Murdoch, *WC* 40). Julius tells Tallis about how stupidly the puppets of his plot behave, “‘Human beings set 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’” (Murdoch, *FHD* 383).

Julius, through his plan, proves that human beings never really see each other at all and that love is a myth. He says,

‘. . . There is no relationship . . . which cannot quite easily be broken. . .’
‘I could divide anybody from anybody. . . . 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. Every man loves himself so astronomically more than he loves his neighbour. Anyone can be made to drop anyone.’ (208)

Looking at this apparently contemptuous motive, we ascribe to Julius the status of the enemy, the devil. Hilary fears,

. . . . Ought I to ‘expose myself’ to Gunnar as to a menacing ray? Ought I to stay on to be a spectacle to him, to accept at close quarters, his silent hatred and contempt; and then at last creep away and hide? There was something hideous and frightening about this. (Murdoch, WC 143)

He later realises that this might just mean “. . . expose or exhibit myself to my enemy” (147). One finds, here, that even Hilary, in A Word Child, perceives the devil as an adversary.

But, why do we perceive him so? Our eagerness to act is a result of our insecurities and doubts. These insecurities do not allow us to perceive things/ people/ circumstances as they actually are. Hilary says, referring to his days at Oxford, “I was touchy and solitary and afraid of making mistakes” (24). “I was terrified of making some memorable public blunder” (113). What Hilary experiences is the infectious fear ‘within’ that compels people to be obsessive and drives them to be sceptical about everything. The result of this fear and insecurity is wrong perception. Instead of accepting and dealing with the latent fears within, man, due to his growing need to project on the external, ascribes this fear to the devil. Consequently, his understanding of himself and the devil are both blurred by wrong perception. Tallis attributes this to Morgan’s nature, saying, “‘. . . She’s got a picture of what she wants me to be and I’m just not it and it simply exasperates her. . .’ ” (Murdoch, FHD 359).
Like Morgan, man is unwilling to look at the world and accept it as it is. His driving need to fit everything into his image of it causes him to have the wrong image of the world. This is precisely what obstructs him from seeing the truth behind even the master and the devil. He perceives the master as a saviour and the devil as an enemy. But, in a way, it is the master who drives him outward and the devil who forces him to go within. Man does not ‘see’ this because of the pre-conceived notion he has of both. Julius says, “. . . . Morgan has a remarkable capacity for making false images of people and then persecuting the people with the images. Well, you know that. Anyway she’d cast me in some sort of role as a liberating force and then she started talking some nauseating drivel about freedom. . . ’ ” (362). Again, it is Morgan’s perception that the devil is a liberating force. This is also untrue because freedom, in the sense that she understands it, is not reality. While bound by her perception or image of freedom, she continues to think that the devil is responsible for it. In truth, the devil neither binds nor frees. It is she who does both.

But, our insecurities, at this point of the journey, are so strong that we are unable to face the reality of the present and construct illusory perceptions of the ‘tools’ of living (like happiness, freedom, etc.) in order to escape the present. After Rupert’s death, Julius remarks, “. . . . Rupert didn’t really love goodness. He loved a big imposing good-Rupert image. Rupert didn’t die of drowning. He died of vanity’ ” (384). Much before his death, when Hilda learns about the affair, Julius tells Rupert, “ ‘Why should you not be a little to blame after all? You are upset because your image of yourself is shaken and because Hilda’s image of you is shaken. A trifle chipped or cracked perhaps. You have expected too much of yourself, Rupert.’ ” He further advises Rupert, “ ‘. . . . A little realism a touch of shall we call it ironical pessimism will oil the wheels. Human life is a jumbled ramshackle business at best
and you really must stop aspiring to be perfect, Rupert, especially after this latest piece of evidence!” (342). Then, in a conversation between Rupert and Julius that follows, Rupert says,

‘... I couldn’t live like that.’
‘Like what? Without a false picture of yourself?’
‘No. In cynicism.’
‘Why use that nasty word? Let us say a sensible acceptance of the second-rate.’ (343)

This highly insightful dialogue between Rupert and Julius uncovers the hidden motives of vanity behind the seemingly virtuous act that man undertakes. Besides, Rupert’s arguments and Julius’s proclamations underline the fact that we create and impose images because we attach some sort of significance to our actions – the so-called significance which is an illusion. Perhaps, reality is bare and, therefore, we consider it second-rate. When Rupert says,

‘There is something I can’t live without –
’[Julius says] A mirage, my dear fellow. Better the real world, however shabby, than that condition of high-minded illusion.’ (343)

So, the self-doubts, which have come from the dark place within, propel us to the outside and we misunderstand the quest of life to be the quest for living. Since that is unachievable, we create illusions that make these unreal ideas seem real. We are blinded into embroiling our energies in the snare of our creation. For an amateur to fall into such a trap is not surprising. Life doesn’t offer answers, it asks questions which we must incorrectly answer before we realise what questions should actually be asked in the first place. The incident at the Piccadilly Circus station subtly depicts the predicament of man trapped in his own perceptions. The pigeon at the bottom of the first escalator on the Bakerloo side at the station symbolises Morgan herself. She seeks freedom but is unable to escape: “... The idea of the bird trapped in that warm dusty electric-lighted underground place filled her heart with pity and horror” (291).
Strangely enough, the bird refuses help just like Morgan. Morgan’s repeated efforts to rescue the bird prove futile. In the process, she loses her purse and becomes frantic to reach her destination. She gets entangled in a difficult situation (like the affair with Rupert). After much struggle, she unexpectedly finds Tallis at the station. She tries to follow him but is unable to keep pace and loses him: “I must see Tallis, I must see him at once,” (294) she thinks. Before she reaches Tallis’s house, “She panted along between houses which were stripped and wrenched and torn, where people sat silently on doorsteps and waited. The horror, the horror of the world” (295). The episode at the Piccadilly station is one of horror. It delineates the difficulty of extricating oneself from the self-created prison of perceptions. Here, Morgan feels a sense of terror because of the idea she has about the devil and about freedom. But, in reality, the devil is only a response to the darkest fears that lie within her.

We eventually do understand that, in the rare moment that we inspire confidence in ourselves, such a reaction to the ‘devil’ is merely a rejoinder to the dark uncertainties that lie within. One gets a real insight into who the enemy is when Tommy declares that Hilary is his own worst enemy, since he cannot decide to be happy. Later, when Hilary thinks of what Gunnar would have told Lady Kitty about him, he wonders, “. . . What monster had been there all these years of which I knew nothing and which was yet a part of my being?” (Murdoch, WC 172). The monster could be the sinister doubts which cause a venomous reaction to the devil. Hence, a meeting with the ‘devil’ becomes a dire necessity, and not an unfortunate turn of events. Hilary’s words to Kitty, “‘. . . He [Gunnar] needs me, you think. Perhaps I need him even more than he needs me,’ ” (195) is an acknowledgement of this need.
Like the wise man, our ability to finally face the devil comes after we understand that the devil doesn’t have a personal motive. His intention is to restore order in the mechanism called life. But it is hard to face him with this understanding and, therefore, we resist it. To face the devil, we need to be honest about ourselves, the reality of our own self. It is for this reason that Clifford, in *A Word Child*, advises Hilary to see Gunnar. In fact, what he tells Hilary gives the reader an insight into how to deal with the devil: “‘. . . . You must just be there, undergo him, let him pass you by. . . .’” (143). Later, even Gunnar tells Hilary,

‘This much I suppose I learnt from analysis, to pull emotion, feeling, what lies deeper and more awfully close to the live heart, out into the open a bit more; to apprehend connections and let terrible things own their feelings without disguise. To let the dog see the rabbit, as we used to say, and let the rabbit also see the dog. Only this is awfully hard to do. . . .’ (267)

Gunnar’s words underline the process of coming to terms with the devil. One has to let one’s innermost feelings come out without hiding them. One has to admit and expose them as they are – expose them to one’s own self; or else it will result in self-deceit. Needless to say, being truthful and letting things out in the open is awfully hard. But the devil can enable us to achieve this: After Julius plants the seed of doubt in Hilda, she thinks about the calamity that has befallen her and wonders, for the first time, if Rupert was really happy with his marriage? The narrator says, “. . . her own motives for self-deception were strong and for the first time visible to her” (Murdoch, *FHD* 306). Then, Hilda (who initially dreaded Julius’s company) pleads with Julius to stay with her and rescue her from her predicament.

Thus, we finally realise that it is right or necessary to meet the devil, the ‘dark brother’ inside all of us. When Morgan goes for an outing with Peter, she realises, in an epiphanic moment,
It had been right to go to Julius. When one has such a deep instinctive need to do something then it cannot be wrong to do it. Julius always *shows* me things, she thought, he is a great world-revealer. . . . With Julius one is in the hands of gods, one has *fallen* into their hands. That is frightening but life-giving. To be *deep* in life: not to creep by or tremble on verges. (163)

As Morgan rightly points, the devil enables us to be deep in life. ‘To be deep in life’ means that the act of life is of utmost importance. The devil facilitates us to fully participate in the act of life, and not just step on its threshold or verge. Similar is the glimpse of reality which even the master shows. Therefore, both the master and the devil, in one sense, awaken us to life. In the novel, when Morgan is “. . . still trying to be on holiday from herself,” Rupert believes that Julius “. . . has shaken her, probably educated her” (221). This might lead to her deciding about what sort of a person she is and what human life is about. It is to be specially noted here that Morgan is actually on a holiday from her own inner self and inner life, and Julius propels her back into the same.

According to Jung, the part of the unconscious that refuses to grow up and face the challenges of life represents ‘puer aeternus’ (male) and ‘puella aeterna’ (female), another set of his archetypes that are antithetical to ‘senex’. These character archetypes may have both negative and positive sides. Their denial of maturity which is famously referred to as Peter Pan Syndrome is the negative side. For example, it is this immature boy in Faust that drives him to see the devil only outside. Needless to say, Hilary, Morgan, Rupert, Simon and many other characters fall into this category.

The positive side of this archetype is a product of the psyche accessing the higher and complete child-like wisdom in which the opposites lie close together, i.e., they are not very defined. The novels suggest that Tallis represents the positive
side of this archetype, since he alone shows a tremendous amount of restraint in his meeting with the devil/challenges. In his first encounter with Julius:

Tallis stared at Julius and visibly shuddered. Then, he took a step forward and held out his hand. ‘Hello.’

With a marked raising of the eyebrows Julius took the proffered hand. ‘Good evening.’ Julius sat down. (71)

After this there was a short silence which Julius was evidently enjoying. Later, Julius refers to this meet and advises Morgan, “‘Why not go back to your husband? He seemed to me to be quite a nice man. . . . You should be pleased we have met amicably. . . ’” (88–89). From this, one learns that even though Tallis was initially apprehensive of facing Julius, he does not resist the meeting. It is interesting to know how Tallis achieves this. In their last meeting, Julius questions Tallis, “‘You concede that I am an instrument of justice?’ ” (387). To this, Tallis’s response is a simple smile. His smile is suggestive of his understanding that Julius is ‘just’ an instrument of justice. Beyond this, Tallis does not give him any undue significance. Tallis does not impose an image on Julius; he sees the devil as he is. This is how he is able to successfully face the devil, understand him and communicate with him without the interference of words. In A Word Child, when Clifford asks Hilary if meeting Gunnar had been a reconciliation scene, Hilary recollects, “It had not been the reconciliation scene. It had been mysterious, ambiguous, for hope or fear I knew not what. But it had been somehow a tremendous communication . . .’” (Murdoch, WC 206). This means that when Hillary musters enough strength to face the devil, a tremendous communication takes place.

At this point, it is important to probe into the tools that assist us to look at the devil as he is. Strangely, in the novels, it is only Tallis who is able to do this. When
we delve into how he achieves this, we find that he is the only character who is sure about what he is. When he is writing addresses on envelopes, Julius asks him if it is not a waste of his intellectual powers. Tallis replies, “‘... I haven’t got any intellectual powers...’” (Murdoch, *FHD* 357). Tallis’s honest opinion about himself does not allow Julius to trigger his vanity. On the contrary, Julius says about Morgan that she considers herself an intellectual eagle when in reality she is blind with ignorance and sentiment. Unlike Morgan, Tallis does not hold a wrong image or, rather, any image of himself. Not only does he project his real self, he also explores people’s real self. For example, Peter had to play or act a part with Rupert and Hilda. With Tallis, he had no role to play: Peter “lived in a state of vulnerability and nakedness which was not too far from despair” (97). In Tallis’s company, Peter could live free from pretensions. He was able to live in reality. However, he feels despair because that is how the ignorant look at reality. Reality can be depressing to those who have no taste for it.

At the end, the meeting with the ‘devil’ releases us from our ‘notions,’ even if he momentarily pulls off such an achievement. Again, depending on the way they deal with their new-found freedom (going back home), the difference between the amateur and the wise man is very distinctive. For the amateur, this freedom presents itself in the form of a momentary clarity which he is incapable of prolonging. This is because he has an ‘idea’ about freedom, that it signifies becoming free from something – in his case, becoming free from the dark place/ego within. Hence, as soon as he misunderstands thus, he is once again thrust outward. But, for the wise man, being free is freedom from all notions and ideas. He understands that to be just free is being nothing. The amateur doesn’t comprehend this truth and, thus, denigrates it. For him, going home is encapsulated in a moment of flashing clarity. The truth as a
prolonged state of being doesn’t seem right because he is not comfortable with nothingness.

In the moment of clarity, we realise that we are nothing. Clifford echoes a similar sentiment on the insignificance of human life when he refers to Gunnar, saying that “He has, what I cannot forgive, a thoroughly inflated sense of his own value (ever since Oxford). We are nothing, nothing, nothing, and to imagine otherwise is moral conceit” (Murdoch, WC 359).

But ‘nothingness’ frightens us. We feel as though we will fall into oblivion. It contradicts our need to understand living. We feel that we will be stripped of significance (which we cannot yet understand, because we are still trying to figure out ‘why’ we exist. We haven’t reached the stage where ‘why’ doesn’t matter). The astute description of Peter’s flat suggests emptiness and we realise how we fear the same: “Peter was reposing on his bed as usual, propped up against a grey mound of pillows, dressed in shirt and trousers, barefoot. His hands were clasped upon his breast and his eyes were dreamy” (Murdoch, FHD 56). Hilda feels he also looked like a soldier, against his room background: “Reflected sunshine lighted up the room revealing its nakedness. Hilda shuddered. A stripped room is a place of fear. Apart from Peter’s iron bedstead and the chair there was little furniture” (57).

The stripped room is symbolic of the nothingness within. And, since our perception of ‘the inside’ is filled with the images and significance we create, nothingness, which is the reality, appals us. Iris Murdoch’s essay on Void refers to this bare reality as ‘void’ or nothingness. To an extent, some characters in A Word Child are driven to see and admit this truth. When Hilary calls Arthur ‘a nonentity’ (Murdoch, WC 337), Crystal declares that she is also a nonentity. Towards the end of
the novel, when Lady Kitty dies, the newspaper headlines again exclude Hilary. He says, “Once again I had dropped out of the story as if I had never existed” (377). Hilary’s words echo his evident desire for significance. However, Simone Weil’s dictum, “‘The illusion of perspective places him [man] at the centre of space’” (qtd. in Conradi 69), echoes the importance of refusing significance, fully understanding that we are not the centre. It is for this reason that Peter J. Conradi says that Murdoch’s novels have the theme of decentering. Tallis is constantly making efforts to refuse the temptations of significance, but many others, especially his father, Leonard Browne is unable to do the same. Browne’s complaint to Hilda projects this need for significance:

‘. . . I didn’t ask to exist, did I? Why did this space in the universe have to be filled with a lump of smelly flesh attached to a guttering intelligence? …. If I was forced to exist I ought to have had something in return, oughtn’t I? I don’t mean anything vulgar like happiness. I daresay that’s another myth anyhow. But a little grain of significance, as tiny as a pearl perhaps or a droplet of water or a mite of dust that you could hardly see as it settled on the tip of your finger –’ (Murdoch, FHD 52)

Our need for significance stems from our desire to be paid attention to. Duality is created because of this need, because we tend to move farther outward trying to seek love and recognition from something external. Like everything in life, the need to follow the ‘master’ and face the ‘devil’ also comes from paying attention. However, in this case, too much attention to the master or the devil will propel us outward again, continuing that cycle of cause and effect. In A Word Child, Hilary recollects his childhood:

I shall not talk about the orphanage: again, fairness is probably impossible. It was not that I was beaten (though I was) or starved (though I was always hungry); it was just that nobody loved me. In fact I early took in that I was unlovable. Nobody singled me out, nobody gave me their attention. . . . I can hardly remember the early years at the orphanage. When the light of memory
falls I was already as it were old, old and scarred and settled in a posture of anger and resentment, a sense of having been incurably maimed by injustice. (Murdoch, WC 18)

Hilary later confesses that his only source of hope was Crystal and Osmand who rescued him out of his outcast mentality and bitterness. He recalls referring to Osmand, “He gave me his full attention” (21). Sadly, attention is a precursor to significance. Paying too much attention gives rise to duality because one might, in the process, give a lot of significance to the other as an entity.

By paying excessive attention to the idea of the devil, we read too much into its significance. Instead of giving importance to the clarity it gives, we give it more meaning. Morgan tells Tallis, “‘Julius is my godfather. My father in god with a small ‘g’. He has shown me myself. . . . Julius woke me. . .’” (Murdoch, FHD 189-90). Morgan either loathes Julius or considers him a god. Either way, she is reading more meaning into him and his mission than she should. In the short trip with Peter, she experiences an epiphanic moment: “. . . She looked up. A strange regular metallic sound was coming down out of the sky. She saw three swans flying, their whiteness kindled and almost invisible against the pale sun-brimming sky. The rustling whistling sound of their wings passed on over her head and faded” (163). The imagery suggests feelings of panic, horror, and freedom, and an urge to let loose the universal innocent love latent in her. Of course, gradually, Julius reveals to Morgan the impossibility of achieving any such standards with the ‘empty abstractions’ (190) she has.

This attitude sharply contrasts with the wise man’s understanding of life. Referring to her life with Tallis, Morgan says,

‘Living with Tallis was like living in a gipsy encampment. At first it all seemed very unworldly and spiritual and free. Later it was depressing. Later
still it was frightening. It made me lose my sense of identity. I resented the muddle but I couldn’t dominate it. The trouble was that Tallis didn’t expect me to, he didn’t expect the right things of me. With Tallis there were no forms and limits, things had no boundaries. Oh it’s hard to explain. In the end everything about him began to irritate me terribly, even his freckles.’ (78-79)

What Tallis did not expect was a dramatic sense of meaning or significance. Seemingly, life devoid of such drama is difficult for us to digest. That state of ‘being’ which Tallis at times achieves is not accepted by Morgan. Morgan loves to dissect life with her images and notions. Hence, she detests Tallis. Tallis imposes no forms and boundaries. That is precisely why it is so hard to explain life with Tallis – because, with him, there is no framework.

To arrive at such an understanding, one needs to understand the difference between life and living. To live life, one must detach/dissociate one’s self from living. Then, the deed that carries the burden of our notions will cease to exist. Only the act, as an independent entity, will matter. Hence, it becomes important to ‘do’ or perform the act as a matter of ritual or routine. When Rupert asks what Julius expected of her, Morgan says,

‘To respond to his magic. To be predictable. To be gay at the right times, quiet at the right times. To live to his time-table. To cook. . . .’

. . . . With Julius everything was ritual. Oh Rupert, there are people who communicate with the deep abysses of one’s mind and these people are frightening.’ (79)

Julius is directly communicating with the ‘within’ of Morgan and she finds this repulsive. She further says that even Tallis did this. She regrets that she couldn’t find an ordinary man. The irony is that Morgan is not happy with either of these two because she wants significance, something that they are consciously or unconsciously stripping her of. And, how do they do this? As Morgan confesses, she is expected to stick to a mind-numbing routine. Routine is mindless work which has to be repeatedly
performed. It is the only work which does not attach any significance to the act. Sticking to the routine – a practice which Julius and Tallis impose on Morgan – helps one to live in the present. The readers find that even Tallis is saved by the monotony of his life. He, as Julius says, goes for lectures because he does not want to think. Not giving way to too many thoughts and imagination brings one back to reality, to the present. The present does not allow us to attach excessive significance to one act over the other. At one point, Tallis cries for his father’s health, decides to tell him the truth the next day, and the next minute he is writing the lecture. This does not suggest apathy or indifference. There are tears in that one moment, but the next minute he gives himself fully to something else: “Tallis is engaged to the point of exhaustion” (Conradi 24). He is, in one sense, true to the moment, and shows us how to ‘be.’ Indeed, the mind-numbing routine that he sticks to is therapeutic.

Even Hilary, who is very particular about keeping to the routine, confesses that office routine work keeps him off the thoughts of Gunnar even when Gunnar is around. When Gunnar comes, Hilary thinks, “Better the assumed calm of the usual mind-numbing routine” (Murdoch, WC 97). In the beginning of the novel, he explains, “Routine, in my case at least, discouraged thought. Your exercise of free choice is a prodigious stirrer up of your reflection. The patterned sameness of the days of the week gave a comforting sense of absolute subjection to history and time, perhaps a comforting sense of mortality” (27). He adds, “My ‘days’ gave me identity, a sort of ecto-skeleton. Beyond my routine chaos began and without routine my life (perhaps any life?) was a phantasmagoria” (28). The exercise of free choice, the choice to do certain things creates conflict and confusion. On the contrary, going through a choiceless routine helps us live in the present and results in silencing the stirring up of our images. Devoid of this routine (which highlights the importance of
an ‘act for act’s sake’), life is but a ‘phantasmagoria’. Away from the presentness of
the moment, man creates false images to feel the illusion of significance. When Hilda
asks Morgan, “‘What do you want me to do?’” she says, “‘Nothing at the moment. I
just want you to exist quietly near me while I discover who I am and what the purpose
of life is’” (Murdoch, *FHD* 44).

Thus, in order to conceive life as it is, it is important to look at a person or a
relation as it is. The person doesn’t have to be anything in a relationship. Morgan
unconsciously echoes this deepest truth when she asks Hilda to just exist, just ‘be.’
Also, when Hilda and Rupert advise Tallis about his life and compel him to do
something about Morgan, he says, “‘... When I see what to do I’ll do it’” (160).
Tallis’s words emphasise the importance of the act.

At the crucial point of attempting to understand the importance of a life devoid
of perception, it is inevitable to probe a little more into the life of the only character
who could, in some sense, achieve this. Talking about her life with Julius and Tallis,
Morgan explains to Hilda,

‘... he’s (Julius) very unworldly. But he is mythical. ... But Tallis has no
myth.’

... . . .

‘... Julius and I lived like gods. I can’t convey it to you. You know, in
some way Tallis is a sick man. He’s perfectly sane, but his sanity is
depressing, it lowers one’s vitality. My love for him was always so sort of
nervy, and he hadn’t the instincts for making things easy and nice. Tallis has
got no inner life, no real conception of himself, there’s a sort of emptiness. I
used to think that Tallis was waiting for something but later on I decided that
he wasn’t. Sometimes his mode of being almost frightened me. He’s obscure
and yet somehow he’s without mystery. Julius is so open and so *clear*, and yet
he’s mysterious and exciting too. ...’ (48)

It is already clear that Julius represents the perception of the characters. What
about Tallis? Tallis is said to have no myth and mystery. Morgan’s distress in living
with him reflects a discomfort with reality. Tallis does not wait for anything. He is content to just ‘be.’ He is obscure to Morgan and to the readers, to an extent, because, like Morgan, we are unwilling to understand his simplicity. In *Existentialists and Mystics*, Murdoch says, “The great artist, like the great saint, calms us by a kind of unassuming simple lucidity. . .” (qtd. in Milligan 175).

At various crucial points, the novel reminds us that Tallis is not a saint untouched by the trials of life. Difficulties bother him and his actions are calculated and spontaneous, both at once. He does not escape action. Rather, he plunges into it. The restaurant scene, where a group of youth attacks a coloured Jamaican, proves this. Referring to the dual, Axel says to Julius, “‘My God, it was impressive! Do you know, we all acted characteristically. Simon intervened incompetently, I talked, you watched, and Tallis acted’” (Murdoch, FHD 215).

Tallis highlights the role of a participating witness. He plunges into the act but without the melodramatic motive of ‘rescuing the other.’ Needless to say, ‘doing’ with a motive is an illusion. In a serious discussion about Peter’s stay with Tallis, Hilda says, “. . . Poor old Tallis often thinks he can help people but really he’s hopelessly incompetent’” (12). The irony is that the motive behind helping the other is an illusion. In truth, not only Tallis, but, no one is competent to help another. To think otherwise is immaturity and ignorance. Calvin Blick, a character in *A Flight from the Enchanter*, says that the “notion that one can liberate another’s soul from captivity is an illusion of the very young” (qtd. in Bloom 77).

The wise man alone understands this and plunges into performing the act. He is, thus, always a step ahead. As a result of his wisdom, he does not fall into the trap of ‘doing.’ This is an incredibly difficult thing to do. The amateur falls into this
temptation even after he gets clarity to do something with the momentary wisdom he attains. He foolishly ascribes a motive even to wisdom. But the wise man makes no such mistake. The thought-provoking conversation between Tallis and Julius, at the end of the novel, subtly brings out Tallis’s wisdom. Tallis asks Julius why he is revealing the entire plot to him. Julius says,

‘Oh you know why. 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.

Tallis sat for a moment reflecting. Then he jumped up.

‘We must telephone to Hilda.’
‘You mean tell her all this?’
‘Yes. They must all be told. At once. Not the house ’phone, everyone hears every word. There’s a ’phone box down the street. Come on.’
‘Are you going to talk to Hilda?’
‘No. You’re going to talk to Hilda.’ (Murdoch, FHD 367)

Axel says in the end, “‘. . . The only person about the place with really sound instincts is Tallis. He led Julius straight to the telephone’ ” (389).

From a keen reading of the conversation, one can see that Tallis faces the biggest temptation – of taking the credit for the rescue. The devil himself is ready to offer this credit to Tallis. Yet, Tallis, instead of taking the onus of the situation and the action, leaves it to Julius to unwind the wire, giving up another opportunity to feel significant. Also, instead of discussing and debating on the happenings, Tallis leads Julius to action. By renouncing the illusory sense of doer-ship, Tallis has renounced even the act which would have given him an illusory sense of significance.

The wise man who goes through life with an open mind, a mind devoid of perceptions, learns to live life. Morgan says, “‘I’ll probably never get over Julius, well yes I will, but I must learn to live. . . ’ ” (49). She will, indeed, get over her ideas
when she learns to live in reality. The only way forward, to pursue the truth of life, is by dissociating oneself from living, and associating oneself with life. The only way out is the way in.