CHAPTER FOUR

LINGUISTIC CONSTRUCTION OF GOOD AND EVIL

Iris Murdoch is unusual among modern novelists in depicting and appreciating our longing for the good and also of gradual attraction towards evil in many of her protagonists. That her characters have been convincingly moving has been elucidated in the previous chapter which dealt exhaustively upon the narrative construction of good and evil. The emphasis upon the linguistic construction of good and evil is an important aspect of this chapter.

Murdoch has as Olga Kenyon denotes, displayed a wide range of imagery linguistically. It is through these that she captures the gulf between good and evil. She succeeds in conveying myriad notions implied in these ethical formulations. The good characters, display a range of vocabulary which is often inadequate, and limited. Laced with overtones of self defeat and rejection by the world, the good characters find it difficult to function normally. Evil lurks portentously with a much wider ranging self assured vocabulary, confident of itself. Language helps in denoting the arena of ethics, where the protagonists are shown misusing or neglecting institutionalized religion and yet long for a more spiritually ordered
life. Through language Murdoch analyses evil as intelligently as she does spirituality.

*The Bell* (1958) is set in an enclosure where the possibility of salvation is a topic often debated on. Religion is suspect from the very start. Dora, an inmate, had never been 'able to distinguish religion from superstition'. As denoted in an earlier chapter, the characters of good do not receive any sympathetic treatment from the author, or from their counterparts in the world around them. Toby Gashe, a visitor at Imber describes Michael Meade, the head of Imber in an unimpressed manner": there was something tired and needy about him... and was not too obviously a leader."¹ Yet later the same Michael was seen by Dora as one who was decisive and yet gentle. Another all pervading character of good was the Abbess. Her notions of good were of the strictest and severest forms. She felt that one's duty "was not necessarily to seek the highest regardless of the realities of our spiritual life ... but to seek that place, that task, those people, which will make our spiritual life most constantly grow and flourish".² With regards to his good intentions Michael had always felt himself to be a man waiting for a call. Murdoch describes him to be a man who knew the futility of his recent years, eaten by an ennui which he had tried to picture to himself as an

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² Ibid., p.81.
'insatiable thirst for the good'. Murdoch herself had suggested in the novel that "those who hope, by retiring from the world, to earn a holiday from human frailty, in themselves and others, are usually disappointed". Michael tried hard to respond to his calling, it meant to him, an act of service into good and "a loss of personality... yet these ideals were still for him, while strongly beckoning, remote and hard to interpret." Michael and his lot are representative of what Murdoch terms as the lot where the struggle was from within, 'the day-to-day attempt to be impersonal and just, the continual mistakes and examinations of conscience'. In *Henry and Cato* (1976) good is reflected in varying degrees in both Father Brendan Craddock and Cato. Cato especially, was presented with a great sense of indecisiveness, right from the outset. His character develops slowly. At the outset he is shown 'walking very slowly', from North to South he walks back and forth. His thoughts are always muddled, even though to Beautiful Joe, the evil counterpart, he remains a figure of hope Cato kept on reflecting, "If only... everything were not happening to me all at once...." This statement seems to be a reflection of the various characters of good and their attitude towards life. Christ for Cato was someone personal. Cato had come to Christ "suddenly with no warning and with a sense of immense barriers dissolving in the mind, he had

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4 Ibid.

tripped and stumbled into reality..." At that time Cato felt "as if he had not only emerged from the cave but was looking at the Sun and finding that it was easy to look at..." Cato learnt that he was mystical, that he needed no spectacular vision of Christ. In fact Murdoch goes so far as to denote that he was with Christ and he was Christ. Cato, muddled up as usual, is unable to convey his feelings to anyone. Murdoch describes Cato's sentiments which again run consistently with the sentiments of the various characters of good. Murdoch states that Cato's "was not a headlong rush into a new life of self-sacrifice and strenuous devotion. It was like a river... what exactly he had to do emerged more slowly. He must become a priest, his whole life must be a showing of what he now knew." And Cato realized that it would not be easy, for even with his new cleansed vision he saw his old self, still existing and unchanged and perhaps even unchangeable. With regards to his faith Cato felt that he and good occupied the same space. "Hell he could not imagine, it was for him an intellectual idea. Damnation if it existed was God's affair". Only God concerned Cato "only God was his business, only God interested him...." Cato gradually found himself changing.

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7 Ibid., p.38.
8 Ibid., p.40.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., p.42.
He felt like a plant growing yet not able to be counsellor of what the changes were..."\(^{11}\) Cato began to feel more independent, more individualistic. Cato also began to experience a kind of spiritual dryness. He felt it was a phase which would pass, yet it didn't. "Cato woke up one morning with the absolute conviction that there was no God".\(^{12}\) Cato didn't quite or know what would happen, whether there would be a miracle to renew his faith on whether he'd destroy himself and leave Christ. He thought endlessly "suppose now when he was able to give the matter his whole consideration he were to decide, irrevocably and without appeal that there was no God?"\(^{13}\)

On the other hand, Beautiful Joe, whose character had been elucidated upon in an earlier chapter, continued to haunt him. Cato began to realize that perhaps "Beautiful Joe had been sent to tempt him. When had he begun to doubt God? At the time when Beautiful Joe came into his life".\(^{14}\) Brendan Craddock encourages Cato to go on. Brendan holds the view that "we have to suffer for God in the intellect, go on and on taking the strain.. Our truth is at best a shadowy reflection, yet we must never stop trying to understand."\(^{15}\)

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12 Ibid., p.48.
13 Ibid., p.49.
14 Ibid., p.53.
15 Ibid., p.193.
Tallis Brown in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970) is, as discussed earlier, an awkward and untidy man. He lived in a house full of junk and filth. Hilda and Rupert, a husband and wife team, discuss Tallis at length. Tallis is described as ‘spineless’, ‘a muddler’ and someone who ‘never seems to know what he can manage and what he can’t’. Even physically Tallis Brown fell short of the glory of the evil Julius King. While Julius was considered ‘terribly good looking, Tallis was described as a ‘sort of runt’. Julius King continued to exercise a powerful, magical grip on Morgan, Tallis’ estranged wife. Morgan confessed that “everything with Julius was so high- it was higher than anything like marriage.... it was a heroic world...the light was so clear and everything was larger than life”.¹⁶ Life with Julius was extraordinary, wonderful and yet awful at the same time, Tallis for her was an ‘unsolved problem’ and she felt an awful sort of naked pity and distress”¹⁷ for him. For Morgan myth was necessary. She felt “Tallis has no myth, Julius is almost all myth”.¹⁸ Morgan's comments are crucial to the characters of both Tallis and Julius. “Julius and I lived like gods... Tallis is a sick man. He's perfectly sane, but his sanity is depressing, it lowers one's vitality .... He's obscure and yet somehow he's without mystery. Julius is so open

¹⁷ Ibid., p.59.
¹⁸ Ibid., p.60.
and so clear, and yet he's mysterious and exciting too."\(^{19}\) Julius made her feel solid, compact and real. Tallis often wrote to Morgan while she was with Julius but she didn't pay his letters any heed. It made her feel sick and she tore them up. As far as cleanliness was concerned Julius King won hands down. His house was sparkling clean, with everything in place. Murdoch does not describe his house in a manner as detailed as she does Tallis', when Hilda had gone to Tallis' house she described it as a place full of horror. "The indescribably horrible smell of the house assailed her. The smell was really mysteriously unpleasant."\(^{20}\) No matter what Tallis did for his ailing father, the latter was never satisfied. His father tells him "you had every bloody advantage and look what you have done with your life. Just look at you."\(^{21}\) Everyone felt Tallis had been a failure. Even Tallis had no faith in himself. He had to look after Hilda's son Peter and he asked himself warily" How can I be responsible for Peter, when I can't organize myself?"\(^{22}\) Wherever Tallis was there always seemed to be a muddle. Interestingly enough Tallis is ready to accept the fact that Morgan was still in love with Julius King. He doesn't try to persuade her to go back to him. He even helped Morgan to shift her things. The clumsy scenario began with Tallis who pushes the stuff on a

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\(^{20}\) Ibid, p. 67.

\(^{21}\) Ibid, p. 108.

\(^{22}\) Ibid, p. 113.
handcart. Morgan was irritated and Tallis kept apologizing until Morgan finally told him. "If you say 'sorry' again I shall be sick". That good acts and does not merely watch is indicated at the scene at the Chinese restaurant. Five burly youths about eighteen were assaulting a Jamaican, and Tallis Brown, Julius King and a couple of others were witnesses to the hapless scene. Murdoch notes "Tallis moved in from behind Julius and before anyone could shift- or cry out he had struck the youth very hard across the side of the face".23 And, a friend them summed it up "Do you know, we all acted characteristically Simon intervened incompetently, I talked, you watched and Tallis acted"24 and even Julius King declared that 'it was perfect' Good characters always acted when necessary, no matter how nondescript a picture they might portray otherwise.

In Nuns and Soldiers (1980) Anne Cavidge is the runaway nun, whose conversion to Roman Catholicism had been described by Murdoch as a flight to innocence'. Anne felt that she was giving her life for a quiet conscience'. "Innocence was then the form under which god appeared to her.. She did not, at the start, think clearly of 'goodness' or 'holiness' as a visible goal. She took to a fervent belief in a personal God, a personal saviour...."25 hollow as do most

24 Ibid., p.241.
characters of good. What gained power in her mind was the idea of holiness, of becoming good in some more positive sense. Gradually Anne began to feel hollow as do most characters of good. 'Holiness not cleverness was the path .... but this path... began to fill Anne with strange doubts... her instincts and intuitions had begun quietly to point her back towards... a kind of negative humility which did not aspire to the name of goodness."26 Anne continued to hand over her trials to God. She was exquisitely disciplined, heard only by God. Ultimately when Anne left the convent she began to wonder "Had they been wasted, those years, had she spent them inventing a false Christianity and a false Christ? she could not think so. Christ belonged to her and would travel with her, her Christ the only one that was really her".27 Murdoch denotes that Anne was 'soaked in Christianity and in Christ, sunk, saturated, stained....' Anne acts as a care giver to Guy and Gertrude Openshaw. Guy is stricken with cancer and is dying; Gertrude and Anne were old friends.

Guy Openshaw a confirmed non believer expressed a desire to meet Anne. Guy tells Anne his views on suffering and virtue. He felt that 'suffering is always so interesting and that "our vices are general, dull, the ordinary rotten mud of human meanness and cowardice and cruelty and egoism.. Only in our

26 Iris Murdoch, _Nuns and Soldiers_ (London 1980), p.61
27 Ibid., 67.
virtues are we original, because virtue is difficult..." Even here though good was so much more marginalised, Guy told Gertrude that his dialogue with Anne was 'a foretaste of heaven' even though both of them had disagreed on many counts. Even though good continues to doubt itself and its significance. We hear instances where the good is lauded for its effort. Gertrude openly wondered upon Anne's mission in life. "She could not imagine now how she could have survived without Anne Cavidge, and Anne's return to her now carried the significance of the world". In short Anne became the much needed crutch for survival. Anne Cavidge's vision of Christ had been described in an earlier chapter, where Christ had appealed to her to continue the good work on her own. Anne gradually came to realize that she had to 'survive' on her own terms. Murdoch's figure of good in this novel, continues to feel defeated but is actually such a necessary being in terms of setting right broken relationships and transforming lives around her. On her own Anne felt that her Christ lived even though she felt that he had been "a failure, a pathetic deluded disappointed man who had come to an exceptionally sticky end...." At the finale when Anne is all

29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., p.106.
31 Ibid., p.507.
set to depart for America, fresh hope assails her. Murdoch continues to give her figure of good recognition in the world, marginal as it were; the closing lines are testimony to this sentiment. When Anne came out of the pub called the Prince of Denmark, the snowflakes began to descend slowly, "it reminded her of something .... it looked like the heavens spread out in glory, totally enthralled before the face of God, countless, limitless, eternally beautiful, the universe in majesty proclaiming the presence and the goodness of its Creator." 32 And a lightness enveloped her being and Murdoch continues to assert the marginality as also the existence of the positive side of good.

William Eastcote in *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983) was 'a very devout person'. He lived a life entirely devoted to good works. The protagonists of the novel, did not believe in god. There was a fundamental principle advocated on this behalf and this was that "the mystery of God was one with the Inner sight of the soul, and the illuminated Way was the Good life, where truthful vision spontaneously prompted virtuous desire". 33 Eastcote is alloted very few lines in the novel but his presence is marked. He is recognised as a figure of good. Eastcote's famous sermon was on the preaching of good. He advocated "Let us love the close things, the close clear good things, and hope that in their light

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other goods may be added.... Let us seek aid in pure things turning our minds to
good people... to the pure words of Christ in the Gospel, and to the monks of God
obedient in Him in nature.... "Recognize one's own evil, mend what can be
mended, and for what cannot be undone, place it in love and faith in the clear
light of the healing goodness of God". 34 Even his last words before he passed
away were "pray always, pray always to God." 35 Even John Robert Rozanov the
self styled philosopher of Ennistown and deemed to be the evil counterpart had
full faith in Eastcote. Before Rozanov committed suicide he had left a note for
Eastcote in which he had appointed the latter as legal guardian to his
granddaughter Hattie. Eastcote became, as do other figures of good a peripheral
yet lasting influence in Rozanov's life, though both reflected thinking so ardently
opposite to the other. When Eastcote died, Dr. Roach his physician declared
with emotion that he had been 'a saint if ever there was one'. And also that
Eastcote's had been a "wonderful life... how terribly we shall all miss him. But
what a wonderful life, what a wonderful man, not just a comforter but a living
evidence of religious truth...." 36 Anthea, his niece felt the grief even more so and
she knew that her "feeling about everything else were as nothing compared with
the everything of William Eastcote his goodness and the mystery of his death.

36 Ibid., p.421.

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She felt an intense wailing grief for which the only salve was that vanished goodness which she would now press forever to her heart.37 The goodness had left their lives and they had not bothered to respond to it while it was there, in their midst.

Goodness being mocked at, just as Christ often was is particularly pertinent in *The Good Apprentice* (1985). Stuart Cuno as a figure of good continues to paint a pathetic yet prominent figure as elucidated in the earlier chapter. Cuno has terminated his grant from the university and moved back home with his father, Harry Cuno. Murdoch introduced Cuno to us at the outset at a social setting; a party in the home of Midge Mac Caskerville. This setting subtly conveys the difference, both ethically and otherwise, between Cuno and the others. Cuno is a vegetarian, and the others are not. Murdoch also emphasizes that Cuno is a voracious eater but that Midge, the hostess had quite forgotten to create a vegetarian dish for him. Cuno has no complaints whatsoever. Later he gets into an argument with the others over the subject of computers. He detests computers and machines, "a machine doesn't think... A machine can't even stimulate the human mind... because we are always involved in distinguishing between good and evil"38 Despite being the lone voice in the wilderness Cuno

proceeds to tell his attackers that "being objective is being truthful, making right judgements is a moral activity, all thinking is a function of morality, it's done by humans, it's touched by values right into the centre..."39 Again, the emphasis is upon a religion without God. Cuno admitted that-- religion was required to create an awareness "...something that keeps love of goodness in people's lives, that shows goodness as the most important thing..."40

Harry Cuno is exasperated by Stuart Cuno's efforts at being good. He tells him "why can't you go on studying something worthwhile, you could study and help the poor?... You are a defeatist, you are bogus.. you want to be god..."41 Stuart Cuno detested "sexual promiscuity, vulgar public sex, the lack of privacy and reticence, the lack of reverence the lack of inwardness".42 His 'hedonism' was an instinctive craving for nothingness. "He had not yet been tested. Can a man live with no evil, no shadow, no ego?... He knew his present failings, and that he would descend further into it all, into the mess and muddle of wrong doing, like everyone else... Yet still, in some way, he was waiting for a sign".43 He was

40 Ibid., p.31.
41 Ibid., p.38.
42 Ibid., p.53.
43 Ibid., p.53.
as Thomas, another protagonist put it, 'apprenticed to goodness'. At the outset Stuart Cuno is more in a mess than he has ever been before, his step brother Edward had been accused of murdering his friend. Edward was in a state of mental and psychological shock. As narrated in an earlier chapter, Stuart had tried to mediate, but had thought he had failed. People often did not respond to him and his ideas positively. Stuart himself had never especially expected people to love him, had never depended on love. Yet at the finale, the murdered boy's mother who had continually launched a tirade of angry venomous letters upon Edward, finally forgave him. She admitted 'your brother's visit did some good'. So Stuart Cuno, apprenticed to good does contribute his share towards good will.

Similar instances occur in the character and life of Jenkin Riderhood in *The Book and The Brotherhood* (1987) Jenkin does not have any major role in the novel interspersed as it is with myriad characters. An earlier chapter denoted his influence and his belief in the new theology. Again a peculiar characteristic trait, shared between him and the other figures of good is that he didn't go to church, nor did he believe in God, but he wanted religion to go on somehow. When Jenkin was alive, Murdoch as well as the other protagonists paid him little attention. When he died, many people became aware of his significance. Rose, for instance became aware "how much more than she had ever realize." she had
loved and depended on Jenkin...\textsuperscript{44} She remembered that Jenkin was 'a wonderful presence', he had indeed given a soul to all things. Murdoch also stated that 'Jenkin's golden character was attested by all' Interestingly, while Jenkin was alive, he seemed to have had no family but at the funeral a large number of people came to manifest their grief. And "since he'd appeared to be something of a fellow traveller of the Christian faith, it was fitting that the solemn words of the Prayer Book, so sober and so beautiful, should bid him farewell."\textsuperscript{45} There was a continual sharing of the many ways in which good had been reflected in a small, uncharacteristic manner.

The \textit{Time of the Angels} (1966) is the novel where evil has extended immense ramifications. The novel is haunted by a certain coldness and this is constantly portrayed in the damp weather, the bitter fog and the absurd chilly weather. An area of gloom pervades all through. The line 'it's so cold' is often echoed and fog comes well inside the house. Carel is the rector of the non-existent church, who continues 'not to see anyone' nor is he available on the phone. Carel had always been the kind of person who was the source of power. Evil which is always so attractive is now even more so and everyone in the novel seeks to meet Carel, even though he staunchly refuses to do so. Of him it was

\textsuperscript{44} Iris Murdoch, \textit{The Book and the Brotherhood} (London: 1987), p.474.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., p.478.
said, 'He likes to scandalize people' and was 'terribly unbalanced', and that his existence was 'a part of the breakdown of Christianity'. Carel was indeed mad and, while his wife was yet alive but striken with a fatal disease, he had taken the black hired help Pattie to bed. Sexual promiscuity was not unknown to Carel.

It was even described in the most normal, even religious terms Pattie "entered into Carel's presence as into the presence of God... Carel immediately touched her, he caressed her, he loved her. And then one day... Carel took her to bed."\textsuperscript{46} He equated the sexual and the religious. He didn't believe in God the Father but applied the same lines of worship to Pattie whenever he slept with her. He revered her then to the position of Mary, "Hail Pattie, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women."\textsuperscript{47} He soon became as evil as evil possibly could become. In Murdoch's words "he became a recluse, refused to see callers or to answer letters... He introduced curious variations of his own into the ceremonial of his services and even into the liturgy. He began a sermon by saying, 'And what if I tell you that there is no God?... He once conducted a service from behind the altar. He was given to laughing in church."\textsuperscript{48} Pattie the black hired help had seen him at very close quarters. She apprehended at last

\textsuperscript{46} Iris Murdoch. \textit{The Time of the Angels} (London: 1966), p 27.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., p 158.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., p 30.
something like a great fear in Carel, "a fear which afflicted her with terror a kind of nausea. It often seemed to her now that... she had always seen him as a soul in hell. Carel was becoming very frightened and he carried fear about him as a physical environment. He, complained of a black thing which kept whisking out of sight... Pattie knew that what frightened Carel did not belong to the material world."49 In the meantime Carel continued to reign in his mad world, being termed 'neurotic' 'unbalanced' 'psychotic' 'a thoroughly evil man'. He also had sexual liaisons with his 'niece' (who later turned out to be his own daughter) Elizabeth. Carel openly admitted his unbelief for God even though he was a priest. He satisfied himself with being 'a priest of no God'. To quote him "my vocation is to be a priest. If there is no God it is my vocation to be a priest of no God"50 and he told Marcus his brother "imagine how often I have been tempted to announce from the pulpit that there is no God. It would be the most religious statement that could be conceived of..."51 As explained in an earlier chapter Carel spoke of the fact that "there is only this there is no God, and the single God of the philosophers is an illusion and a fake"52 and on evil he stated "multiplicity is not paganism, it is the triumph of evil, or rather of what used to be called evil and is

50 Ibid. p.170.
51 Ibid., p.171.
52 Ibid., p.172.
now nameless". Even when Marcus tried to argue that there was "goodness whatever you say, there is morality, it's first there, it makes a difference", Carel merely laughed: "all altruism feeds the fat ego... we are clay Marcus and nothing is real for us except the uncanny womb of being into which we shall return." Carel also insisted that the idea was that one had to be 'good for nothing'. Of goodness he felt that the concept was empty. "This has been said of the concept of God. It is even more true of the concept of Good..." Carel ends up taking his own life, and Marcus continued to wonder why. Stray observations on Carel continued. "What had Carel died of... Had Carel despaired, and what could that despair have been like ?... Had chance, sheer contingency choked Carel in the end?" So, in the end evil committed suicide, and left no significant mark in the world.

Marcus Vallar in *The Message to the Planet* (1989) has been denoted in an earlier chapter. Irina his daughter stated "He imagines he's some sort of sage... He's going to save the world, we're living through a dark era and waiting for a

54 Ibid., p.172.
55 Ibid., p.173.
56 Ibid., p.174.
57 Ibid., p.225.
But Irina insisted that he differed from the messiah or Jesus because in spite of everything he remained "just Marcus Vallar, it's just dull old megalomania". In spite of being dubbed the most wicked person alive, Vallar still commanded authority and an arena of mystery surrounded him. His own daughter offered certain clues about him. Marcus had even gone to India "... to look at all the suffering on show there, perhaps he thought they would see that he was really a god... he's got to be a great sinner and understand evil as well as good and be the victims and Hitler too and Christ and Anti-Christ.... He wants to fall into awful depths of suffering and degradation and die a terrible and famous death and be taken to heaven in a fiery chariot..." Patrick was a protagonist in the novel who had been so ill that he'd been left for dead. Vallar was the only hope. When Vallar came to town, he went to Patrick and woke him up saying "Patrick, Patrick, wake up, it is I Marcus Vallar, Patrick, I command you, wake up... any ill thing I said to you I now take back, any harm I meant to you I hereby revoke. I ask you to pardon me I command you to get well." Vallar asserted an authority so miraculous that Patrick awoke and was healed. When a cult known as the stone people came to learn about the incident, they became besotted with

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59 Ibid., p.105.
60 Ibid., p.105.
61 Ibid., p.129.
him. They considered him to be a sign as well as someone who had a message for them. Marcus laid emphasis upon suffering. He felt that one"... must adore emptiness and the extremity of pain'. 62 He felt too "that concentrated evil, that supreme almost supernatural cruelty, teaches us that we are at a parting of the ways, man's salvation or man's destruction..." 63 And at the end when Marcus took his own life, there was nothing but dissolution, Marcus had not left any impact on the world. As stated earlier evil has always been painted in a very attractive manner. Pitted against Michael Meade in The Bell (1958) was Nick. Michael continued to feel incomplete and ill at ease in his role, Nick was always very self assured and took great pleasure in belittling Michael. Nick had always been "a child of considerable beauty... a trouble maker and something of a star... The masters doted on him." 64 Nick had been a pupil in Michael's class and he would sit "in class staring at Michael with an appearance of fascination so bold and unconnected as to be almost provocative." 65 Later on he changed his stance and in the process became even more attractive to Michael. Nick appeared once again in Michael’s life and later on takes his own life. Michael survives, but continues, to ponder upon his relationship with Nick. "He felt indeed as if his

63 Ibid., p.166.,
65 Ibid., p.101.
belief in God had been broken. As if he had discovered that he had believed. He absorbed himself so utterly, so desperately in the thought of Nick that even to think about God seemed an intrusion, an absurdity. Later on however a sense of his personality returned to him and he gradually began to feel that he could carry on.

In *Henry and Cato* (1976) Beautiful Joe was instrumental in the gradual destruction of the priest Cato. When Cato reflected later he realized that Joe was someone who completely baffled him. "He defeated me with a graceful demonic brilliance Lucifer, bearer of light... And Cato remembered how he had once thought of Joe as a symbol of breakdown in his life even as an emissary of the devil." In *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983) George Mc. Caffrey is shown at the outset as having a quarrel with his wife Stella. The weather is dark and wet. The vocabulary used enhances the situation, "the malignant rain rattled on the car like shot. Propelled in oblique flurries, it assaulted the windscreen of racing raindrops." As denoted earlier, George had the capacity to introduce absolute disorder in peoples lives. George was a violent man who got into rages and to put it plainly was something evil. On discussing George, the comments heard were

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that he needed electric shocks' and that he was someone who 'must be in hell.
Described to be one who had chronic hurt vanity, cosmic resentment, metaphysical envy George was also someone who was "probably more worried about losing his driving license than about having nearly killed his wife". With this kind of maniacal evil, he made people understand terrorists simply because he had given up the niceties of human intercourse and hated everybody. In Murdoch's words "George was an accomplished narcissist, an expert and dedicated liver of the double life... not as bad as he pretended to be, or as he really believed himself to be". It was thus, difficult to explain that enigma called George. There seemed to be a deep wound in his soul. "Pride and vanity and venomous hurt of feelings obscured his sun. He saw the world as a conspiracy against him, and himself as a victim of cosmic injustice".

Good then is subjected to overwhelming attack, and yet these figures of good are simultaneously minor yet un-ignorable; portraying how 'goodness as also evil' operates in the world. God absolutely central and by far the most important idea, but it is not often recognized. However difficult it is to be, or to do good, it is even more difficult to ignore its presence altogether. In *A Fairly

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70 Ibid., p.78.
71 Ibid.
Honourable Defeat (1970) Julius King is haunted by Tallis Brown; it is only by an "effort of will, propelled by selfish enjoyment", that he succeeds in not surrendering to him.72 Stuart Cuno in The Good Apprentice (1985) is a person who is longing to help others yet he is also horribly aware of his own awkwardness which is often at fault. To lose the concept of God, as the adolescent generation in the novels has generally done, is not the answer. We have seen that far from "filling the moral bill, this disappearance of the central idea only exacerbates their confusion, ... can only lead to even more self-centred and communally unworkable systems".73

The good figure appears time and again with the evil figure and linguistically Murdoch has denoted that good establishes no victory yet it is never annihilated. Evil may not be conquered just as yet but, goodness continues to lead to a perpetual possibility that continues to point towards hope; and this continues to be the crux of Murdoch's writings.

This section will now focus upon the linguistic aspects of good and evil in vivid detail by focusing upon the vocabulary used for the various protagonists of both good and evil. I shall begin with The Bell (1958). As

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72 Suguna Ramanathan's essay in Iris Murdoch: Figures of Good, explicates these idea.

already mentioned earlier, the novel is set in Imber Court, and Michael Meade, is an aspirant priest who also strives to be as ‘good’ as he can be. However, goodness continues to elude him, and even the sermon that he preaches can only be ‘Be ye therefore slightly improved’ in lieu of James Tayper Pace’s maxim ‘Be ye therefore perfect’. Michael Meade, is seen as being slightly more tolerant then James Tayper Pace. Michael is, in the novel, projected as a failed priest, failed school teacher and also a chaste homosexual, who falls in love with an adolescent named Nick Fawley. It was because of Nick Fawley that Michael had been sent out of the school. When the novel opens Michael is at Imber Court, this time poised on the brink of a relationship with a young man called Toby Gashe. Murdoch’s ethical formulations can only be presented through the eyes of the other protagonist, in this case Toby’s: “Whatever could it be like to be an almost priest like figure and yet go around kissing boys? He wondered, if, in spite of what he had said, Michael did this often? Perhaps he just had sudden irresistible inclinations of this sort. Did he suffer torments of remorse? He found himself dwelling with tenderness upon the idea of Michael’s frailties”. Murdoch gives us an idea about the various reactions that the good people have towards their attempts at being good; which actually become very thwarted. In this case Michael wants to achieve as much of the good life as

possible but temptations arrive in the form of Toby and Nick who pander to his homosexuality. In another novel *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970), Tallis Brown is the epitome of the good person. However, the concept of good is hardly attractive and eventually it is the evil Julius King who triumphs over the good Tallis Brown. At the very outset Tallis is described by Hilda, his sister in law, as a sort of ‘drop-out’ and someone who was ‘hopelessly incompetent’ and also a ‘terribly odd man’ whose ‘activities are all so wet and dilettante and disconnected’. Hilda, a staunch altruist also felt that Tallis was someone who was so ‘spiritless’ and ‘such a muddler’ someone who ‘just can’t cope’ and was ‘a man without ideas’. Thus, right from the start there was nothing very positive about him. While Hilda felt that Julius King was ‘terribly good looking’ she felt too, that Tallis Brown was such a ‘sort of runt’ and as far as social graces were concerned, Julius King was for her a ‘charmer’ \(^{75}\) while Tallis Brown was a ‘natural solitary’. Even to Morgan, Tallis Brown’s ex-wife, who later had an affair with Julius King, Julius was ‘a most amusing companion’ who was ‘awfully handsome’ and ‘almost all myth’ while Tallis Brown was someone who had no myth; and therefore, uninteresting in comparison. Morgan also felt that “in some ways Tallis is a sick man. He’s perfectly sane, but his sanity is depressing, it lowers one’s

\(^{75}\) All the adjectives have been taken from Iris Murdoch’s novel *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (London: 1970).
vitality. Tallis has got no inner life no real conception of himself, there’s a sort of emptiness. Julius is all soul, all inner being...” 76 Even Peter, the son of Hilda and Rupert, who stayed with Tallis felt that Tallis was “a terribly anxious man and also that Tallis is somewhere else, he never really exists in the present at all” When Julius King chanced upon Tallis, he remarked, “what a very strange little person. He ought to be sitting on a toadstool...” 77 and besides he also felt that Tallis was a very ‘nervous’ man. While Julius King was by all means, a ‘fanatically neat man’ Tallis Brown was very untidy; his surroundings were extremely filthy and in demeanour he was terribly unkempt. He looked untidy, tired and dirty with hair always jagged and uncombed. And as far as his presence was concerned Tallis Brown represented someone who was always in trouble. Hilda stated that wherever Tallis is, there’s always a muddle. It was also decided between Rupert and Hilda that Morgan’s involvement with Tallis was based on sheer illusion. They felt that to Morgan “Tallis represented holy poverty or some such stuff... Then she woke up one morning and saw she just had a weak and unsuccessful man for a husband”. 78 Apart from all these taunting remarks from other people, Tallis also had to put up with his invalid, terminally ill

77 Ibid., p.85
78 Ibid., p. 221
father, to whom he was nothing but a ‘stupid son’ who could not make a
decent living. Tallis Brown is thus, in all of Murdoch’s works, someone who
is the ‘good for nothing’ figure in its fullest sense of the term, and yet he is
also someone who, as had been elucidated in an earlier chapter, is solid and
dependable.

We continue to see shades of the same in another character of ‘good’—
Anne Cavidge the ‘runaway nun’ of Nuns and Soldiers (1980) Anne, is the
epitome of good in the novel and very often is subjected to rudeness and
misinterpretation from the rest of the world. However, she receives a much
better deal in life when compared to Tallis Brown. She is actually openly
appreciated even during her short tenure with her friend Gertrude Openshaw.
To Gertrude she was clever Anne Cavidge who had “shocked them all by
becoming a Roman Catholic, after a series of wild love affairs”.79 To this,
Gertrude’s reaction had been predictable ‘Gertrude fought her, mourned
her... One cannot communicate with a nun” and later on when Anne does
leave the order and the convent, Gertrude tells her ‘we are both defeated’.
While on her part Anne knew that “Gertrude was very glad that she was in
the house. She scarcely wanted Anne to go outside the door.”80 Anne was a

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80 Ibid., p. 57.
total failure in the truest sense of the word, especially the way the world understood the word. However, it is obvious that Gertrude, who had made a success of her life, in as far as a good marriage and wealth was concerned, depended wholly on Anne. Murdoch herself spoke so much about Anne and her religious leanings during the course of the novel. She tells us that Anne had simply left because she changed her views about religion. When Anne went to meet Guy Openshaw, Gertrude’s dying husband he told her “maybe you should have hung on… You could have heard the sound of the bagpipes”. She endured his sardonic comments, even when he bluntly told her “I’ve always hated god”. Anne, in the novel, was a very useful character. She was always needed, and in all her years at the nunnery had learnt the skill of being a comfort to others in need. Gertrude soon found herself thinking “… I want Anne to stay with me forever, I can’t live without her now. The presence of Anne in the house is necessary to my continued survival”. She becomes so indispensable that Gertrude tells her ‘god sent you to me’. Later on in the novel, another character named Daisy, who has been portrayed by Murdoch as the kind who hung around bars and lived a very shabby existence, told Anne “You’re in love with Gertrude! That’s why you’re so filled with spite and envy, coming round here and insinuating things and asking questions… get out!… as if I hadn’t enough trouble without being persecuted by jealous


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nuns suffering from sexual deprivation!". 

Anna had to beat a hasty retreat and Murdoch also touches another sore point in the novel, by making Anna fall in love with the Polish Count. This love is unrequited and all that Anna can do is to feel a deep yearning for the count. As Murdoch states ‘she had not been interested in his interest in Christ, only in his interest in her’. The human in her comes out when she states ‘I want him, I want him, I shall die without him...’ Murdoch also denotes that ‘she could not yet banish him however, and she saw again and again, those pale eyes... like the apparition of a holy saint! Despite her longing for him, Anna soon realized that the count’s love was solely reserved for Gertrude. Towards the end of the novel we find that Anna had gone to locate Daisy at the pub called the Prince of Denmark; it was a kind of reconciliatory gesture before she left for America. Even this gesture is defeated because Daisy herself had long left for America, and Anna in the process overheard a conversation concerning herself. She was being described as the ‘ghastly nun’ chasing Daisy, an ‘unfrocked nun’ and also a nun who “was a raving lesbian and had been chucked out of her convent for seducing novices”. However, Murdoch allots Anna a semblance of happiness in the finale by sending her to America, to embrace life anew.

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83 All adjectives used are from Iris Murdoch’s *Nuns and Soldiers* (London: 1980)
William Eastcote, in *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983) has been a very marginalised person. As already denoted earlier, he has been by far the most low profile character of good in Murdoch’s novels. However when the mad, yet philosophical John Robert Rozanov, (whose wickedness is as usual revered and admired by the town of Ennistone); comes to town, it is to Eastcote that he turns to. Eastcote’s words are innocent in a different way and at a meeting he clearly defines the norm that hovers over the disorders everywhere in the novel. To quote him “let us love the close things, the close clear good things which are as it were close to us, within our reach, part still of the world…. Let us then seek and in pure things, turning our mind to good people… to the pure words of Christ in the Gospel…”84 Much later in the novel, N the narrator, while speaking of the universal willingness of almost everyone to indulge in spiteful gossip remarks that, because of his virtuous austerity, William Eastcote was someone who was never idly gossiped to ‘but in this respect as in others he was exceptional’. That could be easily missed as just one observation among many but, it pinpoints to his singularity and value. Of all the characters of good, we realize that Eastcote is by far the most tranquil: we see less of his struggle.85 As pointed out Murdoch manages to keep him beautifully balanced on the tightrope to saintliness, tenderly


humanising him with frailties on occasion. The words used about him have, in many cases, religious connotations. He is a Christ-figure. George the raving maniac figure of the novel is quietened down by the death of Bill the lizard; (as Eastcote was referred to). The language used to describe Eastcote’s death is significant: “it seemed to him that this too was a sign that Bill the lizard had offered himself up as an innocent substitute for George’s death. Love had reached its climax and died in peace” \(^{86}\). That this is clearly a reference to the Atonement is borne out by the fact that on the very next page there is a specific reference to Christ in George’s conversation with Diane.

‘Something’s all washed away- washed in blood.’

‘Like Jesus Christ’

“Yes. Yes. Nothing less would do. I said the world was full of signs today. And Bill the lizard dead: God rest his soul.” \(^{87}\) Eastcote’s capacity for effecting change in the lives of people is related to Christ’s. When he dies, Alex, the mother of George, thinks about him and realises how much she had

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\(^{87}\) Ibid., p.492.
loved him, "He was to be always there, making life more significant and secure in a way which did not need to be continually checked." 88 While none of these characters was shown interacting with Eastcote while he lived, they recognise him as a pattern irradiating their lives now that he was dead. Eastcote's freedom is related to the Protestant view of the individual, absolutely alone before god, free to make his own moral choices.

Stuart Cuno, in the novel that followed The Philosopher's Pupil is, as the title of the novel suggests The Good Apprentice (1985). As the novel progresses, we learn that Stuart Cuno had a brother called Edward who was 'always the star' and was 'the charmer'. When we first hear about Stuart Cuno in the novel, we are told that he was not the kind who believed in god but was 'on a mission to save mankind' and was expecting his 'first miracle'. We hear him being discussed and condoned as such by other people in the novel. At the party that he is supposed to attend there are snide comments regarding how 'jugs of water' had been kept ready for him; a cynical reference to Jesus and the first miracle He performed at the wedding of Cana. Midge Mc Caskerville, the hostess stated 'Stuart doesn't believe in God' and others stated that Stuart 'wants to be like Job, always in the wrong before God, only he's got to (do) it without God'. He was referred to as an 'out of

date' boy who thought before he laughed at a joke. In fact his entire attempt at being good and his aim at being a good apprentice was interpreted as 'a cry for help'. Ursula, another protagonist in the novel pointed out that Stuart had always been a 'slow sort of chap'. And as mentioned in an earlier chapter, Stuart was not good to look at. He was someone with "a large pale face.... Someone had once likened Stuart to a plump white grub with a big head emerging from an apple..." Murdoch thus, manages to portray the fact that good has never been attractive either literally or metaphorically. Stuart’s views upon machines and computers were rigid. He felt that 'a machine doesn’t think.... A machine can’t even stimulate the human mind’ and he also felt that we as humans were always involved in distinguishing good and evil. However Stuart, as like the other figures of good has very little support from the others in the novel. His father, Harry Cuno, also mocked him, whenever he had the opportunity to do so. He had told him “you want to make everything moral...modern science has abolished the difference between good and evil, there isn’t anything deep...” Stuart Cuno also wanted to hold on to a semblance of religion, in his words “something that keeps love of goodness in peoples lives, that shows as the most important


90 Ibid., p.29.
thing...”91 As much as he wanted to do good, Stuart realized that he was being labelled as nothing but gloomy, and they felt that Stuart had a temporary fit of religious mania, like boys had at fourteen. What Stuart Cuno failed to do, was to convince people about his motives. Harry Cuno again told him “You seem to be trapped inside a purely theoretical notion of yourself as good or holy or something.... You’re a defeatist, you’re bogus. you’d like to know how to blow up the world, but you never will, so the only way you can destroy it is to pretend to give it up.”92 Stuart Cuno himself wanted a sense of direction, but even his brother Edward told him, “nothing connects anymore... There’s no morality, no centre, since guilt can exist outside it, on its own.”93 Edward, who had been accused of murdering his friend found little comfort in Stuart’s words. He accused him of living in some sort of blank childish place and he told him ‘I loathe your presence, you suffocate me...’ Even later on when, in an attempt to ease Edward’s pain, Stuart met Mrs. Wilsden, the dead man’s mother, she lashed out at him” you detestable complacent prig... We’ve heard about you, pretending to give up sex and going around being holy. Don’t you realise what a charlatan you are? What you really enjoy is cruelty and power... I find you a horrible and

92 Ibid., p.38.
93 Ibid., p.45.
hateful person. You can only do harm and I am sorry for people you will have power over in your life." Murdoch has succeeded in making him both young and troubled and strong and unshaken. He exists therefore, in an environment in which moral philosophy has failed to make ethics a relevant issue.

In the novel *The Book and The Brotherhood* (1987) Jenkin Riderhood portrays an aura of good. Like William Eastcote before him, Jenkin is allotted very little space in the novel and in this respect his role is even more marginalised than that of the other figures of good. Jenkin Riderhood is first seen as being part of the ‘old set’; that comprised, a group of friends who had met after a long span of time. Murdoch states that ‘of all the survivors Jenkin was, or perhaps first seemed, the least successful’. She goes on to denote that the others had achieved success of some measure. Duncan Cambus had a distinguished career as a diplomat and later served in the Home Civil Service, Robin, had become a well known geneticist and Sinclair, a marine biologist of repute. All this was to reassert Murdoch’s point that “Jenkin Riderhood was, and had always been, a school master... He had never applied for a headship. He was a diffident solitary man, easily pleased by small treats. He knew a number of languages and liked going on package

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Jenkin on his part was quite certain that though he never went to Church, he wanted religion to go on, somehow. To this, his friends had asked him not to be ‘silly’ and they all were of the opinion that Jenkin still had not got anywhere. However, one person whom all the protagonists revere is Levquist, their old classical languages professor, and he puts in positive comments on Jenkin when he told Gerard “Riderhood doesn’t need to get anywhere, he walks the path, he exists where he is...” and much later ‘Riderhood is tougher than you, he’s harder...’ However, in spite of the fact that Gerard felt that Jenkin got nowhere, Murdoch asserted that Gerard recognized the fact that his friend has a special touch about him “Gerard had always recognised his friend had always some radical even metaphysical sense more solid than himself, more dense, more real, more contingently existent, more full of being.” The novel paints a picture of human life, but Murdoch’s stand has not drastically changed. Jenkin dies in a freak shooting accident and his death was necessary to change the world of the others around him. This again is the Christ likeness that Murdoch continues to portray.

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96 Ibid., p.25.
97 Ibid., p.118.
As far as the negative characters are concerned, Murdoch has portrayed them effectively enough. In the novel *The Bell* (1958) Murdoch starts off with an atmosphere where religion is suspect, even though the setting is at Imber court, where a group of nuns and lay religious people abound. Dora, an inmate of the place, has never been able to distinguish religion from superstition. She has been labelled the 'witch' of the novel. Murdoch states that her's is 'erratic' behavior. Dora cannot come to terms with traditional religion and Murdoch describes her as taking in the 'oddness of the scene'. Dora also got an 'unpleasant shock' when she perceived a 'shapeless pile of squatting black cloth' which was actually the nuns kneeling in prayer. Even the sermon in Latin 'dismayed and distinctly shocked' her. Language continues to play an important role in the novel. The chapel was to Dora's resentful eye a 'shabby derelict pitiable drawing room, harbouring an alien rite, half sinister, half ludicrous! The other negative character in the novel is Nick Fawley, a regular drunkard. His eyes were always 'red rimmed and watery' because of drink. While in school Nick had been a clever young man of 'inconsolable beauty'. Murdoch also states that Nick was often the centre of loves and hates among his fellows. He was a 'troublemaker and something of a star'. To Michael Meade, the 'good' protagonist, Nick became the veritable stumbling block, where evil and good collided. Nick's face continually reflected his inner being; he was a 'master of the art of
grimacing’ he ‘treated his face as a mask-alarming, amusing, seductive, sardonic expression. Ultimately Nick became the chief cause of Michael’s downfall.

Another brilliant portrayal, perhaps one of the finest in Murdochean terms is that of the character of Carel Fisher, the rector in the *Time of the Angels* (1966) Carel was the rector of a defunct church. He was described as someone who was ‘never in doubt’ and was very confident in church whenever he preached. He was also referred to as a minimally correct though unenthusiastic person. As the novel progressed Carel began to develop small but unnerving eccentricities and became a recluse. In the early stages of the novel, Pattie o’ Driscoll, the coloured help began to notice certain changes in Carel. She saw him as a ‘soul in hell’. She observed that he “was becoming very frightened, he carried fear about him as a physical environment.”

Even Eugene Peshkov, the caretaker of the run down rectory had asked Pattie “is he often ill like this”? He had pondered upon this issue because Carel had ‘alarmed’ him a little and Eugene felt that “his face was odd in some way”.

Another protagonist Norah Shadox Brown felt that Carel was ‘neurotic’

98 All adjectives have been taken from Iris Murdoch’s *The Bell* (London; 1958)

99 All adjectives and quotations regarding Carel Fisher have been taken from Iris Murdoch’s *The Time of the Angels* (London 1966).
‘unbalanced’ ‘psychotic’ and ‘a thoroughly evil man’; the kind of person who made everyone around him as mad as he was. Even Carel’s own brother, Marcus often felt that Carel was ‘unkind’ and ‘unchristian’ Even the aura that he loaned to the people around him earned him comments like ‘that strange rector’ and he always seemed more alarming and he often stood out as ‘huge and monstrous’. Pattie, found him ‘very moody and frequently harsh’. Carel was gradually condemned as a priest who was ‘down right cynical’ and a mad man who lived as it were in the slow darkness of his mind. He was touchy and rather neurotic and he refused to see anyone, whether within his rectory or outside it. In the final chapter of the novel Carel dies. Murdoch commented “Carel had been a great sign. What had Carel died of? Or had his departure been something cool, another act and as it happened the last one in some long pattern of quiet cynicism?” Instead of being given a decent obituary, Carel had to be subjected to a social worker’s report on his sanity. Evil may have been very vividly portrayed in the novel, but in the end, it fails.

In the novel *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970) Julius King is the absolutely satanic character pitted against the absolute good found in Tallis Brown. Julius was ‘absolutely Satanic’ and his “diabolism is contested by the novel’s own peculiar achievement’. Peter J. Conradi also observes that
Tallis Brown, the Christ figure in the novel is someone who is both good and interesting. The title, as already discussed refers to the defeat of good by evil, and thus succeeds for Julius King. According to Conradi, the opening words are ‘Julius King’ and the closing lines were ‘life was good’ and these lines apply to Julius King and so evil frames the entire book. He continues to be a brilliant success in the book. He is a disturbing, uncanny creation, with his colourless hair and violet brown eyes. In bearing he appears as someone positively regal, equipped as he was, with a silver handled cane, and an umbrella with an ivory handle and lotus design; even his formal attire was complete with an opera cape. Murdoch also loans him a touch of old world gallantry such as hand kissing. At the outset Julius is described as someone who is ‘not a saint’. Physically he was ‘terribly good looking’, someone who had all the elements of ‘style’ and thus he ‘could get away with anything’ and was also ‘a most amusing companion’. And, another protagonist described him as someone who wasn’t a compromiser and that he was ‘a man with no nonsense about him’. The adjectives used to describe him are more positive and gracious than the ones used for Tallis Brown. Hilda remarked that he was ‘rather remarkable’ while Morgan his erstwhile lover reasoned that he was ‘extraordinary’. Tallis was also a fanatically neat man; he himself admitted that he had ‘a passion for cleanliness and order’. Murdoch however
conceded that he was ‘wonderful and awful’ at the same time, and was also a
dangerous, mischief maker.

In *Henry and Cato* (1976) the priest Cato, as one has already noted,
fell hopelessly in love with the young man named Beautiful Joe. Beautiful
Joe is instrumental in the destruction of Cato as a person and also as a priest.
Joe’s physical attributes have already been described in detail in an earlier
chapter; and when Cato reflected later, he realized that Joe was someone who
had baffled him completely. He felt that Joe “had defeated me with a
graceful, demonic brilliance. Lucifer, bearer of light…. And Cato
remembered how he had once thought of Joe as a symbol of breakdown in his
life even as an emissary of the devil…”100 Beautiful Joe was clever and
shrewd and he could decipher Cato’s emotional dependency upon him. Joe
exploited Cato to the hilt and even told him ‘I don’t believe in God, I believe
in you’. Cato himself was told by Father Brendan Craddock to help Joe, but
one realizes that in the end, Cato gave up his priesthood and his entire life to
run away with Joe but Joe rejects him. Livid with rage Joe mocked Cato and
accused him of deserting him, when he needed him the most.


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Shades of evil are also found in the character of Marcus Vallar, in the novel *The Message to the Planet* (1989). Vallar is the epitome of the wicked person and his character has been described in detail in an earlier chapter. Vallar conveys chaos and destruction within the novel. At the very outset Murdoch denotes how ill Patrick Fenman, a poet is, because of Marcus Vallar's curse upon him. The entire group responsible for the care of Fenman, came together, describing Vallar in their own ways. Gildas Herne an ex priest felt that Marcus was 'mad' while Jack Sheerwater, a painter, felt that 'Marcus was dangerous'. Marcus was a great mathematician, and was at the time of the novel, still a legend at Cambridge. In keeping with Murdochean elements Marcus was a success at being a genius in his own way, and was physically, extremely good looking and dignified. He was the sort who could join a conversation and direct it firmly toward his own concerns and he had "an unobtrusive, unselfconscious, air of superiority-" Men who met him were usually fascinated, often captivated, while women were sometimes inclined to fall in love with him”. Murdoch notes that "Marcus did not suffer fools gladly and was prepared to make frank and often adverse value judgements... a group of students in due course became frightened of him, turned against him, said he had the 'evil eye' and refused to mention his name.”

though many admitted that he was a fearful egoist, they agreed that he was ‘a colossal human being whom they were very fortunate indeed to know’. Much later, Gildas Herne, felt that Marcus ‘didn’t understand morality, that’s a concept he hadn’t got. A dose of ordinary morality would have killed him’ and Jack Sheerwater, felt that ‘Marcus is a demon, and he’s certainly extreme... Marcus is beyond good and evil’. Gildas Herne also felt that what Marcus, then a recluse, was up to was nothing but sheer megalomania. He concluded ‘I see him as a false prophet, pseudo-scientist, pseudo-philosopher’. Marcus became a revered personage, due to his healing of Patrick Fenman. In the later sections of the novel, we see him being sought out by a group of people known as the stone people. Marcus ended up taking his own life; Ludens termed it ‘a symbolic martyrdom’ and others felt he was ‘magically translated like Jesus’. Thus, in life as well as death Marcus and the brilliance of his own special evil was celebrated by the people around him.

This chapter has focused intently upon the linguistic concept of good and evil in nine of Iris Murdoch’s novels. I have indicated that these concepts pass through different phases. In the teeth of the chaos she pictures, she continues to offer incorruptible and transcendent good, for as she vehemently asserts: ‘The good is compulsory, the beautiful is not’ and once
again 'we are required to be good men, not to be geniuses'. The austerity of this primary group of characters is then almost hidden behind the crowded forefront of the other characters who portray the evil persona. What is predominant in all this is that for Murdoch, the kind of man who does earn his right to be 'outside society' turns out in her work to be the good man or the mystical heros, unsupported by religious dogma, in the world but not of it, the man who is trying to educate his own desires. ¹⁰²