Murdoch in an interview with Sarjerao B. Sagare disclosed that the journey from appearance to reality:

is a general theme of literature. A novel is a drama about people who are in some kind of confusion or illusion but are seeking enlightenment, freedom, seeking happiness of course, which we all seek and the novel describes a drama which ends in catastrophe, falling back into illusion or acquiring greater illusion or becoming more sensible, more enlightened or more free…I think that there’s a struggle between good and evil…novel is a general picture of human life (Sagare, 13, 1999).

This is the central theme of Murdoch’s novels but it especially befits *The Good Apprentice*; it has two brothers as protagonists one of whom moves a step closer to his answers and the other falls back into another net of illusion as the novel ends. It seems that through her novels Murdoch is on a journey; a moral quest, a quest for goodness as inherently she knows that human beings are selfish, dark and evil. She with her vast portrayal of characters both good and bad wants to show a glimpse of the world in which she lives. She seems to contend that it is almost impossible to look for answers to the metaphysical questions as “all sorts of important things have no explanations” (GA, 143). Repeatedly in all her novels we find intellectual muddlers on an epistemological quest – the quest for truth, the ultimate knowledge
and they all invariably fail. They suffer trying to interpret and describe but no solution, no satisfying interpretation ever comes out from anywhere. The characters are living in a chaos but amidst this chaos a light, a hint comes from somewhere which cheers them up and gives them courage to move on.

Stuart Cuno, the character of Good in this novel is on a personal quest of goodness, he gives up his studies at the prestigious Cambridge and goes in search of a pure life. He has decided to become good. He has no faith in God, so he invents his own methods which include celibacy and chastity. His friends, family and relations question his intentions. He is sensed by other characters “as deathly – inert, pallid, like a maggot.” (Byatt, 291, 1994). Jesse seeing him at Seegard screams “There’s a dead man, you’ve got a corpse there, it’s sitting at the table, I can see it” (GA, 292). Stuart has no charms and “practises celibacy, meditation and a kind of disciplined annihilation of the ego” (Byatt, 331, 1994). He makes innocent interventions in the complicated lives of others – Edward, Meredith and Midge. Midge who initially thought of Stuart as ‘unnatural, freakish and cold’ (GA, 136) falls in love with him, at Seegard after the most melodramatic event of the novel. It was a sudden realization for her. On their trip back, Stuart was sitting at the back seat and “gradually she had felt her whole body change, first dreadfully chilled, then slowly warmed, by the rays which came from behind…” (GA, 269). Midge says that “I know you want to live your special life and have no sex and never marry, I respect that, I love that ... I simply want to give you my love” (GA, 371). Stuart runs from his house after holding her ‘hot hand’.
She is like a test. He is aware that she can be a temptation and runs away from her. He passes the test and is a step closer to his ideal to be good. Stuart is running away from evil. “At the surface level Iris’ novels tend to explain evil in terms of social environment. But at the deeper level, the perversities of imagination are given a full display to lay bare the evils residing in the inner self of man”. (Bajaj, 1992) There are characters like Stuart in almost all her novels; the modern would be saints who by constant unselfing move a rung higher on the ladder of good. Although Stuart is sexually attracted to Meredith—adolescent son of Midge and Thomas, he consciously keeps a check on himself and controls his mind, Stuart thinks:

He loved Meredith. Stuart was not dismayed by his sexual feelings about the boy. He had, or had had, more or less vague sexual feelings about all sorts of things and people, school-masters, girls seen in trains, mathematical problems, holy objects, the idea of being good. Sex seemed to be mixed into everything…the mechanical superficial aspects of the desires characteristic of his youthful age he dealt with himself, privately and without guilt (GA, 247).

In Murdoch there is an inclination of good characters towards bisexuality; beauty is not gender specific for them. But these characters never succumb to this low Eros and transform it into something higher than the physical plane; as Stuart becomes a mentor and a moral support for Meredith as beauty “should be attended to with awe, reverence and temperance” (Grimshaw, 2007, 169)
Her world of novels is dominated by muddlers who are disillusioned. They are all lonely, forlorn creatures who grope in wilderness. The inner space of doubt and indecision, emptiness and unfulfilment rules them and they are on a quest but most of them are unable to find peace and solace. It is almost impossible for the ordinary machine; the unconscious of human mind to understand the idea of good; a transcendent, semi-mystical nature of consciousness. Midge, Ursula, Harry all of them lash Stuart in the beginning of the novel on his pursuit. Stuart wants to do good in a quiet and invisible way. He is the only character of good in Murdoch who openly speaks of good. He is the ‘significance centre’ of the novel. Ramanathan (1990) observes that the title of the novel is on Stuart. Though he is outside all the episodes of the novel like Hugo of Under the Net; he alters almost everybody and everything in the novel. Stuart is the direct good moral sense. He is a disciplined spirit, and Jesse is the opposite of goodness; he is unchecked, free, play and magic. So, he sees Stuart as “that man’s dead, take him away, I curse him. Take the white thing away, its dead. The white thing, take it away from here” (GA,292). Stuart is white-goodness, and Seegard, the palatial house of Jesse is dark; amoral. Stuart does not belong there; he is an outcast in Seegard. He wants to do good and be helpful to all. He wants to genuinely help Edward and asks him to write a generous letter to Mark’s mother inspite of receiving hate letters from her. Like all genuine good he is also mistrusted all the time. He also has his own set of personal muddles. He could not stand people suffering and the planet suffering. He needs to know the mysteries of this myriad world. He also feels shock at Midge’s sudden love. He is the quiet type who would not get provoked; when Harry confronts him
with “your good and evil are bad dogs better left to lie. Evil has a right to exist quietly; it won’t do much harm if you don’t stir it up. Everywhere you go you’re an intruder. You’ll go through life making trouble, you’re dangerous” (GA, 442). He takes it with calm, but runs away to a quiet church, ponders over and gets muddled. He becomes really sad and goes to an underground station, as he stands there waiting for a train, he sees a mouse running on the tracks and he starts thinking of the human predicament. Suddenly a revelation comes when he sees the rat run about, sit up, hold up its paws that it is in no hurry it’s not trapped, but lives there.

He comes to realize the sense of here and now, the ‘Power of Now’. He comes to terms with himself and sees that shame and loneliness are not a permanent condition. You can make life a trap or a home; it depends on the accuracy of the act. The transition happened with “it was not trapped. It lived there”. “An extra-ordinarily peaceful joy ran through him, a thrilling consciousness of the warmth and pace of his blood... He rolled his head to and fro against the tiles, half closing, his eyes and sighing with joy” (GA, 447). He now becomes lenient with himself, takes up a job as a school-master, reads *Mansfield Park* as a he has to do a paper in English literature. He learns to take life as it comes which is always a good sign in Murdoch. A similar kind of experience is felt by Harriet (*Sacred and Profane love machine*), Diana (*Bruno’s dream*) and even Jake (*Under the Net*) which means that Murdoch makes her characters feel their importance in the world, however, little and late it might be. Finding his joy, he makes sure he helps others and tells Edward to go and meet Midge. Edward tells her, “But this being in love (with Stuart) is an illusion. Stuart’s
external, it’s all in you, Stuart’s nothing, he’s powerless, he’s an unreal element...Harry and Thomas are real. And Meredith is real” (GA, 470).

Midge through Edward was able to see ‘the event’ in a new light. It makes her think that she can do good herself. She doesn’t need Stuart to do good. It was all a dream; she understands all this when she moves above her own suffering and realises the suffering of others (in her case Edward). She now decides to leave Harry; father of both Stuart and Edward ‘a monster of will, a disappointed spoilt child’ who thinks of himself as “a transforming god” (GA, 254).

Harry wants to transform Midge from Thomas’ woman into ‘Harry’s woman’. He knew that Midge “though she was absolutely in love, did not yet feel her need for him in the terrible imperative agonising way that he needed her” (GA,254). He hates Thomas (Midge’s husband) and feels he must make Midge also do so. Somewhere deep down he is scared and afraid of what he is doing; “Oh, how crazy the mind is, ingenious, histrionic, wicked and deep” (GA, 255). He sees a dream in which two old men are digging his grave in his own garden. One is Thomas and another his own dad. He is a selfish, sensual person like Blaise of Sacred and Profane Love Machine; he manages to convert this dream image into the grave of Thomas and visualizes himself and Midge in a small French town sipping wine; this is the control of the unconscious mind; failing to see reality, living in illusions. He needed Midge “as a drug addict needs his fix, without her, he constantly fidgeted and groaned with
longing” (GA, 254). Losing Midge is the greatest punishment for him, it almost destroys him, as in the end she unites more strongly with Thomas than ever. He tries to woo her back by writing a long emotional letter but she rejects him by replying ‘no, I am sorry’ in a note. She feels “they (she and Harry) were perfectly suited to each other. But it did not follow that they could ever be happy together, and happiness was so much the point. Rightness and goodness of course; but happiness... that was essential.” (GA, 495). She now understands the importance of being good which first germinated when she met Stuart at Seegard.

The title of the novel is on Stuart but the name of the parts of the novel are on Edward; his step-brother; the illegitimate son of a famous painter Jesse Baltram and his model Chloe. Edward’s mother is dead when the novel opens and he cannot remember being close to her or Jesse. He has been brought up by his stepfather Harry Cuno. The first part of the novel is called ‘The Prodigal Son’ which is supposedly Edward. His fortune is lost through an accident at the university where he is studying. He gives in good humoured intentions his best friend Mark a drug hidden in a sandwich, which leads to Mark’s accidental death. Edward then gets disillusioned and is set on a quest by the psychologist and uncle Thomas Mc Caskerville. His journey is a search for his own independent identity, trying to understand who he is. The novel begins with these paragraphs:
I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

These were not perhaps the actual words which Edward Baltram uttered to himself on the occasion of his momentous and mysterious summons, yet their echo was not absent even then and later he repeated them often (GA, 1).

These lines show the need to find solace; on physical level this means to find his real biological father but it is a quest to find happiness which is shared by both the prodigal son Edward and the good son Stuart – who is also struggling to find his true identity like all other protagonists of Iris Murdoch. Edward reaches Seegard in search of peace to his real father (Jesse) who never somehow accepted him. Edward has a magical stay there with two step sisters and a step-mom. After he discovers Jesse’s mental unstablity he feels responsible for him. Jesse is Edward’s other. He wants to understand himself through Jesse. Edward desired his aunt Midge but it is Jesse who kisses her (mistaking her for Chloe) Edward is uncomfortable with Stuart’s goodness and it is Jesse who shouts at Stuart calling him a ‘dead man’ .Edward sees himself and Jesse as one entity “he wandered over to fireplace and looked at the photograph of himself as Jesse” (GA,278).Edward sees a fantastic vision of Jesse’s death and ultimately he is the one who finds him drowned “deeply embedded in tangled reed stems and roots and water weed” (GA,435).
*The Good Apprentice* mainly explores the nature of guilt of Edward and of other characters. Murdoch seems to have brought guilt as a theme into her novel as it “brings into play two of her most consistent concerns: the disruptive intrusion into our lives of contingent or accidental forces, and the question of the status of spirituality in the late twentieth century” (Nicol, 2004,42) The novel begins with contingent forces causing havoc in Edward’s life; who guilt ridden seeks redemption through the mysterious haven of his long lost father Jesse. He is unable to come out of the past that how “one momentary act of folly had destroyed all his time”(GA,10) and is running away from it .Murdoch through Edward seems to show us that past cannot be redeemed; Edward has to accept it but must also understand that he has to live in the present with an acceptance of past.

The second part of the novel is called ‘Seegard’; where Edward goes in search of redemption when real death is denied to him as it would be a consolation. He is made to live with his tormented consciousness and then come out of it through self introspection, through ‘unselfing’; changing one’s thinking patterns and looking outside oneself, is what Murdoch wants Edward to learn. Continuous introspection and love for oneself and others is possible only through goodness–‘the central pre-occupation of her later novels’ which Stuart is shown to do when he helps others(Edward, Midge, Mrs.Wilsden) in coming to terms with their respective guilt. At Seegard, Edward goes through symbolic death; with Jesse’s death which was absolutely necessary for his freedom. The third part of the novel is ‘Life after Death’, where Edward’s absolution begins.
Murdoch through her past obsessed characters wants to tell us that past cannot be redeemed for something new. Edward was looking for something outside himself in Jesse and Brownie. Once he accepted that he had to live with his past (which Thomas told him in the beginning), he becomes quiet and wants to move on in life. Edward needed to transform his experience of Mark’s death into a language. He needed to relive it to outgrow it. He had to bring it out from his unconscious into his consciousness and understand it fully so that with time he is effectively redeemed. When in the end Brownie in a letter tells Edward that it was the mutual affection for Mark which brought them together and that she’s going to marry Giles and is planning to live in America, Edward is shattered but later thinks, “Our relationship was always strained and willed. We never got past the stage of using each other to placate Mark” (GA, 515). For the first time now, he feels consciously sorry for Mark and not himself. He wears Jesse’s ring and Ilona’s chain (which he could not even dare to look at earlier) in a ceremonial way and speaks aloud. ‘I have got to survive’.

Murdoch notes Conradi “can of course evoke the inner world, the world of fantasies, projections, demonic illusions too. No one writes better today about the urgencies and illusions of the moral life” (1986). The apparently ‘good psychoanalyst’ Thomas McCaskerville is also suffering from these illusions. He is a real good husband who trusts his wife and loves her in a conventional way. When he finds out about her liaison with his best friend, Harry, he is deeply hurt, “I trusted you completely. My
home, my marriage, was one place where I did not have to be suspicious. My love for you was an absolute resting place” (GA, 408) and again. “I may be a fool, and I may have been an imperfect husband, but I have loved you very much and I do love you very much” (GA, 407). He leaves Midge and goes to his outhouse in Quitterne and gives Midge time to think and make up her mind. At Quitterne he ponders over the whole matter and thinks:

He had been inattentive, self-absorbed, his love had been sleepy, he had not only taken her for granted, he had taken his love for her for granted too. No doubt it was also a kind of vanity, a sense of his superiority to any possible rival, a prevailing consciousness that people were always a bit afraid of him and would never dare to cross him (GA, 421).

Right under his nose a man whom he had so full heartedly liked and trusted is having an affair with his wife from last two years, a friend dared to cross his ego. Thomas valued chaste instincts and held them, in himself and others, apt to promote happiness. He had lately noticed and reflected on Midge’s moods but had decided not to worry. Never in his worst nightmare did he think that Midge could do something like this, “he regarded her too much as a happy dependent child.” (GA, 421). Having a kind of ‘atavism and a tendency to maunder eloquently, Thomas resembles his creator Murdoch’ notes Turner (1993).
Thomas and Murdoch both analyze their characters/patients carefully. Both ponder over their patients/Characters with great care and fascination. Ursula, the general practitioner calls him “too deep” (GA, 35) and says that “Thomas is moving away from science… Analysis being lay analysis… He sees his function as priestly” (GA, 35). Underneath the traditional morality of Thomas and Murdoch there is a depth of wisdom. “Thomas had studied literature, then took a medical degree to please his Mc Caskerville grandfather” (GA, 81) and later had gone into psychiatry. He now feels that as if he was ‘spiritually designed’ for it. Edward tells him “this stuff (advice) of yours just sounds like poetry”. (GA.69) and later Thomas tells Edward “We need priests, we miss… their power’ (GA, 69) Thomas is not a conventional analyst. He is more than only religious or artistic “He knew whom he could not treat” (GA, 81).

Thomas is poetic and religious, powerful and wise just like Murdoch. She has become aware of her limitations as a human being and has started honouring them with *The Good Apprentice*. She has become “poetic and religious, powerful and wise, but she is not completely modern, not experimental. Her innovations are subtle, and some of them are reinventions or rejuvenations, of old forms.” (Turner,1993,102-103) Thomas is the only fully effective ethical force in the novel. Murdoch seems to have deep empathy with Thomas’ character, such a representation requires enormous amount of energy, concentration and understanding of psychology. He is a truly good psychoanalyst who thinks him to be an ‘ad-hoc’ expert on misery and guilt; he knows his limitations as a healer and also suffers from dilemmas ‘with increasing doubts, to put himself in question’ and “he sometimes
wondered whether he was not engaged in the wrong occupation. It did appear to him that he helped people. Yet how could this be, when he required of his patients more than he required of himself” (GA,82). He is another of her intellectual confused characters who know and yet who don’t know. This looks like an existential problem but her novels pose big metaphysical questions and offer no solutions.

She and her characters represent Everyman. Iris Murdoch is on a personal journey which if looked deeply in her novels can be surfaced. She has grown in wisdom with her understanding of the metaphysical questions of life and she constantly defers explanations novel after novel; which is a sign of good literature. There is a looming uncertainty presented in all her novels – the repeated pattern of delusions and revelations in ordinary daily incidents make her characters strong enough to continue on their own respective journeys. It seems this is what Murdoch seems to show us through her novels and the Good Apprentice adds on to this knowledge. Conradi (1986) notes these words spoken by Julian in A Fairly Honourable Defeat to be central to her ‘grimly comic aesthetic’:

Human beings are roughly constructed entities full of indeterminacies and vagueness and empty spaces. Driven along by their own personal needs they latch blindly onto each other, then pull away, then clutch again. Their little sadisms and little masochisms are surface phenomena. Anyone will do to play the roles. They never really see each other at all. There is no relationship (...) which cannot quite easily be broken and there is none the breaking of which is a matter of any genuine seriousness. Human beings are essentially finders of substitutes. (FHD, 233).
Thomas McCaskerville is a blend of Plato and Sartre – two father figures for her. The putting of father saint figure in the role of a psychoanalyst must have been really challenging for Murdoch. Thomas is “the most fascinating character and situation (in terms of reader / character / author dynamics) that one will ever find in her canon” (Turner, 1993). Both Thomas and Jesse are the father figures in the novel. Thomas a more realistic one and Jesse a more fictional and limited one with his ill-health, madness and myopia. Although Jesse is the main father figure as he is the goal of Edward’s quest, it is Thomas who is more protective of him. Thomas is the emotional and spiritual core of the book and Jesse is more like a myth, more imagined. Edward thinks before meeting Jesse that “perhaps, Jesse does not exist at all? Perhaps he’s someone whom they invented, or something they just believe in, like God?” (GA, 163). Jesse is the element of mystery and opacity in the novel. He is an absolute of suffering for Edward; a brilliant man robbed of his talent by madness. Edward’s chaotic psychic state is fully reflected in Jesse’s physical appearance; wild eyes, disheveled hair, tangled beard, tattered pajamas. When he sees Jesse’s “big head, so close now, discerning squares and hexagons in the wrinkled skin. He became aware of a strong smell, a smell of urine, of sweat, of old age” (GA, 191); the reader is reminded of Bruno of *Bruno’s Dream*.

Edward’s illusionary ‘religious and fanciful’ image of Jesse is broken now who he thought would ameliorate him. The reality shatters his illusions and he now starts to leave his guilt; the obsession with Mark’s death and thinks of saving Jesse from misery. Edward had to love and immerse himself in the world outside which begins
by caring for Jesse. He moves a step closer towards fulfilling his quest for forgiveness by renewing his involvement with the outside world. Jesse the ‘absolute figure’, the ‘would be villain’ is the source of enlightenment for Edward; the ‘Merlin’ figure, an artist who is of great significance.

‘Seegard’ is the palatial mansion, the amoral world of this mad artist which is made of two words ‘See’ and ‘guard’. Seeing is not believing in ‘Seegard’ and one has to guard oneself from danger. Jesse, Seegard and his family, Mother May, Bettina and Ilona present a ‘world of uncheckd spirit’, beautiful but decaying. Jesse is raw, cardinal energy which takes what it wants: Chloe, May, Midge, Max and now according to May wants to have Ilona too. His energy is all engulfing; an artist who lives by the virtue of his shaping organizing ego; “such energy is demonic and finally decays.” (Ramanathan, 1990, 166). Seegard is crumbling, there is dust everywhere. It is also a magical land, a fantasy land. The three women are often compared to strange beings by Edward. The different names of different parts of the house: Transition, West Selden, East Selden, Selden Square, Stable Square and Interfectory also seem to come out of some gothic novel. The word Interfectory means ‘killing place’ in Latin. Edward calls his time at Seegard “a corrupt mystery, a good enigma, a journey to the underworld” (GA, 517). There is an eerie quality to the beauty of landscape – a knowing feeling of strange and magical. Murdoch herself said in an interview that Seegard is inspired from Malory and from the magic and romance of poems like Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight. Ilona tells Edward about
poltergeists roaming around in Seegard. Edward too feels their presence. A magical instance is when he sees Ilona dancing in air around the ‘Lingam Stone’;

Ilona was lifted from the ground by some superior force, a wind perhaps (only there was no wind) and was conveyed to and fro over the grass, the tips of which her feet were barely touching…both of her feet, moving in slow motion, poised well above the gleaming green surface of the grass as her swaying body was carried away along the glade and then back again toward the pillar. Once or twice it seemed as if like a leaf, she was about to be blown away altogether and to disappear floating in the wood (GA, 157).

Mother May, Jesse’s wife and Edward’s step mother shows bitterness in her memoirs in newspapers describing Jesse’s multiple affairs, his hatred of women, his sexual appetite and his cruelty to the women he slept with. May tells Edward of Jesse’s desire to have him aborted when he discovered Chloe’s pregnancy. There are very few paintings of Jesse in the house Seegard as they are saved by Mother May; to sell for a greater profit posthumously. Jesse tells Edward that he craves ‘a bit of skirt’ even in his last weakness, May tells Edward that Jesse ‘lusts after’ Ilona. She paints a demonic picture of him but, Ilona speaks very fondly of Jesse. Mother May controls everyone and everything in Seegard. She keeps Jesse hidden in the Seegard tower and doesn’t allow Edward to meet him, prolonging his misery. Mother May and Bettina, her older daughter are ‘evil, undermining hags’ whose deceptive nature is revealed after Jesse’s death. She accuses Edward of bringing death to Seegard whereas earlier she mentioned that she invited him to alleviate his pain of Mark’s
death. Ilona, Mother May’s younger daughter is the ‘mysterious, life giving’ power of the novel who reminds Jesse of his youth. Initially she was in her mother’s authoritative control, Edward’s coming made her bolder and she decided to move outside the manipulative confines of her control. She abandons Seegard after Jesse’s death and “follows her own path” (GA, 455).

Murdoch uses absurdity in the quest theme which is a post-modern technique notes Wheeler (1995). Murdoch’s protagonists almost always never make it; their quests are fulfilled but never in the way they intended. Contingency and absurdity always block their goal. They never reach but understand very often what the quest should be; as opposed to their earlier selfish concerns. By seeing the otherness of people they achieve this understanding. Their journeys move from confusion to acceptance. Stuart is able to accept but Edward moves from one illusion to another. Edward’s world is the world of darkness, guilt and suffering, of machine like repeatability, of the power of unconscious. Stuart’s world has also arisen from the same elements but his ability to love and seeing the other as a separate entity has made him the centre of good in the novel. Stuart is also harassed and trampled upon by the society but he came out of it like a hero and is helping others also. On the other hand Edward consistently moves from one quest to another. He is constantly searching, questioning and struggling against his self. His picturing the world in terms of his desires had a distorting effect. His desire to find absolution from Mark’s ghost was his first illusion; which takes him to the séance, from there he is led to second illusion; Jesse. Then he moves to Brownie (Mark’s sister), feeling that her love
would cure him. He seemingly moves a little closer to his quest with, ‘I’ve got to
survive’ and thinks about writing a novel someday. He falls in his latest illusion in
the end when he sees “his mother Chloe, as she had stood beside the path and opened
out her arms and shrieked…I’ll talk to Harry about her, I’ll find out all about her,
I’ve never done that. Perhaps I am responsible for her too.” (GA, 519). Edward is
representing Everyman here; ‘the finders of substitutes’. When the reality becomes
too harsh for human consciousness to bear, the unconscious comes in and “provides
a place for generation of illusions and dreams which provide protection from this
pain” (Moden, 2011, 46). We can move out of this unconscious rut if we pay close
attention to certain signs, particularly outside us which open up our consciousness
and brings us nearer to reality. Murdoch implies in her novels that it is extremely
difficult to free oneself from the power of the unconscious as it traps us in a
repetitive pattern. It requires a strong will to come out of it; to look at the otherness
of the other, free from solipsism.

Derrida calls for slow stratified reading to fully understand a text where meanings
link up everywhere with other texts, genres or topics of discourses. From beginning
to end The Good Apprentice analyses the contrast between science and religious
(romantic and mystic) views of the human mind. A line is drawn between science
and religion in the beginning of the novel at McCaskervatives dinner party. Midge
who says she can’t understand pure science and free will says “she heard on TV that
the subatomic world needs us to rescue us from chaos. It all sounds perfectly made.
No wonder there are terrorists. No wonder we need religion” (GA, 27). In a
discussion on computers Stuart says “Computer logic can’t be a model for the human mind, there is no ideal model and there can’t be because minds are persons they are moral and spiritual all the way through, the idea of a machine isn’t in place” (GA,29). Towards the end, Harry argues that “Stuart’s a menace, he’s a simplifier, he’s got no imagination, has got no sense of drama” (GA, 521) and Edward speaks in favour of Stuart. “Perhaps, he’s got no unconscious mind”. Harry speaking for Freud replies, ‘Everybody’s got one, that’s why religion is an illusion” (GA, 521). Thus a dialectic is set between scientific and religious by Murdoch in the novel. Ursula says “Computers work in binary systems (yes/no, off/on) but the mind “is a bottomless mystery” (GA, 390). She deconstructs herself. During the party she speaks for the need for scientific, pure thinking (GA, 28) and the existence of ‘such a thing as human nature’. Yet any scientific investigation of such a phenomenon is out of question for her: “Only people like Thomas imagine they understand it and my God they’re a menace… They (Thomas like people) can only function if they’re supremely confident, like God” (GA, 390-91). Having Ursula though muddled but a confident practicing successful physician verbally attack a psychoanalyst and his profession is an approval from Murdoch to speak for Freud. But when Harry, the most self-centered person speaks for Freud, it gives an opposite message. With all this Murdoch surely wants to emphasize the tussle between two perspectives – religion versus science. Having Ursula, the scientific doctor say, the word ‘God’ twice in one paragraph is not an accident. Midge another shallow character is made to speak for Freud. When Stuart reproaches her for her unconcern over Meredith watching pornography; she says, “Sex is everywhere… Anyway, children aren’t
innocent, psychoanalysis proves that” (GA, 32). This is an indirect reference to Freud’s most controversial and discussed theory. Having Harry and Midge speak up for Freud, the characters who are most occupied with sex might seem like having fun at Freud’s expense and it shows how scantily they have read and understood Freud.

There is a subtle criticism of Freud presented through Thomas; near the end of the novel he, a practicing psychoanalyst thinks: “His general understanding of human psychology had broken down. Where the individual mind is concerned the light of science could reveal so little” (GA, 496) and again “the person he found most puzzling was himself”. (GA, 496).

_The Good Apprentice_ reminds one of ‘_A la Recherché du temps perdu_’ by Proust where the narrator hero just like Edward is trying to make sense of his past. Although Proust’s narrator hero’s dilemma of the past is sorted, Murdoch’s Edward jumps from one illusion to another; his quest is never-ending.

_The Good Apprentice_ and Charlotte Bronte’s _Jane Eyre_ are of bildungsroman genre with their quest motif and internalisation of the action — the focus is on the gradual unfolding of Jane’s and Edward and Stuart’s moral and spiritual sensibility. Edward and Jane grow up without their blood relations, both fear they are inherently bad and both are placed in an isolated gothic location with a potentially insane other. This
novel reminds one of the Victorian Age literature, especially the novels of Charles Dickens, Fanny Burney and Samuel Richardson. The fear of losing one’s father and the need to find him is very strong in Edward and almost all Charles Dickens’ novels whose central figure is mostly an orphan in search of his family. We are reminded of *To the Lighthouse* with the uncertainty of the first few lines of this novel. The novel asks many metaphysical questions and like all other Murdoch novels, offers no answers. Our life is ‘momentous and mysterious’ which was reflected in the first page of the novel itself. Goodness, morality all is important but the head and the heart are always in conflict regarding old world morality and goodness which is shown through Midge. The characters are on their personal quests and their truths are always deferred which sounds exactly like Derrida’s ‘differance’.

Her solemn tone of first four lines reminds one of biblical quotes. Jesse reminds us of the name of Biblical tree of Jesse which represents Jesus' family tree. The name is taken from Isaiah 11:1, in which Jesus is referred to as a shoot coming up from the stump of Jesse. Baltram reminds of Beltane fires. Beltane is the May Day festival of long lost Gaelic communities of Scotland. Most commonly it is held on 30 April, but sometimes on 1 May. Beltane is mentioned in some of the earliest Irish literature. It marked the beginning of summer when rituals were performed to protect the cattle, crops and people, special bonfires were kindled, and their flames, smoke and ashes were thought to have protective powers. Jesse the mysterious magician artist has Dionysus’ like long hair, he was the god of the grape harvest, winemaking and wine, of ritual madness and religious ecstasy in Greek mythology. Jesse is also referred as
mad and ecstatic by other characters. He is also the protector of nature as he does not want trees around Seegard to be felled by the mysterious Tree men. Jesse is discovered drowned by Edward; he first sees a fantastic dreamlike vision of Jesse’s death and then actually he sees him drowned with:

He kept looking for a certain formation of willow trees… stream had made a little beach with stones and…Visible stone structure jutting out into the water… He was dizzied with gazing down into a dark reedy water…He began to see more deeply down among the reed beds, moving a little upstream …he saw Jesse…strangely floating up almost to the surface…a rounded bundle trussed in tangles of weeds… Deeply embedded in tangled reed stems and roots and water weed. (GA, 434-35)

This is suggestive of the Pre-Raphaelite painting of Ophelia by John Everett Millais. The painting is known for its portrayal of the detailed flora of the river and the riverbank, just like Edward’s vision. The painting depicts Ophelia, a character from Shakespeare's play Hamlet, singing while floating in a river just before she drowns.

Wheeler (1995) has noted the use of medieval themes in The Good Apprentice. There is a difference between Medieval Knights and Murdoch’s hero; whereas Medieval Knights are always clear of what they are searching, Murdochean hero suffers from existential problems and he always has to bear the brunt of the contingent – the unpredictable forces outside of himself (human or natural).She has also compared Edward and Jesse’s relationship to Beowulf and Horthgar. Horthgar
had complete faith in Beowulf’s strength and thought of him as the saviour of his kingdom. In the same way Edward had hoped for redemption from his unseen father Jesse. But ironically Edward ends up saving Jesse rather than other way round. Edward’s quest reminds one of medieval Welsh tales of *Mabinogi* especially its first branch *Pwyll Pendefig Dyfed* in which Pwyle, Prince of Dyfed tells of Pryderi’s parents and his birth, loss and recovery. Ilona is also inspired from medieval literature – the life giving feminine force who loves nature. She does not want the trees to be cut down unlike Bettina and Mother May. She performs a magical dance, alone amidst nature. Her strange dance ends with offering of flowers at the foot of the ‘Lingam stone’. This leads us to another inter-textual element: Indian culture, where ladies pray and offer flowers to idols of gods and goddesses and to ‘Shivalinga’. Mother May also reminds of Gwenhwyvar of *The Mabinogion*, wife of Arthur whose wisdom prevents the husband from falling prey to his ego. Similarly Mother May helped Edward in the beginning to come out of his grief by making him do all kinds of physical chores to alleviate his mental pain. The three ladies of Seegard have often been compared to Shakespeare’s three witches. When the action of the novel moves from London to Seegard in part two of the novel, it reminds once again of Shakespeare and his comic mock-pastoral romances. Seegard offers fantasy space; an escape from truth for Edward but in reality it is a deceptive veil as it hides Jesse the reason of his quest. In Seegard ‘perception is always clouded by illusion’ when Stuart “felt as if he were breathing in falsity and would soon be made of it, as they were, as Edward was coming to be. He had felt as he said that he could do no good there” (GA, 331)
The biblical story of Prodigal son is the basic structure of the novel. Edward goes to Jesse in search of redemption, to free himself of misery. But the story is opposite to the original here; unless he removed his inner turmoil by looking at the world with a new perspective he could not help Jesse, his father and hence himself. The good son Stuart is regarded as Christ figure by Ramanathan (1990, 150-51). Midge the fallen woman is awakened from her sin by Stuart’s simple presence in the car. Midge imagines that “she caressed that face with her thoughts but never in fantasy touched it with her lips or hand; only sometimes she did imagine herself kissing the sleeve or shoulder of his jacket, and this was exquisite.” (GA, 462) The woman who kissed Christ’s hem must have revered him in a similar fashion. Stuart is like ‘pure essence’, an entirely pure being. He also stands for death like Christ; death of wickedness and immorality. After Midge decides to live with Thomas and Meredith, she thinks of the cleansing that she has undergone; it was like going through death and recalled “the curious effect which Stuart had had upon her, the killing of her ordinary life, the annihilation of her instinctive desires, the sense of utter deprivation which had been too a kind of unearthly joy.” (GA, 491)

Another biblical element of the novel is Edward’s random opening of the bible for a sors; a message from the verses and this is what he gets—“Destruction cometh, and they shall seek peace and there shall be none. Mischief shall come upon mischief and rumour shall come upon rumour, then shall they seek a vision of the prophet, but the law shall perish from the priest and counsel from the ancients.” (GA, 48) These lines
describe the entire plot of the novel. All the characters are seeking peace, but there are events on which nobody has control (*mischief upon mischief*). They are trapped. Thomas and Stuart might want to help these trapped people but they cannot as they themselves are somehow trapped.

Mark is the element of ‘Jungian Shadow’ in the novel. He is Edward’s shadow; his obsession. The shadow may appear in dreams and visions and typically ‘appears as a person of the same sex as that of the dreamer.’ The shadow's appearance depends largely on the experience of the individual, because much of the shadow develops in the individual's mind. Talking to the shadow may indicate that one is concerned with conflicting desires or intentions which Edward is struggling with. He wants to get rid of Mark with Jesse’s help (his second shadow figure). When he understands that Jesse is the one who needs help, he transforms the shadows from a source of fear to a source of enlightenment and inspiration. There is no physical fight but he metaphorically defeats his fear with the idea of love and acceptance with Stuart’s help.

Morley (2012) shows the influence of Elais Canetti’s ‘Verwandlung’ on Murdoch’s idea of ‘unselfing’. Both are means of seeing the other as completely different from the self. The power figures of Murdoch and Canetti seem to be blind to others. This blindness is the most important metaphor in Canetti’s *Die Blendung*. In The Good Apprentice most of the characters suffer from this blindness. Midge is
metaphorically blind in lustful love of Harry. Her blindness increases when she falsely falls in for Harry’s good son Stuart. Finally, with the help of the prodigal son Edward, the light of clarity is restored to her eyes and she sees Thomas (her husband) in a new light and finally sheds blindness. An important context of power figures in Murdoch can be traced to Elias Canetti. Murdoch had a long strange clandestine relationship with him. John Bayley describes Canetti as “Iris’s one-time lover, tyrant, dominator and master” (2003, 426). Conradi has noted that Canetti’s “jealousy, paranoia, misogyny, mythomania” (2001, 353) fuelled Murdoch’s imagination and is a model of all power figures and villains in her. Canetti was controlling and never wanted to let her go during the initial years of their relationship. Henry Cuno in The Good Apprentice seems to be inspired from Canetti. Harry does not want to let go of Midge just like Canetti.

Skinner (2012) has noted ‘recurrent pirate fantasies’ and images in Murdoch’s novels and feels the influence of Stevenson’s Long John silver on her. Even the name Harry Cuno reminds one of a pirate like enchanter who is wicked to the core. Though Murdoch considers Blind Pew as a memorable character from Treasure Island, it is Long John silver from whom all her wicked enchanters are inspired from.

The Good Apprentice highlights the importance of origins and parental influence which links in with Bloom’s argument in the Anxiety of Influence that poets are
hindered in their creative process by the strange relationship they necessarily maintained with ancestor poets; he argues that ‘the poet in a poet’ is inspired to write by reading another poet's poetry and will tend to produce work that is derivative of existing poetry and therefore not original. Poets must form an original poetic vision in order to guarantee their survival, therefore the influence of ancestor poets inspires a sense of anxiety in living poets. Edward’s flight from his stepfather to his biological father is essentially a search for his own independent identity, trying to understand his personal history and find a niche for himself unpolluted by the influence of his ancestry. The enormous guilt of Edward is comparable to Ancient Mariner. Both experience life-in-death:

God save thee, ancient mariner,
From the fiends that plague thus thee;
Why lookst thou so?-With my cross-bow
I shot the ALBATROSS. (As noted by Ramanathan, 1990, 166)

Osborn (2012) has noted the role of mourning in the work of both Derrida and Murdoch particularly Derrida’s late text *The Work of Mourning* (2001) and Murdoch’s novels after 1970; “making mourning the focus of critical inquiry reveals that Murdoch’s portrayal of loss in her novels relies upon the gaps, absences and iteration which are central to deconstruction” (Osborn, 110). Murdoch was not fully aware of Derrida’s work but she unknowingly uses these deconstruction techniques in her novels. Derrida in his ‘mourning texts’ is constantly reminded of one loss following another. As we age, we suffer from so many losses that it becomes
impossible for us to recognize which loss we are mourning. This iterability led him to put a plural in ‘The Deaths of Roland Barthes’ which he explains:

The deaths of Roland Barthes; his deaths, that is, those of his relatives those deaths that must have inhabited him, situating places and solemn moments, orienting tombs in his inner space (ending – and probably even beginning – with his mother’s death). His deaths, those he lived in the plural, those he must have linked together, trying in vain to ‘dialecticize’ them before the ‘total’ and ‘undialectical death. (As noted by Osborne,116)

These unavoidable iterable losses are felt in Murdoch’s fiction too. Harry Cuno is reminded of all his losses and impermanence of his own life with “Casmir is dead, and Romula is dead, and Stuart’s mother is dead and lovely Chloe who was so very much alive is dead too, and I shall die.” (GA, 42)

In both Derrida and Murdoch bereavement is highlighted with omissions, gaps and fractures in text. Edward is unable to have a conversation after Mark’s death. He is in his own world, full of confusion and helpless. Edward after the death of Jesse (he sees his body floating in water and thinks it to be a hallucination) forgets the first death (Mark) and is mourning only Jesse. His remorse and grief has doubled, first it was only Mark and now Jesse adds on to it. His bereavement has also added from death to deaths.
The third part of the novel ‘Life after death’ is full of mourning. Edward, Brownie, Mrs. Wilsden, Ilona, Harry, Midge are all in mourning. Some for the real people who died (Edward, Ilona, Mrs. Wilsden) and some for their lost love (Harry and Midge), which is ironically not mutual. Harry is mourning for Midge’s love and Midge is mourning for Stuart’s. But, these mourners must carry their burdens alone. They are not allowed to speak of their losses. Edward tries to discuss it with Thomas but he fails. Thomas the psychoanalyst is never able to understand Edward’s true feelings and is experimenting on him (which he acknowledges). This lack of words, failure of language of mourning creates gaps and lacunae in Murdoch’s novel. These are gaps, absences and aporia which are central to deconstruction; a proper deconstruction technique which Murdoch is using in her fiction. Edward is deeply affected by Mark and Jesse’s death, he struggles to come to terms with it but is unable to due to inability of language which Derrida laments in his mourning texts and calls it “being at a loss” (Osborn, 118). Shedding of tears is most common way of expressing grief which Murdoch and Derrida greatly use. Murdoch herself was “easily moved and often cried in public”. (Conradi, 2001, 558)

There is a strong autobiographical element in all her novels. In most of her novels strange, hidden sexual relationships are mentioned which reminds one of her own powerful, strong relationship with Elias Canetti – Blaise and Emily, Harry and Midge. She has even dedicated the novel The Flight From the Enchanter to Canetti. Mischa Fox is Canetti transfigured. Canetti continued to affect her throughout her writing period. The affair also helped her to distinguish between true and false pain.
He remained the most important figure for her until his death in 1994. Jesse, Monty, Hugo, Mischa Fox, Lucas, Thomas, Miles; all her men characters are inspired from one man Canetti. Powerful men or not so powerful men; all have some characteristics of Canetti, ‘the master’ and her ‘wondrous necessary man’.

She deconstructs herself when she wishes to see her novels as fiction only and does not want readers to look for her philosophy in them as her novels are full of philosophical discussions and the central idea of her fiction Contingency is but a philosophical category. (Nicol, 2004, 161). She uses deconstruction in almost all her novels; exchange of letters is a device she greatly uses in her novels and letters are open to endless interpretations, a deconstruction technique. Bradley, the main characters of The Black Prince reflects “What dangerous machines letters are... a letter can be endlessly re-read and reinterpreted, it stirs imagination and fantasy, it persists” (BP, 184).

Murdoch accuses Derrida of using creative writing style in his philosophical texts in her important philosophical tome Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals. However, she herself is doing the same in her fiction. Her novels can easily be read as philosophical treatises if looked at carefully; she plans them keeping Contingency at its center and Metaphysics on the periphery of the circle of her story and characters. When Edward loses Brownie near the end of the novel, he realizes that “all
movement, all journeying had been an illusion” (GA, 511). He seems to understand the ambivalence of Murdoch with:

In a way it’s all a muddle starting off, with an accident: my breakdown, drugs, telepathy, my father’s illness cloistered neurotic women, people arriving unexpectedly, all sorts of things which happened by pure chance. At so many points anything being otherwise could have made everything be otherwise. In another way it’s a whole complex thing, internally connected, like a dark globe, a dark world, as if we are all parts of a single drama, living inside a work of art. Perhaps important things in life are always like that, so that you can think of them both ways. (GA, 517-18)

The absence of meaning in Murdoch is related to deconstruction’s central idea; pregnerating absence with significance. There is a lack of comprehension because of death in Edward and other characters which leads to ‘undecidability’ in both the plot and characters. Derrida thinks that “undecidability of a text is not the absence of meaning, but its very possibility”(Osborne, 2012, 112). Murdoch’s insistence that ‘everything is relative, incomplete, not yet fully true’; truth is yet to be discovered, is deferred novel after novel; the reader seems to be on a quest just like the characters as her novels:

Sound suspiciously like Derrida’s differance; difference and endless deferral cannot take a centre seriously. And in the theology of the later novels(of Murdoch) undecidability finds a more complete expression…while her philosophy denounces deconstruction, her later novels deliberately offer, in
the process of exploring and dismantling Christian theology, an ambivalence antithetical to a centre.(Ramanathan, 2007, 35)
Bajaj, Kum Kum. “Treatment of Evil in Iris Murdoch’s Novels: An Appraisal”. 


