Chapter-6
THE GREEN KNIGHT

Murdoch has showed the value of goodness, truth and love in the post modern era retaining her unusual style of presenting these themes in contradictory world of contingent, metaphysical and melodramatic novels. *The Green Knight* is a novel full of illusions, fantasy and tricks. It is also about retribution, reconciliation and forgiveness. The first line of the novel “Once upon a time there were three little girls” (TGK, 1) sounds as if a magical tale is to be spun and it sure is one with its numerous mythical and mysterious medieval allusions. The plot is taken from the legend of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the biblical story of *Cain and Abel* and the story of Christ’s resurrection.

The novel opens mysteriously with certain questions: who is the strange man in green staring at Louise’s house? And where is the history professor Dr. Lucas Graffe?; the adopted arrogant son who wants to take revenge from his younger brother Clement, the biological child of his parents and has tried killing him when he was in an inebriated condition under a tree with a baseball bat. Peter Mir, a stranger in protecting Clement instead takes the blow on his head. Lucas goes into hiding apparently disturbed by this incident. His friends unaware of the secret are worried for Lucas as they think that he had resisted an attack by a mugger out walking one night.
Lucas hated and bullied Clement as a child, but Clement loved him and cared for him. Lucas had taught Clement ‘to accept in silence any degree of despotism’. He is one of those powerful characters of Murdoch who demand awe from others and have their way somehow or the other. His friend circle consists of Clement, friend Bellamy (who wants to become a monk) dead friend’s wife Louise and her three adolescent daughters - Aleph, Sefton and Moy, Joan Blacket- a middle aged widow who wants to marry Clement and her teen-age son Harvey, two homosexual friends Emil and Clive and a rich social-worker Tessa Millen give him constant attention. Lucas loved the absolute power that he had over Clement and others. He is absolute evil and is the only character in the novel who does not change. Lucas hates parties, people, innocence and morality. Lucas is a complex fusion of character; he rejects sin and forgiveness on one hand on the other hand he is tutoring Sefton. “What is history? A truthful account of what happened in the past. As this necessary involves evaluation the historian is also a moralist... Historians are fallible beings who must make up their own minds, constantly aware of the particularized demands of truth” (TGK, 274). Historians are protectors of truth and he defies being one. He is a powerful hypocrite enchanter who has charmed his coterie of friends. Clement thinks “He has hypnotized us” and “I admired and revered him when I was a child” (TGK, 271). He teaches in a strict manner. Sefton was afraid of him but also felt “a profound reverential passion. If permitted she would have bowed to touch his feet” (TGK, 272). Joan calls him a hero and they often feel lost without the magician. Tessa says “We all love a glimpse of Lucas, it’s a religious experience” (TGK, 158)
and Bellamy says “he is capable of anything… He is the bravest person I know… he lives absolutely outside ordinary conventions… a sort of counter-saint” (TGK, 171).

All the characters want to gain his favour, not realising his evil nature and self centeredness. Lucas does not allow people to meet him “I do not visit. Only, unfortunately, am sometimes visited” (TGK, 72). During the course of the novel we see him meeting only Clement, Bellamy, Sefton and Peter. Other characters very often talk about him but they never meet him. He never agrees to accusations made against him by Peter who comes back and demands justice and instead presents him a confused man; manipulates Clement into distorting the actual course of events, into denying everything that Peter tries to communicate to the coterie as he does not want to lose his control over them.

The friend circle in the beginning is in a kind of ‘settled, unchanging vacuum’. They are either waiting for their lives to begin (Moy) or are searching for a place in the world (Bellamy, Clement, Louise, Sefton, Harvey, Joan) to fit into. Their future is unclear as the person on whom all of them rely; Lucas has completely disappeared from their lives. He was like a magician; a strong influence on all of them. The search for their spiritual centre is soon going to be filled with the magical green man who is Peter Mir, killed by Lucas; resurrected from his death, demanding revenge. Peter has come back to shake the ‘moral sluggishness’ of Clement and Lucas. Clement the softer of the two gets a little shaken but his inability to tell the truth
portrays him a coward; he is also not able to convey his feelings of love to Louise. Lucas remains unaffected and never accepts that he was wrong in trying to kill Clement; he never apologizes for what he has done. Clement is a faint-heart, a weak person who is bullied all his life by his elder adopted brother and once by Peter when he fails to narrate the truth. He thrives on his guilt; the guilt of intruding in his brother’s life:

He wanted from Lucas some reassurance, some liberation, some absolution. But what for? Of course for being so unkind to Lucas when they were little children. He must have been unkind. Of course he had been unkind for existing, for arriving, an outsider, an intruder, a spoiler, a wrecker, in that world of pure undivided love in which Lucas had first emerged in consciousness (TGK, 93).

Lucas used to torture Clement with a baseball bat when they were young and he tried to kill him with the same now. But after the ‘First beheading scene’ where Lucas mistakenly kills Mir, he promises Clement that he will never ever try to kill him again. The two beheading scenes can be linked to revelations (Murdoch’s favourite device). The first scene helped Lucas clear his old jealousy and his love/hate relationship with Clement. The ‘Second beheading’ scene changes Mir’s sensibility; he does not seek revenge now and recalls “God…God-I have remembered God” (TGK, 298), recollects his forgotten Buddhist inclination and wants to absolve Lucas, but not without a minor cut, his small ritual like the medieval Green Knight.
Peter, the Good brings about a change in every body’s lives. Bellamy wants to get into a monastery as the novel opens. He has never stuck to one thing, has changed jobs frequently, and finds ordinary living difficult. His parents were Evangelists a little of which has stayed with him in his unconscious which is impressed by the personal experience of guilt for sin that he feels. He says that he adopted Roman Catholicism but his unconscious works the Evangelist way. He is on the spiritual path, but is struggling to find his place. He wants to forget everything and live a free life but doesn’t know what, where and how to find it. He is looking for answers everywhere but is unable to find them like many of Murdoch’s characters; the would be saints. He wants to become invisible; has started to live a secluded life, away from all in quest of truth. Despite Father Damien’s constant appeals of not falling for fantasies, Bellamy can’t help worshipping angels. He saw Mir as an angel, a liberator and assigned himself to him. He wants to tell him all his troubles and seeks advice. Bellamy unconsciously owing to his evangelical background feels that the conflict between Peter Mir and Lucas is because of him. He feels responsible to prevent this feud but lacks courage. Another dimension to this conflict can be Peter is a Jew and Lucas a Christian and Bellamy who is a protestant turned catholic feels responsible for this feud due to their religions. He corresponds with father Damien before he assigns himself to Peter; he has a fantastic view of Christianity and Christ. Father Damien warns him. “Your yearning for holiness and giving up the world are mere expressions of fancies which give you a thrill” (TGK, 95).He tells Bellamy to find a job and start helping people “be happy yourself and make others happy, that is your
path... Do not seek for God outside your own soul” (TGK, 464). Father Damien takes a final leave from Bellamy with Virgil’s *Final leave of Dante*:

Do not expect any word or any sign from me.
Your will is free, upright and sound.
It would be wrong not to be ruled by its good sense.
And so, master of yourself, I crown you a soldier and I mitre you. (TGK, 269)

Father Damien is telling Bellamy to conquer himself; his ego and not to fall for fantasies and illusions created by his fat ego. Soon after father Damien’s letter Bellamy sees a bright light falling over Mir in the re-enactment scene. He is enchanted with Mir even more now. Then at Mir’s place when he sleeps in his bed, he feels light and happy for the first time. He feels a satisfaction of ego whenever he is with Peter. He has associated himself with Peter Mir to complacent his egoist mind; which enhances one’s identity through association with an object. This is an unconscious compulsion - one of the basic mind structures through which the ego comes into existence is this identification with a gratifying object which for Bellamy is Mir (earlier it was father Damien) and for Clement it is Lucas. When Dr. Fonsett comes to take Peter Mir away, Bellamy is devastated. He even tries to lock Dr. Fonsett and others in a room. Bellamy’s greatest flaw is thinking that he has a control over his universe. With Peter’s sudden, shocking death his search halts abruptly; he realizes the importance of contingency and accepts the absurdity life offers.
Finally, he gives away his fantastic idea to be a monk and agrees to live with Emil who proposes him “You deceive yourself. All beings strive for happiness, but it has many names and what is sought is often something else…Be glad that you are free, Bellamy, you have done no harm. You can still attain your open busy life helping other people. Why not have innocent happiness as well? You know we love each other.” (TGK, 426) In the end he leaves for his sea-side cottage and there pondering over father Damien’s letters thinks of living with Emil whence a sense of peace prevailed over him; “he felt a sudden surge, as of a warm wind, a breath of warm air… I love Emil and Emil loves me… I shall get that job helping people, and we shall live together and stay together.”(TGK, 465)

The position enjoyed by Lucas is usurped by Peter after the dramatic reversal of the enlightening ‘Second beheading scene’. He slowly changes everybody’s consciousness like a spiritual guru. He tells Harvey while massaging his foot (which heals magically immediately afterwards). “You must work too, you must have courage.” (TGK, 338) After this Harvey starts gaining confidence and acquires Sefton’s true love. The Clifton ladies also start loving Peter after he magically brings Anax (Bellamy’s collie) home. He gifts the three girls expensive necklaces and the acceptance of the gifts suggest his acceptance as a friend. Clement does not see Peter as good till the end. Peter’s last words to Clement are “look after your brother” (TGK, 456) All his life he has been tormented by his brother and the man who protected him from his brother’s fatal blow is telling him to look after his brother. This is devastating and comes like a blow to Clement who finally wakes up from his
moral lethargy. “I shall go on blindly and secretly jumbling all these things together and making no sense of them as long as I live. May be every human creature carries some such inescapable burden. That is being human. A very weird affair.’”(TGK, 456) This is not only Clement’s but Everyman’s predicament; we are also on a journey to understand this mysterious thing called life. Murdoch understands human beings as selfish and weird creatures with their fancies and illusions and this is what she tries to portray in her novels.

Quest as a theme is present in almost all Murdoch novels; the protagonist is always on a quest, looking for an order in his life. In this novel there is not one or two but many characters who are in search of truth; who remove their ‘destructive fantasies’ in the course of the novel; as they move away from ‘singular prejudiced’ view towards the ability to accept the infinite variety of human beings and their complexities. Bellamy, Harvey, Clement, Louise all of them when they accept contingency and surrender to the reality, they are changed. They all overcome isolation and achieve love when they come out of their selfish fantastic world and concentrate on the other. All of them start to understand reality rather than succumbing to the selfish desires of the self; the essential Murdochian Good - Peter Mir leads these deluded characters towards this understanding. His name in Russian means ‘World Peace’. Peter is like the enigmatic and elusive Green Man (Francova, 1995) who over the ages has been associated with layers and layers of meanings.
The Green Man is always portrayed as a male head ‘disgorging vegetation’, a symbol of ‘life force and resurrection’. He is portrayed as a mask with its eyes and mouth open, always watchful and giving testimony, so is Peter Mir; watchful and validating who not only brings a change in other people’s consciousness but, takes them a step closer to happiness. Louise learns to allow freedom to her daughters, Bellamy gains love of his friends and satisfaction by mingling with the world and start doing good in people’s lives. Harvey overcomes his self-denigration and gains Sefton’s love and decides to marry. Clement gets Louise, Moy decides to go to an art school which earlier she rejected. He brings peace in everybody’s lives and sacrifices himself. He is the saint who was once a sinner. When he first arrives with motives of revenge and retribution he is not a figure of good. Journey towards goodness is the basic theme in all Murdoch novels and Peter is its harbinger here. Initially, he wanted retribution which made him ruthless and violent. He was entirely blinded by his vengeance. He tells Lucas “I want to maim and cripple you, I want to damage your mind” (TGK, 252). After the dramatic reversal; the ‘Second beheading scene’- he is a thoroughly changed man, as if enlightenment dawned upon him. Now he seeks reconciliation and peace. He asks forgiveness from Lucas; as a true good character and “now sees the vindictive rages and vengeful intentions are but fantasies, the superficial frothing of the ego. I am now able to overcome these selfish and purely phenomenal manifestations” (TGK, 306). All the friend’s illusions are also taken care of and they realize that Peter was right and not Lucas.
Murdoch sees fantasy as a destroyer of reason and one has to come out of fantasies to be good. First, she makes Peter come out of his dark, revengeful fantasies and then she makes him a source through whom all other characters remove their fantasies and come into the real world and do good just like Stuart did in *The Good Apprentice*. Peter now throws a lavish dinner party to celebrate his newly acquired friend circle, where his one little lie comes out (like the Green Knight); of not being a psychoanalyst but, a rich butcher. His psychiatrist Dr. Fonsett takes him away from the middle of the party and tells him “Come on now, Peter, give them your blessing and let us be gone” (TGK, 358). Everybody instinctively understood Peter’s spirituality and goodness:

Clement also noticed and mentioned to Bellamy, that their host, gracefully opening his hand and then raising it, was touching all the people with whom he conversed ‘I suppose he is blessing us all’ Clement said. ‘He patted me. Now he can hardly take his hands off Emil.’ Bellamy, beaming with pleasure, replied. ‘Accept his blessing. He will do us all good. Can you not feel a kind of warm enlivening force?’ (TGK, 330)

Peter dies in the psychiatric clinic in the end, he made Clement realise his ethical lethargy who finally understands the moral power of their meeting and it fading away already when he thinks himself to be “some alter-ego of my brother, enacting some minor ordeal of my own?... I am ... just a wretched sinner and a failure. I have no courage. I have failed... and must wear the badge of failure for the rest of my life.” (TGK, 432) which again reminds of the medieval Green Knight. In the novel
the story of the Green Knight is repeated many times by different characters. Peter Mir is christened ‘the Green Knight’ by Aleph as he is a mysterious man who wears green clothes and carries green umbrella. The structure of the narrative is also similar in both texts: ‘the challenge, the trial and final re-instating of order’. What is different in The Green Knight than other novels of Murdoch is that in it she gives the reader the exact source of her intertext. She starts a textual / philosophical game.

The fourteenth century medieval Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is a story of moral failure; a story proving that humans fail. The Arthurian tale focuses on the individual, his quest, his challenges, his tragedy, moral conflicts and his victory. The story goes that during a New Year’s Eve dinner at King Arthur’s court, a mysterious figure dressed in green arrives. He challenges the Knights. He will allow anyone to cut off his head now but, next year this person must allow his head to be sliced off by him. Sir Gawain accepts the challenge. He rips off the Green Knight’s head, but the Green Knight does not die. He picks up his head and rides away. After a year, Sir Gawain goes in search of the Green Chapel. He goes through innumerable struggles and finally on Christmas day finds a beautiful castle of Lord Bercilak, who invites him to stay and promises to show him where the Green Chapel is by New Year day. That night, Bercilak makes a deal with Sir Gawain: He will go hunting the next morning and whatever he kills he will give to Gawain in exchange for anything Gawain has won during the day. When Bercilak has gone, his beautiful wife tries to seduce him; he stops himself but gives in a little by kissing Bercilak’s wife. That evening when Bercilak gives Gawain the venison, he kisses him. The next day, the
same thing happens, but he kisses him twice and the third day Gawain kisses the wife three times and accepts a green girdle which she said would protect him from death. When the lord returns Sir Gawain kisses him thrice but doesn’t give him the girdle.

On New Year’s Day he leaves the castle with a man leading him to the Green Chapel. He warns Gawain that death is imminent and urges him to return back. But Gawain moves on. He finds the Green Chapel and hears an axe being sharpened. He sees Green Knight waiting for him with a large axe. Gawain presents his neck, but recoils when the Green Knight feigns a blow. The Green Knight scolds him for his cowardice. Gawain courageously asks the Green Knight to strike once more. The Green Knight feigns a strike and Gawain holds still demanding him to complete his blow, which he does only nicking Gawain’s neck. Gawain is joyous, thinking he has fulfilled the pact. The Green Knight reveals that he is Bercilak and he and his wife devised the temptations to test him. Gawain failed a little by kissing his wife and by not giving the Green girdle. However, Gawain failed by not facing the axe with faith. He depended on the green girdle to save him from death. Gawain repents his failure and wears the green girdle on his arm as a reminder of his failure. When Gawain returns to King Arthur’s castle and tells his story, all the Knights join Gawain in wearing green girdles on their arms. Medieval writings meanings were in layers to create a strong impact on their audience. Similarly, this novel also has layers and layers of meanings; literal, allegorical and metaphorical. Moral and spiritual meanings are also inherent in it. The medieval poem is a didactic poem with a moral
and can also be read as a religious poem. The mysterious double figure of Bertilak / Green Knight lends it an enigmatic quality which is an important feature of Murdoch’s *The Green Knight* also. Peter’s character is enchanting and magical with a hint of spirituality which makes it suitable to the post-modern readers with their dilemmas. Peter’s connection to both the medieval poem and the Christ allegory gives him two separate identities. In the novel also he has separate identities; a ‘malevolent force of disruption’ for Lucas and source of good for Moy, Clement and Bellamy and others. Clement near the end pondering over these dramatic episodes relates them to the medieval poem; which is a self-referential device used by Murdoch:

Pieces of the story are there, but aren’t they somehow jumbled up and wrong way round? Lucas cut off Peter’s head, and Peter might have cut off his, but because he was noble and forgiving he only drew a little of Lucas’s blood. It isn’t like the poem, yet it is too...Lucas was brave and Peter was merciful...And Aleph, wasn’t she the temptress, wasn’t she what they both wanted? But that isn’t quite right, the Lady was the wife of the Green Knight, and the Green Knight was good, though he was also a magician. Now Lucas is a magician too, and Lucas is not good, but Aleph is Lucas’s wife...Lucas cut off Peter’s head twice, he killed him first instead of me and second because he wanted the Lady (TGK, 431-32).

Clement comprehends as to how Aleph only could mysteriously call Mir ‘the Green Knight’ and evoke this tale and its ending. ‘Aleph’ means truth; she is another mysterious character, as in the beginning she tells Harvey ‘I’m just waiting’. (TGK,38) may be she’s waiting for Lucas to return so that they can finally decide about their life together and there is every chance that she must be aware of Lucas’s
whereabouts and the incident in details. Murdoch has taken *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight’s* outer framework – the beheading game of retribution and mercy, themes of virtue and truth in her novel; the rest is tangled and magically conjured as noticed by Clement.

Murdoch chooses to end the novel with Bellamy; he introspects “don’t be miserable thinking you can’t be perfect, isn’t the *Bhagavad Gita* about that, living above one’s moral station, I must ask Emil and there was something about Christ not fading”.(TGK,472) He again has assigned himself to another human being. First, it was Father Damien then Peter Mir and now Emil. Murdoch wants to show us that life is an ongoing learning journey. One has his share of disillusions and revelations. It is an unconscious pattern in Murdochian characters. Edward, Jake, Bellamy, Stuart, Bruno, Miles and other characters move in this illusion - reality - illusion pattern but it does not mean that they stop finding happiness in everyday life. One has to move on keeping in mind values like goodness and morality which have to be developed pragmatically; keep working, helping people and doing good is the essence of her novels.

There is a search and a struggle to be perfect in her characters but who decides the ideals? One has to beat one’s own dilemmas, imperfections and fantasies and move on in life, it is ‘self-realisation’. Acceptance of life and others is a very important aspect in Murdoch’s literature and philosophy. This is one of her major themes along
with ‘goodness and morality’. Murdoch sees fantasy as a destroyer of reason and truth. She makes most of her characters come out of their fantasy world again to fall into another illusion as human beings are always looking for substitutes in their life, an anchor to hold on to. But, owing to their wavering minds and lack of introspection they jump from one illusion to another without realizing that their true nature is to love unconditionally the self and the other. Murdoch gives her characters their moments of epiphany; whence they discover their true nature but again they fall out of it and into another fantasy under the Power of the unconscious mind; the repetitive machine like pattern of the mind.

Murdoch unconsciously uses the techniques of Derridean deconstruction in her fiction; aporias or dead endedness and continuous deferral of meaning are the two most common devices she uses. She never allows her characters to understand the meaning of their lives, continuously denying them ‘truth’ unless they come out of their false images and false goods. Very few of her characters come out of their fantasy world, and those who come out are given no guarantee of not falling back.

Derrida thinks of ‘supplement’ to be the central idea of logocentric thought of Philosophy which works by setting up a central opposition, in which one term is privileged over another which he calls ‘binary oppositions’. In Murdoch’s literature/philosophy opposition; she gives prominence to literature, but philosophy is the ‘supplement’ which is present in her literature without which her literature
becomes a lacking entity. Nicol (2004) thinks that Derrida plays a role in her late fiction similar to what Sartre played in her earlier fiction. Derrida is the ‘catalyst’ for Murdoch’s *Metaphysics as a guide to Morals*. Although she praises Derrida and calls him ‘a remarkable thinker, a great scholar, a brilliant maverick polymath’ what she does not like about him is his bringing literary into philosophy which she herself is unconsciously doing otherwise - bringing philosophy into literary. Contingency her central theme is a philosophical entity, good is also a philosophical article. Her fiction is full of philosophical substance. Her novels look like ‘philosophical debates.’ Philosophy not only serves as a ‘supplement’ in her thought, it is equally important to her literature. As deconstruction implies what gives her literature its prioritized position is philosophy:

As befits a metaphysician, Murdoch makes the typical philosophical move which Derrida has repeatedly exposed and challenged in metaphysics: she defines literature as the realm of contradiction and irreducibility, of chaos and muddle. But this move, he demonstrates, is precisely the means by which philosophy creates its own other, placing the literary outside the boundaries of philosophy and thereby implying that philosophy is not all about contradiction and unchecked rhetorical play (Bran, 2004, 161).

Iris Murdoch believed that “The greatest art is impersonal.” (Murdoch, 1970, 68) She also understands that the ‘seductions of the unconscious’- the artist’s obsessions and fancies are never far from an artist’s work, they always show or come up in the work of art which she calls ‘refined sado-masochism.’ (Murdoch, 1970, 68) Murdoch also falls under the seductions or power of the unconscious. Her two writing alter egos -
the philosopher self and the novelist self are constantly in a subtle war against each other, invisible to the ordinary reader. Her novelist self is constantly trying to find a way away from the philosophical self which are demands of the unconscious. But, the unconscious and the philosophical self always win and we see their influence in her fiction. The autobiographical and philosophical elements in her works are under the ‘seduction of the unconscious mind’ from which it is impossible to get freedom. The lengthy philosophical ruminations in the novel come from Murdoch’s philosophical self and the central power figure comes unconsciously from Elias Canetti (her enchanter). The secret relationship of Aleph and Lucas Graffe is her own and Canetti’s. (See Conradi, 2001)

*The Green Knight* alludes to the Bible, Roman mythology and medieval romance. Myth plays an important aspect in this novel; she uses a lot of mythical structures - the Leda and Swan myth, *Romulus and Remus* allusion and *Cain and Abel’s* story, who were, according to the *Book of Genesis*, sons of Adam and Eve. Cain is a farmer and his younger brother Abel is a shepherd. Cain was the first human born and Abel was the first human to die. Cain committed the first murder by killing his brother due to jealousy. The mysterious Peter also alludes to some character out of the fifth century *Beowulf* oriented towards truth and good. Peter’s desire to leave Moy’s birthday party before midnight can be alluded to *Cinderella*. Louise is shown reading *A Glastonbury Romance* which concerns the legend that Joseph of Arithmathea brought the Grail, a vessel containing the blood of Jesus to the town. Glastonbury is also the town where King Arthur of *Sir Gawain and Green Knight* is buried. The
novel is divided into five parts which coincide with Sir Gawain’s five point Pentangle which symbolize; five senses, five wounds of Christ, five joys of Mary and five Knightly virtues. The names of the chapters Justice and Mercy follow the course of the medieval poem indicating the change from revenge to ‘merciful finale’. Moy with her telepathic and mysterious abilities resembles Morgan le Fay; King Arthur’s half-sister, a powerful sorceress. The word blunder is used many times in the novel; Moy ‘blundered forward’, Bellamy thinks that Peter’s metamorphosis was ‘a great mysterious blunder’ and Clement fears ‘blundering about’ on the way to the re-enactment scene. Bellamy in the end ‘blundered on’ after Anax and Moy when they were running to put the rock back to its hole in the dell. This word reminds of the opening lines of Sir *Gawain and the Green Knight* which demands the acceptance of contingency and wondrous nature of the world:

Where war and wrack and wonder  
By shifts had sojourned there,  
And bliss by turns with blunder  
In that land’s lot had share. (Borroff, 2005, 63)

*The Green Knight* is self-referential also; there are certain typical features which we see in almost all Murdoch novels - a questing hero, two opposite male or female characters, use of myths, contingency, mysticism, melodrama and a different understanding of the world at the end, unexpected development and hurried pairing of characters in the end. The difference in *The Green Knight* and her other novels is that, it doesn’t have one main central male enchanter character but two. So, it depicts
the world as less organised, confusing and incomprehensibly contingent with different characters muddling through their tasks making the novel highly complex. Peter demanding retribution exclaims “just punishment would seem to be the reception of a blow upon the head delivered with equal force.” (TGK, 126) and it reminds one of the Old Testament.

This novel also has examples of anthropomorphisation ‘a belief that even inanimate objects possessed soul’ which is firmly affirmed by Moy. She feels pain, sorrow and love for the inanimate life present on the planet Earth. “Who am I, she thought, to interfere with the destiny of a stone? Perhaps they all want to be elsewhere, out in the sun and the rain, out in the sea, where I found them, in their own places, in freedom? (TGK,260). Here, she is talking about all the different kinds of stones that she has collected in her room. “Moy lowered the stone into the hole. It fitted exactly. Moy felt something snap inside her as if her heart had snapped… she touched the stone, pressing it firmly into its hole. Kneeling, she kissed it” (TGK, 470).

There are allusions to Hindu mythology, Bellamy thinks of Bhagwad Gita and Peter talks of Krishna and Arjuna in a letter to Lucas asking reconciliation. “There are moments for war and there are moments for peace... the discussion between Krishna and Arjuna why did Krishna tell Arjuna to fight? ... The ready answer is that Arjuna, sunk in egoism, could not have made the decision not to fight with pure mind, his motives have been self-righteous, his action valueless”. (TGK, 306) Peter alludes to
Judaism and Buddhism. Murdoch’s vivid allusions remind one of T.S. Eliot’s poetry also. She demands like Eliot, the reader to be well read and informed of the world literature, different cultures and religions of the world. After their first meeting with Peter, the friend circle play a naming game in which each one has to speak of a fictional character who they think resembles Mir. Sefton says ‘Prospero’, Louise says ‘Mr. Pickwick’, Moy says ‘Minotaur’, Clement says ‘Mephistopheles’ and Aleph most characteristically names him ‘The Green Knight’. Further, Bellamy repeatedly calls him an angel, an avatar, an incarnation and a pure sinless creature.

Elizabeth Dipple (1996) thinks Peter to be a scapegoat; keeping in mind Rene Girard’s theory of mimetic desire which arises when two people love one object; Lucas and Clement both love their mother but she preferred Clement which results in Lucas’s hatred towards Clement. This mimetic hatred can be stopped by ‘claiming an innocent victim and putting him to death’ which is served here by Peter Mir. He is also compared to an apocalyptic being. Peter speaks “The heavens shall be rolled together - as a scroll” (TGK, 253). This image occurs both in Isaiah and in Revelation notes Lucas. This happens after the sixth seal in Apocalypse and ‘indicates the end of life in the universe’. Peter Mir is an apocalyptic arrival (men seem to appear from nowhere or in skies) whose authority is established on the world. Peter’s authority can also be judged at the time of his final departure with Dr. Fonsett. Like an apocalyptic being he exits with his own free will and says, “Now, I can go straight on through it all”. (TGK, 354) “In order to ‘go through it all’ as an apocalyptic figure, he goes from death to resurrection and life in the world and back
to death. He has begun the new era, and like Christ, the original apocalyptic figure in western culture, he departs, leaving it behind.” (Dipple, 1996, 166)

_The Green Knight_ can be seen as a moral allegory; the teen-aged sisters are named Althea, Sophia and Moira meaning truth, wisdom and destiny. Although, they have changed their names to Aleph, Sefton and Moi to suit their needs but their names still allegorise; Aleph is the first letter of Hebrew, Sefton evokes awe and high regard and Moy is simply me or ‘moi’. The opening lines of the novel remind one of _Alice in the wonderland_ where Joan is talking to Louise about her daughters. “Once upon a time there were three little girls... And they lived at the bottom of a well’ (TGK, 1). Shakespeare’s influence is inevitably seen in all of Murdoch. The novel is like a Shakespearean drama because many scenes are acted: Moy’s birthday party and the re-enactment scene are acted before characters who serve as audience.

In the beginning Peter reminds of Shylock with his demand for retribution and justice but, Peter Mir is ‘The Green Man’; Nature, which almost disappeared in the age of Reason i.e. from late eighteenth century onwards. Murdoch’s revival of the Green Man suggests the need of understanding and moving closer to nature rather than exploiting it. Lucas does not comprehend the unscientific mind of Peter. Moy and Peter instantly share camaraderie because of their proximity to Nature. She cares for both living and non-living beings with extreme love. She fights with a swan once in order to save a small black duck. She is also in love with Rembrandt’s painting
The Polish Rider, which shows a young man riding through dramatic countryside of trees and rocks, his head prominent but at the same time blending with the background, his reflective look gazing towards a mysterious future and so is Moy enigmatic with her secret sorrow and supernatural power close to nature.

The Green Knight is the penultimate novel of Murdoch written in 1993. It is considered her last great work of art as the impact of Alzheimer’s is greatly visible in Jackson’s Dilemma (1995). The plot remembered by Clement of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight in the novel is full of errors and discrepancies. There are many other errors also which serve as aporia and gaps in the narrative. In the opening section Joan calls Sefton ‘a brown stocking’ whereas the correct expression for a pedant is ‘blue stocking’. When Peter Mir is struck by lightning during the second beheading scene, he is not hurt at all; no wound or burn which is quite improbable. Moy fighting with a big swan is also quite unreal and is quite melodramatic. Another major error in the novel is the time of action of the novel. We are told that it begins in October and continues till January of the following year (but no year is mentioned by Dame Murdoch). Historical facts that the characters speak are mismatched in time that creates confusion for the reader, for instance:

An early reference to the young being scared off, sex by AIDS places the scene in 1980’s at the earliest. Subsequent references to the reunification of Germany and student loans place it post 1990 and therefore Lucas and Clement’s discussion of a current American election mean that the action can only take place between October 1992 and January 1993 (the year of the novel’s publication). But it does not seem like 1993 and this is not just
because of the lack of references to popular culture or the rather old-fashioned
diction of the young people. Not only does no one have a mobile phone, but
the fax-machine, already in widespread use by the mid 80’s is presented as a
recent invention (unless Humphrey Hook is very slow on the uptake) and
Aleph and Sefton have obviously taken the Oxbridge entrance exam in their
seventh not their fourth term, which was no longer possible by the 1990s.
Something which one would have assumed that Murdoch as an Oxford don
might have known about (Tomkinson, 2010, 88-89).

The sea presented in The Green Knight reminds of the coastline of The Sea, the Sea
and also to Hardy’s Wessex, Emily Bronte’s Yorkshire and Cape Cod of Moby Dick.
Peter reminds of Hugo of Under the Net. Both of them are foreigners, rich and
mystical spiritual beings. Both are hospitalized after a blow to the head. Both of
them are lost at the end. Peter dies and Hugo goes off to a foreign land to work as a
watchmaker.

Murdoch was greatly influenced by Schopenhauer who believed that an individual’s
inner life and what lies behind one’s actions and speech is unknowable and
controlled by the unconscious which Murdoch also believed ‘that our knowledge of
ourselves is false as it does not reflect reality as it really is’. Her fiction is full of
characters who fail to see the other as an entity free from their own fantasies.
Another intertextual element is to Schopenhauer’s On the suffering of the World can
be related to Moy, Peter and Bellamy; all three of them are attuned to this idea of
Schopenhauer’s suffering that each suffers in the world accordingly. “Each individual
misfortune, to be sure, seems an exceptional occurrence, but misfortune in general is

177
the rule” (Leeson, 2010, 129) Peter suffers from loss of freedom and memory. Bellamy suffers loss of spiritual teacher twice and Moy who is the most sensitive suffers loss of innocence with the family members going their own way; Aleph with Lucas, Louie with Clement and Sefton with Harvey.

*The Green Knight* reminds one of the fables and the great Indian *Panchtantra*; as it has Anax the thinking dog. He is shown to be thinking like a human being. It also alludes to *Hansel and Gretel*. Murdoch “use of *Hansel and Gretel* in *The Green Knight* clarifies how the relationships that children have with their parents affect their engagement with others as adults.”(Fiander, 2004, 37)

In *The Green Knight*, Murdoch like her last seminal philosophical work *Metaphysics as a guide to morals* is emphasising on the need to see the Platonic Good as a transcendent reality, an essential virtue to eradicate a self-centered approach to life. The drama of this novel is founded upon two opposing school of thoughts, the neoplatonic developed through Peter Mir and the Nietzschean by Lucas Graffe. The central influence on *The Green Knight* is of Schopenhauer as Murdoch believed that Nietzsche was deeply influenced by Schopenhauer and called him ‘the only serious moralist of our century.’ The characters of this novel are based on his thought that “human beings are pre-programmed to see the world in certain ways. The only way to experience there other is within a specified set of parameters.”(Leeson, 2010, 125)
*The Green Knight* has a connection to Erich Auerbach’s *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* written in Istanbul between May 1942 and 1945; it is the history of representation in Western literature from ancient to modern times and known as a classic in the study of realism in literature notes Fiona Tomkinson. *Mimesis* opens with a comparative study of how the world is represented in Homer’s *Odyssey* and *Bible* and the same can be alluded in this novel when Peter Mir says, “Heine said that being Greek, is a young man’s game, one ages into becoming a Jew” (TGK, 249). Also Aleph choosing the name Aleph: a Hebrew letter over her original Greek name Althea is an indication that Murdoch must have read *Mimesis* and unconsciously uses it in *The Green Knight*. The title ‘The Brown stocking’ spoken by Joan for Sefton is the title of the twentieth and last chapter of *Mimesis* “Which for Auerbach is the measure of the hegemony of the contingent” (Tomkinson, 2010, 84). Also, in the first chapter of *Mimesis*, Auerbach gives example of ‘Odysseus’s scar’ which is also the tapestry of Peter’s drawing room “a tapestry depicting the return of Odysseus”. (TGK, 335) Also chapter sixteen of *Mimesis* is entitled ‘The Interrupted Supper’ and Peter’s supper is also interrupted by Dr. Fonsett and Tessa. Chapter number five of Auerbach’s book can also be related to *The Green Knight* which tells the story of ‘murderous family hatred between stepson and stepfather’, Chapter nine tells the story of an exalted being; an angel and Peter is also referred to be one in this novel, the sixth chapter is entitled ‘The Knights set forth’; another direct allusion. Murdoch is trying to put something of all genres as envisioned by Auerbach in her most intertextual novel.
It is a well known fact that Murdoch uses numerous stylistic devices to make her novels interesting and exclusive; she never allowed anybody to edit her work, wrote in hand and never used typewriter or computer. She uses a lot of italics in her writings. The italic is the typeface of the elite. It depicts accuracy, insistency and prominence. It is the master trope in English rhetoric. Italics fracture the English body type, it is to print the other, the highly authorial words. Iris Murdoch uses italics as a medium to show her authorial presence, to look into the unconscious desires, actions and motives of her characters. Looking carefully at the italicized words, we can look into the hidden unconscious of the characters of *The Green Knight*. The less the number of italicized words, the less muddled that character is in this novel. The more the italics the more the quest for truth, reality and understanding of this world and more confusions between right and wrong; Clement and Bellamy’s words are more in number than other characters as they are the ones who are full of dilemmas. (The words in italics in next paragraphs are italicized by Dame Murdoch in the novel)

Clement cannot think for himself, he depends on Lucas to take decisions. Murdoch through Clement wants to show the power of an enchanter on the other which she was also experiencing with Elias Canetti. Clement thinks that it is his ‘*duty*’ to look after Lucas and Mir tells him the same thing before going away for the second time. Clement’s greatest confusion is to make a choice between his brother and his saviour (Peter; the Truth). He is filled with guilt by Lucas’s constant accusations of existing in his life. He is made miserable by even thinking about it. The reenactment scene
was an eye-opener for Clement, he understands now the entire story from a new angle; he now understands his relationship with his brother Lucas and deciphers how Lucas had used him again for his selfish motives and also recalls the childhood torture that Lucas used to inflict upon him. When Lucas tells Clement about reconciliation between him and Peter and that he has forgiven Clement for existing, Clement is devastated he starts to hate himself for being alive; his ego is deeply hurt, he can’t imagine why and how Lucas had forgiven him. He does not want to get out of his misery; he loves being miserable like most people. In the fourth part Eros, Lucas has left and Aleph is also missing, Clement finds a chance to come closer to Louise but he is unable to reveal his affection in this delicate situation. Clement then makes a link to the story of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and thinks about the roles of Peter, Lucas and Aleph when he is suddenly thinks of himself as a ‘failure’. Both Peter and Lucas have moved on but he the ‘alter ego’ of his brother is still searching with ‘what about me?’ Finally, it is Louise who makes a move towards Clement by going to his theatre and then Clement tells her his feelings. Clement and Louise marry and Clement is happy and worried about Aleph just like her mother. He has finally done something for himself, coming out of the shadow of his brother. He has now learnt the lesson that he will have to silent the ‘demons’ of his mind (he asked himself *did he loved Aleph?*) and hope for a bright ‘future’ with Louise by his side.

Now let’s look at Bellamy’s italics which will show his journey from illusion to reality. When Harvey falls from a bridge and broke his leg Bellamy (the evangelist)
thinks it’s his fault ‘dear, God, my fault’. He was earlier in depression and now living in seclusion; he thinks of suicide also ‘almost no one else, understand at all’.

Father Damien suggested him ‘service’ when Bellamy thought he was not needed anywhere. He searched for a ‘sign,’a ‘miracle’ which would be ‘wonderful’ and ‘liberate’ him. He saw Mir as an angel, a liberator and assigned himself to him. He wants to tell him all his troubles and seeks advice. He is living in a ‘dream’ which is ‘irrelevant, irrelevant’ as if it ‘wasn’t there’. He is telling Mir to ‘please, please’ take him as a disciple. He wants to become ‘spiritual’ and being ‘revered’ which father Damien has guessed in his letter (TGK, 221). He is ‘very sorry’ when his fantasies are not fulfilled. After Peter’s death his sensibility changes; as Murdoch firmly believes that looking at death from close quarters can change one’s understanding of life and in the fourth and fifth part of the novel Bellamy’s italics are considerably, reduced by Murdoch which is a good sign which means he is taking back the control over himself. He has understood and transfigured himself from a naïve spiritual learner to a free bird fully in control. His thinking about the Bhagavad Geeta represents the drowning of his ego in the vast ocean of love and goodness; the true spiritual masters.

Murdoch’s novels show a level of hope which is otherwise absent in post-modern writings. Her novels present a deep, mysterious and indefinable quality; good which makes one realise that truth is not as harsh and unjust as it appears and it is attainable provide you ‘unself’ of your fantasies. We readers, through her characters, plots and stories get to learn about life’s myriad details and develop certain kind of tolerance.
and acceptance towards life and truth. Her works never give us an answer and reaffirms the ‘unfinalizability’ of human life which Mikhail Bakhtin uses; the sense that the last word about our lives cannot be written nor the final analysis achieved; it is always deferred to speak in Derrida’s words.
END NOTES


