BRUNO’S DREAM

In Bruno’s Dream Murdoch shows how knowing the self is important in comprehending life and others. The title of the novel reveals the ‘illusioning fantasy’ world of its central character Bruno who spins a web of his dreams. This fantasy ridden dream world is the characteristic feature of all other character’s consciousnesses as well. The image of dream is a recurrent device in Murdoch’s novels; in this novel it is of vital importance as it unveils ‘the unknown’ and tries to make Derrida’s ‘inaccessible secret’ knowable and ‘full of sense’ (Derrida, 1998, 4). This unknown is what Murdoch calls ‘the Unconscious’ which is a “secret formalist trying to create solipsistic and self-enclosed fiction out of all it surveys.” (Conradi, 1986, 84). The novel Bruno’s Dream begins with a psychological dive into the consciousness of Bruno, who is a typical past-obsessed character of Murdoch with a deep need to make sense of his past, but is unable to comprehend, and when he does, it’s very late. “One must do something about the past. It doesn’t just cease to be. It goes on existing and affecting the present, and in new and different ways, as if in some other dimension it too were growing” (TNTG, 122). Bruno an old bedridden man, totally dependent on others thinks all the time about people who were once a part of his family some dead and some estranged, he now realizes that he has never known others- his mother, Janie, Maureen, Gwen and Miles; as death approaches he understands that he comprehends himself as little as he has others and thinks:
What had happened to him and what was it all about and did it matter now that it was practically all over, he wondered. It’s all a dream, he thought, one goes through life in a dream, its all too hard. Death refutes induction. There is no “it” for it to be all about. There is just the dream, its texture, its essence and in our last things we subsist only in the dream of another, a shade within a shade, fading, fading, fading (BD, 9-10).

These lines delineate his predicament fully. Now, he is nearing his end and realizes that there is no reality of life; one is unable to understand its complexities. At his death bed he wants to reconcile with his son Miles who married an Indian girl Parvati, the cause of their alienation, as Bruno feared she will produce ‘coffee coloured grandchildren’. This wish leads to a chain of events which constitutes Bruno’s Dream.

Murdoch’s novels are an attempt to show humans as they truly are – dark, confused, lonely and low; muddlers. Her characters are always finding it difficult to understand the Other. Be it Jake, Bruno, Miles, Diana, Danby, Adelaide, all are biased in their relationships. We can easily relate to them as we also don’t see the Other as different and unique, but how we want to see him/her. Bruno and most of the characters of Murdoch represent Everyman. We love to live in unconscious complacency as it is very difficult to accept reality and one’s demanding consciousness. So we feign live all our life, suppressed under the power of unconscious. Bruno was also under this spell of the unconscious which is a kind of self deception; one of the major themes of
Iris Murdoch. We ourselves have allowed the repression of our conscious selves and trained ourselves to ignore the reality. Bruno fails to understand life outside his own life (his thoughts, his memories). He represents a spider whose body is thin and dry and head is symbolically big full of ‘million times thought thoughts’ (BD, 19). His life is like his web made of will, memories and dreams he has knitted around him. On the surface it seems that he was feeling guilty and uncomfortable since his wife Janie’s death – as he deceived her. In reality he is concerned about his pride and ego that was hurt when Janie went inside Maureen’s flat, leaving him knocking furiously on the door which made all the other lodgers come out and mock him. It is this humiliation he cannot forget. He tells Lisa, “Something which ought to be quite unimportant turns out to be the most important thing of all” (BD, 165).

Another grudge that Bruno was struggling to was calling his unborn grand children ‘coffee-coloured’. Later when he sees Parvati’s picture after her death with his daughter Gwen, his perception changes. She is not an Indian girl now; she is like any other girl. He wanted them to forgive him for his careless talk. He still wants to console his ego and reflects:

It was so unfair to have been made to carry the moral burden of his careless talk, to carry it for years until it became a monstrous unwilled part of himself. He had not wanted Miles to marry an Indian girl. But how soon he would have forgotten his theories when confronted with a real girl. If only they had ignored his remarks, if only they had made him meet Parvati, let him meet Parvati, instead of flying off and building up his offence into a permanent barrier. If they had only been gentle with him and reasoned with him instead
of getting so high-minded and angry. It all happened so quickly, and then he had been given his role and condemned for it (BD, 14-15).

Bruno on his death bed wants to speak to somebody who would listen to his grievances and console his big fat ego. He represents Everyman. We always feel that our pain is most hurting. It is human nature that when we show our pain and grievances to a concerned person, we feel relieved. Bruno is doing just the same; soothing himself. *Bruno’s Dream* represents Everyman’s dream. How we want to settle all our issues before we die so that we can have a peaceful life after death (if there is one). It is again very selfish. It is for our well being as we are basically self-centered. We can so easily relate with Bruno when he thinks "One says things hastily, without meaning them, without having thought, without understanding them even. One ought to be forgiven for those hasty things” (BD, 11). But this is a learning lesson which we have to learn. We so easily take others for granted that we speak and do conveniently whatever we want to thinking it to be freedom but we ought to understand the Other, respect him/her as a separate entity. Both Simone Weil and Murdoch ‘believe that freedom is humility and obedience to reality rather than resolution to choose and act’ (Ariturk, 1997). Murdochian characters are learning that freedom ‘onsets responsibility and not imposing power’. Freedom is abstinence from self and the will which is ‘freedom from fantasy’. Freedom is attention to something which is other than the self. Attention, is the central concept of Murdoch. It includes Good which combines knowledge, freedom, love, reality, morality, justice and respect. It is pure vision, seeing clearly the other besides the egocentric self, which is a ‘place for self-consoling illusions’. Attention is “a just and loving gaze directed
upon an individual reality” (Murdoch, 1970, 37). All the characters of Bruno’s 
Dream are initially lacking in this attention except for Nigel and Lisa; Diana 
acquires this loving attention towards the end. Bruno the lead character is nowhere 
close. This loving attention helps Nigel, Lisa and Diana to see reality as it is and to 
act and react in the right way. On the contrary Bruno is always fantasizing and 
dreaming which is exact opposite of loving attention.

For Murdoch this human life is a ‘pilgrimage’ from appearance to reality, from 
dreaming fantastic ego to actuality and understanding the other. It is a moral quest; 
moral because it is very personal. She and her individual characters are struggling to 
understand this reality. Most of us also live all our life in a fantasy world. She wants 
to show the physical transformation of characters through inner change. Innate 
goodness and love transforms the soul from darkness to light. She believes that 
human beings are motored by an energy; highly personal and separate and yet 
extremely powerful and not easily understood by its owner. It is the Unconscious, 
(see Conradi, 1986) under its power we human beings work like a machine, 
repeatedly repeating ourselves. Freud believed that we don’t have a control over it 
but Murdoch understands that through loving Attention towards the Other and the 
Self we can move from the Cave towards the Sun. The reality lies open, just in front 
of us but we don’t perceive real as real but what our ego wants us to see. The 
customary habits that we have formed over the years create a mirage in front of our 
eyes which we believe is truth, these habits can slowly be changed through constant
effort to be and do good. We live an unconscious life, which is just a sham, but it is so powerful that we believe it to be truth; the real truth is what we don’t perceive.

All his life Bruno believed what his unconscious wanted him to believe and understand. Bruno understood that his personal perception is reality. He continued living life like a muddler. He never went to his dying wife thinking that she might curse him. He lived in a dream, an unreal world. Murdoch has repeatedly spoken of the power of love; If Bruno inculcated love, his life would have taken a different course. There are two kinds of love which she mentions. One which is true ‘a huge vault open out overhead’ and other the fantastic romantic love which enlarged the greedy self of Bruno, Danby and Miles which “will envisage suffering, absence, separation, pain, it will exult in these” (BD,189). True love is “that accepts death, the love that lives with death” (BD, 190).

One new aspect that Murdoch added in Bruno’s Dream if compared to her earlier novels is the strength of love when it faces death. Death shorns one of everything; attachments, passions and possessions but love “holds out to the end; the last and greatest, it is the only force that is coeval with death” (Baldenga, 1974, 148). Nigel to whose meditative ecstasy one whole chapter is devoted in Bruno’s Dream calls Love and Death “two indistinct and terrible angels encircle the earth, embracing, enlacing, tumbling through circular space, both oned and oneing in magnetic joy. Love and Death, pursuing and pursued” (BD, 28) and knows “Love is Death. All is one” (BD,
28). This is the central theme of this Booker nominated novel, it is a contemplation on the reality of death in our lives; there is an amalgamation of love and death which could mean everything or nothing. Diana understands this at the end when she starts loving the dying, hideous Bruno with:

One isn’t anything, and yet one loves people. How could that be? Her resentment against Miles, against Lisa, against Danby had utterly gone away. They will flourish and you will watch them kind as if you were watching children… Love them. Let love like a huge vault open out overhead… love still existed and it was the only thing that existed. (BD, 310-11).

Bruno also understands after his fall in flooding Thames; the failure of his life with “One sees now how pointless it all was, all the things one chased after, all the things one wanted. And if there is something that matters now at the end it must be the only thing that matters. I wish I’d known it then. It looks as if it would have been easy to be kind and good since it’s so obvious now that nothing else matters at all” (BD,305). He realises now that Janie wanted to forgive him when she was calling him to her death-bed. Bruno has come out of his dream world by realising the importance of love and kindness. To see Other as really different is a difficult task which is possible through ‘unselfing’. The bed ridden Bruno in the process of his ‘unselfing’, views himself completely and thoroughly now for the first time. His consciousness ranges from his youth to early days of his happy married life up to the days of his many broken relationships. He is in deep ambivalence now with contradictory feelings of fear, hatred and mistrust on one side and hopeful of making
amends, wanting to be loved by someone new and is in ‘self-pity’ which is the favourite mode of denial of human beings. He asks Nigel - the philosopher questions which ‘a curious self-searching mind, wandering into the vistas of the self’ asks. Bruno figuratively speaking is imprisoned in his own house which has made him a ‘paranoid and pessimist’. He connects everything to a spider and its web; he is a big bulbous defensive spider in its own entangled web; of depression, guilt and despair; he thinks:

I am at the centre of the great orb of my life, until some blind hand snaps the thread. I have lived for nearly ninety years and I know nothing…Where is the difference between me and these little humble creatures? The spider spins its web I can no other. I spin out my consciousness, this compulsive chatterer, this idle rambling voice that will so soon be mute. But it’s all a dream. Reality is too hard. I have lived my life in a dream and now it is too late to wake up (BD, 304).

Bruno finally understands love in presence of death. For the first time he understood with absolute certainty the essence of life but it is of no use as it cannot redeem his past. It surely implies that death could be an awakening into some new life more fulfilling with “I think...I think God is death” (BD, 102)

Miles (Bruno’s son) also lives in past, in his first wife Parvati’s memory. He has never allowed himself to see the real face of Parvati’s death. He had trained his mind to think of her as a superior being; a conscious reality for him. He fears to come out
of it, when Bruno wants to talk about her, he doesn’t want to talk fearing her image in his mind would be defiled. “I sometimes feel, Lisa, as if I never really experienced her death at all. I poeticized it, I made it into something unreal, something beautiful” (BD, 173). He had written an idolizing poem after Parvati’s death to preserve his beautiful past as he was too scared to face the reality. He is living a double life. On one side he is writing ‘Notebook of particulars’ in which he writes about things around him, but it is again a complacency. His unconscious mind has trained him to be away from consciousness and reality which is too harsh for him and his ego. He had started taking Lisa ‘a bird with a broken wing’ for granted unable to see her as a separate person. It was hurtful to accept for him, Danby expressing his love for her and probably that is what awakened the sleeping Eros in him. He is not a brilliant artist as he suffers from prejudice and fantasy. He cannot also accept the Other (just like his father). He himself is aware that he is a mediocre artist and reflects:

He knew, and he knew it in fear and trembling, that good art comes out of courage, humility, virtue: and in the more discouraged moments of his long vigil he had felt his continued failure to be simply the relentlessly necessary result of his general mediocrity, his quiet well-bred worldliness and love of ease. There was a barrier to be surmounted which he could not surmount, and the barrier was a moral barrier. Was it still possible somehow to cleave his heart in twain and throw away the worsen part of it? Miles knew that such a thing could never be simple, could scarcely be conceivable. (BD, 190).

He plans to come out of his mediocrity by overcoming his moral barrier, but he is not sure whether he will be able to do it. This is a dilemma we humans face every
day. We know what is right, but still we are unable to do as it is extremely difficult for us to look beyond ourselves; out of the power of Unconscious. He now understands that romantic love is selfish and selfless love is true love which is very difficult to acquire. He realises that his love for Parvati was also not true “how he had begun, even in those first seconds, (of Parvati’s death) to plot how to cheat himself of any full recognition of what had occurred.”(BD, 188). Miles is accepting how he trained himself consciously to be under the unconscious, how “he had become duller with the years, more pleasure loving, less conscious” (BD, 189).

Danby (Bruno’s son-in-law) also shares the dream of living in past. He is remembered of his dead wife Gwen almost every night who died while saving a boy from drowning in Thames. The boy swam to his safety while she drowned herself of heart-attack. Danby also wanted to console his ego (like all human beings) when he goes to Miles’ house to ask him to meet Bruno, he “wanted to be asked to stay, given a drink, somehow comforted by Miles. He would like to have talked about the past” (BD,75). Danby also like Miles finds his solace in Lisa but he is luckier to finally have Lisa than Miles. Lisa’s resemblance to Gwen is what attracted Danby towards her. It was a ‘re-enactment of the past’ for him. Danby “held it for gospel that Gwen had been reality and his subsequent life had been a dream.” (BD, 142). He knew that his affair with Adelaide and flirtations with Diana are not for real. He is aware and in awe of his relationship with Gwen and thinks:
Danby’s relationship with Gwen had seemed to him, even at the time, something that was not quite himself, but more like a visitation from outside... Gwen was not his type and he was not hers. Gwen had had a kind of authority over him which seemed more an attribute of her sheer alienness than the result of any rational effect of persuasion. Perhaps it had simply been the authority of a terrifying degree of love. And in retrospect Danby saw his marriage as a pure celebration of the god of love, something almost arbitrary and yet entirely necessary, invented and conducted at the whim of that deity without the help of any mundane basis in nature. Of course Danby, though he had never opened a text book of psychology in his life, knew that the working of nature is very often hidden and that what had so powerfully brought him and Gwen together could well be, after all, something natural, but he did not want to know. He preferred to believe in the action of the god in his life; an action which he took to be entirely sui generis and unique. (BD, 142).

He is aware that his relationship with Lisa will bring him back to the “intense and real world of the present, his shaking – off of the dead hand of the fabulous Gwen”. (Dipple, 1982, 172) He is once again obsessed in love, this time with Lisa. He is aware of their similarities but he clearly understands their differences as well and feels that time has come to move away from the past to live in present. He ponders:

He was an older fatter more drunken man than the one whom Gwen had so unaccountably loved. But he was also perhaps, and this intimation somehow entered into the deepest part of Danby’s pain, a wiser man. The years had brought him something which potentially at least, was good. That obscure small good seemed to suffer and ache inside him as he thought vaguely but intensely about all the might- have- beens of a quite other life with Lisa. It seemed to him that in spite of his casual mode of being and his bad behaviour to Adelaide and his general willingness to play the fool, he had found something in the world, some little grain of understanding which that glimpse of Lisa had made suddenly luminous and alive. He felt obscurely the dividedness of his being, the extent of what was gross, the littleness and value of what was not (BD, 244-45).
Danby is one character whose ‘unworthiness is genuine’. He knows who he is and that makes him morally advanced than his counterpart Miles who is living in an illusion and does not want to come out of it. Danby finally steps away from the past when he swims in the Thames after looking at death from close quarters during the duel. He ‘experiences metaphorical death in the stillness and peace of the water’ and feels “a strange beatific lightness as if all his sins, including the ones which he had long forgotten, had been suddenly forgiven. The mist had lifted and the rain was abating. A little pale sunlight began to glow from behind him and he saw that a perfect rainbow had come into being, hanging over London” (BD,254). He also sees the present absolutely for the first time now: beginning to understand that death makes you free and love incessantly which completes you; with Lisa he will experience it later. It began with the duel “I am dying for a girl (Adelaide) I didn’t love, I am dying because I failed to love” (BD, 252).

Diana, Miles’ present wife never sees people as different, free individuals. She has generalised views about most of the people around her; Lisa her younger sister is someone ‘who has somehow missed the bus of life’ and ‘has lost the instinct for happiness’. Her pride is hurt when she finds out Lisa to be somebody who can love and be loved by Miles, Bruno and Danby. When she comes to know that Lisa and Miles have sacrificed their love for her she becomes the weaker one and Lisa the stronger of the two. They have exchanged places now. Her big human ego gets hurt and she thinks:
If only they (Lisa and Miles) had gone away, thought Diana, I could have survived. Of course, it would have been terrible... But if they had gone, she thought, then all the energy, all the pride, all the sense of self would have been on the side of survival. I would have wanted to show them and to show the world how well I could survive. I would have felt less bitter... As the wife, retained triumphant I can appeal to nobody, least of all to myself. Everyway I lose. (BD, 233).

She feels ‘utterly brought low’. Diana is not worried that her husband has started loving somebody else, but she is troubled by her pride. She is indignant but she doesn’t want to show her hurt and starts living in resentment. “My pain and bitterness are sealed up inside me forever” (BD, 233). She becomes physically weak and ugly like Lisa of the past. Nigel the mouth piece of Murdoch and the agent of good inspires Diana and makes her understand the Other and Self “You must not be resentful, you must not be angry with them. There must not be a speck of resentment, not a speck of anger. That is a task, that is the task (BD, 221). Death is what awakens everybody in this novel and it has given a kind of sense to Diana also. Circumstances change, she now moves closer to Bruno; by loving Bruno she learns to love death and gains clear insight into love and beauty of the details of her present life. She now understands Nigel when he tells her to abandon her pride and forgive Miles. She has started seeing natural things in detail which she never used to see. She has now acquired the ‘loving attention’: 
And she saw the ivy leaves and the puckered doorknob, and the tear in the pocket of Bruno’s old dressing gown with clarity and a closeness which she had never experienced before. The familiar roads between Kemp ford Gardens and Stadium Street seemed like those of an unknown city, so many were the new things which she now began to notice in them: potted plants in windows, irregular stair upon walls, moist green moss between paving stones. Even little piles of dust and screwed up paper drifted into corners seemed to claim and deserve her attention. And the faces of passerby glowed with an uncanny clarity, as if her specious present had been lengthened out to allow of contemplation within the space of a second (BD, 310).

Diana understood this at the end when she has fallen fully in love for the first time giving a somersault effect to her consciousness with “one isn’t anything, and yet one loves people. How could that be? Her resentment against Miles, against Lisa, against Danby had utterly gone away. They will flourish and you will watch them kind as if you were watching children… Love them. Let love like a huge vault open out overhead… love still existed and it was the only thing that existed.” (BD, 310-11).

The main motive of a Murdoch novel is to make the reader understand her basic gospel; to accept the other, believe in goodness and love, to consciously start working at it (unselfing) which is a task, which needs discipline; to come out of the unconscious complacence, to struggle against it, fight it; the demon within, to be aware of reality and to accept it with all humility; to love all and everything. Patience and persistence are the pre-requisites for coming out of the power of unconscious that has made a slave out of humans.
Lisa is one such character in the novel who knows how to love (along with Nigel) and sees the other as other. Both of them live in the present unlike other characters who dwell in past. Earlier Lisa was about to succumb to her illusions when she wanted to go to India, to run away from reality, from Miles and Diana. At this juncture her stream of consciousness is not shown which is a significant Murdoch device; not to reveal everything, a pre-requisite of all good literature. Lisa now realizes suffering is not death and says “Death contradicts ownership and self.” (BD, 130) Murdoch through Lisa is talking of death as ‘annihilation of the self, will and ego’. For true love one has to experience this death, which she consciously experiences when she decides to move away from Miles after he pronounced his newfound love for her. By choosing Danby she accepted the reality that she has given away Miles (a moral decision). Nigel says “When we suffer we think everything is a big machine. But the machine is just a fantasm of our pain” (BD, 239). Suffering is self consolation. It is an escape from the reality, we suffer and feel comforted. This is what Bruno, Miles, Diana and Danby are doing. With the help of the characters of good Nigel and Lisa everybody is shaken out of their dream world; out of the suffering and somehow are a little closer to understanding how to love and see; to live love and death together; death of the self and love for the other.

It is Lisa who makes Bruno realize the importance of presence and redundance of past. “Brooding about the past is so often fantasy of how one might have won and resentment that one didn’t. It is that resentment which one so often mistakes for
repentence” (BD 176). She asks him to let go of the past and “think about other things, think about anything that’s good” (BD, 176).

Nigel, Bruno’s male nurse is the one who helps Bruno in the identification with sacredness of presence and the realization that divinity lives in the quotidian. Talking about God, Bruno told Nigel how for him God was always changing forms, from protectiveness to spiders to a strict official to “nothing but an intellectual fiction, an old hypothesis, a piece of literature” (BD, 100). Bruno realizes after the conversation that his childhood image of the divine was real when he saw God in the details of the present. Nigel knows that death is love. The death of self-love requires great effort – discipline, commitment and understanding truth, which he knows is very difficult to acquire as each loves himself more. It is unconscious complacency: we do what will make us flourish.

Lisa says ‘Human beings are not demons’ but are far more muddled as they are simply trying to protect themselves by attending only to themselves under the influence of their Unconscious. But real love wants us to ‘try to draw a sort of quiet line round’ ego and the self and lives apart from that.

Intertextuality works through allusions to other texts. It sends the reader to other texts before lending its meaning to his understanding. Bruno’s Dream reminds us of Shakespeare who was one of the favourite writers of Murdoch. Peter Conradi in Iris
Murdoch’s biography (Iris Murdoch : A Life) notes that after the publication of *The Red and the Green* (1965) Murdoch was feeling rudderless, so she decided to take a break and re-read whole of Shakespeare. She took four years studying him and the outcome was *Bruno’s Dream*. Dr. Wendy Naknishi notes allusions to *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *Hamlet* too.

We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.
(*The Tempest, Act V*)

These lines present the gist of *Bruno’s Dream*. Bruno wakes up from a troubled dream at the beginning of the novel and the closing line of the novel describes his death. Bruno’s life is a ‘dream’ rounded by eternal sleep. *Bruno’s Dream* also reminds of *Hamlet* where there is description of fear of death as arising from our terror of troubled sleep from which there is no arising. Ailing, old Bruno dreads the night because of its nightmares. For him “the drama of sleeping and waking had become preoccupying and fearful now that consciousness itself could be so heavy a burden” (BD, 3). There are around dozen references in *Bruno’s Dream* to the “fact that ordinary unmindful consciousness is a species of dreaming.” (Conradi, 1986, 98) The human consciousness is a dream is largely favoured by Shakespeare and Buddhism also. Hinduism holds the same idea calling it *Maya*. *Bruno’s dream* also plays with the same idea. Bruno living in a dream world, under the power of unconscious treating and believing life to be what he thought rather than
understanding the other. “It’s all a dream, he thought, one goes through life in a dream. It’s all too hard” (BD, 9). As discussed earlier we lead complacence lives understanding what we want to rather than accepting the truth and reality. We dwindle in past and worry about the future rather than living in present. All the characters are suffering from this past mania.

Another intertextuality is to Shakespeare’s *As you like it* and *The Tempest* where there were improbable pairings, misunderstandings and reconciliations. In *Bruno’s Dream* also the law of probability and rationality is defiled. First it was Adelaide and Danby and Miles and Diana then in the middle it became Danby and Diana, Miles and Lisa whereas Adelaide was always confused between Will and Nigel. In the end it turned out to be Adelaide and Will, Miles and Diana back together as husband and wife and Danby getting Lisa. Initially Danby and Miles were also emotionally engaged to their first wives Gwen and Parvati who were long dead when the novel opens. It turned out that Nigel went to India in place of Lisa. These improbabilities are masterly presented to us where “within the framework of the play (Shakespeare’s) and novel (Murdoch’s), the characters embark on an elaborate dance whose pattern is indecipherable to its participants but who find that some instinctive knowledge enables them to perform the required steps, as they couple and part, and then meet again, seeing each other afresh, with changed vision.”(Nakanishi, 8)
Imagery of sleep and dreams is prominent in *Bruno’s dream*. There are innumerable references to the word web; spider’s, Bruno’s consciousness’s web and the webs of imagination of other characters which reminds of Shakespeare’s *All’s Well That Ends Well* with “The web of our life is a mingled yarn, good and ill together” (Act iv, scene 2) Bruno also thinks “I am at the centre of the great orb of my life… I have lived for nearly ninety years and know nothing…The spider spins his web, it can no other. I spin out my consciousness.” (BD, 303) Buddhism thinks the physical and psychic elements of the world are like a spider’s web. You touch one part and whole of it shakes. There are strong allusions to Buddhism in the novel. Nigel is one mystical character who calls himself God and seems to possess enlightened powers. His personality is mystical, unperceivable and unknowable. His only goal is to bring other characters to ‘greater self – awareness’ or ‘self-realization’. He magically appears in moments of crisis in the novel, preventing Danby, Diana, Adelaide and Will from hurting themselves or others. He offers advice, peace and wisdom to all the doling characters. One entire chapter (chapter number three) is dedicated by Murdoch to Nigel’s meditation, madness, serenity, calmness which is utterly undecipherable but is the gist of Murdoch’s philosophy that “Love is death. All is one” (BD, 28). He is presented a superhuman in this chapter. He is shown levitating which only saints can do, “he has been sitting cross-legged on the floor outside Danby’s bedroom, listening in the darkness to Danby and Adelaide talking together, rises silently, elegantly, his legs still crossed… He glides up the stairs to his own room, enters, and secures the room” (BD, 27).There are saints in Indian ancient history and modern history also who perform these kinds of feats (See Yogananda,
Nigel helps people in ‘overhearing’, ‘awakening’, ‘self-realization’ from the dream world of self-centered thoughts. The main apostle of Buddhism and Hinduism is ‘wakefulness’ to a clear, continuous awareness of one’s body and mind devoid of thoughts and emotions together with a ‘recognition that the world is bathed in love’. Peter J. Conradi notes in his autobiographical memoir *Going Buddhist* the prominence of Buddhism in Murdoch’s novels. He has remarked that he has seen “Murdoch ‘overhearing’ herself, and feeling taken aback by her own words. Sometimes she surprised herself as when hearing herself tell me in 1985, Everything I have written is concerned in some sense with holiness” (Conradi, 2004, 135)

*Bruno’s Dream* reminds one of *The Good Apprentice* another Murdoch novel although written a little later. Thomas McCaskerville also thinks like Bruno that he doesn’t know himself and he goes a step ahead by stating that he finds himself more complex than any other person. But there is a difference between Bruno and Thomas’ situation; Bruno is on his death bed and Thomas has a long way to go and is given a chance by Murdoch to know himself by constant introspection; self realization and he grows morally, ethically, philosophically and spiritually. This is how her characters are given a chance to progress.

*Bruno’s Dream* also alludes to William Blake’s *The marriage of Heaven and Hell*, *plate 3*. Nigel refers to a new heaven and new earth and tells Diana that only love as self-extinction can make a new heaven and a new earth. Blake's ‘Theory of
contraries’ was a belief that progression in life is impossible without contraries. “He explores the contrary nature of reason and of energy, believing that two types of people existed: the "energetic creators" and the "rational organizers", or, as he calls them in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, the "devils" and "angels". Both are necessary to life according to Blake”(Nurmi,1979,558-562) which is death and love for Nigel.

Conradi notes that Nigel reminds of Tolstoy’s Ivan Ilyich’s man servant Gerasim who offers him kindness and honesty which he himself was unable of. Bruno is like Ivan and Nigel also soothes him. He also begins to see his life afresh and realizes the vanity of life and dies in ‘exquisite happiness’ just like Bruno who dies a ‘good death’.

Bruno is like the ‘Red King’ of *Alice in Wonderland* living in “his contracting world-his consciousness contains the life of the people he knows or knew, the dead interacting with the living, all going through frenzied motions.”(Byatt, 1994, 264). *Alice in wonderland* is a fairy tale, an illusion and, so is Bruno’s consciousness. He is living in an illusory, dream world. Every dream has an end, Bruno also comes out of his dream when he realises that Janie wanted to forgive him at the time of her death. This opens his eyes and he realises the mystery of life – Love. Both Red King of the chess and Bruno are central characters who have all the pieces working for them and they do not move at all throughout the story. Alice wins the game of chess
by taking the Red Queen, she notes that the Red King had been all this time asleep. She wonders whether it is her dream or his. Similarly, we readers and Bruno both are jostled out of our unconscious complacency with “yet love still existed and it was the only thing that existed” (BD, 311).

Nigel is like Kim, the adventurous boy of Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim*, who like Nigel dashes over rooftops at night listening at people’s doors and windows notes Janfarie Skinner (2012). Kim was one of the favourite novels of Murdoch’s childhood. Probably she has learnt the art of describing details of the world around from Kipling’s colourful and detailed natural word pictures. This novel must have given her a firsthand ‘experience of participating in a spiritual search’ with the Tibetan lama in his search for truth which is also the aim of *Bruno’s Dream*.

Bruno is also like Samuel Beckett’s metaphysicians, the protagonists who are alone, meaningless, full of despair and silence. The actuality of a Beckett novel is an overstated dream, a ‘nightmare extended to cover past and future’. Similarly, Bruno is always living in his past, working up his dreamlike consciousness with his past regrets and failures, hoping for an enlightened future which he is unable to get much like Beckett’s characters.
Elizabeth Dipple (1982) has noted another Shakespearean allusion, to *Othello*. It is Barbantio’s statement of disbelief and horror on hearing Desdemona’s marriage to Othello. “For nature so preposterously to err.” (Act 1, scene 3) Both Bruno and Parvati’s parents reaction comes to mind when we read this line. Their rigidity and narrow-mindedness is visible when they shun their love. They are incapable of seeing the other and suffer from constrained religious barriers. Miles also suffers from superiority complex when he reacts to Gwen’s (her intellectual, saint like sister) marriage to ‘haphazard, sensual Danby’. Miles is a hypocrite; his alliance to Parvati is ‘serious and utterly justified’ but Gwen and Lisa’s love for Danby is horrifying for him.

*Bruno’s Dream* alludes to play -within - a play another Shakespearean comic device. The whole Will-Nigel-Adelaide-Auntie group functions as an elegant play-within-a-play, which can be read separately from the novel; with its own boundaries, comicalities and completeness. Murdoch uses all the Shakespearean comedy elements in this novel. Will and Nigel are twins, Will starts bantering with Diana as soon as he comes to paint the railings. He plays the fool. There is a duel between Will and Danby which is instigated by Nigel. Also there, are many reversals in love alliances which are already discussed. These elements are used to give a comic relief to the reader. “The hilariously tearful marriage of Will and Adelaide with all its attendant ironies, and the projection of twins-to-be-born, Mercutio and Benedick, one tragic and one comic, non-identical, absurd. Will’s life as an actor combines a
professional realistic reference with Shakespeare’s idea of life as a dream.” (Dipple, 1982, 179)

Conradi (1986) notes an allusion to Nuns and Soldiers - another Murdoch novel; there are similarities between Lisa and Anne Cavidge story. All the characters are in love with Anne like Lisa and she suffered silently for a long time too. Both are ex-nuns now moving towards the world.

Derrida believes binary oppositions are found in every text; studying them closely makes the text more interesting. The first in Bruno’s Dream is Hate/Love. The novel begins with hatred, hatred of Bruno towards self and others. He thinks that he has loved people but they have not loved him back; he is in resentment, anger and hatred when the novel opens. He and most of the characters think sensual love to be true love, unaware of love of the soul towards the ultimate which makes one free; love that Bruno and Diana feel at the end of the novel which probably Nigel and Lisa are aware of since beginning. The novel begins with Bruno thinking only of the hatred that he has received from Janie, Miles’s resentment for his behaviour towards the girl he loved and married. Lying on his death-bed, Bruno is obsessed with the guilt of the past. Janie his wife had accidently found out at Harrod’s about his affair. She coldly withdrew from Bruno and this tormented him. Maureen, the mistress also somehow vanished from his life, Janie denied him forgiveness in spite of his repeated kneeling and begging. Their quarrels continued even when Janie was suffering from cancer.
Janie was dying, but Bruno refused to listen to her. Looking back at those moments, he grieved “he had heard her crying out calling his name. He had not gone up. He feared that she would curse him at the end. But perhaps she had wanted to forgive him, to be reconciled with him” (BD, 17). That he could not, and did not forgive her, even at the end corrodes Bruno’s consciousness. He is seeking forgiveness for his hatred. He wants to meet Miles and confess and repent. His hatred makes him realise the true worth of love; Lisa and Nigel help him in understanding it. When Lisa tells him “leave yourself... brooding about the past is so often fantasy of how one might have won and resentment that one didn’t. It is that resentment which one so often mistakes for repentance”. (BD, 176). Step by step Bruno is moving towards his moment of illumination and finally on the verge of dying he gets the real meaning of life. “He had loved only a few people and loved them so badly, so selfishly. He had made a muddle of everything. Was it only in the presence of death that one could see so clearly what love ought to be like?” (BD,305). And later “His tears flowed. But he was glad that he knew, at last”. This realisation of true love also comes to Diana when she lives death by being with and loving the dying Bruno unconditionally.

Another binary opposition is Dream/Reality. Early, in the novel we see Bruno reviewing the incidents in his life as nothing but a dream. It is at the end that he realises that he was always distant from reality when he broods on seeing a fly trapped in a spider’s net. “I have been through this vale of tears and never seen anything real. The reality. That’s the other thing. But now it’s too late and I don’t even know what it is” (BD, 304). Now, in the arms of death he contemplates and
He understands that Janie had called him at the end, not to curse, but to forgive. “Janie I am so sorry” murmured Bruno (BD, 305). In this murmuring he was purified, he learnt to love, to understand, to forgive and this is the true reality, the ultimate truth of life; to love.

The ascetic / hedonist opposition is quite prominent in Bruno’s Dream. Pleasure loving Danby and Diana on one side and restraining Miles and Lisa on the other. Although Lisa is stirred out of her ascetism by Miles’ reciprocation of her love. She turns towards hedonist Danby for a life full of pleasure. She tells him, ‘all those self–denying years prove nothing’. Diana on the other hand starts to behave like an ascetic after the painful knowledge that nobody loves her. We expect a good life for Diana as she has experienced a ‘good death’. Murdoch has tried to portray real death in Bruno’s dream; which is so difficult to accept and understand. She has tried to show ‘a civilization like ours that is death–denying’ the importance of a good life which Lisa, Danby, Diana and Miles will have after the novel finishes.

Another important binary opposition is self/other. We human beings are not our own masters as we perform under the unconscious and we have no control over the contingencies that life throws at us. So, throughout life we compensate for this lack by wanting to possess others. But even if one becomes the owner of the whole earth this lack cannot be compensated for. Because the joy which comes, with being the
master of self is completely unique, and becoming a master of others bring nothing but misery. All his life Bruno wanted to own Janie, Maureen, Miles, the stamps, spiders. His materialistic desires of ownership are so strong that during the flood in spite of being bed ridden, he tried to save the stamps by getting up and risking his life. He is a thinking muddler who achieves the fuller and in a sense final revelation not through Lisa, but through Diana and his own brooding conscience; ‘unselfing’ which is loving attention towards the other. He now had the knowledge, ‘this absolute nothing-else-matters’ but it could not go back and straighten out his muddles. But, “he was glad that he knew, at last.” (BD, 305).

Murdoch explores the Self in her fiction involving complex psychological, philosophical and religious systems with a unique attitude towards epistemological understanding. She is showing us repeatedly through her novels and characters that it is almost impossible for human beings to come out of this unconscious complacence. We are trapped in a net of illusion; thinking ourselves to be autonomous but it is invented to placate the self. She describes our consciousness as “freedom caught in a trap” (Murdoch, 1953, 36) There is a deep understanding why her novels never end conclusively as she believes it is extremely difficult to comprehend the other; the truth is elusive and ‘it is a task that never ends’ which is the basic premise of all her novels and Derrida’s too as he says the final meaning is always deferred
End Notes


