Death is what instructs us most of all.... Those who can live with death can live in the truth, only this is almost unendurable.... Death is the great destroyer of all images and all stories, and human beings will do anything rather than envisage it.

Brendan in *Henry and Cato*

*Bruno's Dream* (1969) is a unique novel which deals for the first time with the subject of death and its relationship with love. Death has often figured in Murdoch's novels as a catalytic agent. By forcing an intensity of attention unusual in the quotidian dreamy life of man, it sharpens not only the apprehension of reality but also inspires a selfless love and a true exercise of freedom. Such mystical moments of the 'sublime' experienced by the otherwise self-centred, morally sluggish characters like Effingham in *The Unicorns*, Ducane in *The Nice and the Good*, Cato in *Henry and Cato*, Tim Reed in *Muns and Soldiers* bestow upon them a
temporary clarity of vision, in which the "box-like enclosure of the self is attenuated and opened out." 1

Death is a bold subject and very few writers are able to portray it without letting it slip into artificiality and sentimentality. Bronte's _Dream_ is vaguely paralleled with Tolstoy's _The Death of Iван Ilyich_. It is an attempt to draw a picture of an old man dying, in conformity with the exacting criteria laid down by Murdoch herself. Keeping in mind the problematic relationship between death and consolation, she avers:

It is not easy to portray death, real death, not fake, prettified death. Even Tolstoy did not really manage it in _Iван Ilyich_, although he did it elsewhere. The great deaths of literature are few, but they show us with an exemplary clarity the way in which art invigorates us by a juxtaposition, almost an identification, of pointlessness and value. The death of Patroclus, the death of Cordelia, the death of Petya Rostov. All is vanity. The only thing which is of real importance is the ability to see it all clearly and respond to it justly which is inseparable from virtue. 2

According to her, the supreme artistic feat of displaying suffering without a thrill and death without a consolation has been successfully managed only by Shakespeare in _King Lear_. Cordelia's death is an example of a 'real' instead of a 'prettified' death. Murdoch's strong disapproval of 'prettified' death is a part of her general distrust of the romantic tradition in literature and art. The idea of an exciting, suffering freedom associated with the Neo-Kantian
Luciferian rebel has glorified the notion of death, transforming it into a "liebestod, painful and exhilarating, or at worst charming and sweetly tearful." The task, as Murdoch sees it, is to minimize this romantic idea of freedom and to see death in its reality, without taking refuge in sublime and consolatory emotions. She has achieved this highly difficult aim, to some extent, in *Brumo's Dream*. Another novel concerned with non-consolatory death is *Humb and Soldiers*.

The novel rings with an optimistic note in spite of its sombre ambience. The study of death is enjoined by Socrates for directing the attention away from the egoistic material goals, towards the light of truth. Death, the great iconoclast helps in breaking the false images and forms imposed by man on reality. The major characters in the novel gain positively from the experience of death and achieve moral freedom by dispelling their illusions. Her subsequent novels are, however, not so optimistic. For instance, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* is a study of defeat of the good by evil and indicates a limited view of human capability for change. Murdoch appears to be pointing that "the healthy psyche chooses the hope of life rather than dwelling in the absolute of death." Therefore, the moral knowledge granted by it tends to be a momentary insight leaving the characters only slightly touched. It is in this perspective that we watch Charles Arrowby in the last pages of *The Sea, The Sea*. A recent interview with John Haffenden confirms her belief that egoism being so fearfully
strong and natural, one can hope for a little bit of improvement only. To expect a marked degree of progress is demanding something which goes contrary to human nature. The most one can hope for is "a fairly honourable defeat".

Myth is used in the novel to symbolize a transcendent reality unattainable but worthy of attention. The Eros/Thanatos myth provides the basic scaffolding. According to Edgar Wind the Platonic theory of love is the key to a philosophy of dying. The perfection of love cannot be arrived at without first dying to imperfect desires. Love and death i.e. the Platonic Eros and Thanatos or Mors are contending forces of equal strength. They are the two indistinct and terrible angels encircling the earth, "embracing, enlacing, tumbling through circular space, both oned and oneing in magnetic joy...pursuing and pursued." Death, presented as an extinction of ownership and self, is a loss rarely accepted. More often than not it is "poeticised". Mundane love does not rise above its self-concentration to face so complete a deprivation. But if death is genuinely confronted and accepted, it can bring about a transformation. The denuding of all desires in its grip can result in an impersonality, disinterestedness and self-effacement which affirms that love is the only thing that exists. Real love requires self-extinction like death. According to Murdoch death is not something "terribly special" which happens at the end of life but as 'unselfing', it can take place any time. At the end of the novel, Diana's act of rotating the cup
against the direction of the spider is symbolic of what
Schopenhauer would describe as the "turning" of the will. This
is the true sense in which "love is death". The abolition of
the will in selfless compassion is to be aware of the world
without the ego. Such a love, though almost unattainable, is
something worth aspiring for and holding on to. The two faces
of love, described in The Nice and the Good, again figure in
this novel. There is the love based on personal gratification
for those like Will, Adelaide and Danby, who have meagre
spiritual and moral resources. For others, like Nigel, Bruno,
Diana and Lisa who possess a higher spiritual strength and
discipline, love can become a renunciation of self and "a
universal panoply of reconciliation."  

The theme of self-annihilation, compassion and
tolerance has a strong foothold in Indian religious philosophy.
Murdoch is particularly fascinated by the Buddhist therapy
which aims at change of consciousness to bring the process of
self-emvelopment to an end. In Bruno's Dream subtle references
are made to various myths and ideas from the Vedas, Upanishads
and Mahayana Buddhism to support her own emphasis on self-
annihilation as a necessary condition for moral growth and
liberation.

The novel brings out the contrast between the
Eastern and Western consciousness and emerges in favour of
the less materialistic attitude of the East. The paradigm
of this theme rests on Nigel and Bruno. Their female counterparts are Parvati, Lisa and Diana. Nigel, Bruno’s male nurse is the practitioner of Indian mysticism. He represents the self-denying, resigned and spiritualistic Eastern consciousness. In his mystical trance in chapter 3, he uses the vedantic utterance Om or Aum. Om is both a symbol of Brahman, the Supreme Reality as well as of the three states of consciousness i.e. the waking, dream and of dreamless sleep. Nigel is also a kind of Bodhisattva who strives for egolessness and performs acts in a spirit of humility and compassion. In Chapter 9 his progress through the night from the knowledge of evil to the understanding of the meaning of death and eternity has been compared to the stages of Buddha’s struggle, the night before his enlightenment. He comes out of this trance with “the tender, forgiving, infinitely sad smile” (p.79) of the omniscient, who knows, understands and loves all. Like a Bodhisattva, he imparts his wisdom for the redemption of others. He tells Bruno, who is afraid of death, that it is something beautiful, “something one could be in love with” (p.99). He prescribes the therapy of self-denial to Diana, recommending an attitude of forgiveness towards those who had wronged her: “Let them trample over you…. See and pardon” (p.208).

Bruno is the representative of the decadent, Western materialistic ego-consciousness. He is the dying Fisher King of the Western ethos. Bruno’s typical Western attitude is displayed in his scientific interest in spiders, his passion
for material possessions like the stamps and his racial prejudice against Indians. The progress of the novel indicates the slow surrender of his egocentric consciousness in the direction of the Eastern ego-effacement and love.

A similar Oriental vs Occidental opposition is manifested in the two female characters of Parvati and Diana. The name Parvati takes a deeper significance from the Hindu myth of Shiva and Parvati. The legendary Parvati was the daughter of the mountain-king Himalya. She, who was used to living in a palace, adorned in silks and pearls, undergoes all forms of severe austerities in order to win Lord Shiva, the arch ascetic of the gods. Ultimately she succeeds in her mission and becomes his consort. Miles writes a poem entitled *Shiva and Parvati* perhaps considering himself the Shiva to his Parvati. But the self-denial, hinted at in the myth is displayed first by Lisa, an unselfish person like Nigel, who understands the meaning of real love and later by Diana. Diana, who had been very far indeed from the world of Parvati (self-abnegation), through suffering and attachment for a dying person slowly loosens the fetters of her ego and moves into a world closely related to Parvati and Lisa.

Another significant allusion to Indian mythology is discernible in the use of the spider symbol. Bruno's image of God at one stage is that of the beautiful *Argus Nigra* (a rare species of spiders), swinging very lightly upon a fine and
almost invisible golden thread (p.260). In the Upanishads, the spider symbol emphasises the sole reality of Brahman. All objects are manifestations of it.  

Various other minor allusions to Indian myth have been discerned by William F. Hall, in the initial relationship between Bruno and Lisa. Lisa is compared to the maid servant who was sent to the foul-smelling sage Vyasa, in the Mahabharata. The downpour in Chapter 28 that brings about the flood and washes away Bruno's precious stamps has a reference, both to the Biblical Old Testament flood and the torrential symbolic downpour of the Indian Myth. Bruno's plunge into the flooding river recalls the common Hindu ritual of immersion into the celestial river Ganges, for the sake of purification.

Bruno's 'dream' is descriptive of the ordinary illusion-ridden and hazy state of mind of most people. They are busy devising dreams and foisting patterns on the reality to which they pay scant attention. Upon such a clouded landscape made up of illusions, the light of truth occasionally breaks through, awakening them to the trance-like nature of their lives. Such moments of recognition and revelation are important and should be attended to. Various characters in this novel can be seen living amongst the phantasms of their own creation. As in The Nice and the Good, these characters are traumatised by past catastrophes, involving death, violence and some degree of moral responsibility. Living encapsulated and enslaved in the past, they do not possess the freedom to
face the present or to confront the otherness of people around them. The evolution of the novel is concerned with the liberation of Bruno, Miles and Danby from these obsessions which are but forms or patterns imposed on reality. They come to terms with reality by facing the contingency of death and by transcending the selfish concerns of their egos.

"It is a salient thing in human life, one of the most general features of human beings, that they may be dominated by remorse or by some plan of their lives which may have gone wrong."17 What Iris Murdoch says above with reference to Hilary Burde in A Word Child and Charles Arrowby in The Sea, The Sea is equally true of Bruno, the central figure of the novel. He is an old man slowly dying, presumably of cancer, whose consciousness is dominated by an obsessive guilt and remorse over some past incidents. As he fearfully confronts the approaching certainty of death, his mind meditates on some sort of redemption of the past. He longs for forgiveness by the dead and some kind of harmonious reconciliation with the living:

If only he could believe in death-bed repentance and instant salvation. Even the idea of purgatory was infinitely consoling; to survive and suffer in the eternal embrace of a totally just love. Even the idea of a judgement, a judgement on his cruelty to his wife, his cruelty to his son. Even if Janie's dying curses were to drag him to hell (p.13).

His mind is beset by two great sorrows. One is the doubt whether his wife Janie had forgiven him in the last
moments of her life for his affair with Maureen. Janie's illness had come soon after she learnt about Bruno's infidelity and she had blamed it on him. Their quarrel had persisted throughout her illness and, when at the end she called out to him, he pretended he had not heard, fearing she would curse him. Now, forty years after her death, the thought of his bad behaviour towards her and the unknowability of her last feelings, still nags at him. The inability to accept the terrible contingency of what happened recalls Mary Clothier's guilt over the accidental death of her husband in *The Nice and the Good* or Montague Smill's obsession with his wife Sophie's death in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*.

His other great sorrow is connected with the estrangement of his son Miles, brought about by his tactless opposition to his marriage with Parvati. She was killed soon after the marriage and the breach between the father and son remained unsealed. The impasse obsessively hurts him. A very sympathetic account of his remorseful mental state is given by the omniscient narrator:

If only certain things had not been said. One says things hastily, without meaning them, without having thought, without understanding them even. One ought to be forgiven for those hasty things. 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 all ignored his remarks, if only they had made him meet Parvati, let him meet Parvati, instead of flying off and building up his offense into a permanent barrier...he had been given his role and condemned for it (p,14).

In the last stage of his life, his desire for a reconciliation turns into a consolatory fantasy that his son would be a sympathetic listener to whom he would unburden his grief. He directs a considerable amount of will in the resuscitation of their relationship. Damby, his son-in-law, arranges for a meeting between the two of them, but being aware of Miles' irreconcilable and inconsiderate nature, he fears the outcome. His fear comes true. Miles refuses to allow his father to unlock his heart. The incident increases Bruno's pain and suffering and jolts his health downwards. But in Murdoch's moral scheme the collapse of Bruno's fantasy about Miles is necessary, for it is not the past but the lived present which can offer an illumination.

Bruno's desire for forgiveness and reconciliation is, however, compensated by the subsequent visits of Lisa and Diana. Lisa works as a soothing, transforming agent who presents a new vocabulary about the past and of life as a dream. She, who had learnt the meaning of impersonal love from the experience of watching her own father's death, knows how to gently direct his attention away from himself. She stresses on the holiness of the present moment. Her conversation with him converges on the lack of God who might have forgiven the
past. In such a situation, the flagellation of the guilty self will go on endlessly with no succour from anywhere. She points at the futility of Bruno's wallowing guilt by referring to the accidental nature of most human acts:

In the world things happen as they do happen. Think how much of it was accidental,... There were the things that happened. But thinking about wickedness usually just comforts.... Human beings are not demons. They are much too muddy.... There are things one can do nothing with. Try to draw a sort of quiet line round it round it (p.154).

She also conveys the most important Murdochian warning on the dangers of obsession and egocentricity when she tells him:

You live too much in yourself....Leave yourself. It's just an agitating puppet. Think about other things, think about anything that's good.... 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 (p.155).

The thrust, as usual, is outwards and to external things. Bruno progressively learns to quiet the ongoing warfare in his mind and to live absolutely in the contingent muddy present. The loss of his stamp collection in the rising waters of Thames functions as a symbolic baptism. It marks off the moment when he can finally turn away from the past with its concentration on the self and its possessions. "It was as if the flooding Thames which inundated Bruno's house had left behind a world as different as that left after the Biblical flood of forty days and forty nights."18
In the last pages of the novel *he and Diana* soon
grow to understand the ultimate meaning of love and death.
Diana, who is herself spiritually transformed by looking,
touching and finally learning to love this shrunken, ugly,
distorted old man, remains at his bedside till he dies. In
her loving ministration Bruno achieves a kind of non-consoling,
terrible intuition that life as it is, cannot be redeemed. For
the first time he learns to see the selfishness of his ordinary
muddled love affairs. "He had loved only a few people and
loved them so badly, so selfishly" (p.264). With unprecedented
clarity he recognises what love ought to be like. It has to
be infinite in strength, resources, power and resilience. It
must possess a flexibility which includes forgiveness of those
who may have wronged us. Unless love expands itself into a
"huge vault opening overhead", death rather than love will
triumph. He wishes the knowledge he had now of what love ought
to be, could "somehow go backwards and purify the little selfish
loves and straighten out the muddles" (p.264). He knows it
could not be so, but this clarity of vision makes him realise
that Janie must have arrived at the same intuition on her death
bed and had wanted to forgive, rather than curse him. His attempts
at self-justification had earlier obscured the true recognition
of his wife's feelings. Through extremity of suffering and
propinquity of death, he rises above the false forms of his
selfish concerns and gains the freedom to love Janie and
recognise the contingency of her death.
Miles Greensleave, Bruno's son is also totally obsessed by the death of his wife, Parvati. This obsession has reduced him into a solipsistic person, insensitive and inattentive to others. His romantic imagination has created a false and limited world and he spends his life hermetically sealed in it. He is the artist, the image-maker who waits anxiously in this self-enclosed shell for the visitation of the inspiring God of the Muse. Like Bruno, suffering forces him to face his old bereavement and in the rediscovery of death he finds love as well as the inspiration to be a poet.

Miles had lost his wife and unborn child in an air-crash soon after their marriage. His passionate love for her had not been expansive enough to accept death. Instead of facing the reality of the situation, he sought an escape from it in poetry. He had committed his feelings in a long, commemorative poem entitled Parvati and Siva. He locks his emotions instead of releasing them. He changes the horror of death into an art object, a "survival poem" written out of his own "outrageous will" to survive. The narrator comments:

He transformed the plane crash into a dazzling tornado of erotic imagery. But the poem was a lie and although art cannot but console for what it weeps over, the completion of the poem left him sour and sick and utterly convinced of the henceforward impossibility of love (p.34).

After her death, he shuns the company of others, especially women, earning for himself a seclusion and to some extent even the hostility of his colleagues in the army.
His marriage with Diana did little to improve his solitary egotism. Diana consciously preserved his memory of the past by leaving the core of his emotions untouched. She did all the courting. She pampered him with her loving care, using all the "whole huge force of her woman's nature to comfort him to lure him out of the dark box in which he had been living" (p.59). She fantasized Parvati as a "damsel heroine in the castle" (p.82) who was dead but not forgotten and humbly accepted that she could never occupy Parvati's place in his heart. Miles' egotism prevailed securely in this atmosphere.

As a poet, Miles made self-conscious efforts to 'see' the particularity of reality and added from time to time new items to his Notebook of Particulars. His concentration on the particular is, in fact, an evasion of the complex reality and truth. It is a form of self-deception and consolation. Like Bradley Pearson in The Black Prince, he concentrates more on the sheer purification of his art without enriching it with the experience of life. He lacks the moral vision and freedom required for really 'seeing'.

He is the perfect example of Nigel's commentary that a "human being hardly ever thinks about other people. He contemplates fantasies which resemble them and which he has decked out for his own purposes" (p.208). His inattentiveness is conspicuously noticeable in his lack of concern for his old,
dying father. His image of his father's emotional nature is
ludicrously remote from reality. He pictures him romantically
as a "sage represented by Blake, withdrawn and distant" while
it is transparently visible that Bruno is highly involved and
a sensitive person. Miles' refusal to listen to his pathetic
attempts at confession and reconciliation is not only a sign
of his moral blindness but also a clue to his self-protective
nature. He does not want to participate in the sufferings of
others because he knows that 'seeing' it clearly would make him
vulnerable to it.

In the same manner he remains blissfully cut off
from the suffering of his wife, Diana. He is not concerned
with her feelings, being so absorbed in himself. When Lisa, her
ailing sister, comes to live under their roof after floundering
from the Communist party to the vocation of a nun and later to
teaching, Miles does not again make an effort to apprehend her
as an individual. He looks upon her with pity as a "cold, dewy
yet wilting flower" or a "bird with a broken wing" (p. 61). This
image of her is a kind of pattern which congeals around her
preventing him from really 'seeing' her. He never imagined
she had any secret life or was interested in men. Diana had
mooted a theory that Lisa was not interested in them and he
had vaguely taken over the theory. He knew nothing about her
past life because apart from the philosophical discussions
they had occasionally, he had never really talked to her.
The first time he is galvanised into attention is when he witnesses Danby's hopeless infatuation for her. It comes to him as a shock that he himself had an intensely overriding, destructive passion for her and that she was 'loseable' and free to be courted by some other man. But what shakes him totally is the discovery that the plain and quiet little Lisa had for long nursed a hopeless obsession for him. The sudden mutual love made Miles experience at once the destruction of his second marriage and the revival of the first. He has a moment of joyful recognition or what Aristotle would have described as an anamorisis. He realises that he had set his entire life moving in the wrong direction by not facing the death of Parvati. His love for her lacked the ability to fight against this utter loss. He tells Lisa:

I sometimes feel, Lisa, as if I never really experienced her death at all. I poetised it, I made it into something unreal, something beautiful. I had to.... But it remains like a kind of barrier, a falseness. I think it prevents me from writing. It's like a curse (p.152).

Ironically, Miles' second love also decides to go to India in order to work for the "Save the Children" Organisation. However, she later changes her mind and remains in London. To resolve the tangle, she rejects her brother-in-law's suit and agrees to marry Danby, seeking at last to have her fling at pleasures of this world. The mental shock experienced by Miles after this incident makes him fully conscious of the real face
of Parvati's death. He undergoes the necessary death-like ordeal—a "crisis in his relations with the past" (p. 267). He learns to desecry the image of true love that not only accepts death but also lives with it. After lying in a state of coma for a few days, he relives the immediate incidents preceding Parvati's accident. Looking at the old world of the past made new, or perhaps seen for the first time, it dawns upon him: "And now she was dead, broken and scattered upon a mountain-side, utterly gone out of the world, existing no more anywhere. Parvati and his child... She was utterly gone out of the world forever. She did not exist any more at all" (p. 234).

Hopeless love for Lisa showed Miles how to face Parvati's death and "allowed his god to come". His failure as a poet had been connected with his failure to come to terms with his grief. As he learns to confront his loss boldly and to live free of obsession, he is renewed creatively as a poet. He wins a degree of freedom by directing his attention away from himself. By liberating himself from the past fixation he learns to accept the contingency of reality. But the real moral freedom involving the ability to see people as they are, still eludes him. In the last chapters of the book he is seen at his work, insulated in his summer house, wearing a strange angelic smile, oblivious of his suffering wife and father. Murdoch is here apparently making a point on the connection of true art with morals. She proves that a morally immature person who concentrates on barren image-making and egotism is
a poor agent of truth. Such a person perceives very little of the externally real and cannot, therefore, be a proper creative artist. Miles had a momentary insight into the nature of good art when he saw in "fear and trembling" that it comes out of "courage, humility, virtue" (p.166). Had this grasp of truth been pursued it could have brought about a transformation in him. We are not sure if the moral base in him is strong enough for the production of poetry that is not narcissistic. The theme of the good and bad artist is fully explored in The Black Prince. In this novel Murdoch demonstrates how Bradley Pearson's slow, moral growth results in the shaping of a good artist.

Danby Odell is another lost widower whose life centres upon a fatal mistake committed long ago by his wife. His marriage had come to an end with Gwen's untimely death brought about by her futile effort to save a child from drowning in the Thames. The irony of the situation became clear when the child swam safely to the shore while Gwen was drowned. Danby had shielded himself from facing the loss by seeking consolation in a succession of casual love affairs with the two maidservants, Linda and Adelaide. Although he never recovered from Gwen's death yet being an amiable and modest person, whose "life energy was cheerful stuff" (p.20), he does not entirely retreat into a self-protective egoistic armour. He is morally more realistic and mature than the arrogant and self-centred, Miles. His limited but genuine goodness is far superior in moral value to
the pretentious seriousness of his brother-in-law. His humility and lack of an exaggerated self-image is a sign of a person possessing sufficient moral freedom to enable him to act well towards others. His attitude towards Bruno is an evidence of his altruistic, compassionate nature. His sense of responsibility for him is sharply in contrast with Miles' cold negligence. He nurses the dying man with a blank and almost impersonal sort of love, the kind of love associated with a renunciation of the self.

He is a hedonist to the core of his being but has an honest recognition of himself and others which displays a man in touch with the real world. He is a skillful businessman who manages the printing press in a practical way. His greatest humility lies in his love for Owen. He was fully conscious that she was unlike him. He had himself been amazed and overwhelmed by their marriage. It seemed to him like a "visitation from outside", a "pure celebration of the god of love". She had a kind of authority over him that seemed more an attribute of her "sheer alienness than the result of any rational effect of persuasion" (p. 126). He had suffered from this terrifying degree of love as a soul might suffer in the presence of its God. In his modesty he felt sorry he had loved her whole heartedly but with too ordinary a heart. He could never think of himself as worthy of this visitation of the god Eros and did not expect any repetition of this good luck. It had been for him a once-in-a-lifetime affair.
But with the entry of Lisa in his life the god visits him again. Her resemblance with Gwen shakes him out of his emotional apathy by stirring up an agony of remembrance. He is clearly conscious of his age, appearance and position. He knew he was an "older, fatter, more drunken man than the one whom Gwen had so unaccountably loved" (p.213). In the circular re-enactment of the past and the experience of a comical death, he faces the reality of Owen's death and rediscovers her in Lisa. The real catalyst, however, takes place in the trumpery duel with Will Boase. He, being a rival for Adelaide's favours, could not brook Danby's casual affair with her. During the duel Danby imagines himself lying dead on the bank of the river Thames, below the same bridge from where Owen had leapt to her futile death. The comicality and the pointlessness of the situation strikes him: "He thought, I am dying for a girl I didn't love, I am dying because I failed to love, I am dying just upon the brink of love" (p.219). The entire episode points at the absurdity and purposelessness of human life on earth.

However, he escapes death and the police through Nigel's intervention and by jumping into the river. Symbolically, this immersion into water is a kind of baptism for him comparable to Bruno's, later in the novel. He felt a sudden sense of blissful release and a "strange beatific lightness as if all his sins, including the ones which he had long ago forgotten had been suddenly forgiven" (p.221). It is through the
extremity of this situation and the suffering he undergoes for Lisa that he experiences his old bereavement for the first time. In the rediscovery of death he discovers love. Reinvigorated and renewed by the power of love he feels for Lisa, he gradually shakes the dead hand of Owen and re-enters the real world of the present. He gets Lisa as a reward for his moral progress. In their coming together at the end of the novel, we have a genuine "picture of life at its most explosively robust and hopeful. They could not help presenting a spectacle of triumph" (p.263). In the novel it appears that death is always in equipoise with life. Thanatos and Eros are contending forces of equal and divergent strength.\textsuperscript{23} 

The most surprising spiritual and moral metamorphosis in the novel is that of Diana, the attractive, smart and hedonistic wife of Miles. Her progress is marked by an ability to travel far into reality from the narrowly enclosed world in which she was trapped by her complacency and emotional greed. She is pictured in the early sections of the book as a great fantasist busy imposing pleasing forms on reality. She had painted a dream picture of herself and her inexhaustible love for Miles. She conceived of her relationship with him in archetypal fairy-like terms and of herself in the sustaining role of a "mysterious lady of the fountain who heals the wound of the wandering knight, the wound which has defied all other touches" (p.82). She had charmed herself into believing that she was the healer who can warm him back to life. She simply
desires to preserve and prolong her sense of protection. Instead of drawing him out of himself she constructs a beautiful and elegant burrow to secure herself and Miles from the buffets of reality. She invents formalities for their life, transforming the little house into a ceremonious old fashioned manor house, where meals are punctually and meticulously served.

Her assessment of her sister Lisa is also shaped to suit her ego-gratifying fantasy. She insists on placing her as a "doomed girl" or a "bird with a broken wing" who has to be comforted. Little does she realise that Lisa possessed a tougher moral fibre than she could imagine. Her greater contact with reality is evident in the position she held in a school, one visit to which had made Diana sick. Another apparent instance of how fantasy runs at odds with reality in Diana’s character is the shock she experiences when she sees Bruno for the first time. She had visited him in the role of a reconciler, expecting to meet a silvery haired old gentleman, with an evident and affecting resemblance to Miles, whom she would coax along and charm into paying her compliments" (p.119). What she saw was a repelling, grotesque man with a bulbous head, skeletal limbs and an unkempt, shaggy appearance.

The aesthetic creation of a house and milieu, where for years she had governed, could not withstand disruption from the external reality, symbolised by Bruno and Danby. The first blow is struck on her structured world with all its charming
fantasies when she loses, first her husband and then her lover, Danby to Lisa. Through the knowledge of the emptiness of her marriage combined with the slow, laborious process of watching Bruno's death she discovers the real nature of selfless love and moral freedom. Her real education begins with the breaking of the false images and forms constructed by her egoistic fantasy. She proceeds from the artificially created world to the other-centred realm of reality. Sitting silently beside the dying man, she participates in his vision. Like him, she gradually comes to see the paradoxical similarity of love and death. She realises that the purest form of love entails, like death, a renunciation of personal interests and advantages. It results in a feeling of a peaceful universal benignity that renounces attachments to the past and bathes one's entire attitude in calm forgiveness and serenity. Though difficult of achievement, this is the impersonal love posited by the godlike mystic, Nigel when he advises Diana to forgive Miles and Lisa: "Let them trample over you in their own way. Let them walk on you. Send anger and hate away. Love them and let them walk on you" (p.208).

The reality of Bruno's death and the "helplessness of human stuff" (p.269) in its grip does not destroy her, rather it grants her freedom from the shackles of the ego. It discloses large areas of meaning as she penetrates through the world of myth and contiguity. The end of the novel shows that she had "emerged at last into a vast place of loneliness" (p.267)
with the resentment against others gone. Living in the reality of death, she is demurred of all desire. She is made nothing by it. She is at last free. "The old spotted hand that was holding on to hers relaxed gently at last" (p.269). She stands where her sister Lisa had stood in the beginning. Diana moves from the Platonic Cave towards the sun while Lisa returns to it. Lisa chooses happiness to self-abnegation, Diana the 'severe hedonist' takes on herself the rigours of self-discipline.

Iris Murdoch believes that moral advancement can only take place with the abjuration of false, consolatory images. Lisa Watkin, the almost saint-like figure in this novel has also undergone this process of re-education. She had lived a life of discipline in the service of others and is a symbol of the self-denial that is regarded as a necessary quality for virtue and freedom. In her sincere devotion to moral duty, she had spent her life in several unnatural, self-effacing roles. She had been a nun, a school teacher in a tough East London School, and a potential worker with the Indian children in Calcutta. At one time this heavy strain led to a physical breakdown and illness. Her selflessness is exhibited in her calm, detached and gentle attitude towards Bruno. She feels none of the physical revulsion initially experienced by Diana. She manages to gently guide his tortured spirit to reconcile with the past, by redirecting it to live and love the present.

In a variety of comments on her, Miles and Diana
reveal the masochistic element in her nature. "Lisa wants death....she certainly wants to suffer....She's a mystic.... she wants to be nothinged."(p.83). It soon becomes apparent that the entire base of her saintliness was a kind of role playing and the result of her hopeless obsession for her brother-in-law, Miles. Her deepest drive is sexual rather than spiritual. She provides another variation on the theme of sexual motives in relation to religious vocation as were witnessed in Michael Meade and Catherine Pawley in The Bell or Jacoby in The Philosopher's Pupil.

At the end of the novel, she gives up Miles and chooses to marry Danby, a warm sensualist, quite unlike her. She is transformed by the subsequent happiness, looks years younger and reinvigorated whilst her elder sister moves in the opposite direction. The hard, self-abnegating lines on her harrowed mum-like face are transferred to Diana's face. The change in Lisa who has advanced from self-suppression to self-love, which in Murdochian moral scheme would appear to be deplorable, is not looked down upon here. The indication perhaps is that the most important task in morals is to abjure fantasies and false images. Life, instead of being imprisoned in an artificial pattern must be allowed to follow its natural rhythm. Lisa's disinclination to continue on the austere path and the eschewing of the self-conceived role is connected with Murdoch's disapproval of all patterns and forms created
by fantasy. Ann Cavigle's example in *Huns and Soldiers* points at the same moral. In an honest appraisal of herself, Lisa tells Danby:

> I've been living in a dark cage. Now I'm out of it. It has been painful, this coming out, and it will go on being painful for sometime, but that's a simple clean pain such as one might live with... I have never been more sane, coldly sane, self-interestedly sane. I am a woman. I want warmth and love, affection, laughter, happiness, all the things I'd done without. I don't want to live upon the rack (p.257).

For her, the path of freedom lay in giving up those very qualities which are recommended for it. Murdochian generosity conceives of a multiple faceted personality and of multiple ways in which good may be reached.

The major characters of the novel release themselves from their patterned forms of existence. They learn to 'see' the contingent reality and live in the present. By facing death, they discover love that is death-like in its extinction of self, thereby achieving a modicum of freedom and the selfless knowledge of the reality of others in their 'otherness'.

The novel has a mythological core to which Murdoch has herself attested. It is lent by the Eros/Thanatos theme and the allusions to the Indian philosophical, religious and legendary myths. Use of various symbols has also been made. There are the naturally projected symbols like the stamps, spiders and the dressing gown. Of the three, the dressing gown is the most complex and eerie. Bruno’s dying consciousness
looks upon it as a symbol of death. It hardens into folds as he becomes permanently bed-ridden. When he drifts into death, it moves to the bottom of the bed to claim him. The Power station and the Brompton Cemetery representing life and death are other symbols which do not strain credibility. The only symbol that appears to be forced and is described by one critic as a "clumsy piece of narrative machinery"\(^{25}\) is the flooding of the river Thames. The familiar theme of baptism by water often figures in her novels, but it does not come as a natural event in this book. Like *The Unicorn*, *Bruno's Dream* is a 'closed' novel with a well defined structure. But unlike the former, the form and content are here well-integrated. In fact, the reader's response is unlikely to be impaired by the failure to recognise its mythical layering and symbolic references. The use of myth is deliberately disposable and provisional. It is subordinated to her major concern with characterisation. It is not superimposed to work as a constraint in the realistic apprehension of the characters. Even a critic like P.W. Thomson, who has strongly argued in favour of the mythic convention and ritualistic events of the novel, has not failed to notice the psychological realism in the portrayal of the characters. He admits that the book's "dispassionate linking of narrative with real life is achieved through a resourceful collaboration with conventional realism."\(^{26}\)

The success of the novel lies in the realistic creation of such a compellingly powerful picture of an old man
dying. His death is neither melodramatically nor aridly portrayed. In fact, the author has minutely delineated the detailed memories and fears which haunt Bruno's mind. His consciousness is penetratingly explored by the omniscient narrator who also "dodges anonymously from his consciousness to Danby's to Miles's to Diana's to Adelaide's to Nigel's" in a very skillful manner. Bruno's character is drawn with a humorous affection that shirks nothing and does not rob him of pathos or dignity. The study of his dying process is done in a non-consolatory manner. For this reason, the novel deserves to be praised as one of the most accurately observed pieces of thanatology. 28

Murdock's ideas in her later novels are generally related to the experience of her characters who do not by themselves exemplify them. The illustrations of her views or variations on them are provided by the incidents and relationships of her characters with others. In the best of her novels "we are engaged by her characters as human beings sparing as she may be in her development of them and arbitrary as she may be in providing motivation for their thoughts and actions." 29 In *Bruno's Dream*, her ideas are worked out at the experiential level, except in the case of Nigel. The notions he voices do not have any psychological content. He is crucially important in affecting changes in the relationships of most characters and is responsible for instigating many events. But as a character, his identity is vague and
somewhat associated with delinquency. One reviewer describes him as an "ambiguous god-from the machine". He possesses a fêy-like being and supernatural powers. Murdoch's aim is to give him at the cost of credulity, an imperious god-like authority over others, by the information he gains through voyeuristic acts. He is shown as a universal lover of mankind, cherishing man in his infinite variety. In him, Murdoch comes closest to the overt formulation of the characteristics of the highest spiritual love. To justify his behaviour, she leaves the possibility open for considering his mystic visions as drug-induced. The overall impression of him is, however, unsatisfactory. He remains at the level of abstraction and does not acquire a free, lived-in reality. He is the only living character whose mode of existence is unimaginable.

This is the only blemish on the otherwise fairly realistic characterization. The characters, though enshrined by myths and ideas, have not petrified into mere formulae, by acting puppet-like at the behest of their creator. Brune, Danby, Miles, Diana and Lisa are all loving creations of a compassionate author, although they do not manage to acquire a full otherness which is the mark of great characters in literature. The form is there, but its hold is light enough to grant them breathing space and a partial freedom to be. The will of the author and her system, though recognizable, is more relaxed and self-mocking. "The book has a generosity that
almost does the work of love."^{31} This quality sets it in contrast to her earlier 'closed' novels like *The Unicorn* or *Under the Hat* where the myth has cramped the free development of characters. In this respect, it achieves to some extent, the Shakespearean ideal of a combination of real character and magical pattern.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


3. Ibid., p.82.


6. Conradi, p.98.


11. Bodhisattva is one whose essence is pure, i.e., enlightenment or wisdom. In Mahayana Buddhism, a Bodhisattva is one who renounces nirvana in order to work for the salvation of the suffering mankind. He is an enlightened and compassionate being. See also John M. Koller, Oriental Philosophies (New York: Scribner's, 1970), p.122.


13. The reference is to the named King Amafortas, the guardian of the Holy Grail (the symbol of the spirit of Jesus Christ). When he fails to protect it, as a punishment a serious incurable injury is inflicted on him. See Thomas Bulfinch, Mythology (New York: Laurel, 1959), p.354.
14. The description is given in *Brihadaranyaka Upanisad* like this: "As a spider moves along the thread (that it produces) and as from a fire tiny sparks fly in all directions, so from the self emanate all forms and all the worlds, all gods, all beings". See Swami Hitkhananda, *The Upanisads* (New York: Harper, 1949), p.41.

15. According to the myth, there comes a time when there is chaos in the world and deterioration in the Cosmic order. Men are full of evil. There is no wise man or saint. Love vanishes and egotism prevails. Then Vishnu, the Supreme Being from whom the world emanated, manifests his destructive aspect by becoming the sun. He searches the world and it rises up in a gigantic conflagration. In order to quench it he sends torrential rains. At last the suffering body of the earth finds ultimate relief or extinction or *nirvana*. See Heinrich Zimmer, pp, 35-37.


27. Elizabeth Dipple, p.176.

28. Ibid., p.175.

29. Frederick P.W. McDowell, p.421.
