It is as if we live in a kind of rubble world, and we are always making forms.

Iris Murdoch

Iris Murdoch received Britain's most prestigious Booker McConnell prize for Fiction in 1978 for her widely acclaimed nineteenth novel The Sea, The Sea. The maturity of style first exhibited in The Nice and the Good in 1968 has reached a culmination in this work. This fairly long novel full of ruminative details, allusions and undertones of hidden meaning displays a confident and relaxed style. In reply to Jack I. Biles' query as to why her earlier novels are shorter than the later ones she associates this tendency with her increasing self assurance:

I have become more relaxed and, in a sense, more confident. There is more reflection in the later novels than in the early ones....The young person is anxious and afraid to ramble round.
Then, later on, you don't care if you ramble round. You know what you can do and what you can't do, and you're not frightened of destroying your form by blurring it. 1

The Sea, The Sea followed by Nuns and Soldiers and The Philosopher's Pupil marks a fresh turning in Murdoch's career with the emergence of a partially new mode that concentrates on slowing down and "rambling round". The prominent characteristic of her novels from the days of Under the Net was the hurricane speed in which actions took place. It is now slackened to accommodate to a protracted and almost animistic brooding over the natural world. Extensive elegant descriptions of the sea and landscape, reminiscent of the early nineteenth century novels, enrich the pages of the book. The novel begins with one such superb "word picture" of a seascape glowing in the "bland May sunshine" in its various colours of luxurious purple, blue, emerald green and indigo. 2

The ruminative quality which heightens the effect of the natural descriptions is also visible in the detailed reportage of the workings of the protagonist's mind. The slow reiterative nature of the delusions of Charles Arrowby, though at times carried to the extent of maddening irritation, is rendered psychologically convincing, if we keep in mind that the author is exploring the excesses of an obsession. The same reflectiveness is exhibited in the last part of the novel as Charles gradually reassesses the bizarre events of his life. The benefit of this slow languorous reading is that it keeps the reader in
touch with the deeper and subtle effects the novel intends to convey. It achieves what the earlier novels with their rapid movement had been unable to do.

The plot of the novel moves on two levels. The surface story concentrates on Charles Arrowby's life and his obsession. His narrow structured way of looking at the world and people around him reveals his colossal egotism, lack of moral discipline and a false sense of freedom. In common with Under the Net, A Severed Head, The Black Prince and A Word Child, the author has used the first-person male narrator as a device for presenting his distorted vision. This narrative method has been used with great success whenever she deals with self deception, illusion and partial understanding. Such a narrator makes mistakes about the sexual and moral natures of others. He is the "flawed reflector" and the plot hinges on his unbalanced moral perspective. As his initial faulty and patterned vision of reality is gradually eroded by various contingent happenings, he learns how to 'see' people instead of imposing his own forms on them. This leads to his moral evolution and freedom. The entire story filters through his changing consciousness, forcing the reader constantly to distinguish between the falsity and truth of his impressions. An additional complication is added to the story by the form in which the narration is moulded i.e. of entries made in the diary of this deluded hero.

The simple tale of Charles Arrowby's obsession hides
a deeper infrastructure pertaining to spiritual life. At this level the novel is concerned with the theme of renunciation. In different ways both Charles and James attempt at it, although they are ultimately forced back into the world they desire to leave. Here, once again we are on familiar grounds, first covered in The Bell. The insistence is on immersion into life rather than withdrawal. The dangers of magic in its various forms and the Tibetan theory of the demons and bardo provide an occult dimension to the story. This profound psychic landscape is unveiled gradually in a quiet and unobtrusive manner by James Arrowby.

The title of the book is allusive and symbolic. It alludes to a memorable passage in one of Xenophon's most personal writings Anabasis Kyron: The Expedition of Cyrus. Xenophon was the commander of the Greek mercenaries of Prince Cyrus. After wandering many miles away from home through the unknown dry territories of Kurdistan and Armenia, his forces catch a glimpse of the Black Sea from the top of a pass. These lovers of the sea pay it a pagan homage in their ecstatic cry "Thalassa, Thalassa" which means "the sea, the sea". Titus utters a similar cry in the novel. For the Greek mercenaries the sea stood for joy, safety, serenity and light after darkness. The relief they feel describes the initial mood in which Charles looks at the solitude of the place by the sea where he had retired after a frenzied life in the theatre. He reckons
the sea as a purifying power that would provide him a spiritual baptism. But as we later come to know, it belies his expectations. Apart from being an image of nature and the elements, use of the sea as a symbol with philosophical implications has been made in many of her novels. It is considered as a "mother of forms" and an ideal concrete metaphor for the zone of contingency. It is seen as a vast and detached force resisting all attempts at subjugation. Charles' ropes cannot contain it. Titus is buffeted and killed by its unruly waves. The sea can prove to be terrible for those who cannot swim in it and are unaware of its dimensions, just as the sea of life is dangerous for those lacking in a reliable moral compass. This aspect is fully demonstrated in A Fairly Honourable Defeat. The body of the morally lazy Rupert is found floating in the swimming pool, at the end of that novel, while Simon displays his moral strength in resisting the threats of Julius King (a symbol of evil) by escaping from the same pool. The ability to handle the potential destructiveness of water and to regard this element as life giving in a way reminds us of Joseph Conrad's use of the same image.

The title also has a resonance in Paul Valery's poem "Le Cimetiere Marin" (The Graveyard by the sea) especially the line "La mer, la mer toujours recommence." This poem first figured in The Unicorn. Charles' autobiographical diary, full of egotistical reflections is like Valery's poem which is described as "un monologue de moi". The marine graveyard
symbolizes the eternal aspects of the sea and mortality. The title of the novel, the frequent references to Cimetière Marin (a restaurant) in the local village and the Church graveyard with its puzzling grave of a sailor named Dummy, are all echoes of Valery’s poem. Both these works project the indifference of the sea or nature in general towards minds engaged in interpreting or subjugating it. Both recommend the breaking of the bondage of the mind from the objects of its contemplation. Although concerned with escape from the world they advocate a return to it.

"Under a clever arabesque inlay we note the familiar Murdochian dialectic, contingency battling and defeating myth." This is an apt description of the central theme of the novel. As usual we have the 'form' or 'myth' maker at the ostensible centre of the book. It is his myth about reality that is being explored. Charles Arrowby is the artist figure, a specialist in forming and expressing. He is unmarried and alone at the age of sixty, like most of Murdoch’s central, solipsistic characters. His introduction of himself speaks volumes for his arrogance and self-centredness:

How long does mortal fame endure? My kind of fame, not very long, but long enough. Yes, yes I am Charles Arrowby and as I write this I am shall we say, over sixty years of age. I am wifeless, childless, brotherless, sisterless, I am my well known self, made glittering and brittle of fame (p.3).

In keeping with his character, he views the world and the people with whom he comes in contact according to his
subjective and limited vision, freely imposing a self-designed form on his relationships with them. He is morally incapable of 'seeing' the separate reality of others. The nonchalant way in which he is used to manipulating others for his own ends is a clear evidence of his smug, romantic notion of freedom. As a successful theatrical producer and director, controlling others had become a matter of habit with him. He enjoyed being called a 'tartar', 'tyrant' or even a 'power-erased monster' (p. 3). In fact, he considered such a reputation useful in his profession:

If absolute power corrupts absolutely then I must be the most corrupt of men. A theatre director is a dictator. (If he is not, he is not doing his job). I fostered my reputation for ruthlessness, it was extremely useful. Actors expected tears and nervous prostration when I was around (p. 37).

As a power figure he is comparable with Prospero in The Tempest. He is, however, more "fallible" than John Ducane in The Hecate and the Good and Julius King in A Fairly Honourable Defeat. Robert Rosemow in The Philosopher's Pupil is his immediate successor.

The moral hazard for a powerful person like Charles occurs when he extends his tyranny and power from actors on the stage to their personal lives as well. Without ceding any real interiority or freedom to others and with sheer indifference to their feelings, he believes he can revolutionize the lives and destinies of others. His attitude towards the women in his life, in particular, is a ruthless exercise of power. One after the other, with a sheer lack of responsibility, he had
chosen the heroines of his plays to be his lovers. Rosina, Lizzie, Jeannie and Doris are some of the names of those whom he had exploited and stranded. In almost all of his love affairs the same pattern of fickleness emerged. Clement Makin and Hartley were the only women with whom his relationship had been, to some extent, sincere. With the rest of them he had believed in demonstrating his power by coolly breaking up their marriages and relationships with others. He had remorselessly taken Rosina away from her husband, Peregrine, with never a thought for the damage he may have done to his soul. Peregrine had lived in a "hell" of torment and jealousy. His warning/remember and beware—there are those who live in hell" (p.166), is an open indication of his state of mind. His final act of pushing Charles into Minn's cauldron was a form of retribution. But for James' paranormal feat of saving him it would have meant a sure death. The information that it was Peregrine and not Ben who had made an attempt to kill him comes as a great surprise to Charles because he was unused to apprehending the effect of his actions.

Even Rosina, whom he later discards for Lizzie, keeps pestering him throughout the novel, shattering his peace of mind. The lesson inherent in the entire situation hints at the moral risk involved in treating others as mere objects for self coercive reasons with no respect for them as individuals. Human beings cannot be shelved off like inanimate objects after use. One's actions have consequences. The freedom to act
in an irresponsible way with others is morally dangerous. It had never crossed Charles' mind that for Rosina, the relationship may have meant something different and could not be easily snapped off. His attitude towards her is reminiscent of Ducane's desire to break away from Jessica in *The Mice and the Good*. Rosina's caustic remark has some truth in it:

> You never had any imagination, no wonder you couldn't write plays. You are a cold child. You want women but you are never interested in the people you want, so you learn nothing. You've had love affairs but somehow you've stayed innocent, no not innocent, you are fundamentally vicious, but somehow immature (p.188).

In a way, it cannot be denied that there is a trait of viciousness in Charles' character. Murdoch's statement in *The Black Prince* lends support to this assumption. She avers that there are no "unrecorded encapsulated moments" when one can behave anyhow and resume life where one left off. Only the "wicked regard time as discontinuous, the wicked dull their sense of natural causality."¹¹

Lizzie Scherer, the only credible, lovable and engaging woman in the story is another person who really loved him and continues doing so even after being abandoned. In an effort to face her loss of him and to live an innocent, sexless life she had set up a *menage* with a homosexual, Gilbert Opian. But Charles, ever eager to exercise power and to break bonds, sadistically succeeds in separating the two by making elusive promises to the gullible Lizzie. It is she who points at his basic selfishness when he once again leaves her to
chase the mirage, Hartley:

...you don't want to stay with anyone, in the end you drop everyone. You once said getting married was like buying a doll, which shows what you think of marriage....you made me act, you made every one act, you're like a very good dancer, you make other people dance but its got to be with you. You don't respect people as people, you don't see them, you're not really a teacher, you're a sort of rapacious magician (p.45).

In fact, Charles had been a magician on the stage, a Prospero who ruled over his island of power. (This was incidentally his last stage role). His retirement to the seaside resort at the peak of his career or on the "crest of the wave", as he describes it, is like Prospero returning to Milan with the intention of giving up magic to spend the last days of his life in peace. He sees his retirement from the glitter of the theatre world as a surrender or a kind of renunciation of power. It is an effort to change magic into spirit. He thinks if he had stayed there any longer, he would have wilted spiritually. He says: "Now I shall abjure magic and become a hermit; put myself in a situation where I can honestly say that I have nothing else to do but to learn to be good. The end of life is rightly thought of as a period of meditation" (p.2).

But Charles does not prove equal to this high task because he has neither undergone the sudden "moral change" which he mentions in the beginning of the novel (Murdochian way of showing that moral outlook cannot be changed over night) nor does he possess the capability of understanding and abjuring magic. The lure of magic accompanies him in his retreat. The
past and the people associated with it do not leave him alone for long. His solipsistic gesture of fleeing from society to repent over his life of egotism was bound to be defeated, for practice of goodness and unselfishness requires active interaction with others.

Numerous other parallels are drawn with Charles' retirement to a remote house named Shruff End, situated on dangerous yellow cliffs beside the cold Atlantic. It has been compared with Yeats' return to his tower and Stephen Dedalus to Sandy Cove. Though chiefly impelled by the desire to shun the magic of mortal fame, another major reason is his plan to write an autobiographical account of his past life. He is not sure of the 'form' he wants to give to his reflections in tranquillity but hopes to write something which will have permanence. He uses the words 'diary', 'memoir' 'philosophical journal' for it. Later, on finding some of the character sketches he had written interesting, he falsely conceives of them as a 'novel'. He also describes it as a story or journal. But the coherent literary form he had hopefully set forth to discover, is never found.

The entire novel is a proof that the strictures of form have to fight hard in the face of reality. Though Charles had wanted to observe his past and present it in a systematically structured way, yet the confused manner is visible from the beginning. His formal organization is time and again beset by
interruptions made by the occurrences of contingent and uncanny incidents. Elizabeth Dipple comments on his style of writing in these words:

The smooth elegance of form is projected when Charles can mold, shape and all too often belie his material, but the interruptions, illustrate disorder and breaking of control, which are interestingly paralleled by a literal breaking of objects. An ugly green vase is smashed, a large mirror is knocked down and a face peers at him through the window — all suggestive of the uncanny encroaching upon the smooth surface of life. He wants to transform his life into an art work but is constantly reminded that the essential nature of reality will not allow him to succeed. His diary progresses jerkily and is filled with contradiction/non-sequiturs. He is forced to replace formal control with the daily vision of a man struggling against human obstacles. He refuses to submit to a tidy, formally satisfying closure by interpreting the visitation of the four seals as a sign of mystical vision. Instead, he chooses the formless, anti-artistic, shapeless reality of life. This is a proof of both moral and artistic maturity.

A similar theme of the real world breaking on the crafted form had been earlier taken up in The Black Prince. Like Bradley Pearson, Charles is incapable of controlling his life and maintaining the calm role of a retired Prospero, just as he is unable to write a carefully ordered exclusive diary. Intrusions take place and his innocent solitude is broken by the manifold spectres of the past. Reality breaks upon not
only the form of his writing but also on the form he wishes to impose on his life, by weeding away forty years of lived experience to join himself to the days of innocence. He had come to this place determined to get rid of his past, to clear his house of visitors, to pattern his life and its story in a style most suited to his mind. But contingent reality comes knocking down these imaginary structures in the shape of various theatrical friends and ex-mistresses.

The most disruptive force proves to be his adolescent beloved Mary Hartley. The central drama of the story rests on his foolish and unbridled obsession for her. It is described by Michael Hollington as a "Platonist fixation with a myth of a fall, according to which men and women were once angels and loved purely and chastely." Though it may not be entirely acceptable to describe the affair in Hollington's serious terms but the fact remains that to Charles, Mary Hartley was the Beatrice who symbolised innocence, chaste passion and goodness. She was the beginning and the end, the alpha and omega of his life; the "one great light" in the cavern of his mind. He had never been able to forget the idyllic days spent together. His description of that period is tinged with a luminous romantic aura:

We lived in paradise. We fled on bicycles to lie in buttercup fields, beside railway bridges, near canals, in wasteland awaiting housing estates. Ours was already a suburban countryside, but it was as lovely and significant to us as the Garden of Eden. ... She had the wisdom of the innocents and we conversed as angels. She was at home in time and space (p.80).
The idyll had suddenly come to an end with Hartley's refusal to marry him with a frank admission that they wouldn't make each other happy. This was followed by her definitive disappearance from his life, after her marriage with Ben. Charles had raved and lamented, "I lost her, the jewel of the world" (p.81). He searched for her in vain. Hereafter he remains entrapped in a fixed view of her. He regarded this event a metaphysical crisis that fouled his life and left his mind with no rest. Later, whenever he was accused of behaving like a 'cold fish' in his dealings with other women, he held Hartley responsible for it. His promiscuity, he says, was a vicious attempt to prove that she was right after all.

But she was only right because she left me. You die at heart from a withdrawal of love..., Hartley destroyed my innocence, she and the demon of jealousy. She made me faithless..., she made me a worldly man by rejecting me, that failure ruined me morally..., It was her rejection that made me lose my way (p.84).

As a matter of pure coincidence, Hartley, now a fat, dowdy, provincial old lady had retired to the same village with her husband. A chance meeting with her once again rekindles the past love. His obsession takes over and becomes the controlling dream of his life. He wants to recapture the lost innocence of the love affair of 40 years ago. The magnitude of his obsession is discernible when a fastidious, weakly and overcivilized man like him ever ready to notice the flaws in the looks of women, is now so possessed that he fails to see the wrinkles, the haggard old body, unkempt and badly permed...
hair of Hartley. Her ordinariness, dreariness and slow responses do not irk him. Years of fame and all the friendships of theatre people have all palled before this egocentric dream. The reader can easily see through the irony of the situation and the futility of his delusion.

Charles Arrowby had earlier fled to the theatre to escape from the frustration of his affair with Hartley. He now desires to form a well-wrought whole by excluding the middle period of his life and experience to reach back to the idyllic days of the past. This craving is a symptom of a man dwelling in fantasy, in the darkness of Plato's cave seeing only shadows created by himself. His desire illustrates the blindness of a human being obsessed by a self-satisfying vision, contracting reality into a single pattern. It is natural for him as an artist to feel the need of discarding unwanted materials to give his work a form, but his wish to eliminate forty years from his own and Hartley's lives appears to be highly ludicrous and morally dangerous.

Charles' pursuit of Hartley, his attachment to the past, and the desire to banish experience reveals a morally undisciplined person who has failed to grow up. He is kind of Peter Pan figure (the title character of J.M. Barrie's play). Forgetting that he is dealing with a real human being and not an imaginary Shakespearean heroine on the stage, he thinks he can persuade Hartley to leave her husband and come to him.
His distorted myopic vision neither allows him to consider her as a separate person with an identity and life of her own, nor to listen to her objections and reasons. Her confused insistence that she wants to remain with her husband, brutish though he may be, and that she is satisfied with her ordinary, lower middle class life, fails to convince him. In a voice which rings of commonsense and objectivity she tells him: "You want to make him unreal, but he's real (Ben).... Our love wasn't real, it was childish, it was like a game, we were like brother and sister, we didn't know what love was then....we were children. You never became a part of my real life" (p.303).

But Charles persists in thinking that she is unhappily married (a hasty opinion based on a conversation he eavesdrops). Like Orpheus who carries his search for his Eurydice even down to the lower world he imagines himself rescuing her from the marital inferno. Looking at the famous painting of Perseus and Andromeda by Titian he pictures Hartley as the Andromeda, chained to the rock of marriage and himself as the winged Perseus who breaks her chains by killing the sea monster (Ben). In spite of her resistance in an outrageously meddlesome way, he imprisons her in his house putting her reputation, life and well being, all at stake. His action recalls of Proust's *La Prisonnière*, in which the hero installs his mistress in his house, so that he can see her and possess her at any hour. It is a case of trying to enslave a consciousness "a form of appropriation and getting hold of the other's
freedom: Love of this kind treats the beloved as an automaton. His romantic resolve to 'free' her and keep her captive also recalls episodes involving princesses detained in other novels like The Unicorn or An Unofficial Rose. To some extent, it anticipates Robert Rosaner's attitude to his grand-daughter in The Philosopher's Funeral. In Charles Arrowby's act, Murdoch has launched a two pronged attack both on the existentialist concept of love and the literary idea of an unrequited love, much taken up by novelists, poets and dramatists. Such a lover has always evoked sympathy in literature. In Arrowby's romantic egotism the author is endeavouring to show the grotesqueness, cruelty and perversity of this idea. Her attack on the literary convention of the obsessed lover "gives vivid intensity to the romance of ego and misuse of others which literature and those who toy with it, can so often be guilty of."

James Arrowby, Charles' cousin, the superior of the two in intelligence and moral strength points at the wrongness of his action. He tries to open his eyes to the fictionality of the entire case in a manner displaying an exemplary grasp of the situation:

You've made it into a story, and stories are false......You are assuming on as far as I can see very insubstantial evidence, your memory of some idyllic times at school and so on, that if you were to carry her off you would be able to love her and make her happy and she would be able to love you and make you happy. Such situations are in fact fairly rare and hard of achievement. Further, as a matter inseparable from the happiness you prize so much, you assume that it is morally right thus to rescue her even in the apparent absence of her consent (p. 335).
James endeavours to make him realise the marital position of Hartley. He explains it with perfect sanity and insight which is quite surprising for a person who is a bachelor himself. He tells Charles: "Do you really know what her marriage is like? You say she's unhappy, most people are. A long marriage is very unifying, even if it's not ideal and those old structures must be respected. You may not think much of her husband, but he may suit her..." (p.178).

Although Charles refuses to face the situation in this light and sticks to the bias that James is incapable of taking interest in him, yet he is finally persuaded to restore Hartley to her husband. But in spite of the reality of the situation, Charles clings to the belief that she will ultimately rush back to his arms. The truth dawns on him when she actually departs to Australia and he finds her house empty and his letter lying unread, under the bathroom linoleum. When all possibilities come to an end, he is forced to accept defeat. Used to exercising power he had found himself for the first time powerless in the face of a person who refuses to succumb to his charismatic personality. It takes him a long time to realise the pointlessness of his obsession and that the grounds for a renewal of the bond with Hartley had not existed. Like most of the protagonists of Murdoch's novels, he has to undergo a process of education to achieve a moral progress that is only possible when one relinquishes a structured way of looking at the world. Real freedom does not lie in an exercise of power but in an imaginative loving apprehension.
of another. "Her protagonists...can redeem themselves only by discovering new ways of seeing reality and by resisting the false consolations of form and fantasy." Arrowby reaches this stage after a great deal of melodrama and foolishness. The deaths of Titus and James are in a great way responsible for the gradual change in his outlook. Hearing the end of the book, he sees Hartley as an ordinary woman with not much of intelligence. He realises that he had after all fought for a "phantom Helen". He recognizes the narcissistic element in his love for her:

...what a 'fantasist' I have been myself. I was the dreamer, I the magician. How much, I see as I look back, I read into it all, reading my own dream text and not looking at reality. Hartley had been right when she said of our love that it was not a part of the real world. It had no place (p. 499).

Charles' confident perception of orderly schemes in his relationship with Titus, the adopted son of Ben and Hartley, is also struck down by the 'monster contingency'. Titus had unwittingly become a cause of disharmony between his parents because Ben suspected him to be the illegitimate son of Charles. When the latter learns of this, he is at once fascinated by the idea of moulding him into a surrogate son to fulfill his dream of reliving the affectionate relationship he had with his own father in the past. He is flattered by the mysterious visit of Titus to confirm the facts from him. Titus becomes another object of his manipulation. He endeavours to work his magic on him and to use him as a decoy to allure Hartley. He pursues him
like Ulysses after his Telemachus or a Bloom in search of his Stephen Dedalus. He vows he would redeem and set him up financially and professionally. The boy is involuntarily caught into Charles' obessional maelstrom and feeds his fantasy.

It is when Titus gets drowned that we are made aware of the irresponsibility with which Charles had viewed this relationship. Rosina's premonition, based on an accurate assessment of his character, comes true. She had earlier drawn our attention to the reluctance in Charles' nature to be really involved or to take responsibility for others:

You never put yourself in a situation, where you could have a real son. Your sons are fantasies, they're easier to deal with. Do you imagine you could really "take on" that silly uneducated adolescent boy in there? He'll vanish out of your life like everything else has done, because you can't grasp the stuff of reality. He'll turn out to be a dream child too — when you touch him he'll fade and disappear — you'll see (p.315).

Charles eventually sees the truth of this accusation. He feels responsible for his death. The "relentless causality" of his sin which involved misuse of others and ruling over their fates like a god, touches the boy. From the moral point of view this is something hubristic and punishment for it comes in the death of Titus. Out of vanity and to match himself equal to the boy in swimming, he had failed to warn him adequately that the sea was dangerous. As he reviews the whole situation, he has an unusual moment of insight:
He had been with me such a short time; and he had come to me as to his death, as to his executioner. By what strange path of accidents, alive with so many other possibilities, had he made his way to the base of that sheer rock where he had tried again and again to pull himself out of the moving teasing killing sea? I ought to have warned him, I ought never to have dived in with him on that first day; I had destroyed him because I so rejoiced in his youth and because I had to pretend to be young too. He died because he trusted me. My vanity destroyed him. It is a matter of causality. The payment for faults is automatic. I relaxed my hold and he lay dead (p.459).

Another person Charles Arrowby fails to 'see' justly is his cousin James. He had always looked at him through a thick net formed of prejudice, spite and jealousy. James Arrowby is one of Murdoch's most subtly developed characters of the good, but his goodness remains hidden from the self-absorbed eyes of his cousin, Charles forever, persisted in making negative judgements about him. It soon becomes apparent that the feeling of rivalry is entirely in Charles' mind: a self-created form or projection of his own guilt. James seems to have felt nothing else but love for him.

Charles' inability to view him dispassionately had a long history traceable to the days of their childhood when his uncle Abel and Aunt Estelle (James' parents) had been wrapped in a glow of riches, luxury and charm. His own parents, in contrast, were down-to-earth and lacking in glamour. He admits: "I could not help regarding Uncle Abel and Aunt Estelle as glamorous almost godlike beings in comparison with whom my parents seemed insignificant and dull. I could not help seeing
them in that comparison, as failures" (p.39). Charles had always envied James for his parents.

James did well in education. His knowledge of mathematics, history, art and various languages was far superior to that of Charles who had reasonable but not very high education, Charles' unease about his cousin consisted of the fear that he would succeed in life, while he himself would fail. His original intent had been to impress and outshine this "golden boy" before whom he felt like an inferior provincial barbarian. Charles felt delighted when James joined the army and later chose a career of a professional soldier in India instead of leading a life of success in England. "I felt obscurely cheered because I intuited that James had taken a wrong turning" (p.64). He judges James' situation on a worldly comparison of his own glittering career in the theatre. Little did he know that his cousin had become an adept in Buddhist mysticism and his achievement in the spiritual and moral fields was far beyond the reach of ordinary mortals. The superior moral strength of James is visible in the clear vision he has of real life situations. His grasp over the Hartley episode and the sensible practical stand he takes on the occasion, in spite of his cousin's quirky obsessive behaviour, is a superb example of a man who has control over his egoistic self and whose actions are morally free. He is an objective person with no illusions. His conduct in the midst of Charles' "sustained madness...shines very brightly." He lives, unafflicted by vanity and self-engrossedness in his Pimlico
flat, Like Tallis in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, living amidst an enormous untidy collection of Tibetan materials, solid gold Buddhas, jade and porcelain items, all muddled up with odd things like stones, mud and feathers, he exhibits no distaste for the messiness of life. He is in contact with the world he lives in and is familiar with the flora, fauna and stones in his surroundings. Charles, on the contrary, displays absolute ignorance of the commonest creatures around him which is a sufficient proof of his self-absorption. No one is better aware than James about the general solipsistic nature of human beings. He describes them as "inward looking creatures" and poseurs. For this reason he dissuades Charles from writing an autobiography.

But this pilgrim on the spiritual path goes off the rails and is not quite able to reach the goal of renunciation he had aimed at. By learning various tricks of the adept in mysticism, he had used religion to provide power for himself. Like Charles, the magic of power enchants him. Aware that these tricks and the power they bestow constitute the negative aspect of religion, he delivers the central message of the novel: "Goodness is giving up power and acting upon the world negatively" (p.448). He makes his real renunciation by severing his attachment for Charles whom he had always loved. He dies by volition leaving all his property to him. This extraordinary way of dying proves the magnitude of his self-discipline.

After James' death, Charles goes to live in his Pimlico flat in London. It is there that he understands the
spatial character of his cousin and the bond that had existed between them. He analyses the entire relationship with a perception and penetration quite unusual in him:

Religion is power, it must be, and yet that is its bane. The exercise of power is a dangerous delight perhaps James wanted to simply lay down the burden of a mysticism that had gone wrong, a spirituality which had somehow degenerated into magic. Had he been overwhelmed with disgust because he had had to use his 'power' to save my life, was that the last straw... Had I proved to be in the end, a thankless burden and a dangerous attachment. Here, and sadly, I understood the meaning of James' last visit. James had come to make his peace with me, but it was for his sake, not for mine, in order to break a bond, not to perfect it... He came not with any ordinary desire for reconciliation, but in order to rid himself of a last irritating preoccupation. Anxiety or guilt about his wretched cousin might cloud the conditions of the perfect departure upon which he had perhaps long been bent (pp.474-75).

Freedom involves the capacity of being able to see people as they are, and we find Charles gradually shifting his focus from his own self to others. The end of the novel shows some change in his general outlook which can be considered as a sign of moral evolution and mental liberation. His decision to return to London and society is like a homecoming to the place "where magic does not shrink reality and turn it into tiny things to be the toys of fairies" (p.482). There is a note of resignation and acceptance, a "calm of mind, all passion spent", in the last twenty seven pages of the novel entitled, "Life goes on". Living contemplatively in James' flat, he conscientiously tries to examine the strange events of the recent past with a dispassionate, unsparing attitude.
Although he constantly slips back into egotism and the belittling of others, he keeps trying to abjure magic and to see the truth. In the process, his urge towards power over others seems to subside and he becomes more objectively interested in them. As he tries to interpret Hartley and James, it becomes clear to him that:

Time, like the sea, unties all knots. Judgements on people are never final, they emerge from summings up which at once suggest the need of a reconsideration. Human arrangements are nothing but loose ends and hasty reckoning, whatever art may otherwise pretend in order to console us (p.477).

As we watch him going forward with real insight, paying attention to others, generously giving them money and his time, he appears to be in the process of becoming a wise Prospero, relinquishing the demonic dependence on magic. But immediately after the announcement that he is going to live quietly, trying to do tiny good things and harming no one, he backslides into a compromising position by arranging for a lunch with Angela (Peregrine's seventeen year old step-daughter) who had been offering herself. The novel ends on a note of black comedy and a cynical suggestion that the familiar cycle may be re-enacted. As the demon casket, most spooky of James' possessions, falls down and opens, he wonders: "Upon the demon ridden pilgrimage of human life, what next I wonder" (p.502).

This ambiguous position indicates the impossibility of a complete moral change or total freedom from the myths and forms generated by the self-protective fantasy. Charles himself hints at this impossibility when he reflects: "Can one change
oneself? I doubt it. Or if there is any change it must be measured as the millionth part of a millimetre" (p. 501). Who knows the "great useless machine" of love stirred by Hartley may be waiting to be operative again and will reawakens another obsession in Charles' life. The novel's significant and clever end clearly hints that he could go either way—towards a better selfless self or towards another demonic obsession, limiting his freedom once again. But the very fact he has made an attempt to look at the reality, may itself be a foothold however tiny, for his future moral climb and his dealings with others.

In most of her novels Iris Murdoch has shown the main characters progressing from a stage of moral ignorance holding a false concept of freedom, to a condition where they are able to perceive the reality of others by overcoming the various patterns and forms they had imposed on them, thus achieving a medium of true freedom. The same limited and partial freedom is discernible in the characterization and the form of the novel. Impelled by her theoretical ideas of freedom, she has endeavoured in her later novels to give a flexibility and looseness to the form in order to allow more space for the expansion of her characters. This tendency is markedly noticeable from The Nave and the Good onwards.

In The Sea, The Sea, she sets out to make an exposition of the moral theory that an obsession enslaves the mind, limiting one's vision and endangering spiritual development.
The landscape of the place where the central drama is enacted, creates a "perfect atmosphere for breeding demons" and one of the demons in the novel is the obsession of Charles. It is composed of ungainly, huge, yellow rocks, a hair-raising Cauldron, the violent sea and a vast island which Charles never ventures to explore. It is an uncomfortable place with an eerie house named Shruff End—meaning black. The local hotel has an equally sombre name—Raven. The village is narrow Dean, with a sign post spelling Herodens (black village). There is a predominance of black colour in the entire scene suggesting the obscurity of the place. Shruff End is a weird house, desolately separated from the mainland and has a haunted landing. The entire scene is appropriate for the working out of the futile ambitions, obsessions and guilt of the hero. It is a place comparable to the Homeric Hades or the Tibetan nārāyaṇa where the soul wanders after death, meeting the demons of its own creation and waiting for rebirth. Charles' retirement from the theatre is like an entrance into a nārāyaṇa. At Shruff End he encounters the demons of his illusions and the shadows of 'causality' are worked out in his life. Here he suffers an automatic sort of punishment for his misuse of people.

Despite the theme of obsession and the enclosed atmosphere of the place where the story is enacted, the novel possesses a reasonable quality of openness. This can be mainly attributed to the ruminatively descriptive style of narration, a fairly realistic characterization of the protagonist and a large cast. Freedom of characterization which implies the
ability of the author to see them as separate persons with lives of their own is limited by the theme no doubt, but within this structure the Character of Charles Arrowby is portrayed with exceptional realism. What appears at first sight to be a stupidly unlikeable man whose behaviour is insufferable becomes artistically justified and well-sustained if we remember the premise of the book and the underlying moral theory which is being explored. His obsessive tracing and retracing is a natural outcome of the type of person he is supposed to be. Looked at from this angle, his character achieves a kind of reality. But the overall design of the novel debars him from acquiring a depth and a memorable stature.

Murdoch's moral theories sometimes work as a constraint on genuine life-like characterisation.

There are many other accidental characters in the novel who constitute Murdoch's idea of conveying the vastness of reality, and a substantial picture of the "manifold virtues of man and society." In spite of their particularised names like Gilbert Opian, Lizzie Scherer, Wilfred Dunning, they are unable to attain the roundness and concreteness of free characters. The descriptions of her characters are at times vague and conventionally bland. They fail to acquire a distinct identity. Titus, for example, is introduced with a description of "rather moist pinkness of his lips" which does not make a concrete picture of him.

Just as acceptance of contingency as a part of reality
is important for moral freedom and virtue, similarly portrayal of contingency is an important attribute of realism. But this is one aspect which is easier to describe in theory than to portray in practice. As usual, many contingent aspects of reality appear in a rather formulaic and manipulated manner. Here is an art which deals mainly with abstract metaphors of contingency. It is unable to make it appear natural and germane to the plot. The patterns of pebbles, for example, intend to convey a sense of contingency in nature, like Mrs. Tindham's 37 varieties of cats in Under the Net. But this seems to be artificially imposed. Again, when contingency is shown symbolically in the shape of monsters with open mouths and glistening teeth and their pink interior cavities or in the sea serpent with the aim of puzzling the hero out of orderly structuring of reality, it carries a quotient of disappointment for the reader.

The freedom which she has forever desired to give her characters, has always eluded them. Though they fulfill the requirements of the theme and move at times comfortably within a framework which has become increasingly more accommodating, yet they are not really free. Perhaps in a way this is justified, for total freedom is, according to Murdoch, a fantasy both in art as well as life. Freedom has to be limited freedom.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


4. Xenophon was a Greek historian and a follower of Socrates. He lived from 444-359 B.C. As a writer of prose he had a strong influence on Latin literature. His chief works are Anabasis, Hel lenica and Cyropaedia.


15. Elizabeth Dipple, p.287.

17. Elizabeth Dipple, p. 292.


20. James describes the Tibetan bardo as a place where "some Tibetans believed that the souls of the dead, while waiting to be reborn, wander in a sort of Limbo, not unlike the Homeric Hades. They called it bardo. It can be rather unpleasant. You meet all kinds of demons there..." It is a place of a just automatic sort of punishment. The learned ones regard these figures as subjective visions, which depend on the sort of life the dead man has led." (The Sea, The Sea, p. 304).