PREFACE

Iris Murdoch is a major contemporary British author whose novels have elicited a great deal of interest all over the world. A large number of critical essays and some full length books have been written on her. But apart from A.S. Byatt's examination of her early novels in the light of the concept of freedom, none of the later critics like Peter Wolfe, Frank Baldanza, Rubin Rabinovits, Elizabeth Dipple, Richard Todd or even Peter J. Conradi have made more than a passing reference to this central theme of Murdoch's novels. Even Byatt's book Degrees of Freedom is limited to the first seven novels. Perhaps Murdoch's own statement, made in an interview with W.K. Rose in 1968, that the theme of her work is love not freedom, was responsible for detracting the attention of writers from this subject.

The aim of this dissertation is to suggest that freedom is a continuing theme in her fiction. Unlike Byatt, whose book encompasses economic and social freedom as well, this study is basically concerned with moral, psychological and artistic freedom. It is centred upon personal relationships and involves the discovery of the reality of others. Murdoch places the highest value on the unique, precious, irreducible and unpredictable individual. But she pictures him in a society consisting of other independent and unique individuals. His liberty is, therefore, contingent upon that of others. Real
freedom implies understanding that others exist. It consists of taking them into account and conferring upon them an equal status.

This, of course, is a difficult task because man is essentially incapable of attending to the reality of others. Psychologically, his freedom is defined by his mental mechanism. He lives in a subjective, self-defensive, 'box-like' enclosure of his mind. His egocentric fantasy limits his vision. It breeds illusions that are like forms or myths imposed on reality. Most of the characters of her novels are seen working out their fantasy lives in terms of some suitable pattern. To be free entails an accurate vision of reality unencumbered by forms or patterns. Freedom also includes the acceptance of contingency within one's personality as well as that created by external chance factors. According to Murdoch, the ultimate aim in morals, as in literature, remains the same. The goal is to achieve objectivity which is but freedom from self-preoccupation and fantasy.

This dissertation is an attempt to study the tension between 'freedom' and 'form' in some of Murdoch's major novels. The aim is primarily to ascertain how far the characters succeed in arriving at the imaginative recognition of the reality of others and themselves by giving up the various forms created by obsessions, self-conceived dramatic roles or the images imposed on those with whom they come in contact.
with this theme are the basic human concerns of love, power, justice, death, truth and goodness. This study is only partly directed at observing to what extent the characters are made free from the author's hold and become "real human beings".

Murdoch is an extremely productive writer. It is difficult to do justice to all the 22 novels within the limits of my discussion. The choice is, therefore, confined to some of her representative novels. The publication of *The Nice and the Good* in 1968 can be considered a turning point in her career as a novelist. An effort has been made to include novels from the early and later periods, keeping in mind the two categories of the 'open' and the 'closed' forms. The purpose is to make a kind of comparative analysis of the various developments in her art and thematic concerns.

The first chapter is devoted to the study of concept of freedom and the image of man in the contemporary philosophical context. It also places the concept in the entire Murdochian philosophical and aesthetic scheme. The second chapter concentrates on the examination of her Gothic novel, *The Unnamed*. Although chronologically this is her seventh novel, it has been placed first in this dissertation, because of its unique character. Of all the novels included in this study, it is the only one which deals with a total lack of freedom in its theme and structure. It demonstrates how forms and myths created by fantasy can completely enslave and
curtail liberty. Structurally, it is a good example of a 'closed' novel in which there is no space for the free expansion of characters. The other chapters are concerned with novels where freedom is worked out in a positive direction. The conclusion sums up the kind of freedom that has been achieved both by the characters and the author.