Form is the great consolation of love, but it is also its great temptation.

Iris Murdoch in "The Sublime and the Good"

An Unofficial Rose (1962), like The Bell is an attempt at writing an 'open' novel. It displays the author's technical interest in nineteenth century realism and a sustained attempt to learn from writers like Tolstoy, Jane Austen, George Eliot and Henry James. One does not feel entirely convinced with A.S. Byatt's complaint that the fictional world of the novel is less accessible and less immediate to the imagination because of the "obtrusive presence of Henry James, and with him, of John Bayley's reading of the Golden Bowl of Jane Austen, and with her, of Lionel Trilling's reading of Mansfield Park." In fact, the influence of writers such as Henry James and Jane Austen has added a
a quiet strength to the realism of the novel. Economically centred around few characters and settings, it is aimed at presenting an image of life. In pursuance of this goal, she endeavours to make the social settings and the landscape naturalistic. It is one of her most Jamesian novels, muted in tone in which action is secondary to the reactions of the characters. Their minds and emotions are explored through the dramatised shifting point-of-view technique associated with James. The author deliberately effaces herself from the surface of the novel and refrains from obtrusive comments that may deflect the attention of the readers from the intensity and immediacy of the character's choice-making problems. An Unofficial Rose also exhibits Iris Murdoch's efforts to combine realism with a deft use of symbolism. Added to all this, is the usual philosophical dimension on which the novel works to explore the major concerns of freedom, form, choice-making, contingency and goodness.

The title of the book comes from "The Old Vicarage, Grantchester", a poem by the romantic poet Rupert Brooke. The title page carries an epigraph with a line from it. In this poem, the natural freedom of England where "unkempt about those hedges blows/An English Unofficial Rose" is favourably set against the disciplined and regimented life in Germany (in about 1912), where "roses bloom as they are told". The poem hinges on the conceit that nature in Germany is formally ordered, while in England it is gloriously free. To Rupert
Brooke, the English unofficial rose was the ultimate reality. He satirises the smugly ordered life of Grantchester. Grayhallock and Seton Blaise in *An Unofficial Rose* or the Imber Community in *The Bell* are examples of such places susceptible to the pressures of contingent reality. At the end of this novel, we find most of the characters moving away from Dungeness, as they do from the Imber Court in *The Bell*. Their departure signals the Murdochian truth that a patterned and insular living by mere rules and conventions is bound to disintegrate.

The 'rose' is one of the two central symbols of the novel. It is associated with Randall Paronett's nursery, a youthful project of his, devoted to the creation of new "floribundas" and "hybrid teas". These official roses, grown, cultivated and exhibited annually at Grayhallock are contrasted with the 'unofficial' dog-rose. This is the true rose, the miracle of nature possessing a natural beauty and a natural form. Less symmetrical in shape, it grows wild and contingent. It owes nothing to the hand of man. The cultivated official roses, on the other hand, are symbols of determinism and the human urge to impose a form on nature. It involves "the endless tormenting of nature to produce new forms and colours far inferior to the old." Randall's obsessive search for form in life is an outcome of the shapes he had engrafted on the roses. The aim of the novel is to demonstrate the superficiality of the factitious attractiveness of form, symbolised by the official rose and the moral need of accepting
the less appealing contingency, exemplified by the
'unnatural' rose.

The natural perfection of the rose is counterpoised
against the artistic perfection of the Tintoretto painting,
the other major symbol of the novel. The golden, serene and
authoritative painting of Susannah bathing, was bequeathed to
Hugh by his wife. It stands for beauty and artistic excellence
embodying a vision of perfection fused with a sense of reality.
It is both a source of capital (and thus potentially of power
and freedom) as well as an 'ironic presiding intelligence
viewing the characters.'

The Tintoretto and the roses are planted symbols
but they acquire a life of natural ones because of the way the
story is worked around them. The attitudes of Hugh, Randall
and Ann towards these symbols illuminate and expand their
characters. Hugh's marriage and the Tintoretto are inextricably
bound from the beginning. Therefore, later when the painting
becomes a part of the narrative mechanism, it is much better
embedded in our consciousness of the characters than the bell
in the earlier novel. It is not artificially clamped on us.
In the same manner, the roses are a natural part of the story
with a close relation to the lives of the main characters of
the novel.

The only planted symbol is the German dagger and
for this reason it fails to be integrated into the narration
and the theme of the story. Like the gipsy in *The Sandcastle*,
it remains unconvincing and superficial. The idea of savagery
and violence associated with it, is something thought out and
does not work by itself. The author appears to be bestowing
significance on it which cannot be easily linked with the
characters. Penn and Miranda with whose relationship the
symbol is associated are not present enough to be enlarged
by references to it. It is a substitute for their feelings and
does not deepen their characters.

Symbolism in this book is subordinate to the
humanistic element. It is a "liberal kind of a novel about
human relations," concerned with the way one person interacts
with another. The relationships are confined within family
units. In a world close to Jane Austen's novels, there are
two country estates with long established traditions of
gentility. These are situated about two hours from London
by car. The entire scene has a kind of peace and innocence
about it. On one estate stands the spacious country house
named Grayhallock, where three generations of Peronnett family
are living. Hugh, the grandfather, is a retired civil servant,
67 years old, who has led a highly conventional and a dull
life with a proper marriage and a proper career. The novel
opens with a rainswept vista of his wife Fanny's funeral. It
is attended by almost all the characters, relatives and
friends who figure in the story. Randall Peronnett, his son,
is a horticulturist with a "small genius", but has succeeded
in setting up a large and flourishing rose nursery. He later
abandons it when his marriage with Ann turns sour. They have
an adolescent daughter named Miranda. Their nephew, who has
come from Australia, is a visitor at Grayhallock. This "pathetic
elf" is in love with his cunning cousin, Miranda.

In the stately Mansion named Seton Blaise, on the
neighbouring estate, lives the Finch family. There has been an
easy going and long standing friendship between the two families,
Humphrey Finch is an old friend of Hugh. "An incident in
Narrakesh which even the British Foreign Service, with its
wide tolerance of eccentricity, could not overlook" (p.13),
had brought his career to an untimely end. He is now in love
with Penn Graham. His wife Mildred, on the other hand, had
for many years cherished romantic feelings for Hugh and always
figured that she would 'inherit' him on his wife's death. Her
younger brother, Colonel Felix Meecham is inarticulately in
love with Ann. He looks forward to marrying her after Randall's
withdrawal from Grayhallock with Lindsay Rimmer. But he is
unaware of young Miranda's feelings for him. Her guileful
machinations ultimately prevent her mother from finding
happiness with Felix, the only man who had loved her steadfastly.
Closely related to the Peronett family are the two Londoners,
Emma and Lindsay Rimmer. Emma, a writer of mystery fiction is
Hugh's erstwhile mistress. Twenty five years ago he had
deserted her in order to remain safely with his wife. After
Fanny's death he seeks to reverse time, in the manner of Charles
Arrowby in *The Sea, The Sea* by reestablishing some sort of relationship with her. Lindsay Rimmer, Emma's adventurous secretary and companion, is being courted by Randall who wants to marry her to escape from his dull, loveless life with Ann.

Interwoven with these love imbroglios of the old, the middle-aged and the adolescents, is the larger dimension of the theme of freedom, power and enchantment. The problem of moral freedom is initially investigated from within the existential context and as the character gains progressive clarity of vision, the reversal of the stance takes place. In this novel it is Hugh who achieves the kind of freedom associated with an improvement of vision. The existential quest for liberty with its insistence on withdrawal from society and on cutting off superficial ties with others is displayed in the dreams of Randall, Hugh and Penn. Each of these characters are dreamers and live in worlds of fantasy. They are enslaved and enchanted by those whom they love. By examining their ideas, Iris Murdoch intends to expose the deceptive quality of their longings and to highlight the meaning of real freedom and love.

In her earlier novels, particularly in *Under the Net* and *The Flight from the Enchanter*, the theme of freedom was worked out on the personal and social planes. Later, she focussed her attention entirely on freedom within personal relationships, concentrating on the theme of one person's power
and modification of another. Such relationships ignore the need of paying 'loving attention' to the reality of others. Trusting the existential assumption that they are free to know the world according to saw their images of it, they indulge in form making. We have seen how Jake Donaghue and Michael Meade in the previous novels foist patterns of their fantasy on others. Randall is afflicted by the same malady but the 'form' he is in search of, symbolizes the existential search for 'identity' 'being' or 'selfhood'. This is equally detrimental to the perception of the reality of others and himself.

The characters whose complex web of emotions and ideas are revealed through the point-of-view technique once again fall into the famous Murdochian classification of the 'Totalitarian' and the 'Ordinary Language Man'. To the first group representing 'neurosis' belong the rapacious or the violent characters like Randall, Lindsay, Emma Sands, Steve and Miranda. In the second group come the conventional or the good characters, Ann, Felix, Hugh and Fanny. How 'neurosis' and 'convention' work as the enemies of love and freedom we have already seen in The Bell. In An Unofficial Rose there is a certain amount of ambiguity about the character of Ann who not only represents 'convention' but is also symbolic of 'good'. It appears as if the author is arguing that 'convention' is at least better than 'neurosis' as it centres on the world outside the narrow shell of the neurotic self.
This novel is Murdoch's first sustained attempt to study the relationship between freedom and good.

Randall Peronett, who can be designated as the hero of the novel, is the major victim of 'neurosis'. It drives him to forsake his wife, daughter and a stable marriage for an empty idea of freedom that turns out to be but a kind of enslavement. As a horticultural student at the Reading university, Randall had studied rose culture. Later, he practised this art in the Peronett nursery by developing myriads of prize-winning roses. As a result of his painstaking work, patience and skill, he produced a series of new well-known roses "by which the name of Peronett would be remembered" (p.27). Being an artist, the eternal false "form-making figure" and a lover of beauty, Randall worshipped the chaste and perfect form of the roses. His passionate love for them is vividly portrayed in chapter 22 when he goes on a secret visit to Grayhallock before his final break with Ann. The entire visit is seen through his eyes. As he stands completely entranced by the vision of a large number of roses in bloom, it occurs to him:

There were moments when he knew that he loved nothing in the world so much as he loved these roses; and that he loved them with a love of such transcendent purity that they made him, for the moment like to themselves. He could have knelt before these flowers, wept before them, knowing them to be not only the most beautiful things in existence but the most beautiful things conceivable. God in his dreams did not see anything lovelier. Indeed the roses were God, and Randall worshipped (p.213).
To his mind, the formal perfection of the hybrid roses with their compact patterns was the most desirable of all things. It was his version of what Roquentin in *La Nausée* found in the jazz song of the negress i.e. a self-contained perfection from which the impurity and contingency of existence is driven out. The cultivated symmetry and the beauty of the roses accentuates his frustration in not finding the same excellence in real life and his marriage. His irritable fits of depression, recourse to liquor and the final desertion of Ann are all evidence of the "whining discontent" with his wife's lack of 'form'. He complains bitterly: "I need a different world, a formal world. I need form,... something to encounter, something to make me be. Form, as this rose has it. That's what Ann hasn't got. She's as messy and flabby and open as a bloody dogrose. That's what gets me down. That's what destroys all my imagination, all the bloody footholds" (p.37). In his opinion, she is a destroyer and the incarnate spirit of the negative. Without the presence of a 'form' in her he finds nothing in her to encounter; no force or resistance that could have given him a pass to perfected identity. Ultimately he recoils from her and looks for it elsewhere. His aspiration of 'form' as a refuge from the formlessness of becoming, is a trail left behind by the successful imposition of a designed pattern on the roses. He forgets that form in art is one thing, but trying to look for it in the messiness of human world is another. It is not only a frustrating search, but is also
morally wrong. Iris Murdoch sees in his dislike and fear of the "real, existing, messy world", full of "real, existing messy" people, a symptom of lack of love and tolerance.

His marriage defines for him a muddy immersion in a false state of affairs - a state of bad faith, It is a kind of trap/wants to escape from. Like Nor in The Sandcastle, he searches for freedom from this dull, lifeless wedlock, in a torrid love-affair with a younger woman. His need for a different and formal world entices him to enter into a strange relationship with Lindsay Rimmer and Emma. For him they appear to be the symbols of freedom, will and intelligence, in other words, whose lives possess a form. He finds in Lindsay a strongly well defined self and personality. "She was shapely and complete, and like a kaleidoscope, like a complex rose, her polychrome being fell into an authoritative pattern which proclaimed her free" (p. 73). By entering into her world, he thought, he would be lifted into the airy world of imagination denied by Ann's anonymity and negativeness.

Randall's love for Lindsay is a kind of romantic fantasy. Such a love is dangerous because of its extreme self-centredness. The lover feels that everything in the world has gone away to the other person and a spell of enchantment is cast on him. Enchantment had come over him, violently and suddenly. "This falling in love was he felt, the best thing he had ever done. It had that absolute authority which seems
to put an act beyond the range of right and wrong" (p.69).

Lindsay is a figure created by this condition. She is an image of man's immemorial sexual fantasies like Jake's golden vision of Anna. Randall visualises her as a princesse lontaine, guarded by Emma and his solipsistic gaze fails to 'see' her real character. "Gold" and its cognate "golden" frequently describe anything associated with her. His "vast and annihilating beatific vision" of her constitutes of a "golden consciousness". They meet in a "golden afternoon sunlight" and her head is crowned with "pale, metallic golden hair." Anything 'golden' in Murdoch's novels is liable to be dangerous as it is associated with fantasy.11

Financial freedom was required to provide him with an opportunity to leave for Rome with this dream figure. His father assists him though not entirely on unselfish grounds. Hugh sells his 'golden dream', the Tintoretto to purchase a fantasy of freedom for his son and himself. He enables his son to make the choice he could not make himself twenty years earlier. But on receiving the cheque for a substantial amount, Randall's feelings are mixed up. It appeared as if he had made a "symbolic assassination of his father". The sense of liberation too, seemed to be vacuous and directionless as a dream. "It was as if he had grown to some enormous size and at the same time everything solid, every resistance had been removed. He floated on the air like a huge undirected balloon" (p.195).
The freedom he had bargained for by leaving the solidity of his life at Grayhallock, can at best be described as deceptive. He had romantically figured his flight as a perfect image of freedom:

To be alone with Lindsay in Rome and to be rich seemed to constitute the very peak and essence of unimpeded activity. He had a little reckoned without his mind; and although he told himself that he would change...he had not yet...quite put off the bad old self. He worried” (p.303).

His chief worry is connected with Emma’s role in his relationship with Lindsay. He could not get her out of his mind. Moreover, he had imagined Emma and Lindsay to be living high up in a region of perfect freedom or a sort of paradise of imagination. He had been prepared to commit any crime in order to emulate their mode of being. But somehow the heights of the "immaculate condition", he had wanted to reach with Lindsay as a perfect consort, are never reached. Instead of being free, he becomes her slave. She is the boss and the stronger of the two. She, who had been a slave of Emma is now privileged to be in a dominating position. In fact, neither Emma nor Lindsay can be exactly described as ‘free’, for according to Simone Weil whose ideas are endorsed by Murdoch, a master must give up his own freedom to ensure the captivity of his slave;

"Man is a slave in so far as between action and its effect, between effort and the finished work, there is the interference of alien wills.”12 No one not even the powerful can fully own his actions. Emma’s alien will interferes in
Randall's sense of achieved freedom. She plays the role of a powerful mysterious 'god' in his life. A person of inscrutable individuality, she manages to steal the actions he had deemed his own free acts. It is later revealed to him that she had a secret agreement with Lindsay over him. She had left her 'snail's traces' even on Grayhallock. Randall resents this threat to his supremacy. In an anguished attempt to bolster his self-importance and freedom, he tells her:

"Don't pretend that it's you who had done this. It is I who have done it" (p. 202). But the bizarre relationship between his beloved and Emma delivers the first jolt to his conviction of a self-willed freedom. The relationship between the two is excellently handled and Emma succeeds as Randall's rival conquering him through his own fear.13

Randall is not free in the sense in which Jake and Michael Meade are at the end of the novel. To reach at their condition requires the ability to transcend one's self-awareness to a degree that permits penetration into the reality of others. It also involves breaking through the patterns and forms created by one's fantasy. Randall is not shown as having freed himself in this manner. He glimpses the daylight of reality but only through chinks in his armour. "A number of things, seemingly unrelated, contributed to there being in his attempted pattern, significant gaps" (p. 303). One of such gaps pertains to his earlier apprehension of Lindsay. He soon becomes conscious that his moon-goddess does not measure up to
the glorious image he had constructed of her. Instead of the heavenly Venus he had imagined, he gains Venus Anadyomene, an earthly Venus. This artificial Lindsay resembles Madge and Sadie of Under the Net. He detects with disapproval her lack of interest in Italian art. Her deceit is noticeable in the various versions she gave of her childhood. But these flaws, he thinks, only detract the "tiniest bit from her grace" (p. 302).
He deliberately glosses over her vulgarity. Turning his face away from where reality lay, he indulges in a continual fantasy of love making. Another 'gap' he discerns is in himself. He realises that he could never be a successful play wright. The only task he knows he was good at, was raising of roses. But at this stage the roses have thorns and he is not prepared to go back to them.

Ann alone remains steady in his mind. She represents a reality and a virtue as opposed to his greatly structured fantasy. But the power of this image had been broken.

Ann's tyranny was broken, her dead hand was gone....Perhaps this and only this was what Lindsay was for, to free him from Ann....Ann's awareness of him had vanished, it was nothing. By passing through extremity, by committing the final crimes, he had freed himself forever of any concern about what Ann thought (p. 306).

However, like Nor's wife Nan in The Sandcastle, Ann is real and normal to him. The 'connection' in a marriage, which is a reality in itself, cannot be easily overlooked. Very early in the novel he speaks of being hideously connected with her.
"It's odd how the connection survives any real relationship" (p. 118),
His mind refuses to be cleared of the picture of the sunny hillside at Grayhallock, covered with roses and Ann standing amongst them. This gainsays the norm of the existential Luciferian adventures of the will and its undaunted insistence on breaking ties with others. Ties even after they are broken still exist, spelling out the unfreedom of man. As the novel ends Randall appears to be on the verge of repeating his father's action of returning to a second best but secure relationship with Ann.

Randall is no more than a polemical sketch. His need of 'form' is backed by the knowledge of existentialist philosophy and is not made visible in his character. Therefore, all the time we feel that the author is trying to convey something deeper, something unrelated to his actions, something which remains an abstraction and does not acquire a viable structure. A.S. Byatt, while criticizing the characterization in the novel, points at this lack of lived-in quality. "...one is being told things, not shown them, not given them; we are constantly told, for instance that Emma is 'dark, perhaps twisted', that Randall 'needs form' or is 'violent'; but in the novel these things have no life." The author fails to attend to the reality of Randall as he is oblivious to the real Ann.

Hugh Randall is another character attracted by the misleading mirage of freedom. He can, in a way, be considered the central character of the novel. Like his son he is in
love with an enchantress Emma Sands, whom years earlier he had abandoned for reasons which are still not very clear to him. Perhaps it was for pure convention that he had sacrificed what had then appeared to be a marvel. Perhaps the considerations of job, status and lack of money were in his mind. May be some "demons of morality" forced him to remember his marriage and wife. But this sacrifice had never appeared to hold much significance to him. It never released any great store of spiritual energy. He had in fact, spent years of resentment against Fanny until the dull, resigned companionship had reduced their marriage to a hollow frame. Emma keeps on magnetically existing in his mind.

On the other hand, Emma had turned to writing detective stories with highly formal plots to assuage the sorrows caused by Hugh's neglect. She never married but dedicated her life to art rather than to the reality of persons. The solitary projection of herself as the centre of moral values soon deprives her of the gift of normal human relationships. She indulges in lesbianism, beats her secretaries, elevating herself to Heidegger's "liberated individual" who prefers brutalised personal relations. Hugh, who was responsible for her solipsistic lonely world, is made to feel its sting most strongly when he tries to pick up the precious pieces of the old love after Fanny's death. He sells the Tintoretto in an effort to redeem the past. By giving a portion of the money
to Randall, he wants to remove Lindsay from the scene and to make Emma more accessible. But Emma demonstrates her inability to enter into a candid and normal relationship with Hugh. She tells him:

Let it be some innocent dream love, a courtly love, something never realized all dreams. And Penn shall be our symbolic child. And you can telephone me and send me flowers. It will be quite like seventeen again. Won't that be youth enough, restoration enough, redemption enough? (p.313)

She settles for an illusion of romance but sets Hugh free. Hugh is the only one who manages by the end of the novel to acquire some degree of freedom. In the final recognition of the meaning of the past and that the days spent with Fanny had been good, he learns how to face the actuality of life. If freedom consists in the ability to imagine the distinct being of others and acceptance of their contingency, then Hugh has certainly gained it. He learns to look at Fanny as an individual, unmerged with the Tintoretto, something which he had not done before. He sees her not as a resented wife but as a woman who possessed gentleness of spirit and self-respect. He saw in her a "dignity which she had all along but had kept humbly lowered like a dipped flag or a crumpled crest" (p.333). He feels glad for having stayed with her till her death. Thinking of his dead wife, is a process that ends in renewed love and this brings him to a level of realistic understanding which no other character in the novel attains.

Hugh also realizes that the early idea of freedom
with Emma had been an illusion. He knows it was better to leave her alone, for it was impossible to redeem the past:

They had fashioned their own destinies and had of necessity become dream figures to each other, and there was no violence of action, no feverish grasping and flinging back of the years, which could alter that now....She was, he felt, beyond him; and his humility contained its own flat cheerfulness. As he dropped his hands in resignation he felt something akin to relief. After all he had doubtless, in the old days, turned her down for some good reasons (p.332).

He rejects Emma and in doing so escapes the enslavement that Randall had not been able to avoid. His position with regards to morals is half way between that of Randall and Ann. Like them, he is offered his moment of liberty from his marriage to choose for a more alluring romantic love. But unlike Randall and like Ann, he rejects his freedom for not much apparent reason. Perhaps in his unknowingness lies his goodness. Perhaps like her, his entire being compelled him in this direction, proving Murdoch's belief that freedom does not lie in rational choices but is an obedience to a correct moral vision.

Hugh survives by taking life as it comes by submitting to the contingent present and obeying the necessity of the situation. Viewed from a narrow angle, one can be tempted for a moment to agree with Ernest Buckler's comment that "in the end each character settles almost comfortably, for something less than his original dream. The recurrent catchword is: People survive." But that would be to underestimate not only the same moral perspective of the novel, but also the note of
optimism on which it ends. Hugh's departure for India with Mildred, symbolises an optimistic acceptance of the present moment in all its inscrutable reality. A similar desire is echoed by Bradley Pearson in The Black Prince when he forswears living in the past or the future. On board the ship he muses:

His consciousness was a tenuous and dim receptacle and it would soon be extinct. But meanwhile there was now the wind and starry night and the great erasing sea. And ahead there was India and the unknown future, however brief.... Perhaps he had been confused, perhaps he had understood nothing but he had certainly survived. He was free (p.334).

The theme of freedom and enslavement is also played out in a minor sub-plot, ranging around the adolescents, Penn and Miranda. Penn on a visit to England imagines himself free from parental authority. But soon his romantic delusions make him the victim and slave of his cousin Miranda, the frighteningly efficient enchantress. He pictures himself as a disciple of courtly love and a slave of this moon-goddess, for whom he could do any service. This abject love is an illusory idealisation. He had yet to learn the meaning of real impersonal love. "He must learn, he realized to live in the real world with Miranda" (p.241).

The tendency to be conventional is equally harmful as 'neurosis'. Convention drives Hugh not to forsake his wife when she was alive. Convention again supremely drives Randall's wife Ann, the "unofficial rose" of the title. In her we find a willingness to accept the opinions of others, to conform to
social niceties, and an unreflective observance of rules and conventions. Randall finds her conformity to rules depressing. "Ann lives by rules and her acts don't have places, they don't belong anywhere" (p. 119), he complains. Self-withholding and shy, she had never really known what she actually wants. The idea of doing what she ought had been deeply implanted in her soul, removing all possibility of any self-regarding movement of the will. This has resulted in what Randall describes as an open, formless life and a monochromatic personality which he and his daughter do not appreciate. Miranda describes her as an anonymous, faceless, shapeless, directionless mass.

Ann's adherence to duty engenders a negative attitude in most of her actions. Such an attitude is limited and overlooks the variegated spectacle of the world of events and people. It ignores the vista of choices open to it. By being absorbed in functions and duties she has, in the Sartrean terms, lost sight of herself. Her virtues consist of those attitudes that would have been condemned by him for being tainted with bad faith and viscosity. Ann is aware of her limitations: "I am always saying no... all my strength has to go into saying no. I have no strength left for the positive" (pp. 129-30).

She declines Randall's request for a divorce because the stubborn unreflective adherence to Anglicanism did not allow her to believe that her marriage was at a dead-end. Her concept of marriage relied strongly on habit, convenience, religious law and not so much on love. Douglas Swann, the
village pastor tries to show her the importance of love. But she refuses Felix Meeham, the only person who loved her and would have provided her a warm relationship.

Ann is Iris Murdoch's symbol of goodness in whom she explores the nature of moral life. She is a truthful, non-fantasizing person. Frank Baldanza describes her as a kind of saint figure and Elizabeth Dipple proves that she is a character of unconscious good. The quality of goodness in her can be compared to that of Adam Verber and Maggie in Henry James' The Golden Bowl. Like Maggie, Ann rejects her "immediate impulses and the desire for knowledge, and finds in the refuge of convention and deliberate 'ignorance', salvation both for herself and for others." Ann's good is a state of unconsciousness and deliberate ignorance. 'Knowingness' in Murdochian and Bayley's terms is a force opposed to love. Ann realises in the end that for her, not knowing was better than knowing. To be understood is not a human right, and that includes even oneself. "Not to know was best, to forget was best", she feels (p.326). The contrast can be seen in the intelligent knowing complicity of consciousness in the relationship between Randall and Lindsay and the unawareness of Ann who refuses even to imagine or know what Randall does when he is away from Grayhallock. The loving acceptance and the unthinking quality in her is accompanied by a refusal to blame or hate others to the extent of even becoming a scapegoat. When Randall accuses her for Steve's death, she thinks that if
others wanted to blame someone, she could make a "vacuum into which their blame ran" (p. 127). In a way she is the 'non-powerful' pure being who only suffers and does not attempt to pass the suffering on.²²

Her rejection of Felix's love is a rejection of a potential freedom. Faced with a kind of choice requiring an act of will she fails to assert herself. Like Hugh, she cannot explain the reason but she does not break free, partly due to Miranda's wilful interference and partly due to her conventional mode of being. Believing in the value of the renunciation of self and crucifixion of one's selfish desires, she feels that loving and marrying Felix would amount to self-gratification. In the last part of the book, after being unable to make a rational self-willed choice, she prefers to stay at Grayhallock probably to keep the lamp burning for Randall. To her, the return to a state of unconsciousness was a better alternative to her love for Felix which would have been "rational and beautiful and free." It appears as if her "whole life had compelled her" (p. 320) to take this decision proving that the ties of duty, habit, loyalty and affection are stronger than the dream of freedom. In the working of Ann's uncomplicated selfless nature, Murdoch has tried to demonstrate the flimsiness of the existentialist faith in rational choices and conscious decisions.

The question which vexes most readers is, why she
had not broken free instead of remaining enslaved to an empty form of marriage. Although Murdoch has created an impression of ambiguity about the whole issue, yet to a certain extent, she appears to have set out to prove the point that has been dealt with in her article "On 'God' and 'Good'". She writes: "What we really are seems much more like an obscure system of energy out of which choices and visible acts of will emerge at intervals in ways which are often unclear and often dependent on the condition of the system in between the moments of choice."23 This obscure system throws light on the mechanism of Ann's choosing. Far from being needle thin and clear as the existentialists claim, the psyche which operates at moments of choice is as large as a landscape.

In Ann's final situation, Iris Murdoch echoes the definition of freedom and virtue with its emphasis on 'vision' rather than 'movement'.

In an interview with Ruth Boyd, Murdoch suggests that although Ann may have been a prisoner of her nature, she is like Kierkegaard's knight of faith, who comes in the disguise of a tax-gatherer.24 She renounces an alluring love but in doing so gains spiritually. A muddled acceptance of things as they are, may show a masochistic or a lazy nature but it also points the right direction to those who aspire for moral advancement and freedom. In fact, all the ambiguity surrounding Ann's goodness can be attributed to the fact that like Maggie in The Golden Bowl, she is shown as human and to be human is to
be virtually unknown. Her goodness is incomplete and questionable like any ordinary person's. She resides in the world of practical affairs forever beset by incompleteness and lack of form. Douglas Swann tries to apprise her of her positive goodness, the manner in which the author apprehends of it although his arguments stem from a religious rather than a secular bias. When Ann protests that her love for Randall is 'imperfect' and she herself is shapeless and awkward he tells her:

Shapeless and awkward... Precisely. We must not expect our lives to have a visible shape. They are invisibly shaped by God. Goodness accepts the contingent. Love accepts the contingent. Nothing is more fatal to love than to want everything to have form (p. 130).

He condemns Randall with magisterial severity for desiring to have a form and considers it a sign of unmanliness. "He is a man before he is an artist", he says (p. 130).

Ann's character is not given a resonance and life which could have made her a convincing central figure of the novel. She is the only 'good' character who is at the hub of the book and to whom so much of importance has been attached as is obvious from the title. To place a good character who by nature lacks structure and form in such a dominant position, is to make the novel lack in a strong and vital centre. Iris Murdoch generally merges her 'good' characters in the peripheral areas of the novel because their self-denial and negativity make them a trifle insipid.25
Ann's virtues are not completely enacted. We are
told about Ann's devotion to her husband, her sharp business
acumen, her love for Fanny whom she had nursed before her
death and also of the commendable role she plays in the village
affairs. But all the while various categories of actions are
being pointed out to us without being illustrated in particular
experiences. We are made to understand her, never shown or
acquainted with her. In the crucial points of the novel, e.g.
her mourning for Fanny, Randall's quarrel, and departure, the
discovery of Miranda's scheming action, or Felix's proposal,
hers reactions are completely unconvincing and impotent.

The only scene where her inner conflict is made
vividly clear is when she has to make a choice between her
desire for Felix and her usual lassitude. It is here that the
details of the fumbling obscurity of Ann's choice is illustrated
with all psychological minuteness. This vivid and penetrating
analysis of her mind in chapter 22 is remarkably portrayed
perhaps because Murdoch's enthusiasm in proving her philosophical
point has been brought to work forcefully in this description.
That is the only occasion when Ann can be seen sympathetically
by us.

In a novel which demands real and solid people for
its sustenance, most of the important characters fall short of
the ideal. The "reader's desire for credibility is imposed
upon."

Hugh Peronett, the sixty-seven year old widower, with
an unforgivable lack of perceptiveness for those close to him, is too blurred to be the central figure in uniting the strands of the family destiny. Randall is so abstractly portrayed and oozes with so much of self pity that it is difficult to sympathise with him (Perhaps the author does not want us to do so). Felix Meecham with his straight-laced military attitude and Miranda in all her precocity are equally insipid and unconvincing.

Iris Murdoch has laboured hard to efface herself from the surface of the novel and to free her characters by presenting the narrative through their points of view. However, what she achieves in this quarter, proves a loss in another. Her conscious disappearance from the matter in hand has been at the cost of the sense of life. They have become lifeless figures. Though free, they are not really free. The feeling of a unifying presence of a delighted imagination displayed in Shakespeare and Tolstoy or in The Bell, has been lost in this novel.

An Unofficial Rose possesses a kind of realism and openness that does not pertain to the creation of life-like characters. The realism it achieves is of a naturalistic kind, particularly revealed in the description of certain scenes. The brilliant cameo of the rose covered hillock is one such example. The psychological expertise with which Mildred's moral muddle, Hugh's thoughts at his wife's funeral or Ann's
wavering unclear nature is portrayed, are all instances of vivid realistic descriptions. The greatest flaw, however, of the novel is that it lacks a complex emotional depth that could have only been achieved through the medium of well imagined free characterization.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


   All further page references are to this edition of the novel and are incorporated parenthetically in the text.


7. See Granville Hicks, "The Operations of Love", Saturday Review, 45, 19 May 1962, p. 32.


14. Venus or Aphrodite is the Greek goddess of love. The elder Venus is described as the daughter of Zeus and
The younger Venus is the offspring of Uranus, born from the foam of the sea. She first stepped on land in Cyprus and was called Anadyomene or "she who came out of the sea".


24. The Knight of Faith figures in Soren Kierkegaard's *dialectical book Fear and Trembling*. He is contrasted with the Knight of Infinite Desperation, who like an ancient stale or the Romantic hero, believes in renunciation of everything without any hope of ever getting it back. He lives in the infinite and forswears the finite. The Knight of Faith gives up everything like him but at the same time believes he will gain it back in the end. He renounces the infinite yet continues to live in it. Whereas the former is incommeasurable with everyday bourgeois life, the Knight of faith has nothing extraordinary about him. He looks like a "tax collector" and acts like him, Robert Bostall (ed), *Kierkegaard Anthology* (New Jersey : Princeton Univ. Press, 1946), p.117.

25. Elizabeth Dipple illustrates this point very well in Chapter XIII, "Unconscious Good and The Success of Evil", of her book *Work For The Spirit*, pp.36-79.

26. Leonard Kriegal, p.73.