CHAPTER SEVEN

Myths and Symbols

A literary symbol is clearly an embodiment of something indefinable. As the spirit or vital principle occupies our bodies and shines out, so thoughts and feelings occupy the form, shape or body which we call symbol. A symbol represents unexpressed references and condensed meaning. Symbols are the token that represent a particular idea or thought. It has something indeterminate a mystery that escapes our intellect. Thus a symbol at once reveals or conceals some thing. The literary symbol embodies awareness and it is always pregnant with meaning. Every symbol is particular in feeling and equality since it is a habit of human thought, which is likely to differ with every individual.

The term myth is concerned with traditional tale containing beliefs about ancient times or natural events and usually involving supernatural beings. Myths are stories that narrate in an imaginative and symbolic manner the total and basic structures upon which a culture rests. The myth may appear to be fantastic and bizarre, because the mythic story cannot be delineated in the terms of the ordinary conventions of the culture. In fact, the ordinary conventions of the culture are understood as having their origins in the myth. The term mythology is concerned with certain body of myths, for
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instance Greek, African and Scandinavian or it may refer to the study of myths.

Myths provide an understanding of the beings, personages and actions in a particular period of time and are often merge into legends, sagas, and tales. Studies of myth might seek to locate in the origin of these stories expressions of human psychic structure or consider them as a collective societial response to the mystery of life. Myths may be classified according to the dominant theme expressed in the narrative. Some of the most important themes treated in myths are creations and origins, the birth of gods and divine being, death and the alter life, and the renewal and rebirth of the world.

Symbols and myths represent a particular role in post war literature. In a realistic novel these are always casually related to their meaning and importance. All human lives are somehow determined by indefinable principles, which operate outside the domain of cause and effect, but which have a hidden meaning that manifests it in external phenomena. The symbolic novel draws its image from the realm of religion and myth. These two realms provide an authoritative interpretation of the symbol through the belief, or at least a memory of that belief, that genuinely links meaning and images.

'We live in myth and symbol all the time,' Murdoch has remarked in a review'. Murdoch admits furthermore to a personal myth which informs her work, but we can ultimately only guess at its authines^2. Murdoch uses her dominant narrative symbols to explore the resources of her creativity. Her
writing can be read (in Elaine Showalter's terms) as "a double-voiced discourse, containing a "dominant" and a "muted" story, what Gilbert and Gubar call a "Palimpsest" where 'The orthodox plot recedes, and another plot, hither to submerged in the anonymity of the background, stands out in bold relief like a thumb print.'

The novels of Iris Murdoch represent a rich and complex body of mythic material. Murdoch proclaims that we are prone to live in myth and symbol, that "we're all constantly inventing symbolic images to express our situation." Murdoch's richly brief works support this statement, but it should be noted for Murdoch, as a literary realist, resists symbolic readings of her novels. It is worth mentioning, that Murdoch's view of myth does not include the Jungian concept of typical forms embedded in some kind of racial consciousness. She does not intend to use myth to impose form and thereby transcend contingency as she sees the modernists' doing. Murdoch considers myth as the product of the obsessive, fantasy-making operations to the deluded and deluding ego and should be situated within the consciousness of characters. Such kind of mythmaking activity can be seen in the novels that contain first person narrator-novels like Under the Net, A Severed Head, The Black Prince and The Sea, the Sea. Murdoch is aware that myth shelters dangers for the artist too and she understands her own inclinations to myth making. Murdoch has often commented on the fact that mythic structures can become capable of drawing characters "into a sort of spiral, or into a kind of form which ultimately is the form of one's own mind,"
she cites *A Severed Head* as one instance where she has given herself to myth.\(^6\)

The term myth, as John Cruickshank points out in his book on Albert Camus, has become very popular as a critical term, in a rather vague way. Cruickshank delineates the roman-mythe as follow:

*There has .... existed, to some extent in the theatre
bur more strikingly in the novel, an attempt to create
'contemporary myth'. A great imaginative effort has
been made to put into fiction situations and plots
which do not simply deal with some universal human
trait but are meant to express universal truth about
man's situation in the world. The search for myth is
closely linked with the increasingly metaphysical
aspirations of the French novel. The myth has
provided a means whereby men of letters have taken
over the role of commentators on human destiny – a
role which professional philosophers once regarded
as their own but now seem largely to have abandoned
in favour of linguistics and logical analysis.\(^7\).*

The term roman-mythe used by Cruickshank appears variously and loosely; It will sometimes means an allegorical novel, sometimes a symbolist novel, sometimes any novel which adds a metaphysical dimension to the
world by event it represents. The novels of Murdoch could certainly be called roman-mythe; none of them are precisely allegorical. Therefore, her novels can in some sense be delineated as symbolist and tend to assimilate a metaphysical dimension to the events they delineate.

Murdoch's remarks about the evolving of a 'satisfactory myth' and its relation to the problem of the novel seem against Cruickshank picture of Camus' views on the use of myth and symbol in the novel. Murdoch represents a satisfactory framework within which to consider the structure of her novels in general and their use of symbolism in particular.

We may turn at last to what finally differentiates art from life, the question of form. Form is the temptation of love and its peril, whether in art or life: to round of a situation, sum up a character. But the difference is that art has got to have form, whereas life need not. And artist both dreads and longs for the approach of necessity, the moment at which form irrevocably crystallizes. There is a temptation for any novelist and one to which, if I am right, modern novelists yield too readily, to imagine that the problem of a novel is solved and the difficulties overcome as soon as a form in the sense of a satisfactory myth has been evolved. But that is only the beginning. There is then the much more difficult battle to prevent that form
from becoming rigid, by the free expansion against it of individual characters. A novel must be a house fit for free characters to live in; and to combine form with a respect for reality with all its odd contingent ways is the highest art of Prose.⁸

Therefore Murdoch employed the word 'myth' in the sense of a coherent narrative pattern, with its 'metaphysical dimension' concerned probably with symbols to its events. It should be noted that Murdoch's own novels in terms of her own description of the ideal relation of form to free character, therefore, regarding to her work it might be possible to differentiate 'fantasy myth' from the symbolic novel—and to put the first two books in the category of fantasy myth proper, The Sandcastle, The Bell, and An Unofficial Rose certainly as symbolic novels with A Severed Head, The Unicorn, The Black Prince and The Sea the Sea coming somewhere in between.

Murdoch, in her critical articles particularly emphasizes on the shape of her novel, wants to convey reality and believes quite enough respect to form. In her delineations of symbols and symbolism, she considers the symbols to be essentially self-contained. The symbols to have a small, clean, resonant, self contained quality, to have the uniqueness and separateness of an individual. She thinks the real individual is boundless and not completely definable, and the symbol is known intuitively to be self-contained. She says :-
Reality is not a given whole. An understanding of this, a respect for the contingent, is essential to imagination as opposed to fantasy. Our sense of form, which is an aspect of our desire for consolation, can be a danger to our sense of reality as a rich receding background. Against the consolations of form, the clear crystalline work, the simplified fantasy-myth, we must pit the destructive power of the now so unfashionable naturalistic idea of character.

Real people are destructive of myth, contingency is destructive of fantasy, and opens the way for imagination. Think of the Russians, those great master of the contingent. Too much contingency of course may turn out into journalism. But since reality is incomplete, art must not be too afraid of incompleteness.⁹

The first two novels of Murdoch *Under the Net* and *The Flight from the Enchanter* represent her concept of 'fantasy myth'. Both represent unreal actions; events happen with fantastic ease of suddenness. Murdoch has employed the settings, which are deliberately strange, the canvas is large, and all the characters in each novel are related as concept to some central philosophical theme. *Under the Net* conveys a philosophical myth-possessing the question, how do we realize reality, what is real in our experience?
Therefore, the characters in this novel are grouped round this notion; Hugo Belfounder is shown with his simple nostalgia for the particular. Dave represents his logical analysis of world and rigid religious moral philosophy hefty is concerned with his subjection of everything to political expediency. Anna experiences reality through 'Pure' or 'impure' art and her sister Sadie uses other people herself. The novel is concerned with the contrasted worlds of business and art, silence and speech, isolation and society.

Murdoch's next novel *The Flight from the Enchanter* too represents a mythical framework which is around the enigmatic figure of Mischa Fox, a wealthy and powerful mover and shaker in London. Misha Wields power, cluster all the other characters, who are varying degree, wielders or victims of power themselves. The novel conveys the planning, the deliberate arrangement which is apparent throughout the book. The novel can indeed be called fantasy myth, a powerful bitterly amusing social myth of modern times representing its own terms and psychological explanations of cruelty, misunderstanding and social insecurity. The novel is a complete and amusing and moving meditation on modern freedom and slavery. *The Flight From the Enchanter* is different from Murdoch's other novels for its brilliant hurry, its intricacies of symbols and repeating actions.

In both novels events have been described moving, both as part of the myth in themselves. Through out *Under the Net* Jake the narrator shows a great warmth and life and involves the reader emotionally. Jake can be considered interesting because of his precision and enthusiasm with which he
describes his reactions – to Anna in the theatre, to lefty in the pub, to the
problem of work and to Hugo’s final revelations. The other characters of the
novel can be seen like caricatures move like dream figures through the story
but Jake’s understanding of them provides them, within the myth, more than a
mosaic reality.

The realization of London as a whole city is an element of reality in the
novel, which prevents the fantasy from being simply brittle. This is deliberately
conveyed within, the myth, and it may be said that the contingent reality of
London, is set against the romantic unreality of Paris. London has been
delineated in a vivid style – mansions, pubs, buses, bridges, bombed churches and Thames represent an exact picture of the real London. The
elements of reality are also visible in The Flight From the Enchanter, which
hold the reader and prevent him from enjoying it merely for the intellectual
pleasure of understanding the pattern. This pattern is arguably most real in a
more exclusive sense in the case with Under the Net. Neither the characters
nor the settings and events in The Flight from the Enchanter, are so closely
related to actuality as in Under the Net.

The recurrent symbols can be seen within fantasy-myth, the whole
action of Under the Net is symbolic at its most important level. It is about the
search for truth, social, moral and aesthetic. The Flight from the Enchanter
represents the predatory aspects of power and love in society. The Flight
from the Enchanter is pervaded by image of traps and hunts, machines
which savage their slave (Nina’s swing machine, Calvin Blick’s Camera), fish
tangled with fruit bushes. A wire cage covered an area in the corner and there was a glint of glass. A haze hung over the luxuriant scene and it seemed hotter than ever within the garden. Disciplined fruit trees were spread-eagled along every wall, their leaves curling in the heat. Dora and Mrs Mark began to walk alone one of the paths, the dried up spiky fingers of raspberry came catching at their clothes.

'Why there's Catherine', said Mrs Mark. She's picking the apricots'.

They came towards her. A large string net of small mesh had been thrown over a section of the wall to protect the fruits from the birds. Behind the net Catherine was to be seen, almost lost in the foliage of the tree, dropping the golden fruit into a wide basket at her feet. She wore a floppy white sun hat under which her dark hair straggled in a long knot, hazy with wisps and tendrils, which hung down between her shoulder-blades. She was intent on her labour and did not see Dora, and Mrs Mark until they had come very close. Her dark head, thrown back beneath the powdery glow of the hanging apricots, looked to Dora Spanish, and again beautiful. Her averted face,
without the nervous self protective look which it were
in company, seemed stronger, more dignified, and
more sad.

Hello, Catherine! said Mrs Mark loudly. I've brought
Dora to see you'.

Catherine jumped and turned around, looking startled.

What a jittery creature she is, Dora thought. She
smiled and Catherine smiled back at her through the
Net (TB, pp. 71-2)

The image of the fruit garden represents the Renaissance Eden and in
it Catherine can be seen obliquely as Eve. Miltonic overtones seen be realize
in this passage. The description of the garden, the laborious discipline that is
maintained to protect the natural luxuriance of the garden, the spread-eagled
fruit trees, the raspberry comes which catch at the clothes, the exotic apricots
and the mesh are described marvelously. Catherine can be seen like Milton's
Eve in terms of the voluptuously vegetation which surrounds her as she works
it; her hair like Eve's with its wisps and tendrils is suggestive of the profusion
of nature. Murdoch's almost indefinitely extensive and subtle symbolism can
be seen in the Bell. The garden functions as a place of honest practical labour
with measurable economic returns to the less imaginatively susceptible
members of the Imber community. But here we can see Catherine at its
center, it conveys the erotic energies which the community will find so hard to
control. It reflects on the appalling consequences that will follow from
Catherine's attempt to discipline her own sexual nature through her choice of the religious life, an attempt in which all the members of lay community are involved.

The Bell is Murdoch's most complete achievement integrating her symbolism and her imagery in general with the plot and characters at the simple narrative level. The novel represents other images having the symbolic and the metaphysical weights, which attach themselves quite naturally to things, which are part of the scenery. We can take example of the lake, the birds, the music and the Abbey. These are symbol conveying something real in an action or a piece of fictional scenery. There are images of the birds and birds' song in the novel; the birds represent a particular aspect of the 'natural' purity of the country community. The same is true of the music imagery, which interweaves with the bird imagery; music is related to the characters' spiritual states throughout the novel.

The most significant symbol of the book is the bell, the events of the story are arranged, somewhat loosely around itself. At the beginning of the novel we can see that a new bell is to be hung in the Abbey tower, and will enter the gate like a postulant-here resembling Catherine Fawely, a member of the community who intends to enter the Abbey as a nun. Dora's husband Poul tells her about the legend of the old bell, which flew out of the tower into the lake. This happened as the Bishop cursed the Abbey on an occasion when one of the nuns took a lover and would not confess; the guilty nun drowned herself in the lake when the bell was lost. Toby a boy in the
community finds this bell, and reveals its existence to Dora. Dora determines, to raise the bell and substitute it for the new one at the Christening Ceremony. Dora considers this act as a kind of rite of power and liberation. The bell embedded in the mud is a symbol for the involvement of spiritual energy in passion and ambiguous emotion.

G.S. Fraser visualizes the bell both as a 'symbol of a lost order and faith' and, when it is dragged up from the mud as something which, like the loss of Rain's car, 'creates a sense of interactivity in things, sometimes ingeniously conquered, sometimes farcically or wretchedly triumphant.' Murdoch's great effort can be seen in this work, the raising of the bell is mechanically convincing and dramatic. Murdoch's use of the bell is something, which affects the events in the narrative as a new and exciting technical achievement. Murdoch's achievement in using a symbol intensifies the narrative and enriches our response to the novel.

The Bell itself changes its significance as symbolic object according to the characters that respond to it. James and Michael appropriate the new bell as religious symbol in their sermons. Although they use it in opposite ways to support their opposing religious ideals they both consciously use the bell to mean only one thing. Toby and Dora consider the bell a symbol of a more elusive and less conscious kind. For Toby with his personal experience of raising the old bell from the depths of the lake, the bell's retrieval functions as a rite of passage, linking youth to youth manhood, school to University, (sexual) ignorance to (sexual) knowledge. For him the bell is associated with
Dora and its gradual recovery with his growing sense of intimacy with her. It is in connection with Dora that the mysterious significance of the bell fully emerges. When Dora is left alone with the old bell she is impressed and frightened by its physical presence:

*It was black inside and alarmingly like an inhabited cave. Very lightly she touched the great clapper, hanging profoundly still in the interior. The feeling of fear had not left her and she withdrew hastily and switched the torch on. The squat figures faced her from the sloping surface of the bronze, solid, simple, beautiful, absurd, full of the brim with something which was to the artist not an object of speculation or imagination* (TB, p.267).

The bell is threatening because it expresses by its history, its function in the narrative, and its very shape the inescapable connections between erotic and spiritual love. The imagery throughout their section is powerfully erotic as well as religious; it links the bell with unexplored and unexpressed female sexuality as well as with the spiritual energy of the part which speaks to the present through carvings and inscription in a foreign and only half-understood language. The writing itself here emphasises the connection, which all the characters (except the Abbess) seek in their different ways and their different reasons to deny, with all the unhappy consequences.
All the symbols in the narrative seem to reach their emotional as well as their logical fulfillment in the presence of the naively vital Dora. Accordingly, as Dora rows alone across the lake, crossing for the last time those symbolic waters which separate the house from the Abby, the narrator reminds us implicitly that she has learnt to swim: 'The depths below affrighted her no longer' (TB, p.316). The sentence draws its full range of meaning from knowledge of the entire preceding narrative with its insistence upon the image hauling up unknown hideous/beautiful objects out of the depths.

A Severed Head is a mythical novel, which is slightly different from the others, in that it is not concerned with overall metaphysics, but with patterns of social and sexual behaviour. The central image – the severed head, image of the petrifying Medusa, the dark (female) Celtic gods, the soothsaying Orpheus – has a poetic force. Alexander, the sculptor of that novel, making a portrait head swathed in bandages, like a death's – head, talks as Bledyrd in The Sandcastle talks, of the use of portraiture as a means to truth. Murdoch conveys her technical, cool interest in the sado-masochism of a man who tries to love his wife's lover, is reinforced by her use of the contrasting Freudian and Sartrean concepts of what the ancient image of the severed head, the Medusa, meant. Freud saw the head as a symbol of male fear of castration. Sartre saw it as an image of the basis fear of being observed. Castration, the voyeuristic witnessing of secret sex, including incest, underlie the plot of this drawing room comedy, and contribute to its ambiguous elegance. The novel describes sexual shifts, the change of partners, which are here part of a
stylized fictional representation of the ways in which we are all puppets of blind and incomprehensible forces.

A Several Head, may be called Murdoch's attempt to investigate the problem of insincerity regarding human relationship. The novel combines her idea of truth for the facile idea of sincerity with which both Freud and Sartre in Murdoch's thinking are to a certain extent concerned. The 'truths' are Freudian and Sartrean truths — that represent the protagonist has to come to grips with his own sexual violence and fear, and with the urge towards self confidence, or whether his acts are his own. These truths can be seen only steps on the way to the discovery of a vaster and more vague general truth; have been personified by Honor Klein, a female character in the novel. Honor combines in human both Murdoch's respect for the individual and love, which is inevitable as well as truth seeking.

The novel is a fine example of successfully employed symbol. The image of the head is more wide spread, more, various and, more elaborate, for instance Georgie's (the mistress of Martin) realistic head, and Martin's mother, and Honer's references are concerned with it. The image artistically presents very different matter from the real bell stuck in the real mud and conveying it overtones. There is an elaboration of repetitive situations, and actions around a central theme to form a cumulative moral impression. A Severed Head conveys excellently the oddity of human behaviour when faced with moral and emotional crisis and they attempt to behave in a 'civilized' manner. The twists in the character of Martin and his maneuvers
may be called fantastic but they grow from reality. Murdoch has worked her image into the very texture of actions, therefore at every turn it deepens, reinforces and opens up the implications of her themes. The intellectual symbolism can be seen into the 'real' action, the symbol here is not a narrative device like the bell rather it is illustrative and contrived and excellently constructed.

Murdoch's *An Unofficial Rose* may be called her most sustained attempt to integrate realism and symbolism, respect of the individual character and his individual fate with the metaphysical dimension. The novel represents the concept of goodness and consciousness or unconsciousness 'form' and contingency, which are her favourite fields. The novel is concerned with two particular images the Tintoretto painting and the roses and through the way Murdoch has worked the story round them take on the life of natural symbols. Hugh Peronett the owner of the Tintoretto that can be called Randoll (his son) Ann (Randell's Wife) and the roses and their different attitudes illuminate each other. The marriage of Hugh and the Tintoretto are so naturally integrated to start with, that the painting becomes part of the narrative mechanism and is much more deeply embedded in our consciousness of the characters than the bell. The Roses can be called fanciful and represent the part of the story. As an idea as the initial structure of a novel, the stringing of the themes the stories between the 'natural' perfection of the rose (Ann's dogrose, Lindsay's polychrome rose, the white Rose Miranda) and the artistic perfection of the individual Tintoretto painting is excellently shown.
The novels of Iris Murdoch in terms of their form convey the relationship of the symbols to the ideas and to the 'real' unity of the novel as a whole. Her theory of the novel represents her concepts of realism, freedom of characters the metaphysical dimension, form symbols, and myths. No other novelist sees the problem of form in the modern novel quite as she does, according to her, writers are usually simply crystalline or simply naturalistic and her attempt to explore the possibility of a combination seem intellectual and admirable task. Murdoch is more conscious of the creation of sustained realistic narrative. She fuses the intellectual sense of order with a passionate sense of real complexity and solidity.

Murdoch's well-known novel *The Black Prince* is pervaded with various images one of them is a kite. When Bradley leaves Rachel's house after kissing her. Julian release her kite and Bradley follows it faithfully as he walks to the subway station. The kites symbolizes the glimpse of the eternal that he is soon to get, but has not yet received. Bradley already has philosophized about the importance of kites when he was drunk in Bristol nothing that kites are distant high things that are an image of human condition. The kite ability to fly and to see the world from a higher perspective is something that all humans aspire to and is something that Bradley shall be able to do by the end of the novel. The kite symbolises the ability to see beyond the world of illusionary forms that dominates the everyday world.

Another important image is Jewels, Bradley's sister Priscilla is obsessed with her jewels and believes that if she receives them, all of her...
trouble shall be over. This belief is false and represents the sad state of her life. Priscilla's jewels represent the one thing that she was able to gather during her married years. To some extent, they represent her sole legacy, since she has lived a childless existence. But it is a sad legacy, as jewels are cold, meaningless items whose primary significance is their monetary value. Priscilla's inability to see the illusionary and meaningless nature of these items is consisted with her inability to have seen, or looked for, a deeper layer of truth during her entire life. When she finally receives her longed after jewels, she not surprisingly does not feel happier. Her jewels are meaningless items that suggest the way in which she and most people, waste their lives by not trying to aspire for more meaning truths.

There is also a very important symbol in the novel that is Der Rosenkavalier Strauss's Opera that Bradley and Julian attend. The opera has a special symbolic role because it contains sexual partners of grossly different ages, similar to the one in The Black Prince. Bradley's realization of the similarity between the opera and his own sexuality causes him to won it after only several minutes of watching it. The colour red that plays such a large role in the opera's setting also is significant in bringing out Bradley's silenced sexual desires. Although Bradley may not know this at the beginning of the novel, the plot of Der Rosenkavalier also foreshadows that of The Black Prince. While Bradley and Julian will have a love affair, as the Princess and Octavian did, both Julian and Octavian will eventually leave their older lovers and find partners their own age.
The Black Prince is also one of her most dexterous creations in its depiction of mythical framework as well as narrative pattern. The novel represents mythical framework with remarkable symbols to convey Murdoch notions of art-Love and truth. Regarding her novels William Slaymaker say:

In her fiction, Christian Celtic and classical myths play an important role in her fictional interpretation of freedom. The explanatory structures for human action and motivation found in Greek tragedy and epic-fate, destiny, doom, Ate’, frenzy, nemesis, fury-are adumbrated in her novels. Murdoch has adopted the pagan world of irrational forces to modern life, not only as a literary device, but also as an explanatory system which emphasizes the mystery and opacity of human existence. Freedom appears as a suspect mode of that existence that, like human life itself, is so complex as to defy a total rational analysis, myths provide fictional framework to support her notion of the incomprehensibility and impenetrability of human action and motivation.12

Art as a vehicle for Truth – As Loxias and Bradley Pearson explain in their forewords and postscripts, art is one of the rare venues that allows for the articulation of truth. The fictional editor of The Black Prince is P. Loxias another name for the Greek god Apollo. Bradley Pearson is the author of the
narrative section of the novel, entitled *The Black Prince: A Celebration of Love*. The novel is written in prison and its title is slightly more complete than Murdoch's own. Murdoch believes that the world of every day life is a world of illusians, behind which exists a world of truth, containing 'ideal forms'. When one is finally able to see the world of ideal forms, one is glimpsing truth. In a realm with both illusory and true worlds, art holds a special place because through it an artist is able to bring viewers out of the illusory plane and into the true one. Art serves as a fundamental philosophical tool that can alert the world to higher meanings in life. Bradley Pearson's struggle to write a deeply meaningful novel in *The Black Prince* captures one artist's attempt to preserve a glimmer of truth for others. Pearson's experience of Eros allows him to create the ultimate master work. In doing so, as P. Loxias (the God Apollo) suggests, he is able to bring truth to the readers.

In *The Black Prince* the mysterious editor of the novel 'P. Loxia's is truly supposed to be the Greek God Apollo. In the novel's original publication, Murdoch provided a clue to his identity by placing a picture of Apollo on the book's cover. Without this clue, few people truly understood who Loxias was, since the correlation of the theme to the God comes only from an obscure reference in Aeschylus's *The Oresteia*. Apollo's placement as the editor of the novel is appropriate because he is the God of Art and the novel primarily concerns the nature of art. Apollo's presence also helps to explain the book's title, since Apollo was known as 'The Black Prince'. The title also refers to Shakespeare's Hamlet, a character referenced frequently in the novel,
because he too was called 'the black prince'. Furthermore, the initials of the 'Black Prince', 'B.P.' are also those of Bradley Pearson, suggesting that he may be a Black Prince of his own accord.

Hamlet is a major motif in the novel. Hamlet's characters, text, and themes recur several times. The play primarily appears because Julian Baffin, wants to study Hamlet so she keeps asking Bradley to teach it to her. By explaining it (Hamlet) to Julian, Bradley is able to articulate his interpretation of what Hamlet actually means. The theme in Hamlet that is most important to The Black Prince is that of identity and the ability to create one's identity through the use of world. As Bradley Pearson writes his narrative, he struggles with this issue, which may be the reason for which the novel is called The Black Prince—a little usually given to Hamlet.

From this confrontation with Hamlet and his meeting with Julian comes another of Pearson's analyses of love. Bradley sees love as a 'demonic force engaged in continuous creation and participation,' may be called an act of creating beloved, like a work of art (BP. p.173). Unlike great art, the claims of love are overbearing, overpowering and blinding, love can even 'dim the dream of art and make it seem secondary, even a delusion' (BP.p174). In mythical terms, the 'black arrow' of love is fearfully destructive in its power to delude, and Black Eros inspires Bradley to write his book, which as the postscripts show, may be based on a complete delusion.
The Time of the Angels is a symbolic novel about the moral consequences of contemplating certain concepts. The concepts are grimmer and larger and the emphasis has shifted from the process of ideas in the characters’ minds to the large and ritually significant actions and ideas illicit in them, the novel conveys the unrealized implications, psychological, moral, behavioural, of the concepts at work in the ‘demythologizing’ of the church. Murdoch represents a belief that a deepening and enriching of concepts is possible and desirable and it may recognize the atmosphere of moral and intellectual panic confused. It is a frightening phenomenon, and most of its priests seem unaware of how frightening. The image of buzzing blackness and swirling fog that Murdoch uses to evoke seem very appropriate.

The Time of the Angels may be called a philosophical myth, or fantasy, playing games with Nietzsche’s The Birth of Tragedy and the new school of ‘Death of God’ theology. The beginning delineation of the character of Pettie O’Rourke, half black, half Irish, however, is written with clarity in a way that suggests that the rest of the story will have the emotional immediacy of The Bell. Pattie’s actions are infect almost entirely part of Carel’s religious-sexual myth (she has to be the Black Maddona to balance the White Virgin Princess, his incestuously seduced daughter Elizabeth). If we response to the initial description we may consider that Murdoch has promised something she has not performed, whatever the illumination conveyed by the myth.

Murdoch’s fabulous novel The Unicorn symbolizes the power of spiritual love over fierceness. According to the medieval European folklore
and art, only a virgin could capture the unicorn. In *The Unicorn*, the virgin is 'Maid Marian' who begins by thinking that she can 'liberate' Hannah; 'I shall talk to her about freedom.' (UP, p.76). Denis thinks about Marian that she may be like the virgin, some kind of trap for unicorn. The novel conveys Freudian uses of mythology and certain coldness, a certain ultimate passivity towards its own story quite different from the unachieved feeling of *An Unofficial Rose*. *The Unicorn* may be called an elaborate image of the working of Ate. The novel represents the sinister aspects of the landscape, Marian's unreasonable fear and the slight repulsion she feels from Hannah's oddity, Murdoch does it so excellently that the events have resonance outside themselves. The slow change in Scottow from pleasant burly countryman to something indefinably horrible and cruel is excellently done, for example, the moment when he touches Jamesie's Cheek with his whip. The strangeness of country, house and society is something new and monotonous.

*The Unicorn* represents an attempt by means of creation of a private myth, a private religious symbolism, to explore our attitudes, psychoanalytical and philosophic, to contemplation, to religious suffering, and to evil and innocence. The whole scene: sea, cliffs, bog, vegetation, dolmen, villagers, the odd aeroplane, salmon, hares, pheasants, furniture, has indeed been invested with that curious significance the landscape has in a good fairy-tale. The novel is concerned with strangeness for the sake of strangeness leads to a kind of fantasy in which it is easy to make subtle moral points or psychological point. The use of the landscape in this book in general is very
powerful; it is related both to our sense of that which is not human and thus mysterious, and to the uncompromising, again, non-messy, nature of the spiritual events which take place. On this level, Hannah's ambiguous passivity parallels the ambiguity in Murdoch's attitude to the unusually intractable landscape.

In *The Unicorn* Murdoch presents two houses in the narrative – Riders and Gaze Castle. These are symbolically named, and stand respectively for platonic religion – Riders recalling Christian contemplation – Gaze sufficiently suggesting this – which is involved in the concepts of guilt, sin and redemption; the division between the houses is seen as something undesirable in the action, even in the flood, disastrous. The beautiful golden maids at Riders, and the Black Maids at Gaze reinforce this allegorical feeling about it. It is at Riders that those are found who associate Hannah's situation with aesthetic feelings, and with the joining of perfection and reality in beauty. Max has been shown a pure Platonist; Pip Lejour, who loves and possesses Hannah, wished to be an artist, a poet; Effingham Loves Hannah as he finds her situation 'somehow beautiful' and Max tells him that beauty is a spiritual value. Where as at Gaze, there is Gerald, an avenger, who may be called the epitome of furies. There is Davis with his sense of the necessity of suffering, and his Christian sense of love as a power to overcome all.

Murdoch symbolism in general presents (as mentioned earlier in Elaine Showalter's terms) a *double-voiced discourse*, to illustrate this we can take a consideration of what is perhaps the most complex and interesting symbol in
Murdoch's writing, the symbol of the Cave. The Primary reference is, of course, to Plato's parable of the Cave as a metaphor of the human condition of eikasia, subjection to shadowy illusion. It is not surprising that the Cave, itself an image of illusion should have in Murdoch's narratives its dark and mysterious double as a site of potential truth, the Sibyl's Cave.¹⁴

Murdoch's most sustained fictional re-working of the parable of the Cave is to be found in The Sea The Sea: Charles appropriates it in an extensive passage:

Since I started writing this 'book' or whatever it is I have felt as if I were walking about in a dark cavern where there are various 'lights', made perhaps by the shafts or apertures which reach the outside world. (What gloomy image of my mind but I do not mean it in a gloomy sense.) There is among those lights one great light towards which I have been half consciously wending my way. It may be a great mouth opening to the daylight, or it may be a hole through which fires emerge from the center of the earth. And am I still unsure which it is, and must I now approach in order to find out? This image has come to me so suddenly; I am not sure what to make of it (TSTS, p.77).
Charles remains uncertain as to what to make of this image of the Cave for the rest of his journal, 'I remember', he says at the beginning of the journal, 'James saying something about people who end their lives in caves, well, this, here is my Cave' (TSTS, p.4). It is the opening of a new life, which is designed to be innocent and secluded; Charles has chosen to 'abjure magic and become a hermit' (TSTS, p.2). Here the Cave may be associated with Prospero's cell: the truth may be learnt and where the illusion of power (the illusions of the theatre) is finally relinquished. With an inward turning movement which is characteristic of this witty novel where the outside turns out to be the inside the Cave turns into an image of Charles's own mind, not where he is, but what he is.

Murdoch plays ironically with Charles's version of the parable. Hartley, the object of Charles's obsessive love, is the Platonic Sun to which 'All the best, even Clement, have been shadows by comparison' (SS, p.77), and Charles proclaims a little later, 'The light in the cavern is daylight, not fire' (SS, p.79). Charles continually revises and reverses this apparently confident judgment and in the end the parable itself is revised and reversed by the author. The apertures to Charles's Cave multiply in a bewildering way and truth becomes increasingly hard to distinguish from illusion, Charles, in the last of his many reflections on Hartley, settles eventually for a partial truth, an incomplete illumination:

One Can be too ingenious in trying to search out the truth. Sometimes one must simply respect its veiled
face. Of course this is a love story. She was not able
to be my Beatrice nor was I able to be saved by her
but the idea was not senseless or unworthy
(SS; p.500).

The Cave in *The Sea, The Sea* is both the theatrical enclosure in
which we live and a place of contemplation of confrontation with inner truth, a
testing place. In several of the other novels it acts as a transforming vessel, a
place of initiation, figurative death and rebirth for the young heroes who enter
it. In *The Philosopher's Pupil*, Tom the youngest of the three Mc Caffrey
brother descends as far as he can towards the source of Luc's Rill to the
under ground circular space which houses the base of the elaborate workings
of the Institute Baths. The journey serves his need for some sort of symbolic
or magical act, which - concerned or touched his situation *without running
any danger of changing it* (PP; p.53). Even more dangerous is the adolescent
Piers's (again) self imposed ordeal in Gunnar's Cave (*The Nice and the Good*)
where, in the grip of his unhappy love for the equally immature Barbara, he
plans to sit out the duration of a tide. His plan becomes an obsession that he
cannot explain; it was certainly connected with Barbara, but it might be truer
to say that the idea of the Cave had swallowed up the idea of Barbara' (NG,
p.228). For both Tom and Piers the entry into the hidden place of danger
brings with it a strong sensation of sexual desire. Their ordeals, like Toby's
raising of the bell, act obviously as rites of passage initiations which prove the
heroes worthy of their beloveds and enable them to gain their - hearts' desires' yet another variant on the quest motif.

These set pieces, however do come across as over-contrived their symbolic function - (especially in The Philosopher's Pupil) apt to become tediously explicit. These novels restore the positive mythical possibilities of the Cave, reclaiming it as a site of potential truth.

Murdoch's versatility can be seen in The Philosopher's Pupil and Nun's and Soldiers in which she offers us moments of myth or art where Christ is present. In The Philosopher's Pupil it is a whole scene, a beach picnic, where the innocent young man Tom, is overcome by his discovery of Christ's legendary visit to Britain with Joseph of Arimathea. Here the demonic George near drowning to rescue the Papillon dog, which is subsequently nestled between his sister-in-law's breasts, watched by his nephew Adam, who loves the dog. The Papillon is, in its way, the soul (Papillon means butterfly in French, and psyche in Greek). George suffers hell to fetch it back to Adam, who has named it Zed, because he and it are Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.

In Nun's and Soldiers Murdoch portrayed the character of Anne Cavidge, who has given up being a nun because she has lost her faith in God. Anne has the most direct and startling experience of Christ, when she is visited by him in her kitchen and told 'almost carelessly' that there is salvation and she must do it all herself. Christ told her that he was not a magician and
further said she knows what to do. Christ advised her to do right and to refrain from wrong. This Christ is very real and somewhat inconsequential; interestingly, he shares with all Murdoch's 'good' people.

Murdoch does not believe in a personal God but subscribes to the notion of Christ as a symbol of affliction. In that context she suggests that the only appropriate way to consider Christ is not as Christ Risen, which she regards as one of the self-consoling fantasies propagated by Christian religion, but as Christ of the cross. Murdoch says:

> Few idea invented by humanity have more power to console than the idea of purgatory. To buy back evil by suffering in the embrace of good: what could be more satisfying, or as a romantic might say more thrilling? Indeed the central image of Christianity lends itself (to) just this illegitimate transformation.\(^{15}\)

This belief finds expression in Murdoch's fiction, which contains a number of examples of individuals, often-religious figures, who do not believe in God, but who value Christ as a symbol. Thus father Bernard in *The Philosopher's Pupil* tells Rozanov that he does not believe in God but 'lives and breather Christ' (PP, pp.185-7). When Rozanov suggests that 'Christianity is a cult of suffering'. Father Bernard retorts: 'Not if Christ didn't rise it isn't. And it is essential that he did not rise. If he be risen then is our faith vain' (PP, p.188). Father McAlister of *The Book and The Brotherhood* shares this
notion: 'Christ on the cross-made sense of all the rest, but only if he really
died. Christ lives, Christ saves, because he died as we die. The ultimate
reality hovered these, not as a phantom man, but as a terrible truth (BB,
p.540). Thus Murdoch believes in the impersonality of God on the one hand
and the importance of Christ on the cross on the other and values him as a
symbol of religion.
References

1. Iris Murdoch, review of Elias Canetti's Crowds and Powers, in The spectator, 7 September 1962, quoted by A.S. Byatt, Iris Murdoch p.29.


9. Iris Murdoch, Against Dryness in Encounter, 16, January 1961, p.20

10. G.S. Fraser, 'Iris Murdoch : The Solidity of the Normal,' in J. Wain, ed; International Literary Annual 11, 1959,

11. The term Crystalline is concerned with the novel in the twentieth century particularly the novels of William Golding. Murdoch describes them as a small 'quasi-allegorical object' ed. A.S. Byatt, Degress of Freedom : Early Novels of Iris Murdoch, Chatto and Windus, 1965, p.30


14. In classical mythology sibyls were female prophets whose ecstatic utterances were inspired by Apollo.