Chapter Four

From Illusion to Reality

In her works, Murdoch portrays the spiritual and moral problems that human beings have to face in the modern world. She is aware of the complexities of human motivations, desires and moral choices. She also underlines the possibility to achieve a state of transcending self to face reality beyond human vanity and imperfection. For Murdoch, goodness and love consist of learning unselfishness and directing attention from the self towards external reality. Her novels focus how the characters succeed in arriving at the imaginative identification of the reality of others and themselves by giving up the various forms formed by obsessions, self-conceived dramatic roles or the images imposed on those with whom they come into contact. Widdows is not far off the mark when she says, “the moral life for Murdoch is a quest from illusion to reality, in which the human beings progress from the natural stage of egoistic illusion towards a clearer vision of reality and towards the good” (14). Reality can be understood through love and man’s attempts to restructure the sufferings of fellow human beings.

Murdochian characters are self-obsessed and their primary aim is to go in search of their own interests. Most of these characters lack moral values and involve themselves with adultery, homosexuality, violence, and incest. Murdoch wants the human beings to overcome these moral problems and face reality. The moral evolution which human beings must undergo is described by Murdoch as a “pilgrimage from appearance to reality” (Fire 387). This pilgrimage inspired by love is, for Murdoch, a sort of transcendence because it is “going beyond the egoistic self to the consciousness of the
other” (“Metaphysics” 119). To see people and objects in their true nature and in their proper relationships to each other is the task of a moral pilgrim. The characteristic mark of the active moral agent is moral vision. It is the ability to direct his attention away from “the proliferation of blinding self-centred aims and image” (Sovereignty 67).

Plato is a dominant Western influence on Murdoch’s thought. As a philosopher, Murdoch is interested in philosophy of morals and proclaims herself a Platonist because of her adoption of the concepts of morals and the idea of good as discussed by Plato. Widdows remarks, “In Murdoch’s vision of the moral life her reliance on Plato is vivid, and her picture of the moral universe is thoroughly Platonic” (95). Her notion of the good and her equation of love with wisdom have their origin in Plato. Plato uses the image of the sun when he explains the concept of goodness. In The Republic, Plato writes “as goodness stands in the intelligible realm to intelligence and the things we know, so in the visible realm the sun stands to sight and the things we see” (235). Through linking goodness with the sun, it can be seen that Plato views goodness as a powerful quality that gives knowledge and truth to men. According to Murdoch, the sun for Plato, “represents the form of the Good in whose light the truth is seen” (Fire 4). Murdoch supports Plato’s idea that goodness is the light that reveals to people the way the things truly are.

Murdoch describes Plato as serious, religious and concerned with spiritual salvation. He pictures human life as a pilgrimage from appearance to reality. His famous allegory of the cave presents a method for explaining an individual’s state of illusion. Antonoccio points out, “Plato’s allegory of the cave or his image of the Good as the sun are intended to describe the nature of reality and also to suggest a method for attaining knowledge of that reality” (22). The myth begins with men living inside a cave. They
cannot move their bodies as they are chained. They can see only what is in front of them. They see only shadows of the real world outside the cave, and these shadows are reflected by a fire behind them. By the light of the fire, the prisoners can see their own forms and those of others reflected on the wall. Plato then describes how painful it would be for the prisoner, if he is set free and forced to climb the steep ascent up out of the cave and out into the bright sun, which would dazzle him. The movement of descent is an important aspect of the myth of the cave:

Plato sometimes seems to imply that the road towards the Good leads away from the world of particularity and detail. However, he speaks of a descending as well as an ascending dialectic and he speaks of a return to the cave. In any case, in so far as goodness is for use in politics and in the market place it must combine its increasing intuitions of unity with an increasing grasp of complexity and detail. False conceptions are often generalized, stereotyped and unconnected. (Sovereignty 93)

The traveller, having seen the sun, turns round again and descends back into the cave. The journey does not lead back into illusion, but involves changed self who sees the inside of the cave in a different light. The pilgrim sees the wall, the fire and the other prisoners of the cave for what they are. He has achieved deep insight into goodness and reality, and sees the insight of the cave not in the light from the sun itself, but from the experience of what the real world is like. Thus the movement of the good person does not necessarily mean that he/she always moves towards the sun, but the knowledge of the real world has become internalized when apprehending the real world.
Unlike Plato’s version of the visible progress of the soul towards good, Murdoch presents the formula that the light of the sun does exist but one cannot presume to see it clearly. According to Murdoch, Plato’s connection of the good with the real is “the centre of his thought and one of the most fruitful ideas in philosophy” (Sovereignty 45). She also makes this concept the centre of her own moral philosophy by equating Plato’s state of illusion with egoism. According to Leeson, “Murdoch regards the allegory as perfectly informing the intuitive and spiritual aspects of the moral life” (90). Murdoch agrees with Plato’s idea that “an attempt to look right away from self towards a distant transcendent perfection, a source of uncontaminated energy, a source of new and quite undreamt-of virtue is important of morality” (Sovereignty 99).

Good and its indefinability is connected with the unsystematic and inexhaustible variety of the world and the pointlessness of virtue. Good is “mysterious because of human frailty, because of the immense distance which is involved” (97). The path for both Plato and Murdoch involves moving from the world of appearance out into the external world. Murdoch believes that a good man should be aware of the events happening around him and look at them in a realistic manner. She writes, “. . . the defeat of illusion requires moral effort, one improves morally as he or she turns toward reality” (Fire 425). Only by a concentrated moral effort one can rid oneself of these illusions and move in the direction of moral perfection.

Murdoch also gets the source of many of her ideas on contemporary life and the need to overcome the self from Simone Weil. Both Murdoch and Weil appreciate that suffering or affliction has an educational value. Weil explains, it is affliction that reveals, “suddenly and to our very great surprise, that we are totally mistaken” (462). Murdoch
notes that people are unable to acknowledge the reality of affliction because it is readily falsified in some way so as to make it bearable. Directed by sado-masochistic impulses, a further tool of the ingenious self, “Our attention can be drawn back into the self, while at the same time we are deluded into thinking that the experience is somehow ‘good’” (Sovereignty 68). The knowledge of affliction is the key to Weil’s religious meditations. In his acceptance of affliction, man accepts the decreative process and thereby becomes aware that he is totally mistaken in the arrogant presumption that “the world is created and controlled by ourselves” (462). Weil’s concept of decreation indicates a progress in man’s self-knowledge of his nothingness. In the act of accepting suffering, man begins to climb the ladder of transcendence. Her doctrine of decreation is one in which man renounces and purifies the self.

The problem of religion has loomed large in Murdoch’s philosophical thought and is a significant influence on her novels. She is notable for her profound interest in and engagement with religious ideas and sources. Antonaccio points out, Murdoch “was as deeply aware of the magical and superstitious aspects of religion as she was of its connection with moral goodness” (10). Religion for her is to do with spiritual change and renewal of life. Christianity has always concentrated on the ennobling effect of suffering. The Holy Bible assures, “And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish and strengthen you” (1 Pet.5:10). The Christian response to calamity is to accept the adversities, pains and afflictions which life brings, so that they may be turned into a positive spiritual force. A person who suffers as a result of his sin can be prompted to correct his path so as to return to the perfect path. Suffering is a part of morality if it
purifies the sufferer. This process essentially does not cause a boasting of the ego. This kind of suffering helps in the improvement of the personality. Murdoch says, “to suffer like an animal. That would be god-like” (qtd. in Conradi 295). Murdoch also focuses in her novels on the negative aspect of suffering which enhances the ego of a personality and obscures reality from him. The Christian idea concentrates on the positive aspect of suffering. This kind of suffering paves way for the rejuvenation to attain perfection.

A perennial motif in Murdoch’s novels is a journey from gullibility to reality and from delusion to revelation. In her novels, quest-motif is a prominent feature and these questing heroes become the victim of their quest undertaken with a blind and solipsistic vision, only when the veil of selfishness is removed their quest ends in realization, recognition and self-awareness. Murdoch writes, “an increasing awareness of ‘goods’ and the attempt (usually only partially successful) to attend to them purely, without self, brings with it an increasing awareness of the unity and interdependence of the moral world” (Sovereignty 69). After enduring loneliness, and failure, these characters are impelled by their sense of failure to some degree of self-examination. This introspection leads the individuals to apprehend a new vision of the world. These characters come to perceive that “in the larger world outside itself there is a moral order which can operate effectively if it admits the necessity of renouncing the imperious demands of the self and of accepting the facts of limits” (Bajaj 251). The subtle use of the ironic mode allows Murdoch to focus on the self-gratifying illusions of these protagonists. The plot is maneuvered and meandered to mark the process of development from self-deception to an awareness of reality.
Murdoch stresses the importance of self-transformation and self-renewal through her characters. The traditional devices of a sudden contact with crisis or suffering help the characters examine their selves. As the characters interact and bump into others they reflect upon the situations and slowly learn to recognize their mistakes. This realization forces them to transfer their attention and abandon some of the roles and myths of their creation. Most of the major characters by the end of the novels come to understand the falsity of their situations and by giving up their subjective visions earn moral freedom to understand others.

The most important aspect of Murdoch’s literary imagination derives from her conceptual thought which reveals a Platonic concern for truth in art. According to Murdoch, art can play an important part in the discovery of fantasy and she offers suggestions to the individual as well as the artist seeking the good. She explains:

The prescription for art is then the same as for dialectic, overcome personal fantasy and egoistic anxiety and self-indulgent day-dream. Order and separate and distinguish the world justly. Magic in its unregenerate form as the fantastic doctoring of the real for consumption by the private ego is the bane of art as it is of philosophy. Obsession shrinks reality to a single pattern. The artist’s is his eternal companion, the cosy dreaming ego, the dweller in the vaults of eikasia. (*Fire 70*)

Thus art purifies and clarifies one’s fantasy-ridden consciousness. Murdoch urges each human being to pursue this quest. Her philosophy states that one’s main pursuit in life
should be to destroy selfish fantasy, which in turn will allow a true vision of the world and encourage the attainment of goodness.

Murdoch’s own fiction is permeated by a consistent attention to or respect for moral law which is closely related to her conception of goodness. She attacks the functionality of self and pleads for a change of consciousness. She attacks the dominance of self to the exclusion of all that lies outside it. Repeatedly, she makes the assertion that the central evil is the liking for self over others. The experiential self with its preference for terrestrial and material benefits gives an undue importance to the egoistic self. The egoistic self tends to be impervious to outside claims. The ego, in its self-confinement, in its auto-matism, psychical and social, distorts the apprehension of true reality and hinders the contemplation of the scattered intimations of the good. It obscures the necessary quality of transcendence required in the process of unselfing.

Murdoch’s presentation of characters displays her belief that vision of goodness is possible and is gained by the loss of generalizing. Goodness is the centre or focus of attention and gives men the ability to identify the truth. Self-realization can be achieved by recognizing the free identity of others and seeing justly. As long as one’s cognitive powers are clouded by biased and unstable motives one cannot see reality.

Murdoch’s concern for the idea of perfection is a process of rising to a unifying vision of the good. She believes that the good man must know certain things about his surroundings and about the existence of other people and their claims. The chief enemy of excellence in morality is “personal fantasy, the tissue of self-aggrandizing and consoling wishes and dreams which prevents one from seeing what is there outside one”
Her fiction thus pleads for a change of consciousness, a rebornness, an inner evolution and a change of understanding. One can relate to the world and outside reality through an act of selfless attention. There is a consistent emphasis on love, acceptance, endurance and renunciation. When the selfish ego extends its sympathy, the self achieves full consciousness and maturity. Murdoch maintains that such an ideal of perfection has to be given a central place in moral thought.

The modern philosophical allusions in Under the Net are derived mainly from Murdoch’s interests as a philosopher in the works of Ludwig Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein’s philosophy supplies the theme from which the title is drawn. The net demonstrates how concepts, ideas of connections of thought can be used to arrive at a unified description of the universe. The net is a picture of reality constructed in order to describe the world. Wittgenstein uses the image of the net to refer to the ideas, concepts and language and about the mechanics which reveal man’s interest in defining himself and his world. He explains:

The different nets correspond to different systems for describing the world. Mechanic determines one form of description of the world by saying that all proposition used in the description of the world must be obtained in a given way from a given set of propositions – the axioms of mechanics. It thus supplies the bricks for building the edifice of science, and it says, Any building that you want to elect, whatever it may be, must somehow be constructed with these bricks, and with these alone. (139)
The net thus represents “the picture of reality we construct to describe the world” (Rabinovitz 11).

The net is conceived as a trap or prison from which the characters seek to escape. This image of net is presented by Murdoch through Hugo, one of the characters in *Under the Net*. According to him, all attempts of theorizing or generalizing are in fact a falsification of the particular or individualistic character of any decision. Theories, ideas, concepts and language form an impassable net barring one from understanding the essential reality of a particular situation. Hugo says, “a movement away from theory and generality is the movement towards truth” (*Net* 91). Hugo claims that language, the most common net is also a falsification of reality. He says truth can be attained only in silence.

Like Wittgenstein, Hugo considers language as a machine for making falsehoods. The only alternative for the inability of language to convey the particular reality of a situation, feelings or things is to avoid saying it. Only actions and silence do not lie. Hugo says, “it is in silence that the human spirit touches the divine”(92). Jake is enchanted by this concept and under the impact of these ideas, he discovers that his own vision, on the contrary has been distorted by generality. Hugo takes the shape of destiny for Jake and works like an enchanter in his mind. But he is an enchanter who is unaware of his influence and is not encouraged by the desire for power.

Hugo has no desire to make life into a pattern. He is ready to accept the contingent elements of life. The net thus represents the picture of reality one constructs to describe the world. It suggests limitation and confinement as appropriate symbols of the world of form. He disbelieves in the power of words to capture any fragments of the
essence or nature of things or people in the world. For Hugo, any attempt of
generalization or even those at description are doomed to fail. In his endless discussion
with Jake, he declares, “all theorizing is flight. We must be ruled by the situation itself
and this is unutterably particular. Indeed it is something to which we can never get close
enough, however hard we may try as it were to crawl under the net” (91).

Renunciation and withdrawal from worldly pleasures become a must for good
people in the Murdochian world. Hugo is ever ready to provide financial help to others.
When Anna leaves him, he gives the theatre to National Independent Socialists Party as
they are in need of an office. He even sells the factory of Belfounder Rockets. He gives
his house as well as his Alvis car to NISP. By stripping himself off all that he had, he
triumphantly comes out of the confusion he has created around him. His self-sacrificing
spirit is revealed through his actions. Hugo’s primary characteristic, like that of
Murdoch’s all good characters is renunciation, and like many of them, finally he leaves
the scene.

At the end of the novel, Hugo goes off to become a manufacturer of objects that
do not speak but only produce sounds similar to that of the beating hearts. Hugo’s
decision to become a watchmaker is part of this acceptance of life and it indicates a
positive attitude and not personal suffering. He recognizes that “God is a task. God is
detail. It all lies close to your hand” (229). For Hugo, absolute truth can only be attained
in silence. He tells Jake “the language just won’t let you present it as it really was” (69).
A philosophy of silence, however is obviously impracticable and Hugo is caught in a
dilemma that he cannot resolve. He is “a sort of non-philosophical metaphysician who is
supposed to be paralyzed” (Kermode 62) by this conflict.
Murdoch presents Hugo not as an abstraction but as a real character with his share of worldly failures and successes. He is a rich man who makes fireworks and films. But he seeks neither fame nor money which come to him naturally and automatically. He leaves the bedazzlement of the momentary fire-works in favour of a humble profession of watch-making. In the end, he leaves London and also his beloved Sadie. There is a premeditated focus on his qualities of renunciation, required for the perception of reality. Hugo’s own explanation for his retreat is very humble. He tells Jake:

Well, I don’t really believe in private enterprise, at least I think I don’t. I’m so bad at understanding these things. And if one’s in any doubt about a racket one ought to clear out, don’t you think? Anyhow, while I had the factory I just couldn’t help making money, and I don’t want that. I want to travel light. Otherwise one can never understand anything. (Net 223)

He gives off of his attachments and belongingness and takes over as an apprentice watch-maker in Nottingham.

Hugo’s injunctions emphasize man’s vital need to understand the supremacy of his self. One must accept the world and know oneself in the true context of that world as it naturally exists. Hugo’s departing words have a salutary effect on Jake. Hugo’s withdrawal from the terrestrial field brings to light the power of renunciation, rescission and self-abnegation as a gateway to knowledge. Murdoch’s own pronouncements emphasize that the truths of spirit can be apprehended only by those who prepare themselves for their reception by rigorous discipline. One must cleanse the mind of all distractions and purge the heart from all corruption to acquire spiritual wisdom.
Murdoch’s good characters always find themselves isolated and consciously or unconsciously have the tendency to do good for others. They suffer and are neglected by the world but persist in following the righteous path. Though they are good in their actions, they fail to perceive the reality of the world. Heusel says, Ordinary Language Man, “surrenders to conventions, his choices being subject to the rules of society” (19). These outwardly virtuous characters are condemned by Murdoch. These characters’ civilized and rational behaviour is not accepted by her because she believes that reality is not at all rational. A person does not reveal his true self when he/she attempts to be civilized and rational outwardly. When irrationality in man is ignored that prevents him from attaining self-knowledge and considering other people. According to Murdoch, such a morality is useless.

In An Unofficial Rose, Ann acts as a selfless character, not doing any harm to anyone. She fails to live according to her husband’s wish. Due to her conventionality, Ann fails to take notice of the needs of other people. Ann seeks to obtain goodness by losing herself in anonymous acts of generosity. For her own sake, Ann does not dare to break conventions. She is a typical conventional character. In doing so, she fails to perceive the inner thoughts of her husband and daughter.

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. When Randall leaves Ann, she is courted by Felix. Though she loves Felix, the idea of Christian marriage prevents her from taking any extreme step. Her allegiance to Anglicanism makes her disbelieve that her marriage is over. She thinks, marriage is based on habit, convenience and religious law. For her, “marriage is a sacrament” (Unofficial
She, therefore, must keep the Grayhallock open. She must “keep the light burning for Randall” (273), when he comes back. To her, the return to a state of unconsciousness is a better alternative than loving Felix which would have been rational and beautiful and free. It appears as if her “whole life had compelled her” (320). Ann’s decision proves that the ties of duty, habit, loyalty and affection are stronger than the dream of freedom.

Ann is not only paired against a man of will, her husband Randall, but also paired against the demonic energy of her daughter Miranda. Miranda herself loves Felix and is committed “to a programme of survival” (309). Miranda due to her love for Felix, prevents Ann from marrying him. She even decides to join with Randall later. Ann on the other hand is not affected at all. Her conventional attitude prevents her to attain reality. She continues to live as usual. The greatness about Ann is that though she has been rejected by all, she is able to survive enduring everything. She wins a prize in floral arrangement competition, and is able to control herself and lead life at the nursery. Her good approach towards human beings remains unchanged.

The essence of human life is to discover one’s true self and live according to its truth. The knowledge of true self is not easy to arrive at. The moral conflict and urgency must be respected as one small step towards forward movement. Ann’s strength lies in that she does not assert the independence of ego to seek private gain at the expense of others. She does not let the powerful machinery work for her, even though many opportunities lie before her, for a life full of happiness with Felix. But her lack of will ultimately culminates in one single choice. This choice is in favour of her simplicity, continuity and the strength of the normal. She ruminates:
She had lived in unconsciousness and doubtless she would again, for it was her nature. She was not framed for recognizing, let alone for grasping, her own felicity. In the end perhaps, for her, not knowing was better than knowing . . . . Felix would be well, Felix would be very well, without her. Still less did she feel any inclination to call her obsession by any grander name. Not to know was best, to forget was best. But it would not be Randall or Felix that she would forget but only herself, only what she had done and what it meant. (339)

Ann does not attain moral growth because of conventionality. Hence, she fails to love and accept the otherness of her husband Randall. At the end of the novel, one finds Ann in a vindictive mood. As in the case of other novels, one does not find Ann coming to an understanding of reality. She feels she cannot accept Randall as he is. So Ann does not attain the vision of reality here. Conventional approach causes inability to see the primitive needs of others. Ann fails to see the inner life of herself and others.

The formal impact of these conventional characters remains minimal in Murdoch’s novels. Oates opines, “these spokesmen strike the reader as unreal because they are no more than ideas, the embodiment of ideas, and constitute in a sense the novelist’s failure to communicate her theme . . . ” (192). These characters are separated from muddle and sin. They “function as signposts rather than successful illustrations of the good” (Bajaj 86). The good are humble and invisible. They are unaffected to the subtle appeals to power because of their sense of external reality. These characters pull the idea of truth out of obscurity. Surrounded by darkness the egoistic characters seek out
help from them. They try to show them the difficult and perilous path and remove themselves from the centre.

Tallis Browne in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, lives without illusion in the confusing complicities of the world. He has generous acts, passive and least interfering temperament. He does not use his knowledge to alter the status of others. Julius realizes Tallis’s power and is forced to act as desired by Tallis. Julius is successful in destroying the married life of Rupert and Hilda. When he tells all this to Tallis, the latter immediately realizes the disaster. He says, “they must all be told. At once” (*Fairly* 367). He instantaneously takes Julius to the telephone box and forces him to talk to Hilda in Prembrokeshire about the game played by him.

The main focus in *The Fairly Honourable Defeat*, is consistently on the way Tallis opposes evil. His endeavour to save the marriage of Rupert and Hilda shows his belief in manipulating the destinies of others. Tallis makes Hilda see through the game and desire for immediate reconciliation with Rupert. He explains Hilda, “it was a sort of joke, that’s all. And no one else knows anything about it, there haven’t been any rumours or any talk” (373). But Murdoch, by making her telephone and car fail, brings the supremacy of the contingent. Through the accidental death of Rupert, Murdoch makes the readers feel that tampering with the passion cannot go unpunished. Tallis accepts his defeat in his attempt to save Rupert, but he is satisfied with the means used by himself.

Tallis’s story remains a story of defeat. His active and real participation in the lives of others occurs too late and so goodness loses. In the end, morally smug world scatters. Tallis continues a life of charmlessness, holiness and endless good work. Julius
leaves for Paris though not enhanced but visibly touched by Tallis’s goodness. Goodness
does not suffer defeat. The final impression of moral vigour comes through the character
of Tallis who persuades Julius that the enchantment must end. Julius’s clearing off does
not indicate the disappearance of evil from the world. Pachuau states, “Evil may not be
conquered just as yet but, goodness continues to lead a perpetual possibility that
continues to point towards hope, and this is the crux of Murdoch’s writing” (85). Good
and evil are parts of the scheme of the universe. A disciplined mind with its sense under
control and free from attachment and repulsion attains a purity of spirit.

To apprehend real good, one should learn to lose one’s self. Bondage to one’s own
self inhibits one’s growth to the higher level of being. But when one can rise above the
chains and bondages, one can make one’s nature the medium for the embodiment of the
spiritual. Then alone does one learn to consider the universal principles of existence.
Murdoch’s characters without frontiers assert the possibility of achieving such a state.
Hugo in Under the Net commits himself to a life of material renunciation. Ann Peronett
in An Unofficial Rose lives a life of constant surrender to the will. Tallis Browne in A
Fairly Honourable Defeat is a Christ-figure, mocked and chided. Murdoch’s rigorous
vision deflects the authority of good in the absence of action. Only those who can devote
themselves to truth, goodness and reality make a distinct impact. Hugo, Ann and Tallis
highlight what Murdoch implies by selfless attention to truth, goodness and objectivity.

The stage before unselfing is an unstable condition for Murdoch’s protagonists
and their fragmentary forms of selves are either misleading, disturbed or distorted image
of themselves. This initial state is a hypothetical state in the psyche of the protagonists
who vacillate between freedom of choice and the dilemma caused by illusions that blur
the right choice. Once the unselfing comes to a close, the self makes a compromise or adjustment to the reality of existence. Self at this point becomes a sensitive liberator of the psyche from the binding shackles of obsessions, illusions, fears, anxieties, emotional disparities and problems of money, marriage, violence, corruption resentment, alienation, death and sense of guilt that issue forth from the predicamental existence. They come to terms with self only after a lengthy exercise of illusory pursuits, misappropriations and misinterpretations. Murdoch’s protagonists are either victimizers or victims and they resolve in reality triumphantly. They resign to reality constructing an image for themselves to which they strictly adhere.

Murdoch in her novels, has shown the main characters progressing from a stage of moral ignorance holding a false concept of freedom. They come to perceive the reality of others by overcoming the various patterns and forms they had imposed on them, and thus achieving a modicum of true freedom. All of them manage to free themselves to some extent from their enslaving memories that have brought their lives to a stasis. Their frozen outlook has deprived them of proper contact with others. Bove states, “Murdoch believes that to move to a higher level of awareness, toward good and truth, individuals must sublimate their egos and attend to others” (191). As they forgive themselves, others and their pasts they emerge stronger and more capable of appreciating the beautiful and learn to see with an unclouded vision, a characteristic of true freedom and a mark of moral growth.

Self-interest is a condition in which one remains comprehensively trapped. Murdoch considers this self-directed intellectual activity as a source of moral failure. Her novels reveal how the characters come out of their fantasy world to face reality. Facing
reality brings mental as well as moral maturity to the protagonists. As the characters are in illusion they fail to achieve what they want to achieve. In *Under the Net*, Jake’s struggle against his own fantasies and patterns, eventually throws light on both dimensions of freedom. Datta comments, the novel *Under the Net* “is a loosely episodic story of a free-wheeling, self-involved hero, Jake Donaghue, who is caught in a series of contingent events . . . leading to the heightening of his vision of reality” (51). Jake’s great achievement of his adventures is his capacity to accept that contingency is fundamental to life and that one ought to be open to different interpretations of reality. He is jotted by his friend Hugo into accepting life’s heterogeneity. The fantasy world of his own creation is shattered when he is faced with the truth in Hugo’s room in the hospital. Fernandes points out, “his final meeting with Hugo at the hospital towards the end of the novel helps the protagonist to understand that he has often formed hasty and false impressions of people and situations around him” (89). Hugo’s explanation of the whole situation forces Jake to discover how wrong he has been in his suppositions. His conversation with Hugo makes him discover that his interpretation of events has been completely wrong. Jake comes to know that Hugo does not love Anna, but Sadie and the mime theatre is not Hugo’s idea but Anna’s. He also comes to know that Sadie does not love Hugo but Jake. The revelation of facts which has dislocated past, present and future makes Jake come to terms with reality.

From his conversation with Hugo, Jake learns that he has imposed his theories on the other people and misinterpreted the facts about them. Shocked by his own lack of understanding of the other characters, Jake begins to structure his own life. Jack reflects:
When does one ever know a human being? Perhaps only after one has realized the impossibility of knowledge and renounced the desire for it and finally ceased to feed even the need of it. But then what one achieves is no longer knowledge, it is simply a kind of co-existence, and this too is one of the guises of love. (Net 238)

After this realization, Jake accepts the existence of the world not merely as an extension of himself but as separate and other than himself. Relying on himself, Jake’s self-image becomes more nearly defined and this revelation reduces his sense of nebulousness. He develops a concept of self by slowly becoming aware of his own uniqueness.

When Jake is under illusion, he thinks that dialogue leads to self-destruction. But it is only through dialogue that Jake recognizes his own worth and truth about others. He says, “A pattern in my mind was suddenly scattered and the prices of it went flying about me like birds” (225). He realizes that he has been busy constructing a plot in order to elude reality. This discovery makes him recognize the individuality of others and conceive things as they are. He looks Hugo not as a lover or as a philosopher of silence rather as a human being struggling to come to terms with reality. Jake reflects, Hugo “towered in my mind like a monolith; an unshaped and undivided stone which men before history had set up for some human purpose which would remain forever obscure” (268). Jake wonders why he pursues Hugo, for he has nothing to tell him. Jake considers, Hugo “was a sign, a portent, a miracle” (268). Hugo’s revelations give Jake the right perception on human relationships. He moves out of his spell and enchantment. He also earns moral and psychological freedom, by giving up the false forms he had imposed upon others and himself.
Concurrent with moral freedom, Jake also gains artistic freedom by developing a destiny of his own as a writer. Bajaj points out, Jake’s “process of maturity takes place on two levels as individual and as an artist” (36). Jake suffers delusion after delusion until he is free from all misconceptions and ready to become a true artist. In the words of Widmann, Jake, “in actuality is the person bound by nets of delusion” (14). His process of self-discovery as an individual makes him aware of his true vocation. When the French writer wins the award, Jake is astonished. He decides, “Why should I waste time transcribing his writings instead of producing my own? I would never translate . . . Never, never, never” (Net 192). Breteuil’s rebirth from mercenary to genuine artist forces Jake to question his own conceptions of reality. Jake’s apprehension of his true vocation indicates his apprehension of true being.

Maturity brings a definite change in Jake’s attitude to life. He starts caring less for money. Jake’s refusal to Madge’s proposal is a refusal to his parasitical relationship with other human beings. She offers a lucrative job of script writing for a film company. He rejects this in favour of an artistic discipline required for a creative vocation. He thinks, “The fact is that I must live my own life. And it simply doesn’t lie in this direction” (179). Jake’s desire to devote himself to creative work is accompanied by his need for taking up a job and to do something for society. Thus he transforms from being a mere translator and literary hack into a genuine creative writer. Chakraborty avers, “he has balanced the demands of intellectual and practical life and he has renewed his creative energy” (34). The pain Jake suffers comes from his enclosed egoism.

Coming out of self-delusion to reality changes the very concept of Jake’s life. He imagines love as the emotional straining and scheming for possession. Because of this
notion, he runs after Anna and tries to possess her. Jake comes to know about his misconceptions about Anna from Hugo, he realizes that “Anna really existed now as a separate being and not as a part of myself” (Net 268). This discovery makes him recognize the individuality of others and to conceive things as they are. He releases Anna from his hold and grants her the freedom to be the other. She is set free of the image he has imposed upon her. For him, she exists now as a separate person and he respects her for what she is. Kashyap asserts, Jake “is freed of his illusions when he enters the world of love and freedom which brings him the state of true self-realization” (416). Jake’s final relation with Anna involves a respect for the opacity of her individuality. The need for social dealings and human access has dawned upon him.

In the end, when Finn finally goes back to Dublin, his otherness for the first time dawns on Jake. He realizes that Finn has inhabited a different universe and is motivated by his individual needs and desires. This astonishes and wakens him to the fact that he has failed to consider the inner feelings of Finn. As he is created by his own imagination, he fails to visualize Finn’s separate existence apart from it. When Finn leaves, Jake “felt ashamed, ashamed to being parted from Finn, of having known so little about Finn, of having conceived thing as I pleased and not as they were” (Net 279). This is one of the shocking recognitions that ends Jake’s isolated freedom and compels him to take into consideration the survival and liberty of others.

It is after his Paris visit, Jake takes up the job of an orderly in a hospital. Now the money which has tied Jake to other human beings loses its previous significance. Jake though not actively committed to politics, is still communicating with Lefty, the eccentric leader of the New Independent Socialists. It is due to this significant development in his
character that his humanistic qualities come to the forefront. He buys Mister Mars, the
movie dog, which he has kidnapped by spending all that he had. He has learnt to embrace
the contingency of people and the “untidy dappledness of the world” (Kellman 48). Jake
decides to take a part-time job in a hospital and rent a room near Hampstead Heath. Thus
Jake has pursued reality and truth and discovered the answer in the particular situation
and the individual person.

A particular destructive fantasy which Murdoch seeks to reveal is humanity’s
obsession with creating order and thus failing to recognize the unpredictability of the
world. The acceptance of contingency is a very common theme in her novels. In fact, this
acceptance of contingency and this surrender to loss of control are at the heart of one’s
discovery of love. She explains:

It is the task of mortals (as artists and as men) to understand the
necessary for the sake of the intelligence, to see in a pure just light the
hardness of the real properties of the world, the effects of the wandering
causes, why good purposes are checked and where the mystery of the
random has to be accepted. (Fire 80)

Accepting contingency by abandoning rational concepts and self-centredness becomes
the basic ideology of overcoming destructive fantasy. Living a life dictated by the
concept of Murdochian love helps one to get freed from the shackles of obsession.

Jake’s apprehension of his true vocation indicates apprehension of his true being.
His journey from self-righteous, self-obsessive neurotic awareness of people and
environment is a journey from appearance to reality. Analysing the character of Jake,
Byatt writes, “the development of his ability to recognize a need to do something, in society, has been a development of his possibility of becoming an artist” (33). Jake proceeds from a false concept of freedom and consolatory forms of fantasy to real freedom. His solipsistic view acquires a humanistic awareness. Through a series of encounters, he reaches a stage where he understands the meaning of love and creativity. He is free and reconciled to the contingency of creation. The revival of Jake’s creativity is associated with the renewal of sense of wonder in the inexplicable mystery of the world. He has slipped under the net of theories, forms and projected subjective vision. He is now open to the wonders of life.

It is essential for human beings to face reality and come out of their fantasy world. Human beings try to rationalize their experiences and give them some form according to their own imagination. Murdoch feels that it is the duty of a novelist to make his characters come out of fantasy, myth and discover reality as she remarks:

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 clean crystalline work, the simplified fantasy-myth, we must put the destructive power of the now so unfashionable naturalistic idea of characters. (“Dryness” 19)

Shattering of fantasy is necessary for human beings to realize the real existence of others.
Murdoch’s *The Flight from the Enchanter* focuses on the dominant image of flight or escape from the overpowering spell of an enchanter figure. Rosa’s escape from Mischa’s influence gives Rosa the opportunity to define herself by accepting a responsibility she had previously avoided. The brothers have turned into a nightmarish affair from which Rosa is unable to extricate herself. Their unpredictable behaviour towards her, by making her the victim of sexual power, brings Rosa to make a moral decision and act on it. After Stefan Lusiewicz moves into her home and threatens Hunter, she realizes her captivity and wants to free from it. She plans to turn to Mischa, who has greater power than the demonic Lusiewicz brothers. In need of help to combat the power gained by the men over her, Rosa turns to Mischa, who has been harassing Rosa and Hunter to sell the ‘Artemis.’ She also requests him some form of solution for her problem.

Rosa’s brief moment of freedom, after having made the decision to get rid of the brothers is replaced by the feeling that she “was selling herself into captivity” (*Flight* 24). Rosa sees herself as unsubstantial in relation to Mischa and the Lusiewicz brothers. Mischa arranges a governmental edict that requires the banishment of eastern European refugees born east of an arbitrary boundary line. This action alleviates her predicament with the brothers, but inadvertently causes Nina, her close friend to commit suicide. Thus when Rosa loses control over the brothers, she senses that her own actions are powerless and this awareness compels her to withdraw from their domain and to rely once more on the power of Mischa.

Rosa’s pilgrimage to Mischa’s house makes her understand her illusions. Overcoming her fears about Mischa, Rosa travels to Italy to meet him. Unaware that
Mischa is drawing the net of control closely around her, Rosa in a romantic frenzy rushes to his Italian villa telling herself that “this was the day that would decide her fate . . . . Her destiny was already made” (275). Her romanticism about her relationship to Mischa is shattered by Calvin Blick’s revelation that Mischa knows about her relationship with the Lusiewicz brothers. Moreover, he has instructed Calvin to photograph Rosa with them to use as an instrument for blackmailing her brother.

Calvin Blick leads Rosa away from the trance of her illusion. Grimshaw opines, “as illusion is overcome, the individual obtains a truer picture of reality, and low Eros is transfigured into high Eros” (168). She experiences a kind of annihilation when Blick unveils the halo like mask around Mischa. The illusory suffering of Rosa does end in quite a positive clarity of self-chastisement while she decides to leave Mischa on instructions from Calvin. She says, “It’s odd . . . in the past I always felt that whether I went towards him or away from him. I was only doing his will. But it was all an illusion” (Flight 281). By destroying her Romanticism about Mischa’s power over her, Calvin enables Rosa to set herself free. This break in Mischa’s net of power underlines the contingent aspect of life, of real people being able to destroy myth and illusion like Rosa. She encounters the hardness of reality through direct exposure to the evil in Mischa and Calvin. She achieves a sudden freshness and clarity of thought which she has been unable to do prior to this event. Coming face to face with evil makes Rosa reflect and see that she has willed much of the disorder and disaster upon herself and others. She fails to love and heed the needs of others.

Calvin also points out to Rosa how she is too self-centered to see Nina’s desperate need for help. He informs the reasons of Nina’s suicide. Rosa learns that Nina, her close
friend commits suicide because of the government order invoked by Mischa to eliminate Rosa’s predicament with the brothers. She regrets that her own selfish interests have affected the lives of others. When Calvin points out about Nina that “Someone ought to have explained things to her, someone who knew her situation through and through. As it was, she was just an incidental casualty” (279). Rosa realizes her mistakes that how she ignores Nina when she approaches her for help. Shocked by Nina’s death and conscious of her own freedom, Rosa moves away from her solitary and mechanical existence and is able to accept the responsibility for others and herself.

Freed from the overpowering spell of Mischa, Rosa is in a position to apprehend the value of other individuals. Rosa experiences a process of renewal within herself and throughout the course of the events, two things have altered her. She decides to quit her mechanical and impersonal job at the factory to accept the responsibility of editing the ‘Artemis’ and secondly, she has developed from a solitary and faithless state to being able to accept the responsibility for others and herself. When Rosa returns to London, Peter informs that one of the wealthy stockholders of the ‘Artemis’, Mrs. Wingfield, has died and left “you all the shares of the Artemis . . . and an annuity of five hundred pounds so long as the journal continues in publication with you as its editor” (285). As Rosa is freed from Mischa’s influence she acquires the chance to assume the responsibility for her own life. Mrs. Wingfield’s will leaves the shares of the ‘Artemis’ to Rosa, and an annuity if she comes forward to edit the journal.

Rosa from a solitary and faithless state of existence establishes a direction for her life predicking her individual identity. She accepts the responsibility of editing the ‘Artemis’. At this point, Rosa devotes herself to promote the traditional ideas of the
journal and she senses a need to function constructively in society. When this happens, Rosa learns to adjust to her solitude and to be responsive to the uniqueness of others and to the demands of her own distinctive nature. Moreover, she balances the various demands of her social, professional and private life. Rosa seems to be in her own independence and possesses the initiative to act.

At the end of the novel, Rosa decides to marry Peter Saward. He points out that she is not entirely free when she asks him to marry her, he says:

He looked at her calmly and a little sadly. ‘You can imagine, my darling’, he said, how much it moves me to hear you say this. But you don’t really want it. Some god or demon makes you say it, but you don’t really want it . . . . He put his hand under her chin and looked into her eyes. She stared back at him fiercely. (287)

Peter forces Rosa to continue to face reality by reminding her of Mischa’s power. She must create a believable concept of truth by emerging from her egoistic shell. Rosa occurs self-renewal after fleeing from the power of Mischa. She also realizes her egoism and her inability to understand others. Thus Rosa undergoes a movement from isolation to affiliation with others and from non-identity to identity. Her unselfing reveals an endless flight from fantasy, fear, wantonness and helplessness.

The novel, *An Unofficial Rose* is concerned with the relationships between freedom and virtue, and also between beauty and truth. The characters in Murdoch’s novels display a whole gamut of human experiences and human emotions. The extremes of behaviour and the workings of relationships serve to highlight the actualities of
ordinary life in which one strives towards fuller understanding of one’s self and consequently of the world. In Spear view Murdoch’s novels are “metaphors of life and consciously presented as art, so that the reality of life is subsumed into the theatricality of an invented world” (19).

Randall in *An Unofficial Rose* abandons his married life to achieve freedom and form. Neurosis forces him to leave his wife and to suffer enslavement at the hands of Lindsay. He is self-centered and does not mind the desires of others. The love of Lindsay offers Randall an opportunity to free himself from the negative force of Ann. Lindsay too wants freedom and forces him to arrange money without caring for the means. She says “the programme is, first you think, then you get the money. . .” (*Unofficial* 125-26). Both Randall and Lindsay do not want to know anything about Ann. Lindsay is preoccupied with her own thoughts and urges Randall to get money.

Only financial freedom can provide Randall with an opportunity to leave for Rome with his dream figure. He seeks the help of his father to get money. Randall succeeds in making his father give him a huge amount of money by selling Tintoretto, the costly painting. Randall tells his father, “I know you like the picture. But it isn’t as if it would be a family heirloom. You know quite well I’d sell it before you were cold” (184). Hugh, his father assists him though not entirely on unselfish grounds. He sells his ‘golden dream’, the Tintoretto, to purchase a fantasy of freedom for his son. He enables his son to make the choice he could not make himself twenty years earlier. Hugh forsakes his mistress Emma, in order to protect his married life. But on receiving the cheque, Randall’s feelings are mixed up. Datta opines, “It appears as if he had made a symbolic assassination of his father” (98). After receiving the money, he feels “he floated on the air
like a huge undirected balloon” (Unofficial 215). The sense of liberation seems to be blank and drifting as a dream.

The freedom Randall has bargained for by leaving the solidity of his life at Grayhallock, can at best be described as deceptive. He has romantically figured his flight as a perfect image of freedom. He describes:

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 would soon don a new personality . . . he had not yet . . . quite put off the bad old self. (314)

Randall’s finds it difficult to get rid of the thought of Lindsay from his mind. Moreover, he has imagined that Lindsay lives in a region of perfect freedom or a sort of paradise of imagination. He is prepared to do anything in order to emulate her mode of being. Instead of being free, he becomes her slave.

Ann has failed to understand her husband and gets rejected by Randall. Later he pities for the rejected Ann, but still sees her as “deadeningly structureless” (121). Ann’s memory persistently haunts him during his elopement with Lindsay. He is remorseful for his act. Even during his fantasies, he always remembers Ann’s face. After his flight to Rome with Lindsay, Ann occupies his nightly dreams. He now begins to feel “curious stirrings of another freedom” (315), and the future he now looks includes a vision of Ann. Randall cherishes the hope of a secure future with Ann.
Randall is not free in the sense in which other characters are at the end of the novel. To reach their condition requires the ability to transcend one’s self-awareness to a degree that permits penetration into the reality of others. According to Mole, “the struggle to become good requires knowledge of one’s own moral character it provides a further impetus for patient and careful attention to the world” (83). 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. The novelist asserts, “A number of things, seemingly unrelated, contributed to there being in his attempted pattern, significant gaps” (Unofficial 303). One such gap pertains to his earlier apprehension is Lindsay. He soon becomes conscious that his moon-goddess does not measure up to the glorious image he has constructed of her. He detects with disapproval of her lack of interest in Italian art. Her deceit is noticeable in the various versions she gives of her childhood. He deliberately glosses over her vulgarity. Turning his face away from where reality lay, he indulges in a continual fantasy. He realizes that he could never be a successful playwright. The only task he knows is that he is good at raising of roses. But at this stage the roses have thorns and he is not prepared to go back to them. At the end of the novel, Randall appears to be on the verge of returning to develop a securer relationship with Ann. His mind “saw in a vision the sunny hillside at Grayhallock” (317), covered with roses and Ann standing amongst them.

The idea of suffering as presented by Murdoch can be compared with the Christian idea of suffering. This difficult idea of redemptive suffering derives clearly from the thought of Simone Weil. Weil sees the acceptance of injustice and the
acceptance of suffering as an apprehension of reality. In *The Unicorn*, Murdoch projects the negative aspect of suffering. This kind of suffering is contradictory to the Christian view. The Christian idea concentrates on the positive aspect of suffering. Suffering leads to the reformation of the character of an individual. Murdoch argues, “Morality, as virtue, involves a particular acceptance of the human condition and the suffering therein, combined with a concomitant checking of selfish desires” (“Metaphysics” 109). Her argument is that negative suffering would lead a person to being self-satisfied and thus to becoming egoistic.

In *The Unicorn*, Hannah takes upon herself the suffering of isolation as expiation out of her feeling of guilt of betrayal and adultery. Suffering ennobles and purifies and leads towards the path to goodness. It also helps one to kill the self. But in this novel, Murdoch brings out that suffering has its own enchantment and consolation. Consolation is a dangerous idea. It is a characteristic of evil, and a device to reduce one’s consciousness of the evil. It also transforms love into false love. Murdoch remarks, “to buy back evil by suffering in the embrace of good: what could be more satisfying . . . . . Indeed, the central image of Christianity lends itself just this illegitimate transformation” (*Sovereignty* 82). Hannah’s attempt of self-purification turns out to be a false attempt because her realm is that of purgatory and not of true unselfing. Self-mortification disguises self-deception and rapacious ego.

Hannah resists any move for freedom. Once, she has left Gaze and gone to her father but he has refused to accept her. After that, Jamesie attempts to rescue her, but are caught by Gerald Scottow. Finally Marian and Effingham try to save Hannah by kidnapping her. But this becomes a vain attempt. She tells Effingham, “I belong here, it
all belongs here. To go somewhere else would have too much significance now, it would make me be something” (Unicorn 93). But Hannah does not realize that this desire to transcend her own being requires more immense energy. When Peter’s arrival is announced, she gets collapsed.

In the case of Hannah, suffering becomes consolation, and not a means of unselfing. Attempt of self-purification ends with sexual submission to Gerald Scottow, her captive. She realizes that what she has taken for the contemplation of good is self-contemplation only. She admits to Marian:

It was your belief in the significance of my suffering that kept me going. Ah, how much I needed you all! I have battened upon you like a secret vampire, I have even battened on Max Lejour. I needed my audience, I lived in your gaze like a false God. But it is the punishment of a false God to become unreal. I have become unreal. You have made me unreal by thinking about me so much. You made me into an object of contemplation.

(219)

Even after realizing her mistakes, Hannah refuses to move out of the cave. She declines the offer of Pip to move out with him. She hopes that she can come out of the purgatory on her own.

Dennis has a Christian and feudal view of Hannah’s suffering. He also has faith in Hannah’s goodness and the efficacy of her suffering. He views her suffering as a form of Christian penance for sin. He explains, “What is spiritual is unnatural. The soul under the burden of sin cannot flee . . . . you cannot come between her and her suffering, it is
too complicated, too precious” (65). At the end of the novel, Dennis kills Peter to free Hannah. But as soon as there is a second announcement of Peter’s arrival, she becomes unnerved and commits suicide. Cubukcu avers, “As a recluse, she lives through her guilt which is finally atoned for in her death” (70). Her destiny is marked not by spiritual advancement but by murder and defeat. The drama of self-purification ends in sado-masochism. Her choice of penitential virtue achieves nothing. Thus her spiritual quest becomes futile.

Murdoch’s *The Unicorn* partly reveals the falsity of construing virtue to be “a stripping the personality for a leap” (“Sublime” 270), unaccompanied by a change of vision and an effacement of the self. Her suffering is not a truly spiritual act but an effort at buying back evil by suffering in the hold of good. Such an attempt at self-immolation is bound to fail in the Murdochian scheme because it is more of self-indulgence, a virtuous disguise of the rapacious ego. It is linked with sado-masochism rather than a genuine moral discipline and change. Murdoch strongly criticizes such false suffering in the following lines:

The idea of suffering confuses the mind and in certain contexts (the context of ‘sincere self-examination’ for instance) can masquerade as a purification. It is rarely this, for unless it is very intense indeed it is far too interesting. Plato does not say that philosophy is the study of suffering, he says it is the study of death (Phaedo 64A), and these ideas are totally dissimilar. That moral improvement involves suffering is usually true, but the suffering is the by-product of a new orientation and not in any sense an end in itself. (*Sovereignty* 66-67)
Hannah makes suffering a consolatory idea. Instead of purification, it leads to excessive self-involvement and finally to violence. No new orientation takes place in her case which would have enabled her to break free of her shackles. Even in her recognition of her enslavement does not in any way improve her perception of others. It is a temporary insight into her downward situation which is soon veiled by the murder of Scottow and her own death. Due to lack of love, Hannah fails to achieve reality. Gazing at life instead of entering it, is a sign of egoistic self-involvement. Wolfe states, Hannah forgets that “the way to freedom ties in relinquishing these illusions or forms and entering sympathetically into life” (196). Thus Hannah lives in her underground selfish illusions and refuses to come out of the cave to gaze the truth.

Thus Murdoch’s novels, in varying ways, show that the truth is open to all but many do not feel any urge to seek it. Of those who have the urge, many suffer from doubt and vacillation. Even if they do not have doubts, many are scared away by difficulties. Only a few racing souls succeed in braving the perils and reaching the goals. Such a state is attained only by very few, who are willing to pay the price in self-discipline, steadfastness and non-attachment. For the apprehension of the final truth, every taint of individuality should disappear. There should be elimination of all prejudices and idiosyncrasies. One must learn to live above absorption of persons and places. In order to change the unregenerate nature, one must cut the root of desire which is the main cause of illusions and sufferings.

Most of Murdoch’s novels trace the moral progress of her characters from mediocre illusion ridden lives to self-realization. Blinded by self-interest, romantic notions of freedom and an opaque vision, they are engaged in transforming reality into
various self-designed patterns and forms. Human beings by nature are “selfish and sunk
in a reality deformed by their own fantasies, the good requires a transformation of the self
through the purification of psychic Eros, which is the motive force of human moral
being” (Antonaccio 15). Their moral development is a gradual transition from this stage
to a condition where they have a better insight into themselves and others. This evolution
is achieved by a loving and compassionate attention paid to the individual’s reality of
people or situations confronting them. The direction of attention on individuals and
obedience to reality is an exercise of love and freedom. Both freedom and love involve
the imaginative recognition and respect for this otherness.

In The Nice and the Good, one can find Ducane’s moral progress towards
freedom and discovery of reality. In the process he learns the meaning of goodness and
justice. According to Datta, Ducane “learns to face the starkness of truth and to exercise
true moral freedom by discarding the forms and patterns he had contrived for himself and
others” (116). As a legal advisor to the case, Ducane is placed in a position of authority
and power. He is placed to inquire the death of Radeechy. Ducane discovers that
Radeechy has conducted black magic in the vaults under the Whitehall offices. MC
Grath, an employee of the same department, supplies pigeons and naked women required
for the rites. Richard Biranne, another colleague is also embroiled in the scandal. He is
the morally culpable accessory to Radeechy’s suicide and the murder of his wife. Richard
has suppressed the suicide note left by Radeechy revealing the facts of his wife’s adultery
and blaming Richard for his death.

Early in his life, Ducane has given up a career in the courts as he considered
judging morally as wrong. He has observed that no human being is worthy of being a
judge. However, is humble enough to be a just man and a just judge. This illusion that he alone is capable of being just expresses a dangerous desire to shape and command the world. He has exercised considerable influence on other characters but has not been much concerned with the power he has over them. Although Ducane considers himself to be good and just, he is far away from these virtues. Mole states, “If being good is thought of as involving virtue, then a deliberate attempt to become good seems to involve self-directed attention, which renders improvement impossible” (78-79). It is only his experience in Gunnar’s cave that makes him a good man. He risks his life to save Pierce’s life by swimming to Gunnar’s cave where the adolescent boy has gone to impress Barbara. Ducane is trapped in the cave along with Pierce and the dog, Mingo. With the rise of the sea water, their lives are in danger. When Ducane faces death, his views about himself undergo a change. It is evident in the following lines:

He saw himself now as a little rat, a busy little scurrying rat seeking out its own little advantages and comforts. To live easily, to have cosy familiar pleasures, to be well thought of . . . . He saw the face of Biranne near to him, as in a silent film, moving, mouthing, but unheard. He thought, if I ever get out of here I will be no man’s judge. Nothing is worth doing except to kill the little rat, not to judge, not to be superior, not to exercise power, not to seek, seek, seek. To love and to reconcile and to forgive, only this matters. All power is sin and all law is frailty. Love is the only justice. Forgiveness, reconciliation, not law. (Nice 304-5)

Thus Ducane is able to become good when he rises above his self-interest and risks his personal life to save Pierce’s life. A desperate encounter with his own death makes him
realize that he can judge no man. He recognizes that his idea about himself as good is the
greatest sin because it prevents him from doing good for others.

Death often figures in Murdoch’s novels as a catalytic agent. By forcing an
interest of attention in the dreamy life of man, it sharpens not only the apprehension of
reality but also inspires a selfless love and a true exercise of freedom. In the words of
Datta, Murdoch “undertakes serious examination of death as a powerful force for the
destruction of the dreaming, self-aggrandizing ego that hinders moral growth and
freedom” (115). The idea of death forces to attend on the good and releases the hold of
the normal deluded working of the egocentric self. The absoluteness of death clarifies the
vision by negation and effacement of the self. It opens the way to love, virtue and
freedom. Both Murdoch and Sartre try to give a realistic content to Plato’s image of life
outside the cave by considering death as a crucifixion of personal desires. Ducane’s
moment of epiphany and insight into the meaning of reality and life emerges out of his
close brush with death. Death, the destroyer of all images, dispels all the roles and forms.
His concepts of goodness and justice undergo a process of transformation. He has learnt
to transcend his solipsism

Love and near death help Ducane to see power and law as evil and love and
forgiveness as good. For the first time, he comes to understand the immense moral danger
involved in the use of power. When he traps Biranne he feels intense satisfaction, but
soon he recognizes his defect. Instead of spoiling Biranne’s career by writing about his
hiding Radeechy’s dying statement on a paper, Ducane excuses him and ignores what
should have been done according to law. The conflict in his mind about dispensation of
justice in the Radeechy case is resolved. Once he is assured of Biranne’s remorse that he
still loves Paula, his ex-wife, he decides to conceal his disclosures. After gaining power over Biranne, Ducane starts dispensing his own type of justice which is morally superior to the justice of law. He makes Biranne reveal his crime to this divorced wife and is able to unite the divorced couple. It only implies that he has learnt something about the reality of evil and the vast selfishness lying as its roots.

Ducane’s moral progress is evident in the acceptance of his shortcomings. As a character immersed in a moral struggle, he exercises his power over others. He sees himself a “perfect whited sepulcher” (Nice 251). He realizes that he has deceived Jessica and Kate by keeping them unknown about each other. Ducane is aware of the others like Jessica. He prevents himself from becoming egoistic and this can be considered his goodness. He recognizes the illusory power with which he has been obsessed. Winsor avers, “One sees John Ducane’s growing recognition of the separate state of others, at the beginning of the novel, he keeps Jessica Bird tied to him to the extent that she is literally blind to the outside world and at the end he recognizes and denounces his own egotism” (149). He is able to free himself from his physical involvement with Jessica and also to come out of his romantic involvement. He learns to perceive others sympathetically and justly. Thus the abandonment of self leads not only to love and freedom, but also to happiness.

Ducane’s basic characteristic is moral struggle. He expends his considerable powers of rumination on examining his own moral potentialities. Granlund opines, “Moral growth comes to those who recognize the limitations of their vision and who seek to widen their vision instead of despairing” (175). Ducane learns one significant fact about evil, that evil lies within human heart. He releases himself from Jessica’s
possessiveness and Kate’s playful kitten love and decides to marry Mary Clothier. He acknowledges, “he had begun to need Mary when he had begun to need a better image of himself. She was the consoling counterpart of his self-abasement” (Nice 334). Ducane’s love for Mary moves away from the selfish, self-absorbed love that he earlier felt for Kate or for Jessica. He confesses to Mary about his relations with Jessica. He does not fear what Mary would feel about him.

Ducane recognizes whom he truly loves when he is inside the cave. He identifies love as an enabling force by the image of a woman’s face, a saving Venus figure inside the cave. He sees, “the face of a woman swam in front of him, seeming to move and yet to be still like the racing moon, indistinct and yet intent, staring into his eyes” (302). Venus is the symbol of low Eros or physical love which he had for Jessica and Kate. Now that kind of love is developed into a truer love for Mary. When she meets Ducane afterwards in his house in London, Ducane thinks that her “mode of being gave him a moral, even a metaphysical confidence in the world, in the reality of goodness . . . it is in the nature of love to discern good, and the best love is . . . a love of what is good” (344). The Venus figure in the Gunnar Cave is later replaced by Mary Clothier who symbolizes true love.

Ducane begins to feel the impersonal and transcendental love for Mary. Earlier, he fails to apprehend Mary as a separate individual. For him, “She was far too plain an object to remain visible to him” (334), and gradually he develops a growing respect for her and begins to attend her. He tries to free her of the obsession with the past. As both of them come to a mutual understanding, Ducane learns that “the best love is in some part at any rate a love of what is good” (333). For him she is the mother goddess, the very
embodiment of goodness and generosity. In *The Nice and the Good*, Murdoch makes the
readers understand that love is linked with goodness. When Ducane’s illusion about his
goodness is shattered, he realizes the uprightness of Mary.

The novel *The Nice and the Good* is psychologically realistic and has granted a
degree of freedom to Ducane. It also represents a landmark in Murdoch’s fictional career.
It exhibits her mature but pessimistic outlook about the importance of death as an
instrument of knowledge. For Murdoch, one of the means of recognizing solipsism or
illusion is the near death experience. Ducane is shown to be in a state of illusion that he
comes to recognize through love and a near death experience, and he finally becomes
partially unselfed. In the words of Bove, Ducane, “the central character in the novel,
comes to recognize, through a near death experience, the true nature of power and the
dreariness of evil” (59). Inside the cave he faces the threat of death, and this affects him
substantially. He embraces the idea of the world governed by chance, which does not
frighten him because he has started unselfing and the unselfing self embraces chance and
is not concerned about its existence. Death can result in shedding of some illusions and
forms falsely created by man.

Murdoch’s idea of liberation of the self is connected very closely with the
religious idea. She has mentioned the perception of reality as the most important aspect in
the growth of the personality of an individual. This perception of reality is possible only
if the self is freed from selfish passion, neurosis, cruelty and egoism. All the narrow,
selfish desires, and urges of an individual will be curtailed only when this liberation is
attained. Murdoch’s work is concerned with that type of morality which helps the
individual to perceive reality and to attain freedom. Her novels also try to establish that
the human mind has the tendency to deform the reality with the help of fantasy and illusion.

Morgan in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* is an egoist, veiled in false moral concepts. Without knowing the real meaning of love, she tells that she is going to love everyone. According to Murdoch, moral language is a function of perception, “We clearly understand and grow by looking” (*Sovereignty* 31). Morgan fails to realize her flaws and believes that she can see clearly. This always turns out to be an illusion, and she is short-sighted and cannot see reality. Murdoch asserts, “We have to accept a darker, less fully conscious, less steadily rational image of the dynamics of the human personality” (44). One has to accept that the human personality is complex, opaque and ambiguous. One has to focus one’s attention and accept the limitations of what one can reasonably know about oneself, others and life.

The theme of anxiety, fragility and finitude of human life is developed in the important scene in which Morgan is in the underground and tries to save a pigeon. Obsessed by her problems with Rupert, Morgan sees a pigeon at the bottom of the escalator. She focuses on the bird to the exclusion of the crowd of hasty preoccupied human beings that pass her by. She sees, “People hurried past her, shadows with anxious vague eyes. No one stopped, not one watched, no one paid the slightest attention to what she was doing” (*Fairly* 292). Her obsession with Rupert is replaced by the thought of rescuing the bird from the underground. This attempt at rescuing the bird is one of the few occasions where Morgan ceases to be preoccupied with herself. All of her energies are directed toward something outside her.
The most prominent technique in Murdoch’s story-telling is her use of images. Imagery is an author’s use of vivid and descriptive language to add depth to the work. The pigeon and Morgan are to a certain extent intertwined. Through her unconscious identification with it, she begins to understand her fears and worries. When Morgan sees the bird, her immediate reaction becomes strong. Erisken points out, “It is a dramatic turning-point in her personal journey towards wholeness, integrity and a more mature identity” (169). Morgan wants to rescue the bird from the disaster. She plans to drive the bird to the upper part of the station and she contemplates:

. . . even if I can’t catch it, if I could only drive it up into the upper part of the station, it might see the daylight through one of the exits and fly out. It would have more chance of survival there than if it stays down here. The idea of the bird trapped in that warm dusty electric-lighted underground place filled her heart with pity and horror. (Fairly 291)

Morgan thus steps onto the up-ward bound escalator to implement the plan. The upward movement toward the light is a direct reference to the Platonic myth of the cave and is associated with the movement away from the illusory world of self-deception and ultimately to transcendent.

Morgan’s compassion for the bird directs her attention away from herself. This is significant with respect to her process of unselfing. She begins to find her own real self and her true identity. Morgan tries to save the pigeon. Every time she gets close, however the bird flies away so she cannot reach. When she chases it up the escalator, the bird flies back down to the bottom. She is caught in a dilemma as to how she can save the
pigeon and worries that whatever she does it will die. She “felt dejection and confused
defeated pain for her poor fugitive. Where could it be now?” (293). The dilemma
concerning the pigeon echoes her psychological state. Her present panic and fear which
she feels on behalf of the pigeon, is an indication of the parallel dilemma she faces in her
own life. She fears true intimacy and yet her identity is suffocating in the depth of
deception around which her life revolves.

The underground scene brings to light the point that the ego-maniac souls lost in
material pursuits remain separated and alienated from their real spiritual self. Morgan’s
chase of the pigeon symbolizes her chase of her innocent self. After a while, she realizes
that she has lost her handbag. She is trapped in the underground with neither ticket nor
money. Morgan feels like a “bird the small and suffering animal that cannot save itself
from the underground entrapment. Oh hell, thought Morgan, all the rest and this as well”
(329). Like Ducane, she experiences a metaphoric death while she is in the underground.
It exists like a nightmare, and she has neither the power nor material good to get away
and to save herself from the situation. There she sees Tallis. She tells herself, “I must
follow Tallis. I must see Tallis, I must see him at once” (334). In Morgan’s case, Tallis
represents some sort of value and innocence. She feels ashamed of her act towards him.
She knows she is all hallow inside. She is not able to catch neither the pigeon nor Tallis.
She wants to cling to her lost innocence, but it eludes her every time.

Although Morgan has now left the underground, the atmosphere outside is hellish.
The external atmosphere is a reflection of her inner world. It is important that her guilt
for once concerns someone other than herself. She sees her past actions as being
consequential for other people’s lives. In this case, she realizes that her actions have been
deprived someone of its life. However, her mind still revolves around herself. She identifies with something larger than herself, and although this is a negative and painful experience for her, she transcends the solipsistic world view she has been living within. As one “defeats illusion, which the shadows inside the cave symbolize, one is better able to turn toward truth and reality, which the sun in Plato’s parable represents” (Grimshaw 167).

Morgan has a long way to go to reach a degree of moral maturity by seeing beyond herself to the other. She is on the way. Morgan is convinced that she has reached insight into who she is and also believed the consequential change in her to be imminent. Morgan realizes that relationships are fragmented and unreadable to her. She thinks:

. . . all the trouble in my life has come from men. The only time I was ever really happy was when Hilda and I were together, long ago when we were young. And not just long ago, but ever since in a way Hilda has been the guardian of my happiness. I never came to claim it, but I knew it was there, and that was my only deep and enduring comfort. All through that awful time in America I rested upon the thought of Hilda, and when I came back it was to Hilda that I came home. How childish of me to have tried to deceive her. (Fairly 347)

Morgan writes a letter to Rupert, letting him know that she will have no more to do with him and that she reproaches him for having started the relationship. She also writes a short note to Hilda saying, “Darling hang on. We will not be divided” (349). At the end of the novel, Hilda, Morgan and Peter move to California and start a new happy life.
The idea of unselfing and loving attention is directed to what is other than oneself. Morgan’s journey to the underground represents a symbolic death, a death in which she for a while loses her sense of selfhood. The death-imagery is present not only structurally, but by use of other references to hell, both directly and indirectly. Erisken holds the view that “the recognizable dual patterns of up/ down, inside/ outside, darkness/ light belong to a traditional Christian imagery of heaven/ hell, as well as being profoundly Platonic” (328). This symbolic death has a great significance in her story as she is potential for goodness. Murdoch avers, “the acceptance of death is an acceptance of our own nothingness which is an automatic spur to our concern with what is not ourselves” (Sovereignty 103). Morgan’s search for self is driven by an anxiety of being nothing.

Murdoch’s novels reveal how the protagonists come out of their fantasy world to face reality. Facing reality brings mental as well as moral maturity to them. Till these characters are in illusion they fail to achieve what they want to achieve. It is only by confronting reality they are able to do what they wanted to do throughout their lives. The Black Prince is the story of Bradley’s creative struggle as an artist and a moral person to be realistic and free. The freedom of his goal is gradual and torturously achieved. It involves a slow surrender to the open and contingent world of messy human affairs. Ekstam points out, “Bradley strives towards perfection as he enhances his understanding of human nature and progresses towards a more just and loving relationship with others. (22). Both as an artist and a man, he progresses by dispelling his egocentric formalist illusions regarding art, himself and others.
Earlier Bradley displays himself in a state of illusion obsessed with his own needs. As an artist, he is unable to create a good work of art. Murdoch makes him recognize the state of illusion through love. He falls in love with Julian, Arnold’s daughter, who asks for his help with the literary works she has to study. Bradley selfishly rejects her, but later, due to her persistent pleas, he accepts to help her with Shakespeare. During the *Hamlet* tutorial, he finds out that he has fallen passionately in love with her. He recalls:

> When how did I begin to realize the charm of this girl? Love generates, or rather reveals something which may be called *absolute charm*. In the beloved nothing is gauche. Every move of the head, every tone of the voice, every laugh or grunt or cough or twitch of the nose is as valuable and revealing as a glimpse of paradise. And in fact lying there absolutely limp and yet absolutely taut with my brow on the ground and my eyes closed I was actually not just glimpsing but in paradise. The act of falling in love, of really falling in love (I do not mean what sometimes passes by this name), floods the being with immediate ecstasy. (*Prince* 206-7)

After he falls in love, he recognizes his solipsism and his moral state and the process of unselfing begins. His egoism is replaced by a kind of concern for others. His altruism, both in his disposition and discourse, is the result of love and it has freed him from his old obsessions and his attitude towards the people around him.

Falling in love is the central drama in the lives of most people and the key to achieve freedom. Both Simone Weil and Murdoch agree to this idea and regard love as
the liberating catalytic force. Murdoch comments, “whereby the central of significance is suddenly ripped out of the self, and the dreamy ego is shocked into awareness of an entirely separate reality” (*Fire* 36). For Bradley, this blaze of love transmutes his vision of life and the world. Conradi asserts that “the black coal is steadily changed into a diamond” (52). It also gives Bradley a liberation from self-regarding enclosedness and a concomitant access to reality.

Love brings about an attitude of selflessness and generosity towards others. Murdoch is fundamentally concerned with Eros’s ability to promote what she calls unselfing. Gordon states, Murdoch’s “principal paths to the Good are Eros and art. Eros and art are by no means unegoistic or incorruptible in her scheme of things, but they are capable of transforming selfhood into a mode of spiritual aspiration, a step on the Platonic ladder to a reality beyond appearances” (46). Unselfing is the redirection of consciousness away from one’s natural state of preoccupation with the self. She explains, when the self is confronted with something beautiful, that object has an almost natural ability to arrest the ego’s normal patterns of self-directed obsession. Romantic love is the perfect image of this dynamic in action. Murdoch contends:

Falling in love, a violent process which Plato more than once vividly describes (love in abnegation, abjection, slavery) is for many people the most extraordinary and most revealing experience of their lives, whereby the centre of significance is suddenly ripped out of the self and the dreamy ego is shocked into awareness of an entirely separate reality. (*Fire* 417)
Erotic love is a virtually universal experience that has the capacity to remove the centre of significance from the self and focus it on another reality. Bradley feels renewed due to his love for Julian. Julian’s love makes him feel “completely happy and also feel virtuous” (*Prince* 122).

Bradley’s capacity for right and truthful perception starts initially with his falling in love with Julian. He knows that love can change the quality of consciousness. In his new love, he tries to find the source of true art. Julian has filled him with an unimaginable power which he states, “I knew that I would and I could use in my art. The deep cause of the universe, the stars, the distant galaxies, the ultimate particles of matter, had fashioned these two things, my love and my art as aspects of what was ultimately one and the same” (209). He is so obsessed with his own self-renewal in his passion for Julian. Earlier the love of an old man for a young girl is something which he considers ugly and pathetic. Now he finds Julian pretty and finds his own middle-aged body handsome. Similarly his attitude towards Roger and Marigold softens. He is no longer offended by their affair. Bradley tells them, “I’m very sorry I was so unpleasant to you both down in Bristol . . . . I still am, but don’t regard you as wicked, I know how these things happen” (220). He also wants to cultivate a friendly rapport with Christian. He grants her forgiveness and asks to be forgiven. His neurotic disgust for smells and ageing bodies disappears. He also reads Arnold’s work and brings out a favourable review. He also hides the fact from Julian and says a lie about his age.

Julian’s elopement and stay with Bradley at Patara is the culmination of Bradley’s dream. It is her infatuation with Bradley that makes her not to see the oddness of her match with him. It is only after her father comes to take her back she acts like a real
woman. On learning the actual age of Bradley and his affair with her mother Rachael, she understands the oddness of her stay with Bradley. She leaves him and returns to her parents in London. With this withdrawal begins the real education and the true ascesis of Bradley. His earlier charity and benign selfless outlook though inspired by love for Julian, is an outcome of the fantasy-ridden euphoric bliss. It is an expression of self-joy not a real objective interest in others.

Bradley’s love for Rachael and her daughter Julian constitutes the major part of *The Black Prince* and brings him from illusion to reality. It is in fact the change in their attitude towards him that makes him realize the otherness of other human beings. Arnold’s murder by Rachael gives Bradley a big shock. He is falsely convicted for the murder of Arnold Baffin, because of Bradley’s disclosure of Arnold’s affair with Christian. In the trial, Bradley is accused of being jealous of Arnold. He is misunderstood and betrayed by everyone in the trial. None of them, Julian, Francis, Hartbourne and Christian, does anything for him. Bradley is sentenced to life imprisonment. He is imprisoned and his deep meditation in the prison, over the past happenings of his life enables him to come out of his fantasy world and also arise above hatred and malice felt by ordinary people.

In the solitary confines of the prison, where Bradley remains till his death, he comes in contact with P. Loxias, who stands for moderation and self-knowledge. During this period, as he envisages illness and death, a change comes over him. He realizes, “the black Eros whom he loved and feared was but an in substantial shadow of a greater and more terrible godhead” (390). In the company of Apollo, the god of wisdom, he learns to confront the truth and in the process undergoes a change. He relinquishes a dramatic
sense of himself, learns to see his earlier servitude and measures his newly acquired freedom.

Bradley’s imprisonment provides him the necessary ordeal to become a great artist. He has waited all his life to write his masterpiece, but it is in prison he can write his novel. Elmore opines, “the loss of self and personal liberty transforms him into an artist now able to write the story of his former selfish self and companions” (5). His trial for Arnold’s murder and the consequent unexpected dreadful and unjust public humiliation become the real turning points of life. The trial leads him to write his book and helps to become a new and humble man. The guilt, the trial, and the subsequent punishment reveal to him the true vision. They teach him the pain and the final joy gained from the loving attention to the world. This true vision unites him to his love and inspires him to create his work of art. He says, “I saw this book, which I have written, I saw my dearest friend P.L. I saw myself a new man, altered out of recognition” (Prince 389). His work of art comes into existence when he moves beyond his own solipsistic neurosis.

A deep understanding of the horrors of life and an exposure to the external world provide the necessary discipline for moral life and art. Bradley comes to discern the unfairness of his previous abstract theories of art. He feels the force of creative energy and sees it extended in all the experiences of the world only after having been educated in the school of suffering. Datta asserts, Bradley’s “greatest opus, written in prison, is the harvest of the experience gained through the harrowing ordeal” (172). It is a work of literary art which remembers his love for Julian. It is his gift to her as well as a possession of her. He is sure that “from this embrace she can never now escape” (Prince
He also realizes that she has a separate identity. This acceptance shows Bradley’s self-transformation and his understanding of contingency.

Murdoch acts out a role within the text which allows her to know her character from within and without and then to expose what she mimics. Todd is quite right in his opinion about *The Black Prince* that Murdoch has been “triumphantly successful in finding a mode of discourse in which to show what she means by ‘form’ or lack or super-abundance of it and to show what might be implied, in its consoling or non-consoling nature . . .” (27-28). It is clear that one of the principal concerns of the novel is the apprehension of life through art. Bradley while writing his story indulges in a series of soliloquies about the relation between life, art and suffering. Only by examining each event, he is able to distinguish reality from appearance and make sense of the contingency of the events which come upon him. Finally only by the actual act of writing his memories, he is able to realize himself as novelist and as artist.

The discovery of reality is the paramount concern of Murdoch’s novels. She describes her novels as “pilgrimages from illusion towards reality” (Bradbury 72). At the end of her novels, she makes the major characters achieve some degree of self-knowledge and freedom from magical forms and illusions. They are set on more realistic courses and see themselves and grow from inside to outward, a prerequisite of real moral freedom. They realize that in order to create an illusion of freedom they had translated reality into a self-conceived concept of destiny. It is only when they are released from the hold of patterns that they learn to accept the past along with the contingency of their own selves and others.
As a novelist, Murdoch follows the late eighteenth and nineteenth century tradition. For her, the nineteenth century writers present a slice of life full of many and various characters against a background of ordinary social values. This slice of life is presented in detail of everyday life that the reader can foresee the whole life style of that society. To her,

The novel, in the great nineteenth century sense, attempts to envisage if not the whole of life, at any rate a piece of it large and varied enough to seem to illuminate the whole, and has most obviously an open texture, the porous or cracked quality. . . . Through which it communicates with life, and life flows in and out of it . . . . The thing is open in the sense that it looks toward life and life looks back. (“Metaphysics” 96)

Thus a realistic novel communicates with life and takes its feedback from life.

Realism in art and literature is an endeavour to portray life as it is. It shows life with reality, omitting nothing that is ugly or painful and idealizing nothing. To the realists, the writer’s most important function is to describe as truthfully as possible what is observed through the senses. According to Galsworthy, “the word ‘realist’ characterizes that artist whose temperamental preoccupation is with revelation of the actual spirit of life, character and thought with a view to enlighten him and others” (23).

It is a greater achievement for a work of art to represent the ordinary life truly than the extraordinary life incompletely. George Eliot in Essays and Leaves from a Note-book, confesses, “I am content to tell my simple story, without trying to make things seem
better than they were; dreading nothing indeed but falsity which, in spite of one’s best efforts, there is reason to dread. Falsehood is so easy, truth so difficult” (45).

Some of the main realist writers who impressed Murdoch are Jane Austen, George Eliot and Tolstoy because of the large social sense that they created full of various independent centers of significance, that is degrees of freedom. Their characters are not puppets or stereotypes or mainly one central character around which all the story and the other characters turn with no freedom and identity of their own. This traditionalist stance in Murdoch is what connects her to the realist writers of the late eighteenth century. As a realist, her emphasis is on concrete details, vivid images and scenes. According to George Eliot, “word-painting and dramatic presentation are the two main branches of the novelist’s art” (qtd. in Witemeyer 2). The aim is to allow the reader to see directly, truly and justly.

For Murdoch, reality is incomplete, accidental, messy, formless and mysterious. She says, “reality is the great surprising variety of the world” (Sovereignty 66). For her, there are very few characters from the contemporary novel that one can remember as personalities because usually a single character as she calls, “it swallows up the entire book” (“Sublime” 260). The most important thing that a novel does to the reader is to show him/her that the other people exist. So the novels that Murdoch writes about are novels of characters because they are inhabited by various and free characters of love. From loving attention, Murdoch asks the readers to move their attention to real people in everyday life. She tries to show in her works the beauty, the love, freedom, and the experience of morality in touch with this vast richness, this multiplicity, this chaos and the contingency of reality.
For Murdoch, one can achieve self-awareness through goodness and love. Ramanathan affirms, goodness “is related to a particular state of consciousness which is free of all attachments and has learnt to forego what the greedy ego desires to grasp” (67). Goodness teaches to become unselfish, tolerant, forgiving and makes one follow the path of self-renunciation. She writes, “in particular situations reality is revealed to the patient eye of love” (Sovereignty 45). Love universalizes the individuals and also makes them unique. Murdoch recognizes the importance of disciplined love which opens out into the world and sees people as they are. Goodness ultimately occurs when one is able to abandon the concerns of the self. This giving up of self results in Murdoch’s unique definition of love. She defines love and freedom as follows, “freedom is exercised in the confrontation by each other, in the context of an infinitely extensible work of imaginative understanding, of two irreducibly dissimilar individuals. Love is the imaginative recognition of that is respect for, this otherness” (“Sublime” 52).

Murdoch believes that both goodness and love essentially consist of learning unselfishness and directing attention from the self towards the exterior reality. Ikonomakis points out, “only goodness constitutes the true precondition to improvement, which one achieves through the careful attention to the other’s reality” (84). One must realize that human personality is not transparent. It is opaque and one should not try to interpret other’s through one’s own narrow outlook. She stresses not the comprehensibility of the world but its incomprehensibility. Human nature cannot be changed, evil, ignorance and selfishness will continue to exist and cause suffering to humanity. But one should try to understand reality through love and attempt to ameliorate the sufferings of others.
In Murdoch’s moral theory as well as in her aesthetics, the definition of freedom entails a combat against fantasy and all its steps towards form, pattern or myth-making. Almost all her novels trace the progress of her central characters from a state of form-making fantasy to an awareness of reality which is the sign of freedom. In the beginning they are shown living in fantasy worlds with well-ordered, neat and explicable lives shielded from the pains, pressures and harshness of the contingent reality around them. In their smugness, they do not perceive others as real human beings but see them through the veil of self-devised forms and opinions. Through various progressions and devices, love being the major one, they are able to redirect their attention away from the mirrors of self-obsession and achieve a state of realism and freedom. The moral evolution of the protagonists of these novels is shown as they learn to rise above their self obsessive tendencies of fantasizing and experience a heightened clarification of vision.