Chapter Three

Coexistence at Crossroads

Murdoch as a novelist is seriously concerned with the deterioration of moral values in human life. She has structured her fictional renderings with an ethical backdrop. In her novels, moral themes have been analysed highly. Her novels are revolutionary in the sense that they address the more serious problems of mankind. She is unusual among modern novelists in depicting and appreciating the human beings’ longing for the good and also of gradual attraction towards evil in many of her protagonists. Punja remarks, Murdoch’s novels usually portray “complicated and sophisticated sexual relations among the professional classes” (4). Her depiction of twentieth century middle class and intelligentsia reveals her sharp examination as well as her inventive power. The life of human beings is interpreted imaginatively in the context of the philosophical and metaphysical framework of the age.

Literature is inescapably tied to ethics and is useful in personal development, and in thought and action. Morality is a part of human life. The term moral theory refers to a set of abstract moral principles that outline standards of the right conduct and the judgments of particular actions as right or wrong. It is also conceived as a guideline for human pleasure or happiness in life that is based on goodness, justice, equality, liberty, dignity and virtue. Anthony, a moral philosopher, describes morality as follows:

Morality pertains to matters of what is right and wrong, good and bad or praiseworthy and blameworthy. It strikes at the very core of human existence, exposing fundamental assumptions about liberty, equality,
Thus morality is the systematic study of the nature of value concepts such as good, bad, right and wrong.

In ancient times, the Greek ethical theorists held the view that morality is about the good life that refers to the good behaviour of human beings in society. The Socratic teaching was essentially ethical in character. It was the sophists who had introduced into Greek philosophy the problem of man and of the duties of man. The Sophists were a group of teachers who were primarily concerned with the education of young men for a political career in Greece. Socrates considered that a thorough understanding of the nature of goodness was necessary for leading a good life. Stance comments, “Socrates openly deprecated such speculations, and considered all such knowledge comparatively worthless as against ethical knowledge, the knowledge of man” (142). Similarly, other ethicists like Plato and Aristotle taught the need and understanding of the nature of goodness and also of the truth that goodness belongs to the nature of things. To understand goodness means “to understand the nature of the universe and that part of it we call human nature” (Pachauau 102).

The spread of Christianity in Europe gave a new emphasis to the individuals. During this period more attention was given to the inner aspect of morality. It is believed that the inner motives of man indicate his true spiritual state and fit him for the life of
heaven, which is the aspiration of every good man. The three primary manifestations of Christianity namely, Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism have recognized that the Christian faith involves a particular way of life. The good news of salvation in Christ calls for a life of discipleship. *The Bible*, the book of Christianity includes moral teachings and descriptions of the moral life of Christians. The subject matter of Christian ethics is the Christian moral life and teaching. The relationship between Christian ethics and philosophical ethics is important. All Christian ethics recognize the Christian scriptures, traditions and teachings of the church as the revelatory source of moral wisdom and knowledge. The significant difference between the two “result from the different sources of ethical knowledge and wisdom employed” (Hick 19). Philosophical ethics is based on human reason and human experience and does not accept the role of faith and revelation that is centered on Christian ethics. However, Christian ethics poses the same basic questions and has the same form and structure as philosophical ethics.

Industrial Revolution, French Revolution and Russian Revolution not only changed the economic and political systems but also brought a definite change in human behaviour and attitude towards life. The propagation of John Stuart Mill’s Utilitarian Doctrine, the psychological theories advanced by Freud and Jung, the spread of education, the Women’s Liberation Movement, the acceptance of promiscuity, homosexuality and lesbianism have deeply affected human relationships. In the present scientific age, the dogmas, images and precepts of religion have lost much of their power. The absoluteness of religious and ethical systems has been undermined. Most of the writers have tried to show the direct or indirect impact of these things in the lives of
human beings. Accepted moral codes are reviewed. There is no emotional attachment between modern man and the things he possesses.

The novelists in different ages have seen life from different angles and have based human relationships in their novels on different ideologies. In the eighteenth century, writers like Fielding and Smollett based human relationships on the basis of latitudinarian Christianity. In the nineteenth century the Victorians based human relations on the concept of respectability. The twentieth century English society was in a state of flux. The two World Wars have shattered the human faith. There was a decadence of finer human values resulting in skepticism, cynicism and ultimately leading to loss of faith in religion. Due to the collapse of Christian values, thought and belief, the twentieth century writers faced the dilemma of choosing the philosophy of life in their books. Virginia Woolf feels that the portrayal of character is incomplete because the writers give only external details and fail to probe into the inner life. For her, “life was a sum total of both the external and the internal i.e., the life within” (qtd. in Myles 8). D.H. Lawrence’s conception of novel is inextricably related to life. For him, novel is a powerful medium of interpreting life. He also believes that art should have a moral. He states, “any novel which reveals true and vivid relationships is a moral work, no matter what the relationships may consist in” (57).

George Orwell and William Golding stand apart from the other writers of the twentieth century in the sense that instead of experimenting with style and technique they have attempted to bring about a revolution in themes. In his novels, Orwell unveils the problems resulting from the changing social values. Golding’s fiction revolves around many issues related to man’s destiny and his precarious position in the world. Both of
them write about an ideal state where man would be free from problems and live a peaceful life. The novels of Graham Greene are concerned with the perpetual struggle between good and evil as they are coexistent in the universe. These novelists visualize a better future for mankind through religious consciousness.

Murdoch is also aware of modern trends which bring about distorted human relationships. As Frankova has rightly pointed out, “Murdoch generously embraces all possible kinds of love relationships and it would take statistical evaluation to ascertain their frequencies” (70). She is interested in the upliftment of the society and hence she adopts a moralistic approach. She has a concern for the decline of morality in the modern society. She believes that the chaos and confusion prevalent in the present materialistic and existential world can be remedied only by supplying a moral outlook and vision. In this scientific age the comforting institutions like religion, community and even family are openly renounced. The conventional and acceptable codes of behaviour have been overthrown and outrageous, unconventional and revolutionary principles have taken the place enjoyed by these ousted codes. Modern man is estranged from his dear and near ones and abandoned without any spiritual solace. He is left to stare into the void he finds in himself. Murdoch believes man’s quest for the mirages of the world leads him to a selfish, materialistic and superfluous life which pulls him into the chasm of despair, futility and fills him with a feeling of emptiness. She is preoccupied with this situation and realizes the necessity of bringing back discipline and a moral order into the modern world.

The most meaningful identity that can be supplied to the modern man is the moral identity. The degradation that occurs in the moral aspect of human life causes disaster to
mankind in all spheres of life. The genuine values of life are incomprehensible for him. Awaring of this situation Murdoch makes an attempt to revitalize the modern man who is deprived of his essential vitality. She assumes a diagnostic attitude to the ills of humanity and states a common concern about the sinking moral standards. She presents the yielding to the temptation as something inevitable in the fallible human nature and she considers moral perfection an ideal situation which is not easily attainable.

Religion occupies a considerable part in Murdoch’s moral philosophy and is a significant influence in her novels. She presents the chaotic situation of the present society that discarded the power of the existential man without the guiding light of spirituality. She defines God as “a single perfect transcendent non-representable and necessarily real object of attention” (Sovereignty 55). Though she does not admit her faith in a personal God, she believes that the religious background would help an individual adhere to a moralistic path. Pachuau comments, “Murdoch is interested in the link between morality and religion and speaks of religion as being the love and worship of the good” (11). She is optimistic that religion may help one to remove anxiety through the hope of the salvation of man. Belief in personal God seems to guarantee that people keep the overall pattern of morality. She believes in the essential goodness of a person which can be achieved only through a disciplined life. Only a disciplined and self-restraint one can attain true freedom. For Murdoch, freedom is not synonymous with unbridled conduct and indiscipline. She has cherished the Christ figure in her heart and that she has tried to come closer and closer to Christian perfection.

Murdoch is concerned with the problem of evil, egotism and virtue. She believes that hatred is quite as powerful a tie as love. Hers was an age tormented by the problems
of good and evil. This uncertainty about whether life is good or evil is representative of some recurrent interests which appear in the fiction of the Post-War era. Justine points out, in the fiction of Murdoch one can find the “problem of evil handled rely deftly but with predigested and well-entrenched yet divergent convictions” (64). She believes that although evil is more fascinating and energetic than good, man commits evil not for the sake of malicious and sadistic delight, but they are compelled by circumstances. Evil has a strange coercive force, a temptation, a mystery and a horrible charm. Murdoch’s deepest concerns are certainly ethical and spiritual, the complex nature of egoism, evil, enhancement and virtue. Her novels are described as “psychological detective stories” (Justine 66). Her narrative skill effectively conceals her preoccupation with the nature of good and evil, with religious life, and with the sacred and the profane.

In the novels of Murdoch, one can come across a lot of individuals who wallow in the faith of sin and evil. This defect in the nature of man is highlighted in the novels of William Golding too. Like Murdoch, his novels deal with the problems of good and evil in human beings and with their sinful nature. One of the salient characteristics of his fictional world is that he has been viewed as a writer very much interested in putting his characters “into extreme situations, observe the evil they do and the sin they suffer, and do this in a mythmaker’s style, well beyond the constraints of Christian morality” (Trahair 159). Similarly, Murdoch is concerned with morality and in her novels, she reveals the truth about real human nature. According to Haffenden:

It [evil] is a salient thing in human life, one of the most general features of human beings, that they may be dominated by remorse or by some plan of their lives which may have gone wrong. Some people who are not bad find
themselves so situated that they are unable to stop themselves from doing the greatest possible harm they can to others. (201)

Thus evil is brutal, elusive, by turns vivid and vague, horrible and subtle.

Murdoch holds a very important position among modern writers and she is deeply interested in the moral aspect of life. She attempts to probe into the complex recesses of the human mind and projects the intricate aspects of the human personality. Murdochian characters who are brought to the limelight have complicated psychological facets which can be related to the social, individual, moral, religious, ethical and mythical concerns. Her philosophical essays are full of ideas and principles relating to morality. In her novels the characters are presented in a contradictory manner, who follow entirely different types of morality. Spear says, “the philosophical and theological debate about god and good, about good and evil, is very much to the fore and carries within it troubling ethical thoughts that continue to be significant throughout the rest of Murdoch’s work” (233). She deals with sin and its manifestations in an expository manner. She is overtly didactic in that sense she has a vision of an ideal society and has a moral design for the present society’s reconstruction.

The disassociation of the character from the moral background introduces certain distortions in the perception of modern novelists regarding human beings. Murdoch depicts the relationships of middle aged people who belong to the middle class. There are many instances of promiscuity, homosexuality, lesbianism and incest in her novels. Punja remarks, Murdoch “has introduced sexual relations in her books to explode the myth that human beings can understand one another only through sex” (109). Her novels show that
these sexual relations fail to create good human relationships. Sexual relations without love often lead to disillusionment. Her fiction occasionally generates excitement and exasperation. There is a mixture of apparent bizarreness and excogitation, but one remains fully absorbed in the narrative. One can find the inherent evil, psychic urges opposed to the disciplined, religious and moral principles in all novels. Most of the characters in these novels indulge in extramarital relationships, homosexuality, misusing of power and denying the basic freedom to others.

Disloyalty in family life is a very important issue delineated by Murdoch in her novels. She presents marital incongruity and extramarital relationships within a framework of highly complicated psychological and existential theories. Adultery is considered by Murdoch as a moral problem which prevents moral improvement. There have been various causes for the widespread of adultery in the twentieth century. Due to the two World Wars many men were killed. This led to a great disproportion in the number of men against the number of women. There has been a great break down of religious and ethical standards. Marriage is no longer considered to be a sacred institution. The women of the Post-War period are no longer confined to the house. The twentieth century women do not want to remain dependent upon men but want to equal them in every field of life.

Murdoch takes up the theme of extramarital relations versus conjugal fidelity in many of her novels and shows how extramarital relations can lead to serious consequences. She points out that these relations make a man lead a double life. He becomes a liar and his lies weave such a net around him that he cannot escape from them. The extramarital relations not only end up with the disruption of a family but also
sometimes in murders and suicides. Repeatedly in her novels, she brings out a situation where one party to a marriage, often the husband, has divided loyalties. She maintains a belief in moral standards, despite what Taylor sees as the erosion of values after the war:

The implications of moral uncertainty, social change and an accompanying linguistic failure for the serious novel, the traditional evocation of manners and morals at which the English customarily excel, are wide-ranging . . . Novels about sexual morality tend to flourish in a morally stable society, or one that is only beginning to breakup. Take away moral prohibition, and the traditional novel of manners is robbed of most of its point. (237)

Marriage has been evolved as an institution. It has become “a social convention, and is a social, legal and moral permission to have sexual relations and to produce children” (Punja 115). Marriages which are performed without emotional compatibility and intellectual understanding are likely to fail. They are likely to result in divorce or constant apathy or quarrels or in extramarital relationships. In *An Unofficial Rose*, the married life of Randall and Ann ends in failure because of lack of understanding. Ann respects the institution of marriage. For her, marriage is scared. For Randall, sacrament of marriage has no meaning. He flirts with Nancy Bowshot, the wife of the gardener.

Randall finds Ann without any form. As he is in search of form, he refuses to love his wife. He seeks a way to escape from the marriage bond. Randall receives solace and freedom from his relationship with Lindsay. Unlike Ann, Lindsay fulfils Randall’s dreams and aspirations. He has met Lindsay at Emma’s place. He visits Emma, his
father’s former mistress, for curiosity sake and also to ask her to recommend his plays for publication. On seeing Lindsay, he falls in love with her. As Randall has been feeling bored with his wife Ann, he desperately loves Lindsay. Both Randall and Ann have been quarrelling and feeling irritated with each other. The love of Lindsay offers him an opportunity to free himself from the negative force of Ann. Randall sees Ann, “indeed as the incarnate spirit of the Negative” (*Unofficial* 77). Lindsay who has experienced poverty in her life has come to London to have better financial prospects and seek adventure. Even though she knows that Randall is married to Ann, she does not bother about Ann. She is concerned about her own gaiety without bothering moral scruples. She enslaves Randall and forces him to arrange money in order to lead a luxurious life. As Randall is blindly in love with Lindsay, he compels his father to sell the costly painting to lead a happy life with Lindsay. During their stay at Rome, Lindsay seems to Randall, “a sort of recumbent Aphrodite Anadyomene, an Aphrodite of the world of sleep” (300). He dreams that he would be happy by having Lindsay with him, but he soon feels distracted. He imagines his life with Lindsay would be “a perpetual flight from Paris to Madrid, from Madrid to New York, from New York to . . .” (305). Further he feels, the world is large and there are other women in it besides Lindsay.

One way in which the novel *An Unofficial Rose* improves on is in its more balanced view of the central marriage and its more circumspect and intricate analysis of the dynamics of the relations between husband and wife. The demoralizing effect of Randall’s behaviour on Ann is well conveyed as follows:

The particular quality of her long battle with Randall had seemed progressively to empty the certainties by which she lived, as if the real
world were being quietly taken away, grain by grain, and stored in some place of which she had no knowledge. This did not make her doubt the certainties. There would be for her no sudden switch of the light which would show a different scene. But there was a dreariness, a hollowness. She could not inhabit what she ought to be. (129)

The egoist Randall fails to respect the institution of marriage. As he is in the enslavement of another woman, he fails to love his wife. He hurts and insults her and finally leaves her alone. When he gets bored of Lindsay, he feels that he is free to return to Ann and believes she will wait for him indefinitely. Their married life fails because of lack of understanding. Randall, being a neurotic lives in his own world. His self-centredness prevents him to love her. Murdoch is firmly opposed to “auto reflexivity or egocentricity which she sees as the motive force behind multi form confusion and human failures” (Dipple 87). As Randall is in the pursuit of freedom and form, he considers marriage as a cage. Ann as a conventional figure does not change her notions. Thus both Randall and Ann fail to understand each other. If they come forward to shed their own concepts, their marriage life would become a paradise.

In Murdoch’s *The Bell*, Paul-Dora relationship reveals that a marriage between unequal partners gets doomed and often results in extramarital relationships. Dora is about twenty and Paul is thirty three at the time of their marriage. Paul belongs to the upper-middle class and Dora to the lower-middle class. Paul marries Dora for her vitality. Dora marries Paul for the following reasons:
She married him for his good taste and his flat in Knightsbridge, she married him for a certain integrity and nobility of character which she saw in him. She married him because he was so wonderfully more grown-up than her thin neurotic art-student friends. She married him a little for his money. (*Bell 8*)

After marriage, Paul installs her in Knightsbridge flat in the midst of his unique collection of medieval ivories. He even makes Dora to give up her art studies. Everything is decided and finalized by Paul. Dora loses her individuality and longs for love and freedom. Paul and Dora start quarrelling with each other and he humiliates her. He is a jealous husband and does not like any attention shown to her by any other man. He fails to respect Dora as a distinct person with her own history and values. Commenting on this situation, Datta affirms that, Paul “encroaches upon Dora’s personality and gives her no space to develop” (82). His feelings for her are motivated by an irrational drive for power. He destroys something gentle and cheerful in her by imposing his own will. The feeling of emptiness which results from having no image of her personal worth leads to a gloomy kind of subjectivity. She passionately wants to escape from her demanding husband.

Paul represents the world of form, while Dora illustrates the force of the contingent. Murdoch defines form as the rigid need for order or controlling patterns. On the other hand, she explains that contingency is associated with a “truer picture of freedom” (“Dryness” 19), since it “is destructive of fantasy and opens the way for the imagination” (19). Prior to her marriage to Paul, Dora enjoys a sense of freedom because she is immersed in the world of the contingent, Murdoch describes this as the “gaieties of
her student life” (Bell 8). Paul’s violence occurs when his attempts to impose form on and control his wife are unsuccessful.

Dora realizes her loss of identity and in order to assert her individuality she runs away from Paul in a fit of psychological torture. Murdoch states, “the exercise of a love founded on tolerance and understanding of others” (Sovereignty 42). Simon de Beauvoir also emphasizes the importance of love in relationships and stresses that “each partner should respect the independence of the other” (33). Dora finds that it is extremely difficult to remain within the institution of marriage. She feels attracted towards Noel because his mockery of her husband eases something in her heart. Punja avers, “Dora-Noel Spens relationship is an attempt on the part of Dora to escape from the mentioned tortures inflicted by Paul” (120). Dora does not approve of her friendship with Noel but yields “to the temptations of escaping from Paul’s elegant and untouchable flat by drinking with Noel” (Bell 11). She finds pleasure in the company of Noel and his easy going friends. Karl points out, “accordingly, they hate each other . . . and their ‘modern’ marriage is a compromise that Dora is unwilling to maintain” (263). Shashi Deshpande, through Saru in The Dark Holds no Terror tries to bring out the importance of understanding between husband and wife. Saru’s husband becomes jealous and aggressive, when she assumes the role of a lady doctor. Like Dora, being disappointed in her marital life, she develops an affair with Boozie and Padmakar Rao. In fact, it is Paul’s dominating nature that forces Dora to escape from him. He fails to understand her. Instead of giving her his love and respect, he makes her feel inferior and this drives her to leave him and to have an extra-marital relationship with Noel.
A Severed Head deals with the Western bourgeois society. All the characters behave as individuals seeking their own happiness. In order to achieve this happiness, everybody tries to establish their own relationship with others. In this novel, Martin’s life is ordered by moral control and convention. Martin-Antonia relationship is significant for it proves that marriages without emotional understanding end in failure. Antonia is older than Martin by five years. He is often referred to as a child by Antonia. Their marriage is simply at a standstill and Antonia explains this to Martin as, “It’s partly my being so much older and being a sort of mother to you” (Severed 26). Martin develops an affair with Georgie to come out of this mother-child relationship. In the words of Nakanishi, Martin “is a complacent bourgeois individual whose actions arise from self-interest” (886). Though he is aware that he deceives his wife, he is involved with Georgie.

Love, understanding and the feeling of oneness which are essential ingredients in a nuptial knot have been lost for a long time in the relationship between Martin and Antonia. The failure of normal husband-wife relationship makes Martin and Antonia to have extramarital pursuits and the marriage vows lose their meaning for them. Isaiah Smithson describes the relationship of Martin with Antonia as that of “uroboric ego to great mother” (136). Antonia is the centre of his world and the mother figure he lost in his adolescence. She is five years his senior causing her sometimes to be mistaken for his mother. According to Martin’s description of her she has ancestral connections to an artistic clan and dominates his life like his artistic mother. Martin is unable to see her as she really is. The reality of Martin’s relationship with Antonia is only fully understood, by her. She knows that he retires upon her for his social status, his moral position and for his emotional responses. He says, “I had married Antonia in a church, but that was
largely for social reasons, and I did not think that the marriage bond, though solemn, was uniquely sacred” (*Severed* 11). She is aware of her power over him. The power she holds over Martin comes from his worship of her as a woman, especially in her role as his substitute mother. Antonia develops an affair with Palmer because of this role. This explanation provides an excuse for Antonia’s adulterous behaviour as well as the power she holds over Martin. Thus Martin and Antonia deceive each other by developing affairs with Georgie and Palmer.

Murdoch is disillusioned with the world and is disgusted with the true nature of man. She also portrays the egoistic state of man which hinders his spiritual growth. Ego makes a person totally unable to make an assessment about his own status, physically, mentally or spiritually. It also prevents him to love others. In *The Black Prince*, Arnold-Rachel relationship is an instance of artificial love. They no longer feel “wrapped up in one another” (*Prince* 29). They quarrel with each other and try to justify their amoral relations. Arnold emerges as the most physically aggressive character despite the fact that he is famous and successful as a writer. In the beginning of the novel, the battering occurs when Rachel makes a negative remark about his work. Unable to tolerate her remarks, Arnold hits Rachel. Murdoch stresses a mutual understanding between the partners. Here Arnold and Rachel lack both love and understanding. Arnold as a husband fails to consider his wife as an individual person. For Rachel, her marriage with Arnold does not provide her individuality. She feels dejected and isolated. She regrets:

He has sent me to hell. He has taken my whole life from me. He has spoilt the world. I am as clever as he is. He has just blocked me off from everything. I can’t work, I can’t think, I can’t be, because of him. His stuff
crawls over everything, he takes away all my things and turns them into
his things. I’ve never been myself or lived my own life at all. I’ve always
been afraid of him. (40)

Thus Rachel does not have a cordial relationship with Arnold. Arnold’s attitude towards
her makes her think about an escape from him.

The marriage bond with Arnold does not give any comfort to Rachael. She suffers
from alienation and longs for freedom and love. In order to attain this, she tries to
develop an affair with Bradley. Simone de Beauvoir claims, “marriage finds its natural
fulfillment in adultery. This is the woman’s sole defence against the domestic slavery in
which she is bound” (44). Rachel chooses this defence mechanism and tries to get closer
to Bradley to compensate for the pain and frustration in her marriage. She speaks of her
subjection to Arnold and says, “A married woman is a subdivision of her husband’s mind
and he can release misery into her consciousness whenever he pleases, like ink spreading
into water” (Prince 176). She further complains that Arnold does not let her take a job
although she is as clever as he is and has spoilt her whole life. Arnold’s infidelities and
quick temper together with his callous treatment of Rachel have increased her hatred for
him. She wants to form an alliance with Bradley because she has been unhappy with
Arnold for so long and feels caged.

Murdoch realistically portrays not only the reasons for extramarital relationship
but also its consequences. Arnold plays the role of the tyrant for a long time. In order to
alleviate her own feelings of marital unfulfillment and powerlessness brought on by the
constraints of her domestic slavery, Rachel tries to have relationship with Bradley.
Rachel’s presence with Bradley makes her feel as if she is in a new world. She tells Bradley, “I need love, I need more people to love, I need you to love” (139). Murdoch through Rachel illustrates the difficulty of leaving an abusive partner. Nursel Icoz comments, “all she [Rachel] can do is to develop a plan of action, which will reduce distress by providing an outlet” (57). Rachel first plans to establish an emotional relationship with Bradley when that does not work she plans her husband’s murder. Arnold fails to consider his wife as a person having her own individuality. Moreover, he asserts his power over her and wants her to be submissive. Rachel, like Dora in The Bell, lacks freedom and love, so she is in the pursuit to attain it by violating the laws of marriage. At the end of the novel, Rachel murders Arnold and takes revenge on Bradley by putting the charge on him. Thus through Arnold and Rachel, Murdoch stresses the fact that lack of understanding and love lead the partners to disaster.

Like Dora, Morgan in A Fairly Honourable Defeat, attempts to gain freedom from the constraints of marriage through adultery. She fails to understand the love of her husband, as she lives in a world of illusions. Tallis respects the institution of marriage. For him, marriage “is a symbolic blood-relationship, it’s the creation of a new family bond” (Fairly 191). Morgan fails to love Tallis and develops a relationship with Julius, because she says, “I don’t care for bonds, family or otherwise” (191). This leads her to take up an extramarital affair forgetting the marriage bond. The marriage between Tallis and Morgan has failed, but Tallis’s love for Morgan is still prevalent in spite of her sexual relations with Julius King. Morgan’s solipsism blinds her to realize Tallis’s love towards her. She has met Julius in a philology conference at Dibbins and developed a stormy love affair with him. As Tallis is an odd man, Morgan could not tolerate his
attitude. His activities are all so wet and disconnected. For Morgan, her love for Tallis “was always so sort of nervy, and he hadn’t the instincts for making things easy and nice” (48). He is a man without ideas but Morgan lives by ideas.

Tallis and Morgan have not managed to keep their relationship healthy. Tallis is abstract and lives in his dream world. Morgan says, “living with Tallis was like living in a gipsy encampment” (78). Tallis and Morgan’s marriage is a symbol of good, and its failure is thus a symbol of the lack of connection between context and ideals. Morgan has never really been able to see Tallis. She tells Hilda, “Tallis has got no inner life . . .” (25). Tallis’s honourable defeat is his failure to reunite with Morgan. Grimshaw remarks, Tallis “is so insufficiently connected to the world of form that he fails to generate a clear vision or plan by which he can regain his wife’s affections, in spite of his desperate wish to do so” (91). Morgan fails to understand Tallis, because evil in the form of selfishness and egoism creates veil that hinders her from true vision.

Murdoch illustrates that Morgan is the puppet of her own selfishness and egoistic impulses. These selfish desires and illusions affect her ability to improve morally. Morgan’s search for identity has to do with her search for a story of her life which makes sense to her. Her quest for a purpose in life leads her into illegal relationships. Tallis’s love for Morgan is perfect love, as he does not love her to boost his ego, but for her own sake. True love, seeing the other in the light of the good, has to do with humility. Murdoch says, humility “is not a peculiar habit of self-effacement, rather like having an inaudible voice, it is a selfless respect for reality and one of the most difficult and central virtues” (Sovereignty 95). Morgan cannot afford such tenderness and pity, because she
feels diminished by it. She fails to realize that it is through accepting the individuality of others that she would be able to find happiness.

The importance of genuine and sincere relationship in a marital life is a major concern for Murdoch. In *The Black Prince*, through Roger and Priscilla, Murdoch points out the consequences of adultery. Being self-centred, Murdoch’s characters lack interest in others. They do not consider other people’s aspirations and requirements. As they live in the world of fantasy, they fail to understand the psyche of others. To achieve their goal, they even dare to break the marriage bond. Priscilla’s husband Roger, gets entangled with Marigold, a young beautiful girl and this forces Priscilla to leave her home.

Priscilla says that Roger always shouts at her and hates to see her. She says, “I’d sit and cry for hours with sheer misery, sitting there in front of him and he’d just go on reading the paper” (85). She attempts to make her home beautiful and herself attractive, but when she realizes that her husband still scorns and humiliates her, she leaves him. Because of Bradley’s pestering, Priscilla thinks of going back to Roger, but she is afraid of him and asks, “If I’m quiet he won’t hurt me, will he?” (223). Moreover, she has been brought up by her mother to believe that she needs a man to take care of her, therefore she is psychologically dependent on Roger. Roger fails to love his wife because he is doomed with the wish of getting a child. When he finds Priscilla cannot fulfill it, he achieves it by having an affair with another woman.

Marital violence represents a complex social and psychological problem which is determined by individual, social-psychological and socio-cultural factors. Feelings of
anxiety and depression are common in the wives who have been neglected by their husbands. So they come to perceive themselves as worthless, incompetent and deserving to be beaten. These battered women sometimes opt for diminishing themselves instead of resisting the hostile situation. In Goldstein’s words, “Battered women are often treated with anti-depressants and tranquilizers, and may attempt suicide due to a pervasive sense of hopelessness and despair about themselves and their lives” (46). Priscilla in *The Black Prince*, is also forced to choose a fatal decision as Roger “threatens to have her certified as mad and shut up, that Roger was killing her mind, breaking things and saying she had done it and could not remember” (119). Roger’s abusive treatment of Priscilla seems to be triggered by her being far from the ideal wife when compared to Marigold. All these threats have produced in Priscilla such a state of helplessness and anxiety that she can only be pacified by tranquilizers, she makes two suicidal attempts. Although she is saved in the first attempt, the second one becomes fatal. Murdoch as a moral philosopher insists that each individual has to remove the veil- egocentricism that prevents them from loving others. If Roger would have shed his egoism and loved his wife, he might have led a happy life with Priscilla.

The circumstances leading to commit adultery obviously fascinate Murdoch as a novelist. Dooley in “Iris Murdoch’s Novels of Adultery” states that the attraction for Murdoch “is clearly the conflict of moral codes implied in these choices, not simply that one is wrong and the other is right, but that the choice is infinitely complicated and any decision will be a compromise” (421). Murdoch is quite clear about the evils of promiscuity. Her values are not repressive social rules but a personal morality, which refuse to ignore the effects of behaviour like adultery on the individuals involved. She
views the novel as “the form of art most concerned with the existence of other persons” (“Sublime” 278). However, in her novels the theme of adultery provides a scope for her exploration of ethical questions without the intrusion of the bizarre.

One of the factors that corrupt the individual is power. The theme of power is perennial to literature of all times. Some writers glorify power and some expose its evil potential. Murdoch’s “studies of power usually employ her evil enchanter-figures, which have been discussed . . . and compared with Muriel Spark’s, Anthony Burgess’ and William Golding’s portrayals of evil” (Frankova 66). The theme of power and attribution of omnipotence forms a leitmotif in many of Murdoch’s novels and is central to the schematization that affects her works. Murdoch’s power-figures are extremely egocentric characters, incapable of ordinary relations with other people. They initiate relationships but are unable to sustain them since they do not really see others as separate beings. Kane opines, Murdoch’s “rejection of power in human relationships as antithetic to love is quite explicit and this is probably what earned her the label of didacticism on the part of some critics” (45). These enchanter figures have the power to paralyze other people’s will.

In the novels of Murdoch, power is the external potential assigned to the protagonists. In The Flight from the Enchanter, Mischa Fox exploits his power to his own benefits, and destroys the individuality of the other characters. His magical power makes him “a sort of screen on to which his slaves and victims project their own unconscious drives” (Baldanza 43). He is an exotic enchanter and a romantic figure. He is a famous man, and fabulously wealthy. As the owner of a chain of newspapers, he is influential as well as immensely rich. His assumed role of a protector of the weak and vulnerable and
the tendency of destroying them, shows he himself is victimized by the enchantment of power. He is entirely caught up in the role of an enchanter. He is held in this role because of his inability to love others and because of his need to control others. His moral referent is power, not love. Byatt puts it “Mischa’s relations to other individuals are either those of pity or those of destruction, he cannot meet them in love” (62). This failure leads to his own enslavement. Mischa seems to exercise a strange power over the lives of the other characters. He understands the ways in which others are self-enchanted. All characters feel Mischa’s demonic powers and make observations about them.

Mischa is a mysterious outsider. His origin and age are unknown. His close associates consider it a mark of prestige to be known as his friend. Rainborough exclaims:

No one knows Mischa’s age. One can hardly even make a guess. It’s uncanny. He could be thirty, he could be fifty-five. Have you ever met anyone who knew? . . . No one knows his age. No one knows where he came from either. Where was he born? What blood is in his veins? No one knows. And if you try to imagine you are paralysed. It’s like that thing with his eyes. You can’t look into his eyes. You have to look at his eyes. Heaven knows what you’d see if you looked in. (Flight 35)

The pervasive sense of Mischa’s power is enhanced by Murdoch’s choice of imagery. Mischa’s face is described as “hawk-like” (209). The hawk is noted for its skilful maneuvering and for its keen eyesight. It also suggests watchfulness and tenacity. Mischa’s power also owes much to the fact that he loves to control the lives of others. He
also has a striking appearance. He has one blue eye and one brown eye. It is described that “there was a brown profile and a blue profile, giving the impression of two faces superimposed” (79). Like Re, the sun god, Mischa has two personalities represented by his eyes of two different colours.

Mischa is a refugee who has managed to turn his rootless past into an advantage. His understanding of the refugee mentality enables him to take advantage of refugees like Nina and Calvin Blick. Mischa’s enigmatic behaviour and social position makes him an object of fantasy for others. Nina’s enchantment with Mischa begins as love and gradually transforms into “a strange emotion which had in it more of terror and fascination than tenderness” (143). She is the most pathetic victim of his power. She is completely dependent on him for her existence and is isolated because of this dependency. She lives alone in misery in an artificial world that he has created for her, and her release from his spell is attained only through her suicide.

The will to power turns Mischa into a demonic enchanter. Calvin Blick is under the spell of Mischa and becomes his slave. Calvin is described as a “tall man, with pale eyes whose colour no one could ever remember” (14). Murdoch identifies him with the moon because it functions as a mirror and reflects light derived from the sun. This is true of Calvin whose powers are delegated to him by Mischa. Rainborough points out that, Calvin “is the dark half of Mischa Fox’s mind” (33). Calvin’s schemes are planned in secret by Mischa. Thus Calvin acts as an intermediary, spy and blackmailer for Mischa.

Rainborough is also a romantic adolescent, though an over aged one. Mischa’s fame appeals to Rainborough, who as Wolfe suggests, “has the typical middle-class
aspiration to social prestige” (79). For him, to be associated with a glamorous figure is an attainment of this aspiration. His emotions regarding Mischa are mixed with fear, distaste and with a little fondness. He declares that Mischa is “a man capable of enormous cruelty” (Flight 31). He also expresses disgust at Mischa’s manipulation of people. He professes cynicism at Mischa’s fame, declaring that “the heavens don’t turn red when Mischa lands, comets don’t turn the sky” (30). However, he is gratified when considered by others to be Mischa’s intimate friend. He cherishes Mischa’s good opinion of him and is anxious for the continuance of their friendship.

In the world of form, Mischa is a figure from fables. His last name ‘Fox’ is an allusion to the animal often depicted in fables. In appearance, he resembles a fox with his “long tenderly curving mouth” (79). His movements are agile and spy like a fox. His eyes are “wide and serene, like those of a happy animal” (190). Foxes are regarded as predators. In his relationship with Rosa, imagery of pursuit and captivity is often used to suggest that Mischa is the predator. Thus, he enslaves Rosa by having in his possession a photograph of her with the Lusciewicz brothers. Rosa identifies him “the very figure of evil” (103). She recognizes in him the quality of the outlaw. Though it was she who had terminated their relationship ten years before, her enchantment with him has not ceased. She finds herself “still, however partially and however obscurely, fascinated by the idea of Mischa” (102).

Mischa structures both human organizations and human emotions according to his own mysterious theories of society and psyche. The kind of power that Mischa wields and exercises fails to take into view the power of the inherited collective view of the world. His power derives from his need for form. The enslaved and enchanted characters
gather round him. His victims are proud to know him, listen to his gnomic utterances as oracle, obey him, and fall in love with him. He is threatening because his methods are so devious. His connections and achievements are so dubious. The double profile signifies omnipotence and omniscience. He has sufficient power to control the lives of others and churn and charm their imagination without being affected himself. Those who are under his spell have to struggle and face the horrors of life outside the secure world of social and emotional environment whereas he himself remains unperturbed and calm.

Even though Mischa is an alien, he succeeds in accumulating power with his strange, devious and mysterious connections. Murdoch uses Mischa as the linchpin for her views on freedom and power. Most of the characters in the novel look to Mischa for personal salvation. The other characters confuse his power with moral superiority and spiritual strength. However, Mischa’s power is a net to prevent others from exercising their own will or moral integrity.

Murdoch analyses the spiritual aspect of power. The spiritual and moral struggle of the characters is fraught with risk because they assume for themselves a role which puts them in a morally superior position. In some novels deployment of power theme concentrates on the projection of power gods who are shown to concentrate all authority in their hands and manipulate and design others’ lives in their own image. Julius King in A Fairly Honourable Defeat is elected to be a god by other people and made into a god. Like Mischa, he is rootless, but his rootless violence has its roots in his experiences in Dachau. Martz points out, Julius “takes a malevolent joy in manipulating people, but at bottom his destructive plots arise from his disgust with human follies and vanities” (83). Julius expresses his hatred for mankind to Rupert as, “I have no general respect for the
human race. They are a loathsome crew and don’t deserve to survive” (*Fairly* 194). To Julius, human beings, are not free, separate beings to be respected and loved, but puppets to be manipulated by those more powerful. He expresses, “All human beings have staggeringly great faults which can easily be exploited by a clever observer” (208). His hatred for humanity has a possible psychological explanation. He was a prisoner at Belsen during World War II, and the horror he experienced there has destroyed his capacity for love and kindness, and has warped his personality.

Julius acts as a magician and makes other characters to act as his puppets. His conception of human relationship is perverted. He finds evil exciting, fascinating and alive. For him, good is dull and the path of virtue is totally depressing and anybody who tries to follow these is sure to get his spirit broken. Dooley in “Good Versus Evil” opines, “Julius is an inveterate destroyer of other people’s value systems and a demolisher of grand narratives” (8). He enjoys inflicting pain on others and spreading destruction without any personal interest. To the other characters, Julius is a fantasy figure and he represents in dramatic terms a kind of challenging opacity to which the other characters are drawn by their interest. In the fantasy of others, Julius plays many roles. To Morgan he represents form, which she craves after a muddled life with her husband Tallis. He expects her “to be gay at the right times, quiet at the right times. To live to his timetable” (*Fairly* 79). Their relationship in her mind assumes epic proportions. Morgan considers Julius as her god. As a god, he has the ability to show her things. Though rejected by him, he remains “large and omnipresent in her consciousness” (279). Her enchantment with him continues until she becomes involved in another illusory relationship.
To the other characters, Julius is a fantasy figure and he represents in dramatic terms a kind of challenging opacity to which the other characters are drawn by their interest. To, Hilda, Julius is not an individual, but an “exotic foreign object” (7). She is without guile and is easily manipulated by Julius into his destructive scheme. She succumbs to his spell. Thinking Julius as a worthy confident, Hilda becomes the tragic victim of his vicious intrigue. Julius is idealized by Hilda’s husband Rupert, who insists on seeing life in simple terms. Rupert prefers to remain hidden behind his philosophical façade. Unlike Rupert, Julius sees the top of the moral structure as being empty.

In *The Fairly Honourable Defeat*, the exercise of power over others reinforces Murdoch’s representation of the human limitations that inhere in low Eros. It also reveals that the power mongers try to control and suppress others due to lack of attention and love. To Axel, Julius is “morally attractive” (25). To Simon, Julius is a father figure, an enchanter who can compel him to do things against his will. Julius is able to exercise power over both Axel and Simon because of the knowledge he possesses, that “Axel is . . . an extremely jealous man” (238). Julius decides to satisfy his craving for power by attempting to undermine the success of Axel and Simon’s relationship. Bove points out that Murdoch represents Julius as “the embodiment of evil and as such, he is one of Murdoch’s power figures” (53). Julius does this by forming a friendship with Simon, a relationship that is formed for the purpose of creating knowledge and secrets which Julius can use to exercise power over Simon.

Julius is assigned a key position within the novel. He is not only a mysterious figure with his blunt speech, critical observation and intervention in day-to-day affairs, but also closely linked with the focus of evil. To remain detached from the muddle of
human relationships is Julius’s idea of freedom. His evil does not take a sympathetic view of human relationship. His destructive plots arise from his disgust with human follies and frailties, and thus exposes the weaknesses in moral thought that make his victims easy prey. His conspicuous remarks about good are:

Human beings have often dreamed of the extension of goodness beyond the pitiful level at which they muck along, but it is precisely a dream, and a totally vague one at that. It is not just that human nature absolutely precludes goodness, it is that goodness, in that extended sense, is not even a coherent concept, it is unimaginable for human beings, like certain things in physics. Only unlike physics there isn’t even any notation with which to indicate it, since it simply isn’t these at all! (Fairly 199)

Thus, Julius is a selfish person having no faith in the goodness of man.

Julius is a grand puppet-master and a superhuman magician. He is powerful, glamorous, enchanting, exciting and seductive. He is characterized as being manipulative, and inflicts suffering and enjoys watching it. He has little compassion towards others. He tells Simon, “But human beings cannot live without power anymore than they can live without water” (239). Julius’s manipulations wreck the images of conformity and make him appear a sinister. Bajaj comments, “the dualistic imagination of Murdoch simultaneously projects Julius as an agent of evil as also the real evil of the victims which lies within their own self” (186). It is easy for Julius to enact a god-like puppet-show, with himself a supreme puppeteer, because he is familiar with the confused foibles of the characters.
In *The Flight from the Enchanter* and *The Fairly Honourable Defeat*, power is the central theme, and the plot revolves around the magic of enchanter figures. In these novels the subject of how muddled, confused and spiritually blinded captives make others their god, and seek her serious attention. In her Caen Lectures, Murdoch states, “people are not only manipulated by others, but want to be so . . . people very often elect a god in their lives, they elect somebody whose puppet they want to be and . . . almost subconsciously, are ready to receive suggestions from this person” (qtd. in Bajaj 152). Psychopomps like Mischa and Julius become completely insensitive to other’s needs. The power that they wield is entrusted to them by a host of morally blind characters. They become their gods since these enslaved characters suffer from ignorance and impotence and so regard these powerful beings with fascination and loathing. In the words of Turner, “Murdoch’s own apparent thirst for power, no analyst or psychoanalytic writer I can imagine would vouchsafe that mistakes are never made, but full knowledge of the field, with proper, thorough training, greatly expands what is obvious” (314). The power figures possess demonic energy and generate situations to assert their authority. These enchanters are mysterious magical figures who represent the forces at work in an ambiguous universe. Thus Murdoch associates power with evil. Evil in Murdoch’s world resides in the failure of human relationships whereas good exists in its narrow and infrequent success.

Murdoch views homosexuality from its moral and social perspectives. She often portrays the issue of homosexuality in her fiction. Grimshaw opines, “in depicting the impact upon the homosexual of the legal and social regulation of homosexuality,
Murdoch’s fiction is also aligned with social constructionist theories of sexuality, which assert that homosexual behaviour is shaped by social forces” (552-53).

When the Labour party came into office at the 1945 election under a manifesto promising to restore public confidence through radical, political and social change, it appeared that these sentiments of hope and renewal were well justified. Yet Labour’s policies of egalitarian social fairness produced anxiety in the middle and upper classes, which, significantly was embedded in an undercurrent of lingering Victorian moral values. As a result of these political, social and moral tensions, the Labour Party ultimately lost public support, and the conservative party came into office in 1951. According to Coppa, “the conservatives intended to respond to the prevalent moral and social concerns at this time by implementing legislative means designed to improve the moral climate in Britain” (89). Under this new regime of morality through legislation, the government was obligated to preserve public order and decency in order to ensure that members of the public did not breach moral standards of behaviour.

The government was compelled to understand this sexual orientation since homosexuality was seen as one of the major ways in which the public sense of moral decency was outraged. The aim of this search for understanding was to find a solution to the homosexuality problem, thereby reducing the occurrence of homosexual offenses and in so doing, ensuring moral decency and public order. Many people believed that the then existing laws for male homosexual offenses should be changed.

Murdoch attempts to address this social question, homosexuality in her fiction. *The Bell*, Murdoch’s first fictional work depicts the daily life of a male homosexual in
detail. It accurately illustrates the legal dilemmas faced by homosexual men during this era. Jeffrey Weeks points out, “laws deeply affect and restrict the behaviour of the homosexual” (164). Murdoch delineates the impact of the law upon the individual homosexual in her characterization of Michael Meade. He suffers from a great deal of anxiety over his sexuality as “he continued rather hopelessly to do what he . . . felt the most dreadful guilt for doing” (Bell 101). Murdoch has physically consummated some of his homosexual relationships since she characterizes him as being plagued by the guilt which springs from committing a sexual offence. Bergonzi opines, “Murdoch usually writes about intelligent, sensitive, sophisticated characters whose lives are complicated by guilty secrets and unexplained mysteries, and who are often caught up in bizarre and improbable sexual entanglements” (364). She portrays Michael as a Christian, in order to suggest that his feelings of guilt arise from having committed the sin of sodomy, the love that dare not speak its name in Christian settings.

Murdoch explores in her philosophical writings the relationships among the freedom of choice of the individual in public and private moral concerns. In this way, she makes homosexuality a fitting subject in which she could explore in her fiction these larger moral questions. In The Bell, Murdoch portrays Michael’s struggle with these very issues of public and private morality. In the religious community at Imber Court, homosexuality is viewed as an unnatural and sinful predilection. As the leader of this community, Michael is desperate to keep his homosexual identity in secret.

Michael- Nick relationship covers the major part of the novel and plays a very important role in its plot construction. Before meeting Nick Fawley, Micheal is shown to be sexually perverted. He has experienced “homosexuality at school as well as at
Cambridge University” (Bell 99). He wants to become a priest. On the advice of a priest, he gives up the practice of “what he had come to regard as his vice and returned to the practice of his religion” (100). The Bishop tells him to spend one year at school and study some theology in his spare time before he enters a seminary. It is at this critical juncture of his life that Micheal meets Nick, a boy of fourteen and of considerable beauty. His homosexual instincts are awakened. Murdoch brings out the inner feelings of Michael as follows:

Michael was perfectly aware that Nick’s charms were beginning to move him in a way which was more than casual. He knew himself to be susceptible without for a second feeling himself in danger, so confident and happy did he feel in his plans for the future. The fact too, that he had never before felt attracted in this way by a person so much younger than himself contributed to make him regard his affection for Nick as something rather special but in no way menacing. He felt neither guilt nor distress at the pleasure with which he was now filled by the proximity of this young creature . . . . (101-2)

Thus Michael forgets his future aspirations and continues to get along well with Nick. Michael is sexually drawn to Nick and Nick too feels attracted to the teacher. They seem to live in an eternity of passion.

In her characterization of Michael Meade, the closeted Christian homosexual protagonist, Murdoch depicts the way in which confessions can be given in order to implicate another person’s homosexual orientation. Michael-Nick relationship is
disturbed when towards the end of the term when an evangelist and a non-conformist preacher visits the school to speak to the boys. During his lecture, Michael is “not listening, thinking of Nick’s embraces” (106), but his lecture on sodomy has a deep effect upon Nick. The next day instead of coming to Michael, Nick goes to the headmaster and confesses everything. This leads to Michael’s departure from the school and failure of his ambition to become a priest. He is tormented by the conflict between homosexual tendencies and his desire to become a priest.

Murdoch reveals in her fiction the tendency to hide one’s sexual secrets. After arriving at Imber, Michael strives to keep his homosexual past a secret since homosexuality is considered undesirable in this religious community. This preoccupation sinks Micheal more deeply into egoism and solipsism. Dipple writes, Murdoch’s “choice of homosexuality . . . is interesting in that it is the mode of sexuality which has been questioned and largely disapproved of in the Christian tradition” (45). Michael’s attempt to keep his sexuality in secret proves to be a very difficult task when he realizes that Nick Fawley is one of the new members of the community.

Nick represents a serious threat to Michael because he not only possesses knowledge about Michael’s secret sexual orientation, but also because he can now observe Michael in order to obtain new forms of knowledge that can be used to strengthen his power over him. Michael feels attracted towards Toby, exactly the way he has felt attracted towards Nick. In spite of prayer and religious rigours he cannot help to check the repetition of a homosexual affair with Toby Gashe, a visitor to the Imber Court. Another phase begins with Toby’s arrival when the inhibited homosexual love emerges again. In his enjoyment of Toby’s presence and talking to him in a pub on their way back
from Swindon to Imber Court, Michael realizes what overwhelming emotion he has missed. He unexpectedly kisses the boy, after drinking too much of country cider. When Nick suddenly appears after Michael kisses Toby, Michael fears what Nick might have seen. Michael speculates, “. . . but Nick might have seen something the same” (*Bell* 158). Michael’s fear heightens because he realizes that Nick’s new knowledge about his advances to Toby will prove to be even more powerful for Nick since Michael is regarded as a spiritual leader of the community. Karl explains, “In both instances with Nick and Toby, Michael is persecuted as a sodomist, although with neither has his demonstration of feeling gone past the initial stages” (262).

In *The Bell*, Murdoch presents the homosexual’s attempt to suppress his secrets from the knowledge of others. She also analyses the effects of power related to this sexual orientation. She illustrates how autonomous inner linguistic and moral processes affect the subject and emphasizes the importance of seeking the truth in these processes. She also depicts the moral failures of the individual that spring from solipsism and egoism. She portrays the effect on the homosexual of the community’s failure to see him truthfully and lovingly.

In *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, Murdoch illustrates the preoccupation others have over the authenticity of another’s sexuality in her depiction of the two characters Axel and Simon, a homosexual couple. She deplores the social opprobrium surrounding homosexuality and illustrates in her fiction that because of this moral misconception on the part of the community, the homosexual often decides to keep his sexual orientation as a secret. Such lies and secrets are moral failings both on the part of the individual-homosexual and the community. The homosexual “fails morally because he or she fails to
be truthful about his or her inner identity while the community’s moral failure stems from its refusal to be just and loving toward the individual homosexual” (Grimshaw 136).

In the beginning, Simon and Axel live in Axel’s small flat in Bayswater. Later, they purchase a house in Barons court. Simon has been attracted towards Axel right from the beginning and has in fact started adoring him. The accidental and revelatory meeting of Simon and Axel in Athens clichéd the issue of their marriage. Murdoch describes his first meeting with Axel as follows:

From that first moment of contact Simon had known that something quite amazing had occurred. He gazed and gazed at Axel in the café. Axel looked quite different, he looked strange, he looked glorified. Simon ached to touch him. He was already in an agony of calculation about his chances. He felt sick with joy and terror. He thanked the gods that he really was alone. He prayed to Apollo, he prostrated himself in thought before the figure with which he had taken such strange liberties. Axel continued to talk about antiquities and Greek wine, but the humorous look remained in his eye and filled Simon with wild wild hope. (Fairly 179)

As Axel wanted to live with someone in absolute fidelity and truthfulness and trust, they started to live together.

Speculations about another’s sexuality may arise because of the appearance of the homosexual, with the underlying assumption that one can discern homosexuality from an individual’s countenance and demeanor of physical attributes. Murdoch also portrays the manner in which members of the public may express opprobrium about the
homosexual’s appearance. Peter Forster by condemning Axel-Simon relationship voices the traditional social view against homosexuality. He tells Axel, “you keep your relationship with Simon a dark secret, don’t you!” (119). He even asks him why he does not tell others in Whitehall that he lives with another man. Peter asks Axel “Are you afraid of losing your precious job? Afraid of being called a pansy? Why don’t you tell the truth to the world” (119). Murdoch reveals her ideas through the words of Axel. He replies:

My private life is my own affair. And would be if I were heterosexual. Why should I tell Whitehall whom I sleep with? I don’t reject this society. I live and work in it and make my own judgments about how this is best to be done. You accuse us of hypocrisy. All right. Very few human beings are innocent of that. But I think you should also consider your own case.

(119)

Murdoch’s male homosexual characters continue to remain at least partly in the closet. She portrays closeting to some extent and thereby intends to imply that the homosexuals continue to face an amount of social prejudice. At the inception of the novel, the speculation over the authenticity of Simon’s sexuality occurs in a discussion between Hilda and Rupert Foster. Hilda asks Rupert, “Do you think Simon is really homosexual?” (7). Murdoch shows that the impulse towards speculation is so powerful that even partners or close friends can succumb to the temptation to question the homosexual. When Simon witnesses an altercation in a Chinese restaurant, the victim’s assailants taunt him, “Look who’s here . . . a fucking queer. Listen to his squeaky little voice . . . want those pretty looks spoilt mister? . . . We don’t like pooves” (214). These
epithets accurately express certain public sentiments towards homosexuals during this era.

In *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, Murdoch depicts the problems that continued to render problematic about the homosexual’s public declarations of homosexuality throughout the 1960s. She also illustrates her belief that society often interferes and tries to control homosexual behaviour through its prevalent misjudgments and expectations of homosexual people. Murdoch makes the readers feel that they are like other married couples. Their attachments are the same, their fears are the same. Like an older husband Axel dominates Simon. Like a husband, Axel has lectured to Simon, “Don’t tell me lies even trivial ones and don’t conceal things from me. Love should be without fear” (223). He also feels irritated with Simon when he knows that he has been hiding certain things from him. Julius tries to create some hurdles in Axel-Simon relationship. However, Simon’s confessions to Axel saves their relationship. At the end of the novel, Axel and Simon are rewarded by provincial France on their way to Italy, by a renewal and strengthening of their love for one another.

Murdoch’s depiction of homosexuality in these fictional works reflects the concerns to which she devotes a large amount of her creative and intellectual energy. Grimshaw states, “homosexuality was a fitting forum in which Murdoch could investigate in particular the tensions between individual freedom and responsibility” (167). In *The Bell* and *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, Murdoch deals with a high degree of realism and social stigma associated with male homosexuality that existed in society during that time. Her novels also illustrate the moral and political issues confronting society at large. Murdoch is not against homosexuality and she does not condemn such
people. She is concerned about the restrictions that prevent the homosexuals to act freely. As they suffer from guilt and fear, they fail to attend the needs of others. Antonaccio points out, “in sum, the aim of Murdoch’s moral psychology is not only to demonstrate that consciousness is the fundamental mode of moral being but also that the fundamental mode of moral being in the individual in conscious relation to others” (52). Murdoch makes the readers understand that the presence of fear and guilt lead to moral crisis.

In her novels, Murdoch has primarily focused human relationship for the reason that her philosophy has marked proximity with this aspect of life that she has attempted to portray in manifold dimensions. Murdoch considers incest as one of the moral problems which prevents the individuals to view reality. She admires and explores Freud’s thoughts and ideas both in her philosophical and literary works. She has expressed great admiration for Freud’s thought. Freud considers incest as a socio-moral taboo in society, sprouts from the very first natural sexual impulse of young boys and girls. For human relationships, Murdoch follows Freudian themes emphasizing the relationships. Freud finds out that “the experiences of psychoanalysis make the assumption of an innate aversion to incestuous relations altogether impossible” (167). In other words, man has the innate and subconscious sexual relationship to a member of his family. Freud’s psychoanalysis confirms that “the first sexual impulses of the young are regularly of an incestuous nature” (169). Murdoch in connection with such relationships deals with the “labyrinthine nature of the human subconscious with regard to sex” (Frankova 59). While experimenting with diverse love affairs, Murdoch brazenly demonstrates incestuous relationships.
Incestuous relationships are a complex group of unusual relations. In her fictional work Murdoch inquires into the darker side of human nature. *A Severed Head* is the first novel where incest has been openly handled. It also deals with a deeper moral inquiry. Gauri says, *A Severed Head*, “is the novel where Murdoch mentions incest between siblings along with other forms of relationships” (3). In this novel incestuous relationships occur in various relations. It is represented by Palmer, a psychologist and his half-sister Honor, a German Jewish anthropologist. Revealing various sexual relationships, Murdoch breaks the taboo of incest. She shows the incestuous relations within a group of civilized and educated people. Honor Klein is a teacher figure. She changes the consciousness not only of other characters but even of her own brother Palmer, who is a psychoanalyst. Martin is shocked when he finds Honor in bed with Palmer, her half-brother. He says, “from this those shivered through me a violence of amazement not distinguishable from horror; and I felt as a physical pain the shock of what I had done to them” (*Severed* 89).

In the beginning Palmer fully controls Martin and Antonia. Honor on the other hand controls Palmer who is supposed to solve psychological problems of others, yet he miserably fails to free himself from the clutches of Honor. Psychiatrists deal with neurosis which is supposed to be caused due to incestuous feelings or acts. Here the psychoanalyst himself indulges in incest. Instead of making incest look as a heinous act it is shown as a union of the like with the like at the conscious level.

Murdoch has a great deal of skepticism about the process of psychoanalysis. Her disapproval of psychoanalysis seeps into her fiction. This disapproval is particularly noticeable in her characterization of Palmer as a psychoanalyst. Foucault explains, that
psychoanalysis “rediscovered . . . incest at the heart of . . . sexuality as the principle of its formation and the key to its intelligibility” (35). He further points out that incestuous desires must be brought out into the open during psychoanalysis and “deciphered for the truth that they can tell about the person who has disclosed such desires by those who possess the appropriate expertise” (101).

In her portrayal of Palmer, Murdoch not only notices the dangers of psychoanalysis, but also like Foucault indicts psychoanalysis itself. She presents Palmer with a great deal of irony since this character as a psychoanalyst should be able to overcome his own incestuous desires and the psychic malaise from which they spring. Palmer uses psychoanalytic discourse autonomously because of his emphasis on individual decision and free choice. Rabinovitz comments, “from psychoanalysis Palmer has developed a notion of permissiveness . . . . As both his ideas and his actions show, Palmer’s version of psychoanalysis leads to utter moral anarchy” (31).

The problem of egoism, in Murdoch’s view is not merely a redirection of vision but also a transformation of psychic energy to allow for progression of the self. Leeson opines, “Murdoch believes in the context of a scientific therapy which aims not at making people good but at making them workable” (43). Murdoch claims that psychotherapy should have the explicit aim of making oneself morally better. In *Iris Murdoch: A Life*, Conradi states:

Murdoch felt that psychoanalysis generated self-concern, gave too abstract and crude a picture to account for human variousness, left the spiritual out of account . . . . Our energy should in any case be turned outwards in
close loving attention towards the quiddity of the world, not inwards,
which tended to reinforce habitual practice. (494)

Thus psychotherapy should provide a form of creating modes of attention which can
ultimately break the psyche.

Murdoch also considers suicide as a hindrance for obtaining freedom. Suicides
and deaths occur frequently in her novels. She also examines the reasons for committing
suicide. She connects suicide with the concept of love and freedom. She associates virtue
with freedom and knowledge. Her emphasis is on the knowledge of others and not the
self. The most powerful medium linking one with reality is love. Winsor, while
discussing the role of love in the apprehension of reality, provides a valid Freudian
explanation for it. She says, “Freud believes that children are led to modify their
primitive world views through contact with reality, which teaches them that they are not
the centre of the universe, and through the desire for love, which motivates them to lessen
their self-centredness” (148). Murdoch believes that goodness and love consist of
directing attention away from the self towards exterior reality.

A frequent tragic motif occurs in Murdoch’s novels is the individual, who does
not receive proper attention eventually commits suicide. For one reason or another, these
persons are unable to cope with the events unfolding around them and choose the
weapon, suicide. In *The Bell*, Nick ends his life, killing himself, as he does not get love
and attention from others. He arrives in the Imber Community as a guest. He has been
permitted to spend the last few weeks with his sister Catherine before her entry into the
nunnery. Earlier, Michael, the leader of the community worked in the school where Nick
studied. Michael’s teaching career is cut short by a scandal concerning his unconsummated love for Nick. After that the idea of setting up the semi-religious lay community fulfils Michael’s long cherished ambition. In establishing, the lay community, Michael exercises an existential form of freedom by ignoring the past and imposing a rational order or form on the world.

Michael’s image of himself as one favoured by God leads to spiritual pride and to a facile optimism. He seeks the help of religion to escape from the desire to exercise power over others. The arrival of Nick in Imber Court disturbs him because he thinks that he might be destined in some humble way to stand as a witness to the latter’s spiritual development. Due to this fear, he fails to take care and love Nick. For Murdoch, love is incompatible with power because it does not involve the desire to change another. The proper use of power can be achieved only by a consideration for the individual. As the communication between Michael and Nick is not established, Nick feels the void in his life. Since, Nick fails to communicate with Michael and his sister, Catherine, he has to endure the feeling of alienation and frustration. He is not ready to lose his sister at any cost. It is to prevent the loss of his sister that he sabotages her attempt of entering the Abbey. When Catherine goes mad, he realizes what harm he has done to her. As he has lost the last object of his love, he realizes complete darkness in his life, and commits suicide.

The process of recovery starts with Nick Fawley’s death, which strips Michael of his illusions. In suffering with Nick’s death, he realizes that love has been wasted. After Nick’s death, Michael feels very sad. He considers himself responsible for Nick’s death. He would have loved and saved Nick, but he refuses to do so because the pattern of a
spiritual destiny and a sense of sin associated with Nick overpower him. Michael fails to hear the voice of love. He realizes:

Nick had needed love, and he ought to have given him what he had to offer, without fears about its imperfection. If he had more faith he would have done so, not calculating either Nick’s faults or his own . . . . So great a love must have contained some grain of god, something at least which might have attached Nick to this world given him some glimpse of hope.

(*Bell* 307)

Thus Michael ignores the boy’s needs because of his own sense of imperfection. His concern to keep his hands clean and secure his future has deterred him from opening his heart to Nick.

Murdoch’s view is that morality has everything to do with one’s concerned responsiveness. She wants the human beings to attend to other people’s needs. This responsiveness involves an element of particularity not reducible to any form of complex universality. Nina, the dressmaker in *The Flight from the Enchanter* is another example. She is a victim of power. She is prevented from being free in every respect because of her fear. An alien in an alien world, she becomes both the victim of Mischa’s power and Rosa’s egoism. She is unable to live “sanely, with-out fear” (*Flight* 132), and while alive she is not free. Nina is the most pathetic victim of Mischa’s power. For Nina, Mischa carries, “in his indefinable foreignness a kind of oriental magic” (140). By giving Nina financial aid but denying her either love or guidance he keeps Nina imprisoned in her role of the alien. She comes to believe that she cannot act on her own free will:
As Nina was incapable of opposing any will of her own to Mischa should he wish to define her position further in any way that he pleased, she simply agreed, nor was she at that time at all distressed at the thought that she was falling yet farther into Mischa’s power. It was some time after that she first began to feel liked by her condition. (142)

The destructive power of Mischa and the world in which Nina lives is projected through Nina’s dream in which she sees her sewing machine metamorphosed as a dragon. She feels, “the machine was looking more and more like some animal” (138). Her own world is ripped apart by the dragon Mischa.

When Nina devises a plan to escape from Mischa, the only person she believes who is able to help her is Rosa. Rosa “figured in the mind of the dressmaker as a kind of archangel a beneficent power, and in any case her only hope” (145). For Nina, Mischa’s power is enormous in its mythical quality. Her fear of authority is undefeatable due to her past. Her attention has been consumed by Mischa’s power, so that she can see nothing else. She has to be always prepared to receive him. Nina wants to run away from him but she has no place to go. She tries to obtain help from Rosa because she “had once been under Mischa’s spell and had freed herself without migrating to Antipodes” (141). Unfortunately, Rosa does not listen to her when she approaches her on three different occasions. Rosa refuses to love and pay attention. In the words of Nakanishi, love “can grant a person the ability to see . . . clearly, free from selfish desires or jealous insecurities” (890). Finding no escape from Mischa, Nina commits suicide. She has to behave like Mischa’s complete slave who can escape only through death.
Mischa’s behaviour towards Nina follows a pattern that takes shape in the novel. His beneficence and initial interest in Nina enslave her, while his ensuing indifference and role-playing confuse and isolate her. Finally, it is his indifference to Nina’s needs as a woman that drives her to despair and she commits suicide. Mischa is in control of the situation as he has the information that would set Nina free from political and psychological fear but he does not work out it. Rosa fails to observe Nina’s need for assistance because of her consuming self-interest. She is not able to console Nina, and allows her to suffer. At the end of the novel, Calvin forces Rosa to realize her mistake. Rosa like Michael regrets for not showing compassion towards Nina. Thus both Mischa and Rosa fail to pay attention towards Nina. Without any loving attention Nina flees from this world choosing death.

Murdoch takes up her recurring theme of selflessness, in order to show how values must take their value from exterior sources. Murdoch’s characters inherit selfish nature and pursue selfish goals. This attitude makes them neglect the feelings and desires of others. Rejection and ignorance lead them to commit suicide. Priscilla in The Black Prince, is a sympathetic, but pitiful woman who spends her life moaning the ruined state of her life. Priscilla’s loss is that of her husband’s love. Her subjectivity as a childless woman is defined by the love and presence of her husband. She starts to miss him and feels sorry for abandoning him, blaming herself as an inadequate wife. She says:

I should never have left him . . . And here in this meaningless place I’m with myself more. Even hating Roger was something, it meant something, being made unhappy by him did, after all he belongs to me. And I was used to things there, there was something to do, shopping and cooking and
cleaning the house, even though he didn’t come home for his supper . . .
I’m connected with him forever, it’s for better and worse, worse in this case, but any tie is something when one’s drifting away to hell. (Prince 222-23)

Now in her loneliness, the dull house chores and the way Roger used to treat her do not hurt her. Even though Roger avoids her, she wants to be with him.

In *The Black Prince*, Priscilla commits suicide because of despair and loneliness. Her husband Roger rejects her and has an affair with another lady. As Roger ignores and avoids her, she gets deluded and seeks the help of her brother Bradley. As Bradley is entirely self-absorbed, he fails to console and give refuge to Priscilla. *The Black Prince*, provides “the literal loss of self as a foil for the absence of selflessness” (Elmore 4). Priscilla is rejected by both Roger and Bradley.

After being abandoned by her husband, Priscilla comes to her brother’s house hoping he would take care of her. But Bradley’s selfishness and moral bankruptcy become evident, when he writes, “I did not want to be involved in any mess of Priscilla’s. I did not even want to have to be sorry for Priscilla” (Prince 72). He refuses to give love to his sister. He rejects any involvement in the reality of Priscilla’s existence. He tells Priscilla that she cannot simply leave her husband she has no choice but to return to him and must therefore control herself. His self-interested nature leads him to neglect his sister. His callousness compels her to commit suicide by swallowing sleeping pills. Under self-delusion, he feels that Priscilla’s death has made him free. Priscilla commits suicide, when Bradley is away with Julian. Francis informs him about the death of his sister.
Bradley does not want to ruin his bliss with Julian by going home. He decides not to tell Julian about Priscilla’s death. Even when he hears that she has killed herself, he lacks the compassion and concern that one would normally feel for a sibling.

Bradley feels a certain amount of guilt for his sister’s suicide. In his own obsession, he allows Priscilla to die. It is only when he attends Priscilla’s funeral he realizes and remarks to Francis; “It wasn’t your fault. It was my fault” (344). He becomes conscious of his guilt ridden inner self. He regrets for his shameful act. He feels that if he would have comforted her, she would have lived in this world with hope. He expresses, Priscilla “died because nobody loved her” (366). His guilty consciousness prickles him and he says “I had neglected Priscilla” (388). Thus Priscilla’s life is ruined because of an unloving marriage and also due to her self-centred brother.

Through suicide, Murdoch makes the readers realize the importance of loving attention towards others. Suicide is a sin and it also prevents one’s moral progress. For Murdoch, those who perceive the inner feelings of others can only realize reality. She considers suicide as one of the obstacles that prevents human beings to arrive at reality. Kristeva explains “Suicide is not a disguised act of war but a merging with sadness and beyond it, with that impossible love, never reached, always elsewhere, such as the promises of nothingness, of death” (3). Murdoch, through her characters Nick, Nina and Priscilla, brings out the fact that love is necessary for human beings. If people lack love, understanding, care and hope, they seek to escape the desolate situation through death. So Murdoch pleads, man to love and heed the fellow beings. Love replaces hatred, misunderstanding and hostility. Murdoch calls human beings to love and care for each other.
Abortion consistently appears in Murdoch’s novels as a tragic and traumatic experience. Murdoch expresses the turmoil the characters face after the abortion. She also describes the impact upon the characters due to abortion. In her portrayal of Morgan in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, Murdoch presents the impact of abortion on women. Murdoch exposes the effects through her characters. Morgan flees from Tallis because his rounded inadequacies stifled and strangled her. After developing an affair with Julius, she settled in America. Their relationship gets bored and both Julius and Morgan come back to England separately. When Julius and Morgan meet for the first time after having separated in America, Morgan informs him about her abortion. She even says that she is not going to ask money from him. Julius is shocked to hear this and says “you regard the destruction of a child as a financial transaction” (*Fairly* 89). But Morgan does not care for what she has done. She says, “as far as I was concerned it was a disease” (89). Morgan wants to rebuild her relationship with Julius. But he is not ready to accept her, as she aborts his child without informing him. He says, “A woman who is fortunate enough to have a child and who then murders it seems to me a rather odd phenomenon” (126).

Murdoch later makes Morgan regret for her act. Due to the trick played by Julius, Rupert and Morgan fall in love with each other. She is in a confused state and feels a sort of emptiness in her life. After her experience in the Piccadilly Circus, she goes to Tallis’s house. She bursts in and finds Peter there. She tries to explain Peter what she has been through. Her description is incoherent, but it suddenly brings a new dimension into the situation. She feels:

*The child, thought Morgan, the child might have existed. It would have been a few months old. It might have been the solution to everything. Why*
had she not understood what a terrible thing it was to deprive that child of life? She had killed it so casually and drunk half a bottle of Bourbon afterwards. (297)

Morgan for the first time feels remorseful for the abortion. This shocking realization is belated one for her. At the time of abortion, she does not feel any sympathy for the child. In order to take revenge on Julius, she aborts the child. Her solution to everything is from the perspective of her own messy life which she needs to make sense of.

Like Morgan, Priscilla in *The Black Prince*, feels sorry for aborting the child. Due to her relationship with Roger, Priscilla becomes pregnant before their marriage. As Roger does not want to marry her, he forces her to have an abortion and then makes her father pay half of it. Bradley, Priscilla’s brother says, “this illegal and thoroughly solid drama upset my poor father very much indeed” (*Prince* 70). Priscilla’s father is a puritan and a timid law-abiding man. He feels ashamed and frightened. He is already ill and becomes worse and never recovered after that. After this incident, Roger married Priscilla because she lied about being pregnant. Without their desired child, their relationship clung together in a state of misery. Roger starts an affair with another lady and rejects her. Priscilla’s great regret is the abortion that left her unable to have children. She says, “That child, the one child, to think that it existed, it cried out for life? and we killed it deliberately” (85).

Roger avoids Priscilla because he needs a child. He has accepted to marry her to have a child. When Priscilla fails to give a child, he starts to disregard her. Abortion leads Priscilla to lose her life. It also makes her feel lonely. She regrets:
Twenty-a grown-up son someone to love-to look after me—oh Bradley, you don’t know how I have yearned day and night for that child. He would have made all the difference to Roger and me. I think Roger began to hate me when he found I couldn’t have children. And it was all his fault anyway. He found that rotten doctor. Oh it’s so unjust, so unjust. (89)

Thus Priscilla expresses her inner agony due to abortion. This guilty consciousness leads her to frustration and alienation. Finally, lack of comfort from others forces her to end her life.

Murdoch’s own fiction is permeated by a reliable attention to or respect for moral law which is closely related to her conception of goodness. She “concentrates rather on a real and stringent depiction of errors and resultant casualty which rules human affairs under the aegis of chance” (Dipple 6). Her emphatic concern assumes importance in the wake of the post Christian break-down and the death of god ethos. In the struggle to be modern, man has chosen to abandon the inward and upward look and has preferred to reject the possibility of the transcendental. The spiritual sterility of modern man has created innumerable problems and good has become a vague, distant and hollow concept. Through the medium of her novels, Murdoch tries to reclaim certain possibilities for human life in the twentieth century context and presents the need to live a life as worth-living.

The action in the novels spring from the domineering self of an individual. The bright and intense self lives unfulfilled in its egoistic concentration. Unwilling to give up any of the necessary demands of self and at the same time, expecting everything from the
other, the egoistic self sets in motion a series of events that lead towards disaster. As Nussbaum comments, “Murdoch more than any other contemporary ethical thinkers, has made us vividly aware of the many stratagems by which the ego wraps itself in a cozy self-serving fog that prevents egress to the reality of the other” (74). The solipsistic self of Murdoch’s characters leads them into an imbroglio of lies, guilt, deceit, infidelity, sexual perversity and sado-masochism. Murdoch does not fail to display the sexual perversions like incest and homosexuality prevail in the modern society. Through the volatile domain of love Murdoch allows the readers to have a direct peep into the real dynamics of human behaviour. The erotic and sexual entanglements hinder the spiritual struggles of many characters.

One of Murdoch’s great gifts as a novelist is her capacity to analyze conscious thought in her characters as well as unconscious impulses and emotional states in a real detached manner. She records the inner reverberations of every moment of her characters’ experience. In arresting their inner turmoil, she underlines their moral failings. The claustrophobic characters who cannot relate to the reality outside their own self cannot be morally buoyant or open. Bajaj comments, “there is an absolute plausibility in their being morally limited and marginal” (255). The characters assume structure not by means but through the subtle unfolding of the workings of their personality in terms of distinctly shaped responses to life which ensures them individuation.

Murdoch analyses the moral longing for the good through flawed characters. She points out how evil is produced by obsessive faith or fantasies, lack of self knowledge and misplaced good intentions. In Murdoch’s view, moral endeavour is best seen as an
attempt to overcome illusion and selfish fantasy in order to see and respond to the real world. One can see the weird and sexually perverted universe and the serious moral burden of the characters in her novels. Denham opines, Murdoch’s novels “show that their form- the form of detailed, imaginative narrative- manifests a way of thinking about moral experience that her philosophical writings both recommend and vindicate” (606). She explains why her characters fall in love in such an eccentric and ludicrous manner as follows:

Falling in love, a violent process which Plato more than once vividly describes (love is abnegation, objection, 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. Love in this form may be a somewhat ambiguous instructor. (Fire 36)

It is in this sense, that the drama of the life of Murdoch’s vain pseudo-intellectuals, morally prudish men maddened by their ego, emotionally greedy women, and eclipsed good characters all involved in the lonely hunt for love, power and consolation is validated. Through her characters, Murdoch shows, man is a fugitive, a benighted being, aimlessly wandering through the world’s wilderness. The obsession under which her characters labour is the outcome of some emotional need or lack of maturity.

The novels of Murdoch occupy a distinctive place in the field of contemporary moral inquiry. She has anticipated and shaped many of the issues central to recent ethics including the relation between human identity and ideas of the good, the effect of the
modern critique of religion on moral life and thought, the relation between ethics and literature and the contemporary debate about liberalism. She is centrally engaged with the question of the self and the moral dimensions of every attempt to picture human beings. Murdoch’s thought “builds important bridges between secular moral philosophy and religious ethics” (Antonaccio 127). While Murdoch acknowledges the waning influences of traditional religious beliefs and ideals in contemporary society, she embraces an essentially religious picture of human beings as fallen and in need of transformation.