CONCLUSION

This study of Murdoch’s novels began on the premise of her major thematic preoccupations. She is undoubtedly a major contemporary novelist but any assessment of her fictional oeuvre is beset with a singular problem: she defies classification as a novelist. She was not a Modernist; she was not a Post-Modernist, she was not, like many of her female contemporaries, a feminist writer; yet, despite the fact that she employed many Victorian devices and themes in her novels, she can scarcely be branded as a traditionalist. She was a thinker, a novelist of ideas, a philosopher who dared to introduce philosophic discussion into her novels; at the same time she was a myth-maker, a weaver of stories interested in patterns, interested in form, interested in language, interested above all in according supreme importance to truth, goodness and love in a world that has dispensed with God.

Her principal thematic concerns relate to human condition and hence she made few concessions to the frantic lifestyle of the modern world. Marriage and love are as precious themes to her as religion, morality, myth and magic. Her novels embody the thematic configurations of the values, ideas and ideals she held dear. And her tenacity to her concerns is fairly evident in the descriptions of life given in minute details in her novels. This is still further corroborated by the increasing length of
her novels one after another. Apart from Jackson’s Dilemma, her novels grew longer and longer. A full understanding of her polymathic fictional genius demands the learning and culture of a Renaissance Man-a knowledge of literature, philosophy, classics, politics, fairly tales and legend, history, psychology, languages, art, drama, music, popular science and probably a dozen other subjects. She was an excellent story-teller; her novels are full of excitement and anticipation; most of her characters can be accepted on a level realistic enough to satisfy the reader reading purely for pleasure. It would be no exaggeration to say that there is God's plenty in the Murdochian world. There is romance for those who seek it, mystery for those who want mystery, and happiness, humour and genuine comedy of a very high order characterise her novels.

As the human condition is the business of the novelist today, she responds to it with full responsibility and awareness of her role as a moral philosopher and novelist. Throughout her career she chose to write novels about social life, principally the life of the middle and upper middle classes, rather than about the domesticities of family life. This brought her criticism on two fronts: first from the feminists that, as a woman, she did not attempt to deal with the problems of modern women and secondly that, though she was writing about late twentieth-century modern life, few of her characters seemed to work for living. Both the comments have some grain of truth in them but can hardly be accepted as genuine criticism, given Murdoch’s tendency and temperament. Her work must be judged in its own right without imposing far-fetched analogies or laboured influences. It should not be assessed for being different from what the
critics fancy it to be. Pope’s dictum in An Essay on Criticism is fairly apt in this context:

A perfect judge will read each work of wit.

With the same spirit that its author writ.

However, a genuine problem for Murdoch seems to be the occasional failure to integrate the elements of myth and realism, a failure which was more pronounced in the earlier books. A particular example is *The Sandcastle* where Murdoch has introduced the mythical Lawrentian figure of the gypsy and leaves us to puzzle about the magic rites of Felicity, who is presented at first as a perfectly ordinary girl. Felicity can be contrasted with Moy in *The Green Knight* where the duality of myth and realism is with us from the outset and Moy is not only one of Louise’s children, but is also the youngest princess of the fairy story, Indeed she is first introduced to us through Joan Blacket’s fairy-tale opening. In her early novels Murdoch is basically concerned with the themes of confinement, freedom and exercise of physical power and violence. However, these novels exhibit, though obliquely, Murdoch’s later concerns - concepts of love and truth. The next group of novels deals with the theme of marital relationships, expanding on its various dimensions. Love within and outside marriage determines the success or failure of marriage. Mor’s marriage is sustained because of his simplicity of thought whereas Dora fails in her marriage due to lack of it.

In the next group of novels morality emerges as a potent
theme. The configuration of this theme appears in the form of conflict between good and evil. Here, she seems to view evil as stemming from catalytic figures who destroy the peace and tranquility of the world around them. She posits the idea of existential man who has chosen Satan in lieu of God. It is just such a man who is placed at the centre of several novels of this group including the novels from 1966 to 1971. The protagonists in these novels are, by and large, power-mongers who seek to undermine the simpler characters by testing the quality of their goodness. They are usually self-seeking villains with apparent indifference to those around them. These novels may not be overtly philosophical, they certainly embody some of the basic philosophic concepts of our time. One is sure to come across thoughts about God, about Good and Evil, about Reality and about the quality of a love.

Although Murdoch is obsessed with the theme of childhood, she falls short of Dickensian range, her child characters show her understanding of child psychology. Donald and Felicity in The Sandcastle, the twins, Edward and Henrietta in The Nice and the Good, Luca in The Sacred and Profane Love Machine, Adam in Philosopher’s Pupil and Moy in Jackson’s Dilemma are only some of the specimens that exhibit her mastery in the depiction of childhood. It is worth noting, however, that the children in her novels are always affected by the relationship of their parents and estrangement of the parents creates an adverse impact on their emotional and moral growth. Thus, Murdoch has linked the theme of childhood to marriage and its vicissitudes.
In the group of novels examined in chapter five Murdoch has moved a step forward in the investigation of evil. She seems to take the stance that humankind is innately evil and as a result violence, deaths, accident and machinations emerge as dominant themes. Each of the four novels during the period 1973-1976 ends in deaths that have their origin in the selfishness and self-seeking of one or more of the characters. These novels also seem to support Murdoch’s concept of contingency, and chaotic and accidental nature of human life.

The penultimate group of novels is concerned with the theme of morality though they may not essentially be about God. There is a discussion of religion, concept of Goodness and Truth with characters who have mystical powers which affect most of the other people with whom they come into contact. Symbolically the novels examine the ontological proof of God’s existence by suggesting that the belief in the magician creates the magician himself. And the last two novels, The Green Knight and Jackson’s Dilemma expand the theme of the preceding group of novels to myth magic and mystery.

Through her novels Murdoch has tried to establish the imperfect nature of human life and the world. Almost all her thematic preoccupations are coloured by her moral outlook which rests on concepts like truth, goodness and religion though apparently without a god. The ethical and philosophical content of the novels changed and grew over the years. Under the Net posited a comparatively straightforward moral problem, which was not much complicated by the introduction of a
religious dimension in The Bell. Later novels, however, enter into philosophic discussion about the nature of Good and Evil, about the existence or non-existence of God, about the relationship of morality to religion and about mystic beliefs such as Buddhism, Judaism or, indeed, Christianity itself. Most people shift their religious and political perspectives as they grow older, responding to their own explorations and investigations. Murdoch was no exception and so she pursued trains of thought that led her through many philosophic and moral issues. As a result of this, Murdoch’s fiction is permeated by a consistent attention to or respect for moral law which is closely allied to her conception of goodness. The central question explored in her novels is, how can we live in a world divorced from good? In her novels, Murdoch creates an absorbing image of our present day confusions. As a novelist, she deals with matters which have reached a dead end.

Notwithstanding her professed role as a ‘moral psychologist’, Murdoch does not advocate any particular religious belief and social ideology in her novels, but emphatically focuses her attention on human interaction. For her, morality essentially lies in human behaviour. It should be flexible and argumentative, and must be centred on the individual. Transcendent metaphysical realities such as God or History, or the Church, should not be allowed to foreshadow the moral life of an individual. Murdoch has properly understood the dilemma of the modern man, and is fully aware of the distortions that have tainted human relations, caused by the decline of religious values, break with the cultural and moral background, over ambitious material pursuits, and the selfish tendencies
encouraged for mythical individual happiness.

The distorted human relations have also caused the almost total collapse of emotional interaction and understanding among human beings. The modern man, as projected by her, is solipsistic and erects barriers between himself and reality to sustain the illusion of self-centred happiness of a private enclosed world of his own making. For such self-deluded individuals, Murdoch offers no direct remedy but she strongly feels that ‘unselfing’ can be an effective measure to reach out to others but this ‘unselfing’ or annihilation of the ‘demonic ego’ involves a conscious move towards love, friendship and goodness. And, to some extent, she has been able to materialise this concept in her novels through her ‘figures of good’. Undue emphasis on reason drains the emotional energy, often resulting in muddled human relations and general chaos in life.

In her twin roles of a moral philosopher and novelist, Murdoch shows that humanity can be saved from disaster, catastrophe and tragic lot only through goodness and love. Goodness teaches us to become unselfish, tolerant, forgiving, and makes us follow the path of self-renunciation. In her novels, goodness, reality and love are closely linked together. For her, goodness is a selfless attention to nature, and obedience to reality is an exercise of love. She is convinced that love has a unique power to transform and to universalise human life. If she has laid bare the reality of life in her novels as a moral psychologist, she has diagnosed the ills and maladies that afflict humankind and suggested the remedy - a trident of love, goodness and reality. But she is always alert to her responsibility as a
noverist and consciously abstains from making any generalizing statements. At the same time she is capable of profound insights into very wide range of emotional and metaphysical experience without being deterministic. Her real greatness as a novelist lies in the way she synthesizes her aesthetic and moral imperatives.

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