THE TIME OF ANGELS TO AN ACCIDENTAL MAN

In the five novels which were written between 1966 to 1971, Murdoch is preoccupied with the concept of good and evil. She is deeply concerned with the problems and conflicts that arise due to the presence of good and evil in human life. In her philosophical treatise, The Sovereignty of Good (1971), Murdoch commented: If one does not believe in a personal God there is no problem of evil, but here it is almost insuperable difficulty of looking properly at evil and human suffering.¹

Murdoch’s concept of suffering involves the simultaneous presence of good and evil. It is also related to religion, faith and spirituality as these ideas place God at the centre. But the interplay between good and evil has a moral angle to it which presupposes nobility, redemption and emancipation through good and depression and the consequent pessimism brought about by the influence of evil forces. In short, Murdoch's concept of good and evil is best apprehended in the framework of ethical behaviour which is, by and large, dictated by the norms of prevailing morality and its codes. The group of novels under

consideration in this chapter includes *The Time of The Angels* (1966), *The Nice and the Good* (1968), *Bruno’s Dream* (1969), *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970) and *An Accidental Man* (1971). Although these novels appear to be farcical and funny, good and evil remain the central thematic focus in them. Murdoch has understandably infused these novels with a focused concept of evil which is, at times, coupled with a negation of the existence of God. However, her view of evil is different from that of William Golding who saw evil as indigenous to Man. In these novels, Murdoch appears to view evil as stemming from catalytic/demonic figures who destroy the peace and tranquility of the world around them. Her view of existential man posits man as descending from Kant’s idea of man. She has explained, ‘Kant abolished God and made man God in his stead.... this man is with us still, free independent, lonely, powerful, rational, responsible, brave... his proper name is Lucifer.’ This view of man is placed at the centre of several of her novels of this period. The hero in the novels under consideration seeks to undermine the simpler characters by testing the quality of their ‘goodness’. He is conspicuous by his sense of power which is largely expressed by his own self-regard and his apparent indifference to the people and surroundings.

Murdoch considers the novel as ‘a comic form’. Notwithstanding her claim that her books are ‘full of happiness, she is aware of the lure of evil and its magnetic power: one tends to be impressed by the people who are demonic... I think one identifies with the demonic.

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characters in books, since it’s a deep notion to feel that the devil tempts you and gives you power in return for giving up goodness, which is after all often dull.³

Obviously, then, Murdoch’s concept of good and evil is fundamentally Christian, which foregrounds the idea of original sin. Carel Fisher in The Time of the Angels, for instance and Julius King in A Fairly Honourable Defeat impose themselves upon our minds more forcefully than do their ‘good’ counterparts, Eugene Peshkov, Rupert Foster and Tallis Brown. In The Time of the Angels Murdoch takes up the theme of The Bell: the problem of ethical behaviour as it is influenced by modern religious and philosophical ideas. But, unlike The Bell this book has no characters to provide it with a moral centre, which helps to account for its depressing and pessimistic quality.⁴ The Flight from the Enchanter. The Unicorn and The Time of the Angels have curious demonic inversions of community alongwith the recurring Murdochian theme of the struggle of love against the many guises of evil in everyday life.

Much of the action in The Time of the Angels takes place at the Rectory, with the sinister figure of Carel Fisher looming large. The ruined structure of the Rectory has only the tower and a little adjoining portion left in a ramshackle state. It was to be dismantled but due to some technical hitch, dismantling is postponed for some time. It is during this

period that the entire action of the novel takes place. In the Rectory house there is a constant noise produced by the underground railway which contributes to the horror of the Gothic world in the novel. Perhaps these details have been deliberately incorporated only to meet the demands of gothic form that sets off the principal thematic concern: the conflict between good and evil.

In the virtually gothic atmosphere—full of suspense and murkiness of the Rectory—Carel exercises full control over its inhabitants. In fact, the Rectory, where Carel, Muriel, Elizabeth, Pattie, Eugene and Leo, the main characters of the novel live, is not attached to any church. ‘The whole place looks as if it’s been bombed now... They have knocked everything down all round the Rectory.’5 Ironically enough, this delapidated space is ruled over by the demonic figure of the Rector, Carel who bedevils the angels staying inside it. What is worse still, he acts as a god to those under his possession, though he himself has little faith in any godhead. He wields absolute power over his daughter (Muriel), niece (Elizabeth) and servant (mistress Pattie). Of all the characters, Muriel is evidently the worst victim of his spell for she felt that he was a part of her consciousness that she was almost surprised that he was visible to other people. She wears him, carries him and endures him all the time. As far as Elizabeth is concerned, she is totally under his control because of her being invalid. And she can hardly object to Carel’s incestuous relations with herself.

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Apparently Carel’s passion including sexual relations with Pattie and incestuous relationship with Elizabeth suffices to project him as a cynic who derives pleasure from his evil deeds. What degrades him further is the revelation by Pattie that she knows all about it and that Elizabeth is his daughter through his earlier incestuous misdeed with his brother’s wife. This turns him into a downright immoral and inhuman masochist who misuses his power as an office-bearer of Christianity, namely the post of Rector. To highlight the predominance of evil, as it were, Murdoch has deliberately created a murky atmosphere befitting his devilish nature and diabolical activities therein. There is a foggy weather throughout and lights are kept on even during daytime. The interface of darkness and dim lights can be said to signify the darkness in Carel’s soul, which believes that ‘God is dead’.

Ironically, the theme of evil overshadows the world of good, and the agent of evil is Carel Fisher, the black-cassocked rector. With his egoism and passion for evil, Carel hovers over the world of the Rectory, avoiding any possible contact with light and goodness betokened by the outside world. In essence, Murdoch has foregrounded the working of evil through the Rector’s inhuman figure. He appears to lack ordinary human identity, he remains a voice though threatening and foreboding evil and whenever he is present his person is obscure. In contrast to his divine calling, Carel is identified with darkness. He is a mysterious and sinister figure who despite his central position is extremely elusive. He is related to several of the other characters - he is brother of Marcus, the father of Muriel and also, as it turns out, of Elizabeth, though his putative role in
regard to her is that of uncle and guardian. The servant Pattie is his mistress as also is Elizabeth with whom his relationships are multiple and complex. Anthrea Barlow had once been in love with him and one may assume from her tears at the end of the novel that she still is. The Russian Eugene Peshkov and his son Leo have their own quarters in the Rectory, where Eugene works as a porter. The Rectory itself is Carel’s by right of his job, a job which is essentially sinecure.

Carel’s problem, as a minister of the Church, is that he has ceased to believe in the existence of God, though his ungodly thoughts are by and large screened from us. But his figure foreshadows a number of priestly figures who appear in later novels and who have lost their faith, with the distinction, however, that unlike Carel, most of them continue to struggle with the concept of goodness. Under the cover of his religious calling, Carel seems to act as devil’s disciple without any apparent allurement or hopes of some unexpected material gain. He justifies his position, however, by asserting that ‘if there is no God there is all the more need for a priest,’ ⁶ Nevertheless, he is not free of God, rather, he is obsessed by the ‘God-myth.’ When he talks of the death of God he does not appear to view God as non-existent. He sees him in some way as having existed and existing no more, as though Lucifer’s fallen angels had won their battle and let unredeemed evil loose in the world. It seems, as though, perhaps, he is himself one of the fallen angels.

Carel has recreated God in his own image and substituted self ‘for the true object of veneration.’ ‘When I celebrate mass’, he tells Marcus, ‘I am God,’ yet as far as God takes on any identity, it is a demonic one; he is the dark opposite to goodness, to morality, a god of the underworld. For Muriel, ‘There had always been an area of darkness in her relationship with her father.’ She perceives Eugene Peshkov as an essential counterweight to Carel, the white figure against the black one. However, despite being a symbol of evil, Carel is a focus of love. Pattie loves him completely, absolutely and desperately. For the sake of her love for him she is prepared to put up with almost any indignity. When he takes her as his mistress she surrenders to him blindly and when he ceases to visit her bed, having found another prey in Elizabeth, she accepts the change despairingly. Even Marcus finds himself drawn to Carel after his final encounter with him. This love for Carel may be degrading for other characters but it hardly elevates Carel- the loved one- to any status of moral dignity capable of goodness.

Carel’s personality ineluctably invites comparison with that of Faustus as Carel has sold his soul to the devil. His tragic end becomes inevitable for an echo-not to say intertextuality-from Marlowe’s Dr. Faustus in the third chapter of the novel connects the two stories and drops a hint for Carel’s death: ‘Lo where Christ’s blood streamed in the firmament. Faustus signs a pact of twenty four years with Lucifer only because he was over-eager to gratify his own desires. If Faustus abjures

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8 Ibid, p. 179.
God for worldly pleasures, Carel too has rejected redemption, for in rejecting God he has also rejected Good. In fact, Good paves the way towards God’s grace in so far as it requires a human being to move towards others, rather than be damned to selfishness. Sadly, Carel inverts the very concept of good in his preoccupation with evil and the victories it is supposed to bring to him.

What makes Carel both irremediable and irredeemable is his love of evil and to perpetuate this lust he has imposed a moral and spiritual tyranny upon those who depend on him in some way. In his devilish arrogance, he assumes the role of a godhead and undertakes the task of ‘creating’ others as his passion and whims would dictate. He becomes all the more abominable and despicable when he attempts to coat his evil deeds with religious/divine concepts. For instance he created Pattie as ‘a goddess’ and later, ‘fumbling... to undo the front of her blouse’ he attempts to recreate as a Black Virgin Mary: ‘Hail Pattie, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed thou art among women.’

Interestingly, the last moments in Carel’s life, when death was approaching him, come as a fitting parallel to that of Faustus. When Faustus knew that the end of his allotted time was approaching, he believed that the supernatural powers were lying in wait for him. In the like manner, Carel sees rats and mice and ‘a black thing’ manifesting themselves in his presence, though Pattie knows that what frightened Carel did not belong to the material world. Murdoch has presented the

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idea of demonic possession through Pattie. As she acts in complete subservience to Carel, she comes across a gradual realization of something happening inside his mind.

Pattie approached at last something like a great fear in Carel, a fear which affected her with terror and with a kind of nausea. It seemed to her now that... she had always seen him as a soul in hell. Carel was becoming very frightened and he carried fear about with him as a physical environment.\(^\text{10}\)

It is not surprising, therefore, to find Carel an otherworldly creature who inhabits the world of Rectory as a malign force, debasing himself and others as well. He belongs inside Rectory, which is his prison, his Gaze Castle, and inside the Rectory he imprisons Elizabeth only to satisfy his lust, a passion which causes his undoing. In making her a prey of incest, he commits the most heinous of crimes in human life for which there is neither reprieve nor redemption. Elizabeth is unable to resist his sexual coercion because she is handicapped. Neither Carel nor Elizabeth ever goes outside the doors. No one from outside is allowed in; when others from outside- Pattie, Muriel, Leo-go out, they are generally enveloped in fog which conceals the identity of the Rectory. Likewise, when anyone from outside manages to enter, as does Marcus, Carel’s identity is concealed by an impenetrable darkness.

Evidently, the darkness and fog are indistinguishably associated with the world of evil created and perpetuated by Carel. The

fog in the novel lifts after Carel’s death which is not a natural one but through suicide. And for one like Carel, death could not come in a better guise than a sense of defeat, upholding the ultimate victory of goodness and truth over evil and diabolism. The ‘good’ finally prevails in the form of sunshine. In her philosophical writings Murdoch often refers to Plato’s idea that the good man, after various vicissitudes, is eventually able to emerge from the cave and to look at the sun. ‘The Sun’, she explains, ‘represents the form of the Good in whose light the truth is seen, it reveals the world, hitherto invisible, and is also a source of life.’

The idea of the ‘Good’ then, obviously, comes up as the source of light and by implication truth. This good as light stands in perpetual conflict with evil as darkness. Hence, the metaphorical significance of darkness may be seen in Murdoch’s novels to represent an absence of Good, breeding a secrecy which obscures reality. That Carel is never able to face the light of day must suggest his opposition, his hostility to Good. In contrast to Carel’s love of evil, Eugene appears in the novel as an epitome of goodness and love. When he says to Pattie, ‘Pattie, I feel so full of joy, I hardly know where I am. It indicates the unalloyed joy of being able to look at the sun which suggests the true goodness of Eugene. It is the goodness which subdues self and makes one look outward towards others. He offers Pattie a selfless love, which makes no demands on her, and a moral love through marriage that is briefly able to restore her self-respect.

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Later in the fifteenth chapter of the novel, the sun still shines and its hope still suffuses through Pattie. What she has always longed for is to ‘be married, to be ordinary, to love in innocence’ yet when she contemplates Eugene’s offer she realizes that, though it is ‘perfectly possible’, it is also ‘totally impossible.’ This thought is followed immediately by the entrance of Carel, wearing dark glasses to obscure the sun and demanding that the curtains should be pulled across so that he is protected from the glare. This love of darkness contrasts with the love scene of the previous chapter. Here, once again, Carel hijacks the God-myth, demanding of Pattie a love which is willing to be crucified for him, as though he has some demonic knowledge of Eugene’s proposal and is determined to thwart it. And ironically enough, the chapter ends in a demonic copulation. Despite Carel’s efforts to win her to evil, Pattie, however, finally escapes. Faced with the problem to choose between the good Eugene and the corrupt Carel, she is torn in conflict. Though she submits first to the seductions of evil for she misakes them for genuine love, she is able to overcome this dilemma at the end. Carel is to her what he is to himself - God. When she first went to work for Carel at the country rectory: She entered into Carel’s presence as into the presence of God, and like the souls of the blessed, realized her felicity... by a sense of her own body glorified ... Carel’s divine hands created her in her turn a goddess.12

Even after a gap of thirteen years, Pattie still clings to her uncritical love for Carel but when she learns of his incestuous

relationship with Elizabeth, she is completely disillusioned in her love and decides to desert him: She would have to go, she would have to leave him at last. She loved him, but she could do nothing with her love. It was for her own torment only and not for his salvation. She did not love him enough to save him... She could not make his miracle of redemption.\(^\text{13}\)

Thus Pattie succeeds at last in resolving the imbroglio of her love for Carel. Although it is too late to save her love with Engene, it is not too late for her to save herself and she escapes from the Rectory to work in an African refugee camp. This fulfills her secret dream of dedicating herself to the service of humanity. Her new identity as Patricia signals her redemption from the world of her past evil life and an atonement for her misdeeds in having devoted herself to the devil itself.

Murdoch has closely focused attention on the question of morality by staging a conflict between good and evil in the novel. What saves the novel from degrading into a melodrama is the comic spirit which, at times, turns into black comedy of events, undermining the serious moral argument again and again. Marcus Fisher, Carel’s brother is willing, like Murdoch, to dispense with God but he is made anxious by the thought of a system of a ‘morality without God’ and this worry pervades the novel as an undercurrent. While struggling to establish ‘the idea of an Absolute’ in morals; he discovers that the thread of his argument has become lost in his overwhelming concern about Carel and Elizabeth. However, this explains that the actual action, delineating the

conflict between good and evil, runs parallel to the contemplation of philosophical thought. One may find on a lower plane, Leo and Muriel discussing the questions of morals. They seem at first intent on outdoing each other in their declarations of their own immorality; yet at the end of the discussion they make a comic parody of genuine religious rites. Such comic events alleviate the seriousness of the novel, imparting it the vigour of readability and interest. But the fact remains, however, that good represents order and evil chaos. In The Time of Angels Carel occupies the centre with the satanic nature of his evil. This is further developed in various ways in the next few novels. The Nice and the Good is equally concerned with the theme of conflict between good and evil but the setting and atmosphere in this novel are altogether different. The action is set in open spaces like London and Dorset, and in bright summer sunlight. It seems that Murdoch wished to convey the message that evil can operate in broad day light also; it is no longer confined to darkness.

The Nice and the Good, in atmosphere, treatment and subject matter, marks something of a break with its predecessors. It moves easily between London and Dorset, between the Whitehall office, where Octavian Gray is Head of Department and Trescomb House, the seaside home of Octavian and his wife. All the characters, with the exception of Jessica Bird, belong to one or (like Octavian himself) both of these locations and Octavian though not a major character, is the unifying force between them. Octavian and Kate Gray preside over an extensive menage at Trescombe House, and the resemblance to the courtly world of

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Shakespearean comedy in this novel is not hard to see. The novel opens with the sound of a revolver shot, followed swiftly by Richard Biranne rushing into Octavian’s room to announce that Radeechy has shot himself. Though it looks like the opening of a thriller, Murdoch has carefully restrained this element to develop any further so that the principal focus on the conflict between good and bad occupies the centrestage.

In fact, Trescombe House becomes the nucleus of action; over the years, it has been transformed into the permanent residence of a cluster of people who might well be described as ‘hangers on’. The household consists of Theo, Octavian’s valetudinarian brother, Kate’s friend Mary Clothier and her son Pierce; Paula, the divorced wife of Richard Biranne and her nine-year-old twins, Edward and Henrietta; Willy Kost, a refugee scholar, who lives in a cottage on the estate. Murdoch’s love of animals is suggested by the presence of the animal inhabitants - Mingo, a shaggy non descript sort of dog, and Montrose, the cat. The group is completed by the house keeper Caisie who appears to be the only paid helper. Mary Clothier has the charge of household arrangements. Taken together, this motley community is a typically Murdochian group. They appear to live in harmony together but, beneath the apparently easygoing surface, most of them suffer from a rumbling discontent with their own lives. Willy, Theo, Mary and Paula each have an uneasy link with their past which haunts them. Kate endures a muddled present and the two other children, fourteen-year-old Barbara Gray and

fifteen-year-old Pierce, find that the future of adolescent uncertainty, love and sex, is catching up with them. Only the twins are frilly contented with their lot.

John Ducane, Octavian’s colleague and a friend, is a frequent visitor to Trescombe household. Ducane is asked by Octavian to investigate the apparent suicide of Joseph Radeechy, a minor and eccentric colleague, in the hope that a scandal may be avoided. Interestingly, Ducane is a man obsessed with the idea of perfection: ‘a man who needed to think well of himself... he was accustomed to picture himself as a strong self-sufficient clean-living rather austere person to whom helping others was a natural activity.’

During the investigation, it comes to light that Richard Biranne, a bureaucrat, was blackmailing Radeechy who was involved in midnight magic pursuits. Like Radeechy, Richard Biranne is being blackmailed by Peter McGrath, the office messenger responsible for the press leak. He is also found guilty of removing Radeechy’s note telling the cause of his suicide. Biranne is expected to lose his job, but it is Ducane himself who resigns. Miracles start happening. Ducane is placed in a position of considerable power from the point of view of his enquiry since, as both men recognize, he holds Biranne’s future career in his hands. Yet for a number of reasons Ducane is unwilling to exercise his power in such a way as to bring about the inevitable destruction of Biranne’s career. In a deal which both men admit to be itself a form of blackmail, Ducane in

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effect agrees to present his report incomplete so that the whole unhappy affair might have a satisfactory closure. Thus in trying to be good to others. Ducane is guilty of letting the culprit go scotfree and feels professionally unsatisfied. However, he is morally at rest when he offers his resignation to Octavian along with his report, ostensibly in order to be able to pursue his academic interests in Roman law on a more full time basis.

In some interesting ways, Ducane’s predicament and final decision can be seen as figurative of conflict between good and evil. His real problem is to uphold his own goodness but he feels that he is failing in his ideal of personal goodness. Ducane, elevated to godlike status by many of those with whom he comes into contact, largely because of his ability to elicit information and confidence, in many ways represents a realistic advance on earlier power figures. His predicament is complicated by a lack of clarity and decisiveness surrounding aspects of his personal life. He becomes appalled by his, in his own view, frivolous involvement with Jessica Bird and Kate Gray, and, like Biranne and Radeechy, is strongly attracted to Judy McGrath. He has to strive actively to detach himself from what these entanglements involve. He has been unable to put a satisfactory end to a finished love affair with Jessica Bird, whilst simultaneously he finds himself indulging in a chaste love affair with Kate. Ironically, neither woman is aware of the existence of the other, a duplicity which he regrets. Yet he is unable to clear up this ‘mess’ simply because it would inflict a serious damage... to his own dignity. He is insensitive to or unaware of how this revelation would hurt both women.
This angle of his personality places him in somewhat unfavourable light for he is more concerned with his own ‘goodness’ and self-image. It is the enquiry which he conducts, rather than the actual fact of Radeechy’s suicide, that sets in motion a train of events which changes the lives of nearly every character in the novel.  

The title of the novel draws attention to itself in that the terms nice and good are put together and are intended to mean almost the samething. Though the terms seem to be mixed up, it appears that the novelist considers all those actions as nice which are done to avoid hurting the feelings of others and to help others without losing self-interest. On the other hand, good actions demand forgetfulness of the self-interest. In the good actions, the doer is ready to risk even his own life or happiness to protect and safeguard the interests of others. In the novel, Ducane may be called good while Kate might be described as nice.

John Ducane is able to become good when he rises above his self-interest and risks his personal life to save Pierce’s life in Gunnar’s cave. He gains moral courage to feel free from the fear of what others would say about him. But all this does not happen in a moment. In the first few chapters of The Nice and The Good, Ducane faces the paradox of morality. He thinks in order to be good, it may be necessary to imagine ‘oneself good’. Although Ducane considers himself to be good and just, he is far away from these virtues. It is only his experience in the Gunnar’s cave that makes him a good man. He risks his life to save Pierce’s by

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17 Hilda D. Spear, op. cit. p. 64.
swimming to Gunnar’s cave where the adolescent boy had gone to impress an adolescent girl Barbara Gray. Ducane is trapped in the cave along with Pierce, and Mingo, the dog. Here Murdoch has made little use of Gothic trappings and stressed the reality of darkness and cold-water. The metaphorical significance of Ducane’s entry into the cave cannot be ignored, for there he suffers the dark night of the soul and finally emerges into the light, a changed man. As the waters rise and he and Pierce hold tight to each other and cling closely to Mingo, death appears to be very close and Ducane experiences an epiphany:

He saw himself now as a little rat, a busy little scurrying rat seeking out its own little advantages and comforts... He thought if I ever get out of here I will be no man’s judge. Nothing is worth doing except to kill the little rat, not to judge, not to be superior, not to exercise power, not to seek, seek, seek. To love and to reconcile and to forgive, only this matters. All power is sin and all law is frailty. Forgiveness, reconciliation, not law.\(^{18}\)

When they emerge from the cave, they emerge into a new world, where everything suddenly seems to fall into place. Wisdom dawns upon him and he realizes that in fact what he had been doing was only to live easily, to have cozy familiar pleasures and to be well thought of. Thus the incident of swimming to Gunnar’s cave metamorphoses the whole personality of Ducane. True to his silent promise, Ducane sets about reconciling all the problems of the Trescombe House community:

\(^{18}\) Iris Murdoch, The Nice and The Good, p. 315.
he returns Kate to Octavian; he reunites Paula with Richard Biranne, thus giving the twins their father again. Instead of spoiling Biranne’s career by writing about his hiding of Radeechy’s dying statement on a paper, Ducane excuses him and ignores what should have been done according to law. He is able to free himself from his physical involvement with Jessica and also to come out of his romantic involvement with Kate. He marries Mary Clothier, whom he has loved for a long time without realising it. Not only does he forgive the blackmailer McGrath but also employs him as his manservant. In her philosophical book, Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals, Murdoch observed: Those who refuse to compromise reasonably with what they see as evil may well destroy themselves and their innocent friends and achieve nothing.\(^\text{19}\)

In his resolution to do good to others, Ducane transcends his self-interest. While confessing before Mary about his relations with Jessica, he is least frightened about the consequences. His moral transition is symbolised by his eventual love for Mary whose concern for others demonstrates her innate goodness. Her mode of being gives him a metaphysical confidence in the reality of goodness. Hence, his compromises with evil appear to bring about only good.

Ducane is essentially the moral focus of this novel and through his character. Murdoch has shown how the good never use their power over other human beings for their personal benefits. They use their influence on others to enhance the happiness of those who lack it. After

gaining power over Biranne, Ducane starts dispensing his own brand of justice which is morally superior to the justice of conventional law. He makes Biranne reveal his crime to his divorced wife, Paula, and is able to unite the divorced couple. Again, Murdoch brings home the lesson through Ducane that forgiveness, reconciliation and love are interlinked and these seminal virtues lead up finally to what is known as goodness. Of the above three virtues, love is inseparably linked to goodness: It is in the nature of love to discern good, and the best love is in some part at any rate a love of what is good. She also points out that a gradual loss of respect that a man has for himself develops in him the need to locate in someone else the picture of an upright person. When Ducane’s illusion about his goodness is shattered, he realizes the uprightness of Mary Clothier.

Theodore Gray, however, turns out to be another moral epicentre of the novel when he broods that one should not look at evil but should look at good. It is doubly important in that it breaks the tyranny of the past and the adherence of evil to the personality as well. He contemplates: In the light of the good, evil can be seen in its place, not owned, just existing in its place. Almost reduced to insignificance by other characters, Theo represents Murdoch’s idea of the good. He keeps company with the innocent twins, Mingo (the dog) and Mary Casie (the maid-servant). When the twins, Edward and Henrietta feel sorry for a bird which has broken its wing, Theo simply takes the bird in hand and drowns it in the sea, because nothing can be done with the broken wing. It is only

21 Ibid, p. 346.
Theo who treats Mary Casie at the human level and feels a kinship with her. His true nature is revealed to the reader when Willy is talking about his past and telling how he has betrayed two persons who were gassed to death by the Nazis. His purpose of making Willy to talk about his past is to make him free of his guilt and not to gain power over him.

Willy Cost, the great scholar, in *The Nice and the Good*, utters certain truths about living happily in the Murdochian world. He advises Jessica (who has been rejected by Ducane) to free herself from ‘jealousy’ and think about the virtue called ‘generosity’ magnanimity, charity. Analysing her relationship with Ducane, Willy comments, There is no merit, Jessica, in a faithfulness which is poison to you and tivity to him. Willy feels, jealousy leads from deceit to cruelty and he knows that human beings are frail. So he suggests to Jessica:

> We are not good people, and the best we can hope for is to be gentle, to forgive each other and to forgive the past, to be forgiven ourselves and to accept this forgiveness, and to return again to the beautiful unexpected strangeness of the world.²²

In *The Nice and The Good*, one finds the good characters, Ducane, Mary, Theo and Willy behave as suggested by Willy himself, whereas the nice characters, Kate and Octavian are unable to do so. It may justifiably be concluded that the good characters are involved in positive goodness while the nice characters merely abstain from doing harm to others. Besides the theme of goodness, the novel deals with romantic

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attachments in what is almost a comic fashion. As in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* lovers meet their equals in the forest of Arcadia, so do the lovers meet their equals in Ducane’s house. Everything is sorted out and the novel ends on a note of happiness. The twins, Henrietta and Edward, are a constant source of entertainment and often of information. Murdoch described herself as having a ‘soft spot’ for them and gave them some of her own characteristics— the never-quenched thirst for interesting facts, the love of the sea and her own special interest in stones and shells.

The next novel, *Bruno’s Dream*, published the year before *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970) can be seen to mirror many of the ideas to be found in the last of the essays, the title essay of the book, in which suffering, Love and Death are matters of deep concern. *Bruno’s Dream* (1969) seems to illustrate the thesis that notwithstanding the existence and predominance of evil in life, Good is supreme over other concepts. In this novel, Murdoch shows a positive and rich vision of love by relating it to some very important human concerns. Two of the earlier novels, *An Unofficial Rose* and *The Italian Girl*, had begun with a death, and *The Nice and The Good* with a suicide; all three of these deaths serve as a catalyst for changes in the lives of the survivors. *Bruno’s Dream* begins with Bruno Greenleave who is almost ninety years old and is close to death. Though the novel begins in his dying consciousness, his actual death occurs only in the last sentence of the final page. In fact, the novel is concerned with Bruno’s attempts to desperately understand his own life and the reasons for his failure. It also deals with the impact of his dying upon the living. Here Murdoch shows how past unpleasant memories can
create a wedge between a father and a son. He keeps looking back to the past, reliving it, analysing the feelings he had experienced, especially in his relations with Janie, his wife, and Maureen, his mistress. He apparently unconsciously rearranges the apportionment of guilt for all that went wrong in it. So he recalls his childhood and adolescence blighted by a harsh and unloving father, his marriage destroyed by an uncaring wife who turns his children against him. His daughter’s death by drowning is seen as terrible and without point. His surviving son, Miles, never bothers to visit him and naturally he is unhappy at the estrangement from Miles because the latter had married Parvati, an Indian, without his approval, though Parvati had died soon after in an air-crash. Miles has married again but his differences with his father have not been bridged. Tragically, Bruno’s efforts at self-acceptance fail since no one helps him in this. As Miles never visits him, Danby, Bruno’s son-in-law, with whom Bruno now lives, does not have the patience to listen to him. Bruno, Miles and Danby, are living an isolated and circumscribed existence, either out of choice or of necessity.

Yet, for all the pathos Bruno’s life evokes, he is manifestly imprisoned in self-pity and hardly makes any effort even mentally to reach out to others. His eponymous ‘dream’ is his pointless, frustrated life. His real horror is that, just as his mother, his wife and his daughter now are reduced to his dreams, he too will meet the same fate. Significantly, the romantic love theme in the novel comes up along side the terror of dying as experienced by Bruno. During the course of the novel while Bruno lies dying, Danby, Miles, Lisa, Diana, Adelaide and
Will Boase fall in and out of love and ultimately pair off, Danby with Lisa, Adelaide with Will and Miles with the muse of poetry. Diana, however, is left at the end, loving and caring for Bruno and from his suffering learning vicariously how to accept death. Bruno’s next sympathiser is Lisa, sister of Miles’s second wife Diana. Lisa takes it upon herself to come and meet Bruno’s despair and nervousness. She responds to his specific terror and his unpreparedness for death. She tells Bruno of the futility of holding on to the past, and also to oneself by pointing out that he lives too much in himself. When Bruno asks her, ‘Where can I live, Child?’ her answer is ‘Outside. Leave yourself. It is just an agitating puppet. Think about other things, think about anything that’s good.’

Thus Lisa’s impact transforms Bruno and, to some extent, extricates him from the tangled web of his fantasies, which he has created around himself. Bruno compares himself to the spiders and thinks that there is little difference between him and these little creatures. The spider spins its web, Bruno spins out his ‘consciousness’ in which he is stuck unawares. He realises that since there is no God and no life after death, man has to untangle the confusion of the web called life. When the stamp-album is carried away by the flood waters, Bruno loses the false sense of security given by money. By surrendering himself to the changing flux of reality he is able to release and acquire a serenity.

Apparently, Bruno’s dying looks terrible in its proportions given the tragic sense of loss that overweighs his consciousness. As he is
dying without God and with nothing to replace God except blind fate, his whole life appears meaningless. All his musings turn out to be an exercise in futility and lead him nowhere except finally to the acceptance of his own death and an awareness of his own littleness. His death, however, releases Diana from her fears and resentments. She too finds herself able to accept the idea of death but also to see through it to the other side, which Bruno was unable to do. This other side was love and for her, ‘love still existed and it was the only thing that existed.’

Bruno and his son, Miles, are in fact linked by the problematic nature of the relationship between death and consolation. Murdoch herself believes that it is the role of tragedy, and also of comedy, to show us suffering without a thrill and death without a consolation. What redeems Bruno, after all, is that in his death he is able to teach Diana to accept death. The novel itself seems to beg a question as Frank Kermode put it: Does the novel make death poetic, as Miles’s early bad poem did? (Bruno’s Dream) examines itself on this.

In the context of Murdoch’s preoccupation with the conflict of good and evil, the demonic aspects of the other novels of this period are less apparent here. The evil is, undoubtedly, less pronounced here, though the twins Nigel and Will, particularly the former, seem to have some demonic qualities about them. Will is selfish and violent but not very intelligent. Nigel, on the other hand, like Puck or Ariel, is ubiquitous, all-knowing, all-seeing, all-hearing, a voyeur, a creature of the night who

peeps into windows and passes through doors, himself unseen and unheard. He is a mischief-maker and a betrayer but his acts of betrayal are informed by a rigid sense of morality through which he betrays the two great loves of his life, his twin brother Will, and Danby. When he discloses Will’s theft of Bruno’s stamp and Danby’s affair with Adelaide, his actions are, perhaps, more like Christ, and not wanton acts of malice. In his own way Nigel is the strongest force for good in the novel. He intends to purge his loved ones through this betrayal, to purify them of their sins. He tells Diana:

Maybe this is how God appears now in the world, a little unregarded crazy person whom every one pushes aside, knocks down and steps upon. Or it can be that I am the false god, or one of the million false gods there are. It matters very little. The false god is the true God. Up any religion a man may climb.\textsuperscript{25}

Interestingly, Nigel is introduced to us through the thoughts of others before he actually appears in the novel. For Bruno he is Nigel with the angel fingers, who is good and gentle with the old man; Danby thinks he is ‘a bit mystical’ and ‘rather beautiful’ whilst Adelaide sees him as a demon. As the novel proceeds we gather the impression that he is all these things. On his first appearance, the time is suspended and the narrative flows in continuous present. A similar suspension of time, indicated by a change in tense, occurs on several occasions, each such occurrence marked by a mystical, godlike manifestation of Nigel’s

attributes. Chapter nine, dedicated entirely to Nigel, offers him as Christ and finally as God: ‘Nigel smiles ... the tender, forgiving, infinitely sad smile of Almighty God.’

Obviously, then, Nigel’s godlike attributes are manifested in his all-embracing love. In his conversation with Diana he claims that he loves everybody. It is love that transfigures him, transcending the fears and hates of ordinary life but, above all, his is a selfless love. He sacrifices his love for Will, in order that Will may marry Adelaide, he sacrifices his love for Danby, taking Lisa’s place in Calcutta with the Save the Children Fund, thus allowing her to return and save Danby. He is a chameleon-like mythical character, yet the reality of his spiritual love brings about changes in the lives of all those who come into contact with him. He is, in fact, Murdoch’s mouthpiece for happiness in love which follows when there is a successful emotional and physical union. In this novel Murdoch tends to emphasise the sanctity of marital love.

However, love has another very significant mode which Diana learns, after she has suffered an emotional catastrophe. When she learns about Miles’s love for Lisa she feels tormented and humiliated and even contemplates suicide. At such a critical moment, Nigel, the male nurse in Bruno’s attendance, comes to her help and advises her to ‘annihilate’ and ‘trample’ her ego. In attending to Bruno and Miles, Diana gradually stops thinking of her own need for happiness or love. As a result of this commitment towards the service of others, she devotes herself entirely to the

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26 Ibid, p. 81.
care of these men, who do not acknowledge her care. Her final knowledge becomes an important statement about love in the novel. Her love has become impersonal for she has sublimated it through self-sacrifice. It is an all encompassing sense of acceptance of the human reality.

Thus, the novel reverses the assumption that the apparently sinister or neglected characters have no worth of their own. Instead, people like Nigel strengthen the notion that love, goodness, nobility and self-sacrifice might be traced in the lowest of ranks. Goodness manifests itself through Nigel and Diana who bring happiness and peace to those around them, making life worthwhile.

The novel that followed Bruno’s Dream was A Fairly Honourable Defeat (1970). It deals with the theme of conflict between good and evil. Tallis, the moral focus of the book, like Ducane in The Nice and the Good, finds his good pitted against Julius King’s evil. But, unlike Ducane, the good does not finally prevail. The obvious reason for Tallis’s failure is that he is so disorganised and confused that he cannot be an effective saviour of others.

The opening of A Fairly Honourable Defeat is sanguine with Hilda and Rupert celebrating their twentieth wedding anniversary in happy mood. The sun is shining as they sit together in their London garden, gossiping about their relations and friends and acquaintances. A Fairly Honourable defeat along with An Accidental Man seems, in certain
ways, to adhere broadly to the pattern of Shakespearean comedy. There are repeated specific allusions in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, though the march of the plot seems to have more in common with *Much Ado About Nothing*. In particular, the choice of weather and venue accentuates the thematic thrust of the novel: conflict between good and evil. The action of the novel continues with its tremendous cost of characters until it reaches the climax and the hot weather breaks, to be followed by torrential rain. Perhaps, Murdoch has intended the sunny atmosphere as a metaphorical index to goodness but the first words in the novel are ‘Julius King’ - the agent of evil - spoken by Hilda. It is significant in so far as it introduces the curious theme of the novel- the intense desire of the most of the characters to pry into each other’s lives. Equally important are the comments about Julius made by Rupert and repeated by Hilda. Julius is obviously their bete noire. He is ‘ungodly’ and unsaintly and justifies the adjectives ascribed to him by systematically destroying Rupert and his marriage, though the destruction is partly accidental, as is Rupert’s death.

In the elaborate Machiavellian plot of the novel, Murdoch has contrived a masterly interplay of good and evil with Tallis and Julius as principal figures. Murdoch herself in the discussions in Caen expounded on the Christian symbolism in the novel: ‘Tallis is the Christ figure... Julius... the Prince of Darkness, King of this world... Morgan is the

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human soul over whom they are disputing.\textsuperscript{28}

Evidently, therefore, Murdoch has consciously foregrounded these two characters in the action of the novel. In the first five chapters the names of Julius and Tallis are on every one’s lips. Julius appears first in the novel at a candle-lit dinner to which he has been invited by Axel and Simon. Julius is the ex-lover of Morgan, Hilda’s sister. Ironically. Tallis, cuckolded husband of Morgan, is also invited there. No doubt, Julius steals the show here, as he does throughout the novel, for, unlike The Nice and the Good and Bruno’s Dream, it is a novel in which the Evil has an upper edge over the Good. A Fairly Honourable Defeat can be seen as an exploration into motiveless malignity, recalling the actions of Iago in Othello. Julius mouths the praise of evil which may serve as a summary to what happens in the novel: ‘Evil... is exciting and fascinating and alive. It is also very much more mysterious than good. Good can be seen through. Evil is opaque.\textsuperscript{29}

In her discussion of the novel Hilda Spear has noted its dramatic nature: The novel is particularly concerned with theatre, with drama as parallel with, but distinct from, reality; the characters are constantly playing roles in parts that have been written for them by others or by themselves. The principal playwright is Julius, playing Shakespeare and Prospero in one: ‘I was the magician’, he tells Hilda on the phone, ‘I invented it and made it happen.’ Morgan’s reciting of ‘Full fathom five’ preshadows the sea-change that Julius brings about in the lives of several

\textsuperscript{28} J.L. Chevalier (ed.) Recontes avec Iris Murdoch, Caen, 1978, p. 75.
\textsuperscript{29} Iris Murdoch, A Fairly Honourable Defeat, London: Chatto and Windus, 1971, p. 223.
of the characters and the death by drowning that is Rupert’s part.\textsuperscript{30}

Although many of the events in the novel appear to be comic on the surface, they have in reality a sinister edge likely to bring about tragic consequences. Julius King’s conception of life and human relationships is Machiavellian to the extent of moral perversion. Being a cynic he spreads disaster in the lives of Rupert, Hilda and Morgan. His intentions are more sinister in that, like Iago, he is seeking some sort of personal satisfaction and revenge; the attempt to attach Morgan and Rupert to each other is for their harm, not for their good. This shows how desperate Julius is in his quest of power and once he gains it he has no restriction in making an unfair evil use of it to satisfy his ego. In separating Hilda from Rupert he feels triumphant for he discards everything called good dismissing it as incoherent, chaotic and beyond human access. His conspiratorial plot is aimed at destroying the happy marriage of Rupert and Hilda, though he is innocent of planning Rupert’s death. Morgan, Rupert and Simon are his ‘puppets’ and Julius is their enchanter/magician. When Julius ensnares Simon in the act of eavesdropping at the museum, he exercises his power to bend Simon to his will and having done so he feels stronger with a consolidated destructive power at his disposal. This lends a brief insight into the workings of evil. It is an indisputable fact that the philosophy of the novel is equally destructive. Julius is so utterly engrossed in his own solipsistic view of the world that he fails to either see or acknowledge any point of view which differs from that of his own. Goodness he utterly rejects, as

he explains to Rupert: ‘It is not just that human nature absolutely precludes goodness, it is that goodness... is not even a coherent concept, it is unimaginable for human beings.  

Julius is able to dominate and manipulate other characters because he is gifted with a deadly combination of argument and practical wisdom which is too often put to Machiavellian uses. Rupert can hardly be a fit adversary for he is preoccupied with philosophical theories that are endlessly debatable. Scientific proof, even though unreal, confounds him and thus he falls an easy prey to Julius machinations. Julius is essentially self-obsessed and self-indulgent and delights in full exercise of power over his victims without either sensitivity to the sufferings of his victim or sympathy with him. He is the archetype of the ‘Kantian man’– Lucifer. He feels that life is good even though others may suffer and die. For instance, he can coolly visit a restaurant recommended by the dead Rupert.

It hardly needs emphasis that Tallis is a foil to Julius. While Julius constantly dominates the action of the novel, hovering over others like a devil, Tallis, the Christ figure is uneasily relegated to the background. He is, in fact, a scapegoat Christ who bears the burden of others on his shoulders - an erring wife, a sick and disgruntled father, a dropout nephew. Tallis is presented as a believable good character through whom selfless love shines. His goodness dismisses the Murdochian suggestion that we find Evil more attractive than Good.

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31 Iris Murdoch, A Fairly Honourable Defeat, p. 224.
On the contrary, Murdoch shows through the person of Tallis how the good are above the influence of evil. Julius’s Machiavellian tricks fail to affect Tallis’s nature and his relations. He remains faithful to his love for Morgan and is also unshaken in his devotion to his miserable father. Not only this he also remains devoted, rather neurotically, to the memory of his dead younger sister. Though he seems to be apparently uncaring to himself and the upkeep of his household, he acts unerringly and positively when resistance to wrongdoing is required. The thugs beating up the Jamaican visitor are dealt with summarily. And when Julius finally confesses his plot and seeks guidance for his future conduct from Tallis, he banishes Julius saying just go away... Go right away. Despite this, in the biggest irony of the novel, it is Julius who triumphs and Tallis who is left defeated and weeping for the sorrows of life at the end of the novel.

This bleak view is, however, amply compensated by the Axel - Simon sub-plot. Axel and Simon are a homosexual couple who are living together like married couples. We are told how Simon had been attracted towards Axel right from the beginning and had in fact started adoring him. The accidental and revelatory meeting of Simon and Axel in Athens clinched the issue of their marriage. 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.’³² This homosexual couple is introduced in the novel on purpose. Their characters are quite different from each other- Axel is reticent whereas Simon is flamboyant. Peter

³² Iris Murdoch, A Fairly Honourable Defeat, p. 31.
Conradi claims that Murdoch’s depiction of the couple as ‘happy is a small triumph’,\textsuperscript{33} W.S. Hampl, on the other hand, dismisses the relationship: ‘yet the text presents Murdoch’s nonsensical homosexuality as actually quite plausible ... Despite years in a monogamous homosexual relationship with Simon, Axel questions whether his partner is having an affair with either a heterosexual woman or else a heterosexual man.’\textsuperscript{34}

However, despite these disclaimers, the fact remains that Axel - Simon relationship relieves the novel of its unusually serious and dull atmosphere. Simon is twenty and Axel is forty two. Like an older husband, Axel dominates Simon. In his pursuit of evil cause Julius does not spare this pair and tries to create some hurdles between Simon and Axel but to his dismay, Julius fails to defeat them. Whereas Hilda and Rupert are not able to communicate at the time of crisis, Simon’s confession to Axel saves Simon-Axel relationship. Through this couple, Murdoch is attempting to prove that sometimes homosexual love can be more powerful than the so-called normal heterosexual love. The mutual bond between Simon and Axel withstands the onslaughts of Julius’s cunning and they emerge victorious. Simon is especially able to look back happily upon the ‘untouchable reality’ of his past knowledge of his older brother Rupert and to look forward with joy to ‘a new happiness’ with Axel. As the vicissitudes of love are finally resolved, things gain their right place and in the penultimate chapter of this novel, Axel and Simon are shown holidaying in France.

\textsuperscript{34} W.S. Hampl, Desires Deferred: Homosexual and Queer Representations in the Novels of Iris Murdoch, Modern Fiction Studies, Vol. 47, Number 3, Fall 2001, pp. 661-662.
An Accidental Man (1971) is the last novel of this group and rehearses many of Murdoch’s major themes. It is distinguished by the use of epistolary technique with letter-sections appearing now and then. The focus of the book is on the relationship between letter-writers and recipients. Murdoch has set An Accidental Man against a foul world of political muddle, cruelty and moral chaos. Ludwig Leferrier’s predicament is meant to reflect the moral complexity characterising individual attitudes towards Vietnam War. He is faced with a choice between return to the United States, punishment for draft evasion and the inevitable destruction of a promising career, or residence in Britain, with the settled life of an Oxford fellowship and a financially and socially secure marriage to Gracy Tisbourne, who is desperately in love with him.

Murdoch seems to have made mental preparations for some time when she took up the writing of An Accidental Man. In an interview in 1968 with Ronald Bryden, she admitted: I would like to have much more accident in my work than I’ve yet managed to put in. That is, I would like to be much more realistic than I am. Reality, she believes, is fragmented and often inexplicable and the role of art is to mirror this incompleteness. Soon after the publication of this novel she has remarked that this novel ‘began with the idea of an accident.’

Murdoch who believes that there is a direct relationship among comedy, contingency and realism in fiction, has written a comic novel

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35 Ronald Bryden, Talking to Iris Murdoch. The Listener, 14 April, 1968, p. 433.
36 Iris Murdoch in conversation with A.S. Byatt, B.B.C. Interview, Now Read on. 27 October, 1971 (Unpublished)
that embodies her vision of a random and godless world. An Accidental Man, a brittle comedy of manners with over twenty-four characters, contains four deaths, two attempted suicides, and characters suffering from mental retardation, schizophrenia, and brain damage. The novel has a Dickensian sweep. The whole novel is full of accidents and Austin Gibson Gray is the ‘accidental man’ of its title. In her study of An Accidental Man, Angela Hague has focused on the comic and contingent elements in the novel: ‘An Accidental Man, which shows Murdoch’s comic skills at their best, successfully combines comedy and horror in a way that intensifies both.’

In the godless world of the novel everything seems to be chaotic and uncertain. Charles Ledgard, about to commit suicide, has the vision of a universe ruled by chance and sees a world of ‘chaos upon which everything rested and out of which it was made.’ Even the contemplative Gracy Tisbourne is frightened by a sense of the world being quite without order and of other things looking through, and Ludwig Leferrier, trying to decide what he should do about avoiding the draft, senses the futility and emptiness of life. The lives of several of the characters are irrevocably altered by a bizarre series of accidents, among them Mitzi Ricardo’s broken ankle which abruptly ends her career as an athlete. Similarly the deaths of Rosalind Monkley, Henrietta Sayce, and Dorina Gibson Grey are all accidental, as are Norman Monkley’s fall and the resulting brain damage. It should be noted, however, that this chaotic,

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accidental world does not always result in tragedy, for that would endow it with a predictability that would contradict its essential nature. Events such as Mavis’s new spiritual awareness and Grade’s inheritance of the family fortune are also a result of chance.

Several images in the novel illustrate the accidental, inexplicable world in which the characters live. Throughout the novel Dorina is puzzled by the sentence, ‘Pliez les genoux, pliez les genoux, c’est impossible detrop pliez les genoux’, thinking that it may possibly be of religious significance. Just before her death, however, she remembers that her skiing instructor, not a holy man, had said these words to her. This lack of profound significance of the above phrase exemplifies the nonsensicality and meaninglessness of phenomena in An Accidental Man.

Another phenomenon which intensifies the above theme is the self-absorption of the characters. Several times in the novel people walk by each other without seeing or acknowledging one another, or miss meetings by moments. London’s labyrinthine streets become symbolic of the ignorance and blindness of the characters as they pass and miss one another, and in the instance of Rosalind Monkley, of accidental death itself. At the beginning of the book Mathew and Ludwig pass in the street, oblivious to one another and unaware that they will meet and develop an important relationship. Dorina’s accidental death could have been prevented had chance not prevented her from making contact with Charlotte or Austin, or if Ludwig had acknowledged seeing her on the street. The implication is that the characters are travelling in a maze they
cannot see or understand and as a result, powerless to take any kind of effective action. Murdoch’s opinion that reality is too complex for human beings to understand or control is expressed in the frustrated attempts of her characters to find consistent patterns or causal relationships in the world around them. Garth Gibson Grey in the novel searches for some kind of logical order and rationality in the world, but is unable to discover the ‘system’.

Because a child could step into the road and die there was a certain sense in which it was necessary to live. The connections were there, a secret logic in the world as relentlessly necessary as a mathematical system... These deaths were merely signs, accidental signs even. They were not starting points or end points. What lay before him was the system itself... Absolute contradiction seemed at the heart of things and yet the system was there, the secret logic of the world, its only logic, its only sense.\(^{39}\)

Maris Argyll, speaking of her sister Dorina, echoes Garth’s fear that, although some sort of secret rational order exists, it is impossible for human beings to see it. This world of hidden meanings, improvable propositions, and unpredictable outcomes is also, as could be expected, godless. Ironically, this godless universe, in contradistinction to earlier novels, has no central power figure. It is certainly a novel without a central character and conspicuously lacks any kind of hero in the traditional sense of the term. Two figures, however, seem to contend for

the central position of a comic hero. Austin Gibson Grey and Ludwig Leferrier represent, often ironically, the heroes of both the typical and ironic comedy modes. As a typical comic hero, Austin emerges victorious over the forces around him. Ludwig corresponds to the hero of ironic comedy and chooses to leave an unreformed society behind him, Austin, a far from sympathetic character whose actions are frequently despicable, is last seen physically and emotionally transformed into a healthy, happy individual who has used all his reversals for personal gain. Ironically again, this transformation is partially a result of losing his wife rather than winning a bride.

On the other hand, Ludwig appears as an ironic hero. His maternal grandfather is said to have disappeared during the war and was thought to have died in a concentration camp. A strong and rigid disapproval of Hitler had led families of both Ludwig’s father and mother to migrate westward. His parents decided to migrate to America. As they knew only German and French, they came to England for a brief visit to improve their English and Ludwig was born here. His accidental birth in England gives him British nationality. He wants to live in England and continue his academic pursuits by joining Oxford University as a don, teaching history, and also to marry Gracie Tisbourne, with whom he has fallen in love. He hates the war (Vietnam War) because it is foolish and brutal. His parents, who feel proud of being American now, go on pressing him hard to come to America. In America, he is sure to be imprisoned and his academic career wasted, but his parents want him to face bravely the consequences of evading conscription in the U.S. army. When he is
ultimately shown going back to U.S.A., he knows he is done for. Through the life of Ludwig in *An Accidental Man*, Murdoch points out how World War II and then Vietnam War affected the lives of certain individuals.

Obviously then, Austin may be taken as the eponymous hero of the novel. By showing too many accidents in the life of Austin, Murdoch makes him representative of every body. One characteristic of Austin’s ability to survive is his refusal to allow the tragedies of others to touch him. After Norman’s accident he falls into a sound sleep; his reaction to his wife’s death is similar. His first thoughts about Alison Ledgard’s death are also predictable, ‘So the old woman was gone, Good. Charlotte would be rich and would lend him money.’ In fact, in keeping with Austin’s propensity for turning unfortunate events to personal gain, his search for his wife becomes such a pleasurable experience that he often forgets her entirely. The final section of the novel, in which Austin is finally able to move his fingers, underscores his final victory over the forces that have plagued him, for his inability to use his hand since his childhood ‘accident’ has been symbolic throughout the novel of his problems in dealing with the world. His new physical flexibility parallels the rebirth of his personality, brought about by the misfortunes of other people.

The final section of *An Accidental Man*, with its emphasis on Austin’s rejuvenation and acceptance by society, with the pairings of couples and the resulting pregnancies of Ann Colindale, Gracie and Karen, and with the cocktail party setting seem to be an example of happy ending. However, the ending is more ironic because for a number of
characters, the action of the novel has brought about a realisation of personal failure. Matthew, sailing to America with Ludwig realizes that ‘he would never be a hero’. Garth’s marriage to Gracie is another admission of failure; like Matthew, he has searched and failed to find some sort of moral pattern. Matthew though failing in his magic goes on taking new roles. He remains an eternal taker-on of quests involving power, manipulation and the playing of god roles. He cannot transform himself because he cannot leave the tools and images of his magic. He has got a rich experience of life that the novel seems to convey to us: ‘He had seen important things, he had seen terrible things. He had seen poverty and war, violence, oppression, cruelty, injustice and hunger. He had seen decisive moments in men’s lives.\footnote{Iris Murdoch, An Accidental Man, London: Chatto and Windus, 1972, p. 122.}

Matthew wants things to be better and to remove starvation and fear. He is essentially a figure of good and for him, real spirituality can be attained by going deeper than the obvious and trying ‘to go where God used to be.’

It is evident from the foregoing discussion that the novels of this period embody some important thoughts about God, about Good and Evil, about Reality and about the quality of love. The novels that are to be discussed in the following chapter grapple with the reality of life, with the force of love to redeem or destroy.