CHAPTER 4

POWER

I

It's 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. I think it's one of the things that prevents people from being good. Why are people not good, and why, without being evil or even having bad intentions, do they do bad things? ... 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. It's an evident feature of human psychology that people have secret dream lives. ... To dramatize your life and to feel that you have a destiny represents a very general human temptation. It's a magical element in life which is so dangerous, and which is the enemy of religion and the enemy of goodness....
Iris Murdoch's words just quoted make two important features of a power figure abundantly clear. He is a man nursing a secret hurt or a secret dream, and because of the dominance of that particular secret in his life, he has ceased to grow beyond that point. He is a man, in other words, with arrested moral growth. There is a willed refusal to grow, an arrested emotional development in his character and an almost infantile self-absorption and self-centredness. This infantile quality, combined in an adult with physical independence, and more important, with an independence to make choices, gives rise to a dangerous will to power. The exercise of manipulative power is seen by Murdoch as linked to a moral childishness.

Viewed from this angle the nature of the moral life is ultimately seen as growth. It has been seen in the chapter on religion how, in a religious person, it is necessary for him to grow beyond the initial emotional experience of God. That is why demythologising was seen as a necessary factor in the refinement of the eros. If morality is growth, if it is a more and more clear recognition of the reality outside, then the will to power is seen as a non-receptivity to reality: to other opinions, other people, other suggestions that life may make. The quagmire which the will to power constitutes is thus a
childish (not innocent when in an adult) refusal to grow and an inability to grow out of a childish self-centredness.

The other important feature that Murdoch's words about 'demonic figures' highlight is that power is antithetical to goodness, since a will to power uses people. It is also an irony of the situation, that the power figure is generally not consciously demonic. This factor will be seen as the different power figures who appear in Murdoch's novels are examined. The exercise of manipulative power may even co-exist with a desire to be good (in Charles Arrowby for example). But though not conscious, the will to power, since it arises out of an arrested moral growth, cannot begin to 'see' the other person. The question that now arises is: what gives a person with a secret hurt or a secret dream this power over people? The answer may be that because he cannot 'see' others as people, he is able to use them, to play with them (however unintentionally) and in general, create havoc in peoples' lives.

"Few questions are more important than: who is the boss?" says Julius King in A Fairly Honourable Defeat, (FHD, 225). Iris Murdoch, in novel after novel, sees power as determining the tilt in the balance of human relationships. She closely scrutinises the phenomenon of power and examines the will to power. In
the moral quagmire that confronts human beings, erotic love and impure religious aspirations, though constituting prickly moral problems, at least contain the seeds of love. Even if it is mostly vanity and illusion, erotic love partakes somewhat of refined love. But the will to power on the other hand, is a complete refusal to see a human being as separate, inviolable and not-to-be manipulated. It is vanity, illusion and self-centredness on a large scale, in direct antithesis to the aim of a good man: the annihilation of the fat ego.

Iris Murdoch's 'moral psychology' places the utmost value on 'seeing' properly, that is, with attention and with love:

... It is in the capacity to love, that is to see, that the liberation of the soul from fantasy consists. The freedom which is a proper human goal is the freedom from fantasy, that is the realism of compassion. What I have called fantasy, the proliferation of blinding self-centered aims and images, is itself a powerful system of energy, and most of what is often called 'will' or 'willing' belongs to this system. What counteracts the system is attention to reality inspired by, consisting of, love.

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A proper attention to things, 'seeing' them in the right perspective, removes the veils of illusion hanging over reality. Humility becomes very important since it sees the self and its seekings in their right proportions against the vastness of the reality outside. The seeking self then appears small and the machinations of its psyche of little importance or magnitude:

The humble man, because he sees himself as nothing, can see other things as they are. He sees the pointlessness of virtue and its unique value and the endless extent of its demand.

Humility is thus the attribute of goodness.

A will to power, on the other hand, performs just the opposite function. It reduces the outside reality to nothing more than just substance to feed the appetite of its ever-busy psyche. It tramples upon moral and ethical values of love and wilfully disregards the separateness of the external world. It has no touch of humility. Everything becomes self-feeding and self-aggrandising. The process of giving up power: a will to powerlessness, is the beginning of unselfing. If everything points back to the self in the former phenomenon, in the latter, it points back from the self to the reality outside.
This chapter will consider the central power figures of the novels *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, *A Word Child*, *The Sea, the Sea*, *The Philosopher's Pupil* and *The Book and the Brotherhood*. The power figures of these novels are seen to epitomise different kinds of power structures and situations. For instance, Hilary Burde in *A Word Child* and Charles in *The Sea, the Sea* exercise emotional power. Rozanov in *The Philosopher's Pupil* and Crimond in *The Book and the Brotherhood* have intellectual power, while Marcus Vallar in *The Message to the Planet* exercises spiritual power, but is later seen to renounce it. The chapter will consider the task of powerlessness in the context of Murdoch's latest novel *The Message to the Planet*.

II

It may be noticed that in the novels of Murdoch where the central thrust is an examination of power, a set pattern of character relationships is followed. The paradigm in these novels is of a central power figure radiating, as it were, waves of influence on a group of characters: generally relatives or friends of long standing. *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* too, follows such a pattern. But it is different from the other 'power' novels, in that the will to power examined in this novel is not the result of a moral retardation due to a festering secret poisoning the mind. Nor is it an
unconscious short-sightedness of moral perception. The will to power in Julius King is projected in the novel as simply there, a fact of life. Because of thus being there without a cause and without an apparent motive and with a full awareness of itself, manipulative power in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* is seen to be satanic.

It may be argued that, towards the end of the novel, an important fact about Julius King's past is thrown out at random to the reader, which may be construed as having affected Julius's moral growth. This fact (perceived, typically, by Tallis, the good man) has to do with Julius having been in a concentration camp during the war:

Julius's shirt sleeves were rolled up to the elbow. Just above the elbow something was visible upon his arm. Tallis took hold of Julius's wrist with one hand and with the other rolled the sleeve back a little further. There was a blue tattoo mark, a number inscribed in a circle. Tallis released him.

"So you were in a concentration camp?"
"Yes", said Julius. (FHD, 430)

There is a casual 'take it or leave' air about the way this fact is presented by the author. Perhaps it is her sense of realism, an attempt to present her apprehension
of life in the realistic mode, which has prompted her to make this little detail in the novel. But the whole of the novel overwhelmingly supports the idea of its being a theological myth, in which Julius King projects the image of Satan. Murdoch has herself said about *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* in an interview:

Of course, that book is a theological myth. I think hardly anybody notices this, but it doesn't matter; it's just something in the background. Julius King is, of course, Satan, and Tallis is a Christ-figure and Tallis's father (Leonard Browne) is God the Father, who finds that it's all gone wrong.

Just as the novel plays a variation on the theme of erotic love (see Chapter 2), by showing how it can be induced, it also plays a variation on the theme of power, by showing how the will to power simply exists in the world; in fact, as the name of the character embodying it reveals, it is 'king' of the human condition. The present discussion will not examine the details of the theological myth structuring the novel. But it hopes to examine the figure of power, Julius King.

*A Fairly Honourable Defeat* begins with the name of
Julius King. The group of friends is introduced — Hilda and Rupert Forster, Hilda’s sister Morgan, Axel and Simon, the homosexual couple, Tallis Browne, Morgan’s husband and the Christ-figure of the novel. Of all these characters, Tallis is seen to be the only person over whom Julius has no power. This, despite the fact that Morgan has had an affair with Julius and is still, by all symptoms, in love with him. The bond between Tallis and Julius could well have been like the one in A Word Child between Hilary Burde and Gunnar Jopling, which will be examined shortly, that is, compulsive and reciprocal, but the fact that it is not, shows how completely unmoved Tallis is by Julius’s tricks. Why should this be? Tallis is certainly made sad when Morgan leaves him. But he is not in a rage with either himself or with Julius; this goes to show perhaps the infinite capacity to understand and to unself that goodness possesses, which capacity entails no drama about emotional issues.

It has been seen in the chapter on erotic love that Julius induces Morgan and Rupert to fall in love with each other. He is almost, but not quite instrumental in breaking the Simon and Axel relationship too; in this case he satisfies himself by causing a serious rift between the two. What is the motive for these destructive acts? The rather peevish irritability that Julius feels towards Rupert’s pompousness, and his
irritation with Morgan's persecution of himself are not sufficient reason to break up a marriage and cause the death of Rupert into the bargain. Later Julius tells Tallis (tongue in cheek) that he is 'an instrument of justice'. He has earlier told Morgan that human beings are like puppets. Certainly he enacts a drama involving Rupert, Morgan and Hilda with a Puckish glee and a debonair nonchalance and an artistic finesse that would put a puppeteer to shame. What comes across very strongly is the irrationality of the exercise of manipulative power in the world and the fact that such a dangerously irrational evil should be a condition of life. Power for power's sake: demonic evil — this is on display through Julius. The novel shows the 'fairly honourable defeat' of the good in the world by the sheer existence and strength of evil. It is noteworthy that erotic love and religious aspirations, though constituting serious moral problems, smack not so much of evil as of emotional mess and muddle. It is the will to power which is seen as evil by Murdoch and this perception is heightened by the form of the novel: an allegorical myth, as it were, where ordinary reality is at times suffused with a supernatural significance, and the figure of power himself is seen as Lucifer.

If Julius King can be seen as Lucifer in A Fairly Honourable Defeat, the present study hopes to make a case for Hilary Burde, the power figure of A Word Child.
to be interpreted on the lines of Peter Pan, the precocious child-hero of James Barrie's play of the same name, the boy who refuses to grow up. A brief outline of the important events in the novel may be in order here.

Hilary Burde is the product of a traumatic childhood. Orphaned at a tender age, ill-treated by his aunt, put in an orphanage and separated from his sister Crystal whom he adores, his earliest awareness of himself is of being a 'bad boy', one who has to be sent away, of being unlovable. This results in a 'cosmic furious permanent sense of being victimised'. Hilary's anger and violence are expressed in destructive physical acts like trying to burn down the orphanage where he gets so little attention. He is saved from this delinquent childhood by a natural gift for words, which he discovers through the painstaking efforts of his teacher. This gift sees him succeed through exams to a coveted fellowship in an Oxford college. The stage seems set for happiness and prosperity, but disaster strikes in the form of an erotic relationship with the wife of his friend and mentor, Gunnar Jopling. Anne Jopling is transformed from a happy wife and mother into an unhappy woman torn between two men. The climax comes when she is killed in an accident to Hilary's car when the latter, in a fit of rage, is racing on the highway, trying to take Anne away from her husband.
As the novel opens, we see Hilary some years after the tragedy, working as an insignificant official in a government office. His unloved childhood together with the crisis of his early manhood has made an insurmountable block in his moral growth. He can no more control the anger and violence in his nature (of which he is very well aware) than get over obsessive guilt feelings over Anne's death and the destruction of his own life. In fact, the anger feeds the guilt and the guilt the violence until his mind and life are a fine quagmire of self-obsession and the consequent inability to ‘see’. He arranges people's lives: at least the lives of Crystal (his sister) and Tommy (his girl friend) and Arthur Fisch (Crystal's fiance). His own life is a regimented routine of fixed evenings on fixed days with friends. The implicit violence contained in these manipulations of people's lives sometimes finds physical vent in the form of destructive acts like the pulling apart of the telephone in the first few pages of the novel. Such destructive acts of violence are but a repetition of his childhood acts of arson, of trying to burn down his orphanage. Hilary Burde cannot and will not grow up. He refuses to grow out of moral infantilism.

It does not, therefore, come as a surprise to find that history repeats itself. Hilary has secret meetings with Kitty, Gunnar's second wife, which soon lead to
love. The unsuspecting Gunnar, who has barely got over his psychological problems about the ghost of Hilary hanging over his life, discovers the meetings and surprises the couple one night. Going to meet Hilary one last time, Kitty accidentally slips into the Thames and dies of exposure, and Hilary is guilty now of two accidental deaths.

Something needs to be said about the Gunnar-Hilary relationship. Though the former is the one wronged and the latter the wrong-doer, both are guilty of not letting any clear light play over the past. Each has succeeded in making a bogey-man of the other, the only difference being that Hilary has wilfully destroyed any prospect of happiness in his life by systematically cutting away all his chances. Gunnar has 'got on' with his life but found it impossible either to forgive Hilary or to gently put away the ghost of his dead wife Anne. An ability to 'see' clearly in an objective light, to be able to forgive either oneself or another are seen to be moral requirements. The only character who is capable of this is Arthur Fisch who tells Hilary:

"You mustn't discuss him with his wife and see her secretly, it's not your place to do that, it's not your job, it can't do good, don't you see it makes the other thing impossible, you mustn't have muddles and secrets, and - and
excitement - you must only have faithful sort
of -- good will and - truthfulness and - some
sort of simple old idea ... you're
deliberately destroying your power to make
things better, like a soldier deliberately
making himself unfit for duty, it's a crime
...
" (WC,290)

Hilary perfectly fits Murdoch's description, placed at
the head of this chapter, of lives gone wrong. The
secret remorse and anger in his past prevents Hilary
from being good. Though not deliberately intending to,
he yet causes the greatest harm to people around him,
some of whom he dearly loves : Crystal, Anne, Gunnar,
Kitty, Tommy, the list is endless. He cannot begin to
see them as individual entities, to appreciate their
feelings and thoughts. He hopes to make Crystal happy
and ends up using her love and her support, refusing to
give her any of his support ; he habitually detaches
Arthur from her on the evenings when Arthur has dinner
with Crystal. He is guilty of making a drama out of the
sordid events of his life and revelling in violence and
a kind of sulky pique. This 'inner circle' of Hilary's
mind, repeatedly making identical trips on the same
tracks is beautifully captured in the Inner Circle tube
journeys that Hilary likes to make in the Underground.

It has been noted a little earlier that a parallel
could be drawn between Hilary Burde and Peter Pan, the sinister child who refused to grow up in James Barrie's play. A similar case could be made, as a matter of fact, for all of Murdoch's power figures, because Peter Pan could ultimately be seen as a play about the refusal to grow up and perceive the real. This refusal is intimately linked with Murdoch's perception of the will to power.

The parallel with Peter Pan is more peculiarly true of A Word Child, since, throughout the book there are references to and discussions about Peter Pan; Peter Pan's statue in Kensington Gardens figures in the background on many of Hilary's walks and also in the scene where Kitty makes her astounding 'proposal' to Hilary (that Hilary should father her child). As Peter Pan is officially chosen for the Christmas pantomime in Hilary's office, it follows that there is also social 'chatter' about the play. But by far the most important comment on Peter Pan is made by Arthur in the course of a dinner conversation with Hilary. Peter Pan, the boy-child who goes to Never-Never land with his other friends who do not wish to become adults, and lives a life according to the dictates of his wishes is seen as 'reality breaking in' by Hilary. Arthur apprehends the real behind the apparent:

"... One's mind is just an accidental jumble..."
of stuff. There's nothing behind ordinary life. There isn't anything complete. Life isn't a play. It isn't even a pantomime."
(WC, 87)

He thinks that Peter dramatises, that Peter is:

"... Oh I don't know - spirit gone wrong, just turning up as an unnerving visitor who can't really help and who can't get in either. ... I mean the spiritual urge is mad unless it's embodied in some ordinary way of life. It's destructive, it's just a crazy sprite."
(WC, 88)

Peter Pan epitomises stubborn, uncompromising willing, an inability to appreciate the ordinary and the mundane which is ultimately the real. Such 'willing', is moreover, destructive: not only of one's own life but of others'. Hilary Burde, nursing his anger and hatred against the cosmos from his childhood, refusing to grow out of the self-dramatised stage, in mad fits of rage wills the destruction of other people's lives. He breaks up the Anne-Gunnar marriage which results in Anne's death. Tristram, their son, also commits suicide at a later age. This horrific event does not improve his moral grasp on life. Events repeat themselves and
Hilary is once more instrumental in breaking up the Kitty-Gunnar marriage, again responsible for the accidental death of Kitty. He plays havoc with Crystal's life, the sister whom he loves, out of a will to have things his own way, by the sheer power of his will over hers. He arranges too, Tommy's life, and Arthur Fisch is not allowed the freedom of courting Crystal. A monolithic will and a grievous tendency to violence when the will is thwarted, are the ingredients of this exercise of manipulative power.

The Sea, the Sea, winner of the Booker Prize, combines, in the interstices of its cunning blend of form and matter, a realisation of the devious working of the human mind together with glimpses of a Reality which, though tangible, is yet maddeningly beyond grasp. The novel is a triumph of form and technique: only seldom is it given for any work of art to contain in its formal structure the whole world with its constant and puzzling heaving motions and the light of the horizon beyond. That The Sea, the Sea manages to do so with elan and insouciance suggests the remarkable calibre of its author.

The novel is in the form of a diary or journal of a stage celebrity, now retired and come to live near the sea in solitude. Charles Arrowby wishes to end his life with 'a period of meditation', after the glamour and magic of the stage:
Now I shall abjure magic and become a hermit; put myself in a situation where I can honestly say that I have nothing else to do but to learn to be good. (SS, 2)

The unsuspecting reader only slowly becomes aware of the gulf between this avowal and the actual behaviour of Charles. From his diary Charles appears a monster of egoism and, paradoxically, naïveté. He is totally self-absorbed as only infants can be. But this self-absorption, so touching in infants, is seen to produce in an adult, when combined with physical and mental maturity, an enormous moral childishness. Charles's is an arrested moral growth and this is what makes him a true enfant terrible of the theatre, a man who uses his power to manipulate people in his own interests without a thought for their feelings. The readers' response to his egotistical antics is mountingly intense and amused exasperation, not unmixed with fear. For, aren't we all in some measure Charles Arrowbys? Murdoch's projection in the individual of a universal moral failing is what makes her one of the important novelists of all time.

It is gradually revealed that the learning 'to be good' programme includes the sending of a thoroughly nasty, teasing letter full of manipulative wiles to Lizzie, ex-actress whom Charles has directed earlier,
and ex-girlfriend. Though the letter is not directly shown in the novel, we do get to see Lizzie's reply which besides telling us about Charles' own letter to her also reveals Charles as other people see him:

You don't respect people as people, you don't see them, you're not really a teacher, you're a sort of rapacious magician. (SS, 45)

The appeal to Charles at the end of the letter shows Lizzie to be much more of a moral realist than Charles can ever hope to be:

Can we not love each other and see each other at last in freedom, without possessiveness and violence and fear, now that we are growing old? I do so want us to love each other, but not in a way that would destroy me. (SS, 47)

Charles' response to the letter is that 'it is a silly inconsistent letter, half saying the opposite of what it is trying to say.' A quick reply would have reassured Lizzie; instead Charles decides to ignore the letter and let silence have an effect on the poor susceptibilities of Lizzie. Which, of course, it does. The rest is history.

Charles' relations with Rosina, as indeed his relations with all the women in his life, are no more creditable. Wantonly destroying her marriage with
Peregrine for the sake of a passing whim, to possess what seems difficult to possess, Charles has proceeded to discard her after a rather tumultuous relationship. Rosina, however, is not as forgiving as Lizzie. After breaking an old vase and the beautiful glass of a mirror in Charles' sea-side house, she frightens him one night, catching him unawares in his house and threatens to destroy his life, if he marries anyone and sets up a house. Charles soberly realises that:

it was hatred, and hatred can destroy, it has its own magic. Rosina had the will and the power to do exactly what she threatened. And as I thought this I felt with a pang that this black will was, when it was otherwise directed, the very thing which had made me love her. (SS, 107)

Through Rosina's rancorous hatred, the reader can gauge the hurt which Charles has inflicted on her earlier. Rosina also tells him about the child which she had had aborted after he left her and the pain of that killing that she carries even now. Charles, of course, quickly proceeds to put the unpleasant fact out of his mind. After he 'imprisons' Hartley, his first love, now grown old, in his house, Rosina tells him:
"... You were pretty old hat when you were still with us, now you're ancient history. The young people have never heard of you, Charles. You're exploded, you're not even a myth. I can see it now, Charles dear, you are old. Where's all that charm we used to go on about? It was nothing but power really. Now you've lost your power you've lost your charm. No wonder you have to make do with a Bearded Lady." (SS, 314)

Peregrine tells him much the same thing after admitting to have pushed him (Charles) into 'Minn's Cauldron':

You're an exploded myth. And you still think you're Genghis Khan! Laissez-moi rire. I can't think why I let you haunt me all these years, I suppose it was just your power and the endless spectacle of you doing well and flourishing like the green bay tree. Now you're old and done for, you'll wither away like Prospero did when he went back to Milan, you'll get pathetic and senile, and kind girls like Lizzie will visit you to cheer you up. At least they will for a while. You never did anything for mankind, you never did a damn thing for anybody except yourself." (SS, 399)
Peregrine, a little while later, leaves the theatre in London to go as a propagandist for peace to Ireland where he is killed by terrorists. The comparison between him and Charles is implicit.

The most important revelation, by far, about Charles' falsifying consciousness and his indifference to the sanctity of individual persons is made by his shocking illusions about the relationship with his 'first love' Hartley, and his relationship with his cousin James.

The 'playful' and 'childish' involvement that Charles has had with his childhood sweetheart, Hartley, has never palled in his mind. Instead, the image has gained a golden sheen of something beautiful and perfect. Clement, his first lover, had advised him to put this love of childhood away in his toy cupboard. But the 'adult' Charles still 'quakes' with love for the lost girl.

He meets her again, improbably enough, in the same seaside village where he has retired to learn to be good. On meeting her, now a respectable old ordinary married woman, Charles lets loose his pent-up past feelings, little apprehending the gap between his illusions and the all too obvious reality. It is a total refusal on his part to grow up; to understand that
his childhood dreams and fancies have no place in an adult mind. But Charles is no adult in moral terms. It is his infantile self-absorption, as noted earlier, and a wilful desire to possess, to pander to his empty infatuation which leads him to imprison the poor old woman in his house. Even after repeated pleadings from her, he refuses to let her go back to her husband. His eavesdropping at Hartley's house a little earlier has enabled him to overhear one of her frequent quarrels with her husband, Ben about him, Charles, the bogeyman of their marriage. Charles retaliates with horror and pity for Hartley, not realising that his bullying of Lizzie had produced much the same of the dreaded, "I am sorry. I am sorry" from Lizzie. The shocking spectacle of poor Hartley, abducted by Charles, just sleeping in the 'cell' upstairs, repeatedly asking to be set free, on the one hand, and Charles locking the door of her room and not wanting to hear reason, shows the enormity of his callous disregard for any wish other than his own, and of his sheer unwillingness and inability to see things calmly and in truth.

Charles' childish self-centredness, and consequent moral retardation leading to a will to power, is offset by his cousin James' ability to 'see' clearly. It is his timely intervention which practically solves the problem of Hartley for Charles. It could be noted that Charles falsifies James' character too in the diary, and
it is only when James makes an appearance directly in the novel that we realise how illusion-ridden is Charles' self-absorbed mind.

In spite of Charles' egotistical and yet naive will to power and the much displayed area of his attachments: 'my home', 'my cliff' 'my tower', his ways of eating food and cooking meals, he has yet been allowed some deep insights into theatre. The unquestionable love he bears for Shakespearean drama is not false. This testifies to Murdoch's wonderful delineation of character in this novel. But Charles, though he understands Shakespeare, uses the plays to project himself, and to bend the audience to his will.

The atmosphere created in the novel is gothic. The evocations of the lonely sea and the horizon, the demons and monsters all biding their time and waiting to spring nasty surprises peculiarly relates to the theme of power and magic: both worldly and spiritual. The novel leaves almost a surrealistic impression: the sea-monster that Charles sees which is but a reflection of his unconscious mind, the demons which haunt the house and the demons which kill Titus seem poised between the real and the unreal. What Conradi says about the quality of surrealism in Murdoch's work is particularly relevant here:

Her best work is quiveringly real/unreal in
its texture. What can be perplexing is not that she fails to convince, but that she can describe with an extraordinary, hallucinatory validating detail and power the most ‘unlikely’ situations, so that, before you have time to decide whether or not you believe in them, you find yourself forced to imagine them.

The unfinished finale of the novel, its refusal to end is a superb piece of craftsmanship for it accomplishes a great many things: it underlines the elasticity and the sheer bounceable quality of the ego. Charles seems subdued after the two revelations made to him. The first revelation is that it was James who miraculously rescued him from Minn's Cauldron. The second is the news of James' willed death, followed by the vision of the night sky, and the vision, too, of the four seals looking up at him from the sea. But Charles' subdued quiet does not last long. He is seen back in action in his illusion-creating mind. He almost, but not quite, believes that James died of a heart attack and that a freak wave lifted him from Minn's Cauldron. His psyche has to quickly re-assimilate the Hartley phenomenon and relegate it to the back of his mind. The post-script shows, moreover, the impossibility of any permanent improvement in human nature. It shows how life really is: the high points have to peak and then
fall back and rush to the muddied shores of our everyday muddled human experience.

Julius King is rendered on supernatural lines; Hilary Burde demonstrates how a hurt undergone in the past occludes the vision and leads to a violent will to power; Charles Arrowby projects infantile self-centredness that leads to a thoughtless use of other people. All these figures, though different from one another have one thing in common beside the exercise of manipulative power, and that is the inability to 'see', an inability which is equated with moral retardation. What about the intellect? If morality is defined as a growth in perception, should not the intellect have a large part to play in such a development? Apparently it should. But that a lopsided growth of the other faculties of the human psyche generates a subtle, insidious, not easily recognised will to power, is shown by the character of Rozanov in The Philosopher's Pupil. Rozanov the philosopher, perhaps shows the 'intellectual' will to power.

The Philosopher's Pupil is surely Murdoch's most peopled novel. The maelstrom of events, emotions and feelings of the many characters in the busy spa town of Ennistone (a fictitious place) is described in vivid, sometimes lurid detail. There is even a wonderful incident with the dog Zed and a fox narrated with an
uncanny rightness of tone. More than any other novel in the Murdoch oeuvre, this is the one most likely to make one throw up one's hands and say: 'there's too much in it'.

The dominant theme of the novel is seen to be power, two hubs of power around whom is generated fascination, hypnotic attraction, curiosity and a lot of feeling — both good and bad. The philosopher Rozanov and his one-time pupil George McCaffery are these hubs that provide much of the talk in the novel and who seem to take up most of the breathing space in the book, creating a steamy and stifling atmosphere of suppressed excitement and violence. This atmosphere is much the same as the atmosphere in the Institute housing the waters of the spa town. The structural paradigm observed in the other power novels of Murdoch, a figure of power influencing a large coterie of friends and relatives, is repeated here. Only here, the group of friends is broadened to include almost a whole town of people who:

are related through family ties and professional ones, through common history and self-delusion of romantic yearning.
Typically, they all get together in the water. Everyone swims in Ennistone, and encounters at the pool both further the action and lead to its resolution. Water is as vital a reality as air.

Water, always a significant symbol in the novels of Murdoch, attains the level of an omniscient character in The Philosopher's Pupil. If 'N' the narrator is the ever-present conscious entity of the novel, water is the deep, unconscious but ever-present element in which most of the important events of the novel take place. The book begins with a marital quarrel in the rain and ends with the philosopher's suicide in a bathtub.

John Robert Rozanov, presented to us when he is in his sixties, comes back to his native town of Ennistone. A philosopher, author of many weighty books, John Robert, so the Ennistonians fondly believe, has come home to write his last great book. Rozanov himself is tired of philosophical activity—of his thoughts which never paused or rest 'all carrying innumerable abstract interconnections in his bursting head'. He asks himself questions like the following:
Why do thoughts not lose their owners? How does the individual stay together and not stray away like racing water drops? How does consciousness continue, how can it? Could the curse of memory not end, and why did it not end? (PP, 131)

He longs for rest:

He longed to live with ordinariness and see it simply with clear calm eyes. A simple lucidity seemed always close at hand, never achieved. He longed for thoughts which were quiet and at rest. (PP, 133)

But to live with ordinariness is what Rozanov cannot do. In fact the years and years of abstract thought have perhaps performed the function of abstracting the things of the intellect from everyday reality. Though the narrator ‘N’ of the novel tells us that Rozanov had no dogmatic belief and that ‘his own personal morality had a simplicity’, we are time and again made aware of how lacking he is in a kind of moral sense, the moral sense that recognises that innocence should not be perverted and that indifference to the pain of somebody else amounts to callous cruelty. If Rozanov is naive, it is in worldly matters which show a divorce between life and thought. In matters of arranging a maid for his grand-
daughter, of arranging a husband (so shocking to the western mind) for her, he goes about the whole business with a single-minded simplistic logic that cannot fail to shock.

Rozanov is shown to fail disastrously in both his roles: as a teacher and as a grandparent:

Rozanov has been a teacher as well as a philosopher. His refusal to nurture his pupil, and see him as an individual desperately needing reassurance, shows that his failure as a teacher is no less monstrous than his failure as a grandparent. Teacher and parent are related roles; both demand loving attention to the vulnerable. In both roles Rozanov reacts immorally, refusing to feel in the first case, and feeling wrongly in the second.

When a kind word would have assuaged George's self-esteem, Rozanov says to him:

"You are a fake, a faux mauvais, pretending to be wicked because you are unhappy. You are not mad or satanic, you're just a fool suffering from hurt and vanity. You lack imagination, what made you bad at philosophy
makes you bad at being bad. It's a game. You're a dull dog, George, an ordinary dull mediocre egoist, you will never be anything else." (PP, 224)

There is truth in these words. George is a fake, suffering from vanity more than anything else. But Rozanov as a teacher should also be aware of another important truth, and that is George's desperate need of him, to be recognised and spoken to kindly. Rozanov wilfully refuses to look at these needs and damns George with home-truths which George is not equipped to understand and accept. He caps the conversation with "as far as I'm concerned you don't exist." (PP, 224)

Rozanov does no better as a parent. It is revealed that he did not 'get along well' with his daughter and, after her death, saddled with a young grand-daughter, Rozanov does worse: he proceeds to fall in love with her. To prevent her, and perhaps himself, from this damning knowledge, the grand-daughter Hattie is subjected to a wandering on-the-move childhood. She is whisked across continents during her school holidays on hectic round-the-world trips. The only stable person, who means love and friendship and security to her, is her 'maid' Pearl, whom Rozanov has so arbitrarily and so naively chosen. After Hattie leaves her school, Rozanov ensconces her and Pearl at Slipper
Casting about in his mind for a suitable young man who could marry Hattie and make her happy, he hits upon Tom McCaffrey, the cheerful younger brother of George. He summons Tom and puts the 'proposal' to him, much to the latter's huge astonishment, a kind of excitement and also a dismay at this novel prospect. Young Tom's attentions are willy-nilly engaged. The unfortunate scandal in the local newspapers upsets Rozanov's plans. He is livid with Tom, and arbitrarily stops him from seeing Hattie, contemptuously rejects Pearl's love for him (Rozanov) with disgust, and lies to Hattie about Pearl, telling her that she did not care for her. He takes Hattie forcibly away from Pearl to his own house, where proximity undoes any moral scruple he might have had. He confesses to his seventeen-year-old granddaughter that he is in love with her.

In his lack of control over his own desires and obsessions, in his horror of ridicule, in his vanity, he is very much like his own pupil George:

He disliked and ignored his daughter; he dislikes and ignores his pupil; he despises a woman-servant who loves him; he makes Tom McCaffrey fall in with his plans; he is in love with his granddaughter. Consumed by jealousy, anger and sexuality, he is
essentially not very different from George in intellect and worldly success.

Rozanov can fall no further. Disillusioned by philosophy, by his inability to see the penetration of morality into everyday things, he commits suicide. Faustian? Yes, perhaps.

Now, why should a man of intellect have power? Quite apart from George, the whole of Ennistone town is affected by Rozanov's arrival. Is it only worldly success as an intellectual that gives Rozanov power and a radiating wave of influence? An air of being pleased and satisfied with himself? But such a state of complacency in intellectual matters is again a refusal to be open to outside influences; it amounts to a refusal to negotiate with difference and variety — this refusal again precludes growth. Rozanov's fixture in an intellectual world, his dismissal of what does not conform to his standards, is a failure of growth in moral consciousness. It is an inability to step out of a defined world into an undefined, and perhaps, more real outside. Charles' childishness in The Sea, the Sea, his naivety and self-absorption, combined with worldly success, is the more recognisable form of power. Rozanov's will to power, lurking behind his intellectual exercises, is the less recognisable form of moral childishness and immaturity: it is hard for the human
mind to perceive intellectual prowess along with moral weakness.

The second hub of power in The Philosopher's Pupil is George McCaffrey, Rozanov's one-time student of philosophy. It is this power relationship that gives the book its title. George is the person most disturbed by Rozanov's arrival in Ennistone. It is revealed that Rozanov had once dismissed George as a mediocre student of philosophy. He was instrumental in discouraging and dissuading George from continuing to study in that field. Rozanov, in his vast indifference, does not realise that:

... he had also mortally wounded George's soul, setting at the same time therein the eternal need to be justified, to be healed, to be saved by the executioner himself. He and only he who had dealt the wound could heal it. (PP, 136)

George even follows Rozanov to America to somehow make Rozanov recognise his existence. Rozanov is, however, casual and makes it clear that he does not wish to see any more of George. When a kind word or even a gesture would have sufficed to fill George's needs, Rozanov wounds his self-esteem by making a show of his contemptuous indifference.
In some men like Rozanov an acute intellect and success in the worldly sense sanction an arrogant power over people; in others like George, a wounded self-esteem, which leads to a black hatred, sanctions the power of a demented will to do what it wants:

There was some deep wound in George's soul into which every tiniest slight or setback poured its gall. Pride and vanity, and venomous hurt feelings obscured his sun. (PP, 76)

George, around whom and in whom flow raging thoughts which often end in violence (like smashing all the Roman Glass in the Institute Museum, and 'murdering' his wife Stella and Rozanov), fills the reader with horror and pity. He is the closest, of all the characters in Murdoch's novels, to insanity. His grasp on the world is limited to his mad thoughts: even the birds outside his room seem to say 'Rozanov', 'Rozanov'. He is acutely conscious of himself, however; even his walk has an affectedness. The whole world is stripped and pared down to his single obsessive need: to have his teacher simply recognise him.

George is appalling; he is impossible. Yet there is seen to be a hypnotic attractiveness about him. All the women in the town wish to save him from himself.
All the men admire his freedom from ordinary morality. Thus George too enjoys a conscious power. He is acutely conscious of an image of himself 'which is in some ways significantly at odds with reality' :

George was an accomplished narcissist, an expert and dedicated liver of the double life, and this in a way which was not always to his discredit ... Herein perhaps he intuitively practised the sort of protective coloration which consists in sincerely giving one's faults pejorative names which conceal the yet more awful nature of what is named. (PP, 73)

In the interview with Murdoch quoted at the beginning of this chapter, she says that there is, in life, a magical element antithetical to goodness; this is the temptation to dramatise one's life, to derive a kind of power from a false dramatic conception of oneself. George seems true to this type of a power figure. The question must be asked whether the apparent freedom that he appropriates from the responsibilities of an ordinary morality is really freedom at all. Or is he at the mercy of his self-dramatised insane compulsions? To have no control over one's passions can be seen to be bondage of the worst sort. Though there is freedom from the mundaneness of the world, there is no freedom from

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the machinations of one's inmost self. This is the quagmire in which George is so thoroughly sunk.

The point can be considered from the outside, as it were, from the point of view of the people who are at the receiving end. The people admire the sort of power emanating from George. But there is also this angle to be considered: at what point will the admiration from society cease? Obviously the power exercised by George in his 'freedom' cannot be allowed to go on being exercised, for it transgresses social sanctions too flagrantly. Charles' or Rozanov's powers can be exercised indefinitely for they do not cross prescribed social norms. The people's admiration and envy of George's 'power' are a faint reflection of the deep human impulse to do what one likes, an impulse held in check, according to Freud, by the ego.

The Philosopher's Pupil shows up the grim reality of the moral quagmire. The picture of the human being is luridly coloured, and the tortured consciousnesses of Rozanov and George, the figures of power, exercising all their manipulative wiles, show the morally stifling nature of the will to power.

David Crimond in The Book and the Brotherhood has already been discussed in the chapter on erotic love. He is also a figure of power who sets off certain irrevocable consequences amongst the friends who come
under his dominating influence. Though these consequences make up much of the novel, it will be observed that, unlike Hilary Burde, Charles Arrowby, John Robert Rozanov or George McCaffrey, the centrality of the power character Crimond to the novel as a whole is curiously diffused. What comes across more strongly is the chaotic condition of the modern world, pictured in microcosm through the dance at the Commemoration Ball at Oxford in the beginning of the novel. David Crimond seems much more a by-product than the engineer of the chaos. I suppose this difference between Crimond and say, Rozanov, has also something to do with the deliberate desultoriness of the narrative technique used by Iris Murdoch in The Book and the Brotherhood. It may be recalled that this technique has been discussed in the second chapter.

But David Crimond does share with the earlier power figures the fact of being prey to his own extreme emotions and ill-thought out needs despite an apparent 'freedom' from conventional moral restrictions. Hilary Burde, Charles Arrowby, Rozanov, and George McCaffrey, for all that they control other people's needs and feelings, cannot control their own, and that is the ironic paradox repeated in the case of Crimond. Such compulsiveness, curiously enough, exudes a kind of power in the world.

Crimond controls two interwoven and self-created
power structures, both webbed by the same group of friends. Two currents of manipulative power run from him down to the 'brotherhood'. One is his erotic relationship with Jean, Duncan's wife, that sets off reverberations of disastrous consequences. This aspect of his character has been discussed in the second chapter. The other current of power of primary importance to his character is the power he derives from his single-minded devotion to the Marxist revolutionary cause. Initially, the 'brotherhood' of friends who 'commission' his book on political philosophy (the title of the novel derives from this thread in the story) admire the power emanating from him:

They were all fond of Crimond, though he was even then the person least closely involved in the group. They also, and this was important, admired and respected him because he was more politically active, more dedicated, and more ascetic than they were. He was also more politically educated and apt to assemble his ideas into theories. (BB, 97)

But soon after his first entanglement with Jean, it is seen that Crimond breaks off all contact with the friends, accepting, however, the financial support that they extend. Matters come to a head after Crimond draws
Jean, deliberately, a second time from her husband. The sexual power that he enjoys curiously informs his power as a radical political thinker. It is ironical to note that Crimond's concerns are essentially moral—the Marxist's concern for the proletariat, the poor and the exploited. How he derives power from such a moral concern becomes clear when it is understood that his very strong convictions and extreme dedication have a very narrow focussing. Single-minded devotion and the utmost concentration on one's task may be very dangerous, since, contrary to popularly held notions, such an attitude misses out on the complexity of any given problem. Crimond derives his will to power from a closed approach to the Marxist revolutionary cause. At the committee meeting of the brotherhood, Rose levels a stinging critique of this when she tells him:

"Your 'people' are abstractions, they're just a vague idea that feeds your sense of power, your sort of Marxism is old and done for, that's what's finished! You're not a new sort of person, you're just an old-fashioned insolent power maniac who thinks he's superman! You say the individual doesn't exist --- what about people who are starving in Africa"? (BB, 336)

The danger that Crimond has fallen into is forgetting
the reality, the concrete situation of the people that he is so concerned about. Intent on his Utopian theory, he has perhaps missed out on the variegated and complex reality that the theory refers to. The danger is that a closed outlook leads to an assumption of power which may be a foreshadowing of the forms fascism generally takes. Gulliver observes:

"Utopian Marxism leads straight to the most revolting kinds of repression! The most important fact of our age is the wickedness of Hitler and Stalin. We mustn't tolerate any stuff which suggests that communism is really fine if only it can be done properly." (BB, 224)

Thus, what is essentially moral in its roots — the Marxist concern for the have-nots — turns immoral when it refuses to look at alternative models. A narrow emphasis on a part of the whole: total conviction regarding a particular political ideology modifies the moral fibre of the person and leads to a moral short-sightedness. It is again seen that power in Crimond, as in the other figures of power, is equated with a non-receptivity to the other, different political alternatives and different people; in other words, a refusal to look at the real. The will to power in
Crimond rests on an aggressive and self-assertive confidence in his particular political ideology. A more open approach would be less dogmatic and less assertive. It would take in its purview alternative thoughts and opinions. As it is, Crimond dismisses Gerald and his company of friends, and ordinary morality into the bargain:

"... You have no energy, you are lazy people. The real heroes of our time are those who are brave enough to let go of the old dreamy self-centred self-satisfied morality and the old imperialistic moral person who was monarch of all he surveyed... -- the old complacent liberal individual is already lost, he's a fake, he's finished, he cannot constitute a value..."(BB,336)

The paradoxical fact, as has been noted a little earlier, is that Crimond, the self-assertive giant of the monolithic will, has no power or control over his own mind. He sinks into the most despairing depression once his book is completed and the task of single-minded concentration is done. Mention has been made in chapter two of the mad suicide pact with Jean. Once that fails he mistakenly supposes himself in love with Rose. When Rose rejects him he arranges the duel with pistols, with Duncan, killing Jenkin into the bargain. A single-
minded devotion to a cause, though capable of exercising utmost power over other people, is shown as incapable of exercising any over itself. The inevitable outcome of freedom from external reality is seen to be a threat to the sanity of the soul. And that is the quagmire to which this sort of will to power is prone. A will to power, that is, points back to the self; the task of powerlessness moves in the opposite direction: it points back from the self to the reality outside. The former is freedom from external, the latter is a freedom from the machine-like working of the psyche. The last part of this chapter will examine, in Marcus Vallar, the central figure of The Message to the Planet, the movement towards powerlessness.

III

With Marcus Vallar, Iris Murdoch moves on to an examination of the task of powerlessness: how a holy figure, both powerful and good, can divest himself of his power to such an extent that he can die out of an identification with the powerless. The process of Marcus Vallar's development in the book, from a power figure to a god-man, then to a renouncer of power, raises a number of interesting questions about the meaning of certain concepts like Goodness, Power and Holiness. Holiness, it is clear, has the ability to
influence and to effect changes, which means that there is some quality of the powerful in it. How does holiness, then, relate to goodness, and how is it, in turn, related to powerlessness? The question to be asked at this juncture is: Is Marcus Vallar a holy man? or is he a good man? and are these two concepts of the good and the holy so clearly divisible? Suguna Ramanathan in Figures of Good, the most recent book on Murdoch that discusses The Message to the Planet, separates goodness and holiness. 'Goodness; when it takes on the problem of suffering, changes into holiness.' Does this answer the question? Or do the two concepts of holiness and goodness acquire different connotations in different contexts? For example, in the Indian context, the sadhu or rishi is endowed with both goodness and holiness.

Some light could be thrown on these questions by a brief study of the life of Marcus Vallar.

Much like the other novels of Iris Murdoch where there is a central power figure, The Message to the Planet opens with a reference to Marcus Vallar. His early life is briefly sketched for the reader: a mathematical prodigy at three, the discoverer of something called the 'Vallar Theorem' at nineteen at Cambridge, then on to painting under the guidance of Jack Sheerwater (one of the friends who make up the
group influenced by Marcus), soon to surpass the teacher and guide. Marcus is also said to be a Jew, enormously rich, and married, with a daughter. He has spent his childhood in a polyglot society and speaks several European languages fluently. A little later in the book he also learns Japanese and Sanskrit. The mastery over several languages and the urge to learn more, along with the ability to attend to things ("... He had large long grey eyes which could express some almost supernatural degree of attention. Sometimes these eyes were cold or gleamed dangerously, sometimes they just stared. They could compel people to run from the room"). (MP, 8) are Murdoch's prescriptions for goodness:

... If I am learning, for instance, Russian, I am confronted by an authoritative structure which commands my respect. The task is difficult and the goal is distant and perhaps never entirely attainable. My work is a progressive revelation of something which exists independently of me. Attention is rewarded by a knowledge of reality. Love of Russian leads me away from myself towards something alien to me, something, my consciousness cannot take over, swallow up, deny or make unreal.
Marcus's forays into varied fields of intellectual and artistic pursuits are in opposition to the power figures who have been studied so far: Hilary is the 'word child', Charles Arrowby is the dramatist manqué, Rozanov, the philosopher, and Crimond the Marxist. It is apprehended that Marcus is in search of something, that he grows out of one discipline into another, very unlike the characteristic power figure who saturates and derives his power from one particular study.

But it is also seen that Marcus's eyes 'compel,' which is a characteristic of the power figure. Is he another Rozanov, with a vast ability to think and a vaster power to damn people with his judgements on their capacities, one wonders? For a little later come the 'poisoned darts': Marcus denounces Jack as a 'commercially-minded painter with a vile promiscuous sex life'; Gildas as a 'false priest' and 'a merchant of false consoling superstitions'; and 'curses' Patrick Fenman, the Irish poet. Ludens, whilst visiting Marcus later is 'roughed up' because he insensitively rejects his daughter Irina's declaration of love for him. The effects of these 'darts' linger in the minds of the friends, who nevertheless still consider Marcus a 'remarkable man'. Gildas leaves the church and his priesthood; Ludens carries a painful reminder of Marcus' anger; Jack cheerfully acknowledges that Marcus might be right about him, and Patrick lies dying because he truly
believes that he has been cursed. One might observe the qualitative difference in the way the group of friends takes Marcus' contemptuous dismissals and the way Rozanov's dismissal of George McCaffrey is taken by the latter in The Philosopher's Pupil. What does the difference indicate? That it is all a chance factor, an accident, whether the recipient is a Ludens or a Patrick or a George? Or how some minds have a propensity to brood over wrongs and create festering sores while other minds are comparatively cleaner? Or does it say something about criticism which is true and necessary, a standard by which the spurious acknowledges its second-rateness? One wonders. But unlike Rozanov's refusal to help George, Marcus comes with Ludens to allay any wrong that he may have done to Patrick Fenman. Marcus can 'see' and 'recognise' and then set about a way of healing. It is also likely that clear seeing and denunciation of the false are necessary to proper, good loving, but that such denunciation should be objective and free of self. It is in this vital respect that Marcus differs from Rozanov.

The major part of the novel The Message to the Planet is taken up with Ludens finding Marcus again, bringing him to Patrick to 'cure' him and then their long, strange association that ends with the 'death' of Marcus.
When Ludens 'finds' Marcus in a country cottage on the lands of Lord Claverdon, it is after a considerable time gap since his last meeting with him. Marcus looks strange and almost elderly. He is also frightened and his mode of speech seems to have 'relapsed into some primordial foreignness'. He speaks of confederates, messengers and arms. "You said you came to ask me something? Who sent you? What is your question? What is demanded?" (MP, 75)

The 'what is demanded?' really establishes the state of Marcus' mind: so far away from the 'ordinary reality' of a middle-class English milieu. Along with physical changes Ludens is also aware of other changes in Marcus. His earlier obsession with an universal language, pure cognition and metaphysics is now gone or changed into something else, of which Ludens cannot have an inkling. From matters intellectual, Marcus seems to have grown into matters spiritual for he now talks about 'a pure experience of the most extreme suffering', 'of how to separate one's thoughts from one's obsessions'. Ludens anxiously tries to make meaning of all this, while Irina thinks that her father is 'stark, staring mad'.

The raising of Patrick Fennman from the dead constitutes a miracle. Marcus admits as much later, and talking about the phenomenon, says:
"One answer is I don't know what happened. An unusual power was present. Though what does that mean? The event was important. I was expecting something like that." (MP, 161)

There is a qualitative difference between this 'miracle' and James' saving of Charles Arrowby in The Sea, the Sea. James there dismisses his powers as magic while in The Message to the Planet, the magic is a miracle and associated with Christ's raising of Lazarus from the dead. Marcus, moreover, speaks of the 'godman':

"At a certain point one is compelled to develop a conception of insight, or pure thinking, which is not recognisably 'moral', something which simulates, or is, the rising up of man into the divine, as if one were being driven into the godhead." (MP, 164)

We have seen how Marcus Vallar has grown or developed from a figure of power in search of, perhaps, the absolute, into the holy man with powers to do something miraculous. It is a movement from power to holiness. But what about goodness? Jack has earlier said that Marcus is beyond good and evil. Gildas replies that beyond good and evil is evil. Is Marcus then evil?
This question seems ridiculously out of context. For it is certain that whatever Marcus is, he is not evil like say, Julius King. But what is the meaning of 'pure thinking' which is 'not recognisably moral' that Marcus is groping for in his words quoted above? Ludens is puzzled and says, "I don't think ordinary morality is superficial. I don't think it's just a convention or an illusion. I think it's fundamental and well, absolute."
(MP, 164)

Ludens reflects the general reader's point of view here and also the author's point of view. But Murdoch, in Marcus, is imagining a kind of superhuman strength and courage and wisdom, as if Marcus were indeed an incarnation:

"There are moments when a great meaning, a great new meaning, a meaning for all mankind, comes near to us and can be uttered. To partake in that utterance must demand superhuman courage, courage from the divine, an ability to think so intensely as to die even from pure thought -- to die a death ordained, not for self-glorification, a significant and saving death." (MP, 165)

As a contrast to Ludens' earnest belief in Marcus' role as a thinker and Marcus' own obsessions with 'pure
suffering' is his daughter Irina's total scepticism regarding her father's powers:

"He imagines he's some sort of sage. He wanted me to shave his head, only I wouldn't. I just cut his hair and beard with scissors. He's going to save the world, we are living through a dark era and waiting for a revelation, and he's the revelation." (MP, 104)

and later:

"And another thing is he's got to be a great sinner and understand evil as well as good and be the victims and Hitler too and Christ and anti-christ. He wants to enact the spiritual or something destiny of the human soul. He wants to fall into awful depths of suffering and degradation and die a terrible and famous death and be taken to heaven in a fiery chariot, it's all in the mind, just as you say, and he still expects to get his breakfast on time." (MP, 105)

Irina arranges and manipulates to have Marcus put into Bellmain, a frighteningly efficient medical institution for the very rich, treating, generally, patients with mental problems. Ludens, who is unaware, until the last
minute, of Irina's trickery, is furious. His utter concern for Marcus, his fear of Marcus being drugged or misunderstood reveals the deep tenderness of his love for the 'master'.

The rest of the novel is taken up with interminable accounts of Luden's visits to Marcus stationed at Bellmain, with meticulous details of everyday life going on in those highly artificial surroundings, on the one hand, and the equally interminable accounts of the little onsets and setbacks in the love triangle of Franca, Jack and Alison (discussed in the second chapter) on the other. The even and steady flow of the narrative suggests the unflagging desire and deeply felt wish of Ludens (since he is closer to the reader) that Marcus should write his thoughts down. At a remove, it also reveals a readying of Marcus' spiritual powers. Thus, when Fanny Amherst makes her 'offerings' and later on, appears to Marcus, the reader, prepared by the author's magically beautiful evocation of the fresh, ephemeral innocence of the early morning, is totally caught up with the spirit of the encounter:

Then once more she began to approach, less tentatively but slowly. She came and stood before him and they looked at each other, he benign and alert, she radiant with a silent
joy by which her face was almost contorted. Then she drew something out of the pocket of her dress and said to Marcus in her clear though childish voice, "Would you please just hold my stone for a moment?"

She held out her hand. In her palm was a black and white stone, rounded and very smooth, about the size of a goose's egg. Marcus' long fingers scooped the stone up. As he held it, they continued to gaze at each other, and it was as if, as it seemed to Ludens, in that long moment, they understood each other. Marcus released the stone into her outstretched hand. She stepped back, uttering a little cry like the chirp of a small bird. Then she turned and ran swiftly away and vanished. (MP, 303)

The stone looks forward to the advent of the 'stone people' who come to have a 'showing', a darshan of Marcus. These 'showings' fill Ludens with 'amazement, exasperation, fear and awe'. Irina's reaction is typical. She comments, "Dad loved it" (MP, 317).

Marcus is seen to be at the height of his powers of holiness at this point. The 'showings' seem to please him. But not for long, however. Marcus gives up
the 'showings' when he feels that he has not been 'worthy' enough to establish holiness. After his public declaration confessing the unworthiness he feels, he is stoned with the very stones that were offered to him by his devotees.

This incident shocks his ardent followers. Pat, the seekers, even Ludens to some extent, are half-ashamed, and feel their relationship with Marcus undergoing a change. Pat, his most devoted follower, says thus:

"He's thought too much, like into a kind of doom. If you think too much it's intolerable, it must be, you see all the horrible things that are hidden away, the world's so vile really, there's just little bits are nice, ... It's a great pain to try to imagine what such thinking could be, it stands to reason if things are mostly bad and you think them your mind must be full of horrors... I sort of thought he was God, you'd have to be cruel and have infinite love and, some great wisdom and other things to be able to see the whole world of sin and evil and all the tears and not go mad. ... Now I think he's a victim.... Like Christ on the cross all for nothing, like if Christ was just an ordinary man... a deceived
Patrick Fennman's little speech just quoted above, together with Marcus' giving up 'showing', raises two important issues: one is the problem of the holy figure – how is he to deal with his powers? and what should the people, by whom he is surrounded, make of it? Irina's acid comments about her father's spiritual propensities (noted a little earlier) constitute a possible viewing of the power of the holy man. Is it just the feeding and self-aggrandisation of the ego? A reductionist view would pare it down to say that this last is the truth.

The twin facet of the same issue is – what is the holy man to do with his powers? Does he in truth have the power or is it the power granted to him by the devotion of his followers? Murdoch, in an interview, has said that she is interested in the problem of the god-man:

... a particular kind of mythology that interests me is that of the power figure: the figure who is elected, as it were, to be God by other people, and made into a god who is a kind of false god ... a kind of power relationship and a magical relationship, where the people who are the worshippers really
create the god ...

Have Marcus' powers been created by his devotees? Is he a false god? The questions are hard to answer. Murdoch's words seem to apply more to the power figure than to the holy man. But they have been quoted here just to see that though Marcus' powers seem genuine enough, it is a moot point to know how much of the power resides or is given, as it were, in the form of devotion by the recipients. (Even a 'dog's tooth glows with light' when worshipped rightly, says James in The Sea, the Sea). And what cost power, even that of the holy man? Marcus, towards the end gives up power, abandons it, because he realises that he is not worthy and that goodness lies in giving up power; he wills his own death.

This gets us to the second important issue. If the holy powerful one is an incarnation of the divine, how does divinity handle the problem of power? Can a God of power be God? It is interesting to see that the Hindu versions of the incarnation do not see it as a problem: Krishna or Rama function as 'powerful' extraordinary beings they exercise power with a sense of the right and just. This is also the case with Jehovah or even the Christian concept of God the Father. But Christ's response to power is entirely different. His crucifixion is an understanding that power must be given
up, abandoned, that divinity rests in voluntary powerlessness.

Whether the all-loving, all-seeing God, or the poor 'deluded' (in Pat's words) Christ figure, or whether the one is the other, this is the question that echoes and re-echoes after Marcus Vallar's willed death. The correspondence on his death and the concluding dialogue between Ludens and Gildas heighten the ambiguity of the diverse responses over the Marcus Vallar phenomenon. There is no resolving answer to the ambiguity. Perhaps there cannot be. It is enough that Iris Murdoch so clearly and so intelligently recognises, and with her recognition, gives a form and body to the deepest moral issues.