The novels written by Murdoch in the 1960s, *A Severed Head*, *The Unicorn*, *The Italian Girl* and *The Time of The Angels* were far different from the novels written in the 1950s. The general cast of the novels of the sixties included the grotesque, perverse outcasts, manipulators playing games of seduction. There were also hints of incest, lover-rivals, suicides, murders and the gothic manner of narration. In *A Severed Head*, Murdoch borrowed the Freudian concept of psychoanalysis. The title, *A Severed Head*, was an allusion to Freud’s interpretation of the Medusa legend as a fearsome castration symbol. Palmer Anderson, a psychoanalyst, wielded control over Martin Lynch-Gibbon, and went on to recount his story in the novel. Antonia confessed to her husband Martin that she was having a serious love affair with his friend Palmer Anderson, the psychoanalyst. Martin on the other hand suffered from mother-fixation and was induced to have an affair with Georgie, who became his mistress. Matters get
further complicated by the arrival of Honor Klein, an anthropologist, who revealed the secret relationship between Martin and Georgie. In the cellar scene, when Martin attacked Honor, to his surprise he found himself feeling attracted to Honor, but was later shocked, when he found Honor at Cambridge in bed with her brother, Anderson. Thus, the major characters in the novel indulged in distasteful activity of adultery and incest. Living in a supposedly civilized society, the characters unabashedly indulged in acts of barbarism. In spite of the mess Anderson himself was in, he considered sincerity as a fundamental virtue; he says: “We must try to be very lucid and very honest. We are civilized and intelligent people” (ASH,35). Thus, Murdoch shows how the psychoanalyst who was supposed to restore confidence in others was himself in a state of mess – confused and deluded. The scene in the cellar, when Martin attacked Honor, releases Martin’s own buried violence. He became obsessed with Honor. Later, when he discovered the incestuous relationship between Anderson and Honor Klein, he realized his own feelings of Mother-fixation that had strangled him so far. In the end, Honor returned to Martin and the two were left to face some kind of an uncompromising future
together. In Against Dryness, Murdoch pointed out, “what we require is a renewed sense of the difficulty and complexity of the moral life and the opacity of persons” (Byatt, 123). Thus A Severed Head has resemblances of ‘Restoration Comedy.’ It has ‘over-plotted’ theme, gross yet witty sexual overtures. It shows love is war and power-game.

In An Unofficial Rose Murdoch takes up a new stance, and for the first time she attempted the study of ‘goodness’ as opposed to ‘freedom.’ In a way it was this novel that laid the foundation to the discussion of “goodness” in her later works. The story concerning two families is rather complex. There is the family of Hugh Peronett, his son Randall and his wife Ann. Then there is the Finch Family, particularly Humphrey Finch’s wife Mildred, and her brother Felix. The story moves around the Tintoretto painting owned by Hugh, although earlier it was inherited by Hugh’s wife from her art-dealer father. Randall, like Mor in The Sandcastle, is trapped in his marriage with Ann. She is the conventional, ‘messy,’ ‘shabby,’ ‘normal’ wife. His craving for something more led him into a strange relationship with Emma Sands, (whom Hugh loves), and her (Emma’s)
secretary Lindsay. Randall’s fascination for Lindsay made him adore her exquisiteness. Although he gained Lindsay and felt liberated from Ann’s bondage, yet he is not totally free in the Murdochian sense. In *The Sublime and The Good*, Murdoch writes:

> Freedom is exercised in the confrontation by each other... of two irreducibly dissimilar individuals. Love is the imaginative recognition of, that is respect for, this otherness (Pg. 42-55).

On the other hand, Ann came across as a passive onlooker. She refused to look into Randall’s wanderings. To conform to social demands or to put oneself in a state of un-consciousness of what the other partner was doing may be perhaps for Murdoch ‘Conventional.’ Swann, the pastor, in the novel remarked that “being good is a state of unconsciousness.” Murdoch herself was trying to comprehend the nature of goodness and so Ann’s goodness appeared ambiguous.
Murdoch dealt with the Freudian mythical framework of *The Severed Head* in *The Unicorn* too. She tried to move away from fantasy and myth up to *The Bell*, but she could not do away with myth-making and allusions altogether. *The Unicorn* had all the elements of mystery, it is full of medieval gothic experiences. All the inhabitants of the castle are connected with the mistress Hannah-Crean-Smith. Murdoch called the castle a cage or a prison. Hannah herself is a prisoner and lived with Gerald Scottow, the man who looked after the castle. He is appointed by Hannah’s husband and her first cousin, to spy on his wife. Marian Taylor, who arrives at the castle to be Hannah’s tutor companion, is left bewildered. Hannah is punished by her husband, for committing adultery with Pip Lejour, the son of a scholar, Max Lejour. She is confined to the castle for seven years and the term of her imprisonment is about to end. But her predicament and passive suffering remained a mystery. Although surrounded by all her loved ones, her confinement could be seen as a ‘Freudian Myth’ or an ‘obsessional neurosis.’ Yet, on the other hand, Hannah’s suffering could be interpreted as a redemptive suffering or a sort of penance, a thought Murdoch borrowed from Simone.
Weil. Hannah’s attempts at self-purification many times led to self-hatred and violence. Therefore, in a way Hannah’s passive acceptance was unnatural, as it failed to help her move towards understanding or self-realization.

_The Unicorn_ can be read as an attempt on the part of the writer to create a ‘private myth,’ ‘a private religious symbolism,’ it is also perhaps an attempt to explore attitudes to religious suffering, to evil and innocence. Murdoch categorically states that the only way to succeed is to pay ‘attention,’ an idea propagated by Simone Weil. Murdoch in _Against Dryness_ took up Weil’s word, ‘Attention’ and emphasized its need. Simone Weil had said ‘that morality is a matter of attention, not of will. We need a new vocabulary of attention’ (Byatt,183). Simone Weil’s concept could be considered as a ‘touchstone’ for the religious validity of Hannah’s suffering. When Effingham complains of Hannah’s unreciprocative love although she is made for love, Max retorted: I think that must be what, in these last years, she has understood. If she were to give way to Ordinary love in that situation she would be lost. The only being she can afford to love now is God (TU,117). Therefore, when one
becomes capable of ‘de-creating’ the self and renouncing the ‘I’ one becomes attentive to God. When Murdoch was asked as to why she chose to write obsessional novels, she suggested that the characters are slaves and they concern the odd connexions that existed between spirituality and sex, and the whole ambiguity of the spiritual world. *The Unicorn* stands as a symbol of ‘animality’ and ‘spirituality.’ The human being is, for Murdoch, the animal that worshiped – ‘The impulse to worship is deep and ambiguous and old’ (SG,100). *The Unicorn* can be read as Murdoch’s attempt to understand morality, virtue, love, suffering and freedom.

Murdoch’s earlier novels have often been regarded as chaotic, disturbing and perhaps a bit over exaggerated – anxious scenes of disaster and rescue, sexual interactions regardless of sex and kin, unimaginable twists and much more. However, the “improbable possibilities which she chooses to present are actually externalizations of the endless combinations, often mutually exclusive and contradictory that lie at the bottom of consciousness” (Ramanathan,2). The mind is free to entertain anything and everything, while behaviour is based on social
norms. Murdoch is primarily interested to probe the innermost ‘seascape’ of an individual which is private and capable of the unimaginable, which also appears shocking and unrealistic to the ‘socially conditioned consciousness.’ Murdochian novels do have bits of sporadic darkness and also reveals the difficulty of the protagonists to be good in immensely difficult situations. Yet the novelist refuses to give up and finds reasons to highlight goodness which is rare, but not absent.

The Nice and The Good, in treatment and subject matter, marks something of a break from the earlier novels. The novel ushers in a new stylistic confidence. Murdoch tries to define the good with the help of Plato and Buddhism. The novels each seek to clarify the relation of the good aspects of love: love as a pure feeling and love as sexual attraction which is depicted in The Nice and The Good. In an interview with W.K. Rose in the year 1968, the year The Nice and The Good was published Murdoch says:

I think (freedom) might have been
(my main subject) in the past. No, I
think love is my subject. I have very
mixed feelings about the concept of freedom now. This is partly a philosophical development. I once was a kind of existentialist and now I am a kind of Platonist. What I am concerned about really is love...

(Dipple,158).

Murdoch in *The Nice and The Good* brings out the protagonists obsession with sex and later the emergence of love through self-realization. Murdoch focuses on the concept of inculcating ‘attention’ and love for others, other than the self recur in almost all her works. In both *Bruno’s Dream* and in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, she explores this theme which also appeared in her novels like *The Bell* or *A Severed Head* or *The Italian Girl*. In the *The Nice and The Good* Murdoch employs a genre that is modest with a lot of story telling and jokes. However, the novel is characterised by the presence of irony which shows, the reality of pain on the psyche. Both fun and pain co-exists in the novel.
The novel opens with a fascinating murder mystery. John Ducane, a legal advisor to Octavian Grey, has been asked to investigate into the suicide of Radeechy. Ducane has to become the sleuth and this serves as a great moral anxiety for Ducane. He finds himself in a dilemma to question somebody, to doubt, to be a judge for somebody’s actions. Ducane meets Peter McGrath, the office messenger who is responsible for the press leak about Redeechy and his involvement with a woman. A ‘large sum of money changed hands’ in many of Redeechy’s affairs. Ducane confronts McGrath and begins to question him, at this point Ducane realizes that he is not a successful barrister because:

this “making people talk” was not just a matter of what was said or even how it was said – it was a talent which depended upon all sorts of intuitive, perhaps telephonic, emanations of an almost physical kind (NG,66).

Throughout the cross-examination, Ducane carefully watched his own conscience and understood his own limitations and inability
“to conceive of any kind of villainy of which he would not have been capable himself. His imagination reached out into the world of evil simply by prolonging the patterns of his own faults” (NG,65). Ducane’s dilemma brings out the paradox of all morality. Ducane resents the pride of the Judges who themselves are imperfect and also concludes “that no human being is worthy to be a judge” (NG,74). To be a judge means to have control and the power to decide upon another individual’s destiny and Ducane perceived himself as the best almost ‘half guilty’: “I alone of all these people am good enough, am humble enough to be a judge” (NG,74). In this sense he has power over McGrath and also his former mistress Jessica. Ducane is the alpha and omega of Jessica’s life, but Ducane finds himself fascinated by Kate Gray, Octavian Gray’s wife. Ducane is aware that Jessica would be shattered if he were to leave her, this leaves him feeling guilty, after all Ducane’s aim was of becoming a good man “and although he had little of the demonic in his nature there was a devil of pride, a stiff Calvinistic Scottish devil, who was capable of bringing Ducane to utter damnation, and Ducane knew this perfectly well” (NG,75).
Ducane broke off with Jessica which left Jessica shocked and despondent as she depended on him. But he consoled himself by thinking that he wanted to move away from being a ‘muddled lover’ and for this “as he also believed, the only point of severity with the past is improvement of the future” (NG,76). Ducane ruminates over the complex layers of his consciousness and wonders about his relation with both Kate and Jessica. Kate made him happy, but he knew that he was not in love with her “it was a civilized achievement of middle age” (NG,99). He was confident that Kate would not be a ‘burden’ or an ‘obsession’ and “the wonderful thing about Kate was that she was unattainable; and this was what was to set him free forever” (NG,99). Ducane was consciously shying away from the responsibility of a relationship. With Kate there is no anxiety of the future only the fulfillment of the present: the need to be attached and yet free attracts Ducane the most. However, when he thinks of Jessica he feels both remorse and guilt, he asks himself: “Had he the right to be happy with Kate for a second, to take what Kate was so generously offering to him, at a time when he was causing this dreadful suffering to another person?” (NG,99). Ducane knows that his self-indulgence and irresponsibility has caused much pain to
Jessica, yet he knows that he must discontinue his relation with Jessica. Murdoch had remarked in her interview with W.K. Rose that: “Opening out of love is a world, where we really can see other people, and are not simply dominated by our slavish impulses” (Pg. 59-73). Ducane has to learn to release himself from the entanglements with both Jessica and Kate, he must also learn that attraction or lust cannot be a substitute to love.

Murdoch in a very subtle way depicts the working of Ducane’s mind and his relation with a whole cast of characters present in the novel. He regrets his game of love with Kate and Jessica, he knows he acted irresponsibly and had lied to both, as he tells Kate “I’m sick of explaining, Kate. I’m sick of myself” (NG, 264). Ducane again finds himself in an odd position when he feels drawn towards Judy McGrath whom he encounters unexpectedly: “His imagination had to fight to picture her clearly. It was as if she had become a disembodied ailment which attacked his whole substance” (NG, 268). But he soon realized his bizarre thoughts could only ruin him because “when one falls into falsehood all one’s judgments are dislocated” (NG, 268). Ducane rightly thinks that when the mind itself is so ‘muddled’ and
'demented' how can one become another man's judge. In the midst of this anxiety and agony, Ducane looks for support in Mary Clothier: "Why do I always have to be helping people, thought Ducane, and getting no help myself? I wish someone could help me. I wish Mary could" (NG, 269). The novel moves around several characters but more so of Ducane's central consciousness A.S Byatt pointed out "that he is more real to us as a moral consciousness than as a sensual presence" (Pg. 113-14).

*The Nice and The Good* has all the ingredients of a typical Shakespearean romance such as *The Tempest, A Winter's Tale*, especially based on the themes of love, forgiveness and reconciliation. Murdoch's *The Nice and The Good*, opines Conradi is:

An ideal world in which love could have supernatural harmonising power conflicts with intractable muddle and multiplicity; the poignant mood, like that of the mature bitter-sweet comedies, is extraordinary poised
between joy and sad complaisance

(Pg, 143).

The novel has an entire crew of displaced persons who have been jettisoned from the social circle and have come together at the Dorset ‘Harem’ of the hedonists Kate and Octavian Gray. Kate’s friend Paula Biranne wrestles with a broken marriage and love affair, which her husband brought to an abrupt end after mutilating her lover. She has a son Pierce, who plays an important role in Ducane’s realization of the good. Then there is Mary Clothier who acts as the motherfigure at the Trescombe world. She is tormented by the guilt of her husband’s unfortunate accident which occurred after a marital row. She had twins Henrietta and Edward a bundle of satisfied kids. Uncle Theo, Octavian’s ‘would-be saintly’ brother had been compelled to leave the Indian Civil Service after a scandal outburst. He was further exiled from the Buddhist community as well. Kate’s daughter Barbara is an extension of Kate’s wilder self. And finally there is Willy Kost who lives in a separate cottage nurturing the guilt of betrayal of his two fellow-prisoners. Almost
all the characters are fighting to overcome the past and Paula speaks thus as a spokesperson for all the characters:

Is it fruitless to think about the past and build up coherent pictures of how one’s life went wrong? I have never believed in remorse and repentance. But one must do something about the past. It doesn’t just cease to be. It goes on existing and affecting the present, and in new and different ways, as if in some other dimension it too were growing (NG,120).

Murdoch’s themes deal with the formidable past in most of her novels, such as, *Bruno’s Dream*, *A Word Child* and *The Time of The Angels*. The question as to how does one alter the past or neutralize it can be answered only by Murdoch who believes that love heals all maladies and this idea is beautifully brought out in *The Nice and The Good*. Ducane goes through a whole lot of anxious moment throughout the novel, but the incident in which he comes face to face with death in Gunnar’s cave when he tries to save Pierce becomes a turning point to his understanding of
love and goodness. Ducane swim towards the entrance of the cave in order to look for Pierce, but the strong current seized him and Ducane thought: I wonder if this is the end, thought Ducane, and if so what it will all have amounted to. How tawdry and small it has all been (NG,304). Suddenly Ducane sees himself as a ‘little rat’ who mindlessly goes about seeking cosy comforts. He sees flashes of past and faces of Mary and Biranne. He thinks:

If I ever get out of here I will be no man’s judge. Nothing is worth doing except to kill the little rat, not to judge, not to be superior, not to exercise power, not to seek, seek, seek. To love and to reconcile and to forgive, only this matters. All power is sin and all law is frailty. Love is the only justice. Forgiveness, reconciliation, not law (NG,305).

In The Sovereignty of Good over other concepts Murdoch explains that “The Humble Man, because he sees himself as nothing, can see other things as they are” (SG,103). And in the
same essay Murdoch agrees to Simone Weil’s explanation of the humble man who “perceives the distance between suffering and death. And although he is not by definition the good man perhaps he is the kind of man who is most likely to become good” (SG,104). Ducane aptly fits into the above role as he is able to introspect his own consciousness and ceases to act upon the other unjustly. Ducane had been asked to solve the mystery of Radeechy’s suicide and for this he had to choose the course where Biranne would be involved in disgrace. He feels a strong urge to pull Biranne out of the mess: “it isn’t that I want to play God, I’ve just had this business forced upon me and I’ve got do something about it” (NG,313). Moreover, Ducane understands “human law is only a very rough approximation to justice” (NG,313). He sincerely wants Biranne to begin life afresh with Paula his wife who still loves him, Ducane tells Biranne:

The thing about Paula just came as an inspiration, an extra, a felicitious conjecture. She certainly loves you, so why not try it. I’m not sentencing you to try (NG,313-14).
Ducane earnestly wishes to see the couple reunited. Ducane realizes his position of considerable power and almost blackmails Biranne to return to Paula rather than to bring an inevitable destruction to his career. For this he decides to present an incomplete report, in the sense that he would somehow bring a satisfactory closure of Radeechy suicide without bringing Biranne’s name. Ducane decided to offer his resignation along with the report and later to pursue his academic interest in Roman law. By taking such a decision, Ducane remains professionally challenged but morally at peace.

Ducane’s predicament and his decision is perhaps the novelist’s stance in what she believes the most. Richard Todd posits this idea rightly: “power and omniscience are dangerous weapons and the artist must resist the too obvious temptation to round off a situation…” (Pg. 64-5).

Thus having drawn attention to the above, Murdoch too in her characteristic style does round off this novel. At various points in the novel Murdoch has dramatized the ‘world’s randomness.’ There is Octavian who kindly tolerates his wife’s random collecting of people, while for his brother Theo it
becomes a problem. It may be noted that in many of Murdoch’s novels, the characters are shown reacting to the randomness of stones collected from the seashore. Here too the good twins are seen collecting stones:

   All were rounded, but some were flattish, some oblong, some spherical, some were almost transparent, others more or less copiously speckled, others close-textured and nearly black, a few of a brownish-red, some of a pale grey, others of a purple which was almost blue (NG,153).

For the twins the stones symbolized a “treasury of lovable individuals,” while for the unhappy Theo the stones were a “bizarre nightmare their multiplicity and randomness appalled him” (NG,152). Uncle Theo could not comprehend the simple joys, he ponders: “The intention of God could reach only a little way through the opacity of matter, and where it failed to penetrate there was just jumble and desolation” (NG,152). Conradi comments “such incommensurabilities between mind
and world in this novel are held in place. The human world is neither shrunken nor swollen...” (Pg. 147). Through Ducane one can notice the harmony and proportion in the novel:

Everything in Dorset is round,
thought Ducane. The little hills are round, these bricks are round, the Veronica bushes, the Catalpa tree, the crowns of the acasia, the pebbles on the beach, the clump of small bamboos beside the arch. He thought, everything in Dorset is just the right size (NG,46).

Ducane is gripped in moments of sheer satisfaction “thus he walked on with Kate at his side, conveying along with him his jumbled cloud of thoughts whose self-protective and self-adjusting, chemistry is known as mental health” (NG,46). Almost willingly Ducane succumbs to the urgencies of the ego. Also by feeding the ego Ducane’s mental health remains stable or so he thinks.
The Nice and The Good is a balanced novel as Murdoch has used a humble mystery genre, but that the novel does not appear limited or superficial. In The Fire and The Sun, Murdoch has eloquently argued for art's function against the scorn of Plato, who propagated dialectic as the best and perhaps the only right mode of thought. Although simplistic in style, The Nice and The Good created a high level of moral awareness. Murdoch has a clear and precise idea of what she meant by good. There is no false claim nor loud sermons on the subject of good as might have been in other novels. And although Ducane is the central protagonist who struggles and strives to be good, as against Ducane's struggle, the real definition of good can be seen through Uncle Theo, whose dreary personality drags him into the background. Through his infrequent yet profound ruminations about his past and present failures he gradually begins to realize that being good requires a kind of stringent discipline:

Theo had begun to glimpse the distance which separates the nice from the good, and the vision of this gap had terrified his soul. He had seen, far off, what is perhaps the most
dreadful thing in the world, the other
face of love, its blank face. 
Everything that he was, even the best 
that he was, was connected with 
possessive self-filling human love 
(NG,348).

Theo has been trapped by his guilty past. “He’s a broken reed if ever there was one” (NG,47). Theo deliberately isolated himself. Nobody in the Trescombe household is truly curious to know him. But Mary Clothier tries to make him talk about the past or even suggests meeting Willy but Theo thinks it pointless: “you can’t expect two neurotic egomaniacs like me and Willy to get on together” (NG,88). In all her efforts to understand old Theo Mary ends up feeling exasperated with her own self. Yet when Theo and Willy meet, they are able to share moments of togetherness trying to understand truth:

All is vanity, Willy, and man walks in
a vain shadow. You and I are the only 
people here who know this, which is 
why we are bad for each other. We
have to chatter about it. You and I are the only people here who know, but we also know that we do not know. Our hearts are too corrupt to know such a thing as truth, we know it only as illusion (NG, 124).

Murdoch has rightly suggested the difficulty an individual faces in the quest to be good. And inspite of frequent attempts to attain the good the disappointments are large. Both Theo and Willy are engulfed in the guilt of the past yet, both hold on to hope and affirmation of the good as Theo describes:

The point is that nothing matters except loving what is good. Not to look at evil but to look at good. Only this contemplation breaks the tyranny of the past, breaks the adherence of evil to the personality, breaks in the end, the personality itself (NG, 344).
Theo moves slowly yet steadily from self-condemnation to self-realization. He soon understands that clinging to the past will only make things worse for him. He learns to break himself from guilt and bondage of the past. Theo who had taken vows in a Buddhist monastery in India, had got involved with a young boy there, who had later drowned in the Ganges. Guilt-ridden, Theo had fled the place. He yearned to return but the torment was much too deep, then but now he thinks of returning. He learns to forgive himself and in small ways looks at a new horizon:

The image of return had been the image of a very human love. Now it was the image of that other one. Why should he stay here and not? Perhaps the great mountain of himself would never grow less but he could keep company with the enlightenment of others, and might regain at least the untempered innocence of a well-guarded child. And although he might never draw a single step closer to that great blankness he would know of its
reality and feel more purely in the simplicity of his life the distant plucking of its magnetic power (NG, 349).

Theo fled from the shattered image of himself. He could see his bloated egoism. And he understood the difference between "the nice" and "the good" giving "a benediction to the title." Theo decides to return to the monastery and live the life of a renunciant, to give up the self and approach the world with understanding of love and forgiveness. Murdoch depended on Buddhism to find a solution to the endless challenges of human life. It may be noted that even Hinduism referred to "the action without fruit." The Gita beautifully extols this: If thou art not able to do even this, then, remaining attached to Me as thy shelter / Relinquish the fruits of all actions while continuing to strive for self-mastery (Ch. XII, Verse 11). If an individual, who is materialistically inclined and is unable to perform meditative actions just to please God, he should cling to the Lord with faith. A person must seek refuge in God's unconditional love, and perform all actions without concentrating on their fruits. Such
relinquishment means renouncing preconceived expectations and receiving the lord’s compassion and grace.

Finally Theo redeems himself as “He saw in dreams the saffron robes, the shaven heads, the green valley...” (NG,347). Theo felt cleansed, washed, baptized and “Tears suddenly began to stream down... perhaps he would die after all in that green valley” (NG,349). Murdoch allows her characters to falter, and patiently watches over them until they learn to overcome and then evolve. Inspite of the innumerous shortcomings Murdoch helps her characters to strive for the good, even if it is at times momentarily. Elizabeth Dipple aptly comments the distinction with reference to *The Nice and The Good*: “The nice are not the good, although our love of comfortable social relationships and sheer moral laziness tend to make us choose the easy way of equating the two” (Pg.9).

The Grays, that is Octavian and Kate represent the ‘Nice’ in *The Nice and The Good*. They “enjoyed the deep superiority of the socially secure” (NG,19). They were happily married and carried a kind of ‘careless magnanimity’ and they were earnest
almost “spontaneous in their efforts to cause happiness in others” (NG, 20). Kate’s capacity to live in the present keeps her relation with Octavian and her sentimental friendship with Ducane:

How wonderful everything is and
Octavian isn’t the least bit hurt about
John, I know he isn’t, not the least little bit, it doesn’t worry him at all.
Octavian is happy and I’m going to make John happy (NG, 122).

Kate believes that she can square everyone concerned with her magnanimity of love, she thinks:

How wonderful love is, the most wonderful thing in the whole world.
And how lucky I am to be able to love without muddle, without fear, in absolute freedom (NG, 122).

Kate suffers from no guilt, she is happy to be morally unconscious. “This parody suggests an extension of low Eros, by everyone ‘loving’ everyone else in no matter how covetous
promiscuous a fashion” (Conradi,150). The grays are temperamentally well-suited:

We were both breast-fed babies with happy childhoods. It does make a difference. I think being good is just a matter of temperament in the end. Yes, we shall all be so happy and good too. Oh, how utterly marvelous it is to be! (NG,122)

Kate inhabits a world of complete self-satisfaction. Even after the disasters that separate her and John Ducane at the end where she laments “all our house seems broken apart” to which Octavian replies “Darling, you’ll soon get other ones” (NG,340). Kate is quick to recover and rediscover “the rituals of love.” Kate and Octavian prepare to make love with their usual perfunctory and funny enquiry – “Ready, darling?” “Ready, sweetheart” (NG,341). In an imperfect world, the imperfect Kate is far better than her husband who deceives her. At least (She) Kate blurts out her true feelings to Octavian, while he ‘easily forgave himself’ of his adultery. By contrast the Trescombe women, Paula and Mary,
are certainly more moral. When Mary reveals her feelings for Willy to Ducane, he advises her:

You must try, try with all the forces you can summon. You’ve been too humble with him. It’s often an act of charity to treat someone as an equal and not as a superior! A women in love is a great spiritual force if only she wills properly (NG, 107-8).

Mary’s spiritual forces transforms Ducane “Her mode of being gave him a moral, even a metaphysical, confidence in the world, in the reality of goodness” (NG, 333). Ducane realized they were morally so much alike. “No love is entirely without worth, even when the frivolous calls to the frivolous and the base to the base. But 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” (NG, 333). Ducane looks at Mary with ‘absolute respect,’ he feels she is better than him and needs her as “she was the consoling counterpart of his self-abasement” (NG, 334). Murdoch has employed Plato’s image of the sun while explaining the concept
of the good. She affirms: “There is a magnetic centre (The Sun). But it is easier to look at the converging edges than to look at the centre itself. We do not and probably cannot know, conceptualise, what it is like in the centre” (SG,100).

The egocentric self is too preoccupied worshipping ‘false suns’ and fails to recognize the actual centre of worship. Ducane too is led to believe that Kate would provide the much needed dependence and harmless camaraderie. While the clinging Jessica suffocates him. She loved “him without reservation” (NG,83). Her over indulgent love became a ‘painful yoke’ for Ducane. He makes an effort to break away from the emotional muddle: “I mean we can’t co-exist and take each other for granted. We aren’t friends either. It doesn’t work, Jessica, it’s a bad situation” (NG,79). Although Ducane was physically attracted to Jessica, all along his conscience reminded him not to have love affairs, “as he now forced himself sternly to see, a clear case of seeing and approving the better and doing the worse” (NG,76). In *The Sovereignty of Good*, Murdoch posits that human excellence is not easily attainable simply because “the world is aimless, chancy, and huge, and we are blinded by self” (SG,100). Ducane
slips far too often. When he meets Judy McGrath, who had slipped into his bedroom for help, he is tempted momentarily:

Ducane’s fantasy fingers stroked her body with a feathery creative touch, the light light touch of passion which conjures forth, to the last caressed detail, a presence of flesh (NG, 251).

Quickly he recovers and observes his other self that had become completely cold. He thinks “I’ve fiddled and compromised with two women and been a failure with one and a catastrophe to the other” (NG, 251). Ducane condemns himself:

I am the cause that evil is in a man like McGrath. I cannot pity the wretched or bring hope or comfort to the damned. I cannot feel compassion for those over whom I imagine myself to be set as a judge... just because of my own conception of myself as spotless: my quaint idea of myself as good, which seems to go on being

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Ducane introspects and visualizes his own two selves, one as nice and the other as not so good. He has control over others' lives but finds it difficult to tame the self. This is because Murdoch explains that “we are largely mechanical creatures, the slaves of relentlessly strong selfish forces... At best, as decent persons, we are usually very specialized. We behave well in areas where this can be done fairly easily and let other areas of possible virtue remain undeveloped” (SG,99).

Thus Murdoch insists on self improvement in order to understand the core of inner goodness. In *The Nice and The Good*, Murdoch has employed the traditional method of narration, particularly, the omniscient third-person method of narration, where the author stands above the characters knowing what each of them thinks and feels, and “the story is a narrative of events arranged in time sequence” (Foster,39). Here, Murdoch has handled the technical devices more skillfully, compared to her earlier works. She moves cautiously from scene to scene,
character to character linking incidents and presenting it from other viewpoints. Also significant are references to works of art, which provides the basis of Murdoch’s artistic and narrative skills. In *The Nice and The Good*, a painting of Bronzino’s Allegory is shown in the National Gallery in London “Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time.” Venus and Cupid are shown in the painting as kissing:

A slim elongated naked Venus turns languidly towards a slim elongated naked cupid. Cupid stoops against her, his long-fingered left hand supporting her head, his long-fingered right hand curled about her left breast. His lips have just come to rest very lightly upon hers, or perhaps just beside hers. It is the long still moment of dreamy suspended passion...

(NG,141)

The painting is suggestive of a reconciliation of Paula and Biranne. It was a ‘symbol of their courtship’ and a symbol ‘of
undreamt delights’ (NG,141). The painting is also suggestive of permanence and transience of human behaviour and emotions. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, most of her novels since 1968 abound in references and allusions to Shakespearean plots and themes. Richard Todd observes some of these novels as a reflection of Murdoch’s continuing interest in Shakespeare (Pg.22). *The Nice and The Good* is a kind of “lyrical meditation as in late romances such as *The Tempest, A Winter’s Tale*, on the miraculous themes of love, forgiveness and reconciliation” (Conradi,143). Murdoch’s fiction also depicts the presence of a power figure. These power figures not only enchant but also oppress those who are weak-willed. Such as Ducan’s oppression to Jessica in *The Nice and The Good*. One is also reminded of Prospero in *The Tempest*. Todd considers *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *Measure for Measure* more influential in this particular aspect of power and enchantment and explores the resemblances with *The Nice and The Good* and *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. Julius King is Murdoch’s Oberon figure, who remains set aside from the rest of the cast, likewise Julius king remains uninvolved. The Duke in Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* is a power figure and exercises power over other
characters. John Ducane in *The Nice and The Good* is Murdoch’s power figure, who is entrusted with the task of conducting an enquiry into the death of Redeechy, with the object of avoiding a Whitehall scandal. However, Ducane works with a moral design and gives up power. In *The Sovereignty of Good* Murdoch explains “how difficult it is to be objective.” Then she goes on to explain: “Art transcends selfish and obsessive limitataions of personality and can enlarge the sensibility of its consumer. It is a kind of goodness by proxy” (SG,87).

Ducane’s realistic image is filled with compassion. Thus Ducane feels both Pity and Justice and decides not to punish Biranne. When introspection begins, self realization follows this can be true of both Ducane and Uncle Theo. The novel ends with reconciliation, marriage and a flying saucer spotted by the enlightened twins. Within the complexities Murdoch has managed to engage ‘the serenities of it’s basic balance.’ As compared to her earlier novels, *The Nice and The good*, launches Murdoch into a mode of matured and serious examination of the Buddhist discipline which she turns in novel after novel. Hilary Burde of *A Word Child* is another Murdochian novel depicting a man who is an ego maniac and unable to understand the
simplicity of truth. Hilary chooses ‘mediocrity and retardation’ instead of introspection.

The structure of the novel is controlled by the powerful will of the first person male narrator, Hilary Burde. His relentless account of the days drives the narrative to its near fatal conclusion. Murdoch has almost mastered the art of first person narration and as in *The Black Prince* or even in *The Sea The Sea* – all her ideas and perceptions have been splendidly woven to the characters who portray them convincingly. Murdoch chooses to absent herself from the immediate urgency and sensibility of the novels. Infact, Murdoch’s device focuses on enlarging the reader’s ability to comprehend a challenging character such as Hilary Burde, “the word child spinning out his tale according to the tightly controlled laws of his falsely disciplined being” (Dipple, 212). Just as Bradley in *The Black Prince* or Charles Arrowby in *The Sea, The Sea*, Hilary Burde comes across as a negative character to some of her readers if not all. Unlike Bradley and Charles who recover from the ego voyage, Hilary remains farthest to the sun. Yet Murdoch takes the risk and allows her protagonist to play his part. Although Hilary comes across as dislikeable and grim, he has an attractive romantic aura
which draws some readers and the female characters of the novel dangerously close to loving him excessively. Barbara Steves Heusel points out at the influence of Ludwig Wittgenstein particularly in *A Word Child, The Sea, The Sea, Nuns and Soldiers* and goes on to comment “readers sometimes fail to notice the need for equating the necessary with Murdoch’s patterns and the contingent with the characters reactions; their language games reveal how they control their behaviour within Murdoch’s larger patterns of cyclical fate. They evoke order as a defense against the fear of chaos” (Pg.43).

Most of the characters are temporarily content with a myopic perspective of life which later leads to absurd consequences. *A Word Child* may be looked at as Murdoch’s “explicit analysis of the ways human beings use language for purposes other than communication” (Heusel,45). Hilary designs his life on a rational plane of learning languages, inorder to curb the continuous instinct of violence, which he perpetually feels. He learns languages in an attempt to avoid a nagging desire for suicide. Thus he uses language not only to survive, but to distance himself away from others. One of his colleagues
comments rightly that Hilary is like a dog who has learned a trick in order to seek some kind of appreciation from people. A student of language is enchanted by his grammar until disaster and chaos become a recurring cycle of his life. He became a word child when Mr. Osmand, his teacher-mentor, tutored and bestowed on him, his own pattern and knowledge of the language 'order to give the potentially delinquent adolescent some stability.' Hilary looks up to his teacher with reverence and gratitude: "I learnt from Mr. Osmand how to write the best language in the world accurately and clearly and, ultimately with a hard careful elegance" (WC,21). This new experience of learning languages was like a 'miracle' to Hilary as it reduced his pain: "I discovered words and words were my salvation. I was not, except in some very broken-down sense of that ambiguous term, a love child. I was a word child" (WC,21). So Hilary's new dimension to life, is 'In the beginning was the word, and the word was made flesh.' The words created order to his otherwise disorderly life: "My days gave me identity, a sort of ecto-skeleton" (WC,28). He explains how language taught him to cope with existence: "I relied upon routine, had been so perhaps ever since I realized that..."
grammatical rules were to be my salvation; and since I despaired of salvation, even more so” (WC,27).

For Hilary all that mattered was pure survival on day to day basis. He cared little for Art or Religion. He learnt language not because he wanted to be a writer but nevertheless, he ruminates: “I loved words, but I was not a word-user, rather a word-watcher, in the way that some people are bird-watchers” (WCP,28). Hilary refused to participate in the dance of life as life like History was a ‘slaughterhouse.’ Hilary wanted to survive not for his own sake but for the sake of his sister Crystal:

I loved Crystal at once in a sort of prophetic way, as if I were God and already knew all about her. Or as if she were God. Or as if I knew that she was my only hope (WC,18).

His otherwise dark conception of life, himself and humanity at large compels him to look for a practical pattern that consoles him. Other than his sister Crystal it was Mr. Osmand who cared for Hilary and introduces him to the ‘game of words.’ But Hilary
refuses to use language to enhance himself "I early saw that the nature of words and their relationship to reality made metaphysical systems impossible" (WC,28). Hilary was stuck in the anguish, anger and pain of a terrible childhood. He never knew who his father was and his mother was a ‘tart.’ His mother died when he was seven and although he doesn’t remember much yet: “It is a memory of a state of being loved, a sense certainly of some lost brightness, an era of light before the darkness started” (WC,17). That moment defined Hilary’s chaotic existence. Aunt Bill, his mother’s sister cared for them. But soon Hilary was separated from his little sister Crystal and sent to an orphanage. Unloved and orphaned Hilary realized he was scarred and maimed for life:

I was brimming with anger and hatred. I hated, not society, puny sociologists’ abstraction, I hated the universe. I wanted to cause it pain in return for the pain it caused me. I hated it on my behalf, on Crystal’s, on my mother’s. I hated the men who had exploited my mother and ill-
treated her and despised her. I had a
cosmic furious permanent sense of
myself as victimized. It is particularly
hard to overcome resentment caused
by injustice. And I was so lonely
(WC,19).

The raw wounds of childhood trauma leaves an adult Hilary
stubbornly sic(k). In his quest for survival Hilary takes up study
of languages and excels in it too. However, learning languages
turned into an obsession only to give some concrete blame to his
shaky life. He tried to flaunt his status among his peers, but
remained blind to the needs of others who were trying to
frantically communicate to him. At the Impiatts' dinner party, his
only hope of recognition was his ability to memorise language.
Hilary unwittingly reveals the psychological motivation behind
his obsession:

Nothing humbles human pride more
than inability to understand a
language. It's a perfect image of
spiritual limitation. The cleverest man
looks a fool if he can't speak a language properly (WC,98).

The bitter memory of his childhood left no space for Hilary to build cordial relationship with anyone other than his sister. He was just unprepared to converse in the languages he knew – foreign or interpersonal languages. Laura Impiatt sums up his problem thus: “Hilary, you don’t value yourself enough. There’s so much of you and you make so little of it. It’s as if you’d lost all your courage, just absolutely lost all your nerve” (WC,131). Hilary was completely shattered and fragmented from within. The language game he usually indulges in are a kind of defence mechanism which include inflating his self worth, rejecting proximity, humiliating others, speaking in coarse tones and even lying.

Thus Hilary employs language as a means to get away, and to reduce everyone except Anne and Kitty, the two women he romanticizes. The following dialogues would highlight how Hilary remains tangled in the net of grammar. He does this time and again to protect himself and this way he builds a wall
between himself and the Impiatts. Demonstrating the language games, he speaks to Laura and then to the reader:

I've been admiring your luscious stockings, I can't take my eyes off your ankles. I talked this sort of vulgar nonsense to Laura. I always acted the goat with the Impiatts, they seemed to expect it. Sometimes there was not a pin to choose, between me and Reggie Farbottom, the office comic (WC,7).

Hilary also builds a wall with his language and routines, which are obvious to his friends. Freddie observes how Hilary imposes strict rules of grammar on his relationships, almost treating others as objects and comments: “He likes to live in other people’s worlds and have none of his own” (WC,8). His friendly acquaintances recognize the incongruity of Hilary’s knowledge of so many languages but never using it “He never leaves the perimeter of the royal parks” (WC,10).
There are people who try to understand him like the schoolmaster Mr. Osmand, his sister Crystal, his dotting girl friend Tommy, even the Impiatts who generously spend time with him. 'Stichomythic dialogues' at a dinner party displays Laura's interest in Hilary's psychological condition, but Freddie her husband recognizes the social danger inherent in Hilary's language games:

“What language are you going to learn next, Hilary?”

“Sanskrit. I’ve met a wonderful Indian girl who’ll teach me.”

“I’m jealous! I can’t think of why you would want to learn a dead language.”

“He knows all the living ones”, said Freddie.

“No, I don’t. I don’t know Chinese or Japanese or any Indian or African or Polynesian language. My Turkish is shadowy. My Finnish is poor—”

“Hilary loves showing off”. 
“I always thought the Tower of Babel such a sinister myth,” said Freddie...

“What about Esperanto?” said Laura.

“Hilary, do you know Esperanto?”

“Of course.”

“Do you think it-?”

“I can’t think how the words of all those languages don’t get all mixed up in your head”, said Laura. “They would in mine.”

“Word Pie” (WC,97 - 98).

Murdoch here makes Hilary reveal that his mind does not process all these languages for communication and most of the times the words of the languages are like a useless jumble and are fully disconnected from the actual purpose. Laura is able to analyse Hilary’s language games when she replies: “I chatter artlessly in your presence you do nothing artlessly. You use words as a hiding place. You’re always hiding. But what from?” (WC,51).Then there is Clifford Larr who sharply criticizes Hilary’s linguistic behaviour. When the two argue about whether
Arthur Fisch is a worthy husband for Crystal, Larr ends the conversation with:

You are the sort of lower class product who never grow the little prize boy who was top in the exam. Always envious, always anxious. You exist by excelling, by knowing just that little more than the others and understand nothing (WC,79).

There are times when he intimidates his acquaintances by his illusions of grandeur and neurotism. *A Word Child* can be read as Murdoch’s critique of the ‘Mechanistic mould of the unconscious.’ The novelist examines a Freundian pattern of obsessions by the protagonist. Murdoch also explores the root cause of such behaviour in the unconscious mind. In such a situation, the characters are usually trapped in a mysterious source of energy, wherein they are either saved or suffocated. Hilary is typical of Murdoch’s male enchanters and he appropriately uses language to repress the painful emotions from his childhood. When Hilary goes through emotional highs and
the ingredients of chance? Was it
cynicism to hope this?... or was I
perhaps actually wiser?... certainly I
could better measure now, what had
been invisible to me then except as a
provocation to rage, the amount of
sheer accident which these things,
perhaps all things, contained
(WC,382).

This inner questioning is a major breakthrough for Hilary as
slowly he takes responsibility for his actions. Yet, at times he
wants to unburden himself and let some God be answerable for
all the mess: “There is a religious teaching which says that God is
the author of all actions” (WC,382). Hilary has had moments of
insight yet he has not really traveled past the fire into the sun, the
journey is long and Hilary is found limping.

Coming to the major plot of the novel it is patterned by
Hilary falling in love, losing the love object to death, being lost in
utter desperation and trying to recover or establish some order in
his life. Hilary is almost unable to break free from disasters. He is not able to accept that the disasters which are caused, were due to his excessive egoism. The novel begins with Hilary expounding on what he calls the 'amount of sheer accident' in everyday life. He goes on to tell his readers that he had had "a kind of platonic remembrance" of the first seven years of his life as "a state of being loved" by a mother, and that when she died, "a sense certainly of some lost brightness, as era of light" disappeared (WC,17). He weaves a dream world of a perfect love, being nurtured and cared for, a sort of security all of humankind craves for. And in this dream world he constructs for his sister Crystal at the end of the novel:

And I would live with her in a cottage
and she should have her garden and
her animals and all her little heart's desires, and I would simulate with her
a kind of peace, perhaps even a kind of joy, into which some of the reality of these things might merge at last.
We two alone shall sing like birds in the cage (WC,383).
Such moments give a glimpse of Hilary's tender feelings – a much gentle Hilary with ordinary dreams, a man who wants to give rather than one who covets that which belongs to another. The sudden death of his mother and a world with his cruel aunt distorts his view of reality: "I detested Aunt Bill forever with a hatred which can still make me tremble" (WC,17). Murdoch in a fascinating manner achieves an equally strong response in words and elicits a similar response from the readers as well. Hilary felt unwanted and unloved and when he was sent to an orphanage, he found an outlet for his frustration: "I liked hitting people, I liked breaking things. Once I tried to set fire to the orphanage. I was in a juvenile court before I was twelve" (WC,20). Hilary is never really able to overcome the anger and resentment he feels towards people. To escape from such intense pain he does two things one he depends on his sister for motherly love and two escapes into sleep:

A talent for oblivion is a talent for survival. I laid my head down and merciful pain-killing sleep covered me fathoms deep. Not to have been
Emptiness engulfs his being and he would have long destroyed himself but “I could not consider suicide because of Crystal, but I wanted to have my death always beside me” (WC,27). Perhaps it is this brotherly love that he felt so deeply for Crystal that saved him from complete self-destruction as he tells the readers that when he was not in Crystal’s presence he was “brimming with anger”:

I had a cosmic furious permanent sense of myself as victimized. It is particularly hard to overcome resentment caused by injustice. And I am so lonely. The bottomless bitter misery of childhood: how little even now it is understood. Probably no adult misery can compare with a child’s despair (WC,19).
Hilary blamed the universe for all his misery. He acts out the terror of being alive in terrorizing others especially his girlfriend Tommy. As a young scholar at Oxford, Hilary experiences in some strange way a state of being loved, or desired, or wanted. Falling in love with Anne his mentor, Gunnar Jopling’s wife brings joy to his otherwise routine life:

The habit of relentless activity is hard to break. Yes, I was ready to fall in love... I fell in love with Anne, in spite of there being every reason why I ought not to, because those shining clever gentle eyes somehow, and from the very first moment, looked right into my soul and I felt myself known for the first time in my life (WC,116).

Anne’s presence had a soothing effect on Hilary, he felt he belonged to the other “Her presence made me rest, every muscle, every atom, became quiet and relaxed. I lived, I saw, I was”
A triumphant feeling of having conquered that which was next to impossible, Hilary was swaying in love. "The discovery that one is in love is automatically delightful..." At first he finds this loving business, an affair for his own sake i.e. he respected Anne and knew that she was happily married, she was not in love with him and Hilary did not want to seduce her. Although he tried to enjoy his love for her privately he could not for long hide his feelings for her: "I love you, Anne. I worship you. I think about you all the time. I've never loved anyone else. I love you to insanity, to death, I can't help it"

Anne eventually succumbs to his demanding love:

Pity changed imperceptibly into enslaving fascination. She felt the grains of violence in me and yearned over them. I talked about my past... She saw me, she attended to me more than anyone had ever done... it was like being seen by God. She bathed my hurt soul in a reviving dew.
Insane in love, Hilary could not think rationally and the result was his bizarre decision to elope against Anne’s wishes. Hilary could not think of a life without Anne and wanted to possess her wholly. In such an act of fury and love the car he drove meets with an accident and Anne is killed. Hilary realized his folly but it was far too late to mend anything. He knew also that his ‘terrible love’ had destroyed Anne and Gunnar her husband. He could have asked for forgiveness instead he chose to bury the guilt:

I had lost my moral self-respect and with it my ability to control my life.
Sin and despair are mixed and only repentance can change sin into pure pain. I could not clean the resentment out of my misery (WC,126).

He lacked the will and the courage to face Gunnar, thus allowing guilt to flourish. Hilary resigned from his fellowship course. Gunnar cleverly patched up the accident, resigned and went into politics and became a successful and famous person. On the other hand Hilary lived with the guilt, he was unable to apologize to
Gunnar and lived a quite ordinary insignificant life. Then suddenly, almost twenty one years after Anne’s death, Hilary meets Kitty, Gunnar’s second wife, who asks for his help to ease Gunnar’s pent-up rage. But instead of gaining insight from his previous foolishness he falls once again in love with Gunnar’s second wife Kitty. Thus, he enacts exactly what he ought not to. When Kitty asks him to give her a child, Hilary admits that, having killed Anne’s unborn child, he owes Gunnar a child. For the first time Hilary tries to rationalize the whole thing with Kitty: “Oh I know. I’m the dedicated one, the anointed one, the sacrificial victim if you like it. But I doubt if these high conceptions would impress Gunnar if he were to find out” (WC,347). Having been bitten once, Hilary, now understands the catastrophic situation of such bizarre demands:

But it does look as if, my dear dear love, you will have to choose, we will have to choose, between, well, everything for a short time and very little for a long time, whether to live dully or die gloriously. Not that I admit that either plan is feasible, I
don’t know what I want – Oh Christ,
oh my dear, how mad, what madness encompasses us! How long would you let me make love to you if you didn’t become so? Seven times? Seventy times seven? (WC,348).

How much more of sinning? And how much more of guilt? And could there be forgiveness seventy times seven? Hilary uses the Biblical connotation of trying to forgive seventy times seven. If Gunnar learns of their deceit would he be able to forgive them, especially Hilary? It is a clear muddle and Hilary desperately in love with Kitty attempts to play safe. He also decides to sever the relation for their sake, for Gunnar’s sake:

Kitty, we can’t continue this any more, you know it and I know it. You can’t belong to me. This seems, perhaps it is, a great thing between us, it’s certainly a great thing for me, but all human emotions are full of illusion
and the years and the time we would need for trying this, for making it real, don’t exist. We are in a false place and our love is all shot up with falsity... The world is full of causes, otherwise they wouldn’t be able to send rockets to Jupiter. But from here another step and we are destroyed. We mustn’t let irresistible forces make us destroy and be destroyed; we must resist the irresistible and we can (WC,369).

The last line states a very positive tone. Hilary is in complete command of the situation. In the midst of the great Eros, he is able to exercise self control, which he could not even think of in his affair with Anne. He is clear that he doesn’t want to deceive Gunnar again he tells Kitty:

If I’ve helped him, and if this is a service to you, I’m glad and joyful and this is a kind of blessing I never
thought I'd have in my life anymore. I must be content with that. And I've held you and kissed you and that is a gift from the universe which will bless and gladden me forever... I've got to go, Kitty, absolutely and forever, and I've got to go now (WC,370).

Hilary's minimal transformation is the love he received from Kitty now and Anne earlier. Both these women loved him with his past and his absurdities. They risked their own lives and paid for it in tragic death. For a man like Hilary the love he received from the two women took him to heights of pure joy which he had never known. This miracle of love which he experienced brings sanity to his otherwise distorted mind and is willing to let go off the love of his life.

Ironically, Gunnar enters the scene of Hilary-Kitty last meeting, in which Hilary had resolved to end their relationship. A fight ensues between a raging Gunnar and a shocked Hilary and
subsequently Kitty falls off the jetty and dies of exposure. Life once again comes a full circle for Hilary. Thus he compulsively entered on a course of action identical to his previous love affair which proved destructive. Hilary is obsessed with the self and the narrow possessiveness of his love, brings about devastation in his life.

The central portion of the novel highlights on the idea of reconciliation. Somewhere along the lines Murdoch is concerned as to bring the protagonist to reconcile and thereby seek redemption. Hilary could not envisage a reconciliation with Gunnar, it was sheer torture: It was almost impossible, and “to realize that it could be, and yet might never be. This was a new suffering which the damned had not imagined, as if Christ should open a window into hell, look through, and then close it again” (WC,173). Guilt brings fear and fear takes one farther from repentance:

What a stupid coagulated mess of indistinguishable guilt and misery I had become. How perfectly futile all my sufferings had been. If only I
could separate out that awful mixture
of sin and pain, if I could only even
for a short time, even for a moment,
suffer purely without the burden of
self-degradation to which I had
deliberately condemned, myself, there
might be a place for miracle
(WC,201).

Hilary hoped against all odd for a change for a miracle. His sister
Crystal appeals to him to forgive and to be forgiven. Even Arthur
tries to make Hilary see sense in asking him to keep away from
Kitty and focus on forgiving Gunnar: “you could help yourself...
but it can only be done by holding onto the good thing, and
believing in it and holding on…” (WC,290). Again Arthur
chastised Hilary for messing around with Kitty “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). Sin then is not just wrongful action but the inability to
accept and repent, this is Hilary’s dilemma.
The protagonist and his relation with Crystal, his sister, is equally significant. In the early chapters of the novel, Hilary points out that Crystal is equal to God; he lived "for the hope of Crystal as men live for the hope of God" (WC,19). His attachment to Crystal was such that it would be accurate to say "I was simply her" (WC,60). He needed Crystal to help him bear the dreadful moments of life. Crystal just had to be available, he always wanted her in a way:

in a place fixed and controlled by me. I had to know, at any moment, where she was. I needed her sequestered innocence, as a man might want his better self to be stored away separately in a pure deity.

Did I want her to remain a virgin? Yes (WC,60).

Hilary confesses that his need for Crystal has nothing to do with physical attraction. Dependence on her was his desire to transform himself, to free himself from obsessions. Another interesting relationship is that between Hilary and Tommy. Tommy was another major phenomenon of his life like Crystal,
although his attraction to Tommy appeared just physical. Most of the times Hilary was blunt and treated Tommy with indifference. Tommy, on the other hand loved him more than he deserved to be loved. He could never develop a language of tenderness for Tommy, he dominated her. Tommy loved him completely:

Hilary, let’s get married why not opt for happiness? I could make you happy. And you haven’t been. I don’t know why, but you haven’t perhaps ever, been happy. Let me love you and look after you forever. Let’s have a home, a real place, I could make it so nice. I want to give my whole life to making you happy (WC,158 - 59).

Although Hilary refuses to commit himself to marriage with Tommy, her persistence and patience does pay off in the end of the novel, where Tommy insists on marrying Hilary, who unredeemed, yet a little wiser is willing to move forward to an ambiguous future.
Another important focus of the novel is its comparison with J M Barrie’s *Peter Pan*, a work that has fascinated Murdoch deeply. The comparison between these two works is dealt in detail by Dipple in *Work for the Spirit*. A staging of *Peter Pan* has been planned as the Christmas Pantomine at the office where Hilary works. There is a lot of excitement regarding the casting and the symbolic meaning of the play. A reference to *Peter Pan* is shown in many of Murdoch’s novels. Even characters are shown to take keen interest in *Peter Pan*. Murdoch, says Dipple “refers to Peter Pan to indicate minor magic and sinister childishness, but in *A Word Child* its centrality enlarges the referential frame” (Pg. 216). The play is made into a spiritual allegory. Gunnar claims that the play is “about parents and being unwilling to grow up, but what made it sinister was that the childishness had been invested with spirituality... The fragmentation of spirit is the problem of our age” (WC,227). Arthur is another commentator who argues against Hilary’s inclination to make the play. While Hilary considers Peter Pan as ‘reality breaking in,’ Arthur then points out that he is actually “spirit gone wrong, just turning up as an unnerving visitor who can’t really help and can’t get in either... the spiritual urge is mad
unless it's embodied in some ordinary way of life. It's destructive, it's just a crazy spirit" (WC,87-8). Hilary's interpretation of the fey boy as that of reality, is opposed to Arthur's point of view of him as crazy and destructive. This also highlights on the interesting clue to Hilary's views of many things being himself a 'bad boy' right from the beginning, Hilary suffers from bouts of violence, loneliness and feels excluded from ordinary society. His energy like that of Peter Pan's grows into a misplaced spirituality which remains destructive because it cannot be embodied into ordinary life.

Another connection of Peter Pan can be seen by Crystal's possible role as Wendy who plays the mother like figure to the various lost and abandoned boys of this tale. Although far too ordinary she comes across as wonderful and magical to the four men, each of whom defines her nature according to his needs. For Hilary, she is a part of him, owed by love to him; for the embittered Clifford Larr she is the perfect image of the virgin, for Gunnar she is a simple, generous, loving woman who filled in the vacuum when Anne died, while for Arthur she is the symbol of family life. Towards the final pages of the novel the reader gets to
see a more calmed Hilary musing over death, life and his own foolishness but most importantly of forgiving:

I was older, I lacked the recklessness of youth and its generosity. When I was in the cold Thames I soon forgot about Kitty. The deepest me knew of no one else was desperate to survive. The middle-aged are more careful of themselves. Would such a desperation, or such a mean carefulness, now at last and in this more awful need, guard me from the self-destruction to which I had earlier doomed myself?...Certainly I could better measure now, what had been invisible to me then except as a provocation to rage, the amount of sheer accident which these things, perhaps all things, contained. Then I had raged at the accidental but had
not let it in any way save me from my insistence upon being the author of everything. Now I saw my authorship more modestly and could perhaps move in time towards forgiving myself, forgiving them all (WC,382).

This rumination, is important as it takes place in St Stephen’s Church in Gloucester Road, the Church where T.S Eliot had served for many years as a church-warden. Hilary journey’s into contemplation of all the deaths, including that of Mr. Osmand, his teacher who loved him deeply, this and the memory of Eliot’s greatest achievement, ‘the words and ideology of Four Quarters.’

The last section of *A Word Child* concludes with a meditation to reflect on the substance of the novel and Hilary’s progress or attempt towards self-realization:

> There was also, I saw, a memorial tablet which asked me to pray for the repose of the soul of Thomas Streams Eliot. How is it with you, old friend, the intolerable wrestle with
words...But I could feel a lively gratitude for words, even for words whose sense I could scarcely understand. If all time is eternally present all time is unredeemable...

(WC,383 - 84).

Elizabeth Dipple writes in *The Work for the Spirit* "In this novel where every work of art mentioned is weighed against the context of action, this passage takes on particular relevance: a giant step has been taken from Hassan and Peter Pan to the adult and profound recognitions of temporarily in the Four Quarters and Hilary for the first time is capable of seeing words as the vehicle of profound meaning, meaning that bears directly on his own misperceptions and now painfully increased knowledge" (Pg. 223). Crystal’s decision to marry Arthur came like a bombshell to Hilary. He lost her to his ‘heroism’: “so now I would never live with Crystal, we two would never sing like birds in a cage. Arthur, not I, would look after her and love her and fulfill all her little heart’s desires” (WC,387). Although sad, Hilary accepts the change, he learns to be a spectator to the events of his life rather
than a participant, no wonder then he allows Tommy to take over.

It was Christmas time, the mood for celebration, a new beginning. The bells of St. Mary Abbots were ringing Christmas in with wild cascades of joy. Other churches nearby had taken up the chime. The Christ child, at any rate, had managed to get himself born:

‘Happy Christmas, Tommy.’

‘I’m going to marry you, Hilary.’

‘Are you, Thomas?’

‘Yes, I’m going to marry you.’

‘Are you, Thomassina?’ (WC,391).

Hilary a little puzzled and amused is ready for a new life, a new beginning. His journey towards self-realization is hardly near but then as the saying ‘Every saint has a past and every Sinner a future.’ Hilary has left his past behind and is ready for a new beginning, perhaps his journey towards self-introspection.
REFERENCES

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