CHAPTER 3

FROM IGNORANCE TO KNOWLEDGE:

THE PROTAGONISTS JOURNEY TOWARDS SELF-REALIZATION.

Murdoch’s works are full of powerful paradoxes, such that it was extremely puzzling to her readers. As a meticulous writer Murdoch was aware of two negative ideas that were concurrent during her period — ‘fading cultural idea’ and ‘demonic misuse of them.’ Many of Murdoch’s early novels reflect upon a phase where ideas lost their power because the very ethos of culture went awry. So if Murdoch displayed the grotesque in her earlier novels, she mellowed down to reflect upon the positive moral ideal which must also rejoice. With a sense of responsibility towards her readers she created ‘soul-compelling human artifacts’ and a ‘radiant paraphernalia’ of life and art. Her works were a visual treat, as she brilliantly switched from detailed perception of the natural world to the inner-most idiosyncracies of her characters. Her protagonists lived intensely in a world too
puzzling or even nonsensical. Many of her characters were 
deeply occupied with a world within themselves.

One of the most significant aspects of Murdoch's works is 
her technical craftsmanship. She elaborately worked on her plot 
and character, the two main features of fiction. The result was 
 Novels with great eloquence, a subtle use of myth, impressive 
imagery and characters that fitted into the events of the novel. 
Another technically skilled feature of her style as a novelist was 
to baffle her readers, with the unpredictable, uncontrollable 
nature of actual people in an actual situation. However, Murdoch 
not only controls her characters, when needed she also imposes a 
control on her readers by throwing them off-balance, bereft of 
expectation and open to the shock of a larger and probably more 
ironic or appalling idea of the world than he had bargained for. 
Thus her fictional world of characters belonged to the archetypal 
sophisticated bourgeois class, and very often she added to her 
large canvas unusual characters, some of them ridiculously 
eccentric: Mitzi Ricardo, the destroyed athlete in An Accidental 
Man; then in A Word Child; there was the mysterious Indian girl 
Biscuit, to name only a few.
Murdoch worked out her plots and characters with 'permutations and combinations' combining mystery and reality, magic and logic, imagination and knowledge. Her characters are deceiving husbands, Peter Pan boy, honourable soldier, witch, secret homosexuals, priests, Nuns, outsiders, failed artists, writers and others. Murdoch’s versatility echoed with stimulating originality. One of the most outstanding qualities of Murdoch as a writer was her ability to allow her characters to be preoccupied with themselves. Nowhere does she judge or condemn her characters; rather she presents their flaws almost sympathetically.

Also an equally worth mentioning issue of a Murdoch novel is the presence of a male first person narrator. In many of her interviews Murdoch had stated that she dealt with women’s psyches as often as men’s especially in her third-person narrations. She concluded by revealing that there was hardly any barrier between men’s and women’s minds. Yet in her interviews she also maintained that her personal preference was the male psyche and often she looked at the world from a masculine perspective. And this could be noted as Murdoch’s riskiest style.
Yet Murdoch managed to create sympathy in her readers for her deeply flawed characters. Moreover, Murdoch's characters who were on a journey towards truth or moral victory perceived that they had certain materials to work with; such materials that would eventually forward the aims they projected. For example in *The Nice and The Good* the aim of the novelist was to show how one can be a just judge. In *Bruno's Dream* the novel is about the ability to let go or learn to die. *The Black Prince* is about creating great art. Thus Murdoch's fiction dealt with methods devised by various kinds of consciousness in order to traverse that extra distance. The novels describe how the human mind gathered useful tools to travel through but later receded as the distance demanded 'redefinition.' For example in *Henry and Cato*, Cato had to begin his journey with a different set of tools than he had earlier. Similarly in *Nuns and Soldiers*, Anne had to change her perception of the journey as well as the destination. In *The Sea, The Sea* Charles had to learn to tame the 'sound and fury' of his restless mind before he set out in search of tranquility. On the other hand Murdoch's characters of Good refused to define the end; and insisted on concentrating on the route itself, through humble perseverance. In *The Fire and The
Sun, Murdoch summed up the limited human state by identifying the humankind with two wistful, comic, allegorical figures in Shakespeare’s *Henry IV*, Part II: “However much we idolize each other, we are limited specialized animals. ...We are creatures of a day, nothing much. We do not understand ourselves, we lack reality...We are cast in the roles of Shallow and Silence, and must not, in favour or art of philosophy, protests too much” (Dipple,97). These lines point to the fact that Murdoch agreed with Shakespeare that each human being was unique and functioned ‘like a figure in a work of art.’ Very often man forgot that he was mortal and all plans and dreams must be kept small.

Thus Murdoch patiently rested her eyes carefully on every character and ardently designed their moods and destinies. In an invigoratingly and scrupulous manner she combined duty and joy in order to create powerful fiction. It was rather challenging for a novelist like Murdoch to focus attention on patience and love especially when the main underlying ideas of the society then, was loss of proper religious concepts. Yet Murdoch depicted the dualities brilliantly.
Novels like, *Henry and Cato, Nuns and Soldiers, The Black Prince* too, dealt with the theme of growth and transformation, in the life of the protagonist. The writer wrote with extraordinary energy and power. The characters in all their frailties, awfulness and incompleteness appeared real to the readers. *The Black Prince* was undoubtedly one of Murdoch’s extraordinary achievements. The novel was both funny and deeply distressing. The sheer energy and power of the novelist was in her ability to create characters with their weaknesses, incorrigible sadness, lies and deceit an ordinary world in all its incompleteness. Murdoch had borrowed her plot for *The Black Prince* from two major sources; Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and Dostoevsky’s *Underground Man.*

In *The Black Prince*, Bradley Pearson is the artist-narrator. He was a participant in the act of his own creation; he was also a part of what could be called as the plot of the novel. The book’s ‘meanings’ were digested into it’s actual substance and later it flowed outward from that security. The novel was ‘a thriller, a black book about marriage, a dark book about authorized rivalry. It was also a reflective book about love.’ The story is in three
parts. Bradley Pearson's love affair with Julian Baffin, the daughter of his friend, enemy and fellow writer Arnold Baffin. The first part ended at the point where Bradley realized that he had fallen in love with Julian. The second part of the novel opened with his declaration of this love. The third part deals with elopement, and discovery of the lovers by Julian's father. From the device of the Editor's foreword, we come to know that Bradley Pearson had been persuaded to write the story of his unhappy love. The Editor noted: "Man's creative struggle, his search for wisdom and truth, is a love story... Every artist is an unhappy lover. And unhappy lovers want to tell their story" (BP,9).

For Bradley his artistic creation and his falling in love went hand in hand. The book was framed by a foreword and afterword by a fictitious editor P. Loxias, who was frequently addressed in the book as a 'dear dear friend.' The editor Loxias in the foreword claimed himself to be the 'alter ego' of Bradley Pearson. Murdoch had objected to 'the crystalline fiction of dry modernist symbol' and pointed out that art and aesthetics could not go hand in hand if they were not held together by some moral
component. In *The Fire and The Sun* Murdoch says: "...Beauty cannot be discussed by itself. There is in this sense no 'pure aesthetics' viewpoint...the relation of art to truth and goodness must be the fundamental concern" (FS,72). Pearson too in his foreword announces his book as a work of art:

All art deals with the absurd and aims at the simple. Good art speaks truth, indeed is truth, perhaps the only truth. I have endeavoured in what follows to be wisely artful and artfully wise, and to tell truth as I understood it, not only concerning the superficial and 'exciting' aspects of this drama, but also concerning what lies deeper (BP,11).

*The Black Prince* was Murdoch's fictional statement. She poured into fiction her best thoughts about art, its relationship to human behaviour and development. Also, Murdoch took the risk of placing the plot on the character of Bradley Pearson. She allowed him the freedom to journey from ignorance to knowledge.
The novel starts off from the point where Pearson had retired from his desk as the inspector of taxes in the tax office. His life had been uneventful, he was married to Christian, but they were divorced. He was solitary, suffered from insomnia and his book was the story of an intimate friendship. He had long been contemplating on writing a book but soon found his thoughts and ideas stale and gradually lost interest. He regretted not being a successful writer, but consoled himself that at least he was upright and didn’t have to please anyone “at the expense of truth” (BP,12). He was unsuccessful as a philosopher for “only stories and magic really endure” (BP,13). He felt an acute sense of despair at having lived a “life without self-expression” (BP,12). He mused about saints of art who had simply waited mutely all their lives rather than profane the purity of a single page with anything less... Yet he continued to wait “not always with patience”, but “with an increasing confidence” (BP,13). After having retired from the tax office, Bradley looked forward to devoting time to writing as he thought “inspiration would come with freedom” (BP,17). But Bradley realized the difficulties: “Noise, which had never distressed me before, began to do so. For the first time in my life I urgently wanted silence”
Bradley in the literal sense maintained a new routine of silence, but never seemed to have enough of it, so he decided to leave London and rent a cottage beside the sea. This was typical of Murdoch’s protagonists when at a specific point of their lives they chose to move away from the routine to seek clarification, to introspect, to be alone. Even *The Sea, The Sea* dealt with a similar theme where Charles Arrowby decided to live a life of introspection. Murdoch’s intention was to shift focus from the self, as she explained in *The Sovereignty of Good* “A great deal of art, perhaps most art, actually is self-consoling fantasy, and even great art cannot guarantee the quality of its consumer’s consciousness” (SG,85).

For Bradley too, forty years of ‘literary effort’ helped him produce only three short books. He pondered “writing is like getting married. One should never commit oneself until one is amazed at one’s luck” (BP,18). Murdoch’s view was that even the slightest “shallow experience” of great art could have its effect. In the sense, “It invigorates our best faculties and, to use Platonic language, inspires love in the highest part of the soul” (SG,85). The central theme of the novel was Bradley’s falling in
love with twenty year old Julian. This incident was also the turning point for the protagonist as well as the novel. Although Julian was no muse, yet he came to realize almost too late that: "The book had to come into being because of the book Julian had to be..." "...she somehow was and is the book, the story of herself. This is her deification and incidentally her immortality" (BP,389).

Bradley was confronted with reality at four different stages. He found himself muddled in his relationship with Priscilla (his sister) Rachel, Arnold and Julian. Bradley was forced to be involved in his relationship especially with his sister who had an unhappy marriage. Although her troubles were not too relevant, nonetheless her suicide later became crucial in leading to a crisis in his life. Bradley felt pity and remorse for his sister but it left him exasperated as Priscilla, his sister suffered from "uncontrolled remorse" and certain kind of sadness, which lacked proper judgement became unattractive. He tried to help Priscilla save her marriage only to discover later that Roger, Priscilla’s husband lived with his mistress Marigold. And though he wanted to tear them apart he could not even touch them “It
was as if their happiness had made them into saints. ...they were invulnerable in bliss” (BP,100). Bradley just could not be a part of Priscilla’s suffering; he found himself ‘incompatible’ with her anguish and pain as he mused “we care absolutely about that with which we can identify ourselves. A saint would identify himself with everything” (BP,109). Bradley accepted his own limitation to be helpful. Later, Bradley found himself in a strange relationship with Rachel (Arnold’s wife).

It is a strange fact that the barriers which guard the degrees of intimacy are immensely strong, and yet can be overthrown by a light touch. Only take someone’s hand in a certain way, even look into their eyes in a certain way, and the world is changed forever (BP,119).

Though Bradley never was attracted to Rachel he felt drawn and realized that some unexpected “consequences” awaited him. “There are no spare unrecorded encapsulated moments in which we can behave ‘anyhow’ and then expect to resume life where we
left off' (BP,125). Bradley was conscious of his every move "My lightest whim can affect the whole future" (BP,125). Inwardly Bradley knew that his proximity to Rachel was only perhaps to settle scores with Arnold, who seemed to be enjoying Bradley’s ex-wife Christian’s company. But then the ground for the events had already been set and although Bradley wanted so much to leave all the muddles behind, he realized that he long ceased to be his own master. He longed for “darkness,” “purity,” “solitude.”

Bradley’s relationship with Arnold was equally complicated. Arnold was Bradley’s ‘Protégé.’ Arnold who was younger than Bradley was just out of college and completing his first novel. Arnold was a schoolmaster but gave up his job and devoted himself to ‘Writing.’ Arnold was an instant hit and ‘pleased the public taste’: What followed was wealth and fame. Bradley envied Arnold for strange reasons. Although Arnold referred to Bradley as his ‘spiritual father’ there was a certain distance between the two. “We are a vain crew and can be irrevocably estranged by criticism” (BP,31). Arnold had easily settled into the popular mould and feared Bradley’s criticism of
Bradley, Murdoch’s own understanding was echoed. In The Sublime And The Beautiful Revisited, she had aptly pointed out the nature of the artist’s role, of the complex tensions involved in the artist’s duty to form and his moral obligation to include ‘reality with all its odd contingent’ ways. Murdoch realistically conceived a character having a moral function, which reminded the reader of what Murdoch called the ‘opacity of human beings.’

Yet another aspect of Bradley’s complex nature was revealed by Francis Marloe. Neurotic Francis charged Bradley and Arnold being in love with each other, thereby hinting at a homosexual relationship. Bradley refuted the charges as baseless. The warring friendship of love-hate relationship was at the centre of the novel as both opposed the other’s aesthetic theories. In his review of Arnold’s new book, Bradley was quick to criticize: “However, one must ask not just, is it amusing, is it exciting, but is it a work of art? And the answers to this question in this case, and I fear in the case of the rest of Mr. Baffin’s Oeuvre, is alas no” (BP, 146). Bradley sarcastically went on to comment that Arnold Baffin may be a prolific writer, but had no imagination and lacked the “formulations of density,” “the special state of
fusion, which is the unmistakable mark of art...” (BP,146).

Bradley felt a sense of satisfaction when Arnold was criticized by his daughter Julian who commented:

I do think my father should be told the truth for once, everyone has got into a sort of mindless habit of flattering him, he’s an accepted writer and a literary figure and all that, and no one really looks at the stuff critically as they would if he were unknown, it’s like a conspiracy (BP,137).

Julian compared her father with Bradley and she told him, how she enjoyed talking to him because he was ‘so precise’ and not like her father who she felt “lives in a sort of rosy haze with Jesus and Mary and Buddha and Shiva and the Fisher king all chasing round and round dressed up as people in Chelsea” (BP,137). Julian’s criticism of her father’s works acted as consolation to Bradley who had been waiting for some overwhelming experience which will activate his dormant writing
skills. Or, perhaps Bradley was waiting for the aesthetic and erotic to blend together; he did feel something of the sort in his brief intimate relation with Rachel: “Was this perhaps in an unexpected form the opening itself of my long awaited ‘break-through,” (BP, 142). Bradley was not sure of what held him but he agreed that it had some sort of an adventure. He felt “conscious of nothing except a flaming, sea of vague undirected physical desire” (BP, 142). Rachel’s ‘unexpected affections’ did not so much release his latent talent but fills him with an unknown anxiety. He would have to respond to Rachel’s challenges but then it occurred to him, “I was a bad artist because I was a coward” (BP, 144). And he thought “If some great change was pending in my life this could not but be part of my development as an artist, since my development as an artist was my development as a man” (BP, 144). For an artist-man to develop, he needed a shattering passion which he feels for Julian. He falls intensely in love with Julian and just two days of ‘being in love’ felt almost like eternity. He recounted his feelings:

I was simply a saint. I was so warmed
and vitalized by sheer gratitude that I
overflowed with charity. I felt so
privileged and glorified that 
resentment, even memory of any 
wrong done to me, seemed 
inconceivable. I wanted to go around 
touching people, blessing them, 
communicating my great happiness, 
the good news, the secret of how the 
whole universe was a place of joy and 
freedom filled and running over with 
selfless rapture (BP,244).

The reader was suddenly given a glimpse of a very different 
Bradley. A Bradley who was able to look outside. He found love 
and a reason to live even if it meant not having to see her. That 
she existed was all that mattered to him: he recalled “I could 
almost have forgotten her, as perhaps the mystic forgets God, 
when he becomes God” (BP,244). Suddenly, without any 
inhibitions the ‘dramatised narrator’ exposed himself and this 
later enabled him to change his perspective to both art and life.
From his experience Bradley theorized that art was linked to moral truth, because of 'inattention,' ('attention' according to Murdoch was equated with love – selfless love) the artist succumbed to mediocrity in his work and drifted away from truth. But he questioned, “Can there be a natural as it were Shakespearean felicity in the moral life? Or are Eastern sages right to set a dreaming ego?” (BP,190). Murdoch had used a sophisticated tool to make the protagonist articulate what art was by analysing Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in his discussion with Julian. He could not recollect the moment he fell in love with Julian. But he knew he felt drawn, there was a magnetic pull as if suddenly:

His God is a real God and not an *eidolon* of private fantasy, and because love has here invented language as if for the first time, he can change pain into poetry and Orgasms into pure thought (BP,200).

Something other than the usual had happened to Bradley, something extraordinary and the reader soon realized that Bradley was ill-equipped to experience such a glorious
phenomena. He was engulfed in what may be called 'absolute charm.' Now he was in no hurry. Time turned into eternity. The world for Bradley was Julian. She became his world of abundance. He touched her everywhere. His whole being radiated in the glow of being in love. He tried vaguely to remember the moment of his intense feelings, the discussions about Shakespeare and *Hamlet* where he had asserted:

> Hamlet is words, and so is Hamlet. He is as witty as Jesus Christ, but whereas Christ speaks Hamlet is speech. He is the tormented empty sinful consciousness of man seared by the bright light of art, the God's flayed victim dancing the dance of creation (BP, 199).

Murdoch believed that tragedy was difficult to write and perhaps, according to her, only Shakespeare and Aeschylus had succeeded. Murdoch used pain, and devastating failure or (tragedy) as a means to enlighten oneself, to push the unwilling psyche forward and force it towards the path of self-realization. Elizabeth Dipple
posits: “The unattainable quest for goodness constitutes the most important idea in Murdoch’s art, a quest too obscure for human beings to see clearly, and about which we usually deceive ourselves when we think we are on it” (Dipple,107).

For, Murdoch, art aimed to pull oneself away from the preoccupation with the self. Her characters were compelled to do so, in such a way that something of the real good could be perceived. This phenomenon of pulling the self from the self is the Apollo-Marsyas myth, which Murdoch had employed in her novel *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* and even in *The Black Prince*. This myth has been a part of western art for centuries. This myth is important as it has connections to the moral-spiritual aspirations of mankind. In the myth Marsyas, a mortal of uncommon musical abilities, challenged the god of music Apollo to a contest, which Marsyas lost. His punishment was a horrible and painful death.

In Murdoch’s novels, her protagonists were always unprepared to face reality. Many of the protagonists were clueless about the effect of their ignorant actions. They never gave a thought to the pain their actions would create, and like Marsyas had
done, with egoistic hubris and failure to grasp the repercussions. The pain that the protagonists experienced was not something bargained for and therefore it was terrible and bitter. Murdoch’s characters were deliberately subjected to pain and death; for only a forced knowledge of truth, helped the characters achieve partial redemption. Murdoch’s most extended use of the Marsyas Myth occurred extensively in *The Black Prince*. The novel rightly embodied and expressed the doctrine she preached and brought out the manifold operations of art, its use and how an artist pursued it. As a novel, it also illustrated the profound and necessary practice of irony, which Murdoch believed the artist must employ, as it was a more natural method in describing real lives of human beings than the grand abstractions of tragedy. Bradley was constantly occupied with his autobiographical work of art which he was in the process of unraveling for the readers. In one of his addresses to Loxias he expressed his views thus:

> The novel is a comic form. Language is a comic form, and makes jokes in its sleep. God, if he existed would laugh at His creation. Yet it is also the case that life is horrible, without
metaphysical sense, wrecked by chance, pain and the close prospect of death. Out of this is born irony, our dangerous and necessary tool (BP, 81).

In studying Plato’s point of view of the artist in *The Fire And The Sun*, Murdoch pointed out how Plato disallowed the existence of the good artist, who according to Murdoch should “imitate the calm unenvious Demiurge who sees the recalcitrant jumble of his material with just eyes, and with a commanding sense of Proportion” (FS, 76). What Plato described was the bad artist and their mediocre output and Murdoch agreed to Plato’s point of view: “The bad artist is a naïve fantasist...and construes the world in accordance with the easy unresisted mechanical “causality” of his personal dream life” (FS, 76).

Thus, in the process of achieving good art, the artist’s most accurate tool had to be the use of irony. And Murdoch rightly used irony as the primary structure in *The Black Prince*. The result was a love story, an adventure story, and a lengthy dramatization of art.
by an elaborate system of forewords and postscripts. It also included a narrative with a self conscious admission of truth which he addressed to the editor. The reader was drawn into a world of multiple points of view. With reference to Bradley Pearson, Dipple explains: “The density of the tale constantly works against its clarity, and Bradley Pearson as both self-conscious artist and literary, critic is at once achieving art and illustrating its pain and impossibility: Marsyas always loses, and yet the losing provides the extasis, the human achievement and the ultimate contact with divine ‘other’ reality” (Dipple, 110). Bradley referred to the myth as he rendered Hamlet. Perhaps, for the first time he understood the pain Shakespeare spoke about as:

He transmits his private obsessions into a rhetoric so public that it can be mumbled by any child. He enacts the purification of speech, yet also this is something comic, a sort of trick, like a huge pun, like a long almost pointless joke. Shakespeare cries out in agony, he writhes, he dances, he laughs, he shrieks, and he makes us
laugh and shrink ourselves out of hell.

Being is acting. We are tissues and tissues of different personae and yet we are nothing at all (BP,200).

Bradley felt the 'magnetic pull' of Julian’s love, but the image of Eros had not been replaced by that of Apollo. Shakespeare’s God, was a real god and not that of fantasy for “what redeems us is that speech is ultimately divine” (BP,200). What made Murdoch a remarkable novelist was her ability to show intelligent, potential characters fall into the folly trap of endless delusion. *The Black Prince* was also a tale of how the protagonist struggled towards development. Bradley had to pay an immeasurably painful price before he moved onto the path of art and goodness. Loving Julian ardently affected Bradley in more ways than he could digest. Firstly he loved her as a real woman in the real world and secondly he accepted the inappropriateness of the situation: “After all, I had seen this child since her birth. I had seen her in her cradle. I had held her in my arms when she was twenty inches long. Oh Christ” (BP,205).
Bradley was totally unprepared for this blow. And this was the child he always liked yet desire like a flame warmed him as he yearned for Julian:

I lay in bed and thought about Julian’s legs, now bare and egg-shell brown, now encased in tights, pink, mauve, black. I thought about her mane of dry shining greeny-golden hair and the way it grew down the back of her neck. I thought about the intense concentration of her strokable nose pouting mouth, pointing like an animal’s muzzle. I thought about the sky-cleanness of her English water-colour eyes. I thought about her breasts. I felt completely happy and I felt good (BP,211).

As a reader there was a mixed reaction of pity and joy towards Bradley. The human mind was so incredibly shocking! What kind of love, made many wise men so foolish? Perhaps, Bradley was
gripped by the erotic love for Julian which was a reality. He experienced pangs of pain, desire, separation, possession as he recounted: “The idea that one recovers from being in love is, of course, by definition (by my definition anyway) excluded from the state of love. Besides, one does not always recover.” (BP,248). It was as if Bradley had some premonition of what was coming. This love affair was perhaps a “Predestined collision” (BP,206). It may be noted that Murdoch had constructed the novel in such a manner that mirrored actions occurred frequently, and earlier it was the same Bradley who had attacked the Roger-Marigold affair which went on to become his own dilemma. Then again just as he experienced falling in love with Julian as a moment of revolution in art, he received a letter (the fatal letter which leads Rachel to murder her husband) from Arnold saying that he too has fallen in love, with Christian, and that this event would create a revolution in his art. These ironic twists and repetitions create the novel’s strong sense of the erratic and impenetrable, thereby making situations unjudgeable.

Another ironic situation occurs in the novel, when Bradley learnt of Priscilla’s suicide from Francis; instead of going to
London he drove towards Patara, his get away cottage and reflected:

There are moments when, if one rejects the simple and obvious promptings of duty, one finds oneself in a labyrinth of complexities of some quite new kind. Sometimes no doubt one acts rightly in resisting these simple promptings, one acts rightly in bringing into being the terrible refinements which lie beyond (BP,325).

Bradley meets Julian dressed “in black tights, black shoes, a black velvet jerkin” (BP,328). Again art – Julian as Hamlet-is summoned to reinforce the power of love. What followed was the brazen rape which Bradley looked at as motivational content. Feeling ‘horrified’ and ‘triumphant’ both at once he went through a metamorphosis. Later as he recollected the incident he thought of Julian as sacred and holy:
She looked so much, and beautifully, older, not the child I had known at all, but some wonderful holy woman, a prophetess, a temple prostitute. She had combed her hair smoothly and pressed it back and her face had the nakedness, the solitude, the ambiguous staring eloquence of a mask. She had the dazed empty look of a great statue (BP, 330-31).

Both Bradley and Julian assumed that they would be able to write great books especially after their intense and powerful experience. This persistent belief that intense human love (Eros) could help produce art was soon shattered by the Protagonist moral inadequacy. Priscilla, his sister had died because nobody cared or loved her enough. Bradley’s obsessive love for Julian made him act irresponsibly towards Priscilla. His indifference and failure to help his sister on time resulted in her death. Bradley forgot his duty towards his suffering sister. His priority was his
sexual fantasy. Blindly he believed he had been enlightened in love:

Her love for me was an absolute work spoken. It belongs to the eternal. I cannot doubt that word, it is the logos of all being, and if she loves me not chaos is come again. Love is knowledge, you see, like the philosophers always told us. I know her by intuition as if she were inside my head. (BP,366).

And then Bradley felt if he loved Julian so ardently he would be able to love everyone: "Because I love Julian I ought to be able to love everybody. I will be able to one day. Oh Christ, I could only have some happiness. When she comes back I'll love everybody, I'll love Priscilla" (BP,367). Bradley's calculation of love had gone haywire. On one hand he was tormented with guilt over his negligence of Priscilla and on the other hand Julian had left him with no valid explanation. All the crisis actually prepared Bradley for the worst: Rachel's murder of her husband Arnold and
Bradley's trial for Arnold's murder. This twist of the fate provided for the final irony of the novel.

In a brilliant and magnificent Postscript, Bradley comes across as wiser, more composed and transformed. The trial of Arnold's murder exposed him to dreadful and public humiliation to which he remained a mute spectator without "screams of protest." In the maelstrom of confusion, misunderstandings, incredibility he commented: "I had never felt more alert and alive in my life, and from the vantage point of my new consciousness I looked back upon what I had been. A timid incomplete resentful man" (BP,383). Inspite of the anguish, Bradley bravely accepted his fate. He considered the misfortune as a blessing in disguise:

I also felt something like this, that the emergence of my life out of quietness into public drama and horror was a necessary and in some deeper sense natural outcome of the visitation with which I had been honoured. Sometimes I thought of it as a punishment for the failure of my vow
of silence. Sometimes, shifting the same idea only very slightly, it seemed more like a reward (BP, 388-89).

It was the ordeal of the trial which eventually led to Bradley's slaying of the ego. He moved from ignorance to light. The entire trial changed Bradley's persona from a cynic to a man of wisdom. This change resonated in his autobiography. No longer lost in ignorance and darkness he now knew what silence is which he had, in moments of blindness, identified as a calm state of mind sitting at the writing-desk with the creative Eros hovering over him. In a very subtle yet poignant manner Murdoch through Bradley, chose to give the readers the full substance of the novel:

So we live on together here in our quiet monastery, as we are pleased to call it. And so I come to the end of this book. I do not know if I shall write another. You have taught me to live in the present and to forswear the
fruitless anxious pain which binds to past and to future our miserable local arc of the great wheel of desire. Art is a vain and hollow show, a toy of gross illusion, unless it points beyond itself and moves ever whither it points. You who are a musician have shown me this, in the wordless ultimate regions of your art, where form and substance hover upon the brink of silence, and where articulate forms negate themselves and vanish into ecstasy. Whether words can travel that path, through truth, absurdity, simplicity, to silence I do not know, nor what path can be like. I may write again or may at last abjure what you have made me see to be but a rough magic (BP,391-92).
Towards the end what remained for Bradley was the question of whether he would continue to write again, or like Prospero, ‘abjure this rough magic.’ His process of growth from ignorance to enlightenment was real as he was able to celebrate suffering which turned to joy. He bravely makes the crisis of his own identity into the stuff of his art. The ultimate ripping of the self, the complete self-exposure of the protagonist helped him move towards another journey: self-realization. The last few sentences of the novel and P. Loxias’s postscripts were composed of understatements and the whole pattern of progress from bad art to real art to ‘nothing.’ “Art is not cosy and it is not mocked. Art tells the only truth that ultimately matters. It is the light by which human things can be mended. And after art there is, let me assure you all, nothing” (BP,416).

For Murdoch, fiction was perhaps a reflection of mankind’s activity. It was a world of adventures where plots and situations of characters are made to live and love their roles. The novel was full of Murdochian energy, her technique was full of twists and turns: false beginnings, mythological interweaving, amusing image patters, brilliant conversations, ironic letters all coalesced to bring
out a brilliant novel. Deliberately she coaxed her readers to accept the irrational imperfections of her protagonist Bradley. The result was the reader felt compelled to agree with her affirmation of prevailing goodness and good art:

Now indeed I can see my life as a quest and an ascesis, but lost until the end in ignorance and dark. I was seeking you, I was seeking him, and the knowledge beyond all persons which has no name at all. So it sought you long and in sorrow, and in the end you consoled me for my life-long deprivation of you by suffering with me. And the suffering became joy (BP,391).

Thus Bradley’s love for Julian and her loss turned him into a recluse who could rejoice even in suffering. His love for Julian turned into a life-long ‘sacrament.’ Bradley appeared as if he had suffered transfiguration and had become a saint. London became for Bradley Jerusalem, a pilgrim’s home. His book was dedicated
to Julian’s ‘deification’ and ‘immortality.’ At the same time his behaviour changed from being resentful to ‘maniac generosity’ which made him appear at once ludicrous and yet wholly believable.

On various occasions Bradley compared the experience of falling in love with that of the Platonic Pilgrim, who emerged from enslavement in the cave, into the sun. He established this analogy between mind and cave:

> These images which float in the mind’s cave (and whatever the philosophers may say the mind is a dark cave full of drifting beings) are of course not neutral apparitions but are already saturated with judgment, lurid with it (BP, 192).

As soon as he recognized his love for Julian he felt dazzled like one who emerged from the cave: “This morning I had felt like a cave-dweller emerging into the sun. She was the truth of my life” (BP, 285). This truth he believed would help him inhabit a real
world: “There was an overwhelming sense of reality, of being at last the real and seeing the real. The tables, the chairs, the sherry glasses, the curls on the rug, the dust: real” (BP,209). The loss of the self was partly false, partly true. Bradley knew he had to “go beyond love or utterly change it” (BP,350). Bradley would not have made any progress as a seeker without the black and partly destructive Eros. Eros had to be an indispensible part of his quest.

Murdoch expected much out of an artist so as to level perfection in such a way that old errors were not endlessly repeated:

   In art, as in morality, great things go by the board because at the crucial moment we blink our eyes. When is the crucial moment? Greatness is to recognize it and be able to hold it and extend it (BP,13).

Bradley often referred to human beings as ‘those without identity.’ Therefore, it may be concurred that the theme of *The Black Prince* was the complete destruction of identity in love and morals, yet on the other hand it could be a redemption of identity as in art and morals. The paradox of the novel was Bradley’s fall
from grace or 'desublimation.' The way down had to be looked at as one of defeat, but as a rebirth for often later he admitted of his 'bad conscience':

In a purely technical sense I was condemned for having murdered Arnold... In a more extended sense, and this too provided fruit for meditation, I was condemned for being a certain sort of awful person (BP,387).

As a pilgrim Bradley began to look at reality which he had stubbornly refused to admit to his consciousness. Also he realized that he was the creator and character of his own plot “The creator of form must suffer formlessness. Even risk dying of it” (BP,414). *The Black Prince* was perhaps Murdoch’s dark and deep struggle to understand both good and evil. Through Bradley she realised that ‘the human soul is full of surprises.’ Not the type to be vanquished easily Murdoch pursued her curiosity by plunging into another novel *The Sea, The Sea.*
Murdoch’s *The Sea, The Sea* also was a story of obsession just like one of her own many writerly obsessions such as – the Sea, the involvement of magic, religion, guilt and the quest for virtue. She amalgamated the ‘gothic claustrophobia’ with ‘magnificent openness.’ In an informal interview on BBC Radio’s Kaleidoscope in November 1978, Iris Murdoch, while discussing *The Sea, The Sea* for which she had then just received the Booker Prize, pointed out that what she was particularly referring to in the novel was that ‘the road to goodness is a dangerous road.’ The protagonist Charles Arrowby could be seen traveling on the obsessive path struggling to sustain the demands of self-realization and ‘unselfing’ a process which Murdoch propagated. Murdoch’s often risky, yet first-person male voice was presented by Charles Arrowby the narrator. Like Bradley in *The Black Prince*, Charles too had an overdose of exasperating egotism and self-revealing comedy as he wrote his book in the first person, but found it difficult to define its form:

Of course there is no need to separate ‘memoir’ from ‘diary’ or ‘philosophical journal’. I can tell you, reader, about my past life and about
my 'world-view' also, as I ramble along. Why not? It can all come out naturally as I reflect. Thus unanxiously (for am I not leaving anxiety behind?) I shall discover my ‘literary form.’ (SS, 2).

The Sea The Sea right from the beginning moved against all the strictures of novelistic ideas. And though the artist-narrator tried to give ‘form’ or ‘shape’ to his life and art, he found or (would find) the challenge far more difficult than he could digest.

The protagonist Charles Arrowby, a theatre-director, had retired to a sea-shore village at the age of sixty, after enjoying a successful career as a director. Since he believed that the ‘main events’ of his life were over and as “I am wifeless, childless, brotherless, sisterless, I am my well-known self, made glittering and brittle by fame” (SS, 3) he could try “to repent of a life of egoism” (SS, 1) or “something of the sort” (SS, 1). Although he never came to ‘disapprove’ of the theatre, there was that persistent ‘something’ that all along accompanied him as he says:
I just knew that if I stayed in it any longer I would begin to wilt spiritually, would lose something which had traveled with me patiently so far, but might go away if I did not attend to it at last...(SS,4).

Thus Charles chose to live in an isolated lovely place called ‘Shruff End’ and reclaim his spiritual identity. “The whole house is indeed sparsely furnished. I have introduced very little of my own. (There is only one bed; I am not expecting visitors!) This emptiness suits me” (SS,15). Charles was quick to adjust to a life of seclusion as he recollected “this great space for which I have been longing all my life” (SS,15). Charles tried to make his life into a kind of art object and went to great lengths to achieve the same, however, the necessary nature of the world did not allow him to succeed without much struggle. As a literary theorist, Murdoch expressed her view to Bryan Magee in a BBC interview in 1978 shortly before *The Sea, The Sea* was published:
“And somehow, we live in a literary atmosphere. When we tell stories or when we write letters, we are making a form out of something which might be formless, and this is one of the deep motives for literature, or for art of any sort: that one is defeating the formlessness of the world... One is cheering oneself up and consoling oneself, and also instructing oneself, by giving form to something which is perhaps alarmingly formless in its original condition – a sort of rubble – it is as if we live in a kind of rubble world, and we are always making forms.” (Dipple, 277).

Charles had begun his diary with a superb description of the seascape. However, the second paragraph brought out a horrific experience, which Charles refused to share until he felt calmer: “I had written the above, destined to be the opening paragraph of
my memoirs, when something happened which was extraordinary and so horrible that I cannot bring myself to describe it…” (SS,1).

Throughout the entire first part of the novel entitled ‘Prehistory’ there were several appalling and frightening incidents which Charles had to confront. Charles struggled to conceal from himself and the readers his own ‘rubbled world,’ yet interruptions persisted as an ugly green vase on the landing was smashed, a mirror was knocked down, a face peered at him mysteriously in the night, Charles was forced to live with uncanny experiences. Later he found out that all the horror mischief was caused by his discarded mistress, Rosina Vambrugh. The incident was symbolic because although Charles wished for solitude, the guilt of the past comes to haunt him. Murdoch uses yet another symbolic action to reinforce Charles’s dangerous struggle to wean himself of the past; his house Shruff End, was on a rocky promontory extending out towards the sea and was extremely difficult to climb up especially after swimming. There is an iron banister but reaching it without the help of a rope becomes difficult. Charles tried all kinds of devices but no knots could hold as the sea just washed away all attempts, just as Charles’s
subjective desires' were ruthlessly swept out into the indifferent sea of reality which he struggled to banish.

The novel moved around two major issues: first his attachment to the memories of his childhood, second his life in the theatre where he bartered his innocence for power and fame. His memorable recollections were of his gentle and good father, his puritanical mother, his fashionable uncle Abel and glamorous American Aunt Estelle who are touchingly talked about. And his happy memories also included his childhood sweetheart Hartley, whom he had planned to marry. But fate had other plans, compared to Uncle Abel's fortune, his father was not successful. Moreover his cousin James's 'effortless superiority' would tend to emerge in ordinary ways. Charles felt like 'a provincial barbarian' or was made to feel so. Charles reflected on their relation:

Silently, James and I, from earliest moments, were acutely, suspiciously, constantly aware of each other... I cannot say that we feared each other; the fear was all mine, and was a fear not exactly of James but of something
that James stood for. (This something was I suppose my prophetic veiled conception of my own life as a failure, as a total disaster) But we lived, in relation to each other, in a cloud of discomfort and anxiety... I envied James (SS,62).

For Charles, the seeds of jealousy were sown from childhood and went on to form the powerful action of the novel. If The Black Prince had reflections of Hamlet, The Sea, The Sea reflected on the theme of The Tempest, which Murdoch, in 1969 had called “perhaps my favourite of all plays. It is to do with reconciliation and virtue and triumph of Virtue” (Conradi,232). The book’s message was how hard it is to give up power and even more, how difficult it was for one to change.

Charles’s life in the theatre was equally interesting. He joined the theatre ‘because of Shakespeare.’ He had his moments of success and failures. He was called a ‘tyrant’ a ‘tartar.’ He soon realized that: “The theatre is an attack on mankind carried on by
magic: to victimize an audience every night, to make them laugh and cry and suffer and miss their trains" (SS,33). Only when the devastation was nearly complete, did, men helplessly realize the sad ruin of their lives. Thus, the theatre, became a place of obsession for Charles and his mad involvement with the theatre was all part of revenge: “What I needed was just that particular way of shouting back at the world” (SS,33).

Charles’s first affair was with Clement Makin a famous actress twice his age. Clement helped him become successful. Even Charles rightly acknowledged this fact. While Clement was alive and after her death, there was a steady stream of women who vied for his attention and love, among them Rosina, followed by Lizzie, who loves him ardently. In none of the above relationships barring Clement did Charles feel any kind of deep reverence or affection. He foolishly believed that he had gained complete control over his London theatrical group but found himself in the midst of all them. To add to this was his discovery that the ‘old creeping bag’ of a woman seen in the village was indeed his first love, the ordinary Mary Hartley Fitch living with her husband in a pretty house named Nibletts. In a mad frenzy of astonishment and delight: “old
desires were suddenly present. I saw her blue, blue eyes and the curious mad look of her round face which was so unchanged. And her lips which had been so white and so cold” (SS,119). His meaningless life suddenly found reason to live. His spirits renewed and he looked forward to brighter possibilities of sharing a new life with Hartley.

However, Hartley, whose adult name was Mary Fitch, wished to continue the life she and Ben had established. They had an ordinary marriage with monotonous marital quarrels which Murdoch handled with ruthless ease in almost all her works. One night Charles eavesdropped on Hartley and found them in the midst of a domestic quarrel with Hartley’s repeated ‘I’m sorry, ‘I’m sorry, Ben. Charles came to the conclusion that her husband was a bully and he had to rescue his beloved Hartley. Thus, he pictured himself as a rescuing hero, and much later on his visit to Wallace Collection in London he imagined himself and Hartley with Titian’s famous painting of Perseus and Andromeda which awakens in him the ‘Sea Monster’ of jealousy. Charles, foolishly believed that Hartley was imprisoned in her marriage to Ben. This
was the misapprehension of the whole situation and Charles abducted and imprisoned Hartley:

Oh, Hartley, darling, be gentle with me, don’t be so sort of remote. Admit it, say it, you’re never really loved anybody but me, you’ve come home at last. That night when I saw you in the car headlight you had come here, you had to come. Say that you love me, say that it will be all right, that we’ll be happy. Christ, don’t you want to be happy at last and live with a man who loves you and is kind to you and believes what you say? (SS,279).

Desperate as he was Charles cuts a pitiable figure as he tried hard to coax and restore the long lost innocence and happiness. Then, in some mysterious way Titus, Hartley’s adopted son, appeared and Charles was anxious to use him as ‘bait’ in order to lure Hartley to stay with him: “Let’s go to London, all three of us, and
then away somewhere, anywhere. We’re a family now. What I’ve never had since I left my parent’s home. Let’s go away together anywhere you like and chase after some happiness” (SS,307).

Elizabeth Dipple has rightly remarked that “Murdoch’s attack on the literary convention of the obsessed lover gave intensity to the romance of ego, and thus she used fiction to fight against its own traditional convictions” (Dipple,287).

Charles was selfishly preoccupied with his own perception of past. He believed that he was too good to be rejected by ‘plain’ Hartley. And though Hartley rejected his whimsical love, he preferred to assume that it was only a matter of time before Hartley became his forever. Charles continued to believe that she was unhappily married to Ben. He thought he must shoulder the responsibility of rescuing her:

There was kind of dreadful violent leaping ahead in this thought, as if I were being powerfully jerked by something which already existed in the far-off future. Hatred, jealousy, fear and fierce yearnings love raged
together in my mind. Oh my poor girl, oh my dear girl. I felt an agony of protective possessive love, and such a deep pain to think how I had failed to defend her from a lifetime of unhappiness (SS, 157-59).

Charles arrived at the conclusion that Hartley’s husband was a brute, boorish rogue, who tortured his lady-love. Hartley, as Charles fondly remembered, was innocent and timid. He thought she doesn’t deserve a husband like Ben:

From the browned curled surfaces, out of a sinless world, the bright soft unformed young faces gazed forth. It was an unspoilt world, a world of true simple and pure pleasures, a happy world, since my trust in her was absolute, and since in our childish old-fashioned chastity we did not yet consider making love (SS, 203).
Charles had invested his pride or self-respect in Hartley’s implicit trust; after all it was she who had defended him in his weakest moments of life. Later, as Charles had left for London, Hartley vanished from his life. In a letter which he wrote to her he explained his absence and affirmed his love for her:

I have had a successful career, but an empty life. That is what it comes to. I never conceived of marrying because I knew there was only one woman that I would or could marry. Hartley, think about that, believe it. I have waited for you...(SS,204).

Charles is trapped in his adolescent fantasy. Like a typical teenager, he roughed his way to Hartley’s house and dropped his letter for her. When Hartley later came to meet him, he behaved clumsily in frenzy and astonishment:

Everything is explained already. I love you. You’re here. You love me, you need me. Don’t resist. Let’s go away to London, tomorrow morning,
tonight. Never mind about clothes.
I’ll buy you clothes. You’re my wife
now (SS,212).

Thoughtlessly, he weaved dreams of their union; although he was
aware of her unattractiveness, he paid her utmost tributes:

I was delighted by the absence of any
attempt to attract. This was a novelty
in my life... The new unpainted lips
were, I felt, alone a tribute to me... I
felt proud, possessive, relieved, as if
some life-long terror had been
removed (SS,214).

He persistently compelled Hartley to accept that she loved him
dearly, although, she wished to explain otherwise: “It wasn’t just
anything, oh don’t upset me so, we were too much like brother
and sister and you were so sort of bossy and I decided I didn’t
want to” (SS,216). Hartley tried in vain to convince Charles that
he was not the Prince of her dreams as he longed to hear or
believe: “If I’d loved you enough I would have married you, if
you’d loved me enough you would have married me. There aren’t any reasons” (SS,217).

Charles was determined to bring back Hartley and deliberately kept memories of their childhood alive: “I was continually conscious of Hartley, as of her real presence, and she was with me as Jesus used to be with me when I was a child” (SS,245). In his eagerness to win her love, he behaved irresponsibly and selfishly. He was least concerned about the outcome. He couldn’t care less that she was old and married, nothing mattered to him. He tried to convince her that she was caged against her wishes in an unhappy marriage: “You know-this burden, this useless fruitless loyalty, this pointless sacrifice. You are making his life a misery too, let it go, let him go. You’re like a half-dead person” (SS,276). Hartley refused to be convinced and almost disgustingly retorted:

There are moments, I’ve learnt, when
one has to fold one’s hand. I can see
what you want to do and why. You
want to make my marriage crash,
explode. But it won’t. It’s indestructible (SS,277).

For Hartley all that mattered was her marriage. No matter how ruthless her husband was, she was pleased to be caged in the ordinariness of tormenting togetherness. She was not interested in adventures or freedom and yet she admitted:

Yes, I suppose I love you, I have never forgotten you, and when I saw you I felt it all again, but it is something childish, it isn’t part of the real world. There was never any place for our love in the world. If there had been it would have won and we wouldn’t have parted (SS,280).

Hartley blamed herself for the mess she got into “I simply made you come, like people are lured to destruction, not for any good but for disaster and death. That’s what I’ve been making all my life, not a home, not a child, but just horrors” (SS,281). Charles refused to accept any of Hartley’s explanations. He was charged
up with adolescent energy and adventure: “I felt like a child who rushed to the cage of its new pet...” (SS,282). As a reader one was forced to feel a sense of pity for Charles who comes across as demented, unstable, unsettled. His mind raged with only one thought – that of Hartley:

As I gazed at her I felt a kind of new strength composed of pity and tenderness. And as I thought to show her how little I minded her shabby helplessness, my titanic love could even have wished for greater odds (SS,283).

Charles refused to let her go and as much as he wished to offer her freedom, in confining her, he appeared more ruthless than her husband. Even Hartley later realized that perhaps Charles was not in love with her. He resented her and therefore was being unkind to her by forcing her to stay with him. Charles impatiently tried to convince her of his love for her. But Hartley’s hysteria made him ponder over his futile exercise: “I felt that the most violent assault was being made on my spirit, on my sanity” (SS,305). Exhausted
and troubled Charles 'felt horror, fear, a sort of disgusted shame.'

For the first time he felt ashamed of his stupid action. And yet there were quieter moments when Charles reflected on the wrongness of his action in abducting Hartley:

What was I doing, or rather what was happening to me? I held my head in my hands. I was totally vulnerable and helpless. I had lost control of my life and of the lives with which I was meddling. I felt dread and a terrible fatalism, and bitter grief, grief such as I had never felt in my life since Hartley had left me so many years ago. I had wakened some sleeping demon... (SS,310).

Charles had left the theatre behind, so that he could renounce and atone for a life of folly. But the plot of his past resurfaced forcing him to enact the follies he detested again. It was at this point that James Arrowby, Charles’s cousin comes to his rescue and
explains to him that all along he was fighting for a ‘Phantom Helen’:

Your love for this girl, when she was a girl, was put by shock into a state of suspended animation. Now the shock of meeting her again has led you to re-enact all your old feelings for her. It’s a mental charade, a necessary one perhaps, it has its own necessity, but not like what you think (SS,353).

James Arrowby was the voice of reason as against Charles who was caught in the sea of ignorance. James further threw light: “...nothing human is eternal. For us, eternity is an illusion. It’s like in a fairy tale... At present you’re just obsessed, hypnotized” (SS,353). Charles was always jealous of James’ money, education, assurance. In a way he pursued success out of rivalry. Even when James tried to reason with Charles he mockingly reminded James of his homosexual stature. To sound real and wise like James, he stated “you seem to think the past is unreal, a pit full of ghosts. But to me the past is in some ways the most real
thing of all. It isn’t just a case of sentimentality about an old
flame. It’s a principle of life, it’s a project” (SS, 354). Wounded
and maddened Charles decided to lie low. He had not given up on
Hartley; after all the whole business of sending her back to her
husband was engineered by James. He waited anxiously for her
return, he assumed that it was his ‘task’ and ‘privilege to teach
her the desire to live.’ He felt only he ‘could revive her’ as he
was her ‘destined prince.’ And if at all she refused to return to
him he decided he would simply start the whole thing again from
the beginning.

James’s reasonings were at once recognizable as good and
true. Murdoch had again cleverly chosen James, as the illusioned
figure of goodness who has come to both warn and awaken
Charles’s dream ego! James continued to introduce reason and
good sense to a much reluctant Charles:

one is that you may be deluding
yourself in thinking that you have
really loved this woman all these
years. What’s the proof? And what is
love anyway? Love’s all over the
mountains where the beautiful go to
die no doubt, but I cannot attach
much meaning to your idea of such a
long-lasting love for someone you
lost sight of so long ago (SS, 178).

Charles’ involvement and obsession had reached beyond
reasoning, he was the “king” and she his “beggar maid.” And this
“king” was willing to renounce all just to be with his “beggar
maid.” Charles was unprepared to let go the stubborn romantic
ego and still dreamt on:

She made me whole as I had never
been since she left me. She
summoned up my whole being, and I
wanted to hold her and to overwhelm
her and to lie with her forever... to
amaze her humility with the forces of
my love, but also to be humble myself
and to let her, in the end, console me
and give me back my own best self.
For she held my virtue in her keeping, she had held it and kept it all these years, she was my alpha and my omega. It was not an illusion (SS,186).

Charles cuts a sorry figure, although earlier he intimidated the reader with his egocentric madness, now, one was naturally able to feel the pain and anguish of what Charles went through—maybe he loved madly, he needed to tame his mind and learn to love purely. Finally Charles was compelled to accept defeat, when Hartley actually leaves for Australia with her husband Ben. Ordinary individuals, like Charles were dumbfounded by the enticing propositions of illusory sense experiences and manically cling to delusive forms as though it were reality. Charles believed such illusions to be the cause and security of his very existence: to further understand Charles’ frame of mind an explanation from The Bhagavad Gita suggests that “Avidya, ignorance, produces egoism; from the ego arises feeling or desire and identification with senses and sense objects as a means of fulfillment. This
leads to a series of desire-motivated good and bad actions the result, which in turn produce new causes and effects” (Pg. 89).

The Gita further maintains that the individual delusion was the ignorance in man that eclipsed his perception and gives him a false concept of reality. Maya, cosmic delusion, was the universal substance of forms in the infinite formless. Thus, the ignorant man fabricates his own standards of morality and behaviour and calls them right, irrespective of the disharmony with the divine law. A deluded Charles, habitually compelled by the inner voice of the sense mind, bereaved about his unaccomplished experiences and his own folly:

my new, my second love for her, my second ‘innings’ seemed at its height a thing sublime, even without illusion, when I had seen her as so pitiful, so broken, and yet as something which I could cherish...

She is gone, she is nothing, for me she no longer exists, and after all I fought for a Phantom Helen...What a
That Hartley was just another Phantom Helen slowly dawned on Charles soon after he lost her. Dipple beautifully echoed this point as she stated that "it is human desire to create, a mythology of another person instead of letting her live in her own free being" (Pg. 292).

Charles’ idea of freedom was narrow and selfish as confining an individual can never amount to absolute Love. Even Rosina, his ex-mistress, ridiculed and insulted him for behaving immature; discussing Hartley, Rosina told Charles: “she’s an old-age Pensioner, she wants to rest now, she wants to put her feet up and watch television, not to have disturbances and adventures” (SS,185). She further reminded him “you’ve lived in a hedonistic dream... you always picked on women who could look after themselves... A cold fish with clean hands!” (SS,185). In The Sublime and The Good Murdoch spoke of freedom as the understanding of “otherness,” ‘understanding of two irreducibly dissimilar individuals.’ Charles’ agitatedly restless mind was
wholly self-centred as he says “as for self-centred, of course I am pursuing my own interests here and not just altruistically hers! Let her know that she can give me happiness by giving herself freedom” (SS,206). The reader most often was left baffled by Charles’ histrionics, yet Murdoch was successful in making Charles credible, for she knew that what Charles was, we all are, only the degree of madness varied from individual to individual.

A point to be noted was that Murdoch’s ‘problem’ protagonists were all intelligent and possessed ‘a highly cultivated mind.’ Charles too was intelligent, he loved Shakespeare. He was devoted to the theatre and Shakespeare. Yet he was unable to alter his thoughts, infact some of his great productions of Shakespeare were, as he put it, his way of shouting back at the world. Through Charles, Murdoch perhaps wanted to point out the dangers of feeding the unrelenting ego. In cases such as Charles, nothing could modify him except extreme suffering. Only when he was faced with ‘irrecoverable failure’ and all consoling fantasy snatched ruthlessly, does he awaken. Another significant point of the novel is Charles’ rescue by James from the whirlpool Charles records this feat in his diary:
I must write this down quickly as evidence, since I am beginning to forget as I write. James saved me. He somehow came down right into the water. He put his hands under my armpits and I felt myself coming up as if I were in a lift. I saw him against the sheer side of the rock leaning down to me, and then I rose up and he held me against his body and we came up together. But he was not standing on anything. One moment he was against the rock as if he were clinging onto it like a bat. Then he was simply standing on the water (SS,468).

Charles was certain no human power could have saved him from the jaws of death. James had rescued him by the sheer "exercise of those powers which, he had so casually spoken of as tricks" (SS,469). When Charles accused Ben of pushing him into the
whirlpool, James firmly said that: ‘I know. I know it wasn’t Ben.’ The intensity and finality of James’ tone left Charles baffled and he wondered ‘How could he know this?’ James’s power was illustrated seconds later as when he simply said ‘peregrine,’ to which at once Peregrine confessed to have pushed Charles. Nowhere does James sound pompous and deliberately try to underscore the power of asceticism. It was a known fact that ascetic practice emanated immense power. And James had often made use of his power to shake Charles’ restless mind. Even the demonology which haunted the novel’s beginning was a way of illustrating the frame of mind and its power – both unenlightened and enlightened. The sea-serpent Charles mentioned was a reflection of the agitated, restless mind, while James’s miracles were the power of a purified mind. A new relationship between the two was opened; the old resentment he felt towards James had evaporated:

I was suddenly filled with the most piercing pure and tender joy, as if the sky had opened and a stream of white light had descended (SS,470).
These lines definitely highlight a very different Charles: the brooding deluded, demented Charles was able to feel joy at last. After much labour, anguish, ignorance, Murdoch’s protagonist was slowly able to shed his veil of ignorance and see pure ‘white light.’ One could almost assert that Charles was on the road towards self-realization. Charles recalled his final meeting with James:

Had I proved to be, in the end, a thankless burden and a dangerous attachment? Here, and sadly, I understood the possible meaning of James’ last visit. James had come to make peace with me, but it was for his sake, not for mine, in order to perfect it (SS,474-75).

James too was attempting to renounce his attachment to Charles and indeed from life. No matter however spiritually developed a man may be but the lure to succumb to magic could prove dangerous for a true spiritual aspirant. As Dipple aptly remarks: “The dangerous road to goodness for a man like James who takes
a spiritual route is more subtly tempting and finally more devastating than the egoistic path Charles has so blindly followed” (Dipple, 291). Even James later realized that he needed to make more effort in order to let things be as they were. The thought of the physical ‘seizing’ of Charles, and then rescuing him from Minn’s Cauldron, these were subtle temptations to bring order and effect salvation for others. There have been many critics who have questioned James’s role of being a saviour in order to save Charles from drowning. Such interference leads to a moral dilemma and a real one. However, no religion advocates detached watchfulness, and James too at a crucial moment does not hesitate to use his power to save Charles. For an egotist like Charles he needed shock treatment and miracles to tame his erratic behaviour. Nevertheless, James was far too aware of the need to give up this magic or power:

All spirituality tends to degenerate into magic, and the use of magic has an automatic nemesis even when the mine has been purified of grosser habits. White magic is black magic (SS, 445).
James needed to purify the last trace of attachment in his relationship with Charles. James fully understood that one can teach the ignorant but not play saviour. Each one is accountable for oneself. Finally, James knew that he had to cut the umbilical cord of attachment, he has to let Charles be, he has to free Charles as James tells Charles: “And when one attachment is cast off another arrives by way of consolation. We never give up a pleasure absolutely, we only barter it for another” (SS,445). What James meant was the inner and outer renunciation of attachment. Only when a spiritual seeker was able to rise from the planes of objective possessions, and learnt to disentangle himself from the senses could there be self-realization. Therefore, “Goodness is giving up power and acting upon the world negatively. The good are unimaginable” (SS,445). There were moments when James became involved with the lives of others, which often happened out of compassion. Yet he realized he must quit before being further dragged into other people’s problems. He used reason and impersonal serenity to pursue his path of liberation and he succeeded.
Although, Murdoch had given a just description of James and his function as a spiritual seeker, she also warned against the lure of temptations to exercise power by the use of magic. James was able to influence Charles and through his deeds inspired him to look at life differently. After Charles learnt of James’s death he pondered:

Would he meet me there, in the shape of some persistent horror, a foul Phantom me, the creation of his mind? If so I prayed that when he achieved his liberation he might not forget me but come, in pity and in compassion, to know the truth. Whatever that might mean (SS, 475).

Murdoch had justly allowed James a pivotal role in Charles’ transformation: As they say few saints are planted in unexpected soil.

In the last section of the novel subtitled ‘Life Goes On,’ the reader gets to see a quieter and contemplative Charles. Slowly
and nostalgically he examined the awful events of his recent past almost nonchalantly "Time, like the sea, unties all knots" (SS, 477). He tried to become more objective: "We must live by the light of our own self-satisfaction, through that secret vital busy inwardness which is even more remarkable than reason" (SS, 482). There was a new awareness, his tone humbled remarkably. There were small signs of change in Charles as if he were making an effort to be good: "There may be no saints, but there is at least one proof that the light of self-satisfaction can illuminate the whole world" (SS, 482). Charles accepted the need for the inner light which helped the seeker abandon delusion. However, Charles had begun to introspect and remain in silence; he was able to rightly understand the process of ‘unselfing’ and become a light to the self. There were two major changes in Charles, One, that he started loving his brother James, whom earlier he feared and resented. The other was his acceptance that blind attachment causes great suffering. When he examined his obsession with Hartley, he was able to look at the entire episode with more honesty. He accepted that perhaps he intimidated her by being bossy as Hartley had mentioned. Also, when he thought of Hartley’s loyalty and concern for Ben he accepted painfully
that may be her husband effected upon her a sexual awakening which he himself had been unable to do. There were quieter ruminations of the past: “she was not able to my Beatrice nor was I able to be saved by her, but the idea was not senseless or unworthy” (SS,500). There were moments when Charles was left saddened by Hartley’s indifference. But it was precisely at this juncture that he needed to forgive Hartley the most. Finally, Charles willingly learnt to give up even the last hope of his obsessive love for Hartley: “My love’s imagination gave up the real Hartley and consoled itself with high abstract ideas of blindly accepting it all. That was the exit” (SS,499).

After a plethora of events Charles hung up his boots. It takes a great amount of courage to accept defeat. The protagonist Charles was finally tamed after many trials. That blind love which was a part of his weakness now became his strength: “The past buries the past and must end in silence, but it can be a conscious silence that rests open-eyed” (SS,500). Murdoch patiently helped her protagonist develop gradually towards moral advancement. Charles accepted towards the end that perhaps he was in love with his own youth and then he wonders “who is
one’s first love” (SS,502) the answer to which can be – the self. The ability to move away from selfishness and embrace selflessness can be a journey towards self-realization. The protagonist Charles too has had such a sublime moment:

I pulled myself up, knelt... then I saw below me, their wet doggy faces looking curiously upward, four seals, swimming so close to the rock that I could almost have touched them. I looked down at their pointed noses... They curved and played a while, gulping and gurgling a little, looking at me all the time. And as I watched their play I could not doubt that they were beneficient beings come to visit me and bless me (SS,476).

After a long cumbersome journey, Charles was ready to rest. His vision had moved from Hartley to ‘seals’ and ‘stars.’ Like most of Murdoch’s heroes, Charles was defiant but eventually learnt to surrender the particulars of the world, he so dearly inhabited. The
circumstances of his life pushed him to reconcile with reality. He was not sure how much of himself he could change: “can one change oneself” (SS, 501). Charles’ remarks on the difficulty of trying to change oneself was Murdoch’s refusal to console or offer any stance. Life’s disorder created painful experiences. And the only way to minimize the problems would be to make small attempts to change the self. Although Charles may not have learnt much, at least he learnt to give up romantic love. That was the beginning of his first step towards self-realization.
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