CHAPTER V
Homosexuality in Some Novels of Iris Murdoch

The growth of modern knowledge, especially in the area of sexuality has greatly contributed to the study of Homosexuality. The contemporary accumulation of data in that area is impressive. But what is the weight of such evidence? The widespread incidence of homosexuality now seems undoubted, though this was perhaps the most startling finding of the Kinsey reports three decades ago.

But what does such prevalence actually prove? It is frequently assumed that prevalence is to be equated with normality, understood as implying propriety and a positive ethical evaluation. But critics have said, when influenza reaches epidemic proportions, its high incidence is not assumed to render it normal and non-pathological. The point is that the prevalence argument does not of itself, prove normality.

As regards homosexuality, the only thing that its prevalence proves is that the homosexual question is a major human concern. But though an important point, it does not prove normality. The liberal view-holder and critics are not necessarily wrong, but their theory and findings are based on the prevalence argument — and that is unprovable on this basis.

We may define the homosexual condition as one of same-sex ambivalence. The capacity for same-sex love is seen as a legitimate developmental drive, and it pertains to the process of pre-adult development, critics have argued that this drive should be fulfilled non-sexually. Sexual expression is regarded
as inappropriate to the fulfilment of pre-adult developmental needs. This is presented as the psychological grounding for the traditional prohibition of homosexual behaviour.

Many conservative critics of the Homosexual case, agree with the decriminalisation of sexual behaviour between consenting adults in private, on the ground that such behaviour lies outside the province of the law. This is not however in the belief that homosexual activity is appropriate in itself. Even if legal intervention is regarded as out of place, there is still scope for ethical evaluation here.

A reading of the existing psycho-analytic data on homosexuality raises two questions of particular interest. If homosexuality is defined as same-sex love, why is there so much evidence of hostility — whether overt or latent — towards members of the same sex? And why is the homosexual partner so frequently identified — whether consciously or unconsciously — as a parent-figure of same sex? The evidence for these two points is note-worthy.

The parental identification of the lesbian relationship is a common place of the psychoanalytic literature. The search for a mother-figure, whether or not this is consciously realised to be the goal of the relationship suggests that the lesbian partner has the character of a mother-daughter relationship.

Likewise in the male homosexual there is evidence of a
quest to fulfil the needs that properly belong to the father-son relationship.

The same-sex hostility in the homosexuals shows the parental character of the homosexual relationship. One major study of male homosexuals concluded that when the homosexual's father had been hostile to his son, the homosexual partner was invariably identified with the father who had been feared and hated. Evidence for same-sex hostility generally may be found both within sexual relationships and in social relationships as when antagonism is felt towards colleagues of the same sex.

The parental identification of the homosexual partner suggests that the homosexual's capacity for relating to the same sex, generally is a transference from the relationship with the parent of the same sex.

The present paper cannot do more than outline certain aspects of the evidence that, in both sexes the psycho-dynamic structure of homosexuality is one of same-sex ambivalence, whether of greater or lesser degree in individual cases. One constant underlying principle comes to the fore. The homosexual — whether man or woman — has suffered from some difficulty in the ability to relate to the parent of the same-sex, and there is a corresponding attempt to make good, this difficulty — through the medicine of same-sex, i.e. homosexual relationships. The causes may not only be wilful maltreatment or neglect by the parent of the same-sex, but also unintentional or accidental
hurt, or even temporary absence in the early years of the child's growth.

In other words, the unresolved animosity that was originally a response to hurtful behaviour (whether deliberate or unintentional) by the parent of the same-sex, has been generalised and has the potential for reactivation in any interpersonal transaction with members of the same-sex.

The same-sex relationship should not therefore be seen as an abnormal attachment but as the attempt to resolve an abnormal detachment.

The definition of homosexuality, which is usually taken for granted, is that homosexuality is adequately defined in terms of love for the same-sex, critics say that this is only partially true and therefore partially untrue and misleading as a definition of the condition.

Need for love from, dependency on, and identification with, the parent of the same-sex are met through the child's attachment to the parent. A defensive detachment from the parent of the same-sex implies a blocking of the normal identificatory process. The ability to relate to the parent of the same-sex is seen as crucial. To be attached to one's mother is in itself entirely normal. When there is a defensive detachment from the father the only remaining channel for attachment is that to the mother. Thus the so-called 'mother-fixation' in the male implies, not an abnormal attachment to the opposite sex, but an abnormal
detachment from the same sex. Same-sex love is not a deviation from normal development, but an attempt to resume and continue the normal developmental process. The homosexual's deepest need is quite properly for relationships with members of his or her own sex.

In the homosexual condition, psychological needs that are essentially pre-adult developmental needs, remain in a person who may in other respects be adult.

Homosexuals may be — and often obviously are — capable of adequate intellectual, social and professional functioning.

The capacity for same-sex love is seen as a legitimate developmental drive. The liberal affirmation that same-sex love is fulfilling, natural and proper is in fact correct. The conservatives, need not disagree with this. The point of disagreement lies only in the means of fulfilling this need ... should it be sexual or non-sexual?

The conservative argument is that the fulfilment of pre-adult development needs should be non-sexual. It is not that the needs as such are wrong.

In contemporary psychiatry, the most influential theory of homosexuality has been that of Sigmund Freud, who held that homosexuality is the expression of a biological, bi-sexual pre-disposition common to all people. Freud speculated that all people go through a homo-erotic phase in the process of achieving
heterosexuality and retain from that phase, some latent homosexual tendencies. These tendencies, he thought, are reflected in sublimated form in feelings of friendship for members of one's own sex, as well as in feminine attitudes or interests in males and in masculine attitudes or interest in females.

More recent investigations however have cast doubts on Freud's theory of psychic bisexuality and points rather to a psychosexual neutrality at birth. This neutrality permits the development of enormous variation in psychosexual orientation and functioning according to each individual's experiences.

Alfred Kinsey and his associates suggested a 7-point scale to conceptualise the range (they believed there are various degrees of bisexuality and exclusive homosexuality is the highest degree).

0. Exclusive heterosexuality.
1. Predominant heterosexuality with incidental homosexual contacts.
2. More than incidental homosexual behaviour but still more heterosexual than homosexual.
3. An even balance of the two.
4. A greater tendency towards homosexuality but with substantial heterosexual component.
5. Pre-dominant homosexuality with only incidental heterosexual behaviour.
6. Exclusive homosexuality.
To label homosexuality as a flight from heterosexuality is developmentally incorrect. A person cannot turn from something he has not reached.

Conservatives insist on the complementarity of male and female. This is stated, not merely as a statement of biology or psychology, but as the divinely ordained purpose for the human race. The Bible says, God created mankind, "male and female ... in his own image".¹

Heterosexual marriage is seen as the only legitimate form of sexual expression, and homosexual practices are therefore prohibited. Some scholars have said that the loneliness of man is remedied not by the creation of another man, but by the addition of woman.

Many scholars say that they are not interested in books about homosexuals, or books by homosexuals, but books which express a sensibility which can be legitimately but somewhat speculatively labelled homosexual. That is, books whose main value is the beauty, virtue, charm of young men, young by self-definition, and unwilling to mature; though such beauty, virtue etc. often express themselves by the means of a style, an insolent wit, a defiance of reality, which seems to have nothing to do with sex. Such books may express dandyism. Not all dandy

¹'Genesis. 27.
books are of interest, but the few that are interesting, throw light on both the nature of sexuality and the return of literature.

Books by Evelyn Waugh, which are the most brilliant and typical of the whole dandy group, whose sexual sensibility can be described as narcissism are heterosexual. Yet homosexual is an indispensable word in describing his novels.

Some critics talk of homosexuality not in an empirical or Freudian sense — about the sub-conscious sources of an individual's sexual reference — but about a cultural pattern of sensibility, affecting his/her sense of humour, preference among painters, love/hate of ritual, choice of games and groups and recreations — a pattern which may fairly be labelled homosexual.

In Kipling's imaginative world, the bonding of man to man, and man to boy, is so intensely felt by both writer and sympathetic reader, that we may call the field of feeling homoerotic. Indeed such a field is to be found in most adventure novels, from Robinson Crusoe on, from Defoe; through Scott, Cooper, Dumas, to Stevenson and Kipling — the principal value celebrated is the comradeship of a band of brothers — typically brothers-in-arms, three musketeers or whatever. Often women are absent, and when they are present, they are thematically minor. Of course we should not read these stories as homosexual. They are, homoerotic, according to many critics.

Homoerotic sensibility can extend to include a very
sensual appreciation of another man's physical beauty, without becoming homosexual. There are vivid examples of that in Tolstoy's for instance, *War and Peace*.

A literary form, like satire, which seems in some novels by Waugh clearly allied to homosexuality, a natural expression of the 20's protest against its patriarchal past or against Kipling's manliness, in other novels like Orwell's, seems just as clearly allied to a conservative manhood and orthodox heterosexuality.

In Evelyn Waugh's novel *Put out more Flags* the twin characters Basil Seal and Ambrose Silk are homosexual and narcissitic, mutually dependent and mutally treacherous. This novel is a vivid example of pathos and defiance, the brilliance and fragility of the homosexual.

Thus homosexuality is a phase, an episode, in a longer story, which is in some sense, the history of literature.

Iris Murdoch is a major contemporary writer in Britain and has emerged in the post-war period not only as the most productive and influential British novelist of her generation but equally importantly, as a powerful intellectual and original theorist of fiction. "Iris Murdoch is unusual in having consistently taken a clear view of the form she has explored."²

²RT. 13.
She has emphasized that she aims to write as a realist, in an identifiably nineteenth-century tradition of English and European fiction.

At the same time she has maintained that it is now practically impossible for novelists to do this for good philosophical and epistemological reasons. Murdoch's traditional stance is due in part to her admiration of the nineteenth-century greats — Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Dickens, and lying behind their achievement, Shakespeare, whom she often described as the patron-saint of novelists.³

She thinks that ... "the novel can survive only through radical experiments, that it must manifest linguistic and formal daring ... and that humanistic realism is no longer a ready option for fiction."⁴

Murdoch's theoretical position owes its development to her habit of reading and thought which displays a carefully cultivated, historically aware and genuinely international literary sensibility. It arises from strong conceptions of the role of art in society and as an instrument of human knowledge.

With this background in mind, we must turn to examine

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³ 'RT. 14.
⁴ 'RT. 14.
homosexuality in her novels. About her childhood, Murdoch stresses that it was happy. Her time in Brussels in 1944 as an officer of UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) — was of particular importance to her intellectual life and direction. She first encountered the existentialist movement there, which was to have such importance in the redirection of wartime and Post-War philosophy, both in the continent and in Britain. In her book, *Sartre, Romantic Rationalist*, she acknowledges Sartre's deepened portrait of consciousness, the parallelisms between existentialist and British philosophy and also the importance of the novel as a mode of human enquiry. She says, "The novel is a picture of, and a comment upon, the human condition and a typical product of the era to which belong also the writings of Nietzsche, the psychology of Freud, the philosophy of Sartre."\(^5\)

"A firm believer in the power of the political pamphlets, she has written on issues such as homosexuality, Vietnam (she strongly condemned the American intervention), nuclear weapons and school education. Several of these topics do arise in her novels, particularly in the 1970's, and in their presentation, we may sense a Sartrean existentialist concern for advocating freedom of human action, a freedom which is located

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\(^5\)Satre, Romantic Rationalist. i0.
firmly in the context of those complexities that inevitably arise when the individuals predicament within society is concerned. 6

In her famous essay, "Against Dryness" she made clear that she considers the novel must create essential images of humanity and must therefore be "a fit house for free characters to live in." 7

In her world, whatever is contingent, messy, boundless, infinitely particular, and endlessly still to be explained, holds crucial place. She has also urged that art is a pursuit of the good.

In three essays, "The Sublime and the Good", "Against Dryness" and "The Sublime and the Beautiful Re-visited", Murdoch offers reflections and approaches to a complex of problems lying on the edges of moral philosophy and literary criticism. Murdoch has often contemplated on the practice of love and its place in the pursuit of goodness.

In "The Sublime and the Good", she writes, "Art and morals with certain provisos — one. Their essence is the same. The essence of both of them is love. Love is the extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real."

6 "RT. 23.
7 "RT. 23."
Love, and so art and morals, is the discovery of reality.  

A.S. Byatt says, "In The Bell, Michael Meade, homosexual schoolmaster, who — with his sense of destiny in his call to priesthood, his sense of patterns and portents in his life, his imaginative visions of moral situations — when he falls in love with Nick Fawley as a boy, or impulsively kisses Toby — is tempted towards a neurotic vision (although he ironically fails Nick by a contrary recoil into self-protective convention). Convention is represented by James Tayper Pace who finds it easy to say that some things are simply forbidden."

Murdoch often uses the word machinery, to describe recognizable patterns of human behaviour. Thus Michael Meade is caught in the (excellently described) machinery, of guilt and repentance.

Murdoch has said in her essay, "Against Dryness" and "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited" that "literary conceptions of man, too readily push man in the direction of either convention or neurosis. The former leads to a version of the literacy hero she refers to as Ordinary Language Man and the latter to, Totalitarian Man."
A.S. Byatt argues that in *The Bell*, James Tayper Pace, in his inability to deal with Michael's predicament is an Ordinary Language Man. Michael, unable to deal with Nick, an instance of Totalitarian Man. James and Michael are free characters because in them Murdoch "explores the fluctuations between vision, convention, neurosis, and fantasy." The Community in *The Bell*, disintegrates after a while, unable to stand the various pressures on its existence. These culminate with the suicide of Nick Fawley, who had as a school boy of fourteen, terminated and confessed to a passionate homosexual relationship with Michael, who was then teaching in the school. Michael's hope of priesthood dashed, he had eventually devoted himself to setting up the community at Imber. After his betrayal of Michael, Nick had gradually drifted out of his life, returning to Imber as an alcoholic in need of rehabilitation. Toby Gashe, an 18-year old boy, who is visiting Imber on a working holiday, discovers the old bell. Toby struggles to assert his heterosexuality after discovering, that Michael is attracted to him.

Elizabeth Dipple says, "The circularity of *The Bell*'s structure, in which Michael Meade in his middle age repeats a pattern of behaviour which in his youth condemned him to years of guilt and unhappiness.", shows Murdoch's concern with the

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11. *RT.* 44.

character's basic apprehension of religion. In The Bell and Henry and Cato, there is the aspiring saint versus the would-be-artist. Dora, in The Bell, and, Henry in Henry and Cato, are artists in a failed professional way, but not practitioners. Opposed to them are Michael Meade and Cato Forbes, both men with a religious vocation who define their lives in terms of their allegiance to the Church and to Christ. Both of these latter two also have homosexual inclinations, which they sadly and unsuccessfully fight, and which they place in an either/or relationship to their Christianity.

In both novels, Murdoch explores the labyrinth of sexuality and spirituality whose subtle interactions are so confusing and often damaging. Her choice of homosexuality in both books is interesting and largely disapproved of in the Christian tradition and about which much guilt can accumulate.

James Tayper Pace, in The Bell, disapproves of homosexuality simply and outrightly and pointlessly drops antihomosexual remarks as in his uncharitable references to Nick Fawley, who he claims, looks like a pansy. When an embarrassed Toby Gashe goes to him to confess his very slight flirtation with Michael, James is shocked and has no machinery for understanding or forgiving the beleaguered and only slightly erring Michael. In his sermon on the Good, he sees the whole issue indeed the whole of moral life, as very simple.

"We should consider, not what delights us or what
disgusts us, morally speaking, but what is forbidden. And this we know, more than we are often ready to admit. We know it from God's word and from His Church with a certainty as great as our belief. Truthfulness is enjoined, the relief of suffering is enjoined, adultery is forbidden, Sodomy is forbidden ... sodomy is not disgusting, it is just forbidden. 13

In this sermon, James is consciously attacking Dora's sexual carelessness, and reflecting on that of Nick Fawley and unconsciously, Michael. His later analysis of Michael's misde-meanour — and from the point of view of his limited knowledge of Michael's past and present behaviour it is hardly more than that — obviates the continuation of Michael's spiritual aspirations. "This kind of negative judgement inherent in established Christianity and of which James is so pure a spokesman, cannot be seen as other than destructive to both the secular and the spiritual life. Poor Nick Fawley, in angrily catechizing Toby about his relations with Michael and Dora, describes the virtuous James as the 'only available saint' but his statement reflects only his own inclination towards guilt and guilty relationship to Christianity as opposed to James's simple, untemptable nature, not any noteworthy truth about the real thrust of the novel." 14

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13 B. 133.
14 WS. 244.
Very unlike James in theological temper, is the Roman Catholic priest, Brendan Craddock, in *Henry and Cato*. Whereas James is obtuse, Brendan quickly perceives the nature of the relationship between his fellow priest Cato, and the clever, delinquent boy called Beautiful Joe. Brendan is a more sophisticated character; moreover, he reflects a real change in Murdoch’s apprehension of Christianity and the possibilities of the religious life. He does not assume that Cato’s homosexual longings are blameworthy or unusual; he focuses rather on Cato’s naive egoistic belief that he is the only person in the world who can ‘save’ Beautiful Joe. "For Brendan, the only important issue is Cato’s hurtful or helpful behaviour in respect to Joe, and he castigates his colleague’s lack of humility and failure to believe in the functioning of a separate providential agent. As he sees it, the state of being in love is automatically a powerfully egotistical one..."\(^{15}\)

Brendan, is one of Murdoch’s characters of the good and a voice to be listened to.

Brendan’s intelligent passion in outlining the real and necessary, in traditional language of Christianity, depends on a sophisticated sense of the higher spiritual reaches of his Catholicism, so that for him, the breaking of questionable

\(^{15}\) *WS*. 245.
Levitical and Pauline rules, like those forbidding homosexuality, is not at all important, as it had been for the more naive James. Cato is set against the background of a Christian organization — the Roman Church — which in its internal workings has seen the spiritual history of many Cato's.

Yeats was shocked by George Eliot's treatment of Tito in *Romola*. "Great literature ... is the Forgiveness of Sin, and when we find it becoming the Accusation of Sin, as in George Eliot, who plucks her Tito to pieces with as much assurance as if he had been clockwork, literature has begun to change into something else." 16

Iris Murdoch defines freedom and virtue as in some ways identical — and they are related to beauty too, because they are related to the kind of formal truth-seeking of the artist. In *The Sublime and The Beautiful Re-Visited*, she says, "Virtue is not essentially or immediately, concerned with choosing between actions or rules or reasons, nor with stripping the personality for a leap. It is concerned with real apprehending that other people exist. This too is what freedom really is, and it is impossible not to feel the creation of a work of art as a struggle for freedom. Freedom is not choosing, that is merely the move we make, when all is absolutely lost. Freedom is

16 CR.
knowing and understanding and respecting things quite other than ourselves. Virtue is in this sense to be construed as knowledge and connects us so with reality.  

One of the moral and aesthetic terms to which Iris Murdoch most frequently returns is attention. A.S. Byatt says, "In Miss Murdoch's thought, attention is an actual experience of freedom, the realisation that although swayed by passions, we are capable of rational conduct. It is such attention which caused Miss Murdoch in "On God" and "Good" to be able to write. Freedom is not strictly the exercise of the will, but rather the experience of accurate vision which, when this becomes appropriate, occasions actions.

The concept of attention in Miss Murdoch's terms is closely related to the concept of good or goodness. Throughout her philosophical writings she returns to the question of perfection, of the nature of truth, of whether there can be said or seen to be any transcendent good outside human imperfections, and vanities, in some way beyond the operations of time, chance and necessity, which can be a meaningful object of contemplation.

Let me come to certain other novels by Iris Murdoch, where the problem of homosexuality has cropped up. In The Nice
and the Good, the nice are not the good. John Ducane, does not qualify as a character of the good — that is, a character whom the percipient reader can see as under the tight, even appalling moral discipline, which is required in Murdoch's subtly worked frame. He is nice and learns a great deal, but good? Let us follow the progress of a minor, off-centre character, Uncle Theo, whose formal impact on the novel's complex design is minimal. "He functions as a vital signpost to, rather than as an exemplar or successful illustration of the good."¹⁹ Much of his compelling strength in the book comes from the complementarity of his melancholic Jewish refugee friend, Willy Kost, and his energies are generally absorbed by his guilt over his past his longing for redemption.

Theo's closest relationships are not with his placid, self-confident brother Octavian, but with Willy Kost and simple household beings, the inseparable nature-loving twins, Henrietta and Edward, and Casie, the servant.

Not until the last few pages of the novel, do we learn that his derailment had been caused by his attempt at an easy solution; to take vows in a Buddhist monastery had long ago seemed to him a way of changing, becoming good. After his failures there, the rest of his life had been a discipline in the

¹⁹ 'WS. 10.'
hard path, always with the hope of the redemptive, healing touch of the old Buddhist master as a possibility. Theo knows that the breaking of the personality comes not from the curse of defeat, guilt or evil, but from the clear light of the good. The story of his own defeat emerges (towards the end of the book) for the first time as part of Theo's ruminations over the death of the old man. "The tale comprises his search for a discipline — it tells of his failure to transform himself or to face the real issue — a failure ultimately signalled by the homosexual seduction of a boy and the boy's subsequent death." 

As Theo was drawn further into the rigours of Buddhism, "he had begun to glimpse the distance which separates the nice from the good, and the vision of this gap had terrified his soul ... Perhaps it was to calm the frenzy of this fear that he had so much and so suddenly needed to hold tightly in his arms a beautiful golden skinned-boy as lithe as a puma." 

In this novel only Theo knows what good is, knows the appalling demand it makes, and with guilt behind him and no false consolation before him, he may be able to move forward towards it. The idea of a good character must be modified and seen as

20 'WS. 13.
21 'NG. 348.
a person 'of the good', a person who goes as far as possible towards an unseeable goal.\textsuperscript{22}

In \textit{The Sea, The Sea} (1978) we find that the middle part of Charles Arrowby's life — that is, his real life in the theatre — has been indeed a life of frenzied energy, lies and tyranny. He loved his gentle father and had loving relationship with a few men, Wilfred Dunning, the homosexual Fritzie Eitel and was pursued by Peregrine Arbelow and Gilbert Opian — all homosexuals. But Murdoch has depicted Charles as basically heterosexual — his dependence on women is absolute. Peregrine once says to Charles, "I can't think why I let you haunt me all these years."\textsuperscript{23} Peregrine says, "I enjoyed leading you on and just looking at you."\textsuperscript{24} He had an unnatural longing and love for Charles.

In Murdoch's novel, \textit{The Book and the Brotherhood} where a future threatens all that is bookless, soulless, technocratic and violent, the writing of a neo-Marxist great work "The Book" of the title, heralds and welcomes in this new age and is set against a familiar love-dance. There is a repeated assertion that mankind lives on the brink of the fastest change in the history of the planet.

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\item \textsuperscript{22} WS. 14.
\item \textsuperscript{23} SS. 399.
\item \textsuperscript{24} SS. 398.
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The Brotherhood is a group of middle-aged friends who met, mostly at Oxford, where they studied Classics, and have stayed close since then. They are led by Gerard Hernshaw, who aspires morally but is also a man of power and who loves the simple and innocent Jenkins Riderhood. The well-born Rose Curtland, the diplomat Dunncan Cambus and his wealthy wife Jean Kowitz complete the inner group. Lily Boyne, a confused and unexpectedly rich widow, and Gulliver Ashe, bisexual, hungry and unemployed, make up a younger contingent. This brotherhood of rich and tired and generous idealists have been paying David Crimond to write the Book that is to express the Left-wing idealism, they once all shared. The problem is that they have come to fear and hate the views he represents while to Crimond, the Brotherhood represents a reactionary liberal humanist world whose softness and falseness, he detests. He wishes to liquidate the soft bourgeois individual, and believes that it takes society to eliminate the ego. They are paying him to be their own executioner.

In this novel, Gerard, who prefers men, is attracted by Jenkin Riderhood. Young Jenkin is attracted to Crimond. Of such stuff is the world of human imperfection made, that Crimond's revitalised Marxism is to redeem.

"Harold Bloom recently commended Miss Murdoch's formidable gifts. Ranking her below only Freud and Proust, he calls her a major student of Eros, an original and endlessly
provocative theorist of the tragi-comedy of sexual love. Bloom justly says, "She has the style of the age." 25

"Iris Murdoch's work is an extraordinary chronicle of the manners of the mid and late twentieth century British upper-middle classes and like Jane Austen, she wrests from a strictly limited subject-matter, the maximum of drama, interest and play." 26

The number of Murdoch's characters who turn out to be at least partly homosexual further recalls Proust, and it is a part of her unnoticed, unsung courage, to deal always with homosexuality as an unremarkable, general feature of the human scene. She is full of Proustian speculations, on love, time, death, grief, loss, mortality. She gives us a picture of our times, and combines this with an interesting psychology, and her successes begin by being specific and local: what it feels like to be happy or in pain, obsessed or jealous, in or out of love; what rivalry, or love-hate friendship, the desire to recapture the past, obtain revenge or forgiveness, actually look like in particular cases.

Iris Murdoch's career shows her seemingly endless capacity to renew herself, to rework her material to change and

25 SA. 290.
26 SA. 290.
to grow. Her novels have increased in length and their tone has altered from 1960 onwards. The rate of production, which became annual, did not slow down, and earned her critical hostility. But she went on winning honours. By 1978, when *The Sea, The Sea* won Britain's most prestigious literary award, the Booker-McConnell Prize, her reputation was international. She is one of the few contemporary British novelists being widely read in Soviet Union, and *Under the Net* and three other novels have been translated into Russian.

Richard Todd has thanked Miss Murdoch's publishers Chatto and Windus Ltd. for the following information — *'Under the Net* indeed remains her most translated book... virtually, the entire canon is in Dutch and Danish: more than three-quarters of her fiction is now in French, Spanish, Swedish and Japanese..."27

'Murdochland' is now an internationally known landscape and the direction of her fiction represents a significant tendency of the contemporary British novel.

Iris Murdoch's recent novels continue to highlight her subtle and complex understanding of realism.

Surely, one of the many reasons for her extraordinary popularity is that her depiction of middle-class society is

27 "RT. 20."
absorbing. The reader is quickly drawn into such a situation as she builds up, and though he loathes what might be called bourgeois decadence as in *A Severed Head*, *An Accidental Man* of that society's general structure, he cannot help admiring her work. "Although almost all readers of the contemporary novel come from the socio-intellectual world she depicts, some recoil, objecting in a rather confused and sometimes violent way, either to what they call her unrealistic plots or to the way the characters act. Some even claim that that she is not only unrealistic but even evil ... in seeing human characters so unidealistatically, so relentlessly. This problem probably would not occur for a writer who had not instantly become extremely popular ... and certainly it would not be a problem to a novelist who handled realism more easily and conventionally, who made decisions different from and milder than those which so powerfully motivate Murdoch."28