CHAPTER 11
General Discussion

The World of Iris Murdoch's Novels

Iris Murdoch's novels are markedly individual. According to Alan Massie, in "The Novel Today".... 'Murdoch is of the three (Murdoch, Spark and Anis) the easiest to characterize and the hardest to assess.' The nineteenth century novel, specifically English and Russian, held an attraction for Murdoch. She has declared her allegiance to the large realistic tradition of the Nineteenth century novel. Some admirers have compared her novels to the late plays of Shakespeare. We can say that the comparison holds good to this extent that she is willing to mix comedy with melodrama. She can easily present the improbable and impossible with assurance and without explanation in order to explore matters of great importance — such as the nature of the good and the evil, the temptations of religion and magic and the effects of sexuality on individual and social life. She writes novels in which repressions are brought to the surface and made into words. Because she is not afraid to topple into absurdity, as she does at moments in every novel, her prose loses its precision and becomes exaggerated and bombastic, she is also capable of moments of illuminating insight.

Under the Net (1954) was hailed by a reviewer in The Sunday Times as a real achievement of entertainment and impersonation. The word 'impersonation' is a clear pointer to what Iris Murdoch is doing in all these novels: she is creating personae, masks.'

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The most important 'mask' in the novel *Under the Net* is Jake Donaghue, an impecunious and hack translator of the best selling French writer Jean-Pierre Brétel. Jake returns from Paris to London in time to learn that the relationship with the girl whose flat he and his companion Finn have been using has come to an end. Jake is faced with the immediate needs of shelter and survival, and contemplates the prospect of renewing an earlier friendship, with the singer and actress Anna Quentin. In tracking Anna down to the mime theatre where she now works, Jake comes back into contact with other people from his past — notably Anna's sister, Sadie, and Hugo Belfounder, who is Jake's alter ego as well as an apparent sexual rival. Jake's predicament is complicated by his feeling that he had earlier betrayed Hugo by publishing a book, *The Silencier*, which adapts many of their former conversations on language and philosophical matters. The novel's title is taken from one of these conversations. Hugo has been described by Murdoch as 'a sort of non-philosophical metaphysician who is supposed to be paralysed in a way by the problem about which the novel plays. As she told Frank Kermode in a 'House of Fiction' interview, the book ...... "plays with a philosophical idea. The problem which is mentioned in the title is the problem of how far conceptualizing and theorizing, which from one point of view are absolutely essential, in fact divide
you from the thing which is the object of theoretical attention."²

The suggestion here seems to be that as literature itself fleshes out that which philosophy might concern itself with, so in the story issues of the relationship between abstract impressions and real experiences are important. The elusiveness of the real, guides the quest structure of the book, which is in fact a double one. With Finn and Dave Gellman for company, Jake seeks intellectual fulfillment in the form of some obscurely planned reconciliation with Hugo in London: in solitude he seeks erotic fulfillment through his search for Anna, who has, he learns, left for Paris. Jake goes to Paris but does not find Anna. He returns to London, but before he can follow a course of action that will eventually lead him to Hugo, he undergoes a spiritual crisis. After some comic financial reverses involving his ex-girlfriend and her bookmaker - consort, money becomes his chief need, so he becomes a hospital cleaner. Suddenly, Hugo is brought in with a head-injury sustained at a political rally, and Jake enters the hospital at night in an act of reparation with Hugo. Jake learns that his misgivings about The Silencer are

unfounded. He is most unsettled when he realizes that it is Sadie and not Anna, who has been in love with him. This effects his attitude towards words and writing, producing a new attitude towards creativity. The relationship between Hugo and Jake is in fact of a kind recurrent in Murdoch — it is the contrast between artist and saint. She has shown the contrast between "the man who's silent and the man who speaks; the man who's unconsciously good and the man who's consciously, aesthetically, creating his life ... a kind of struggle between an angel and a mortal."

Jake is the hero of a comedy where character and action are presented as comically subordinate to setting and situation. When Jake encounters Anna in the 'props' room of her Mime Theatre, the richly chaotic theatrical scene is described in a memorable passage:

'It was like a vast toy shop that had been hit by a bomb. In my first glance I noticed a French horn, a rocking-horse, a set of red-striped tin-trumpets, some Chinese silk robes; a couple of rifles, Paisley shawls, teddy bears, glass balls, tangles of necklaces and other jewellery, a convex mirror.'

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a stuffed snake, countless toy animals, and a number of trunks, out of which multi-coloured costumes trailed ... I sat down on the nearest seat, which happened to be the back of a rocking horse, and surveyed the scene.\footnote{Under the Net (Chatto and Windus, London 1954) 37. Subsequently cited as UN.}

The comic element is seen in the theatrical or rather cinematic action when Jake meets Anna ...

'I took her wrist, and for an instant saw her eyes wide with alarm, very close to mine, and then in a moment I had thrown her, very carefully, onto a pile of velvet costumes in the corner of the room. My knee sank into the velvet beside her, and straightaway a mass of scarves, laces, tin trumpets, wooly dogs, fancy hats and other objects came cascading down on top of us until we were half buried.'\footnote{UN. 40.}

Jake draws on the conventions of Hollywood cinema, fifties-style, in moments of indecision or fear or simply embarrassment. Let's see what happens when he meets the formidable 'bookie', Sacred Sammy.

'I took a gulp of whisky and put on my belt, endeavouring to wear the expression of one who contrary to appearances, is master of the situation. The films provide one with useful
conventions of this kind. I looked Sammy up and down with deliberation.⑥

With Anna, Jake's cinematic strong-guy stance helps him to avoid the kind of encounter that seemed almost inevitable with a long-lost 'old flame,' a meeting full of awkward silences and polite clipped exchanges: 'In a moment we should be talking soberly like two old acquaintances. I wasn't going to allow this.'⑦ The intelligent film star, Sadie, Anna's sister, comically undercuts Jake's cinematic act, when, Jake finds her at the hairdressers:

'You won't start being afraid of me, I suppose.' I said, leering at her in the glass. Sadie went off into peals of laughter. 'Jake, darling, no, you're just too utterly harmless!' She called out.

I didn't so much care for this turn in the conversation.⑧

The whole narrative, in which Jake sees himself as quester, hero, 'like a prince in a fairy-tale,'⑨ is pervaded by

⑥ 'UN. 71.
⑦ 'UN. 40.
⑧ 'UN. 53.
⑨ 'UN. 51.
images of women as seen through Jake's eyes, women wearing masks of make-up, elaborate coiffures, high heeled shoes. Jake is the detached male observer who seems to carry something of the author's own fascination with and detachment from, the fashions and conventions which codified femininity in the early fifties, when the novel came out.

Under the Net provides a good-humoured critique of the male questing hero of modernist fiction. At the conclusion of the novel Jake has found his true quest, his path, but he does not celebrate it in a grand style. He is last seen puzzling over the workings of genetics as he contemplates a mixed litter of newborn kittens.

In her intellectual rigour and her willingness to write about the most intense emotions in a comic mode, she may be seen as a successor to Ivy-Compton-Burnett whom she also resembles in the deliberate melodrama of her plotting.

On the other hand, her exact, even meticulous description of the surface of life, of the appearance of her characters, their houses, clothes, furnishings, and meals, would seem to make her a realist ever in the manner of Arnold Bennett.

Murdoch's second book, The Flight from the Enchanter, which appeared in 1956 shows a preoccupation with power relations. We assume that the title's 'flight' is Rosa Keepe, and that the 'enchanter' is Mischa Fox. The novel is about the warring opposition of men and women. It is hard to understand
the power that Mischa Fox so calmly and with such threatening charm wields over Rosa. The two had evidently been in love and near marriage in the past, but Rosa had escaped from Mischa's enslavement, and is still escaping. Mischa Fox is indeed a sort of magical pattern maker, and the group's bestowal of importance on him is indicated, effectively if not very elaborately, by his different coloured eyes, and his remarks on the ease of achieving fame for no very specific reason.

This is easily the most brilliant and original novel that has appeared for a long time, by many critics. Critics have acclaimed her as an excellent entertainer since, she combines intelligence and wit with seriousness. Critics say that a voyage in her delightful company is better than one with almost anybody else.

We can say it is a work of art, authentic, deliberate and mature. It has remained one of the most popular of her novels. It has a large and lively group of characters: the ravishing, absurd young Annette who runs away from her finishing school to enter the school of life, and learns a good deal more than she bargained for; melancholy but fierce Rosa, the mistress of two Polish brothers, her brother, editor of a down-at-heel magazine, the scholar, Peter Saward, who is obsessed by an indescribable ancient script; Rainborough, a civil servant, who is struggling in the toils of his determined secretary. Their lives revolve around the mysterious figure of Mischa Fox, a man who is
not famous for anything in particular, but just famous. Each of them has some idea, object, person or illusion by which he is possessed. Each tries to break the spell and to flee from the enchanter. This novel moves through a series of episodes which are vivid and paradoxical as dreams. The meeting of the shareholders of "Artemis" is outrageously funny. There are scenes where comedy balances on the edge of tragedy. Some scenes show the normal suddenly deviating into the sinister, and the beautiful turning into the grotesque. All the qualities, imagination, intelligence and vitality, which have made Iris Murdoch famous, are present in *The Flight from the Enchanter*.

This novel leaves us more with an impression of the universality of power rather than of Mischa's complexity. Several commentators have said that Mischa Fox's presence in the book does not carry enough weight. Certainly later Murdoch power figures are more complexly present in their novels. The characters in this novel fall into two dramatically opposed categories — there are complicated, often mysterious characters and there are those whose narrow dimensions hinder the novel. Social concerns are more in the forefront than in other novels of Murdoch. Yet we see that Murdoch is finally more interested in the larger moral issues of power than in politics, which is only a subdivision.

In place of gaiety, or the hazy world of the London upper middle classes, miasmic demonism makes its bow.
Murdoch really succeeds in this novel because of the demonic and mysterious evocations, which had not been present in Under the Net. "The real demonism flows not primarily from Mischa Fox, the power figure, but from the outsiders, the Polish brothers, Jan and Stefan Lusiewic, who live in a room in Pimlico with their infinitely aged, silent and immobile mother, around whom they dance wildly, calling her the earth. In a novel which strongly opposes men and women, as well as eastern and western Europe, Murdoch uses these two brothers with their mysterious cultural otherness, as true and alien representatives of the primitive, earthy Poland of their childhood, a middle European world which also produces Mischa Fox and the trapped, pitiable dress maker, Nina. Power, revenge and a threatening upward mobility characterize these brothers as they use their major weapons — sex, intelligence, work, greed, bullying — against the society they intend to conquer."10 The two brothers are geniuses with machines. They use Rosa almost as an extension of her factory machine and this is one of the most interesting devices in the novel. The brothers are particularly effective in that they complement our knowledge of Mischa, whose childhood cruelties, such as killing animals because he loves them so much, he
cannot bear to see them suffer, were based in a middle European village and are as inexplicable as the primitive logic of Stefan and Jan. The brothers are in the process of establishing themselves in English society, whereas Mischa is the now perfectly assimilated product. In various ways, all three, Mischa, Stefan and Jan represent the mechanical forces within Western society which has excised and at the same time is vulnerable to "The excision of these primitive, uncontrollable powers has led to artificial substitutes which Murdoch symbolizes through the machines which the western mind has invented and uses, but does not understand and cannot control." 11

Rosa literally has a machine. When she is bored to despair, she goes to work in a factory where the brothers are employed, and her labour is machine-minding. Her machine, with its personal chant (Kitty Kitty bang bang click) is an incomprehensible object to her, but it represents her own mechanical personality and activity, which Stefan and Jan can so easily control. "This carefully worked out analogy introduces to Murdoch's work the characteristic theme of mechanical and machine-like human behaviour, a theme which she will develop as her career advances." 12 Rosa tries hard to understand her world. Yet it is easier, she finds, to remain a slave to various

11. WS. 138.
12. WS. 138.
machines, to fulfil a limited function, to be enslaved by the Polish brothers, to be trapped by her brother Hunter's need for her, to perceive characters narr wly as she does Nina. The Polish brothers find it easy to invade hers as well as other machine-like-minds - Annette's and Hunter's — with their mysterious and threatening power, and the aimless western characters have no resources with which to answer this invasion.

Murdoch gives Mischa one blue and one brown eye to indicate that he is almost totally an ambiguous character, and through his strangely sourceless wealth and subtle connections with all the major characters (except the Polish brothers, who are his avatars), implies a mysterious universal magnetism as the source of his power. It is very clear that he is a source of great fantasy for all of his London victims except Peter Saward, a scholar. The others pursue him, are proud to know him, listen to his utterances as to an oracle, obey him, fall in love with him. "Like Richard III to Macbeth, he is a pretype of the power demon, so fully developed and so much better handled later in the character of Julius King in A Fairly Honourable Defeat." Calvin Blick, is Mischa's active instrument, perverted and cruel, but like Mischa, with frequent flashes of real truth and comprehension. Calvin Blick tells Rosa at the end of the novel that

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13. "WS. 138."
Mischa killed him years ago, destroying his selfhood and breaking down his personality, as he has done to all his victims with his power.

Mischa Fox's real power lies in his ability to charm and churn the imagination of others. He himself is certainly calm, while the characters on whom his magnetism works, flounder about, like the rare fish in his party drawing-room in their frantic desire to live after their aquarium has been broken by Rosa's glass paper-weight. "Like the fish, the characters are doomed, not to immediate death (this will come later in Murdoch's work) but to the horrors of life outside the secure world of a really adequate social emotional environment. Mischa's persona is at least partially a creation of his friends' imaginations, and realizing that, he enjoys his mystery and his ability to manoeuver and observe their struggles."14

Like the fish-like-flounderings of the characters the plot-workings of the novel evoke the archetype of the labyrinth and the temple. The novel opens with silly Annette Cockeyne's rejection of Dante's image of the Minotaur from Canto XII of the 'Inferno'. This creature of the labyrinth, 'bounded to and fro in pain and frustration. Dante was saying, like a bull that has

14 *WS*, 138.
received the death blow. Annette naively sees the whole thing as God's fault and as very cruel and unpleasant, then dashes forward into the maze which she calls the School of Life, we do not find her unconsciousness and ignorance at all interesting. However, the allusion to the Minotaur, the labyrinth and its hellish, physical fury serves as a good introduction to the characters who weave their way through tortured lives and the peculiar physical brutalities of civilized London. What they seek is elusive and in its various expressions, pointless. The aimlessness of the characters is occasionally and temporarily focused on the feminist periodical, 'Artemis', once the powerful instrument of the suffragate movement and now edited by poor spineless Hunter Keepe. Mischa in his endless hunger, wants everything, including the Artemis, but Rosa takes a combative stand and begs rescue for the journal from one of its founders, the grand old suffragate, Camilla Wingfield, who happens to live just across the square. Miss Wingfield said that she had never forgotten a song that she heard before 1910 and never remembered one that she heard since then. She is a crazy old lady who is able to galvanize the old suffragates and defeat Mischa's takeover bid in a splendidly comic scene. She then dies and leaves

15. Iris Murdoch, The Flight from The Enchanter. Subsequently cited as FE.
Rosa one valuable social way of redeeming herself: the majority of shares of 'Artemis.' "Artemis, which represents the struggle, power and certainty of women in the past, can potentially save modern Rosa from the entrapment of men that has characterized her wanderings in the maze of her life, and this undeveloped idea is as close as Murdoch ever gets to an extended feminist statement." 16

This novel does not end with marriage ceremonies (brothers and sisters are closer here than lovers). It rather asserts the reality of the labyrinth and the falseness of the temple. Rosa and all the characters wrongly anticipate Mischa's big party in his mysterious temple (two interconnected houses in Kensington) as a redemptive and sublime movement. They assemble, glowing with excitement for a splendid meaningful affair. They assemble as for a holy movement, and instead, a nasty drama of the violence of reality, takes place, which portrays the human destructiveness. The account of Mischa Fox's party is given from the point of view of John Rainborough, who like Mischa, is the most elaborated male character. The major issue of Mischa's party is the revelation of a deadly enmity between Rosa and Annette, who destructively fight like cats. Annette, young, youthful, rich, flirtatious and dressed like a sea-green mermaid

16 WS. 140.
in a cocktail costume is full of the power of youth and destructively loves the most powerful male. Annette also represents the myth of the unicorn virgin which Mischa expounds to John Rainborough. As he explained it, there are three types of women divided by age — the unicorn girl, the siren and most importantly, the wise woman: "There is a kind of wise woman," said Mischa, 'One in whom a destruction, a cataclysm has at some time taken place. All structures have been broken down and there is nothing left but the husk, the earth, the wisdom of the flesh. One can create such a woman sometimes by breaking her." 17

Mischa also comments on virginity as a relevance to Annette's attitude to life and her falling a victim to Rainborough:

"The Young are full of dreams", said Mischa, 'That is what makes them so touching and so dangerous. Every young girl dreams of dominating the forces of evil. She thinks she has that virtue in her that can conquer anything. Such a girl may be a virgin in soul even after much experience and still believe in the legend of virginity. This is what leads to the dragon, imagining that she will be protected." 18

Annette and Rosa fight over Mischa at his party. They

17 FE. 144.
18 FE. 142.
fight savagely after the fish-bowl has been broken, and somehow, the frantic writhing and death of the fish open them to their own violence and confusion. The struggles of the dying fish and the ugly, sex-centred brawling of the two women destroy any image of the holy or godlike. Murdoch describes the fight scene in a brilliant example of broad comedy which is full of rollicking fun and laughter:

"Flowers were tossed away, and fishes snatched from cushions or plucked from under stampeding feet, and were hurled into the vases. One was dropped by mistake into a decanter of gin. Hands reached out and every hand clutched its coloured fish. Under the tables and the chairs they scrambled to gather them up, and the room was full of cries."19

Mischa, the man who loves all creatures and weeps to see them destroyed and moribund, enslaves most women with his peculiar image and character:

"There was thus a brown profile and a blue profile, giving the impression of two faces superimposed."20 Annette's misery at the party and comic failure at suicide balance Rosa's near submission to the Mischa she thought she had escaped.

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19 FE. 211.
20 FE. 86.
Nina, the dressmaker, is an interesting and significant device in the novel Like Mischa and the two Polish brothers she is from eastern Europe. She is in a middle state between two cultures, but she lacks the power and ruthlessness of the Polish brothers. Nina is encaged by Mischa's magic and later kills herself in despair. Nina has a dream in which her sewing machine is metamorphosed into a devouring dragon, its steel jaws destroying the fabric of the world. The lonely, serious message of the novel is that there is no protection from the dragon, and that each person is imprisoned and fights the dragon of the enchanter.

Thus we find that Murdoch's novels, The Flight from the Enchanter, A Severed Head and The Unicorn, are tales of enchantment which involve two groups of characters, those who enchant and those who are enchanted, in an intricate network of flight and pursuit. The enchanters are mysterious, magical figures who represent the forces at work in an ambiguous universe, while the enchanted suffer from ignorance and impotence and so regard these powerful beings with fascination and loathing.

In Flight from the Enchanter and A Severed Head, the enchanters appear ominously exotic. It is manifested in a visible foreignness, as Mischa's Oriental Magic and Honor's mid-European brusqueness. Mischa is also likened to a sage and priest, Honor to a goddess. Both Honor and Mischa, who are
frequently referred to as demons and ghouls, take on the power of merciless deities.

At the end of the novel, Rosa Keepe’s panic is assuaged when Peter Saward shows her a picture of Mischa’s birthplace: He shows her the old market square and the famous bronze fountain, and the mediaeval bridge across the river—He pacifies Rosa with a romantic escape from reality, the novel ends nearly where it began, with another exploitation of Mischa as a mythic or story book character.

Then in 1957, came a quiet and small novel, The Sandcastle, after the bizarre and energetic The Flight from the Enchanter. At the centre of the novel is an adulterous but unconsummated love affair between the schoolmaster Bill Mor and the young, very young painter Rain Carter, with Bill’s wife Nan, playing the villain. Rain is a childish girl with a childish appeal, which causes the vulnerable old Demoyte, (whose painting she has been asked to do), to fall in love with her. Demoyte, knowing his case to be hopeless, being like a father-figure to Rain, encourages the affair between Rain and Mor. The School-Master Mor, trapped in an unhappy, loveless marriage with destructive Nan, succumbs to Rain’s gentle, sweet, childlike innocence. But he does not appreciate the lying situations that Rain puts him in to, and is often offended by Rain’s emotionally retarded childishness. Rain is like a fairy dream in Mor’s life, which until then, was so full of boredom. The frustrated, middle
aged and unhappily married school master loses his heart completely to a bewitching young artist. Around him are characters like his friend Tim Burke, Nan his wife and his children, Don and Felicity and his several colleagues, who provide him the reality, ultimately to defeat the false fantasy. Mor's fourteen-year-old girl, Felicity was "very thin and straight, and tall for her age. The skin of her face, which was very white but covered over in summer with a thick scattering of golden freckles, was drawn tightly over the bridge of her nose and away from her prominent eyes, giving her a perpetual look of inquiry and astonishment. She had her mother's eyes, a gleaming blue, but filled with a hazier and more dreamy light. Nan's hair was a dark blond, undulating naturally over her head, the ends of it tucked away into a subdued halo. Felicity's was fairer and straighter, drawn now into a straggling tail which emerged from under her school hat. In looks, the girl had none of her father. It was Donald, who had inherited Mor's dark and jaggedly curly hair and his bony face, irregular to ugliness."

Donald was "tall enough to box Mor in the eyes; indeed there was scarcely an inch between them. His resemblance to his father was considerable. He had Mor's crisp, dark hair, his crooked nose and lop-sided

21 Iris Murdoch, The Sandcastle 16. Subsequently cited as SC.
smile. His eyes were darker though, and more suspicious. Mor's eyes were a flecked grey, Donald's brooding brown. The block points upon his chin portended a dark and vigorous beard. His face was soft, however, still with the indeterminacy of boyhood. His mouth was shapeless and pouting, not firmly set." 22

Felicity plays by an English sea in Devon. "not building fantasy sandcastles but indulging in black magical rites hoping to destroy Rain's power over her father. Rain and Felicity stand in a peculiar parallel relationship. Both afflicted by childhood, they play their arts of enchantment: Rain through sex, Felicity through magical enactments which she partially shares with her maturing brother, Don. The object of both is possession of Mor." 23

At the end of the novel, Felicity is sitting by herself on the stairs, half-way up. "From up above she could hear the quiet sound of voices as Mor and Donald were talking in the bedroom. Everything was all right now. Why was it then that she was starting to cry. She fumbled in her clothes until she found a handkerchief. Her eyes were filled with tears and soon they were streaming down her face. She gave a little sob into her handkerchief. Everything was all right now. It was all right. It was all right." 24

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22 SC. 42.
23 WS. 143-144.
24 SC. 313.
Iris Murdoch's *The Sand-Castle* comes as perhaps more of a surprise. It deals with the most ordinary and everyday environment in the Murdoch canon to date, being set among the staff of a Home Countries boarding school. It is a love story ending in renunciation. "Although it has been criticized for its decided thematic similarity to the conventional literature of women's magazines, it is more like its predecessor, *The Flight From the Enchanter*, in its basic moral and narrative assumptions than is sometimes realized."25 Most of us fail to take into account the extent to which Rain Carter operates here much as Mischa Fox does in *The Flight from the Enchanter*. She, like Mischa, is a central figure around whom others — not just Mor, but Demoyte as well, possibly even Jim Burke, Mor's jeweller friend — weave fantasies. "The level at which these operate is less mysterious than in the earlier novel, the reader may well identify it as merely sexual. But it must be admitted that Murdoch's skill lies in conveying the extent to which Mor declines to show awareness of what is happening to him. His opening moves display his considerable reluctance to admit to the explicit consequences of his involvement with the girl, who in fact represents many different kinds of escape: to youth, wealth and a life away from the constriction of his marriage."26

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25. *RT.* 36.

The Sandcastle contains a lot of characters who rush about independently, each one eccentric and self-centred. It is bright and airy and the characters move about freely; it is more like life as it is normally lived. In 1958, after publishing her first four novels, Iris Murdoch said that the disadvantage of an open novel is, "it may become loose in texture and it is more difficult to make the structure evident; a closed novel is more intensely integrated but may be more claustrophobic in atmosphere and the characters may lose their sense of freedom. Ideally, and if one were a great writer, one could. I think, combine both these things in a single work and not have to oscillate between them."27

Until about 1970 Murdoch did oscillate between the closed novel and the open novel. Since then, she has produced a number of superb novels that do indeed combine these two sets of virtues.

The art in which Iris Murdoch excels is not the art of restraint with which we are confronted in the Sandcastle, but one of display — also of some exoticism — which is quite alien to the mode of portrayal chosen for Mor. One example is the afternoon of the mysteriously escapist car drive which culminates in Rain's green Riley overturning into the river, and her

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27 SA, 24.
decision to swim. At the sight of Rain's clothes lying on the river bank, Mor turns away quickly. The scene does not affect him sufficiently for us to be interested in him.

"While in many ways the quiet and everyday world offered in this novel is one which she believes the novelist should not consider unworthy of attention, it is a world to which her own fictional talents are simply not best suited." 28

Murdoch has said that her chief failure in The Sandcastle was that she did not attend sufficiently to the character of Nan Mor. She has said,

"it would have been a far better novel if I had spent more imaginative time detaching Nan from the story and not letting her just play the part of this rather tiresome wife but making her somebody with quite extraordinary ideas of her own, playing some quite different game, perhaps, having some dream life of her own which is quite different from that of the other characters." 29

There are high level dramatic adventures in The Sandcastle. There are lengthy descriptions of scenes such as Mor's and Rain's attempts to get her car out of the river, and the tower-climbing sequence involving Mor's son Donald and his

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28 R1. 38.

29 R1. 38.
friend Carde. The combination of such adventures persisted in The Bell and here Murdoch was certainly more successful.

The art-mascer Bledyard alone remains not just resistant to, but apparently unaware of, the childlike charm exercised by Rain.

"I sent her away," Bledyard states to Mor, "He leaned over Mor, his long hair flapping. There is such a thing as respect for reality. You are living on dreams now, dreams of happiness, dreams of freedom. But in all this you consider only yourself. You do not apprehend the distinct being of either your wife or Miss Carter."  

Then again Bledyard said something which made Mor furious. "You know you are damaging her. You are diminishing her by involving her in this. A painter can only paint what he is. You will prevent her from being a great painter."  

"He is raving, thought Mor ... why had he been so patient with this maniac."  

Bledyard is shown to be ludicrous in everyday life, but

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31. SC. 213.
32. SC. 214.
33. SC. 214.
capable at heightened moments of rising to a certain gracefullness. He is dutifully and lovingly attached to the pious Anglican Christianity community. He has neither power nor charisma in the classroom and is considered a comic butt by the boys. Yet he is serious enough to challenge Mor when he perceives the wilful, destructive pattern of the Rain-Mor affair. He does so with the objectivity of the truth-teller without regard for his own position in Mor's eyes. "This often comic, humble man, whose most serious comments appear hilarious because of his stammering word repetitions ... is admired by his colleagues as a man ... he is a gentleman with inborn style and well trained grace." 34

"Critics of The Sand castle have been disturbed by the gypsy and by his possible claims to being a symbol in the book. It is often noticed that he leaves the scene at the end of the novel's action, having appeared at various sinister, resonant moments during it, notably on the afternoon of the ill-fated car-ride. The way in which the gypsy seems to function is rather like the case of the bell in the next novel: both are accorded symbolic value by the characters in whose presence they operate." 35

34. WS. 17.
35. RT. 39.
"Felicity's determined voodoo on the seashore might perhaps be touching, but somehow the cemonism is all too serious, too powerfully designed .... Murdoch has gone very far in giving fictional flesh to Felicity's imaginary Angus." \(^{36}\) Silent, wordless Angus, a gipsy, appears before Felicity as he also does with his Tarot deck to Rain and Mor in the woods. He also leans eerily and terrifyingly on Mor's doorbell one night when Rain stays over, chastely, in Felicity's empty bed.

"It was the gipsy-looking wood cutter whom they had seen in the wood, playing with the cards. A second later Mor realized the fantastic thing that had happened. The gipsy had been sheltering from the rain under the porch, and without noticing it he had been leaning his shoulder against the bell." \(^{37}\)

"The link between this kind of superstition and the real substance of the book is not easily seen, for this novel, inspite of its failures and irritation, also contains Murdoch's first serious religious examination of the moral life of the good." \(^{38}\)

Next came The Bell in 1958. The religious seriousness and the simplicity of The Sandcastle formed an important

\(^{36}\) WS. 144.
\(^{37}\) SC. 144.
\(^{38}\) WS. 144.
bridge to The Bell. Of the ten early novels, this one, much more than The Flight from the Enchanter, shows her mature style.

Murdoch's devotion to works of art is seen clearly in most of her novels, and she depicts their sustained usefulness. She says in The Fire and the Sun: "Good art, thought of as a symbolic force rather than statement, provides a stirring image of a pure transcendent value, a steady visible enduring higher good, and perhaps provides for many people, in an unreligious age without prayer or sacraments, their clearest experience of something grasped as separate and precious and beneficial and held quietly and unpossessively in the attention. Good art which we love can seem holy and attention to it can be like praying. ... As Kierkegaard said, we admire and relax. Good art, on the other hand, provides work for the spirit."39

In her early novel The Bell (1958), Murdoch first put this far-reaching idea of the religious function of good art in our period, to work.

Dora Greenfield, the childish, worldly, straying wife, absolutely out of place in the quarrelsome piety of the religious community at Imber, goes to the National Gallery with the intention, though of course unconsciously, of escaping for sometime from her two wretched lives — an unhappy marriage to

39 Iris Murdoch, The Fire and the Sun 76-77.
the neurotic Paul and the unsatisfying continuation of an affair with the hedonist journalist, Noel:

"Dora was always moved by pictures. Today she was moved, but in a new way, she marvelled with a kind of gratitude, that they were all still there, and her heart was filled with love for the pictures, their authority, their marvellous generosity, their splendour. It occurred to her that here at last was something real and something perfect. ... she felt that she had had a revelation. She looked at the radiant, sombre, tender, powerful canvas of Gainsborough and felt a sudden desire to go down on her knees before it embracing it, shedding tears ... her real life, her real problems, were at Imber; and since, somewhere, something good existed, it might be that her problems would be solved after all."\(^{40}\)

Dora is also moved for a moment to the same profound insights before the medieval bell, 'a thing from another world.'\(^{41}\) "The square faced her from the sloping surface of the bronze, solid, simple, beautiful, absurd, full to the brim with something which was to the artist not an object of speculation or imagination."\(^{42}\)

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\(^{40}\) Iris Murdoch, *The Bell* 191-192. Subsequently cited as B.

\(^{41}\) B. 222.

\(^{42}\) B. 270.
Dora possesses a naive vitality according to the homosexual Michael Meade, one of the leaders of the community at Imber, who finds her irritatingly frivolous and he sees her as epitomising, "everything he didn't care for about women."

Dora's vitality stands in contrast to the rigidly masculine demeanour of Dora's academic husband, "Paul lives by the values of single-mindedness and self-discipline, qualities which might be admirable if he did not put them to purely egotistical use. Paul's desire for offspring says everything about his position as a representative and agent of patriarchy."

"The sense of family was strong in him and he preserved an ancestral nostalgia for the dignity and ceremonial of kinship. He yearned for a son, a little Paul whom he could instruct and encourage, and finally converse with as an equal and even consult as a rival intelligence." It follows that motherhood would have improved the status of Dora in Paul's eyes, but Dora we find is totally unprepared for children but she does not try to prevent conception.

Two outsiders, at the high-minded Anglican lay community Imber Court, are responsible for discovering in Imber

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43 B. 128.
44 DJ. 74.
45 B. 10.
lake and secretly raising from its depths, the medieval bell. That had, according to the legend, belonged to Imber Abbey but when one of the nuns took a lover and the Abbey was placed under a curse, it flew out of its tower and into the lake. The faithless nun drowned herself, and legend says that the tolling of a bell in the lake portends a death. The two outsiders are a graceful, cheerful, innocent boy Toby Gashe, whose natural goodness and sensitivity contrast with the willed discipline of the Imber Court brotherhood; and a childish visitor Dora Greenfield, the errant wife of an art historian working at Imber. In the upright, doctrinaire company at Imber, Dora seems morally tarnished like the fallen nun herself. Lithely swimming and exploring the lake, humble, happy Toby detects the sunken bell. Dora knows the legend from her husband Paul, and at her behest, he raises the bell, named 'Gabriel'. Yielding to the still yet "'living' presence and 'spell' of the risen bell in the barn, feeling 'reverence for it, almost love', Dora rings it because the 'truth-telling voice ... must not be silenced'.'46

The bell is manifestly the central symbol of the novel. A.S. Byatt says the bell is a planted rather than a natural symbol. Deborah Johnson attempts a corrective answer to Byatt:

"The 'connection' between truth-telling and the ringing

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46 B. 289.
of the bell is, after all, Dora's, as well as the novelists. The ringing of the bell is only one of the number of consciously symbolic actions which Dora takes in an attempt to resolve her predicament in relation to her husband who doesn't respect her and to the Imber community by whom she feels casually judged.47

Toby tries to assert his heterosexuality after discovering that Michael is attracted to him. Michael Meade, a homosexual, caused Toby's fall. James Tayper Pace, disapproves of homosexuality outrightly. When Toby goes to him to confess his very slight flirtation with Michael, James is shocked. In his sermon on the good, he says: "We should consider not what delights us or what disgusts us, morally speaking, but what is forbidden ... sodomy is forbidden ... sodomy is not disgusting, it is just forbidden."48

Towards the end of The Bell, several personalities have survived, some have failed. Catherine, Nick's sister, a schizophrenic in love with Michael, tries to drown herself but is rescued by a nun. Nick shoots his head off. The unstable world of Imber Court dissolves, the Abbey takes over its grounds. Toby seems unscathed. Michael is broken but has to face up to the indignities of survival. Dora begins to acquire a sense of identity, to value herself and learn to swim.

47 DJ. 82.
48 B. 133.
From 1961 to 1966 a Murdoch novel appeared annually. A Severed Head was published in 1961. This period brought her wide acclaim "as a novelist of cerebral, sexually adventurous fiction, which would show an alarming tendency to turn into unconscious self-parody, and in which in their erotic behaviour the characters frequently overstep conventional barriers of age, gender and blood relationship. The field of action is largely restricted to a narrow band of the wealthy bourgeoisie, and a languorously decadent atmosphere is often characterized by richly described, decorative interiors, much heavy drinking, lachrymosity, suffering and fatigue."

There are some Murdoch novels which one could call mythical, "novels in which Miss Murdoch's interest in these mechanisms, in parodies of the good, in patterning, leads to the structure seeming to hold more aesthetic power than the individual characters — even though the morality of these novels continues to assert the paramount imperative of observing the Free individual. Such novels include A Severed Head, The Unicorn, and The Time of the Angels."

A Severed Head is different from the others, in that it is not concerned with metaphysics but with pattern of social

49. "RT 46.
50. "AB. 26."
and sexual behaviour. It has a cool elegance. **A Severed Head** is narrated by the urbane, Anglo-Irish Martin Lynch-Gibbon, whose successful peaceful marriage and concealed adulterous relationship are threatened and destroyed by narrated events. The two power figures here are the anthropologist Honor Klein and the psycho analyst Palmer Anderson, who have an incestuous relationship, but are seen as gods.

"They (Palmer and Antonio) seemed in that momentary vision of them like deities upon an Indian frieze, enthroned, inhumanly beautiful, a pair of sovereigns, distant and serene. They turned towards us, startled but not yet risen, still gracious in their arrested communion."

Peter J. Conradi has drawn attention to the repetition of Oedipal family situations in Murdoch's novels: sibling rivalry in **Under the Net**, A Flight from the Enchanter, **A Severed Head**, Bruno's Dream, brother-sister incest in **A Severed Head**, The Bell, The Red and the Green, to mention some.

Martin Lynch-Gibbon, an unfaithful husband and lover is the male narrator. "**A Severed Head** draws attention to the abyss which lurks behind apparently civilised behaviour."  

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51. Iris Murdoch, **A Severed Head** 58. Subsequently cited as SH.

52. DJ. 26.
novel opens, Martin has been involved in a "prolonged and successful masquerade."53

Martin is an intelligent forty-one year old wine merchant. His fashionable wife Antonia is a society beauty, older than him and they are childless. Georgie, an economics lecturer at the London School of Economics is Martin's mistress. Martin stumbles from one appalling revelation to another. Anonaria announces that she will leave him for her psychoanalyst, Palmer Anderson. The love affair between Anonia and her brother-in-law Alexander, between Palmer and his half-sister Honor Klein shock Martin. The final regrouping is different. Palmer leaves for America with the newly-enslaved Georgia, Anonia leaves for Rome with Martin's brother Alexander who has loved her for years. "Martin who has fallen fatally for the unlovely Honor Klein, is rewarded by her in an ending which, for all that he is at last with a woman whom he loves with wholehearted (if, to the reader mysterious) passion, is ambiguous."54

"We see in this novel that Murdoch is an earnest champion of the individual's independence. She vehemently criticises everything that constricts this freedom. She approves of monogamy. However she is hostile to the rigid marriage-bond

53. SA. 92-98.
54. SH. 20.
which is likely to restrict the individual's freedom and weaken their love for each other. If the partners of a marriage do not enjoy mutual love, trust and understanding, there is no point in their staying together as husband and wife. 55

The symbol of severed, sculptured, and imagined heads, in A Severed Head, has been discussed by most of Murdoch's critics. It has confused readers since so many clues are given within the novel. The Irish fertility folklore, Freudian and primitive implications and others are suggested by different characters. Antonia is seen by Alexander as a severed head but it is Honor who contains both reason and emotions - within her.

About the Japanese Samurai sword Honor said emotionally, "In Japan these swords are practically religious objects. They are forged not only with great care but with great reverence. And the use of them is not merely an art but a spiritual exercise." 56 Honor's depth and emotions therefore draw and influence. Martin as no other woman could do, A Severed Head is the artificial severance between emotions and reason that leads to the modern sensual and moral love.

The Biblical reference to A Severed Head is that Herod married his brother's wife Herodius. John the Baptist

55 GR. n.d.
56 SH. 96.
preached, that, it was not good to marry one's brother's wife. When Herod asked Heroidus what she most desired, she asked for the head of John the Baptist. So, the Severed Head.

"No longer now attending to me she moved the sword back and laid it across her knees in the attitude of a patient executioner ... ."57

"She laughed suddenly, and with that she laid her other hand upon the hilt and drew the sword upward with surprising swiftness to describe a great arc at the level of her head. It made a sound like a whip moving. The point came down within an inch of the arm of my chair and then descended again to the floor ... ."58

Martin who is obsessed with Honor is taken by surprise that she has chosen to find him and be with him. He says "I know you have the temperament of an assassin". 59 Then at the close of the novel Martin tells Honor, "You told me you were a severed head. Can one have human relations with a severed head?" 60

The symbolic handling of adultery, incest, castration.

57 SH. 98.
58 SH. 97.
59 SH. 204.
60 SH. 205.
sexual confusion, violence and suicide by Murdoch in *A Severed Head* makes it a brilliantly enjoyable book and at times appallingly funny, witty and superbly mature.

*An Unofficial Rose* came out in 1962. Critics think of *An Unofficial Rose* as a strong novel with some lapses. "In *The Bell* and in *An Unofficial Rose* Iris Murdoch makes much more successful and sustained attempts at showing efforts, failures, partial failures, to apprehend the distinct being of other people... Both *The Bell* and *An Unofficial Rose* are concerned with the relationships between freedom and virtue, and also between beauty and truth."61 Byatt further says that both these novels could be described as, "English symbolic novels, in which a powerful formal element is provided by the relationship of plot and characters to certain symbolic objects."62

The English unofficial rose is no doubt Ann Peronett. She is one of Murdoch's characters of the good. She tries to assert a will she does not possess and negatively handles crucial scenes which could have given her happiness in life.

"She had let go of the exceedingly dear and precious Felix whom she loved and needed with all her heart, almost. It

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61. AB. 22.
62. AB. 22.
seemed to her, because of a naked meaningless incapacity to take what she wanted.\textsuperscript{63}

Ann is a character with no strength to call other characters or the reader to her. When Felix sails off to the French Marie-Laure, leaving Ann, it is hard to feel pity for Ann.

"Human freedom is seen here in terms of the freedom to explore possibilities, although the way in which we actually react in the face of a freeing vista may be disappointingly cautious ... Here perhaps, the character with the greatest overall vision is Emma, the writer of detective stories."\textsuperscript{64}

Actions and events in this novel are pushed around by both Mildred Finch from Seton Blaise and Emma Sands from London. Both of them visit the main court, Gray Hallock.

We find Hugh Peronett is recently widowed. He once had a brief affair with Emma. Emma is a writer of detective stories. Lindsay Rimmer helps her as a companion playing Ariel to her Prospero. Hugh's son Randall, married to Ann, falls in love with Lindsay. Randall flees to Italy with Lindsay. Mildred is the surviving child (with a destructive, demonic nature,) of Ann and

\textsuperscript{63}Iris Murdoch, \textit{An Unofficial Rose}, 335. Subsequently cited as UR.

\textsuperscript{64}RT. 53.
Randall. She has desired Felix, who loves Ann, 'ever since she could remember' and destroys the relationship between Felix and her mother. At the end of the novel, Randall returns to a securer though second best relationship like Hugh once did. Hugh is rejected by Emma and decides to journey to India with Mildred and her brother Felix.

In 1963 came the next novel, The Unicorn. This novel shares a Gothic environment with The Italian Girl (1964). We see a new form — the gothic — in these novels. There is a relation in sense to Wuthering Heights. The claustrophobic atmosphere of Hannah-Crean-Smith's room where she is imprisoned by Gerald Scottow, sickens us. "It is, however, one of Murdoch's major achievements among the early novels — a novel of serious religious dimension, and the best and most profound analysis of some of her most compelling ideas." In The Unicorn, Marian Taylor takes on the job of a governess at the remote Gaze Castle. She has to look after the mistress of the house, Hannah Crean-Smith who tried to murder her husband Peter by pushing him over a cliff. He was crippled and went off to New York. Gerald Scottow, Peter's ex-lover imprisoned Hannah at the Gaze for seven years before Marian arrived there. In The Unicorn, the sea.
marsh and the bog are all used to create a sense of barren wasteland. It becomes symbolic of the morally barren world that Marian has come to. *The Italian Girl* (1964) is the shortest of Murdoch’s novels. In this novel the Oedipal pattern is somewhat dominant and tedious. "Its shortness may be its greatest liability, in as much as Murdoch’s strength lies in amplification and extension, not in contraction." 

Much, too much, is thrown in for such a short novel — "not only do we have a few well-defined versions of oedipal hatred, but also mad, comic dreams, Russian sorcerers and outsiders, Medusa hair imagery, Freudian hatreds and loves, abortion, bizarre matings." 

The historical novel, *The Red and the Green* followed in 1965. It is set in Dublin and the atmosphere in the week leading up to the abortive Easter Rising of 1916. "There is no doubt that Murdoch researched her material carefully." Readers and critics feel sometimes that Murdoch made a mistake to use Millie Kinnard’s escapade as a central episode. Perhaps, if she were to re-write her novel today, the failed priest Barney, who falls downstairs carrying some bottles of whiskey, would be given more

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67. *WS.* 152.
68. *WS.* 152.
69. *RT.* 58.
prominence by her. Murdoch contrasts here formlessness versus form, good versus inevitable evil. Marvellous Millie with her pistols is everyone's choice and poor Kathleen Drumm with her Catholic charities is a humble character who fails to dazzle.

Kathleen's husband Barney, is "a failed priest, a failed husband, a failed stepfather, and he vents his quiet resentment against Kathleen and his life, on a lying, egocentric autobiography, which he gives up after a Good Friday apprehension of God and Love." 70

"It is unfortunately true that Murdoch lost much popular support and even many of her serious readers in the period of An Unofficial Rose, The Unicorn, The Italian Girl, The Red and The Green, and The Time of the Angles: that is from 1962 to 1966. This is apparently her most uncertain period ..." 71

Elizabeth Dipple asks, "What caused the uncertainty and dissatisfaction of so many readers during the 1960's and how did Murdoch's fictions change so that she has now become the best serious realist in our language?" 72

Murdoch has said that all her major themes are to some degree already present in her first novel, Under the Net.

70. WS. 153.
71. WS. 134.
72. WS. 134.
Although Murdoch made changes, one of the distinctions of her work is the essential consistency. The ideas were there but the method of transmitting the themes and making them effective had yet to be worked out. When we look back at her first ten novels, we find the artistic experimentation with modes and vehicles of enormous interest.

The Time of the Angels was published in 1966 and it is sometimes felt to conclude a rather unsatisfactory stage in Murdoch's career. "Like many of her less successful novels, it is fascinating more for the thought that underlies it than for the working of that thought into the form of the novel's action and characterization." 73

Carel Fisher is rector of a non-existent City Church (it was destroyed in the war). In the rectory live his daughter Muriel, his beautiful, invalid ward Elizabeth and their West Indian maid-servant Pattie O'Driscoll. Here too are Eugene, a Russian emigre, and his delinquent son, Leo, Carel's brother Marcus, co-guardian with him of Elizabeth, tries to make contact with Carel but is constantly rebuffed. Marcus represents the rational man and insists strongly and proudly that he is not a Christian. Carel too believes there is no God. These seven characters go through a dance of attraction and repulsion.

73 RT. 59.
misunderstanding and revelation. At the centre of it all is Carel — a priest who believes that God being dead, his angels are released. At the end, Muriel finds herself with the power of life and death over her father. Carel and his household are all prisoners of circumstance, of their ideas or fantasies, of love. The intricate plotting of the relationships of these characters makes this novel both interesting and disturbing.

The Time of the Angels conveys a rather chilly detachment towards the female characters on the part of the female author. As in the Gothic novels, The Unicorn and The Italian Girl, The Time of the Angels offers visions of hell, where taut and terrible family relationships are played out in an Oedipal drama.

The Nice and the Good (1968) in atmosphere, treatment and subject matter, marks a definite break from its predecessors. Right from the opening sentence, the reader may sense a new, authoritative stylistic confidence. The quirks of the previous novels have vanished (the gripping of a table, repeatedly employed to accompany intense emotion, the over-reliance on the metaphor of the machine), and a descriptive capacity, not really encountered since The Bell, is here evident.

The opening sentence runs thus: "A Head of department, working quietly in his room in Whitehall on a summer afternoon, is not accustomed to being disturbed by the nearby and
indubitable sound of a revolver shot."  

The descriptive is thus shown: "The front door was wide open, framing distant cuckoo calls, while beyond the weedy gravel drive, beyond the dipped descending lawn and the erect hedge of raspberry-and-creamy spiraea, rose up the sea, a silvery blue ...".

Octavian and Kate Gray preside over an extensive menage at Trescombe House, and we can see a clearly defined resemblance to the courtly world of Shakespearian comedy in this novel. In addition to Octavian's brother Theo, the household consists of Mary Clothier (a widowed friend of Kate's from university days) and Paula Biranne (divorced, and more recently settled in this family). The younger generation consists of Barbara, daughter of the Grays', Mary's son Pierce (both teen-aged) and the charming, formidable twins of Paula, nine-year-old Edward and Henrietta. There is also the housekeeper Casie, and a refugee scholar Willy Kost, Mingo the dog and Montrose the cat. A frequent visitor to this household is John Ducane. Ducane is asked by Octavian to investigate the apparent suicide to Joseph Radeechy, a colleague in Whitehall. The novel's actions alternate between the London of Ducane's enterprise and Trescombe House.

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74 Iris Murdoch, *The Nice and the Good*. Subsequently, cited as NG.

75 NG, 19.
We find a minor character Casie, saying to Mary:

"Women are real people in Russia. Here they're just dirt. It's no good being a woman." 76

"Murdoch continues to place her women in the most unhappy predicaments. Her tight-love-plots rarely work in favour of her female characters. Whereas for the men in love the women may indeed embody the force of the contingent, the accidental and the unexpected ... for the women the experience of 'love' very often comes as a defeat ..." 77

We find in The Nice and the Good that the nice are not the good. John Ducane is nice, but he is not a character of the good. Theo is the character who is striving to be good. He loves his Jewish refugee friend Willy Kost and simple household beings: Mingo the dog, the nature-loving children, Henrietta and Edward and Casie, the maid-servant. He has been through inferno and been broken by it. Only Theo knows what good is, knows the great 'apalling' demands it makes, and with guilt behind him he strives as far as possible towards the unattainability of good. The production of such a character as Theo—a person of the good—is certainly not an easy job.

Miles Greensleave in Bruno's Dream, arrives at this

76. NG. 103.
77. DJ. 61.
illuminating conclusion: "He knew, and knew it in fear and
trembling, that good art comes out of courage, humility,
virtue." 78

Bruno's Dream has a plot which is initiated by a desire
for reconciliation and the first and last chapters depict the
dying consciousness of a very old man. It presents an anatomy of
death in which the dying Bruno learns a vital fact. This novel,
through the old man Bruno shows that an ordinary human mind is
slowly and reluctantly realizing what life and death are. Yet it
is a strangely cheerful book. Miles is one of Murdoch's most
dislikeable characters. He at least loved his Indian wife Parvati
and after her death wrote a very long, bad poem, when he began to
love Lisa, the ex-nun and his sister-in-law, and lost her, he
began to write inspired poetry. Lisa's life of discipline and
religious questing (she had begun many life-denying roles: as a
nun, and as a potential worker with Indian children) may be
contrasted to the selfishness and insensitivity of Miles, a
would-be saint, would-be artist contrast that Murdoch often depicts. A.S. Byatt while reviewing Bruno's Dream has stated
that "it is Murdoch's contemplation of Shakespeare's treatment of
Cordelia, and her belief in the sublimity of 'King Lear' that
are never far from the back of our minds here." 79.

78 Iris Murdoch, Bruno's Dream. 166.
79 Rt. 68.
Like a rare species of the spiders which have been his life long passion, Bruno at ninety faces extinction. He is obsessed with his past, and with the valuable stamp-collection he may leave to Danby, the son-in-law who shares his house, or to Miles, his son, from whom he is bitterly estranged. Before Bruno dies, he wishes to be reconciled with Miles, who has found peace of sorts with his second wife Diana and her sister Lisa, the ex-nun. Elaborate plans are laid for a meeting of Bruno and Miles. The meeting takes place bringing the two households inextricably together. Emotions flare, partners change, and change again, Bruno's dream comes to an end in the cataclysmic action of love.

In _A Fairly Honourable Defeat_ (1970), Iris Murdoch returns to a novelistic mode similar to that of _The Nice and the Good_, both in its 'openness' and in the use of an enchanter. In _A Fairly Honourable Defeat_, as in the next novel _An Accidental Man_ (1971), "Many potentially disabling elements are turned to explicitly comic use, and from here on in Murdoch's development it is possible to see this comic sense as attaining increasingly sophisticated solipsistic dimensions which reflect on the difficulties of handling the contingent mess of life within the constraints of the novel as a form."\(^{80}\) Both _A Fairly Honourable Defeat_ and _An Accidental Man_ can be shown to broadly adhering to
a pattern of Shakespearian comedy, and are longer novels than their predecessors. Much of the plot in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* has much in common with *Much Ado about Nothing* and there are repeated specific allusions to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

In *The Sovereignty of Good* she reflects: 'Perhaps one of the greatest achievements of all is to join the sense of absolute mortality not to the tragic but to the comic.'\textsuperscript{81} In *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* the structure of the work and the characters at last carry equally aesthetic weight. This shows Murdoch's new artistic maturity. Satanic Julius King, a Satan in person says, 'Human beings are essentially finders of substitutes.'\textsuperscript{82} This has always been a great Murdochian theme. The hurt produced by the removal of one relationship is compensated for by the substitution of a new one. "Humanists who admire Murdoch's work do not, it seems to me, always appreciate how much steel there is in her vision, coexisting, not always comfortably, with warmer and more romantic elements. In *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* the elements come together and produce a brilliant and decisive masterpiece."\textsuperscript{83} Here again we find the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{81} Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* 87.
  \item \textsuperscript{82} Iris Murdoch, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* 233.
  Subsequently cited as FH.
  \item \textsuperscript{83} SA, 160.
\end{itemize}
Christ-figure, Tallis, who is both good and interesting, contrasted to the devil, Julius. Murdoch also values independent existence and in this novel we find this most — through characters who are interesting, believable, even memorable — the hugely sympathetic Simon, 'Sensitive and childlike and pleasure-loving', 

Hilda, the wife who put husband before career, intelligent without pretension, strong and comfortable. Rupert her pompous well-meaning husband, the stiff Axel, the disturbed Morgan and Peter, the good Tallis, "The characters are alive, and alive through the relationships which define them, and by virtue of which they exist. Hilda and Morgan's closeness and dependency which excluded and hurt their mother while she lived, Morgan and Simon's affectionate and flirtatious friendship; Hilda and Peter's mother-son love, frustrated and gone under ground now that he is adolescent." 

"Morgan perceives Tallis as weak, without myth and Julius as strong, and full of mythic charisma." 

Tallis confines an unglamorous presence with hopeless, impotent love. Morgan tells him, "When I married you I felt I was killing myself... I have to be outside, in the open, in the

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84 'FH. 18.
85 'SA. 162
86 'WS. 18.
clear air, on the high places, free, free, free." Many readers may be inclined to applaud Morgan's insistence on freedom, yet such freedom in this case is nothing more than selfish egotism.

Tallis's character is of limited interest in the sense that he is too good, his knowledge is so rare, uncluttered, yet directly on target, clear and to the point. Rupert and Julius are intelligent theorists, yet it is Tallis who tells Hilda and Rupert that Peter's case of thieving is beyond their capacities and requires psychoanalysis. As usual he is right. Peter is last heard of, undergoing treatment in California. Tallis's real power and fascination comes in his dealings with evil. In a Chinese restaurant where brutal white thugs are attacking a defenceless black man, Tallis slaps the leader with tremendous force, putting an abrupt stop to the evil.

All the changes in this novel have to do with loss and diminution. Murdoch is not projecting a positive future world here. The only happy note comes from the hard-earned joy of Axel and Simon. This homosexual relationship, endangered by society, is strong and stable enough to withstand Julius's attentions. Julius's inability to deal with the contingent aspects of human relationships causes him psychosomatic ailments such as migraine and a complex of digestive disorders which never occur.

87 FH. 190.
and heal up, when he is on his own, as in the final chapter. In this he is utterly opposed to Tallis. Julius states that he is content in Paris because 'he was not closely involved with human beings'. We find that "evil in Murdoch's world resides in the failure of human relationship, whereas good exists in its narrow and infrequent success."89

In An Accidental Man (1971), Murdoch's interest in the role contingency in general and accident in particular can and should play, is shown in an extensive manner. The central episode involves Austin Gibson Grey who runs over a little girl while he is slightly drunk and driving his brother Matthew's car. He escapes prosecution but is blackmailed by Norman Monkley, the girl's stepfather, until a further accident and physical assault on Austin's part, reduces Monkley to a state of mental vegetation. At the beginning of the novel, clever young Gracie Tisbourne and American Ludwig Leferrier, a Vietnam war objector, are discussing Austin, the accidental man. "Bad Luck is a sort of wickedness in some people ... I hate his soupy sort of emotions, the way he looks at life ..."90 (says Gracie). W. ked or not, Austin is one of those people who thrive on the

88.FH. 402.
89.WS. 196.
90.Iris Murdoch, An Accidental Man 19.
destruction of others. No one escapes from his extraordinary and ruinous influence, least of all Dorina, his wife, a crazed angel who is drawn to him by an overwhelming love and fear: Mitzi Ricardo, his alcoholic landlady; and Matthew, his highly successful older brother. As Austin struggles to survive, the lives of all those who try to save him are altered in ways that are usually amusing, sometimes appalling, yet always revealing. Murdoch's gifts of intellect, imagination and language are brought fully together in this novel, which is both humane and extremely funny. Concise plot summary of this novel is difficult, in view of the enormous cast. But most of the novel shows this accident in particular, as well as accident in general, reflected in facets of the lives of others. Towards the end of the novel, one of the characters existing only in the letter-writing sequences, a delinquent little girl named Henrietta Sayce, has fallen to her death from some scaffolding.

Austin as a character is an absolute triumph for Murdoch. The reader experiences a pure hatred for him. Of course, Austin is too disorganized to be a pure demon like Julius King, "but his utter separation from human decency, his madly obsessive perversion of everything and his total lack of moral faculty create a demonic effect. Even more than Julius King, he projects a nasty aura through his self-pitying weakness, unpredictability and the accumulating details of his foul behaviour: stealing and selling Ludwig's books, stealing Dorina's ring and brooch, killing the child Rosalind, Smashing Norman.
Monkley’s skull, smashing Matthew’s beautiful Chinese porcelain collection, stealing five pounds from the impoverished Mitzi etc. Murdoch makes no attempt to justify him. An Accidental Man treats a moral issue which has concerned Murdoch outside her fiction. "This is a Vietnam novel, set against a foul world of political muddle, cruelty and moral chaos." Vietnam is not mentioned in the novel, "but it may be assumed that Ludwig Leferrier’s predicament is meant to reflect the moral complexity characterizing individual attitudes towards ... one of the more wantonly wicked political actions of the human race." The Black Prince (1973) is considered by many of her readers as Murdoch’s finest work. It may be thought of as Murdoch’s closest approach to the ‘post-modernist’ novel. It is not hard to see in Bradley Pearson and his rival Arnold Baffin, an artist-saint contrast. The characters, in all their awfulness, frailty, sadness, and ordinary human incompleteness, are real to the reader. The writing throughout is electric with energy and power. The novel is both very funny and acutely distressing. Dostoevski’s presence as well as Shakespeare’s is

91. WS. 208.
92. WS. 210.
93. RT. 72.
felt behind the book. "It is a superb thriller, a black book about marriage, a dark book about authorial rivalry. It is also a reflective book about love and it is this aspect which I shall emphasise." Fastidiousness is one of The Black Prince's topics. The settings of the book — Bradley's precious pretty flat in the perpetual seedy area of Fitzrovia, the Baffins cheerfully vulgar Ealing house, Christian's Hollywood 1950s Notting Hill flat, Bristol — are all most vividly realised.

"The book has received diverse readings. A.S. Byatt has commented unfavourably on its deliberate indeterminism. Richard Todd argues that there is nothing to stop us reading it as the story of a foot-fetichist. Lorna Sage argues, in contrast, that it could have been told in the omniscient third person — there would have been much lost in the way of local effect, but nothing of consequence in placing the story as a whole. Murdoch calls it an authoritarian work, dismisses the postscripts as just play and says that, for the attentive reader, it is made clear how you should interpret the wanderings and maunderies of a narrator and where you should believe him. In fact realism and illusionism cohabit in this novel perfectly and comfortably with much that questions their premises." 95

94 SAA. 185.
95 SAA. 186.
This brilliant and subtle novel cannot be discussed fully here. "Murdoch's technique here is extremely sophisticated and an excellent example of the complex range and disjunctive duality which characterize her best work. First, she herself estimates art as it occurs in the real world, in one of the major works of a real, and in her opinion the greatest, author — Shakespeare."^96

Themes elsewhere handled more seriously have been treated in a buoyant and almost frivolous manner in The Sacred and Profane Love Machine (1974). Further interaction between fantasy and reality is evident in this novel. Both The Sacred and Profane Love Machine and Henry and Cato (1976) have two heroes and two worlds. Both are black comedies about male vanity and female power. Out of their small casts, the illusion of a whole society is created.

Blaise Gavender and Monty Small are neighbours in Wild Buckinghamshire which is stranded between two worlds, neither fully countrified nor citified and with a new motor way about to be opened on its flank. At the end of the book, the motorway is opened and the first hare squashed on it. Blaise thinks of himself as a failed psychiatrist. Blaise is a cheat, a weak and second rate man. Harriet his good wife pleads for a loan from

^96. *WS*. 43.
Monty, a detective story writer, so that Blaise can become a doctor and continue his medical studies. Blaise has a mistress, Emily MacHugh in Putney. Blaise is forced to reveal to Harriet and their son, sixteen-years old David, the nine-year existence of a second menage with Emily and Luca, their son. The moral issues in this novel are attended to with characteristic seriousness but there is a playfulness surrounding the character of Monty who has recently lost his wife Sophie. Luca makes the double world single. The domestic calm of Hood House is broken by Luca, who makes a habit of stowing away in Blaise's car and appearing in his Hood House woods, joining the two worlds.

Magnus Bowles is created by Monty as an alibi for Blaise who visits Emily once a week. Harriet takes pleasure in hearing about Magnus Bowles, Blaise's nocturnal patient. What is comically grotesque is Harriet suffering her first rejection after Blaise's disclosure about Emily. She announces to Monty, "I've got to talk to Magnus Bowles. Blaise said I was the only woman who existed for Magnus, He must need me ..." Monty at once invents and announces Magnus' suicide. Harriet leaves for Germany but is killed by terrorists' bullets while shielding Luca at Hanover airport.

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97 Iris Murdoch, The Sacred and Profane Love Machine 273-74. Subsequently cited as SMPM.
An Accidental Man (1971) and A Word Child (1975) hold in focus the central, titular male character. The Sacred and Profane Love Machine only at first glance centres on the double loves of Blaise Gavender. While reading the novel, the reader is more powerfully connected to the mourning Montague Small by authorial devices. 'Blaise carries the external structure of the work while Monty dominates its internal rhythm.'

Elizabeth Dipple has usefully discussed the relationship between A Word Child and J.M. Barrie's Peter Pan, a work consistently fascinating to Murdoch and to which there are many allusions in this novel. "It may be thought, too, that in certain respects this novel brings the Shakespearian phase in Murdoch's development to an end, at least in so far as from now on there seems to be a less explicit concern with Shakespearian comic form, and a trend towards a more playful deployment of Shakespearian elements as other interests begin to take on a more dominant role." 

At first glance A Word Child (1975) seems to raise familiar themes of its predecessors in a familiar technique. However, a closer look reveals some differences and developments from its preceding novels. Richard Lea has discussed that in

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98: WS. 226.
99: RT. 83.
1975 Murdoch contributed to one of a series of 'Black Papers'. Her paper, was termed 'Socialism and selection', in 'Black Paper' 1975 (London). She then argued against the government policy in Britain, as it seemed "to favour the indiscriminate introduction of non-selective, unstreamed comprehensivization. At the end of this essay she urges that there is room for complacency in the face of such a state of affairs only as far as able, middle-class children with an illiterate background who on the chance system are being denied the right to a strict academic education which can only be achieved on the basis of some sort of selection."100

The narrator of _A Word Child_ Hilary Burde, 'another of Murdoch's depictions of a man egomanically choosing mediocrity and retardation instead of looking humbly at the truth,'101 comes from an illiterate, utterly loveless background, being a prostitute's child. He has been rescued because of the discovery of his linguistic aptitude by the schoolmaster Mr. Osman, a version of Murdoch's good man. Hilary pursued his studies at Oxford with considerable success. There he befriended Gunnar and Anne Jopling. The relationship between Hilary and Gunnar is really central to the narrative, clear yet surrounded by mystery. The plot illustrates Hilary's compulsive nature through a retrospective diary fashion, divided into days 'which reflects the

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100 'RT. 80.'
101 'WS. 212.'
rigidness of the only way Hilary seems capable of dealing with his life. 102

Like Bradley Pearson in The Black Prince and Charles Arrowby in The Sea, The Sea, Hilary is a maddening and negative character. He is painfully dislikeable but has a romantic aura which can draw some readers and which certainly has significant power over the women in his story. A brief four and a half week comprise the action of this novel.

Deborah Johnson says, there is always the possibility in Iris Murdoch novels that the pilgrim's sense of his quest will turn out to be yet another illusion, another gratifying fiction. This is what happens to Hilary Burde. His original quest, in which he saw himself (as so many Murdochian heroes do) as a Knight-errant, was the freeing of himself and his sister, Crystal, from the poverty and deprivation of their childhood through his ambitious and single minded studies at Oxford. I was busy. Like a Knight upon a quest I was dedicated, under orders. I had to rescue myself and Crystal, to get us out of the dark hole in which we had grown up and out into sunlight, into freedom. 103 Again Hilary says of the second quest, 'I now had a task, I was like a knight with a quest. I needed my chastity

102 102.RT. 83.
103 103.DJ. 5-6.
now, I needed my aloneness; and it seemed to me with a quickening amazement that I had kept myself for just this time."104 This is a characteristic illusion of the Murdochian hero. There really never was a quest for Hillary. Murdoch's strongest ways of getting across the quality of Hilary's character is her portrayal of his tyranny over others like Crystal, Tommy, Arthur.

Elizabeth Dipple says that "Two structural features of this novel must be mentioned before leaving it: the intense and complex life of the White hall office is magnificently described and full of detail ... the atmosphere resonates with a debasing comic reality which attaches itself to the mediocrity of Hilary's life. The other feature is the choric effect of the rock song 'Water bird', ... this silly song of loss and betrayal is a flimsy shadow of the real loss of Anne and finally Kitty, who becomes ironically and sadly, the real waterbird of the novel as she loses her life in the icy Thames. 105

In Henry and Cato (1976), Murdoch continues her exploration of the artist-Saint combination in pairs of characters set in opposition. She now seems to be paying attention to the backgrounds against which these characters move.

104 Iris Murdoch, A Word Child 200. Subsequently cited as WC.

105 WS. 228.
The plot of *Henry and Cato* is expressly binary. In one panel we find Henry Marshalson returning to his ancestral home from the United States, because he has inherited it due to his elder brother Sandy's death. In another panel we see Cato Forbes and his sister Collette, who are long-standing neighbours of the Marshalsons. We find Cato struggling with his priestly vocation in a run-down area of west London and his homosexual relationship to the youth Beautiful Joe.

"From a technical point of view there are some new aspects to Murdoch's treatment of the Saint-artist contrast."\(^{106}\) The major contrast noticed with the novels of the 1950's and 1960's lies in the control exercised over the narrator's handling and presentation of the story. Throughout *Henry and Cato* Murdoch confronts religious problems with a firmness not seen in earlier religious novels like *The Bell* and *The Unicorn*. We can see, the vast development from *The Bell* to *Henry and Cato* when we see Brendan Craddock as a powerful character who recounts the dangers and disciplines, of religious life eloquently. Brendan's "Convincing portrayal reminds both Cato and the reader that life is supremely important, not the bitter impossibility that Michael Meade had seen it to be."\(^{107}\) "Although *Henry and Cato* is a

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\(^{106}\) RT. 87.

\(^{107}\) WS. 253.
serious novel about the rigours of the mystic way and Cato's egotistic fall into the delights and horrors of the secular renunciation of that way. Murdoch is also closely attuned to an audience impatient of or indifferent to the religious life and more likely to delight in Henry and Colette's happy marriage than respond to Cato's punishment or to Brendan's going forward into the final stages of the Saintly via negativa." ... 108

Murdoch's portrayal and evocation of darkness, raw fear and both casual and horribly spontaneous violence are among the best things in this excellent novel.

Peter J. Conradi says, "Murdoch's own use of imagery is carelessly brilliant and profligate as ever ... When Lucius contemplates writing poetry he conceives that 'All you have to do is just record your thoughts one by one, like bats emerging from a hole.'(79)." 109

The theme of renunciation continues to be examined by Murdoch in The Sea, The Sea (1978). Like Henry and Cato, the binary opposition involving artist and saint, is dealt with. Charles Arrowby has just retired from a successful career as a theatrical director and has bought Shruff's End on a barren, lonely British coastline. His attempts to remain in solitude are

108. WS. 258-259.
109. SA. 228.
thwarted by the arrival of visitors with whom he is compelled to share the lonely delights of the land and sea-scape.

The structure of his novel is dominated by what Elizabeth Dipple calls 'its meandering refusal of closure'.\textsuperscript{110} The Unicorn is a good book dealing with the confusions and desires of spiritual life. "The Sea, The Sea goes far deeper in both characterization and religious thought..."\textsuperscript{111} The reader's quest in The Sea, The Sea is more difficult, but it also offers greater rewards. "In an informal interview on BBC radio 4's Kaleidoscope in November 1978, Iris Murdoch, discussing The Sea, The Sea, ... pointed out that the road to goodness is a dangerous road. In both The Unicorn and The Sea, The Sea we have characters obsessively on that road and unable to sustain its demands. The extreme contrast in structure, however, makes the spiritual quest of the two novels appear very different.\textsuperscript{112} Hannah Crean-Smith is at the centre of The Unicorn, whereas James Arrowby, the Buddhist quester in The Sea, The Sea, only gradually emerges from the egotistic muddle of his cousin Charles's first person narrative. The Sea, The Sea is a long book, more replete with details than earlier novels. "The Sea, always an important symbol in Murdoch, is not a place of rest, peace and knowledge

\textsuperscript{110}\textit{WS.} 157.  
\textsuperscript{111}\textit{WS.} 266.  
\textsuperscript{112}\textit{WS.} 274.
for Charles, nor does it provide spirit after his parched life. His development and gradual moral advancement take place not here but later in James's London flat.\footnote{WS. 299.}

In 1980 came \textit{Nuns and Soldiers}. Many consider it a peripheral version of \textit{Hamlet}. There is a sub 'The Prince of Denmark' where revenge is rather wishy spoken of. There is ostensibly only one nun in the book and she is introduced after leaving the cloister. There is also no soldier but a devotee of military history. So the title \textit{Nuns and Soldiers} has caused puzzlement among reviewers. "It would be consistent with Murdoch's thoughts, for the title to refer to the ways people see themselves and others. Although there are some innovations, largely from the point of view of technique, there is a great deal that is familiar and which begins to look like self-parody."\footnote{RT. 92.} There is suffering, deceit, drink and fatigue. There is unrequited love.

Deborah Johnson states, "\textit{Nuns and Soldiers} gives its female characters a new freedom of thought and action."\footnote{OJ. 72.} In this novel, Anne and Daisy, two temperamentally opposed women, both go to America towards the end — Anne to Poor Clares in
Chicago, Daisy to a community of feminist friends. This indicates that Murdoch is now less inclined to confine her women 'within the structures of the traditional erotic plot,'\textsuperscript{116} "The spokesman for the judges of the Booker Prize in 1978, Sir Alfred Ayer, rightly pointed out that \textit{The Sea, The Sea} is not about Plato, and it is not, except for the occasional evocation or idea: nor similarly, is \textit{Nuns and Soldiers} about Wittgenstein. The force of allusion can certainly, in dealing with some sections of any Murdoch novel, throw the attention momentarily towards a philosophic idea or particularly an image, but the dance of bloodless categories which Guy Openshaw finally sees philosophy to be is indeed opposed to the crowded, extensive life of a Murdoch novel. She deserves more than the cliche of philosophical novelist..."\textsuperscript{117} Dipple further states that compared to the comic currents of the first novel \textit{Under the Net}, the extended and acknowledged profundity of \textit{Nuns and Soldiers} is in deep contrast. As in \textit{The Sea, The Sea}, in \textit{Nuns and Soldiers}, Murdoch is much bolder in introducing both latent and open levels of discourse about the nature and function of novels themselves. Anne Cavidge in \textit{Nuns and Soldiers} reads novels which had been banned in the convent in favour of more useful activity. "Anne had been reading \textit{Little Dorrit}, it was amazing, it was so crammed

\textsuperscript{116} DJ. 73.
\textsuperscript{117} WS. 315.
and chaotic, and yet so touching, a kind of miracle, a strangely naked display of feeling, and full of profound ideas, yet one felt it was all true."^{118}

Murdoch's own development takes her back to "the detail and pleasure in the form which the novels read by these characters so completely elicit, and she now boldly implies the possibility of her own contemporary but extended style ...^{119}

Dipple states further that Murdoch has found her way, her style step by step and she does not sound like any of her antecedents. "Although Murdoch's ideology has changed only slightly from time to time, her wide variety of forms, subtle indirect experimentation and continuous ability to surprise and enchant underline a development of increasing seriousness."^{120} She strives to unite major characters of the good with the majority of failed characters who populate the middle range of the ordinary world.

The Philosopher's Pupil (1983) shows two departures from established Murdochian convention. Murdoch has used the first person male narrator, in many of her novels. This novel too is a first person narration with a difference. The narration, instead of being that of a character, whose own role in the novel

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^{118}Iris Murdoch, Nuns and Soldiers 53-54. Subsequently as NS.

^{119}WS. 346.

^{120}WS. 347.
is thereby revealed in an unconsciously uncomplimentary fashion, performs in effect the function of an omniscient third-person narration. The narrator of The Philosopher's Pupil is N. and the character N never identifies himself beyond saying, "I am a shadow, Nemo, not the masked presence or secret voice of one of the main characters." N as we see knows much more about the details of the story he is telling than any third-person narrator in the Murdoch canon. He is a stickler for details, incorporating details which no reader can possibly need or even want to know (e.g. the menu of a beach picnic, the lyrics of an excruciatingly bad pop song), N imagines someone asking him, "'But how on earth do you know all these things about all these people?' N replies, 'Well, where does one person end and another person begin? It is my role in life to listen to stories. I also had the assistance of a certain lady."  

The second major departure from established convention, lies in the topographical background to The Philosopher's Pupil. The Murdochland of south-west London has been completely abandoned here. The action of the novel takes place in a spa town within commuting distance of London. N refers to it as Ennistone. The town and its baths are described in minute.

121. Iris Murdoch, The Philosopher's Pupil 23. Subsequently cited as PP.
122. pp. 558.
almost guidebook form, detail, and are of considerable interest to N, though not quite relevant to the story. The first section is entitled, 'The Events in Our Town'. The Philosopher's Pupil is longer, and its cast larger than any of its predecessors.

In the English spa town of Ennistone, hot springs bubble up from deep beneath the earth. In these healing waters the towns people seek health and regeneration, righteousness and ritual cleansing. To this town, steeped in ancient lore and subterranean inspiration, the Philosopher, John Robert Rozanov, one of Ennistone's most distinguished townsmen, returns with his granddaughter Haltie Meynell and her maid Pearl Scotney. Rozanov exerts an almost magical, Prospero-like influence over a host of Ennistonians, and especially over George McCaffrey, the Philosopher's old pupil, a demonic man desperate for redemption. The Philosopher's Pupil might be discussed as an extended debate, continued from Henry and Cato, about romantic matters as the search for innocence, the nature of religion, morality, redemption and damnation. The story centres around the three brothers, George, Brian, Tom. George who attacked his teacher Rozanov, was a man whose loss of self respect accompanied his moral decline.

In this book we see the ageing philosopher who finds his task too hard, and an unbelieving priest with his paltry mind "discuss with an intense and purging scepticism some of the primary categories of Murdoch's belief ... Perhaps no recent
novel has so demonstrated the continuity of romantic concerns into the present day as this one; or raised so insistently the ambiguity in the heart of our Romantic inheritance that if, twenty years ago, we tended to see Romanticism as a disease, we now increasingly realise that there may also be another Romanticism that needs the name of cure."123

"The Philosopher's Pupil may well be the untidiest book she has yet written,"124 Guy says in Nuns and Soldiers, "A Philosopher's thought suits you or it doesn't. It's only deep in that sense. It is like a novel,"125 Murdoch, "although persistently arguing for a strict differentiation between philosophy and the novel, consciously parallels their effects on the readers ..."126

In The Philosopher's Pupil, Murdoch has produced some of her most bizarre matchings and mismatchings as she explores the powers and vagaries of erotic love. The erotic experience in The Philosopher's Pupil is peculiarly hard to categorize, tending as it does to unfold through the memories of the various characters. Does it take place in fact or in fantasy? Is it

123· SA. 269.
124· SA. 270.
125· NS. 2.
126· WS. 306.
heterosexual or homosexual? What is it that binds people together?"127

What is interesting according to Deborah Johnson is that in *The Philosopher's Pupil*, "Iris Murdoch explicitly draws attention to the dialogue between her own offstage presence as female author and her male narrator -- N". The certain lady of Murdoch's novel is the author herself, a hidden M behind N. N is garrulous, fussy, old-fashioned, slightly pompous. "He seeks continuously to interpret, order, reconcile, to impose meaning. Like Jake Donaghue, he is one of Iris Murdoch's incurable metaphysicians and may plausibly be seen as a scapegoat for the novelist herself, ..."129

*The Good Apprentice* (1985) shows Edward's search for and may find a parallel in the parable his father Jesse's story of the Prodigal Son.

"The Good Apprentice begins with an explicit reference to Edward as the prodigal son, and his crime, return to his father, and redemption follow the parable exactly enough. But for Miss Murdoch a novel is a means of testing reality. It is not surprising that in her world, where authority is always suspect,

127. DJ. 110.
128. DJ. 52.
129. DJ. 50.
the father of Christ's parable becomes fallible and an enchanter, and is only in Edward's awareness the means of his recovery. 130

Iris Murdoch's relationship to the centre (authority; certainly; truth; God) is conveyed beautifully in the above last sentence.

"Accordingly, Iris Murdoch's work with its delighted search for imperfection, its prolific creativity and its refusal to rest content with conclusions has much to show its women readers ... in the end it bears eloquent testimony to the human capacity — circumscribed but nevertheless inspiring — for change and renewal. 131

Murdoch's career shows her seemingly endless capacity to renew herself, to rework her material, to change and to grow. Her three novels mark yet another change of mood and direction —, The Philosopher's Pupil, The Good Apprentice, The Book and the Brotherhood (1987). These have huge casts, they are sprawling, relaxed and carelessly assured. These novels abound in inexhaustible descriptions of the natural scene, of place and person, of objects and of strong, often unforgettable emotion. "Their climate shares a certain pessimism and fear for the

130. DJ. 113.
131. DJ. 114.
future. There is also a mood of animism, with a number of characters predisposed to the fey, to minor magic, to endowing their physical environment with an alien life. ... the deaths of father-figures link them too: Eastcote and Rozanov, the good and bad philosophers of The Philosopher's Pupil, Levquist and Gerard's father in The Book and the Brotherhood, Jesse and Max Point in The Good Apprentice. Two of these at least are struggling to make some major contribution to human thought in an increasingly apocalyptic age. So were Rupert in A Fairly Honourable Defeat and Carel in The Time of the Angels, at the time when Murdoch herself was wrestling with what was to become The Sovereignty of Good ..."\(^{132}\) Now in the novels mentioned of 1983 to 1987, there is both a new gravity about philosophical enterprise, and a new ferocity of doubt, 'Thinking is hell',\(^{133}\) 'philosophy is agony',\(^{134}\) The titles of The Good Apprentice and The Book and the Brotherhood promise something different, but turn out to be only obliquely related to the substance of the novels themselves. "The real energy is turned to exploring character and feeling, with a human curiosity whose occasional

\(^{132}\) SA. 272.

\(^{133}\) Iris Murdoch, The Good Apprentice 243. Subsequently cited as GA.

\(^{134}\) Iris Murdoch, The Book and the Brotherhood 294.
cutting edge is the sharper for the confident relaxation out of which it is born ... 135

Peter Conradi, who has reviewed Murdoch's novels until 1987, thinks The Good Apprentice the best of her novels since The Sea, The Sea. He says that too much contingency can obscure form in the same way as form can obscure the contingent openness of the world. This novel excels for bold simplicity of theme as well as complexity of its handling. Its opening is sensational. Young Edward Baltram gives his friend Mark Wilsden a drug sandwich and thereby unwittingly kills him. The rest of the novel concerns his attempts to recover self-respect and to find a father-figure who can welcome and forgive him. Recovery from the past is not a new theme in Murdoch novels. In the 1960s it figured in novel after novel. Harry Cuno, Edward Baltram's step-father, argues that religion is a lie because it pretends that you can start again; but it is an equal lie to pretend, in a Godless world, that you don't have to try. The beauty of The Good Apprentice is in the way it spotlights its central figure, the patience with which it advances his particular case, and the ambiguities which it shows to attend it. The other characters in The Good Apprentice attempt with varying degree of skill and fact to reach through Edward's misery which is demonic and awaken him. 135 SA. 272.
Edward reads coarse thrillers, isolates himself, sickens with black unhappiness, gripped by an unconscious which exults in his unhappiness. The force of his case comes from Murdoch’s belief that most lives conceal analogous moments of defeat and despair, and also struggles, like Edward’s towards recovery.

Stuart who is Edward’s elder brother, has a Christ-like image and is a character of the good. He, quite as much as Edward, is the good apprentice of the title. Until The Good Apprentice, Murdoch’s good characters tend to be eccentric figures, with an inner life the reader is vouchsafed little information about. “Part of the fascination of Stuart’s depiction comes from Murdoch’s courage in attacking so directly the problems of portraying goodness.” Stuart is the good brother, who wants to do good and stay unspotted by the world but discovers how unpopular his attempt on virtue makes him.

In the third section of the book, called ‘Life after Death’, there is resolution, vexed as always by ambush and surprise. Horror and pain fill this book as much as joy. The Good Apprentice starts in winter and moves through a year. It could be read as a series of season-spectives lovingly depicting the myriad surprises that mark the English year.

In The Book and The Brotherhood (1987) the bookless.

136. SA. 277.
soulless, technocratic and violent age is the background against which 'the book' of the title is being written. The book is a neo-Marxist work, a great work which heralds and welcomes in a new age. There is a repeated assertion that mankind lives on the brink of the fastest change in the history of the planet. The novel has memorable scenes and landscapes, there are many moments of emotional power, many new characters. Two relationships show a real greatness: the relationship between Violet and Tamar, and between Gerard, and Grey. "It has long been Murdoch's ambition to give as much life to the characters in her novels as to their structure. Yet in both The Philosopher's Pupil and The Book and The Brotherhood their interior dialectic does not, in either novel, quite take fire, which in so far as they are also novels interested in ideas, is potentially harmful."137

The reason seems to be that the emotions experienced by the characters can be more vivid than either the ideas or even the characters themselves. The Brotherhood is a group of middle-aged-friends who met, mostly at Oxford, where they studied Classics, and have stayed close since then. This brotherhood of rich and tired idealists, led by Gerard Hernshaw, a man of power, 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 view he

137 fn. 286.
represents, while to Crimond, the Brotherhood represent the 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. We expect a show-down." Crimond is the 1987 philosopher – King of Murdoch's novels like many others – Palmer Anderson, Julius King, Carel Fisher. Murdoch neutralises her own worst nightmares through these characters, giving her characters a cogent voice and free rein, to see where they will take her and us. The great old humanist and Classicist Levquist who features early in the book, dies. Crimond is a seducer of minds and bodies, associated with adultery, a suicide-pact, an appalling physical injury, and an accidental death. Crimond is a puritan, intensely hostile to the pleasure-principle, a man who has never cried in his life, who suffers a death-wish, and has both contempt for and need of women.

This is a novel full of treats and marvels. The novel excels too in the range of emotions, specially loss and pain e.g. Rose's mourning for her brother Sinclair, and Sinclair's missing dog, and Gerard's continuing grief over the loss in childhood of a beautiful parrot called Grey. Gerard's passion for Grey

138 SA. 286.
touches the book with greatness. The novel has three parts, mid summer, mid winter, spring.

The Book and The Brotherhood is highly entertaining. Murdoch's intricate story-telling and the depiction of the unpredictability and depth of characters. The shock-proposal of Crimond staggers Rose. Lily's last minute bid for Crimond's interest seems crazy. Duncan's jealousy, and Gull and Lily's confusion are certainly of interest to us and have great resemblance to human life. In this novel too, one can seek parallels with the great Dostoevski.

Again, after reading A Message to the Planet (1990), critics have likened her to Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Some critics who have hated Murdoch's impenetrable style, have dismissed the analogy as over-exuberant. Murdoch's The Message to the Planet, is lengthy and rambling. It is an obscure study of spiritual and intellectual renewal. Marcus Vallar, intellectual and philosopher, occupies the centre-stage in this titled and tetchy universe of sagging humanity. Alfred Ludens firmly believes in the supernatural genius of Vallor. In the main, the novel details Luden's growing awareness of Vallar's ineffectual role as a messiah, his failure to produce answers about mankind's miscarriages. Using the Ludens-Vallar axis as a home-base, the novel extends outwards into the lives of several characters, singed by the intellectual glow of Vallar's being. There is the unbelievable arrogant artist Jack Sheerwater who sincerely
believes that his wife Franca would happily accept his mistress as a soul sister. As Franca's goodness of heart comes under constant assault, Luden's faith, too, is violently shaken. Finally, both these characters — the sources of light and hope — are stripped of their endemic faith in the healing powers of love and loyalty. Their disenchantment is the crux of this crusty novel about seeking spiritual stability and finding a void.

The Sanatorium named Benbow is located somewhere in the back of beyond — Murdoch's favourite setting for escape — and here at Benbow, a major part of the plot matures and Vallar is taken there for recuperation. "As his reputation as a faith-healer spreads, the novel provides a tentative comment on the break down of spiritual values and the predominance of illusory faith."139 In the closing up of this discursive novel, we follow the grieving Ludens back to civilization where he attempts to put his life and his friends into order.

"The absolute repudiation of borrowed beliefs is typified by Luden's spiritual recovery: 'In a way, he doesn't exist anymore,' Ludens says about his dead mentor, 'In another way, I'll be thinking about him and living with him for the rest

of my life ...' The road to recovery is the awareness of the utter futility of acquired dogma. The commonest contemporary theme of spiritual self-reliance is transformed into a tangential tale of tortured compulsions."140

The Message to the Planet is a modern problem posed in a straggling sweep of evasive connotations. Everyday sounds and their rhythm abide in the narration of this novel. But its music is audible only at a deeper level. Portraying a hemisphere in suspension, a world that has left behind its past but has no future to look forward to, Murdoch depicts the beautiful misty ordinary world.

In 1994, 1995 two other novels of Iris Murdoch were published. The Green Knight was published in 1994 and Jackson's Dilemma came in 1995.

Murdoch's novels consistently disconcert and fascinate both female and male readers by continually questioning gender identity and transgressing gender boundaries. Her novels are an extraordinary chronicle of the manners of the mid - and late twentieth-century British upper-middle classes.

"The world as Iris Murdoch shows it is decentred, full of displaced persons, a world where the old stable social and
ethical systems no longer provide security. In her relentless probing of the less acceptable areas of the psyche, of the various ways in which we lay waste our creative energies, and of the power struggles which make up life in an aggressive society, Iris Murdoch offers a surprisingly fresh and radical vision of the human (and, as I have argued, in many ways, specifically female) struggle both for self-definition and for connection with others. "141