Chapter - I  
Introduction

The modern age in literature is known for its achievements in both emancipation and destruction. Technological advances could either save millions of human beings or destroy them several times. The literature of the 20th century has consistently addressed the extreme situations of freedom and oppression, ruins and achievements. It also strongly focuses on the psychological crisis of modern human being.

In 20th century wars significantly altered political, geographical, financial and social relations. If World War I (1914-1918) reiterated the issue of territorial conquest, World War II (1939-45) underscored the ease of destruction. World War II has shown the power of mindless technology and unbearable human suffering. In this century wars revealed several truths. It underlined the cruelty as an integral feature of human psychology and devastation and destruction as a result of it. The literature of the two World Wars was an attempt to negotiate the trauma of such extensive suffering and the theme of power and cruelty. The war also revealed the fragile nature of human existence. T.S. Eliot’s poem *The Wasteland* raised question of the existence of modern human being. The entire literature of the century can be read as an attempt to deal with discovery of the hopelessness of courage and the fallibility of mankind in the face of war. It can also be said that literary techniques like the ‘stream of consciousness’ in James Joyce and Virginia Woolf were responses to the brutal nature of the realities of war. Poets and artists sought to
escape the harsh reality of suffering, destruction and cruelty by retreating into the mind. Rather than exploring the real world, they preferred to explore the mind. Therefore, the literature of the Post-World Wars was often a literature of escape.

In addition to the popularization of literature and the extensive mass cultural forms of the 20th century, there was also a flourishing of artistic rebellion against established forms. This resulted in radical experimentation in artistic form, technique and themes. Ideological conflicts, especially after World War II, divided the world among capitalist/communist lines. Escalating tensions between these two camps in Europe and America changed global geopolitics. It resulted in to the Cold War. Large-scale refugee movement across the world during the course of the century saw people migrating across borders in search of a safer and better life. Genocidal wars and ethnic cleansing became a part of the century- starting with the Jews in Nazi Germany, through the conflicts in Africa and Europe in the last decades of the century. No other century saw so many millions suffer from racism, poverty, unemployment or disease. Like other movements the feminist movement marked impact on literary and cultural studies of the century.

The early 20th century presented the experiments with form, language and style (for ex. Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, E.M. Forster). The later period of the century developed a new sensibility in the aftermath and contexts of war, high imperialism and new ideas in philosophy and human psychology (especially in the work of Sigmund Freud and William James). Radical departures in views about god, religions doctrine and sexuality are embodied in most of these works.
The 20th century could very well be the age of the English novel. It covers the wide variety of forms, the radical experimentation with language and style and the political agenda of particular writers, all contributed to the novel.

“The literature of the 20th century has an overwhelming preoccupation with the self, the nature of consciousness, and the process of perception. Literature is often subjective, and personal and internal. Authors are concerned with the fragmentation of both experience and thought. Many employ stream-of-consciousness: the fluid, associational, often illogical, sequence of the ideas, feelings and impressions of a single mind as seen in the works of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce” (Taormina, //www.nvcc.edu/).

The 20th century fiction is influenced by theories and philosophies of the mind, especially Freudianism. The novelists of the period commented on the art of the novel. Numerous genres ranging from satires to historical fiction can be seen in this period. Science fiction and fantasy emerged as important genres. George Orwell wrote two of the most significant political allegories in twentieth century fiction. His political ideology was essentially a humanism that rejected any form of domination and coercive power structures. James Joyce is surely the most daring user of the English language in this century. In the same period Virginia Woolf is known as one of the finest practitioners of the stream-of-consciousness mode, like Joyce, less concerned with the external world than with the workings of the characters’ mind. D.H. Lawrence was influenced by the work of Freud and believed that civilization is built on a denial of the
instinct whereas Aldous Huxley is often read under the category of fantasy or science fiction. If Huxley’s fiction created utopian and dystopian worlds based on a vision technology, the work of the Anglo-Irish C. S. Lewis offered a fantasy created out of a more religious vision. The quiet realism of Graham Greene in works like *Brighton Rock, The Quiet American* and *A Burnt-Out Case* stands as a sharp contrast to both, the high fantasy of contemporaries like Tolkien and the postmodern ‘play’ of John Fowles and Graham Swift. The novelists Anthony Burgess, William Golding, Lawrence Durrell and Iris Murdoch also played an important role in 20th century fiction.

Iris Murdoch (1919-99) was an extremely erudite philosopher and thinker of the 20th century. She has given a new meaning to the existence of women novelists with a new connotation to the meaning of love and freedom in her novels. Recent developments in the fields of psychology and psycho-analysis have made human being feel as if everything about personality can be known and every psychological problem can be solved. But Murdoch’s view is different in this concern. She feels human personality is opaque and cannot be understood. The modern novelists, under the wrong notion that human personality can be understood like other material things, are distorting reality by their dream like fantasy. Murdoch thinks that the novelists today are required to get rid of this fantasy and they should try to understand the complexity of human life and also that human beings are opaque and cannot be understood like other material objects.

Murdoch gives different meanings of freedom than that of commonly understood by people. Normally the word ‘freedom’ is used to convey: the sense of liberty, frankness; familiarity; and
license. The word free means: not bound by rules; unimpeded; unconstrained but for Murdoch true freedom means respecting and understanding other than oneself. It means giving other people right to exist in their own way. Freedom is not strictly the exercise of the will, but rather the experience of accurate vision. It is connected with an accurate vision of reality. But this is a difficult task because human beings are constantly engaged in weaving falsifying structured veils of fantasies that act like ‘forms’ or myths concealing reality. Moral or psychological freedom entails a change of consciousness, which can be brought about by a disciplined process of unselfing and suppression of the ego. This leads to greater clarification of vision.

“We are not isolated free choosers, monarchs of all we survey, but benighted creatures sunk in a reality whose nature we are constantly and overwhelmingly tempted to deform by fantasy” (Murdoch, Against Dryness 30).

She interprets fantasy as the proliferation of blinding self centered aims what is often called “will”. She considers morality and goodness only as forms of realism. She thinks that the chief enemy of excellence in morality and also in art is personal fantasy: the tissue of self-aggrandizing and consoling wishes and dreams which prevents one from seeing what is there outside one. A person’s egocentric fantasy limits his/her vision. It gives birth to illusion imposed on reality. Most of the characters of Murdoch’s novels are seen working out their fantasy. They contrive various kinds of strategies to define their lives in the form of roles, quests or theories to live by. But reality soon alters these structures. To be free, it is necessary an accurate vision of reality. Murdoch urges humanity to face reality. It is by facing reality that her characters discover a sense of density and
perceive that it is not possible for an individual to have a complete knowledge of the personality of other persons. Murdoch says that the ultimate aim in morals, as it is in literature, is to achieve objectivity which is but freedom from self preoccupation and fantasy. Murdoch described fantasy as ‘bad imagining’ which she considers as the chief enemy of morals, art and freedom.

Iris Murdoch often writes novels that involve the fantasy of freedom and the difficulty of establishing loving relationships between equals. Her novels are filled with unlikely incidents and complicated storylines, and reveal a belief in the power of art and mythology as a tool to understand something greater than the self. Through her novels she tries to reveal the fact that self-involved persons can not see the reality of the existence. Because they live in various forms, myths and fantasies and proceed to achieve the fantasy of freedom considering it real freedom.

Murdoch’s novels have deep impressions of French Existentialist Movement. She had a close encounter with war and devastations during her stint as UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) volunteer working for the refugees in Belgium and Austria. In the back drop of bloodshed and depravation love and freedom acquired a new dimension in the Murdoch’s literature. With the publication of her first novel *Under the Net* (1954), she emerged not only as one of the most productive and influential British novelists of her generation but also as a powerful intellectual and original theorist of fiction. The increasingly evident liveliness and variety of British fiction since the war has contrasted very curiously with a sense of restraint about aesthetic discussion of the novel. She has emphasized that she aimed to write as a realist. When Murdoch says that she is a realist, she probably means that her writing is inevitably concerned with the contemporary conditions.
Murdoch has been a significant figure of post-war British life. Without doubt she is one of the most celebrated novelists of the second half of the 20th century; her novels are complex and challenging. Many of her novels have figures of good who show how immensely difficult it is to be or to do good in this world. Her novels have a compelling power. At the most basic level she is a great story teller. Her intricate, often double plots; her evocative, and sometimes playful novels settings; her insightful portrayals of her characters wrestling with the ordinary muddles of life; and her sheer inventiveness all mark her distinctive style. At a deeper level Murdoch examines serious moral concerns, portrays the quest for good in life, and includes a strong symbolism.

Murdoch’s contribution cannot be neglected with the concern of the modern novel, whose innovative contribution to the art of fiction makes it impossible to ignore her in any account of the origins of the modern novel. Iris Murdoch has published twenty six novels since 1954 but she avoided- writing autobiographical novels, what she sees as the obvious danger for a writer. In her novels the settings may well reflect back-grounds familiar to her, and the civil servant, university dons and Irish characters may seem to belong to the milieu of her own life, but the narrative, the plots, the bizarre relationships are creations of her lively imagination. She believes that she as author should not be in her books. She follows the dictates of modernism. Like most novelists, she identifies with a wide range of her characters, but they are not individual people she has known in life. Nevertheless, her experience of life is frequently incorporated into her novels. This is especially apparent in the London settings of the majority of her novels, for she displays simultaneously the detailed
and intimate knowledge of the metropolis that only a long
acquaintance during childhood and particularly later in her early
working life could have given her. Some aspects of her personality
such as her friendships with dogs, her obsessive love of the sea, or her
interest in stones to see, to feel and to collect them- creep into several
of the novels.

Iris Murdoch was born in Dublin on 15 July 1919. She was the
only child of an Anglo-Irish mother and an Irish or Scots-Irish father.
Despite her mixed national background, she states at times that both
her parents were Irish. As she suggests-

“My Irishness is Anglo-Irishness in a very strict sense. I
think this is a very special way of being Irish... I’ am
profoundly Irish and I’ve been consciousness of this all
my life... ” (Chevalier 93).

Her bright and cheerful mother had been training as an opera singer
when she married at the age of eighteen and gave up her intended
career to dedicate herself to her husband and home. From her mother
Murdoch seems to have inherited her artistic interests and her sense of
humour as well as pleasant and attractive singing voice. From her
more serious father she inherited her intellectual ability and interest.
When she was one year old, her family left Ireland and moved to
London as her father joined the civil service. Since her childhood
spent mainly in London, she was deprived of any extended family, for
her Irish relations were far away and, though she often spent holidays
in Ireland, the day-to-day intimacy of close-knit relationships did not
feature in her upbringing. In an Interview with John Haffenden in
1983 she remarked that she was able to identify with exiles because
she herself is ‘a kind of exile, a displaced person’( Novelists in Interview 201).

Iris Murdoch used to think that she would like to have a brother. Her novels are full of sibling relationships; twins seem to have a special attraction for her, particularly twins of different sexes. She delights, too, in half-relationships which allow her characters to have an extra parent or so and thus confuse their origins. As she grew older, she gradually came to the conclusion that a brother might well have had an adverse effect upon her own life for he might have had all the money available for education and she would have missed the opportunity of going to Oxford. Unlike many of her female contemporaries, she has had no external compulsions upon her to espouse the cause of feminism and has responded to life and experience without the burden of ‘gender-consciousness’ being thrust upon her. As a result, it would be difficult to find in her work specifically female subject matter, though the patriarchal world which she presents is fairly traditional. However, in its treatment of men and women, it is clear that, as an author, she is very conscious of the unfairness of a world in which a married woman is just ‘a subdivision of her husband’s mind’ (Murdoch, The Black Prince 176). Murdochian family was a very close-knit and she spent an extremely happy childhood. She depicts children in her novels they frequently seem to be at odds with their parents. For ex. In The Sandcastle when children are first introduced, they are a cause for dissension between their schoolteacher, father and their mother.

Iris Murdoch’s interest in stories began at childhood with Lewis Carroll’s Alicebooks, with Kim and with Treasure Island, books which fired her imagination and provided her with the
excitement and the magic necessary for stimulating her creative faculties. Iris agrees that she was encouraged by her father to read various books, both of children’s and of grown-up. This basement was really an excellent preparation for her later life’s creative and academic interests. Her education was started in a Froebel Institute near her home in London. Her education may be seen as conforming to the conventional and traditional pattern of the middle and upper-middle classes at the time. In 1931, when she was twelve years old, she was sent away to be a boarder at Badminton school in Bristol where she was at first extremely homesick. It was perhaps the memory of this period in her life helped to make Penn’s homesickness in An unofficial Rose a felt misery. Murdoch trusted her parent’s judgment about her education. She grew to enjoy school and developed her interest in classics, in modern languages and in literature.

Murdoch went to a women’s college, Somerville, at oxford in 1938, as she left her single-sex public school. At Somerville she read Greats (classics, philosophy and ancient history), gaining first class in her B.A. examinations in 1942. Her membership of the communist party during her undergraduate days may be seen as rather conventional. Marxism flourished in the universities at that time and it was a common enough phenomenon, especially among the more high-minded students, to become members of ‘the party’. For Murdoch, as for so many others, it represented a rebellion against her upbringing and her background. She took her school education in single–sex public school. But during her years at oxford there was inevitably some mixing with the male undergraduates. Here, she displayed a rare capacity to endear herself to fellow–students of both
sexes. She was described by her university contemporaries as being of a ‘stunning’ beauty. The advent of war in September 1939 interrupted the lives of the people. At that time, many young men who would have gone to the University left school, and went straight into the forces and many other’s found their university courses interrupted by their enlistment. Murdoch first time emotionally involved with fellow oxford student Frank Thompson. But this involvement ended with his tragic wartime death in June 1944, as he was considered as a spy in occupied Bulgaria. Like other young men he had joined up at the outbreak of war and served in both Turkey and the Middle East before being sent to Macedonia to try to find out about German troop movements. Over thirty years later Murdoch wrote a letter to The Times that he was:

"a poet, a person of exceptional charm and sweetness, always full of jokes and fun, a lover of art and of nature, a scholar, a man of the highest principals, delicate, scrupulous and tender" (Spear 11).

After completion of degree education at oxford, Murdoch joined the civil service as an Assistant Principal in the Treasury, living and working in wartime London. After the war, she felt the need to do some social work to help those who had been displaced and disoriented in the conflict and joined as an organizer in London to work for the UNRRA. She also travelled to Belgium and Austria, working in displaced persons camps. Her experiences with UNRRA left an unending impression on her mind. It emphasized her identification with exiles. Such impressions can be seen in her novels. Because throughout her novels there are depictions of exiles and refugees, illegal immigrants who have fled the horrors of their own
country, men and women trying to escape from their past. Yet they are not always sympathetically portrayed; the Lusiewicz brothers in *The Flight From the Enchanter* have minds which appear to be permanently distorted by their early experiences, whilst Julias King in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* has brought the evils of Belsen back to Britain from the prison camp and he destroys the innocent and essentially good Rupert out of sheer pride and malice.

Murdoch’s university studies concentrated her interest in philosophy and the classics though she enjoyed reading literature at school. Her first publications in the early 1950’s concerned themselves with philosophical matters—metaphysics and existentialism. She was awarded a scholarship to go to the USA for her further philosophical studies. Though she was no longer a member of the communist party, she was refused a visa on account of her previous membership. Thus, despite her anger against the decision, she remained in Britain. This seemed harsh perhaps at that time but it changed the course of her life and saved her for us as a distinctly English novelist. In 1947, after a period of reading and thinking and helped by a Sarah Smithson studentship in Philosophy, she decided to return to academic life and spent a year at Newnham College, Cambridge, before returning to Oxford in 1948 as lecturer in philosophy and fellow of St. Anne’s College. By this time, she knew that she wanted to teach philosophy, wanted to be a writer and wanted to be in Oxford. Four years after Frank Thompson’s death, she met Franz Steiner, a Czechoslovakian Jew whose parents had been deported and killed by the Nazis. There was an immediate and mutual attraction between them. Franz Steiner was trained as an anthropologist but he was also a poet. They met in 1948. But as he was already a sick man, struggled to live, but died in 1952.
By now Murdoch started to write novels. But at first her novels were rejected by a publisher till the acceptance of a novel *Under the Net* by Chatto and Windus, which is published in 1954. From that time, her process of publishing books staked. After two years of 1954, she married the critic and scholar John Bayley, to whom she dedicated *The Sandcastle*. Bayley was a novelist with a more slender output who followed a busy academic career and retired from the Warton professorship of English literature in Oxford in 1992. This marriage was a happy and supportive which enabled Murdoch to write in peace and security. He was an eccentric and knowledgeable cook, whose interest in food and cooking frequently surfaces in the novels, particularly in *The Sea, The Sea*. In general Murdoch does not discuss her novels with him until they are complete. Murdoch’s work shows immense industry.

Iris Murdoch got both national and international recognition in the last fifteen years or so has. She has been not only awarded a number of prestigious literary prizes, including the Booker Prize for *The Sea, The Sea* in 1978, but she has also been admitted to the Irish Academy, the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Sciences. She is a fellow of St. Anne’s college, Oxford and has been given an Honorary D. Litt from the University of Oxford. Furthermore, in 1987, following a CBE awarded in 1976, she was honoured with a DBE. That same year she was distinguished with a rare honour for a living novelist by having her portrait, painted by Tom Phillips, hung in the National Portrait Gallery. She was busily following two careers, One career was teaching and writing about philosophy and another was to simultaneously writing novels. M. Bernard Le Gros has seen this duality as the central problem:
“is she a novelist-philosopher or a novelist and a philosopher? In other words, is there a relationship between her novels and her philosophy and if so, what is this relationship?” (Chevalier 63).

Murdoch’s interest in philosophy has been maintained throughout her career. The names and ideas of philosophers, particularly of Sartre and Plato, frequently appear in her novels and many of her characters indulge in philosophical discussions, though not necessarily on the level of academic philosophy. There is a difference between a ‘philosophical novel’ and a novel which is concerned with modes of thought which may be philosophical. In early March 1950 she has two philosophical articles at her credit and she continued to publish articles and books of philosophy though she is somewhat dismissive of the suggestion that she herself is a philosopher. She speaks:

“I am a teacher of philosophy and I am trained as a philosopher and I ‘do’ philosophy and I teach philosophy, but philosophy is fantastically difficult and I think those who attempt to write it would probably agree that there are very few moments when they rise to the level of real philosophy. One is writing about philosophy...one is not actually doing the real thing” (79).

Murdoch published her first book Sartre: Romantic Rationalist in 1953, which is about Sartre rather than about pure philosophical concepts. She explains that she is writing about Sartre and his theories and not postulating new and original philosophic theories of her own. The book is essentially a philosophical study based on a consideration of Sartre’s novels which she suggests, ‘provide more comprehensive
material for a study of his thought’ (138). In 1945, when she was working for UNRRA, she met Sartre briefly and he was an early influence upon her. She is not agree with Sartre in his treatment of human relationships and she illustrates:

“It is on the lonely awareness of the individual and not on the individual’s integration with his society that his attention centres. In Sartre’s world rational awareness is in inverse ratio to social integration” (62).

She sees the contingent as integral to life. She comments in her introduction to the 1987 edition of the book Sartre: Romantic Rationalist: “the world is contingent and infinitely various” (38). It thus follows that the isolated individual is completely at odds with his society and can be a representation of no one but himself. The solipsistic narrator, Jake in Under the Net hates contingency. Jake understands at the end of the plot that society does not revolve around him but rather that he is part of a highly complex human world. Murdoch discusses Sartre’s ideas and ends her argument with a consideration of ‘truth’ in literature:

“Real people are destructive of myth; contingency is destructive of fantasy and opens the way for imagination” (Bradbury 31).

The fantasy versus imagination is recurrent theme in her non-fiction and is a significant index to an understanding of her fiction. The surface level of many of her novels appears to have mythological significance but at a deeper level there are real people suffering real human emotions and the apparent superficiality of the plot is subverted by what turns out to be an imaginative presentation of
reality. She sees herself as a realistic writer and as one who wants to write about life, as for her life seems terrible and funny.

Murdoch commented in the discussions of her work that she did not entirely agree with Sartre’s ideas and she then feels very far away from him. Her following philosophical books suggests where her fundamental philosophical interests lie and illustrate her movement away from Sartrean Existentialism in the thirty and more years since she published her first book. Murdoch published: The Sovereignty of Good (1970), The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists and her platonic imitation, Acastos: Two Platonic Dialogues (1986). She described Plato as the most satisfying philosopher. She has been most concerned in her philosophical writings with Plato though she rejects many of his views on Art. She comments in The Fire and the Sun:

“Plato never did justice to the unique truth-conveying capacities of art” (85).

Nevertheless, she accepts Plato’s concept of ‘The Good’ and we see the reflection of Platonic philosophy in her novels. Her philosophical work Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals (1992) addresses some of the problems which have absorbed so much of her interest in the novels. Her novels are the idea of morality in human life, that its religious foundations have been largely snatched from us.

The problem of religion has a significant influence on Murdoch’s novels. She was brought up as a protestant; as a child she was taught to pray and the doctrine of the Trinity was explained to her at an early age. From her early belief, she moved through Marxism to an agnostic standpoint, believing in nothing supernatural, rejecting God, not accepting the divinity of Christ and having no faith in the
idea of a personal God. Religion for her is to do with spiritual change and renewal of life and it is this view which has become increasingly significant in the later novels, connecting up with her acceptance of Plato’s idea of man’s life being a pilgrimage towards reality. She is aware, of the comfort of religion and agrees with the role of religion ‘to present the idea of God at all’ and she explains, ‘even as myth is a consolation’ (88). Murdoch sees art as able to develop imaginative structures to compensate man for the absence of God and she sees herself as a Christian ‘fellow-traveler,’ accepting the reality of the ‘persona’ of Christ as a kind of moral exemplum, though not as supernatural being.

Murdoch is known for her variety of writing. Apart from the novels and philosophical books, she has published plays, poems, a short story the libretto of an opera, The Servants, and a play with music, The One Alone, which was performed on BBC Radio in 1987. Her first two plays were based on her own novels, A Severed Head (1964) and The Italian Girl (1968). She has also made a dramatic adaptation of The Black Prince. She has also written her fair share of Letters to The Times. A number of these letters have been concerned with education, particularly with the education of girls and the question of selective versus comprehensive schools. Education does not play a major part in her novels but The Sandcastle is set in a boy’s school and the question of girls’ education and also of choice occurs in that novel as well as in several others like The Flight from the Enchanter and The Green Knight.

Murdoch is known for her novels but she claims that she would much rather be a poet, apparently seeing novel writing as a less happy destiny than that of being a poet. In A Word Child, there is a brief
discussion of the relative merits of plays, novels and poetry. In it Arthur, ‘the good’, character remarks -

“Poetry is best of all. Who wouldn’t rather be a poet than anything else? Poetry is where words end” (88).

Murdoch has some poetic gift as she has published a number of poems in magazines. There is an obvious interest in a variety of poetic possibilities and a technical competence which avoids the obtrusion of rhyme or of rhythmic patterns. Murdoch also had some leanings towards being a painter and in her 1983 interview with John Haffenden. She remarked that she envy painters because as she considers that they are happy people. The two original plays are more substantial than the poetry and deal with themes familiar to us through the novels - the nature of love and of truth and the problems of power. As a novelist Murdoch has been prolific, despite her comments in 1978 about the superiority of poetry, by 1988, in the British Council pamphlet about her, she wrote that the novel is the supreme literary from which is beginning its reign and for long time it may travel with us. Such statement of Murdoch appears as a declaration of personal faith in the novel form, in defiance of those who have claimed that the novel is dead. She has always been an avid reader of novels and other literature, both European and classical. She reads and re-reads her favorite Victorians - Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and particularity Henry Jones whose interest in ‘patterns’ has influenced her own novels.

In Murdoch’s novels, we see many dramatic moments and the fact is that several of the novels have already been turned into plays and television films. It will be seen that the plots are often presented in terms of drama, knowing that there is a life outside the action. The
influence of drama is further apparent, Murdoch herself commented in her interview with John Haffenden:

“Of course a novel is a drama.” (Novelists In Interview 204).

Later in a discussion with John Bayley and Martin Dodsworth at the British Academy in 1991, she remarked that there is a great religious power in Shakespeare. It thus seems meaningful to look at the way in which her novels tend towards the dramatic qualities.

Murdoch’s books are about ideas; this statement merely can’t assure us to say her a philosophical novelist. It will be like to see the problem so simplistically. She herself appears to consider the purely philosophical novel as an unsatisfactory art form and in the first chapter of Sartre: Romantic Rationalist She suggests the shortcoming of the philosophical novel by comparing Sartre’s Nausee’ to its disadvantage, with Kafka’s The Castle:

“La Nausee’ is not a metaphysical tale, like ‘The Castle,’ nor is the absurdity of Sartre the absurdity of Kafka. Kafka’s K. is not himself a metaphysician; his actions show forth, but his thoughts do not analyze, the absurdity of his world. The hero of ‘La Nausee’ is reflective and analytical; the book is not a metaphysical image so much as a philosophical analysis which makes us of the metaphysical image... Roquentin’s (La Nausee) plight appears to be a philosopher’s plight, while K’s (The Castle) is that of everyman” (138).

It is everyman’s plight which she attempts to grapple with in her own novels. Any analysis which her characters make of the
absurdity of their own world is subordinate to their actions, and
though the character’s dilemmas constantly bring ideas into the
forefront of the novels. It is their interaction with other characters and
with the world around them that is of ultimate significance. In her
final summing-up she remarks, ‘The novel, the novel proper that is, is
about people’s treatment of each other, and so it is about human
values’ (Ibid). And she ends by commenting:

“(Sartre’s) inability to write a great novel is a tragic
symptom of a situation which afflicts us all. We know that
the real lesson to be taught is that the human person is
precious and unique; but we seem unable to set it forth
except in terms of ideology and abstraction”(148).

Murdoch’s words suggest what she would wish to put forward
the concept of the isolated Sartrean man but the idea of the
interdependence of people in a contingent world. Particularly in the
first-person novels she does present the isolated world of the self-
absorbed solipsistic man but only to show us that finally his plight is
the plight of everyman.

We see that Murdoch’s actual method of writing novels is not
changed. She planned in advance the complicated plots. Such
planning- characters, settings, incidents, the general shape of the
novel- is completed before Murdoch begins to write. She used to
make the overall plan clear in her mind before to start writing novels.
She has used widespread use of words and says that she enjoys
writing and can not quite imagine life without a novel. She explains
her views about novels that novels are about individuals. Those are
the combination of both comic and sadness but through that they tell
us the secret of life. The novels formulate the deep truths about
human society and the human soul and it is also a work of art.
Murdoch has constantly illustrated the enormous breadth of possibilities within the novel since the publication of her first novel, *Under the Net* in 1954. The individuals within the novels display the whole gamut of human experience and human emotions. Comedy and tragedy exist side by side and the extremes of behavior and the intricacies of relationships serve only to highlight the ourselves of ordinary life in which we strive towards fuller understanding of ourselves and consequently of the world around us. The novels are metaphors of life and consciously presented as art, so that the reality of life is subsumed into the theatrically of an invented world.

Iris Murdoch’s novels have always divided critical opinions sharply, for and against. Kingsley Amis called her a distinguished novelist of a rare kind. She has been vilified and eulogized ever since; her novels are attacked as the pretentious equivalent of women’s magazine writing, as disguised moral philosophy and as ‘non-novels’. Alternatively, she is praised by academic critics like Frank Kermode and by emphatically non-academic reviewers like Auberon Waugh. Amis’s original assessment is supported twenty years later by a large body of critical work quite apart from reviews. But the problem of defining her achievements remains, and is crucial to any interpretation of the state of the novel. Murdoch has contributed as a ‘polemicist’ to use her own term, to the debate about the English novel’s relations to its own past and to the new novel abroad. She published a study of Sartre before *Under the Net*, and number of works which deals with moral philosophy and the purpose of art. Her essay on the novel, “Against Dryness” has become authoritative as a source of ideas and terminology.
Murdoch, as an Oxford philosopher, is an exceptional in her respect for Sartre and existentialism. She is like Fowles and unlike many English and American novelists in her awareness of modern French fiction. There is more influence on Iris of Sartre than Butor and Raymond Queneau, to whom Under the Net is dedicated, a whimsical, witty surrealist. But Iris Murdoch herself may have distracted attention from such influences, and affinities, especially after The Bell by her praise for the qualities of Victorian fiction and their relevance to the novelist’s present situation. Discussing John Holloway’s theory about the English Ideology, Bernard Bergonzi writes in The Situation of Novel:

“It will be obvious that the stance of such critics as John Bayley, Iris Murdoch and W.J. Harvey, and their belief in the novel of character, stems directly from the English Ideology, which insists on seeing the nineteenth century as still a going concern. So at least it would seem to French an American observer and it is hard not to use phrases without an implied sneer” (60).

He finds that in Murdoch’s novels since The Bell she has failed to achieve the imaginative openness of the great Nineteenth-Century novelists and instead indulges in fantasy, myth and manipulation. The charge of manipulation has been common among reviewers who value her commitment to the English Ideology and to generosity of moral concern, and its result is that her novels are sometimes declared untrue, in their exotic patterns and plots, to the best English tradition, and at other times declared unemancipated from a traditional novel hopelessly rooted in the past.
In Under the Net the existentialist Jake says that nothing is more paralyzing than a sense of historical perspective, especially in literary matters. But historical perspective is invited not only by Iris Murdoch’s critical and philosophical thought and by her praise of an earlier fictional density and mystery in rendering life, but in the novels too. There is a deliberate fostering of elements in the Murdoch world which are intended to strike the reader as incongruous in their connotations of period. We read her with an unusually pronounced sense of contrast between, contemporary and old-fashioned in the lives of the communities invented by her.

In Britain, women novelists have an unusually rich tradition of women writers to give them confidence in the use of a variety of forms. Jane Austen introduced fine comedy into her moralizing social stories. The Bronte’s transformed the gothic with dream and female indignation. George Elliot extended realism to include the intellectual life of her time. Virginia Woolf embraced impressionism and experimented with structure. Such models were almost taken away from women to be subsumed into the male stream of the novel, but are now being reclaimed to demonstrate women’s range and versatility.

Iris Murdoch accepts patriarchy in that she does not feel excluded from the discourse of philosophy, indeed feels free to enter the male psyche as narrator. Antonia Byatt posits a creative mind which is androgynous, sharing male and female attributes. Like George Eliot she represents men with almost as much skill as women; and both explore problems in science. They and Margaret Drabble continue to vindicate the realist novel, based on the assumption that it reflects the reality of experience. However, she implicitly attracts the
exclusiveness of patriarchal language by using gynecological terms to overcome shame and concealment.

There were many different reactions from socialist feminists who believed that socialism could be adapted to include the concerns of woman, to radical feminists who posit a social organization in which men have power over women and must thus be opposed. There has been a valuable cross fertilization between feminism and the novel. Feminists have gone to literature to examine and deconstruct restrictive images which males have created of females.

Iris Murdoch wishes to revive the richness of 19th century prose, as used by Dickens and Dostoyevsky. She includes women’s concerns from spiritual longings to gossip about motivation; but her ideological position is that language can and should be divorced from gender identification. Iris Murdoch has never wanted to be called a ‘woman writer’ preferring to be accepted as a writer in man’s world. This reflects the desire of women of her generation to be accepted as equal, not different. It was not till the 1960’s and even more the 1970’s, that many women expressed the need to stress gender difference. Iris Murdoch has never felt this need like Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir, she considers good art should transcend gender difference. She claims that the novel is about facing up to the truth and living with a more realistic view of oneself and other people. This moral concern, together with her joyful inventiveness, makes Murdoch a major British Novelist. Her twenty-four novels present remarkably imagined characters through which she examines the complexities of relationships and art.

This research studies Iris Murdoch as a novelist, a moralist and from a feminist point of view. Feminist perspectives illuminate
some her unusual qualities: her ability to inhabit a male psyche; her use of a dominant male voice together with more questioning voices; her respect for particle failures, for the flawed individual. Iris Murdoch is committed to the realistic depiction of individuals; a characteristically English realism. In “Against Dryness (1961)” she advocates the ‘liberal’ English tradition of respect for the individual. Murdoch assumes that one of the novels task is to create realistically perceived character and to transmit moral judgments through their relationships. Thus she can be considered in the tradition of Female creators of the novel in the 18th Century, such as Fanny Burney and Jane Austen.

Murdoch’s respect for character is based on a moral and philosophical view that we should give full attention to other individuals, in life as in the novel. It suggests the need to forget one’s personality in order to look seriously at other people.

“Good art can’t help teaching you things, but it shouldn’t aim at teaching,” asserts Murdoch.

(Haffenden, The Literary Review 31-32)

In the view of Murdoch the novel is a literary artifact, a work of the imagination. She possesses a modern realization of the paradoxes of realism: that it attempt to represent the world ‘as it is’, which is virtually impossible, given the limits of our minds and our language.

Murdoch self consciously combines realistic descriptions of people with half-fantastic plots. She takes special pleasure in design and invention. She pioneers the unfashionable concept of art as knowledge, based on humanistic realism. Murdoch’s realism is not unlike Aristotle’s mimesis, which says that art is an imitation of reality. One of her objectives is the vivid rendering of the world of
individual centers of consciousness we live in. Realist narrative
moves towards some sense of order in its endings when decisive
choices are often made. Structuralists see this as underwriting
capitalist ideology in stressing consumer chokes. But a close reading
of some of Murdoch’s comments reveals a fairly pessimistic view of
human freedom. Her endings suggest how limited our choices are,
how circumscribed our potential. He is aware of the difficulties
involved in realism, yet expresses explicit moral attachment to its
values. She loves to create habitable imagined worlds while
commenting on their fictiveness. Some of her best novels can be read
as fables about the difficulties of realism and truth–telling. Her first
published novel Under the Net (1954), demonstrates the ambiguous
power of the tradition, the curiously symbiotic relationship between
old realism and new experiment.

Murdoch’s fiction might be defined as a battle between real
people and fantasy. She delights in games-playing and fabulation,
which she usually succeeds in grounding with realistically drawn
characters. She uses the philosophically respectable term ‘games-
playing’, rather than ‘fantasy’ which can reveal subversive elements.
Our culture has attempted to silence unreason and otherness by
interpreting fantasy as moral allegory- a valid approach to Murdoch’s
plots. Though many refer to her plotting as contrived, her
contrivances usually arise from the psychological problems of her
characters and can thus be justified from a realistic standpoint .The
characters undergo real ordeals symbolizing the cruelty of chance, or
fake ordeals, as tests. Adventures test character, but seem mainly
introduced because Murdoch enjoys fabulation, invention.
“Iris Murdoch enjoys the construction of fantastic plots demonstrating the mobility of our fantasy. Her artifice and complex plotting could be said to ally her with Anne Radcliffe’s female gothic. She justifies her apparently contradictory aims by maintaining that we all synthesize fact, fiction and allegory. Yet she does not always achieve this synthesis in her writing. Her practice sometimes runs counter to her theories. She maintains that life has no meaning or pattern, yet her plots impose patterns exploring uncontrollable forces in our subconscious” (Kenyon 20).

Murdoch’s narrative works towards the imposition of form, with imagery suggested by the unconscious forces in our psyche. At the same time her structures work towards the painful awareness of moral imperatives, a partial acquisition of self knowledge. She bravely, almost alone defends art as the instrument of knowledge, of morality.

She gives prominence to morality is rare in the 20th century, while her interest in ‘virtue’ is unusual in moral philosophy today. She analyses our longing for the good through flawed characters. Most male philosophers have preferred abstract moral theory which she eschews in flavour of seeing how percepts work in practice. She maintains there is a difference between her writing of philosophy and her fiction-writing. She achieves admirable clarity in her expositions of the ideas of Sartre, and Plato in The Sovereignty of Good (1970), and The Fire and the Sun (1977) is a lucid exposition of Plato’s views on art. Her first book on philosophy was published in 1953- Sartre: Romantic Rationalist. It offers a brilliant placing of Sartre’s thought.
Murdoch preferred to use male narrators in her novels. She exposes the lack of self-knowledge, the weaknesses of her male narrators through their own words. She eschews the anger which feminist critics such as Gilbert and Gubar have noted as implicit in many female texts. This may be because her use of different discourses allows her to cross gender boundaries, thus gaining access to the male psyche as well as the female. She sees what moral preoccupations they share as much as the psychological fantasies that separate. She encapsulates celebration and emotion, mind and body, philosophy and poetry. He examines these traditional divisions in western culture through her male narrators and her own authorial voice. She makes the males realize how much they have to learn, how much they play roles. They gain a plurality of vision as they learn. Charles’ (The Sea, the Sea) self-congratulatory journal provides a commentary on his egotism, which circumstances force him to face. She subverts male models of behaviour by showing the protagonist having to revise his assumptions about women, about personal power, about maleness and femaleness. The questing male hero is treated ironically. But when he is humiliated it is not so much because he is male, but for living too much in illusion. Murdoch believes facing up to reality equally important, and difficult, for all of us. For her the pursuit of the good transcends gender boundaries.

Since Jane Austen, it has been acknowledged that irony is well deployed by women. It can prove a subtle weapon since the intended meaning is the opposite of the one stated. Murdoch’s first person male narrators always begin with partial delusions, exposed relentlessly. There is ghoulish irony at the end of The Black Prince when each character claims to have been loved by Bradley and to
know the truth. In spite of her serious intentions, Murdoch considers the novel essentially a comic form; comic because even at our most solemn moments we may appear absurd to an onlooker. She represents her characters as mortal, limited, absurd, contingent and this belongs to a comic world. Though writing on philosophy, she insists that there are few philosophical concepts in her novels. Murdoch’s best novels are often the funniest. Since the beginning she has shown her mastery at farce, slapstick, parody and black humour. Falling in love is central to Murdoch’s plots, as it is to many women’s novels. She has taken the age old female limitation—life circumscribed to caring for and loving those nearest—and turned it into a moral guide. She is eloquent on erotic love, reintroducing some of the richness of 19th century prose when she includes elements of romantic worship and idealization. But she tests her characters, by the ways they respond and find most of them wanting, incapable of giving themselves honestly, other seeing the other clearly for long.

Murdoch exploits falling in love to discover appalling truths. Like Jane Austen, she considers the way one loves, reveals personality. Loving involves lies, hypocrisy even secrecy, so provides a useful tool for wider social analysis. Through it she can also analyses the secretive parts of our mind, not entirely subconscious, not entirely fantasy. She offers shrewd studies of possessiveness. In Murdoch’s novels love is the touchstone by which her characters are judged as in Shakespeare’s comedies. She praises Shakespeare for his ‘extraordinary ability to combine a marvelous pattern or myth with the expansion of characters as absolutely free persons, independent of each other’ (Ibid). Foolishness and devotion is used in love to construct comic works of art by both these writers. Falling in love is
convenient dramatic device containing suspense, theatrical coincidence, even violence. Murdoch derives this form, like many women novelists, from the process of falling in love. It provides a variety of patterns in the slow or speedy meeting of two people, their spiritual or erotic or failed union followed by life together or misery at forced or involuntary partings. These patterns are too often criticized. They demonstrate the need she shares with experiments to play with the shaping of fictions. Art is playing games, she and her characters frequently state. She enjoys the lucid quality in art, well symbolized by the absurdity of characters in erotic positions. She maintains that the structure of good literary works has to do with erotic mysteries. She makes erotic use of Plato, showing how sexual love of the beautiful can lead to the Good, to aesthetic and moral worth. Murdoch is also affected by Freud in which she considers libido central to the understanding of our unconscious motivation.

“There’s a deep truth in certain things, like the notion of the ‘superego’ and the ‘id’. What I agree with in Freud is the doctrine of the unconscious mind, and the idea of ‘eros’ as fundamental energy, a drive which includes sex and which can be good and can be bad (That’s all in Plato)... Dreams have a great many sorts of explanation. Once the Freud virus has got into you, you keep looking at things in his way” (Ibid).

In Murdoch’s novels libido, erotic desire, is used symbolically to illustrate the universality of the ‘id’ and represent aspects of sexual behaviour which are susceptible to generalization and mythmaking. Unfortunately, the rich naturalistic texture of much of her writing makes it hard for many readers to accept the similarity of patterning
in these loves. In her novel the characters are so distinct one expects their reactions to passion to be more varied, less symmetrical. Through her male narrator she represents the uncomfortable links between art, desire and sadomasochism. Freud’s comments on ‘the true artist’ give insights into her writing at its best.

“he understands how to work over his day-dreams in such a way as to make them lose what is too personal... he makes it possible for others to derive consolation and alleviation from their own sources of pleasure in their unconscious which have become inaccessible to them”(17).

Murdoch finds Freud as useful to her writing as Plato since they both see love as energy. Libido can be good or bad but it is essentially sexual. Of course it can be dangerous or creative to fall in love. She often represents feelings of love in religious terms since these provide metaphors which can still be grasped by non-believers. She and her male narrators consider man’s creative struggle is a love story and the desire of the human heart for love and knowledge is infinite. This cosmic perspective links her with Marguerite Yourcenar, the greatest modern French women writer. She and Murdoch share an admiration for Greek thought and the brief golden age when philosophy, rationality and the arts flourished. Both share ideals influenced by Greek writers: to be just; to learn to die; to create something good. Though they might have been academic philosophers, both have preferred to create novels which analyse the moral problems of individuals. Both foreground the study of the individual soul, like the 19th century novel but neither follows it in presenting marriage as a solution or even possible salvation. They tend to depict heterosexual marriage as destructive. Both childless,
they are concerned with the adult’s possibility of attaining spiritual grace through physical love- echoes both of Plato and Christianity.

It is considered by Tolstoy that a novel reflects the religious experience of an age. Certainly, Murdoch and Yourcenar depict people misusing or neglecting institutionalized religion, but longing for a more spiritual life. Both analyse evil as intelligently as they analyse spirituality. Both point out how evil is produced by obsessive faiths or fantasies, lack of self knowledge, misplaced good intentions. In both, evil takes on deceptive guises of greed, sloth, love of power, self-centeredness in our morally messy world. In Iris Murdoch’s novel evil is often connected with magic. Magic widens the theme by connecting it with the irrational. Occasionally she includes too much black magic for the humanist reader to take seriously, as in The Nice and the Good (1968); recently she has increased in subtlety: in The Sea, The Sea. She contrasts two types of magic: that of the theatre director Charles and paranormal powers learnt in the East by his cousin. She sees magic as an aspect of religion, often equating it with spiritual powers. Murdoch differs from Plato in thinking that art must use some element of magic and enchantment before abjuring them. Certainly, the suspense and melodrama in her plotting stress the magic of story- telling. A saintly figure and an artist are often paired in her novels.

Iris Murdoch is unusual among modern novelists in appreciating our longing for the good and dramatizing our inevitable failures through convincingly moving characters, such as Michael in The Bell. In Nuns and Soldiers (1980), the pursuit of the good is particularly well evoked especially through Anne. Murdoch claims that the mind should be and often is- directed towards concepts of the
good, of God, of death. She explored notions of the Good in her novel:

“Goodness is giving up power and acting negatively on the world” (Murdoch, The Sea, The Sea 478).

After making relations of Murdoch with Marguerite Yourcenar, we come to understand that both represent humans seeking to slough off some of the dross of ordinary living, to contemplate cosmic power. Their many novels end with an experience of transcendence, a revelation of the value of the present moment. Like feminist theologians, both turn to less sexual symbols of ultimate reality. The novel of social quest has been enlarged into a novel of spiritual quest, in which the protagonist understates a journey whose purpose is to attain new spiritual knowledge. Few women novelists have tackled this visionary quest until Doris Lessing and Margaret Atwood.

In her novels Murdoch had developed the mature structure for which she is celebrated, juxtaposing the ordinary with the extraordinary leaving the reader to decide which level of reality she most values. She dramatizes the struggle between sexual & religious instincts, in the same world as Woolf, but with a less indulgent eye. Murdoch’s structures grow more complex, more satisfyingly open-ended. There are elements of philosophical fable or rather moral fable used with a real sense of the individual. She has worked at the vocabulary needed for the unpretentious moral teaching of the 19th century tradition which she has done so much to maintain alive and relevant. While developing a more positive view of society, she also emphasizes the power of evil, shown in the violence analyzed in The Philosopher’s Pupil. We come to understand that critical assessments of her work vary considerably. Elizabeth Dipple values her ‘moral
and ideological grasp of human failure’ (89). Peter Conradi praises her as an original and powerfully intellectual theorist of fiction, an articulate and invigorating challenge to experimentalists, because she shows art as the instrument of knowledge. She explored the difficulties of realism. In her best novels she combines a sense of the mystery and formlessness of people’s lives partly by intelligent use of concepts such as convention and neurosis—not as total patterning devices, but as instruments for the exploration of character and motive.

Murdoch believes that art is a necessary technique for discovering truth and great art expresses and explains religion to each generation. Murdoch believes that an artist’s role is very important that he can attempt to reveal truth. We understand that one main feature of Murdoch’s thought rests on the belief that a writer as well as a man can fall prey to self-aggrandizing fantasy, escape from which is possible by transcending self-centred consolations, by cultivating the quality of “unselfing”. Through her novels it is seen that Murdoch tries to reach a fresh understanding of human nature. She presents through her novels, the complexities of human personalities, desires and moral choices of human being as well as the spiritual and moral problems which man has to face in this modern world. In her novels the desire for moral improvement is shown to be embedded in the inner turmoil of the characters. By virtue of this, the novels gain dramatic force. Ann Peronett in An unofficial Rose Hugo Belfounder in Under The Net, Tallis Browne in A Fairly Honourable Defeat and Stuart Cuno in The Good Apprentice represent Murdoch’s ideal of perfection in morals. They possess the qualities of ‘unselfing.’ The frustrated search for good of Hannah Cransmith in
The Unicorn, Charles Arrowby in The Sea, The Sea highlights Murdoch’s insistence that moral over-reaching meets a pathetic end. Murdoch has not only elaborated the side of good but also the contours of evil. The characters invite evils in their life by not properly understanding the ‘self’ and the ‘other.’ The refusal to see the contingent and the desire to accumulate power, blocks any forward march.

Murdoch’s writing was from self-assured confident position. We do not see anxiety or nervousness in her writing because of the impact of changing literary trends. She wrote tales of human motivations and frustrations till Jackson’s Dilemma (1995). Murdoch’s views on the state of the novel were stated more explicitly in her essays “Against Dryness-A Polemical Sketch”, “The Sublime and the Good” and “The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited” and her books The Sovereignty of Good over other concepts, The Fire and the Sun and Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals. These essays are published when a serious appraisal was going on about the state of Post Second War novel in England. The novelists of the Post Second World War era discard the heritage of modernism and openly and vociferously denounce the experimental novel. This era novels are different in mood and tone from preceding novels. A survey of modern novel reveals that there have been three imaginative impulses- history, fable and myth. In classic novelists these impulses were fused which were accounted for their superiority. But a distinguishing characteristic of the modern novel appears to be the disjunction of the historical, fabulist and mythical impulses. This may account for endless debates regarding the status of the novel.
The novel before the First World War was committed for the representation of social reality. It was the mirror of life. But the experimental novel which was written by as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Marcel Proust, Dorothy Richardson, seems to break the continuity of the generic novel - the novel presenting social reality. These two trends are pointed out by Malcolm Bradbury:

“One is the tendency to the fiction to withdraw both from referential composition realism and both from schematic formal organization, from designs of point of view, systems of interlocking consciousness, towards the presentation of the lexical surface of the text itself. The second, related phenomenon is a fascination with the fictional process as a parody of form- it becomes a game like construct with which permutations can be played” (15).

In this period novel it is tried to join both writer and reader to respect and love the characters. Because character is the base of a novel which is a skillful draft. But to crate character had become the difficult problem not only in England but also in America and on the contingent also.

“This crisis in the character obviously corresponds to a similar crisis in the concept of man. Modern man can be seen as a mere numerical entity within the most terrifying collectives that the human race has ever known. He can be seen as existing not for himself alone but as part of something else, of collective feeling, idea and organism. It is very difficult to create a character out of such a man, at least, in the traditional sense of the world” (Moravio 70-71).
Bernard Bergonzi sees contemporary fiction as the fiction of existential isolation and alienation of efforts at self-definition. John Bayley in his book *The Characters of Love* asserts that not only should characters exist independently but that their creators should love them also. He explains:

“What I understand by all author’s love for his characters is a delight in their independent existence as ‘Other People’ an attitude towards them which is analogous to our feelings towards those we love in life; and an intense interest in their personalities combined with a sort of detached solicitude, a respect for their freedom” (8).

Murdoch praises the Nineteenth century novel because it is concerned with real various individuals struggling in society. The novelist who were writing then were themselves concerned with certain larger issues regarding the technique and the problem of catching the essence of social reality. Angus Wilson’s work especially *No Laughing Matter* shows his concern for the status of the text, the nature of literary imagination and the tendency of art to falsify. Muriel Spark is preoccupied with the question of truth of fiction and considers her own novels to be fictions out of which some truth does emerge. Whereas David Storey believes that novel was no longer a reliable metaphor for what was going on as the whole social context was inimical to the writing of fiction. He abandoned fiction in favour of theatre after the publication of *Radcliffe* (1963). Graham Greene thinks plot to be his personal indulgence. However, we cannot neglect thing that the issues like the value of realism, the relationship of writer to text, the coerciveness of plot, the substance of character, the seriousness of form and endings, the nature of fictional text and
the god-like power of plotter, did engage the attention of these writers. But it is clear that most of them see the problem in terms of their own struggle to be faithful to themselves as perceivers. Iris Murdoch’s immense faith in the novel as an art form assures us. We see that Murdoch more than any other novelist of her generation tries to isolate, approach and explore problems concerning art, truth, life and reality and also she tries to reflect all these things in fictional works.

In *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* we come to know that Murdoch believes that the main aim of the novel is to depict the complexity of human personality engaged in a living relationship with a recognizable social reality (75). She always tried to face difficulties for the sake of reality. She explains that art represents a sort of paradox in human communication. She pleads for more concepts in terms of which to picture the substance of our being. She is concerned with the effect on literature, of self-consciousness, historically exacerbated by the advent of scientific method, and scientific symbolic languages. For Murdoch the relationship between words and things remains a prime concern. In her article “T.S. Eliot as a Moralist” she praises Eliot for his continual concern, in the midst of difficulties, for the referential character of words and his resistance to make a war upon language. To tell the importance of the novelist she elaborates that the writer has always been important and is essential. He is a truth teller and as a defender of words. Culture and words are the bases of the novelist. Murdoch sees the primitive force of stories, as a way of preserving against our self-questioning our culture and our language. The story is near about as fundamental concept. However much novelists may try, for reasons of fashion or

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art, to stop telling stories, the story is always likely to break out again in a new form. Everything else may be done by the pictures or by other mediums, but stories about human beings are best told in words and that “best” is a matter of a response to a deep and ordinary human need. Murdoch’s appeal for more and better defined moral concepts and her passionate belief in the importance of stories of primitive human recounting of events is important in two ways. First is this that it sets her away from her contemporaries as it also boldly denounces the self-consciousness of many modern writers. Secondly it reflects a mind aware of the difficulties art poses, and function it performs in human life.

Murdoch was known that art represents the realities, but to some extent it may be false to reality and Human experience is depicted finely through art. She think that aiming to depict life, art must therefore, lie to life whenever it imparts a sense of form where none is actually present. In one of her interviews she explains:

“Art can subtly tamper with truth to a great degree because art is enjoyment. People persist in becoming good artists against every possible discouragement and disappointment because it is marvellous activity, a gratification of the ego., a free omnipotent imposition of form unless this is constantly being as it were pulled at by the value of truth, the art work itself may not be as good and the artist may be simply, using art as form of self-indulgence. So, I think in art itself there is a conflict between the form maker and truthful formless figure” (Bellamy 139-40).
Novel has been always remained the point of discussion both in England and France about its form. The novelist has been always remained in his search for mediums to solve the situations emerging from the explosion of knowledge and disintegration of social and cultural structures, indulged in extremes of experimentation. Novel could not avoid creating new possibilities for its own future. If we see the history of novel, we come to know that it is the history of forms. Murdoch’s non-fictional works, speak of her concern with a search for what may be regarded as memorable metaphors for the process of artistic creation. In “Against Dryness” and parts of *The Sovereignty of Good* she advocates that form and contingency should co-exist. And in some of her other essays, she is concerned with the nature of this co-existence which Shakespeare’s art, in Murdoch’s views, exhibits fully. Murdoch agrees that Shakespeare managed a kind of plausibility which unites from and contingency by identifying the worlds he created with the real world so closely that his world appears to be the real world. To make an assessment of the fictional scene her distinction between the ‘journalistic’ and ‘crystalline’ were quoted frequently. She depicts her views in “Against Dryness”:

“*Literature must always represent a battle between real people and images, and what it requires now is a much stronger and more complex conception of the former... literature in curing its own ills, can give us a new vocabulary of experience and a truer picture of freedom* (31).

Iris Murdoch refined her formulations about the nature and function of art. These formulations help to place the novelist in a larger context. Her views of literature alerted many contemporary
intellectual conventions and theories. She clarifies that her realism is not only reportage but rather it reflects a conviction about the uses of art. She explains that in good art we do not ask for realism, but we ask for truth. Her philosophical work *The Fire and the Sun* (1978) presents an important aspect of her view of art and aesthetics. It takes up for analysis a pertinent aesthetic issue, such issue which has vexed aestheticians, theoreticians and literary critics, the issue of relationship between art and morality and it sets out firmly and more eloquently her view of the uses of art and proves it again more powerfully than her well reasoned earlier essays had done. She depicts the supremacy of art over dialectic in her philosophical work *The Fire and the Sun*:

“*Art, especially literature, is a great hall of reflection where we can all meet and where everything under the sun can be examined and considered...Art is far and away the most educational thing we have far more so than its rivals philosophy and theology and science...*” (86).

Iris Murdoch uses a fundamental platonic vocabulary when she argues for the value of art. Her sense of the integrity of art reflects Plato’s injunction that art fantasises and is sophistry. She comments by giving reasons why Plato banished artists from Republic:

“*Art is dangerous chiefly because it apes the spiritual and subtly disguises it and trivializes it... Artists obscure the enlightening power of thought and skill by aiming at plausibility rather than truth...the artist cannot represent or celebrate the good, but only what is daemonic and fantastic and extreme, whereas truth is quite and sober*
and confined. Art is sophistry at best an ironic ‘mimesis’ whose fake ‘truthfulness’ is a subtle enemy of virtue. Art objects are not real unities but pseudo-objects completed by fantasising mind in its escape from reality... Art is a false presence and a false present (65-66).

Murdoch reacts to Plato’s objections to art that his objections are primarily religious in nature. Plato believed that art is an egoistic substitute for and a copy of religious discipline. Art springs from vicarious knowledge. It is the product of the inferior part of the soul and harms by nourishing the passions which should be educated and disciplined. Murdoch begins by substantiating Plato’s objections. She agrees that art is an attempt to achieve omnipotence through personal fantasy and is abode of wish fulfillment. She also agrees that art is a prime producer of illusory unities. It pretends to be more unified than it is and allows us in reading to conceive of ourselves as more unified than we are. Yet Murdoch argues against the great wizard and takes un-platonic position. She differentiates between the good art and menipean art. Bad art is a lie and it is a fantasy where as good art clarifies evil and assures us about the power of truth. It encourages, revitalizes us through which we get spirit for the work. Through good art one understands our own self as well as it provides knowledge about others. By understanding our ownself as well as by understanding others we go towards final reality. It has the power to illustrate truth and beauty and lead to the good in a more effective way than philosophical dialect. In this way, these are Murdoch’s views about good art which makes us known about Murdoch’s concept of freedom. According to Murdoch great art is lofty and expresses and explains religion to each generation. All art lies but good art pierces its
way into truth. Artists through “Some deeper vision of their subject - matter may become privileged truth-tellers” (7).

Plato condemns art and the artist as they exhibit the lowest and most irrational kind of awareness. Murdoch’s dispute with Plato starts from this point. Plato believes that it is the philosopher who sees the most minute particulars and cherishes them and points them out but Murdoch contends:

“As one batters here at the cage of language it is difficult to keep the artist out of the picture even when one is attempting to describe the good man” (47).

Iris Murdoch believes that the relation of art to truth and good must be the fundamental concern and so she links to construct some positive aesthetic touchstone. She states that good art links with the creative process and thought of good art is like a symbolic force which provides a stirring image of a pure transcendent value. She explains:

“Art is a special discerning exercise of intelligence in relation to the real and although aesthetic form has essential elements of trickery and magic, yet form in art, as form in philosophy is designed to communicate and reveal. In the shock of joy in response to good art an essential ingredient is a sense of the revelation of reality of the really real-the world as we were well able so clearly to see it before” (78).

A sober truthful minds’ creative imagination resists the vision of self-protective, self-promoting fantasy Murdoch believes:
“The artists’ freedom is hard won, and is a function of his grasp of reality... The imagination fuses, but in order to do so it must tease apart in thought what is apart in reality resisting the facile merging tendencies of the obsessive ego. The prescription for art is then the same as for dialectic: overcome personal fantasy and egoistic anxiety and self-indulgent day-dream. Order and separate and distinguish the world justly. Magic in its unregenerate form as the fantastic doctoring of the real for consumption by the private ego is the bane of art as it is of philosophy. Obsession shrinks reality to a single pattern” (79).

Good art is the product of artist’s alert and conscious mind. While creating good art the artist has to purify his own egotism first, which seems a crucial work. Because ‘ego’ is the main hindrance in the creation process of art as well as it is also the hindrance in human beings progress. Because egotism does not permit us to know our ‘self’ as well as to know, understand and respect others. The artist must subtract his personality from the text. An emphasis on John Keats’s ‘Negative Capability’ is the most prominent aspect of Murdoch’s view of fiction. In creating a work of art, the author is involved in a moral act-demanding a negation of his own self. According to Murdoch Shakespeare comes nearest to this ideal because he pays full attention to his characters and perceives fully what is really and completely going on without the imprisoning control of his ideologies or prejudices. She agrees with Shakespeare’s facility to combine high aesthetic and moral principle. She compares the detachment of the artist with the saint. An artist is inside the
things he sees and speaks of as well as outside them. Murdoch seems to have drawn energy from the use of form that allows far greater interrelation between the self and the other, the inner resources of imagination and the outer reality. It gives more freedom and opportunities to the writer to deal with the contingent reality.

We see a strong spirit in Murdoch’s criticism of contemporary fiction. Her desire was to bring back to the novel some of the comprehensive vision of life, society and human characters. She sees the transmission of realistically perceived character as exercising a moral function. So, her ideas of fiction are profoundly moral. She writes:

“To silence and expel self; to contemplate and delineate nature with a clear eye, is not easy and demands a moral discipline” (Murdoch, The Sovereignty of Good 64).

Iris Murdoch’s work had drawn the attention of the artistic world readers and Critics for views regarding the function of art and the artist. She criticized the experimental novelists and because of that she is aligned to her immediate contemporaries. Its output is this that when Under the Net published, it was immediately clubbed with the angry literature of fifties partly because Murdoch like the angry novelists distrusts the high-brow experimental novel and partly because the novel does show the social texture of the post war English life which is also to be found in the novels of Alan Sillitoe, David Storey and John Briane. In this novel a picaresque protagonist Jake finds no satisfaction from better cars, clothes, paintings and bathrooms. In this novel hero gets various experiences of life, goes through spiritual crisis into maturity and subsequently realizes his own identity and role in this insecure and competitive world. This
novel *Under the Net* not only sets her apart from these contemporaries of hers but it also unwinds the essential burden of her literary imagination. The novel was widely reviewed and Kingsley Amis called Murdoch a distinguished novelist of a rare kind. Whereas *The New Statesman* dismissed the novel as ‘blue-stockings fantasy’ and ‘cafe writing’ and it is not applicable for valuable serious attention. In this way, such type of conflicting opinions regarding she work she faced through her novelistic career. After *Under the Net*, the next four novels problematized her reputation as it could not be decided that which mode she was likely to adopt for her literary imagination. Then the gothic mode was adopted for *The Flight From the Enchanter*, *The Sandcastle*-which was a family drama in which a tale of love triangle was written in the manner of fashion magazine stories. *The Bell* was set in the realistic mode. *A Severed Head* used the style of Restoration Comedies. Murdoch’s critics allege that her novels do not conform to her theoretical pronouncements and succumb to the tyranny of obsolete standards and tried and elaborate mythic patterns. But critics also agree that she is one of the most intelligent, incisive, witty, original and difficult novelists whose work is characterized by a truly fertile imagination. Because of many literary, philosophical and mythological allusions, she has appeared problematic for reviewers and readers.

Peter Wolfe and Donna Gerstenberger tried to understand Murdoch’s serious concerns. A.S. Byatt, who has most emphatically highlighted Murdoch’s pre-occupation with freedom in both personal relationships and social context through the struggles of her characters to achieve it. Murdoch’s work started showing a distinct and a characteristic style peculiarly own. She succeeds in contriving
over wrought well-plotted novels which contradicted her preference for open forms and free and independent characters. But she is also criticised by the critics such as Linda Kuehl for reducing her people to predetermined and predictable roles and submerging them to weighty and unrealizable philosophical concepts and mythic literary allusions. She labels her work as metaphysical fantasy. Harold Bloom praises Murdoch for her conceptual originality but does not rank her with major post-modern writers such as Samuel Beckett, Thomas Pynchon and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. According to Bloom she flouts aesthetic orthodoxy and defiantly employs old-fashioned story-telling techniques and as a writer she thinks for herself, philosophically and theologically but has not been able to fuse idea and story into a perfect whole. “Elegy for Iris” (160) is a presentation of Bayley’s companionship with Iris as her husband in which he comments about her art as a novelist and gives an intimate portrayal of a woman who with her serious and comic tales continues to hold the attention and imagination of critics and readers. Bayley elaborates about Murdoch’s art and personality in the following words:

“Iris’s work at least to me is genuinely mysterious, like Shakespeare’s. About her greatness as a novelist I have no doubts at all, although she has never by nature needed, possessed, or tried to cultivate the charisma which is the most vital element to the success of a sage or mage. Her books create a new world, which is also in an inspired sense and ordinary one. They have no axe to grind; they are devoid of intellectual pretension, or the need to be different. They are not part of a personality which fascinates and mesmerizes it admires” (168).
Murdoch’s novels in varying ways show that the mind in its relentless egoism habitually mistakes false images of the good for the good itself so that even the most spiritually advanced human beings, saints, cannot escape the dense nets of illusion created by personal desire. Such type of reference in her novels takes her towards the philosophical writer. She tells that philosophy can prove fatal in a work of art but her own novels go toward philosophical context. Murdoch handled ethical and spiritual matters for serious examination in her novels. Her works evaluate the nature of goodness and its various forms. The central point of Murdoch’s comments is the question of perfection of the nature of truth and the possibility of transcendent good beyond human imperfections and vanities. She takes a moral position and presents a world which is confused because of lack of moral virtues which she thinks are important. She does not use philosophy as a convenient mode to present her ideas and opinions. She is a philosopher as idealist who uses the novel for more exacting and instructive purposes, to explore the vast and ambiguous human mind. The Novel is an important device for Murdoch which helps her to make a complete evaluation of human search for good, a disinterested awareness of the world outside the self.

Iris Murdoch’s philosophical touch with mystical tilt separates her from the other contemporary thinkers especially Siegmund Freud. This philosophical touch also points the way her novels have to be read and her characters assessed. Freud like Plato acknowledges the importance of Eros as a fundamental force. According to Plato this energy is to be perceived in terms of sexuality as well as in its transformation. Sexual love is a cosmic power whose principle Eros
connects the commonest human desire to the highest morality. Eros is thus a mediating spirit that takes human desire beyond the sexual to the good. Whereas Freud does not recognize that love transcends sex. According to Murdoch love transforms the quality of consciousness. She rejected the Freuds statement that one must live in the ego. These concepts are used to identify the maladies with which the contemporary human being. Murdoch has handed complex moral issues as the subject matter of her novels which are balanced by her comic vision.

Murdoch thinks that novel is occupied by an open world, a world of absurdity, loose ends and ignorance. She likes the comic novel. She thinks that novel is an inclusive genre which includes so many messy particulars, so much contingency, so much heterogeneous stuff. Her novel involves the nature of bizarre and sexually pervert universe. Murdoch explains her views about love:

“Falling in Love’, a violent process which Plato more than once vividly describes (love is abnegation, objection, slavery) is for many people the most extraordinary and most revealing experience of their lives, whereby the centre of significance is suddenly ripped out of the self, and the dreamy ego is shocked into awareness of an entirely separate reality. Love in this form may be a somewhat ambiguous instructor. Plato has admitted that Eros is a bit of a sophist. The desire of the sturdy ego (the bad horse) to dominate and posses the beloved rather than to serve and adore him, may be overwhelmingly strong” (Murdoch, The Fire and the Sun 36).
In this sense the drama of the life of her vain pseudo-intellectuals, morally prudish men maddened by their ego, emotionally greedy women, & smart and waifish teenagers and eclipsed good characters- all are involved in the lovely hunt for love, power and consolation, is validated. We see that through her many characters Murdoch tries to show the twentieth Century man as a fugitive, he is a benighted being who is aimlessly and not knowingly, helplessly wandering through the worlds wilderness. Her characters in her novels live in the spell of illusion or obsession, in the need of emotional support. The maturity remains away from them. They are covered by blind consciousness. Their attempt to understand reality turns into a series of subjective magical devices. In her novel *The Flight From the Enchanter* Calvin Blick Says:

“You will never know the truth, and you will read the signs in accordance with your deepest wishes. That is what we humans always have to do. Reality is a cipher with many solutions all of them right ones” (278).

In *The Flight From the Enchanter* Calvin Blick sees life as a riddle. Man does not possess the strength to struggle through the trials of self-knowledge and self-purification towards the mountain heights of the sprit. He is a filled with discordant emotions, contradictory ideas and clashing impulses. The people in Murdoch’s novels as also in real life are driven by fantasies over which they have no or little control and the explanations responses to events of these people seems suspicious. Murdoch’s realism involves not only what is in the text but what lies beyond it. It searches for the ultimate reality.

“In Murdoch’s work the discovery of reality is both historical (generally contemporary England) and
transcendent- a curious and a radical intermeshing
which defines her idea of the operation of love”
(Dipple, 34).

Murdoch elaborated the dilemmas, spiritual ambiguities and
moral paradoxes of modern generation through her novels. Her search
goes towards the human heart and mind. Her characters illustrate the
strain and the central disquietudes of present life and history. Her love
lorn, power hungry characters impose a pattern of reality on the chaos
of life and try to console themselves with false apprehension. Her
novels try to depict a positive faith in the possibility of human
goodness, which can be achieved by human endeavour. Though her
useful fictions found deficient in creating free and independent world
for her characters to inhabit, continue to assert her significant role in
restoring vitality to this art form. Murdoch’s novels illustrate her
consistent belief in certain fundamental issues confronting mankind.
Through her novels she has got a place of a thinker, a novelist of
ideas, a philosopher who illustrates philosophical issues through her
novels. She is also known as a myth-maker, a weaver of stories, who
is interested in patterns, interested in forms, interested in establishing
truth, goodness and love in this modern world which seems Godless,
loveless, faithless and virtuesless.

Iris Murdoch is a professional philosopher turned novelist. Her
novels are filled with densely populated, and intricately plots. Her
novels have the virtue of orderliness and embody a moving and
wholly intelligible view of life. She emphasized that the novel should
be an art of image and not be only an instrument of analysis and
reflection. She emphasized on the point that her novels should not be
read for her philosophy, but influences of philosophers like Sartre,
Simone Weil Wittgenstein, Samuel Beckett and Raymond Queneau can be seen in her works. Her obsession with philosophy is evident in the titles of her novels like *The Philosophers’ Pupil*, and *The Good Apprentice*. For Murdoch true knowledge is to know the realities without fantasizing them. She presents the inadequacies of both existentialist and linguistic philosophers. According to her these both presents a shallow view of human nature and the novels written under the impact of these philosophies lack a genuine conception of love and freedom. For Murdoch, freedom is not only exercise of the will but a disciplined overcoming of the self. Goodness is knowledge which connects human beings with reality and Love means the realization that something other than oneself is real.

Iris Murdoch handles the theme of adultery, homosexuality, incest, castration, violence and suicide and yet succeeds in making her novels brilliantly enjoyable. We see a portrayal of twentieth century middle class, her acute observation and inventive power through her novels. She observes human life without any form. She says:

“We are like people who for a long time looked out of a window without noticing the glass- and then one day began to notice this too” (Sartre 26).

Murdoch points out that the novelist is potentially the great truth teller; he is also an expert fantasy-monger. She considered the novels of the nineteenth century superior to the novels of the twentieth century. The nineteenth century had a universal set of norms which the novelists could appeal to or even assume, while the twentieth-century novelist feels compelled to communicate a more personal, unique statement. In the twentieth-century the people do not have a
confident feeling about society and future. The progress of science in the present age has produced a very unsettling background. According to her in the twentieth century we do not have a sense of a universal human world or a universal human audience as was found in the nineteenth century.

Murdoch’s observation about the present human being is that he is completely absorbed in his affairs. He has lost interest in the world around him and does not realize the problems a man has to face to rise above the worldly interests. The today’s novelist is also lost in different theories and has forgotten his real aim to remain faithful to reality and truth and try to present them in his work. She advises the novelist to write his books describing human beings as they are. She tries to tell that the novelists instead of concentrating on the ugly aspects of life should concentrate on the essential human interests as found in the novels of the nineteenth century novelists.

Murdoch’s novels strongly reveal the human personality. They present the best picture of disturbed human being. While presenting the various philosophical ideas she restructures the idea of freedom. The fantasy and the freedom are the recurrent themes in her novels. Her interpretation of freedom is different than the general meaning. Before understanding her interpretation let’s see the meaning of these terms. Norman Spinrad states:

“Fantasy is the natural state of human consciousness” (10).

Fantasy is a form of literature that describes the impossible and makes little or no attempt to achieve realistic effects. Instead, fantasy seeks to please or to terrify the imagination. Fantasy defined by David Bleich is ‘a way a naming the feeling in dynamic or behavioural terms rather than in simple denotational terms like love or fear or
anxiety” (2). Fantasy is a fiction of the unconscious mind, acting on unconscious knowledge, the purpose of which is to expand consciousness. Fantasy is also called ‘fancy’ and is related to the Italian word ‘fantasia’ from which it probably derived its name. Like the Italian form of music which is written freely from the imagination and unrestricted by rules of form, the literary fantasy is a form of imaginative thinking that is controlled more by the thinkers wishes, motives and feelings than by conditions in the objective world (The Encyclopedia 14). For practical purposes fantasy may be purposeless, which can be connotated with day dreaming or night dreaming. Day dreaming or night dreams are generated by thoughts which are provoked by the real world or to camouflage the reality. Both these dreams are born from the subconscious level of the mind.

The dynamism of the word ‘fantasy’ itself can be manifested in the thoughts of young and old, child and adult. A male child may fantasise for his mother and a girl child for her father. In adults this fantasy extends usually for the worldly pleasures which may have behavioural changes in the individual. These repressed feelings and emotions can be termed as love, fear or anxiety. These suppressed feelings can be manifested in the form of prose, verse, novel, fiction, paintings and art etc. According to Argentine writer, Bioy Casares, fantasy is “as old as fear”. Certainly, fantasy pre-dates realistic fiction. The ancient Sumerian Gilgamesh ‘Epic’ is a fantastic fiction. Medieval texts as La Divina Commedia by Dante, Le Morte d’Arthur by Thomas Malory deal with the marvelous, the supernatural and the monstrous. Similarly, the story collections of pre-modern non-European cultures such as the Indian ocean of stories and the Arab
*Thousand and one Nights* are predominantly collections of fantastic tales.

The origins of fantasy as a genre of western literature is distinct from realistic or mainstream literature, can be traced, back to the 18th century, when such Gothic novels as *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1764) by Ann Radcliffe started to exploit certain bizarre and supernatural themes that were to be taken up again by later writers of fantasy. Themes in fantasy literature include doppelgangers, mirror worlds, diabolic pacts, alternative histories, magical quests, and the invasion of reality by dreams and monstrous haunting. Fantasy is prevalent from time immemorable—the conception of paradise, the Garden of Eden, the Golden age, the Computer age and the Scope age. Eric Rabkin hence claims that ‘fantasy has had a broad appeal to people of all ages, and in all forms—narrative, drama, poetry, paintings, music and films’ (189). The fantastic stories have entered into the children’s bookshelves and libraries as fables. For the adults life is too harsh, too chaotic. They cannot face reality. They fantasise order. Commenting on this requirement Eric Rabkin says:

“Reality, as Hemingway tells us is not so kind. We structure our lives, our sense of sexual roles, and our relations with fellow workers by subtle political conventions to which we subscribe because we need the consolation of a tame world” (211).

Our age is riddled with problems beyond the mundane. People die eventually, having struggled all their lives in combating with the demands of their genuine and counterfeit selves. Neurotic anxiety and its resultant despair are insurmountable, snatching from man his
integral freedom, freedom that could mean for him a hypothetical release from fantasy. Freedom has not been always interpreted as an exercise of the will, but rather as the experience of accurate vision, which allows man to act properly at the right time, though, ultimately it should mean “the overcoming of the self” (Murdoch, The Sovereignty of Good 95). Murdoch equates virtue with freedom, finding them consistent and infallible within the capacity of the other’s experience. The other, is naturally then, someone or something apart from the self and it comes into being when the self ceases to exist. Therefore, Freedom here has a far more intrinsic part to perform, for it is not merely choosing a path of life freely, but it is something spiritual and its true meaning is derived, when, freedom combines with the essential values of sincerity and truth. Only then, a free man can achieve that state of vision where things that are apart from the self are apprehended. Murdoch’s all absorbing study of human being deals through the kaleidoscopic vision of fantasy, the absurdity of existence, the concern to justify man’s resolve to live meaningfully in the face of an indifferent universe and the philosophical analysis of the basis for human unity. Everyone is free, but we are all responsible for the situation within which the choice of a path is determined that will lead towards freedom for the protagonist of today. In the attempt to seek truth and freedom, man finds himself facing a dark, unreal world. The unreality within this cyclosom of free vision is nightmarish.

Iris Murdoch’s chief preoccupation was with the ethical concerns of goodness and freedom, modified and enriched by the philosophies of existentialism, Buddhism and Platonism during her extremely productive career. Her novels have the virtue of orderliness
and embody a moving and wholly intelligible view of life. She views human beings as accidental creatures, purportedly free but actually constricted by the boundaries of self, society and the natural world. The plots of her novel often focus on one individual’s recognition that free will and self-knowledge are illusory.

The present research work attempts to study a continuing theme of the fantasy of freedom in the selected ten novels of Murdoch: i) *Under the Net* ii) *The Bell* iii) *An Unofficial Rose* iv) *The Unicorn* v) *A Severed Head* vi) *The Nice and the Good* vii) *The Flight from the Enchanter* viii) *The Sandcastle* ix) *Bruno’s Dream* and x) *The Sea, The Sea*. Murdoch’s concept of freedom is linked with virtue, love, attention, humility and realism. It demands objectivity and process of ‘unselfing’. According to her freedom means knowing, understanding and respecting others. The proposed research work demonstrates how forms and myths created by fantasy can completely enslave and curtail liberty. In Murdoch’s moral theory as well as in her aesthetics, the definition of freedom entails a dispassionate adjustment of vision. This involves a combat against fantasy. Murdoch’s novels, which are selected for research work, trace the progress of central characters from a state of form making fantasy to an awareness of reality which is the sign of freedom. In the beginning, they are shown living in fantasy world with well-ordered, neat and explicable lives shielded from the pains, pressures and harshness of the contingent reality around them. They do not perceive others as real human beings in their smugness but see them through the veil of self-devised forms and opinions. Through various progressions and devices, love being the major one, they are able to redirect their attention away from the mirrors of self-obsession and
achieve a state of realism and freedom. As an author Murdoch liberates herself from her own fantasy in order to bestow reality on her characters. Murdoch’s characters first live in the fantasy, later because of love, dialogue etc medium they recognizes their own worth and truth about others. They go towards freedom from fantasy. The journey of characters from fantasy to freedom is narrated in the novels of Murdoch. Her narrator reveals that how the characters come out of their fantasy world to face reality.

Thus, the present research attempts to study the above discussed all points. The research attempts to strengthen the point that the fantasy of freedom is a continuing and basic theme in the novels of Iris Murdoch. It also insists to understand that human beings egocentric fantasy limits his vision and freedom. The freedom is a proper human goal which can be achieved by an accurate vision of reality and so humanity should face this reality.
References


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